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# **Syria Crisis Common Context Analysis**

Report commissioned by the  
IASC Inter-Agency Humanitarian Evaluations Steering Group as part of the Syria  
Coordinated Accountability and Lessons Learning Initiative

**Hugo Slim and Lorenzo Trombetta**

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The contents and conclusions of this report reflect strictly those of the authors and not those of the members of the Steering Group for Inter-Agency Humanitarian Evaluations.

## **Management**

Management Group: Francesca Bonino, ALNAP; Machiel Salomons, UNHCR; Erica Mattellone and Mathew Varghese, UNICEF; Elise Benoit, WFP.

Chair of the Management Group: Scott Green, OCHA.

Project Manager: Maria Agnese Giordano, OCHA.

## **Commissioner**

This study was commissioned by the Inter-Agency Humanitarian Evaluations Steering Group. Members of the Steering Group are ALNAP, FAO, IFRC, OCHA, UNHCR, UNICEF, WFP, WHO and World Vision International.

## **About the authors**

This study was carried out by Hugo Slim and Lorenzo Trombetta. Dr. Slim is a leading scholar in humanitarian studies with a strong focus on the ethics of war, humanitarian practice and human rights. He is currently leading research on Humanitarian Ethics at the Institute of Ethics, Law and Armed Conflict at the University of Oxford. Dr. Slim combines strong academic rigour with well-grounded experience in operational settings.

Lorenzo Trombetta is a Beirut-based scholar and journalist specialized in Syria and Lebanon. Dr. Trombetta has authored two books on contemporary Syria, written several academic papers and contributed to various international conferences and workshops on Syria. Dr. Trombetta also provides advice to parliamentary commissions and governmental panels. He works as Middle Eastern correspondent for the Italian news agency *Ansa* and the Italian review of geopolitics *LIMEs*. Dr. Trombetta is fluent in Arabic.

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## Foreword

As the Syria conflict persists and the humanitarian crisis in the region worsens, humanitarian actors are looking at ways to find solutions to respond to the growing needs of affected people and to the spread of political violence in the region. Learning, reflecting and analysing are critical processes for helping humanitarian actors identify more suitable and effective ways to deliver aid, protect people in need and strengthen community resilience.

Responding to this need, the IASC Steering Group for Inter-Agency Humanitarian Evaluations (IAHE) in 2013 established the Syria Co-ordinated Accountability and Lessons Learning (CALL) initiative, overseen by an inter-agency Management Group composed of WFP, UNHCR, UNICEF, OCHA and ALNAP. The Syria-CALL initiative's key objectives are to enhance the quality and use of evaluative activities, and increase learning and knowledge sharing for improved humanitarian response.

This Common Context Analysis is one of the outputs of this initiative. It will be complemented by a common evaluation framework, which will help ensure that a collective conclusion can be drawn from the evaluative activities being undertaken by members of the IASC. ALNAP's Syria Portal <http://www.syrialearning.org/> is another valuable resource designed to promote sharing of lessons across the humanitarian community supported by the Syria-CALL.

The commissioning of the present Common Context Analysis was motivated by a concern that many IASC agencies will be conducting their own learning and accountability activities looking at their response to the ongoing crisis. This will likely include formal evaluations, real-time evaluations, lesson learning activities, after action reviews and other types of process and studies. There was a broad consensus that a ready-to-use common understanding of the crisis could contribute to saving time and resources, and avoid duplication of efforts.

The management of such an initiative represents a complex undertaking, and the present result has only been possible through effective coordination and team work on the part of the Management Group. We would like to thank all those who contributed to this study, in particular WFP and UNHCR for funding the Common Context Analysis, OCHA for managing and coordinating it, the Management Group for the valuable guidance and support, and, of course, the authors, Dr. Hugo Slim and Dr. Lorenzo Trombetta.

We look forward to partners' making use of the tools and resources provided under the CALL initiative.

Steering Group for Inter-Agency Humanitarian Evaluations  
*ALNAP, FAO, IFRC, OCHA, UNHCR, UNICEF, WFP, WHO and World Vision International*

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## Acronyms

ACAPS	Assessment Capacities Project
ACU	Assistance Coordination Unit
CALL	Syria Evaluation Portal for Coordinated Accountability and Lessons Learning
CBO	Community-Based Organization
COI	Independent International Commission of Inquiry
CSR	Corporate Social Responsibility
ERC	Emergency Relief Coordinator
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization
FSA	Free Syria Army
GONGOS	Government-organized NGOs
IASC	Inter-Agency Standing Committee
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross
IDP	Internally Displaced Persons
IFAD	International Fund for Agricultural Development
IHL	International Humanitarian Law
ILO	International Labour Organization
IMF	International Monetary Fund
J-RANS	Joint Rapid Assessment for Northern Syria
PKK	Kurdistan Workers' Party
MOSAL	Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour
MSF	Médecins Sans Frontières
NCB	National Coordination Body
OCHA	United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
RRP	Syria Regional Refugee Response
SARC	Syrian Arab Red Crescent
SDRC	Syrian Development Research Centre
SHARP	Syria Humanitarian Assistance Response Plan
SNAP	Syria Needs Assessment Project
SNC	Syrian National Council
UNCTAD	United Nations Conference on Trade and Development
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNRWA	United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees
WFP	World Food Programme
WHO	World Health Organization

## Introduction

The Syria crisis was declared a level-three (L3) humanitarian emergency in January 2013. A humanitarian appeal was launched in June 2013, the largest ever launched by the United Nations.<sup>1</sup> Although an L3 humanitarian emergency requires a mandatory inter-agency humanitarian evaluation, in the case of Syria, the Steering Group for Inter-Agency Humanitarian Evaluations concurred to undertake a different type of evaluative work, which would provide for an appropriate level of lesson learning and system-wide accountability to help guide the ongoing response to the Syria crisis.

In January 2014, the Steering Group for Inter-Agency Humanitarian Evaluations set up the Coordinated Accountability and Lessons Learning (CALL) initiative to support evaluations of the humanitarian response to the Syria crisis. The Inter-Agency Standing Committee's (IASC) Transformative Agenda driving the humanitarian system's initiatives for greater effectiveness and accountability underpins the Syria CALL. Accordingly, a major concern of CALL is the establishment of effective modalities for coordinating evaluation and lesson-learning activities across humanitarian actors and among relevant evaluation networks, such as the Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance in Humanitarian Action (ALNAP), the United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG) and the Evaluation Network of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development/Development Assistance Committee (OECD/DAC).

This report is the Common Context Analysis of the Syria crisis, and it is one of the three primary deliverables of CALL. The others are the ALNAP Evaluation Portal<sup>2</sup> and a Common Evaluation Framework. Together, these products will serve as an "evaluation starter pack" for IASC agencies to support their evaluation work.

This Common Context Analysis aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the Syria crisis and the humanitarian impact in the region. Together with the Common Evaluation Framework, this Common Context Analysis will ensure a systematic and coherent approach to building evaluative evidence. This Common Context Analysis aims to offer a ready-to-use common understanding of the crisis, thus saving evaluation teams' time and research, and avoiding unnecessary duplication.

The primary focus of this Common Context Analysis is the Syria crisis and its regional spillover. Chapter one provides an historical understanding of the political, social and economic factors that led to the outbreak of the crisis, and it examines the condition of the Syrian State and civil society before March 2011. Chapter two examines the political dynamics during the period of civil resistance and Government repression between March and December 2011, and its impact on the civilian population. Chapter three charts the rise of civil resistance and its militarization and radicalization, and it illustrates the different Syrian perspectives on the crisis. Chapter four examines the impact of the initial repression and subsequent armed conflict on Syria's civilian population and describes the main patterns

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<sup>1</sup> The appeal is available at <http://fts.unocha.org/>

<sup>2</sup> The ALNAP Syria Evaluation Portal is at [www.syrialearning.org/](http://www.syrialearning.org/)



of violence. Chapter five examines the humanitarian needs that emerged from the onset of the armed conflict and the necessity for humanitarian agencies to respond to the twin challenge of extreme displacement and entrapment of the civilian population. Chapter six identifies the key distinguishing characteristics of the conflict that have most affected humanitarian action and shaped the particular context of humanitarian operations throughout the crisis. Chapter seven concludes with the key take aways from this report.

The Context Analysis focuses on the period from March 2011 to April 2014. A timeline of key events during the crisis is in annex.

This study was carried out by two consultants—one in Beirut and one in Oxford—with a small research team at the Institute of Ethics, Law and Armed Conflict at the University of Oxford, UK. The research combined desk-based secondary sources, semi-structured interviews with Syrian and international humanitarian managers during visits to Syria, Beirut and Gaziantep, and interviews in London and remotely by Skype.



## **Chapter One – History and Syria prior to 2011**

Before the crisis in 2011, the State of Syria was already vulnerable. Unsustainable authoritarian governance and economic decline were generating significant internal pressures across Syria's extremely localized society. The country had many different local and sectarian alliances with competing regional and international powers, which made it likely that any conflict within Syria would soon become internationalized and protracted.

This chapter gives an overview of Syrian society and politics in the run-up to the crisis. It explains the origins of the modern Syrian State, and examines the particular dynamics of the Baathist Governments led by Hafez al-Assad and his successor, Bashar al-Assad. It also describes the fragility in the Syrian economy that had emerged by 2011, and the rising discontent that flowed from increasing impoverishment in large sectors of Syrian society.

### **Syria after the Ottoman Empire**

Modern Syria is the result of a series of political compromises between the European winners of the First World War and the new authorities of the emerging Republic of Turkey. The Anglo-French agreement of 1916 defined new French and British spheres of influence in regions previously dominated by the Ottoman Empire for almost four centuries (1516-1918). The new political order in the old Ottoman provinces of the Levant was formalized at the San Remo conference in 1920. This agreement granted France the mandate over "Northern Syria" (present-day Lebanon and Syria), and Britain the mandate over "Southern Syria" (present-day Israel, Palestinian Territories, Jordan and Iraq).

In the years that followed, France trimmed the territories under its authority along clear sectarian and ethnic lines. In 1920, Greater Lebanon (present-day Lebanon), Damascus State, Aleppo State and the Alawite State were created. One year later, the French authorities created the Jabal Druze State and the Sanjak of Alexandretta. The latter was transferred to Turkey and became the present-day Province of Hatay, into which many Syrian refugees have recently fled. In 1943, the Arab Republic of Syria gained formal independence—the result of a gradual merger of the Damascus, Aleppo, Alawite and Jabal Druzes states. Modern Syria thus took shape over a portion of land that was only about half the size (185,000 km<sup>2</sup>) of the ancient Ottoman provinces of Syria (300,000 km<sup>2</sup>), so leaving many traditionally "Syrian" areas in neighbouring states. The map overleaf illustrates the changes of the Syrian national/administrative boundaries from the Ottoman period to the present day.



**Legend**

- ★ National capitals
- Main cities
- Present day international boundaries
- Boundary of former Palestinian mandate
- ..... Armistice demarcation line
- - - - - Ottoman-era administrative boundaries

Disclaimer: The designations employed and the presentation of material on this map do not imply the expression of any opinion whatsoever on the part of the Secretariat of the United Nations concerning the legal status of any country, territory, city or area or of its authorities, or concerning the delimitation of its frontiers or boundaries.  
 Creation date: 18 June 2014 Sources: United Nations Cartographic Section, Natural Earth, UNOCHA, Daniel Pipes, Greater Syria: The History of an Ambition, Oxford University Press, 1992, page 30

## The Historical Mosaic of Syrian Society

Syria's politics has always been shaped between the profound localism of its many sub-national groupings and the strategic interests of great powers. Since its creation as a nation-State in 1919 out of the wreckage of the Ottoman Empire, modern Syria has been a fulcrum of international and regional politics focusing on the balance of power. The high levels of foreign intervention in the present conflict continue this dynamic.

The country is really a mosaic of small groupings and their local relationships that spread beyond the arbitrary borders of the modern State. In the Ottoman Empire's Syrian provinces (also known as *Bilad ash-Sham*), the formal administrative configuration of Ottoman rule was overlaid on a set of "locally integrated regions."<sup>3</sup> Their boundaries did not correspond with provincial lines drawn by Istanbul. Instead, each region had its own relative political autonomy managed by its local elite, who were more integrated with their geographical locale than with the wider Government network of their Syrian province.<sup>4</sup>

Some of these political locales were effective city states (Damascus, Aleppo, Nablus, Acre) and boasted sectarian and ethnic pluralism. Others were isolated entities, characterized by the dominance of one or two communities, such as the Druze-Maronite Jabal ash-Shuf, the Twelver Shia Jabal Amil and the Alawite Jabal Nusayri. With the fall of the Ottoman Empire, these "Syrian" spaces were pressed into a nation State that had never existed before, and was now defined by new Anglo-French borders that paid little attention to Ottoman administrative divisions or the wider relational politics of the *Bilad ash-Sham*. The old mosaic had bold new lines painted on it, but still thrived on its traditional cross-border connections and localized identities. The same was true at Syrian independence in 1946.

Despite the nationalist rhetoric of the Baathist Governments, different Syrian regions (particularly those in border areas) have privileged organic links with their various neighbouring countries. For many people it feels more natural to be Levantine than Syrian. The region of Damascus is deeply connected to the Lebanese Bekaa Valley. Hermel in Lebanon is really part of the plain of Homs. The Daraa region naturally elides with northern Jordan, while Syria's eastern region of Dayr az-Zawr and Iraq's western region of al-Anbar share deep socioeconomic links. The northern hinterlands of Aleppo, Raqqa and Idlib are interconnected with southern Anatolia, and the Turkish Province of Hatay is linked with the northern region of Latakia.

These regional bonds make sense of Hezbollah's commitment to Syrian Government forces, and explain the passage of Sunni jihadists, al-Qaeda militants and other militiamen along the Euphrates from al-Anbar to Raqqa, through Dayr az-Zawr. Turkish interventionism in the rural regions of Aleppo, Idlib and Latakia is similar to the Jordanian attitude along the Daraa region. Ankara and Amman have aimed to create buffer zones that avoid an even greater influx of refugees, and that could limit the risk of the spillover of violence into their own states. The Syrian conflict inevitably affects and connects the politics, kinship and economics of Lebanon, Iraq, Turkey and Jordan.

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<sup>3</sup> Philipp Thomas, *Identities and Loyalties in Bihad al-Sham at the Beginning of the Early Modern Period*, in eds. Thomas and Schuman, *From the Syrian Land to the States of Syria and Lebanon*, Orient Institute Beirut, Beirut, 2004, pp9-26.

<sup>4</sup> Fawwaz Traboulsi, *A History of Modern Lebanon*, Pluto Press, London, 1997, p3ff.

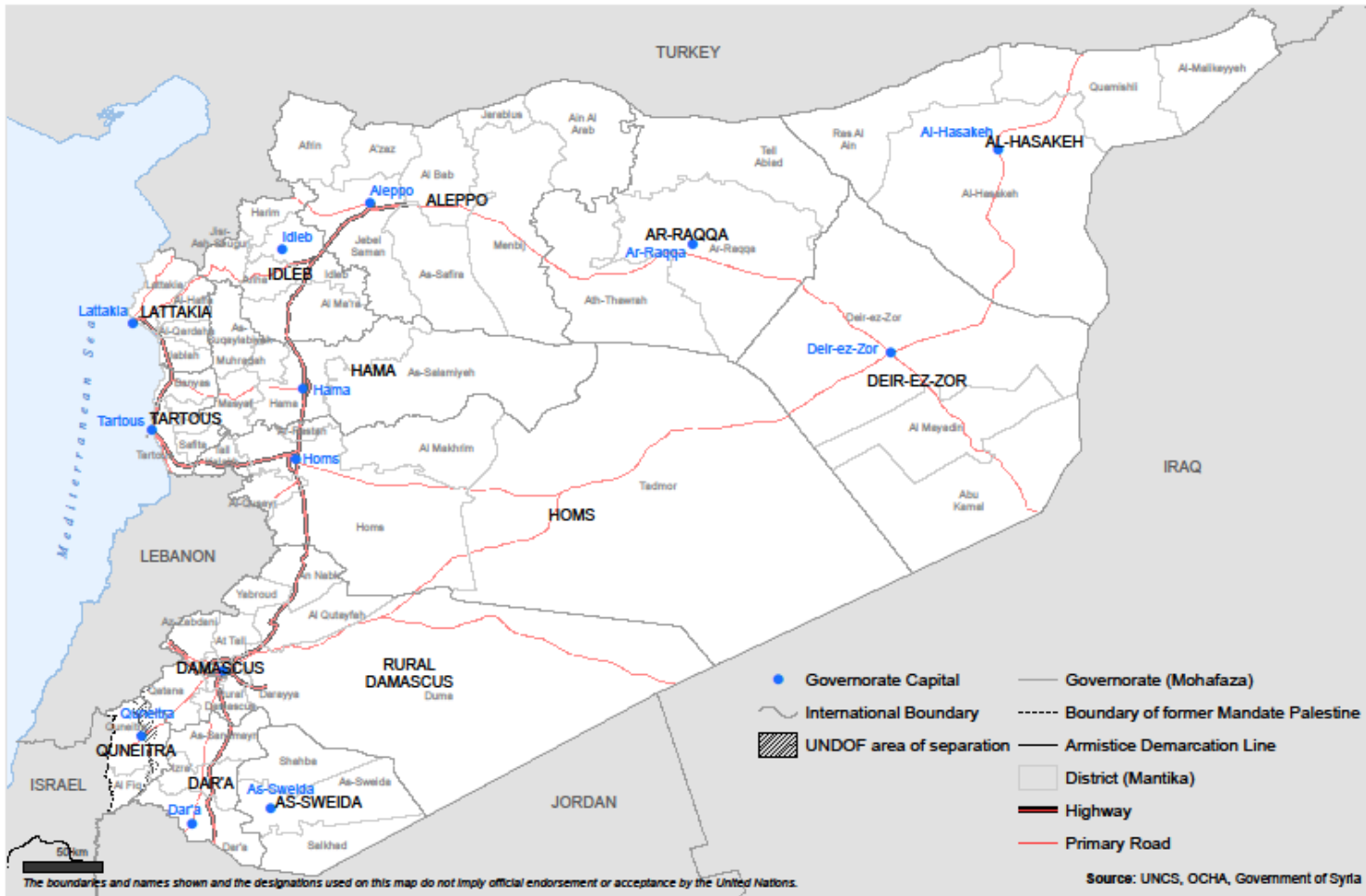
## Demography

When the crisis began, Syria had an estimated population of 21.5 million people, which was growing at a rate of 3.4 per cent per annum. Of the total population, 10.9 million people were male and 10.6 million were female.

Some 35.8 per cent of the population were under age 14, and 20.7 per cent of the population (4.5 million people) were aged between 15 and 24. The overall working-age population was 13 million people, and only 3.5 per cent of the population were aged over 65. The urban population accounted for 55 per cent of the population (11.4 million people) and the rural population for 44.3 per cent (9 million people).<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> All figures are from UN World Population Prospects 2012 Revision at <http://esa.un.org/unpd/wpp/index.htm>



## Syrian Groupings

In 2011, modern Syria was structured around three different social and geographic zones: an urban zone along the Aleppo-Damascus axis, passing through Homs and Hama; rural zones in the south (Daraa), in the north-west (Idlib), in the north-east (Hasaka) and in the mountains above Latakia and Tartus; and desert areas in central, northern and eastern Syria around Tadmur, Raqqa and Dayr az-Zawr.

Different ethnic and sectarian groups tended to dominate these different spaces. Sunni Muslims made up the majority of the Syrian population and traditionally dominated the Syrian cities.<sup>6</sup> Sunnis were the backbone of the Damascus (79.5 per cent) and Aleppo (61.5 per cent) elites, but also of Homs, Hama, Dayr az-Zawr, Daraa and the coastal cities of Latakia, Baniyas and Tartus. They also lived in some villages of the Orontes central plain and in the desert areas in central, south and eastern Syria.

Sunnis shared most of the urban landscape with Orthodox Christians, who constituted the largest Christian community and claimed supremacy over the other eastern churches. The Orthodox lived in the coastal cities, particularly in Latakia, some districts of Damascus, Homs and Aleppo, but also in some rural regions. In the hinterland of Baniyas and Tartus, Christian communities carved out a strip of territory going from Homs to the sea, in villages along the eastern slopes of the Anti-Lebanon mountains and on the plain of the Hawran to the south.

The mountainous hinterland of Latakia was historically dominated by the Nusayrite community, later known as "Alawite". Historically, Alawites were on the fringes of the wider Muslim community. Considered misbelievers by Sunni orthodoxy and viewed with suspicion by some Shia groups, the Alawites were long persecuted by the various authorities that dominated their regions.<sup>7</sup>

Bedouins traditionally inhabited the steppe in central, eastern and north-eastern Syria. At the beginning of the French mandate, Bedouins controlled more than a quarter of the newly born Syrian State. Syrian Bedouins are mostly Sunnis, even though they also have minorities who are Twelver Shia and Christian. After independence, the State forcibly sedentarized the eastern tribes. Today, nomadic people only comprise 0.4 per cent of the population.<sup>8</sup>

North-eastern Syria is mostly inhabited by Kurds, who make up 8.3 per cent of Syria's population. Two other regions with a Kurdish majority are located west and east of Aleppo, near the border with Turkey, respectively on the slopes of Jabal al-Akrad ("Kurd Dag" in Kurdish) and on the eastern bank of the Euphrates around the village of Ayn al-Arab

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<sup>6</sup> Khoury, Philip, *Syria and the French Mandate. The politics of Arab Nationalism 1920/1945*, Princeton University Press, Princeton 1987, pp14-16; Youssef Courbage, *Ce que la démographie nous dit du conflit syrien*, in «Slate», October 12, 2012 (<http://goo.gl/2Yzbu>).

<sup>7</sup> Friedman, Yaron, *The Nusayris-'Alawis: An Introduction to the Religion, History and Identity of the Leading Minority in Syria*, Brill, Leiden Boston 2010, p175ff.

<sup>8</sup> Claudia Kickingger, *Les bédouins, la modernité et l'Etat*, in Dupret, Baudouin et al. (ed.), *La Syrie au present. Reflets d'une société*, Actes-Sud, Paris, 2007, pp.242-252; Tore Kjeilen "Bedouins", in *Encyclopedia of the Orient*, <http://i-cias.com/e.o/bedouins.htm>



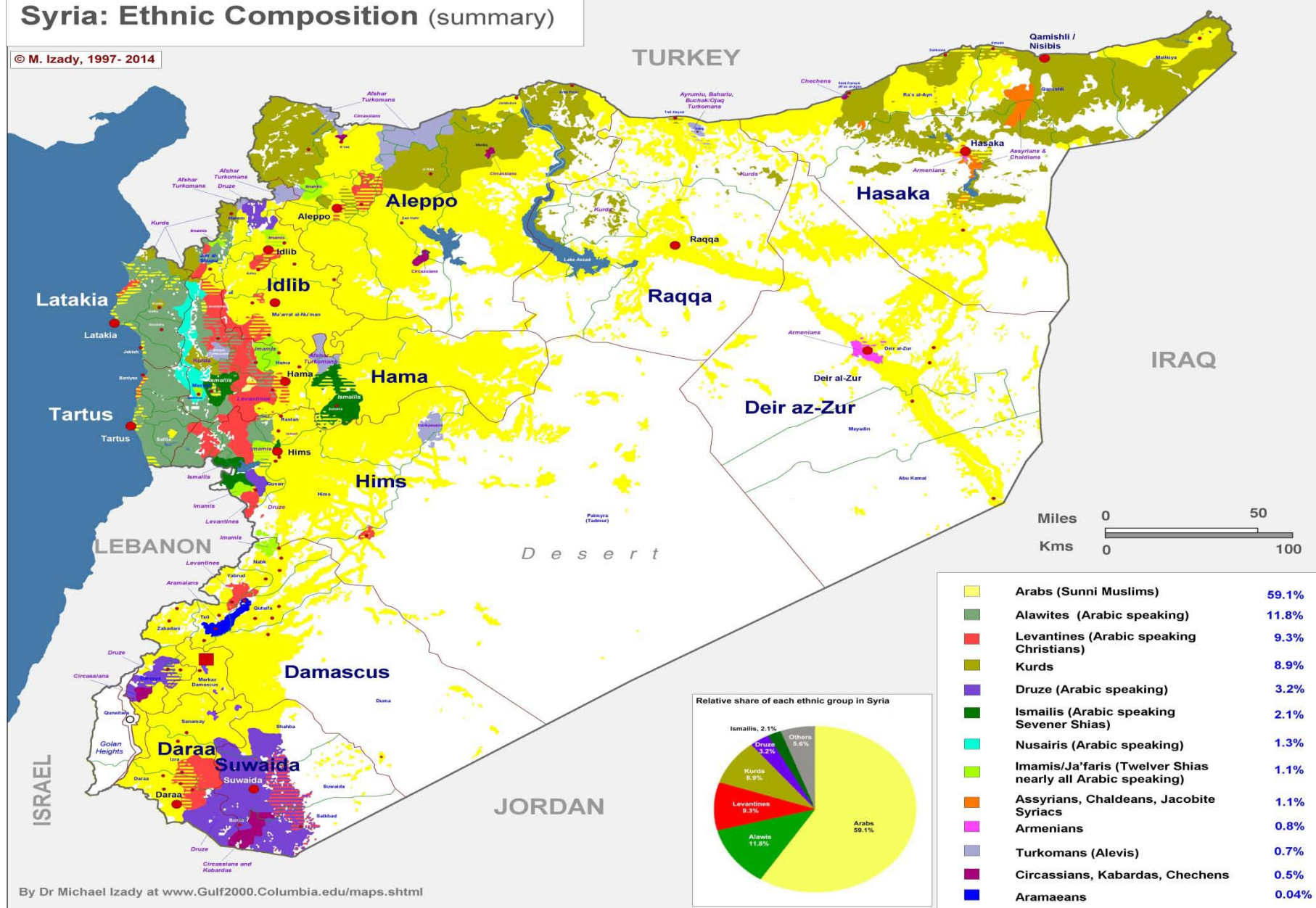
(Kobani). This mosaic of Syrian peoples was also enriched by smaller ethnic communities, such as Circassians, Turkmen, Armenians and Syriacs, and by different religious professions such as Twelver Shia, Druze, Ismailis, Christian Melkites, Maronites, Protestants, Copts, Chaldeans and Jews.

There were also significant refugee populations in Syria in early 2011. A long-term population of 500,000 Palestinians lived in various urban communities. A smaller and more recent population of nearly 63,000 Iraqi refugees was similarly integrating into Syrian cities.

The intense levels of localism across the Syrian State are a key characteristic of the Syrian context. Politically, they contribute resistance to developing a single and effective opposition to Government power. Militarily, they mean that hundreds of armed groups emerged to fight their own particular corners against the centralist regime. Socially, they mean that the organization of Syrian civil society is very localized and fragmented around small spaces and diverse identities. This makes it harder to develop humanitarian partnerships, but they are often more effective because of their depth and reach within a community.

# Syria: Ethnic Composition (summary)

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By Dr Michael Izady at [www.Gulf2000.Columbia.edu/maps.shtml](http://www.Gulf2000.Columbia.edu/maps.shtml)

## Assad Power from 1970-2000

Syria's power structure is characterized by the concentration of highly authoritarian power in the Government circle around the President.<sup>9</sup> This pattern of governance dates back to the current President's father who took power in the Syrian Baath<sup>10</sup> party in 1970.

The structure of the Syrian regime under President Hafez al-Assad (1970-2000) was characterized by three main power sources: the predominance of the *rais* in Syria's decision-making hubs; the pervasive role of controlling party and State machinery; the placement of Alawite men from clans allied with the Assads in highly ranked positions, alongside a power base widely dominated by Sunni representatives coming from rural areas; and the coexistence of formal and informal powers, some exposed and some hidden.<sup>11</sup>

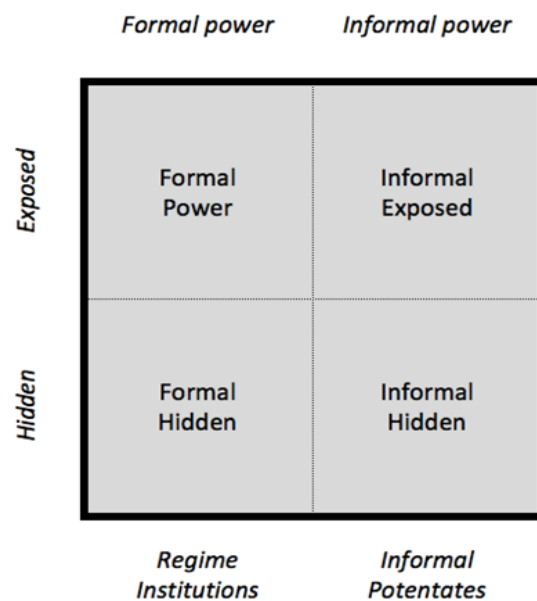


Table 1: *Formal Vs Informal Power – Exposed Vs Hidden Power*. Source: Lorenzo Trombetta

<sup>9</sup> For decades, historians and political scientists studying the nature of the Syrian Government under the rule of the Assad family have recognized its character as authoritarian. See, for example, Batatu, Hanna, *Syria's Peasantry, the Descendants of Its Lesser Ruml Noables and their Politics*, Princeton University Press, Princeton 1999; Haddad, Bassam, *Business Networks in Syria. The Political Economy of Authoritarian Resilience*, Stanford University Press, Stanford, California 2012; Hinnebusch, Raymond, *Authoritarian Power in Ba'athist Syria. Army, Party and Peasant*, Westview Press, Boulder, Colorado 1990; Leverett, Flynt, *Inheriting Syria. Bashar's Trial by Fire*, Brookings Institution Press, Washington DC 2005; Perthes, Volker, *Syria: Difficult Inheritance*, in Perthes, Volker (ed.), *Arab Elites: Negotiating the Politics of Change*, Lynne Rienner, Boulder-London 2004, pp. 87-111; Weeden, Lisa, *Ambiguity of Domination*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago 1999.

<sup>10</sup> The Arabic word "Baath" means renaissance or resurrection. It was a rallying cry for the reaffirmation of Arab culture and Government after the subjugation of empire and colonialism. The same word was chosen for the main party in Iraq.

<sup>11</sup> Sadiq, Mahmud, *Hiwar hawla Suriya*, Dar 'Ukaz, Jeddah 1993. pp.71-77.

Formal power was represented by State institutions, both those that are exposed and obvious (such as Government, parliament, judiciary and the Baath party organizations), and those that are hidden (security apparatus and special forces). Exposed power is topped by the Executive, notably the Prime Minister, the Speaker of Parliament and governors. But the real decision-makers are at the hidden level. There is also a level of “informal power” represented by figures who operate above and beyond their designated official status or even outside of any institutional role. For example, they would include some senior members of the secret police. Informal power also arises from centres of power whose existence is not codified in the constitution or other State laws, such as powerful business interests connected to the secret services. Much of the Syrian Government was controlled by an informal power that is real but hidden, and through which the real decision makers are at work. This is distinct from apparent and exposed power in which the executive operates officially, as illustrated in the following tables.<sup>12</sup>

	<i>Formal power</i>	<i>Informal power</i>
<i>Exposed</i>	State institutions	Business elite
<i>Hidden</i>	Security apparatus	Informal potentates

Table 2: The main actors in the Syrian power system. Source: Lorenzo Trombetta

The structure of Government power and control was based on three fundamental institutions: the organs of control; the Army and the party apparatus.<sup>13</sup> Baath and the Army both have an evident structure that hides the effective power at top levels, while the security apparatus is placed behind the curtain of State institutions.

<sup>12</sup> The power analysis that follows is from Lorenzo Trombetta, *Beyond the Party: The Shifting Structure of Syria's Power*, in eds Luca Aneschi, Gennaro Gervasio and Andrea Teti, *Informal Power in the Greater Middle East*, Routledge, Oxford and New York, 2014, pp26-33.

<sup>13</sup> Hinnebusch 1990: 156; Van Dam, N. (1979) *The struggle for power in Syria: Sectarianism, regionalism, and tribalism in politics, 1961-1978*, Kent, UK: Croom Helm Ltd., 134; Batatu: 206; Perthes, V. (1997) *The political economy of Syria under Asad*, London: I.B. Tauris, 180f; Perthes 2004: 11; Aoyama, H. (2001) *History Does Not Repeat Itself (Or Does It?!): The Political Changes in Syria after Hafiz al-Asad's Death*. Middle East Studies Series 50, Chiba, Japan: Institute of Developing Economies, 30; Leverett: 15.

	<i>Formal power</i>	<i>Informal power</i>
<i>Exposed</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Government</li> <li>- Parliament</li> <li>- Court of Justice</li> <li>- Local councils</li> <li>- Baath agencies</li> <li>- Army</li> </ul>	<i>Businessmen elite mainly from Sunni bourgeoisie</i>
<i>Hidden</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Mukhabarat</li> <li>- Baath CR &amp; CC</li> <li>- Republican Guard</li> <li>- Special Forces</li> </ul>	<i>Informal potentates dominated by the Assads or members of allied Alawi clans</i>

Table 3: *Tools of power*. Source: Lorenzo Trombetta

The men at the helm of the more sensitive offices of the security services, the Army and the Baath Party constituted the nucleus of power around the President. A core principle of the Assad Government was that key roles in these institutions should be entrusted to people close to the President through family ties or patronage. As such, the President controlled probably no more than a dozen officials in intelligence, the armed forces and the party close to him through family or economic ties.<sup>14</sup>

In this way, Hafez al-Assad ruled by his power over a small group of officials in the intelligence sector, the armed forces and party bureaucrats who recognized his authority and were connected to him in blood or economic ties. This structure remained essentially stable and cohesive throughout his rule.<sup>15</sup>

More widely, the President dominated institutions with Alawites. Militarily, he created special forces and paramilitary units almost exclusively of Alawite clans close to the Assads, and put his closest allies and family members in charge. Larger army units, such as the Republican Guard and the Fourth Division, were created with special responsibility for control of the capital entrusted to Alawites close to the Assads.<sup>16</sup> Politically, the Baath party was similarly co-opted. Alawites occupied half the upper echelons of the party, and a third of the provinces and key ministries were entrusted to Alawite governors and ministers. The country's economy and finance also gradually came under Alawite management.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Raymond Hinnebusch, *Authoritarian Power in Baathist Syria. Army, Party and Peasant*, Westview Press, Boulder, Colorado 1990, p150; Flynt Leverett, *Inheriting Syria. Bashar's Trial by Fire*, Brookings Institution Press, Washington DC 2005, p42.

<sup>15</sup> Hanna Batatu, *Syria's Peasantry, the Descendants of Its Lesser Ruml Nobles and their Politics*, Princeton University Press, Princeton 1999, pp244-249.

<sup>16</sup> Batatu, p217ff; Hinnebusch, p163 and Alain Chouet, *L'espace tribale des alaouites à l'épreuve du pouvoir. La désintégration par la politique*, in «Maghreb-Machrek», 147, 1995, pp. 93-119.

<sup>17</sup> Chouet, p99f; Fabrice Balanche, *La région alaouite et le pouvoir syrien*, Karthala, Paris 2006.

Favouring other communities within the system was also important. Selected Sunni representatives were used to ensure the support of the majority urban middle class and peripheral areas.<sup>18</sup> The importance of this Sunni element within the regime started declining towards the late 1970s, and a new practice took over in which an Alawite deputy shadowed every Sunni who had a leading role in an institution.

### **Bashar al-Assad's Succession Period 2000-2011**

Bashar al-Assad's decade of uncontested power developed important new features that consolidated a further "assadization" of power while posturing with more liberal reforms. The President (*rais*) was no longer the absolute leader but remained at the helm of the regime as *primus inter pares* within a similarly clannish structure of hidden power. Informal real power passed into the hands of an oligarchy consisting of members of the second generation of the Assad family (Bashar al-Assad, his brother Maher, their cousin Rami Makhlef and others), a handful of officials in the control institutions, and a few older men who had managed to survive the purges of the Hafez system.

The support of Sunni men from rural families diminished to such an extent that by 2011, only members of the President's family appeared at the head of the more sensitive institutions. Sunni establishment figures belonged only to the token organs of formal Government rather than real power.<sup>19</sup> The Assad family and its allies intensified control over top intelligence positions, while the decision-making role of the party organs, which had been for decades one of the pillars of real power, was drastically reduced. The Baath party only continued to play a decisive role at the local level, the only sphere where it carried out an important function in managing the system by ensuring control of territory. The core Alawite parts of the military were strengthened, while the bulk of the Army was not.

### **Weakened and Diffuse Opposition**

No organized and sustainable opposition was able to emerge in Baathist and Assadist political culture. Opponents were mostly forced into exile, or they spent more time in a prison cell than in their own society. Traditional opposition inside and outside Syria remained weak and fragmented, unable to represent the neglected masses and still mesmerized by old-fashioned leftist or pan-Arabist ideologies.

Syrian youths—particularly those living big cities—easily mastered the web to bypass State censorship, and they created numerous platforms for social, cultural and mostly apolitical debate. Other young people in remote and rural areas, and subjected to more rigid social rules, adopted political Islam as an alternative identity to the Government and its secularist

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<sup>18</sup> Volker Perthes, Syria: Difficult Inheritance, in Perthes, Volker (ed.), Arab Elites: Negotiating the Politics of Change, Lynne Rienner, Boulder-London 2004, p110. Leverett, p41; Hinnebusch, p 161.

<sup>19</sup> Trombetta, Lorenzo, 'Beyond the Party: The Shifting Structure of Syria's Power', in Anceschi, Luca, Gervasio, Gennaro & Teti, Andrea (ed.), Informal Power in the Greater Middle East, Routledge, Oxford/New York, 2014, pp.26-33.

rhetoric, as well as to the “West”, which was seen as hostile to traditional Syrian values and an accomplice to the injustices of the system.

Syria’s media was co-opted and restricted. Under the Assad Government, the media played the role of bolstering the legitimacy of the Government and the cult of the President. Syrian public opinion was aware of this role but behaved “as if” it were persuaded by the regime’s official discourse.<sup>20</sup> A few months into Bashar Assad’s rule, there was some privatization of the press liberalization, but licenses were granted only to the media outlets of the political groups included in the Progressive National Front—an umbrella of parties allied with the Baath party. Other private magazines were allowed to be published (such as the satirical *ad-Dumari*), but they were banned shortly afterwards.

### **The Syrian Economy**

In early 2011, Syria was recognized as a middle-income country with strong economic growth, high levels of fiscal stability and many positive development indicators. Between 2001 and 2010, it averaged annual GDP growth of 4.5 per cent. About 91 per cent of the population owned their own house and 85 per cent of households were using high-quality public water systems.<sup>21</sup> Education levels had been consistently good, although always with significantly less female inclusion. Health indicators were relatively high, with a strong cadre of medical professionals, and 70 per cent of drugs were locally produced. Vaccination coverage was 91 per cent in 2010, and child mortality was down from 38 per 1,000 births in 1990 to 15 per 1,000 in 2011.<sup>22</sup>

### **A Two-Speed Economy**

But Syria was no simple middle-income success story. There were also significant signs of weakening State institutions and increasing economic inequalities. Decades of authoritarian Government, an entrenched ethos of socialist bureaucracy, a culture of patronage and intermediaries (*wasta*) and clientilism, high levels of tax avoidance and shrinking State investments were seriously degrading Government effectiveness. Health systems were also under increasing strain from low investment and rising levels of chronic diseases, such as asthma, kidney disease and cancer. These diseases require costly treatments and affected 10 per cent of the population by 2011.<sup>23</sup>

The economy was pulling in two directions: some people were getting richer while many were getting poorer. Bashar Assad’s attempt at limited economic liberalization and privatization with its resolutely Baathist model of a “social-market economy” proved to be a

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<sup>20</sup> Lisa Weeden, *Ambiguity of Domination*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago 1999, p 5-7.

<sup>21</sup> Rabie Nasser, Zaki Mehchi and Khalid Abu Ismail, *Socioeconomic Roots and Impact of the Syrian Crisis*, The Syrian Centre for Policy Research, January 2013, p18.

<sup>22</sup> Save the Children, *A Devastating Toll: The Impact of Three Years of War on the Health of Syria’s Children*, London 2014, pp8-9.

<sup>23</sup> Nasser et al p28.

damaging half-measure. It freed up economic ownership in key commercial sectors and attracted foreign companies to create a new wealthy elite, most of which involved the Assad oligopoly in crony capitalism.<sup>24</sup>

But these reforms depleted agricultural livelihoods and increased prices. Reforms reduced important subsidies for agriculture, food and energy. Economic growth was not sufficiently inclusive.<sup>25</sup> Core sectors of the economy were in decline. In 2006, Syria became a net importer of oil for the first time, and a lack of strategic investment in agriculture and a series of droughts saw rural production steadily decline throughout the 2000s. Instead, the service sector, communications and property markets expanded with little obvious gains for low-income groups.

### **Increasing Poverty**

Rising prices and the decline in agricultural productivity created a new “poverty belt” around major cities, as failing farmers inwardly migrated in search of peri-urban livelihoods, and low-income families struggled with increasing costs. Although GDP had been growing well, levels of GDP per capita were relatively weak. Poor distribution of wealth gave rise to “low equilibrium” growth and an economy marked by significant governance and elite bottlenecks that prevented more equal distribution.<sup>26</sup>

Syria’s extreme poverty level still remained lower than comparable countries, such as Egypt and Tunisia. In 2007, extreme poverty was at 12 per cent, while an estimated 30 per cent of the population lived in poverty.<sup>27</sup> Poverty was traditionally concentrated in the rural areas of the eastern and northern regions, but moved increasingly south as four years of drought and liberalization generated internal migration.<sup>28</sup> A significant part of the Syrian economy and people’s survival capability has been built on remittances. The World Bank estimates that remittances into Syria rose sharply from \$750 million in 2007 to over \$2 billion in 2012.<sup>29</sup>

In short, Syria’s political crisis of 2011 developed in a country that was highly developed compared with most humanitarian settings, but which was also economically and politically vulnerable. The benchmark emergency for the Syrian crisis is Former Yugoslavia rather than Sri Lanka or Colombia, and the Syrian context is very far removed from South Sudan or the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

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<sup>24</sup> Bassam Haddad, *Business Networks in Syria. The Political Economy of Authoritarian Resilience*, Stanford University Press, Stanford, California 2012, p119f.

<sup>25</sup> See [www.worldbank.org/en/country/syria/overview](http://www.worldbank.org/en/country/syria/overview)

<sup>26</sup> Nasser et al, p20.

<sup>27</sup> UNDP, *Poverty in Syria: 1996-2004. Diagnosis and Pro-poor Policy Consideration*, June 2005 at <http://goo.gl/PzjLs>.

<sup>28</sup> Nasser et al, p24-25.

<sup>29</sup> See graph from World Bank *Migration and Remittances Factbook 2013* at <http://knoema.com/WBRI02013/migration-and-remittances-factbook-2013?country=1001890-syrian-arab-republic>



## The Vulnerability of Syrian Society and the Risk of Spillover

Despite its relative wealth compared with other humanitarian contexts, the Syrian State was increasingly vulnerable by 2011. Figure one, below, models the various pressures that were mounting across the State that would break out into popular protest and extreme Government repression and violence.

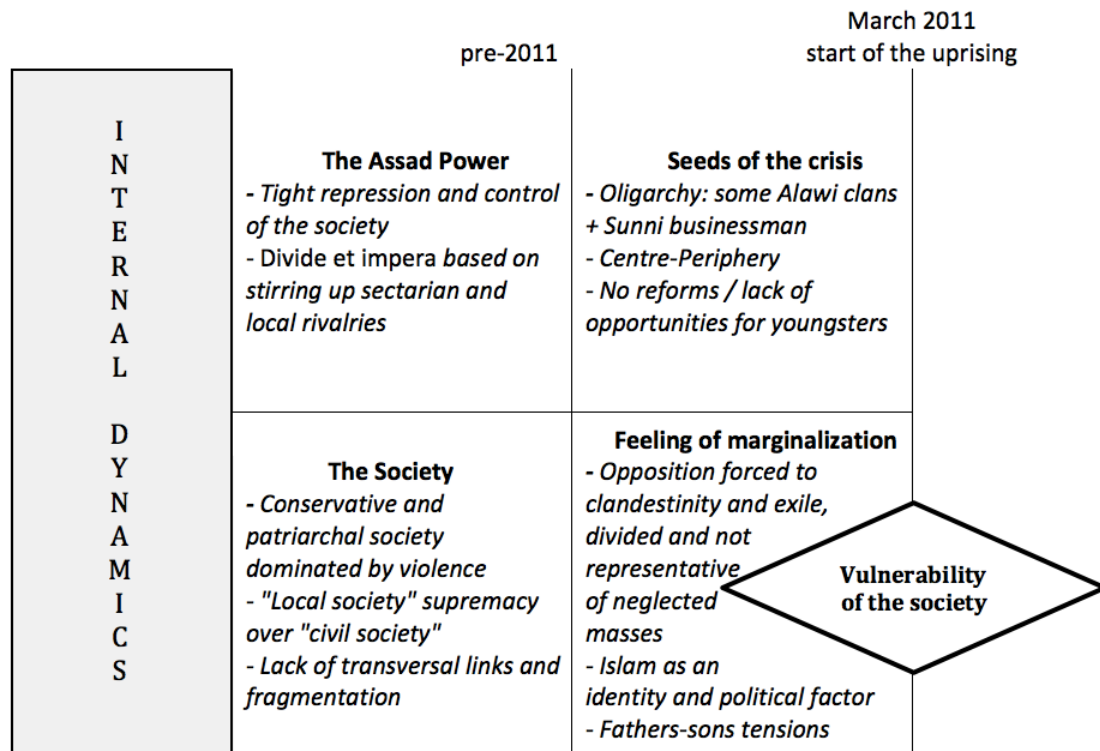


Figure One: *The vulnerability of Syrian Society and the Risk of Spillover*. Source: Lorenzo Trombetta

Syria's vulnerability came not only from within its own political system, but also from its political alliances and enmities regionally and internationally. Particular regional and international powers were determined to have Syria within their sphere of influence and prevent its internal politics from threatening their own stability. A key piece of the Middle East, Syria could consolidate or erode their power.

Conflict in Syria could spillover into these other territories, and these external political interests and proxy forces could spill into Syria to drive the conflict there. Spillover in the Syrian conflict must be understood as a two-way valve. This is how the conflict escalated to become regional and international, as shown in figure two.

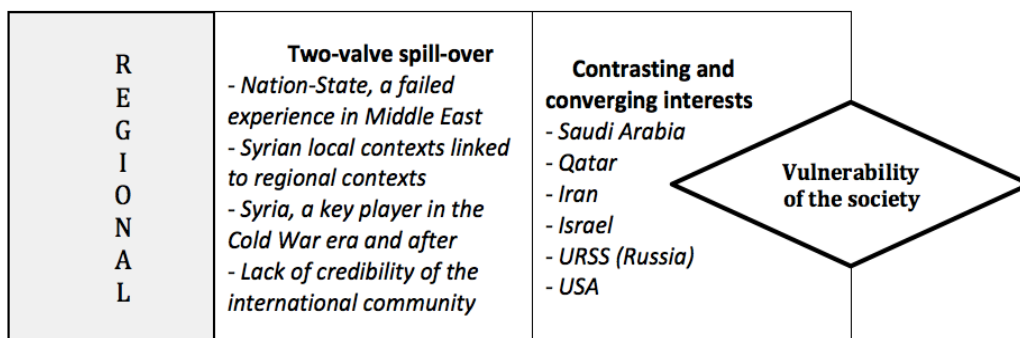


Figure Two: *The vulnerability of Syrian Society and the Risk of Spill-Over.* Source: Lorenzo Trombetta

The vulnerability of Syrian society has been made far worse by the conflict, which has not brought any increased stability or positive transformation to Syrian society. As things stand in 2014, Syrian society is even more vulnerable and depleted than at the start of the uprising, as shown in figure one.

### Rising Discontent in 2011

“Do not humiliate the Syrian people!” was the first slogan of the Syrian uprising. It was chanted in February 2011 by local tradesmen in the Hariqa market in Old Damascus who were lodging an unprecedented protest against police abuses.<sup>30</sup> One month later, thousands of people marched in the southern city of Daraa to demand "justice", "freedom" and the "removal of the governor".<sup>31</sup> After Daraa, people from Homs and other minor Syrian cities joined the protests, and the inhabitants of the countryside of Damascus and Aleppo rose up against the Government. The rhetoric and dynamics of the first months of the Syrian revolt clearly indicated that socioeconomic factors played a crucial role—more so than political factors—in pushing people to face the bloody repression of Assad power. For the first time in Syria’s contemporary history, people demanded real and concrete political and economic reforms.

Daraa, Homs, Dayr az-Zawr, Hama, and the Aleppo and Damascus suburbs were all key areas of the new poverty belt that suffered the most while the coastal region and the Damascus-Aleppo urban axis got richer. These depressed areas, in large part dominated by Sunnis, represented people facing the unsustainable population pressure around large cities exacerbated by the migration of thousands of families from the rural regions. From the east and from the north-east, thousands of families had left their crops and were crammed into makeshift camps around Aleppo and Damascus. The rural exodus also occurred in the region of Daraa. The later revolt of this formerly loyal “Granary of Syria” is emblematic of how the

<sup>30</sup> <http://youtu.be/cEM1z5KPdWg>, 17 Feb 2011.

<sup>31</sup> <http://youtu.be/nlCh9dKhnr4>, 18 Mar 2011.

regime had squandered a credit of trust built over decades by Hafez Assad. The southern region had been considered among the most loyal to the power of Damascus and fully integrated into the Baathist system.<sup>32</sup>

In the two-speed Syria, dissent had spread not only among the most vulnerable people, but also in large sections of the middle class. Stress migration was not only from the countryside towards the periphery of the city, but also from the city centre to the suburbs. Many families of the Sunni bourgeoisie were no longer able to support the standard of living in the city, where rents had soared in competition with new Iraqi refugees.<sup>33</sup> By 2011, more than 20 per cent of the country's population now lived in Damascus and its suburbs. In autumn 2010, the United Nations warned that low rainfall and inadequate infrastructure had pushed 2.3 million Syrians into "extreme poverty".<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Leenders, Reinould, *Collective Action and Mobilization in Dar'a: An Anatomy of the Onset of Syria Popular Uprising*, American University of Beirut (Aub) 2012, p21.

<sup>33</sup> Fabrice Balanche, *Géographie de la révolte syrienne*, in «Outre-terre», 29, 3, 2012, pp. 437-458; Ahmad Taysir, *Limadha shta'lat ath thawra fi rif Dimashq?*, in «Orient-News», October 15, 2012 (<http://goo.gl/PWYw9>).

<sup>34</sup> Starr, Stephen, *Revolt in Syria. Eye-witness to the uprising*, Hurst & Company, London 2012.

## **Chapter Two – Syrian Civil Society**

This chapter examines the state of civil society in Syria before the crisis. In particular, it looks at the Syrian Government's long reluctance to expose Syrian civil society to international development agencies. It describes the Government's efforts to lead the expansion of Syrian civil society by creating the Syria Trust.

### **Civil Society Before 2011**

The struggle to find experienced and diverse humanitarian partners with high levels of humanitarian capacity has been a particular feature of the Syrian crisis. This is partly the result of deliberate restrictions on civil society. The historical development of welfare organizations, NGOs and civil-society organizations has followed a very particular path in Syria, mostly due to strong authoritarian restrictions and the Baath party's socialist model of popular organizations.<sup>35</sup>

During the French mandate, Syrian elites aspired to build a democratic and plural society in harmony with their own traditions and cultural principles. In this spirit, the period between 1946 and 1958 is known as the "democratic parenthesis". This was a more liberal period that existed between independence and political unity with Nasser's Egypt.

A remnant of this liberal intellectual elite has shown extraordinary resilience in confronting Government policies of domestic repression and fragmentation along sectarian and ideological lines. Despite years of torture in prison and the loss of many of their fellows, hundreds of Syrian opponents and dissidents from all sectarian affiliations have continued to advocate peacefully for the respect of basic human rights and principles of citizenship and social justice. The presence of this network of social solidarity based on familiar and tribal ties has helped to preserve the peculiarity of the Syrian mosaic. Today, this network continues to limit the disintegration of society under a prolonged state of violence.

### **MOSAL, GONGOS and Charitable Associations**

In 1958, the Baath party introduced a new law for charitable associations. This privileged party organizations such as the Syrian Women's Union and a youth union called the Baath Pioneers. The law also amalgamated Syria's labour unions. These Government-organized NGOs (GONGOS) were the only national organizations permitted to work on matters affecting women, youth and labour.

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<sup>35</sup> For a good summary of civil-society development in Syria, see Marieke Bosman, *The NGO Sector in Syria – An Overview*, INTRAC, Oxford, June 2012.

The 1958 law and the various associations arising from it were administered by the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour (MOSAL), which, from its inception, has been slow, underresourced, bureaucratic and closely linked to the State's security services.<sup>36</sup> MOSAL's operational culture has always been more concerned with vetting and limiting civil-society organizations than with expanding and enabling the sector. A strategic concern was always to stop the internationalization of the sector, resist Western infiltration and prevent the build-up of non-Baathist social organization and power. The Syrian Arab Red Crescent Society (SARC), which has become the main humanitarian actor in this crisis, was always a central organization in this national policy. Founded in 1942, it joined the Red Cross/Crescent Movement in 1946 and developed into one of the largest Red Crescent Societies in the Middle East.

Alongside these formal party organizations, Syrian society has nevertheless had a strong and vibrant tradition of informal giving and local charity. Indeed, most analysts recognize that Syrian society manifests a highly committed and generous charitable spirit. At the forefront of this extensive charitable sector are religious organizations—Muslim and Christian—that have a long tradition of operating locally and with less Government intrusion than most other groups.

Under Baathist rule, religious charities tended to be locally and charismatically led by Imams, nuns, priests and senior lay people from particular mosques and churches. This charitable tradition usually focused on religiously identified vulnerable groups, such as orphans, widows and young women, and a religious calendar of relief work that prioritized peaks of fundraising and caring activities that coincided with religious festivals.<sup>37</sup>

Before the crisis, Syria had a tradition of secular charitable associations. If they were well connected, some would be registered by MOSAL. But most operated informally and entrepreneurially as the private endeavour of rich patrons. As in nineteenth and twentieth century Europe, these informal community-based organizations were often an outlet and opportunity for the energy and commitment for women, often from the higher echelons of the Syrian elite.<sup>38</sup> These associations tended to focus on single-issue groups, such as the blind, disabled or refugee women (often due to the personal experience of their patrons). They also engaged in income-generation projects as early livelihoods work for these groups. Secular and religious organizations always operated with a large constituency of volunteers, some of whom would receive nominal payment.

After 2000, in the period of potential reform and the opening-up of society after the death of Hafez al-Assad, many professional people set up more technocratic organizations that followed the model of developmental NGOs. These organizations employed paid staff and leveraged middle-class Syrian know-how in capacity-building projects. Their projects' organizations were often funded as corporate social responsibility (CSR) programmes

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<sup>36</sup> Bosman, pp 3-4.

<sup>37</sup> Bosman, p6.

<sup>38</sup> *ibid*

sponsored by the rising number of national and international companies in Syria, which also gave them an element of political cover.

### **Asma al-Assad and the Syria Trust**

The Syria Trust became the dominant organization in this new wave of civil-society development and was spearheaded by Asma al-Assad, the new President's wife. The Syria Trust and its public positioning of Asma al-Assad was intended to give her a dynamic role and a modern regional image in line with other Arab first ladies. In 2008, the Syria Trust teamed up with UNDP to develop the "NGO Platform". This brought together 100 development NGOs in a national dialogue in 2008/9, which set out a vision for the development goals of civil society in Syria. The process was coordinated by the Syrian Development Research Centre (SDRC), which was the think-tank element of the Syria Trust.<sup>39</sup>

During this process of setting up the NGO Platform, the term "civil society" received Government blessing for the first time, and progressive liberal development discourse began to be used officially. However, the Syria Trust's business model as an incubator and umbrella organization for a new wave of civil-society organizations still ensured that the Baath party continued to have oversight and political control over the growing field of new organizations. Patronage within this network still rested with the Assad power base through Asma's political leadership and SDRC's policy control. Each Syria Trust organization had an umbilical cord that reached back into Baathist influence. In 2010, Asma opened the First Development Conference held by the Syria Trust to showcase Syria's new concern with development and civil society.<sup>40</sup>

The 2010 conference made clear that development is primarily a technocratic socioeconomic project to be done in close cooperation with the Government.<sup>41</sup> Wider issues were regarded as extremely sensitive and unacceptable to the Government. Human rights, women's rights, democracy, advocacy and even capacity-building were not mentioned. These limits on what constituted acceptable matters for civil society continued, and the new wave of NGOs were acutely aware of red lines around their work. The crossing of these red lines by protestors in February and March 2011 set the scene for the open conflict that emerged.

### **International Agencies**

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<sup>39</sup> See <http://syriatrust.sy/en/our-work/sydrdc-project/knowledge-sharing-and-capacity-development>

<sup>40</sup> <http://sana.sy/eng/258/2010/01/23/268429.htm>

<sup>41</sup> The conference defined development as "rural development, community empowerment, culture and development, institutions and development, children, youth and development, employment, entrepreneurship and development, ensuring sustainability of development projects and sustainable economic growth and poverty reduction".

International agency involvement in Syria was very limited before 2011. Several UN agencies were in Syria, either with offices in Damascus or by working from a regional office. These included UNDP, UNRWA, UNICEF, FAO, IFAD, ILO, UNCTAD, UNESCO, WFP and WHO. The IMF and the World Bank were also active. A select few international NGOs became active in Syria in the late 1990s. The Aga Khan Development Network and the Said Foundation were perhaps the biggest, both representing powerful backers. The Aga Khan leads the important Shia sect of Ismailis, of whom there were about 200,000 in Syria. Wafiq Said is a Syrian-Saudi Arabian businessman who is perhaps the richest of the Syrian diaspora. He has a foundation for the higher education of people from Syria, Palestine, Lebanon, Jordan and the UK who have been disadvantaged by poverty or disability in childhood. An Italian NGO, Movimondo, also led a number of small EU-funded projects for UNRWA.<sup>42</sup>

### **Civil-Society Capacity at the Outbreak of Crisis**

The history of civil-society development in Syria meant that the 2011 crisis occurred in a civil-society context that was underdeveloped. High State control of a limited number of organizations was mixed with a very fragmented but energetic tradition of local charity.

Five main features characterized the state of civil society at the onset of the crisis:

- The sector was overseen by highly centralized, inefficient and security-conscious Government control by MOSAL, which had a strong preference for party-organized NGOs and resisted international influence.
- Alternative welfare models had developed nationally as a pattern of localized, fragmented, informal but extensive voluntary charitable associations that concentrated on a pity-based relief model.
- More recently, a trend towards development professionalism had begun to emerge around CSR projects and a more confident middle class.
- This NGO wave was caught and controlled by the Assad Government through the Syria Trust process.
- The space and number of UN organizations and international NGOs was tightly limited.

These characteristics of Syrian civil society would inevitably affect the way that large volumes of international humanitarian aid could be received and distributed. Finding impartial, neutral and independent humanitarian intermediaries was going to be hard. Finding direct traction with local community-based organizations (CBOs) was going to take time and involve the difficult task of bypassing Government control.

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<sup>42</sup> Bosman, p11.

## **Chapter Three – 2011 Uprising and Perspectives on the Conflict**

This chapter charts the rise of civil resistance and unrest in 2011 and its militarization and radicalization into extreme non-international armed conflict in early 2012. It also examines different Syrian perspectives on the crisis, the various opposition groupings and the regional and geo-political dynamics around the conflict.

### **Civil Resistance and the Eruption of Open Conflict**

The Syrian uprising developed differently in different places. Various towns and cities took distinct approaches to non-violent protest. Eventually, some moved more willingly to armed resistance, while others took up arms reluctantly. In many areas people remained determined to pursue non-violence.

Internationally, the Syrian uprising emerged in the wider regional context of the Arab Spring. Starting in Tunis at the end of 2010, this wave of popular protests against Arab Governments across North Africa and the Middle East finally arrived in Syria, where it started in similar non-violent mass protests.

### **The Local Coordination Committees**

Many college students formed the backbone of the first local coordination committees of Syrian activists in a protest movement that was formed locally, not nationally. As the basic cell of the movement, the coordination committees (*Lajnat at-tansiq*) were formed in a ward (*hayy, hara*) or in a small village. These committees were created spontaneously, and the first coordination committees were formed where there was already a network of activists and a culture of popular mobilization. The *tansiqiyya* was formed essentially for three purposes: to document what was happening in the street, with photos and videos published on the Internet, to connect segments of the local community and coordinate protest efforts, and to deal with humanitarian emergencies.

The decentralization of the protest movement proved necessary to ensure the survival of the movement in the face of extreme repression. All leaders were aware of the constant risk of death or detention, and they knew it was essential to prioritize the continuity of the group after their possible death or disappearance. The movement could not depend on a single person, which explains the absence of a clearly identifiable leadership on a national scale. Decentralization also allowed the movement to be more responsive to local communities' demands, and to maintain a direct link with its immediate environment in exchange for steady popular support. However, the movement's local dynamic prevented it from "conquering" large public spaces. The larger the gathering, the easier it was for the regime to disperse it and arrest participants.



During the first months of the uprising, the local committees explicitly defended the principle of non-violent movement. In late August 2011, even after fierce repression by the regime in central Syria and the subsequent formation of the first armed cells, the Union of the *tansiqiyyat* reacted with a resolute statement in favour of non-violence: “The militarization would push the revolution into an arena in which the regime has a clear advantage and would eventually erode the moral superiority that has characterized the revolution since its beginning.”<sup>43</sup>

## Government Response

Faced with the spread of protests, the regime in Damascus pursued a twin-track strategy of apparent reform alongside increasing repression. Government strategy seemed more about refashioning than reforming key laws. The President abolished martial law (April 2011), indicated his intention to launch a “national dialogue” (May 2011) and promised “reforms”. These included a new electoral law (July 2011), a new media law (August 2011) and a new constitution (February 2012). At the same time, military and police repression continued and troops remained in the strongholds of civil protest.

Neither the new constitution nor the new laws changed the essential relationship between the regime and the Syrian citizens. Martial law was replaced by a new counter-terrorism law. A new media law maintained restrictions on local and foreign journalists.<sup>44</sup> The electoral law confirmed the ban on the creation of parties based on ethnic, religious and tribal groups, so excluding the Kurds and the Muslim Brothers, among others, from political life. The 2012 constitution confirmed that the Head of State had to be male and Muslim, thus excluding women and all non-Muslim religious communities. The new text abolished the Baath monopoly, but confirmed that at least half the seats in parliament would be occupied by peasants and workers, whose candidates were to be chosen by the party’s regional branches.

## Militarization of the Uprising

The uprising became militarized in autumn 2011 with the creation of the Free Syria Army (FSA) by mostly Sunni defectors from the Government Army who fled to Jordan and Turkey. But the FSA soon became a brand name used by anyone with a rifle, a machine gun or a mortar and who claimed to fight against “the criminal gangs of Assad”. There has never been a single and united FSA, but a number of groups—called “battalions” (*katiba/kata’ib*) or “brigades” (*liwa’/alwiyya*)—who are not always coordinated. Initially, these groups used weapons seized in raids against the Government Army through smuggling from neighbouring countries, or with the connivance of Army officers who were sympathetic to the revolt or simply needed money.

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<sup>43</sup> Local Coordination Committees, “Messages to the Syrians”, August 29, 2011 (<http://goo.gl/HFQZ9>).

<sup>44</sup> Zein, D., “The ‘New’ Syrian Media Law is Nothing New” in Committee to protect journalists (Cpj), September 7, 2011 at <http://cpj.org/blog/2011/09/the-new-syrian-media-law-is-nothing-new.php>

Pro-Western regional powers began to organize and support FSA's different factions with arms and money. Real results of this aid were not seen until autumn 2012, when rebel forces in northern Syria started shooting down Government military aircraft. In early 2012, numerous civilians living in the repression-affected areas gave up on non-violence and began to join FSA, often operating as a type of neighbourhood watch charged with protecting peaceful demonstrators from loyalist forces. The civilians who first chose the path of armed resistance were not the educated youth from the affluent city neighbourhoods, but workers, artisans, farmers and employees from the rural regions or the depressed suburbs of Damascus and Aleppo.

The militarization of the uprising undoubtedly encouraged the Government, which always feared the mass action of peaceful activists more than armed insurgents. When the first FSA units were formed, the regime was finally able to fight on its own ground and stereotype its enemies as terrorists. Deep divides soon emerged within FSA that gave further encouragement to the Government. Senior Syrian Army defectors sought to assume the leadership of the armed uprising, but splits arose between so-called FSA headquarters liaising with State sponsors in exile and those fighting in FSA "brigades" on the ground. Outside Syria, there was a proliferation of acronyms for different military platforms commanded by a variety of generals supported by Qatar, Saudi Arabia and Turkey. Inside the country, most FSA factions acted without a shared vision and unified strategy.

### **Radicalization of the Conflict**

The entry of Islamist military groups became a significant feature in the expansion of the conflict and further complicated the humanitarian context of the crisis. Humanitarian programming would be inevitably shaped by extreme jihadist intolerance of Western aid workers, and donor concerns about counter-terrorism laws and the risk of aid falling under Islamist control.

In the summer of 2012, the armed resistance to the regime's repression increasingly embraced Islamic extremism, and foreign jihadist fighters arrived to reframe Syria's political and economic conflict as a sectarian-oriented fight. Many thousands of Islamist fighters have entered Syria to fight against the Government. But tens of thousands of militants of various nationalities, and also Shia Lebanese and Iraqi jihadists, have arrived in Syria to support the Assad Government. The number of foreign fighters alongside the loyalist forces is equal to, if not greater than, that of foreigners arriving to fight against the regime.<sup>45</sup>

But the radicalization of the conflict may have been shaped partly by a deliberate Government policy of provocation. From early in the crisis, Syrian authorities deliberately attacked sacred places and symbols of Sunnism to create a sectarian dimension to the conflict and give anti-Government protesters the idea that they were being targeted by a

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<sup>45</sup> According to the Syrian regime "twelve thousands foreign fighters joined the terrorist groups in Syria", *Tishrin*, Damascus, February 18, 2014, p.1.

sectarian (Alawite) army that persecutes Sunnis. This strategy of tension—driven by car bombings—was launched in Damascus and elsewhere and attributed to al-Qaeda and extremist terrorists.

Several prominent figures of the non-violent protest movement and of secular parties were killed or arrested, as were Alawite and Christian dissidents. These were the moderates able to defuse a spate of sectarian polarization and build bridges among rival communities. At the same time as so-called political reforms, the regime released many Muslim brothers, jihadists and Sunni extremists, the majority of whom had been jailed after returning from their holy war against the Anglo-American troops in Iraq.<sup>46</sup> Many read these Government moves as specifically designed to accelerate sectarian polarization.

At the beginning of 2013, the main al-Qaeda-inspired group, currently operative in the northern and north-eastern regions of the country, reached Syria from Iraq. This was the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL, also known as The Islamic State of Iraq and Sham, ISIS; or in Arabic 'ad-Dawla al-Islamiyya fi l-'Iraq wa sh-Sham', Daesh). Another al-Qaeda-inspired group, the Salvation Front (*Jabhat an-Nusra*), also gained ground and marginalized the non-violent Syrian movement. In 2014, Nusra then joined the insurgents' ranks against ISIL.<sup>47</sup>

ISIL and Nusra receive financial, logistical and military support from institutional and private actors in the Arab Gulf countries, namely Qatar, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait. The Syrian uprising still threatens the stability of their States by modelling anti-Government civil protest. Some analysts suggest that this made it preferable to reframe and sustain the Syrian revolt as sectarian rather than democratic, and so radicalize the struggle in these terms, and counter growing Iranian hegemony and reduce Russian sway in the region (as part of their alliance with Washington). Throughout 2013, a minority of well-armed and well-paid extremist Islamist fighters has been able to obscure a popular protest movement and reduce the political space for non-violent movements in Syria and the rest of the Arab world.<sup>48</sup>

Paradoxically, this extremist metamorphosis of the conflict may have convinced many Westerners about the justness of their initial decision to deny support to the rebels. The process of radicalization has also allowed the Syrian Government and its sponsors to present themselves as the only possible alternative to chaos, destruction and Qaedist terror.<sup>49</sup> Yet it

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<sup>46</sup> The Syrian regime has a long history of support to Sunni jihadist groups, both in Lebanon and Iraq. Since the end of 2011, the regime has released from his prisons many fundamentalists who later became leaders of the extremists anti-regime armed groups: Zelin, Aaron, "Free Radical", *Foreign Policy*, February 3, 2012 (<http://goo.gl/Kg86w3>); Baczko, 2013b, p.4; Habash, Mohammed, "Radicals are Assad's best friends", *The National*, January 1, 2014 (<http://goo.gl/vl728G>).

<sup>47</sup> For a summary of the relationships between the two groups, see in particular: "Rule of fear: Isis abuses in detention in Northern Syria", *Amnesty International*, December 19, 2013, pp.3-4; Reuter, Christof, "Masked Army: Jihadist Group Expands Rapidly in Syria", *Der Spiegel*, December 18, 2013 (<http://goo.gl/hgql7m>).

<sup>48</sup> Adam Baczko, Arthur Quesnay, Gilles Dorronsoro, *Between al Qaeda and the Syrian regime: a Path out of the current crisis*, in *Noria – Networks of researchers in international affairs*, December 2013.

<sup>49</sup> Worth, Robert & Schmitt Eric, "Jihadist Groups Gain in Turmoil Across Middle East", *The New York Times*, December 3, 2013 (<http://goo.gl/zoCfNp>); "Where are the good guys?", *The Economist*, 21 December 21, 2013,

is also possible to see ISIL having common interests with the Assad Government rather than being a simple part of the armed opposition.<sup>50</sup> The real aim of this Qaedist group may not be to weaken the regime, but to counteract the non-Islamist and secular rebel front. In this, Assadism and Qaedism currently have common cause.

### **Forces of Moderation**

Concentration on armed groups and the suffering they inflict can obscure the role of wider moderate forces at play in Syria. The conflict is not simply dominated by a dualism between Asadism and Qaedism. Syria is not just a country with a wrecked economy, where more than 150,000 people have been killed,<sup>51</sup> from where there is an immense exodus of civilians, and where tens of thousands of people disappear in the prisons of the regime and the Qaedist movements. Syria also continues to be a place where many thousands of non-violent activists resist in the name of self-determination, freedom, citizenship, equal opportunities and social justice.

In many ways, the three-year uprising has contributed to the emergence of a new de facto civil society that provides humanitarian aid, social organization and a new media landscape of citizen journalists, social networks and bloggers. All these groups have played a crucial role in protecting, repairing and reforming Syrian society while facing all types of governmental control, punishments and threats.

Squeezed between jihadism and Government repression, tens of thousands of Syrian activists resist in their different localities. They are mostly Sunnis, but they are also Druze, Christians, Kurds, Ismailis and Alawites, and they contribute to the growth of the local society at various levels.

All these activists—stuck in violent environments and fragmented into several groups and platforms—are unable to impose themselves as legitimate representatives of their local communities. Their violent predicament means they struggle to expand their networks to create national links among various peaceful initiatives. Yet they try to revive civil institutions in the areas that are no longer under Government control, or that are not yet subjugated to the domination of Islamist extremists. Their experience of reconstruction from the bottom of the administrative structure (parts of Aleppo being good examples) is restoring the provision of services to citizens, and could represent a viable alternative to Assad and Qaedist power.<sup>52</sup>

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p. 52 (<http://goo.gl/Cn5EeV>). Since Spring of 2011, "there is no alternative to Asad" is the phrase that was more often repeated by Western diplomats and analysts during confidential conversations about the future of Syria.

<sup>50</sup> Pinto, Catherina, "Daesh and Asad, convergences in pencil tip", *SiriaLibano.com*, January 21, 2014, (<http://goo.gl/fgXGZN>). "Mass executions in Syria may amount to war crimes, senior UN official warns", *UN News Center*, January 16 2014 (<http://goo.gl/ldukd0>).

<sup>51</sup> "Syria death toll over 150,000, says human rights body", *Reuters*, April 1, 2014 (<http://goo.gl/P2vQvY>).

<sup>52</sup> Baczko et al.

## Opposition Groupings

Renewed attempts to consolidate a political opposition have consistently failed. Since the first protests in 2011, two main poles of the traditional Syrian opposition inside the country and in exile had been actively seeking support and visibility. Various secular and leftist parties formed the National Coordination Body (NCB) in Damascus in June 2011. This platform remained an elite group and did not succeed in gaining any concrete support from the grassroots-movement protesters.

The Syrian National Council (SNC-1)<sup>53</sup> was created in Turkey in November 2011 with a strong component of the Muslim Brotherhood. It mainly represented the opposition abroad and, as with the NCB, developed little legitimacy and influence inside Syria. However, in regional and international contexts, SNC-1 received varying degrees of political, diplomatic and financial support, mainly from Turkey, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, the US and the EU. NCB tended to be sponsored by Iran and the BRICS members (Russia, China, India, Brazil and South Africa).

For months, SNC-1 was the main interlocutor with Turkey, the Western powers and their Arab allies in their increasingly desperate effort to find a trusted “contact person” to build the post-Assad Syria. In April 2012, the Friends of Syria group recognized SNC as one of the legitimate representatives of the Syrian people. SNC did not receive a full endorsement because of its inability to build consensus at home and to incorporate other voices from the anti-Assad platforms, such as the NCB and Kurdish groups.

SNC-1 and NCB sided with peaceful demonstrators and set out several conditions for the “national dialogue”: the regime must release all political prisoners; withdraw its troops from the cities; abolish the Ba’arhist monopoly and martial law; open the borders to foreign media; and launch a fair trial against the perpetrators of the violence. However, in strong disagreement with SNC-1, NCB’s political programme insisted on rejecting three things: foreign military support; sectarian incitement and the militarization of the uprising. NCB’s call for dialogue was deemed unrealistic by many in the face of a regime that had always opted to use violence and whose militant supporters were voicing the slogan: “Assad or we burn the country”. Many also felt that NCB was strengthening the regime by justifying Government rhetoric that it allowed opposition activities at home.

The traditional lack of unity in Kurdish politics was inevitably reflected in the dynamics of the 2011 revolt. Some Kurdish formations merged into NCB, others into SNC-1. The wider platform—the Kurdish National Council, created in October 2011 by 16 groups—first joined SNC-1, but then came out and signed an agreement with the Syrian wing of the Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK). The council argued for a political and administrative decentralization

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<sup>53</sup> It is important to note that there are two SNCs. The Syrian National Council (SNC-1) was largely a Muslim Brotherhood group. Later, the Syrian National Council joined the Syrian National Coalition (SNC-2), which was the more secular and West-leaning wider grouping encouraged by the Friends of Syria group.

able to respect the territorial integrity of post-Assad Syria, invoking the constitutional recognition of the Kurdish national identity and calling for the abolition of discriminatory policies imposed in Syria since 1962.

In November 2012, the Syrian National Coalition (SNC-2) was formed in a meeting in Qatar under strong pressure from Western powers and their Gulf allies, operating in the group of states known as the Friends of Syria.<sup>54</sup> This new platform was intended to consolidate the Syrian opposition. Instead, the traditional opposition remains strung out across a wide spectrum of different positions. SNC-2 is increasingly fragmented. One wing dominated by the Muslim Brotherhood and supported by Qatar is barricaded behind intransigent positions, alarmed by the defeat suffered by its Islamic counterparts in Egypt. Another wing of the coalition coincides with Saudi interests and clamours for the recognition of some emerging groups of Islamist rebels at odds with the FSA brigades. Without concrete political and diplomatic Western support, the coalition would remain a platform of exiled opposition, unable to form an interim Government in the north of Syria and to represent a credible alternative to the regime and the Qaedists.

### **A Regional and Geopolitical Conflict**

In 2011, a clear geopolitical dynamic crystallized around the conflict that has persisted to date.<sup>55</sup> This dynamic affected three levels of politics:

- Globally, the great powers of the USA, Russia and China diverged around the crisis, with the EU following the USA.
- Regionally, Iran and Saudi Arabia took different sides and squared off against one another (with Turkey, Qatar and Kuwait following Saudi) as they backed armed proxies such as Hezbollah (Iran), and Jabhat an-Nusra and FSA (Saudi and Qatar).
- Nationally, a cohesive Government confronted a diffuse and contested opposition.

Alongside its sectarian, political and socioeconomic drivers, the conflict soon transformed into an internationalized proxy war for several regional and global powers.<sup>56</sup> Islam's wider sectarian conflict is now reflected in the regional power struggle. Neither the Syrian war nor the regional power struggle can be reduced to these religious elements, but nor can they be understood without considering the way sectarian sentiment shapes attitudes and prejudices at the top, and helps mobilize popular forces from below.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> This a grouping of 70 States formed in February 2012 that meets regularly around the UN or in international conferences.

<sup>55</sup> Julien Barnes-Dacey, Syria: A political track beyond chemical weapons?, Workshop Summary Notes, European Council on Foreign Relations (ECFR), November 14, 2013

<sup>56</sup> Aaron Lund, Syrian Jihadism, in Swedish Institute of International Affairs, 13, 2012

<sup>57</sup> *ibid*

Great power politics proved itself a block to unanimous action and policymaking around the crisis. Vetoes were regularly used in discussions of Syria in the UN Security Council, and the Geneva talks made little progress. This geopolitical stand-off was briefly adjusted over the use of chemical weapons in 2013, but it has continued to hold firm on the wider issues of the conflict.

The lack of consensus in the Security Council has affected the humanitarian context. Powerful States have taken very obvious sides in this conflict, which means there is little prospect of concerted international leverage over the warring parties in favour of a more secure environment and increased humanitarian action.

### **Different Syrian Perspectives on the Conflict**

After more than three years since the crisis began, there is still a wide spectrum of various and contrasting narratives of the events. Syrian opinion on the conflict is not as dualistic as it is often presented. The stereotyped representation of a conflict between “the regime” and “the armed opposition” is much more complex and nuanced in reality. It is not possible to give an account of every shade of opinion across Syrian society, but the following range of positions covers the broad views of the main actors involved in the conflict.

- Ideological Baathist Syrians who follow the Assads and fight for them. These are members of the regime at different levels. For them, the struggle is crucial and is posed in terms of an “us or them” struggle, with “them” comprising anyone who is defying Government power. This group sees any political compromise as a defeat and believes in an ultimate solution that cleanses territory dominated by communities who support the revolt. “Assad, or we burn the country”, has been the group’s slogan since early 2012.
- Pragmatic Syrians who support the Syrian Government as the means of saving Syria from the Zionist-American plot against a legitimate Government that has protected Syria from fragmentation and enslavement to foreign powers for decades. According to this vision, Sunni extremists (described as terrorists and puppets of the American-Israel project) pose a serious threat to the historically harmonious coexistence of different Syrian sects and communities. This vision is embraced not only by Alawites, but also by wealthy and powerful Sunnis who in some ways still benefit from the established order. It is also embraced by members of other religious minorities, such as Druzes, Christians and Ismailis, who see the Assads and their regional and international allies as uniquely able to protect them from the Islamist threat.
- Syrians who have been against the regime for decades but did not support the popular uprising, knowing that it would only provoke an extreme and devastating Government response. They believe that the Syrian people should never have paid such a heavy price, and they are sceptical about a “revolution” that has killed more than 150,000 Syrians, displaced half of the population and destroyed large parts of

the country. This group is largely made up of middle-aged opponents and dissidents inside the country who have spent many years in Government prisons.

- Other Syrians have strongly supported the anti-Government protest movement in a non-violent way, directly risking their lives. They are convinced that the Assad regime should go, but they do not believe that violence will serve the best interests of what they call the “Syrian revolution for dignity”. Instead, they think that armed confrontation plays into the hands of the Government and its allies who are ready and willing to use extreme force. This group comprises Syrians from almost all different sects who were born under Assad rule—the so-called Assad generation. They do not belong to any ideological party, they usually refuse to take part in opposition platforms in or outside the country and they strongly criticize them.
- A different group of Syrians support the “revolution” and believe that “armed resistance” is the only way to get rid of the Assad Government. Apart from a minority of Army defectors, these people are mainly Sunni civilians from rural and suburban areas. They took part in the peaceful uprising in 2011 but later decided to embrace weapons to “protect the demonstrations and their community”. They are part of the so-called Free Syrian Army, or belong to the more Islamic armed brigades emerging as the powerful Islamic Front. For these people, sharia (law based on Islamic principles) should be the main jurisdiction of a post-Assad Syria in which the Sunni community would play a leading role.
- Syrians have also embraced jihadist and Qaedist ideology and serve in extremist armed groups, such as Ahrar Sham and Jabhat an Nusra. The majority of these Syrians do not fight simply to defeat the Assad regime, but also to establish an Islamic State where the non-Sunni and non-Arab communities would submit to their authority or be forced to leave. Their discourse is deeply sectarian and expresses hatred towards heterodox Islamic communities, such as Alawites, Twelver Shias, Ismailis and Druzes. These Islamist Syrians belong to the most depressed regions, where social discontent has found answers in radical Sunni Islam.
- Syrians who are disillusioned and do not want to take any political position but are fed up with all the coalitions, platforms and alliances. Some of them have preferred to stay out of the conflict, while others have taken part in the uprising and in what they used to call the “revolution”. Now they say they have been deceived by violent and factional politicians, and have suffered too much from the loss of their relatives and homes. They just want a return to “normality”.

### **The Situation in Early 2014**

By April 2014, a relative stalemate had emerged among the various armed forces on the ground, with few and limited changes in the military balance.



Loyalist Government forces continue to control the vast majority of the urban areas (with the exception of Raqqa and half of Aleppo), plus the Druze-dominated Suwayda' southern region, the coastal area connected to Damascus through Homs and the mountainous region of Qalamun that runs parallel to the Lebanese border.

The diverse rebel front has a volatile grip over some portions of Latakia and Idlib regions, a great part of Aleppo region and some significant portions of territories in southern Syria, such as Qunaytra and Daraa. The main Qaedist group—the Islamic State of Iraq and Sham (ISIS)—controls the northern Raqqa region and some parts of the eastern Dayr az-Zawr region close to the Iraqi frontier, while the Kurdish militias are trying to consolidate their presence in the three different Kurdish areas along the Turkish-Syrian border.

Politically, Assad will undoubtedly be confirmed as President for another seven years in June's multi-party elections, the first in more than half a century. In the meantime, the international community seems unable to propose any feasible mediated peace process after the de facto failure of the Geneva talks in January and February 2014.

## **Chapter Four – Impact of Conflict on People**

This chapter examines the impact of the initial repression and subsequent armed conflict on Syria's civilian population. It describes the main patterns of violations and the general conduct of hostilities that led to so much human suffering. It traces the dramatic rise in displacement, the problems of siege and entrapment, and the increase in deprivation and impoverishment across the country. It then summarizes the conflict's impact on Syrian children.

### **The Evolution and Humanitarian Impact of Armed Conflict**

The conflict developed in two main phases: a first phase of protest and violent repression, followed by a second phase of extreme armed conflict. Each phase involved extensive violations of human rights and international humanitarian law (IHL), leading to widespread deprivation, injury and death.

The impact on the civilian population was enormous and caused a wide range of suffering. The depth of repression and intense levels of armed conflict created significant and diverse humanitarian needs across a majority of the Syrian population, and disrupted socioeconomic conditions and welfare capacity in neighbouring States.

Government response to the demonstrations of February and March 2011 set in motion a policy of violent repression. This policy concentrated on three main strategies: the violent suppression of demonstrations; extensive detention and torture of opposition activists, and the terrorizing of their families; and the deliberate murder of men, women and children by the Assad Government's military forces and its Shabiha paramilitary units.<sup>58</sup>

In August, the UN Human Rights Council set up an Independent International Commission of Inquiry (COI) into Syria.<sup>59</sup> The commission has never been granted entry into Syria, but gathers its information from outside the country. The COI has tracked human rights and IHL violations throughout the conflict and their impact on civilians. The COI's first report covered the period between March and November 2011.<sup>60</sup> In this report, all violations were attributed to the Government side of the conflict. Already by the end of its first report in November 2011, the commission was concluding that Government violence was likely to involve serious violations of international human rights law and crimes against humanity.<sup>61</sup>

The COI's first report described a pattern of violations against civilians that characterized the initial phase of violence. Many of these violations have continued as core characteristics of

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<sup>58</sup> Shabiha is derived from the Arabic word for ghost. Shabiha units grew up as a shadowy group of Alawite smugglers and protection racketeers condoned by and benefiting the Assad regime, and operating mainly in the coastal cities. They became increasingly violent after March 2011, often operating in tandem with Government forces. See [www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/67823/ahed-al-hendi/the-structure-of-syrias-repression](http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/67823/ahed-al-hendi/the-structure-of-syrias-repression)

<sup>59</sup> The Commission was set up by the UN Human Rights Council on 22 August 2011 and has reported seven times to date. See [www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/HRC/IICISyria/Pages/AboutCol.aspx](http://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/HRC/IICISyria/Pages/AboutCol.aspx)

<sup>60</sup> See <http://daccess-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G11/170/97/PDF/G1117097.pdf?OpenElement>

<sup>61</sup> *ibid* paragraphs 84, 108.

the armed conflict. They originated in the conflict's first phase of violent repression, and then escalated as core strategies and patterns of violence in the months of outright armed conflict that followed.

### **Detention, Torture, Murder and Sexual Violence**

Excessive use of force and extrajudicial executions were deployed early on. These executions were either carried out by indiscriminate shootings during the suppression of demonstrations or in separate "shoot to kill" operations targeting opposition activists. They also included the summary execution of soldiers refusing to fire on civilians.<sup>62</sup> By August 2012, the COI was also reporting similar patterns of unlawful killing of captured enemy combatants and pro-Government civilians by opposition groups.<sup>63</sup>

Detention and torture became a particularly violent strategy that has continued throughout the militarized phase of the conflict, and was later taken up by opposition forces. The first COI report referred to the extensive practice of arbitrary detentions of civilians and many cases of enforced disappearances. Detentions of mostly male adults and children were made during demonstrations. Detention typically involved torture, deprivation of food and water, and the use of rape and sexual violence against males, females, adults and children.<sup>64</sup> As subsequent evidence and reports have shown, the detention and torture of tens of thousands of people has been highly systematic from the early phase of the conflict onwards, and often deliberately led to death.<sup>65</sup> By March 2014, there were estimates of 18,000 people missing after detention by Government forces and 8,000 missing after kidnap or detention by opposition forces.<sup>66</sup>

Sexual violence against women, men, boys and girls also became a feature of the crisis from its early days. Rape and sexual violence against women and girls have been most common during house searches, checkpoints, hostage-taking and as part of torture in detention. Men and boys are reported to have been the victims of rape and sexual violence in detention. These violations seem to have been predominantly carried out by Government forces, and fear of rape has been regularly reported as a particular driver of displacement.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> *ibid* paragraphs 41, 42, 43, 48.

<sup>63</sup> COI Report 3 paragraphs 58, 60.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid* paragraphs 61, 62, 65, 66, 72, 73.

<sup>65</sup> See Human Rights Watch report, *Torture Archipelago*, 3 July 2012 at [www.hrw.org/reports/2012/07/03/torture-archipelago-0](http://www.hrw.org/reports/2012/07/03/torture-archipelago-0); and Carter Ruck and Co, London, *A Report into the Credibility of Certain Evidence with Regard to Torture and Execution of Persons Incarcerated by the Current Syrian Regime*, London, 20 January 2014 at [www.carter-ruck.com/Documents/Syria\\_Report-January\\_2014.pdf](http://www.carter-ruck.com/Documents/Syria_Report-January_2014.pdf)

<sup>66</sup> Figures from Syrian Observatory for Human Rights at [www.theguardian.com/world/2014/apr/01/syria-civil-war-death-toll-150000](http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/apr/01/syria-civil-war-death-toll-150000)

<sup>67</sup> COI Fourth Report paragraphs 106, 108; Fifth Report paragraph 91; Sixth Report paragraph 95 and Seventh Report paragraph 69. See also *Violence Against Women: Bleeding Wound in the Syrian Conflict*, Euromediterranean Human Rights Network, Copenhagen, November 2013 at [www.euromedrights.org/eng/wp-content/uploads/2013/11/Doc-report-VAW-Syria.pdf](http://www.euromedrights.org/eng/wp-content/uploads/2013/11/Doc-report-VAW-Syria.pdf)

Restriction of movement was also a Government strategy in the early phase of the violence, as Government forces reportedly laid mines at border areas and used live fire to deter people from fleeing across the Syrian border.<sup>68</sup> A pattern of violations involving the destruction of property, theft and house demolition also set in during this period, as Government forces sought out demonstrators and activists and punished their families.<sup>69</sup> These strategies of destruction and pillage then continued and escalated throughout the armed conflict.

### **Targeting Medical Assistance and Journalists**

During the initial period, the violation of people's right to medical assistance and the destruction and abuse of health facilities also emerged as a Government strategy. Civilians were denied access to medical facilities, and people involved in setting up alternative health-care facilities were detained and tortured.<sup>70</sup> This was another pattern of violation that would escalate to become a key feature of the conflict's military phase and gravely affect civilian protection and survival rates.<sup>71</sup>

Throughout 2012 and 2013, health services degraded dramatically, and medical staff continued to be targeted and killed.<sup>72</sup> Facilities were destroyed in large numbers, many health professionals fled in fear for their lives and supplies were in very short supply. By March 2014, an estimated 60 per cent of Syrian hospitals had been destroyed and only a third of public ambulances and health centres were functioning. Vaccination coverage was breaking down (dropping to 52 per cent from 91 per cent), and polio began infecting children again in Government and opposition areas.<sup>73</sup>

Journalists were another group who, like medics, quickly became specific targets of Government strategy. The space for freedom of expression and information was severely curtailed as Government and opposition groups fought for control of media and cyber space. As with medical personnel, professional journalists, citizen journalists and bloggers were arbitrarily detained and killed by Government forces.<sup>74</sup> Since 2011, 84 journalists—including citizen journalists and netizens—have been killed and more than 12 local and international

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<sup>68</sup> COI First Report paragraphs 76,79.

<sup>69</sup> COI First Report paragraphs 83.

<sup>70</sup> COI First Report paragraphs 80, 81.

<sup>71</sup> This was a constant theme in COI reports. See also Physicians for Human Rights, Syria: Attacks on Doctors, Patients and Hospitals, Cambridge MA, December 2011 [https://s3.amazonaws.com/PHR\\_Reports/syria-attacks-on-drs-patients-hospitals-final-2011.pdf](https://s3.amazonaws.com/PHR_Reports/syria-attacks-on-drs-patients-hospitals-final-2011.pdf), and MSF public letter on 16 September 2013 at [www.msf.org.uk/article/syria-global-coalition-doctors-calls-medical-and-humanitarian-access](http://www.msf.org.uk/article/syria-global-coalition-doctors-calls-medical-and-humanitarian-access)

<sup>72</sup> ICRC, Health Care in Danger January 2012 to December 2013, 7 April 2014, Geneva, at [www.icrc.org/eng/assets/files/publications/icrc-002-4196.pdf](http://www.icrc.org/eng/assets/files/publications/icrc-002-4196.pdf)

<sup>73</sup> UNICEF, Under Siege: The Devastating Impact on Children of Three Years of War in Syria, New York, p8. See also the public dispute about rising polio figures between Dr Bruce Alyward of WHO and Dr Annie Sparrow in the New York Review of Books, Vol LXI, Number 4, March 6-19, 2014, p53.

<sup>74</sup> COI Second Report, 22 February 2012 paragraphs 47-57 at <http://daccess-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G12/106/13/PDF/G1210613.pdf?OpenElement>

journalists remain missing. Syria has become “the world’s deadliest country for media workers”.<sup>75</sup>

## **The Impact of Armed Conflict on Civilians**

From late 2011 onwards, the crisis moved from violent repression to outright military conflict. In July 2011, defectors from the Syrian Government Army set up the Free Syria Army (FSA). On 8 November, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights estimated that Syrian State forces had killed 3,500 civilians since March. Already in their first report published on 23 November 2011, the COI was suggesting that the level of violence would soon escalate to one of non-international armed conflict.<sup>76</sup>

### **Bombardment**

Early 2012 saw a significant escalation and militarization of the conflict. Syrian Government policy moved “from targeted repression to the disproportionate use of force against the civilian population.”<sup>77</sup> This new strategy was characterized by indiscriminate bombardment by artillery and air forces, followed by infantry clearance operations to root out opposition forces. Zabadani, Duma and parts of Damascus were the first to be attacked in January, followed swiftly by the devastation of much of Homs in February. On 14 July 2012, ICRC declared the Syrian crisis to be a non-international armed conflict subject to IHL.<sup>78</sup>

The new militarized phase of the crisis imposed the extreme experience of modern warfare on much of Syria’s civilian population. This experience was characterized by violent death and injury, the destruction of homes and livelihoods, and massive forced displacement. Early COI reports noted that Government attacks were deliberately targeting residential areas and civilians, using fragmentation bombs and snipers to kill women, men and children.<sup>79</sup> By August 2012, the COI concluded that on the Government side, this strategy was being “conducted pursuant to state policy”.<sup>80</sup>

This pattern of direct attacks on civilians, civilian areas and civilian objects has continued as a main feature of the war, largely operated by Government forces but also by some opposition forces. Bombardment was carried out using modern devastating weapons, including Scud missiles and cluster munitions launched directly into civilian and urban areas.<sup>81</sup> The use of chemical weapons added a horrific new dimension to these deliberate

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75 COI Sixth Report paragraphs 153-155.

76 COI First Report paragraph 97.

77 Elizabeth Ferris, Kemal Kirisci and Salman Shaikh, *Syrian Crisis: Massive Displacement, Dire Needs and a Shortage of Solutions*, The Brookings Institution, Washington DC, 2013, p5.

78 [www.reuters.com/article/2012/07/14/us-syria-crisis-icrc-idUSBRE86D09H20120714](http://www.reuters.com/article/2012/07/14/us-syria-crisis-icrc-idUSBRE86D09H20120714)

79 COI Second Report, paragraph 39

80 COI Third Report paragraph 57.

81 As the war developed, the use of cheaper barrel bombs became a particular tactic of Syrian Government air forces.

attacks. The largest chemical attack killed hundreds of people and injured thousands more on 21 August 2013.

### **Physical Injury and Medical Crisis**

Unusually for most modern humanitarian contexts, humanitarian agencies have repeatedly stressed that violent death and direct physical injuries are a major factor in human suffering in Syria. As a result, emergency medical care and war surgery fast became a humanitarian priority and another distinct characteristic of the crisis.

By March 2014, total violent deaths were estimated at 150,000. UNICEF estimated that 10,000 children had met violent deaths, and the total number of known civilian violent war deaths was conservatively calculated at 50,000.<sup>82</sup> This figure does not include a general calculation of excess deaths, which has not yet been made. The remaining 100,000 deaths were from combatant casualties—a very high figure for contemporary warfare. Combatant and civilian injuries began to place great demands on health systems and humanitarian aid.

The high rates of combatant injury meant that medical humanitarian aid also became intensely politically contested from 2013 onwards. The Government imposed increasing restrictions on war surgery materials and general medical supplies entering opposition areas. This is because (contrary to IHL) it considered that medical aid to injured enemy forces constituted direct support to opposition war efforts. For their part, opposition forces raided or hijacked medical humanitarian convoys for emergency supplies.<sup>83</sup>

With the politicization and restriction of medical aid, civilians' rights to medical care became a major concern among health agencies. This was consistently taken up in UN Security Council resolutions and presidential statements on humanitarian access.

### **Displacement**

Strategies of bombardment, detention, torture, murder and sexual violence drove many millions of people to opt for flight and displacement from 2012 onwards, with a major spike in displacement in 2013. Displacement has been extremely dynamic throughout the conflict, as people have been forced to adapt their location to the constantly changing battle lines in urban, suburban and rural areas.

Displacement has not just arisen as a survival strategy by endangered and deprived people. There have also been instances of deliberate forced displacement by Government and opposition forces, and strong indications that all parties were using displacement as a tool of sectarian cleansing and forceful demographic change to create single-sect spaces.<sup>84</sup> The

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<sup>82</sup> UNICEF, *Under Siege*, p4, and the UK-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, see [www.theguardian.com/world/2014/apr/01/syria-civil-war-death-toll-150000](http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/apr/01/syria-civil-war-death-toll-150000)

<sup>83</sup> IRIN, *Syrian Government Increases Restrictions on Medical Aid*, 7 August 2013 at [www.irinnews.org/report/98537/analysis-syrian-government-increases-restrictions-on-medical-aid](http://www.irinnews.org/report/98537/analysis-syrian-government-increases-restrictions-on-medical-aid)

<sup>84</sup> Ferris et al, p11.

Syrian Government has also been consistently judged to fail in its obligations to protect its population from and during forced displacement.<sup>85</sup>

The extent of displacement has been enormous. Nine million people in Syria have been uprooted from their homes, and more than one in three Syrians have been displaced since 2011. People have often had to move repeatedly during the crisis because a single move has seldom protected them. By March 2014, there were 6.52 million people displaced inside Syria,<sup>86</sup> and 2.58 million Syrian people living as refugees in Lebanon, Jordan, Turkey, Iraq and Egypt.<sup>87</sup> Displacement increased most dramatically throughout 2013. Refugee numbers rose from 506,097 people in January 2013 to 2,585,182 people in March 2014.<sup>88</sup> Lebanon, Turkey and Jordan received the largest caseloads, followed by Iraq and Egypt. The steepest growth in IDP numbers also occurred in 2013: numbers more than doubled in nine months, from 2 million people in January 2013 to 4.2 million by September 2013.<sup>89</sup>

### **Siege and Entrapment**

Deliberate siege or protracted entrapment has also been a persistent feature of the Syrian conflict. If some people were able to move to safety, millions of others have been stuck in highly dangerous and deprived environments. Many of these people became known as hard-to-reach or out-of-reach groups. Aid was often prevented from reaching them for genuine security reasons, or because of deliberate obstruction and bureaucratic impediments by the Government.

By 2013, the COI was formally acknowledging that “siege warfare has entered the arsenal of the parties to the conflict”. It noted that siege was being used deliberately “to trap civilians in their homes by controlling the supply of food, water, medicine and electricity”, and that starvation and the denial of humanitarian relief was being used as a weapon of war in breach of IHL.<sup>90</sup> In February 2014, an estimated 3 million people were living in hard-to-reach areas and had not received humanitarian aid for 10 months. Some 250,000 people were estimated to be living under siege and out of reach.<sup>91</sup>

### **Deprivation and Impoverishment**

Deprivation and entrenched impoverishment have been a widespread impact of the armed conflict on civilians. The Syrian crisis has been as much an economic disaster as a social and political one, setting Syria’s development back 30 years.<sup>92</sup> The destructive and dislocating nature of the armed conflict has destroyed social and economic infrastructure, personal

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<sup>85</sup> COI Seventh Report paragraph 144.

<sup>86</sup> OCHA SHARP...

<sup>87</sup> UNCHR at <http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/regional.php>

<sup>88</sup> *ibid*

<sup>89</sup> Ferris, p12.

<sup>90</sup> COI Fifth Report paragraph 141, 142, 146, 148; COI Seventh Report paragraph 132.

<sup>91</sup> SNAP, Feb 2014 at [file:///Users/hslim/Downloads/part\\_i\\_syria.pdf](file:///Users/hslim/Downloads/part_i_syria.pdf)

<sup>92</sup> Syrian Centre for Policy Research, War on Development: Socioeconomic Monitoring Report of Syria, October 2013; UNRWA, Socioeconomic and Damage Assessment Report: UNRWA Microfinance Clients in Syria, March 2014.

assets and livelihoods. Alongside the devastation of health and educational services, Syrian businesses, markets, factories and real estate have all been significantly damaged.

More than half the Syrian population now lives in poverty in or outside the country. Unemployment has reached 48.6 per cent, with 2.33 million lost jobs since 2011. GDP has contracted by 39.6 per cent.<sup>93</sup> For the millions of civilians affected by the conflict, this has meant deep losses of assets, income and opportunities. Combined with losses in health and education, this means a dramatic reduction in life chances for current generations.

### **The Impact on Children**

The conflict's patterns of violence and destruction have had a deep impact on children. UNICEF estimates that 5.5 million children are directly affected by the crisis and need humanitarian assistance in March 2014, which amounts to 56 per cent of all Syrian children. Over 10,000 children have been killed since the beginning of the crisis (OHCHR). A total of 4,000 schools have been destroyed or are being used as temporary housing. This contributes to 2.8 million Syrian children who are either out of school or are at high risk of dropping out of school. In all the conflict-affected areas, the per capita availability of clean water supply in Syria has decreased to one third of pre-crisis levels, placing children at greater risk of disease. By November 2013, Syria confirmed 17 cases of wild polio virus in the country for the first time since 1999. The caseload increased to 36 by May 2014. The detection of polio has been declared a public health emergency. Low immunization rates among children, coupled with large population movements, have created a high-risk environment for further transmission.

A range of child-protection risks have been confirmed through a child-protection assessment,<sup>94</sup> in which 98 per cent of respondents reported that the psychosocial well-being of boys and girls had deteriorated substantially. Children continue to be recruited and used by armed opposition groups. Syrian authorities have arrested, detained arbitrarily or tortured children. Cases of sexual violence of boys in detention have also been reported.<sup>95</sup>

Many children are engaging in economic coping strategies, such as work or early marriage, to help their families survive. Over 1.3 million refugee children have fled to neighbouring countries, many having gone months without access to health care, including routine vaccinations. They arrive in host countries traumatized by the events they have experienced. Many are exposed to harsh living conditions, and the threat of measles, polio, malnutrition and diarrhoeal diseases persists. The refugee influx had strained already fragile services in most host countries and exacerbated intercommunity tensions.

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<sup>93</sup> Ibid pp6-7.

<sup>94</sup> Global Child Protection Working Group. Syria Child Protection assessment- 2013

<sup>95</sup> UN Secretary-General's Report on Children and Armed Conflict in the Syrian Arab Republic, 27 January 2014, S/2014/31 at <http://daccess-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N13/627/07/PDF/N1362707.pdf?OpenElement>



## **Chapter Five – Humanitarian Needs, Response and Challenges**

This chapter examines the humanitarian needs that emerged from the onset of armed conflict, and the necessity for humanitarian agencies to respond to the twin challenges of extreme displacement and entrapment of large civilian populations. It then gives an overview of the two main UN-led humanitarian programmes (SHARP and RRP), and explores the various political tensions in cross-line and cross-border operations.

### **Humanitarian Needs and Response**

The international humanitarian system began to engage in earnest in the Syrian crisis in 2012. This was when the conflict escalated from violent repression to non-international armed conflict, and when it became apparent that the conflict would involve a regional refugee emergency.

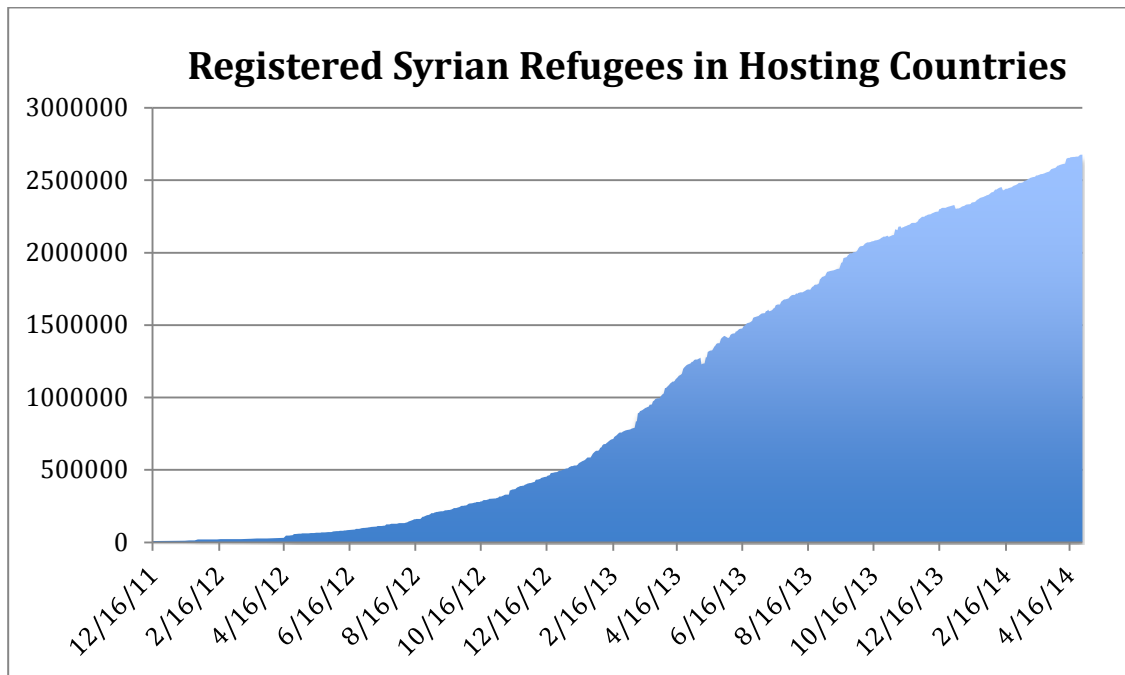
The intensity of humanitarian needs and their proliferation across so much of the population is a major characteristic of the context of the Syrian crisis. Throughout the crisis, the humanitarian context has been characterized by rapidly escalating needs within Syria and across the region. Responding to these needs, humanitarian operations have been greatly enhanced by positive cooperation from regional governments hosting refugees, but routinely hindered by major limitations on humanitarian access inside Syria. Humanitarian limitations within Syria have made it continuously difficult to assess needs and deliver principled and consistent humanitarian response to all parts of the country.

### **The Twin Challenge of Movement and Entrapment**

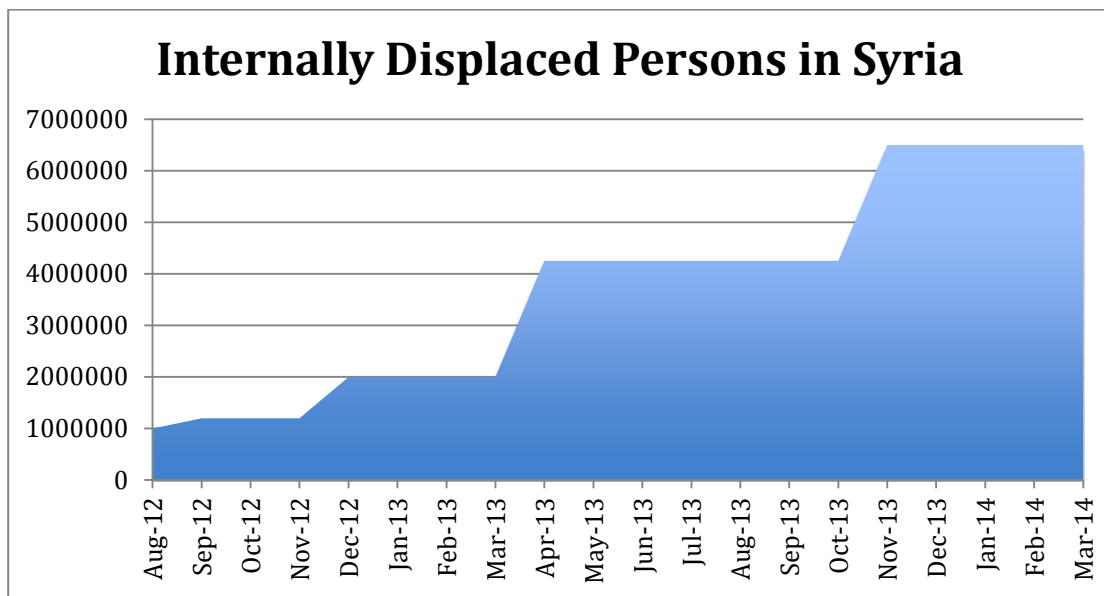
An operational tension between human movement and human isolation was at the heart of Syria's humanitarian needs. Millions of people are on the move, but millions are also dangerously stuck. This combination of extraordinary levels of displacement and high levels of siege posed the divergent challenges of dynamism and entrapment for humanitarian action.

Context demanded that agencies had to respond simultaneously to millions of people engaged in rapid movement, and equally to millions of others who were stuck. These contradictory challenges framed the main strategic test to effective humanitarian operations.

Evolution of numerical trends in IDPs and refugees



Source: UNHCR (<http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/regional.php>)



Source: OCHA, *Syria Humanitarian Bulletin*, 1-45

*[Breaks in the numbers are not necessarily reflecting the reality but might simply be related to reporting times.]*

## **SHARP and RRP**

Leadership and coordination of UN needs assessments, funds and humanitarian management were shared between OCHA and UNHCR in a division of labour that separated regional refugee response (UNHCR) from humanitarian operations inside Syria (OCHA). UNHCR set up the Regional Refugee Response Plan (RRP) and OCHA led the Syrian Humanitarian Assistance Response Plan (SHARP). Both appealed separately to donors and acted on behalf of different caseloads of affected people.

SHARP's final revised appeal for 2012 was \$348 million; the RRP's was \$488 million, combining to \$836 million. As the conflict escalated and displacement rocketed in 2013, the Syrian crisis rapidly became the world's largest humanitarian emergency. SHARP's revised appeal in 2013 reached \$1,410 million and RRP's rose to \$2,982 million. The initial appeal for 2014 was \$2,276 million for SHARP and \$4,245 million for RRP.<sup>96</sup> By March 2014, RRP and SHARP accounted for 43 per cent of the UN's total global humanitarian appeal.<sup>97</sup>

First launched in 2012, the SHARP provides a Government-endorsed planning, coordination and financing platform for international humanitarian interventions inside Syria. The 2014 SHARP seeks to assist up to 9.3 million beneficiaries in Syria, including 6.3 million IDPs, 2.5 million people in hard-to-reach locations, 270,000 Palestine refugees and some 250,000 people living under conditions of siege. The SHARP 2014 outlines requirements totalling \$2.27 billion. Access has been a critical challenge to implementing the SHARP, and the urgent need for unimpeded humanitarian access is called for in UN Security Council resolution 2139. The 2014 SHARP predominantly focuses on life-saving interventions. However, in view of the conflict's enduring nature, it contains initiatives to support the recovery of livelihoods and the strengthening of community resilience in areas of origin and displacement, where conditions permit.<sup>98</sup>

The RRP process, coordinated by UNHCR, was initiated in late 2011, reflecting the rapid growth in refugee flows from Syria. The RRP process has been the principle vehicle through which international support to refugees, in the form of registration, protection and assistance, has been provided. Over 100 partners have structured around 35 sector working groups in the region.

Appealing for \$4.1 billion, the RRP 6 was presented at the international pledging conference in Kuwait in January 2014. RRP partners identified a projected regional refugee caseload of 4.1 million in 2014, ranking it among the largest refugee programmes in the world. Critically, partners also identified 2.7 million host-community residents as beneficiaries of assistance,

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<sup>96</sup> All figures from OCHA Financial Tracking System

<sup>97</sup> OCHA Financial Tracking System, Summary of Requirements and Pledges, 17 March 2014.

and the RRP 6 has expanded the scope of action to include some support to them. As of 31 March 2014, the RRP had received 17 per cent of its funding requirements.<sup>99</sup>

### **Humanitarian Response Inside Syria**

From the start of the crisis, the Syrian Government maintained a determined policy to limit the number of international agencies operating in Syria and to control humanitarian aid. It was clear that Syria would not be a typical humanitarian response with numerous and diverse international and national NGOs.

The Syrian Government rigorously held to its pre-2011 policy of tight restrictions on the non-governmental and inter-governmental sectors. UN agencies were permitted to scale up, but few national and international NGOs were granted registration and permission to operate. On 29 May 2012, an agreement was eventually made between the Syrian Government and UN agencies that allowed the operation of eight UN agencies and potential for nine international NGOs.

### **Humanitarian Restrictions and the Role of SARC**

This agreement also confirmed that the Syrian Arab Red Crescent (SARC) would be the official Government interface and operational partner for all humanitarian agencies.<sup>100</sup> All humanitarian response had to work through SARC. All registration would continue to be handled by MOSAL. Inside Syria, OCHA, WFP, UNICEF, UNRWA, and later WHO, became the largest operational UN agencies. This strict arrangement has continued, and 15 UN agencies, IOM and 16 INGOs were registered by December 2013. A Regional Humanitarian Coordinator position was agreed with the Syrian Government in April 2013, based in Amman. SARC has remained the dominant humanitarian actor and the official conduit for all international aid, including UN food aid.

SARC has had an operational monopoly on humanitarian aid, but it proved to be a more effective and impartial agency than was initially feared by international agencies. Its senior leadership is controlled by the Government and maintains a close association with the security services. On the ground, SARC's 9,000 staff and volunteers have proved to be professional, well connected and extraordinarily committed. By January 2014, 34 SARC members had been killed while carrying out their humanitarian duties.<sup>101</sup> Staff and volunteers across the country may hold different political views personally, but at the local level they work in line with humanitarian principles to meet as many needs as possible.<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>100</sup> Humanitarian Policy Group, Syria Crisis: The Humanitarian Response, note of a roundtable, London, 15 June 2012.

<sup>101</sup> [www.icrc.org/eng/resources/documents/statement/2014/01-12-syria-sarc-death-aid-worker.htm](http://www.icrc.org/eng/resources/documents/statement/2014/01-12-syria-sarc-death-aid-worker.htm)

<sup>102</sup> Interviews with international humanitarian workers in Syria.

The Government is not alone in restricting humanitarian action. Several opposition armed groups, the Qaedist forces and the loyalist militias have regularly restricted the movement of humanitarian workers and humanitarian aid.

### **Local Humanitarian Activism**

The localism that is such a feature of Syrian society also became a strong feature of the Syrian context. Despite the public emphasis on the role of SARC and international agencies, most humanitarian work at the community level in Syria and across the wider refugee crisis has been initiated and managed by local grassroots organizations.<sup>103</sup> The crisis has mobilized and enhanced the plethora of small fragmented religious organizations and informal charitable associations that characterized the localized pattern of civil society before 2011, and many new groups and networks have been formed in response to local suffering.

These voluntary groups have been complemented and catalysed by the dynamism of many humanitarian initiatives run by the Syrian diaspora and wider Muslim solidarity groups that have brought humanitarian help from the Middle East and Europe. Most INGOs that have not found it possible or desirable to register in Damascus have built their operations on these local and diaspora groups.<sup>104</sup> Many of these Syrian humanitarian workers have been threatened, detained or killed. Several international humanitarian workers have been kidnapped, including five members of a Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) team in January 2014. Some Jihadist opposition groups have made clear there is no place for Western agency staff in their control zones.

Many local relief groups learned fast how to engage successfully with the international aid system on both sides of the conflict. "Some groups start by asking for \$2000 to help some people in the neighbourhood. After three months, they will then send proposals for more sustainable projects, like psychological support for kids, their budget then jumps from \$2000 to \$50,000 and they are doing amazing work, and most of them are volunteers."<sup>105</sup>

Importantly, interviews report that it is often women who play the most significant humanitarian roles, especially in Government areas where they have better access and can move more easily and avoid arrest. Christians are also highly active and seem to have better access.

Medics have also taken a significant lead in relief associations, the largest of which was Doctors Coordinate of Damascus, which developed nationally but then retreated into local structures. Many medical volunteers have been students and interns having to learn advanced procedures from videos and websites. An important system of moneychangers also developed alongside relief operations that imported foreign funds, so that foreign cash

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<sup>103</sup> Syria Needs Analysis Project, Relief Actors in Syria, December 2013.

<sup>104</sup> Interviews with INGO staff.

<sup>105</sup> Interview with relief activist in Damascus.

could be converted into local currency. In 2014, the Government began to target and arrest moneychangers as part of its restrictions and attacks on relief.

### **Needs Assessment, Coverage and Cross-Line Aid**

Gathering information and triangulating data on humanitarian needs became a significant challenge because of the movement restrictions, but also because of the increasing fragmentation of political control across the country. The conflict's mosaic pattern meant that most information chains between communities and central authorities were broken, and aggregating needs data was deeply problematic.

To support UN efforts, the Syria Needs Assessment Project (SNAP) was deployed by the Assessment Capacities Project (ACAPS) and MapAction from January 2013.<sup>106</sup> This used a network of field enumerators to combine secondary data with GIS mapping to produce regular regional analysis reports (RAS), thematic reports and scenario-building. The detail and "agility" of the SNAP assessments were judged to have brought important "coherence to a fragmented humanitarian context".<sup>107</sup>

Problems of aid coverage became increasingly voiced in terms of the insufficiency and limits of cross-line aid. This is aid moved by SARC and others from "the Damascus side" across the lines of conflict and into opposition-held areas. UN and NGO frustrations with cross-line aid heightened in early 2013. Strong criticisms of the limits of the dominant SARC/ICRC/UN cross-line approach were voiced by MSF and echoed by many other NGOs now looking to go cross-border.<sup>108</sup> Later in 2013, MSF lobbied further to reject cross-line aid in favour of direct support to Syrian diaspora networks now working throughout opposition areas.<sup>109</sup> Many other NGOs shared this view, but they kept a lower profile on the issue as they still hoped for registration in Damascus, or were being discreet about their existing cross-border operations.

### **The Politicization of Aid and Access**

As the armed conflict developed and opposition forces took control of significant parts of the country, humanitarian aid became highly politicized as a potentially strategic resource for each side. Humanitarian assessment and distribution faced continual obstacles on the Government side and were "plagued by insecurity, bureaucracy, manipulation, intimidation, and limited operational capacity." Across the conflict, humanitarian principles were "under

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<sup>106</sup> See [www.acaps.org/en/pages/syria-snap-project](http://www.acaps.org/en/pages/syria-snap-project)

<sup>107</sup> Andy Fetherstone, Syria Needs Assessment Project, External Mid-term Review, October 2013.

<sup>108</sup> Fabrice Weissman and Rodrigue Marie-Noelle. Le CICR Doit Oser Briser L'Embargo humanitaire en Syrie, Le Temps, Switzerland, 19 March 2013 at <http://www.letemps.ch/Page/Uuid/90730828-8fe4-11e2-9fca-35dc2edbbea3%7C0;>

<sup>109</sup> [www.msf-crash.org/en/sur-le-vif/2013/09/06/7230/scaling-up-aid-in-syria-the-role-of-diaspora-networks/](http://www.msf-crash.org/en/sur-le-vif/2013/09/06/7230/scaling-up-aid-in-syria-the-role-of-diaspora-networks/)

extraordinary pressure” and “independence, neutrality, impartiality and humanity are under continual strain because of necessary compromises and accommodations.”<sup>110</sup>

This strain was partially the result of the Government’s insistence on working through SARC, and the tight restrictions on the areas and recipients of humanitarian aid. As the conflict developed, opposition forces could prove similarly restrictive and manipulative on areas and populations under their control.

## **Humanitarian Access and the UN Security Council**

The problem of humanitarian access became a major focus of humanitarian diplomacy across the UN system from 2012 onwards. Government restrictions continuously limited humanitarian access. So too did opposition policies. As the conflict developed and opposition groups proliferated, humanitarian action faced multiple checkpoints across the country and time-consuming negotiations with multiple groups.

The context was also an especially dangerous one for humanitarian workers. By January 2014, 33 SARC members and 13 UN staff members had been killed in action. Several other international NGO workers had been kidnapped and killed.<sup>111</sup>

In the early UN and Arab League peace initiatives of 2011/12, humanitarian access was given priority as a key part of the process, and it was point three of the six points of the Annan Plan of 14 April 2012.<sup>112</sup> With the failure of the Geneva I process, the UN’s Emergency Relief Coordinator (ERC) led efforts to advocate greater access with the Syrian Government.<sup>113</sup>

In 2013, the UN Security Council became increasingly insistent on the need for increased humanitarian access, and it was more specific about the obstacles to humanitarian action, particularly “bureaucratic impediments” enacted by the Syrian Government. The Council’s presidential statements and resolutions on the Syrian crisis repeatedly demanded expanded relief operations and “immediate, full and unimpeded access”.<sup>114</sup> In its most assertive resolution on humanitarian access in February 2014, the Council demanded that all parties, but in particular the Syrian authorities, allow humanitarian access across conflict lines, in besieged areas and across neighbouring State borders, with further steps to be taken in the case of non-compliance.<sup>115</sup>

The Geneva II talks in January/February 2014 also focused on humanitarian access as a priority in its own right and as a means to create “confidence building measures” between

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<sup>110</sup> Ben Parker, Humanitarianism Besieged, Humanitarian Exchange Network, Issue 59, November 2013.

<sup>111</sup> Statement by EU Humanitarian Commissioner Georgieva on 8 January 2014 at [http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release\\_MEMO-14-5\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_MEMO-14-5_en.htm)

<sup>112</sup> See [www.un.org/en/peacekeeping/documents/six\\_point\\_proposal.pdf](http://www.un.org/en/peacekeeping/documents/six_point_proposal.pdf)

<sup>113</sup> See ERC statements on Syria in 2012/13 at [www.unocha.org/media-resources/erc-key-messages](http://www.unocha.org/media-resources/erc-key-messages)

<sup>114</sup> Presidential Statement S/PRST/2013/15, 2 October 2013.

<sup>115</sup> UN Security Council resolution S/RES/2139, 22 February 2014

the warring parties. The only agreement from these failed talks was the evacuation of civilians from the besieged city of Homs.

A key part of UN humanitarian diplomacy around Syria has been OCHA-led efforts to give greater definition to what constitutes the “arbitrary denial” of humanitarian action under IHL. This research and thinking contributed to the final phrasing of UNSC resolution 2139.

## **Cross-Border Aid**

Cross-border operations into Syria from neighbouring countries, particularly Turkey, developed fast in 2013, as opposition forces controlled more areas inside Syria and cross-line operations continued to have insufficient reach. For much of 2013, there was confusion and hesitation about cross-border operations. There was uncertainty about its legality under international law, particularly among Western donor Governments and UN agencies.<sup>116</sup> There were also pragmatic concerns. Many Western donors feared that their aid might fall into the hands of Islamist opposition forces, so breaching counter-terror laws and political policy.

All these concerns increased the level and detail of donor questioning of NGOs and created “endless bureaucratic and monitoring hurdles” demanded of NGOs as they applied for funding.<sup>117</sup> There were also worries that if the UN engaged in cross-border operations or supported them in any way, the Syrian Government would respond by further restricting agencies on the Government side. This could mean a possible net loss of humanitarian coverage and the potential expulsion of UN agencies. All this slowed down the development of cross-border aid.

The Turkish Government, Syrian NGOs and international NGOs were less hesitant about cross-border aid, which began in 2012 and gathered increasing momentum. The Turkish Government was consistently reluctant to register international NGOs formally to work cross-border in case this pattern of aid created a precedent of cross-border interventions that could work against their interests in any future conflict in the region. However, it was possible to cross the border informally at numerous points, and Turkish officials were content to let Syrians enter their own country. INGOs with their own resources could move ahead in 2013.

Cross-border operations were of three main types. First, “direct” cross-border aid that agencies carried over the border and distributed themselves. This was typical of much Syrian diaspora aid and the medical work of agencies, such as Hand-in Hand and MSF. Secondly, “at-border” aid, which agencies took to the border. This was then collected and carried across the border by a partner working inside Syria who then implemented it on a “remote-management” model. Thirdly, closer cross-border partnerships, in which international NGOs

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<sup>116</sup> Interviews with cross-border donor and NGO managers, April 2014. See also Hugo Slim and Emanuela-Chiara Gillard, *Ethical and Legal Perspectives on Cross-Border Humanitarian Operations*, Humanitarian Exchange, Issue 59, November 2013.

<sup>117</sup> Interviews with cross-border donor and NGO managers, April 2014



and partners inside Syria teamed up to carry out joint needs assessments and develop a more integrated partnership model of implementation and joint monitoring. Several INGOs began with the second model and graduated to the third model during 2013, scaling up significantly around October 2013.<sup>118</sup>

### **Fragmented Partnerships and the Assistance Coordination Unit**

The major challenge for cross-border aid was systematic needs assessments and finding partners of a sufficient reach and capacity to operate at scale. Authority in opposition areas was very diffused and fragmented. Every village or urban neighbourhood was “its own mini republic”.<sup>119</sup> The socialist legacy of local Baathist committees provided strong local leaderships that could provide detailed lists of people and needs in their own community. But no single authority was aggregating data or developing a wider picture of needs and capacity. Initial “guesstimates” from INGO cross-border assessments in early 2013 worked on a figure of 3 million people in need, of whom 1.5 million were “heavily affected”. The main needs were calculated as shelter and non-food items, clean water, medical access and food, especially flour.<sup>120</sup>

In December 2012, the Syrian National Coalition set up the Assistance Coordination Unit (ACU).<sup>121</sup> In Kurdish areas, a similar relief coordination structure was set up through the Supreme Kurdish Committee (SKC) and village relief committees. In 2013, the ACU received donor support to help develop its assessment, monitoring and coordination capability.<sup>122</sup> ACU enumerators gathered the information from the local lists and NGO analysis. The result was the Joint Rapid Assessment for Northern Syria (J-RANS).

The first J-RANS was completed in January 2013 and covered 45 per cent of the six northern governorates, followed by an assessment in Aleppo in March. J-RANS II was completed in April and covered 69 per cent of seven governorates. J-RANS II estimated that 2.7 million people were displaced, and that 10.5 million people out of the regions’ 15.6 million people had limited access to essential goods and services. Access to food and medical services emerged as the priorities.<sup>123</sup>

### **Tensions in Cross-border Partnerships**

Relationships between cross-border agencies and activist humanitarian partners have not been easy. Many well-educated activists who could have been professional and bicultural

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<sup>118</sup> Interviews with cross-border NGO managers, April 2014.

<sup>119</sup> Interview with cross-border NGO manager, April 2014.

<sup>120</sup> This was the working target of the 13 INGOs who came together in Turkey as the NGO Forum at Gazientep in early 2013. Interview with cross-border NGO manager, April 2014.

<sup>121</sup> See ACU at [www.acu-sy.org/Pages/viewpage.aspx?pageID=84](http://www.acu-sy.org/Pages/viewpage.aspx?pageID=84)

<sup>122</sup> Support came from ECHO, DFID and OFDA.

<sup>123</sup> See ACAPS summary of J-RANS at [www.acaps.org/en/news/joint-rapid-assessment-for-northern-syria](http://www.acaps.org/en/news/joint-rapid-assessment-for-northern-syria) and full report at <http://reliefweb.int/report/syrian-arab-republic/joint-rapid-assessment-northern-syria-ii-final-report>

counterparts had fled or been detained by 2013. This made it difficult for NGOs and community partners to fulfil the complex requirements of anxious donors. In some cases, this meant that “poorly-educated local activists had to fill a large amount of paperwork, even for projects as small as \$5000 ones”.<sup>124</sup>

As a result, new broker organizations were formed on the borders and registered in Europe, Turkey or Lebanon. They could recruit professional staff and serve as “administrative hubs” to write proposals and facilitate donor accounting requirements.<sup>125</sup> In early 2014, Syrian social media sites aired many complaints that these “umbrella NGOs” were monopolizing aid flows and cutting out smaller activist groups who lack Western contacts. Islamist social media sites suspect these Syrian NGOs as “intelligence hubs” that are “vetting and mapping” different activist groups.<sup>126</sup>

The ACU also receives criticism within Syrian society for “promoting clientalism” in its development of local councils and the \$20,000 grant that comes with such status. Some bloggers feel that rather than being essentially humanitarian, “all their [ACU’s] work is connected to the Coalition in a patronage network. They need the Local Councils to vote for them in the Coalition. This money has ended up dismantling local bottom-up representative bodies and imposing others from the top by the Coalition – blame the donors”.<sup>127</sup>

Islamist militias, such as the Islamic Front, also have their own relief wings that have received support from regional donors and are equally criticized by secular activists for using aid for similar hearts-and-minds strategies.<sup>128</sup>

The volume and coverage of cross-border aid flows is not yet clear, and many cross-border operations have not openly published their results.

## **The Regional Refugee Response**

Host Governments of the five main refugee-receiving countries have played major roles in managing the regional refugee emergency, often responding with creative and generous policies and support. All countries responded positively with open borders initially, but most began to tighten entry restrictions towards the end of 2013.<sup>129</sup> Refugee figures in April 2014 were Lebanon, 1,001,543; Turkey, 679,753; Jordan, 590,515; Iraq, 219,579; Egypt, 135,905.

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<sup>124</sup> Skype interview with Syrian relief activist, March 2014.

<sup>125</sup> *ibid*

<sup>126</sup> Rapid review of Syrian social media, March 2014.

<sup>127</sup> Skype interview with Syrian relief activist, March 2014

<sup>128</sup> See their video at <http://ahraralsham.net/?p=4875>

<sup>129</sup> [https://www.amnesty.org/en/news/jordan-s-restrictions-refugees-syria-reveal-strain-host-countries-2013-10-](https://www.amnesty.org/en/news/jordan-s-restrictions-refugees-syria-reveal-strain-host-countries-2013-10-31)

## **Regional Impact and Refugee Flows**

In Lebanon, the first Syrian civilians to arrive were escaping from Government repression in the Homs region and crossed the border in the remote territories of Wadi Khaled in April 2011. Since then, Syrians from various embattled regions have entered Lebanon. Now over a million people, they represent the biggest refugee presence in a neighbouring country. This huge number of refugees weighs significantly on Lebanon's already fragile social and sectarian balance. Lebanon's engagement with the crisis is further stressed by the military involvement of the Sunni and Shia militias inside Syria. By April 2014, the majority of Syrian refugees (360,000) were hosted in the Bekaa valley, with 262,000 in the north, 277,000 in Greater Beirut and 124,000 in the south.

Turkey still hosts the second largest community of Syrian refugees. Some 722,000 refugees have fled to the southern regions of Hatay, Kilis, Gaziantep, Sanliurfa and Mardin since autumn 2011. They are spread between over 20 official camps (34 per cent) and different urban locations (66 per cent). There has been a 27 per cent increase in the registered non-camp population since the beginning of 2014. This is due to the introduction of mobile registration units deployed in the field since the beginning of the year.

In Jordan there are about 580,000 Syrian registered refugees. The great majority (80 per cent) live in urban areas, mainly in Amman, Irbid and Mafraq. The first Syrians escaped from the Southern Daraa region and arrived through Jordan's porous borders in the early summer of 2011. At the end of April 2014, a new camp opened its doors in the northern desert of Azraq Province to receive its first 200 guests. This camp has been established with Kuwaiti funding and could shelter up to 130,000 refugees. The other two official camps (Zaatari and EJ Camp) currently host more than 104,000 (17.6 per cent) people and 3,800 (0.6 per cent) people.

In Iraq, Syrian refugees arrived at the beginning of 2012. The majority of the 220,000 registered refugees come from Kurdish-dominated areas close to the border with the autonomous province of Iraqi Kurdistan. Here, they live in nine camps (43 per cent) and different urban locations (57 per cent), with most in the northern regions of Dohuk, Erbil and Suleimaniya. A small percentage (7 per cent) is in the western Sunni-dominated al-Anbar regions.

In summer 2012, Egypt was considered the cheapest and safest destination for Syrian refugees. However, after President Morsi's removal in July 2013, there was a change of Government and popular attitude towards the Syrian crisis, and Egypt has become a more unwelcoming place for Syrians. Currently, about 130,000 refugees are registered in Egypt, mostly in the Mediterranean ports of Damietta and Alexandria, with a minority in Greater Cairo's suburban areas.

## **Building Response on Cross-Border Relationships and Local Hosting**

Already in June 2013, it was anticipated that 75 per cent of refugees would live outside camps.<sup>130</sup> Close cross-border relationships, local generosity and progressive policy by host States focused on avoiding encampment.

In Lebanon, people on both sides of the Lebanese-Syrian border have traditionally close relationships. There is a very long history of seasonal migrant labour running between the two countries, and hundreds of thousands of Syrians go to work in Lebanon each year.<sup>131</sup> Lebanese policy allowed refugees to settle where they choose, and camps have been prohibited. Refugee children have been encouraged to attend Lebanese schools. This has swelled school numbers, but cost, language differences and Government caps on refugee attendance mean that only 25 per cent of refugee children are able to attend, and many have been without school for two years.<sup>132</sup> Many Syrians have rented or borrowed housing from Lebanese host families, set up temporary homes in public buildings or gathered in informal tented settlements (ITS), in which people are deemed particularly vulnerable.<sup>133</sup> This major demographic change in a country of only 4.4 million people has put considerable stress on the country that now has a refugee population equivalent to 25 per cent of its population.<sup>134</sup>

Syrians can cross easily into Turkey with only a passport. Most Syrians moved into the Hatay area of Turkey, which was part of Syria until a popular referendum in 1939 transferred it to Turkey. So there were many close relationships and generous local hosting in this border area. The Turkish Government still responded fast and generously and supported 50 per cent of its refugees in camps. Many of these camps are of a high quality, and people are free to come and go from them without restriction.<sup>135</sup>

Most refugees in Jordan live dispersed in Jordanian communities, being free to leave Za'atari camp if they are sponsored by a Jordanian. This system has seen the great majority of Syrians living and working in mainstream Jordanian society. However, this has created significant tensions in Jordan and a dispute as to whether the refugee influx is draining GDP or adding economic value to the country. An initial tendency for opposition armed groups to use the Za'atari camp for rest and recreation for its troops added to these tensions.<sup>136</sup>

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<sup>130</sup> RRP Interagency Report 7, June 2013 at [http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Inter-Agency%20Regional%20Response%20for%20Syrian%20refugees\\_1.pdf](http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Inter-Agency%20Regional%20Response%20for%20Syrian%20refugees_1.pdf)

<sup>131</sup> Ferris, p20

<sup>132</sup> [www.unicef.org/infobycountry/lebanon\\_71753.html](http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/lebanon_71753.html)

<sup>133</sup> Solidarite International, Informal Tented settlements Vulnerability Analysis, August 2013 at <http://cskc.daleel-madani.org/sites/default/files/resources/SILebanon-ITSVulnerabilityAssessmentReport-August2013%20%281%29.pdf>

<sup>134</sup> Jeremy Loveless, Crisis in Lebanon: Camps for Refugees? Forced Migration Review, Number 43, May 2013.

<sup>135</sup> Dawn Chatty interviewed at [www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-23813975](http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-23813975)

<sup>136</sup> For a good description see Matthew Hall, The Syrian Crisis in Jordan, June 2013 at [www.merip.org/mero/mero062413](http://www.merip.org/mero/mero062413)

Many refugees have been able to work in Lebanon, Turkey and Jordan. Although work permits were required and often difficult to obtain, illegal work for refugees has been a widespread phenomenon. Income from this work has been crucial to refugee survival. WFP also set up an extensive system of vouchers redeemable in supermarkets and local shops in each country. These were a vital complement to people's wages and remittances.

### **The Impact on Host Societies**

As time goes on, there is increasing evidence of socioeconomic strain in host countries from the impact of such large refugee numbers, particularly in Lebanon and Jordan. There are reports of increasing tensions around jobs, wages, water, marriage practices, and the pressure on health and education services.

The effect of the Syrian crisis on regional terms of trade has also seriously affected neighbouring countries. For example, Jordanian farmers used to depend on cheap imports of subsidised Syrian fertiliser, livestock and other agricultural inputs. These supplies have now dried up and seriously increased Jordanian operating costs.<sup>137</sup> Similar losses of Syrian imports affect other neighbouring countries.

UNHCR has recognized the need for a package of "emergency development funds" to support Lebanon and Jordan in particular to deal with such large additions to their population.<sup>138</sup> The UN has set up an International Support Group for Lebanon to address these issues strategically, and a World Bank Multi-Donor Trust Fund has been set up to finance this extra support. The World Bank is also supporting Jordan. The focus in both cases is on emergency budget support to finance the extra demands on public services.<sup>139</sup>

There is also a strong sense in some quarters of the business community that demographic change is enlarging neighbouring economies as Syrians spend, earn and trade in host countries, such as Jordan. Increased commercial investment could be used positively to leverage this long-term economic opportunity and growth across the region.<sup>140</sup>

### **The Vulnerability of Palestinian and Iraqi Refugees**

The situation of Palestinian and Iraqi refugees already in Syria in 2011 was a major cause of concern. UNRWA was supporting a caseload of 500,000 long-standing Palestinians in Syria before the crisis.<sup>141</sup> There were also 62,700 Iraqi refugees who had fled violence in Iraq.

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<sup>137</sup> Oxford Business Group, *The Impact of Syrian Refugees on the Jordanian Economy*, September 2013 at [www.oxfordbusinessgroup.com/economic\\_updates/impact-syrian-refugees-jordan's-economy](http://www.oxfordbusinessgroup.com/economic_updates/impact-syrian-refugees-jordan's-economy)

<sup>138</sup> Interview with Deputy Commissioner at [www.migrationpolicy.org/article/responding-syrian-refugee-crisis-conversation-t-alexander-aleinikoff-un-deputy-high](http://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/responding-syrian-refugee-crisis-conversation-t-alexander-aleinikoff-un-deputy-high)

<sup>139</sup> World Bank on Lebanon in March 2014 at [www.worldbank.org/en/news/feature/2014/03/17/the-world-bank-and-the-impact-of-the-syrian-crisis](http://www.worldbank.org/en/news/feature/2014/03/17/the-world-bank-and-the-impact-of-the-syrian-crisis) and on Jordan July 2013 at [www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2013/07/18/emergency-assistance-jordan-cope-impacts-syrian-crisis](http://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2013/07/18/emergency-assistance-jordan-cope-impacts-syrian-crisis)

<sup>140</sup> Yusuf Mansour cited in Hall, op cit.

<sup>141</sup> UNRWA at [www.unrwa.org/where-we-work/syria](http://www.unrwa.org/where-we-work/syria)

These groups suffered the same deprivation and violence as the wider civilian population. Their situation was made particularly extreme by being refused entry into Lebanon and Jordan in late 2013,<sup>142</sup> and by 18,000 Palestinians being besieged in desperate conditions in the Damascus suburb of Yarmouk, where 160,000 Palestinians lived before the conflict.<sup>143</sup>

### **Volume and Coverage of RRP**

UNHCR led the international refugee response, which included 126 participating agencies and organizations. This programme received \$2.02 billion, which was 68 per cent of requirements.

Food assistance of various types was provided to 2 million refugees, including by food vouchers, which also injected millions of dollars into various local economies. A total of 1.5 million refugee children have received vaccinations and 1 million refugees have received treatment at health facilities. Safe drinking water has been delivered to 836,000 people, and 625,517 people have benefitted from improved sanitation. Psychosocial activities and 190 safe spaces have benefitted 390,000 children. Educational support has reached 440,000 children. A total of 612 schools have received infrastructure support and renovation, and 12,400 teachers and support workers have received training. A total of 144,000 tents have been distributed, and 840,000 people received housing and shelter support in various forms. Essential household items were distributed to 1.6 million people, and 195,714 people received direct cash assistance.<sup>144</sup>

### **Humanitarian Financing**

The top five donors to the Syria crisis have been the USA (\$1.14 billion), the European Commission (\$570 million), the UK (\$438 million), Germany (\$331 million) and Kuwait (\$325 million). The volume of private donations to the crisis has also been high and is listed as the sixth highest contribution (\$299 million).<sup>145</sup> Donors' strategic goals have focused on critical life-saving aid, protection and children's access to education, and on working in close partnership with Governments hosting refugees across the region.

### **Humanitarian Coordination**

The coordination architecture for the Syria response is very articulated. This reflects the complexity of the operation inside the country as well as in the neighbouring refugee hosting countries.

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<sup>142</sup> [www.hrw.org/news/2013/08/07/lebanon-palestinians-fleeing-syria-denied-entry](http://www.hrw.org/news/2013/08/07/lebanon-palestinians-fleeing-syria-denied-entry)

<sup>143</sup> <https://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=46982&Cr=yarmouk&Cr1=palestin>

<sup>144</sup> United Nations, How Humanitarian Funds for the Syria Crisis Were Spent, January to December 2013. For a full sectoral breakdown of the RRP in 2013, see pp24-27.

<sup>145</sup> OCHA, downloaded at 24 April 2014.

## **Syria**

In Syria, the Humanitarian Country Team (HCT) comprises UN agencies and international NGOs. The HCT meets monthly with the Syrian High Relief Committee. This forum is co-chaired by the Minister of Social Affairs and the Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs and Expatriates. The forum reviews progress and gap analysis and coordinates future action.

Within the Syrian Government, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Expatriates (MoFAE) coordinates the humanitarian response between various departments. Beyond the forum with the HCT, the main coordination structure between the Government and the humanitarian community is the Steering Committee, which is chaired by the Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs and Expatriates

At the technical and operational levels, sectoral representatives from Government departments, the UN and other humanitarian counterparts meet regularly. Humanitarian agencies submit periodic progress reports on achievements and constraints in humanitarian deliveries to Syrian authorities. The Resident Coordinator/Humanitarian Coordinator (RC/HC) has established weekly meetings with MoFAE representatives to discuss achievements, challenges and bottlenecks in the humanitarian response.

Under the leadership of the RC/HC, the UN Country Team (UNCT) and the HCT have provided strategic and policy guidance to programming and reviewed progress against targets. An inter-sectoral working group (of eight sectors and two clusters) provides operational guidance and support to the humanitarian operation in Syria led by the Office of the HC. Ten sector groups have also been established: food and agriculture (WFP/FAO/MARN/MOSA), education (UNICEF/MoE), emergency telecommunications (WFP), health (WHO/MoH), NFIs/shelter (UNHCR/MoLA/SARC), nutrition (UNICEF/MoH), early recovery and livelihoods (UNDP), logistics (WFP), protection and community services (UNHCR/MOSA), and WASH (UNICEF/MoWR).

Sector groups include governmental counterparts, SARC, UN agencies, international organizations, INGOs and local NGOs. In addition, several technical working groups have been created, such as the Child Protection Working Group, chaired by UNICEF; the Mental Health and Psychosocial Working Group, chaired by UNHCR/IOM/IMC; and the Financial Assistance Sub-Group, chaired by UNHCR under the Shelter Sector Working Group, led by UNHCR/MOLA. These coordination mechanisms are complemented by UN field hubs at Homs, Tartus, Aleppo and Quamishly, and other sub-national coordination mechanisms.

## **Jordan**

In Jordan, humanitarian response is led by the RC/HC, supported by OCHA, in close cooperation with the Government of Jordan, particularly the Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation. The key coordination forums include the UNCT, which meets monthly, the HCT and the Inter-Agency Task Force, which meet concurrently once a month.

Two key forums focus on different aspects of the humanitarian response. The Inter-Sector Working Group, which is led by UNHCR, coordinates efforts to provide protection and assistance to Syrian refugees in Jordan, as well as a limited number of host communities. This includes a number of sector and sub-sectoral working groups, led by specialized agencies or NGO partners that focus on specific areas of response. These include protection, health care, water and sanitation, education, food security, shelter and NFIs, cash assistance, and mental health and psychosocial support. The refugee response in Jordan is included in the Regional Refugee Plan (RRP), which UNHCR publishes annually on behalf of partners. The 2014 component of the RRP contains 1,265 projects carried out by 64 organizations in eight sectors, benefitting an estimated 800,000 refugees and 2 million people in host communities, at a cost of \$1.2 million.

The Host Community Support Platform has been set up recently by the Government of Jordan and UNDP. This works with five sectoral task forces, which focus on assessing and analysing the impact of the refugee crisis on host communities and public infrastructure, services and resources in Jordan. The task forces (education, health, water/sanitation, livelihoods and municipal services) are led by the relevant line ministries or public authority, with technical assistance from focal points from the UN and donors.

The Government has developed a National Resilience Plan for 2014-2016 to complement the RRP by focusing specifically on mitigating the impact of the crisis on Jordan and host communities. The plan requests \$2.4 billion to support key sectors over a three-year period, as well as \$1.7 billion to cover subsidies and security-related costs. International NGOs that operate in Jordan meet regularly in the context of an INGO forum to coordinate their activities. Donor representatives also meet regularly at the technical and ambassadorial level. The RC/HC in Jordan is working with the Government, UN agencies and NGO partners to develop a coordinated platform for the coordination and implementation of humanitarian and development assistance in Jordan.

## **Turkey**

In Turkey, the humanitarian response to the refugee crisis is led by the Disaster and Emergency Management Agency (AFAD) of the Government of Turkey, supported by the UN RC, UNHCR and other UN agencies and NGO partners. UNHCR coordinates the UN effort to support AFAD in carrying out its functions. This included organizing coordination meetings between Ministry representatives, central and local authorities and camp managers to assess needs, review gaps and identify areas for further cooperation.

AFAD manages the refugee camps in Turkey, but regular coordination meetings are also held between the camp management and the agencies operating in the camps. Efforts to coordinate needs assessments and responses to refugees residing outside formal camps are being stepped up. The Government is the largest single contributor to the refugee response, having spent a reported \$3 billion to provide protection and assistance to refugees since the crisis began. The Turkey component of 2014 RRP, led by UNHCR, requests \$522 million to support ongoing operations.



## **Lebanon**

The primary responsibility for coordinating and providing humanitarian assistance rests with the national authorities. In late 2012, an inter-ministerial committee was constituted under the chairmanship of the Prime Minister to respond to the effects of the growing refugee influx from Syria. The Minister of Social Affairs was designated to coordinate the Government's planning and response. The Prime Minister also chairs a permanent inter-ministerial Higher Relief Committee. This is responsible for coordinating responses to emergencies in Lebanon. Locally, institutions such as Mouhafazats (governorates), municipalities, Union of Municipalities and regional administrative directorates provide coordination on the ground.

The HC is responsible for coordinating international humanitarian response and coordinating with the Government of Lebanon on behalf of the humanitarian community. The cluster system is not operational in Lebanon because UNHCR coordinates humanitarian response to the Syrian crisis.

### **Regional Humanitarian Coordinator**

A number of UN agencies and NGOs have appointed regional directors or coordinators in Amman to ensure regional coherence, planning and strategizing, and to offer support to country-based operations. In 2013, the IASC appointed a Regional HC (RHC) for the Syria crisis, at the Assistant Secretary-General level, to ensure the timely and effective coordination of the humanitarian response at the regional level, in close consultation with the regional representatives of UN agencies and NGOs, as well as country-based RC/HCs.

The Office of the RHC serves as a hub for analysis, information management, advocacy, fundraising and outreach to donors and other partners in the region. It has also led efforts to develop, in cooperation with national Governments and UN agencies, a Comprehensive Regional Strategic Framework that aims to streamline and integrate humanitarian, development, macro-economic and fiscal-support interventions to strengthen resilience, stability and social cohesion in refugee-hosting countries.

## **Chapter Six – The Distinguishing Characteristics of the Context**

This chapter identifies a number of distinguishing characteristics of the Syrian crisis that emerge from the analysis in earlier chapters. These characteristics are not necessarily unique to the Syrian crisis and can feature in many humanitarian emergencies. However, their influence on the operational environment for humanitarian agencies in the Syrian crisis inevitably affected humanitarian modalities and effectiveness in this emergency. Any evaluation of humanitarian response in Syria needs to take them into account as important factors shaping the humanitarian environment.

### **A Middle-Income Emergency**

The context that faced humanitarian agencies in early 2012, and then evolved throughout 2012 and 2013, was extremely challenging by the standard of any recent humanitarian operation in armed conflict. More like the war in Former Yugoslavia than current conflicts in Africa and Asia, the Syrian context involved the disintegration of a middle-income country in an armed conflict that used modern weapons indiscriminately in urban areas, and with extensive violations of human rights and IHL.

The relative middle-income wealth across some sections of Syrian society meant that many people had more assets and higher-value social and economic networks to draw on in order to survive. But the extremely high levels of infrastructure destruction, displacement and economic devastation involved dramatic impoverishment across society as a whole.

### **Authoritarian Control**

The high levels of control exerted on humanitarian agencies by the Syrian Government and armed groups are a significant characteristic of the context of this emergency. The Government maintained its traditionally strict limits on the numbers and movements of international agencies. In doing so, it used a variety of instruments to exert its control. These included security measures, threats and a range of bureaucratic impediments, such as delays in visas and permits of various types. Many armed groups placed similar limits around their zones of control.

The Government remained determined to limit local civil society's expansion and engagement in the humanitarian response by restricting, detaining and murdering relief activists. Government insistence that all agencies use SARC as the conduit of their operations ensured highly centralized control over international humanitarian assistance and limited the freedom of movement of international humanitarian workers.

## **Humanitarian Principles**

The Syrian crisis has posed hard problems for humanitarian ethics. Despite incremental progress on expanding direct humanitarian access by international agencies, there has been no significant breakthrough in the tightly controlled system of humanitarian management. The strategic challenge of working through the authoritarian control of one warring party and its monopolistic aid provider has shaped hard ethical choices for agencies around core principles of impartiality, neutrality and independence. The same has been true of areas controlled by several armed groups. These limits have also posed serious limits to other Code of Conduct principles, such as community participation, capacity-building, sustainability and accountability.<sup>146</sup>

Challenges around humanitarian principles and international legality were increased when agencies rightly sought to explore alternative cross-border modalities. For many months, the operational context has been inhibited by a lack of precision in what practically constitutes “arbitrary denial” of humanitarian aid, and the statist caution of donor Governments who fear the creation of dangerous precedents in cross-border interventions. This made for a paralysing context for much of 2013.

## **State Sovereignty and Humanitarian Aid**

The Syrian crisis has, once again, raised important political questions about the relationship between State sovereignty and international humanitarian action. The Syrian Government’s determined policy of humanitarian nationalism has restricted the level and diversity of international involvement. Limited humanitarian coverage from cross-line aid into opposition-controlled areas has then inevitably raised sovereignty-related questions around cross-border aid. The humanitarian rights and duties of State sovereignty have been a continuing political theme in the crisis, with very practical implications for hard-to-reach civilians on the ground.

## **Fragmentation and Localism**

Centres of political authority are deeply asymmetric and dispersed in this conflict. Clear authoritarian power in one of the warring parties confronts multiple and diffused power structures in a myriad of opposing parties, often competing among themselves. Government structures have remained singularly monolithic and highly organized, but the rest of the Syrian context is marked by fragmentation of various types.

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<sup>146</sup> The Code of Conduct of for the International Red Cross and Crescent Movement and NGOs, articles 6-9, at [www.ifrc.org/en/publications-and-reports/code-of-conduct/](http://www.ifrc.org/en/publications-and-reports/code-of-conduct/)

The localism intrinsic to the Syrian polity means that popular action and humanitarian capability are extremely decentralized across the mosaic of Syria's social, economic and sectarian groupings. The legacy of Baathist authoritarianism and the fractured nature of the opposition mean that no major alternative authorities have developed during the emergency. Instead, humanitarian operations have been required to seek out and engage with a myriad of local authorities and partners.

Proliferating and criss-crossing battle lines have continuously worsened this fragmentation by continuously bifurcating local areas and entrapping or besieging civilian populations. This has made needs assessments, information gathering and operational access extremely patchy and problematic. Above all, it has created a humanitarian context in which the scaling-up of humanitarian effect has been very hard to achieve.

One eventual upside to the deep levels of localism inherent in Syrian humanitarian response may arise if local structures can emerge as professional and legitimate bottom-up authorities. Such localism could provide useful models for international humanitarian action's global search for improved localization and community empowerment.

### **Internationalization and Partiality**

The Syrian conflict became internationalized fast in a web of competing regional and geopolitical interests. Many regional and global powers took partisan stakes in the conflict, and supported regional proxies and Syrian allies accordingly.

There continues to be no unanimity in international and Security Council policy towards the conflict. Many significant States are not seeking to press for a negotiated peace in the conflict but are playing to win.

The conflict's humanitarian impact remains highly regionalized, with an enormous number of refugees spread around the region. This makes successful humanitarian programming dependent on several States, each one of which is feeling the demographic pressure of the emergency and has its own interests in the pursuit and outcome of the conflict.

### **Aid Politicization**

Inside Syria, humanitarian assistance was politicized very early in the conflict, especially by the Government, which restricted and undermined it as a potential resource for its enemies. The conflict's many armed groups then also blocked or bargained with aid as part of their military tactics, withholding it from some areas, attracting it to others and trading it with rivals. In this process, humanitarian workers became military targets in the conflict, as did journalists who worked to bring people's suffering to international attention.

Genuine humanitarian planning and discussion with authorities about the impartial role of aid across the conflict was slow to develop and was frequently trumped by realist decisions to abuse humanitarian aid as military strategy by omission or commission. A humanitarian

consensus about rights, needs and modalities has not yet developed in Syria, making this a continually ad hoc, incremental and uncertain context for humanitarian planning and response.

## **Violations**

The conflict is marked by very high levels of violations of human rights and IHL that have been carried out extensively and intensively across the conflict. Early patterns of detention, torture, murder, disappearances, rape, sexual violence, destruction and looting of property have continued throughout the armed conflict. Sustained levels of deliberate and indiscriminate attacks against civilians and civilian objects have typified the conduct of hostilities. These attacks have been carried out by an array of modern weapons and indiscriminate improvised bombs.

This means that an unusually high level of physical injuries has made medical assistance and war surgery an especially high priority in the context of Syria's battlefields. The extent of violations within Syria has also made protection a major priority. As yet, the humanitarian community has shown little strategic ability to prevent violations and influence the violating behaviour of warring parties. The context of the crisis remains insecure and permissive of continuous violations of all kinds.

## **Displacement and Entrapment**

Enormously high levels of forced displacement have been a striking feature of this context. Displacement has often been en masse and very dynamic and responsive to fast-moving battle lines. Displacement has also been recurrent for many people. IDPs and refugees have been forced to move more than once inside Syria's borders and inside neighbouring States. Once in a host country, the majority of refugee populations have dispersed within the host society rather than encamped. This context has created important new challenges for humanitarian agencies as they try to keep up with, rather than control, people's survival strategies. This model of refugee support has long been regarded as progressive and empowering, so that the Syria case is an exciting test case of this approach.

People have also been pinned down to an exceptional degree in this context because battle lines have trapped them coincidentally, or as people have been deliberately besieged and contained. Inside Syria, the conflict has manifested a major problem of IDPs and internally stuck people.<sup>147</sup> In this way, the Syria crisis has produced urban sieges of a scale not seen in humanitarian practice since Grozny and Former Yugoslavia in the 1990s, Gaza in 2008 and Sri Lanka in 2011.

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<sup>147</sup> This term was usefully coined by Norah Niland of OCHA.

## **Rapid Change and Escalation**

Sudden and rapid changes in operational context have also been a strong feature of the crisis. The constant movement and evolution of the battlefronts in the first two years created a fast-changing context. The intensity of weaponry meant that sophisticated urban areas could be reduced to rubble in hours, dramatically changing people's livelihoods and life chances. The fast flow of displacement that followed such localized attacks created sudden patterns of displacement and re-displacement. Options for humanitarian access also changed suddenly as battle lines moved.

## **Urban Response**

The predominantly urban context of the Syria crisis is a striking feature of its humanitarian challenge. It requires agencies to operate in the middle of a policy of urban destruction, and in support of communities used to sophisticated levels of urban living. This has required large-scale urban programmes of water, food, protection, sanitation and shelter, as well as the complex task of repairing or reinventing modern medical facilities.<sup>148</sup>

## **Stalemate**

The context has become characterized by stalemate. Despite constant military activity, no military force looks set to prevail and no political process is able to succeed. This "dynamic stalemate"<sup>149</sup> has imposed a particular stasis on the context, which creates a norm of low expectations of humanitarian progress. This risks the situation "settling" into unsatisfactory habits of humanitarian restriction, continuing atrocities and gradual donor disinterest.

## **Impoverishment**

While the conflict is in stalemate, impoverishment is in free fall. Syria's economy is drastically diminished and almost completely deindustrialized. People have depleted the assets they had to ensure their survival during 2012/13 and their incomes have plummeted. Health and educational opportunities have been severely reduced, and the life chances for most Syrians are much lower than they were. This continuing decline creates a gradually more difficult context for humanitarian action and early recovery.

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<sup>148</sup> Francois Grunewald, *Cities in Conflict: the Lessons of Syria*, in *Humanitarian Exchange*, No 59, HPG, November 2013, p11; Simone Haysom, *Sanctuary in the City? Urban Displacement and Vulnerability*, HPG Report 23, London, June 2013. See also documents on urban programming in ALNAP's Syria Evaluation Portal at [www.syrialearning.org/resources.aspx?tag=461](http://www.syrialearning.org/resources.aspx?tag=461)

<sup>149</sup> Charles Lister, *Dynamic Stalemate: Surveying Syria's Military Landscape*, Brookings Doha Centre, Policy Briefing, May 2014 at [www.brookings.edu/~media/research/files/papers/2014/05/19%20syria%20military%20landscape%20lister/syria%20military%20landscape%20english.pdf](http://www.brookings.edu/~media/research/files/papers/2014/05/19%20syria%20military%20landscape%20lister/syria%20military%20landscape%20english.pdf)

## Humanitarian Innovation

Much of the literature and public discussion of the Syrian crisis is still negatively focused on problems and failures. However, the particular context of the crisis is undoubtedly generating significant innovations in humanitarian practice. The refugee programme is creating new non-camps modalities of support, and the cross-border programme is exploring new models of access, partnership and assessment. Localization has been a particular feature of the context.

However, while cash transfers are becoming a major part of humanitarian practice in most conflicts and disasters, it is not yet possible to formalize this innovative strategy inside Syria because of counter-terror concerns and the danger of violence escalation. The difficulty of using cash inside Syria means that official humanitarian programming within the country has been commodity heavy. Nevertheless, cash-based programming seems to be a major part of informal cross-line and cross-border humanitarian activity. In the regional refugee response, WFP's voucher programme has also reached an unprecedented scale.

At the intergovernmental level, the UN Security Council's emphasis on humanitarian access is striking, and it may deliver legal and practical innovations around cross-border aid and clearer definitions of arbitrary denial.

## Chapter Seven - Strategic Implications of the Crisis

The Syrian crisis and the challenges it poses to international humanitarian action raise a number of strategic considerations for UN policymakers. In a sense, these considerations are the key take aways from the tragedy of the Syrian crisis.

1. **UN humanitarian action needs to develop a distinct and appropriate way of working in the Middle East.** Much of the policy and practice of modern humanitarian action has grown from its long engagement in emergencies in Africa and Asia. This experience has created an international humanitarian capability that tends towards low income, weak State and mainly rural contexts. With a predictable 10-year focus on the Middle East, UN humanitarian action now needs to reorientate itself towards operations in middle-income contexts that are dominated by strong States, sophisticated weapons, urban populations and intense geopolitical interests.
2. **UN agencies need to develop creative ways of working alongside humanitarian nationalism, which is likely to be an increasingly common feature of strong State emergencies.** The Syrian Government's assertion of its control over humanitarian operations and its resistance to deep engagement by international agencies is similar to policies of humanitarian nationalism exhibited by other strong authoritarian States, such as Sri Lanka, Sudan and Myanmar. UN experience in Syria needs to be evaluated to find the most creative ways of working in States where humanitarian action is firmly nationalized and leaves little room for a diverse array

of international agencies. Fewer agencies make for easier coordination. This brings valuable advantages as simpler collective action. This relative simplicity of international action must be combined with creative ways of giving direct support to community-based organizations and local government in the absence of NGO partners.

3. **UN humanitarian action will once again have to work from within a UN system that lacks political consensus and unanimity.** The Syrian crisis has seen a return to a divided UN Security Council. Conflicts in the Middle East, Ukraine and many other parts of the world are likely to involve a similarly divided UN. In the absence of great power unanimity, UN humanitarian leaders will have to develop a strong humanitarian legitimacy of their own and develop bilateral political links with influential regional and emerging powers that can deliver positive humanitarian effect in each particular crisis.
4. **UN humanitarian practice will need to build popular citizen-based constituencies within each conflict to complement its reliance on formal State power.** The Syrian crisis has witnessed a continuing development of citizen-led humanitarian advocacy using new social media. It has also seen an impressive and spontaneous emergence of citizen-based humanitarian action at the community level. UN agencies need to gain the respect and support of ordinary citizens in future armed conflicts. This support will usefully translate into political legitimacy and direct community-based partnerships.
5. **Clear humanitarian ethics will be an essential mark of credible and effective humanitarian aid.** Increasing conflicts of interest around humanitarian action in a less consensual UN and more confident local actors will require clear ethical thinking from UN agencies and their leaders. Agencies will have to spot challenges to humanitarian principles and deliberate effectively about the best way to handle them. UN leaders will need to communicate their various moral choices clearly in difficult situations that may involve working with a violating Government or armed group, going cross-border or suspending operations. Humanitarian programmes must then be increasingly evaluated on the basis of their ethical decision-making, as well as their humanitarian outputs and efficiency.



## **Annex: Syria Crisis Events Timeline**

Humanitarian funding
Figures of the humanitarian crisis
Details of HR violations

Conflict-related events
International Community-related events
Internal politics-related events (Gvt or anti-Gvt groups)
Security Council Resolutions or Presidential Statements

Source	The humanitarian crisis in figures and other info	Date	Political Event and Conflict	Source
<b>2011</b>				
		Feb 2011	Peaceful protests for respect for HR and economic, legal and political reforms	COI 1
		15 March	State security forces respond with violent repression	SCReport
		April	The regime abolishes the martial law and replaces it by a counter-terrorism law	LT
		April-May	The Local Coordination Committees are formed by non-violent activists	LT
		May	The regime launches the 'national dialogue'	LT
		June	The National Coordination Body (NBC) is formed in Damascus	LT
		July	Creation of Free Syrian Army	
		July	New electoral Law	LT
		Aug	New media law	LT
		Summer	Army	LT
		3 Aug	SC issues a <b>Presidential Statement</b> condemning the ongoing violence against protesters by Syrian forces and calling on restraint from all sides	COI 1
		22 Aug	SC issues a <b>Presidential Statement</b> condemning the ongoing violence against protesters by Syrian forces and calling on restraint from all sides	<a href="http://www.ohchr.org/">http://www.ohchr.org/</a>
		23 Aug	Creation of National Syrian Council	
		Autumn	First FSA operations against the governmental Army	LT
		Oct	The Kurdish National Council is formed in Erbil (Iraq)	LT
		Nov	The Syrian National Council (SNC) is formed in Istanbul.	LT
COI 1	OHCHR estimate that at least 3,500 civilians killed by State forces since March 2011	8 Nov		
SCReport	The High Commissioner for HR briefs Council members in informal consultations indicating that crimes against humanitarian had likely been committed by Syrian government forces	12 Dec		
		Dec	A strategy of tension - made of bombings - is launched in Damascus and elsewhere and was attributed to 'al-Qaeda' and 'extremist terrorists'. The regime releases tens of Muslim brothers, jihadists and Sunni extremists, the majority of whom had been jailed after returning from their 'holy war' against the Anglo-American troops in Iraq.	LT

		2012	
FTS	SHARP Original requirements: 180 million SHARP Revised requirements: 348 million (62% received) RRP Original requirements: 84 million RRP Revised requirements: 488 million (77% received)		
Ferris et al., p22	50,000 to 60,000 refugees and IDPs from Homs alone	2012 Early 2012	targeted repression to the disproportionate use of military force against civilian populations (increasing use of heavy artillery, and systematic shelling of entire neighborhoods)
		Early 2012	First civilians join the FSA ranks.
		Jan	The new constitution is approved
data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/regional.php	<b>Registered Syrian Refugees: 9500</b>	15 Jan	
COI 2	According to IFRC, SARC's SG Dr. Abd-al-Razzaq Jbeiro, was shot and killed on the main Aleppo–Damascus highway while traveling in a vehicle clearly marked with the Red Crescent emblem.	25 Jan	
		Late Jan	Syrian regime's operations in Zabadani, Duma and Damascus
		1 Feb-1 Mar	Brutal crackdown on the city of Homs
		Feb	The loyalist troops besiege Bab Amro (Homs), a rebel stronghold in central Syria. This is a turning point in the armed conflict.
		29 Feb	Kofi Annan appointed UN Secretary General Special Envoy for Syria.
		March	Annan-Asad first meeting in Damascus
Ferris et al.	Refugees in neighboring countries: 40,000	March	
http://syria.unocha.org/	<b>People in need: 1 million</b>	March	
		10 March	Presentation of a six-point plan to bring about a cessation of violence by all parties and commitment to a political process.
UNICEF	Massacre reported in Homs leaving 45 women and children killed.	12-Mar	
WFP Food security	FAO GIEWS issue special Alert for food security in Syria	15-Mar	
		April	recognition of the SNC as 'one of the legitimate representatives of the Syrian people'
		5 April	<b>Presidential Statement</b> urging the Syrian government to adhere to its commitment to cease violence following the Special Envoy's 2 April briefing
		21 April	<b>Resolution 2043</b> authorising deployment of UNSMIS.
WFP Food security	WFP scales up food assistance to reach 250,000 Syrians affected by unrest	24-Apr	
		8 May	The ICRC said fighting in Homs and Idlib had met its criteria for <b>non-international armed conflict</b> , i.e. civil war.
UNICEF	women killed in Houla. Government and opposition reject responsibility. U.N. Human Rights Council says the Syrian military committed war crimes. First major international outcry. Several countries expel Syrian ambassadors in response.	25 May	

Featherstone 2013	Agreement was reached between the Syrian Government and representatives of the United Nations which allowed access by 8 UN agencies and a handful of NGOs to key locations for the delivery of assistance.	End of May		
		June	Military operation in Al Haffe	COI 3
		15 June	UN observers in Syria interrupt their mission because of the intensification of military operations.	COI 3
		30 June	Meeting in Geneva initiated by the then UN peace envoy to Syria Kofi Annan	COI 5
Ferris et al.	Jordanian gvt establishes the Za'atari refugee camp (housed 20000 refugees by Oct 2012, 122000 by Sept 2013)	July		
		Summer	repression increasingly embraces Islamic extremism. Another turning point in the conflict.	LT
		Since 15 July	Escalation in the armed conflict between Government forces and anti-Government armed groups	COI 4
SCReport	Acting Special Representative for Sexual Violence described sexual violence against men, women and children by Syrian government authorities as alarming	16 July		
data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/regional.php	<b>Registered Syrian Refugees: 130,780</b>	1 Aug		
		2 Aug	Kofi Annan resigns. Replaced by Lakhdar Brahimi on 17 Aug	SCReport
WFP Food security	Three Million Syrians Need Food, Crops And Livestock Assistance, UN Report Finds	2 Aug		
http://syria.unocha.org/	<b>People in need: 2.5 million</b>	Sept		
data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/regional.php	<b>Registered Syrian Refugees: 306,555</b>	1-Nov		
		Nov	Launch of Arab League Peace Plan.	LT
		Nov	The SNC merges into the broader Syrian National Coalition.	LT
		12 Nov	Creation of the National Coalition for Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces	COI 4
Parker Nov 2013	Opposition sets up the ACU to coordinate assistance in Syria's rebel-held north	Dec		
		Dec	Arab League observers arrive in Syria for a mission that would last just few weeks.	LT
http://syria.unocha.org/	<b>IDPs: 1.2 million</b>	Dec		
http://syria.unocha.org/	<b>People in need: 4 million</b>	Dec		
WFP Food security	WFP will start providing ready-to-eat food to 125,000 Palestinians around Yarmouk camp	21 Dec		
SNAP Feb 2014	Violent clashes in the Yarmouk neighborhood of Damascus result in the displacement of at least 50% of the 150,000 Palestinians residing in the camp, mostly to Damascus, Homs and Lebanon.	Dec/Jan		

2013			
FTS	SHARP Original requirements: 520 million SHARP Revised requirements: 1410 million (67% received) RRP Original requirements: 1044 million RRP Revised requirements: 2982 million (73% received)	2013	
		Early 2013	ISIS reaches Northern and North-eastern Syria from Iraq. LT
		Jan	Raqqa falls in the hand of the rebels. The city is transformed at a later stage into the main ISIS stronghold. LT
http://syria.unocha.org/	<b>IDPs: 2 million</b>	Jan	
	SNAP is set up	Jan	
	J-RANS I	Jan	
		18 Jan	UN HCHR briefed the SC and requested a referral of the situation in Syria to the ICC COI 4
HumPledging Conf I Report	1 <sup>st</sup> Pledging Conference for Syria saw 43 Member States pledge US\$1.5 billion towards humanitarian efforts	30 Jan	
data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/regional.php	<b>Registered Syrian Refugees: 625,347</b>	30 Jan	
		19 March	the other of employing chemical weapons in an attack that killed dozens in Aleppo province SCReport
		24 March	Forum COI 5
		April	significantly influenced by ISIL as the group has been responsible for kid-napping several aid workers and places strict conditions on the delivery of aid in areas under their control SNAP Feb 2014
	J-RANS I2	April	
http://syria.unocha.org/	<b>People in need: 6.8 million</b>	April	
SCReport	humanitarian situation in Syrian from Amos, Guterres, Bangura, Zerrougui and representatives of Syria, Lebanon, and Turkey.	18 April	
		21 April	President of the Syrian National Coalition Moaz al-Khatif confirms his resignation COI 5
SNAP Feb 2014	Restrictions on arrivals by Jordanian authorities (decrease from 1700 to 300 daily)	May	
		13 May	Creation of a new opposition group, the Union of Syrian Democrats COI 5
		15 May	General Assembly adopted a resolution strongly condemning the Syrian government's use of indiscriminate violence against civilian populations and welcoming the establishment of the National Coalition for Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces as interlocutors needed for a political transition SCReport
SCReport	V. Amos briefed Council members on the situation in Syria and reported that access had been denied or delayed for months and there had been an increasing use of siege tactics by the parties. She called on the Council to consider alternative forms of aid delivery including cross-border operations.	20 June	

Ferris et al., p.13	WFP reduced its rations in Syria due in part to inadequate resourcing and in August, was only able to provide food to 2.4 million people in the country – short of its goal of feeding three million people per month – as a result of the deteriorating security situation.	July		
		5 July	Israel attacked a site near Latakia, apparently targeting Russian-made missiles	COI 6
WFP Food security	or buy enough food joint FAO/WFP report finds	5 July		
		6 July	president, Ahmad Asi Al-Jarba (almost 3 months after his predecessor resigned). 2 days later Prime Minister Ghassan Hitto resigned, citing the inability to form an interim Government to be entrusted with the administration of areas under opposition control.	COI 6
Amos, Pillay Statement 12 July 2013	Amos and Pillay joint statement urging parties to respect IHR and HL and to allow for access to people in need.	12 July		
SNAP Feb 2014	Restrictions on arrivals by Egypt and Lebanon authorities	July		
COI 6	approximately 600,000 to more than 1.85 million	1st half of 2013		
Ferris et al., p.10/11	Approx 50% [of the initial 500,00 Palestine refugees] had been displaced internally or to neighboring countries. Of the 235,000 displaced w/i Syria, 200,000 were seeking refuge in Damascus.	Aug		
Featherstone 2013 & Map OCHA 7 Aug 2013	# of NGOs working in Syria has risen to 12	Aug		
data.unhcr.org /syrianrefugees/regional.php	<b>Registered Syrian Refugees: 1,834,708</b>	31 Aug		
HRW 6 Aug 2013	Lebanese govt begins to bar Palestinians from entering the country from Syria	from 6 Aug		
		21 Aug	Chemical weapons used in Ghouta, killing at least 355 people	SNAP Feb 2014
Red Cross Report Dec 2013	Sudden influx of refugees in Iraq	Aug-Sept		
		Aug-Sept	suburbs; US-Russia agreement on the destruction of the Syrian's regimes chemical weapons.	LT
Reuters, Miles, 3 Sept	More than 2 million refugees have now fled Syria's civil war. Of the total Syrian population of about 20 million, either inside or outside the country, one third is displaced and almost half is in need of assistance, U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees António Guterres told a news conference.	Sept		
Reuters, Miles, 3 Sept	António Guterres told a news conference."What is appalling is that the first million fled Syria in two years. The second million fled Syria in six months,"	Sept		
Ferris et al.	Ashraq	Sept		
		Sept	autonomy in Al-Hasakeh, similar declaration in January 2014 in Ain Al Arab and Afrin in Aleppo	SNAP Feb 2014
		14 Sept	Agreement between Russia and US on the elimination from Syria of chemical weapons	
WFP Food security	WFP Food Vouchers introduced in Jordan's Zaatari camp for Syrian refugees	17 Sept		

		27 Sept	unanimously by the Council and required the verification and destruction of Syria's chemical weapons stockpiles, called for the convening of the Geneva II peace talks and endorsed the establishment of a transitional governing body in Syria with full executive powers.	SCReport
		2 Oct	S/PRST/2013/15: This statement was on humanitarian access in Syria and urged the government to take immediate steps to allow for expanded relief operations and lift bureaucratic obstacles.	SCReport
WFP Food security	WFP rolls out E-Cards for Syrian refugees in Lebanon	11 Oct		
UNICEF	WHO reports at least 22 cases of polio in eastern province Deir al-Zor, Syria	24 Oct		
SNAP Feb 2014	Appearance of 13 cases of polio	Nov		
data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/regional.php	<b>Registered Syrian Refugees: 2,246,131</b>	30 Nov		
SNAP Feb 2014	increasingly fractured => reduced humanitarian space	Late 2013		
SCReport	V. Amos briefed Council members reporting no progress in gaining cross-lines access into hard-to-reach areas.	3 Dec		
WFP Food security	airport from Erbil, Iraq with UN humanitarian aid	15-Dec		
WFP Food security	UN launches \$12.9 billion 2014 aid appeal, half for Syria crisis (\$6.5)	16-Dec		
WFP Food security	Aid Principals Call For Action To Increase Humanitarian Access And Funding For Syria Crisis	18-Dec		
<a href="http://syria.unocha.org/">http://syria.unocha.org/</a>	<b>IDPs: 6.5 million</b>	Dec		

<b>2014</b>				
FTS	SHARP Original requirements: 2276 million (10% received) RRP Original requirements: 4245 million (15% received) [as of 15 March]	<b>2014</b>		
		Jan	Nusra joins the insurgent ranks against ISIS and the regime.	LT
HumPledging Conf II Report	2nd Pledging Conference for Syria saw 40 donors pledge US\$2.3 billion towards humanitarian efforts	15 Jan		
		22-31 Jan	Geneva II	
		Jan-Feb	UN mediated Geneva talks between the regime and the exiled opposition.	LT
WFP Food security	UN-backed evacuation of civilians and delivery of aid at the besieged rebel-held Old City of Homs	12-Feb		
		22 Feb	all parties, in particular the Syrian authorities, allow humanitarian access in Syria across conflict lines, in besieged areas and across borders and expressed the intent to take further steps in the case of non-compliance.	SCReport
data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/regional.php	<b>Registered Syrian Refugees: 2,481,506</b>	28 Feb		
WFP Food security	WFP reaches Al-Houle for the first time since May 2013	10 March		

WFP Food security	United Nations in Jordan Observes Three Years since Outbreak of Syrian Conflict	17 March	
OCHA Humntr Bull n° 44	<b>People in Need: 9.3 million</b> <b>IDPs: 6.5 million</b>	March	
WFP Food security	Joint UN humanitarian statement issued Calling urgently on Syrian authorities and the opposition to allow aid access	23 April	
		April	Syria Human Rights Body says Syria death toll is over 150,000.
			LT



## **Annex: Syria Crisis Events Timeline**