



ISSUE DESCRIPTION



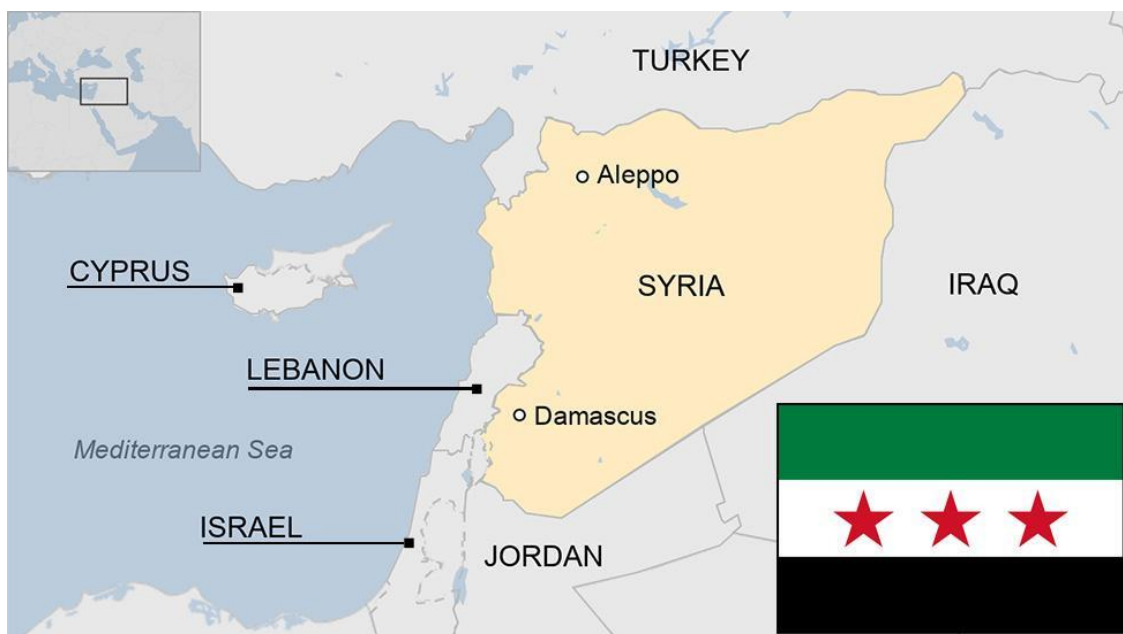
COMMITTEE Security Council

ISSUE Dealing with Insurgencies, Establishing Stability Under the New Leadership in Syria

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Introduction



It is no exaggeration to say that the Syrian conflict, which has now been raging on for 15 years, has become one of the most complicated, life-shattering and demanding crises of the 21st century. Not only because of its direct effects, although the humanitarian and refugee crisis it evoked is devastating in itself, too. Since the outbreak of the Civil War in 2011, more than 12 million people have left, or were forced to leave their homes. More than 250 000 civilians were killed. Total figures of the death toll reach almost 700 000 casualties. It is impossible to emphasise the tragedies the people of Syria had to endure. However, the geopolitical face and nature of the conflict is as complicated as it gets, consisting of ideological differences, multinational interests and concerns, economical setbacks, natural disasters, ethnicity questions and authoritarian oppression. The long-awaited success of overthrowing the authoritarian regime of Bashar al-Assad in December 2024 meant that the initial goal of the 2011 revolution and civil war was finally accomplished. However, during those 13 years of war immense and irreversible consequences have arisen, meaning the conflict remains unsolved, leading to ongoing internal insurgencies and fights. During the civil war, numerous new armed

groups were formed, of whom all had slightly different interests. Generally, they can be categorised into pro-government groups supporting Assad and anti-government rebel groups, whose aim was to overthrow the government. As mentioned, the Syrian civil-war is hugely complicated, thus understanding its intricacies requires research, knowledge of history and geopolitical conflicts. It is ideology against national interest, national interest against independent military groups and military groups against exposed civilians.

Definition of Key Terms

Bashar al-Assad - Assad took over the Syrian government's leading role in 2000 after his father's (Hafez al-Assad) death and was president until he was overthrown in 2024. Although he was first characterised as someone who could bring economic development and change to Syria, he eventually fell short of his promises and built an authoritarian regime. His oppression led to the Syrian revolution in 2011 and the civil war.

Ahmed al-Sharaa - Currently serving as interim president of Syria and commander of the HTS.

HTS - A paramilitary group known as Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham, which was dissolved and integrated into the Syrian national army and now controls most of the country. Recognised as a designated terrorist group by the United Nations and many other countries, although its former link to al-Qaeda was serious, it is much more hidden today. It was formed in 2017 essentially as a branch of al-Qaeda and the group proved to be one of the most successful rebel groups, defeating enemy rebels and overthrowing Assad in 2024.

SDF - Another independent military group known as the Syrian Democratic Forces. They remain to be essentially the only independent armed group which still controls significant territories in north-east Syria, known as the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria (AANES) They consist of Kurd and Arab fighters, although Arab militants are turning more and more against their own group, due to the brutalities committed against their minority. The U.S. heavily backed SDF to defeat ISIS and overthrow Assad's regime.

ISIS - ISIS (Islamic State of Iraq and Syria) is a uniquely brutal jihadist organization that briefly ruled large parts of Iraq and Syria, lost its territory by 2019, but still survives as a global terrorist network. It was heavily attacked and bombed by the U.S.A, President Trump called them "some of the worst terrorists" in the world in January 2026 -according to reports made by Anadolu Agency.

Kurdish people - The Kurdish ethnicity is the largest population on earth without having an autonomous nation themselves. Their population spreads in four neighbouring countries, namely South-East Turkey, North Syria, North Iraq and North-West Iran. They are constantly in dispute with the aforementioned countries due to their lack of independence and cultural differences. The PKK (Kurdistan Workers' Party) , which is the largest operating Kurdish military group and recognised by some states as a terrorist organisation, has been fighting against Turkey for independence for decades (already in 1984).

2011 revolution - In light of the Arab spring in 2011, pro-democratic demonstrations and revolutions were sparked in Tunisia and Egypt, signalling hope to other oppressed Arab societies for change. In spring 2011, peaceful demonstrations took place in South-Syria which were punished with brutal force by the Assad-regime. As a consequence, the peaceful demonstrations turned into a bloody revolution and eventually, a civil war.

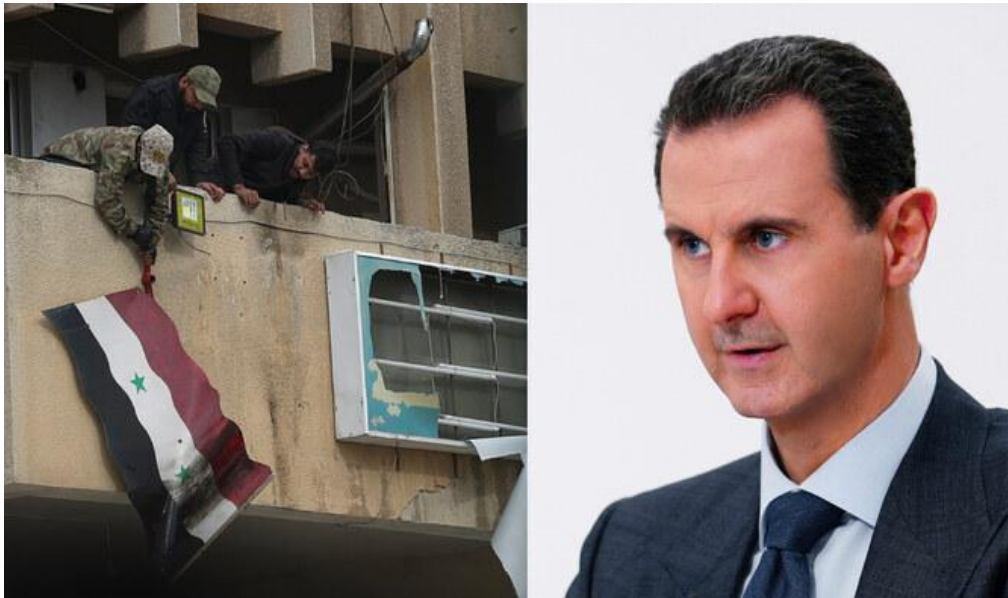
General Overview

FROM REVOLUTION TO CIVIL WAR

There are many perspectives the revolution and civil war of 2011 in Syria could be approached. In order to learn about the conflict of today, it is inevitable to also understand the Syrian civil war itself. The most important aspect to understand is what kind of rebel groups were formed in order to combat the government and in what way were the rebels supported by the international community. In the following paragraphs, an outline of the war shall be laid out, how and why it broke out, how it intensified and what participants appeared on the horizon. As mentioned in the introduction, the listing of every armed group in the war is not only nearly impossible in such a guide, but also redundant. Countless sub-branches of already existing organisations were created after 2011, each of them with slightly different aims, though most of them are already dissolved or adjoined with other groups of today.

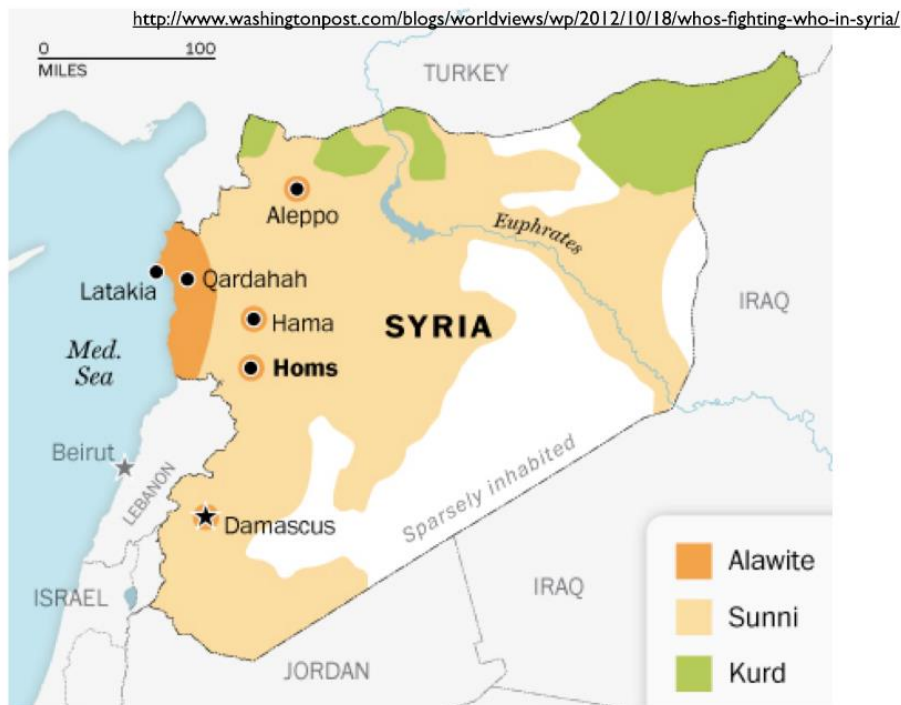
Similarly to other authoritarian Arab nations rising up in the Arab Spring, Syria was a nation of political repression, corruption, high youth unemployment, and prone to many natural disasters. The severe drought which occurred between 2006-2010 displaced rural populations, forcing them to move into urban areas, which worsened economic stress and highlighted the discoordination in society. As such dissatisfaction with the Assad regime kept growing. The first protests were seen in 2011 in Daraa, after teenagers painted anti-government graffiti on walls.

Despite the demonstrations being as peaceful as they were, they were followed by several forceful arrests, showing the Assad's government's commitment to repress any kind of uprising and the nature of their regime. As a consequence, many demonstrations took place in spring-summer, evoking even more brutal responses from the government, such as mass-arrests, use of live ammunition, and major crackdowns. The disputes turned into revolution and the foundation of many organised armed-rebel groups by the end of 2011.



Stepping into 2012 with excitement and hope to weaken the state's power, the world saw the result of an ever-intensifying revolution turn into a bloody civil war consisting of several sides and organisations. The first organised occurrence of rebel-groups brought the creation of Islamist militias, such as the Jabhat al-Nushra, Ahrar al-Sham and the Kurdish YPG. Additionally, many soldiers of the Syrian state military renegaded to create the FSA (Free Syrian Army) to serve the same purpose as the others: overthrow Bashar al-Assad. As the two sides clearly took their position and battles intensified, rebel groups were able to capture territories in the north, for example the significant city of Aleppo. As hindsight, the battle of Aleppo proved to be one of the deadliest and longest battles during the war. At this point footage of Hezbollah fighters, along with Iranian soldiers supporting the Assad regime on the battlefield started to reach the publicity, although their involvement was only acknowledged in 2013. Their support for Assad was crucial for him in maintaining his power for 13 years and very interestingly, his decline started when both Iran and Hezbollah were weakened in 2024 autumn (more on this later). In 2012 the European Union closed all diplomatic relations with Syria and placed sanctions on Assad's regime.

A crucial player of the war and an issue still unresolved today, is the Kurdish population of Syria. Estimates of the total Kurdish population reach 2.5 million people, making them one of the most significant ethnicities of the country. In the war, their fate and protection were taken up by the YPG (People's Defence Units), a Kurdish libertarian socialist group, partially backed by the U.S.A (to aid them fight against ISIS). The YPG was ideologically (if not directly militarily) connected to the PKK, the largest Kurdish paramilitary group, which was and is still fighting heavily against Turkey to establish an autonomous Kurdish nation. Consequently, the appearance of the YPG attracted lots of attention from Ankara. As the YPG was heavily linked to the PKK, this connection between the two organisations first evoked Turkey's tense observation, but from 2016 they have been conducting numerous cross-border strikes in Syria against the YPG and ISIS too.



Bill Webster/The Washington Post

As a sidenote, it is important to see that capturing cities and regions (mostly in North, North-West Syria) is a motive and tactic seen throughout the war and even today in the dispute between the new government and the SDF. The difference between today's and the civil war's strategic situation is that Bashar al-Assad did not offer to negotiate with the rebels, instead chose brute force (even to the extent of chemical weapons!) to annihilate any rebel group that stood in his way. At the beginning of the war, he often referred to the status-quo as a fight between evil-western mercenaries against the patriotic Arab government, although propaganda was no longer of any effect on people.

INTERNATIONAL PARTIES JOINING THE WAR

The situation worsened, when ISIS, seizing the chaos and disruption in the region, entered the fights and captured territories in the north. ISIS, (as it can be seen in the term descriptions above) is an extremist Islamist group, which ultimately aimed for the foundation of an independent Islamic state in Syria and Iraq. Striving for this, they declared a caliphate in the two aforementioned states in 2014. As the fighting further intensified, millions of people were dislocated, evoking the beginning of one the most terrible humanitarian crises of the 21st century. Up until this point, the civil war was a domestic struggle between military groups stemming from the region. However, ISIS joining the fights and declaring a caliphate provoked The United States of America to act and strike on ISIS. Since 2014 the U.S.'s main aim in Syria has been to paralyse ISIS and restrict their movement. The consequence of their intervention made the conflict international, making other countries take sides and join the fighting. Russia, a long-time ally of Syria, was tensely observing the situation up until this moment, decided to enter the war on the government's side in 2015, conducting several airstrikes and strengthening Assad's position. Aside from the long standing (dating back to the cold war) alliance between Russia and Syria, Russia saw an exceptional opportunity for their own trade and military expansions. Russia's main geographical deficit has been their absence of direct naval connections to the Mediterranean Sea, which proved to be a serious strategic issue in previous wars. This is where Syria comes into the picture. One of the largest naval ports in the region is found in Tartus, access to which would guarantee serious geopolitical advantages to Russia. However, their officially stated reason to join the war was to fight ISIS too, a statement of which's credibility was questioned later. Russia's entry reminded the world of classic cold war stand-offs, aiming to counter western influence and to create tension. Therefore, both Damascus and Moscow benefited a ton from their bilateral relationship. At this point the transformation of a domestic conflict into an international proxy war has started.

HUMANITARIAN CRISIS

In 2015 the country reached its worst humanitarian crisis in history. Approximately 7.6 million people were dislocated domestically and 4 million people left Syria to seek shelter in neighbouring countries, such as Turkey, Lebanon, Iraq and Egypt in the same year. Turkey is the largest Syrian refugee-hosting nation in the world, still registering around 3.2 million refugees up to date, although many Syrians were able to move back to their homeland after the fall of the Assad regime in 2024. Since 2015 (until this day) more than 4.2 million Syrian refugees flooded into Europe seeking protection and asylums. Nearly 1.3 of them were granted international protection in the EU between 2015 and 2023. Out of this figure, Germany is the

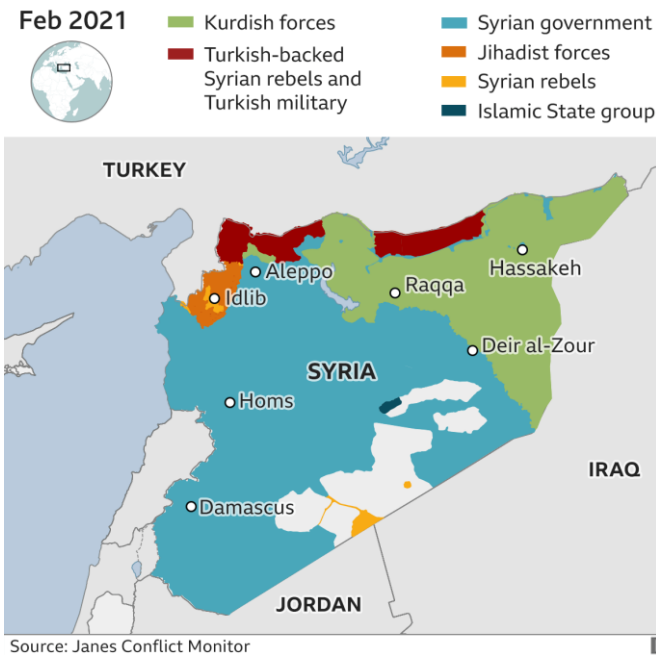
country which welcomed and took in the most migrants. Since the height of the European migration wave in 2015-2016, approximately 1 million Syrian asylum seekers were taken in by Germany. Former German chancellor Angela Merkel's famous "Wir schaffen das" mentality in 2015, which referred to Germany's capacity and power to help the refugees find shelter, even though very benign, was criticized a lot for putting the German economy and work-market in a tough spot. Other middle-European nations, such as Hungary, Poland and Czech-Republic refused to grant asylum to the migrants, forcing them to move on towards Western-Europe.

THE RISE OF THE REBELS AND ASSAD' CONSOLIDATION

The war-period following 2015 saw Assad solidifying his position with the help of Russia, Hezbollah and Iran. However, two significant further rebel groups were established, both of which played crucial roles in the outcome of the war. The Syrian Democratic Forces was founded in October 2015, composed of a multi-ethnic group, aiming to defeat ISIS. Its composition included Kurdish fighters, most of whom were adjoined from the YPG, Arab and Assyrian groups. The group was heavily backed by Washington in order to annihilate ISIS from the region. Their efforts, combined with U.S. forces proved to be decisive, as they conducted obliterating strikes against the Islamist group in 2017 in Raqqa, the ISIS capital in Syria. Opposite to the goals of other rebel groups, their aim is to establish a multi-ethnic, self-administrated region (Rojava) in Northern-Syria. Due to the fact that the SDF mainly consists of former YPG members and Kurdish people in general, Ankara has opposed its existence ever since, creating further tension on the Syrian-Turkish border. The SDF remains the only actively operating rebel force in Syria, as they are stuck in constant fighting with the new interim government, but more on this later. Secondly, another crucial military group, the HTS (Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham) was founded in 2017. The HTS is a Salafi-Jihadist rebel group, which was heavily linked with al-Qaeda, attracting international condemnations first. However, the group claimed they broke all ties with al-Qaeda and were independent from it. Its main residing region was Idlib, where they constantly fought for ground against government forces between 2017 and 2020.

Although controlling 1/3 of Syria at its peak, ISIS lost several battles and territories between 2017-2020 and shrink severely, due to constant attacks from the SDF and the U.S. forces. By 2020 the territorial Caliphate officially ended, marking the end of their rule in significant Syrian territories. Notably, ISIS continued to function as a clandestine guerilla network, conducting destruction and terrorism.

Who controls what in Syria



SALVATION

In 2020 a general stalemate occurred on the battlefield. Assad's forces managed to get a grip on most of the rebel-occupied territories, but the HTS held on to Idlib, maintaining the status quo. The turning point of the war came in 2023. Major rebel groups like the HTS and its allies gathered their forces and launched a large-scale offensive against government forces. The reason why the rebel groups proved to be more and more successful is linked more to geopolitical reasons, than domestic changes. Assad's main three supporting allies, Russia, Iran and Hezbollah have all been weakened by other wars outside of Syria. Russia, starting and fighting their war campaign in Ukraine were increasingly more occupied in directing their forces to Ukraine, rather than Syria. Furthermore, both Iran and Hezbollah (in Lebanon) were heavily bombed and attacked by Israel, weakening their positions and capacity to send more troops and ammunition for Assad. The consequences of the aforementioned geopolitical events were inconceivable for the Syrian government. During their campaign, rebel groups successfully captured major cities like Aleppo, Hama, Daraa, and eventually Damascus. Assad's defensive stances have completely collapsed in November 2024, as the HTS, with the command of Ahmed al-Sharaa forged ahead to eventually capture the capital on December 9th 2024. Bashar al-Assad fled Damascus to Russia, ending decades of dictatorship and oppression. The aftermath saw HTS main-commander Ahmed-al Sharaa become the interim president of Syria.

THE SITUATION TODAY

After the fall of Bashar al-Assad's regime in December 2024, Syria was left deeply fragmented and politically unstable. Bashar al-Assad took over as interim president of the country. In the northwest, HTS kept dominating Idlib, enforcing strict Islamist governance while marginalizing moderate opposition groups. In the northeast, the SDF negotiated a partial ceasefire and integration with transitional authorities, retaining influence over key towns and resources but remaining distrustful of other factions. Former regime loyalists, rebel militias, and local actors vie for power in other regions, often resulting in localized clashes over governance, taxation, and security. Today

Security challenges persist, particularly from ISIS remnants in eastern Syria, which conduct guerrilla attacks that threaten both Kurdish and transitional authority areas. Humanitarian conditions remain severe: millions of displaced Syrians face destroyed infrastructure, limited access to food, water, and healthcare, and high unemployment, complicating reconstruction and governance efforts.

Foreign influence continues to shape Syria's political landscape. Turkey supports opposition groups in Idlib and monitors Kurdish forces near its border, while Russia and Iran retain sway in southern Syria. The United States and coalition partners focus on counterterrorism and humanitarian assistance in the northeast.

The main conflict of today stems from the stand-off between the interim government and the SDF. The SDF refuses to resign any territories, hanging on to its original aim of establishing a self-administrated region. Al-Sharaa and his government are very strongly opposing this, as they aim to create a unified and centred Syria, without any rebel groups maintaining independence. The SDF, which mainly consists of Kurdish people, is afraid that Kurdish rights and human rights in general would be violated in their regions, if they were to be given back to the interim-government. Major cultural questions, such as the teaching language of schools remain to be heavily disputed. While the SDF wants to maintain as much Kurdish independence as possible, al-Sharaa strives to unite all ethnicities. This results in frequent military conflicts, as government forces press on to occupy more and more territories from the SDF. Furthermore, the SDF itself faces internal complications as well, as many Arab SDF fighters have revolted against their own military. Al-Sharaa wishes the SDF to submit all of their legions into the united Syrian army, which the SDF has first pledged in 2025 march, but has not done ever since. As tension and the fighting intensifies between the two sides, the question is raised: Was the overthrowing of Assad an actual achievement and the beginning of a peaceful era in Syria, or was it just another step in the ever-continuing circle of war between Syrians?

Major Parties Involved

Syria (Assad regime):

- Led by Bashar al-Assad.
- Fought to retain power and control the state.
- Backed by Russia and Iran.

Russia:

- Entered the war in 2015.
- Provided airpower, weapons, and diplomatic support to Assad.
- Key role in turning the war in Assad's favor.

Iran:

- Supported Assad from early in the war (2011–2012).
- Supplied military advisors, funding, and allied militias (including Hezbollah).
- Aimed to expand regional influence.

Turkey:

- Opposed Assad and supported Syrian rebel groups.
- Conducted military operations in northern Syria.
- Main goal: prevent Kurdish autonomy near its border.

United States:

- Led an international coalition against ISIS.
- Supported Kurdish-led forces (SDF).
- Limited direct involvement against Assad.

Kurdish forces (backed by the U.S.):

- Controlled parts of northern and eastern Syria.
- Focused on fighting ISIS and securing Kurdish self-rule.

ISIS (Islamic State):

- Controlled large parts of Syria between 2014–2017.
- Fought all other sides.
- Defeated territorially by 2019.

Timeline of Events

2011 - Arab Spring protests begin; Assad's violent crackdown turns unrest into civil war.

2012 - Fighting spreads nationwide; Free Syrian Army forms; major cities become battlegrounds.

2013 - Hezbollah and Iran openly support Assad; chemical weapons attacks draw global attention.

2014 - ISIS captures large territory and declares a "caliphate" with Raqqa as its capital.

2015 - Russia intervenes militarily to support Assad, shifting the war in his favour.

2016 - Government retakes eastern Aleppo, a major defeat for rebel forces.

2017 - Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) capture Raqqa from ISIS.

2018 - Assad regains most major cities; Turkey launches operations against Kurdish forces.

2019 - ISIS loses its last territorial stronghold at Baghouz.

2020 - Ceasefire in Idlib creates a military stalemate; front lines largely freeze.

2023 - Devastating earthquake worsens the humanitarian crisis in northern Syria.

2024 - Major rebel offensive; Assad's regime collapses and he flees the country.

2025 - Transitional authorities form amid ongoing factional and regional tensions.

2026 - Fragile ceasefires continue; Syria remains divided, unstable, and in recovery.

Possible Solutions and Approaches

Solving the Syrian crisis requires both compensation and collaboration. The main conflicting point between the government and the SDF today is that neither parties are willing to compensate. Ahmed Al-Sharaa demands the SDF to give up their respective territories and reconcile with governmental military forces, while the SDF leadership is reluctant to do so as they deem the protection of Kurdish and Arab minorities by Al-Sharaa's government insufficient. The key to coming to an agreement lies in both sides accepting the other's demands and to see that the main priority should be stabilising the nation after 15 years of bloodshed. Should the Syrian Government ensure to provide efficient protection to the aforementioned minorities in north-eastern Syria both culturally and in terms of their safety, the SDF would also be forced to meet Al-Sharaa's demands.

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