

BACKGROUND REPORT

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NATO

Current Crisis in Syria





Current Crisis in Syria

1. Introduction

Around 18 thousand people (by July 2012¹) have died in Syria since the beginning of the uprising in March 2011. As the conflict starts to gain a character of a civil war, according to experts on the Middle Eastern region, the international community has to be very careful to handle the situation properly. It may pose a threat not only to the shaky stability in the Middle East, with extremism² involved, it may likely become a serious threat to the international security.

2. Background Information

2.1 History

Modern Syria was established as a French mandate in 1920. After Syria declared independence in 1946, it struggled for the next two decades under the political instability. Series of coups ended in 1963 when the Baath party took control over Syria. However, the power struggle within the Baath party continued until 1970, when Hafez al-Assad took over the leadership position in the Baath party and established an authoritarian rule over Syria for the next 30 years.

The regime violently suppressed an armed uprising led by the Muslim Brotherhood³ in 1982 with tens of thousands of dead.⁴ It was not only a result of religious differences between the Alawite regime and the Sunni Muslim Brotherhood, but also of the level of

¹ URQUHART, Conal. *Aleppo comes under air and ground assaults from Assad forces*[online]. [cit. 2012-07-29]. Available at: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2012/jul/28/aleppo-air-ground-assaults-assad>. Syrian Revolution Martyr Database. [online]. [cit. 2012-07-26]. Available at: <http://syrianshuhada.com>.

² The definitions of extremism may vary a lot. "Extremism is a complex phenomenon, although its complexity is often hard to see. Most simply, it can be defined as activities (beliefs, attitudes, feelings, actions, strategies) of a character far removed from the ordinary. In conflict settings it manifests as a severe form of conflict engagement. However, the labeling of activities, people, and groups as "extremist", and the defining of what is "ordinary" in any setting is always a subjective and political matter" - COLEMAN, Peter and Andrea BARTOLI. *Addressing extremism* [online]. International center for cooperation & conflict resolution [cit. 2012-02-10]. Available at: http://www.tc.columbia.edu/i/a/document/9386_WhitePaper_2_Extremism_030809.pdf

For sake of this paper we will work with the following definition: "Extremism is a radical viewpoint or perspective which demonize those with opposing opinions, often using all-or-none thinking to characterize people as either "fully for" or "fully against" the group's views, identifying certain people outside the group as having less innate value on a basic human level. In the context of this background, we speak mostly about fundamentalists and fanatics who often advocate even violence to enforce their views. Their methods usually lead to anger and hatred, often making negative generalizations about groups of people (e.g. races and/or religions) and in some cases provoking terrorist attacks."

ZORACH, Alex. *A Definition of Extremism: Correctly Identifying and Gracefully Handling Extremist Views* [online]. [cit. 2012-02-10]. Available at: <http://zorach.wordpress.com/2010/10/12/definition-of-extremism-identifying-handling-extremist-views/>

³ Muslim Brotherhood is an international political Islamist movement founded in Egypt in 1928, which seeks the goal to apply the Sharia law. Its outspoken slogan reads „Islam is the solution“. As it had been suppressed by the Assad regime, it becomes more influential within the current revolutionary forces in Syria.



repression imposed by the Assad regime on the opposition. Opposition activities have been made impossible and faced harsh responses by the regime since then (until 2011).”

2.2 Bashar al-Assad

The current president of Syria, Bashar al-Assad took over the office from his father in 2001. As an ophthalmologist and with an older brother who was to become the presidential successor, he had no political ambitions until his brother died in a car accident in 1994. After the death of his father Hafez in 2000, Bashar became an unopposed candidate of the Baath party for the new Syrian president and has ruled Syria ever since.⁵

Bashar introduced certain measures that launched the economic liberalization and limited political reforms. The most notable event was the release of hundreds of political prisoners. Nevertheless, the regime continued to suppress the political opposition throughout the decade.

As the regime opposed the US Iraqi invasion in 2003 and aligned with Iran, Hamas and Hezbollah, it became isolated on the international scene. However, the government was careful to maintain its traditional partnerships for instance with Russia.

2.3 Demographics

The Syrian population is similar to other Middle Eastern countries. 90% of 22.5 million inhabitants are ethnic Arabs, followed by 9% of Kurds and small minorities of Armenians, Circassians and Turkmen. The sectarian religious differences seem to be more important for the current situation in Syria as these previously determined the political orientation of the ruling regime. A majority of more than 70% are Sunni Muslims, furthermore there are Alawites (12%), Druze (4%) and a small minority of Ismailis who originate from the Shia branch of the Islamic religion. The Christian minority plays also an important role with about 10% members of the total Syrian population. The current regime comes from the Alawite religious group.

3. The Uprising – or Revolution?

3.1 Beginning of the Conflict

Syrians have been facing with similar repressive conditions as those that led other Arab nations to revolutions and uprisings known as the Arab Spring in 2011. A lack of political freedoms alongside with economic difficulties created a strong pressure on the majority population. Yet, first attempts to organise protests in February 2011 weren't very successful. However, the demonstrations gradually spread across the country as severe clashes with the security forces increased the public anger with Assad's regime.

⁴ PORAT, Liad. *The Syrian Muslim Brotherhood and the Assad Regime* [online]. Waltham, Massachusetts, 2010 [cit. 2012-08-08]. Available at: <http://www.brandeis.edu/crown/publications/meb/MEB47.pdf>. Crown Center for Middle East Studies, Brandeis University.

⁵ BBC. Profile: Syria's Bashar al-Assad. [online]. 2011 [cit. 2012-08-08]. Available at: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/10338256>



Bashar al-Assad introduced some measures to satisfy the protesters. He formally lifted the widely-criticised State of Emergency in April 2011. The State of Emergency previously suspended most constitutional protection of citizens and was in place from 1963, commonly used to suppress the dissent. Nevertheless, the regime was criticised for introducing only formal gestures to silence the protesters. Furthermore, Bashar called for a national referendum, which was held in February 2012, to introduce a new constitution through which the space would be open for the political competition outside the Baath party. It was approved by a vast majority of participants, however, it lacked the legitimacy due to the low turnout and ongoing deadly clashes between the regime forces and demonstrators. Under the new constitution, the first parliamentary election that reintroduced other political parties beside the Baath party took place in May 2012. According to some Syrian officials, 51% of eligible voters took part in the election, in which the regime supporters won over 90% seats in the parliament⁶. However, a majority of the opposition boycotted the election.⁷

Promises of limited political reforms did not satisfy the protesters, as most of them saw the only solution to the current crisis in an immediate end of the Assad's regime.

3.2 Actors in the Conflict

3.3.1 The Regime

The Assad regime's forces are estimated to number between 100.000 and 200.000. They dispose of heavy military weapons including tanks, fight helicopters, armoured personnel carriers and artillery. Due to this professional military technology, the regime forces have an advantage in the direct military confrontations with the demonstrators.

A vast majority of the Alawite community is loyal to the regime for several reasons. A majority of Alawites have at least one member of their families in the regime's security forces. High-ranking military posts are held by Alawites, therefore they strongly identify themselves with the regime and they also fear revenge by the Sunni majority in a case of regime's fall. The government security units are also careful to not damage any Alawite districts. Demographically, wealthier urban areas tend to support Assad more than the countryside.⁸

When talking about the regime forces, the Shabiha units played a significant role in the clashes. Shabiha ("ghosts" in Arabic) are likely recruited mostly from Alawite groups, and are sometimes considered to be connected to the drug trafficking business. They are feared as extremely brutal, spotted in some of the worst massacres in Syria so far, often in black clothes. There is no official link between them and the regime and it is impossible to find out

⁶ LANDIS, Joshua. Election Results of the May 7, 2012 Syrian Elections. [online]. [cit. 2012-08-08]. Available at: <http://www.joshualandis.com/blog/?p=14669>

⁷ MROUE, Bassem a John HEILPRIN. Syria Elections: Opposition Boycotts, US Says Vote 'Borders On Ludicrous'. *AF* [online]. 2012 [cit. 2012-08-08]. Available at: http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/05/08/syria-elections-ballots-tallied-parliament_n_1499094.html

⁸ SHARP, Jeremy a Christopher BLANCHARD. *Armed Conflict in Syria: U.S. and International Response* [online]. Congressional Research Service, 2012 [cit. 2012-08-08]. Available at: <http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/mideast/RL33487.pdf>



how much they cooperate with the regime forces, but given the fact they were spotted fighting alongside with the army, it is assumed they do the “dirty work” for the government and the regime tolerates their mafia activities in exchange.^{9 10}

As Bashar al-Assad refused to abdicate, the regime is believed to likely continue the military confrontation with the demonstrators as long as it's capable of fighting or until it wins.

3.3.2 The opposition

The Syrian opposition is considered to be divided. Some parts of the opposition groups are considered to be connected to small communities. The opposition division confuses the international community. Currently, there are two main opposition coalitions in Syria.

♦ **The Syrian National Council (SNC)**

The SNC was formally created in Turkey in October 2011 by a range of mostly exile activists. It includes many members of the Muslim Brotherhood movement and it is dominated by the Sunni community. The SNC serves as a contact point for the international community, but it struggles with the internal disunity and a lack of efficiency. It advocates for an international military intervention, which leads some Syrians in the country to suspect the SNC as a tool of the foreign regional powers¹¹. On the other hand, some protest groups have put aside their differences and respect the SNC.

♦ **National Coordination Body for Democratic Change (NCB)**

The NCB is sometimes referred to as The National Coordination Committee for Democratic Change (NCC). It is based on an opposition bloc inside Syria and includes many long-term dissidents, who are allegedly afraid of Islamists within the SNC¹². Unlike SNC, the NCB is willing to negotiate with Assad's regime, opposes foreign military intervention and communicates with Russia.¹³

⁹ MOUSSAOUI, Rana. AFP. *Shabiha militiamen, tools of the Syria regime* [online]. 2012 [cit. 2012-08-08]. Available at: <http://www.google.com/hostednews/afp/article/ALeqM5gUexCNFzO6liU00IW2f-h-ykJDQ?docId=CNG.b8fb53592ed1f394daeb0aaadc8a1bd9.31>

¹⁰ BBC. *Syria unrest: Who are the shabiha?* [online]. 2012 [cit. 2012-08-08]. Available at: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-14482968>

¹¹ SHARP, Jeremy a Christopher BLANCHARD. *Armed Conflict in Syria: U.S. and International Response* [online]. Congressional Research Service, 2012 [cit. 2012-08-08]. Available at: <http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/mideast/RL33487.pdf>

¹² BBC. *Guide to the Syrian opposition* [online]. 2012 [cit. 2012-08-08]. Available at: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-15798218>

¹³ SHARP, Jeremy a Christopher BLANCHARD. *Armed Conflict in Syria: U.S. and International Response* [online]. Congressional Research Service, 2012 [cit. 2012-08-08]. Available at: <http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/mideast/RL33487.pdf>



♦ **Free Syrian Army (FSA)**

Thousands of Sunni soldiers have deserted the army since the uprising began (up to 60.000 by March 2012, according to the Turkish government data¹⁴). These soldiers are mostly light-armed and trained on elementary level, as the core of the regime's high-ranking and well-trained military officials are from the Alawite religious group. Some of those deserters create the core of the FSA, which resorted to arms in its fight against the current regime. Although its leader Riyad al-Asaad (not related to the president) claims he's got around 40.000 men directly under his command, it is likely that the number is not even a half of this figure (valid estimates are not available)¹⁵ ¹⁶. The FSA and the SNC cooperate together on some issues. In addition, there are also thousands of armed opposition fighters not directly associated with the FSA.

Efficiency of the armed opposition increases in time partly thanks to the foreign support. Some of the armed protesters allegedly receive salaries, part of which comes likely from abroad (especially from Qatar and Saudi Arabi)¹⁷. This was strongly criticised by the regime as a foreign interference.

3.3.3 Other Minority Ethnic Groups

Christians and Kurds remain mostly aside from the current uprising.¹⁸ They fear that the violent conflict could end up in a full-fledged civil war in a case of Assad's regime fall. This fears stem likely from the allegedly sectarian character of the current confrontations, as promoted by some media and the regime, even though the opposition forces claim that they seek to create a tolerant society. In particular, Christians are believed to fear sectarianism that may result in repressions against the minority groups. On the other hand, they refuse to be associated with the regime's crackdown.

¹⁴ PEKER, Emre a Donna ABU-NASR. BLOOMBERG. *Syrian Armed Forces Desertion Said To Surge To 60,000* [online]. [cit. 2012-08-08]. Available at: <http://www.bloomberg.com/news/2012-03-15/syria-loses-20-000-troops-as-deserters-flee-turkey-says-1-.html>

¹⁵ AL JAZEERA. *Ranks of Free Syrian Army 'gaining strength'* [online]. 2012 [cit. 2012-08-08]. Available at: <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2011/12/20111226171260898.html>

¹⁶ BBC. *Guide to the Syrian opposition* [online]. 2012 [cit. 2012-08-08]. Available at: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-15798218>

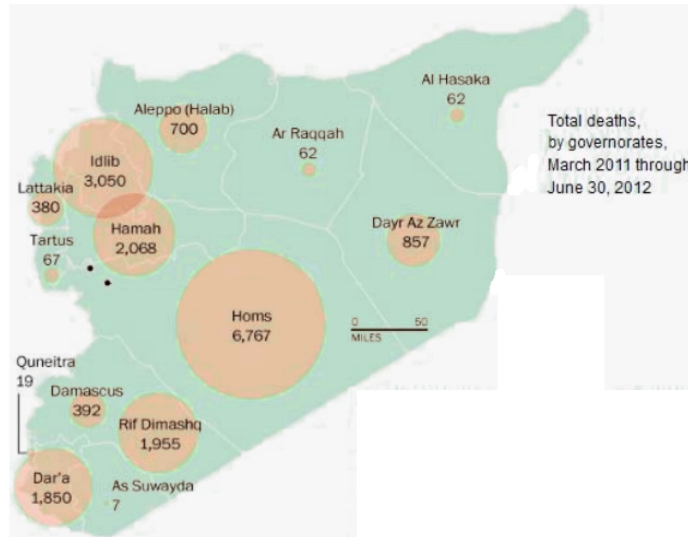
¹⁷ SHARP, Jeremy a Christopher BLANCHARD. *Armed Conflict in Syria: U.S. and International Response* [online]. Congressional Research Service, 2012 [cit. 2012-08-08]. Available at: <http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/mideast/RL33487.pdf>

¹⁸ SHARP, Jeremy a Christopher BLANCHARD. *Armed Conflict in Syria: U.S. and International Response* [online]. Congressional Research Service, 2012 [cit. 2012-08-08]. Available at: <http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/mideast/RL33487.pdf>



3.3 The Current Situation

According to observers, the total death count (around 18 000 by July 2012) contain approximately 12.000 civilian deaths. The humanitarian dimension underlines more than 90.000 refugees from Syria registered within the UNHCR (and other tens of thousands unregistered ones).



Source: Congressional Research Service, SHARP, Jeremy a Christopher BLANCHARD. Armed Conflict in Syria: U.S. and International Response [online]. Congressional Research Service, 2012 [cit. 2012-08-08]. Available at: <http://www.fas.org/sqp/crs/mideast/RL33487.pdf>

Not only the regime is to blame. A lot of the violence, especially at the beginning of the uprising, may have been caused by a lack of knowledge of the security forces how to handle the situation, not necessarily by the regime authorities¹⁹. A lot of reports on the violence are based on unverified sources, because the regime denies foreign journalists and most of the NGOs access. What is more, in some cases, the regime forces have been in the role of victims of an inadequate violence.²⁰ Some of the protest movement is violent, often Islamist groups, smugglers and criminals, sometimes just spontaneous common Sunni people.²¹

¹⁹ "Much of what has happened was due to indiscipline, security forces not knowing how to handle this kind of situation. This is a very far cry from Hama [in the 1980s] – this is not a regime that wants to massacre its people".U.S. official, Crisis Group interview, Washington, 27 May 2011",

PICKERING, Thomas. INTERNATIONAL CRISIS GROUP. *POPULAR PROTEST IN NORTH AFRICA AND THE MIDDLE EAST (VII): THE SYRIAN REGIME'S SLOW-MOTION SUICIDE* [online]. 2011 [cit. 2012-08-08]. Available at: <http://www.crisisgroup.org/~/media/Files/Middle%20East%20North%20Africa/Iraq%20Syria%20Lebanon/Syria/109%20Popular%20Protest%20in%20North%20Africa%20and%20the%20Middle%20East%20VII%20--%20The%20Syrian%20Regimes%20Slow-motion%20Suicide.pdf>

²⁰ BBC. *Timeline: Key moments in Syrian crisis* [online]. 2012 [cit. 2012-08-08]. Available at: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-18891150>

²¹ PICKERING, Thomas. INTERNATIONAL CRISIS GROUP. *POPULAR PROTEST IN NORTH AFRICA AND THE MIDDLE EAST (VII): THE SYRIAN REGIME'S SLOW-MOTION SUICIDE* [online]. 2011 [cit. 2012-08-08].



Involvement of some radical Islamic groups in the Syrian conflict is becoming a serious issue, with more than 40 reported cases of car bombings²² and suicidal attacks since the beginning of the uprising. The Al Qaeda organisation claimed responsibility for some of the attacks as well as other smaller Islamist groups did (e.g. Sunni Jihadist group "The Front to Protect the Syrian People", which has claimed responsibility for several terrorist attacks in Damascus and Aleppo, that were targeting military buildings, but killing civilians too).

3.4 Timeline

These are the key events and milestones of the uprising. The fighting continues with the number of victims rising on both sides every day. The events in *italics* are further described in other chapters.

March 15th 2011, Daraa

Demonstrations started in Daraa and were sparked by arrest of a group of teenagers who were accused of drawing political graffiti with oppositional narrative. As some demonstrators were killed by the security forces, it invoked anger and the protests gradually spread across the country.

April 19 2011

The Emergency Law was formally lifted as a concession to the protesters.

April 22 2011 Daraa

Troops in Daraa cracked down on protesters killing more than 70 of them on this day.

June 3-6 2011 Jisr Al-Shugar

Tens of security forces were killed by armed gangs in Jisr Al-Shugar. This incident indicated that the protests changed into an armed conflict.

Turkey, October 3

The opposition bloc Syrian National Council is formed.

February 26

The constitution referendum was held with voters approving the open political competition.

February - March 2012, Homs

Syrian forces cracked down on the city of Homs with heavy bombardment and the death toll estimated at 700 people killed.

March 16

The Kofi Annan Peace Plan for Syria was submitted to the UN.

Available at: <http://www.crisisgroup.org/~/media/Files/Middle%20East%20North%20Africa/Iraq%20Syria%20Lebanon/Syria/109%20Popular%20Protest%20in%20North%20Africa%20and%20the%20Middle%20East%20VII%20--%20The%20Syrian%20Regimes%20Slow-motion%20Suicide.pdf>

²² ASHER, Berman. ISW. *TIMELINE: TOTAL CAR BOMBINGS IN SYRIA* [online]. 2012 [cit. 2012-08-12]. Available at: <http://www.understandingwar.org/press-media/graphsandstat/timeline-total-car-bombings-syria>



May 7, 2012

Syrian parliamentary election were held and boycotted by the opposition. The Baath party wins a vast majority.

June 23, 2012

The **Syrian army shot down a Turkish fighter jet.** The plane mistakenly entered the Syrian airspace. Turkey disagreed with Syria over where the jet was shot down. Ankara claimed it was a few minutes after the plane had returned to the area above the international waters only close to the Syrian coast, but not above the Syrian territory²³. As a NATO member, Turkey could apply the Article 5 of the NATO treaty, if attacked by Syria.

July 18, 2012 Damascus

Syrian defence minister Daoud Rajiha and his deputy (Bashar al-Assad's brother-in-law) were **killed by a suicidal attack.** It showed that the opposition was able to get closer to the regime officials.

4. The International Dimension

4.1 International Reaction

Syria is an important player in the Middle East region for the international community, which fears that the ongoing fighting in Syria may bring instability to the whole region.

4.1.1 Arab League

The Arab League²⁴ ²⁵ hesitated to act in the matter of the Syrian uprising until November 2011, when it proposed a plan to end the violence in Syria. The plan was accepted by the Syrian government that violated it only a few days later. The Arab League suspended membership of Syria in the Arab League after that and imposed heavy economic sanctions against the Bashar al-Assad's regime. However, the government allowed Arab observers into the country in December 2011. In January 2012, the Arab League drew up a proposal of a political reform, under which Bashar would delegate power to his deputy and negotiate with the opposition. It was rejected by the Syrian government. The League sought support for the plan at the UNSC, but it was vetoed by China and Russia as both Moscow and Beijing have been opposing any military intervention in Syria at the Security Council most likely due to strategic interests to preserve the current Syrian regime. After the Libyan operation, China and Russia view another possible western countries led military intervention

²³ BBC. *Syria-Turkey tension: Assad 'regrets' F-4 jet's downing* [online]. 2012 [cit. 2012-08-08]. Available at: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-18685250>

²⁴ The Arab League is one of the most influential regional political organisations composed of 22 Arab states in Northern Africa and Middle East. Founded in 1945 the organisation strives to deepen cooperation in the fields of economy, culture, politics and, most importantly, in coordination of military defence. The Palestinian Authority is one of the full members of the League.

²⁵ BBC. Profile: Arab League [online]. 2012 [cit. 2012-08-08]. Available at: http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/country_profiles/1550797.stm



in the Middle East as a dangerous precedent for the future justification of operations within their spheres of influence. Moreover, Syria is an important partner for Russia in the Middle East and the end of Bashar's regime would mean another loss of influence and diplomatic prestige for Moscow in the region.

4.1.2 Kofi Annan's Plan

The most notable international attempt to bring peace to Syria was Kofi Annan's Plan. Kofi Annan, as a special envoy of the UN and Arab League, proposed to Bashar al-Assad a plan for a ceasefire that should have been respected by all sides at once in March 2012. Although Bashar had accepted it, he never fulfilled it practically, as he demanded written guarantees from the opposition protesters. The FSA refused to give any guarantee to the government at all. Kofi Annan resigned as the envoy for Syria in August 2012 because of the lack of unity in the UNSC and reluctance of the two sides to the conflict to end the violence²⁶.

4.2 Sanctions and Syrian Economy

Syria produces around 0.5% of total oil production in the world (in comparison to Libya and Iraq that produce approximately 2 to 3% each)^{27 28}. However, because of the sanctions imposed on Syria since the beginning of the protests in 2011, especially by the EU and the US, the oil export fell from around 400.000 bpd in 2010 to 320.000 bpd in 2011²⁹. The drop in oil export decreased Syrian government's revenues by 25%-30%, which creates losses to the national budget already heavily loaded with new military spendings due to the uprising.

Moreover, the Syrian economy has been damaged by the conflict in connection in particular with the losses in revenues from tourism. It is estimated that Syrian GDP fell by 10% in 2011.³⁰ The high inflation is not only a problem for Syrian citizens, but also for the Syrian Central Bank. The reserves held by the Syrian Central Bank shrunk from about \$20 billion before the uprising to the estimated \$5 billion with monthly losses of around \$1 billion³¹. The question is how long the government can continue meeting its budget

²⁶ ANNAN, Kofi. Press conference by Kofi Annan, Joint Special Envoy for Syria. [Press conference]. Geneva, 2 August 2012 [cit. 2012-08-08]. Available at: http://www.unog.ch/unog/website/news_media.nsf/%28httpNewsByYear_en%29/9483586914CF2E3FC1257A4E00589EE7?OpenDocument&cnxt=FA0FE&cookielang=en

²⁷ CIA. *The World Factbook* [online]. 2012 [cit. 2012-08-08]. ISSN 1553-8133. Available at: <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/rankorder/2173rank.html>

²⁸ INTERNATIONAL ENERGY AGENCY. *Oil Market Report* [online]. 2011 [cit. 2012-08-08]. Available at: <http://omrpublic.iea.org/omrarchive/12may11sup.pdf>

²⁹ SHARP, Jeremy a Christopher BLANCHARD. *Armed Conflict in Syria: U.S. and International Response* [online]. Congressional Research Service, 2012 [cit. 2012-08-08]. Available at: <http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/mideast/RL33487.pdf>

³⁰ ALAMI, Mona. IPS. Cracks Widen in Syrian Economy. [online]. Beirut, 2012 [cit. 2012-08-08]. Available at: <http://news.indialocals.com/read/2012/01/24/BJR4AwuwZJV0Kmt2ZwNIZj==/full-story-cracks-widen-in-syrian-economy>



requirements. Daily fuel shortages and power cuts are other factors damaging the Assad's regime position in the conflict.

4.3 Problems of Possible Military Intervention

A foreign military intervention to Syria may help to end the violence, but it could bring several problems as well.

With the experience from other countries in the region and the sectarian character of the conflict, it is difficult to define a possible timeframe for such an operation. It is possible the military intervention to Syria could turn into another long-term mission such as the one in Iraq with extremely high costs. Furthermore, as already mentioned, such an intervention may incense Russia, China, Iran and possibly other countries. Some relations within the international community are already fragile and possible foreign operation in Syria may further break the unstable status quo, in particular with respect to previous strongly criticised interventions in Afghanistan and Libya.

In addition, political goals of the disunited opposition are very uncertain. It is difficult to predict further developments in the country, ensuing a possible fall of the Assad regime. there is a great risk of extremists raise. Existing stockpiles of chemical weapons in Syria may also contribute to unpredictability of the situation in Syria.

4.4 Security Threats of the Syrian Conflict

4.4.1 Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD)

Syria has not not agreed to the international Chemical Weapons Convention and the regime refused to reveal its possession of chemical weapons (CW) until July 2012 with an assurance that the WMD will never be used against the Syrian citizens. The regime added that the weapons can be deployed in case of a foreign intervention.³² Syria is believed to have large stockpiles of biological weapons too.³³

So far, the regime has deployed tens of thousands of troops guarding the chemical and biological weapons.³⁴ However, it may become difficult to assure that the WMD will not fall into the wrong hands shall the Assad regime collapse. Syria does not posses nuclear weapons.

³¹ WASHINGTON POST. *Syria running out of cash as sanctions take toll, but Assad avoids economic pain* [online]. [cit. 2012-08-08]. Available at: http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/syria-running-out-of-cash-as-sanctions-take-toll-but-assad-avoids-economic-pain/2012/04/24/gIQA02njfT_story_1.html

³² MACFARQUHAR, Neil, Eric SCHMITT, Dalal MAWAD a Hwaida SAAD. THE NEW YORK TIMES. *Syria Threatens Chemical Attack on Foreign Force* [online]. 2012 [cit. 2012-08-08]. Available at: http://www.nytimes.com/2012/07/24/world/middleeast/chemical-weapons-wont-be-used-in-rebellion-syria-says.html?pagewanted=2&_r=1

³³ DEKKER, Jill a Jerry GORDON. *Syria's Bio-Warfare Threat: an interview with Dr. Jill Dekker* [online]. 2007 [cit. 2012-08-08]. Available at: http://www.newenglishreview.org/custpage.cfm/frm/13108/sec_id/13108

³⁴ STARR, Barbara. *Military: Thousands of troops needed to secure Syrian chemical sites* [online]. 2012 [cit. 2012-08-08]. Available at: <http://security.blogs.cnn.com/2012/02/22/military-thousands-of-troops-needed-to-secure-syrian-chemical-sites/>



4.4.2 Extremism

The violence and chaos create an environment that may breed different forms of extremism. Sunni radical groups (sometimes connected to Al Qaeda) are believed to have infiltrated the opposition. Currently, there is a lack of alternatives to the Assad regime in Syria due to the opposition's disunity and some radical forces may take an advantage of a power vacuum.

5. Conclusion

It seems impossible to find a consensus in the international community on Syria. Is a foreign military intervention a way to solve the current crisis and stop the violence? Would the Western countries be able to handle it effectively? Should the Western countries try to get involved indirectly or avoid any interference at all? These are the questions to which the international community and NATO has to find right answers in order to stop the violence and establish security in the Middle East.

Tips for Further Study

BBC News – Syria conflict (<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-17258397>)

Armed Conflict in Syria: U.S. and International Response, Congressional Research Service (<http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/mideast/RL33487.pdf>)

Background note: Syria, Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs, U.S. department of state (<http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/3580.htm>)

Syria live blog, Al Jazeera (<http://blogs.aljazeera.com/liveblog/topic/syria-153>)

Syria, REUTERS (<http://www.reuters.com/places/syria>)

News about Syria, CNN (<http://topics.cnn.com/topics/syria>)

Sources

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