



SYRIAN CONFLICT AND THE GLOBAL RESPONSE

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The Arab Springs has triggered many of the undemocratic regimes in West Asia. Syria has been embroiled in civil war in the wake of the uprising against the Bashar-al Assad military regime and his neo-Baathist government. Bashar al-Assad has been president of Syria since 2000.ⁱ The crisis in Syria was prompted by protests in March 2011 calling for the release of political prisoners. National Security forces responded to widespread peaceful demonstrations with brutal violence. President Bashar al-Assad refused to halt attacks and implement the meaningful reforms demanded by protestors. In summer of 2011, numerous accounts emerged from witnesses, victims, the media, and civil society that the government forces had subjected civilians to arbitrary detention, torture, and the deployment and use of heavy artillery.ⁱⁱ Bahsar al- Assad's government has consistently denied responsibility for the crimes and blame for the violence on rebels. The government also denied humanitarian access to civilians. Alongside, the worsening violence, the lack of the assistance from the United Nations, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) caused a severe shortage of food, water and healthcare in the country. Many refugees have fled to the neighboring countries.

As the crisis continued to escalate, opponents of the Assad regime created several opposition organizations such as the Syrian National Council (SNC), an umbrella organization of exiled Syrians and the Free Syrian Army (FSA), a militarized element largely composed of Syrian military defectors and armed rebels. On August 2011, the FSA began attacking Syrian soldiers, marking the first time that the opposition resorted to violence to overthrow the regime and end the government's widespread attacks on civilians.ⁱⁱⁱ Later, the conflict has also grown

increasingly sectarian in nature, with civilians being targeted by both the sides based on the presumed support or opposition to the Assad regime associated with ethnic identities.^{iv}

The Arab League has suspended Syria's membership on 12 November 2011 and imposed economic sanctions which failed to uphold the League of Arab States peace plan.^v The European Union imposed economic sanctions, including an arms embargo, visa ban and asset freeze, against the Syrian regime in May 2011, and has heightened the sanctions periodically since then. In 2012, the EU recognized the National Coalition of the Syrian Opposition as the legitimate representative of the Syrian people, and released a statement calling for Assad to step down to allow for political transitions in January 2013.^{vi}

On August 2013, a series of videos and photographs indicating a new chemical weapons attack has killed a high number of civilians in rebel-held areas outside of Damascus. It is one of the world's most lethal chemical weapons attack since Saddam Hussein used in Halabja in 1988.^{vii} The footage shows a large number of children among the victims of the attack. Casualty estimates have varied widely, from 300 to over 1300.^{viii} Syria being not the signatory of the Chemical Weapons Conventions is accused by the Western countries for the Chemical weapons attacked on its citizens. The US has threatened military action over the attack. But in the interview with Fox News, Assad acknowledged that his government has chemical weapons but denied and blamed rebel groups for the attack.^{ix}

The UN Security Council's permanent members discussed a UK-proposed resolution authorizing necessary measures to protect civilians in Syria.^x Western countries including France are trying to build a coalition to support against the Bashar al-Assad government. However, Russia warned that Western backed military strikes would destabilize the West Asian region.^{xi} In the future, China and Russia are unlikely to support any military action in Syria. The joint UN-Arab League envoy to Syria, Lakhdar Brahmi favors that UN Security Council resolution is required for military action.^{xii}

Both Russia and China have significant economic and military relations with Syria. As permanent members of the UN Security Council, the duo has vetoed three resolutions designed to isolate the Assad regime. The diplomatic oppositions stem from concerns of a Western-backed military intervention similar to those in Libya. Russia remains committed to the Geneva process

and continues to support the regime politically. China supports the role of UN Security Council to resolve the Syria issue politically.^{xiii} China has urged the Syrian government to talk with the opposition and take steps to meet demands for political change.

UN General Secretary Ban Ki-moon has mentioned that Syria conflict had reached its most serious moment. On 15 May 2013, the UN General Assembly adopted a resolution condemning the conflict's escalation, violations of humanitarian law. The Resolution also called to cooperate with the Independent International Commission of Inquiry to investigate into the alleged use of chemical weapons.^{xiv}

In the first week of September 2013, Moscow suggested that US strikes on Syria can be prevented if the Assad regime surrendered its chemical weapons. Thereafter, the US threatened military strikes against Syria has put them on hold after agreeing to a Russian plan to destroy Syria's chemical weapons stockpiles. International monitors have taken over to destroy the regime's chemical weapons stocks which have open for the diplomatic breakthrough on Syria crisis. Now, the entire chemical weapons arsenal is to be dismantled by the middle of 2014 under the terms of the US-Russia brokered deal. Discussions are still continuing at the United Nations over the text of a Security Council resolution on the disarmament programme. Still the U.S Russia and China disagree on issues surrounding the Syria conflict. While Russia and China vehemently opposed to the explicit idea of penalties in the event of Syria falling to co-operate. Developing countries including India have consistently called upon all sides to abjure violence and called for an inclusive political dialogue that could lead to a comprehensive political solution in Syria.^{xv}

(Disclaimer: The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the position of the Centre for Air Power Studies CAPS)

ⁱ Bashar al- Assad has succeeded his father Hafez- al Assad in 2000.

ⁱⁱ See, International Coalitions for the Responsibility to Protect: URL: <http://www.responsibilitytoprotect.org/index.php/crises/crisis-in-syria>

ⁱⁱⁱ Ibid.,

^{iv} Ibid., Also see, Jeremy M. Sharp, "Armed Conflict in Syria: Background and U.S. Response," Congressional Research Service, 6 September 2019, URL: <https://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/mideast/RL33487.pdf>

^v See, David Batty and Jack Shenkar, "Syria suspended from Arab League: Member states agree to exclude Syria and Impose sanctions over its failure to end government crackdown on protests", *The Guardian*, 12 November 2012, URL: <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2011/nov/12/syria-suspended-arab-league>

^{vi} "Embargoes and Sanctions on Syria", 4 June 2013, URL: <https://www.gov.uk/sanctions-on-syria>.

vii Syria Chemical attack: What we know”, BBC News, 24 September 2013, URL: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-23927399>

viii Ibid.,

ix “Defiant Assad Claims government did not use Chemical Weapons, vows to abide by agreement”, *FoxNews*. 19 September 2013, URL: <http://www.foxnews.com/politics/2013/09/19/defiant-assad-claims-government-did-not-use-chem-weapons-vows-to-abide-by/>

x Syria Crisis: UK Puts for war UN proposal, BBC news, 28 August 2013, URL: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-23864124>

xi “As it happened: Syria Crisis”, *BBC News*, URL: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-23863012>

xii “Syria: UN: Arab League envoy says substance may have killed civilians, warns against military Intervention”, *UN News Centre*, 28 August 2013, URL: <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=45718#.UkXLQNJHKlg>

xiii “China urges UN role on Syria after U.S says gives up”, *Reuters*, Beijing, 6 September 2013, URL: <http://www.reuters.com/article/2013/09/06/us-syria-crisis-china-idUSBRE98507G20130906>,

xiv For detail see, “General Assembly Adopts Text Condemning Violence in Syria, Demanding That All Sides End Hostilities”, Sixty Seven General Assembly Planary GA/11372, 15 May 2013, URL: <http://www.un.org/News/Press/docs/2013/ga11372.doc.htm>

xv Sandeep Dikshit, “India joins 41 Nations in condemning Syria Killings”, *The Hindu*, New Delhi, 2 June 2013, URL: <http://www.thehindu.com/news/international/india-joins-41-nations-in-condemning-syria-killings/article3480783.ece>

