

HOW TO END THE SYRIAN CIVIL WAR AND ITS REFUGEE CRISIS - A POSSIBLE SCENARIO

Gabriel GIUVARA*, Gabriel RĂDUCANU**

*Air Operational Centre, Bucharest, Romania, ** "Henri Coandă" Air Force Academy, Braşov, Romania

Abstract: *The Syrian Arab Republic was established after the World War I; administrated initially by the French, the country became independent in 1946 (CIA, 2019). Hafiz al-Assad, member of the Baath Arab Socialist Party took power through a military coup in 1963 (CIA, 2019); his government headed by a single Party declared the state of emergency that would last for 48 years. When Hafiz al-Assad died, by 2000, his son Bashar al-Assad became president by popular referendum. Maintaining the state of emergency allowed al-Assad to retain strict control of security forces and all social and political sectors. The late 2010-early 2011 civil unrest, known as the Arab Spring, spread like wildfire and blew its 'wind of change' across Northern Africa and the Middle East. But in Syria, the protests did not echo nationwide; the security forces suppressed them quickly. In March 2011 however, following the arrest and torture of a couple of students who had written anti-Assad messages on a wall, the situation escalated and protests broke out again. In an attempt to defuse the situation, the security forces opened fire and killed four people. It was the beginning of Syrian civil war, which "has produced over 140,000 dead, hundreds of thousands wounded, and almost half of Syria's population displaced, either internally or in refugee camps on Syria's border" (Amos, 2014). This article focuses on describing the existing situation and a desired end state, defining the problem and developing a possible approach to end the Syrian civil war and its refugee crisis.*

Keywords: *Syria; civil war; refugee crisis*

1. THE SYRIAN REFUGEE CRISIS

The situation in Syria remains critical as long as fighting continues across the country between government forces and anti-Assad regime insurgents -- some of whom are fighting amongst themselves. It looks like

more than 75% of the armed opposition may seek to replace the Assad government with a state ruled according to Sunni Islamic law (Blanchard *et al.*, 2014).

The Kurds have broad control of northeastern Syria and may seek autonomy/independence in the future.

Neither pro-Assad forces nor their opponents appear capable of consolidating their battlefield gains or achieving outright victory in the short term (Blanchard *et al.*, 2014).

Despite the fact that the government forces have lost control of large areas of the country, "the regime's crackdown on dissent has shown little to no sign of abating" (Nerguizian, 2011). The country's Alawite-led praetorian security forces remain devoted

to President Bashar al-Assad and "attempt to restore order and quash unrest"¹. As clashes continue, Syrian populations continue to suffer. They are the subject either of inhumane and degrading treatments by government forces or of recruitment by almost all the factions fighting in Syria:

¹"Syria's Alawite community has a history of persecution, but dominate the ruling family's security forces [...] In the Arab world, the Sunnis exercise a hegemony that has often made minority sects feel insecure. Shia and heterodox sects - such as the Alawites - have been persecuted. Alawites saw the ruling Baath party as a way to transcend narrow sectarian identities, while state employment and the military offered opportunities for social advancement and an escape from poverty. Despite defections and desertions, Syria's praetorian military units may have little choice but to rally around the Assad regime. Given their limited prospects in a post-Assad Syria, heavily Alawite elite units with sizeable numbers of loyal Sunnis will likely perceive no alternatives to defending the regime in the event of wider intervention." Nir Rosen, "Assad's Alawites: The guardians of the throne," (Aljazeera, October 10, 2011), available from <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2011/10/20111010122434671982.html> (accessed on April 5, 2014).

More than 13 million people need humanitarian assistance inside Syria, another 5.6 million have

fled the country as refugees, and 6.2 million people are displaced within Syria (World vision, 2019).



Fig.1. Syrian Refugee crisis in numbers (Source: Al Jazeera, UNHCR)

As depicted in Figure 1, Turkey and Lebanon have represented together ‘temporary destinations’ of more than 3 million Syrian refugees, from where most of them migrated into Europe. Iraq hosts around 250,000 refugees while Jordan, with its three large camps, is “home” of more than 600,000. The Jordanian authorities and charities have done their best to provide supplies and care but the refugee flows push the situation beyond the limits of both the host country and the international community. Armed gangs, prostitution rings, factions and the mental condition of most refugees contribute to the chaos. The al-Qaeda-affiliated extremist groups such as ISIL (the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant) and Jabhat al-Nusra Front have taken advantage of this situation, instigating the refugees to attack Jordanian cities and villages thus creating disorder in the host country. In country, opposition forces continue fighting on multiple fronts as they face pressure from both the government forces and the extremist groups. They lack both unity of purpose and unity of command as well as unified international support. There is a continuous divergence among the opposing elements over the questions of whether and under what conditions to participate in negotiations with Bashar al-Assad regime. While some political wings, like National Coalition of Syrian Revolution and Opposition Forces (or Syrian Opposition Coalition, SOC), want negotiations for a secular Syrian state, others reject secular democracy, the political authority of

the National Coalition, and negotiations with the Assad government and appears committed to continuing their military operations. SOC has expressed several times its request that President Assad and his acolytes will not be members of any transitional governing body. At the international level, divergent perspectives among Syrian parties to the conflict (which in fact reflect their respective international backers) question the prospects for negotiations to end the conflict in the near future. While the member countries of the “Friends of Syria Group”² seek to a transitional process without Bashar al-Assad (as agreed to in Geneva in June 2012), Russia and Iran continue to support the current Syrian regime, which -- contrary to some observers’ predictions -- has shown no indication of an imminent collapse. Furthermore, Syria has not complied with the deadline established by United Nation Security Council Resolution 2118 for removal of chemical agents from its territory, which means that only 70 percent of chemical weapons have been removed. Ultimately, as part of refugees had fled into neighbouring Turkey,

²“The group consists of: Albania, Canada, Egypt, France, Germany, Italy, Jordan, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, United Arab Emirates, the United Kingdom and the United States”. Congressional Research Service, “Armed Conflict in Syria: Overview and U.S. Response,” (Washington DC, March 25, 2019), available online at: <https://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/mideast/RL33487.pdf>

Jordan, Lebanon and Iraq, the war in Syria is also exacerbating local sectarian and political conflicts within these countries, where violence may escalate and threaten national stability.

2. A POSSIBLE SCENARIO

The envisaged scenario which may change the future situation in Syria and its surrounding areas has to reflect the conditions that must exist to achieve the desired end state and how the relationships have to change among the 'actors.' In such an environment, Syria shall pass a peaceful transitional process toward its future status under an established Transitional Governing Body (TGB) as outlined in the June 2012 Geneva principles. To this end, the different factions of insurgents have to reach an agreement on the conditions to participate in negotiations as well as on the tactics, strategy, and their long-term political goals for Syria. Furthermore, they must reach an agreement on a potential future candidacy of Bashar al-Assad for presidential election and involvement of his devotees in the TGB or future Syrian politics. The country's Alawite-led praetorian security forces as well as state security services shall fall under full control of TGB and stop mass killings, arrests, detention and torture as well as inhumane and degrading treatment against population. The international community as well as the international organizations (IOs) and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) shall assist the authorities and charities in the neighbouring countries to deal with the situation involving the Syrian refugees and provide the required funding to respond to the crisis. Nevertheless, Syria has to comply with the deadline established by United Nations Security Council for the complete removal of chemical weapons from its territory. Divergent perspectives among international backers to the Syrian parties must be attenuated and directed to prospecting of an acceptable path to end the conflict. Finally, under no circumstances, the war in Syria shall exacerbate local sectarian and political conflicts within neighbouring countries.

Bashar al-Assad and his devoted forces' actions, the dissensions among the insurgent groups and the continuous pressure exercised by the extremist groups on refugees represent the primary impediments for the achievement of the envisaged state of the situation in Syria and its surrounding areas. The Syrian president's tendency is to continue military and security operations against insurgents while pursuing political agreements that he likely judges could bolster

international support for his government. Then, there is permanent tension between Bashar al-Assad and insurgents regarding the current president's involvement in the future Syrian politics. While Assad's willingness is to participate in discussions but to reject calls for his resignation, some factions demand that President Assad and his acolytes will not be members of any TGB. There is also tension among different factions of insurgents on proposals for negotiation as well as on their long-term political goals for Syria. Explicitly, some tendencies are to continue rejecting secular democracy and negotiations with the Assad government, which is in fact what the other 'actors' have proposed. Increased dialogue of international community under UN aegis may attenuate divergent perspectives on Syria and help the country to remove all chemical weapons from its territory. Amplified assistance by international community, IOs and NGOs will support Damascus to stabilize the crisis of refugees.

3. CONCLUSIONS

There is potential to solve the civil war in Syria as well as the Syrian refugee crisis and transform such a scenario into reality. To this end, there must exist concessions among all involved actors, which in fact does not happen in real life. With many armed opposition groups weakened, defeated, or geographically isolated, military pressure on the Syrian government to make concessions to the opposition has been reduced. As stated by the intelligence community's in 2018 Worldwide Threat Assessment, "the conflict has decisively shifted in the Syrian regime's favour, enabling Russia and Iran to further entrench themselves inside the country" (WTA, 2018). The United Nations Organisation has supported peace talks in Geneva since 2012, but it is yet unclear when or whether the parties might reach a political settlement that could result in a transition away from Bashar al-Assad regime.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

1. Amos, Valerie (ed.). (2014). Statement on Syria. *United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs*. [online]. URL: <https://docs.unocha.org/sites/dms/Documents/15%20March%20USG%20Statement%20Syria%203%20years%20on.pdf> [Accessed on March, 2019].
2. Blanchard, Christopher M.; Humud, Carla E. & Nikitin, Mary Beth D. (2014). *Armed Conflict*

- in Syria: Overview and U.S. Response.* [online]. URL: <https://securityassistance.org/sites/default/files/219940.pdf> [Accessed on March, 2019].
3. Central Agency of Intelligence. (2019). *World Factbook – Syria.* [online]. URL: <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/sy.html>. [Accessed on March, 2019].
 4. Congressional Research Service. (2019). *Armed Conflict in Syria: Overview and U.S. Response. Federation of American Scientists* [online]. URL: <https://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/mideast/RL33487.pdf> [Accessed on March, 2019].
 5. Nerguizian, Aram. (2011). *Instability in Syria: Assessing the Risks of Military Intervention. Center for Strategic and International Studies* (Washington DC, December 13, 2011) [online]. URL: http://csis.org/files/publication/111213_SyriaMilitaryIntervention.pdf [Accessed on March, 2019].
 6. Rosen, Nir. (2011). *Assad's Alawites: The guardians of the throne. Aljazeera*, October 10, 2011 [online]. URL: <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2011/10/20111010122434671982.html> [Accessed on March, 2019].
 7. World vision. (2019). *Syrian refugee crisis: Facts, FAQs, and how to help*, March 15, 2019. [online]. URL: <https://www.worldvision.org/refugees-news-stories/syrian-refugee-crisis-facts> [Accessed on March, 2019].
 8. ***. (2018). *Worldwide Threat Assessment (WTA) of the U.S. Intelligence Community* [online]. URL: <https://www.dni.gov/files/documents/Newsroom/Testimonies/2018-ATA---Unclassified-SSCI.pdf> [Accessed on March, 2019].