



# Syria: Fleeing Terror, Finding Refuge, in Search of Home Away From Home

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## ABSTRACT

War is the greatest catastrophe that brings death and destruction, merciless slaughter and butchery, disease and starvation, poverty and ruin in its wake. A disturbing side of modern wars is that they tend to have global implications. The psychological and economic impact of war on their belligerent societies is huge. Terrorism is driven by politics even when the justifications given for the killing of innocents and the recruiting tools of terrorist groups are cast in religious, ethnic, linguistic or moral terms. The war in Syria is a befitting example. The image of Aylan Kurdi, the small Syrian boy washed up on a Turkish beach, was so heart wrenching that the European politicians and the public opened their arms and their hearts to these refugees. It is high time that the regimes should realize that there are other choices to violence and its attendant terror to gain what they want. The paper seeks to explore the reasons behind the Syrian War and to analyze the deplorable condition of the Refugees.

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## Introduction

War is the greatest catastrophe that brings death and destruction, merciless slaughter and butchery, disease and starvation, poverty and ruin in its wake. A disturbing side of modern wars is that they tend to have global implications. The psychological and economic impact of war on their belligerent societies is huge. Terrorism is driven by politics even when the justifications given for the killing of innocents and the recruiting tools of terrorist groups are cast in religious, ethnic, linguistic or moral terms. The war in Syria is a befitting example. I feel the regimes should realize that there are other choices to violence and its attendant terror to gain what they want. The image of Aylan Kurdi, the small Syrian boy washed up on a Turkish beach, was so heart wrenching that the European politicians and the public opened their arms and their hearts to these refugees.

The problem of refugee influx in Europe is not a new phenomenon, but in the summer of 2015, Europe experienced the highest influx of refugees since World War 2 and Syria became the prime source of refugees. Before talking about the Syrian civil war it is important to know what led to the conflict in the first place. The Arab uprising of 2011 which saw the fall down of many proletarian regimes, gave rise to a revolt against the president Bashar al-Assad of Syria. Unwilling to step down from power, he used the army to crush the Syrian uprising. This resulted in unrest in the country and the formation of the 'Free Syrian Army' on 29 July 2011 by officers who defected from the Syrian Armed Forces with the goal to bring down the government of Bashar al-Assad. They were later joined by extremists like Kurds resulting in a proxy war within the state. Iran send officers to the ground military to combat the situation whereas Arab states like Saudi Arabia, Jordan supported the militants providing them with monetary support. Russia backed President Bashar-Al Asad, while USA supported the rebel

group to bring down the president. The war also saw the emergence of ISIS (Islamic State Of Iraq and Syria), a militant group which did not fight Assad but other rebel groups in Syria. ISIS not only conquered areas in Syria, calling it their Caliphate but have also become the greatest security threat that the world faces today. They not only reveal horrendous videos on social networking sites but also kill innocent civilians and those who oppose them. The women living in the areas controlled by ISIS live in the fear of forced marriage and rape by the fighters. The civilians are still trapped between the religious extremists, the regime and the rebel groups. Today Syria's conflict has devolved from peaceful protests against the government to a violent uprising that has drawn-in neighbouring countries too. It's as much a civil war of government against people as a religious war in which Shiite fighters are pitted against Sunni rebel groups. It is also increasingly becoming a proxy war featuring Russia and Iran against the United States and its allies. This war that began in March 2011 continues to ravage the country with no end in sight. Since the beginning of the Syrian war in 2011, many have fled the country and settled in the neighbouring countries of Turkey, Iraq, Jordan, and Egypt. By mid-2015, the World Bank's estimated cost of the Syrian war for the Middle Eastern countries to \$35 billion. -The sectarian nature of the conflict in Syria has amplified with the regionalization of the conflict, with Iran and Lebanese Hezbollah allied with the Syrian government, and the Sunni monarchical regimes allied with the opposition (including suggestions of arms transfers). Likewise, non-state actors including Islamist militia-fighters from neighbouring Iraq, both Sunni and Shia—battle hardened from the sectarian battles in Iraq—have been reported crossing the border in Syria to join the battle on their respective sides. This "regionalization" of the struggle has had the effect of amplifying sectarian tension across the region.

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In such perilous times where the civilians are in a constant threat, neighbouring countries like Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq, and Egypt have provided valuable protection to Syrian refugees. They have allowed Syrians to access their territories and have dedicated significant financial resources and social services to help them. For example, Turkey, by the start of December 2014, had invested USD 4.5 billion in direct assistance to Syrian refugees in their country and Jordan and Lebanon had spent more than USD 1.2 billion and USD 1.6 billion, respectively. The central Iraqi government and regional Kurdistan government also contributed to the Syrian refugee response by providing relief items, cash assistance, and free access to health care. The burden placed on these countries is immense and has had adverse social and economic costs on the host communities. The influx of large numbers of refugees to urban settings has shifted the demographic composition and strained basic social services like water, sanitation, food, health care, housing, and electricity. A 2014 United Nations Development Program (UNDP) report described the refugee influx as a large-scale “de facto acceleration of urban growth” which has not been matched by increases in housing, service provision, infrastructure, and market capacity adequate to meet the requirements of the increased population. The main problem with Refugee Asylums is that different countries have different laws, systems and procedures for admitting the refugees. The EU Common European Asylum System (CEAS) intends to ensure to protect the rights of asylum seekers and refugees. It also lays down the minimum standards and procedures for processing and deciding asylum applications, and for the treatment of both asylum seekers and those who are recognized as refugees. For Syrian refugees in Lebanon, shelter is a serious concern due to the absence of formal refugee camps and the lack of affordable housing. More than 70 percent of these refugees live outside of government run refugee camps, often in overcrowded rental houses. These refugees have to struggle for the basic amenities like housing and health care and live in deplorable

conditions. Another concern is that of safety of women. U.N’s Human Rights Council report of 2015 revealed the use of sexual violence against girls and women. The report says, “Women and girls were found to have been raped and sexually assaulted in government detention facilities, in particular in the investigation branches of the Military Intelligence Directorate and prisons administered by the General Security Directorate in Damascus. The larger question that we should ask is that whether talks on Syria serve any purpose? The talks in Geneva which aimed at ending the Syrian conflict were derailed by bombings in Homes. Despite of talks and a lot of work by NGOs like White Helmet, it is sad to see that countries have used the crisis as a proxy war for their own interest. The dropping of barrel bombs by the government shows the ruthless side of the government. The civil war has forced 11 million people—half the country’s pre-crisis population—to flee their homes. Many people set dangerous voyages to Mediterranean to somehow reach Europe. From the perspective of recent policy perspective, the majority of migrants who have arrived during the crisis still await confirmation of their refugee status are not supposed to be integrating. ISIS expansion is now a matter of concern for a lot of countries, as it is expanding to new areas, recruiting fighters and widening the reach of attacks in the region. Targeting ISIS, President elect Donald Trump on 1st March said that he would not allow America to become a sanctuary for extremists and vowed to work with the allies to destroy ISIS. With the upcoming elections in September, German chancellor Angela Merkel is under a lot of pressure to keep up her promise to limit the number of immigrants that come to Germany, as for many voters her tenure is associated with a whopping 900,000 refugees that came in 2015 adding 280,000 that arrived this year. There are a lot of groups and outside countries involved in Syria’s war but there are also a lot of contradictions within allies about who to support so there seems to be no immediate end to the war as of now.