

INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF LAW MANAGEMENT & HUMANITIES

[ISSN 2581-5369]

Volume 6 | Issue 4

2023

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The Syrian Conflict: A Multifaceted Analysis of the Political, Social, and Humanitarian Dimensions

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ABSTRACT

Currently, the Ukraine - Russia war is being discussed worldwide, but one war has been ongoing for about 12 years. It is the Syria war upon which the eyes of the world are shifted away but the horrors prevailing in that war is spine chilling - Widespread poverty, hunger, migration, deaths, and injuries are some gruesome features of it. Entry of various parties in the war made the matter worse as everyone is acting upon their interests and the only ones facing the horrors are the innocent civilians. The researcher has discussed the various aspects of the war, the current position, and the interests of various parties involved, it also discussed the violations regarding the human rights and relief measures going on.

Keywords: Syria, humanitarian crisis, UNSC, Arab Spring, refugee.

I. INTRODUCTION

Since 2011, the Syrian conflict has been a major issue, and it is extremely complex due to a variety of factors. It began as a nonviolent demonstration against the dictatorship of President Assad, but it quickly escalated into a protracted civil war that is still going on today. It has become even more complicated as a result of the involvement of numerous nations, including Russia, Iran, Turkey, and the United States.

The fact that the Syrian conflict has had significant social and humanitarian repercussions in addition to political and military ones is one of the main factors contributing to its devastation. There is a lot of tension in the country because of the ethnic and religious divisions, which have resulted in violence against minorities and civilians. Additionally, the violence has forced millions of Syrians to flee their homes, creating a massive refugee crisis and much suffering.

The Syrian conflict has a significant impact on both the local population and the rest of the world. It is a very complicated situation with many different variables at play.

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II. BACKGROUND OF THE WAR

“The war started as an insignificant peaceful protest. In March 2011, some students painted graffiti on the walls of the school criticizing the Bashar-Al-Asad govt, though it was just a silent protest, the govt took it seriously as it was the era of the Arab Spring. The turbulence in the politics of the Arab countries starting with the fall down of the Tunisian government in 2011 as the citizens went against the ruling party caused the same effect in the other neighboring countries like Libya, toppling the government and ultimately killing Md. Gadafi, there was a chance of a domino effect, the govt took strict action resulting in the violent suppression of the protest. The students were arrested based without any evidence and were beaten mercilessly by the authorities. this angered the people and acted as a catalyst in already existing frustration towards the govt. This took a violent turn and soon turned communal. the majority Sunni population of Syria was not liking the fact that Prime Minister Bashar - Al - Assad, a minority Shia Muslim was ruling them. This was the onset of the civil war between the protesting civilians and the Assad army, soon a small fraction of the Syrian army got defected to form a Free Syrian Army(FSA) . Later other parties also joined the war, as it was a perfect chance for other powers to showcase their authority and strength. “²

“The Muslim faction states Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) was prevalent in Iraq at that time saw the opportunity to flourish in arms and entered the chaos-driven land of Syria. In 2014, Abu Bakar Al Baghdadi accounted himself as the new Muslim khalifa. Initially, it got success as it was successful in acquiring some land from the Assad government. Due to these events, the power of the Assad government got reduced and this created a power vacuum in the region. This was the perfect opportunity for ISIS to make a hard-hitting impact and emerged as the main player in the war and it did that by capturing Rakka city and making its headquarters. The atrocities of ISIS were at their peak - rape, murders, public hanging of bodies, sex enslavement against those who opposed ISIS. All these were happening under the nose of the world superpowers, and they did nothing to stop it. World organization like UNSC kept their hands on hand and watched all the happenings. At first, the US was reluctant to have military intervention as it was already facing the brunt of a long-running Afghan war that was running for about 20 years in which America lost more than it gained, both economically and with soldier casualties. ”³

² (No date a) *Freedom House | expanding freedom and democracy*. Available at: https://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/2022-02/FIW_2022_PDF_Booklet_Digital_Final_Web.pdf (Accessed: 09 May 2023).

³ (No date b) *What kind of victory for Russia in Syria? - armyupress.army.mil*. Available at: <https://www.armyupress.army.mil/Portals/7/military-review/Archives/English/Rojansky-Victory-for-Russia.pdf>

III. US INTERVENTION IN THE WAR

As discussed earlier, the US was reluctant to enter the war. But to control the rebels, the Bashar - Al- Assad government used a chemical weapon which was a grave violation of Convention Weapon Convention treaty, which prohibits the storage, production, and use of chemicals in war ultimately killing around 1000 people reported and many go unreported in Eastern Ghouta, near Damascus. Although Syria was not a party to the convention, it was not a matter to ignore.

“After that then President Barrack Obama considered it a red line and decided to intervene in the war. -Official entry into the US happened in 2012.”⁴ Later under the rule of Trump, the US carried out air strikes and destroyed air camps, this move of direct intervention has to face criticism around the world. “On June 17, the US Caesar Syria Civilian Protection Act came into force. While the stated purpose of the sanctions includes pursuing accountability for human rights violations, the act also allows US authorities to unilaterally impose sanctions—such as travel restrictions and asset freezing—on individuals, businesses, industries, and entities that provide material assistance to the Syrian government, its allies operating in Syria, and its paramilitary forces. Thirty-nine designations were initially made on June 17, followed by ten more on July 29. The full impact of these sanctions has yet to be assessed.”⁵

Although the US stated that the sole purpose of its intervention in the war was to curb the activities of ISIS and prevent its spread it was supplying arms to Kurds and rebels which was in turn against the Assad government. So, it was the US move to hit two targets with one arrow.

IV. RUSSIAN INTERVENTION IN THE WAR

“After World War II, two countries emerged as the superpowers of the world – the US and the USSR. There has always been a tussle for power between the US and USSR, and to establish dominance over others, these powers engage themselves in various happenings of the world. one example of it was the US intervention in Afghanistan and supplying arms to the small Muslim extremists to throw the USSR out of Afghanistan. This was the onset of the formation of global terrorism. There was a prolonged cold war between the US and USSR but after the dissolution of the USSR, Russia became a little weak and the US took over the world as a superpower. Russia under the leadership of President Vladimir Putin had no interventions in the matters of Yemen, Libya, or Iraq unlike the USA was fully controlling conflicts from supplying

(Accessed: 09 May 2023).

⁴ (No date a) *Armed conflict in Syria: Overview and U.S. response - CRS reports*. Available at: <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/RL/RL33487> (Accessed: 14 May 2023).

⁵ *World Report 2021: Rights trends in Syria (2021) Human Rights Watch*. Available at: <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2021/country-chapters/syria> (Accessed: 10 May 2023).

ammunition, proving soldiers, and land captures to setting up a puppet government. Russia considered Syria as an opportunity to regain its position as a lone superpower. Geographically, the Mediterranean Sea is an important strategic position for Russia along with the naval dock.

The annexation of Crimea in 2014 by Russia followed by the Ukraine invasion made the matter worse. As a result, Russia had to face various US – European economic and strategic Sanctions. To nullify the effects of the sanctions, Russia took the opportunity to enter Syria and portray itself as a peacekeeper and a mediator between the parties in the war. This would ultimately portray itself positively and put global pressure on the West to terminate all the sanctions against Russia.

Russia didn't want to be present full-fledged in the war due to the low infrastructure for receiving various aircraft and naval equipment. Russia was alone or had very few allies in the land of Syria which limited them to having the actual ground realities which could lead to a situation where a local power would overpower a superpower. These were some reasons which made Russia made reluctant to extend its arms fully. It was against the US interventions in the war because it pointed out a strong apprehension that what the US did in countries like Libya, Yemen, Iraq, etc, the same would be repeated in Syria also. It supported the regime of Bashar – al – Assad and with the support of Russia, the government regained its power. Russia repeatedly tried to establish itself as the legitimate power to bring peace to that region by opposing the US. Russia Carried out various air attacks, and naval Attacks and signed various ceasefire treaties by bringing the parties to the negotiation table, capturing important infrastructures like roads, and destroying the opposition hardware. This helped the Assad government to recapture 2/3 of the region. Lastly, Russia had eyes on oil and gas-rich territories and nuclear studies supported by Iran. “⁶

V. HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS

The worst suffers of the war are not the governments, soldiers, or superpowers, but the civilians of that region who have faced the brunt of the war. The whole life of the person gets disrupted and they are even deprived of the necessities of life. The constant fear of death and torture resides in them and the future of their upcoming generations is uncertain. In the current Syrian war, the violations are at their peak. The use of illegal and illegally banned weapons is a common thing. Public places like markets, schools, and shelters are in complete control of the rebels. People are being raped, murdered, and tortured, are made sex slaves, and are hanged

⁶ (No date a) *Armed conflict in Syria: Overview and U.S. response - CRS reports*. Available at: <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/RL/RL33487> (Accessed: 14 May 2023).

publically. ”According to the Syrian Network for Human Rights (SNHR), at least 100,000 Syrians remain forcibly disappeared. The network also estimates that nearly 15,000 have died due to torture since March 2011, the majority at the hands of Syrian government forces”⁷

The US Along with the allies detained ISIS suspects without any due process along with their families are languishing in jails under dangerous conditions and there is no sign of trial shortly.

VI. DISPLACEMENT CRISIS

“Across the country, there are 6.1 million internally displaced. By mid-February, 900,000 people had been displaced due to hostilities in Idlib governorate, according to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA).”⁸

Refugees are seeking asylum in the neighboring countries, while Turkey closed its borders, and the refugees are headed toward the European countries. In Greece, some refugees entered suspiciously but they were pushed back out of the border. In Lebanon, a small faction got a chance to legally reside in the country but now the permission is being revoked.

VII. ROLE OF UNSC IN THE WAR

The United Nations Security Council (UNSC) has been instrumental in resolving the Syrian war, but its efficiency and political polarization have hindered its success. The UNSC is in charge of preserving world peace and security and has the power to enact sanctions and approve military action. Due to political differences among its members, the UNSC has been unable to take significant action to end the Syrian war.

The permanent members' use of their veto power has been one of the UNSC's biggest inefficiencies. Several resolutions intended to denounce the Syrian government's acts or impose penalties have been rejected by Russia and China, both of which have close relations with the Syrian regime this has prevented the UNSC from taking effective action to resolve the conflict.

On the other hand, the UNSC has approved several resolutions like Resolutions 2139 and 2254 that try to lessen the effects of the Syrian conflict on civilians. These resolutions demand a halt to the hostilities, access to aid supplies, and the beginning of political talks. However, the lack of collaboration between the Syrian government and opposition organizations has made it difficult to put these resolutions into action.

In addition, the UNSC has established several bodies, including the Joint Investigative

⁷ *World Report 2021: Rights trends in Syria* (2021) *Human Rights Watch*. Available at: <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2021/country-chapters/syria> (Accessed: 10 May 2023).

⁸ *World Report 2021: Rights trends in Syria* (2021) *Human Rights Watch*. Available at: <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2021/country-chapters/syria> (Accessed: 10 May 2023).

Mechanism (JIM) and the International, Impartial, and Independent Mechanism (IIIM), to look into and prosecute individuals responsible for war crimes and other transgressions of international law during the conflict. However, because of political differences among the UNSC members, the JIM was dismantled in 2017

In conclusion, the UNSC has played a critical role in addressing the Syrian conflict, but its effectiveness has been limited by political divisions and the use of veto power by its permanent members. The UNSC's efforts to mitigate the impact of the conflict on civilians and establish mechanisms for accountability have been positive steps, but more needs to be done to resolve the conflict and bring lasting peace to Syria.

VIII. POLITICAL/STRATEGIC REASONS FOR UNSC SUCCESS

1. There is a lack of cohesion among the UNSC's 15 member states as a result of the frequent divergence of their priorities and interests. This makes it difficult for them to agree on a common approach to ending the Syrian conflict.

2. The influence of outside parties: The Syrian conflict is influenced by outside parties like Russia, Iran, and the United States, all of which frequently advance their own agendas and thwart attempts to find a solution.

3. The complexity of the conflict: The Syrian government, opposition groups, and radical organizations like ISIS are just a few of the many parties to the conflict, each with a distinct agenda. This complexity makes it difficult to find a simple answer.

(A) Limited Sources

Due to a variety of political and strategic factors, the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) has limited resources and powers to confront the Syrian war. "First off, there are 15 nations that make up the UNSC, and these nations frequently hold divergent views on how to handle situations like the one in Syria. It is challenging for the UNSC to reach an agreement and take decisive action as a result of these divisions, which can be caused by a variety of factors such as ideological disagreements, national interests, or political alliances."⁹

In addition, the UNSC's resources are constrained, which limits what they can do to resolve the crisis. They could not have the necessary resources in terms of money, people, or equipment to do all the necessary tasks. The UNSC may also need to give some initiatives a higher priority than others if they believe that doing so will help the area achieve peace and stability. Strategic

⁹ Kalantar, N. (2019) *The limitations and capabilities of the United Nations in modern conflict*, E. Available at: <https://www.e-ir.info/2019/07/10/the-limitations-and-capabilities-of-the-united-nations-in-modern-conflict/> (Accessed: 14 May 2023).

elements including the degree of involvement of outside powers, the existence of terrorist organizations, or the military might of the parties engaged can have an impact on these priorities.

(B) Steps Further

1. Step up diplomatic efforts: To get the Syrian conflict's parties to the bargaining table, the UNSC might step up its diplomatic efforts. This can entail encouraging external parties to support the peace process and fostering communication between the Syrian government and opposition organisations. Addressing the underlying issues that led to the conflict, such as economic and social inequality, could also be done through diplomatic efforts.
2. Implement a cease-fire: The UNSC might try to implement a general cease-fire in Syria. This can entail the dispatch of peacekeeping troops to keep an eye on the ceasefire and enforce it, as well as actions to disarm and demobilise armed organisations. A ceasefire might serve as a starting point for additional political discussions and the distribution of aid.
3. Support humanitarian help: The UNSC might make efforts to make sure that relief reaches Syrians in need. This could entail providing more cash to assistance agencies and making sure that they have secure, unhindered access to conflict-affected areas. The UNSC could exert pressure on the conflicting parties to permit the safe passage of assistance convoys.
4. Encourage accountability: The UNSC may attempt to encourage accountability for violations of human rights that occurred throughout the Syrian crisis. This can entail aiding the International Criminal Court's and other institutions' efforts to look into and prosecute war crimes. The UNSC may also impose particular penalties on people or organisations that violate human rights.

(C) Summary

The Syrian War began in 2011 as a peaceful protest against the government but quickly escalated when the government violently suppressed the protest. The majority Sunni population did not like being ruled by a minority Shia Muslim, Bashar Al Assad, which led to a civil war between the protesting civilians and the Assad army. The war attracted various other groups, including ISIS, who saw it as an opportunity to expand their power. Despite atrocities committed by ISIS, the world superpowers did little to intervene. The United States entered the war after the Assad government used chemical weapons, which was a violation of the

Convention Weapon Convention treaty. Russia also intervened in the war to regain its position as a lone superpower and strategically position itself in the Mediterranean Sea. The war resulted in the displacement of millions of Syrians and the death of hundreds of thousands.

IX. CONCLUSION

Even though the Syrian war has been going on for 12 years, other conflicts in the news often seem to overshadow it. However, the atrocities and suffering in Syria continue and continue to affect helpless civilians. In 2011, a peaceful demonstration against the Syrian government descended into violence, sparking the creation of the Free Syrian Army and other factions. ISIS's involvement in the conflict worsened the situation because they committed crimes and imposed their own rule in some areas of Syria.

The Syrian government's use of chemical weapons caused the US to reconsider its initial hesitation to enter the conflict. In 2012, the US formally entered the conflict; later airstrikes took place during the Trump administration. The US asserted that the goal of their intervention was to stop ISIS activities, but they also allegedly provided weapons to Kurdish and rebel forces fighting the Syrian government.

Russian intervention in the conflict helped the Syrian government regain control of some areas of the country. Due to Putin's leadership and Russia's weakened position following the collapse of the USSR, it adopted a more aggressive foreign policy posture.

Innocent civilians have endured widespread poverty, hunger, migration, and death throughout the conflict. The dire situation in Syria persists despite the efforts of all parties involved, and the international community has come under fire for its inaction in trying to put an end to the suffering.

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