

Committee: Disarmament and International Security Committee

Issue: The power vacuum in West Iran and Eastern Syria

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Position: Co-Chair

PERSONAL INTRODUCTION

Dear delegates,

My name is Manos Moschos and I will be your co-chair in the 2nd DSTMUN conference. Although this will be my second time chairing, I wish that this study guide will end up being beneficial. I hope you are as excited as I am for the following MUN conference and looking forward to further embracing the MUN community. I started attending conferences in 2017 and I can assure you that Model United Nations is a unique experience and a whole world by itself.

As a co-chair of the GA1 committee, it is my personal aim to help every single one of you before and during the conference so as to ensure that the debate will be carried out successfully, maximizing its quality and providing my assistance when needed, but most importantly making sure that the 2nd DSTMUN is one of your most fruitful conferences. I can assure you that you are going to enjoy the committee to a great extent.

The topics of the disarmament committee are not only very crucial, but also of international concern and thus, in order to be solved, they need the implementation of the appropriate measures, which could be suggested in your resolutions. All delegations are expected and strongly encouraged to fully participate in the committee procedures. This Study Guide will aim to help you counter the pestilential issue currently happening next to us, which is the crisis in both Syria and Iran. Nevertheless, you are expected to make your own research in order to fully explore the topic as well as find your country's policy regarding the issue.

Under no circumstances should you hesitate to contact me, if any of you have any questions, on the following email address: manosmoschos0202@gmail.com to help you clarify the topic and give you a taste of the absolute experience of a DST MUN conference.

Best regards,

Manos Moschos

TOPIC INTRODUCTION

The phenomenon of a power vacuum, although at first can seem rather insignificant, could be described as one of the most vital issues our world is facing nowadays. That is because it is related to political corruption, while in the meantime it follows war and revolts. Unfortunately, such singularities are being exploited by the world's superpowers and mainly they try to apply their power upon the countries affected by it. Such an example can be seen from the United States, which invaded mostly Syria but also Iran, and ended up being part of the ongoing war for several years, in order to, supposedly, prevent al-Assad's maltreatment of his people. Recently, President of the United States of America, Donald Trump's troops were withdrawn recently, as he realized that participating in such an event would only lead to the loss of his people's profit. With that being said, a power vacuum was left in Syria, for which Iran is expected to fill.



The whereabouts of Syria (orange) and Iran (green) are illustrated above

To sum up, there is an ongoing war, where one of the countries with the upper hand is hardly capable to control it, while suffering from its own political instabilities. Having said that, although the Syrian war is expected to come to an end soon with the help of the United Nations and other organizations, a second war is almost certain to occur due to the country's multinationalism. Nevertheless, were immediate measures not be taken soon, the war could expand to Iraq, Lebanon and mainly Turkey, threatening the fragile stability of the middle east.

DEFINITION OF KEY TERMS

Power vacuum

In the world of political science, this term, also known as power void, is used to describe the situation in which someone has lost control of something, without anyone replacing it¹. This phenomenon appears when a government has no distinguishable power or authority. Although as a term it can be used in multiple ways, we are going to use it as the situation after a war or major destruction.

Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF)

¹ "POWER VACUUM: Meaning in the Cambridge English Dictionary." *Cambridge Dictionary*, dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/power-vacuum.

The Syrian Democratic Forces, whose headquarters are located in the northern Syria, have as their military aim the defeat of Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), while their political goal is secular democracy and autonomy in northern Syria, rather than the overthrow of Bashar al-Assad. In other words, these are forces not participating directly in the Syrian civil war, but instead aim to obtain Kurdish autonomy and colonization.

Kurdistan

The Kurds are a middle eastern Iranian ethnic group. They consider themselves as a separate nation, nevertheless hardly do they appear as an individual state in a map. Their land comprises parts of Iran, Turkey, and Iraq. They were one of the allies of the United States against ISIS, but they suffered from great power losses after the US' troop withdrawal.

People's Protection Units (YPG)

YPG is an acronym which is translated to: People's Protection Units. It is a defense group of the Kurdish area of Syria. It arose after the Civil War erupted in Syria and started to spread into Syrian Kurdistan, currently known as Rojava, or Western Kurdistan. In that party, their troops derive mostly from Kurdistan, while many have individually volunteered to join their forces from America and Europe, aiming to further enhance their power and strike down the ISIS jihadist group.

Kurdistan Workers' Party rebels (PKK)

PKK, which translates to "Kurdistan Workers' Party rebels", was formed in 1970 and began a failed attempt in 1984 to emerge an independent Kurdish state within Turkey. Ever since there has been an ongoing conflict between these two parties, while there was another attempt in June 2015. More than 40 thousand people have died in this conflict, and Turkey accuses them of constantly trying to create a separate state in Turkey

Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS)

"The Islamic state of Iraq and levant", also known as "the Islamic state of Iraq and Syria", is a jihadist militant group and a previous unrecognized proto-state, yet recognizable by the United Nations and many individual countries as a terrorist organization. It is responsible for many human-right abuses and various war crimes. It has participated in numerous groups, such as the Iraqi and Yemeni civil war, the war in Afghanistan, the Boko Haram insurgency, the Iraq war and of course the ongoing Syrian civil war, proving their being considered as a terrorist group by numerous countries.

Proxy war

This term describes a war which has been prompted by a major power which does not actually take part in the war. An example of such a war is the Syrian Civil War.

Sunni and Shia Muslims

With the term “Sunni Muslims” we are describing one of the two largest branches of Islam. In Arabic, the word “sunni” means “lawful” while it is consisted of the majority of that religion's adherents. Sunni Muslims regard their value as the mainstream and traditionalist branch of Islam, as distinguished from the minority denomination

Shia Muslims are the Muslims of the branch of Islam believing Ali and the Imams as the only rightful heirs of Muhammad. They see themselves as the oppressed standing up against the wealthy and powerful, standing up to the social standard that was set by their religion. Shia Muslims are usually the ones that end up being the most fanatic ones, while they are opposed most of the times to the previous ones.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Syrian civil war

The government of Bashar al-Assad

This is the main conflict that needs to be discussed, as well as one of the main reasons we need to counter this power vacuum. Unfortunately, by the time this person became the leader, he caused nothing but distress. To begin with, it is important to mention that he was the successor of his father, Hafez, who ruled Syria for 30 years, during which he modernized it, but at the cost of a brutal repression. Bashar signaled that he would be a different kind of leader when he took the throne in 2000, but at the first sight of dissent, he tightened their right of free speech, isolated the economy and left very clear that democratic rule was not in his diplomacies.

The beginning of the war

Enduring decades of authoritarian governments, the people of several middle eastern countries raised their voices and ousted their leaders against the leaders of their country, leading to what is currently being called Arab Spring. 12 years after Bashar Al-Assad’s dictatorship, the people realized that they should revolt against the government. Unfortunately, the government discarded any peaceful demonstrations, and instead opened fire against the protestors. Ever since, government and civilians are in a war, which claimed the lives of more than 60 thousand Syrians.

What inflicted the war

After World War one, the French and the British established the borders of middle eastern countries, grouping many religions and ethnic groups in the same territory. Such example is perfect by taking into notice Israel and Palestine, a territory in which two different religions were placed by the world’s superpowers, leading to an ongoing conflict, numerous deaths and a huge humanitarian crisis. Ever since, the Muslim sect of the “Alawites” has been in command of Syria since the 70’s, despite representing a minor percentage of their population. Afterwards, the Assad government would suppress anyone who would seem to challenge them, which proves the political instability in the territory.

The Opposing Parties

The main parties taking part in the war are four, in which other countries, groups and organizations support each one. This is one of the main reasons why the conflict has yet to be unraveled, as there are people that do not know for whom they are fighting for, but they do acknowledge their hate towards al-Assad’s government.



The picture depicts the four opposing parties of the conflict. As far as the US is concerned, they previously stood alongside the Kurds.

Main events of the war

Everything began when Bashar al-Assad attacked peaceful Arab Spring demonstrations. After that event, the Syrian civil war began, where the two main parties were the rebels and those who support al-Assad’s way to govern its country. The latter decided to unleash extremists, known as jihadists, which of course were on the side of the rebels, and thus it was even more difficult for outside countries to become an ally of one of the two teams. At that time, the Kurds decided to take up arms and informally secede from Assad’s rule in the north. By the end of that year, Iran, Syria’s closest alliance, becomes a member of the war as they began sending troops and other cargo daily to Syria, in order to support their government. At the same

time, Arab gulf states commence sending support to the rebel groups, mainly to counter Iran's assistance. At that time, the middle east is divided in two groups, in Sunnis, that generally support the rebel forces, and the Shias, that mostly support Assad's. At that time, Former President Barack Obama, as a reaction to Assad's atrocities, decided to intervene by secretly training Syrian troops. That is when the opposing party uses chemical weapons for the first time, causing extreme injuries, a vast number of killings and drew the attention of the whole world. Afterward, Obama officially decided to respond to Assad's regime with a military strike, which ended up being a threat, rather than an actual action. After that response, Russia decides to join the dispute, of course on the opposing party.

In 2014, after internal conflicts in Iraq, an al-Qaeda affiliate breaks into the war, calling itself ISIS. They are not opposed directly to Iraq but target Syrian rebels and the Kurds. One year later, the United States decided to militarily strike ISIS, proving that they are no longer as interested in attacking Assad's forces as against the newly-formed terrorist group. By 2015, Turkey attacks the Kurds for trying to gain independence within the Turkish territory, which is one of the main issues in the conflict, the fact that the United States consider its main enemy the ISIS group, while its allies, e.g. Turkey, have other, more important conflicts to focus on. By the time Trump had been elected as the President of the United States, that Assad should be able to stay in power. The same year, the Russian party sends an order to strike the rebels but ends up attacking US troops as well. Simultaneously, a second chemical attack occurs, which leads to many deaths. Following, Trump launched multiple missiles aimed at Syria, claiming the first time the United States directly attacked the Assad regime.

Iranian revolution

One of the biggest issues on the recent world is one of the recent Iranian revolutions, in which the protesters fought for their rights against the government, as Bashar al-Assad would make so many unkept promises. In general, Iran was suffering from corruption, a problem that their leader, Hassan Rouhani, promised to fulfil, but ended up expanding it, such examples can be seen from numerous reports of police brutality, were they are being abusive against women for no reason whatsoever. Nonetheless, during his first conscription, he managed to enhance Iranian economy at some point, mostly by investing in the oil company, by introducing the company "BP". Unfortunately, even after this event, he was unable to solve the issue of unemployment that Iran was suffering from, but instead vowed that he would make sure the economy of the state would receive a blast. Tactlessly, his promise was a forged one, as the country is still suffering from inflation, unemployment, recession, and unstable social freedom. Taking into further notice

the opinion of his people, by December he announced his budget plans, in which he announced the investment of billions of dollars to organizations that make up the hard-line religious establishment in Iran. In addition to that, he would supposedly cut subsidies, increase gas prices and privatize schools. Unfortunately, he completely neglected one of the main problems that the middle-class was encountering, which was the sudden growth of the food price, leading to many starving.

In the end, the Iranians are not led by political organizers, but by poor citizens and villagers in rural towns. Yet, it is still important to take note that there have been previous revolutions in Iran, such as the great Iranian revolution, which have in fact led to the better handling of the country, and in the end to its benefit. All in all, in the current state of Iran, there are people starving and in need of humanitarian aid, that protest originally for an unstable economy, which later on morphed into calls for reform and revolution.

Sunni vs. Shia

In the Syrian civil war, the two main forces both get military equipment from various countries, which are related to the Sunni and Shia beliefs. The first support the Syrian rebels against al-Assad's dictatorship and is reinforced by Iran and the USA, while the latter mainly support the opposing party, and are supported by countries such as Turkey and Saudi Arabia. Shia and Sunni Muslims are usually conflicted with each other in some scale, such as their opinions on the first caliph. Specifically, Shia Muslims support that the first caliph should have been Ali Talib, while the Sunni ones believe the original was rightly chosen. This explains their ongoing conflict, but never did they have an actual war against each other instigated from that difference.

MAJOR COUNTRIES AND ORGANISATIONS INVOLVED

Iran

The Islamic State of Iran could benefit immensely and immediately from the United States' withdrawal of troops from Syria, since the US was continuously preventing Iranian military from entering Syria through Iraq. Consequently, Iran will be free to move through the Iraqi border thus, easing the movement of fighters and weapons, including movement of weaponry through Syria to Hezbollah, Iran's partner in Lebanon. Moreover, the USA's sanctions on Iran will be lifted and thus Iran's economy will rejuvenate. Other than that, since the area is rich in oil, the removal of U.S. troops increases Iran's chances of accessing oil fields in the northeast. Furthermore, the current situation possibly offers the opportunity to the country to shape the political regime in Syria, as the withdrawal emboldened further Iranian influence in Syria's politics, economy, and security. The move provides

Iranians with the operational space to expand their groups of Shiite foreign fighters, both trained and equipped by Iran, who are mobilized and moved throughout the Middle East.

Israel

Israel had hoped the American presence in Syria would block Iran from completing its corridor to the sea; however, it is now left alone to face the consequences of the withdrawal and is left virtually alone to stop Iran from expanding its influence across the region. Furthermore, the country currently seems to be alone in the battle against both the Russian Federation and Iran in Syria, which military experts have analyzed the tactical dangers of.

Syrian Arab Republic

The withdrawal of the forces from Syria influence the instability in the region, since the actors involved in it, prepare for the political order in Syria. The People's Protection Units (YPG), a Kurdish militia in Syria, will most likely enter into negotiations with the Syrian regime to forestall a full-scale Turkish incursion and maintain a degree of autonomy. The YPG will continue to be a fixture in Syria's political and governing structures. However, US influence, will be diminished or non-existent and the Syrian regime, along with allies, such as Russia and Iran will exult. Arab states considered establishing new and improved diplomatic relations with Syria's leader, Bashar al-Assad. Furthermore, Iran remains a potentially potent guerrilla force in the eastern desert region.

United States of America (USA)

The withdrawal of the US from Syria reshapes the stability and the relations in the Middle East and has abruptly scrambled the geopolitics of the region. It most importantly creates a vacuum that will most likely be filled by the Assad regime and Iran. Also, it could allow ISIS's reestablishment in Syria and Iraq while it abandons Kurdish and Arab allies in the area. Even though the United States has only about 2,000 troops in Syria, the consequences of its withdrawal can be far-reaching in a complex war, leaving allies struggling to cope and enemies emboldened. The President of the United States of America, Donald Trump reprimanded "We have defeated ISIS in Syria, my only reason for being there." Finally, the United States has neglected developing partnerships with non-state actors in the Middle East, such as Kurdish and Arab groups in Syria and Iraq.

Russian Federation

The Russian Federation will capitalize on the vacuum left by the USA to set path of the Syrian conflict as it wants. The withdrawal leaves way for Russia to treat Syria as part of its virtual territory. However, while Russia and Iran might benefit in

the short term, the end of Syrian war will likely bring them into conflict, since the mutual alliance in support of the Assad regime will disclose to competing benefits. Specifically, on the one hand, Russia wants a strong government in Syria that is loyal to them. On the other hand, Iran seeks a regime which it can easily employ. President Vladimir Putin approved the decision naming the US withdrawal “correct” as the troops were not needed. Putin’s approval came after Trump announced he was ordering the withdrawal as the US military had achieved its goal of defeating ISIS in Syria.

Hezbollah

Hezbollah consists of a Shi'a Islamist political party and militant group, in Lebanon. Iran and Syria support Hezbollah on a militant, financial and political level respectively. Among Iran’s development of Hezbollah, Iran has gained multiple benefits by carrying out proxy warfare and leveraging third-party combatants, including terrorists and militias. Furthermore, Hezbollah and Israel fought each other in the 2006 Lebanon War. The United States has also previously sanctioned Hezbollah for its role in the Syrian Civil War. Finally, Hezbollah was fighting in the war against Islamic extremists and pledged that the group will not allow Syrian militants to control areas that border Lebanon.

Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS)

The Islamic State may be on the decline, but it has not yet been defeated. It continues to be a dangerous threat to both Syria and Iraq, as in both countries, it consists of a menacing regime, resisting against local forces through attempts to re-establish itself. The US withdrawal from Syria will allow ISIS to restore itself, as well as retake control of territories in conflicted areas. ISIS will have the opportunity to employ Syrians, as analysts estimate it still commands 15,000 fighters.

United Nations Office and Disarmament Affairs (UNODA)

The United Nations Office and Disarmament Affairs has expressed the importance of topics, such as the role of arms control in managing conflicts, new challenges to disarmament, and the humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons. On 28 January 2015, the commencement of the destruction of remaining chemical weapons production facilities in Syria was stressed. On 5 February 2018, High Representative Izumi Nakamitsu supported the implementation on the elimination of chemical weapons in Syria to the United Nations Security Council (UNSC). She stated that the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) was planning on the destruction of the remaining chemical weapons declared by the Syrian government. Furthermore, it has supported that all Member States must comply with the nonproliferation treaty and called for Iran and Syria, among other members, to comply with the treaty. In general, in times of political

chaos, the Office advocates and strives for the disarmament of the region, which is in essence the goal of the entire international community and the United Nations itself.

BLOCS EXPECTED

In order to make the conflict even clearer, the main countries involved are opposed as such:

The Supporters of Assad, specifically Iran, Russian Federation, Hezbollah viz. Lebanon, and Iraqi extremists versus the United States, the United Kingdom, Turkey, Saudi Arabia and Qatar. Consequently, most of the European countries, apart from those that have overwhelming relationships with the Russian Federation, and Israel should be on the alliance of the United States. On the other hand, mainly China and nearby countries with similar beliefs should be on the opposing party, while China and Russia are constantly blocking any international effort against al-Assad.

Bear in mind however, that although Iraq has some of its people fighting on al-Assad’s side, as a country they are opposed to him, mainly because of the previous war with Iran and their supporters in Syria.

TIMELINE OF EVENTS

1946	This was the time when Syria gained its independence, where Iran firstly established its embassy in Syria. At that time, they began their ammunition co-operation.
1979	Iranian revolution; it had a major influence on the cooperation between Syria and Iran.
2000	Bashar al-Assad was elected as the president of Syria, for whom many protests have taken place demanding his resignation. This was one of the main causes of the current Syrian war.
2009	Rise of a new electoral debacle, in which the Iranian rules changed completely, causing a political “earthquake”, while in the meantime it can still lead to the creation of a new strongman emerge from the military.
March 15, 2011	The ongoing Syrian civil war began.
April 2013	The United States secretly join the war by sending forces to train Syrian rebels, while simultaneously urges the Arab gulf states to stop funding the extremists, but gets ignored.

June 2013	Al-Assad decides to abuse chemical weapons on insurgents, resulting to about 2000 deaths, which drew the world's attention.
Summer 2013	The Syrian civil war reaches its climax, when US decides to fight along, while in the battlefield there were already Assad's forces, and the powers of Shia and Sunni.
August 2013	Since the United States threatened the Syrians with a military strike, Russia decides to also get involved in the war, backing up the forces of al-Assad.
February 2014	Internal conflicts, mainly in Iraq, introduce a new power, ISIS, which is opposed not to al-Assad's forces, but instead targets other opposing parties, rebels in Syria and Kurds, introducing the Caliphate.
March 2015	US strikes the aforementioned ISIS power, considering them as a terrorist group and a threat to the whole world.
June 2015	The PKK began another attempt to create an autonomous state.
May 2017	2 nd vote in Iran, in which Hassan Rouhani promised a better future economy and a mar in the state's current unemployment.
2018	United States withdrew their 2000 troops in Syria, causing the Kurds and Iranians to fill the power vacuum.
June 2019	Al-Assad demolishes refugee homes to tighten grip on refugee strongholds.

RELEVANT RESOLUTIONS, TREATIES AND EVENTS

United Nations Security Council Resolution 316

In the resolution above, proposed by the Security Council in 1972, the United Nations demand the Israeli state to withdraw their forces and release any captive Syrian (and Lebanon) soldiers that had been abducted at the time. Furthermore, it mentioned that if Israel does not abide to that law, the Security Council would reconvene to consider further action. This resolution could be related to the dispute to further explain the relations between the two countries, and mainly why Israel, a neighboring country, would not send any help of any kind to Syria.²

United Nations Security Council Resolution 1929

² <http://unscr.com/en/resolutions/doc/316>

Restricts Iran's power due to violating human rights and promoting war, by imposing to them sanctions that gradually indulge Iranian economy and military power. This specific resolution was one of the main reasons why the current president of Iran was elected, as he promised, and achieved, the exemption of these sanctions, by spreading their oil company internationally.³

PREVIOUS ATTEMPTS TO SOLVE THE ISSUE

Syrian peace process

The Syrian peace plan/project was launched by the United Nations and specifically by the secretary general, Kofi Annan, immediately after the first chemical weapon attack. They instantaneously took measures, trying to limit al-Assad's forces, due to violating multiple human rights, and thus decided to politically attack al-Assad. Unfortunately, his project failed, some say due to a matter of logistics and that he was not backed up with the number of soldiers he should be, while others believe the Russian Federation, Iran and China are to blame for the UN's inability to impose themselves on the dictator's party.

Geneva peace talks

The Geneva peace talks on Syria in 2017, also called the Geneva 4-8 talks, were peace consultations between the Syrian government and the Syrian opposition under the patronage of the United Nations. The fighting sides did not get to face-to-face negotiations, but for eight days no party left the dispute, while instead Russia talked with the parties separately. On 29th of March, the Kurdish National Council withdrew from the Syrian opposition in protest of the Syrian's High Negotiation Committee's (HNC) policies.

Barack Obama's attempts against al-Assad

As it has been already mentioned, Obama decided to join the war in a discreet and secretive way, by training the Syrian rebels so as to avoid the rise of dictatorship in the middle east, and later on decides with multiple discussions to prevent the funding of extremist groups by the Arab gulf states. Unfortunately, his second attempt was completely neglected, which could have limited the extremist's power in a major scale, even possibly resulting in their loss on the war.

POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

Legal framework

³ https://www.iaea.org/sites/default/files/unsc_res1929-2010.pdf

One of the main aspects you should consider while drafting your resolutions is that these countries suffer from corruption, thus, donations and similar aid including other resources will be almost impossible to achieve at first. That being said, it is vital to propose, and not impose, laws, in order to limit the current dictatorship as well as ameliorate the humanitarian crisis currently happening. Such laws could be in the form of sanctions against any maltreatment of the Syrians, or even interventions of the peacekeeping force in case of another, third chemical attack by Assad's forces. Nevertheless, you should always bear in mind that the disarmament committee does not have the authority to impose or even propose sanctions, but only the Security Council can do so.

Assistance towards the humanitarian crisis

However, as mentioned earlier, the two parties are corrupted and thus the political turbulences that need to be solved, perhaps by enhancing surveillance to maintain an order in the food and other donations sent to the country. That way, there will be no need for Iran to try and fulfil the power vacuum in Syria, which is apparently not one of its capabilities at its current state. That being said, humanitarian aid should also be sent to the Iranians, but also propose further laws to change the current rules of the Iranian government, which has reached an Iranian electoral debacle. It is advisable to consider, however, that in order to provide such humanitarian aid the necessary infrastructure needs to be created beforehand. In addition, it is crucial to establish a completely transparent system of delivery of the resources in order to assure that they will indeed end up in the hands of the people who are in actual and dire need, since it is widely accepted that both countries are corrupted. Henceforth, the application of anti-corruption laws is strongly encouraged in order to avoid inoperative resolutions. Of course, the matter of handling the humanitarian crisis should be elaborated only to a certain extent, bearing in mind that the issue is being tackled from the scope of the Disarmament and International Security committee not the Social, Humanitarian, and Cultural.

Country relations

Furthermore, it is vital for Iran and Iraq to establish better relationships as this is one of the main reasons behind Iran currently suffering, following the Iranian-Iraqi war. Bear in mind, however, that one of the main causes of the ongoing conflict is the Bashar Al-Assad's dictatorship. Hence, some measures that could be proven efficient may include a referendum as well as pressure on USA to focus on finding more peaceful methods to solve their conflict. Meanwhile, special attention should be given to the Kurds that are currently conflicted with the Turks; another issue that should be clarified as to the borders of each country. Thus, enhanced surveillance could be applied to forbid trespassing of Turkey's borders while further define the

Kurdish territory and its borders, in case it is decided that it should be considered a different and possibly independent state.

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