The Global Crisis in Syria

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Abstract
Throughout this paper, I will explore the ongoing crisis in Syria, most commonly known as the Syrian Civil Car, and look at the key aspects as well as the global issues that it has presented to the international community. First, I will be giving an overview of the conflict in Syria and a detailed history of the destabilization of the region. Next, I will be using a concept that is used in the textbook "World Politics" by Friedan, Lakes, and Schultz (FLS), where I will be addressing the actors, their interactions, preferences and choices, and the institutions governing their decisions. After that, I will be addressing the human rights violations of the Assad regime, its allies, and the opposition forces in respect to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). After human rights, I will be addressing a conflict resolution strategy that I believe is the most effective on the global scale in reference to Middle Eastern conflicts. This paper's main objective is to explain the complexity of the Syrian Civil War and how it has become one of the greatest and most challenging conflicts of our generation.

The Global Crisis in Syria

The civil war in Syria is a complex, multifaceted conflict with over 470,000 deaths, 5 million refugees, and 6.3 million people displaced from their homes (Human Rights Watch, 2016) which involves many actors each with varying choices and preferences. As the conflict continues, many international institutions such as the United Nations (UN) have been facilitating international talks among the international community; however, due to the differing agendas of the actors, little to no progress has been made in the United Nations Security Council (UNSC). Over the course of this paper, the atrocities exhibited in the conflict will be examined and will provide the details that make it necessary for international collaboration to end the conflict once and for all.

Actors and Interests

Primary Pro-Assad Forces

Syrian Arab Republic: On July 17, 2000, after the death of his father, Hafez al-Assad, Bashar al-Assad assumed the position of the President of Syria under the Ba'ath party, which rules under an authoritarian regime (Central Intelligence Agency, 2017). Upon taking power, Bashar al-Assad and his regime worked towards ridding the former government of corruption. After the expulsion of many government officials; authors Rather, Ali, and Abbas explain, "bribery and preferential treatment at higher echelons of the government" (2015) lead to the protests of the Arab Spring in Syria in 2011 and to the current state of affairs revolving around Assad's regime.

Iran: For many years, Iran has been supplying the Assad regime with weapons and funds and has been working with Syria to keep its economy afloat in the midst of a conflict (Horowitz, 2014). Iran has also been increasing its support for the Assad regime by supplying ground and air components to help keep Assad in power for as long as possible (Fulton, Holliday & Wyer, 2013). Since the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), the international community has decreased sanctions on Iran, which has given Iran greater economic leverage than it previously held.

Russia: Russia, the largest and most powerful ally to the Assad regime, has been providing Assad with a "diplomatic shield" in the UN (Laub, 2017). In addition to carrying out airstrikes in support of ground operations, the Russian military has been providing weapons and training to Syrian government forces. According to the BBC, Russia's involvement in backing the Assad regime lies in its desire to keep a power presence in the Middle East, to protect its port in Syria that connects it to the Mediterranean, and to give it a stage to demonstrate its power in the war on terrorism (Doucet, 2016).

Primary Opposition Forces

The Free Syrian Army (FSA): In March of 2017, the Assad regime opened fire on peaceful protesters, firing the first shots of the Syrian Civil War. As a result of this, the Free Syrian Army took up arms against the Assad regime (Laub, 2017). The FSA consists of former Syrian military personnel (who joined the FSA after the war broke out), civilians, and a mix of extremist groups looking to overthrow Assad.

The Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG): With the unrest in Syria, the Kurdish governing party in Syria was presented with an opportunity to further their goal of reclaiming land from the Islamist rebels in the region of Rojava. As of 2017, the YPG is being armed and trained by the United States, who believes that the YPG is the most capable group in the region to combat the Islamic State (IS) (Laub, 2017).

Turkey: Turkey was one of the main opponents to Assad during the 2011 uprising due to Assad's violent reaction to protests (Zalewski & Spencer, 2011). Turkey began training Syrian defectors in order to create the FSA to combat the Assad Regime and ultimately overthrow the Syrian government. Turkey's main interests are the defeat of the IS and a Syrian regime change (Dombey, 2014).

United States: In 2011, after the Assad regime fired on civilians during a peaceful protest, the Obama Administration condemned the attack and called for Bashar al-Assad to resign (Myre, 2017). As the violence turned to a civil war, the United States, at first, was hesitant to join the conflict because of Former President Obama's plan to reduce its presence in the Middle East. However, after the emergence of the IS in the region, former President Obama ordered the bombing missions against the extremist organization in Syria while negotiating peace with Assad (Laub, 2017). After Donald Trump was elected president, Assad used chemical weapons against unarmed civilians. This sparked the first direct strike on Assad forces by the United States on April 6, 2017. Currently, the United States has been pushing for support in the UNSC to condemn Syria for their chemical attacks; however, most of their attempts have been blocked by Russia (McKirdy, 2017).

Outside Combatant Group

ad-Dawlah al-Islāmiyah (IS): Established in 1999 under the name Jama'at al-Tawhid wal-Jihad, the IS is a breakoff group of al-Qaeda, with greater and more extremist ideals compared to the al-Qaeda terrorist group. In Syria and Iraq, IS' main goal is to establish a caliphate, or state, where it can impose Sharia law. The IS is in conflict with all groups mentioned above and with many smaller groups such as Tahrir al-Sham and Ahrar al-Sham. In 2016, IS began to lose territory in Syria and Iraq through precision strikes, cooperation, and overwhelming force. The IS has been suffering greatly and has lost an abundance of its claimed territories (Laub, 2017).

International Institutions

United Nations: The UN has played an important role during the conflict in Syria. Within the United Nations Security Council (UNSC), there are five permanent members: China, France, Russia, the United Kingdom, and the United States. Each permanent member has the ability to veto any resolution instantaneously without debate. During the Syrian Civil War, Russia has frequently vetoed resolutions regarding the Syria conflict. This can be attributed to the Russian policy, with its main goal being to block American efforts in shaping Middle Eastern politics (Yan, 2013).

Issues of Human Rights in Syria

Since the Syrian Civil War began in 2011, human rights have been a major focal point for advocacy groups and the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC), where abuses have been brought to light against both the pro-Assad forces as well as the opposition forces. The abuses range from torture and inhumane treatment to the killing of civilians with small arms and weapons of mass destruction (WMDs); most notably sarin gas used by the Assad regime in correlation with Russia. The issues of human rights abuses deal directly with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), on all sides of the war. According to the Human Rights Watch (HRW), a non-governmental organization (NGO) that specializes in observing human rights abuses in war zones around the world, the Assad regime has broken seven articles written in the UDHR.

Human Rights Abuses – Pro-Assad Forces

Article 3. In Article 3 of the UDHR, it is stated that "everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person" (2017). As reported by the HRW, the Assad regime has been indiscriminately targeting and killings civilians. Prior to the outbreak of the Syrian Civil War, civilians gathered in Damascus to peacefully demand governmental reforms. In response, the Syrian army opened fire on the peaceful protesters, killing and injuring several people. The regime has continuously violated Article 3, however due to the lack of support from Russia and China in the UNSC, the killings of innocent civilians cannot be formally acted upon.

Articles 5/6/7. Since March of 2011, HRW reports that around 12,679 people have died while in custody of the Syrian government (2017). These deaths are thought to have been caused by inhumane punishments such as, torture, starvation, and disease due to a lack of medical care (Goldman, 2017). The prevention of medical treatment and inhumane killings directly violates Article 5 that states that, "[n]o one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment" (2017). The detained civilians are unable to speak to family members or lawyers and are being denied the right to be recognized as a person before the law, as stated in Article 6 and 7 of the UDHR, which declares that "everyone has the right to recognition as a person before the law" and that "all are equal before the law" (2017).

The pro-government forces have also been engaged in the unlawful, secret abductions of advocates for rights such as free speech and democracy; two ideas that are currently under attack

from the Syrian government. According to The Washington Post, around 58,000 civilians have disappeared and are reportedly being held in government run facilities without due process (Naylor, 2015). There are few accounts of what occurs within these "detention centers" due to the low survival rate of those detained.

Article 20. Article 20 states that everyone has to right to assembly, which includes peaceful protests or demonstrations. In 2011, the Syrian army fired into a crowd of peaceful protesters, killing around 44 people (Shadid, 2011). This action taken by government forces stripped its civilians of peaceful assembly, and then triggered a civil war.

Article 25. Since the start of the Civil War, Assad has ordered the military to target hospitals and schools, preventing medical assistance to patients in targeted hospitals (HRW, 2017). These violations eliminate the rights of medical treatment as set forth in Article 25 of the UDHR (2017).

Human Rights Abuses – Opposition Forces

Over the many years of the civil war, human rights abuses have increased exponentially; especially among the IS, the FSA, and the Turkish military.

Articles 3/18. The IS has crossed the Syrian border and conquered land for its self-proclaimed Caliphate. Through its conquest, the IS has forced civilians to conform to their interpretation of Sharia law and killed those who did not (Amnesty Intl., 2016). The IS has abused Articles 3 and 18 of the UDHR that state that "[e]veryone has the right to life" and that "[e]veryone has the right to religion" (2017).

Article 5/9. As said in the previous section, Article 5 and 9 have to do with the fair treatment of detainees. According to the HRW, some opposition groups have kidnapped and tortured civilians and government workers for ransom (2017). According to an activist known as Mazen, this torture sometimes leads to the death of the captive (HRW, 2017).

Another human rights abuse under Article 5 that is present in Syria is the execution of civilians via inhuman ways. For example, in a video obtained from LiveLeak, Turkish soldiers were seen throwing women off cliffs and shooting them as they landed (*Turkish army committing war crimes,* 2016).

Governance and Conflict Resolution in Syria

First, the areas in which governance and conflict resolution has failed will be examined with the example of the conflict in Iraq. The conflict in Iraq was a failure on the part of the US-led coalition because of the lack of preparation for the occupation and transition period. The conflict in Iraq functions as a case study for the major flaws of an invasion and provides insight into what can be changed to increase the chance of military success.

The Iraq War, also known as the Second Gulf War, began in 2003 when allied forces of a US-led coalition invaded, defeated, and overthrew the Iraqi government. The US-led coalition decided to invade after receiving information that Iraq possessed weapons of mass destruction (WMDs) and that the country's leader, Saddam Hussein, was committing crimes against

humanity (Iraq War, 2017). With the downfall of Saddam Hussein, insurgent groups began to form due to lack of governance. This sparked the post-invasion phase of the Iraq War in 2007 which revealed unseen, extensive troubles. Groups such as al-Qaeda and the IS severely impacted the Iraqi economic buildup and Iraq's ability to create a stable post-Saddam state (World Bank, 2017). Although the Saddam regime was overthrown by allied forces, this intervention largely failed due to increased instability of the state, as well as the region as a whole.

The first plan of action that the international community should take is to approve of a unified post-war strategy regarding the Assad regime. Any strategy must be approved by all five permanent members of the UNSC to ensure its efficacy. International cooperation can lead to global support and greater stability. In her chapter on Global Conflict, Shirley Fedorak suggests, "military intervention is necessary to ensure peace and stability;" however, she also suggests, "military intervention can lead to the further destabilization of an already unstable political situation" (2014). This idea from Fedorak suggests a costly scenario in a UNSC strategy for Syria, and is open to many different conflict resolution strategies. An intervention in Syria could lead to another occupation and insurgency like that of Iraq. Only when the international community addresses the conflict in its entirety and discusses the post-war situation can it negotiate a resolution with tools such as sanctions, military action, regime change, or United Nations peacekeeping missions.

Conclusion

The Syrian Civil War has dragged on for years with no definitive conclusion as of 2018. With the Assad regime and its allies being backed by Russia and a multitude of rebel groups being supported by various other foreign states and terrorist organizations, the war may last for an extensive period of time, given the abilities of each of the actors to finance the war. The horrendous acts of human rights violations must be addressed by the international community without bias. In order to resolve the conflict in Syria, there needs to be months of collaboration and planning that is not currently present in the international community.

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