



Model Arab League

Annotated Bibliography for Syria

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This annotated bibliography was created to serve as a research resource for students taking part in the National Council on U.S.-Arab Relations' Model Arab League Program. With the understanding that research can be intimidating and time consuming, an effort was made to find a set of scholarly articles that give a detailed background and thorough account of the current situation for this League of Arab States member. Included are annotations designed to give a description of the source with the intention of students completing the research on their own. There has been an attempt to focus on more contemporary scholarship, specifically post-9/11 and post-2011 (so-called "Arab Spring") where possible, as these are two phenomena that fundamentally changed politics in the Arab world. These sources should provide students with a solid basis for understanding the country they are representing in both regionally and globally significant issues as well as the interests of other countries within the League of Arab States.

At the time of this writing, Syria is in a state of war. Protests that began in March of 2011 in the wake of the Arab Spring were met with a government military response. The use of lethal force by the Syrian army on civilian protesters eventually led the protests to become armed in rebellion. The ongoing state of affairs in Syria has become a humanitarian crisis, as refugees flee from Syria into neighboring countries and the Syrian army routinely bombs areas suspected of harboring and aiding rebels. The fatal effects these actions have on Syrian civilians have drawn international condemnation, yet the regime appears to show no signs of leniency or restraint. Accusations (and in some countries' opinions, confirmation) of the use of chemical weapons have arisen, raising questions of whether war crimes have been committed. While the use of chemical weapons would be horrible, the fact remains that many Syrians continue to be killed by conventional weapons. As the war has dragged on, it has also dragged in extremist elements that can fracture and discredit the opposition. Because the war in Syria is a continuously and rapidly changing situation, it is difficult for academia to keep up. With this in mind, it should be noted that the best information on Syria right now will be news reporting and students are strongly encouraged to follow developments in Syria closely. Given the lag between current events and scholarly analysis, this annotated bibliography should prove useful for understanding the lead up to the Syrian revolt, events that took place within the first year, and some international relations that factor into the conflict. In addition, this guide includes some sources on issues Syria faces that are not directly related to the revolution.

1. Abbas William Samii, "A Stable Structure on Shifting Sands: Assessing the Hizbullah-Iran-Syria Relationship," *Middle East Journal*, Volume 62, Number 1, Winter 2008, pp. 32-53. •• Iran, the Syrian government, and Hizbullah in Lebanon are considered to be close allies in the contemporary Middle East. This tripartite relationship is important to bear in mind as it most certainly plays a role in the regional implications of the Syrian conflict. While the three political actors have had divergent interests in the past, historical events have steered them toward similar positions. Interestingly, Syria is seen having played a powerful central role acting as a bridge between Iran and Hizbullah, especially

when Iraq and Iran were in opposition. This article details contemporary historical events that laid the groundwork for the alliance between Iran, Syria, and Hizbullah in Lebanon, and explains future implications of their connections like the emergence of a “Shi’a Crescent”.

2. Raymond Hinnebusch, “Syria: From ‘Authoritarian Upgrading’ to Revolution?” *International Affairs*, Volume 88, Issue 1, January 2012, pp. 95-113. •• Before his regime crackdown on popular uprisings in Syria, Bashar al-Assad was actually viewed favorably among Syrian citizens and other Arab countries. Upon succeeding Hafez al-Assad, Bashar embarked on a campaign to modernize Syria, liberalizing the economy to allow for more trade and investment as well as bringing internet access. At the same time Bashar created a sense of domestic legitimacy by positioning himself as a defender of Arabs, someone willing to stand up to Israel and the West. While this worked to some extent, it had unintended consequences like weakening the Syrian economy, a possible foundation for future discontent. This article is a densely packed historical account of the processes leading to Syria’s current state including Hafez al-Assad’s ascension to power, passing of the torch to his son Bashar, and the changing internal political and religious dynamics of Syria.
3. Annika Rabo, “‘We are Christians and We are Equal Citizens’: Perspectives on Particularity and Pluralism in Contemporary Syria,” *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations*, Volume 23, Number 1, January 2012, 79-93. •• Syria home to a diverse religious makeup that includes Sunni and Shi’a Muslims, many different Christian denominations, and Druze. Within these religious groups, their adherents can be Syrian, Kurdish, Circassian, and Armenian, among other smaller ethnic groups. While the country has a Muslim majority, the government has been secular for some time as a Ba’athist regime. Bashar al-Assad actually oversaw a liberalization of the government’s stance on religion in the public sphere allowing people of certain religions to use their own civil courts and lifting the ban on the *hijab*. This article illustrates the religious demographics of Syria and argues that any religious divisions within the country are generally framed in a gender biased manner.
4. Monique C. Cardinal, “Religious Education in Syria: Unity and Difference,” *British Journal of Religious Education*, Volume 31, Number 2, March 2009, pp. 91-101. •• While Syria does have both Sunni and Shi’a Muslims as well as various Christian sects, religious education in Syria treats them as two large groups, Muslim and Christian. Both communities have lived alongside each other for almost fourteen centuries and after colonial redrawing of borders, Christians and Muslims were made part of the modern Syrian state. Interestingly, the religious education curricula for both religions appear to be relatively similar. According to this author’s observations, Syrian religious education

teach analogous stories of Muslim and Christian prophets and emphasize national unity alongside an ecumenism that allows for denominational autonomy.

5. Omar S. Dahi and Yasser Munif, "Revolts in Syria: Tracking the Convergence Between Authoritarianism and Neoliberalism," *Journal of Asian and African Studies*, Volume 47, Number 4, August 2012, pp. 323-332. •• There are many angles by which to analyze the revolts associated with the Arab Spring including dissatisfaction with government repression and the push from within for greater democratic representation. Some scholars point to economic reasons, citing the existence of a large Arab youth bubble coupled with high levels of unemployment. This article sees the revolt in Syria to be a product of economic woes, however on more of a macro-level. The authors point out that Hafez al-Assad and the Ba'athists came to power inspired by Nasserist socialism. With the collapse of the Soviet Union, socialism was deemed a failure as well, and Bashar al-Assad came to power promising liberal reforms. It was these liberalizing measures that alienated a lot of Syrians previously employed in the public sector when they felt abandoned by the government and the private sector fared relatively well.
6. Hafizullah Emadi, "Requiem for the Baath Party: Struggle for Change and Freedom in Syria," *Mediterranean Quarterly*, Volume 22, Number 4, 2011, pp. 62-79. •• Under Hafez al-Assad, Syria experienced uprisings in the 1980's. Hafez dealt with these uprisings, the epicenter of which was in Hama, in a brutal fashion, killing more than 20,000 civilians in a short period of time. Then, and now in the current Syrian uprisings, the official rhetoric coming from the government is that of upholding Arab nationalism over religious sectarianism. In Bashar's case, he has often stated that dissidents within Syria today are acting on behalf of Israel and/or the West in sowing seeds of discontent, an attempt to portray himself still as the defender of Syria from invaders. This article concludes by pointing out that one of the main differences between the Syrian revolution and others associated with the Arab Spring is that the Army is still majorly supportive of the regime.
7. Musa al-Gharbi, "Syria Contextualized: The Numbers Game," *Middle East Policy*, Volume 20, Number 1, Spring 2013, pp. 56-67. •• The fact that the Syrian rebellion has not overwhelmingly succeeded begs the question as to whether the Syria opposition is actually a popular opposition. Unfortunately in this case, statistics can be used against the Syrian opposition to make it appear that the rebel fighters are actually an unpopular, radical, and on the fringe, and their supporters are actually ambivalent at best. This author takes on the role of devil's advocate and plays the "numbers game" in order to refute various claims about the Syrian government's brutality, the rebellion's popularity, and the civilian support for revolution. This article highlights one of the largest problems that the Syrian opposition faces, that is, controlling the political discourse regarding their

movement.

8. Christopher Phillips, "Syria's Torment," *Survival: Global Politics and Strategy*, Volume 54, Number 4, August-September 2012, pp. 67-82. •• Few analysts expected Syria to experience uprisings of its own following other countries within the Arab Spring. Many thought of Syria as a relatively stable Arab state despite its heterogeneity. This was often the image touted by Bashar al-Assad, namely that he was the lynchpin of stability and a model to follow given the sectarian strife witnessed historically in Lebanon and more recently in Iraq. As the war in Syria ages, questions of foreign intervention are increasingly raised as there appears to be no internal solution. This article gives some historical context to the Syrian revolution taking place and describes the stakes that various other states and international actors have in the outcome.
9. Roberto La Rovere, Adriana Bruggeman, Francis Turkelboom, Aden Aw-Hassan, Richard Thomas and Kasem Al-Ahmad, "Options to Improve Livelihoods and Protect Natural Resources in Dry Environments : The Case of the Khanasser Valley in Syria," *The Journal of Environment & Development*, Volume 18, Number 2, June 2009, pp. 107-129. •• Syria is classified by the World Bank as an agriculture-based country. With an economy largely based on agriculture, Syrians are interested in improving their farming capabilities and efficiency of water use. The Khanasser valley, about 80 kilometers south of Aleppo, is home to the Khanasser Valley Integrated Research Site (KVIRS) and the International Center for Agricultural Research in the Dry Areas (ICARDA) where scientists have been searching for means to improve agricultural practices in the region. Of course, any farming relies on water, and this article shows that wheat (the predominant crop) farming actually requires a high initial investment, consumes more water than other crops, and therefore does not have as high a return on investment as other crops, all things considered. This article outlines some of their findings which recommend the use of improved barley varieties, switching from barley and/or wheat to cumin, and the possible expansion of olive harvesting.
10. Oray Egin, "The Game Changer: Syria, Iran, and Kurdish Independence," *World Affairs*, May/June 2013, pp. 64-72. •• One of the sizable minority groups in Syria are the Kurds, who are also present in Iraq and Turkey. Prior to the Syrian revolution, Turkey's Tayyip Erdogan had amicable relations with Bashar al-Assad, however in the wake of the Arab Spring, Erdogan's calculations changed and he supported the rebels. This change led Bashar along with Iran to support the Kurdistan Worker's Party (PKK) in Turkey in an attempt to destabilize the region and counter Turkey's political support of the Syrian opposition. Syrian/Iranian backing of the PKK in Turkey may have escalated the conflict there enough to force the Erdogan to negotiate another ceasefire with the Ocalan and the Kurds. In a stunning turn of events, Ocalan even called for a Kurdish withdrawal from

Turkey, which has the potential to immensely alter the national landscape of the Middle East.