



STANFORD MODEL UNITED NATIONS  
CONFERENCE 2014

# The Syrian Civil War

## *REGIME OF BASHAR AL-ASSAD*



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Assistant Chair: Ashwin Sreenivas | Crisis Director: Chloe Rickards

## **Educational Topics Covered:**

Students analyze the effects of the First World War.

- Describe the effects of the war and resulting peace treaties on population movement, the international economy, and shifts in the geographic and political borders of Europe and the Middle East.

Students analyze instances of nation-building in the contemporary world in at least two of the following regions or countries: the Middle East, Africa, Mexico and other parts of Latin America, and China.

- Understand the challenges in the regions, including their geopolitical, cultural, military, and economic significance and the international relationships in which they are involved.
- Describe the recent history of the regions, including political divisions and systems, key leaders, religious issues, natural features, resources, and population patterns.
- Discuss the important trends in the regions today and whether they appear to serve the cause of individual freedom and democracy.

Students analyze the integration of countries into the world economy and the information, technological, and communications revolutions (e.g., television, satellites, computers).

## **The Advisory Council of His Excellency Bashar al-Assad, Honorable President of the Syrian Arab Republic**

Dear Delegates,

My name is Arnav Mariwala and I am a sophomore at Stanford University, planning to major in physics and history. I've been involved in Model UN since eighth grade, and I was a crisis director at SMUNC last year. Model UN has been one of the most fulfilling and exciting parts of my life, and I hope that it can become the same for yours.

Syria is one of the most interesting and serious issues in the world today, and it is only made more complicated by the intricate communal and sectarian divisions present in its society. The notion of the modern Syrian nation state is something that was forced upon the region by European colonizers; as a nation, it did not exist in its current form until the early twentieth century. In other words, its boundaries do not fit in with its cultural history. Nowhere is this more evident than in the current extent of the ISIS crisis and the call for a Kurdish state. As a committee, you will have to deal with this turbulent history to devise a solution that acknowledges and accepts it while moving to the future.

Please feel free to contact me with any questions you might have. My email is [arnavm@stanford.edu](mailto:arnavm@stanford.edu).

I look forward to seeing you all in October. And now, for a message from our Beloved Oppressor; President Bashar al-Assad.

**Members of the Council,**

It is the 25<sup>th</sup> of August 2013. Grave days are upon us. The anarchists have been fighting a bloody war against our motherland for two long years. This war is not a war for freedom, as the corrupt western media has brought it out to be. It is a war of oppression, a war for the radical Sunnis to subjugate diversity. It is a war bereft of passion, for sterile economic gain. Most importantly, it is a war for foreigners to reduce the Syrian Arab Republic to naught but a conduit for their natural resources.

I have called together this council of my closest advisors, generals, and allies to combat this crisis in the most effective manner possible. We aim to annihilate the terrorist opposition and reestablish the Syrian Arab Republic over all of Syria, for all the Syrian people and their friends; and for that, I ask you to stop at nothing.

**Alhumdullilah, and peace be on the Republic,**

**His Excellency President Assad**

**Committee Basics**

The official start date of the committee will be August 25, 2013. This date has been specifically chosen to present a very unique position to both committees in the simulation. This is one week after serious allegations arose that the Syrian regime deployed chemical weapons, and the international community is considering how to respond.

While there is more than enough research and information on what has happened in Syria since the start date of this committee, delegates should only refer to facts and address situations that are relevant at or prior to the start date of this committee.

Recent developments after the start date may be helpful for research and information, but they are not to be referred to in committee. Events and other developments after the start date are not relevant to committee. Instead, the moment delegates enter the committee room, the crisis staff will develop a new thread and story for the Syrian opposition, and the delegates of the committee will then be expected to respond to what the crisis staff come up with.

## **A Brief History**

Following independence in 1946, years of instability culminated in the Ba'ath Party's coup d'état of 1964. In 1970, the minister of defense General Hafez al-Assad seized power and declared himself Prime Minister, then President in 1971. In consolidating power, he reinvented the face of Syrian politics and the Ba'ath party, dividing the state apparatus between different communities and centering power about him and his family. He specifically favored his own Alawite community, initially giving them control over the state military and intelligence apparatus, and later favoring them for high-level government positions. At the same time, he gave overarching powers to the presidency; the president was given veto over all government decisions and multi-party elections for the presidency did not take place; al-Assad would conduct referenda confirming him as president. When he died in 2000, his son Bashar al-Assad took power.

The regime of the two Assads had bred discontent among the Sunni majority; although Sunnis occupied several high-level posts in the government, they were considered secondary to the elite Alawite minority. Therefore, one of the most prominent groups to oppose the Assads initially were the Muslim Brotherhood, creating a Sunni opposition from the beginning, and arguably giving scope for radical elements like Al-Qaeda and the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) to become prominent forces in the future.

The revolutions of the Arab Spring convinced this opposition that there was scope for reform in Syria; resulting in the war we see today.

## Timeline

March 2011	Day of dignity protests in Damascus and Daraa; security forces fire on and kill protestors, triggering violent unrest
May 2011	In response to worsening unrest, al-Assad deploys army in major cities; USA, EU tighten sanctions; Assad announces amnesty for political prisoners
July 2011	Mass demonstrations in Hama, governor dismissed and army sent in; Opposition forms united front in Istanbul
August 2011	Obama calls for Assad to step down, freezes Syrian government assets
October 2011	Russia and China veto UNSC resolution condemning Syria
November 2011	Arab League suspends Syrian membership; Free Syrian Army attacks military base in Damascus
December 2011	Arab league observers land in Syria, leave in January in wake of worsening violence in Damascus
February 2012	US shuts embassy, Russia and China block UNSC draft resolution on Syria; new constitution approved in referendum
March 2012	Free Syrian Army withdraws from Homs in wake of heavy government bombardment
April 2012	UN-backed ceasefire appears to take hold, mission is deployed; opposition denounces it, saying Assad continues to fight
May 2012	UNSC strongly condemns killing of a hundred civilians by government militias near Homs; parliamentary elections held
June 2012	UN suspends mission in light of escalating violence; Assad says conflict is now 'real war', Turkey announces that it will consider military forces near the border to be a threat and take appropriate action
July 2012	Free Syria Army kills three security chiefs of Assad in a bomb attack in Damascus
August 2012	Prime Minister Riad Hijab defects, UNGA resolution demands that Assad resign, UNHRC accuses Syria of war crimes, Obama warns against use of chemical weapons
October 2012	Skirmish with Turkey results in mutual ban on using each others' airspace; historic district of Aleppo destroyed in fire
November 2012	Opposition forces unify into National Coalition for Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces; Islamists refuse to join; Arab League stops short of full recognition; Israelis fire on Syrian artillery in Golan Heights
December 2012	USA recognizes National Coalition as legitimate government

	of Syria; Rebels advance on Damascus airport
January 2013	Israeli jets accused of bombing military base near Damascus
February 2013	Car bombing near Ba'ath party headquarters kills dozens
March 2013	US and Britain pledge non-military aid to rebels; Ghassan Hitto elected as head of coalition; al-Nusra front tries implementing Shari'a in rebel-held areas
April 2013	Britain and France inform the UN that Syria has used chemical weapons against rebels; George Sabra becomes chairman of National Coalition; ISIS formed by Abu bakr al-Baghdadi
May 2013	EU does not renew arms embargo on Syria in move to aid rebels; Israel targets military depot and exchanges fire in Golan Heights
June 2013	Government and Hezbollah recapture Qusair between Homs and Lebanese border; International arms supply tapers off because of involvement of Islamists; 93,000 dead so far in conflict; USA concludes that Assad used chemical weapons and authorizes direct military support to rebels
July 2013	Ahmad al-Jarba elected opposition leader; Rebels capture Khan al-Assal, last major government-held town in Aleppo province
August 2013	UN chemical weapons inspectors arrive in Damascus
September 2013	Russia proposes that Syria give up chemical weapons to international control; UN finds convincing evidence of chemical attack; Rebel groups form alliance to create an Islamic state separate from the western-backed coalition
October 2013	Assad allows international inspectors to destroy chemical weapons stockpile on basis of a US-Russia agreement
December 2013	US and Britain suspend "non-lethal" support for rebels in northern Syria after reports that Islamist rebels seize some bases of Western-backed Free Syrian Army.
January 2014	UN peace talks in Geneva fail because of refusal to discuss a transitional government
February-March 2014	Syrian army and Hezbollah recapture Yabroud, last rebel stronghold by Lebanese borders; Al Qaeda rejects ISIS
June-July 2014	ISIS establishes control in eastern Syria and north-west Iraq; Assad wins presidential election; Government captures Kessab in Latakia province, rebels reenter Qalamoun area and Daraa governorate



# Sociopolitical Issues

## Ethnic Divisions: The Seeds of the Uprising

Many scholars have noted that the current borders of the Arab world were drawn by European colonialists without understanding the deeper ethno-religious structure in Arab society, trying to impose an European model of the nation state in a region where it simply did not fit. One can argue that Syria falls within these improperly drawn borders.

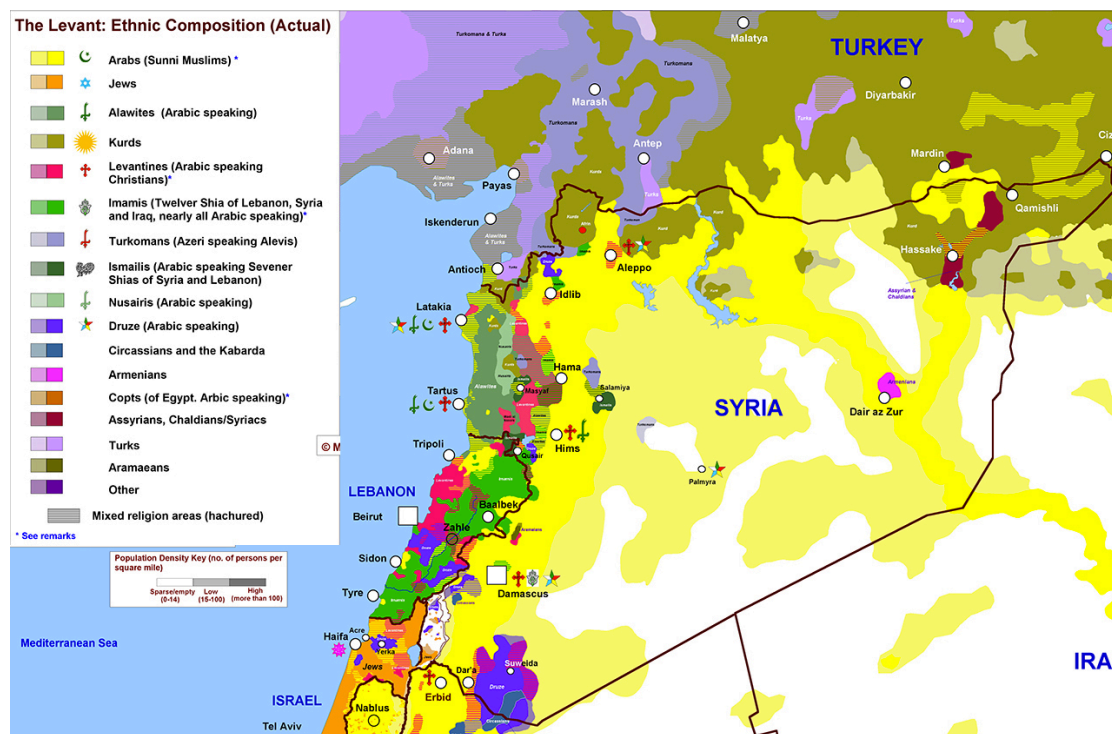


Figure 1: Ethno-religious groups in Syria

The above map shows the immense diversity of ethno-religious and linguistic groups in Syria. About 74% of the population is Sunni Muslim, 13% are various forms of Shi'a including the Alawi community, 3% are Druze, and 10% are Christian. 90% of the population are Arabs, 9% are Kurds, and 1% are Armenians, Circassians, and Turkmen.

However, President Assad's Alawi community has been the dominant community since 1966 after the Ba'ath Party coup d'état.

Although originally a secular pan-Arab and Arab socialist party, the Ba'ath Party in Syria was de facto controlled by the Alawis even before Hafez al-Assad's takeover in 1971. Its strong commitment to Arab socialism and state centered development gave it control over both national politics and the Syrian economy. President Assad's power as President therefore allowed him large amounts of control over the Syrian state. To manage its affairs, he appointed members of his own Alawi community to prominent positions within the republic. Thus, a political elite of Alawis was created that prevented excessive mobility of Sunnis and other communities. With the gradual deregulation of the economy brought about by the global shift towards neoliberal policy from the 1980s, Alawis connected to the political elite were naturally given control over many sectors of the economy, entrenching their power further.

It should be noted, however, that orthodox Sunnis consider Alawis, like other Shi'a muslims, to be heretics because of their recognition of Ali, the prophet's nephew, as his successor. It is therefore safe to say that in a Sunni dominated Syria, the Alawis and similar communities may not be accorded the full rights they are entitled to as Syrians. This is extremely relevant due to more extremist rebels being funded by Sunni nations like Saudi Arabia. Alawi citizens are therefore understandably for the regime, forming its last line of defense in the coastal areas around Damascus as Sunnis join the rebels and Kurds attempt to secede from the Republic.

Preserving the unity of the Syrian Arab Republic therefore must include work on building stronger inter-communal ties and greater economic participation for these communities, while ensuring that extremists do not hijack efforts to promote

unification. Political reform of the same, building on the constitutional referendum of 2012, will help foster social and economic inclusivity.

### **Question of Kurdistan**

The Kurdish diaspora has been described as the world's 'largest nation without a state' and is spread over Syria, Turkey, Iran, and Iraq. Under Saddam Hussein, Kurds were targeted for genocide and severely oppressed. After the American occupation, they were given an autonomous region of northern Iraq where their situation is currently stable. In Turkey, there is minor Kurdish political involvement, however after decades of repression many Kurdish political organizations are still banned. Iran sees similar repression.

Following the uprising in 2011, several Kurdish militias organized themselves into opposition forces but with the markedly distinct goal of Kurdish self-determination. They now control parts of the north and northeast of Turkey, exclusive of other opposition forces. The goal of these militias is solely to establish Kurdish independence, not engage in the broader uprising that the rest of the rebels are involved in.

Bearing this in mind, the focus should be on utilizing the Kurdish forces as a potential ally. The capabilities of Kurdish peshamargas could be used to defeat the opposition in the northwest in return for compromises on Kurdish statehood, preferably resulting in Kurdish autonomy within Syria.

## **Humanitarian Issues**

### **Chemical Weapons**

Syria's Chemical Weapons program began decades ago with training and weapons sourced from the erstwhile Soviet Union and Egypt. In the mid-1980's Syria began developing its own chemical weapons and reports showed that by 2007, Syria had stockpiled hundreds of tonnes of chemical weapons agents. These were weapons that it would use extensively in its war against rebels.

In March 2013 Khan al-Asal, a village in northern Syria with a strong rebel presence was hit with chemical weapons containing sarin, a potent nerve agent. The attack resulted in at least 26 fatalities with scores more injured. The government and the opposition quickly blamed each other but later UN investigations showed that the sarin used in the attack was remarkably similar to that in other Syrian government stockpiles. Other such attacks continued on rebels, with many sources saying that controlled use of chemical agents on rebels had become the fallback strategy for the Syrian military.

In the early hours of August 21, 2013 several rebel controlled areas around the Ghouta, Syria were hit by rockets containing sarin, killing hundreds, with death tolls ranging from the 200s to the 2000s. President Bashar al-Assad immediately denied claims that the Syrian government was behind the attacks, saying instead that rebel groups had used the chemical agents because they were losing. A UN report later showed that the sarin used in the attack was highly purified and of a much higher quality than that generated by Iraq's chemical weapons program.

As of August 2013, Syria has not joined the Chemical Weapons Convention, which would require it to destroy its arsenal of chemical weapons, which would

strongly indicate that Syrian government plans on continuing their use of these weapons.

## **Refugees**

By early 2013, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees announced that over a million refugees had fled war-torn Syria to seek asylum in Jordan, Lebanon, Turkey, Iraq and other neighbouring countries. Unable to provide immediate resettlement for the growing refugee population, a few of these countries, such as Turkey, have erected makeshift “tent cities” where refugees now stay.

With these local refugee camps reaching their breaking point, numerous countries all around the world have helped ease the situation by providing monetary contributions and allowing refugees to immigrate to their country and resettle. Financially, the European Union has been the single largest donor with assistance totaling over \$2.4 billion. Other countries like Sweden, the United Kingdom and the United States have allowed refugees to permanently resettle in their country.

## **Sieges**

Determined to starve civilians of food, essential resources and ammunition, the Syrian military has laid siege to several areas of Syria controlled by rebels. With chemical attacks compounding the problems faced by civilians trapped in the siege, medical institutions find themselves starved of medical supplies to treat wounds suffered in the fighting.

Around the rebel held areas around Damascus, the government has installed checkpoints preventing the entry of food or supplies. With hospitals low on medical supplies, communicable diseases have flourished, and with food running scarce,

malnutrition has sky rocketed. The Assad government has faced increasing pressure to allow the passage of vital aid into the besieged areas, but has till date refused.

### **Homelessness**

Millions of civilians in Syria currently face homelessness as they have either fled their homes to escape the conflict or have had their homes destroyed by the conflict. Estimates by the United Nations have shown that by 2013, after two years of combat, over 4 million people have had to abandon their homes, and up to 2 million children have had to drop out of schools. Another one million people have fled the country.

Resolving this conflict will require the resettlement of the homeless – building homeless camps to provide shelter, rebuilding faith in the education system so that children can return to school and reconstructing devastated cities should be of utmost importance to any solution to this conflict.

### **International Involvement from the UN, NATO and Syrian Allies**

The Syrian war has received a lot of international attention, with foreign assistance being provided to both the government of Syria and to the rebels.

Diplomatically, the Russian government has sent delegations to express their support of the Assad Government. Russia has also supplied the Assad government with weapons, and trained the Syrian army in their use and upkeep. In addition to diplomatic support and supplying of arms, the Iranian government is also to have provided Syria with armed fighters and over \$9 billion in financial support. The Syrian government has also received support from non-government entities, like the Lebanese Hezbollah, which has allegedly sent fighters to combat the rebels.

The Syrian rebels too have received international help. The United States has long been providing non-lethal aid to the rebels, and has also been accused of providing combat training to the rebels. Arab countries, like Qatar and Saudi Arabia have also been known to provide arms to the rebels.

## Geopolitical Issues

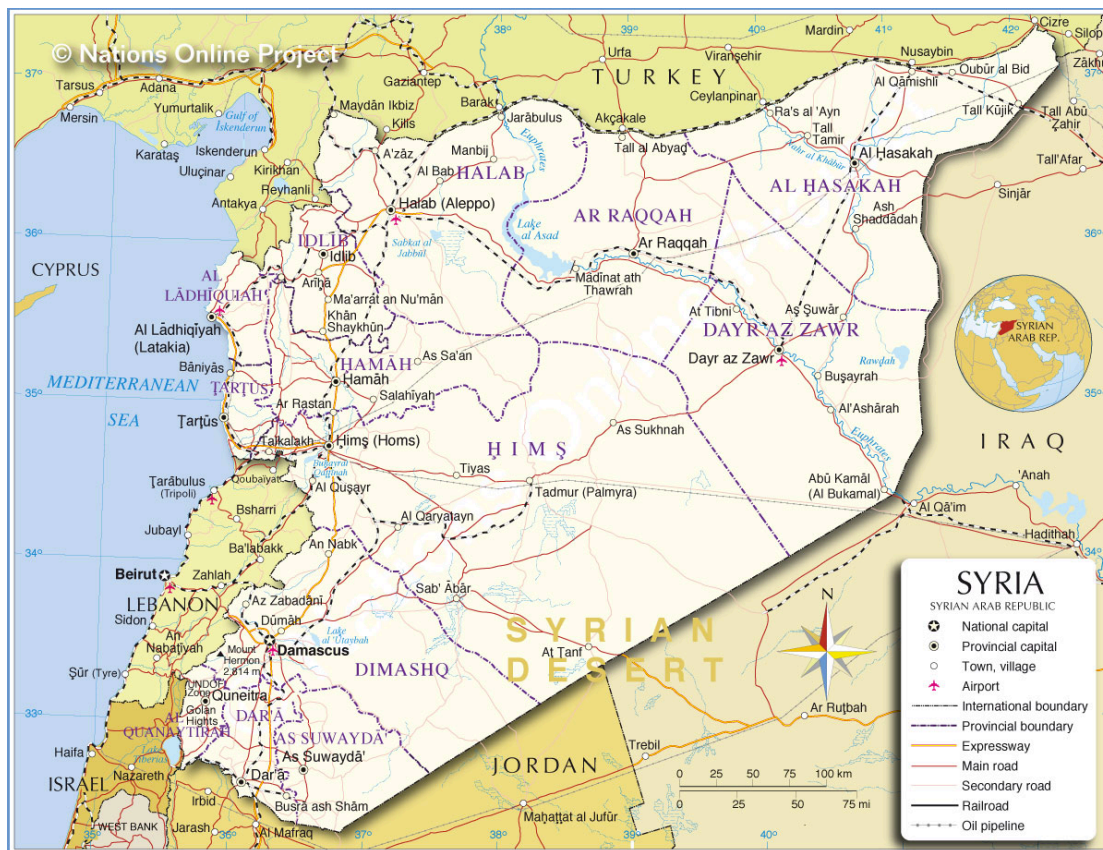


Figure 2: Syria and its Neighbors

The Levant is one of the most turbulent regions in the world. To the south lie Lebanon, Israel, Jordan, and Palestine. To the east lies the insurgency in Iraq, and to the north lies underdeveloped regions of eastern Turkey. Events in Syria could very easily spill over into either of these countries, creating the possibility of conflict perpetuating throughout the region for many years to come.

The greater presence of the international community in this conflict, however, has pushed it into an event encompassing much greater issues within it; namely, the geopolitics of energy, and the conflict between radical Sunnis and Shi'as.



## **The Sunnis and the Shi'as**

As previously stated, the Syrian uprising comprises of primarily Sunni Muslims rebels fighting against the Alawi dominated government forces. On the government side, the Shi'a dominated states of Iran and Lebanon provide military and tactical aid, whereas on the rebels' side aid is provided from the Sunni dominated Gulf States like Saudi Arabia and Qatar. President Assad's government can be thought of as being part of a larger Shi'a alliance with Lebanon and Iran, acting as a counterweight to Sunni domination of the Middle East. The Alawi government effectively gave control of one of the larger Sunni states to a Shi'a minority; radical Sunnis such as Al Qaeda and their splinter groups would like nothing better than to destroy this control.

Losing Syria to a Sunni rebellion would isolate Lebanon and Iran even further, not to mention the profound implications for Shi'as within Syria. It might serve as a sort of slippery slope towards increased Sunni militancy within Lebanon, creating further instability in the Levant. Lebanon only recently came out of a civil war that had spilled over into both Israel and Syria; allowing Sunni forces to gain a strong foothold in Syria therefore would plunge the entire region into conflict again.

Furthermore, the loss of a Shi'a Syrian ally would allow Sunni militias to form a base in Syria and use it to further insurgencies into Iran, threatening its security. This has the possibility of drawing Iranian forces into further conflict across borders and therefore derailing negotiations with the USA and EU regarding sanctions and its nuclear program. Most importantly, however, the continued presence of Sunni militants with only Iran and a weak Lebanon to counter them creates a hotbed for global terrorism. That is why preventing the loss of Syria to the Sunni militants and maintaining the Shi'a alliance may be in the best interests of the region.

## **Natural Gas, Russia, and Qatar**

Russia so far has been unequivocal in its support for the Syrian government, while the USA and EU have been unequivocal in their support for the rebels. The relationship shared between Russia and the EU, while not amicable, has a lot at stake, namely Europe's supply of natural gas. A quarter of Europe's gas consumption comes from Russia, giving Russia an advantage in any confrontation or breakdown in relations. Syria represents an area that could begin such a breakdown.

To reduce Russia's advantage, therefore, the EU would need another competitive gas supplier. A prime candidate for this role is Qatar, since it shares the world's largest natural gas field with Iran. Although Qatar attempted to build a pipeline for this gas through Saudi Arabia, Jordan, and Syria, President Assad blocked this plan in lieu of Syria's long-standing energy commitment to Russia. As a result, Qatar has had to move its gas through sea via the Iran-controlled Straits of Hormuz, making its gas more expensive.

The fall of President Assad's government to a Sunni regime would create a Syria that is more friendly to Qatar; this also explains why Qatar has been vocal in its support for the rebels. Furthermore, a Sunni Syria would isolate Iran even more, and therefore remove another competitor from the European gas market. Iran has signed an agreement to transport gas via a pipeline to the Mediterranean with Iraq and Syria, giving it access to the European market. A hostile Sunni Syria would derail these plans and isolate Iran from the west even further, while allowing Qatar to deplete more gas from their shared gas field. Syria, therefore, is a focal point in this 'struggle' for the European natural gas market, giving the conflict much wider implications than other regional conflicts.

## **Spillover**

There are already fears that the conflict could destabilize the rest of the Levant. The breakdown of government machinery and rule of law creates an environment that is favorable to terrorists, smugglers, and criminals, and creates a secure base for them to pursue trans-national activities. Fears of radical Sunni militias contributing to the Iraqi insurgency are not unfounded, since there are reports of an Al-Qaeda affiliate attacking parts of north-west Iraq from rebel-held territory. The spread of Sunni radicalism will also affect Shi'a dominated Lebanon and Zionist Israel, not to mention potentially providing a base for attacking the western world.

On the above map one can determine that Syria is strategically significant in the edge of the Middle East; giving up Syria to radical militias would destabilize a global hotbed of trade and commerce and lead to the persecution of not just Shi'as but all minorities, including the Druze, Christians, and Kurds. It would once again provoke conflict with Lebanon and Israel and shaken a weak Iraqi government's hold on areas with significant amounts of oil and infrastructure, as well as disrupt life in relatively peaceful Turkey. The significance of this spillover, therefore, must not be understated and must be considered in any possible solution.

## A Note on Research

Being involved in Model UN since 8<sup>th</sup> grade, I know many of y'all will be tempted to type 'Syrian Civil War' into Google and click on Wikipedia. Wikipedia is not the most accurate source; however, it does still have its benefits. It is useful in gaining a *general understanding* of the topic, but always be wary of specific details. A topic as widely covered as this is likely to have accurate information, but always check references before citing anything in committee. More obscure topics, such as some of your character biographies, are not likely to be well written, so I would discourage you from using Wikipedia for those.

Good places to start researching include the CIA world factbook, the state department website on Syria, the UN website, major news outlets like the BBC, New York Times, CNN, Reuters, etc, and academic journals and university websites. I have listed some useful links below as well that should help you begin research.

## Character List

Note: President Bashar al-Assad is represented by the chair (myself), with his administrative assistants Abdul bin Lasun and Karim al-keb 'Abi (both fictional)

- Maher al-Assad – Syrian, Brigadier General, commander of the Republican Guard and Fourth Armored Division
- Farouk al-Shara – Syrian, Vice-President
- Fahd Jassem al-Frej – Syrian, Minister of Defence
- Ali Abdullah Ayyoub – Syrian, Chief of Staff of the Army
- Issam Hallaq – Syrian, Chief of Staff of the Air Force
- Ghassan Jaoudat Ismail – Syrian, General of the Air Force Intelligence Unit
- Mohammad al-Shaar – Syrian, Minister of the Interior
- Mohammad Jihad al-Laham – Syrian, Speaker of the Peoples' Council
- Wael Nader al-Halqi – Syrian, Prime Minister
- Walid Muallem – Syrian, Foreign Minister
- Ali Haidar – Syrian, Minister of National Reconciliation
- Namir al-Assad – Syrian, Head of the Shabiha militias
- Hafez Makhlof – Syrian, Head of the General Security Directorate (intelligence)
- Ali Mamlouk – Syrian, Head of the National Security Bureau of the Ba'ath party and special security advisor to President Assad
- Hassan Nasrallah – Lebanese, Secretary-General of Hezbollah
- Qasem Soleimani – Iranian, Commander of the Qods Force, a special ops unit of Iran
- Hossein Hamadani – Iranian, advisor to Syria and overseer of operations for the Qods Force
- Hossein Taeb – Iranian, Head of the Revolutionary Guards' intelligence bureau
- Mohammad Reza Naqdi – Iranian, Commander of the Basij Militia
- Sergei Lavrov – Russian, Foreign Minister
- Anna Kushchyenko (fictional) – Russian, agent of Russian Foreign Intelligence Service (i.e. the successor to the KGB).
- Vadim Pankov – Russian, agent of Russian Military Intelligence and Commander of 45th Detached Reconnaissance Regiment, a special ops unit
- Saad Abdel-Salam al-Nayef – Health Minister
- Najm Hamad Al Hamad – Justice Minister
- Ismael Ismael – Finance Minister
- Abu Ajeeb, - head of the Al-Abbas Brigade
- Talib al-Barri – Chief of the Naval Staff, Syrian Arab Navy

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