

# IRE223: NATIONS IN CONFLICT

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**Spring 2020**

**Session 12: The War in Syria**

# On The Agenda For Today

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## ■ Israel/Palestinian Conflict: Analysis

- Obstacles to Peace

- What Does the Future Hold?

## ■ The War in Syria

- Introduction

- How did the war start?

- Why did the war start?

- Local actors

- External Actors

- The war

- The Effects of the war

- The Future of Syria

## ■ The Final Exam

# Obstacles to Peace

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- **Control of Jerusalem**
- **Borders of the Palestinian State**
- **Palestinian Refugees Right of return**
- **Jewish Settlements in the West Bank**
- **Security for Israel**



# Why did Peace Talk Failed?

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- Bad timing, artificial deadlines, insufficient preparation, lack of support (US president, regional states), inadequate confidence-building measures, leaders lacking courage, scepticism, absence of personal chemistry and trust, etc.
- Most common => **Extremists** allowed to **set the agenda** + **neglect of Palestinian bottom-up economic development and state-building**
- Past peace talks were predicated on **both parties** wanting a **two states solution**, while **at least one party** prefers to **maintain the status quo**

# Why did Peace Talk Failed?

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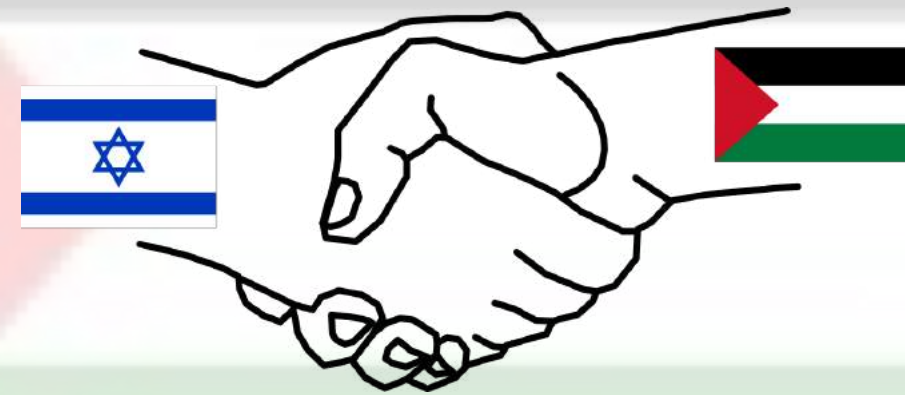
- The **Palestinians** chose **no agreement** over one that did not meet their **minimal conditions** (persisted)
  - Hope for **international support** for a plan along these lines: pressure Israel into an agreement
  - The **status quo** has been made **more bearable**
- **Israel** has consistently opted for the **status quo** rather than such an agreement
  - The costs of **SUCH deal** are much higher than of **NO deal** (social, security, economic, etc)



# Why did Peace Talk Failed?

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- **Advantage** to ending the Israeli/Palestinian conflict:
  - **Open relations** (economic + diplomatic) with **Arab states**
  - Blow to efforts to **delegitimise Israel**
  - **Normalizations of relations** with other nations
- **Moral costs** of occupation for Israeli society?
- Relations with the **Jewish Diaspora**?
- **Consequences of maintaining the status quo** from an Israeli point of view are tolerable => it is illogical to expect Israel to opt for an agreement



# What Does the Future Hold?

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- **An agreement now is preferable** when considering a **potentially bleak future**- is it really?
  - Can wait and see if the potential threats materialise (and if so, sign a deal then): a strategy of waiting served Israel so far
- **Rising support for right wing parties/the Palestinian national moment + Hamas**
- **Agreement is only possible** when at least **one party** has an **incentive** to make **significant concessions/bear the costs of an agreement**
- **Status Quo** stays in place

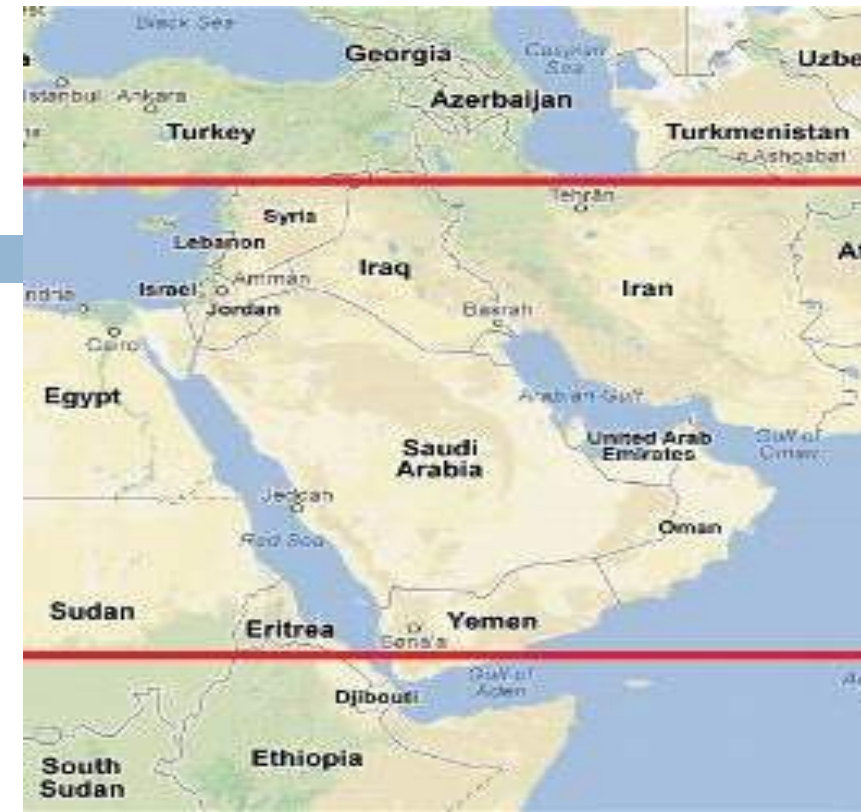
A map of the Middle East region, showing countries like Greece, Turkey, Syria, Saudi Arabia, and others. The title 'The War in Syria' is prominently displayed in the center of the map.

# The War in Syria



# Introduction

- March 2011 => **Peaceful uprising** against the president of Syria (following the 'Arab Spring') turned into a full-scale **civil war**
  - Forces loyal to President **Assad**
  - Forces **opposed** to **Assad's** rule
  - **Jihadist militants** from IS/ISIL/ISIS (Islamic State)
- More than 400k people dead
- Over 5.6 million Syrian refugees in neighboring countries



# How did the war Start?

- March 2011 => Pro-democracy demonstrations erupted in Deraa, inspired by the "**Arab Spring**"
  - Protesters demanded an **end** to the **authoritarian practices** of the regime + **economic reforms**
- **Syrian forces** responded harshly & **violently**, protests spread nationwide, demanding Assad's resignation
  - **Sectarian dimension**
- **Opposition militias** began to form in 2011, the conflict expanded into a full-fledged civil war by 2012

# Why did the war Start?

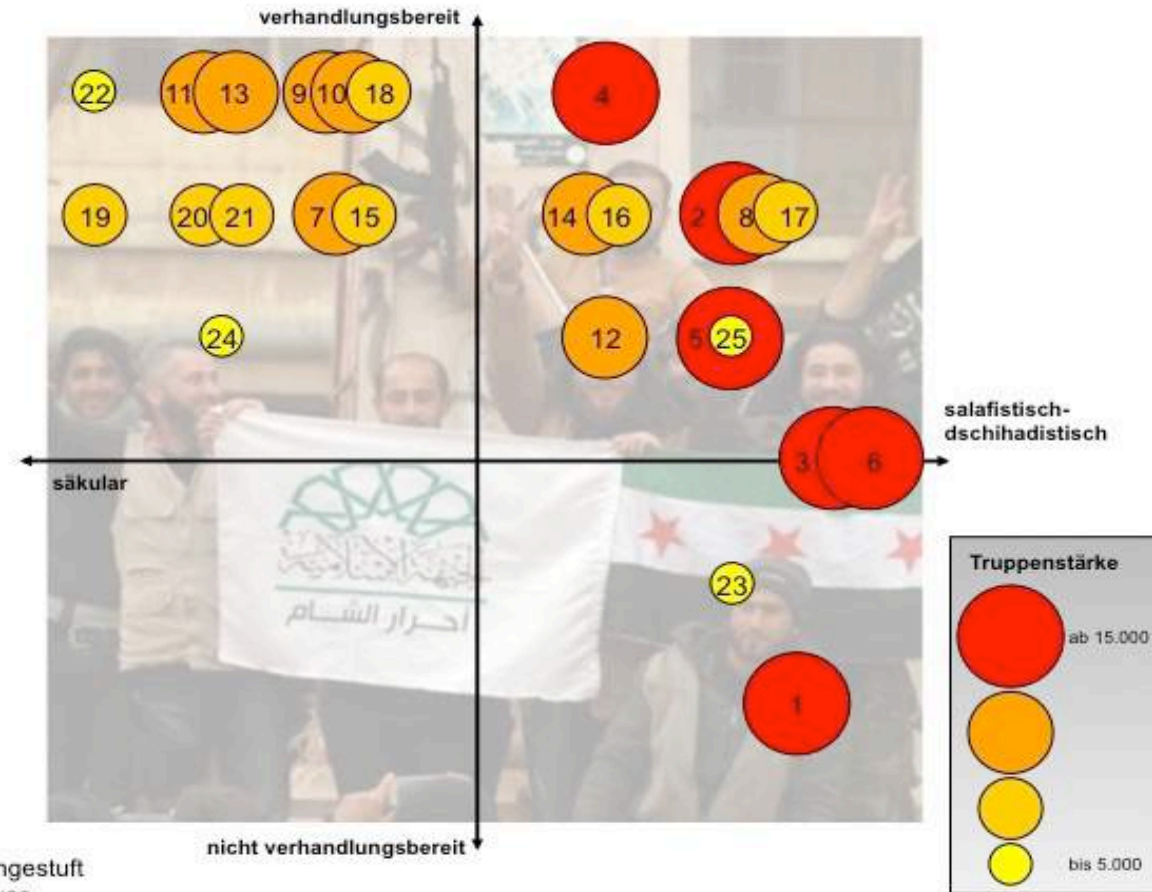
- Long-standing **political** and **economic** problems
  - High **unemployment**, corruption, lack of political freedom (censorship, surveillance, brutal violence against suspected opponents of the regime)
  - **Inequalities** in wealth and privilege
- **Environmental** crisis
- The war has become more than a battle between those who are for or against Assad => **Proxy War**
  - Many **groups** (Kurds) + **countries** (US, Russia) are involved: Complicated ...

# Local Actors

- Every **actor** has its **own interests** and tries to advance them
- The **regime**+ domestic supporters
- The **opposition**: Over 1000 rebel groups, including **Jihadist** groups:
  - ISIL, Nusra Front, HTS
- Are there moderate opposition groups?

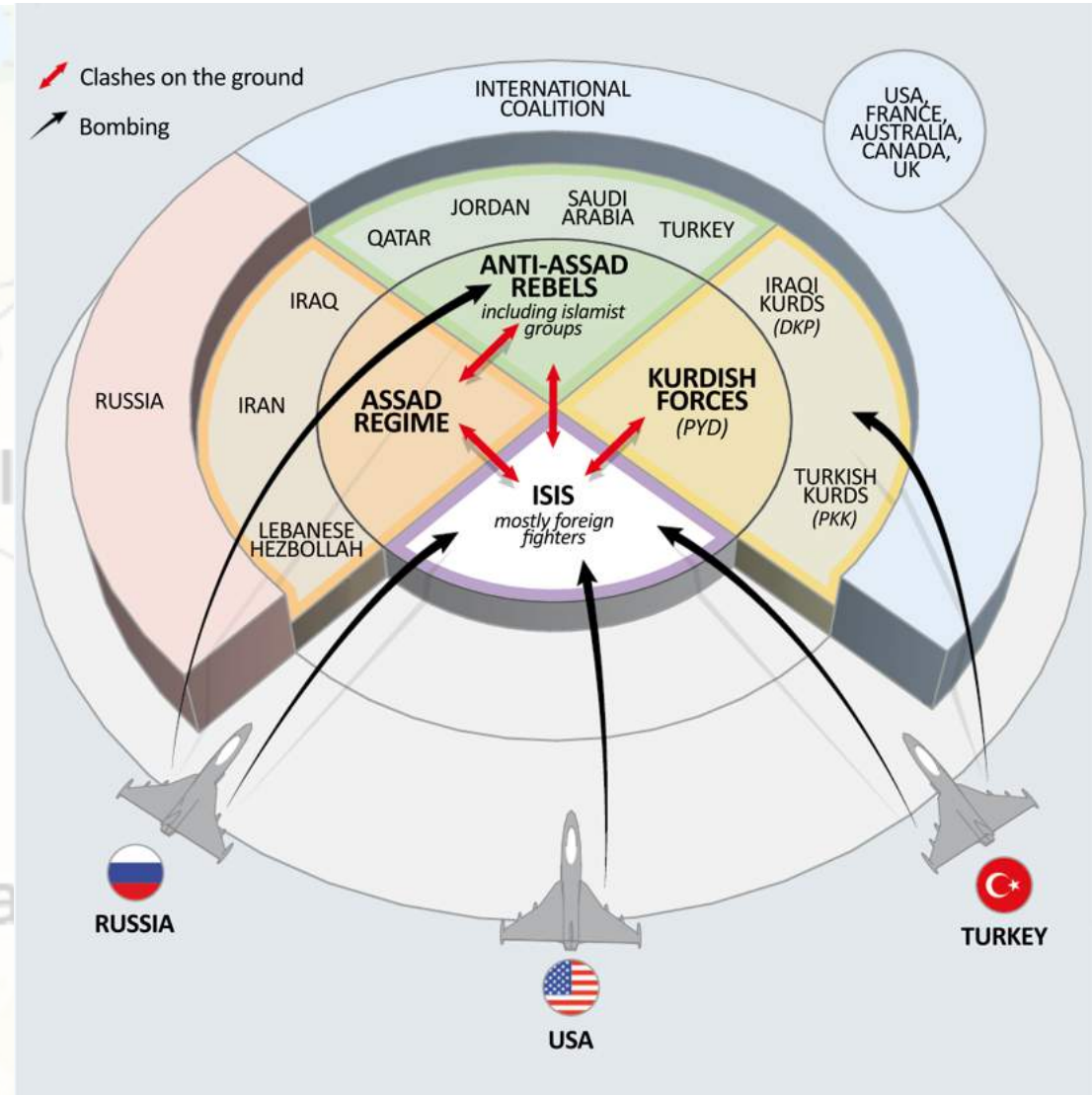
1. Ahrar al- Sham
2. Jaysh al- Islam
3. Jabhat al- Nusra\*
4. Ajnad al-Sham Islamic Union\*\*
5. Jaish al-Fatah
6. Islamic State\*
7. Jaysh al- Mujahideen
8. Levant Front\*\*
9. Originality and Development Front\*\*
10. First Regiment
11. Nour al- Din al- Zenki
12. Islamic Front\*\*
13. Rahman Corps
14. Syrian Turkmen Brigades
15. Sham Legion
16. Furqan Brigades
17. Jabhat Ansar al-Islam
18. First Corps
19. Seif al-Sham Brigades
20. Fajr al-Islam Division
21. Martyr Lieutenant Ahmed Abdou Brigades
22. 13<sup>th</sup> Division
23. Jabhat Ansar al- Din
24. Jaysh al- Thuwar
25. Ansar al-Sham

\* Als Terrororganisation eingestuft  
 \*\* Rebellenzusammenschluss



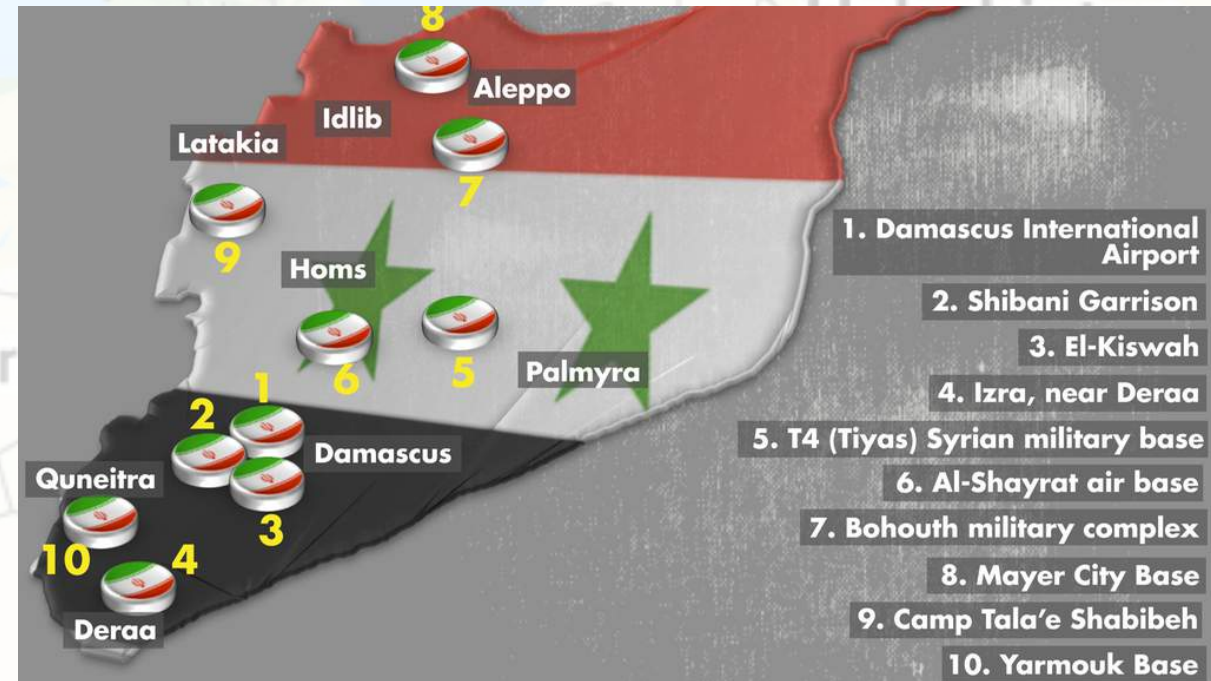
# External Actors

- Syria's neighbours + global powers split:
  - **Anti-Assad:** US, EU, Qatar, Turkey, Saudi Arabia
  - **Pro Assad:** Iran and Russia, China (diplomatically)
- **Russia's air campaign** in support of Assad (2015): Crucial



# External Actors

- Iran wants to **entrench** itself **militarily** in Syria + consolidate a **corridor** from the Gulf to the Mediterranean
- Provokes **Israeli attacks**
- Iranian-funded **militias fighting in Syria include:**
  - Lebanese Hezbollah fighters
  - Iranian Revolutionary Guards
  - Shiite fighters from Pakistan, Afghanistan, Iraq



Iranian Military Bases in Syria

# External Actors

- **US, UK, France** initially provided **support** for **moderate rebel groups**, prioritised non-lethal assistance since jihadists became dominant opposition
- Since 2014, **US-led global coalition** carried out **air strikes** on IS militants in Syria + **supported Kurdish forces (SDF)**
- **Turkey** supports the **rebels**, used them to contain the Kurdish militia that dominates the SDF



# External Actors

- **Saudi Arabia + Qatar**, keen to **counter Iranian influence**, armed & financed rebels
- **Israel**, concerned by Iran's "military entrenchment" in Syria + shipments of Iranian weapons to Hezbollah, conducted hundreds of **air strikes** in Syria



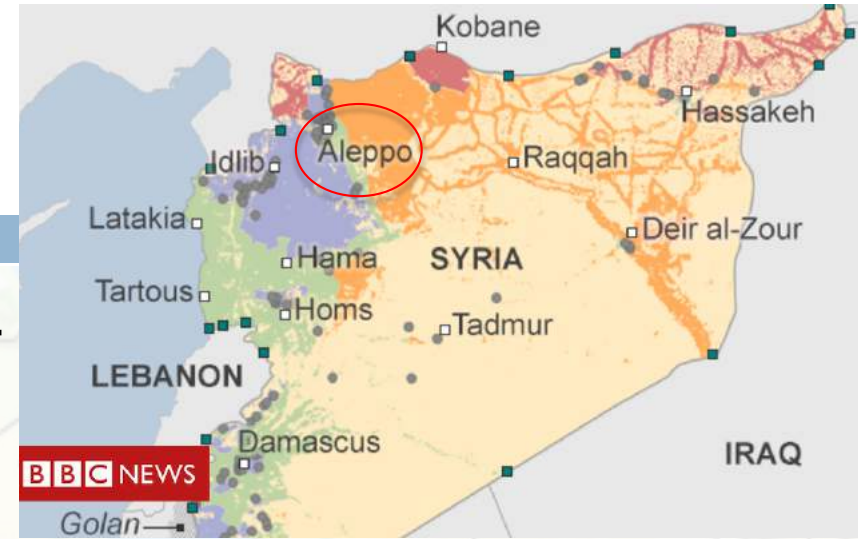


# The War

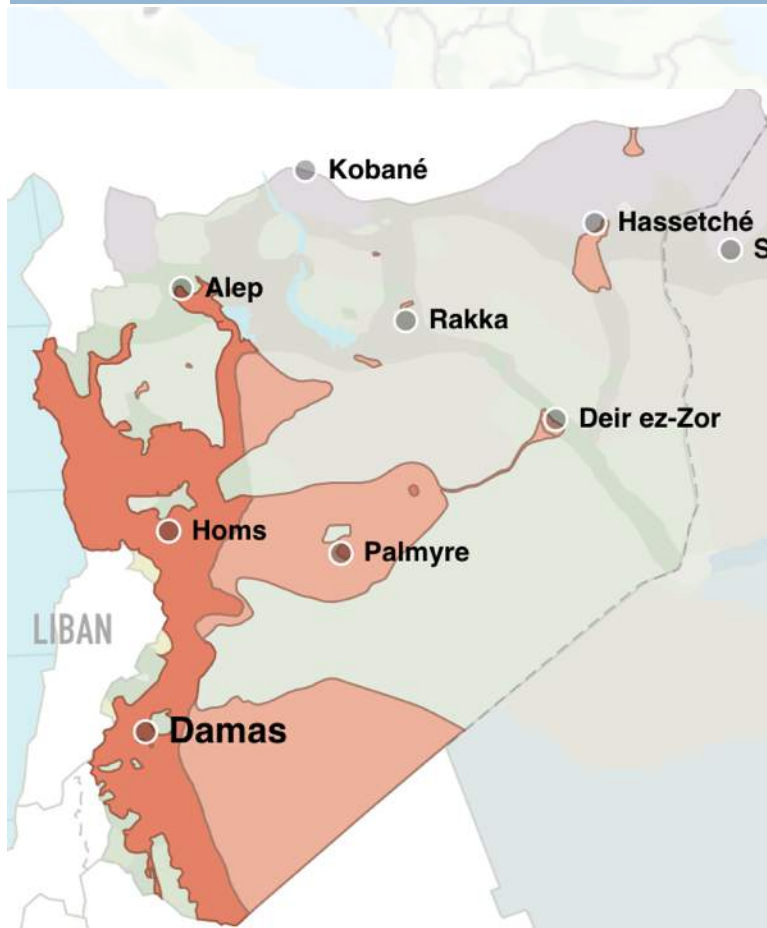
- 2012: Tactical **successes** for the **rebels**, controlled significant territory
- Early 2013: **Stalemate** => Increased international involvement
  - Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Qatar (even the US) publicly funded + armed rebels
  - Iran, Lebanese Hezbollah – arming the Syrian government + sending fighters to Syria
- **Islamist militants** take center stage (Nusra Front, ISIS/ISIL)
- **ISIL** seized large territories in Syria, Iraq and the border between them => **international action** was needed
  - 2014: American air strikes in Iraq, US + Arab states air raid ISIL in Syria

# The War

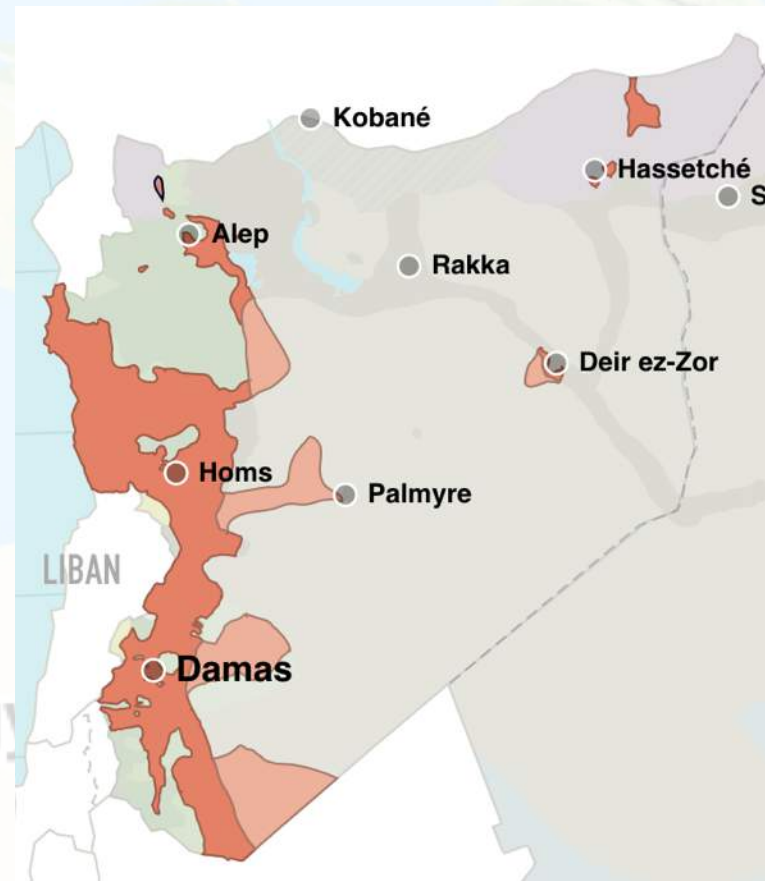
- 2015: **Russia** became more **active** in the conflict
  - Targeting **rebels**, not just ISIL
- 2016:
  - **Ceasefire** between Russian + Assad forces and Western-backed rebels **collapsed** => **Russia** + **pro-Assad** forces attacked rebel-held **Aleppo**
  - **ISIL losing** (fighting 3 rival coalitions + HTS)
- **Government forces** continued to **gain ground**, **Western intervention increased** (most fiercely following incidents involving chemical weapons)



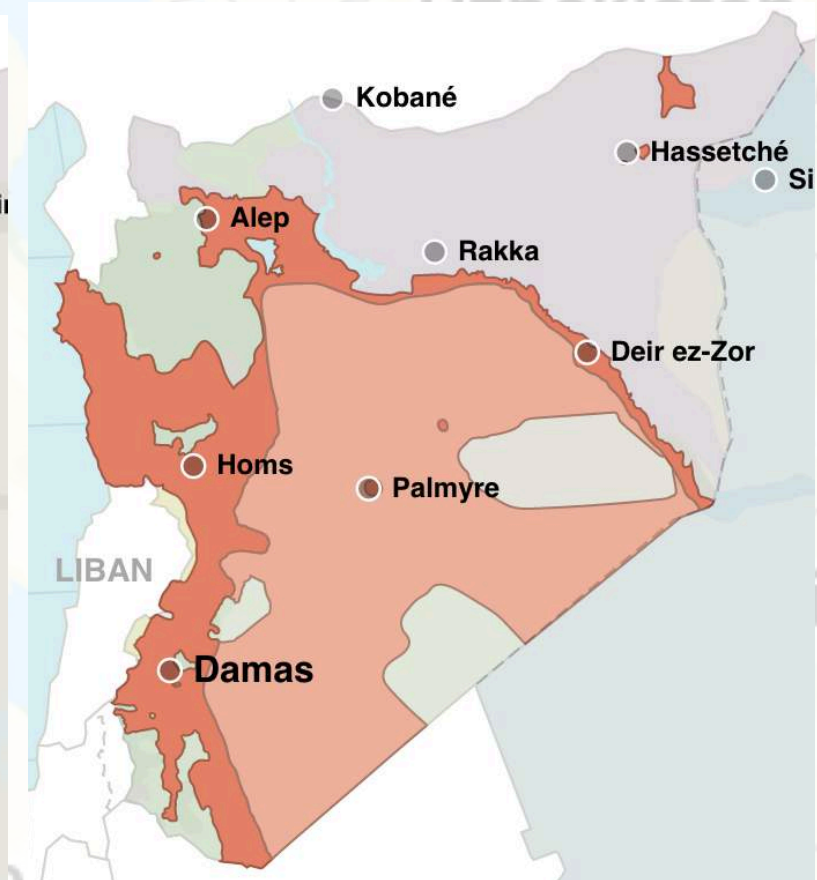
# Assad's Territorial Control



**June 2014:**  
**60.332 km<sup>2</sup>**



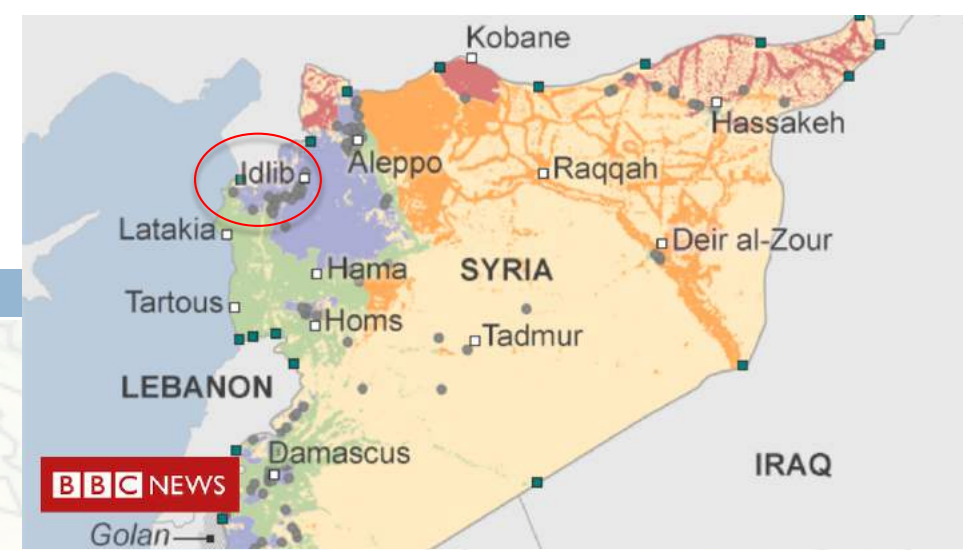
**October 2015:**  
**34.583 km<sup>2</sup>**



**December 2017:**  
**68.442 km<sup>2</sup>**

# The War

- Summer of 2018: **Idlib** as a **battle field** (last rebel held region)
- Russia and Turkey attempted to de-escalate the situation by implementing a **buffer zone** between rebel and government forces
- 2019:
  - **HTS** became the dominant force in Idlib- extensive **fighting**
  - Idlib comes **under assault** from Syrian government forces backed by Russian air strikes, but rebel forces were able to push back the fighting
  - **Trump** unexpectedly ordered US troops to start **withdrawing from Syria**, leaving Syrian Kurds exposed to the threat of an assault by Turkey



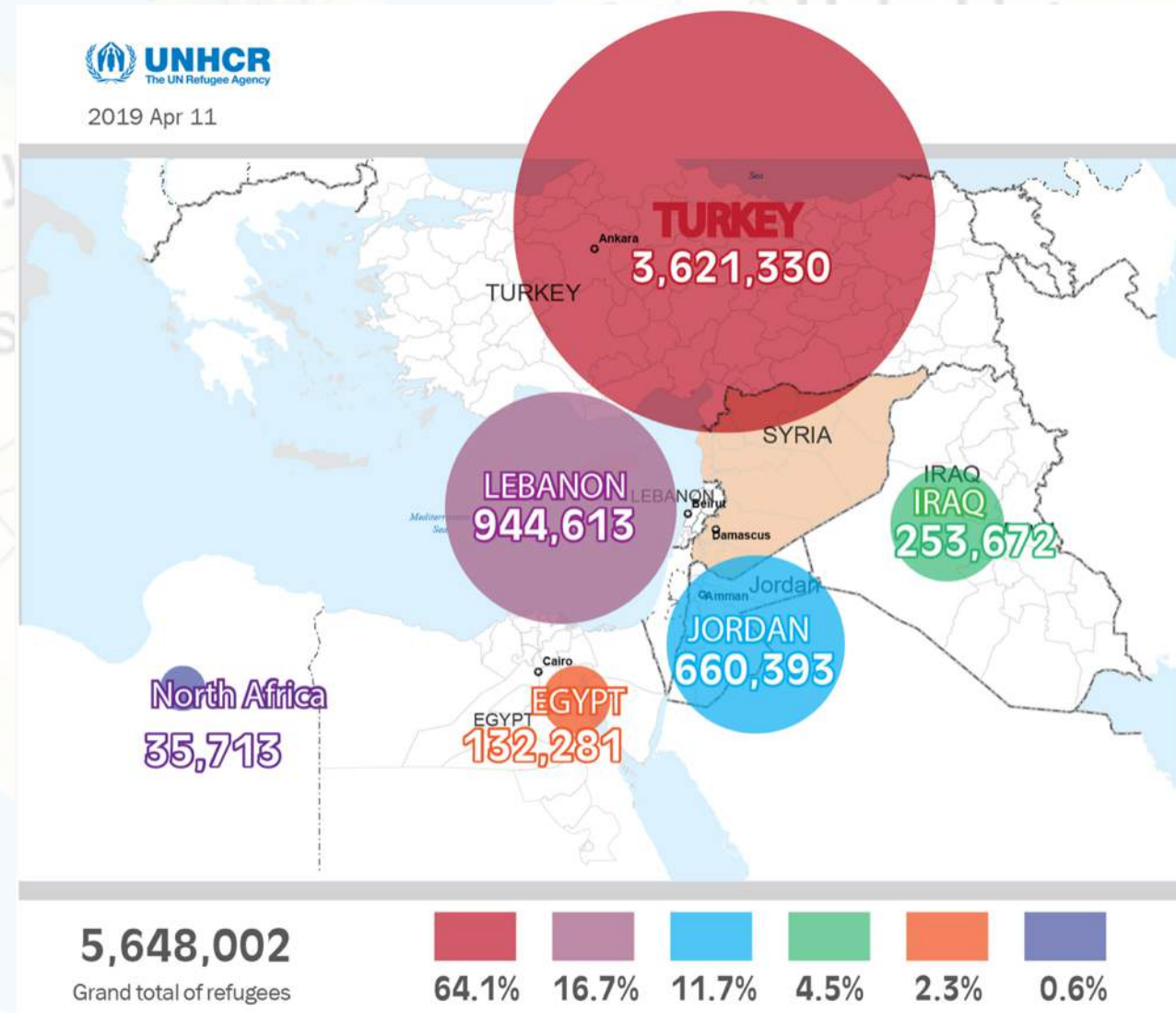
# The War

## Contemporary Developments =>

- Turkey launched an offensive into Syria's Kurdish-held region of north-eastern Syria, Kurdish forces turned to Assad for help
- Late **February 2020**: Turkey and Russian-backed Syrian government forces come into direct confrontation after dozens of Turkish soldiers were killed
  - The confrontation ends after a cease-fire is brokered by Turkey and Syria's ally Russia
- **May 2020**: Seven airstrike on Iran-linked targets in Syria attributed to Israel (weapons factories, etc.)

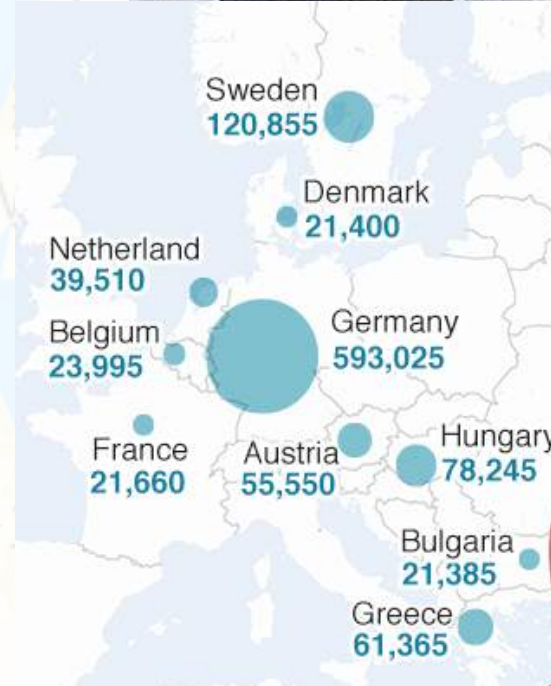
# The Effect of the War

- Number of Syrian registered refugees in neighbouring countries
- Returnees



# The Effect of the War

- **Global attention to the refugee problem only in 2015**
  - Over a million refugees entered Europe
- **2016: EU deal with Turkey to halt refugees from entering Europe**
- **2020: Turkey opens its border to Greece**



# When will the war end?

- While everyone **agrees** that a **political solution** is required, there is only little progress towards one
- Late 2011 and early 2012 saw a series of ill-fated **efforts** by **international organizations** to bring the conflict to an end:
  - Syrian officials agreed to **initiative** calling for the Syrian government to **stop violence against protesters**
  - **A delegation of monitors** from the Arab League **observed the implementation** of the plan in Syria- lacks credibility



# When will the war end?

- A **second agreement** produced a short, **partial cease-fire** in April 2012, after which **violence** resumed and **intensified**
- **International powers join the peace efforts:**
  - June 2012 => **International conference** organized by the UN produced the **Geneva Communiqué**, a road map for negotiations to establish a **transitional governing** body for Syria
  - The **US** and **Russia** unable to agree whether **Assad** would be included in a future Syrian government

# When will the war end?

- 2012: The **Syrian National Council** (opposition umbrella group), was too **narrow** and too **weakened** by infighting to effectively represent the opposition
  - **External actors** prioritized own agendas + **maximize influence** by supporting different rebel factions
  - New opposition coalition: The **National Coalition for Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces**, still suffers from inner divisions and rivalries
- 2013: **No prospect of international military intervention => Diplomacy**



الائتلاف الوطني لقوى  
الثورة والمعارضة السورية

# When will the war end?

- Agreement between Russia, Syria, and the US to place all of Syria's chemical weapons under international control
- UNSC called for the implementation of the **Geneva Communiqué**, but nine rounds of UN-mediated peace talks (the **Geneva II process**) have shown little progress since 2014
  - **Assad** appears **unwilling** to negotiate with the **opposition**
  - **Rebels** insist he must **step down**



# When will the war end?

- Late 2016 => Russia, Iran, Turkey take over the Syrian peace process, sidelining the US
  - 2017 => Russia, Iran, Turkey's **parallel political talks** (the **Astana Process**) to end the war
  - Short lived 'de-escalation zones'
  - Struggle to make headway
- ISIL takes advantage of the Covid-19 situation in Syria



# The Final Exam

- **Dates:**
  - I => June 4
  - II => July 9
  - III => September 10
- 12:00am CET
- Open Questions, open books, 1.5h, via IS
- **Register** for the exam
- Need **60%** to pass
- **Must pass the exam** (and submit a passing conflict report) to finish the course



A world map with a light blue background and various colored regions. The map shows major landmasses and oceans. A dark blue horizontal bar is at the top, containing the page number '30'.

# **IRE223: Nations in Conflict**

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**Thank You For Your Attention!**

**Thank you for your interest in the course!**

**Questions???**

**Feedback???**