

# **HISTORY OF SYRIA AND THE SYRIAN CIVIL WAR**

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## **ABSTRACT**

In our article, we will first examine the history of Syria from the Ottoman period to the present. We need to examine the history of Syria and events under the sovereignty of different states until 1946. In order to see the future of Syria, we will examine the events that took place in Syria during historical periods. We will examine when and what events took place in Syria, what kind of events it faced after the sovereignty of the great states, and what policies were formed.

On the other hand, we will see together what kind of civil war Syria entered into as a result of these events and policies. The Syrian Civil War will be our second chapter to review. The points that we will examine in the Syrian Civil War are how this war emerged.

**Key Words:** Syria, Syria civil war, Modern Syria History, Syrian Proxy Wars

## **INTRODUCTION**

Syria is one of the largest geographies of the Eastern Mediterranean and the Middle East.

It is a republic that continues to exist as a single republic. It is recognized as a regional cultural, diplomatic, political, economic, and military power. Syria, which has been ruled by the Ba'ath Party for more than fifty years on average, has a population of different ethnicities, religions, and sects.

The status quo that emerged in the Middle East during the Cold War could not resist the wind of change. However, in the process that started with the Arab Spring in 2010, the Middle East witnessed a bloody power struggle in which regional and global powers played a role. However, this is not only a domestic power struggle but also a conflict of interest among international actors.

Is this war really the Syrian Civil War? Or is it the battleground of other states? Who are the new actors in the Syrian Civil War? Is Syria the turning point of change in the Middle East? How did the Arab Spring affect Syria? Will the Syrian Civil War determine the fate of the Middle East? Will the Middle East map be redrawn? We will find the answers to these questions in our article, and it will also help us understand the future of Syria. The sources we use in this article are some news agencies and newspapers. However, our most important sources are the books that we use as primary sources and that we specify as references. Moreover, some of the Syrian citizens we interviewed and the personnel assigned there.

### **1. History Of Syria**

Syria has been ruled by the Canaanites, Hebrews, Arameans, Assyrians, Babylonians, Persians, Greeks, Romans, Byzantines, Umayyads, Abbasids, Ayyubids, Seljuks, Mamluks, Crusaders, and the Ottoman Empire throughout history. Its capital, Damascus, was the center of the Umayyad Empire and the regional administrative center of the Mamluk State. Damascus became the capital of the Mamluk Sultanate in 1260 and was attacked and destroyed by Timur in 1400. It came under Ottoman rule in 1517 and was ruled by the Ottomans for 403 years. It came out of Ottoman rule in World War I.

The influence of the French Revolution not only affected European states, but also Arab states. As the Ottoman State was aware of this, it sent its most talented rulers to the region. However, the Europeans sent their most talented agents to the region against this situation. Moreover, these agents could use Arab tribal leaders. One of the most important examples of these is the Sheriff of Mecca, Hussein. The British espionage organization in the Middle East was quite successful. Of course, the success of Edward Lawrence at the head of this espionage organization is undeniable.

With the start of the First World War, Britain and France provided ammunition and military support to the Arab tribes. With the end of the First World War, the Turks were forced to withdraw from Syria. In the next period, the border between Syria and Turkey was drawn with the Ankara Agreement of 1921 and the Treaty of Lausanne in 1923. Of course, this situation is outside the province of Iskenderun. With the Treaty of England and France, Syria is left to the French Mandate. After Syria entered the French Mandate, there were some uprisings. However, these revolts were suppressed by France. From 1921 to 1946, the political administration in Syria and Lebanon was in the hands of the French. With the coming to power of Adolf Hitler in Germany, France had to soften its political rule in the Middle East. 1936 was a very important year. The socialist government that came to power in France, on the one hand, promised the independence of Syria, and on the other hand, wanted the autonomous administrations to be connected to Damascus. The people living in the province of Iskenderun were not satisfied with this situation. Because the French mandate wanted to continue their lives. However, Iskenderun was included in the borders of Turkey as the province of Hatay in 1939 with the diplomatic efforts of Turkey. In 1941, Syria became semi-independent. 1946 was a turning point. Because Syria achieved its independence. State-building, nation-building, and relations with other independent Arab countries began to determine Syrian politics. Sukru El Kuwaiti, who came to power after Syria gained its independence, was replaced by Husnu Zaime with a coup. The Arab-Israel wars that started at that time were effective, and the period of coups began in Syria. At that time, the world was in great conflict. If you wanted to remain a state, you had to choose one of the two great powers at that time. One of them was the United States of America, and the other was the Soviet Union. Syria had used its election in favor of the Soviet Union. Meanwhile, Syria's close neighbor, Turkey, had chosen the USA. The Soviet Union is making Syria a buffer zone against this alliance with its aid to Syria. Turkey was disturbed by this situation, and a Turkish-Arab war would go down in history. However, Syria's positive policies and Turkey's deterrent actions prevented this situation. After this period, Syria wanted to solve the emerging political problems.

These issues, anti-imperialism, Arab nationalism, and the Palestinian issue were on the agenda of the newly established Syria. The unity established between Egypt, Syria, and Yemen is the most important indicator of this situation. The years 1946 and 1963 constitution were the most unstable period in Syria, and even the change of 20 cabinets between 1949 and 1959 proves this situation to us. The union was established in 1958, but the unilateral policy of Jamal Abdul Nasser caused the union to disintegrate after 3 years. During this period, an anti-Western party emerged. The name of this party is the Ba'ath Party. The founders of this party were two people named Selahaddin El Bitar and Misel Eflak, who had studied in Europe. But when these people returned to Syria, they realized that communism did not belong here. This party seized power in Syria with a coup. They wanted to spread socialism everywhere in Syria. However, a new actor appears on the page of history. This actor is the Commander of the Syrian Air Force, Hafez Assad. Hafez Assad became the defense minister by making a coup against the Ba'ath Party. Hafez Assad later captured power in Syria in 1971. Hafez Assad's rule was a totalitarian military state. The bloodiest example of this situation is the suppression of the Muslim Brotherhood uprising in 1982. This situation has created so much fear that we cannot see a collective action until the 2004 Kamisli uprising.

While Hafez Assad was in power, the distribution of economic rent to the masses loyal to him managed to bind the Syrian Sunni Bourgeoisie to him. Another strategy was land reform for landless peasants. He was also a pioneer of Arab nationalism. Another important policy of Hafiz Assad is the Arab Belt policy. In this policy, he placed an Arab village between two Kurdish villages, based on the fact that the Kurds came from Turkey in 1945. Moreover, it was not only to settle the Arabs there but also to take away all their political, social, and economic rights, based on the fact that 20% of the Kurds came from Turkey. In the 1980s and 1990s, Turkey and Syria faced each other again. There were two biggest problems they had. One of them is the water problem, and the other is the PKK terrorist organization problem. Because PKK cadres were located in Syria and Lebanon under Syrian control. 86% of Syria's water comes from the Euphrates River. With the commissioning of the Southeastern Anatolia Project (GAP), Syria's waters decreased by 50% due to the dams built-in 1989. In this period, Turkey made many military threats against Syria. The Adana Consensus of 1998 plays a very important role. According to this agreement, groups that one of the two countries calls terrorists will be transferred to the other. Syria had deported Abdullah Ocalan, the PKK terrorist chief, and in 1999 Ocalan was captured and brought to Turkey. Between 1998 and 2011, relations between Turkey and Syria were the brightest period. The death of Hafez Assad in 2000 and the succession of his son Bashar Assad made relations even better. Especially with the abolition of visas in 2010, a large trade volume has emerged between Turkey and Syria. The deterioration of Turkey-Syria relations was experienced during the 2011 Arab Spring. With the 2011 Arab Spring, anti-Assad demonstrations in the city of Dera, located in the south of Syria, spread throughout Syria.

## 2. SYRIAN CIVIL WAR

Syrian Civil War (Arabic: الحرب الأهلية السورية, al-Harb'ül-ehliyye al-Suriyye), the Syrian army, the Syrian government, and internal rebels in Syria, followed by the Islamic State of Iraq and Damascus, Al Nusra, and some Kurds, Turkmens, Druze, and these are the conflicts in which Syriac groups also participated and foreign powers such as Russia, Iran, USA, Turkey, and Israel have been involved in a limited and regular manner. . The shows began on March 15, 2011, and spread nationwide in April 2011.

In April 2011, the Syrian Army was assigned to suppress the actions and uprisings, and the soldiers opened fire on the demonstrators across the country. After months of a military siege, the demonstrations turned into armed rebellions. Opposition forces, mostly deserted soldiers and civilian volunteers, started to revolt without central leadership. Conflicts in almost every town and city across the country are asymmetrical warfare. In 2013, Hezbollah joined the war on the side of the Syrian army loyal to Bashar al-Assad. While the Bashar Assad administration receives military and financial support from Russia and Iran, the opposition receives weapons and ammunition from Qatar and Saudi Arabia. As of June 2013, Bashar Assad's administration controls 30-40% of the country and 60% of the population in the country. A UN report in late 2012 reported that the civil war was an ongoing "obviously sectarian" conflict between the Nusayri Shabiha militia and Sunni dissidents, but both the opposition and the government denied this.

According to the United Nations, the deceased population exceeded 220,000 as of January 2015. SCPR (Syrian Center for Political Studies) declared the total human population who lost their lives directly or indirectly due to the Syrian Civil War as 470,000 as of February 2016.

According to reports, tens of thousands of demonstrators were imprisoned in state prisons and subjected to systematic torture and terror. International organizations accuse both the Ba'ath Party government and the opposition of human rights violations. As a result of the investigations and field studies conducted by the United Nations and Amnesty International in Syria in 2012 and 2013, it was concluded that most of the human rights violations, torture, and war crimes were committed by the Ba'ath Party government. Chemical weapons were used several times in the war, and this sparked international outrage.

Influenced by the Arab Spring, the rebellion began as a civil revolt against corruption and human rights abuses that began in January 2011 and grew into small demonstrations. On March 15, 2011, large-scale demonstrations broke out in the southern city of Deraa, hence why Deraa was later called the "Cradle of the Revolution." These demonstrations spread throughout the country in a short time. The government responded to the demonstrations with massive arrests, torture, police brutality, and censorship, but the demonstrations continued to grow. Towards the end of April, Bashar Assad launched a large-scale military operation against the resisting cities and towns, tanks, infantry, and heavy weapons participated in the operation, and many civilians lost their lives in a short time.

After the military repression, many soldiers deserted to join the demonstrators, and many began to take up arms. The first armed conflict in the country took place on June 4, 2011, 79 days after the first major demonstrations, in the town of Jisr al-Shughur. When the Syrian Army opened fire on a crowd attending a funeral, angry demonstrators set fire to the building and killed 8 security guards. While the weapons in the seized police station were confiscated, the environment was taken under control. Clashes between the demonstrators and the security forces continued in the following days. After the execution of the soldiers who refused to shoot at civilians by members of the secret service, some security guards fled and joined the demonstrators, fueling the opposition.

When the government forces tried to suppress the demonstrations in many cities of Syria, the events escalated, and small-scale clashes gave way to clashes. As a result, tens of thousands of people died.

Although the first major clashes took place in Homs, Daraa, and Damascus, they soon spread to the whole country. The Siege of Homs, the Siege of Baniyas, the Siege of er-Reston and Telbise, the 2011 Battle of Jisr al-Shughur, and the Siege of Hama were the points where the first major urban battles took place.

The years 2012 and 2013 were years when the opposition took advantage. Opponents approached a few kilometers from the Damascus city center and captured most of Aleppo. Fierce clashes took place in the city center of Homs. Northern and Eastern Syria largely fell into the hands of the regime. YPG declared autonomous cantons in Afrin, Kobani, and Hasek.

The end of 2013 and the beginning of 2014 were a period when the regime started to move forward as the opposition lost much of its foreign support and began to clash with each other. The city center of Damascus was largely secured, the countryside of Hama and Homs was largely cleared of opposition, and the Latakia road was secured. ISIS took over most of the northern and eastern regions.

In 2015, the regime's advance was stopped after ISIS was driven away from its former power by aerial bombardments, and the opposition cooperated in many regions. The opposition broke the siege of Aleppo, took the city center of Idlib from the regime, and cleared the Idlib countryside to a large extent from the regime. At the start of Russian airstrikes in September 2015, the balance of power began to deteriorate in favor of the opposition. The end of 2015 was a period when Russia, Iran, and many Shiite militia groups increased their support for the Syrian regime. On the other hand, opponents lost much of the support they received from the West.

In 2016, the regime and its allies recaptured many settlements in rural Aleppo from the opposition and ISIS. He also captured a large part of the Turkmen Mountain. Thereupon, Turkey and Saudi Arabia discussed the possibility of a land operation, which led to international tension between Iran and Russia. ISIS lost many areas in the northeastern countryside of Syria to the YPG, and in the southern countryside to the Syrian opposition.

The civil war in Syria continues as a full-scale frontal war that has spread throughout the country. After the moderate opposition groups, and then Kurdish groups, ISIS, and other radical groups captured many regions from the regime, clashes are taking place in all regions except the province of Tartus, where the Nusayris are in the majority, and which is called one of the regime's strongholds. The Syrian civil war is not a war between the opposition and the regime. It would not be wrong to say that there are proxy wars in Syria. Even though the Syrian proxy wars or the Syrian civil war have moved away from the world agenda, they will return to the world agenda.

## CONCLUSION

In my article, we mentioned the history of Syria and the short history of the Syrian Civil War. To better understand the articles we will write in the future, we need to understand the History of Syria and the Syrian Civil War. The point we need to know is that the Syrian Civil War has turned into a Proxy war. Those who win this war will have the power to win the real victory and change the map of the Middle East.

Syria has remained under the hegemony of great states throughout its history. We see states such as the Ottoman Empire, France, and England. Moreover, we see that different regimes seized power in Syria. There are great powers behind these governments. Today, we see the same situation in the Syrian Civil War. However, we see this not in the Cold War period, but in hot conflicts. The war between the regime forces and the Free Syrian Army is not limited to the Syrian Civil War. Apart from these two blocks, there are many armed groups in Syria. YPG, ISIS, Al Nusra, and Hezbollah are just a few of them. Many groups, such as these groups, are fighting with the support of other states.

As a result, the most curious aspect of this war is what the states will take from Syria after the end of the Proxy War in Syria and how the Middle East will be shaped.

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