

*Boston University Academy Model United Nations Conference III
Saturday, January 31 to Sunday, February 1, 2015
Boston University Academy
Boston, MA*



***United Nations Security
Council (UNSC)***

Specialized Committee

Background Guide

A Welcome from the Chair

Hi delegates!

My name is Nupur Jain and I am your chair for this committee! I am a current senior and this is currently my third year of taking part in Model UN. I love doing Model UN and I hope I will be able to continue to participate in Model UN in college.

Our vice chair for this committee is Nimish Garg. He is a freshman and this is his first year participating in Model UN. He is off to a booming start!

This is my second time chairing a committee, and I am extremely excited to have the best committee ever! We both hope that you are as excited as we are to have an engaging and fruitful debate. We do require position papers, so make sure you research your country and position well. The whole point of this conference is to enjoy, so don't stress out and have fun!

I can't wait to meet all of you and have a productive, fun weekend!

Yours truly,

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Position Paper Information

This committee will require a formal position paper for each of its topics. Chairs will review position papers, and well-written and well-researched papers are eligible for the committee's Best Position Paper Award, as well as influencing other award determinations.

Position papers are 1-2 pages in length, double-spaced, and should follow a 3-paragraph scheme:

1) Introduction to the topic, 2) delegate's stance on the topic, and 3) delegate's proposed action on the topic. Position papers should follow the following conventions on headers:

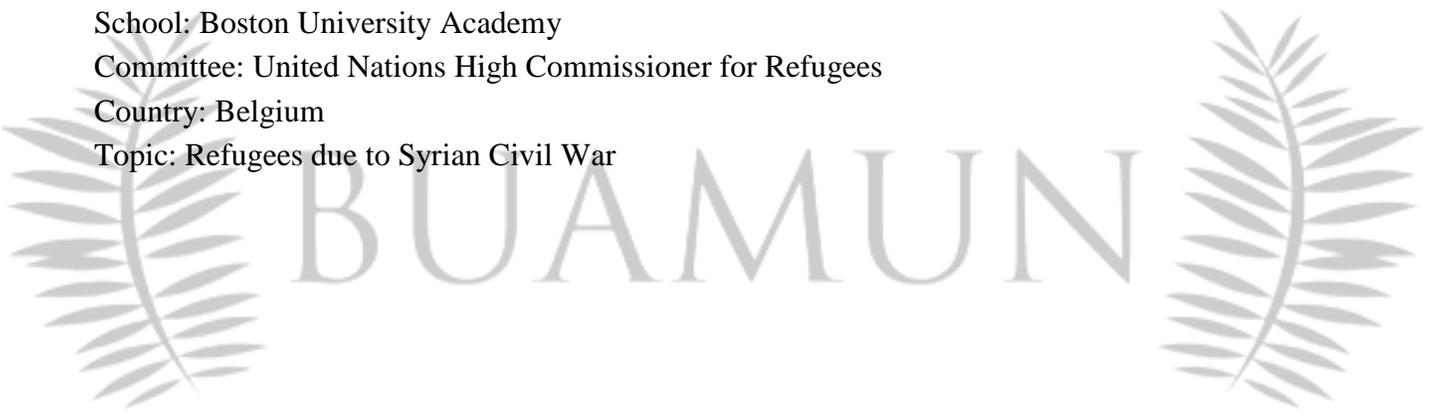
Delegate: Evelyn Huang

School: Boston University Academy

Committee: United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

Country: Belgium

Topic: Refugees due to Syrian Civil War



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The Syrian Civil War

After years of fighting against French rule, Syria gained independence in 1946. Yet Syria was left in the hands of the army, and numerous power struggles resulted. As a result, in 1958, Syria united with Egypt, but this endeavor proved unsuccessful for Syria. Egypt did not care much for Syria and its affairs, so they split apart again in 1961.

Hafez al-Assad, leader of the Ba'th Party, became president of Syria in 1970 through a bloodless coup, establishing the first Assad regime. His government was repressive: the military acted violently against anyone who opposed him, and the government-controlled economy was plagued by favoritism and corruption. Most Syrians are Sunnis, which is a sect of Islam, while the Assads are Alawites, which is a minority population belonging to the Shi'a Islamic sect. The Assads are secular, meaning that they are not based in religion, but they have often favored Alawites over the Sunni majority. The differences between the Sunni and Shi'a populations have been a major reason for discontent.

After Hafez died in 2000, his son, Bashar al-Assad, took authoritarian power and established the second Assad regime. Bashar al Assad's rule was seen as tyrannical because the public could not take part in politics, the government did not listen to the wants of the public, and the people were often threatened to force them to agree with the government. The Syrians wanted to see democratic reforms, but the Assads ran an authoritarian regime that condemned dissent. Elections were consistently rigged in favor of the Assads, and the regime heavily controlled or eliminated freedom of speech, expression, and association.

In 2006, a drought took over much of Syria, impoverishing many farmers and inhabitants and leaving them disillusioned about the government's lack of help. By March 2011, initially as a part of the larger Arab Spring movement, anti-government protests assembled in the cities of Daraa and Aleppo. The army responded violently, and the country erupted into riots and armed insurrection, starting the Syrian Civil War. The people took advantage of these riots to protest against the Assad regime and its tyrannical practices, in order to make Syria a democracy. But the various rebel groups are disjointed, and after more than 2 million casualties, the country remains in a state of war.

Though he faces constant opposition attacks, Bashar al-Assad holds Syria's capital of Damascus. He has benefitted greatly from support from Russia and Iran, his two largest foreign backers, and Hezbollah, a Shi'a militant group in nearby Lebanon, has fought alongside his

military. He has used extremely cruel tactics such as dropping barrel bombs on the opposition stronghold of Aleppo, and he seems to have used chemical weapons, though he denies that accusation. Assad's military has suffered severe manpower shortages, but he still holds much of the country, and he has used the disorganized rebel groups to consolidate his power. For example, he has cynically allowed the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) to exist because ISIS weakens the other rebel forces.

One group of rebels, comprised of defected Syrian Army members, is the secular Free Syrian Army (FSA). It was the first major rebel group, forming near the start of the war in 2011, and it has won over many in the Western world. However, it has faced infighting with other rebel groups, and it is rather ill-equipped, meaning that it has lost much of its power. The Islamic Front is a combination of a few rebel groups that stand in between the secular FSA and the more hard-line ISIS and Jabhat al-Nusra. Owing partially to significant arms support from Saudi Arabia and Qatar, the Islamic Front is currently one of the most powerful rebel coalitions in Syria. However, it has actively resisted efforts to negotiate with Assad. This is a significant barrier to serious negotiations because the largest rebel force refuses to participate in discussions. The Kurds, who live in Eastern Syria, fight against both the oppressive Assad regime and other rebel groups to establish an independent Kurdish state.

At the same time, there are a number of militant terrorist organizations operating against Assad in Syria; their violent tactics have put them at odds with both Assad and more moderate rebels, adding to the chaotic situation there. Jabhat al-Nusra is al-Qaeda's official Syrian affiliate, and its primary motive is to create an Islamic government across the Arab world. Similarly, the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) is trying to establish a strict Islamist nation in Iraq and Syria, and it has recently become notorious for its barbaric tactics and brutal effectiveness.

Peace talks between the Syrian government and opposition have been unsuccessful so far, and the war has caused a great amount of instability in the Middle East. The Syrian National Coalition was created in 2012 to establish a government to replace Assad's. But it has been unable to come to terms with the Assad regime, which wants to stay in power. The war has now reached an impasse: Assad is probably unable to regain his country, but the rebels lack the strength and organization to defeat him entirely. And even if they managed to defeat Assad, it is unclear who would govern Syria in his absence.

Sub-Topic 1: ISIS

ISIS, also known as the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria, began as an offshoot of the terrorist group, al-Qaeda, in 2013. ISIS was disowned by al-Qaeda in February 2013 for not recognizing al-Qaeda's leader, Ayman al-Zawahiri. Instead, followers of ISIS saw Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi as their leader. There are some doubts to where he comes from, but al-Baghdadi is suspected to previously be a cleric in a mosque.

ISIS is basically a more violent, strict, and ambitious form of al-Qaeda. Its ruthlessness has helped allow it to capture and hold a great amount of territory on both sides of the Iraq-Syria border. However, unlike al-Qaeda, ISIS is more focused on increasing its territory, especially in Iraq and Syria. Furthermore, ISIS is very rich because of ransoms and oil refineries, which make hundreds of millions of dollars. It uses that funding to operate a rudimentary government, which has established laws based on a strict interpretation of Islam (that legal system is known as Sharia). ISIS has been recruiting many jihadists, including from developed countries, primarily through social media. Several choose ISIS because it offers them a way of life and an opportunity to do something powerful with their lives. Some seek the thrill while others hope to redeem themselves.

Like al-Qaeda, ISIS wants to create a pure Islamic state; however, al-Qaeda has not been able to achieve this. In order to gain the territory for its state, ISIS has been planning terrorist attacks around the region of Iraq and Syria, including Lebanon. These attacks may induce more violence between the Sunnis and Shi'as, because of the destruction of mosques, for instance. That strife could actually benefit ISIS in the long run because it weakens the government and incites chaos. In its recent overcoming of Middle Eastern cities, ISIS has kidnapped and slaughtered inhabitants, and it has been forcing non-Muslims to convert to Islam. In addition, approximately 2 to 3 million people have left their homes and become refugees because of ISIS's imminent threat. Syria's ruler, Bashar al-Assad, has been fairly weak in fighting ISIS because, although it is anti-Assad, it has also ruthlessly fought rebel groups.

Since coming to power, Shi'a-majority Iraq's government that has tried to avoid keeping Sunnis in power. Previously, Saddam Hussein, a Sunni leader from the Ba'th party, ruled Iraq, and repressed many Shi'a political opponents. After Saddam Hussein was removed from power by the United States in 2003, and his army was disbanded by the US's transitional government, Iraq fell into civil war between the Sunnis and Shi'as. Soon, the new government began a

controversial policy called de-Ba'thification, in which it eliminated all influence of Saddam Hussein's Ba'th party from the government, leading to alienation and anger among the Sunnis. The United States has pushed for a more unifying Iraqi government, but the Shi'a-led government has eliminated Sunnis from the military, and former Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki filled the military with his political allies. As a result of this, much of Iraq's Sunni population has become discontent with the government, and some have begun fighting alongside ISIS. Nouri al-Maliki was ousted as Prime Minister in September of 2014, and it remains to be seen whether Haider al-Abadi, his successor, will improve the political situation in Iraq.

Iraqi troops are uncoordinated and undisciplined, despite being more numerous, making them relatively feckless in the face of the ISIS onslaught. Because of Maliki's reforms, the military is ineffective in Sunni areas, and Maliki has refused to integrate former Sunni Awakening paramilitary officers in his security forces. For that reason, the Iraqi government is at an intelligence disadvantage because it cannot effectively gain intelligence of future attacks when it is so weak in the problematic areas of the country. When ISIS militants have moved into a new city, the Iraqi army has often retreated, leaving the city to be captured by ISIS. The government's incompetence, combined with ISIS's violence, has allowed ISIS to take over a huge swath of northern Iraq, including the major city of Mosul.

ISIS has demonstrated, in the past few months, its hostility towards the US, Great Britain, and other such countries because of their attempts to prevent the rise of an Islamic state. ISIS has captured and beheaded several Americans and Europeans in order to send a message to the rest of the world; these events have forced nations around the world to approach ISIS with much planning and thought. The major western nations signed a pact which made them unable to pay ransom to terrorist kidnappings in 2013. However, only the US and UK has stuck to the pact, while other countries find loopholes in order to pay for kidnappings, incidentally funneling millions of dollars to ISIS.

Currently, the Iraqi army and Kurdish Peshmerga forces are now working to reclaim the territory captured by ISIS, and they have seen some successes; in August, they recaptured the Mosul Dam, which is Iraq's largest dam, from ISIS. But ISIS remains a strong force in Iraq and Syria, and the political problems that allowed it to appear in Iraq still persist.

Sub-Topic 2: Foreign Involvement

As violence has escalated throughout the course of the war, the Western world, the United Nations, and individual nations have been in talks to handle the situation properly.

Currently, the US and its allies have been discussing methods to combat ISIS and Bashar al-Assad. There have been suggestions to prepare the Syrian rebels to take on ISIS and Assad simultaneously. However, some are concerned that not all rebel groups can be trusted, so they need to be vetted carefully. There is no unified rebel front in Syria, and alliances change quickly, meaning that supposedly trustworthy groups could end up changing sides and fighting alongside ISIS. In fact, in the past, weapons from the US's meager support program have been stolen by hard-line Islamists. Additionally, because ISIS and Assad are enemies, fighting Assad could create a power vacuum and make ISIS stronger. Likewise, degrading ISIS might strengthen Assad.

On the other hand, Middle Eastern nations are far more comfortable with arming rebel groups, and Saudi Arabia and Qatar have been particularly active in supporting Islamic rebels. Turkey has also taken a more active role in establishing links with rebel groups. But their support for rebel groups is less about genuine humanitarian interests, and more about using Syria as a convenient battleground for their own regional disagreements and rivalries.

Another option for combating Assad, as well as the pervasive ISIS threat, is airstrikes. After a number of western journalists and aid workers were executed by ISIS, US President Barack Obama announced a campaign of anti-ISIS airstrikes in Syria and Iraq. Several western countries, including the UK, Australia, Canada, France, Germany, and others, have joined this US-led coalition, as have Bahrain, Jordan, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and UAE. But quite a few nations stand against the US's decision to take action in Syria and against ISIS as they fear it may spur a greater risk of western attacks by ISIS.

In theory, the UN Security Council could approve an air mission in Syria by declaring a no-fly zone and mandating an immediate ceasefire. The air mission, which would be carried out by UN member states such as the United States and its coalition, could target specific government facilities, or it could create a rebel-led safe zone within the country. Such an action is allowable under the UN Charter; a similar resolution was enacted in Libya in 2011 in the midst of that country's civil war against Muammar Gaddafi. But Russia has veto power in the Security Council, and it has used its veto in the past to prevent sanctions and other anti-Assad actions.

On the other side, Russia and Iran are two of the major countries supporting the Syrian government, the Assad regime. Russia is one of Syria's largest arms suppliers and has exchanged more than 4 billion dollars. This support is partially because Russia does not trust the US's intentions in the Middle East, and partially because Syria is home to the Russian naval port of Tartus. Iran, primarily Shi'a, has been assisting the Assad regime because they both are Shi'a and Syria had helped Iran in its war against Iraq in the 1980s. Iran's primary motives are preventing Syria from becoming Sunni-controlled and utilizing Syria to threaten Israel with short range missiles. Less directly, Iran has supported Hezbollah, a Shi'a militant group and political party in Lebanon that has helped Assad. China hopes to keep strong financial ties with Syria; yet, China does not want nations to interfere with this war.

Focus Questions

- Does Bashar al-Assad need to transition out of power for the Syrian Civil War to end?
- How can UNSC deal with the fact that there is no unified rebel force? Which rebel group or groups should be at the table in future negotiations with the Assad government?
- How can the international community bring about negotiations between both sides?
- What should the reaction be to Assad's use of chemical weapons?
- Should UNSC approve a campaign of airstrikes in Syria to target Assad's government?
- Which is a larger threat to stability in the region: Assad or ISIS? Can the international community focus on both, or does it need to choose one? Which should the international community choose?
- How can the UN Security Council encourage unifying improvements in the Iraqi military and government?

Bloc Positions

United States, United Kingdom, France, Netherlands

They are against the Syrian government, and they also want to fight ISIS. However, they have not given much aid to the Syrian rebels, although they've considered giving more. These nations are interested in sanctions and airstrikes against both ISIS and Assad's government.

Tunisia, Turkey, Saudi Arabia

They are against the Syrian government as well, but they are very comfortable with helping the Syrian rebels. They will attack Syria even without UN approval; if they do not act otherwise, these nations could be affected by the war themselves. They are all opposed to ISIS.

Iraq, Egypt

Like everyone else, both of these countries think that ISIS is evil, but Iraq has sought help from Iran to that end, which makes the United States and its allies uncomfortable. In terms of Assad, however, they have interesting positions. They both have certain sympathies for Assad: the new Egyptian regime shares Assad's opposition to the Muslim Brotherhood, and Iraq and Assad are both Shi'a powers. And it was revealed that Egypt and Iraq are part of a secret supply chain to sell oil to Assad. Egypt would prefer not to take action against Assad, but it cannot be strongly pro-Assad because it relies on support from Saudi Arabia. Iraq seems to have secretly helped Assad alongside Iran, but it would like to see an end to the chaos.

Syria, Iran, Russia, China

These countries support Assad's side. Russia and China want to help Syria because of financial ties and do not want other countries to play a role in the war at all. Iran helps because of religion agreements and because Syria's location suits Iran. These countries, especially Russia and Iran, will oppose most actions against Assad. All of them would like to eliminate ISIS, but Syria has focused its efforts on rebels other than ISIS.

Argentina, South Africa

These countries don't have a clear opinion on the Syrian Civil War. They should consider their histories, their relationship with Syria, and their allies' opinions to form a stance.

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