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SYRIAN CRISIS AND ITS IMPLICATIONS ON INTERNATIONAL SECURITY

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Abstract
The paper investigated the Syrian Conflict and its implications on international security.Since the start of the Syrian crisis in 2011 provoked by the Arab Spring, hundreds of thousands of Syrians have been internally displaced, houses burnt, properties destroyed, health facilities destroyed, the economy dwindling and many have become refugees in neighboring states, living at the mercy of host countries. Western powers that are supposed to play solvent roles are also seen contesting for relevance in the Middle East politics, thereby playing politics with the misery of Syrians who are in dear need of peace. The paper sought to characterize the Syrian conflict, find out the impact of the crisis on Syria and the implications on international security. This work relied on a descriptive analysis, secondary sources of information, such as books, articles in journals, newspapers and news magazine, conference proceedings and other relevant materials were used. The conflict drained the productive activities and job opportunities, and crowded out the human capital, educational opportunities have dramatically declined, widespread violence and insecurity compromising human rights and dignity of the Syrian population, absence of safe routes among others were some of the notable impacts.While proliferation of small and light weapons, strained global politics, cross-border armed attacks, influx of refugees, bitterness between west's China and Russia relations, division among the European states, are the implications of the Syrian Conflict. The paper concluded that the crisis in Syria has caused humanitarian challenges and threatens international peace.

Keywords: *Security, Syrian Crisis, Middle East Politics, Refugees, International Security*

Background to the Study

Syria was part of the Ottoman Empire for about four centuries, from the early 1500s until the empire's collapse in the early 1900s. Afterward, it came under French colonial control from 1918 to 1946, before gaining independence. The following two decades were marked by political instability, with several coups and a brief union with Egypt under the United Arab Republic. In 1963, the Ba'ath Party seized power, establishing a secular, socialist Arab regime. The new leadership consolidated control by eliminating opposition, nationalizing banks, redistributing land to peasants, and promoting Arabization in education.
The ongoing crisis in Syria has persisted for nearly two decades, with little signs of resolution despite repeated peace efforts. The conflict has triggered the largest displacement of people since World War II. By mid-2015, Turkey had taken in about 1.8 million Syrian refugees, Lebanon hosted around 1.2 million (making it the highest per capita host worldwide, with one refugee for every four Lebanese), and Jordan sheltered roughly 629,000 (UNHCR, 2015). The war has also inflicted severe economic damages on neighboring countries. Lebanon alone is estimated to have lost about $10 billion, prompting calls for greater international aid (Hassan, 2016). Over 470,000 lives have been lost, millions have been forced into exile, and many more remain internally displaced. At the root of the conflict lies the authoritarian rule of Bashar al-Assad, whose regime has been widely accused of human rights abuses, corruption, and

undemocratic practices. These factors, combined with external involvement, fueled and prolonged the war.

Global powers have further complicated the crisis. The United States and Russia have intervened by supporting opposing sides—pro-government and anti-government forces—while other state and non-state actors in the Middle East, including Israel and Iraq, have also played active roles. The conflict has transformed the geopolitical landscape of the region, fueled volatility and enabled terrorist groups to gain strength and visibility.

Syria's modern history illustrates a constant cycle of mutual influence with the wider Middle East, shaped by both internal policies and external interventions. A century ago, Western colonial ambitions and regional rivalries determined its borders and political direction. In the post-colonial period, Syrian policies, in turn, influenced regional dynamics. However, the largely peaceful uprising of 2011 quickly became an all-out war once regional and global powers became militarily and politically involved, leading to the fragmentation of the Syrian state (Rami, 2018: 10–20).

The frustration–aggression theory was adopted in this study, it explains that individuals often become frustrated and may react aggressively when their goals or aspirations are blocked. In 1939, scholars from the Yale University Institute of Human Relations—John Dollard, Leonard Doob, Neal Miller, O.H. Mowrer, and Robert Sears—published a seminar monograph that profoundly influenced the behavioral sciences. Their work sought to explain human aggression through a set of basic principles, and for decades afterward, much of the research on the causes and effects of aggression drew upon their framework. According to this perspective, frustration can trigger aggressive tendencies even when the frustration is not deliberately directed at an individual.

This paper adopts Ted Gurr's version of the frustration–aggression theory, which argues that frustration inevitably leads to aggression. Applied to the Syrian context, the theory is particularly relevant: under Bashar al-Assad's authoritarian regime, Syrians were systematically denied fundamental rights, meaningful employment opportunities, and access to social amenities. Such persistent deprivation and the denial of basic expectations fueled widespread frustration, which in turn erupted into aggression —manifesting as a revolutionary uprising against the regime.

Against this backdrop, this paper examines the Syrian conflict and its implications for international security, considering its regional effects, its impact on Syria, and its broader significance in the globalized security environment.

Statement of Problem

Despite both national and international efforts to end the Syrian conflict, clashes between government forces and rebel groups continue. The war has displaced hundreds of thousands internally, destroyed homes and health facilities, devastated the economy, and forced many Syrians to seek refuge in neighboring countries, where they survive at the mercy of host communities. Meanwhile, Western powers—expected to play constructive roles—are instead competing for influence in Middle Eastern politics, effectively politicizing the suffering of Syrians who desperately need peace. This raises a critical research question: in what ways does the Syrian conflict pose a threat to international security in the era of globalization?

Objectives of the Study

The broad of objective of this study is exploring the Syrian Crisis and its Implications on International Security. Specifically, the study shall:

1. characterize the Syrian Crisis.
2. understand the causes of the Syrian conflict.
3. investigate how the Syrian crisis threatens international security

Research Methodology

This study adopts a descriptive analytical approach to highlight the key implications of the Syrian crisis on international security. Since no research of this kind can be conducted in a

historical vacuum, it was necessary to examine aspects of Syria's historical background to provide context for the conflict. The choice of this method stems from the recognition that the crisis did not emerge suddenly; rather, it has been an ongoing process whose impacts continue to shape both Syria and contemporary international relations. The research relies primarily on secondary sources, including books, journal articles, newspapers, news magazines, conference papers, and other relevant materials.

Results and Discussions

Brief Overview of the Syrian Conflict

In 1970, Syria's Minister of Defense, Hafez al-Assad, seized power and, the following year, declared himself president. He introduced a new constitution, created a legislative body, and manipulated elections to maintain his rule and ensure Ba'ath Party dominance. During his regime, Syria forged strong ties with the Soviet Union, the former Eastern Bloc, and Iran. The state developed its production sectors —agriculture, textiles, plastics, and paper—to meet consumer needs. Education, including medical studies, was conducted in Arabic, and by this period, Syria had become a lower-middle-income country with high literacy, widespread education, and strong employment rates. However, Assad's rule was marked by harsh repression of dissent. Belonging to the Alawite minority sect, he implemented policies that favored his community, thereby securing their loyalty.

After Hafez al-Assad's death in 2000, his son, Bashar al-Assad—a British-trained ophthalmologist—succeeded him and continues to rule today. Like his father, Bashar maintained authoritarian one-party rule, privileging the Alawite sect and placing relatives in positions of power. Although he introduced limited reforms—such as easing restrictions on press freedom and trade, which benefitted the urban business elite—political repression, corruption, and mismanagement persisted. Education and healthcare continued to be heavily state-funded, but alongside these services, private universities and clinics for the wealthy emerged. For the majority, feelings of oppression under Assad's rule remained widespread.

Inspired by the Arab Spring uprisings in Tunisia and Egypt, protests erupted in Syria in February 2011 and escalated into full-scale conflict by 2012–2013. Two opposition groups—the Syrian National Council (SNC) and the National Coordination Committee (NCC)—emerged, but their inability to cooperate deepened divisions and fueled civil war. The regime responded with military force, including airstrikes that devastated civilian populations—men, women, and children alike. Government crackdowns also included mass arrests, brutal interrogations, torture, sniper attacks, and live ammunition against demonstrators. Despite this, Syrians persisted in organizing resistance movements. The regime dismissed protesters and their sympathizers as "terrorists," further escalating tensions.

Causes of the Conflict

Several factors contributed to the outbreak of the crisis. One was the sectarian divide: the Assad family, belonging to the Alawite Shiite minority (about 12% of Syria's population), had long ruled over a majority Sunni population (roughly 77%). This imbalance dated back to Hafez al-Assad's earlier actions. In 1982, his regime brutally crushed an uprising in Hama, killing over 10,000 people and forcing many into exile. This massacre planted the seeds of resentment that exploded into the 2011 uprising. Initially, the movement called for greater freedoms and transparency, but as violence intensified, Sunni rebels began targeting Alawite communities, transforming what began as a democratic movement into a sectarian struggle (Burke, 2013).

The Syrian crisis, a protracted and devastating conflict that has engulfed the nation since 2011, represents one of the most pressing and complex challenges of the contemporary era (Najaf & Jalal, 2024). In their study entitled The Root Causes of the Syrian Crisis: Analyzing Internal and External Factors, Najaf and Jalal provide a comprehensive analysis of the underlying causes that contributed to both the

outbreak and the persistence of the Syrian civil war, with attention to internal and external dimensions. On the domestic front, the research examines socioeconomic disparities, political grievances, and historical antecedents, thereby uncovering the long-standing tensions and systemic weaknesses that created fertile ground for unrest. Beyond these internal dynamics, the study highlights the decisive role of external actors in shaping the trajectory of the conflict. By situating the Syrian war within broader geopolitical rivalries and regional power struggles, the authors demonstrate how foreign interventions—through funding, arming, and supporting various factions—have intensified violence and obstructed peace efforts.

The complexity of the Syrian conflict is also tied to the country's geopolitical position. Strategically located in the heart of the Middle East, Syria borders countries with divergent religious identities and political interests. As Russia's UN ambassador Pankin stated, "Syria is the cornerstone of the Middle East security architecture" (UNSC, 2011a, p.7). Regional alliances have further deepened the crisis: Iran, Iraq, and Lebanon support the Assad government, while Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and Qatar back the Sunni opposition. These religiously driven geopolitical divisions have made it extremely difficult for Arab states to unite in finding a lasting resolution to the Syrian crisis. In a dynamically shifting multipolar world, the reconfiguration of alliances presents a complex and pivotal challenge for global policymakers and stakeholders (Abdulgaffar, 2023). This article entitled "The Geopolitical Implications of Shifting Alliances in a Multipolar World" explores the geopolitical implications of alliance changes, analyzing their historical context, driving factors, and potential consequences. The paper underscores the intricate interplay between shifting alliances and regional/global stability, as well as their influence on power struggles and international cooperation. Moreover, the article delves into the identification of major players and their strategic motivations, shedding light on the nuances of alliance dynamics. Anticipating potential future alliance configurations emerges as a crucial diplomatic approach, paving the way for stability amidst uncertainties. Ultimately, the article offers original recommendations for policymakers and international stakeholders to navigate this intricate landscape, emphasizing dynamic diplomacy, multilateral collaboration, and strategic patience. According to him;:

> the current multipolar geopolitical environment presents a multifaceted tableau of power distribution, economic interdependencies, and strategic complexities. As nations navigate this intricate web of relationships, adept diplomacy and the ability to navigate shifting alliances will play a crucial role in shaping the trajectory of international relations in the 21st century.

Implications of the Conflict on International Security

The contemporary world faces numerous security challenges, many of which stem from decisions made by global leaders and the foreign policies of states. Great powers, in particular, are often driven by the pursuit of national interests, sometimes without consideration of the broader consequences. In this quest for self-interest, states frequently take actions that compromise international peace and stability. Security in today's international system has thus become increasingly costly and difficult to achieve. Unlike the World Wars, where insecurity was largely interstate, many of today's threats originate within states and spill across borders. Terrorist groups such as ISIS, Boko Haram, and Al-Qaeda exemplify this trend.

An important observation is that while most modern security threats begin as domestic issues, the interconnected nature of the global system means they quickly acquire international dimensions. Domestic conflicts can escalate into global crises, with implications for international security. The Syrian conflict is a prime example: it has reshaped the political landscape of the

Middle East and drawn in major powers such as the United States, Russia, Turkey, France, and China. Both the U.S. and Russia, in particular, have sought to project influence in the Syrian crisis, with significant consequences for weaker states caught in between. The civil war has devastated Syrian society, destroyed its cities, strained international diplomacy, and raised doubts about global conflict-resolution mechanisms.

In the 21st century, traditional conceptions of security are undergoing a significant transformation as non-traditional threats assume increasing prominence. According to Arosh (2023), these challenges encompass the growing influence of non-state actors such as organized crime networks and terrorist groups, the complexities associated with civil wars and regime transitions, the consequences of environmental degradation, demographic transformations, and the emergence of cyber-conflict. Transnational organized crime groups—ranging from drug cartels to arms traffickers—constitute a major threat due to their cross-border operations and disregard for international norms. Similarly, terrorism, pursued for political ends, exploits state vulnerabilities and destabilizes societies. Civil wars, characterized by protracted violence and instability, present considerable obstacles to effective international intervention. Environmental degradation, largely driven by climate change, heightens risks through rising sea levels, competition over scarce resources, and the displacement of populations. Demographic shifts, including aging populations and shrinking labor forces, further complicate economic stability and national security. Finally, the advent of the information age has introduced cyber-conflict, in which the traditional boundary between civilian and military spheres is blurred, generating profound implications for sovereignty and state security.

International involvement in the Syrian war has been extensive. The Assad government has received diplomatic backing and military aid from Russia, which has provided weapons, training, and political support. Iran has supplemented this with armed fighters and billions of dollars in financial assistance, while Hezbollah has deployed combatants to back the regime. On the other hand, Syrian rebels have received aid from the United States, including non-lethal support and alleged combat training, as well as weapons from Gulf States such as Qatar and Saudi Arabia. This external involvement has amplified the conflict, transforming it into a proxy war tied to broader geopolitical struggles, including the geopolitics of energy and the rivalry between Sunni and Shi'a factions in the region. Phillips (2022) contends that the decline of U.S.-dominated unipolarity and its interplay with the emergence of a multipolar order in the Middle East significantly influenced the behavior and strategic calculations of foreign states, thereby shaping both the outbreak and trajectory of the Syrian conflict. This evolving multipolar environment also played a decisive role in Russia's intervention in 2015, which paradoxically steered the war toward a potential resolution—an outcome that traditional Systemic Realists would not anticipate. Phillips' analysis of systemic dynamics in the Syrian war demonstrates the continued relevance of the Neo-Realist concept of polarity for explaining both intra- and inter-state conflicts. It further underscores the significance of interactions between regional and global systems in producing these outcomes and calls for a reconsideration of the Neo-Realist assumption that multipolarity invariably prolongs wars.

At the regional level, the conflict reflects the divide between Shi'a-dominated states, such as Iran and Lebanon, and Sunni-dominated states, such as Saudi Arabia and Qatar. Assad's Alawite regime—an offshoot of Shi'ism—represents a minority governing over a Sunni majority. Radical Sunni groups, including Al-Qaeda, have sought to overthrow this arrangement. Saudi Arabia has consistently called for Assad's removal, while Iran has doubled down on its support, intensifying a regional power struggle between Riyadh and Tehran. This rivalry not only fuels instability in Syria but also exacerbates

tensions in other countries, such as Bahrain, where sectarian divides are similarly pronounced.

Syria's neighbors have also been deeply affected. Lebanon, whose ethnic and religious composition mirrors Syria's, has borne the brunt of the refugee crisis, re-igniting sectarian tensions and deepening political polarization between pro-Assad and anti-Assad factions. Since the onset of the Syrian civil war in 2011, the number of Syrian refugees residing in Lebanon has steadily increased. Ongoing instability within Syria has driven waves of civilians to seek safety across the Lebanese border. This large-scale influx has placed immense pressure on Lebanon's infrastructure, economy, and social fabric, as the government struggles to provide adequate housing and resources. While the Lebanese state has sought to accommodate the refugees in anticipation of a peaceful resolution to the conflict, their prolonged stay has generated growing apprehension and resentment among segments of the Lebanese population. The demographic surge has intensified competition for employment, housing, healthcare, education, and essential resources such as water, electricity, and food.

The humanitarian implications of this crisis have drawn the attention of international organizations, most notably the United Nations, which has mobilized substantial assistance. Since 2012, the United States alone has contributed approximately $84 million in financial aid to ease the burden on the Lebanese government. In parallel, the UN and other international organizations operating in Lebanon have implemented measures such as vaccination campaigns, the construction of rehabilitation centers, and the expansion of access to clean water. Basic healthcare and educational services have also been provided to more than 160,000 children. Local Lebanese communities have likewise extended support to refugee populations in an effort to reduce social tensions and foster coexistence.

Nevertheless, the refugee crisis in Lebanon is likely to persist as long as the Syrian conflict remains unresolved. A sustainable solution lies in addressing the root causes of displacement by supporting peace efforts within Syria, thereby enabling refugees to return home and reducing the strain on Lebanon as a host country. However, Lebanon's capacity to influence the outcome of Syria's civil war is limited, given the conflict's complex interplay between the Assad regime and opposition forces. In this context, humanitarian organizations such as the UN, Mercy Corps, and Save the Children continue to play a vital role, not only in supporting Syrian refugees in Lebanon but also in assisting those who remain internally displaced within Syria (Taouk, 2016).

Similarly, Turkey, once committed to its "zero problems with neighbors" policy, has faced both a refugee influx and accusations of backing Islamist militants in Syria, while simultaneously trying to suppress Kurdish separatism within its own borders**.** Until the late 2000s, Turkish foreign policy was primarily oriented toward the West. Turkey was widely regarded as a reliable partner of the United States and Western Europe in the Middle East, aligning its strategic interests through NATO membership and the European Union accession process while maintaining a securitized stance toward its Middle Eastern neighbors. This orientation shifted markedly with the appointment of Ahmet Davutoğlu, a professor of international relations, as Turkey's foreign minister. While sustaining routine relations with the West, Davutoğlu reoriented Ankara's foreign policy toward the former Ottoman sphere, particularly the Middle East and the Western Balkans. Central to this shift was the foreign policy doctrine of "zero problems with neighbours," rooted in Davutoğlu's influential work *Strategic Depth*. Given his neo-Ottomanist and conservative background, the emphasis on former Ottoman territories was a logical extension of his worldview. Within this framework, between 2008 and early 2011, Turkey improved relations with the Assad regime in Syria, sought to mediate nuclear negotiations between Iran and the West, and expanded trade ties with Iraq, the Gulf states, Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, and North Africa. The "zero problems with neighbours" approach thus facilitated the

desecuritization of Turkey's relations with its Middle Eastern neighbors during this period. (Coskun, 2015).

Iraq's fragile stability has been further undermined by cross-border violence and the involvement of Iraqi Sunnis in the Syrian conflict. Jordan, meanwhile, has absorbed over half a million refugees and now hosts U.S. troops on its soil, exposing it to potential retaliatory violence from anti-Western groups. Israel's response has been cautious: while it views Assad as a hostile but predictable adversary, it fears greater risks if the regime collapses, including chemical weapons falling into the hands of Hezbollah or an Islamist rebel government emerging in Damascus.

Globally, the Syrian conflict has damaged relations between the West and Russia/China, fueling deep divisions in international diplomacy. It has also triggered the largest wave of displacement since World War II, linking regional instability in the Middle East to global security concerns such as energy markets, terrorism, and the proliferation of small arms and light weapons (SALW). The rise of ISIS and other extremist groups is a direct consequence of the war, posing long-term challenges to regional and global peace.

Although the Assad regime initiated this crisis through authoritarian repression, external powers—particularly the U.S. and Russia—have worsened it by pursuing competing interests. The conflict has generated immense human suffering: hunger, homelessness, poverty, and displacement dominate everyday life in Syria and its neighboring states. While ordinary citizens bear the brunt of the war, elites and powerful states often profit from the conflict. Given Syria's strategic location in the Middle East, any prolonged instability within its borders inevitably reverberates across the region and the wider international system.

Conclusion

The crisis in Syria today, has affected negatively the politics of the Middle East. The implication of the crisis is that, super powers are using the crisis as a means of flexing muscles (Super Power contestation) in the oil rich region. This is evident in the proliferation of light weapons supplied by Russia and the United States of America to their respective allies. Apart from the proliferation of weapons, the influx of refugees into neighboring countries is a threat to the internal security of the affected states, like Turkey, Lebanon and others. And because influx of people is bilateral in nature, it constitutes a serious problem for the international community, particularly neighbour countries, such Lebanon and Turkey that shares common boundaries with Syria.

More so, the refugees entering neighboring countries as a result of the conflict in Syria could cause serious security problems for the host country, and by implication food security problems. Not all government can manage problems arising from influx of people from conflict affected region, as it requires adequate planning, commitment and resources.

Unfortunately, the crisis is capable of reigniting conflict between the United States of America and Russia that have always contested supremacy in world politics, and the Middle East has always been the theatre to demonstrate strength and capability. In the instance the conflict is not properly managed, properties would be destroyed, lives would be lost, women and children would suffer,

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