Origins of the Crisis

   The al-Assad regime first came into power in 1970 after a bloodless military coup put the government in the hands of Hafiz al-Assad, the father of current Syrian president Bashar al-Assad. Hafiz al-Assad established an authoritarian regime and kept the country under an emergency law that was first implemented in 1962. Under the Syrian constitution, the president is granted the right to call a State of Emergency, which strips citizens of most constitutional rights and gives the government almost unlimited power in regards to domestic security. With the ability to arrest, detain, and execute dissidents whenever it sees fit, the government under Hafiz al-Assad was able to intimidate Syrian citizens and deter them from protesting en masse. As a result, al-Assad was able to quell popular resistance with relative ease until 1976, which marked the beginning of an insurrection headed by the fundamentalist Sunni organization, the Muslim Brotherhood.

   The uprising was violently crushed in 1982, when Syrian armed forces raided the city of Hama, killing over 10,000 Syrian citizens. The Hama massacre showed Syrians that al-Assad was not afraid to use violence against his own people and, in effect, discouraged even the slightest thought in the popular Syrian mind of openly challenging the president's rule again. Despite various human rights violations and the continued denial of constitutional rights, Syrians remained reluctant to protest against the government until al-Assad died in 2000, after ruling for 30 years. Not much changed after Assad's death, however, as parliament swiftly ratified an amendment changing the minimum age of the president from 40 to 34, which allowed al-Assad's son Bashar to take over immediately.

   Many had high hopes for change when Bashar inherited the presidency and Syrians have patiently waited over a decade for economic and human rights reforms. However, the people's patience has worn thin. Bashar's failure to come through on promises for change sparked minor protests in January of this year. The situation escalated in March after the Syrian military

attacked civilians protesting against the arrest of Syrian youths in the Southwestern city of Deraa. Much like Muammar Gadhafi of Libya, al-Assad has blamed the uprising on conspiracies and Islamist Extremists. Originally, Syrian protestors were not demanding an immediate departure of al-Assad nor were they demanding a regime change. Nevertheless, continued violence against protestors has caused further outrage and Syrians are now pushing for al-Assad to go.

Internal actors   **External actors**

-    Syrian Arab Republic   The United Nations (UN)
-    President Bashar al-Assad   The European Union (EU)
-    Pro-democracy protestors   The United States of America (USA)

Current Situation

After 48 years, the Emergency Law in Syria was finally lifted by President Bashar al-Assad in April. The Syrian president has also granted citizenship to thousands of Kurds, released several political prisoners, and replaced his entire cabinet in an attempt to appease protestors throughout the nation. These concessions have not been enough for Syrian protestors, however, and protestors continue to take to the streets and demand al-Assad's departure. One of the largest protests to date occurred earlier this week when over 10,000 Syrians gathered

together in Hama, Syria's fourth largest city. The massive protest remained peaceful thanks to an earlier withdrawal of security forces, but many fear that advancing pro-Assad troops may soon clash with protestors.

In order to avoid violence in Hama and other major cities, over 10,000 Syrians have already taken refuge in Turkey and many more are expected to flee the country soon. However, the Shia Muslim community in Turkey has protested against allowing predominately Sunni refugees from Syria into the country. Many Turks also support al-Assad and are sharply criticizing those attempting to escape the conflict. If violence erupts against Syrian refugees in Turkey, the conflict will undoubtedly become more globalized and will likely provoke a UN intervention. The international community has already strongly condemned Syria's continued use of violence against protestors thus far. The European Union and the United States have both imposed economic sanctions on Syria for its human rights violations but it appears unlikely that there will be any sort of military intervention. In fact, NATO recently announced that it not would launch military operations in Syria like it has in Libya.

The United Nation's Stance

UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon has called the violence used against demonstrators "unacceptable" and has insisted that the Syrian government end all violence against its citizens. The UN is currently demanding access for its workers to give humanitarian aid to Syrian citizens in need of food, water, and medical supplies. Despite requests from the EU, however, the UN Security Council has yet to take direct action in Syria. Whether or not the UN will intervene directly in the conflict remains to be seen.

More Information

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