



Florida High Schools Model United Nations

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UNITED NATIONS SECURITY COUNCIL

THE SITUATION IN SYRIA

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Introduction

The ongoing Syrian civil war confronts not only Syria, but much of the broader Middle East and the international community with profound challenges, particularly when evaluating the emerging sectarian nature of the conflict. As the civil war continues well into its eighth year, and as ethnic and religious communities, including Sunni Arabs, Yazidis, Christians, Druze, and Kurds, are targeted and/or fighting each other, affronts to both inclusivity and sustainability mount.¹ Cross-border conflicts and regional conflagration are continuing threats to international peace and security, too; the Fund for Peace currently ranks Syria as the 4th most fragile state in the world and neighboring Iraq as the 11th most fragile state.² While the Syrian government frequently labels its opposition “terrorists,” the Islamic State (IS) controls far less territory than it did a few years ago. Nonetheless, threats to international peace and security posed by extremist and terrorist organizations are still extant and credible.

The number of Syrians killed thus far is impossible to determine with any precision, but generally accepted estimates point to over 250,000 killed³, with several oft-cited estimates putting the death toll over 500,000.⁴ The continuing humanitarian crisis has already displaced over 8.7 million people within Syria and created over 5.6 million refugees⁵, out of an estimated population of approximately 23 million people; with the most recent Syrian government offensive in the southwest of the country⁶, these totals may continue rising. The vast majority of the refugees have fled to Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon and especially Turkey, but beginning in 2015, rapid influxes of refugees began arriving in southern and eastern Europe with resulting political tensions and subsequent attacks on the refugees.⁷

¹ *Al-Jazeera*, “Syria’s civil war explained from the beginning”, April 14, 2018.

² Fund for Peace, “Fragile States Index 2018”. Found at: <http://fundforpeace.org/fsi/>

³ Anne Barnard, “How We Measure the Human Toll in Syria Amid the Fog of War”, *New York Times*, May 13, 2016.

⁴ Megan Specia, “How Syria’s Death Toll is Lost in the Fog of War”, *New York Times*, April 13, 2018.

⁵ United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), “Syrian Regional Refugee Response”, June 28, 2018. Found at: <http://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/syria>.

⁶ *BBC*, “Syria War: 270,000 displaced by fighting in south-west”, July 2, 2018.

⁷ *BBC*, “Migrant crisis: Clashes at Hungary-Serbia Border” September 16, 2015.

As the UN Security Council in particular, and the international community in general, continues to monitor developments in Syria and strives to mediate a peaceful solution to the conflict, delegates to the Security Council must seek to: stop the current violence; establish a viable and comprehensive plan for the end of the civil war and post-conflict disarmament, demobilization, rehabilitation and reintegration (DDRR) of the combatants; stabilize the current refugee situation and then work with all relevant and interested stakeholders, including the governments of the region, as well as the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) to create the conditions necessary for the Syrian refugees to feel safe enough to return.

International Responses

The United Nations, the Arab League, and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) have all held emergency meetings regarding the violence in Syria as well as to consider currently available diplomatic, economic, legal, political, and security options. In November 2011, the Arab League formally suspended Syria from membership because of Syria's violent repression of political demonstrations; Syria argued that the move was illegal because it was not approved unanimously – Lebanon and Yemen opposed the suspension and Iraq abstained.⁸

The possibility of armed intervention in the Syrian conflict, all the way from the enforcement of “no-fly” zones for the Syrian air force to the actual introduction of armed international forces, potentially from NATO countries, including Turkey, remains a considerable risk. Russian military intervention beginning in 2015 “significantly raised the risks and potential costs of any Western effort to impose a ‘no-fly’ or ‘no-bomb’ zone over parts of Syria, thus rendering untenable ideas that had been gaining steam in some Western capitals.”⁹ Turkey's previous calls for establishing “safe zones” for refugees in northern Syria¹⁰ would require the introduction of considerable outside forces, an eventuality that is not being publicly embraced by many political leaders. Turkish intervention in northern Syria continues as Ankara seeks to weaken Kurdish opposition on both sides of the border; reports have also surfaced that Damascus government has allowed Kurdish fighters expedited passage to northern Syria to halt Turkish advances.¹¹ US and NATO bombing raids and cruise missile strikes to disrupt and destroy the infrastructure of the Islamic State (IS) as well as to deter future Syrian government use of chemical weapons comprise other critical international responses.¹² Israel's involvement in the conflict, including its desires to deter what it sees as Iranian and Hezbollah aggressiveness¹³, only adds to the complexities confronting Syria, the Middle East and the international

⁸ Neil MacFarquhar, “Arab League Votes to Suspend Syria Over Crackdown” *New York Times* November 12, 2011.

⁹ International Crisis Group (ICG), “Russia's Choice in Syria”, Middle East Briefing No. 47, March 29, 2016 p. 4.

¹⁰ Jeremy Bowen, “Turkey: Risk Worth Taking for Syria Safe Zones” *BBC News*, September 27, 2012.

¹¹ Jonathan Marcus, “Syria war: Why Turkey's battle for northern Syria matters”, *BBC News*, February 2, 2018.

¹² Helene Cooper, Thomas Gibbons-Neff and Ben Hubbard, “U.S., Britain and France Strike Syria Over Suspected Chemical Weapons Attack”, *New York Times*, April 13, 2018.

¹³ Ben Hubbard and David M. Halbfinger, “Iran-Israel Conflict Escalates in Shadow of Syrian Civil War”, *New York Times*, April 9, 2018.

community. Iranian support for the Assad government is frequently viewed as an extension of the oft-cited series of confrontations between Iran and both Israel and Saudi Arabia, although it is essential to note that Tehran and Damascus have maintained friendly relations since the Iranian Revolution in 1979.¹⁴

UN System Actions

To underscore the importance of peacefully resolving the nascent Syrian conflict, then Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon sent two of the leading lights of the UN, former Secretary-General Kofi Annan and former Algerian Foreign Minister and UN Undersecretary-General Lakhdar Brahimi. Before his departure from Syria on August 2, 2012, Annan proposed a 6-point plan for resolving the crisis that included the deployment of a UN military observer mission in Syria for several months; the observer mission was removed in mid-August 2012 as a result of increasing violence in the country.¹⁵ Brahimi's overtures did not produce significant improvements nor reductions in violence, either, in large part because both the Assad regime and the rebels appear intent on focusing on securing military victory.

In 2015, 13 of 15 Security Council countries approved a draft resolution that would have referred investigation of Syrian atrocities and war crimes to the International Criminal Court (ICC), but China and Russia vetoed the prospective resolution. Then Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon called for Security Council countries to "look beyond national interest,"¹⁶ but the most fruitful approach at this point may be to frame prospective resolutions as satisfying vital national security interests for Security Council countries as well as their allies throughout the broader Middle East.

Political scientists Lise Morjé Howard and Alexandra Stark highlight critical developing trends that the Security Council must account for as they seek to end the Syrian civil war; in recent decades, "civil wars are lasting longer and are increasingly likely to end with a one-sided victory rather than a negotiated settlement."¹⁷ Given the direct involvement of several Security Council countries, including most notably Russia and the United States, and the plethora of foreign policy aims being pursued by Iran, Israel, Jordan, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and the United States, including arming different proxies, achieving a negotiated settlement will not be easy. Conversely, though, the Security Council and international community must consider the enormous risks posed to the broader Middle East as well as the entire world if the message of the

¹⁴ Sam Dagher, "What Iran is Really Up to in Syria", *The Atlantic*, February 14, 2018.

¹⁵ *BBC News*, "UN Syria observer mission over, Security Council says", August 16, 2012.

¹⁶ *The Guardian*, "UN Security Council is failing Syria, Ban Ki-moon admits", September 7, 2015.

¹⁷ Lise Morjé Howard and Alexandra Stark, "Why Civil Wars Are Lasting Longer", *Foreign Affairs*, February 27, 2018.

Syrian civil war translates to “crush your enemies, see them driven before you, hear the lamentations of their women.”¹⁸

Military Intervention

Military resolution of Syrian civil war has been broached at various points but, save a Syrian invasion of a neighboring state such as Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, or Turkey, or sustained Syrian deployment of chemical weapons¹⁹, at least several Security Council member states, including China and Russia, are likely to oppose authorizing any large-scale occupation of Syria. The current North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) bombing campaign appears intended to provide aerial support to the Iraqi army as well as the oft-referenced “moderate Syrian opposition” but expanding this US-led coalition to include Arab and Muslim world allies has not thus far yielded much concrete support. Many of the Syrian opposition movements that have been designated as the intended beneficiaries of US and allied military strikes are instead claiming that the real beneficiary is Syrian President Bashar al-Assad.²⁰ Furthermore, the effectiveness of this bombing campaign was disputed as IS continued to threaten vulnerable populations and claim additional territory.²¹ Over a period of 3+ years, the Islamic State’s grip on cities within both Syria and Iraq was gradually loosened, although the civilian suffering throughout this period may dampen the celebratory rhetoric.²² Without Security Council authorization, however, these actions may come up against domestic legal and political challenges as well as embroil these countries in dangerous and prolonged military actions.

Russian military intervention in the Syrian civil war and/or regional conflict added new layers of complexity, particularly given the significantly different priorities of NATO and the Russian Federation.²³ Turkey’s November 2015 downing of a Russian military jet ratcheted up tensions between the two countries and throughout the region; relations have improved in recent months after Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan expressed “regret” for shooting down the Russian jet and agreed to meet personally with Russian President Vladimir Putin.²⁴ The Russian military also released a statement calling for a long truce in Aleppo²⁵, an appeal that was ultimately unsuccessful, and the Russian government does not appear inclined to demand the removal of their longtime ally, Syrian President Assad.

¹⁸ *Conan the Barbarian*, Universal Studios, 1982.

¹⁹ *BBC*, “Obama warns Syria chemical weapons use may spark US action” August 21, 2012.

²⁰ Anne Barnard, “Opposition in Syria is Skeptical of US Airstrikes on ISIS” September 29, 2014.

²¹ Karam Shoumali & Anne Barnard, “ISIS Advances in Syrian Border Town of Kobani Despite Airstrikes” *New York Times* October 8, 2014.

²² *Los Angeles Times*, “The rising civilian death toll in the campaign against the Islamic State”, March 31, 2017.

²³ Paul McLeary & Adam Rawnsley, “SitRep: Moscow vs. Washington, Syria Edition” *Foreign Policy* June 20, 2016.

²⁴ *BBC*, “Putin and Erdogan mend ties after Russia-Turkey jet incident” June 29, 2016.

²⁵ *BBC*, “Syria conflict: Russia ‘wants long-term Aleppo ceasefire’” June 16, 2016.

Deploying a peacekeeping mission to Syria may be another option that will be discussed at the Security Council, but it would likely take at least 6 months to assemble a sizeable peacekeeping force; this would also depend upon member states being willing to send their respective military and police forces into the Syrian conflict. With mounting evidence that the government of Syria has engaged in multiple chemical weapons attacks²⁶ as well as the increasingly sectarian nature of the civil war, calls for countries to honor their commitments under the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) doctrine have mounted over the past 7.5 years. To date, the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) doctrine has not emerged as a determining factor in how the varied stakeholders act²⁷, but the Security Council would be remiss if it failed to consider this vital framework and their respective obligations to prevent, prosecute, and punish states and nonstate actors who commit atrocities and mass human rights violations, including the deployment of chemical weapons.

Very Few Good Options Left: Syrian Refugees and Their Receptions in Neighboring Countries

With the horrific violence plaguing Syria, and no effective end to the violence in sight, approximately 5.6 million Syrians have fled their country in the last 5+ years, often facing terrible dangers throughout their harrowing journeys and at times even after they have reached their intended destinations. In August 2014, a ship carrying some 500 Syrian and African refugees sank off the coast of Italy, with some 200 refugees drowning.²⁸ With the sustained, and at times very rapid, influxes of Syrian refugees into Turkey, with a total of 3.5 million registered Syrian refugees now in Turkey²⁹, the hospitality of Turkey towards Syrians is rapidly eroding.³⁰ In Jordan, a country that has for decades housed hundreds of thousands of Palestinian refugees, and for at least a decade hundreds of thousands more Iraqi refugees, the arrival of several hundred thousand, potentially even a million or more, additional Syrian refugees “is deeply unsettling.”³¹ With no sustainable political settlement to the civil war in Syria on the immediate horizon, tens of thousands of Syrians may come to approximate semi-permanent or long-term residents in these neighboring countries, potentially leading to additional strains on local economies and societies.

²⁶ Delegates may also wish to revisit the September 2013 Framework for Elimination of Syrian Chemical Weapons. Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons Executive Council (OPCW), “Joint National Paper by the Russian Federation and the United States of America: Framework for Elimination of Syrian Chemical Weapons”, September 17, 2013. The Framework may be found at: https://www.opcw.org/fileadmin/OPCW/EC/M-33/ecm33nat01_e.pdf

²⁷ Mark Kersten, “The Responsibility to Protect doctrine is faltering. Here’s why.”, *Washington Post*, December 8, 2015.

²⁸ *The Economist*, “A harrowing journey” September 8, 2014.

²⁹ United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), “Syrian Regional Refugee Response”, June 28, 2018.

³⁰ Ceylan Yingsu, “Ancient Haven for Refugees Sees Signs of Strain” *New York Times* July 31, 2014.

³¹ Norimitsu Onishi, “As Syrian Refugees Develop Roots, Jordan Grows Wary” *New York Times* October 5, 2013.

Existing Exigencies: Caring for Syrian Refugees

While the ultimate goal of most refugee agencies and policy-makers is to encourage safe, timely and voluntary repatriation of refugees, notwithstanding Syria's recent call for refugees to return³², it is highly unlikely that the current 5.6+ million Syrian refugees will be able to return to their home country, much less their homes, within the next few months. Where people's homes have either been destroyed or occupied by other families, returning refugees will need considerable assistance in obtaining sustainable housing as well as receiving vital legal assurances and protections that this new housing will not be targeted and/or confiscated.³³ Providing the necessary facilities and services for refugees creates significant financial costs, many of which may be resented by host country governments and populations. A critical distinction about the Syrian refugee crisis that has received comparatively little coverage and/or analysis in Western media is the fact that 75%+ of Syrian refugees are not in organized refugee camps. In Lebanon, there are "no formal refugee camps."³⁴ In Iraq, Jordan, and Turkey, up to 75%+ of Syrian refugees lead dangerous and precarious lives in urban areas³⁵; the city of Gaziantep, Turkey is frequently referred to as "Little Aleppo" and other cities and towns throughout the region have witnessed similar demographic shifts. The projected 2017 UNHCR budget for Syria was just over \$4.6 billion USD, with a gap of over \$2 billion USD remaining at the beginning of 2018.³⁶ With the recent accelerations of Syrian refugee influxes into Turkey and surrounding countries, and significant likelihood of continued refugee outflows from Syria throughout the latter half of 2018, increasing voluntary contributions to the UNHCR and related agencies may be critical to resolving this crisis. Furthermore, the World Food Program (WFP) announced on December 1, 2014 that it was suspending assistance to 1.7 million Syrian refugees because of an acute and ongoing funding crisis.³⁷

UNHCR's primary initiative targeted directly towards Syrian refugees is the Regional Refugee Resilience Plan (3RP) launched on December 7, 2014, and taking over from the Syrian Humanitarian Assistance Program (SHARP). SHARP had been further subdivided into a series of Regional Response Plans with the current iteration being Regional Response Plan 6 (RRP6). Then current projections from RRP6 indicated that the UNHCR was planning for approximately 4.1 million Syrian refugees by the end of 2014 with estimated financial costs reaching an

³² *Associated Press*, "Syrian government calls on refugees to return home", July 3, 2018.

³³ Maha Yahya, "What Will It Take for Syrian Refugees to Return Home?", *Foreign Affairs*, May 28, 2018.

³⁴ UNHCR, "Syrian Emergency" 2016. Found at: <http://www.unhcr.org/en-us/syria-emergency.html>

³⁵ Hugh Eakin and Alisa Roth, "The Catastrophe" October 10, 2013 Loc. 389 in Kem Knapp Sawyer, editor, *Flight from Syria: Refugee Stories* Pulitzer Center 2015.

³⁶ UNHCR, "Operational Portal Refugee Situations: Syria", 2018. Found at: <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/syria>

³⁷ Hugh Naylor, "Lack of money at World Food Program leaves 1.7 million Syrians without aid" *Washington Post*, December 1, 2014.

estimated \$4.3 billion USD for this initiative.³⁸ The UNHCR's 2018 3RP funding appeal is for a total of \$4.4 billion USD³⁹, representing a 20% decrease from 2015 levels while needing to assist 33% more refugees. The international community must improve the timeliness of meeting its commitments; the 2015 3RP funding appeal secured only half of the requested funds.⁴⁰

While then High Commissioner, now Secretary-General, António Guterres repeatedly thanked governments, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and related civil society partners for their generous voluntary contributions, it is abundantly clear that “as the conflict drags on, we must continue to respond together, but finding new and additional means of financing is becoming an increasing challenge.”⁴¹ Increasing voluntary contributions to SHARP and the relevant Regional Response Plans (RRPs) must also mean that governments and interested civil society partners not only pledge greater support but also deliver this support in a timely manner.

Protecting the Most Vulnerable Refugees

All refugees are vulnerable, virtually by definition, but even within refugee populations, certain refugees confront additional challenges, particularly women, children, and people with disabilities. In both Jordan and Libya, UNHCR officials and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) have documented instances of Syrian refugee families selling their daughters into marriages as well as Syrian women who have been forced to trade sex for food and protection.⁴² Assisting these most vulnerable refugee populations is an absolutely critical component of ensuring that the UN System and the international community meet their respective obligations to the refugees and are fundamental steps towards preparing the way for eventual safe and voluntary repatriation.

Conclusion

The enormity and complexities of the Syrian crisis means that the international community will have to confront the consequences of Syria's civil war for months, possibly even years after the eventual conclusion of hostilities. Delegates to the Security Council are tasked with achieving a sustained ceasefire that will permit timely, comprehensive, and inclusive peace negotiations, protecting current and prospective Syrian internally displaced persons (IDPs) and refugees from further deprivation and harm while laying the foundation for the safe, timely and

³⁸ UNHCR, “2014 Syria Regional Response Plan: Strategic Overview” 2014 pp. 8-9. The entire report may be found at:

<http://www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/home/opendocPDFViewer.html?docid=52b170e49&query=syrian%20humanitarian%20assistance%20program>

³⁹ UNHCR-USA, “Syria emergency”, April 19, 2018.

⁴⁰ UNHCR, “3RP Regional Refugee & Resilience Plan 2016-2017 In Response to the Syrian Crisis: Regional Strategic Overview” 2016 p. 51. The entire report as well as the 3RP 2016 Mid-Year Report and the 3RP 2015 Annual Report may be found at: <http://www.3rpsyriacrisis.org/>

⁴¹ António Guterres, “2014 Syria Regional Response Plan” 2014 p. 4.

⁴² Beth McLeod, “Syrian refugees ‘sold for marriage’ in Jordan” *BBC News* May 10, 2013.

voluntary repatriation of all Syrian IDPs and refugees to their original communities whenever possible and to other safe areas when return to their respective original communities is not possible.

Guiding Questions:

How might the international community, including the Security Council, most effectively achieve a lasting ceasefire and/or establishment of humanitarian corridors in Syria?

What are the most essential steps to achieving a negotiated settlement to the Syrian civil war? How might human rights violations and mass atrocities be most effectively addressed and/or prosecuted?

How might the Syrian government be most effectively persuaded and/or pressured to comply with the September 2013 Framework for Elimination of Syrian Chemical Weapons? What steps can the Security Council take to ensure the safe, timely and comprehensive destruction of any remaining Syrian chemical weapons?

What are the most effective long-term steps towards Disarmament, Demobilization, Reconstruction and Reintegration (DDRR) that the Security Council need to consider?

Has your country accepted any Syrian refugees from the ongoing civil war? If so, what services is your country providing as a host country and how have the refugees been treated by the local populations and security forces?

Has your country contributed financially to the UNHCR, the World Food Program, other UN agencies, or related civil society partners to assist the Syrian refugees, including to the Regional Refugee Resilience Plan (3RP)? If so, does your country plan to continue and/or increase these contributions? If your country has not previously contributed financially, does your government have any plans to potentially contribute in the near future?

What steps need to be taken by the international community, including the UNHCR and related UN agencies, as well as neighboring countries and regional organizations, including the League of Arab States, to ensure that all Syrian refugees are properly cared for and that conditions for safe, timely and voluntary repatriation of Syrian refugees when the civil war ends and/or conditions permit safe return?

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United Nations Security Council resolution 2361 (S/RES/2361), “The Situation in the Middle East”, June 29, 2017.

United Nations Security Council resolution 2347 (S/RES/2347), “Maintenance of international peace and security”, March 24, 2017.

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United Nations Security Council resolution 2332 (S/RES/2332), “The Middle East (Syria)” December 21, 2016.

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17, 2014.

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resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017), and
2401 (2018)”, S/2018/618, June 20, 2018.

António Guterres, “Report of the Secretary-General: Review of United Nations cross-border
operations”, S/2018/617, June 19, 2018.

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resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), and 2258 (2015)” S/2017/982 November 16,
2017.

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2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), and 2258 (2015)” S/2016/873 October 18, 2016.

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2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), and 2258 (2015)” S/2016/546 June 17, 2016.

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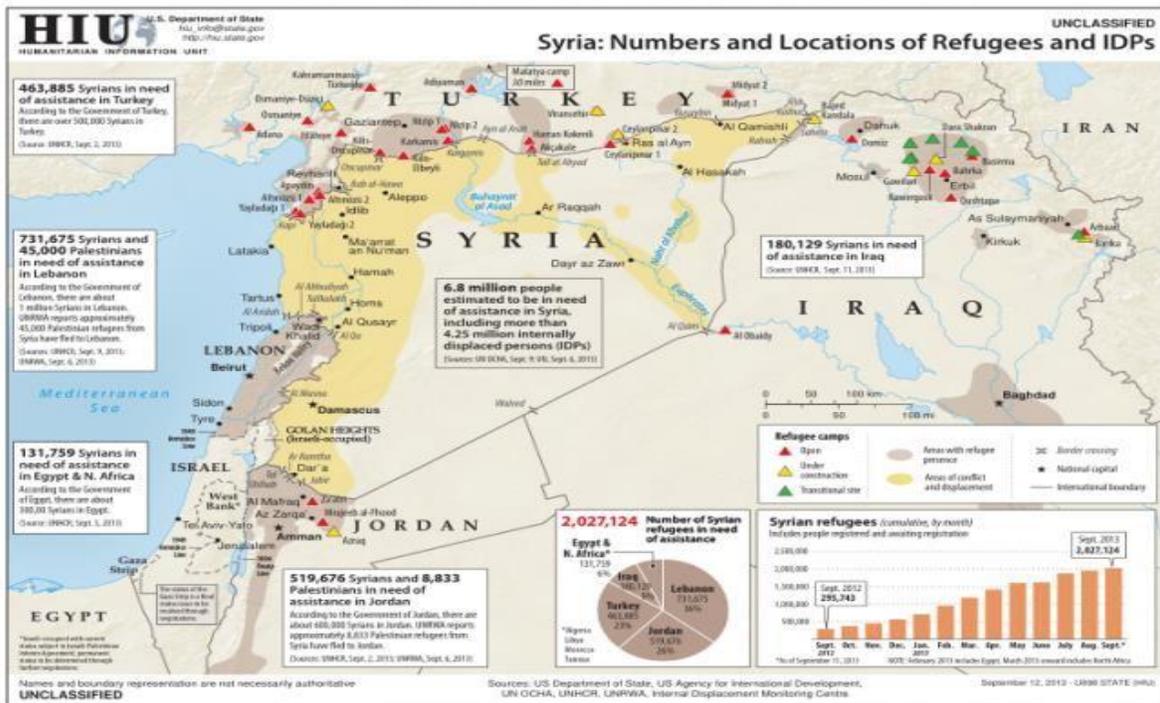
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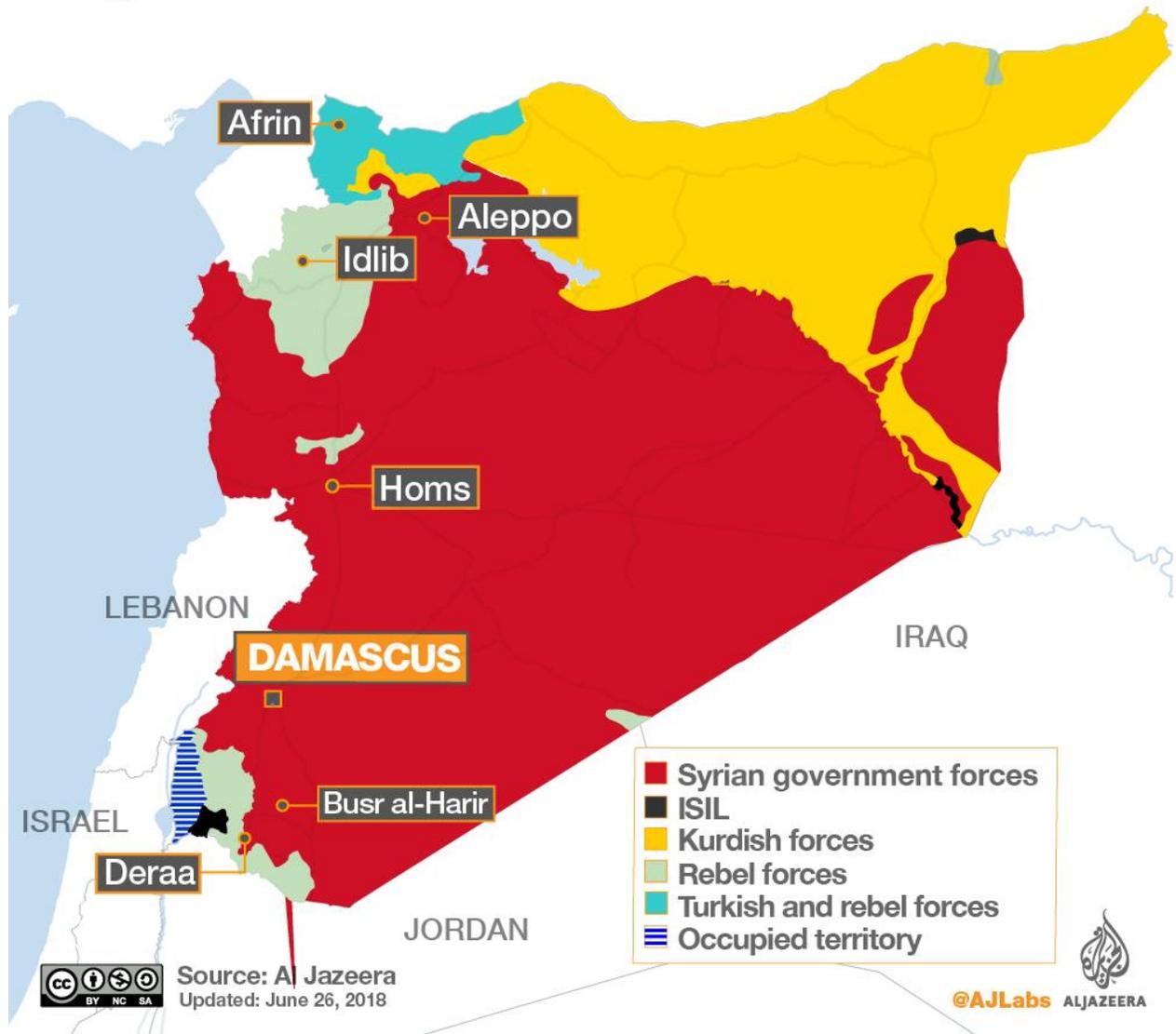
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Please note the statistical figures in the map of “Syria: Numbers and Locations of Refugees and IDPs” changes frequently.

Syria: Who controls what?



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