

The battle for control in Syria

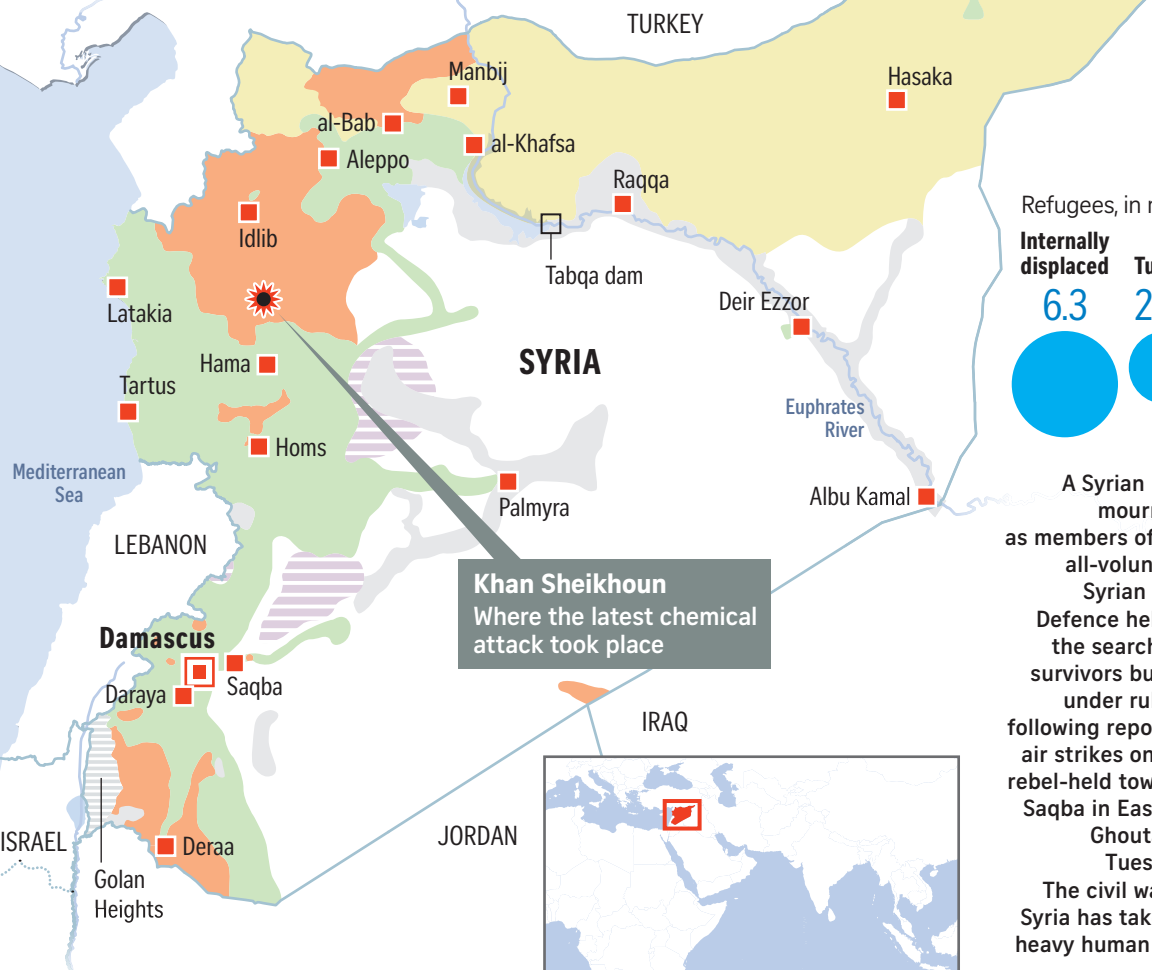
The Syrian civil war is entering its sixth year, with President Bashar al-Assad now on the offensive with the help of long-time allies Russia and Iran, which see the campaign to depose Mr Assad as a Western conspiracy for regime change in the Middle East. Rebels backed by a US-led coalition are rapidly losing ground, but putting up a hard fight. Meanwhile, the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria's (ISIS) bastion of Raqqa is being closed in on by Kurdish rebels backed by the US, as well as rebels backed by Turkish troops.

WHO'S INVOLVED IN THE CONFLICT?

The conflict involves several factions backed by a plethora of countries, with control of areas in the country changing hands frequently as they fight among themselves despite often having similar goals.

Areas of control as of March 19

- ISIS
- Syrian army
- Syrian rebels
- Kurdish forces
- Mixed control



LETHAL CHEMICAL WEAPONS BEING USED

A deadly chemical attack on the town of Khan Sheikhoun on Tuesday left scores of people, including children, dead. But it is not the first instance where deadly chemical weapons have been used in the conflict.

Chlorine

- A choking gas
- Used as a weapon in combat
- Attacks the eyes and provokes choking fits

2014, 2015

At least three attacks blamed on the Syrian regime by United Nations experts

Mustard gas

- Used during WWI
- Delivered in aerosol form after the shell containing it explodes
- Strips mucous membranes
- Causes temporary blindness, burns, pulmonary oedemas, bleeding

Aug 21, 2015

Attack in Marea (north) by ISIS group, according to the UN

Sarin gas

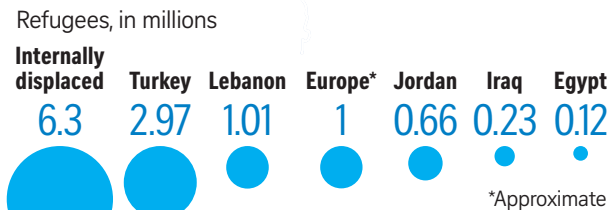
- Discovered in 1938 in Germany
- Nerve agent which reacts when inhaled or when it comes into contact with the skin
- Attacks the nervous and muscular systems
- Causes death by cardiac arrest

Aug 21, 2013

- Attack near Damascus blamed on Syrian regime
- At least 1,429 dead

REFUGEES AND XENOPHOBIA

The war has created millions of refugees, some of whom have been internally displaced within Syria, while others have fled to safer countries. The arrival of large numbers of refugees has given rise to xenophobia in many of the host countries.



A Syrian man mourning as members of the all-volunteer Syrian Civil Defence help in the search for survivors buried under rubble following reported air strikes on the rebel-held town of Saqba in Eastern Ghouta on Tuesday. The civil war in Syria has taken a heavy human toll.



TIMELINE OF THE CONFLICT

2011

March

Security forces shoot dead protesters in southern city of Deraa, triggering violent unrest that spreads nationwide.

July

President Assad sacks the governor of Hama after mass demonstrations. Scores of lives lost as troops sent in to restore order.

2012

February

Government steps up bombardment of Homs and other cities.

August

Prime Minister Riad Hijab defects. US President Barack Obama warns that use of chemical weapons would prompt American intervention.

2013

March

Syrian warplanes bomb Raqqqa after rebels seize control. US and Britain pledge non-military aid to rebels.

August

Chemical weapons used in attack in Damascus that kills 1,429.

October

Mr Assad allows international inspectors to begin to destroy Syria's chemical weapons under US-Russian agreement.

2014

January-February

UN-brokered peace talks in Geneva fail.

June

UN announces destruction of Syria's chemical weapons arsenal and materials. ISIS declares caliphate from Aleppo to Iraqi province of Diyala.

September

US and five Arab countries launch air strikes against ISIS.

2015

January

Kurdish forces push ISIS out of Kobane.

September

Russia carries out first air strikes in Syria.

2016

February

Partial ceasefire brokered by US and Russia comes into effect but breaks down.

August

Turkish troops cross into Syria to push back ISIS and Kurdish rebels from a section of the shared border.

December

Syrian troops recapture the city of Aleppo.

2017

January

Russia, Iran and Turkey agree to enforce a ceasefire between the government and non-Islamist rebels after talks in Kazakhstan.

April 4

Syrian town of Khan Sheikhoun attacked with chemical weapons, killing dozens.