

No end in sight in Syria

By [Callum Tennant](#), Deputy Politics Editor

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Image: Jordi Bernabeu

A United States ceasefire resolution was blocked on 22 February. After a last-minute scramble, a resolution was unanimously passed on the 24, but by the 25 this resolution had been ignored, as bombing continued in Eastern Ghouta. The events of these few days could be seen as a metaphor for the Syrian conflict: false starts, raised hopes, continued violence and abuses of human rights.

The conflict is one of the most complex struggles seen in modern history, largely due to the involvement of foreign states. This war is not just the Syrian regime against rebels, but also the proxy war of multiple countries and interests. Sunni-majority countries, led by Saudi Arabia, are also funding militias to counteract what they see as Iran's increasing presence and power in the region.

The United States is funding multiple militias including the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) which is mostly made up of Kurds. At the same time Turkey has launched an attack into parts of Northern Syria (Operation Olive Branch), claiming other groups are linked to the terrorist group the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK). Meanwhile, Israel is also conducting air strikes which it says are in defence against Iran, which solidifies the unofficial cooperation with Saudi Arabia.

Syria is a rapidly changing conflict where little stays the same. Nothing demonstrates this better than the foreign policy of our very own government. In 2013 it was defeated while trying to approve airstrikes against the Syrian regime of Assad; fast forward two years and in 2015 the UK government voted to start

airstrikes in Syria against ISIS. In other words, all it took was two years before the situation had changed so much that the UK government's main priority was ensuring that the same Syrian regime which it had previously wanted to fall now didn't lose any more territory to ISIS. These changes in attitudes have been repeated, for example Trump firing missiles at the Syrian regime's airfields in retaliation to chemical weapons despite the fact that the US had previously stopped short of direct conflict with the regime.

So because this is a multiple sided conflict, the factions are constantly adjusting their position. The use of militias and the fighting of proxy wars has also thrown up dangerous situations, such as Turkey-backed fighters and American-backed fighters coming into conflict. Two NATO allies effectively fighting each other in Northern Syria is becoming a possibility.

The conflict of so many different interests means that despite the Syrian regime - which is coming closer to victory in the south with assistance from Russia - new fronts are already opening elsewhere, such as around Afrin. The fight for strategic cities like Afrin, and over Eastern Ghouta, is done with no regard for human rights or the suffering inflicted. The conflicts are long, painful and deadly affairs irrespective of whether one is a soldier or civilian. Given the current political atmosphere, it is devastating to say that peace remains little more than a hope for the distant future.



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