

Forum: United Nations Peacebuilding Commission

Issue #25-02: Measures to take back and restabilize Syrian territory

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Introduction

In 2017, the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIS) arose as one of the biggest conflicting parties in Syria and became a complication to the government and the rest of the world. The Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), with the help of the United States (U.S), fought to retake the land from the Islamic State and have been successful at doing so. U.S military officials declared that they have taken back 98% of Islamic State territory throughout Syria and Iraq. The Syrian government controls most of the land in Syria, but its great contenders are the SDF, who were backed by the U.S. This group is the second most dominant in terms of controlling Syrian land. Additionally, there are some minor rebellious group who hold relatively insignificant portions that must still be recaptured. The damage has been immense to the people of Syria, but what has not been taken into sufficient consideration is the restabilization of the Syrian land. The people of Syria have suffered drastic damage from the country and for the nation to get back on its feet, a restabilization process must take place.

According to the United Nations (UN), there was an estimated total of about 9 million Syrian citizens that decided or were forced to flee from Syria because the war made most cities uninhabitable. This is due to the number of attacks and battles that went down in these cities, this caused not only for buildings to be destroyed but for hospitals to lose infrastructure and a way to operate. Furthermore, the cities are also crime ridden due to a lack of police force and authority. 6.5 million Syrians were displaced from their homes but remain in the country. Now that most of Syria is controlled by the government, some cities are safer to inhabit, yet the cities are now

destroyed remains consequential of air strikes and bombings from both sides of the conflict. The restabilization and repopulation of these areas is of great priority after solving the hostility between the Shia and Sunni Muslims. The process of repopulation in Syria is a challenge due to the significant number of people who have left the country; over 4 million people have left the country and an approximately 5,000 continue to flee daily. This is of major burden because the influx of Syrian immigrants in surrounding countries and many other nations throughout the European Union (UN) is starting to become a problem, especially those nations that are struggling financially. A major concern among parties with knowledge of the situation is that the rebuilding and repopulating of Syria will only lead to a restart of the conflict, with the Shia sided government reigning and the radical Sunnis opposing, which makes the resolution crafting process a controversial one.

The damage caused to the land and cities of Syria is too expensive and the government has not demonstrated an interest on investing in renovations for the area's infrastructure. This lack of attention from the government occurs because they are not very supportive of the Sunni people, who make up 75% of the population. Most of the areas that were demolished by the war contain a high density of individuals from this branch of Islam, which explains the lack of aid from the government.

Syrian president Bashar al Assad stated that rebuilding Syria may take up to 400 billion dollars. Considering the economic crisis and the vast number of smaller issues in Syria that have not been addressed yet, it is very complicated for the nation to deal with their social and economic crisis by themselves. This suggests that other countries should take actions, especially those surrounding Syria and those affected by the great influx of Syrian refugees. Given the wide spectrum of different global stakeholders of this issue, it is important that nations collaborate to help Syria get back on its feet while preventing the commencement of another civil war.

Definition of Key Terms

US-led Coalition

The US-led Coalition is a coalition between the United States Army and the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) working together to take down major rebellious Syrian parties like the Islamic State.

Reform

The creation and implementation of changes meant to improve something such as an institution, for example.

Internally Displaced Person

An individual who has been forced to flee from their homes but still remain within the nation's borders.

Restabilization

To bring back stabilization and order to an area that lacks it due to surrounding circumstances.

Repopulation

To introduce more people, or add a population, to an unpopulated area.

Sunni Islam

Sunni Islam, derived from the word Sunnah which refers to the meritorious behavior of the Islamic prophet Muhammad. Currently standing as the largest denomination of Islam, according to Sunni beliefs, Muhammad did not clearly designate a successor, therefore, the Sunni community elected Abu-Bakr (Muhammad's father in law) as his successor, this created major dispute through the Shia Muslims.

Shia Islam

Shia Islam, an Islamic denomination, stands for a great number of Muslims but is a minority beside the Sunni branch. The conflict between the Shia and Sunni erupted due to each

denomination believing that Muhammad chose a different successor. The Shia community believes that Muhammad chose Ali Ibn Abi Talib, Muhammad's cousin and son in law.

General Overview

As previously stated, the current conditions of what used to be highly populated Syrian territories now exist as quite the opposite; what remains of these cities is not the Syrian opposition but a battle to take these cities back, and in the effort to do so the territories are now leftovers of war. These places are full of debris and what used to be people's homes are now areas declared to be inhabitable.

Syrian Civil War

The Syrian civil war is a clash between the Syrian Government, led by President Bashar Al-Assad, and several other different parties who wish to oppose the government for their practices and seeking democracy. These parties are not necessarily all on the same side but strive for the same interests in their own manner. The civil war started in 2011 at the end of the Arab Spring when people around the Middle East were experiencing a change in democracy, economic freedom, and violations of human rights. The people of Syria suffered and continue to do so from an oppressive government that rules harshly and takes rigorous actions against civil disobedience and people who oppose the government, but the Syrian people saw this as an opportunity to create change in their country. The changes they sought include but are not limited to: adjustments of economic freedom, inflation, unemployment, and poverty. Yet, for the Syrian people and their attempts to create these changes, they didn't receive the results they expected, the people of Syria protested peacefully at first, however, the government responded aggressively. Yet, the Syrian people did not accomplish their expected results as they protested peacefully and were responded too aggressively by the government.

The government did not tolerate opposing behavior and started to imprison and torture the people who took part in these protests. For example, it was reported that a 13-year-old boy was killed by the inhumane torture he suffered. After these events, the protests became more violent with the Syrian government responding with killing hundreds of democracy advocates

and imprisoning a lot more.

As these people kept suffering, more opposing groups started to form around the country and more people started to get involved, including both of Syria's allies as their enemies. Russia, a very close ally to Syria due to strategic military interest, started to launch airstrikes against Syrian rebels in 2015. The United States also launched air strikes and had troops on ground to work with the SDF to specifically get rid of the Islamic State. Even though they oppose Bashar's government, the Islamic State was still an enemy to them. The United States, along with every other country or group opposing the Islamic State, took control of 98% of Syrian land, but the government remains the same and the Syrian civil war continues to be a problem.

After 350,000 to 500,000 civilian deaths, 5.1 million refugees, and 7.6 million people internally displaced, the damage still grows and addressing it is very difficult yet necessary, observing the current immigration and refugee problem across Europe and surrounding countries. This damage not only leaves lives lost and people displaced over their will, but vast areas of damaged cities that will take time to rebuild.

Cities as Targets for other Religious Extremists

Syria's civil war and its ongoing crisis affects every aspect of a functional society, one of the most crucial aspects to a practical society are their cultural differences and how the people get along. In Syria's case, what initially drove the start of many rebellious groups was their different beliefs in the Islamic religion, which caused a religious clash and is the partial cause of the creations of many extremists groups like the Islamic State. These cities have been weakened by the constant fighting and caused them to have no authority to restabilize, which makes them potential targets for other groups to take control of them and gain territory

An important example of these groups trying to claim over the weak and uncontrolled territories is the conquest of Raqqa by the SDF. Raqqa is the sixth largest city in Syria and was taken by ISIL in 2014. For this reason, after many airstrikes by Russia, the United States and the Syrian government, the battle of Raqqa evoked in aim to liberate the city from control of the Islamic State. The battle was led by a United States coalition with the SDF and begun June 6th,

2017. After major fighting to take back Raqqa, which was in complete control by the Islamic State, the United States and the SDF, 3,200 civilian casualties, and tens of thousands of people leaving their homes, the SDF finally declared victory and control over the city of Raqqa on October 17, 2017.

What remains unseen is the catastrophe of the city. After being declared liberated by the coalition of the SDF and the United States, the latter pledged minor assistance in rebuilding the city but no action has been taken yet. Even though the United States falls in no obligation to do so, they made this pledge to maintain a good reputation. It is also to many countries' advantage to rebuild the city in order to make it habitable, especially countries suffering from a substantial influx of refugees entering their countries. The city of Raqqa, in its current state, has been declared to be 80% uninhabitable by the United Nations and urges reconstruction posterior to the aftermath.

Current state of Syrian Cities

The state of Syrian cities is disastrous, the commence of the civil war caused major collapses on government facilities and other resources; examples of these include but are not limited to: hospitals, police authorities, water, food and many others. The lack of these resources creates major conflict in the life of these citizens and their families, it also gives more motive for citizens to migrate from Syria to surrounding countries seeing as they can't sustain a normal life in Syria.

In early January 2018, at least 10 Major health facilities across Syria have been collateral damage of air strikes over the course of only one week. These hospitals were subject to major damage and loss of personnel and patients. These attacks inflicted major damage to the facilities and to the people inside them. Even though it is suspected that these strikes are made by the Russian-backed Syrian government, both Syria and Russia have denied targeting civilian areas and killing the dozens of people involved in such attacks. The effect this has on the people is extreme, they have been stripped of well-functioning hospitals and medicines are scarce.

The shortage of water supply is another great conflict in Syria. The five culminating

years to the start of the civil war were terrible for Syria in terms of water. The country suffered one of the worst droughts on record, so great that it killed nearly 85% of eastern Syrian livestock, a main source of food. Water is a resource that is crucial for families to sustain themselves, yet it has been used as a weapon of war. In 2012, rebel forces took over the Ain al-Fijeh natural spring, which is the primary source of water for Damascus and most of Syria. The rebel forces used it as a weapon threatening to cut off the water. After a few years of conflict and rebel groups using water as leverage to their favor, the Syrian regime took over the natural spring in 2017 after fighting the rebels off and conquering the land. To this date, water is a scarce resource in many cities and districts across Syria, but part of the population with access to water report that the water available to them is of bad quality, according to the Registration, Evaluation, Authorisation and Restriction of Chemicals (REACH), an organization created by the European Parliament. The organization declared that they assessed the water situation and found that it was of poor quality and the people that consumed it generally felt ill afterwards; this occurred in almost half of the assessed locations.

Food shortage and availability is another problem that is due for attention in Syria. A UN Humans Rights official in Beirut, Lebanon called the food situation across Syria an “outrage”, he also stated that “food and medical supplies must be allowed to reach civilians inside.” The Syrian government constantly blocks the UN from delivering aid to the people in need. The UN was allowed in once and carried supplies for 25,000 of the affected people, while the estimated number of people affected is 350,000. Many children also suffer from malnutrition and occasionally die of starvation; UNICEF says that there are 1,000 children severely affected.

Syrian Economic Crisis

The numbers of people that fled and died subsequent to the start of the civil war have done nothing but skyrocket, a grand consequence of these actions is the downfall of the Syrian economy since 2010. An estimate by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) has declared that the Syrian economy has collapsed 75% from 2010 to 2015 and is still on its way down. Clearly, the eruption of the civil war and the government's reaction to the protests has caused the country a huge financial crisis, with an IMF estimate loss of hundreds of billions of dollars in a 5 year

period. The population below poverty line, according to a 2017 estimate by the CIA Factbook, stands at a staggering 82.5% of the population, making Syria the country with the highest figure. The economy has also diminished the financial opportunities for citizens seeing as a lot of the population left and the majority of businesses closed down. The unemployment rate stands at 50%, making Syria the second nation with the highest unemployment rate.

Another IMF estimate says that, hypothetically, if the process of rebuilding Syria began in 2018, and the economy grew at a stable rate of 4.5%, it would take an astonishing 20 years for Syria's GDP to become what it was prior to the start of the civil war.

Considering that Syrian President Bashar al Assad stated that rebuilding Syria could take up to 400 billion dollars, it is very unrealistic to assume that Syria can address this issue themselves, especially because their GDP makes up for less than 50 billion dollars. The fact that they also have to address the social issues they currently struggle to deal with in another factor to consider. This aspect of the problem should preferably be addressed before the rebuilding process of Syria takes place, in order to create and maintain a stable society.

Major Parties Involved and Their Views

Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIS/ISIL)

The Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant is an Islamic extremist group who are well known for their horrible actions such as terrorist attacks, mass murders, suicide bombing, and between others. They are also strong opposers to the Syrian government, yet their power has been diminished by the government itself for their disagreement in religious and political views. The Syrian forces have taken back a great majority of their territory; the US claims that 98% of Islamic State territory has been taken back throughout Syria and Iraq.

United States of America

The United States strongly stands against the Islamic State. However, the nation recently dispatched an air strike against the Syrian government for chemical attacks affecting Syrian

civilians. Despite the Islamic State and the Syrian Government pertaining totally different views, the United States opposes both of them and works to take back the territory the Islamic State took over. This nation works with and provides supplies for the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) to fight against the Islamic State and discard them from Syria. This nation also bears 2,000 troops in Syria. After liberating Raqqa from the Islamic State, they pledged minor assistance in rebuilding the city.

Syria

The Syrian government, powered by current president Bashar al-Assad, strongly stands against the Islamic State and the United States. After managing to recapture a significant portion of the land in Syria back from anti-governmental organizations, most cities are rubble and remains of past and ongoing civil war. The president of Syria has declared an estimate that rebuilding Syria may cost up to 400 billion dollars, an amount Syria cannot afford, especially with the ongoing crisis.

Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF)

The Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) are a group of people (mostly Kurdish) who oppose the government and push for democracy across the country, they have worked with the United States to liberate many cities from the Islamic State and other rebel groups that cause severe mayhem and violence. The SDF evoked from a group of people that pushed for a change in democracy in Syria after the civil war erupted. Their goal is to liberate Syria from Assad's regime. They are crucial to the country because they control a lot of land which they have captured alongside the US.

Russia

The Russian government stands by Bashar al-Assad and their Muslim Shia views. Russia occasionally sends airstrikes to the opposers of the government. They have interest in maintaining this relationship with the Syrian government because Syria provides them with a port and an air base for Russia to have troops in, which allows them to deploy their black sea fleet. Given this situation, it is crucial for both Russia and Syria to preserve this alliance. If Syria

accepts to start rebuilding, Russia would also be interested.

Iran

Iran is Syria's closest Arab ally. Iran spends billions of dollars to support Syria and its Shia regime every year. They also provide Syria with weapons and several other forms of financial assistance. Iran does this because their trading route to shipping goods to Lebanon goes through Syria, so maintaining a good relationship is crucial to them and their economy. Given their interest in maintaining a relationship with Syria, they are a potential ally when it comes to rebuilding Syria as well.

Timeline

Date	Description of event
1988	Al Qaeda was founded in Iraq by Osama bin Laden, Ayman al-Zawahiri, among others.
2001	Al Qaeda performed a terrorist attack on the United States, killing a total of 2,977 civilians
2003	Al Qaeda was formed into the Islamic State by Sunni militants after a United States attack on Iraq
2011	The Islamic State joined the rebellion against the Syrian government. Start of overwhelming protests in Syria, leading to Syrian opposition groups and the start of the ongoing Syrian civil war
2013	The Islamic State started to take major control over territories in Syria. Changed their name from the “Islamic State” to “Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant”.

2014	After brutal actions committed by ISIS, the United States undertook drastic measures and established airstrikes on ISIS territories. The US-led coalition with the SDF successfully liberated the city of Raqqa
2016	The US-led coalition with the SDF successfully liberated the city of Manbij
2018	Syrian forces liberate the rebel-held suburb of Eastern Ghouta in Damascus

UN involvement, Relevant Resolutions, Treaties and Events

In response to the start of the Syrian civil war in 2012, the United Nations Security Council launched a mission called “the United Nations Supervision Mission in Syria (UNSMIS).” This mission was created on the 21st of April of 2012 with the intent of a 90 day period duration but ceased the 20th of August of the same year. The purpose of this mission was to supervise the ongoing armed violence in Syria after the start of the civil war. The mission was a failure and ceased because the use of armed violence was too strong and the UN declared that their conditions were not met to extend the mission, therefore, ceasing August 20th.

Another attempt and a more recent one to resolve the issue was a summit taken place in Ankara, Turkey, on April 4th, 2018. The summit consisted of three major countries that play major roles in the issue, but not all of them agree completely and have the same intentions. The Ankara summit consisted of Iran, Russia, and Turkey. With the absence of the United States, it was clear that the nations’ intention was to act without their help and keep the nation out of play. The conference’s intent was to discuss security and stability, return of refugees, and determining the fate of the Syrian Arab Republic by the Syrians.

- **Resolution 2139:** “Was passed by a unanimous vote of the Council on February 22,

2014, and calls on all parties in the Syrian Civil War to permit free access to humanitarian aid.”

- **Resolution 2169:** “Calling on all political entities to overcome divisions and work together in an inclusive and timely political process aimed at strengthening Iraq’s national unity, sovereignty and independence; and for Iraq’s leaders to engage, as quickly as possible, to form a Government that represents the will and sovereignty of all segments of the Iraqi population and that would contribute to finding a viable and sustainable solution to the country’s current challenges; and reaffirming its belief that through its democratic institutions, in cooperation with Iraqi society, Iraq can work to address the challenges facing the country for the benefit of all Iraqis.”
- **Resolution 2254:** “The resolution demands that all parties immediately cease any attacks against civilian targets, it urges all Member States to support efforts to achieve a ceasefire and requests the U.N. to convene the parties to engage in formal negotiations in early January 2016.”
- **Resolution 2268:** “The resolution endorsed the Joint Statement of the United States and the Russia of 22 February 2016 on "cessation of hostilities" and demanded that all parties to whom the cessation of hostilities applied fulfill their commitments thereunder, as well as "the full and immediate implementation of resolution 2254 (2015) to facilitate a Syrian-led and Syrian-owned political transition, in accordance with the Geneva communiqué as set forth in the ISSG Statements.”
- **Resolution 2328:** “Unanimously adopting resolution 2328 (2016), the 15-nation Council requested that the United Nations and other relevant institutions carry out adequate, neutral and direct observation, and ensure further deployment of staff as needed. It further requested that the Secretary-General take urgent steps to make arrangements that

would allow the Organization to observe the well-being of civilians, and to report on the text's implementation within five days.”

- **Resolution 2336:** “Welcomes and supports the efforts by Russia and Turkey to end violence in Syria and jumpstart a political process.”

Evaluation of Previous Attempts to Resolve the Issue

The lack of previous attempts to resolve this issue is evident, but it is important to note that the small number of steps taken have not impacted the issue in any positive direction. For example, the UN was able to come to an accord with the Syrian government to reach 25,000 people with emergency aid, this seems great yet the amount of people that need aid and are in critical conditions reach up to about 350,000 people. This is just a mere example of how the international community has taken steps to restabilize these locations, yet have merely just begun what will be a very hard and arduous task to complete. We can see through all the treaties and resolutions that the first thing that must be done is stop the conflict or halt it, then comes the rebuilding and restabilizing. By knowing that the UN was able to conduct ceasefires there is hope that medical, economic, and foundational support can reach the affected zones safely, yet the challenge is knowing how to create a prolonged state of peace, which we know the UN has not been able to do just yet.

Possible Solutions

As for possible solutions to rebuild Syria, there are several ways to address the issue, but many steps are crucial and are not to be left behind. For example, to rebuild Syria, one must first get rid of the ongoing conflict and the civil war, which initially was what first started to erupt violence and destruction to the city, therefore evoking the current situation Syria suffers to this date. To accomplish this, it is important that violent rebellious groups are removed and to come to an accord with the Syrian government. After this, rebuilding Syria is where many paths are open. Considering that it has been estimated that rebuilding the destroyed cities may take up to

hundreds of billions of dollars, it is clear that Syria is not apt to face the crisis by itself. With this noted, it is crucial that other countries take the initiative to help Syria rebuild its cities, especially those countries affected by the mass immigration of Syrians. Overall, the process that could be followed should include the evacuation of rebel groups as to cease the conflict, the provision of volunteers and funding for reparations, restoration of infrastructure, and a way to keep the peace in cities.

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Appendix or Appendices

I. How the Islamic State stands to this date across Syria and Iraq.

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II. The importance of water and how it affects the current situation in Syria.

www.washingtoninstitute.org/fikraforum/view/the-growing-power-of-water-in-syria.

III. The United Nations Supervision Mission in Syria (UNSMIS)

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IV. In detail summary of the Syrian civil war and its effects

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