

Columbia Preparatory School

SYRIAN NATIONAL COALITION

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Introduction: Hannah Taubenfeld

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Introduction:

We are the Syrian National Coalition. In November 2012, we formed with five main goals. Number one - to bring an end to all violence in Syria. Number two - to ensure a lawful, inclusive, and democratic, political transition. Number three - to maintain the continuity and preservation of functional state institutions and structures within a democratic and rule-of-law abiding state. Number four - to ensure the unity of the Syrian people and territorial integrity and sovereignty of our state. Number five - to bring all those responsible for war crimes to account in accordance with international law. By doing so, we will help the people of Syria. We bring together the most dedicated Syrian opposition groups who are committed to ending the Syrian conflict and Syria's democratic transition. We are based out of Cairo, Egypt. But fear not - we have a global presence with offices in France, Germany, Qatar, Turkey, the United Kingdom and the United States. We are not a group of exclusivity but rather we reflect the ethnic and religious diversity that is a fundamental part of Syrian heritage. We are Shia *and* Sunni Muslims, Alawites, Christians, Kurds, Druze, Armenians, Assyrians, and Circassians. We, the Syrian National Coalition, welcome everyone who is committed to the realization of a democratic Syria.

President Assad is a tyrant and a dictator. He has killed our people, he has tortured our families, he has brought our country into a civil war. Our people are facing struggle. We, along with all political opposition factions, have a strong goals - to overthrow the Assad regime, to end the suffering of our people, and to make the transition towards a free and democratic country. What we want for the future is reasonable, it is to help our people, to give our children a better life, to not make our citizens refugees. We will do everything in our power to reach the goal of

overthrowing the Assad regime and bring victory to the revolution both inside and outside of Syria.

Key Points:

- We would like to discuss the possibility of a cease fire.
- We would like to discuss how to defeat ISIS and other terrorist organizations.
- We would like to discuss how to obtain foreign aid order to help our citizens.
- We would like to discuss the possibility of an interim government which could lead to a democracy.
- We would like to discuss the termination of foreign assistance towards Assad.
- We would like to discuss the eradication of Assad and his supporting forces.
- We would like to discuss the possibility of programs to assist refugees and their hosting countries.
- We would like to discuss the improvement of the use of our resources.
- We would like to discuss the international involvement of the UN in Syria.

Background of Syria:

Bashar al-Assad has ruled as Syria's president since July 2000. He follows his father's rule of Syria from 1970-2000. This shows that the situation in Syria has not changed for a while. Bashar al-Assad's father, Hafez al-Assad, gained power in 1970 through a bloodless military overthrow. From then our country has taken a turn for the worst. In the late 1970s, an Islamist uprising by the Muslim Brotherhood was aimed against Hafez al-Assad and his government run by the military. They attacked civilians and military personnel which in turn led to security forces killing civilians in retaliation strikes. The uprising by the Muslim Brotherhood was the worst in 1982 during the Hama massacre where between 10,000 and 40,000 people were killed by regular Syrian Army troops. The government killed our civilians, our people for no reason. Hafez al-Assad died in June 2000. His son, Bashar al-Assad was then "elected" president - he ran unopposed.

With the election of Bashar al-Assad, came Damascus Spring - the start of a social and political debate. It gave people hope of reform however, by 2001, the movement had been suppressed by authorities and many leading intellectuals were imprisoned. Throughout the following years, there was tension between the militarily run government and the people of Syria. In 2011, the Syrian Civil War began. In March of 2011, violence began in the city of Daraa after a group of teens and children were arrested for writing political graffiti. When people began to demonstrate in response to the arrests, dozens were killed by security forces. In response to the continuation of protests, the Syrian government lied and announced plans to make us all happy. They said that state employees will receive an immediate salary increase. They said that the government plans to license new political parties. Assad said that he knew that our needs were not met but he did not change anything. He continues to tell us that Syria will still be in a state of emergency.

However, a couple months later, the state of emergency was lifted after 48 years. We were told that we had the right to peacefully protest. That did not stop the government from going against its own people, from going against us. As a result, we formed. Made up of Syrian opposition groups, we formed to end President al-Assad's government and replace it with a democratic system. In December, after many countries around the world put sanctions in place against Syria, our government signed an Arab League proposal aimed at ending violence between government forces and protesters - which lasted only a little over a month as violence continued.

By March 2012, somewhere between 8,000 and 10,000 of our innocent civilians had died. As a result, the government accepted a proposal that sought to stop the violence, give access to humanitarian agencies, release detainees and start a political dialogue to address the concerns of the Syrian people. However, once again these were only empty promises and the fighting continued between the government and the opposition forces. Assad mentioned that he will not step down and that his vision of Syria's future includes a new constitution and an end to support for the opposition, which he called terrorists. As Assad began to use chemical weapons against his citizens, many world powers stepped in as the death toll rose. The rise of ISIS made the matter more complicated as more civilians were and still are being killed. The process has been ongoing - Assad says he will stop yet continues to attack his citizens. Since the beginning of the Syrian Civil War, 400,000 Syrians have been killed, 4.81 million Syrians have fled the country, and 6.3 million people are internally displaced. This must end now.

Issues:

Committee of Governance

Describe the Syrian Government and how it operated prior to the conflict.

The Syrian Government is a dictatorship run by Bashar al-Assad since 2000. The authoritarian government cracks down on poor civilians who disagreed brutally, showing no remorse. The system is dominated by a minority group - by no means representing our population correctly. Assad has control of the military and security services but not the broader population - thus out of fear and evil he is terribly violent. However, he does rely on only a small core of trusted military units and thus he limits his ability to control all of Syria. He knows that his government is weak and that the people do not agree with him and thus believes that he can regain power by violently forcing Syrians into submission.

What was your group's view of the Syrian Government before the conflict?

The Syrian Government prior to the Civil War was and still is an atrocity. They kill our civilians, use artillery, air power, bulldozers, sectarian massacres, and even ballistic missiles against our people. They must be stopped. This dictatorship and authoritarian government must become a democracy soon so that we may restore Syria.

Explain the main actors within Syria during the current conflict.

There are four main groups acting within the Syrian conflict: Kurdish forces, ISIS, other governmental opposition groups, and the Assad regime. The Kurds are a group of predominantly Sunni Muslims without a homeland or a state. Many reside in northern Syria but do not consider themselves Syrian. They fight against ISIS and against Assad. In recent years they have aligned themselves with the United States and thus do not directly fight with other rebel groups. They fight “for” the US in hopes that when the Syrian Civil War ends - or when they win the war - they will gain land for their people. ISIS is an organization started as an al Qaeda splinter group. They fight against everyone and do not make alliances. Their goal is to create an Islamic State caliphate that covers Iraq, Syria, and much more of the Middle East. ISIS has taken over many major Syrian cities and has carried out terrorist attacks throughout the world. The governmental opposition groups, include the Free Syrian Army, Syrian Democratic Council, and much more. They all fight against the Assad regime with the main hope that Syria will soon have a democratic government. However, in fighting against Assad they must also fight against ISIS in order to gain control of their country. The fourth group - the Assad regime - is fighting against all. All groups want him out and thus he fights back against all groups. He hopes to maintain his power and will try and achieve this goal by any means necessary. Assad has aligned himself with Russia in hopes of ending the other groups opposing his rule.

Do you have any connections to them? If yes, which ones and why?

We, the Syrian National Coalition, have connections with most governmental opposition groups otherwise known as the rebels. In particular we have aligned ourselves with the Free Syrian Army. We hope to unify support for the FSA. The FSA and us have worked together in carrying out missions and fighting against the tyranny of the Assad regime.

Do you think Syria will need a new constitution coming out of the conflict? Why or why not?

When the Syrian Civil War has ended and we have overthrown Assad and his regime and have eradicated all terrorist organizations, we will need a new constitution. More specifically, we will need a new democratic constitution. To ensure the continuation of public services, legal duties, and basic services in liberated territories, the Coalition will form an interim government to serve as a temporary executive branch. We plan to announce 11 ministers and 3 commissions as part of this administration. Each Ministry will have a 50 member team based in Syria’s liberated territories. The interim government will be dissolved with the appointment of a democratic transitional government. Once a transitional government is formed, it will need to convene a national dialogue to formulate a new Syrian constitution, on the basis of which Syria should hold its first free and democratic elections.

What type of government are you advocating for?

We are advocating for a democratic government where the voices of our people are heard and where free democratic elections will be held.

How were the military and the civilian government connected before and during the conflict?

Before the Syrian Civil War, Assad used the military to kill our civilians who spoke out against his regime. He arrested the innocent, killed the innocent, showed no mercy towards the innocent. He grouped together all people - those taking over his cities and those not. Thus, his military was one of his greatest weapons. Now, during the conflict he uses his military for the same reasons. Assad instructs his men to dismantle the Kurds, ISIS, and the governmental opposition groups. He does not care at what cost these orders will be carried out.

Are external, third parties important to ending the conflict and re-setting the government in Syria? Why or why not?

A third party such as the United States has been able to help us try and end the Syrian Civil War. The United States promotes democracy and our goal for our country is to establish a democracy. Thus, the US is very important in trying to re-set the government in Syria. They have supported our forces and opposition groups. They have trained some of our soldiers. They have given us supplies. All of these efforts have only helped us advance towards our goal.

Committee on Strategic Security

Describe the national security environment in Syria today.

National security is a collective term used for the defense and foreign relations of a country, protection of the interests of a country and its people. Yet, Assad's government fails to understand the meaning of national security. National security does not mean to use the government resources to protect your own narcissistic agenda. Nor does it mean opening fire on peaceful protesters or massacring innocent children and women with chemical weapons. The Assad regime does not provide its citizens with a national security, thus the national security environment in Syria today is non-existent.

How many foreign fighters are there?

The Syrian conflict has been influenced by the involvement of foreign fighters. According to the Soufan group, over 30,000 fighters from over 100 countries have traveled to Syria to join ISIS and other terrorist organizations. Yet, foreign fighters are also supporting the regime side. For instance they support Al-Quds forces, an elite unit of Iranian Revolutionary Guard – which support Assad and have around 15,000 fighters – and Hezbollah – a Lebanese opposition group, which has 30,000 fighters. Although the exact number of foreign fighters is unknown, we

approximate that there are a total of 90,000 foreign fighters in Syria, a number that is likely to increase if President Putin decides to follow through with his plans to “put boots on the ground.”

What state, international, and non-state actors are involved in the conflict, and where does your country fit into the conflict?

The Syrian Civil War is a complex conflict composed of many different state actors that can be broken down into two major sides. One side, the regime, supports President Bashar al-Assad and fights to maintain his authoritarian government. As of now the regime coalition is backed by two major states – Russia and Iran – and numerous paramilitary groups – Hezbollah, the NDF, and of course a section of Syrian Armed forces that has remain loyal to President Assad. The other side, the rebels, want to overthrow President Assad and replace his regime with a new democratic government that helps the people thrive. This side is backed by many nation states including Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Turkey, to a lesser extent the U.S., other European countries, and the Free Syrian Army – a section of the Syrian Army that is against Assad’s atrocities. Some of the states actors in these conflicts, such as ISIS and the Kurds, do not fall on any of the two sides. For example, ISIS wants to establish an independent state in western Syria and is willing to attack anyone who stands in the way.

The Syrian National Coalition is one of the main actors of rebel coalition. We want to overthrow President Assad and his regime. We work with the Free Syrian Army (FSA) towards establishing a new Syria that is all-inclusive, democratic, and Islamic.

To what degree is the SNC invested in the future stability and security environment of Syria?

The future stability and security of Syria is the SNC’s mission. As of now, the Syrian people are struggling to survive in their own country and are being victimized by all sides of the conflict. To fulfill this mission, we work to bring an end to all violence; to ensure a lawful, inclusive and democratic political transition; to maintain the continuity and preservation of functional state institution and structures within a democratic and rule-of-law abiding state; and to bring all those responsible for war crimes to account in accordance with international law. We fulfill this mission by voicing the concerns of the Syrian people, by intensifying pressure on the international community, and by working with the FSA – which is committed to ensuring the protection of civilians and their right to self-dense in conformity with international law.

What is the SNC’s stance on a ceasefire?

As we have already mentioned, our coalition hopes to bring an end to all violence in Syria, and thus we do support a ceasefire. That said, the SNC is not oblivious, we are quite aware of Assad’s tendency to use violence and Putin’s disregards for rules. Therefore, we will be wary of the regime’s troop movements. If the opposition breaks any of the agreements of the ceasefire,

then the FSA will not hesitate to take the actions necessary to avenge the infringement as they see fit. We would also like to be present during the ceasefire negotiations. Regardless of the regime's claims, the SNC is a state actor and therefore we want to be given a seat at the big table.

What were/are Syria's relations with countries on its borders before and during the conflict?

Prior to the Civil War, Syria's relations on its borders were mostly defined by international policy stances. If a country agreed with Syria's anti-western intervention in the Middle East, then that country was likely to have a friendly relationship with Syria. If it didn't agree then it probably didn't have a friendly relationship. This was certainly the case with the Iraq-Syria relationship, which during the 1950s was strong because both countries favored a strong and united Arab nation in the Middle East. They shared a distrust of the West and were hostile towards European intentions in the Arab world. They both were essential players in the formation of the Baath Party, a socialist pan-Arab political group. However, once Saddam Hussein took power and emphasized individual leadership over the Baath party ideals of unified Arab countries, the relationship between the two countries came to a sudden stop. After Saddam's invasion of Iran in 1980, Syria allied with Iran and the Syrian-Iraqi border was closed for the next seven years. Yet, since 2006, the Syrian-Jordan relationship has also been marked by their drastically different foreign policy stances. Syria has long been opposed to Western intervention in the Middle East. While Jordan has historically aligned itself with Americans and British goals in the region. Their distinct foreign policy views have historically been detrimental to their relationship. This was certainly the case with the U.S invasion of Iraq in 2003. Yet, recently their differences have started to disappear. In 2005, Syrian Prime Minister, Naji al-Otari, announced that Syria would return a tract of land along the Syria-Jordan border to Jordan that Syria had held for many years. Unlike Jordan and Iraq, the relations between Syria and Turkey have been marked by border controversies over the Euphrates River. Over the past couple of decades, Turkey has charged Syria with supporting Armenian, Kurdish, and Arab terrorist groups operating against Turkey. In 1920, England split up the Syrian Arab Republic – whose territory encompassed what is now Syria, Lebanon, Israel, Jordan and Alexandretta – and France took control of what would later become Syria and Lebanon. Ever since 1976, when President Hafez al-Assad, Assad's father, ordered Syrian troops to Lebanon to clamp down on a violent uprising, Syria has maintained a strong presence in Lebanon affairs. The presence of Syrian troops in Lebanon came under criticism in 2005, when Rafik al-Hariri, a popular former Lebanese Prime Minister, was killed by a car bomb. The assassination of the former prime minister was blamed on Syria and thousand of demonstrators took to the streets calling for the withdrawal of Syrian troops from Lebanese soil. Although Syria said that it had no role in Hariri's killing, they withdrew their troops from Lebanon. As Syria began to slowly move some of its troops out of Beirut, an estimated 500,000 people turned out to chant pro-Syrian slogans to show solidarity for Syria. Perhaps, Syria's worst enemy is Israel, which it refused to acknowledge in 1948 and even joined other Arab nations aiming to destroy it. Even though Israel survived the war, Syria still

refuses to recognize Israel's existence and only recognizes Palestine. Much of the recent history between Israel and Syria has been focused on the Golan Heights, a disputed border region roughly the size of Queens, NY.

After the war Syria's relationships with countries on its borders have been significantly strained by the war and the number of refugees that have crossed borders and settled on these bordering countries. This is especially true with Jordan, which has struggled to cope with the influx of Syrian refugees. Some countries, such as Jordan, have turned a blind eye to Assad's atrocities and remained neutral throughout the conflict. Lebanon and Iraq, on the other hand, countries with strong Sunni communities, have helped supply the rebels with aid in order to protect the Syrian people.

What was the role of the Syrian Army before the war?

Throughout the history of Syria, the Syrian Army has played an important role in overthrowing authoritarian regimes. This was certainly the case in 1954, when a military coup d'état overthrew General Adib Shishakli and in 1966 when President Assad's father took control. Yet under President Assad's command the role of the military has shifted. Before the Civil War began, the role of the Syrian Army was to crackdown protesters, kill innocent civilians, and eliminate any potential threat to the Assad regime.

What challenges do ISIS pose?

The so-called Islamic State has capitalized on the chaos and taken control of large areas of Syria and Iraq, where it proclaimed the creation of a "caliphate." Perhaps, the biggest challenge that ISIS poses towards our coalition is that it forces the FSA and other rebel forces to fight a two-front war. The rebel forces have to spread thin instead of focusing all their forces to fight Assad and the rebels. Another major challenge that ISIS has presented is that it has misled the international community into believing that the rebel coalition is composed of terrorist organizations. It's important to realize that ISIS and any other terrorist organization is not part of the rebel coalition and they will never be. The rebel coalition is composed of idealistic intellectuals and moderates who share a common goal of saving the Syrian people and providing the future generations with a democratic government.

Committee on Local Security

What was security – such as law and order – at the local level like before the war?

Prior to the war, Syria's security at the local level was run by:

- The army – the largest section of Syria's armed forces; responsible for defense, public works, road construction, public health

- The law enforcement – police forces for general police, internal security duties carried out by many intelligence agencies
- The Political Security Directorate – agency, under guidance of Ministry of Interior, protects people from internal threats, conducts surveillance to protect people
- Syria is part of INTERPOL
- Special metropolitan police in Damascus, overseen by Director of General of the Public Security and Police; Gendarmerie (not strictly military) local security for rural areas; Desert Guard for border control (esp. Syria-Iraq)
- Local police had to protect majority of citizens against Kurdish demonstrations
- Police System –
 - Administrative Police: AKA Neighborhood Police, general security, non-emergency situations
 - Emergency Division: emergencies, roving patrols
 - Criminal Security Dept.: general investigative police duties
 - Dept. of Protection of Public Moralities: investigating suspect homosexuals and their activities

What is the local security environment in Syria like today?

The local security environment in Syria today is catastrophic. Over the course of the four-and-a-half year conflict more than 500,000 Syrians have lost their lives, more than 12 million people – nearly half of Syria’s pre-war population – have been displaced, and the country has been divided into zones controlled by different coalitions. The UN commission of inquiry has evidence that some parties, mostly the regime and ISIS, have committed war crimes such as using chemical weapons, blocking access to food, water, and health services through sieges. The UN Security Council has demanded that all parties end the use of such methods, yet civilians continue to be massacred by barrel bombs dropped by Assad’s aircrafts, while ISIS inflicts barbaric punishments and public executions on civilians who refuse to accept their rules. The terrorist organization fighters have also carried out mass killings against rival armed groups, members of the security forces, and religious minorities.

How many Syrians are involved in fighting on the different sides?

Pro-Assad Forces:

- Syrian Armed Forces: 178,000
- General Security Directorate: 8,000
- National Defense Force: 80,000
- Hezbollah: 6-8,000
- Other allied groups: over 15,500

Anti-Assad Forces:

- FSA: 40-50,000

- Fatah Halab: 25-32,000
- Other groups: 20,000
- SDF: 45,000

Other Forces:

- Islamic Front: 40-70,000
- al-Nusra: 13,000

How secure or insecure are civilians and resources in different regions?

It is safe to say that civilians and their resources are extremely insecure. Since the start of the conflict, more than 4.5 million people have fled Syria, most of them women and children. A further 6.5 million people have been internally displaced. The UN says it will need much aid to help the 13.5 million people, including 6 million children, who will require some form of humanitarian assistance inside Syria. About 70% of the population is without access to adequate drinking water, one in three people are unable to meet their basic food needs, more than 2 million children are out of school, and four out of five people live in poverty. There are now 5.5 million people in besieged areas, one million more than at the beginning of 2017. Out of those, 860,000 are in 18 besieged areas. Despite ceasefire attempts, fighting has continued and humanitarian access has not improved. The situation in Aleppo has worsened since the intensification of Russian airstrikes, especially for the 250,000– 275,000 people trapped in the eastern part of the city. Aleppo has become a focal point in the conflict for both Syrian and international forces. Across the country, hospitals and other health centers have been damaged by airstrikes, making some of them non-functional.

Who is providing local security during the conflict?

The FSA is committed to providing local security during the conflict. They act in accordance with international law, and hold their members accountable for any violations of such laws. They also reject all acts of extremism committed by terrorist groups, as well as the use of chemical weapon – Assad’s go to weapon. As they have clearly stated, they are truly committed to helping and protecting the Syrian people and they welcome all UN investigations into the use of such a weapons.

Who is responsible for securing critical resource like oil and water?

Water:

- ISIS controls much of upper reaches of Tigris/Euphrates
 - Much of which Syria depends on for food, water, and industry
 - ISIS gives water to Shia-majority areas
- Turkey has control of much of the water and has been accused of reducing flows to Lake Assad, Syria’s largest body of fresh water, to cut off supplies to Aleppo

- Syria has longstanding disputes with Turkey over management of shared water resources
- In Syria: rising temps, severe droughts, drying up of farmland, rainfall diminishing
- Syrian government is on the brink of diminishing because of the lack of water, has very little control now
- Millions of Syrians become dependent on imported food aid (UN, World Food Program)
- Farmers in rebel-held areas have been over extracting groundwater to irrigate farmland that otherwise would not be irrigated by rainfall, has led to detrimental impact on dwindling long-term water supplies
- Syria has lost many of its skilled workers because of the displacement and water conflict

Oil:

- In 2014, ISIS controlled most of Syria's oil fields, main oil producing region is in Deir Ezzor province – Eastern Syria
- Production: 34,000 to 40,000 barrels a day, according to locals
 - Has fallen because of coalition and Russian airstrikes against local facilities
- Levels have dropped in Syria since they were taken over by ISIS
- Syria makes its profits from rebel-held territories of northern Syria and eastern territories held by Syrian Kurdish militia and in the “caliphate” border between Syria and Iraq
- It was detected that Assad is buying oil from ISIS
- The government also relies on Russia and Iran for cheap oil

How many small arms were in civilian hands in Syria prior to the conflict?

Small arms were already plentiful in Syria before the war. There were around 700,000 small arms in the hands of Syrian civilians. This is a insignificant number if compared to the 2 million small arms that Assad's arsenal contains.

How has the war changed the number of small arms in civilian hands?

Small arms have had both a positive and negative effect on the war. The acquisition of small arms in Syria has allowed the FSA to protect innocent civilians from the regime's security forces. Although the UN and other international forums, have spoken out against the provision of small arms, which they believe has only heightened the conflict, it's important to realize that Russia has continued to provide the regime's forces with arms. Thus, small arms are necessary for the FSA to protect innocent civilians against Assad's sadistic forces. On the other hand, small arms have helped out the jihadist factions – which we denounce – who often use small arms as a third-wave assaulting force, after first-wave artillery barrages and second-wave suicide bombers.

Where do the small arms come from?

Due to the lack of assistance from foreign nations, the rebels have been forced to acquire their weapons and ammunition through a variety of means including the black market, battlefield

capture, improvise factories, shipments paid for by individual, groups and sometimes foreign governments. A majority of these small arms began flooding towards Syrian rebels via Lebanon, Turkey, and Jordan. Others arrived with defectors from the Syrian Army and more weapons were seized from government caches. Despite the flow of weapons into Syria, the FSA is still not as well armed as the government forces, who use top-notch Russian weapons such as the S-300 surface-to-air missile defense systems, short-range Pantsir-S missile systems and a wide range of heavy weapons – including tanks, ballistic missiles, and fighter jets. We are in great need of foreign assistance!

Committee on Social Reconstruction

What was the social order in Syria like before the conflict?

The social order in Syria was not good. The government was a representation of a minority and did not represent the people at all. There was widespread unemployment and people were unable to meet basic needs. Assad was kept in power through the military, using fear and violence to remain in control of a country made up of people unlike him. They used, and still use, violence to try and force the people of Syria to submit.

What role did civil society play in Syria daily before the war?

There was brief hope for civil society groups in the early 2000s, in the early years of Bashar al-Assad's presidency, but that was quickly shut down. The Assad regime did not want the people to have such freedoms of expression and speech. Several activists were thrown in jail, their only crime being how they strived to make progress in human rights, or how they would wish for a more free and just society. In fact, in 2001, Minister of Information Adnan Omran called civil society "an American term." Civil society groups and organizations were forced to work underground and out of sight.

Was there religious freedom?

Syria is supposedly a secular country, but it was written into the constitution of 1973 that "The religion of the President of the Republic has to be Islam." While Assad's regime is certainly guilty of many civil rights violations, the relations between different religions were often non-violent. Most of that civil co-existence has ended with the war.

What rights did citizens have?

Citizens had very few rights. They could be arrested or killed at any moment by Assad's military. There was a very high literacy rate, but all schools were government run. It is hard to have rights when living under a totalitarian dictator.

Were human rights respected?

Human rights were not respected. The regimes of Hafez al-Assad and Bashar al-Assad arrested and killed anyone who opposed them. They used the military to control anyone who spoke out. They showed absolutely no mercy, not even towards the innocent. Human rights didn't matter at all, because all Assad has ever cared about is staying in power. We cannot allow that to happen.

Is Syria party to international treaties and declaration on the protection of citizens? If so, which ones?

Assad objected to the Convention on the Rights of the Child because they were not in conformity with the Syrian Arab legislations and with the Islamic Shariah's principles, despite the fact that Syria was supposedly a secular country. Syria should heed all international treaties and declarations on the protection of citizens.

Before the conflict, did people have property rights? How was housing provided for?

No. Compared to the other countries of the Middle East, Syria had very low property rights. People often lived in squalor due to the high unemployment. Now, it is even worse because of the conflict. With the addition of so many Iraqi refugees to the Syrian population, rents skyrocketed. The majority of people lived in urban areas, and out of those people about a third lived in 'informal settlements.' Such settlements had electricity and running water, but had limited official recognition or registration. Such residents lacked security or tenure.

Before the conflict, how would you describe the education and health systems?

Education was free and mandatory for children age 6-12. All schools were run by the government, and had mandatory religion classes. The class you were put into depended upon the parent's religion. The life expectancy rate went up during Hafez al-Assad's regime, and infant mortality went down. Despite that, there was frequently an inadequate amount of qualified doctors or nurses, and they those that were qualified, as well as other medical resources, were unevenly dispersed throughout the country. Quality of care and assurance of care was never guaranteed.

Committee on Economic Reconstruction

What was the state of Syria's economy prior to the war? Was it centralized or decentralized? Who controlled natural resource extraction and sale? What sections did the government control and what sectors were run by the private industry?

The economy of Syria had always been very state-sponsored. It was not until 2001 that private banking was legal and even then, by 2004 there were only four private banks in the country. After the 1990's, the government began to liberalize Syria, establishing an official exchange rate. The majority of the land is used for agriculture, one of the main sectors of the Syrian economy, is owned privately, however private involvement in industry is very constrained and the oil industry, Syria's main natural resource, was mainly controlled by the government before the conflict. Syria's economy was decentralized, meaning it was a market economy, albeit a very state-centric one. Syria is home to twenty banks, six being state-owned and fourteen private. Overall, the private sector in Syria was weak and represented a limited fraction of the job market, since it was very difficult to succeed in the sector without powerful connections to members of the regime.

What were the country's chief imports and exports?

Syria's main exports were industry- and agriculture-related materials, including petroleum (and petroleum derived products), minerals, cotton, clothing, fruits and cereal grains. These items were mainly exported to Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates and Libya. In terms of imports, Syria mainly imported machinery and other industrial products, including transport equipment, electric power machinery, metal and metal products, chemicals and chemical products, plastics, paper and yarn.

What percentage of the state budget was devoted to the military? To the health sector? To the education sector?

In 2010, Syria devoted 4.1% of its Gross Domestic Product to the military, reaching a total of US\$2.366 billion. In 2010, 1.5% of its GDP was spent on health, adding up to about US\$887 million. To education, 5.1% of its GDP was devoted in 2009, which translated to around US\$2.75 billion.

Would Syria be considered an unequal society?

Syrian society could have been very easily qualified as an unequal one. In 2007, 33.6% of the population lived in poverty (12.3% living below the extreme poverty line) and it is believed by some economists that 70% of the Gross Domestic Product went to only 30% of the population. Over 10% of the population in 2005 did not have the means to obtain their basic needs and the tendency was for that number to grow as the years passed. Measures of inequality in wealth and income distribution increased in the years leading up to the conflict, reflecting the increase in poverty rate.

What was the role of banks?

Prior to the conflict, banks were mostly controlled by the government. In the years leading up to 2011, banks acquired more and more autonomy, though the state owned 37% of assets in the banking sector and has the right to regulate decisions of all banks in the country. After the authorization of private banking in 2004, the assets of all banks, public and private, grew at a compound rate of over 10%. The government's oppressive and corrupt nature reflects itself in the banking industry, which greatly lacked transparency and was plagued by corruption and bribes, as shown in multiple studies of the Syrian banking industry.

How has the conflict affected all parts of Syria's economy? How has the war impacted access to factors of production (e.g. energy) and basic infrastructure?

The conflict has been extremely detrimental to the Syrian economy. A research conducted by a BMI research team found that the economy will continue to contract at a rate of around 3.9% per year until 2019, deeply impacting the pre-conflict economy. Since the start of the conflict, the Syrian Gross Domestic Product has decreased in a worrisome rate, ravaging the areas of manufacturing and agriculture. Exports have lost a majority of their real value, reflecting the decrease in the GDP, and putting Syria in a complicated position regarding the world market. When it comes to factors of production, such as energy, the detriments have also been significant. Oil outputs, which used to account for 50% of its exports and 30% of governmental revenue pre-conflict, also plummeted. The Islamic State's control of many Syrian oil fields puts Syria in a delicate position, where it loses part of its oil reserves in the black market and can't sell the other part legally.

How has the conflict affected work? What was the unemployment rate prior to the conflict? What sectors employed most people prior to the conflict?

The conflict has had a major impact on work. One of the biggest problems – which will only grow in importance once the conflict is over – is the replacement of the Syrian population. It is estimated that over one fifth of the Syrian population has left the country as refugees and many more have been displaced inside the country. This heavily impacts Syria's workforce, seeing as a large part of it cannot contribute to their previous jobs since they have left the country or are in a region where they must adapt to a new job market.

The conflict has also made it harder to be an active part of the workforce. Before it, unemployment was already on the rise reaching 16% around 2007 – and a worrisome 22% among the country's youth, yet since then these numbers have boomed, with an estimated 60% of the workforce being unemployed, a majority of which lost their jobs as a direct result of the conflict. This relations stems from the fact that the most employable sector – services, which used to employ over 55% of the population – has lost most of its purpose in a violent Syria. The intense decrease in tourism along with security risks, destruction of roads and the hardships in trade and commerce, have rendered the service sector almost impossible to function and many of those that were employed by it lost their jobs.

What was the breakdown of the Syrian population age-wise prior to the conflict?

	2010 (Before Conflict)	2016
0-14 years old	35.61%	31.95%
15-64 years old	60.86%	63.94%
65+ years old	3.62%	4.11%

Committee on Justice, Peace, and Reconciliation

What is Syria's history with Human Rights Violation?

Throughout the course of Assad's regime in Syria, human rights violations have been numerous and widespread. A countless number of civilians have been senselessly murdered, all for the benefit of our dictator. Ever since the rule of Hafez al-Assad began 40 years ago, the Assad forces have conducted several massacres and have even received aid from the Soviet government to build up Syrian military forces for suppression. Not surprisingly, the government denies most of these incidents. These violations have been continuous and largely ignored until 2011, eleven years into Bashar al-Assad's rule, when a peaceful protests calling for the release of political dissidents occurred. These protests were met with ruthless acts of violence from the Syrian government. This all led to a full-fledged civil war, with rebel and opposition groups (such as the SNC) attempting to overthrow the fraudulent government. In 2013 Human Rights Watch estimated that more than 34,346 civilians have been killed in the Syrian conflict. That was four years ago. As of February 2016, there have been 470,000 deaths.

Have war crimes and gross violations of human rights occurred during the Syrian Conflict? How have they been dealt with?

Ever since civil war broke out in Syria, violations of human rights have increased ten-fold. Several reports of suspected chemical weapons attacks on civilians have been especially concerning. Starving children have been denied food aid, there have been enforced disappearances, and the use of sexual violence and abuse as a war tactic. Schools located in towns that the military is currently raiding, are being used as military bases, where children are then held hostage. Within the prison system alone, over 10,000 people have died since the 2011. Torture against prisoners has been systematic and the result of general regime policies. These prisons have also been overseen by a number of different branches of the regime's security services, including Military Security and Air Force Intelligence. Nobody has yet been prosecuted for crimes against humanity.

Briefly describe how accountability in other countries coming out of civil war has been addressed. Amnesty (Chile), trials (Nuremberg, Rwanda, Bosnia), truth and reconciliation commissions (South Africa), local reconciliation efforts (Rwanda).

There are many different variations of accountability that have been taken in nations, post-civil war. After the civil war in Chile, an amnesty law was implemented to protect those who committed human rights violations from going to court. During the Nuremberg trials after World War II, members of the Nazi party were prosecuted by the Allies. Shortly after the Rwandan Genocide, the people held responsible were tried in an international court. Similarly, there were the trials of Serbian leaders in Bosnia. In South Africa, reconciliation commissions and justice bodies were created after the end of apartheid. The Rwandan government also re-established a traditional community court system and have rewritten the constitution to be more inclusive.

How effective have these been?

Accountability is really what matters most. Many of the cases mentioned turned out to be very effective for that country, such as in Germany and South Africa. The fact that most of those responsible for these horrendous acts were tried in court, is indicative of what should happen in Syria. The people that have been complicit in the numerous human rights violations in Syria need to be stripped of their power and convicted.

How effective is the International Criminal Court?

The International Criminal Court has not been able to aid Syria during this time of conflict. The court unfortunately does not have jurisdiction over Syria since we are not a member state of the ICC. Efforts by some members of the UN Security Council for Syria to join the court have been thwarted by Russia, who support Assad's regime. Hopefully in the future, the Council will be willing to refer Syria to the ICC, which would send a strong message to the long corrupt government and can eventually strive to create peace.

How much of a mixed society was Syria prior to the conflict?

Syria has always been a melting pot of different cultures and religions. Sunni Muslims make up the majority of our population. Ethnic Kurds also make up a portion of Syrian society, although they have long been ostracized and oppressed. Our current dictator al-Assad and his inner circle, are all Alawites, a minority sect of Islam who make up only 12 percent of Syrian population but none the less are controlling all of Syria.

Were there protections for minority communities?

There was very little, if any, protection for minority groups in Syria. The Kurdish population which was about 10-15% of the population before the uprising, has long suffered through systematic persecution. This persecution has also been directed to other ethnic minorities (Turks, Assyrians, Armenians, and Circassians). This includes denial of citizenship, denial of ethnic and lingual rights, and restrictions to certain jobs. The “minority protection” that the regime proposes, only violated their human rights rather than boost them.

Were any specific communities/ religions/ ethnicities targeted during the war?

The war has quickly turned into a clash of religions. Sunni Muslims (a majority in the Syrian population) make up a large portion of rebel opposition groups in Syria. Meanwhile, Shiite Muslims have come to support Assad’s Alawite regime. Violence has increased in Aleppo since mid-April, when the government launched an offensive to retake rebel-held areas of the capital. Acts of violence against Kurds have run rampant since the beginning of the war, with the government imprisoning and often times killing Kurdish people.

Committee on Cross-Border Issues

What Countries are on Syria’s borders and what relationships did Syria have with them prior to the conflict?

Syria shares direct borders with Israel, Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq, and Turkey. Assad’s Syria has had poor relations with most of the nations in the Middle East. Their most fractious relationship is with Israel due to both states having claims to the same land. For the other nations, Syria for the most part has taken on a policy of isolationism and has – except for a few moments – been ostracized by the Middle East. However, Syria is very close allies with Iran and Iraq – with Iran being Syria’s closest ally and Iraq finally burying the hatchet with Syria in 2006 to form a historic partnership. The Syrian National Coalition had no allies before the conflict because it didn’t exist yet.

What relationships does Syria have with them during the conflict?

During the conflict, the only real allies Syria has in the region are Iran and Iraq. The other nations in the region have been angered by Assad’s regime and unwilling to recognize it. With the creation of the Syrian National Coalition, we have made allies with the nations that have rejected Syria. The entire Arab League as well as the US and EU have recognized us as the true government of Syria. The nations that recognize us is still growing (at 30 nations right now) and hopefully when the Civil War is over these alliances will spring our democracy into place for the Syrian people and enhance our reputation on the global stage.

Were there refugees living in Syria prior to the conflict?

Prior to the conflict in Syria, there were approximately 1.3 million refugees and asylum seekers in Syria. This equates to about six percent of the population in Syria in 2010. Syria in 2010 had three times the amount of refugees than Europe does today (however the amount of people who applied for asylum is roughly equivalent to Syria's refugees in 2010). There is also a sizeable population of Palestinian refugees who have come to Syria in search of a home and asylum.

Where were they from and how long had they been there? Were they living in cities or camps?

About one million of the 1.3 million refugees in Syria were from Iraq. Iraqi refugees have been coming to Syria for a long time, but the most recent wave of Iraqi refugees have been coming to the country ever since 2003 to escape the US invasion. With the rising tension in Iraq (reaching its peak in the 2006 al-Askari Mosque bombing), more and more people have left Iraq and come to its neighbor Syria. Most of these Iraqi refugees (about 80-90%) live in cities as opposed to camps.

Were Syria's borders secure prior to the war? Who was responsible for securing Syria's borders?

Prior to the war, Syria practiced an open border policy. Similar to neighbors and allies Turkey and Lebanon, Syria's borders are free for people to come in and out of. The government had control of Syria's borders, but now it is in the control of whoever is in power locally.

What environmental concerns did Syria have prior to the war?

Syria is a poor country and although it is as big as Washington state (185000 sq Km) only about a fourth of the land is arable. Most of Syria is desert and only about 10% of land is permanent cropland. Most of the country experiences extreme temperatures that cause frequent dust storms and drought similar to the Midwest during the 1930s. These storms kill soil that is needed to grow food for the population. Syria also experiences very little rainfall due to the high temperatures. With little rainfall, Syria's agriculture is tough to sustain and needs other ways to get water.

Were any of those concerns exacerbated by the war or by its changing relationships with neighboring countries?

The two main concerns that have been exacerbated by the war are the lack of food and water. With the war breaking out, many Syrian farmers have had very poor agricultural return ranging from 25% for some to nothing for others. This has caused livestock to die and farmers to abandon their farms in search of other work. Not only are cities becoming overcrowded, impoverished, and unclean, but also food is rather limited and not increasing anytime soon with farmers no longer farming at the same rate. The other issue is water supplies because the Middle East has been stuck in a drought for the past decade. The only real water source for the Syrians is

the Euphrates River, but Iraq and Turkey are cutting off most of that water for themselves. This leaves us with very little water and many people dying of thirst.

What challenge did terrorism pose to Syria prior to the conflict? Were they homegrown terrorists or terrorists from outside the country? What challenge does ISIS pose for Syria?

Syria has been a victim of terrorism for a very long time. Since the rule of Hafez Al-Assad terrorism has ranged from issues such as the Islamist rise to discontent with Assad. Under the younger Assad terrorism has also been prevalent most notably the car bomb in Damascus in 2008. These terrorists have been a mix of Syrian terrorists and terrorists from other nations. Most of the terrorist attacks in Syria have been blamed on a wide array of people depending on a country's political stance. ISIS poses the threat of a rogue terrorist cell in a country in Civil War. ISIS's savagery has caused many problems to the people of Syria and Iraq and need to be removed at once to have a stable democracy.