

explainity explains: Syrian Conflict

Since 2011, a civil war has raged in Syria. Following the lead of the so-called "Arab Spring", a wave of uprisings and revolutions in the Arab world, the Syrian people have also been protesting against their government with President Bashar al-Assad as its leader.

Syria is home to numerous ethnic and religious groups. And that means different cultures and worldviews.

Over the course of the war, different groups and subgroups have formed with different goals. The war has also expanded into a proxy war. Foreign powers support different sides; whether with money, weapons or foreign aid. They are also pursuing different goals.

Hundreds of thousands of people, many of them innocent, have died in Syria to date. And millions have left the country as refugees.

To examine the situation in early 2018, let's take a closer look.

First, there is President Assad and his government. After some temporary setbacks, they've regained a large majority of the country for their cause. Assad wants to keep power for himself at all costs.

Parts of the northwest and south have moderate oppositional groups fighting for them, groups which hope for an end to corrupt economic politics and for a democratic country.

Other, more radical groups have split off from the opposition .. They occupy parts of northwest Syria, want to bring down the government, and are fighting against the moderate rebels. The goal is to create a Syria in line with the principles of Islam.

In the north, the Kurdish minority is fighting for parts of the country as well. They've never fully accepted by Assad and want to establish their own Kurdish state.

Through the country's long collapse, other extremist groups have been able to invade. The Islamic State, IS for short, fights in Syria against everyone. They want to turn the Middle East into an Islamic Theocracy and destroy other religious groups.

For a while, the IS had a stronghold in Syria and occupied large regions in the East.

Because IS, known as a terrorist organization, wants to acquire power throughout the whole world, it's not only combated in Syria by internal warring parties, but also internationally. One such effort initiated by the U.S., the Anti-IS Coalition, includes all countries involved in the Syrian conflict. As a result, the IS has lost almost all of its controlled areas. Some even say that the IS has been completely defeated in Syria.

President Assad finds support from it's long-standing partner Iran and above all, from Russia. To fight the other groups, they supply weapons and ground forces and fly air strikes for him. Russia's goal: it hopes that an alliance Syria will help strengthen the economic region against the west.

That's an ambition shared by Turkey. Along with the US, they are supporting the moderate rebels in their fight against Assad, among other things with training and ground troops. The US is also helping the Kurdish minority. For Turkey, however, the Kurds are a long-standing source of conflict, which is why they're fighting

against them, to prevent a Kurdish state at the Turkish border. So Turkey has since also invaded the northwest part of the country.

Saudi Arabia supports the radical rebels in their fight against Assad. Mostly because Assad is allied with Iran and a religious war has been raging between Saudi Arabia and Iran for years. With Syria they hope to further develop their religious position in the Middle East.

The war and the collapse of the country have left unmistakable scars. Reconstruction is not conceivable at the moment. Reconciliation attempts by the UN Security Council regularly fail due to the disagreement of many countries.

At a special meeting in late January 2018 with Russia, Turkey, Iran, the UN special representative and parts of the Syrian groups, representatives have argued for democratic elections and a constitutional amendment in Syria.

No one can say what will be left of the traditions and the culture that have shaped the country for centuries. There is also the question, whether there will ever be peaceful coexistence in Syria. And when can all the refugees return to their land?