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United Nations Security Council

The Security Council comprises of 15 United Nations member states, of which China, France, Russia, United States of America, and United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland holds permanent membership. There are also other 10 non-permanent members, with five elected each year to serve two-year terms. Under its Charter, all members are required to abide by with the Security Council’s decision.

The UNSC is responsible for the maintenance of international peace and security. Its Charter includes the establishing peacekeeping missions, imposing international sanctions, and sanctioning of military action. Its powers are implemented through the United Nations Security Council resolutions.
Overview:
For more than four decades, power in Syria has been concentrated around the Assad family and the Syrian Baath Party. Over the course of the revolution, the circle has tightened to a core of Assad family members and staunch loyalists in the military, security, and intelligence establishment. From a round of research and interviews, these seem to be the most relevant players, the key people running the regime as it battles the revolution:
Timeline of the Conflict (March 2011- 31 March 2013): ²

6 March 2011: Around a dozen of boys under the age of 15 are arrested for graffiti in the rural city of Daraa. They spray painted the slogan of Arab uprisings: “The people want to topple the regime.” It was seen as a strong defiance against Syrian authoritarian regime.

15 March 2011: On Facebook, a page called “Syrian Revolution 2011” urged people to protest “Day of Rage.” The effect was a number of protests reported in al-Hasakah, Daraa, Deir ez-Zor, and Hama, with smaller display in Damascus.

3 April 2011: Adel Safar is appointed as the new Prime Minister by President Bashar al-Assad. This was done in response to the people’s call for a change. Assad dissolved his cabinet and assigned Safar to form a new government. Countless thousands of Syrian showed their support for President’s action by gathering in a central Damascus square, waving his picture and chanting his name.

6 April 2011: The country’s only casino was closed by government officials in order to win the support of religious conservatives. The government also announces to grant citizenship to thousands of Kurds residing in Syria. This was also one of their most valuable demands. On the other hand, protest still continues in Daraa. In Houran
chants of “Peaceful Revolution, for Muslims and Christians” were heard.

16 April 2011: Assad gave a speech in front of his new cabinet. He pledged to grant greater political and social rights. He also affirmed that his new priorities were to lift the state of emergency law, allowing regulated demonstrations, as well as to give more freedom of press and freedom of suffrage. The protesters were still not happy and were hoping more from their President.

21 April 2011: President Assad issued a law to end the Syria’s almost 50 year old state of emergency. He also passed a law to abolish the Supreme State Security Council and granted right to peaceful demonstration. In the intervening time, Syrians and the rest of the world watched Syrian army and pro-Assad aggressive supporters abusing and killing protesters.³

19 May 2011: Sanctions are imposed on President Bashar al-Assad for violating human rights by the US. According to BBC, this is the first time International Community has looked into this matter with so much attention. Human Right Watch issued a report about the siege of Daraa titled: “We’ve Never Seen Such Horror.”⁴

24 May 2011: According to Syrian Human Rights group, death toll reached 1100 people. This group also claimed that those Syrian security agents killed soldiers who refused to fire on civilians.
28 May 2011: A 13 year old boy named Hamza Al Khatib was delivered to his family as a mutilated corpse. His body showed signs of torture that included burning, gunshot wounds (not to kill), sexual abuse, and severed genitalia. He was not the only one; there were other children, men and women who suffered the same fate.5

3 June 2011: Largest protest as of this date takes place with about 50,000 protesters in Hama. The government restricts access to the Internet and succeeds in shrinking online activities by almost two-thirds. Al-Jazeera reports that funerals mourners were dispersed with live fire. “This cycle of death repeats itself throughout the revolution.”6

14 June 2011: For the first time, the Arab League condemns the violent action of the Syrian government.7

20 June 2011: President Assad delivers his third major speech since the beginning of the uprisings. He offers amnesty to protestors but warns against the presence of “saboteurs” in the country. He accused the “foreign conspiracies,” “vandals,” and “radical and blasphemous individuals.”8

10 July 2011: Government announces “National Dialogue” to reach a political solution. But the opposition leaders rejected the talks as they believed that the government continued it violent crackdown on the protestors.
31 July 2011: According to activist groups around 136 people are killed in Hama, Dier ez-Zor, Harak and Abu Kamal. This marked the new bloodiest day of the uprising, as of this day.

8 August 2011: Saudi Arabia’s King Abdullah condemned Assad’s action and called his regime a “killing machine.” At the same time, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and Bahrain recalled their ambassadors from Syria.

18 August 2011: International pressure mounts up on Assad as the Leaders in US, France, Britain and Germany called for Assad to resign. Similar statements were followed by the government of Canada and Switzerland. Switzerland also recalled its ambassador.

23 August 2011: Syrian advocates in Turkey announced the formation of the Syrian National Council. The major intention of this group was to unite all opposition groups together and be the premier voice against Assad. Though, as time passed, it experienced internal disagreement and high profile resignations.

2 September 2011: European Union exercises a ban on imports of Syrian oil. This move was taken to starve the regime of its major source of income. Pending this event, Europe has been Syria’s largest oil importer client.

21 September 2011: Turkey’s Prime Minister, Recap Tayyip Erdogan, cuts off all ties with Syria. Before the uprising, Erdogan and Assad were close friends, and their countries enjoyed close trade relations. Turkey also became the strongest opponent of the Assad’s regime and materially started supporting the fight against the government.

4 October 2011: US and Europe pushed for heavier sanctions on Syria. Though, China and Russia blocked this move by the use of
their veto power. This splits the global world powers into two groups.

12 November 2011: The Arab League suspends Syria’s membership. This was perceived as a harsh diplomatic punishment as the regime was now isolated from its neighbors. Syria felt betrayed by their Arab allies.

27 November 2011: Arab League declared sanctions on Syria. These included cutting off all transaction with Syria’s Central Bank, travel ban on Syrian executives, and freezing assets of people related to Assad and its regime.

7 December 2011: In ABC News’ interview, Assad proclaims that he does not have any regrets or remorse over the current situation in Syria. In his words, he is trying to “protect the Syrian people.”

13 December 2011: According to UN, more than 5,000 people were killed in Syria’s conflict as of this date. At this moment, any form of demonstration was met with severe force from the regime.

22 December 2011: Arab League’s observers arrived in Syria. Since this was the
first time this organization ever undertook this expedition, the inexperience was visible. The report compiled did not meet the expectations as it lacked the concrete details of the situation in Syria, much to the dismay of everyone.

24 December 2011: Financial worries finally catch up, as Syria’s oil production fell by 30-35% as a result of international sanctions.  

6 January 2012: General Mustafa Ahmad al-Sheikh defects to join the Free Syrian Army. According to his knowledge, almost 20,000 soldiers, mainly Sunni Muslims, have desolated the Syrian Army.

15 January 2012: Security forces raid the Aleppo University’s campus during a student protest.

4 February 2012: Russia and China vetoed a UN Security Council resolution but backed an Arab League peace plan. According to analysts, the regime used this veto as a cover to increase their violence and fear in Homs and later in Idlib.  

12 February 2012: The leader of Al Qaeda, Ayman al-Zawahiri, sides himself against Assad and sides with the protesters. Assad uses this reason as an argument that the revolution is led by terrorists.

16 February 2012: A non-binding resolution is passed by UN General Assembly asking for the resignation of Bashar Assad.

23 February 2012: Former UN Secretary General Kofi Annan is appointed as the Joint
Special Envoy to seek diplomatic solution to the crisis in Syria.\textsuperscript{14}

15 March 2012: Demonstrations marked one year anniversary of the Syrian uprising. Protestors faced crackdown.\textsuperscript{15} Meanwhile, Assad’s supporters rallied in Damascus and the Druze city of Sweida to show their allegiance.\textsuperscript{16} \textsuperscript{17} One man carries a poster that vows eternal allegiance to Assad.

25 May 2012: Massacres in Al Houla results in 108 dead bodies, out of whom 49 were children. This stirs up global attention and ruthless condemnation of the Assad regime.\textsuperscript{19}

12 April 2012: Ceasefire takes place due to the efforts of Kofi Annan but later it turned out that both the government and the opposition forces violated their sides of agreement.\textsuperscript{18}

28 May 2012: In Damascus, as an act of civil disobedience, shopkeepers close their shops in a protest strike. The exceptional act shows that alliance between the business and government has weakened. On Facebook, the protest was tagged with the slogan, “Open your heart and close your shop.”\textsuperscript{20}

12 June 2012: UN’s Herve Ladosous calls the uprising in Syria a full scale civil war and said that the government has lost control of “large chunks” of cities.\textsuperscript{21}
16 June 2012: UN explains that the situation has become dangerous for observers to continue their work as they are directly targeted in attacks. With this, it suspends its mission.

18 June 2012: News reports claimed that Russia sent two warships to Syria to protect its base in Tartous. The motive behind this was to assist in the base amid increasing violence in Syria and to help in the possible evacuation of the Russian citizens in Syria.²²

6 July 2012: Brigadier General Manaf Tlass, regarded as a “golden boy” of the Assad’s regime, defects.²³

11 July 2012: Syria’s Ambassador to Iraq, Nawaf al-Fares, the most senior diplomat, defects.²⁴

13 July 2012: Officials move stockpile of some of its chemical weapons out of storage. US officials are worried that they might use them “in an act of desperation.” ²⁵

19 July 2012: Russia and China vetoed a UN Security Council resolution but backed an Arab League peace plan. This would have otherwise, imposed further economic sanctions on Syria.²⁶

24 July 2012: Syria’s ambassador to Cyprus, Lamia al-Hariri, and her husband, Abdelatif al-Dabbagh, Syria’s ambassador to UAE defects. Ambassador to Belarus follows in their footsteps.²⁷

August 2012: A video shows rebels performing a public execution of four Assad’s loyalists in Aleppo.²⁸ The Human Rights Watch condemns the execution and has charged both the sides with human right violations.
2 August 2012: Kofi Annan resigns from his position of UN-Arab League Joint Special Envoy to Syria. He blames a lack of unity and will of world powers to solve the crisis.29

6 August 2012: Syrian Prime Minister Riyad Hijab defects and joins the revolution. He blamed the Assad’s regime of “genocide” and “barbarian brutal killing against unarmed people.”30

17 August 2012: Lakhdar Brahimi, a veteran Algerian diplomat, is appointed as the new UN-Arab League Joint Special Envoy to Syria.31

16 September 2012: Iran proves that it is Syria’s closest ally in the Arab world by confirming to the world that its Revolutionary Guards are helping Assad’s regime.32 33

19 October 2012: Syrian conflict starts to spill cross border in Turkey, Israel, Iraq, Jordan, and Lebanon.34 35

11 November 2012: Syrian opposition unites in Doha and elected cleric Ahmed al-Khatib, as head of Syria’s new opposition coalition.36

30 November 2012: Given the internet blackout in Syria, Google and Twitter reactivated their voice to tweet program. This permits an individual with a phone
connection to send a tweet by speaking into their phone. This system was developed and used during the protests in Egypt when their country faced a similar problem.\(^37\)

3 December 2012: US President, Barack Obama, warns the Syrian government against using chemical weapons.\(^38\)\(^39\)

4 December 2012: NATO requests Turkey to deploy Patriot missiles to its southern border with Syria.\(^40\) Hours later, Russians delivered Iskandar missiles to Syria at the port of Tartus.\(^41\)

22 December 2012: Russian military experts told the Syrian officials to move its stock of chemical weapons from “many locations” to “one or two” locations.\(^42\)

1 January 2013: According to Lakhdar Brahimi, toll of people killed could reach up to 100,000.\(^43\)

2 January 2013: UN’s data suggest that the death toll could be more than 60,000.\(^44\)

12 February 2013: Death toll increases to 70,000 - up almost 10,000 from the start of the year.\(^45\)

6 March 2013: Rebels kidnapped 21 Filipino United Nations Disengagement Observer Force Zone (UNDOF) peacekeepers between the borders of Syria and Israel. A video on YouTube of a group called “The Martyr of Yarmouk” claimed responsibility for the kidnapping. In return for their release, they demanded that the Syrian forces withdraw from the area. Later, it emerged that the story was bogus. One of the peacekeeper said in English:

"We, the UN personnel here, are safe, and the Free Syrian Army are treating us good. We cannot go home because the government of (President Bashar) Assad do not stop the bombing. To our family, we hope to see you soon and we are OK here."
The 21 peacekeepers told The Associated Press via Skype that all of them “are fine and in good health.” 46 47 48 49 50

The UN peacekeepers were released to the Jordanian authorities, and all of them were unharmed. 51

**Human Rights Violations:**
Human Rights violation occurs when actions by individuals, governments or a group of people negatively affects the life of the people in an area or country. These acts are defined as unlawful and not in accordance with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights that was ratified on 10 December 1948 in Paris, France. 52

Even after more than six decades of its inception human rights violations still exist throughout the globe. Keeping our attention on the conditions in Syria, we shall examine that the countless articles in the Universal Declaration Human Rights have been outright violated.

Article 3: Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person. 53

Article 5: No one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment. 54

And several other articles which talks about equal protection (Art. 7), arbitrary arrest (Art. 8), innocent until proven guilty (Art. 11.1) and countless others which have been breached. 55

According to the Amnesty International, these numerous Human rights violations
have been vastly committed by the Syrian government,\textsuperscript{56} but Navi Pillay, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, has mentioned in her report that both sides have committed war crimes.\textsuperscript{57} \textsuperscript{58} According to UN, both sides are guilty of brutal killings and targeted attacks, unrelenting bombing, destruction of infrastructure, harassment, torture and ill treatment, kidnapping, hostage taking, and the use of children as human shields and in dangerous non-violent roles.\textsuperscript{59} \textsuperscript{60} \textsuperscript{61} \textsuperscript{62} \textsuperscript{63} After analyzing these documented reports, most of these horrendous acts are committed by the Syrian army in order to complete their military operations and orders.\textsuperscript{64} \textsuperscript{65} Investigation by the UN has led to them to this conclusion that the army is following a shoot-to-kill order from their superiors.

In spring 2012, Amnesty International documented the inhumane actions of the Syrian Military. In addition to the crimes mentioned in the UN report, they observed attacks on hospitals and its personnel, and fatal tortures that ranged from “broken bones, missing teeth, deep scars and open wounds from electric shocks, and from severe beatings and lashings with electric cables to other implements” whose victims were mainly young boys and men.\textsuperscript{66}

Human Rights Watch has pointed its fingers at the government of Syria and its army for using civilians, especially children, as human shields in confrontations to protect themselves. The UN has included the Syrian government in its annual “list of shame” as worst offenders.\textsuperscript{67} The UN Human Rights Council has also passed a resolution condemning the violating acts of the government.\textsuperscript{68}

Though, one can also raise an important counter argument to all these accusations as not all the reports have been completely accurate. For instance, Zainab al-Hosni, who was supposedly beheaded by the Syrian army but she later turned out to be alive.\textsuperscript{69}
Casualties:
Weekly deaths as a result of the Syrian civil war, based on data from the Syrian National Council\textsuperscript{70}

The death toll reveals all the casualties since the start of the uprising in March 2011. It includes civilians, protesters, dissidents, and pro-government soldiers. The most recent UN report put the death count at 70,000.\textsuperscript{71, 72}
Many Syrian Observer groups count armed rebels as “civilians,” an accurate number of civilians killed has been difficult to confirm. The number of children and women killed are recorded separately from overall civilians. Pro-government deaths include those of armed forces, police, and officials. 

Martyr count by Death Method (The Undocumented are mostly gunshot wounds)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Count</th>
<th>Death Method</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>18983</td>
<td>Gunshot wound</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15464</td>
<td>Artillery shelling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10833</td>
<td>Undocumented</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3541</td>
<td>Bombardment by air</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2627</td>
<td>Gunshot from sniper</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1761</td>
<td>Under torture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1103</td>
<td>For refusing to fire at civilians and kill protestors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>721</td>
<td>Due to severe wounds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>641</td>
<td>Sit throat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>585</td>
<td>Tfiyr</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>186</td>
<td>Bomb explosion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>171</td>
<td>Burned</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>151</td>
<td>Bsarokh bayd aime.de</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>57</td>
<td>Because of the difficulty in getting treatment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>39</td>
<td>Mine explosion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29</td>
<td>Heart attack due to fear</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Seventy thousand and counting! How did we reach this number? It’s essential that we ask questions about this reported number of deaths. Sharmine Narwani, in her article
“What the Syrian death tolls really tells us?”75 takes a different route to these reported numbers. An important question to ask while examining the number 70,000 is; what is the importance of having this kind of statistic? Will this high figure bring a peaceful solution swiftly? Or might this contribute to escalate the situation further by causing division and raising fingers?

Closely examining our modern history, one can argue that death tolls during modern wars are regularly manipulated, inflated or downplayed to cater to the needs of the highly politicized parties. For example, Libya’s new government recently published a press statement denouncing that the number of causalities had been exaggerated during the 2011 Libyan civil war; causing NATO’s humanitarian intervention.76

Several prominent figures have questioned this number of 70,000. Rami Abdulrahman of the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR), labels UN’s effort as “political” and the result “propaganda”77

Will this number, 70,000+, be used by the foreign nations as a mean to intervene in Syria?
Refugees:
The UN’s March 2013 estimate puts the number of Syrian refugees to one million, who have fled to bordering countries in order to seek refuge from the conflict. Around 2.5 million Syrians have already lost or fled their homes and hence became internally displaced, due to lack of food and water, and fear of death. The UN High Commissioner for Refugees has reported that the number of people seeking refuge has drastically increased in the year 2013.\textsuperscript{78, 79}

As of March 2013, the UNHCR estimates 3,000 people are crossing Syria’s border per day to seek refuge in neighboring countries. According to UNHCR, 78\% of refugees are women and children.\textsuperscript{80}
Inside Syria’s Torture Centers: 81, 82

Scores of prisoners undergo torture and ill treatment, including beatings, being strung up by their wrists, electrocution, burnings, mock executions and sexual abuse. There are many cases of rape and assault reported and over a dozen reporting of torture on children.
Refugees disguised as militants. According to official statements from the Turkish Democratic Party (DP), around 10,000 Taliban militants are using refugee’s camps in Turkey as a cover, to gain access to the common border between Syria and Turkey.

Namik Kemal Zeybek, said that these militants were using the refugee camp as their base. At night, these radicals leave the camps and attack Syrian targets, and in the morning return to the base.

Turkey’s border is allegedly used to transfer foreign militants and weaponry into Syria.

“In July, Turkish lawmaker Refik Er-Yilmaz said that many CIA and Mossad agents were in Hatay, and that the spies carry various types of identification.”
Past UN Actions:
United Nations Supervision Mission in Syria (UNSMIS)

On 25 March 2012, Kofi Annan, the then Joint Special Envoy of the United Nations and League of Arab States to Syria, proposed a six-point plan that was accepted by Syria and endorsed by this Security Council. The six points asks the Syrian authorities to:

1. Syrian-led political process to address the aspirations and concerns of the Syrian people

2. UN-supervised cessation of armed violence in all its forms by all parties to protect civilians

3. All parties to ensure provision of humanitarian assistance to all areas affected by the fighting, and implement a daily two-hour humanitarian pause

4. Authorities to intensify the pace and scale of release of arbitrarily detained persons

5. Authorities to ensure freedom of movement throughout the country for journalists

6. Authorities to respect freedom of association and the right to demonstrate peacefully
Suggestion for Further Research:
Kindly keep in mind that this study guide is intended to serve only as a comprehensive overview of the crisis in Syria, and by no means are its content extensive. I have outlined major events and happenings which you should you use as a base for further research. Since, this is highly current topic; I would recommend you read reliable news weekly, in order to stay updated of any new happenings.

For additional reading I would suggest the following links.


Points the Resolution should address:

1. Should Bashar al-Assad be recommended to the International Criminal Court?  
2. Is armed intervention a feasible and effective approach?  
3. How will the Security Council continue to engage foreign ministries of Syria’s neighboring countries,
which have become embroiled in the violence?

4. How can the Security Council clearly and confidently mark out the central perpetrators in the ongoing violence?

5. How does the Security Council plan to coordinate with other UN agencies to address this issue, and what other resources does it intend to employ?
ENDNOTES

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84 http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2012/12/19/278923/taliban-members-enter-syria-via-turkey/
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