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The Syrian Puzzle: The Syrian Conflict: Explaining Main Causes of the Conflict

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The Syrian puzzle: The Syrian conflict: Explaining main causes of the conflict

By

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The Syrian puzzle: The Syrian conflict: Explaining main causes of the conflict

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In this study, I examine how sectarian and ethnic fragmentations along with the economic disparity have different deteriorating effects on the stability of the bloody conflict in Syria, and how these effects make it difficult for society to build a consensus that would end the conflict. Politicized Ethnic fragmentation and mobilized sectarianism fueled opposition that destabilized Syria; the government's violent repression of opposition groups exacerbated the conflict that led to virtual civil war; the armed conflict precipitated a crisis of confidence that spawned mass migration; the economic disparity in the country caused more divided society, and it made society vulnerable to experience a civil war. Offering an explanation for the refugee crises caused by the Syrian conflict will provide more explanatory power over why people choose to flee and become refugees.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

It is a fact that the Middle East hosts many intermingled problems, and it may seem that the rivalries between sectarian and radical factions in the region are determined to destabilize any form of peace. Yet, the logic of “let them fight each other” is not morally acceptable for the international community. The ongoing conflict in Syria is one of the most serious problems in the region. Since Middle Eastern countries have the same ethnic, religious, sectarian, and cultural backgrounds, the negative effects of a conflict in one nation can easily spread across the region particularly when other nations provide support to one side of the conflict in the form of weapons, finance or receiving refugees.

The current conflict in Syria began as an uprising against the regime of President Bashar al-Assad in March 2011, which paralleled the Arab Spring uprisings in the Middle East. (Guide, 2014) The fierce response of security forces caused protests against the regime to increase nationwide, calling for the resignation of Bashar al-Assad. Although protests started as nonviolent demands for reform in the government, the Assad regime’s extreme responses to these protests turned them into a brutal conflict that is devastating the country. Moreover the intensified fighting between sectarian and ethnic differences, and the involvement of the several jihadi groups into the conflict with their own varying agendas complicated the conflict in a way that there is not an easy solution for resolving this brutal conflict.

Many Syrians have been trapped in the violence of the war and have been forced to leave their homes and seek refuge in other countries. The numbers on Syria's civil war are upsetting. According to a new news report published by *Economist Magazine*, since March 2011 nearly 200,000 people have been killed and 6.5 million people have become internally displaced. Every day, refugees stream across the borders of Syria into the neighboring countries of Iraq, Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey. Millions of Syrian people have been displaced within the country and are looking for possible foreign aid from outside. However foreign aid agencies argue that transporting aid into Syria is too difficult. (Black, 2016)

On the other hand, this conflict also became Western countries' problem. As a natural consequence of its geopolitical position, Turkey has consistently been one of the first destination countries for asylum seekers and is generally considered a refugee corridor particularly for those travelling from the Middle East to Europe. As a result of these refugee flows, Turkey has always experienced adverse socio-economic, socio-cultural, and political outcomes. Additionally, as a transitional point between the Middle East and Europe, Turkey's instabilities and security concerns stemming from mass refugee flows have spread to the western world. Statistics released by UNHCR (2015), for instance, revealed that more than 10 percent of refugees—about 680,000 people—fled the conflict in Syria to seek asylum in Europe. Given that these refugees predominantly flee to Europe by first crossing into Turkey, the crisis is likely to put additional strain on both areas. In addition, a UNHCR (2015) report also showed that, in 2015, more than 410,000 refugees left Turkey and arrived in Europe by sea. From this perspective, the refugee crisis can't be seen as just a problem of Syrian's neighboring

countries. Rather, especially in the long term, most countries around the world will face the social, economic, and political problems, and security threats arising from the refugee crisis. For this reason, it should be brought under control with constructive solutions in a close international cooperation. In this paper, my first aim is to contribute to our broader understanding of why people choose to flee from the region and become refugees. I will discuss the conflict in Syria focusing on religion, ethnicity, immigration issues, and sectarian differences in the area and hope to highlight some important points for the possible termination of this bloody conflict.

Historical Background

Until the First World War, Syria had been under the Ottoman rule as one of its large provinces. Comparing to modern Syria, this province was also including the lands of contemporary states of Lebanon, Israel, Jordan, Palestine and parts of Turkey and Iraq, which is also known as “Greater Syria.” (Rogan, 2015) Therefore, the cultural diversity was prevailing in the region and also was open to be exploited politically. However, over four hundred years, despite its divergent characteristic Ottoman administration was able to maintain peace and stability in the Syrian society.

Starting from 1699, with the Treaty of Karlowitz the Ottoman Empire started to decline both territorially and administratively. The advances in weaponry system and military tactics along with the strong administration got other powers ahead of the Ottomans, who at the same time were dealing with the corruption and other disorders in the administration. The Industrial Revolution during the 19th century marked the turning point in the history of the humankind. It was also a turning point in the relations between the Ottomans and the other great powers. While the European powers were able to utilize

the technological innovations that the Revolution brought, the Ottomans failed to adapt the new advances and fell behind the other powers. So, this was also a sign of economical downfall of the Ottoman Empire. Another blow to the Empire were the idea of nationalism that came out of the French Revolution. The spread of these ideas within the Empire provoked rebellions in the Balkans and in the end led the loss of territories. (Rogan, 2015)

The fatal strike to the “Sick Man of Europe” came with the World War I. (Rogan, 2015) During the War, French and British diplomats secretly agreed on the post war settlement and the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire into the spheres of influence with the Sykes-Picot Agreement of 1916. Following the War, in the line with Sykes-Picot France acquired a mandate over Syria. During the mandate period, every aspect of the Syrian society was brought under French control. This oppressive atmosphere mobilized educated wealthy Muslims against the French. The major grievances of the Syrian people were the suppression of the political activity and civil rights; the French had separated the political unity of Syria into multiple units in order to prevent a possible national rising against the authority. It was divided into three autonomous regions, with detached areas for the Alawis on the coast and the Druze in the south. (Stearns& Langer, 2001)

However, a widespread revolt against French rule by the Druze minority in 1925 compelled France to let Syria hold elections and draft a constitution. Later, the French granted the Syrian independence on the condition of maintaining French military and economic dominance in the country. However, the agreement did not come into existence because the French parliamentary refused to do it. Despite French opposition, the Second World War opened the way for Syrian independence. The United Nations resolution

recognizing Syria as a sovereign state ordered the French to withdraw from Syrian soil. By April 15, 1946, the withdrawal of French troops left Syrians in the authority. (Rogan, 2015)

Competing groups over the control of government led Syria to experience decades of conflict and chaos following independence in 1946. The coups, countercoups, and irregular civilian rule during this era deteriorated the stability of both government and society. The bloody military coup in 1970 by Minister of Defense General Hafiz al Assad established an authoritarian regime in order to keep the stability to the government. The authority of the Baath Party inflamed a sectarian strife in the society since the members of the Alawi sect, to which Assad belonged, had primary posts in the military and security service. The period after Bashar al-Assad's succession in the summer of 2000 witnessed new hopes of reform in all aspects of society. However, Bashar maintained his father's authoritarian regime by suppressing pro-reform movement. (Scheller, 2013)

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

What are the causes of the conflict in Syria?

When describing the complexity of civil war environment, Pearson and Lounsbury state that “there is nothing that causes something as complex as the outbreak of civil war” (Pearson, 2009, p. 30), there are similarly many complex reasons for the outbreak of the conflict in Syria. While some factors primed the political environment for civil war, others caused the escalation of the conflict. In the years preceding 2011, severe increases in income inequality occurred between the main urban center and the more impoverished areas. Furthermore, economic problems were compounded by faulty governance and corruption at the local level (Berti & Paris, 2014, p. 22). This process leading the country to civil war can be considered as “state failure” because when people in power use their influences in favor of their own interest rather than the state’s interest, the public will feel insecure (Bates, 2008, p. 1).

Moreover, there are also two factors that produce escalation in civil war, which turn the conflict that began as an uprising into large-scale armed conflicts. First, The Assad’s regime responded to the protests with violent crackdown, and aimed to suppress all kind of mobilization against the government. However, this strategy made the situation much worse. When the government imposes greater repression on demonstrators, there is a high likelihood of experiencing civil war. Second, the influence

of foreign powers over sectarian groups and their interest in the outcome escalated the conflict to a larger scale. In the Syrian conflict, there are several foreign powers with different agendas.

Who are the main players in the conflict?

There are internal and external players. The regime of Bashar al-Assad has the control of armed forces. As for the other side, the opposition does not have a unified armed group. There are almost 100,000 rebels divided into hundreds of different groups taking action in local areas. (BBC, 2014, July 26) The reason why opposition could not gather under one umbrella is that Syria has diverse religious and ethnic groups which include (among others) Kurds, Armenians, Assyrians, Christians, Druze, Alawite Shia, and the Arab Sunnis. (BBC, 2014, July 26) Alawite Shia and Arab Sunnis make up the majority of the Muslim population. The tension is high along the sectarian lines between Sunni-Shia. Bashar al-Assad's regime represents the Shia community.

One of the many reasons adding complexity in conflict is regional power. In order to better understand the conflict, it is important to understand the effects of regional actors. Berti and Paris state, "the conflict in Syria today is an extension of the regional cold war between Saudi Arabia and Iran" (Berti & Paris, 2014, p. 26). Sunni-Shia tension between Iran and Saudi Arabia contributes to escalation of the conflict along with their support to the warring parties financially and politically. Berti and Paris point to four struggles as escalatory factors of the conflict: 1) "vertical conflict between the regime and the opposition," 2) "regional proxy war led by Iran and Saudi Arabia," 3) "horizontal struggle between the rebel forces over who represents the opposition," and 4) "Kurdish move toward autonomy" (Berti & Paris, 2014, p. 29). These four struggles in the region

draw a framework of actors involved in the conflict in Syria. Also, we can expand this framework by adding more foreign powers which have some interests to back up the one side such as Russia, the Lebanese Shiite group Hezbollah, China, which are main allies of the Bashar al-Assad's regime; Turkey and Qatar which support for the opposition. Although US and EU have no direct support to neither the Assad's regime nor the opposition, it is reasonable to say that US and EU would be behind of any attempts for replacement of Assad regime with a new one, which is not allied with Iran. In sum, Syria's issue can be defined as an "intractable conflict" in respect of its formation, which involves many aspects of relationship among multiple actors (Jeong, 2008, p. 12).

On the other hand, the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) has flourished during the ongoing conflict in Syria, taking advantage of security gap in Iraq due to the departure of American forces from Iraq. (Arango, 2014) ISIS aims to create a caliphate in Sunni areas of Iraq and Syria. ISIS has control of some regions in northern part of Syria and engaged in fighting with Syrian security forces recently. (Arango, 2014) Thus, ISIS can be seen another threat sustaining the conflict both in Syria and Iraq.

Is there a winning side in this ongoing struggle, which has continued for almost five years?

Assad's regime has been fighting against its own citizens. Even he does not know what he is going to gain at the end of this war. Bashar al-Assad has lost control over many areas in Syria and his credibility in foreign policy. Furthermore, he is determined to fight with any measures to stay in power.

The Opposition Groups: Groups opposed to Assad regime contains several different oppositions. Most prominent ones are Ahrar al-Sham, Al-Qaeda, Free Syrian

Army, Islamic Front, Islamic State of Iraq and Al-Sham (ISIS), Jabhat al-Nusra, Jays al-Islam, Jihadis, Local Coordinating Committees, Muslim Brotherhood, National Coalition for Revolutionary and Opposition Forces, Supreme Military Council (SMC), and Syrian National Council (Erlich, 2014, p.250). Although these groups have been fighting against the Assad Regime, it does not mean that they have been fighting for the same goals. Some of them are the real nationalist groups which are fighting for their country's best interests but some of them are the terrorist organizations which see the Syria as a country that they can use this conflict to spread their ideologies, and obtain critical resources would solidify their power over it. More than 2.5 million people have fled their homes in Syria and almost 6.5 million people have been displaced within Syria since the outbreak of the conflict in 2011. It cannot be considered as a gain to have control over some local areas when so much casualties are taken into consideration. In Syrian civil war, both the Assad's regime and the opposition have lost. In overall Syria has lost as a country.

The Religious Groups: Main religious groups in the area, are Alawite, Christian, Druze, Salafist, Shia, Sufi, and Sunni groups. Sunnis are the major Muslim denomination, which comprise about 74 percent of total population. The opposition groups drew their strongest support from Sunnis (Erlich, 2014, p.244).

Iran: Syria is the most important ally of Iran in the region. Iran always wants a powerful Syria, however Syria has risen as a weak ally during the ongoing civil war. Even in the civil war, Iran has been Assad regime's main supporter. According to BBC News, after the Assad regime began lose power over some parts of the country in 2012,

Hezbollah militia (Iranian-supported) in Lebanon transferred combatants to back Assad's army. Also it has been known that Iran posted military advisors to Syria. (BBC, 2016)

Saudi Arabia: Saudi Arabia sees Syrian conflict as a proxy war with Shiite- led Iran, and supports several rebel groups combating the Assad regime. The Sunni-ruled Gulf kingdom says. "President Assad cannot be part of a solution to the conflict and must hand over power to a transitional administration or be removed by force." (BBC, 2016)

Turkey: The Turkish government has been against the Assad regime since the early days of the conflict in Syria, and it is one of the key supporters of the opposition. However, its aid policies supporting opposition groups has been exploited by some foreign jihadists desiring to unite with the IS. Turkey approved to allow the US-led alliance against IS to use its air bases for attacks on Syria after an IS violence in July 2015. Turkey is facing with the burden of having more than two million refugees

CHAPTER III

SPECIFICATION OF FACTORS AND METHODS

In this thesis, descriptive method will be used. I am going to use ethnic differences factor, economic disparity factor, and sectarian divergences factor to explain the causes behind the Syrian conflict, and why people choose to flee from the region and become refugees. These three factors affected the Syrian conflict entirely and have vital importance to offer any kind of solution for the termination of this conflict. Although there are several factors affecting why people choose to flee from Syria, and become refugees, I assert these three have more importance over the others. Because, any kind of solution for the termination of this conflict should be through the Syrian people, and ethnic differences and sectarian divergences will play main role in the formation of unified Syrian society. And to be able to accomplish it, economic disparity in the Syrian society has to be solved.

Examining the conflict through the lens of these three factors will contribute to our broader understanding of the causes of Syrian conflict. In this conflict, every group has different agenda, and it is important to understand why they behave the way they have been doing. All of the parties to the conflict do not stand to gain very much toward a peaceful solution because their motives are political, and they do not relate to the fundamental claims of citizens who seek an independent and more democratic Syria. This is a very complicated puzzle, and I am going to explain this by focusing how ethnic

differences and sectarian divergences affect it, and which roles economic disparity plays in the conflict. I have two claims. First, sectarian divergences and the ethnic differences in Syria have a deteriorating effect on the stability in Syria. Second, the economic disparity in Syria made it vulnerable to experience different conflicts at the same time, and led to civil war in Syria.

Ethnic Differences Factor

Milton Esman defines Ethnic identity as, “the set of meaning that individuals impute to their membership in an ethnic community, including those attributes that bind them to that collectivity and that distinguish it from others in their relevant environment.” (Esman, 1994, p.27) Despite the fact that there are disagreements about how ethnic identity is shaped and why it endures, most of the intellectuals accept that ethnic conflicts appear as one of the harshest challenges to the contemporary international political order. There are mainly three schools of thoughts on this topic: the primordialist, the instrumentalist, and the constructivist. (Ganguli and Taras, 2002) The instrumentalist approach will be used while explaining how ethnic differences factor affect the Syrian conflict.

According to the instrumentalist approach, ethnicity is that “a tool used by individuals, groups, or elites to obtain larger, typically material end.” (Ganguli and Taras, 2002, p.5) Additionally, Ted Gurr explains that “ethnic identity, one among several alternative bases of identity, gains social and political significance when ethnic entrepreneurs, either for offensive or defense purposes or in response to threads or opportunities for themselves and/or their groups, invoke and manipulate selected ethnic symbols to create political movements in which collective ends are sought.” (Gurr, 2000,

p.4) The reader can conclude that ethnic difference factor can be used as a device to initiate group mobilization via the use of ethnic symbols. Paul Brass defines Politicized ethnicity as, “the creation of elites, who draw upon, distort, and sometimes fabricate materials from the culture cultures of the groups they wish to represent in order to protect their well-being or existence or to gain political and economic advantage for their groups as well as themselves.” (Brass, 1991, p.8) Explaining ethnicity difference factor in the politicized ethnicity realm will be beneficial to show why every group in the Syrian conflict seeks their own agendas, and why they are not be able to build a strong opposition against the Assad regime.

Economic Disparity Factor

The type of political system in the state has vital importance while explaining the reasons led states to have bloody conflicts. In their book, *Why Nations Fail*, Acemoglu and Robinson underline the vital role of politics. Their concept of a prosperous state demands a governing body that powerful enough to unify political power and avoid unending factional disputing or abuse by the elite group. They argue that an extractive political system provides more benefits for a narrow elite population and lead the state to have an extractive financial structure. In this type of system, a big part of society cannot impact the political system, and obtain almost no incentives to apply their hard work into the activities to generate capital, and even if they create wealth, authors emphasizes that it will be seized by the political elites. Acemoglu asserts that this situation leads states to have economic crisis, inequalities in income, and social inequalities. These reasons can be hold as causes that establishing a ground for the outbreak of the conflict in Syria.

Focusing on economic disparity in the Syria will be beneficial for two reasons. First, explaining the causes that establishing a ground for the outbreak of the conflict in Syria will help to reader visualize and comprehend how the Syrian people already were on the brink of the big conflict in early 2011 since the broad economic disparity in the country. Second, it has value to show that after conflict started, Syrian economy went down drastically, and this made some contributions to increased brutality of the conflict. By the most of prominent economists, the gross domestic product (GDP) is accepted as significant predictor of the health of a country's economy. GDP shows the overall dollar worth of entire goods and services produced over a specific time period in a country. It will be used to make comparisons with the prior years of the Syrian conflict and after 2011. Additionally, Syrian refugee number and death rates will be used to show how the conflict intensified during the time.

Sectarian Divergences Factor

Sectarianism is not fresh topic to the Middle Eastern countries, whose culture is largely an Islamic one. Historically, Islam religion led states to build the foundation on which political culture rested. Since of Islam religion provided the basis for establishing the new political order, the realm of the country was not just about the land but corresponded with the religious community. Legitimacy of the state and laws within the order were originated from Islam faith. In the Islamic rule, governing mechanisms saw Christians and Jews as "People of the Book" and specified them with a protected status. Societies, which formed by the followers of these religions, were excused from Islamic order and they were permitted to live their religious lives freely and have their own law order inside their communities. This situation gave non-Muslims a somewhat religious

autonomy. The Ottomans, which governed several Middle Eastern societies including Syrian society until this century, was systematized on the foundation of reconciling religious identity with political authority. Substantial power was delivered to community leaders of different religious sects under its millet order. Many aspects of personal life were managed through the millet order including inheritance, marriage, and divorce. Additionally, there are many different sects within the Islam religion, and every sect was often able to keep their own autonomous communal order alike to Christians and Jews communities. Sectarianism has a long history in the Middle East, and we can assume that it has effect on the way today's political order shaped. (Nassar, 1995)

According to Max Weber's definition, a state is a "compulsory political association with continuous organization (whose) administrative staff successfully uphold a claim to the monopoly of legitimate use of force in the enforcement of its order." (Weber, 1947, p.154) When we look at the other definitions, we see strong highlights about mechanisms implementing laws, extracting taxes, and administering citizens. It is normal to assume that these mechanisms affected by rooted historical experiences because of they are a fundamental portion of their socialization. Syria contains various sects inside of its borders, and having one privileged small sect can raise inequality problems in the society. This makes it harder in the society to have consensus about any issue. Syrian government has to try to satisfy their needs in someway. I believe that focusing on Sectarian divergences factor will give more explanatory power on the explaining why Syrian conflict intensified, and subsequently why people choose to flee country, and become refugees.

CHAPTER IV

DISCUSSION

Analysis of the Effects of Ethic and Sectarian differences on the Syrian Conflict

According to Patrick Cockburn, the Syrian problem contains five different conflicts that cross-inflect and exacerbate each other. He claims, “the war commenced with a genuine popular revolt against a brutal and corrupt dictatorship, but it soon became intertwined with the struggle of the Sunni against the Alawites, and that fed into the Shia-Sunni conflict in the region as a whole, with a standoff between the US, Saudi Arabia, and the Sunni States on the one side and Iran, Iraq, and Lebanese Shia in the other. In addition to this, there is a revived cold war between Moscow and the West, exacerbated by the conflict in Libya and more recently made even worse by the crisis in the Ukraine.” (Cockburn,2014, p.94) Additionally, I claim that inequality in the Syrian society led these different conflicts to take place in Syria, and it bolstered their effects in the region. The roots of inequality in the Syrian society come from different treatments to the sectarian divergences and ethnic differences by the Syrian state. In this paper, the main aim is to show the ethnic and sectarian differences’ effect on the Syrian conflict. However, keeping these five different conflicts in mind will help the reader to comprehend how the ethnic and sectarian differences play a role in the micro and also macro level in the area.

Sectarian divergences have been a problematic part of the social order in Syria since its foundation as the modern Syrian state after the World War I. However, under the

Hafez Assad regime it became more apparent. Hafez Assad was aware of his country's long history of military coups. He strengthened the Syrian military and intelligence service to defend against any potential coup by appointing his relatives to the important positions in these services (Ghalion, 2012).

“He depended on the officers’ corps and he managed, throughout the years, to make the big percentage of the officers in the military belong to the same sect, the Alawis. I witnessed that year after year. I used to monitor every year the list where the ne officers get graduated from the military collages and I used to see, very obvious, how 80 or 70 pre cent of the graduates belongs to the same sect.”
(Ghalion, 2012)

- (Retired) Brigadier General Akil

Haskem

Basar Assad inherited “a tinder box of sectarian tension” with the losers of this tension, notably Sunnis (Haskem, 2012). Alawite Shia and Arab Sunnis are the majority of the Muslim population. The tension is high along the sectarian lines between Sunni-Shia, and Bashar al-Assad’s regime represents the Shia community. Based on information discussed above, I have several arguments. Ghayth Armanazi states, “the very mechanisms of violence, real and imagined, which both Assads have used to keep control have shown what the consequences are of challenging the regime. This legacy of memory and imagined outcomes arguably raised stakes fed the outbreak of the current violence. The fear of severe retribution forced Syrians into a zero sum position.” (Armanazi, 2014.) The fear is very important component of the outbreak of the civil war.

Similarly, when the Yugoslavian state collapsed in the 1990s, it caused great chaos that unleashed enormous panic and fear inside the groups under the state's protection since they had no answer for who would protect them. Michael Ignatief asserts that such "fear makes it difficult to sustain multi confessional, pluralist, tolerant orders when dictatorship collapses" (Hashemi, N., & Postel, 2013, p.46). This is happening in Syria now. Since the first moments of the Syrian uprising, Kurds, Armenians, Assyrians, Christians, Druze, Alawite Shias, and the Arab Sunnis have been asking one question: who will protect us. The only possible answer they have found is themselves.

Moreover the rivalry between sectarian and ethnic differences, and the involvement of the several jihadi groups into the conflict with their own varying agendas led stronger opposing groups to think about even more than question of "who will protect us." They started to seek their own goals that solidify their standing in the divided society or even dreams of a new independent state as in the example of the Kurds. We can conclude that this situation is one of the unintended results of the Assad Regime's fighting against opposing groups. Because the Assad regime's use of extreme tactics against opposing groups had an escalatory effect turning the uprising into large-scale armed conflicts in the area and this deteriorating effect elevated the fighting will of the opposing groups, which then demanded more assistance from their supporters .

Until now, statistics about the casualties in the conflict show that giving arms to the opposing groups did nothing but causing more deaths in the area. Furthermore we have no reliable source of indicating whether escalating conflict through the arm assistance to the opposing groups would be successful, and if so, we should seek reliable answers to the questions of “what sort of governing process will emerge in Syria, and what extent it would be abusive toward those who directly and indirectly sided with the government during the struggle” (Hashemi, N., & Postel, 2013, p.61).

Another reason for what makes Syrian conflict different than others is that the uprising started by the Syrians, who gathered at the streets in 2011 rebelling against dictatorship and corruption, and demanding reform in the government has brought other regional powers onto the table since the uprising had been promptly escalated Shiite-Sunni rivalry. Saudi Arabia is one of the major competitors for the regional domination and if Assad’s regime defeated and collapsed, the Shiite bloc of Tehran-Damascus-Hezbollah would be significantly weakened. Of course, because of this reason Iran, notably other strong regional power, is supporting Assad’s regime by any means necessary to keep Assad in his chair. However, this competition between regional powers only makes Shiite- Sunni antagonism deeper in the area and Syria becomes less livable place. Therefore, refugees stream across the borders of Syria into the neighboring countries of Iraq, Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey everyday.

Another area, which deeply affected by the events since 2011, is the Syrian economy. The uprising has had significant detrimental effects on it. Syrian economy was vigorous from the late-1940s until the early-1980s. Even in 1983, Syria’s GDP was higher than Turkey’s which was almost equal with South Korea. However, with the start

of the uprising in 2011, Syrian economy started experiencing main structural changes. There was a clear distinction between “rural areas where slums had formed as a result of the agricultural crisis” and “urban centers where certain sectors were booming as a result of liberation.” (Starr, 2014.) This situation caused to the immigration of hundreds of thousands of Syrians from northern and eastern Syria to the suburbs of Homs, Damascus, and Daraa. However, analyzing the economic conditions getting harder since just a few indicators are published. Starr asserts three main impact which the uprising has had on the economy; first is “in May 2011, the first set of sanctions was put in place which dampened consumer and investor confidence,” and second is, “in response to the uprising, the regime made poor economic policy choices which appeared to be knee-jerk reactions based purely on political considerations and further deteriorated consumer and investor confidence,” and the third is, “ in November 2011, further sanctions were implemented which had more severe consequences than those which were implemented in May. These sanctions targeted individuals, crude oil exports and investor confidence.” (Starr, 2014, p.8.)

According to The World Bank estimates, the consequences of the Syrian conflict catastrophic for the economy. Syria’s GDP is “estimated to have contracted by an average of 15.4 percent for the period (2011-14) and is expected to decline further by nearly 16 percent in 2015. The decline in GDP growth was in part attributed to a sharp decline in oil production, down from 368,000 barrels per day in 2010 to an estimated 40,000 barrels per day in 2015. After increasing by nearly 90 percent in 2013, average inflation increased by 29 percent in 2014. CPI inflation is estimated to increase by 30

percent in 2015 because of continued trade disruption, shortages and a sharp depreciation of the Syrian pound.” (World Bank, 2016)

What could be done to end all of this? According to Patrick Cockburn, “the theory that arming the opposition will bring Assad to discuss peace and his own departure presupposes a complete transformation of the situation on the battlefield. This would happen, if at all, after years of fighting.” (Cockburn, 2014, p.92) Moreover he believes that Hezbollah, Russia, and Iran are reluctant to see their Syrian ally defeated but also he asserts “allowing Assad to win would be seen as a defeat for the West and their Arab and Turkish allies.” However, Cockburn advocates, “by insisting that Assad should go as a precondition of peace, while knowing this is not going to happen, his enemies are in practice ensuring that the war will go on. Assad may not want a peaceful compromise, but then neither is he being offered one.” (Cockburn, 2014, p.93)

Although some of Cockburn’s observations could be agreeable, several reasons could be raised to show on the invalidity of his last statement. In the first place, protests had started as nonviolent demands for reform in the government, the Assad Regime had the power to orchestrate the protests in a non-brutal way but using extreme responses to these protests turned them into a brutal conflict, which is devastating the country. Since 2011, opposing groups have been fighting against dictatorship and assuming Assad’s stay in power would bring a solution to terminate this bloody conflict is not realistic. Even though opposing groups could not create one united opposition and they have different agendas, they have been fighting against one enemy, Assad’s Regime.

Instability and Difficulty of Building A Consensus in the Region

In May 2016, Syrian conflict reached its fifth year with the Assad government emboldened by flowing international attention, and a rising humanitarian problems exacerbated by the growth of the ISIS. The final statistics are sad, half of the country's population displaced, and more than 215,000 people have been killed almost a third of them civilians and involving more than 10,000 children. Inside Syria, more than "seven million people have been displaced, and the UN says around 60 percent of the population now lives in poverty." The human rights groups blame the international community for the results of the Syrian War. The entire world is witnessing that how Syria has been carved up by jihadist groups, Kurdish fighters, government forces, and non-jihadist opposing groups. The UN refugee agency UNHCR states, "the biggest humanitarian emergency of our era is Syria now". Despite the international attention, there is not a solution to stop Syrian crises on the horizon. According to Bente Scheller, "objections against providing sophisticated weapons to hundreds of local and regionals of Syrian fighters are well reasoned, but there is no optimal solution; the choice instead boils down to choosing the least bad option." (Scheller, 2014, p.217)

Famous author Noam Chomsky points out that the Sunni-Shia separation goes back to the early days of Islam and the Alawites were an early offshoot of Shia Islam. He states, "when the United States invaded Iraq in 2003, the occupation exacerbated low-level religious tensions, which have since been tearing Iraq apart and spread to the entire region- Syria in particular." (Erlich, 2014, p.12) He adds that "the war has become much more complicated because of intensified fighting between Sunni, Alawites, Shia, and other religious and ethnic groups with their own varying agendas." (Erlich, 2014, p.11)

Chomsky believes that there is only one slim possibility that has a chance of saving Syria, “a negotiated, political settlement of the Geneva type.” He asserts that the United States and Russia could bring pressure to bear to terminate this conflict. So, the reader can assume that forming a unity between big powers in the conflict will help to structure unity in the region.

In *Why Nations Fail*, Daron Acemoglu and James Robinson examine the origins of power, prosperity, and poverty. Authors state, “While economic institutions are critical for determining whether a country is poor or prosperous, it is politics and political institutions that determine what economic institutions a country has.” (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2012) Simply, they argue that the states flourish or collapse based on whether the economic and political institutions of the state are “extractive” or “inclusive.” The critical role of stable economic institutions for prosperous countries has been recognized by the international relations literature. Acemoglu and Robinson’s contribution is that they underline the vital role of politics. Their concept of a prosperous state demands a governing body that powerful enough to unify political power and avoid unending factional disputing or abuse by the elite group. We should look for a system, which could avoid unending factual disputing or abuse by the elite group in Syria.

They discuss that an inclusive political system has significant importance for the states to higher their prosperity level since this type of political system will let the state to have an inclusive financial structure. This system delivers justice and incentives for society to develop skills, work hard, earn fair, have investments, and invent. On the contrary, an extractive political system provides more benefits for a narrow elite population and lead the state to have an extractive financial structure. In this type of

system, a big part of society cannot impact the political system, and obtain almost no incentives to apply their hard work into the activities to generate capital, and even if they create wealth, authors emphasizes that it will be seized by the political elites. There are some instances of extractive economic systems that succeed an economical progression for a short time, but most of them cannot accomplish persistent progress. According to Acemoglu and Robinson, the main reason for this situation is that an extractive political system cannot have major technological and scientific changes and there will be disagreement over the system's spoils since advantages of a narrow elite population is more important than the rest of the society.

Evaluation of the Syrian conflict through the Acemoglu and Robinson's why nations fail theory will be beneficial for this discussion. They argue that having multiple ethnical groups in a state and absence of political centralization can cause the deficiency of law and order. They show Somali as a sample of a state with many clans and no central political power. Basically they define it as a failed state. On the other hand, they give Botswana example. Botswana became politically centralized after its independence under Seretse Khama, recognized English language as common medium, and used the capital that comes from diamond trade to finance basic public service. (Acemoglu& Robinson, 2012) And that is why they see Botswana as a well governed and growing state. If the one choose to see England, Japan, United States, and even Botswana as states that not failed, it can be concluded that their inclusive political and economic institutions led them into be prosperous states. Having multiple ethnical groups in a state and absence of political centralization can cause deficiency of the law and order. This is vey close to what is happening in the Syria.

In *Imagined Communities*, Benedict Anderson, presents the theory that nations are productions of contemporary communication systems, and the shared and collective characterization of societies' imagination. In his assessment, he points out that for the formation of nations, people's perception about nation is more important than its objective aspects such as borders and physical possessions, etc. In the anthropological spirit, Anderson asserts, "definition of nation: it is an imagined community- and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign." (Anderson, 2006, 6) Then he explains, "it is imagined because of the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the imagine of their communion." (Anderson, 2006, 6) Therefrom one can conclude that political nations existence is strictly correlated the degree that they exist in people's perception. Even though different ethnic and sectarian groups have been living in Syria for a long time, their imagination towards each other changed drastically during the conflict. Their distinctions became more apparent, this situation raised ethnic and sectarian groups' deteriorating effect towards ending the conflict.

While recognizing the importance of language, Benedict Anderson's work proposes that nationalism emerged around the world by the influences of three leading advances. These advances are "print-capitalism," the emergence of new elites, and the bureaucratic "weld" or "conscious welding of two opposing political orders, one ancient, one quite new." (Anderson, 2006,88) The process began with the "revolutionary vernacularizing thrust of capitalism," which not only enlarged the number of people who know how to read but also caused to the advancement of vernacular languages as tools of administrative centralization. (Anderson, 2006, 39) "The convergence of capitalism and

print technology on the fatal diversity of human language,” Anderson points, “created the possibility of a new form of imagined community, which in its basic morphology set the stage for the modern nation.” (Anderson, 2006, 46) The second advancement was the emergence of what Anderson writes the “creole pioneers – the elite classes who led movements in opposition to the colonial states, particularly in the Americas.” For instance here, print capitalism shows that it has higher importance than language. New England and the Spanish colonies formed their own press and spread their thoughts. Thus “pilgrim creole functionaries and provincial creole print men played the decisive historic role” in the creation of nationalism. (Anderson, 2006, 88) Although Anderson sees nationalism as an outcome of modernity, he approaches it as an inclusive phenomenon determined by ever-changing causes, which are diverged from state to state, and from culture to culture, and moment-to-moment concentrating on what unlike peoples have in common. Anderson’s perspective is that nationalism uses the past as a resource of constructing new social structures, and it mainly springs from religion and dynasty.

In Alliance Formation in Civil Wars, Fotini Christia emphasizes that to be able to comprehend the common shifts of alliances in civil wars, a regional analysis of identity, culture, and history is essential. While Fotini traces these variables’ effects, she also proposes that there is an ultimate reason to changing alliances in civil wars that would not be unexpected to the other popular political power theorists including Thomas Hobbes. She believes that basic power consumption has higher impacts on shifting alliances in civil wars than other variables including the issues related to identity. By relying on neorealist arguments of international relations, Fotini’s main argument is that “Warring groups in multiparty civil wars are motivated first and foremost by relative power

considerations. These groups dwell in an anarchic environment where they seek not only to survive, but also to profit. As a result, each group seeks to form wartime intergroup alliances that constitute minimum winning coalitions: alliances with enough aggregate power to win the conflict, but with as few partners as possible so the group can maximize its share of postwar political control.” (Fotini, 2012, p. 239-240) She asserts, “The relative power distribution between and within various groups is the primary driving force behind alliance formation, alliance changes, group splits, and internal group takeovers.” (Fotini, 2012, p. 1)

Fotini advocates that identities are often used to justify choices made in response to power consumption race, and says, “Elites of the warring parties pick their allies based on power considerations and then construct justifying narratives.” (Fotini, 2012, p. 7) Especially, she claims, “The notions of shared identity are not causes of alliance behavior but are employed instrumentally to justify the power-driven alliance decisions that are actually made by elites... Notions of shared identity thus prove endogenous to alliance preferences: Elites pick their allies first based on tactical dictates, and then look to their identity repertoire for characteristics they share with their friends—and the same time do not share with their enemies—that would allow for the construction of justifying narratives.” (Fotini, 2012, p. 46)

In her book, Fotini discusses that alliance formation is a strategic action, determined by a concern with success and the expansion of wartime profits as anticipated in the political power distribution of the post war state. Normally, all groups desire to be in an alliance that major enough to reach victory while minor enough to safeguard highest political payoffs. However, in reality, accomplishing this outcome is quite challenging

since there are so many number of groups and characteristic disorder in civil war. Since almost every actor looks for an environment for them to commit less and exploit more gains, warring group interactions become problematic, and this adds more complexity to find a common ground between these actors in civil wars. Particularly, while civil war literature widely has looked to the commitment problems as an obstacle to opposing groups having negotiated resolutions with the state, Fotini asserts that commitment problems will also lead groups to be afraid of ending the war as a weaker alliance partner. Because, absence of the third party that can reliably implement the agreed-on separation of political control, the weaker partner will choose to defect and lengthen the war instead of facing with the risk that being betrayed at the hands of the stronger alliance partner upon the end of civil war, which may include fierce regulations and political demotion. Fotini concludes that until the time one alliance partner has enough power to end and win the civil war on its own, as an consequence of this dilemma, the civil war will degrade into a route of endless defection, and alliance shifts, as groups operate in a desire to have the victory while guaranteeing they do not get betrayed at the hands of the stronger alliance partner.

Fotini's approach offers a different point against to identity-grounded opinions, and she shows ideology, common culture, religion, or race do not seem to assure in any lasting way the configuration of the alliance groups. In its place, elites of the opposing groups choose their partners relied on power considerations and subsequently build justifying frames, looking to their "identity repertoires" for the features mutual with their partners and unshared with their adversaries. Similarly, Fotini asserts that same elites can use these identity narratives when justifying actions for obeying their group leaders or

going against them. According to Fotini's thesis, which is parallel with the most of literature in comparative politics, "Elites strategically manipulate identity categories for political purposes, nonetheless suggests that identity attributes do have psychological and emotional import for the rank and file-hence the reason elites constantly invoke them. In other words, while identity factors do not determine alliance choices, the fact that leaders feel compelled to justify their choices in these terms implies identity narratives are useful for public consumption." (Fotini, 2012) Fotini's view is not necessarily against Benedict Anderson's imagined communities thesis that for the formation of nations, people's perception about nation is more important than its objective aspects such as borders and physical possessions, etc. Fotini explains that "wartime alliances, and the groups that comprise them, are not merely imagined but rather constantly reimagined communities." (Anderson, 2012) Knowing the fact that that there is nothing essential about the formation of these alliances, one can conclude that the identity narratives provide a body to hold them together, and they are basically instrumental use of "invented traditions" by elites. If there is a need for new power considerations, these invented traditions will be discarded and re-imagination of these communities will start again.

Civil wars bring complex relations together and that is why policy makers should not only be observing to race, language, or religion to guess or prevent possible civil alliance groups. For instance Bosnia case reveals that Muslims can affiliate with Christians first and then be their adversaries in a civil war environment. Likewise, in Afghanistan, Sunnis can be partner with Shiites at one point in the civil war and be enemy with them at another. Fotini explains that common identity characteristics, such as early dislikes or historical friendships, are factors that cannot fully predict the outcome of

civil war alliances. Fairly, such factors can be gainful to form the post-conflict era. However, they are equally important as in the beginning of civil wars. They can be easily reshaped and used in turns of building one big opposition group against the current regime or destroying any opposition groups go against the current regime. Because of the fragile nature of the civil war environment, relying on the victories local groups may grow in fame at one stage in the civil war and after having losses they can be destroyed by other groups. In sum, according to Fotini, shifts in the relative power distribution between opposing actors will regulate groups' decision to support their alliance or find a new one. By monitoring carefully the changes between the opposing groups in the civil war will help policy makers to predict civil war alliances.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

According a new report published by the Syrian Centre for Policy Research (SCPR), Syrian conflict have had catastrophic impacts on the country's economy, infrastructure, and its institutions in the last five years. The report indicates that there are 470,000 fatalities inflicted by the civil war. In a different perspective, along with the injuries, overall 11.5% of the Syria's population have been killed since the conflict started in March 2011, the report shows. Almost 1.9 million people wounded, and life expectancy has fallen from 70 in 2010 to 55.4 in 2015. There has been drastic amount of decrease in the Syria's GDP. Total economic losses are predicted at \$255bn. (Black, 2016)

Since the beginning of the conflict, every passing year statistics have been deteriorated. There has been an exponential growth in the number of people who choose to flee from the Syria and become refugees. In 2012, the amount of refugee was around 100,000. By the end of April 2013, this number increased to 800,000. In following four months it doubled and amounted to 1.6 million refugees. As of March 1,2016, the number of Syrian refugees scattered around the region is 4.7 million, which is the largest refugee population under the United Nations' supervision. (Black, 2016)

In the Syrian society, ethnic difference, sectarian divergence, and economic disparity factors played a deteriorating role in the stability of the region. Politicized

Ethnic fragmentation and mobilized sectarianism fueled opposition that destabilized Syria; the government's violent repression of opposition groups exacerbated the conflict that led to virtual civil war; the armed conflict precipitated a crisis of confidence that spawned mass migration; the economic disparity in the country caused more divided society, and it made society vulnerable to experience a civil war.

It is true that there is never adequate capital to please every need and demand. Even in the quite wealthy states, means fall short of needs. The harsh truth of scarcity causes to competition over public sources. We define this contest over policies and priorities politics. According to Lewis and Hildreth, "Politics is the use of power and authority to tackle shared problems in the face of scarcity and competing demands." (Lewis& Hildreth, 2011) From this definition, we can assume that there is a strong relationship between power and authority. Power often uses coercion to fulfill its aims, and the authority often applies to voluntary cooperation and influence over people to have specific behaviors otherwise they would not have. Among this power and authority fight over the scarcity of sources, finding balance and governing based on fairness have significant role in the stability of the country. For the Syria case, lack of this balance caused economic disparity. Along with natural sectarian and ethnic fragmentation in the Syrian society, economic disparity made the region vulnerable to experience different conflicts at the same time, and made it difficult for society to build a consensus that would end these conflicts.

Since the early days of the uprising in Syria, Assad regime applied coercion overwhelmingly to fulfill its aims. Their use of extreme tactics against opposing groups has had an escalatory effect on turning the uprising into large-scale armed conflicts in the

area. Syrian society has very fragmented structure. Within the Assad regime, and opposition groups, there are several ethnic and sectarian divergences. The Assad regime's use of extreme measures against the opposing groups caused these groups to fight for their own interests. Seeking their own interests prohibited them to build a strong, united opposition to overthrow the Assad regime, but instead made society more divided in its differences. This situation intensified the brutality of the conflict, and as a result, people chose to emigrate from the area.

Josph E. Stiglitz argues that there are three main ideas of sociopolitical economics that are recognized around the world. First, markets should be efficient and stable, but they are not. Second, political systems must intervene to correct market failures, but they do not. And, third, political and economic systems should be essentially fair, but they are not. According to Stiglitz, these three conditions are closely linked: "the inequality is cause and consequence of the failure of the political system, and it contributes to the instability of our economic system, which in turn contributes to increased inequality -a vicious downward spiral into which we have descended, and from which we can emerge only through concerted policies" (Stiglitz, 2012, p.4). Every country has different level of risk as a consequence of inequality. In Syria, inequality originated from Syrian government's unfair treatments towards its citizens, and it caused more divided society. As a result of his sociopolitical atmosphere in the region, different conflicts could occur in the Syria as Cockburn, 2014 claimed. The country experienced civil war, and it became the main reason why people choose to flee from the region, and become refugee.

I believe that international community has legal and ethic obligations against refugees but there has to be a long-term solution to end this bloody conflict. Because,

there are international security concerns and economical concerns arising from the conflict. These are the indirect consequences of the Syrian conflict in the international area. Unfortunately, the mass refugee influx from Syria used to provide a ground for the illicit activities by the transnational organized criminal networks and became a security threat for final destination countries. Consequences became catastrophic for the final destination countries, and also for the innocent Syrian people.

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