**UPDATE PAPER 1**

**Bloc Positions:**

**Allies of The Syrian Regime**

In the international community, many countries have expressed support for the Syrian regime, or have not condemned the situation. Iran, Russia and China are Assad’s strongest allies. For example, Iran has especially tight ties to Syria. Iran’s Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, leads a religious administration. Syria’s President Bashar al-Assad heads a secular and socialist government. One country is Persian, the other Arab. But since Iran’s 1979 Islamic Revolution, the two have found reason to stick together. Historically the two countries came together in order to fight against a common rival, Saddam Hussein’s Iraq; to check Israeli advances in Lebanon; and to prevent any American attempts to enter the Middle East. In particular, the two countries united to provide support to the Lebanese armed Shia movement, Hezbollah, and to the Palestinian Islamist militant groups, Hamas and Islamic Jihad. But the US Permanent Representative to the United Nations, Susan Rice, has called Iran “part of the problem.” The United States accuses Iran of providing direct assistance to President Assad’s government. Officials say that Iran has sent advisers to Syria and has provided riot gear and surveillance equipment to Syrian security forces. The Obama administration has already taken action against a number of Iranian security officials. Since Syria erupted into conflict, diplomats, spies and military strategists have struggled to work out what lies behind Moscow’s staunch support of its Middle Eastern ally, the Syrian government of President Bashar al-Assad. Mention is frequently made of Russia’s Mediterranean naval facility at the Syrian port of Tartus, which, along with multi-billion-dollar arms sales to Damascus, is why Russia will never abandon the Assad government. A report published on 27 June 2012 by Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty says, “Russia’s greatest strategic and geopolitical interest in Syria is the use of a deep-water port at Tartus.” That report goes on to say that Tartus can dock nuclear submarines, it is the receiving point for Russian weapons shipments to Syria and it is linked to a well-developed network of roads and railways.

**SUPPORTERS FOR “NEW SYRIA”**

Various countries, aside from those listed above, and including NATO countries and the Western bloc want to see a regime change in Syria, which would move the situation forward without Assad as leadership. For example, with the violence increasing and impasse at the United Nations, U.S. officials said the diplomatic focus would now shift back to alternatives such as the “Friends of Syria,” the coalition of western countries, Arab states and key neighbor Turkey which has sought to squeeze the Assad government through sanctions and build up the country’s disorganized opposition. Some members of the group, including Saudi Arabia and Qatar, are believed to be aiding the flow of weapons to Syria’s rebel forces. But U.S. officials say Washington will likely steer clear of such efforts given the murky nature of the rebellion and the uncertainties of a wider military conflict.

**NOTE:** Before escalating conflict, the members of this bloc must determine who would take over if Assad does leave.