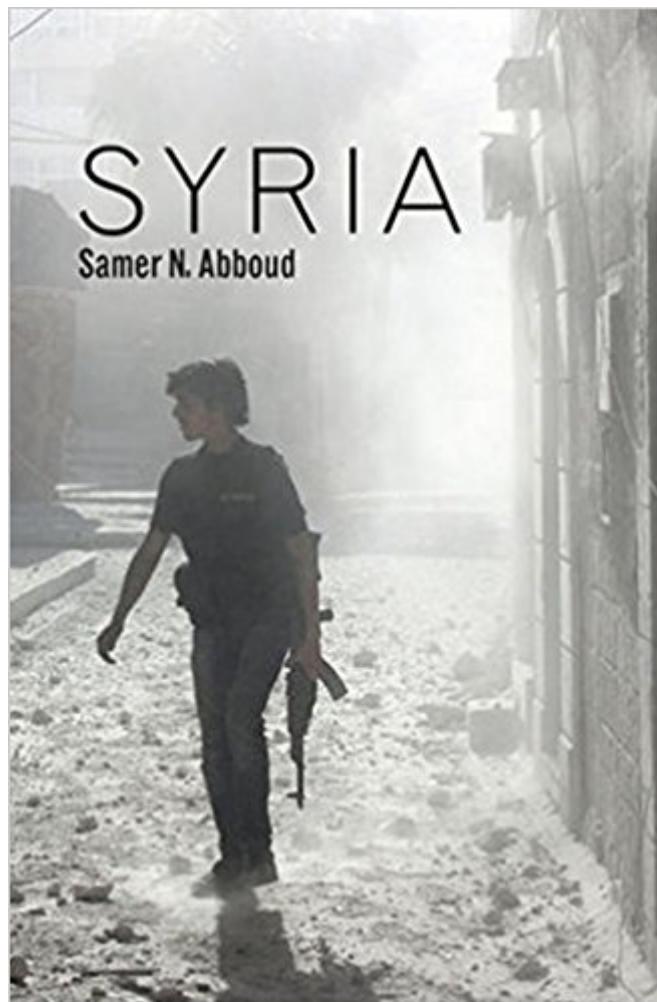


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# Syria (Hot Spots In Global Politics)



## Synopsis

Syria was once one of the Middle East's most stable states. Today it is a country on its knees. Almost 200,000 people are estimated to have died in its bloody internal conflict and, as the violence intensifies, Syria's future looks bleak. In this timely book, Samer Abboud provides an in-depth analysis of Syria's descent into civil war. He unravels the complex and multi-layered causes of the current political and military stalemate - from rebel fragmentation to the differing roles of international actors, and the rise of competing centers of power throughout the country. Rebel in-fighting and the lack of a centralizing authority, he contends, have exacerbated Syria's fragmentation and fragility. This, in turn, has aided the survival of the Assad regime, contributed to the upsurge of sectarianism, and led to a major humanitarian crisis as nine million Syrians have been forced to flee their homes. A resolution to the Syrian conflict seems unlikely in the short-term as the major actors remains committed to a military solution. As this situation persists, the continued fighting is reshaping Syria's borders and will have repercussions on the wider Middle East for decades to come.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"This book brings together the phases and dimensions of the Syrian conflict in a uniquely convincing and comprehensive way. This is prefaced by a useful overview of the historical context of the Uprising. The book's sections on the militarisation of the conflict are especially valuable."

Raymond Hinnebusch, University of St Andrews Samer Abboud offers a cogent survey of multiple dimensions of the Syrian civil war. Readers will find authoritative, yet accessible, treatments of the radical Islamists of the Assistance Front (Jabhat al-Nusra) and the Islamic State, the innovative Kurdish autonomy project, the horrendous economic and human costs of the fighting, and the puzzling responses of foreign actors, particularly Russia and the United Nations, among many other crucial topics. Fred H. Lawson, Mills College

Samer N. Abboud is Associate Professor of International Studies at the Department of Historical and Political Studies, Arcadia University

Fantastic Overview of the last few years and essential for anyone who wants to understand the conflict in Syria.

Samer Abboud is Associate Professor of International Studies at the Department of Historical and Political studies at Arcadia University. In this book he attempts in six chapters to give a history of Syria from its Ottoman years to the French Mandate and the Ba'ath Party control starting in the early 1960s, Syria's history with Israel and Palestine, its collaboration with Iran in the region and how all that brought Syria to its present crisis. The 2011 Syrian uprising is presented in full context (and compared to other uprisings in the region known now as the "Arab Spring,") then he introduces the growing opposition, international intervention and internal fragmentation, the growing humanitarian crisis and finally a resolution. All chapters are well-presented with a solid conclusion. This book must be read in its entirety. Knowing the pre-uprising history is important because the Ba'ath Party quieted all opposition. Syria's borders may have been artificially drawn by its colonial oppressors, but it is a region of small sects and tribes that for many years have been able to live cohesively. Dissenters were either forced into exile or executed. As long as political unrest did not threaten the Assad Syrian government, nothing was done. Those who had the power to influence the people were far away; there was no central leadership. Then the uprising became militarized and an armed opposition ensued. It's no wonder then that ISIS and al-Qaeda were able to storm through and take over parts of Syria because opponents were scattered and not unified nor organized to resist at first. (That is slowly changing though) The educated middle class, the successful business owners and investors were all safely in Damascus and ready to defend the Assad regime. Abboud's narrative is comprehensible and clear, and the chapters flow well. This uprising in Syria did not start as a religious war, it was a socio-economic war that ISIS has taken

advantage of. But more important now for the global concern are the refugees streaming into Lebanon, Turkey, Jordan, Iraq, and Europe and spreading the crisis elsewhere as a socio-humanitarian-economic crisis. All the parties to this conflict agree the only solution is a political solution. Abboud claims the solution to this crisis must come from the Syrians themselves, but how can that be achieved when all the parties have different ideas of resolving the crisis? This week conclusion is perhaps the one flaw to this otherwise great narrative. Reading this book gives the reader a much better historical analysis of the current crisis.

“Syria” was written by Samer N. Abboud, Associate Professor of International Studies at Arcadia University, to help the reader understand the broader dynamics driving the [Syrian civil war], why it has persisted, who the main actors are, and why it has evolved in the way it has. Mr. Abboud is a scholar of Middle Eastern descent who specializes in the political economy of the Syrian conflict. Here, he examines the parallel processes of revolution and civil war and their effects on Syrian state and society. This study is organized into six chapters, beginning with an overview of Syria from the end of the French mandate in 1946, through the 1963 Baathist coup, until the beginning of civil war in 2011. From there, Abboud discusses the first months of the uprising before militarization, the four main violent actors in the war, the international dimensions of the conflict, Syria’s territorial fragmentation, and the humanitarian crisis. He concludes with his own ideas about resolution. The first chapter, “The Rise and Fall of the Baath Party,” is full of helpful information. It actually begins in the late Ottoman period, when economic reforms created the landlord-merchant class that dominated Syrian politics until the Baathist coup of 1963. Abboud describes the unstable political landscape during Syria’s democratic years after independence and why and how this led to the Baathist coup, which installed a rural-minoritarian and authoritarian-populist government. He traces the struggles of Pres. Hafez al-Assad and then Pres. Bashar al-Assad to adapt Syria’s economy in the face of an increasingly outdated, failing statist model, culminating in neo-liberal reforms beginning in 2000, which attempted to achieve social welfare through increasingly privatized and marketized mechanisms. The intent of this dual-track liberalization was to create parallel and competing public and private sectors. This disrupted the relationship between state and society. Though he does not describe specific policies adopted by Pres. Bashar al-Assad’s government, Abboud provides a clear account of the social and economic turmoil wrought by the shift away from Syria’s socialist policies, causing a deterioration of

living standards, high unemployment, and limiting the government's social role and therefore influence. The Baath Party had abandoned its rural constituents. Large, impoverished, formerly rural populations congregating in slum villages at the outskirts of cities due to declining agricultural productivity has led to more than one civil war. But Abboud comes to the conclusion that the historical suppression of political parties, autonomous civil society, and of opposition caused the protests by leaving no institutions available for the expression of grievances. Perhaps, but it is unclear what influence those things might have on economic policy, if they would be destabilizing, or if protests would have been avoided altogether. Once Abboud delves into the uprising and eventual war, I felt that the information was of uneven quality – perhaps due to uneven access- and sometimes disingenuous. Abboud is very much opposed to the Syrian government's policies; he downplays the role of foreign actors in the protests and the war; he exaggerates the influence of parties seeking democratic government; and he underestimates – or misrepresents- the sectarian aspects of the civil war. The war is not sectarian in the sense the Western press has often claimed – that much is true. It's not Alawites against Sunnis; most of the Syrian Army is Sunni. But it is sectarian in that a defeat of the government, whether by the Islamic State or by pro-Western democrats, will result in a Sunni-dominated government and fears that religious minorities will be forced to leave (e.g. Iraq, Algeria, Israel) or engage in perpetual civil war (e.g. Iraq), as always happens in the Arab world in cases of majority-rule government. It is difficult to determine exactly when foreign powers first attempted to intervene in Syria and how, as all parties involved want to hide foreign influence. Anti-Iran banners were being waved in Deraa in April 2011. That looks like Saudi involvement to me, yet Abboud dismisses the Syrian government's accusations of foreign interlopers so early. He claims the protesters rejected the regime's overtures and reforms – because they were hollow. Yes, at first, but substantive reforms were also rejected – because the United States was telling protesters not to negotiate. Abboud seems to approve of accommodationist elements in the government, but the fact is that accommodation had no effect on the protesters' behavior. He downplays the foreign elements in the Free Syrian Army and Jabhat al-Nusra. Al-Nusra recruited extensively in the Arabian peninsula, and recruits have been interviewed by Western press. Abboud mentions that Qatar was supplying rebels with arms from Libya but doesn't mention that they were donated by the United States. Likewise, that was American money that the Saudis used to purchase arms from Croatia. He mentions only one military incursion by Turkey; no mention of the roads that the Turkish military built into Syria or the installation of Uigurs from China, with their families, in Latakia governate. In the chapter about the

beginnings of the uprising, the author describes the three main networks that emerged from the opposition and the government's response to them: Local Coordinated Committees (LCCs), which were established to organized protesters, the Syrian National Council (SNC), and the Free Syrian Army (FSA). A chapter on the armed opposition looks at the FSA, Jabhat al-Nusra, the Kurdish Democratic Union Party (PYD), and the Islamic State. There is not much about internal organization, rather the author focuses on whom these groups were/are fighting, admitting that any sense of rebel coherence had disappeared by the end of 2012. On the side of the Syrian government, Abboud discusses the increasingly privatized and decentralized quality of its defenders, as the Syrian Army has been decimated. There is some brief discussion of Hezbollah and of the emergence of warlords on all sides of the conflict. A chapter on the fragmentation of Syria begins well with a detailed description of the administrative structure of the Kurdish Canton-Based Democratic Autonomy of Rojava, but Abboud provides less detailed information on the Islamic State, Jabhat al-Nusra or the various rebel-controlled regions in Southern Syria. This may be due to lack of access. Sami Moubayed was able to interview some citizens and soldiers living under the Islamic State for his book *Under the Black Flag* (2015), which is a reasonably good source of information on Islamic State administration. Abboud tackles the humanitarian crisis in Syria in his last chapter, which looks at the experience of refugees in neighboring nations but does not cover those who have fled to government-held territory in Syria, though they are easy to access. Abboud says that Germany was taking very few refugees, which changed in 2015, making me wonder exactly when this book was completed. Obviously, Samer Abboud has a point of view "you couldn't very well write a book without one- and I don't share it. Abboud specializes in political economy, and that is where Syria excels. You can find some of his work on Carnegie's Middle East Center's web site and some academic papers through Google. I highly recommend the first chapter of *Syria* as an introduction to the economic roots of the Syrian Civil War. I found some blanket statements in subsequent chapters to be misleading. The statements and omissions with which I take issue concern Abboud's dismissal of foreign intervention as a major impetus toward civil war, what I believe to be an exaggeration of the importance of democratic elements in Syria, and omission of any explanation of why the Syrian government saw "and continues to see- the hand of the Muslim Brotherhood behind the whole mess. I intend to read more of Mr. Abboud's work on political economy, but this book gets only a tepid recommendation.

Abboud, Samer N. *Syria*. Malde, MA: Polity Press, 2016  
I am an undergraduate student and have

been conducting research on the Syrian refugee and humanitarian crisis in the Middle East. Since this is a current event, I couldn't find many books on the topic, but with the help of my professor, he guided me towards this helpful source. Samer N. Abboud, a professor of international studies and a man of Arabic descent, eloquently explains the incidents that eventually led to Syria's five-year civil war. The situation is very complex, yet Abboud sheds light and clarity on the issue by focusing on each factor or party separately. The detailed analysis, which spans a couple chapters, organizes the events in chronological order, making it easy for readers to follow. And towards the end of the book, he even analyzes the humanitarian crisis that has evolved within many of the neighboring Middle Eastern nations and the European Union, broadening the scopes of his scholarship. His information is up-to-date and accurate as he has referenced a number of sources that include academic magazines, international newspapers, and scholarly work from well-renowned universities. I haven't finished the entirety of this book but it has been quite helpful in my research thus far as it looks at both the history of the crisis and the present-day realities. It is an excellent source for anyone conducting research within this area or just interested in extending their knowledge on this horrific, unfolding event.

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