

Syria crisis in danger of spiraling out of control

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It has now been seven years that the civil war has raged in Syria. Some 400,000 have been killed in the fighting, according to United Nations (UN) estimates. Millions of refugees have made their way to other countries, mostly in Europe, in hopes of starting new lives.



Syrian President Bashar al-Assad has managed to remain in power all these years with the help of Russian forces. The rebels have not been united, and have often battled one another. They include the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) which seeks to establish an Islamic caliphate in that part of the world. There is also an alliance of militias supported by the United States (US). There are several other groups divided along sectarian and ethnic lines.

The fighting in Syria now threatens to escalate into a wider conflict between Russia and the US, after the US, the United Kingdom, and France bombed three buildings in Damascus producing and housing chemical weapons that Syrian government forces had allegedly used on in an attack on a rebel-held Douma in eastern Ghouta, killing at least 60 people, including many children, and injuring more than 1,000 others.

Syria and its ally, Russia, both denied the World Health Organization report on the poison gas attack, claiming that the incident had been “staged.” When US President Trump said US missiles would soon rain on Damascus, the Russian ambassador countered the planes would be shot down with Russia’s own missiles. Russian President Vladimir Putin said he hoped common sense would prevail, but the US President countered: “You should not be partners with a gas-killing animal who kills his people and enjoys it.”

The US, British, and French planes fired over a hundred missiles in a precision bombing attack on the Damascus chemical weapons plant last Friday, making sure that the Russian forces

now helping Syria would not get involved. But the war of words could quickly escalate into a shooting war involving the world's top two nuclear powers.

In more peaceful times in the past, Syria celebrated on this day, April 17, what it called Evacuation Day, its virtual Independence Day, to commemorate the evacuation of the last French soldier from Syrian soil in 1946. It was a day when Syria's various ethnic and religious groups – Sunnis and Shias, Christians, Alawites, Kurds, etc. – would come together to raise the national flag in Damascus.

Instead the civil war continues. The Syrians who have not yet left to seek new lives in Europe continue to die in bombing attacks. And now the US and Russia have threatened missile attacks on each other. The UN has thus warned these world powers against letting the crisis spiral out of control.

The UN and the world's leaders – most especially those of the US and Russia – should be able to do this. More, they should be able find ways to wind down the civil war which has already lasted seven years with seemingly no sign of any progress towards peace.