

The situation in Syria

The Syrian Civil War is in its sixth year, having started from government crackdowns against protests in 2011. It has driven one of the greatest refugee crises the world has ever seen. The government appears reluctant to entertain any solution other than complete military victory, while many of the opposition forces are closely allied with jihadist terrorist organizations linked to al-Qaeda

Russia is one of three guarantors of the current ceasefire plan in Syria. Iran, Russia, and Turkey recently agreed to set up de-escalation zones, In these zones, government and opposition forces agree to a cessation of hostilities, including air raids, for a period of 6 months, while the government offers unfettered access to humanitarian aid groups - a goal that has eluded parties to the conflict for some time¹². In Eastern Ghouta, where one of the first de-escalation zones is monitored by Russian military police. Syrian officials approved UN humanitarian assistance to nearly 1.7 million people in hard-to-reach and besieged areas, authorizing more assistance than the UN initially requested. In addition to this, OCPW inspectors confirmed destruction of 25 out of 27 chemical weapons facilities, with final inspections to come for the final two.³ Cooperation from the Syrian regime has yet to translate into observable action in the humanitarian realm, but they are fulfilling obligations under UN resolutions 2118 and 2235 with regards to production/possession of chemical weapons.⁴

All members of the Council agree that the only way forward is a Syrian-led process, as enshrined in the vital Resolution 2254, which endorses the Geneva Communique of 2012 (another document laying out a political process for reconciliation) and acknowledges that ceasefire must be accompanied by negotiation, or it is sure to fail.⁵ There are a few problems with a political process, namely that there is no unified opposition. As regards future action, the Council can endorse the actions taken by Iran, Russia, and Turkey to establish de-escalation zones and establish a formal collaboration between the Guarantors and humanitarian convoys delivering aid to citizens in these areas. As the nationwide ceasefire holds, it is crucial that negotiation be the next step in the process. To this end, the Council should continue to support a national reconciliation, whether this be through providing a forum for opposition parties to establish a unified position, continuing the Geneva talks, or expressing continued support for a political solution. Of primary concern should be the liberation of ISIL held territory in Eastern Syria, which could be a uniting point for government and opposition forces.

The Situation in the DPRK

Since the takeover of Kim Jong-un, North Korea has become increasingly antagonistic to the international community and has increased the intensity of its nuclear weapons program. Advancements made since the election of US President Donald Trump in late 2016 include its recent and most powerful nuclear test, conducted on September 2nd. The Security Council responded with the adoption of Resolution 2375, increasing sanctions on the DPRK and went so far as to ban purchase of textiles from North Korean companies, ban export of gasoline to North Korea, and placed extreme limits on petroleum and oil exports to the country. It also limited the hiring of North Korean workers and joint enterprise with North Korean companies⁶. DPRK responded to the unanimous adoption of Resolution 2375 on September 14th with a ballistic missile launch over Japan. The Council responded promptly with a press statement condemning the actions and calling for dialogue. The situation is escalating rapidly and tensions are at the highest point in recent memory.

Rhetoric from the United States is increasingly bombastic and likely exacerbating existential fears in the Kim regime. Recent deployment of a missile defense system in South Korea provides further threat, as it diminishes the offensive deterrent capabilities of North Korean weapons. Japan, South Korea, and the United States routinely conduct joint military exercises, exacerbating paranoia in North Korea that an invasion or other

aggressive acts may take place. With President Trump leading the United States, a feedback loop exists, whereby rhetoric and build-up on one side begets heightened rhetoric and build-up on the other. Many in the US believe that extraordinary pressure and pushing DPRK to the brink of collapse will result in denuclearization, but North Korea's P5 neighbor and others do not agree, even though international patience for the regime is virtually extinguished. In particular, Chinese support for the regime has also diminished since Kim Jong-un took power in 2011, but they still provide enough support to prevent total collapse and chaos on the peninsula, mostly by limiting the scope of U.S. driven sanctions from the Security Council.⁷ In the most recent round of sanctions, China prevented the US from achieving its stated goal of an oil embargo on North Korea, suggesting the balance required for Security Council consensus on action with regards to this issue.

Russia works closely with China on devising methods to avert the potential disaster this crisis represents, with a dual track approach at the forefront.⁸ The following actions should be on the table for discussion. The United States and South Korea should agree to end joint military exercises on the Korean Peninsula in exchange for a freeze in North Korea's nuclear program, which will be monitored by the IAEA with full compliance by the DPRK. This will serve as a step to establish trust and good faith between the parties involved and should lead to further cooperation on a peace agreement ensuring international respect for the borders of North Korea. Included in this diplomatic settlement should be an exchange of demilitarization-for-demilitarization on either side, which would mean a sharp reduction in conventional military forces on either side. Of particular concern is the Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) system deployed to the region under direction of the United States, which merely serves to increase fears on the part of North Korea that a US first strike is likely.⁹ There needs to be a commitment to respecting the sovereign borders of North Korea primarily by the United States, which has a storied history of intervention and compulsory regime change. Cooperation on the part of the DPRK, with regards to freezing its nuclear weapons program and committing to a peaceful resolution with South Korea and the United States, should be tied to the eventual reduction of economic sanctions.

¹ <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2017/09/final-de-escalation-zones-agreed-astana-170915102811730.html>

² <http://peacemaker.un.org/sites/peacemaker.un.org/files/Memorandum%20on%20the%20creation%20of%20de-escalation%20areas%20in%20the%20Syrian%20Arab%20Republic%20-%20%20The%20Ministry%20of%20Foreign%20Affairs%20of%20the%20Rus.pdf>

³ [August 2017 Report of the OCPW Joint Investigative Mechanism](#)

⁴ [2118](#) , [2235](#)

⁵ http://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BF96FF9%7D/s_res_2254.pdf

⁶ SC Resolution 2375 http://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BF96FF9%7D/s_res_2375.pdf

⁷ <https://www.newyorker.com/news/news-desk/why-china-isnt-ready-to-put-pressure-on-north-korea>

⁸ <http://www.dw.com/en/russia-and-china-urge-peaceful-solution-with-north-korea/a-40573959>

⁹ http://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BF96FF9%7D/s_pv_7996.pdf