

Syria Unrest

Syria is one of the oldest places where civilization has thought to have started. Its capital, Damascus, is one of the oldest continuously inhabited cities in the world. Throughout history it has seen many changes, violent and otherwise.

Today it is comprised of a number of ethnic groups, mostly Arab, though a reasonable number of Kurds, Armenians are also present. There have also been a number of Iraqi refugees and the main Arab group are themselves from different sects and denominations.

Around January 2011, following on from the Arab Spring where protests against ruling regimes erupted in a number of Middle East countries, protesters in Syria came out demanding President Bashar al-Assad and his government step down. In response, Assad sent in troops with some cities and regions being besieged for weeks and months. Both pro and anti-government protest gatherings have at times been large.

Criticism of Syria's crackdown has been quite widespread. The Arab League has responded by suspending Syria's membership. Syria claims that it is fighting an insurgency that is terrorist by nature and claimed Al Qaeda is involved. It has not been possible to verify that claim so many see it as a cynical excuse.

The ruling regime is a sect of Shia, so has support from Iran and Lebanese Hezbollah, while the opposition is largely Sunni, thus receiving support from other Middle East countries, such as Saudi Arabia and others.

Thousands have been killed — civilians and armed combatants. Some are asking the West for a military intervention like there was in Libya, but the US in particular is not keen on another military intervention even though they have been openly hostile and critical of the Syrian ruling regime for many years.

China and Russia also have close ties with Syria and to date have not been keen on any action condemning Syria and have even vetoed some actions. Some papers have reported Iran and others helping Syria with weapons, while others also mentioned the opposition being armed by the West.

Mainstream media coverage is of course part of the issue; understandably the brutal regime crackdown has been met with shock, horror, etc. But the coverage has also been one-sided in the sense that similar types of violence committed by US-led coalition forces in Afghanistan and Pakistan do not receive similar criticism, but much flatter and measured reporting instead. Media Lens covers this point in much more detail pointing out many propaganda problems in mainstream media coverage and is worth reading.