



AtidMUN XI 2025



UNITED NATIONS SECURITY COUNCIL



**TOPIC A: ASSESSING THE NEW POLITICAL
SITUATION IN SYRIA**

**TOPIC B: ESTABLISHING GUIDELINES FOR
FOREIGN INTERVENTION IN DOMESTIC
CONFLICTS**



CHAIR LETTER

Dear Delegates,

Welcome to the United Nations Security Council of AtidMUN XI!

The topics for this year – Assessing the New Political Situation in Syria and Establishing Guidelines for Foreign Intervention in Domestic Conflicts – were specifically chosen by us to give you the best possible committee experience. We wanted to challenge you, the delegates, to tackle complicated and multifaceted situations and issues that would ask you to think outside the box. The first topic is practical and relevant, forcing you to come up with pragmatic solutions for a rapidly changing problem. It is at once extremely narrow in its application and incredibly wide-ranging in its possible solutions, which should provide good grounds for substantive debate. It is not often that we get to witness a historical event unfold before our eyes, and we think that this topic should provide for an unforgettable MUN experience.

The second topic provides a purposeful contrast to the first, being a relatively vague and general topic. However, as will become evident, the two are irrevocably linked. Interventions by foreign nations completely changed the course of the Syrian civil war, and international guidelines are desperately needed in order to ensure long lasting peace and stability. The debate on this topic will thus be informed by the first topic – should you choose to order them in this way – but not limited by it. Rather, it should enable you to release yourselves from the confines of current or past interventions and focus on preventing future wars and atrocities. Approached correctly, it will enable your creativity at crafting long-lasting solutions to shine in a way not many MUN topics allow.

Together with you, we hope to create a committee that you will never forget.

We look forward to seeing you at the conference and to being your Chairs!

Your Chairs,

Roi Nachlieli & Asaf Dar



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INTRODUCTION TO THE COMMITTEE

The United Nations Security Council (UNSC) is one of the six principle organs of the United Nations, and is charged with two main missions: the maintenance of international peace and security under the chapters V and VII of the Charter of the United Nations, and a substantial institutional mission, having a role in the nomination of the members of the International Court of Justice and the Secretary General of the United Nations, and in the admission of new Member States to the United Nations.

It is composed of fifteen members: 5 permanent members (The Republic of China, France, the Russian Federation, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, and the United States of America), also known as the “P5”; and 10 non-permanent members elected by the General Assembly. The 10 non-permanent members currently serving on the Council are Algeria, Denmark, Greece, Guyana, Pakistan, Panama, Republic of Korea, Sierra Leone, Slovenia, and Somalia.

Under Section VII of the United Nations Charter, the Security Council is the main organ responsible for the maintenance of international peace and security. It takes the lead in determining whether a certain act or situation is to be considered as a threat to international peace or an act of aggression. Its first mission is to call upon the parties to a dispute to settle it by peaceful means and to recommend methods of adjustment or terms of settlement. The Security Council can resort to imposing sanctions or even authorize the use of force to maintain or restore international peace and security. Non-coercive sanctions, such as economic sanctions, are stipulated under article 41; coercive measures, such as military interventions, are regulated by article 42 of the United Nations Charter.

Our committee will follow the current composition of the UNSC and the standard rules of procedure of AtidMUN XI, with the addition of several important changes. First, rather than having 15 members, our committee will be comprised of double-delegations; that is, 2 members will represent the same country, increasing our total to 30 delegates. Second, permanent members have ‘veto power’; that is, every ‘no’ vote from a permanent member in a *substantive* vote automatically fails the vote; this is not true for procedural votes. However, P5 members may introduce a *motion to make vote substantive* for a procedural vote, which – if it passes – would transform it into a substantive vote. Third, P5 members may convene a P5 (or a P5+1) caucus to discuss matters among themselves. For further detail and clarifications, please consult the AtidMUN XI Rules of Procedure, section 6.5.



TOPIC A: ASSESSING THE NEW POLITICAL SITUATION IN SYRIA

BACKGROUND TO THE ISSUE

CHAPTER A: ASSAD'S REGIME

The story of modern-day Syria centers around the Assad family and the Ba'ath Party. From Hafiz al-Assad's seizing control of Syria in 1970 in a bloodless military coup-d'etat to Bashar al-Assad's rapid and unexpected fall in late 2024, the Assad family was synonymous with Syria itself. During this era, Syria underwent a process of Assadization, in which the Assad family, and Hafiz al-Assad in particular, pushed for the creation of an authoritarian nationalist socialist state dominated by the military, and for a personality cult of Hafiz himself. Hafiz, and the Ba'ath party more generally, increasingly came to control the entire state apparatus, and most importantly its political, military, and intelligence structures.¹

Two linked features underpinned regime durability. First, the Assad state prioritized authoritarian control through a dense security apparatus, which included not only the Syrian Armed Forces but crucially the Mukhabarat – the intelligence agencies of the state² – and the Republican Guard (the SRG) – a personal army of sorts constituting over 50,000 soldiers – which were used by the state to establish control within Syria itself. To this were later added politicized institutions that prevented organized, legal opposition from mounting a durable challenge to the regime.³ Second, socio-sectarian strategies shored up the regime. The Assad family are Alawites, a religious minority in the Sunni-dominated Syria, and senior posts in the security and military services were disproportionately filled by Alawites; this created a political architecture in which an Alawite-led elite governed a predominantly Sunni society.⁴

This fact that the Assadian regime was not Sunni deeply affected its foreign policy within the Muslim world. It was the first Arab country to recognize the new Shia regime in Iran following the Iranian

¹ *Hafiz al-Assad*, Encyclopedia Britannica. <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Hafiz-al-Assad>

² *The Long Reach of the Mukhabarat: Violence and Harassment Against Syrians Abroad and their Relatives Back Home*, Amnesty International. <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/MDE24/057/2011/en/>

³ *Syria*, Freedom House. <https://freedomhouse.org/country/syria>

⁴ *Regime Change and Minority Risks: Syrian Alawites After Assad*, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. https://carnegie-production-assets.s3.amazonaws.com/static/files/Fefer_Syria.pdf



revolution, and this led to close cooperation with Khomeini and the Ayatollahs. Together, they trained and strengthened Hezbollah, a Shia militant group in Lebanon, during the Lebanese civil war.⁵ This tripartite alliance was further bolstered by USSR – and later Russian – support. From the beginning of Hafez al-Assad's rule, Syria was deeply tied to the Soviet Union, a relationship that provided the regime with its most important external patron during the Cold War. The USSR supplied Damascus with extensive military aid, modern weaponry, and training for the Syrian armed forces, enabling Assad to consolidate domestic control and to confront regional rivals such as Israel.⁶ Moscow also offered diplomatic protection for Syria in the United Nations Security Council, frequently vetoing resolutions against Damascus, and gave crucial economic assistance through loans and technical support in sectors like energy and infrastructure. In exchange, Syria became one of the Soviet Union's most reliable Arab allies, hosting Soviet advisors and granting Moscow naval access to the port of Tartus, a strategic foothold in the Mediterranean. This Cold War partnership both bolstered the authoritarian resilience of the Assad regime and embedded Syria within the Soviet camp, laying the foundations for the later continuation of close ties with post-Soviet Russia.

This consolidation of power in the hands of Hafiz al-Assad came at a price for the Syrian people. The rapid militarization of Syria, which saw the Syrian armed forces increase in size from 50,000 personnel to over half a million in just over 15 years (1967-1986), had left its toll on the Syrian economy. Political dissidents and rebellions were brutally suppressed, as evidenced by the infamous Hama Massacre of 1982, in which thousands of the city's inhabitants were slaughtered by the Ba'athist forces in retaliation for the Muslim Brotherhood uprising.⁷ Thus, when Hafiz died in 2000 and was succeeded by his son Bashar, there was renewed optimism and hope that Bashar would liberalize Syria. These hopes, however, were short-lived. The authoritarian structure erected by Hafiz, including tightly controlled elections, repression of organized opposition, and dominance of security institutions, endured and intensified under Bashar.⁸

⁵ *Power Points Defining the Syria-Hezbollah Relationship*, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. <https://carnegieendowment.org/research/2019/03/power-points-defining-the-syria-hezbollah-relationship?lang=en>

⁶ Raymond Hinnebusch, *Syria: Revolution from Above* (Routledge, 2001).

⁷ *Hama Massacre*, Wikipedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1982_Hama_massacre

⁸ *Bashar al-Assad*, Encyclopedia Britannica. <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Bashar-al-Assad>



CHAPTER B: THE SYRIAN CIVIL WAR AND ASSAD'S COLLAPSE

Protests and Onset of the Violence

In late 2010 and early 2011, the *Arab Spring* protests swept through the Arab world. These protests aimed at securing dignity and human rights in many Arab states, and were fueled by the dissonance between the economic hardship of the local population and the despotic and corrupt nature of the regimes.⁹ Thus, they were usually organized by grassroots movements of civilians on social media platforms. In Syria specifically, sporadic protests began in late January and February 2011; these protests quickly spread to various cities, including Al-Hasakah and even Damascus. The protests began spiraling out of control when the regime arrested fifteen high-school students in Daraa for protesting the regime in early March. Hunger strikes were taken by political prisoners and civilians alike, and a “day of rage” was orchestrated on March 15th, which led to three days of protests in many cities across Syria, including Daraa, Deir a-Zur, Hama, Aleppo, and even Damascus. The crackdown of the Assadian regime turned violent, killing at least two protesters in Daraa and arresting dozens.¹⁰ The situation quickly spiraled out of control in March. Tens of thousands protested the killings, mostly in Daraa; further clashes and protests led to dozens of deaths in Daraa and other cities (including Latakia). A military siege was placed on Daraa, with tanks firing on civilian homes. By August, further sieges were placed by the regime on many other cities, including Homs, Baniyas, and Tafas.

Civil War: Initial Stages (2012-2013)

This planted the roots for a full-scale civil war, as anti-government military groups were formed in late 2011 and early 2012. The first of these was the Free Syrian Army (FSA, later called the ‘National Coalition’), which was formed out of defectors from the Syrian Armed Forces. While creating a government in exile in Turkey and garnering international recognition, they were completely outmatched by Assad’s military power. However, Islamist factions led by Al-Qaeda and ex-Al Qaeda members quickly proved to be significant military opposition; the most successful of these were Jabhat al-Nusra, formed in early 2012, and ISIS, which entered Syria around 2014. In addition, the Kurdish

⁹ *The Arab Spring at Ten Years: What's the Legacy of the Uprisings?*, Council on Foreign Relations.

<https://www.cfr.org/article/arab-spring-ten-years-whats-legacy-uprisings>

¹⁰ *Timeline of the Syrian civil war (January–April 2011)*, Wikipedia.

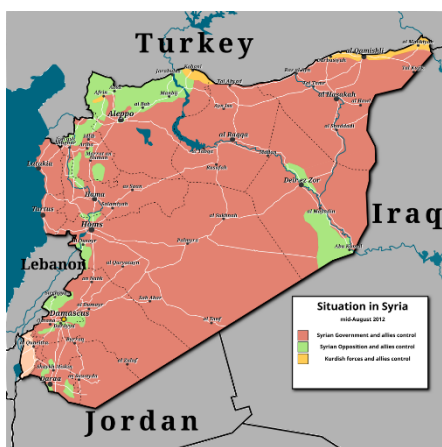
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Timeline_of_the_Syrian_civil_war_\(January%E2%80%93April_2011\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Timeline_of_the_Syrian_civil_war_(January%E2%80%93April_2011))



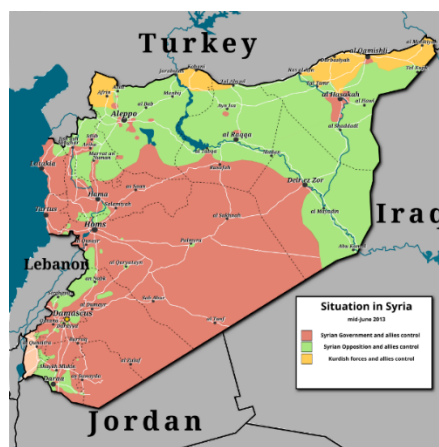
population of northern Syria created the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), aimed at securing Kurdish autonomy or independence in the region. As stated previously, many more factions emerged during these years, each one with separate aims and goals.¹¹

To simplify the situation, we can group all belligerents into a few major groups: government forces (controlled by Assad), opposition forces (led primarily by Jabhat al-Nusra), Kurdish forces (led by the Syrian Democratic Forces), and ISIS. These groups differed primarily in their objectives – while the government forces aimed at regaining control of Syria and the opposition forces aimed at toppling the regime, the Kurds were interested in establishing an autonomous Kurdish region in northern Syria (regardless of the outcome in other parts of Syria), and ISIS/ISIL aimed at creating a new Islamic Caliphate in the greater Mesopotamia-Levant region (entered the fray in late 2013).

The initial stages of the civil war can be characterized by rapid gains by opposition forces, as well as victories by the Kurdish forces. In less than a year, the rebel forces managed to vastly increase the territory under their control, from a few scattered hotspots in August 2012 to nearly half of Syria's land area in June 2013, mostly in the north of Syria and even around Damascus:



August 2012



June 2013

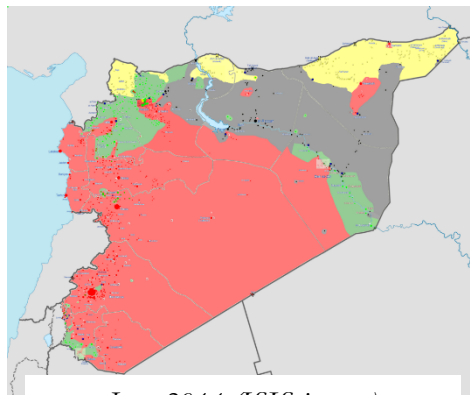
¹¹ *Syria's Civil War: The Descent Into Horror*, Council on Foreign Relations. <https://www.cfr.org/article/syrias-civil-war>



Civil War: Rise of ISIS and Foreign Intervention (Late 2013-2017)

The rise of ISIS in late 2013 dramatically affected the course of the war. Unlike other rebel groups, ISIS did not aim to topple Assad, but to do away with Syria entirely; it aimed at forming a modern caliphate and so disregarded the idea of individual states entirely. These radical ideas, combined with extreme (and violent) versions of Salafi Islam, put them at odds with not only the regime, but with other rebel groups as well.

The effect that ISIS had on the course of the civil war can hardly be overstated. Their first immediate impact was the rapid capture of large swaths of rebel territory; by June 2014, most rebel territory was in ISIS hands. This was made possible by the rapid gains of ISIS in Iraq, as they captured valuable munitions from the fleeing Iraqi military.



June 2014 (ISIS in grey)

The second important impact is that it provided the catalyst for various international powers to directly intervene in the Syrian civil war. While foreign powers were involved in various capacities from the onset of the violence – Russia provided support to Assad, while the US sent food and logistical support to the rebels since at least 2011 – their involvement was minimal and mostly limited to non-lethal support. However, a series of events, including the Iraqi government plea for direct US military intervention in June 2014 and the capturing of several western civilians by ISIL in July and August of that year, forced the US's hand.

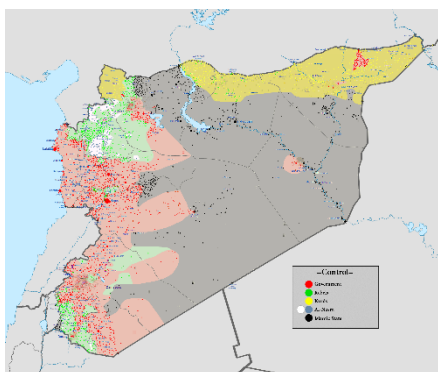
President Obama organized an international coalition to combat ISIS (aptly named the *Global Coalition to Counter ISIL*), which included 60 countries¹², by late 2014, and the US-led bombing campaign

¹² *Joint Statement Issued by Partners at the Counter-ISIL Coalition Ministerial Meeting*, US Department of State. <https://2009-2017.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2014/12/234627.htm>

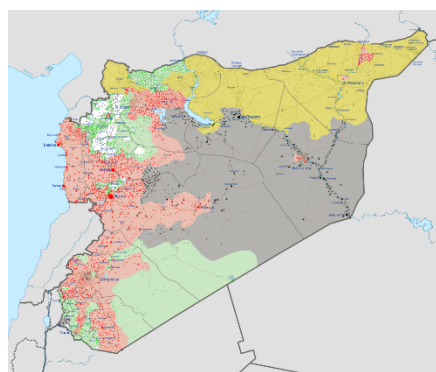


targeting ISIL began in earnest. By 2015 and 2016, the US would deploy special forces to aid the Kurdish SDF in capturing ISIL territory¹³.

Meanwhile, the Russian military intervention began in September 2015, when Assad formally requested Russian military support¹⁴. While the US-led campaign was limited at the time to ISIL targets, its Russian counterpart was aimed at both ISIL and the Free Syrian Army forces, with its primary objective being securing Assad's regime. The campaign involved ground and air forces¹⁵, and included what some consider to be indiscriminate shelling of civilian populations. It should be noted that despite heavy-handed Russian interference, the territory controlled by the Syrian regime shrunk from ~25% in 2015 to around 17% in 2017¹⁶. In contrast, the anti-government forces made impressive gains, with the Kurds capturing territories to the northeast of Syria and Assad losing ground to other factions in the south and northwest. It is during this time that Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) is formed from a coalition of several Islamic extremist rebel factions led by Jabhat al-Nusra and its leader al-Julani.



November 2015 (al-Nusra in white)



May 2017 (HTS in white)

¹³ US military special forces pictured aiding Kurdish fighters in Syria, The Guardian. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/may/26/us-military-photos-syria-soldiers-fighting-isis>

¹⁴ Syria's Assad wrote to Putin over military support: statement, Reuters. <https://www.reuters.com/article/world/syrias-assad-wrote-to-putin-over-military-support-statement-idUSKCN0RU17Y/>

¹⁵ The Syrian civil war: timeline, UK aid and statistics, House of Commons Library. <https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/CBP-9381/CBP-9381.pdf>

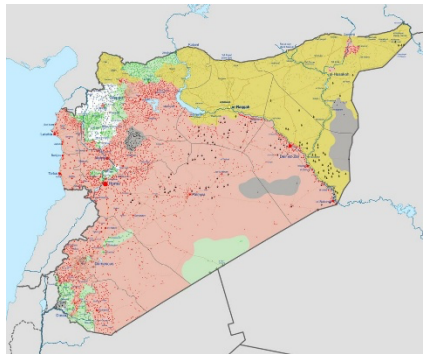
¹⁶ 42 months of Russian operations on the Syrian territory kill more than 8000 civilians including more than 18150 people in their raids and shelling, Syrian Observatory for Human Rights. <https://www.syriahr.com/en/122585/>



Civil War: Assadian and Russian Gains (Late 2017-Early 2020)

As the war drew on, Assad's reliance on Russia's military power grew. This was reflected in the establishment of permanent Russian naval and air force bases on the western seaboard in late 2017¹⁷. In the two years that followed, the tide shifted in favor of the Russian-Assadian alliance. The total collapse of ISIL, which lost over 95% of its territory, led to massive gains by the Kurdish SDF and the Syrian government forces; other rebel groups lost territory as well. By early 2020, Assad managed to capture the crucial M5 road leading from Damascus to Aleppo in the Northwestern province of Idlib.

Turkey, which has long considered the presence of Kurdish forces on its border a threat to international security, began its military intervention in January 2018 Syria by capturing Kurdish strongholds near the border; this would lead to high tensions with the USA, who backed the SDF. Additionally, the Idlib offensive also led to clashes between the Syrian and the Turkish armies, which led to a swift intervention by Putin to stabilize the situation¹⁸.



February 2018

The Idlib offensive also led to the height of the Syrian refugee crisis. Since 2011, a steady stream of refugees would leave Syria; it is estimated that by late 2019 and early 2020, around 7 million refugees – a staggering one-third of Syria's pre-war population of 22 million – had left the war-torn country. Most of these refugees (around 70%) would seek refuge in the neighboring Turkey, Lebanon, and Jordan. Additionally, it is estimated that around 6 million more Syrians would become internally

¹⁷ Russia signs deal to use Syria air base for 49 years, Business Standard. https://www.business-standard.com/article/international/russia-signs-deal-to-use-syria-air-base-for-49-years-117072701238_1.html

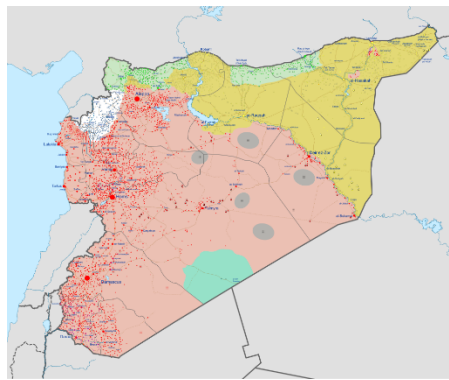
¹⁸ Timeline of the Syrian Civil War: Fourth northwestern Syria offensive and Operation Spring Shield, Wikipedia. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Timeline_of_the_Syrian_civil_war#Fourth_northwestern_Syria_offensive_and_Operation_Spring_Shield_\(December_2019%E2%80%93April_2020\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Timeline_of_the_Syrian_civil_war#Fourth_northwestern_Syria_offensive_and_Operation_Spring_Shield_(December_2019%E2%80%93April_2020))



displaced¹⁹. All in all, over half of Syria's population would have to leave their homes behind, a number nearly unseen in modern conflicts.

Stalemate and Assad's Consolidation of Power (Late 2020-Late 2024)

The 2019-2020 Idlib offensive (the 4th Idlib offensive) was the last major offensive of the Syrian civil war (until the unexpected rebel offensive in November 2024). It led to over four years of relative stalemate between all belligerents, with the de facto borders between them remaining unchanged:



Early 2020-Late 2024

Even though roughly 30% of Syria was not in government hands, many assumed that the civil war had effectively ended, and with good reason. First, the lack of success of any side to topple the other effectively led to Assad retaining control of Syria. Second, and more importantly, many factions seemed to stop trying to topple Assad altogether. The Turks and the Turkish-backed SNA were more interested in establishing buffer zones between Turkey and the Kurds in northeastern Syria. This led the Kurds to actively seek assistance from Assad, calling on him to help them protect Syrian land from Turkey. Additionally, the Kurds seemed to focus on protecting their newly won de facto autonomy and not on toppling Assad. Lastly, even though HTS never ceased its conflict with Assad, it seemed too weak to form a true threat to the regime.

Collapse of Assad's Regime (November-December 2024)

It was thus almost unbelievable to believe that Assad's regime would collapse in late 2024. And yet it did. HTS, led by al-Julani, organized a coalition of rebel forces and launched an assault on Aleppo,

¹⁹ *Refugees of the Syrian civil war*, Wikipedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Refugees_of_the_Syrian_civil_war



which Assad captured in the final Idlib offensive. The city fell in just 3 days. They then advanced south down the M5 highway towards Damascus, capturing the critical cities of Hama and Homs, again in a matter of days. Assad, who was informed by his top generals that the defense forces around Damascus would be no match for the rebels, stayed in Damascus. However, astonishingly, these defenses were easily overrun by rebel forces, who entered the city on December 8th. In just 11 days, al-Julani managed the unthinkable – the same thing that no one was able to do for over 13 years – and toppled Assad. Assad covertly fled Syria by boarding a private jet to Russia. Just like that, Syria was not under Assad control for the first time in 54 years.

It is still unclear how such a complete collapse was possible. Nevertheless, there are several plausible explanations. First, as we know, Assad was not popular with the Syrian population whatsoever – this was the reason for the civil war. These sentiments, however, also extended into the military; recall that the SNA was formed from deserters of Assad's forces. It is thus possible that once the rebels gained the upper hand, the governmental forces simply refused to fiercely fight them back, which led to an incredible and swift collapse of the entire army. Second, since the economic situation of Syria was increasingly dire, Assad relied heavily on Russian, Hezbollah, and Iranian forces. However, with the Russians bogged down in Ukraine and Hezbollah reeling from its disastrous war with Israel (during which nearly all its leadership and much of its fighting power were eliminated), Assad's allies were not able to support him.²⁰

²⁰ *What happened in Syria? How did al-Assad fall?* Al-Jazeera. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/12/8/what-happened-in-syria-has-al-assad-really-fallen>



CHAPTER C: THE RISE OF AHMED AL-SHARAA (AL-JULANI)

The collapse of Assad's regime in December 2024 fundamentally reset the Syrian political landscape. Leading this transition is Ahmed Hussein al-Sharaa, widely known by his former nom de guerre, Abu Mohammad al-Julani. al-Sharaa was the creator of Al-Qaeda's official Syrian off-shoot, Jabhat al-Nusra, led the ultimately victorious Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) in finally toppling Assad, and became the de facto leader of the post-revolutionary government²¹. Immediately, he faced a new kind of battle, one for legitimacy.

Internally, to be viewed as the leader of post-Assad Syria, al-Sharaa needed to establish a new regime, dismantle the old regime, and unify the various armed factions and minorities in Syria under the banner of this new state. First, immediately following the capture of Damascus on December 8, 2024, HTS-affiliated forces established a caretaker government. Al-Sharaa appointed his own figure, Mohammed al-Bashir, as the new Transitional Prime Minister and al-Julani himself was formally appointed President of Syria in January 2025 at the Syrian Revolution Victory Conference²², a move that abolished the position of Prime Minister and dissolved the former Ba'athist parliament²³. This leads us to the next item on his agenda: dismantling Assad's institutions. The new administration quickly moved to annul the 2012 Syrian Constitution and announced plans to dissolve and restructure the Syrian Parliament, security branches, and the former Syrian Arab Army (SAA). Leveraging the existing structure of the Syrian Salvation Government (SSG) run by HTS in Idlib (which was under HTS control throughout most of the Syrian Civil War), the new administration presented itself as a pragmatic, technocratic alternative to Assad's corruption. This involved promising basic services, economic recovery, and anti-corruption crackdowns, a big change from the former government and widely supported by the Sunni population in Syria.²⁴

Next, it was critical that al-Sharaa address the new Syrian Army under the Syrian Ministry of Defence. HTS swiftly took over key military positions, and many of the former SAA soldiers fled to Iraq or the Alawite mountains. By January 2025, the regime's leadership had already called on the commanders

²¹ *Ahmed al-Sharaa* Wikipedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ahmed_al-Sharaa

²² *Syrian Revolution Victory Conference* Wikipedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Syrian_Revolution_Victory_Conference

²³ *Syria's Ahmed al-Sharaa declared interim president as he consolidates power*. The Arab Weekly. <https://the arabweekly.com/syrias-ahmed-al-sharaa-declared-interim-president-he-consolidates-power>

²⁴ *Syria: Transition and U.S. Policy* Congress.gov <https://www.congress.gov/crs-product/RL33487>



of various organizations and militias operating within the country to align themselves with the new government and integrate into the national military. Each faction would remain in control of their own units, while reforming military bases, and recuperating from the devastation of the civil war, and then be reassigned to units based on training and skills later on. This precariously balances uniting the opposing forces of Syria, without forcing integration. However, the SDF are reluctant to join since the SNA have joined, while the Turkish units of the SNA have responded in the same way to the SDF. So, while the new Syrian Ministry of Defence managed to organize, its stability is yet to be tested. The last internal obstacle in Al-Sharaa's way are the Syrian minorities. In Syria, as previously mentioned, there are several minority groups. Namely, the Alawites, the Kurds, the Druze, the Christians, and the Islamic State. Each group has its own interests, its own ideas regarding their autonomy, and it's important to note that although they severed ties with Al-Qaeda in 2016, the new HTS based government originated with Jihadism. The turmoil caused by the lack of security felt by different populations led to multiple incidents and attacks since December 2024.²⁵

Externally, the picture isn't much simpler. Throughout the majority of the Syrian Civil War, as we've seen, al-Julani led, for lack of a better term, Jihadist Salafist terrorist organizations; Jabhat al-Nusra, and HTS. Initially, he advocated for an Islamic state governed by Sharia law. However, al-Sharaa wisely noted that Syria will need international support if his regime is to last and not fall to another warring faction. Since the fall of Damascus, al-Julani, the military leader was no more. Setting aside his nom de guerre, al-Sharaa makes attempts to return to the international stage as a legitimate Syrian sovereign. First, he repositions HTS as an independent localised Syrian movement, fighting the corrupt and Assad regime. He emphasised the importance of Syrian national unity, calling for the country's reconstruction and reconciliation among different factions, in a number of speeches.²⁶

The big reasons for this change, besides the real importance of Syrian national unity, are the sanctions. Al-Sharaa needed to curry favour with the Western powers so they would remove the sanctions on Syria, remove HTS from terrorist lists and lift the bounty on al-Julani's head. The success of this effort

²⁵ *Iran Update, December 8, 2024*. Institute for the Study of War. <https://understandingwar.org/research/middle-east/iran-update-december-8-2024>

²⁶ *The New Syria and Its Obligations under the Chemical Weapons Convention* Lieber Institute <https://lieber.westpoint.edu/new-syria-its-obligations-chemical-weapons-convention>



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would unfreeze funds and enable foreign investment, giving Syria its best chance at surviving post war reconstruction. Additionally, after years of military and financial “support” the big global powers (Russia, the US, Iran) are a critical part of the picture. Even though, Russia backed Assad in the war and Assad was granted asylum in Moscow, al-Sharaa attempted to rebuild the connection, promising Putin continued use of Russian bases in Syria.

Unlike Russia, Iranian forces started leaving in late November. the Iranian government evacuated military commanders and personnel from Syria. Iran has promised to support Assad in the future, should there be a resurgence.

Another point of interest for al-Sharaa was Israel. Over the summer, former Assad forces attempted to gain power and territory by attacking Druze communities in Suwayda. The Druze are a minority present in Israel as well, and in the name of their fellow Druze, Israel has launched airstrikes on Southern Syria. Despite not having the resources to attack after a 14 year long civil war, Israel was nevertheless a source of major tension which has only grown.

Lastly, despite having backed the SNA during the civil war, the Turks became the biggest sponsor of the current government. Additionally, Turkey has the largest number of Syrian refugees. Turkey was and will be a key player in any future Syria could ever hope to envision.



CURRENT SITUATION

Despite the current government's pledges of protection for all religious and ethnic minorities, the fall of the Alawite-dominated regime immediately sparked incidents of sectarian violence, primarily targeting the Alawite minority²⁷. Revenge killings, looting, and harassment, mostly against Alawites, were reported in religiously mixed provinces like Hama, Homs, Tartus, and Latakia. Although this violence was not as widespread as many feared, the UN Security Council issued a statement "strongly condemning" the violence. The HTS-led authorities have since made visible efforts to contain reprisals and promote reconciliation meetings between Sunni and Alawite community leaders, attempting to portray the new government as a force for order rather than sectarianism²⁸. Similarly, the Druze in southern Syria, particularly the Suwayda governorate, face an uncertain future.

Furthermore, 16.5 million people inside Syria in need of humanitarian assistance in 2025, while over 12 million Syrians are forcibly displaced, including 5 million refugees hosted in neighboring countries, namely Turkey²⁹. Despite the fall of the regime and the return of over 1.1 million refugees and internally displaced persons since December 2024³⁰, the situation remains precarious due to ongoing localized conflict, severe economic decline, and critical underfunding of the required \$3.19 billion plan³¹. Many European countries are in a state of unrest because of the influx of refugees of the last decade, and are hoping they might return, now that the civil war has ended.³²

In addition, Turkey emerged as the most influential foreign power, having facilitated the initial rebel offensive³³. Ankara's primary interests remain securing its border from Kurdish militias and facilitating the return of Syrian refugees. Conversely, Russia's influence rapidly diminished as the

²⁷ *Country policy and information note: Alawites and actual or perceived Assadists, Syria, July 2025* GOV.UK <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/syria-country-policy-and-information-notes/country-policy-and-information-note-alawites-and-actual-or-perceived-assadists-syria-july-2025-accessible>

²⁸ *Western Syria clashes* Wikipedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Western_Syria_clashes

²⁹ *Explore Syria's crisis: conflict, displacement, and earthquakes*. ACAPS. <https://www.acaps.org/en/countries/syria>

³⁰ *Humanitarian Crisis Analysis 2025* Sida. <https://www.sida.se/humanitarian-crisis-analysis-2025>

³¹ *Situation Syria Regional Refugee Response - Operational Data Portal (as of October 2025)* UNHCR <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/syria>

³² *The Complicated Reality of Syrians' Return* Migration Policy Institute <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/news/post-assad-returns-syria>

³³ *The Fall of the Assad Regime: Regional and International Power Shifts* SWP Comment. https://www.swp-berlin.org/publications/products/comments/2025C10_SWPComment_Janzing_Assad.pdf

³⁴ *Türkiye's Evolving Engagement with Syria* MP-IDSA <https://idsa.in/issuebrief/turkey-syria-evolving-engagement-260325>



Kremlin, preoccupied with the war in Ukraine, chose to evacuate Assad, offering him asylum³⁵. Russia's minimal resistance signaled a pivot away from an expensive intervention. The end of the Assad regime was also a major strategic defeat for Iran's "Axis of Resistance." Syria under Assad was Iran's essential land bridge for supplying and supporting its Lebanese proxy, Hezbollah^{36,37}. The loss of this route significantly complicates Iran's ability to resupply Hezbollah, forcing the group to rely more on internal production³⁸. The new Syrian government has been openly critical of former Iranian influence, cementing a geopolitical shift that leaves the Iranian-led axis in a state of retreat and reassessment³⁹.

Crucially, Israel appeared as a decisive new key player. Its role immediately shifted from covert airstrikes to a direct military presence. Immediately following Assad's fall, the Israel Defence Forces (IDF) advanced into the UN-controlled buffer zone and southern Syria, seizing territory beyond the Golan Heights⁴⁰. Under Operation "Arrow of Bashan," Israel launched extensive air and naval strikes across Syria, targeting strategic military assets⁴¹. This campaign effectively crippled the Syrian military's air defence networks, missile systems, and all heavy weapons, demanding that the new Syrian armed forces remain out of southern Syria. This action has ensured Syria cannot pose a conventional military threat to Israel in the foreseeable future.

Syria is now dominated by three main domestic power blocs, each with distinct international backers. The HTS-led Coalition (Syrian Government) controls Damascus and most of Western/Central Syria, serving as the dominant political and military force, though it remains under the scrutiny of its primary

³⁵ The State of the Axis of Resistance: Assessing Risks and Opportunities... (AEI) <https://www.aei.org/research-products/report/the-state-of-the-axis-of-resistance/>

³⁶ *The shape-shifting 'axis of resistance'* Chatham House <https://www.chathamhouse.org/2024/12/shape-shifting-axis-resistance-post-assad-middle-east>

³⁷ *The 'Axis of Resistance'* SWP. https://www.swpberlin.org/publications/products/comments/2024C65_SWPComment_Wagner_Axis_of_Resistance.pdf

³⁸ *The State of the Axis of Resistance: Assessing Risks and Opportunities...* (AEI) <https://www.aei.org/research-products/report/the-state-of-the-axis-of-resistance/>

³⁹ *The New Syrian Government: Turning a Page or Rewriting the Script?* New Lines Institute <https://newlinesinstitute.org/articles/the-new-syrian-government-turning-a-page-or-rewriting-the-script/>

⁴⁰ *Don't Fall for the New Syrian Regime's Claims of Moderation* FDD <https://www.fdd.org/analysis/2024/12/20/dont-fall-for-the-new-syrian-regimes-claims-of-moderation/>

⁴¹ *'Arrow of Bashan': Israel Destroys Most of Syria's Strategic Weapons* Algemeiner.com. <https://www.algemeiner.com/2024/12/11/arrow-of-bashan-israel-destroys-most-of-syrias-strategic-weapons/>



foreign backer, Turkey⁴². The Syrian National Army (SNA) operates primarily in northern Syria under the direct patronage of Turkey, though internal tensions with the HTS-led government remain despite an agreement to integrate forces. The Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) controls the North and East (Rojava). The Kurdish-led coalition remains critical of the new constitutional declaration and relies heavily on the United States as an essential partner in the ongoing fight against the Islamic State (IS/Daesh), which continues to pose a threat through pockets of insurgency in the Central Syrian Desert.⁴³

The future of Syria rests on resolving several questions: whether the HTS-led government will fully transition away from its extremist origins; whether the new regime can achieve full domestic military and political unity by integrating the disparate factions like the SNA and SDF; and how the massive humanitarian crisis will be managed⁴⁴.

⁴² *Türkiye's Evolving Engagement with Syria*. MP-IDS A <https://idsa.in/issuebrief/turkey-syria-evolving-engagement-260325>

⁴³ *The State of the Axis of Resistance: Assessing Risks and Opportunities for the United States*. American Enterprise Institute <https://www.aei.org/research-products/report/the-state-of-the-axis-of-resistance/>

⁴⁴ UN: *16.5 Million Syrians Require Humanitarian Aid as Displacement Crisis Persists*. The Syrian Observer. <https://syrianobserver.com/articles/93241/un-165-million-syrians-require-humanitarian-aid-as-displacement-crisis-persists/>



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QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER:

1. What should be done to ensure the protection of religious and ethnic minorities and to prevent sectarian retaliation in the aftermath of regime change?
2. How can the UNSC help the new Syrian government combat remaining ISIS insurgents while preventing the resurgence of extremist ideology in a war-torn and politically fragile state??
3. How can the UNSC help handle reconstruction?
4. What benchmarks are necessary for establishing a stable government in Syria?
5. What conditions should be established for lifting international sanctions?
6. How far can foreign support go, and who will be involved?
7. Will regional powers accept the new status quo?



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ESTABLISHING GUIDELINES FOR FOREIGN INTERVENTION IN DOMESTIC CONFLICTS

BACKGROUND TO THE ISSUE

CHAPTER A: ESTABLISHMENT OF SOVEREIGNTY AND THE INTERNATIONAL SYSTEM

When discussing the sovereignty of states in the international system, one must start at the Peace of Westphalia in 1648. The Peace of Westphalia are two treaties which ended the Thirty Years' War and established the notion of sovereignty of states. Attempting to end a large-scale religious conflict, the Peace of Westphalia established the complete control of a state within its borders, and that no state could interfere with the affairs of another state. For the first time in history, the international system (in its very primitive form) recognized the internal sovereignty of states. All states, no matter their size or power, have the right to their sovereignty.

There are many scholars today who question the validity of Westphalian sovereignty. Westphalian sovereignty was established hundreds of years ago, with no regard for humanitarian interventions or ideas of cosmopolitics or globalization. With that said, Westphalian sovereignty is still broadly regarded as the starting point of international recognition of sovereignty.

The next major historical turning point of international sovereignty is its recognition and embedment in the Charter of the United Nations. The Charter of the United Nations is the founding document of the organization, and the reason you are reading this very study guide. It documents the main functions of the organization, its primary organs, and the principles on which it is based.

One said principle, arguably the most prominent principle is sovereignty. Article 2 of the Charter's first chapter clearly states that the organization is "based on the principle of the sovereign equality of all its Members". In addition, and in relevance to the specific topic at hand, the Article prohibits the United Nations and its members from intervening in matters which are essentially within the domestic jurisdiction of any state. While this article does have a caveat, it regards international disputes, and not domestic ones.



The United Nations does not have a ratified definition of sovereignty in writing. While the previously stated Article does cement sovereignty as a guiding principle of the UN, the word sovereignty is not defined in detail. However, sovereignty has gained meaning in the international system thanks to judicial decisions and international customs. This meaning consists of sovereign equality (meaning all states are treated equally under international law), territorial integrity (meaning all states have the right to reign in their territory), and freedom from intervention (meaning all states have the right to conduct actions within their borders without interference).

CHAPTER B: FOREIGN INTERVENTIONS THROUGHOUT RECENT HISTORY

This chapter will delve further into the history of international interventions, primarily focusing on the 20th-21st centuries as case studies which indicate a global shift in motives for intervention.

International interventions were common practice even before the creation of the nation-state. Countries had a habit of intervening in foreign affairs and adopting foreign domestic conflicts as their own. The Peace of Westphalia, as stated, contains major discourse on the issue of foreign intervention. While the act of foreign intervention dates back centuries, the motives for such actions change over the 20th and 21st centuries.

The oldest type of foreign intervention covered in this study guide is colonial foreign intervention. Up until the early 20th century colonial expansionism was seen as a necessary steppingstone for any rising international power. Although traditional expansionism is not categorized as foreign intervention in domestic affairs (since empires would capture colonies regardless of their state of either distress or peace), intervention of another power's colonies by way of adding fuel to a fire certainly fits the description.

An example of such occurrence is the Spanish-American war. The participation of the United States in the conflict was gradual and eventually led to them fighting the Spanish empire on behalf of Cuban independence. The people of Cuba strived for independence many years prior, and started this specific war three years before the United States entered. The American intervention in the war did lead to a Cuban (or more appropriately, American) victory, the result brought upon the colonial takeover of



Guam, Puerto Rico and the Philippines by the United States, in addition to Cuba becoming an American protectorate.

This outcome raises the question of the USA's true intentions in the war. Some historians believe that the gradual entrance and public outcry for aid to Cuba portrays the USA as a benevolent power helping civilians in distress. Other historians point to the fact that the acquired territories of the USA were never mentioned during the war and are only bounties taken from Spain after their defeat.

After WWI, the motives of nations intervening in foreign domestic affairs shifted slightly, more in rhetoric than in practice. The Treaty of Versailles, alongside the creation of the League of Nations, brought upon a new view of the international system. Firstly, the League of Nations attempted to limit foreign intervention by creating a forum for all members of the League to settle their affairs diplomatically and with the consent of all parties. In addition, the colonies of the losing side of the war were taken and given as "trusteeships" to the winning side, attempting to de-colonize them and build a strong national foundation within them.

In practice, not much changed during that period since the colonial era. The world was shaken by the horrors of WWI, but the mechanisms implemented by the winners still allowed them to intervene with domestic affairs of other countries. The system of "trusteeships" was on paper a way to implement the creation of new independent states, but in practice was just a new name for the same colonial occupation. The League of Nations, lacking the hegemonic force of the USA, didn't deter nations from intervening in domestic affairs. Not only did the League lack the strength to prevent interventions in domestic affairs, but imperialist invasions in general. Both Japan's invasion of Manchuria and Italy's invasion of Ethiopia brought upon little to no real consequences in terms of the invasions' goals and duration.

After WWII, the motive shift was felt on a much larger scale. With newly acquired horrors and fears from Nazi Germany and the Second World War, the United Nations was founded, and stricter, more definitive rules were laid down on interventions. This isn't to say that the UN prioritized sovereignty above all, but the reasons and justifications for intervention drastically changed.



The beginning of the Cold War set the Western and Eastern blocs on a battle of not only power, but ideology. The USA and USSR found themselves intervening in numerous domestic conflicts based on liberty or on anti-imperialistic beliefs. The United States intervened in the domestic affairs of many nations over the span of 45 years including Korea, Vietnam, Nicaragua, Cuba, Iran and Greece. The USSR also had its fair share of interventions, such as Afghanistan, Hungary, Czechoslovakia and East Germany to name a few.

CHAPTER C: R2P AND THE RWANDAN GENOCIDE

This chapter analyses the birth of the Responsibility to Protect, and how the international community reached an agreement on the terms of legitimate international intervention in domestic affairs.

After the end of the Cold War in 1991, the international system became unipolar. The United States had no contention as the leader of the dominant liberal world. During that time the United States intervened in several domestic and international affairs which did not directly involve them. Since the threat of communism disappeared alongside the USSR, the USA intervened on behalf of “humanitarian intervention”.

Humanitarian intervention is generally categorized as a state’s military intervention to end the violation of human rights outside its borders. Humanitarian intervention is a choice that can be made by the state and has not been legally codified. The USA’s unipolar moment is characterized by the USA’s appliance of its right to conduct humanitarian intervention. Cases such as Kosovo and Iraq are primary examples of the United State’s actions. Since humanitarian intervention is not codified in international law, and some instances of said intervention were conducted without the approval of the UNSC, many historians and scholars believe that the actions of the USA were done to solidify hegemony rather than promote human rights.

The year 1994 marked the start of the institutionalization of the notion of foreign intervention for human rights. Up until that time the international community condemned foreign intervention (as seen in chapter 1). In 1994, the Rwandan genocide took place, leading to the loss of an estimated minimum of 800,000 people in just 100 days. Not only did this occurrence shock the world, but the inaction of the international community proved the unjust nature of treating national sovereignty as



an absolute principle. It had become apparent that a new institutional legal doctrine had to be put in place to prevent such atrocities from occurring again.

Thus, the doctrine of the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) was born. The R2P doctrine changes the way foreign intervention was debated up until that time and ratifies more precise definitions of legitimate legal intervention into international law. According to the 2005 World Summit Outcome Document (the founding document of the doctrine), R2P consists of three equally important pillars. The first pillar defines a state's responsibility to its population, the second solidifies international assistance between states to achieve said responsibility, and the third pillar states that should a state "manifestly fail" to uphold its responsibility, the responsibility is placed on other states.

There are two main points to note on the differences between R2P and humanitarian intervention. The first is that the R2P's scope is limited, unlike the undefined scope of humanitarian intervention. R2P only covers four specific occurrences of international crimes: war crimes, crimes against humanity, genocide and ethnic cleansing. While the first three are carefully defined in the Elements of Crimes document of the International Criminal Court, "ethnic cleansing" has yet to be textually defined.

The second differentiating point is transferring interventions from being a state's right to a state's responsibility. Foreign interventions are no longer a right for a state to invoke according to its own motives (such as the cases in the unipolar moment). Foreign interventions become a global responsibility that all states are obliged to uphold. Each state not only holds the right to its sovereignty, but also the responsibility to protect its population. Said responsibility towards the population is transferred to other states once a specific state fails to do so. It is worth mentioning that the wording of the third pillar is "manifestly fails", meaning that not just any failure constitutes a breach of sovereignty, but one of intent and purpose.

The R2P doctrine has led to mixed success. The United Nations has issued use of the doctrine in cases of nations such as Syria, Libya and the Central African Republic. The usage at times managed to mitigate damage, and at times failed. The use of military force under the third pillar of the doctrine remains controversial to this day, which according to some scholars indicates the inefficiency of the doctrine.



CURRENT SITUATION

Today, the debate on foreign interventions in domestic affairs is heated. The Israel-Gaza war, the Syrian uprising and the Ukraine-Russia war have rekindled the fire on this topic. In this chapter the efficiencies and inefficiencies of the R2P doctrine will be explored, and questions will be raised on the trajectory in which international norms should go on the matter of intervention.

R2P has received both praise and criticism over the years. The main achievement of the doctrine is embedding the notion of intervention for the sake of the victim, and the responsibility of the state (and international community) to care for its population. In addition, the rhetoric of the doctrine has been adopted by world leaders and the UNSC, and scholars believe that a behavioral change occurred in world leaders after the adoption. R2P has some success under its belt, including in cases such as Syria and Libya that lead to international interventions.

The R2P doctrine is also the subject of much criticism. The main point of criticism, referring to the beginning of this study guide, is the infringement of national sovereignty. Many states, among them Russia and China, object to the usage of R2P and a means to militarily intervene in domestic affairs. Nations advocating for R2P claim that according to the first and second pillars of the doctrine, non-consensual interventions only occur when a state is either allowing mass atrocities or committing them. Accordingly, R2P strengthens sovereignty rather than weakens it. With that said, sovereignty remains a prominent talking point in the R2P debate.

A second point of criticism emerges from the other end of the spectrum. There is a belief that R2P is not efficient enough and cannot achieve the goals which it had set. The fact that military intervention is a point of contention in the doctrine shows its lack of practical power. This side of the argument calls for a stronger R2P which enables states to act swiftly to prevent mass atrocities. Some even call for the detachment of the R2P doctrine from the UNSC, seeing how the Council is often paralyzed due to vetoes.

Lastly, the R2P doctrine suffers from structural problems. R2P is a doctrine which is supposed to prevent atrocities from happening. Many nations who promote intervention do so (at times rightfully so) before an atrocity occurs. Said nations experience difficulty justifying intervention, which could



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lead to much damage and casualties, before an undoubtedly worst atrocity occurs. In addition, many objectors to the doctrine hinge on the mixed-motive argument. The UNSC is not a court and cannot attempt to prove the mental state of world leaders when making decisions. States are often suspicious of one another when proposing R2P, in fear that an intervening state will expand its mandate over the intervened state and take more than it was meant to.

Given all praise and criticism, what is to be done with the R2P doctrine? Is it time to introduce a new doctrine into the world? In 2011 India, Brazil and South Africa proposed a more detailed doctrine called “Responsibility While Protecting” (RWP). The RWP idea created certain criteria for intervention and strengthened the notion of the intervenors taking responsibility for their actions during the intervention. This idea was rejected mainly by western powers, fearing bureaucratic hurdles which will weaken the doctrine.

Another idea for a new template is the regionalization of R2P. Central non-liberal states view the R2P doctrine as a tool of the Liberal International Order to maintain control in the international system. To counter this, they proposed to regionalize R2P. In doing so, the responsibility to protect populations falls on states geographically close to the atrocity taking place. This means that the regional hegemons will take responsibility for interventions. This falls in line with the BRICS initiative, and the trajectory taken by non-liberal states.

This is where you come in. Yes, you, the delegate reading this. You must act in the name of your nation to promote an international template for foreign intervention. Will you take it on yourself to be the guardian of the Responsibility to Protect, or rather propose a new way to intervene? Do your best to represent your nation and to achieve the best solution you can to the issue.



QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. Does your nation believe that sovereignty is an absolute value, or rather a conditioned one?
2. Has your nation taken part in international interventions in the past?
3. Can the problems of the R2P doctrine be fixed? How so?
4. Should the responsibility to protect be regionalized?
5. Has your nation been subject to colonialism? Has it colonialized?
6. Should the responsibility to protect be bound to the UNSC?
7. Can the international community truly intervene without prejudice and alternative motives?
8. Should use of military force be a codified part of the R2P doctrine?
9. Should the scope of the R2P doctrine be broader? Narrower?



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