

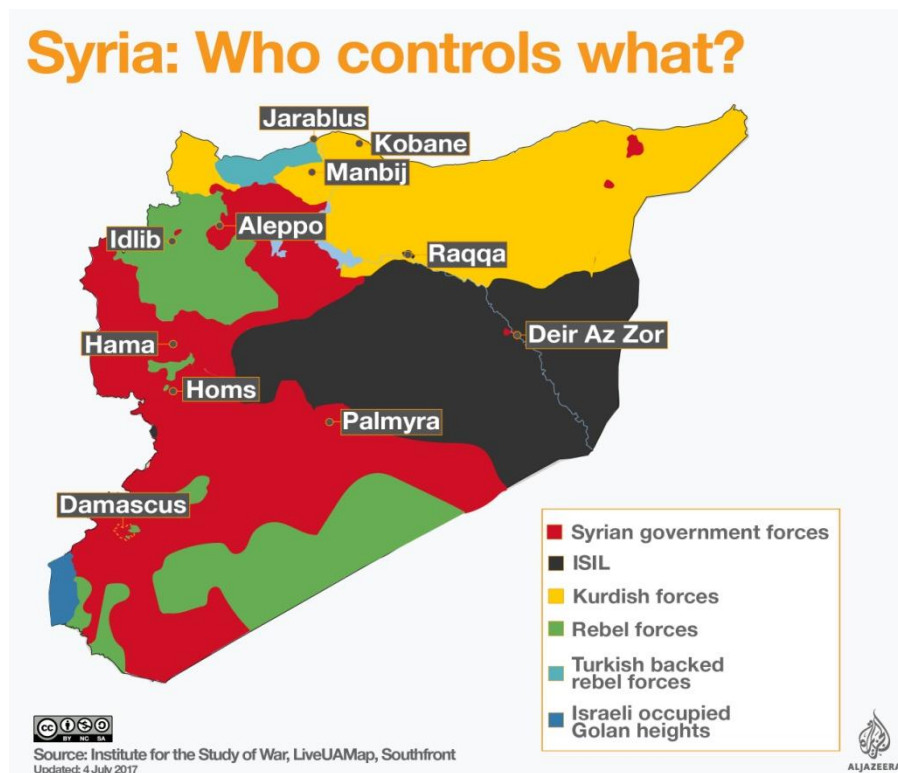
Protection of the Syrian Population Affected by its Civil War.

Structure

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- II. Casualties of the Civil War
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1. The context and history of the Syrian Civil War

In March 2011 Syria's government, led by Pres. Bashar al-Assad, faced an unprecedented challenge to its authority when pro-democracy protests erupted throughout the country. Protesters demanded an end to the authoritarian practices of the Assad regime, in place since Assad's father, Ḥafiz al-Assad, became president in 1971. The Syrian government used violence to suppress demonstrations, making extensive use of police, military, and paramilitary forces. Opposition militias began to form in 2011, and by 2012 the conflict had expanded into a full-fledged civil war.



By the summer of 2011 Syria's regional neighbours and the global powers had both begun to split into pro- and anti-Assad camps. The United States and the European Union were increasingly critical of Assad as his crackdown continued, and U.S. Pres. Barack Obama and several European heads of state called for him to step down in August 2011. An anti-Assad bloc consisting of Qatar, Turkey, and Saudi Arabia formed in the last half of 2011. The United States, the EU, and the Arab League soon introduced sanctions targeting senior members of the Assad regime.

Meanwhile, Syria's long-standing allies Iran and Russia continued their support. An early indicator of the international divisions and rivalries that would prolong the conflict came in October 2011 when Russian and China cast the first of several vetoes blocking a UN Security Council Resolution that would have condemned Assad's crackdown.

2. Casualties of the Civil War

In seven years, the casualties of Syria's civil war have grown from the first handful of protesters shot by government forces to hundreds of thousands of dead.

But as the war has dragged on, growing more diffuse and complex, many international monitoring groups have essentially stopped counting.

Even the United Nations, which released regular reports on the death toll during the first years of the war, gave its last estimate in 2016 — when it relied on 2014 data, in part — and said that it was virtually impossible to verify how many had died.

At that time, a United Nations official said 400,000 people had been killed.

But so many of the biggest moments of the war have happened since then. In the past two years, the government of President Bashar al-Assad, with Russia's help, laid siege to residential areas of Aleppo, once the country's second-largest city, and several other areas controlled by opposition groups, leveling entire neighborhoods. Last weekend, dozens of people died in a suspected chemical attack on a Damascus suburb, prompting the United States, Britain and France to launch retaliatory strikes against Syrian targets early Saturday.

In addition, American-led forces have bombed the Islamic State in large patches of eastern Syria, in strikes believed to have left thousands dead. And dozens of

armed groups, including fighters backed by Iran, have continued to clash, creating a humanitarian catastrophe that the world is struggling to measure.

Without a clear tally of the deaths, advocates worry that the conflict will simply grind on indefinitely, without a concerted international effort to end it.

3. What has been done until now?

The United Nations estimates that 6 million civilians are internally displaced, desperate to find safety in the destroyed cities, facing the constant threat of gunfire in the streets and bombs from the skies.

More than 5 million Syrians who have fled the country face uncertainty as well.

Syrian refugees also attempt the dangerous crossing of the Mediterranean Sea, seeking refuge in Europe. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) reports that in 2017, 172,301 refugees and migrants from Syria and other countries made this perilous journey. They also report that 3,119 refugees did not survive.



Greater United States and Russian engagement on Syria and efforts to reach a political settlement in 2016 failed to significantly reduce egregious violations of human rights and humanitarian law that have come to characterize the armed conflict there.

According to the Syrian Center for Policy Research, an independent Syrian research organization, the death toll from the conflict as of February 2016 was

470,000. The spread and intensification of fighting has led to a dire humanitarian crisis, with 6.1 million internally displaced people and 4.8 million seeking refuge abroad, according to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. By mid-2016, an estimated 1 million people were living in besieged areas and denied life-saving assistance and humanitarian aid.

More than 117,000 have been detained or disappeared since 2011, the vast majority by government forces, including 4,557 between January and June 2016, according to the Syrian Network for Human Rights. Torture and ill-treatment are rampant in detention facilities; thousands have died in detention.

Despite past efforts, civilian casualties and internal displacement are still relevant problems, and it is apparent that further efforts are needed.

Recommended reading:

<http://makhaterltakfir.com/en/News/View/3541/Syrian-Civil-War-Map>

<https://www.britannica.com/event/Syrian-Civil-War>

<https://www.nytimes.com/2018/04/13/world/middleeast/syria-death-toll.html>

<https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2017/country-chapters/syria>

<https://eu.usatoday.com/story/news/2018/02/20/syria-assad-airstrikes-civilian-deaths/350736002/>

<https://www.rferl.org/a/syria-death-toll-2017/28944265.html>

<https://syriancivilwarmap.com/>