IYC 2025
Global Security Organization
Study Guide

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Letter from the Executive Board

Honorable Delegates,

We are thrilled to welcome you to the Global Security Organization (GSO) at the International Youth Conference 2025. As one of IYC's largest committees, we will deliberate on a highly complex and pressing issue: "Assessing the Use and Misuse of the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) Doctrine in the Syrian Civil War." As the global community grapples with evolving humanitarian crises, it is essential that we examine the application of R2P; a doctrine designed to safeguard the world when those entrusted to protect us fail — and critically evaluate its role, effectiveness, and limitations within the context of Syria.

Over the course of two days, delegates will engage in intense debates, nuanced discussions, and collaborative problem-solving. Our agenda invites you to explore the geopolitical, legal, and ethical dimensions of the R2P doctrine, while analyzing the interplay of international actors, regional dynamics, and the broader implications for global governance. We encourage you to come well-prepared with a deep understanding of the topic, backed by extensive research and diverse perspectives.

We emphasise the importance of delving beyond the background guide to uncover the intricacies of the Syrian conflict and the international community's responses. Your informed contributions will be key to driving meaningful discourse, challenging prevailing narratives, and crafting innovative policy recommendations. Together, we aim to foster an inclusive space where every delegate's voice is heard, respected, and valued.

We eagerly anticipate the insights, creativity, and diplomacy that each of you will bring to the table. By engaging actively, questioning critically, and collaborating constructively, we are confident that you will shape discussions that resonate far beyond the conference walls.

We assure you that the GSO at IYC 2025 will be an intellectually stimulating and memorable experience — one that sharpens your understanding of global security issues while enhancing your skills as future leaders and changemakers.

Welcome to the Global Security Organization.

Warm regards,
Sanah Ramchandani, Chair
Aanya Shah, Vice Chair

Introduction

The Syrian Civil War began with widespread anti-government protests in March 2011. Syria's government under President Bashar al-Assad faced an unprecedented challenge when pro-democracy protests erupted throughout the country. The Assad regime's violent crackdown, using police, military and paramilitary forces against civilians, quickly escalated the uprising into full-scale civil war. This conflict has generated one of the worst humanitarian catastrophes of the 21st century, with hundreds of thousands killed and millions displaced. For example, by late 2018 over 465,000 people had died and about half the population (approx. 12 million) were uprooted. The scale of atrocites has repeatedly raised the question of the UN's Responsibility to Protect (R2P) doctrine, which holds that states must protect populations from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity. In Syria, calls to enforce R2P have been deeply contested: vetoes by Russia and China at the UN Security Council blocked collective action, while unilateral strikes (e.g. against chemical weapons) by the US, UK and France have been variously defended as humanitarian intervention or criticized as misuse of R2P.

I. History of the agenda

1970–1971: *Baʿthist Coup and Assad Takeover.* Hafez al-Assad seized power in a 1970 coup and was elected President in 1971. He established an authoritarian regime dominated by the Baʿth Party and Assad's Alawite minority.

1982: *Hama Massacre.* The Assad regime brutally suppressed an Islamist uprising in the city of Hama, reportedly killing tens of thousands of civilians. (By some accounts, up to 40,000 people were killed in that one episode.) This entrenched a legacy of severe repression.

1991–2000: *Lebanon and Succession.* Syria extended its influence over Lebanon (Syrian forces remained in Lebanon under a 1991 cooperation treaty). In May 2000, Israeli troops withdrew from southern Lebanon, ending a long occupation. Also in 2000, Hafez al-Assad died and his son Bashar al-Assad became president, continuing the family's rule.

2006–2010: *Economic Strains and Drought.* Syria suffered a severe drought (2006–2010), the worst in its modern history. Crop failures and water shortages drove many rural families into poverty and displacement. These socioeconomic stresses along with entrenched corruption and inequality created widespread frustration among Syrians on the eve of the Arab Spring.

II. Key Definitions

- **Responsibility to Protect (R2P):** A UN-endorsed doctrine (adopted in 2005) asserting that states must protect their citizens from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity. R2P also obliges the international community to intervene (diplomatically, legally or militarily) if a state manifestly fails to protect its population. (This concept frames the debate over foreign intervention in Syria.)

- **Civil War:** An internal armed conflict within a sovereign state involving government forces and organized opposition groups. Syria's conflict involves multiple factions (government, opposition militias, extremist groups) and foreign proxies.

- **Chemical Weapons:** Weapons using toxic chemicals (e.g. sarin, chlorine) as agents of mass destruction. Their use is banned by international law. Alleged chemical attacks in Syria (2013, 2017) drew global condemnation and international strikes, citing R2P imperatives.

- **Rebel Faction / Free Syrian Army (FSA):** A coalition of armed opposition groups formed in 2011 by former Syrian military officers. The FSA was one of the first major organized rebel fronts in the conflict, aiming to overthrow the Assad government.

- **Safe Zone / Buffer Zone:** A demilitarized area between conflicting parties, monitored or enforced by external powers. In Syria, Russia and Turkey established an Idlib "buffer zone" (2018) where heavy weapons were to be withdrawn. Such zones have been proposed under R2P discussions to protect civilians.

III. Current Situation

The Syrian Civil War remains unresolved. The Assad government, with Russian and Iranian support, has recaptured the majority of Syrian territory, including major cities like Damascus, Aleppo, and Homs. However, large enclaves remain outside government control: most of Idlib province in northwestern Syria is held by Islamist rebel forces, notably Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham, an al-Qaeda affiliate, and much of the northeast is controlled by Kurdish-led forces, the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF).

The fight against ISIS has largely succeeded: the group's so-called "caliphate" was dismantled by 2019, though remnants remain in desert areas. Humanitarian conditions are dire. By late 2018, it was estimated that about 465,000 people had been killed in the conflict and roughly 12 million displaced, half of Syria's pre-war population. Many Syrians remain as refugees in neighboring countries such as Turkey, Lebanon, and Jordan, and beyond. The conflict has left much of the country's infrastructure in ruins. Attacks on civilian areas, sieges of cities, and documented use of chemical weapons, such as sarin in 2013 and chlorine attacks in 2017, have prompted international outrage. In response, the United States, United Kingdom, and France carried out limited air strikes on Syrian government targets in 2017 and 2018, claiming to enforce R2P by punishing chemical attacks.

Politically, Syria remains paralyzed. Multiple rounds of UN- and Russian-led peace talks have failed to produce a negotiated settlement. The last opposition-held pocket in southwestern Syria, Daraa, fell to government control in 2018 under Russian-negotiated deals, and rebels were relocated to Idlib. In January 2019, an Idlib cease-fire under a Russia-Turkey agreement temporarily held, but government forces and allied militias resumed fighting in southern Idlib in 2019. Turkey, fearing Kurdish autonomy near its border, launched a major offensive in northeastern Syria in October 2019. A brief escalation with Turkish-backed forces in Idlib occurred in early 2020 before a new cease-fire was arranged.

Overall, Syria today is divided. The Assad government controls the core of the country, the northwest is held by insurgents, and the northeast is under Kurdish-led administration, backed by US forces until 2019 and now partly cooperating with Damascus. Foreign forces remain: Russia has several military bases and air defenses in Syria, Iran and Iran-backed militias, including Hezbollah, have entrenched positions, Turkey maintains troops and observation posts in the north, and around 2,000 US troops were stationed in

the east until late 2019. The profound humanitarian crisis, with millions of displaced persons and extensive war damage, has been a central factor motivating calls for R2P enforcement.

IV. Timeline (2011–Present) :

March 2011 – Protests and Uprising: Triggered by arrests of youths in Daraa, mass protests erupted demanding political reform. The Assad regime's security forces responded with lethal force. Within weeks, peaceful demonstrations spread nationwide. By summer 2011, the regime was deploying tanks, artillery, and helicopters against cities like Homs and Baniyas.

Mid–2011 – Formation of Rebel Groups: As the crackdown intensified, opposition militias began to form. In July 2011, the Free Syrian Army (FSA) was founded by defecting officers. By September 2011, organized rebel brigades were regularly engaging government troops in urban combat. Syria's neighbors and global powers split into pro- and anti-Assad camps: the US, EU, and some Arab League states condemned Assad, while Iran and Russia supported him. In August 2011, the US and several European leaders publicly called for Assad to step down, and Gulf states such as Qatar, Turkey, and Saudi Arabia joined an "anti-Assad bloc" supporting the opposition.

Late 2011 – UN Vetoes: Efforts to secure the UN Security Council to censure Assad's actions were blocked. In October 2011, Russia and China cast the first of several vetoes on a resolution that would have condemned the Syrian government's crackdown. This use of veto power effectively prevented any UN-mandated military intervention under R2P at that stage.

2012 – Civil War Escalates: By 2012, the conflict had become a full-fledged civil war. Major battles raged in Damascus suburbs, Homs, and Aleppo. The Assad government sought support from allies, increasingly receiving advanced weapons from Iran and Lebanon's Hezbollah, and placing hopes in Russian backing. Opposition forces gained

ground in some areas, but no side achieved decisive victory. Internationally, Western governments imposed economic sanctions on Syria and froze the government's assets.

2013 – Chemical Attacks: On August 21, 2013, a large-scale chemical attack involving sarin nerve agent struck the Damascus suburb of Ghouta, killing hundreds. The opposition accused Assad's forces of carrying it out. This atrocity drew global outrage and calls for action. In late 2013, a Russian-brokered deal led Syria to join the Chemical Weapons Convention and surrender its declared stockpiles for destruction, averting an immediate US strike. No UN resolution was passed due to geopolitical disagreements.

2014 – Rise of ISIS: The Islamist extremist group ISIS exploited the chaos. By mid-2014, ISIS and its al-Qaeda affiliate, Nusra Front, controlled roughly half of Iraq and Syria, declaring a "caliphate." This alarming development prompted the US and allies to launch a broader military campaign in Syria and Iraq against ISIS and other jihadists. A US-led coalition began airstrikes in September 2014.

2015 – Russian Intervention: In September 2015, Russia began direct military intervention. It deployed aircraft and warships to Syria, targeting rebel groups and ISIS, though reports indicate many strikes hit non-ISIS factions. Russian air strikes helped tip the balance in Assad's favor. Around the same time, Iran significantly increased its military advisers and Shia militia support for the Syrian government.

2016 – Aleppo and Cease-fires: A major turning point came in late 2016, when Syrian and Russian forces encircled rebel-held Eastern Aleppo, leading to its surrender in December. This was achieved through massive bombardment, including cluster and incendiary bombs. Aleppo's fall was widely condemned by human rights groups, but no international military intervention occurred. Several temporary cease-fires were attempted, often brokered by Russia and Western countries, but collapsed.

2017 – ISIS Retreat and ChemStrikes: In 2017, ISIS lost its main strongholds. Raqqa, ISIS's de facto capital, fell to the US-backed Syrian Democratic Forces in October 2017, and much of the east, including Dayr al-Zawr, was reclaimed by Assad's forces. During this period, reports of further government use of chemical weapons emerged. In April 2017, a sarin attack in Khan Shaykhun prompted the US to launch 59 cruise missiles at the Shayrat air base. A year later, in April 2018, after a chlorine and nerve-agent attack in Douma, the US, UK, and France conducted over 100 air strikes on Syrian chemical sites. These strikes were justified by leaders as enforcement of R2P against mass-casualty attacks on civilians.

2018 – Regime Advances and Buffer Zone: In mid-2018, Syrian forces backed by Russia and Iran regained much of the south and west, including Daraa and Qunayṭirah. A Russia-mediated deal evacuated rebels from Daraa to Idlib. Meanwhile, Turkey and Russia established a demilitarized buffer zone around much of Idlib in late 2017, with Syrian government and rebel heavy weapons withdrawn. However, January to April 2019 saw renewed fighting. In January, al-Qaeda-linked HTS fighters attacked other rebel factions, seizing most of Idlib. In April 2019, the Syrian army, with Russian air support, crossed into the Idlib zone and began an offensive, capturing territory before being halted by a new agreement.

2019 – Turkish Offensives: In October 2019, Turkey launched a large military incursion into northeastern Syria, shortly after the US announced the withdrawal of its remaining troops from the area. Turkey's goal was to push back the Kurdish YPG, considered a terrorist group by Ankara, and create a "safe zone" for refugees. The offensive led to clashes with Kurdish forces, who then allied with Assad in order to resist, and the displacement of civilians.

2020 – Renewed Clashes and Cease-fire: In early 2020, Syrian government forces backed by Russia bombarded rebel-held Idlib, briefly killing dozens of Turkish soldiers in February. Turkey retaliated, and a new cease-fire was negotiated by Russia and Turkey in March 2020. By mid-2020, the front lines stabilized: government forces held most urban centers and the south, rebels held Idlib, and Kurds controlled the northeast. In

December 2018, after Trump's ISIS defeat declaration, the US announced full troop withdrawal, although a residual American contingent remained to oversee ISIS prisoners.

Throughout this period, diplomatic initiatives such as the Geneva talks, Astana talks, and the UN constitutional committee have repeatedly stalled. No final political settlement has been reached. The Syrian conflict has thus entered a protracted "frozen war" phase, with continued low-intensity violence and heavy foreign influence.

V. Country Specific Information

Syria (Government of Bashar al-Assad): The Assad regime rejects foreign intervention as a violation of sovereignty. Officially, Syria claims to be combating terrorism and denies targeting civilians. In the context of R2P, Damascus has argued that calls for intervention are a pretext for regime change. Syria emphasizes that it supports Arab leadership and has pledged to conduct investigations into war crimes, while blaming extremist insurgents for atrocities. Sectarian rhetoric has been used, with many Assad officials portraying the conflict as a struggle between Sunnis versus the Alawite-led state. The government has repeatedly accused Western states of hypocrisy and insists on non-interference.

Russia: Syria's key international backer. Russia has consistently defended Assad's right to resist "terrorism" and has vetoed UN resolutions on Syria. Militarily, Russia intervened in 2015 with air and ground forces to turn the war in Assad's favor. Russia frames its actions as maintaining state sovereignty and stability and criticizes what it sees as weaponization of R2P by Western powers. Moscow portrays itself as fighting jihadist terrorism, even when some strikes hit non-ISIS rebels, and positions Russia as an indispensable partner for any peace process.

Iran: Assad's principal regional ally. Tehran has poured money, weapons, and militias, including Lebanon's Hezbollah, into Syria to ensure the regime's survival. Iranian leaders argue they are defending Syria from Sunni extremism and protecting Iran's interests, such as access to Lebanon. Along with Russia, Iran has participated in peace negotiations. Iran's role is widely criticized by opponents, but Tehran insists it was invited by Syria

and portrays external sanctions on Syria as unjust. Iran's support for Assad predates the civil war, as Syria and Iran have been close since the 1979 Islamic Revolution.

Saudi Arabia: Initially a major backer of Syria's Sunni opposition. Saudi Arabia funded and armed rebel groups and led the Arab League's anti-Assad position early in the conflict. As the war dragged on, Saudi Arabia shifted focus to other crises, such as Yemen, and became more open to a diplomatic solution involving Assad. Recently, Saudi officials have signaled a willingness to assist in reconstruction, as indicated by U.S. statements in 2018. Officially, Saudi Arabia condemns Assad's human rights abuses but now advocates an "Arab role" in Syria.

Turkey: From 2011, Turkey strongly opposed Assad. It hosted millions of Syrian refugees and supported multiple opposition factions, including Islamist groups. Turkey called for no-fly zones and safe areas, a form of R2P-style protection for civilians, but never obtained international backing. Ankara intervened militarily to expel ISIS and Kurdish YPG forces from its border areas, through Operations Euphrates Shield in 2016 and Olive Branch in 2018. In 2019, it launched Operation Peace Spring against Kurdish enclaves in the northeast. Turkey sees Assad as illegitimate and fears a powerful Kurdish region on its frontier. It demands that any resolution include guarantees against separatism. Turkey has condemned Russian and Syrian actions against rebels in Idlib, yet has also coordinated with Russia on cease-fires.

United States: The U.S. initially focused on counterterrorism in Syria. It provided covert support to some rebel groups and led a coalition against ISIS. The U.S. launched missile strikes on Syrian government targets twice, in 2017 and 2018, in retaliation for chemical attacks. These strikes were presented as limited enforcement of R2P. However, the U.S. never sought to overthrow Assad directly, and by 2019 had announced a full withdrawal of troops. U.S. policy has emphasized ISIS defeat and punishing use of WMDs, while supporting UN-led political talks. The Trump Administration publicly suggested that Gulf states, such as Saudi Arabia, should bear the cost of Syria's reconstruction. Congress and humanitarian agencies continue to push for human rights accountability in Syria.

United Kingdom: A member of the anti-ISIS coalition, the UK conducted air strikes on ISIS and launched missile strikes on Syrian targets after chemical attacks in April 2018, alongside the U.S. and France. The UK has been vocal at the UN about Assad's use of chemical weapons, supporting international investigations. British officials reject full-scale intervention without UN mandate but have called for accountability for atrocities. The UK has provided humanitarian aid to Syrians and refugees. As a permanent UN Security Council member, the UK, with France and the U.S., has often been blocked by Russian and Chinese vetoes from imposing actions under R2P.

Afghanistan: Not directly involved. Afghanistan has focused on its own internal conflict and has no official military or political role in Syria. The Afghan government has not participated in the Syria debate at the UN or otherwise. Some jihadist fighters of Afghan origin joined militant groups in Syria, but as a state, Afghanistan's foreign policy has been limited. Afghan leaders generally support national sovereignty and likely view the Syrian crisis with concern over the potential spillover of extremism.

Israel: Maintains a cautious stance. Israel has not publicly championed R2P in Syria, but it has condemned Syria's alliances with Iran and Hezbollah. Israeli jets have struck Iranian and Hezbollah military sites in Syria dozens of times, aiming to prevent arms transfers. Israel views the Syrian conflict through a security lens, especially regarding threats on the Golan Heights, rather than a humanitarian one. Israeli officials insist they have no territorial ambitions in Syria but wish to see a stable buffer. Israel welcomed reports of Assad's weakening but also opposed violent Iranian expansion under the regime's cover.

Kuwait: As a Gulf monarchy, Kuwait has aligned with other Arab states in condemning Assad's brutality. Kuwait has contributed humanitarian assistance for Syrian refugees and internally displaced people. Kuwait's government advocates a peaceful, political resolution and has backed Arab League statements calling for an end to the bloodshed. It has not provided military support to the Syrian opposition and has urged non-interference, likelybeing mindful of R2P principles but preferring diplomatic means.

Bahrain: Initially, Bahrain joined its Gulf neighbors in denouncing Assad's violence. Like Saudi Arabia, it provided diplomatic support to the opposition in 2011. By 2018, Bahrain, along with the UAE, moved to normalize relations. It announced resumption of work at its Damascus embassy after the UAE reopened its embassy. Bahrain's government states that it aims to strengthen the Arab role in Syria and oppose regional interference. In practice, Bahrain's policy has followed the UAE, focusing on post-war reconstruction and diplomacy rather than continued regime change.

Oman: Oman has been notably neutral throughout the conflict. It has not joined the military or sanctions campaigns against Assad. Oman has hosted discussions and advocated dialogue. Omani officials emphasize sovereignty and non-interference. Oman's approach reflects its broader foreign policy of maintaining ties with all parties, including Iran. It has quietly encouraged Syria's reintegration into the Arab fold, for example by inviting Syrian officials to meetings, arguing that Gulf interests are best served by stability and Arab leadership in Syria.

Qatar: Qatar was an early and vocal backer of the anti-Assad opposition. It provided substantial funding and media support, especially via Al Jazeera, to rebel groups in 2011 to 2014. Qatari leaders framed their policy as supporting democracy and the Syrian people. However, as the war stalemated and extremist elements grew, Qatar's policy became more cautious. It continued to host Syrian opposition figures and advocated for a negotiated settlement. Qatar did not restore full diplomatic ties in 2018 to 2019 but has resumed some contacts. Officially, Qatar calls for a new Syrian government and constitutional change, viewing Assad as illegitimate.

United Arab Emirates: The UAE initially gave modest support to anti-Assad rebels but was never a main conduit for weapons. By late 2018, the UAE shifted course. It reopened its embassy in Damascus and began to engage with the Assad government. The UAE now emphasizes counterterrorism cooperation and postwar reconstruction. Emirati officials argue that an Arab-led solution, with Assad's participation, is needed to prevent chaos and curb Iranian influence. The UAE's stance reflects a prioritization of regional stability over regime change.

Each country's actions and rhetoric in Syria are often justified in terms of R2P, protection of civilians, or sovereignty, depending on their interests. For example, Western powers highlight humanitarian concerns in blaming the Assad regime, whereas Russia and Iran portray themselves as protecting Syria from Islamist extremism. In practice, geopolitical considerations have strongly influenced how R2P has been invoked or rejected in this conflict.

VI. Preambulatory and Operative Clauses

Preambulatory Clauses

Affirming	Deeply conscious	Fully believing
Alarmed by	Deeply convinced	Further deploring
Approving	Deeply disturbed	Further recalling
Aware of	Deeply regretting	Guided by
Believing	Deploring	Having adopted
Bearing in mind	Desiring	Having considered
Cognizant of	Emphasizing	Having considered further
Confident	Expecting	Having devoted attention
Contemplating	Expressing its appreciation	Having examined
Convinced	Expressing its satisfaction Fulfilling	Having heard
Declaring	Fully aware	Having received
Deeply concerned		Having studied

Operative Clauses

Accepts	Declares accordingly	Further proclaims	Regrets
Affirms	Demands*	Further remind	Requests
Approves	Deplores	Further recommends	Resolves
Authorizes	Draws attention	Further requests	Solemnly affirms
Calls for	Designates	Further resolves	Strongly condemns
Calls upon	Emphasizes	Has resolved	Supports
Condemns	Encourages	Notes	Takes note of
Congratulates	Endorses	Proclaims	Trusts
Confirms	Expresses its appreciation	Reaffirms	Urges
Considers	Expresses its hope	Recommends	
Decides	Further invites	Reminds	

Moderated Caucus Topics

1) Was R2P Effectively Invoked in Syria?
2) Role of the UN Security Council in Enforcing R2P in Syria
3) Impact of Russian and Chinese Vetoes on R2P Action in Syria
4) Civilian Protection vs. Regime Change: Interpreting Intentions Behind R2P
5) Should R2P Be Reformed? Proposals for a More Effective Framework
6) Rebuilding International Consensus on R2P Post-Syria
7) Preventing Future Failures: Strengthening R2P Implementation Mechanisms

VII. Points a Resolution Must Answer

1. R2p Rests on the principle that sovereignty not only gives a state the right to 'control' its affairs, but also its responsibility to protect the people within its borders.
   It is proposed that when a state fails to do so, either through:
   a. Lack of ability
   b. Lack of resources
   c. Lack of willingness
   d. With the intention to harm their people
   e. That responsibility shifts to the broader international community, which can then legitimately violate such a state's sovereignty to achieve a higher aim of humanitarian protection.
2. Define the scope of legitimate R2P intervention vs. misuse.
3. Acknowledge where the doctrine was respected or violated in Syria.
4. Analyze the UN Security Council's role and inaction due to vetoes.
5. Evaluate the legality and legitimacy of unilateral/multilateral actions taken in Syria under the pretext of R2P.
6. Propose cooperation with the International Criminal Court (ICC) or ad hoc tribunals.
7. Suggest mechanisms for truth, reconciliation, and victim reparations.
8. Ensure aid access and protection of humanitarian workers.
9. Recommend clearer international standards for invoking R2P.
10. Suggest a periodic review of R2P's implementation and effectiveness.