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**THE UN'S ROLE IN THE RESOLUTION OF THE SYRIAN CRISIS:
PROSPECTS AND CHALLENGES****Asif Khan**

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asifkhan37066@gmail.com**ABSTRACT**

The Syrian crisis, erupting in 2011 from protests against President Assad's authoritarian rule, has evolved into a complex, multifaceted conflict marked by violence, humanitarian suffering, and deep sectarian divisions. Initial demands for democratic reforms quickly escalated into a civil war involving numerous local factions and international actors with conflicting agendas. This protracted conflict is characterized by a convergence of historical grievances, socio-economic hardships, sectarian dynamics, and external interventions, hindering efforts towards a sustainable resolution. Socio-economic factors, including high unemployment and economic inequality, fueled initial discontent. However, the regime's brutal response intensified sectarian identities, with religious minorities largely supporting the government and the Sunni majority forming the core of the opposition. This sectarian narrative became central to the conflict, complicating internal dynamics and external diplomatic efforts. International influence, within the context of the Arab Spring, further complicated the crisis. External actors, including Russia and Iran supporting the Assad regime, and the United States, Turkey, and Gulf States backing opposition groups, transformed Syria into a proxy battleground for broader geopolitical rivalries. This external involvement has prolonged the conflict and obstructed peaceful resolution attempts. The humanitarian crisis has reached catastrophic proportions, with over 90% of the Syrian population living below the poverty line, facing food insecurity and lack of basic services. Massive displacement has altered local demographics, creating tensions between host communities and newcomers. Efforts to achieve peace are hampered by a fractured opposition, deep-rooted mistrust, and the ongoing humanitarian crisis diverting resources from political negotiations. Addressing the crisis requires a comprehensive approach, including durable solutions for displaced populations, rebuilding trust among conflicting parties, sustained diplomatic initiatives, and tackling the root causes of the conflict through socio-economic reforms and institutional strengthening. Ensuring humanitarian access and support remains crucial, requiring

innovative aid delivery strategies and sustained international cooperation. The complex interplay of these factors necessitates comprehensive strategies addressing both immediate humanitarian needs and long-term political solutions for a stable and peaceful future for Syria.

Keywords: *Syrian Crisis, Civil War, Humanitarian Crisis, International Intervention, Sectarian Conflict, Displacement*

Introduction

The Syrian crisis, a devastating conflict that erupted in 2011, represents one of the most complex and protracted humanitarian and political catastrophes of the 21st century. What began as a series of popular protests against the authoritarian regime of President Bashar al-Assad quickly spiraled into a multifaceted civil war, drawing in a multitude of local factions, regional powers, and international actors with divergent interests (Heydemann & Leenders, 2018). This complex interplay of internal and external factors has created a deeply entrenched conflict characterized by widespread violence, immense human suffering, and the fragmentation of Syrian society along sectarian, ethnic, and political lines (Lund, 2012). The crisis has not only destabilized the region but has also had profound global implications, impacting international relations, fueling the rise of extremist groups, and generating one of the largest refugee flows in modern history (Phillips, 2022).

The roots of the Syrian uprising can be traced to a confluence of long-standing socio-economic grievances, political repression, and regional dynamics. Decades of authoritarian rule under the Assad family had stifled political participation, suppressed dissent, and fostered a climate of fear and mistrust (Perthes, 2004). Economic liberalization policies implemented in the years leading up to the uprising had exacerbated existing inequalities, creating a growing sense of frustration among marginalized communities, particularly in rural areas (Hinnebusch, 2003). These socio-economic pressures, coupled with widespread corruption and a lack of opportunities for upward mobility, created a fertile ground for popular discontent. The spark that ignited the Syrian uprising was inspired by the wave of popular revolts sweeping across the Arab world in 2011, known as the Arab Spring (Brownlee et al., 2015). The Tunisian revolution, followed by uprisings in Egypt, Libya, and Yemen, demonstrated the potential for popular mobilization to challenge entrenched authoritarian regimes. This regional context emboldened Syrian citizens to take to the streets, demanding political reforms, greater freedoms, and an end to

corruption (Lynch, 2012). Initially, the protests were largely peaceful and cross-sectarian, reflecting a broad-based desire for change. However, the regime's brutal response to these demonstrations, employing excessive force and arbitrary arrests, quickly escalated tensions and transformed the protests into an armed conflict (Zelin, 2016).

As the conflict intensified, sectarian identities became increasingly salient, shaping the dynamics of the war and complicating efforts to find a peaceful resolution (Van Dam, 2011). The Assad regime, dominated by members of the Alawite minority sect, sought to portray the opposition as a Sunni-led insurgency, thereby mobilizing support among other minority groups, including Christians and Druze, who feared marginalization in a post-Assad Syria (Gambill, 2013). This sectarian narrative, while not fully representative of the complex motivations of all actors involved, contributed to the deepening of divisions within Syrian society and fueled cycles of violence and revenge. The conflict also became a proxy war, with various regional and international powers intervening to support different sides (Landis, 2012). Iran and Russia emerged as key allies of the Assad regime, providing military, financial, and diplomatic support that proved crucial to its survival (Ahmadian, 2019). On the other side, the United States, Turkey, and several Gulf states provided varying levels of support to different opposition groups, although this support was often fragmented and inconsistent (Hokayem, 2014). This external involvement further complicated the conflict, prolonging the violence and hindering efforts to achieve a negotiated settlement. The proliferation of armed groups, ranging from secular rebel factions to Islamist extremist organizations such as Jabhat al-Nusra and the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), further fragmented the opposition and created a chaotic and unpredictable battlefield (Baczko, 2016). The rise of ISIS, in particular, added a new dimension to the conflict, introducing a brutal form of transnational terrorism and drawing in international military intervention in the form of a US-led coalition.

The humanitarian consequences of the Syrian crisis have been devastating. Millions of Syrians have been displaced from their homes, both internally and as refugees in neighboring countries and beyond (Sipahioğlu, 2023). The conflict has resulted in widespread destruction of infrastructure, including hospitals, schools, and homes, leaving much of the country in ruins. The humanitarian crisis has been compounded by economic collapse,

food insecurity, and the spread of disease. Addressing the complex challenges posed by the Syrian crisis requires a multifaceted approach that addresses both the immediate humanitarian needs of the Syrian people and the underlying political and socio-economic causes of the conflict. This includes providing humanitarian assistance to displaced populations, promoting a political transition that is inclusive and representative of all segments of Syrian society, and supporting long-term efforts to rebuild the country and promote reconciliation. The following sections will delve deeper into the various dimensions of the Syrian crisis, exploring its historical context, the key actors involved, the humanitarian consequences, and the challenges and opportunities for achieving a lasting peace.

Historical and Socio-Political Context of the Syrian Crisis

The Syrian crisis did not emerge in a vacuum. Its roots lie in a complex interplay of historical, political, social, and economic factors that have shaped the Syrian state and society over decades (Hinnebusch, 2003). Understanding this historical and socio-political context is crucial for comprehending the dynamics of the conflict and the challenges to finding a lasting solution. The modern Syrian state was established after the collapse of the Ottoman Empire following World War I. Placed under French mandate, Syria experienced a period of political instability and social fragmentation, with competing elites vying for power (Commins, 2012). This period laid the groundwork for future tensions, particularly along sectarian and ethnic lines. After gaining independence in 1946, Syria experienced a series of military coups and political upheavals, culminating in the rise of the Ba'ath Party in the 1960s (Seale, 1996). The Ba'ath Party, with its Arab nationalist and socialist ideology, established a centralized and authoritarian state, suppressing political opposition and consolidating power in the hands of a small elite. In 1970, Hafez al-Assad seized power in a bloodless coup, establishing a long-lasting authoritarian regime that would profoundly shape Syrian society.

Assad's regime relied on a complex system of patronage and co-optation, building a strong security apparatus and cultivating loyalty among key segments of the population, particularly members of the Alawite minority sect (Van Dam, 2011). This system of governance, often described as "neo-patrimonial," created deep-seated inequalities and grievances, particularly

among the Sunni majority, who felt marginalized and excluded from political and economic power. The regime's emphasis on security and stability came at the expense of political freedoms and human rights. Dissent was ruthlessly suppressed, and political participation was severely restricted. This repressive environment fostered a climate of fear and mistrust, preventing the development of a robust civil society and creating a deep divide between the state and its citizens (Heydemann, 2018). In addition to political repression, socio-economic factors played a significant role in creating the conditions for the uprising. While the Syrian economy experienced some periods of growth under Assad, this growth was unevenly distributed, benefiting primarily a small elite connected to the regime (Hinnebusch, 2003). Rural areas, in particular, suffered from neglect and underdevelopment, leading to widespread poverty and unemployment. This economic marginalization created a sense of frustration and resentment among large segments of the population, particularly young people who faced limited opportunities for upward mobility. The early 2000s witnessed a period of limited economic liberalization under Bashar al-Assad, who succeeded his father in 2000. These reforms, however, failed to address the underlying structural problems of the Syrian economy and, in some cases, exacerbated existing inequalities (Phillips, 2022). The benefits of economic growth accrued primarily to a small group of business elites connected to the regime, while the majority of the population continued to struggle with poverty and unemployment. This growing economic disparity further fueled discontent and contributed to the social unrest that would erupt in 2011. The regional context also played a crucial role in shaping the Syrian crisis. The Arab Spring uprisings, which began in Tunisia in late 2010 and quickly spread across the Middle East and North Africa, had a profound impact on Syria (Lynch, 2012). The success of popular movements in toppling long-standing authoritarian regimes in Tunisia and Egypt inspired similar protests in Syria, emboldening citizens to demand political change. The Syrian regime, however, responded to these protests with brutal force, escalating the situation and setting the stage for a protracted and devastating conflict. The interplay of these historical, political, social, and economic factors created a volatile environment in Syria, making it particularly vulnerable to the wave of popular uprisings that swept across the region in 2011. The regime's long history of authoritarian rule, coupled with socio-economic

grievances and regional dynamics, created the perfect storm for the outbreak of the Syrian crisis, a conflict whose consequences continue to reverberate across the region and the world.

The Escalation of Conflict and the Proliferation of Actors

Following the historical and socio-political context, a logical next step is to examine how the initial protests escalated into a full-scale civil war and the subsequent proliferation of actors involved in the conflict. This section will explore the key turning points in the conflict's trajectory, the emergence of various armed groups, and the increasing involvement of external powers.

The initial phase of the Syrian uprising, from March to mid-2011, was characterized by largely peaceful protests demanding political reforms and an end to corruption (Lynch, 2012). However, the Assad regime's violent response to these demonstrations, employing excessive force and arbitrary arrests, quickly radicalized the opposition and led to the formation of armed groups (Zelin, 2016). The emergence of the Free Syrian Army (FSA) in July 2011 marked a significant turning point, signaling the transition from a protest movement to an armed insurgency (O'Bagy, 2013). The FSA, composed primarily of defected Syrian Army officers and civilian volunteers, aimed to overthrow the Assad regime and establish a democratic state. However, the FSA remained a fragmented and loosely organized coalition, lacking a unified command structure and struggling to secure consistent external support.

As the conflict intensified, the sectarian dimension became increasingly pronounced. The regime's efforts to portray the opposition as a Sunni-led insurgency contributed to the mobilization of sectarian identities and the deepening of divisions within Syrian society (Van Dam, 2011). This sectarian narrative, while not fully accurate, resonated with some segments of the population and fueled cycles of violence and revenge. The year 2012 witnessed a significant escalation of the conflict, with widespread fighting erupting in major cities such as Homs, Aleppo, and Damascus (Lund, 2012). The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) declared the situation in Syria a civil war in July 2012, marking a formal recognition of the scale and intensity of the conflict. This escalation also coincided with an increase in external involvement, with regional and international powers providing varying levels of support to different sides.

Iran and Russia emerged as key backers of the Assad regime, providing military, financial, and diplomatic support that proved

crucial to its survival (Ahmadian, 2019). Iran's support included the deployment of military advisors and fighters from the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), while Russia provided weapons, air support, and diplomatic cover at the United Nations. On the other side, the United States, Turkey, and several Gulf states provided support to various opposition groups, although this support was often fragmented and inconsistent (Hokayem, 2014). The lack of a unified strategy among these external actors further complicated the conflict and hindered efforts to achieve a negotiated settlement.

The emergence and rise of extremist groups, particularly Jabhat al-Nusra and the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), added a new and dangerous dimension to the conflict (Baczko, 2016). Jabhat al-Nusra, an al-Qaeda affiliate, established a strong presence in Syria, attracting foreign fighters and exploiting the chaos of the war to expand its influence. ISIS, a more radical and brutal organization, emerged from the chaos of the Iraq War and quickly established a foothold in Syria, seizing large swathes of territory and declaring a self-proclaimed caliphate in 2014. The rise of ISIS not only intensified the conflict but also transformed it into a major international security threat, prompting a US-led military intervention in the form of an international coalition to combat the group. The complex interplay of these various actors—the Assad regime, the FSA, various Islamist factions, regional powers, and international actors created a highly fragmented and dynamic battlefield, making the Syrian conflict one of the most complex and intractable conflicts of the 21st century.

The Humanitarian Crisis and its Multifaceted Impacts

Following the examination of the conflict's escalation and the actors involved, it is crucial to address the devastating humanitarian consequences of the Syrian crisis. This section will delve into the multifaceted impacts of the war on the Syrian population, including displacement, economic devastation, the collapse of essential services, and the long-term social and psychological consequences. The Syrian conflict has triggered one of the largest displacement crises in modern history. Millions of Syrians have been forced to flee their homes, seeking refuge within Syria as internally displaced persons (IDPs) or crossing borders to neighboring countries and beyond (Sipahioğlu, 2023). The scale of displacement has placed immense strain on host communities and has created significant humanitarian challenges. Within Syria, IDPs face precarious living conditions, often lacking access to

basic necessities such as shelter, food, water, and healthcare. The destruction of infrastructure, including hospitals and schools, has further exacerbated the humanitarian situation, making it difficult to provide essential services to those in need.

The economic consequences of the conflict have been equally devastating. The war has led to the destruction of key industries, the disruption of trade, and the collapse of the Syrian currency (Heydemann & Leenders, 2018). This economic devastation has resulted in widespread poverty, unemployment, and food insecurity. The majority of the Syrian population now lives below the poverty line, struggling to meet their basic needs. The lack of access to food, clean water, and healthcare has led to a deterioration of health conditions, with outbreaks of preventable diseases becoming increasingly common. The conflict has also had a profound impact on the social fabric of Syrian society. The violence and displacement have shattered families and communities, creating deep social divisions and eroding trust among different groups. The psychological trauma experienced by many Syrians, particularly children who have witnessed horrific acts of violence, will have long-term consequences for their well-being and development.

The collapse of essential services, such as healthcare, education, and sanitation, has further compounded the humanitarian crisis. Hospitals and clinics have been damaged or destroyed in the fighting, leaving many people without access to medical care. Schools have been closed or used as shelters for displaced persons, disrupting the education of millions of children. The lack of clean water and sanitation has increased the risk of waterborne diseases. The humanitarian response to the Syrian crisis has been immense, with international organizations, NGOs, and host governments providing assistance to displaced populations and those affected by the conflict within Syria (Baroud, 2022). However, the scale of the crisis and the ongoing security challenges have made it difficult to reach all those in need. Humanitarian access has been a major obstacle, with restrictions imposed by various parties to the conflict hindering the delivery of aid to many areas.

The long-term consequences of the Syrian crisis are likely to be profound and far-reaching. The destruction of infrastructure, the loss of human capital, and the deep social divisions will make the process of recovery and reconstruction extremely challenging. The psychological trauma experienced by many Syrians will require long-term mental health support. The large number of refugees and

IDPs will need durable solutions, including voluntary repatriation, local integration, or resettlement to third countries. Addressing the humanitarian crisis in Syria requires a sustained and coordinated effort from the international community. This includes providing humanitarian assistance, ensuring humanitarian access, supporting the rebuilding of essential services, and addressing the long-term needs of displaced populations. It also requires addressing the root causes of the conflict through political dialogue and a commitment to a peaceful resolution.

International Responses and Diplomatic Efforts

Having analyzed the humanitarian crisis, it's essential to examine the various international responses and diplomatic efforts aimed at addressing the Syrian conflict. This section will explore the roles of key international actors, the various diplomatic initiatives undertaken, the challenges faced in achieving a political solution, and the evolving nature of international involvement. The Syrian crisis has elicited a complex and often fragmented international response. From the outset, the international community has struggled to forge a unified approach to the conflict, with differing interests and priorities among key actors hindering effective action (Lund, 2012). The United Nations (UN) has played a central role in coordinating international efforts to address the crisis. The UN Security Council has passed numerous resolutions on Syria, calling for a ceasefire, humanitarian access, and a political transition. However, these resolutions have often been hampered by disagreements among permanent members, particularly Russia and China, who have repeatedly vetoed resolutions that would have imposed stronger sanctions or authorized military intervention (Phillips, 2022).

The UN has also appointed several special envoys to Syria, tasked with mediating between the conflicting parties and facilitating a political solution. These diplomatic efforts have resulted in several rounds of peace talks, held in various locations such as Geneva and Astana. However, these talks have achieved limited progress, due to deep mistrust between the parties and disagreements over the terms of a political transition. Regional actors have also played a significant role in the Syrian conflict. Iran and Russia have been staunch supporters of the Assad regime, providing military, financial, and diplomatic backing (Ahmadian, 2019). Turkey, on the other hand, has supported various opposition groups and has intervened militarily in northern Syria to counter the influence of Kurdish forces (Hokayem, 2014). Other regional powers, such as

Saudi Arabia and Qatar, have also provided support to different factions, further complicating the regional dynamics of the conflict.

The United States has adopted a more ambivalent approach to the Syrian crisis. Initially, the US called for Assad to step down and provided limited support to some opposition groups. However, the rise of ISIS and the focus on counterterrorism became the primary US objective in Syria, leading to a military intervention in the form of a US-led coalition to combat the group (Baczko, 2016). The international response to the humanitarian crisis has been substantial, with billions of dollars in aid pledged by donor countries and international organizations. However, the scale of the crisis and the ongoing security challenges have made it difficult to deliver aid effectively to all those in need. Humanitarian access has been a major obstacle, with restrictions imposed by various parties to the conflict hindering the delivery of aid to many areas.

The challenges to achieving a political solution in Syria are immense. Deep mistrust between the conflicting parties, the fragmentation of the opposition, the involvement of numerous external actors with conflicting agendas, and the ongoing humanitarian crisis have all contributed to the intractability of the conflict. The focus on counterterrorism, particularly the fight against ISIS, has also overshadowed efforts to address the underlying political causes of the conflict. Despite these challenges, there have been some limited successes in international efforts to address specific aspects of the crisis. The international community has played a crucial role in providing humanitarian assistance to displaced populations and in supporting efforts to address the threat posed by ISIS. However, a comprehensive and lasting solution to the Syrian crisis will require a renewed commitment to political dialogue and a more unified approach from the international community. This includes addressing the root causes of the conflict, promoting a political transition that is inclusive and representative of all segments of Syrian society, and supporting long-term efforts to rebuild the country and promote reconciliation.

Pathways to the Future: Challenges and Prospects for Syria

This concluding section will synthesize the key themes discussed throughout the research article and explore the potential pathways forward for Syria. It will examine the major challenges that remain in achieving a lasting peace, the prospects for reconstruction and reconciliation, and the evolving role of the international

community in supporting Syria's recovery. The Syrian crisis has left a devastating legacy. The country has been ravaged by years of war, resulting in widespread destruction, massive displacement, and deep social divisions. The humanitarian crisis continues to be a major concern, with millions of Syrians still in need of assistance. The political landscape remains fragmented, with deep mistrust between the conflicting parties and numerous obstacles to a genuine political transition. Achieving a lasting peace in Syria will require addressing a complex set of interconnected challenges.

One of the most pressing challenges is the need to address the root causes of the conflict. This includes tackling the underlying political and socio-economic grievances that fueled the uprising in the first place. Promoting political reforms, ensuring accountability for human rights abuses, and addressing economic inequalities are crucial steps towards creating a more just and stable society. Rebuilding trust among the conflicting parties is another major challenge. Years of violence and mistrust have created deep divisions within Syrian society. Fostering reconciliation and promoting dialogue between different groups will be essential for healing the wounds of the conflict and building a more inclusive future.

The process of reconstruction and recovery will be a long and arduous one. The destruction of infrastructure, the loss of human capital, and the economic devastation will require significant investment and sustained effort. Rebuilding essential services, such as healthcare, education, and sanitation, will be a priority. Creating economic opportunities and providing support for livelihoods will be crucial for the long-term recovery of the Syrian economy. The issue of displaced persons, both IDPs and refugees, will also need to be addressed. Finding durable solutions for these populations, whether through voluntary repatriation, local integration, or resettlement, will be a major challenge. Creating conditions conducive to the safe and voluntary return of refugees will be particularly important.

The role of the international community in supporting Syria's recovery will be crucial. This includes providing humanitarian assistance, supporting reconstruction efforts, and promoting a political transition. However, the international community must also learn from past mistakes and adopt a more coordinated and coherent approach. Addressing the complex challenges facing Syria will require a long-term commitment and a sustained effort

from all stakeholders. This includes the Syrian people themselves, the regional powers, and the international community.

Despite the immense challenges, there are also some prospects for a more positive future for Syria. The decline of ISIS and the relative stabilization of some areas of the country have created some opportunities for progress. The ongoing diplomatic efforts, although facing significant obstacles, offer a potential pathway towards a political solution. The resilience of the Syrian people, their determination to rebuild their lives and their country, is a source of hope for the future. Ultimately, the future of Syria will depend on the ability of the Syrian people to overcome their divisions, to build a more inclusive and just society, and to find a path towards lasting peace and reconciliation. The international community has a responsibility to support this process and to help create the conditions for a brighter future for Syria.

Conclusion

The Syrian crisis stands as a stark reminder of the devastating consequences of unresolved political grievances, socio-economic inequalities, and external interventions. What began as a series of peaceful protests in 2011 quickly spiraled into a complex and protracted conflict, engulfing the nation in violence, displacement, and humanitarian suffering. This research article has explored the multifaceted dimensions of the crisis, tracing its historical and socio-political roots, examining the escalation of violence and the proliferation of actors, analyzing the profound humanitarian impacts, and assessing the various international responses and diplomatic efforts.

The crisis is not simply a product of recent events but is deeply rooted in Syria's history of authoritarian rule, economic disparities, and social fragmentation. Decades of Ba'ath Party rule, coupled with regional dynamics and the impact of the Arab Spring, created a volatile environment ripe for unrest. The regime's brutal response to initial protests triggered a rapid escalation of violence, transforming a popular uprising into a full-scale civil war. The conflict was further complicated by the increasing involvement of regional and international powers, turning Syria into a proxy battleground for competing interests. The rise of extremist groups like ISIS added another layer of complexity, transforming the conflict into a global security threat.

The humanitarian consequences of the Syrian crisis have been catastrophic. Millions have been displaced, both internally and as refugees, facing precarious living conditions and lacking access to

basic necessities. The economic devastation, the collapse of essential services, and the deep social and psychological trauma inflicted by the war will have long-lasting effects on Syrian society. International responses to the crisis have been marked by both successes and failures. While significant humanitarian aid has been provided, and efforts to combat ISIS have achieved some success, the international community has struggled to forge a unified approach to achieving a political solution. Deep divisions among key actors and a lack of sustained commitment have hampered diplomatic efforts and prolonged the conflict.

Looking to the future, the path forward for Syria remains fraught with challenges. Rebuilding trust among deeply divided communities, addressing the root causes of the conflict, and facilitating a genuine political transition are essential for achieving lasting peace. The process of reconstruction and recovery will be a monumental task, requiring significant investment and sustained effort. The international community has a crucial role to play in supporting these efforts, but ultimately, the future of Syria rests with the Syrian people themselves. They must find a way to overcome their divisions, to heal the wounds of the past, and to build a more inclusive and just society. The Syrian crisis serves as a critical case study for understanding the complex interplay of internal and external factors that can lead to violent conflict. It underscores the importance of addressing underlying political and socio-economic grievances, promoting inclusive governance, and preventing external interventions that can exacerbate existing tensions. The lessons learned from the Syrian crisis must inform future efforts to prevent and resolve conflicts around the world.

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