



## Timeline

**1916** - Syria and Lebanon are controlled by France after the signing of the Sykes-Picot Agreement.

**1918** - 400 years of Ottoman rule ends when Emir Feisal leads Arab forces, with British support, into Damascus.

**1920** - French forces defeat King Faisal's Syrian Arab forces and occupy Syria.

**1940** - During World War II, the British and the Free French Forces occupy Syria and recognize Syrian independence.

**1946** - Syria gains independence after France evacuates troops. A year later, the Socialist Ba'ath Party is founded.

**1958** - Egypt and Syria form the United Arab Republic (UAR), a political union led by Egyptian president Gamal Abdul Nasser in efforts to form a pan-Arab state and to fight "the communist threat". The union survives until 1961 when Syria declares itself independent of Egypt after a military coup.

**1966** - General Salah al Jadid overthrows General Amin al Hafiz, giving power to the first modern religious Alawi.

**1967** - Israel takes over the Golan Heights after the Six Day War against Egypt, Jordan, and Syria.

**1970** - A bloodless coup brings results in the beginning of the 30-year rule of moderate Ba'ath Party member and religious Alawi, Hafiz al-Assad.

**1973** - During the Yom Kippur War, Syria and Egypt attack Israeli forces occupying the Golan Heights and the Sinai Peninsula. Israeli forces defeat the Syrian army and move further into Syria.

**1976** - The Lebanese Civil War and Syria's intervention result in the 30-year Syrian occupation of Lebanon.

**1979** - Muslim Brotherhood kills 83 Alawi student officers resulting in a ban on the Muslim Brotherhood and the death penalty for its members.

**1982** - Hafiz al-Assad orders the Syrian Army to suppress a Muslim Brotherhood inspired Sunni Muslim revolt in the town of Hama resulting in the deaths of more than 10,000 people and discouraging future anti-government activity and protests for years.

**1986** - U.S. and Britain recall ambassadors after accusing Syria of supporting international terrorism.

**2000** - Hafiz al Assad dies. The constitutional minimum age requirement is lowered from 40 to 34 allowing his son, Bashar al Assad, to become President after running unopposed and gaining 97% of the vote.

**2003** - Syria denies developing chemical weapons as U.S. threatens sanctions.

**2005** - The Syrian government is suspected of assassinating the Lebanese Prime Minister, Rafiq Hariri, resulting in political change and the withdrawal of Syrian troops from Lebanon.

**2006** - Cartoons of Prophet Mohammed in Danish newspapers spark protests in Danish and Norwegian embassies in Damascus. Iraq and Syria reestablish diplomatic relations after decades of alienation. The Israeli-Lebanese war results in thousands fleeing into Syria from Lebanon.

**2007** - Al-Assad secures second 7-year term as president.

**2008** - Damascus hosts Middle East Peace summit with France, Turkey, Syria, and Qatar.

**2010** - Syria receives first U.S. ambassador after five years. U.S. imposes sanctions on Syria for supporting terrorism and providing weapons to Hezbollah. Mohannad al-Hassani, head of the Syrian Organization for Human Rights, is incarcerated for three years after being convicted of "weakening nationalist sentiment" and disseminating "false news". After a six-year breach, the U.S. appoints an envoy to Syria.

**2011** - The "Day of Dignity" protesters demand release of political prisoners and are subsequently attacked and arrested. In the city of Deraa the "Day of Rage" protest turns bloody when the Syrian Army starts attacking and shooting at protesters who demand the ousting of President Assad. Syrian government deploys army tanks into the cities of Deraa, Homs, Banyas and suburbs of Damascus to crush anti-government protests. Hundreds of civilians are killed, detained, and wounded. U.S. and EU impose further sanctions on Syria. Syrian government blames gangs for the killings of some 120 members of the security forces. Bloodshed continues, and at least 10,000 people flee to Turkey. U.S. and some European countries condemn situation in Syria, call on President Assad to step down. Russia and China veto UN resolution on Syria. Arab League suspends Syria, and imposes sanctions. At least 5,000 civilians killed according to the UN. Free Syrian Army is formed by Syrian army defectors.

**2012** - Massive attack by Syrian security forces and army in Homs. US, Britain, France, Turkey and Gulf States recognize the National Coalition for Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces as a "legitimate representative" of the Syrian people. This coalition does not include Islamist militias.

**2013** - United Nations weapons inspectors verify the deaths of about 300 people by chemical weapons in Damascus. International weapons inspectors start the destruction of Syria's chemical weapons. U.S. and British "non-lethal" support is suspended amid reports that Free Syrian Army bases have been taken over by Islamist rebels and concerns about the infiltration of Islamists in opposition camps.

**2014** - Syria's refusal to put a transitional government on the table leads to the failure of UN peace talks in Geneva. Hezbollah and the Syrian army take over rebel encampments near the Lebanese border. Rebels leave Homs after three years of resistance. UN completes chemical weapons removal. A "caliphate" is declared by the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) as ISIS gains control over Raqqqa province.

**2015** - Jaish al-Fatah (Army of Conquest), an Islamist rebel alliance with Turkish, Saudi Arabian, and Qatari backing takes over Idlib. Jordanian border crossing is taken over by the Southern Front, an alliance of secular and Islamist groups. ISIS takes Palmyra causing fears of destruction of the pre-Islamic World Heritage site.



## Torture Methods

**THE GERMAN CHAIR** is a torture device where the detainee is tied to the empty metal frame of chair. The chair is folded backwards placing all of the weight on the upper arms causing extreme pressure on the back and spine. This can result in asphyxiation, fractured vertebrae, paralysis, chronic pain, and many other physical and psychological ailments.

**ELECTROCUTION** has been applied to the genitals and other sensitive parts of the body in order to cause physical and psychological trauma. In some cases, the detainee is held suspended a few inches from the ground and forced to stand on their tiptoes while water is poured onto the person and on the floor where electric current is applied.

**THE WHEEL** has been used to give the torturer access to a detainee's feet and face in order to beat them. The detainee is put inside one or two large tires. The detainee's feet and legs are inserted into the tire first, and then folded over, with his/her hands tied behind the back, the head is then inserted into the tire so that the detainee is rests in a "U" shape.

**BOILING SHOWERS** are used to cause pain and to aggravate open wounds.

**REMOVAL OF FINGERNAILS** and toenails, mutilation of the genitals, and extinguishing cigarettes on the body most often on the anus have been reported.

**BEATINGS**, including blunt force to the head have resulting in cracking of the skull, fractured and broken arms, legs, and ribs and death. Drills have reportedly been used to gauge out eyes and iron welders have been used to burn the flesh off detainees' bodies.

**SUSPENSION** by the hands from the ceiling and being made to stand or dangle for days or left to bleed out while dangling has also been used. Detainees are denied medical assistance for their wounds.

**RAPE AND SEXUAL VIOLENCE** has been used as a weapon of war to control, humiliate, and intimidate victims. A majority of these attacks have been carried out by government or plain clothes militia with less frequent reports by FSA and other unknown assailants. Government detainees have been raped and had their partners, female family members and female neighbors raped in front of them while they were in prison. Forced oral sex on young boys and men have been used to cause psychological trauma. Threats of rape by dogs and threats of rape against family members have also been used to intimidate and torture detainees.

**SLEEP DEPRIVATION** and starvation are also used to intimidate, weaken and torture detainees.

**KIDNAPPINGS** by both the government and non-state actors have been reported.

**STARVATION** has been used as a method of torture in government run facilities.

**CHILD SOLDIERS** have been used by armed opposition groups, such as ISIS, Jabhat al-Nusra and YPG Kurdish groups.

**INDISCRIMINATE MURDER** has occurred against civilians by government and opposition forces.

## Current Situation

**Language:** Arabic (official), Kurdish, Armenian, Aramaic, Circassian, French, English

**Population:** 17,951,639 (July 2014 est.)

**Religion:** Muslim 87% (official; Sunni 74%, Alawi, Ismaili, Shia 13%), Christian 10% (Orthodox, Uniate, Nestorian), Druze 3%

**Ethnic groups:** Arab 90%, Kurds, Armenians, Druzes, Circassians and other 10% , small Jewish population

**ONGOING VIOLENCE** between opposition forces and the government started when sporadic demonstrations first took place on January 26, 2011 as part of the wave of protests influenced by the "Arab Spring" demanding the resignation of President Bashar al-Assad. The Syrian conflict has left 220,000 dead. More than three million people have fled the country, and 7.6 million people are estimated to be internally displaced. According to UNHCR, more than three million Syrians have fled to Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan and Iraq while almost 150,000 have declared asylum in the EU. Others have attempted to flee to Europe by boat only to be stranded at sea.

**HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS** have occurred by all groups fighting in Syria. Despite having ratified both the United Nations' International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the Convention on the Rights of the Child, Syria has violated and continues to severely violate human rights inside the country. The Human Rights Council has reported numerous accounts of executions, enforced disappearances, arbitrary arrests, torture, and sexual violence. Non-state actors have also committed egregious human rights violations, including kidnappings, beheadings, rape, torture, and widespread recruitment of child soldiers.

**INTERNAL ACTORS** often aided by external actors with divergent goals have added to the chaos, violence, and human rights violations. The Syrian regime, supported by the Syrian Armed Forces, Hezbollah, and Iran, has been responsible for indiscriminate killings, arbitrary arrests, disappearances, and torture of civilians and the allied opposition. Opposition forces include the Free Syrian Army, a moderate collective of opposition groups opposed to the Assad regime, Jabhat al-Nusra, an Al Qaeda affiliate opposed to the Assad regime but with the greater goal of establishing a religious state in Syria, and ISIS (Islamic State of Iraq and Syria) an Islamist group born out of the conflict in Iraq with hopes of establishing a caliphate in Iraq and Syria. In addition, Kurdish groups include Peshmerga and the People's Protection Unit (YPG), who both hope to establish an autonomous Kurdish region. All of these groups are fighting the Assad regime, but they are also fighting each other and vying for control and power.

**VIOLATION OF CHILDREN'S RIGHTS** have been widespread with children as young as two being executed by security forces and many as young as ten years old held in detention facilities, facing the same torture and cruelty as adults. Human Rights groups have also reported government use of schools as detention and torture centers, military bases, or sniper posts. Children have been arrested and killed while in school, and many others are being used as "bait" to arrest and kill family members who are being associated with anti-government activity.