



ClarkMUN XVI

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FREEDOM
FOR ALL

Syria-ous Matters

UNSC on the Syrian Civil War



Letter from the Background Guide Author

Hello Esteemed Delegates!

My name is Meghan Burr and I am the author of the background guide for Syriaous Matters: The Syrian Civil War 2011 and I am also the Director of Delegate and Conference Affairs for ClarkMUNXVI! I am a Junior at Clark studying Political Science within the International Relations Subfield with a Concentration in Peace and Conflict Studies and I will be pursuing a Masters of International Affairs or Public Administration very soon! I hope to pursue a career in politics and research at a Think Tank or IGO and eventually get my PhD in International Relations down the road. I am also currently the Senior President/Head Del of Model United Nations at Clark! I compete in all types of Model UN from Double Del GA to Crisis which is why I am so excited for this committee! I have been competing in Model UN for 6 years now and have now attended 22 Model UN conferences at the time I am writing this (this was not a fun statistic to calculate). I also have been teaching for the past 2 years at the United Nations Association of Greater Boston and Best Delegate! I am so excited to be running the UNSC at ClarkMUN this year because the last time ClarkMUN ran a UNSC I competed in it in 2023 during my senior year of high school!

This past semester I just completed a capstone research project on Israeli-Palestinian Relations called “Reactionism, Radicalism and Relapse Into Conflict: Why Israel Restricts Humanitarian Access in the Name of State Security” which seeks to look at why states restrict humanitarian aid as a means to increase state security! This project has inspired my desire to run this committee due to the topical nature of the Syrian Civil War and the regional impacts on Levantine regional politics and security which I urge you to consider in all material for this committee.

Best,

Meghan Burr '27

Senior President Model UN at Clark + Director of Delegate and Conference Affairs
ClarkMUNXVI

Equity Statement

This committee is incredibly sensitive and the situation regarding the democratization of Syria is still deeply on-going. This conflict is incredibly nuanced and there is not a traditional good guy fighting the bad guy. I urge you all to analyze Syria on a deeper level because every party in this conflict has committed war crimes at some level. I myself have seen the propaganda online regarding actors in the Syrian civil war. I urge you to do your own research on what these people believe and to please stray away from over-personification of these people (aka I do not want to see a Bashar meme arc). Any content that is not in-line with this equity statement or the ClarkMUNXVI equity statement will be disqualified from awards and reported to the secretariat and potentially based on severity result in your removal from ClarkMUNXVI and subsequent ClarkMUNs.

In terms of the dynamics of this committee, this is an advanced committee and you should expect competition because otherwise it probably wouldn't be very much fun. That said, I do not want to see any type of undiplomatic behavior, bullying, or discrimination on the basis of any protected status or any violations against ClarkMUNXVI policy. Below I have included a detailed procedure guide outlining how I will assess awards in this committee understanding it is slightly non-traditional from the Massachusetts high school circuit. While these metrics are important to me they are not the end all be all. I would rather see a diplomatic and well-done presentation speech than a poor q&a that involved unfair voting mechanisms.

Procedure Guide

This committee will be run as an advanced specialized committee with full GA and Crisis elements which delegates should be prepared for. It is recommended that any delegates participating in this committee have experience participating in both general assembly style committees and crisis committees. In terms of structure our first session together will be fully crisis and you can expect a typical two note pad system with hopefully about 3-4 note cycles with 4-5 crisis updates total including an opening update. You should expect to run an accelerated arc and you can expect that I will be more lenient with responses considering this. Additionally, after lunch I will announce a general assembly topic that has arisen from the crisis or that the dias and backroom finds relevant and we will move into full GA elements. The announcement of this topic is intended to be somewhat ad-hoc however it will not be something totally unrelated/fantastical and will likely have to do with Syrian statebuilding. In terms of award assessment I am looking for arcs that break, good front room (consistent and attention grabbing speeches and production of a well-thought out directive during every directive round) and Authors Panel participation during the GA session. Specifically I am looking for delegates who meet and exceed these metrics through kindness and diplomacy rather than aggression and undiplomatic behavior which ClarkMUNXVI and I will not tolerate alongside bullying, discrimination or any other behavior that does not exemplify the values of Model UN. Especially related to this topic there is a ton of propaganda/misinformation you can find scrolling instagram reels. This is not content I want to see included in arcs, directives or solutions as it does not promote critical thinking about this topic. Best of luck and please email me with any questions regarding procedure!

Key Terms and Events

Arab Spring- Refers to the movement for democratization across the Middle East region which began in 2011 after the self-immolation of a Tunisian Street Vendor against government corruption. Created notable pro-democracy pro-regime protests in Egypt, Tunisia, Syria, Libya, and Bahrain. The Syrian Civil War falls into this broader movement.

NSAG- Non-State Actor. Any political actor that cannot be categorized as a state per the Montevideo Convention of 1933 and/or is unrecognized by the United Nations. The Palestinian Authority and Holy See are non-member observer states of the United Nations.

Proxy- Foreign proxies refer to the direct or indirect funding by one country of another country or NSAG. Within the Syria context Russia is a foreign proxy for the Assad regime because they fund

Syria before Assad

Syria within a modern political context can first be understood with the advent of the French Mandate system established under the Sykes Picot agreement of 1923 which gave French control to Syria and Lebanon by the League of Nations (precursor to the United Nation) as well as British control of Transjordan, Ottoman Palestine, and portions of



Iraq.¹

Syria functioned under the system of French direct rule for 25 years until 1946. In the period of 1946-1956 political chaos ensued as Syria struggled to pick a mode of governance and established a routinized political system. With a brief stint of democratic experimentation in

1954-1956 came the emergence of the Baath party which emphasized pan-Arab identity over religious identities and subsequently divides. Specifically within Syria this ideology became incredibly militaristic and failed to include the major ethnic group of Syria, the Kurds as Arabs.²

Emergence of the United Arab Republic

In 1958 after the rise of Gamal Abdul Nasser in Egypt who additionally shared the ideology of Pan-Arab Nationalism, Syria and Egypt combined to form the United Arab Republic. The experiment was brief and only lasted for 3 years ending in 1961 and marks

¹ Britannica Editors. "United Arab Republic." Encyclopedia Britannica, February 9, 2026.

² Yom, Sean. *Government and Politics of the Middle East and North Africa*.

the political dominance of the Pan-Arab Nasserist ideology. The biggest problem in the dissolution was that while Egyptians and Syrians wanted to engage with Pan-Arabism, they were just not ready to give up their state identity to become one homogenous state. This would eventually lead to UAR's downfall in 1961 and this political chaos would make the perfect conditions for the Assad family to rise to power.³

The Assad Family's rise to power

The Assad political legacy began in 1971 during the military coup carried out by Hafez al-Assad. Hafez al-Assad was from a rural military background and had a unique religious identity as an Alawite. Alawites are a branch of Shia Islam that are a religious minority within Syria. Hafez al-Assad is therefore a part of the secular Baathist party which de-emphasizes sectarian divides in favor of Arab nationalism.. Hafez al-Assad did institute some reforms within economic, agricultural, and social spheres. Hafez al-Assad's rule, while beginning in a slightly more decentralized manner certainly did not end that way. Hafez still ruled as a dictator... I don't think you finished this sentence.

Beginning of the Syrian Civil War

The Syrian Civil War began in 2011 with peaceful pro-democracy protests associated with the Arab Spring movement. ⁴ The Syrian Civil War protests began against Syrian President and Dictator Bashar al-Assad in Deraa, Syria and quickly spread across the country to Damascus, Hama, and Hom. The Assad regime responded with force, commonly committing human rights violations in order to maintain control over Syria including tactics such as torture, mass arrests,

³ Yom, Sean. *Government and Politics of the Middle East and North Africa*.

⁴ "Zine El Abidine Ben Ali." Wikipedia.

and extrajudicial executions⁵. In 2011, a group known as the Free Syria Army (FSA) was formed from defected Syrian Armed Forces (Assad backed Syrian military) personnel⁶. The Free Syria Army is an umbrella coalition of many different actors in Syria that are all generally fighting the Assad Regime and the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS/ISIL), The most notable actors in this coalition are the Al-Nursa Front (Al-Qaeda Affiliate), HTS (Organization for the Liberation of the Levant [former Al-Qaeda affiliate]), and the SDF (Syrian Democratic Forces), with and many other actors as well.. The war waged on for over a decade finally ending in 2024 when Damascus fell to the FSA and the HTS leader Abu Mohammad al-Julani took power over Syria as head of state.

ISIS appears

ISIS is an Al-Qaeda affiliate group which formed in the 2000s as an offshoot from Al-Qaeda Iraq (AQI) during the political instability of the 2000s in Iraq. AQI was founded by Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, a proponent of the ideology of Jihadism. Jihadism is a form of Sunni Political Islam which advocates for violent militarized struggle in the name of Islam. After the death of al-Zarqawi in an American airstrike the group rebranded to encompass a large number of Sunni Jihadist groups and called themselves the Islamic State of Iraq. The group's main ideology is that they seek the establishment of a global caliphate of Islamic rule, otherwise known as Sharia Law. ISI seeks to begin this caliphate within the territories of Iraq and Syria and then eventually expand this into a global caliphate. This group would subsequently rebrand to become ISIS (Islamic State of Iraq and Syria) in 2013. ISIS had success in creating what political scientists refer to as a proto-state, basically an entity that functions as a state but does not meet some of the criteria for statehood and is therefore not recognized. Some of these criteria can include the

⁵ CFR Editors. "Syria's Civil War: The Descent Into Horror."

⁶ "Free Syria Army." Wikipedia.

capacity to enter into international relations, ability to levy taxes, a monopoly over the use of force, and a continuous territory per the Montevideo Convention of 1933 which defines the general criteria for statehood. The Islamic State during their peak met some of these requirements but not all of them, and due to their crimes against humanity in order to maintain a monopoly over the use of force in the territory they controlled. How were all of the groups fighting in the civil war antagonized by ISIS, and who did most of the fighting against ISIS during their incursion? What is the difference between ISIS and HTS and the Nusra Front?

The Current Situation and Problems at Play

We will begin the committee in March 2011 during the escalation of the Arab Spring protests in Daraa. The escalation was caused by a clash between Syrian children and the Assad regime when they were creating graffiti art against Bashar al-Assad with anti-government slogans. The children were subsequently arrested and tortured, sparking a huge increase in protests after the regime's disregard for the parent's request for information on their children. This is what sparked the escalation from the Arab Spring protests into the Syrian Civil War.

Many governments have a range of opinions on the situation, many of which are/will act as foreign proxies. Most notably Iran, Russia, and Hezbollah taking their typical anti-western stance in favor of Assad, while more western aligned countries such as Jordan, Turkey, and the United States maintained an anti-Assad approach backing the rebel forces. These become very prominent as we move through committee and as the situation ramps up.

Questions to Consider

How can countries balance geopolitical interests with each other?

What should the role of foreign proxies be? Should countries be funding foreign proxy groups like Hezbollah?

What role does Syrian oil play in this conflict?

How can Jihadism be addressed?

What could a new Syrian democratic government look like? How will that transition be made?

Characters/Countries

1. USA *veto power*: The United States during 2011 supported the anti-Assad rebel group forces of the Free Syria Army, however it later shifted to only provide support to the Kurdish SDF. The SDF was more so of a Kurdish defense movement than it was necessarily seeking to topple the Assad regime. The United States should keep in mind the connotation of western interventionism and seek to balance this awareness with supporting human rights and democracy in the region. Also Trump abandoned the Kurds in 2016 by withdrawing army troops because Erdogan told him to.
2. France *veto power*: France also took a relatively anti-Assad approach with a stronger emphasis on humanitarian aid. Similarly to the United States, France has an interesting connotation to their intervention due to the Sykes-Picot treaty, therefore avoiding neocolonial perceptions will be important to balancing interest.
3. UK *veto power*: The United Kingdom took a much stronger anti-Assad approach fully backing the Free Syria Army with weaponry and financial assistance. The United Kingdom was also a part of the Sykes-Picot Agreement.
4. China *veto power*- China backed the Assad regime as an anti-western force fully. Since China is non-western
5. Russia *veto power*- Russia provides probably some of the strongest international support to the Assad regime and later in 2015 would launch an actual military operation against the FSA.
6. Bosnia & Herzegovina- As a small but geographically relevant state Bosnia is mostly interested in regional stability rather than acts of interventionism. Strong focus on maintaining stability (the regime) as well as humanitarian aid.
7. Brazil- Brazil is an emerging power as one of the founding members of BRICS. Brazil took in a large amount of Syrian refugees making migration out of Syria a main concern. Brazil also emphasis south-south partnerships rather than backing the regime or the rebels.
8. Gabon- As a global south African nation does not have a major stake as a foreign proxy but generally advocates for institutionalism as a solution to global conflict.
9. Lebanon- Lebanon's proximity to Syria makes it a major player in the region especially with the presence of Hezbollah, one of Iran's other proxies in Southern Lebanon. The

Lebanese government which functions with a system of confessional sectarianism had a split with the Maronite Christians and Sunni Muslims backing the FSA while the Shia (Hezbollah included) generally backed Assad.

10. Nigeria- Nigeria is a moderately developed state with strong internal political and religious divides similar to those presented in Syria. Nigeria is most interested in relative stability and combating Islamic extremism.
11. Colombia- Columbia is a developing Latin American state that has large ties to drug cartels and also experiences relative political instability. Colombia, while not directly tied to Syria, maintains diplomatic relations with both sides.
12. Germany- Germany ceased diplomatic relations with the Assad government in 2013 soon after the start of the war. Germany however prioritizes stability and non-interference with Europe.
13. India- India also focuses on regional stability and has a strong religious divide between Hindu and Muslim populations. India is also a member of BRICS and a leader in the global south economy.
14. Portugal- Portugal also prioritizes humanitarian aid and European security, with a strong emphasis on addressing the migration crisis.
15. South Africa- South Africa leads with support for the Syrian uprising but is still however cautious of the diplomatic and political implications that this would cause.
16. Azerbaijan- Azerbaijan is often seen as a middle ground between the east and west however is increasingly siding with the east due to Russian gas supply. Azerbaijan primarily supports the Assad regime.
17. Guatemala- Guatemala is a non-aligned Latin American country that prioritizes economics and security. Guatemala also shares a colonial background and therefore does not support any actions that could be interpreted as such.
18. Morocco- A fellow MENA country that is also impacted by the Arab Spring through some small scale protests. Morocco supports the FSA.
19. Pakistan- Pakistan is a country with similar regional security issues considering their shared border with India. Pakistan has internal strife whether to support or not to support

the Assad regime with mounting pressure from the Sunni population to denounce but has complicated family ties.

20. Togo- Togo is a developing African state that prioritizes state security and combatting Jihadism.

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