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ANALYSIS OF THE SITUATION OF DISPLACED SYRIANS AND REFUGEES AS A CONSEQUENCE OF THE ARMED CONFLICT

Final Degree Investigation to Obtain the Degree of International Studies Bachelor and Foreign Trade Mention

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I

<<There is no greater sorrow in the world that the loss of their homeland. >>

Eurípides
Greek Philosopher

Acknowledgment

I would like to express my gratitude to my parents, siblings and friends who have been with me throughout the preparation of this work, especially to my mother who has always encouraged me to keep going and never give up. Also to Xavier, who gave me encouragement and unconditional support to carry out the development of each line of this analysis. At the University of Azuay for being my guide during my years of education and gave me the necessary guidelines to complete my studies. And, the Spanish professor Ignacio Alvarez-Ossorio, who selflessly gave me his help to complete this investigation.

INDEX

Illustration Index

Chart Index

Appendix Index

Abstract

In late 2011, Mohamed Bouazizi died of a self-immolation, expressing hopelessness and discontent against the government of Ben Ali. In Tunisia Bouazizi made people wake up and protest against the injustices of their government, causing a domino effect in other Arab countries and northern Africa. Syria is the most affected Arab country, not only the government of Al-Assad has indiscriminately violently attacked the population but also international forces had an important leading role in the conflict. That caused the displacement of thousands of people, as well as a large number of refugees in neighboring countries. With this background, this analysis describes and analyzes the situation of refugees and Syrians displaced by the conflict in Syria, as well as identifying the challenges and expectations for displaced Syrians and refugees.

Resumen

A finales de 2011 en Túnez, muere el joven Mohamed Bouazizi a causa de una autoinmolación, expresando su desesperación y descontento en contra del gobierno de Ben Alí. Lo que hizo que su pueblo se despertara y salga a protestar en contra de las injusticias de su gobierno, causando así un efecto domino en los demás países árabes y parte del norte de África. Siendo Siria uno de los países árabes más afectados, donde no solo su gobierno ha atacado de forma violenta e indiscriminada a su población, si no también la fuerza internacional ha tenido un importante protagonismo en Siria mediante su intervención, lo que ha causado el desplazamiento de miles de personas, así como también un gran cantidad de refugiados en los países vecinos. En torno a estos antecedentes, este análisis describe y analiza la situación de los refugiados y desplazados sirios como consecuencia del conflicto en Siria. Así como también determina los retos y expectativas para los refugiados y desplazados sirios.

INTRODUCTION

With the beginning of the Arab Spring in December 2010, characterized by massive protests in the Arab world, Tunisia was the first country demanding improvement and well-being of their lifestyle. Later, the protests extended to countries of North Africa and the Middle East such as Algeria, Morocco, Egypt, Yemen and Bahrain.

Those events were considered one of the greatest uprisings that ever happened in the Arab world, taking into account that the kind of regimes in the middle east are not democratic at all, and human rights are limited. Therefore, such actions have put an end to governments that never seemed to end such as Mubarak in Egypt, Ben Alí in Tunisia and Gaddafi in Libya.

Syria Arab is a country made up of a state with a wide political and family history, without a democratic system, economic inequality, as well as high rates of unemployment and underemployment. These factors drove the Syrian population to rise and protest, with the main purpose to demand their government change its governance policies and achieve a sustainable solution for the Syrian people. However, these protests became a problem for the Syrian government and soon became a worldwide protagonist, using the Internet as a valuable tool linking with the rest of the world

In Syria, the civil war had already lasted four years, leaving serious consequences for civilians, infrastructure, and its economy. One of the greatest effects of the seemingly endless war is the massive flow of refugees fleeing from the region, thereby becoming displaced within Syria as well as in the neighboring countries of Turkey, Iraq, Lebanon, Jordan and Egypt.

Therefore, this study describes and analyzes the situation of displaced Syrians and refugees. Also, it describes the principal cities and routes where Syrian refugees go and the camps located in the neighboring countries. Also, it highlights the work of The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the primary organization in charge of refugees and other humanitarian organizations. Moreover, it includes a description of the

situation of the Kurdish minority spread across Syria, Iraq, Turkey and Iran. They are known to be the largest ethnic minority from the Middle East, which are not considered as a nation-state, who where also affected by the Syrian conflict.

Later, an analysis is presented of the challenges that the Syrian society is facing due to the humanitarian crisis and especially children, who in many cases arrived in refugee camps by themselves. Finally, a comparison of the situation of the refugees from other countries of the Arab Spring is made to establish a difference about how the problems were managed.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION TO THE SYRIAN ARMED CONFLICT

For a better understanding of what is happening in Syria and what caused the displacement of thousands of people in the country, it is necessary to make a brief political history of Syria from 1963. In this chapter, the al-Assad family will be analyzed and its 45 year empowerment within the Syrian society. Moreover, a brief study of religious sects and ethnic groups distributed in the country is made.

Additionally, a study of the Arab Spring released in 2011 will be reviewed, as well as the Syrian role and beginnings of this conflict. Also, the main groups related to this war, the Syrian government, the Syrian armed opposition and the international forces involved in the armed conflict are presented. Lastly, a summary of the main events that have beaten the Syrian population within the last four years of conflict.

1.1 Description of the conflict as a result of the Arab Spring

1.1.1 The al-Assad dynasty

Illustration 1 The Assad. Sitting and second from the left, Bashar.

Source: Diario ABC. Retrieved January 23 2014 from http://www.abc.es/20120624/internacional/abci-alauitas-siria-assad-201206221553.html

Since the coup in Syria in 1963, when the socialist Baath Party came to power, a new Syria began a dramatic approach to economic and social policies. Seven years later, through a coup in 1970, General Hafez al-Assad and his family took power in Syria, Assad means lion in Arabic. Thus, Hafez al-Assad father of the current president of Syria ruled the state and adopted a new constitution in 1973, besides being involved in the Arab-Israeli wars of that time. In 1985, al-Assad returned to be proclaimed president for seven more years, having a significant acceptance of 99.8% of the vote (World Guide, 2014).

In 1991, al-Assad was again re-elected for the fourth time, occupying 99.98% of the votes (ibid.), however, this time his candidacy was the only one submitted. Following this broadly mandate term, in 1999 he was elected one more time, occupying the longest Syrian term in history. In June 2000, General Hafez al-Assad died suddenly, plunging the entire country into mourning after three decades of rule. As a consequence, Hafez al-Assad was succeeded by his son Bashar al-Assad, who lived in London and practiced his profession as an ophthalmologist in a nearby hospital.

It is important to highlight religion in Syria, where most of the Syrian population practices the Sunni[1] branch of Islam; other groups are Alawites[2], Ismailis[3], and the Shiites[4]. As for non-Muslims, most are Christians mainly Greek and Armenian Orthodox. Bashar al-Assad and his family belong to the Alawite minority that are distributed in Lebanon, Turkey and Syria, which were present from the beginnings of the mandate of his father of Bashar al-Assad up to this day. Despite being a religious minority in Syria, they have occupied most senior positions in the army and also the national security services control (Russian Today, 2012). Wealthy Sunni merchants and the Christian minority collaborate and support the regime. That is why the government feels supported confronting rebels who are against his regime.

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[1] The Word *sunni* in Arabic comes from the term *ahl al-sun-nah wa'l-jamā'ah,* that is, the people who followed the *Sunnah* of the Prophet. For Sunnism, the function of the caliph was to protect the borders of Islam, maintaining security and peace, name judges, etc.… Currently, 87% of Muslims are Sunni (Hossein 2006, 81).

[2] Alawites are an offshoot of Shiite Islam. Alawites of Syria should not be confused with the Alawites in Turkey. Syrian Alawites in power the country have survived defining themselves as a school of Shiism and, in recent decades, they have tried to achieve a greater Shiite legitimacy (Hossein 2006, 94)

[3] The Ismaili is the second most important branch of Shiism. Separated from the main body of Shiism (Hossein 2006, 89).

[4] Shiism comes from the Arabic term *shi`at Ali* that means supporters of *Ali inb Abi Talib*. For Shiites, the successor to the Prophet must have a thorough knowledge of Islamic Law and esoteric knowledge of the Koran and the prophetic teachings. Therefore, it could not be elected, but had to be chosen by the Prophet through the divine mandate. Currently, 13% of Muslims are Shiites. (Hossein 2006, 82).

Illustration 2 Representative map of the different sects and ethnic groups located in different areas of the country.

This map represents areas where a different sect and ethnicity is either the majority group or the group with the highest proportion of inhabitants.

TURKEY

Aleppo

Latakia

Hama

Homs

SYRIA

LEBANON

Damascus

IRAQ

High proportion or majority of groups
- = Main city
- = Sunni Arabs
- = Christian
- = Alawite
- = Kurdish
- = Druze
- = Shia
- = Ismaili

ISRAELI-OCCUPIED GOLAN HEIGHTS

JORDAN

© IISS
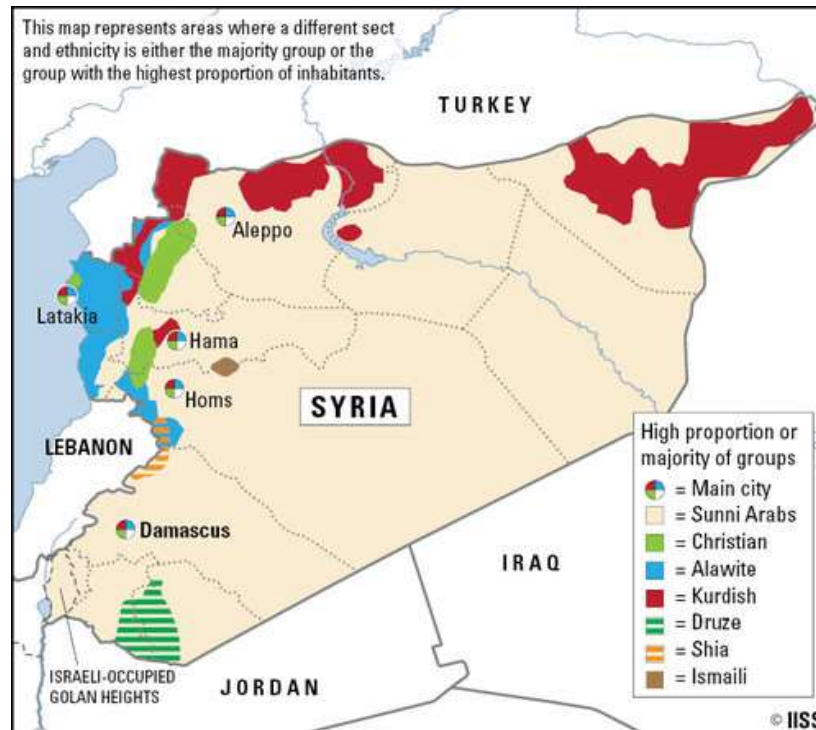
Source: Hokayem, Emile, 2013 Syria´s Uprising and the Fracturing of the Levant (Pg.8) [Acceded on February 20, 2014].

1.1.2. The Arab Spring

The Arab Spring was composed of a series of anti-government protests staged in late 2010, initiated by the Tunisian revolution when Mohamed Bouazizi a young Tunisian who burned himself alive because the police arrested him for selling fruit since he did not have permits. He wanted to make a complaint about the events, but the request was denied and in response to the negativity of the authorities, Mohamed committed suicide, having no doubt that this would mark the beginning of the Arab revolts.

From this event, protests and riots spread to other Middle Eastern countries such as Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Yemen, Bahrain, Syria, Morocco, Jordan; characterized by massive violence,

5

while the government of each country responded with repression and severe attacks, promising reforms and changes in the government system.

The main factors that caused the Arab Spring revolt were the following:

- Unemployment
- Dictatorship
- Corruption
- Violation of human rights
- Social inequality
- Injustice
- Abuse of power

The Arab Spring term was named by the Western press in early 2011 when the Tunisian revolution resulted in the overthrow of Ben Ali and spread to other Arab countries. Likewise, the term used is similar to what happened in Eastern Europe in 1989, when the communist regimes including Poland, Hungary and the seemingly impenetrable the German Democratic Republic fell through popular protests known as the domino effect (Manfreda, 2013). Soon, such countries that made up the communist block were adopting democratic systems and were officially recognized by the fall of the Berlin Wall.

However, since the start of the Arab Spring, unlike what happened in Europe in 1989 and the reaction of their governments and people as such, the protests were and continued to be even violent as well as the governmental responses, resulting in non-stopping repression and death. Egypt, Tunisia, and Yemen entered a period of uncertain transition, while, in Syria and Libya, the protests turned into bloody civil wars triggered by the death of its leader. Meanwhile in Syria, intense civil war has lasted until now with no hope of ending this conflict, this, added to the millions of people who have fled the country.

1.2 Principal actors in the Syrian conflict

Syria was the sixth country in conflict after the Arab Spring started, where the protests began in March 2011. The conflict began as it did for the rest of the Arab world like a contagious disease that began harmlessly whit a group of youths in the southern city Daraa, imitating what they saw in Tunisia and Egypt. They wrote antigovernment graffiti in a

school, later captured and brought to the authorities, where their nails were removed their and they were beaten (Starr, 2012).

As a consequence, the mothers came to complain to the authorities about their children, but their request was denied in a hostile manner. After, protests against authoritarianism and abuse of power by the government began, especially young people joined the boycott not only against the abusive governmental system but to fight corruption, social inequality, injustice, unemployment, disrespect for human rights, among others. Thus, that is how the most violent and protracted civil war ever in the region divided the country in two; the Syrian armed forces supported by the government and opposition rebel groups, which will be discussed below.

1.2.1 The Syrian government

First, we have the Syrian government as the primary protagonist of the conflict in Syria. The al-Assad family belonging to minority Alawite, who had formed the largest political force represented by the Baath party, runs Syria. Likewise, the total power of the al-Assad family has been due to the great political career that has been forged from the first term of his father of Bashar al-Assad: Hafez.

Having the Arab Spring on the rise, the economic, political and social aspects of Syria were weakened by the numerous protests and demands for improvements in the political system. Thus, the country was fragmented by groups supporting and against the regime. Many authorities from the President's Office resigned, and one of the most significant was the prime minister who joined the opposition group, initiating the weakening of the regime.

On the other hand, the Syrian government has international allies such as Russia, China, and Iran that have supported the government with military and economic resources, which have provided support for the Syrian government to remain in power. Additionally, the government has the support of the Christian minority, who represent 10% of the Syrian population and have supported the government because they fear that opposition groups once in power would discriminate them (Manfreda, 2014).

Last, but no less important, are the Sunni soldiers who quit the opposition to support the government. Some of them are in governmental positions, and other middle-class Sunnis have joined to support al-Assad to defend their material interests (ibid.). Others, however, do not trust the opposition and instead have become key allies of the al-Assad. Also, according to Western intelligence there are about 60,000 foreign fighters in Syria fighting alongside al-Assad (El País, 2013).

1.2.2 The Syrian armed opposition

The Syrian opposition is formed mainly by those who quit from the government of al-Assad, and by foreign-armed groups seeking to overthrow the regime and take over the major Syrian cities. The first opposition group of the scheme, the so-called Syrian National Council, was formed when the conflict began in 2011, which sought to gather as many opponents and take control of the government, thereby supported by Turkey, Qatar, and Egypt. Also, this organization was under the Muslim Brotherhood´s control, established in Egypt, which in the beginning had broad power and then lost track with the weakening of the government of Mohamed Mursi in Egypt. Later it was overthrown from power that affected the Syrian National Council that was replaced by the National Coalition of Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces.

NATIONAL COALITION OF SYRIAN REVOLUTIONARY AND OPPOSITION FORCES

Illustration 3 N.C.S.R.O.F.

الائتلاف الوطني لقوى
الثورة والمعارضة السورية

Source: National Coalition of Syrian Revolution. [Acceded on March 17, 2014] Retrieved from: http://en.etilaf.org]

The National Coalition of Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces (N.C.S.R.O.F.) was created after the S.N.C. decayed and lost control of its troops on Syrian soil. This squad was formed by a group of opponents of the regime, as well as military forces. This organization was officially created on November 11th, 2012 in Doha, Qatar[5]. This group was officially recognized to be the legitimate representative by the Gulf Cooperation Council consisting of: Saudi Arabia States, Qatar, United Arab Emirates, Kuwait and Oman. Later, France, Turkey, Great Britain and the United States recognized this group. The primary objective of these countries that know this organization is to form a national group that will help overthrow the al-Assad, as well as to supply them with weapons and other resources to achieve this objective (Larouche, 2012). This organization is considered by most of the international community as the principal representative actor of the Syrian opposition, although not all opposition groups are part of this group.

FREE SYRIAN ARMY

As the first two groups of regime opponents were reviewed, it is important to analyze the Free Syrian Army (F.S.A.), which is another major opposition group formed by defectors from the Syrian military. On April 2011, the first defections from the Syrian army were notorious. A group of several soldiers in the city of Daraa decided to flee when they received orders to fire at civilians (Rodriguez, 2012). Also, Rodriguez reported that some soldiers, who refused to shoot, were killed by their superiors accusing them of being traitors.

Later, a meeting of the deserter group on July 29, 2011, through a video posted on the Internet, made a call to join them and fight the regime. The leader of this group was led by Riyad al-Asaad, a former colonel in the Syrian Arab Air Force before quitting in July 2011, which formed one of the most representative Syrian opposition groups. Since his leaving in 2011, and after several assassination attempts, he decided to move to Turkey and lead the organization. The F.S.A. is considered by the West as a moderate and stable organization to seek a democratic Syria (Alandete, 2014) rebel group.

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[5] With the official recognition of this coalition of both the Middle East and West, we can evidence the international involvement in the Syrian conflict since its beginning.

Since the conflict started, Saudi Arabia, the United States, and the United Kingdom, managed to supply military aid to the opposition groups to achieve its group in northern Syria. However, in late 2013 the United States and the United Kingdom decided to suspend military aid to the group after an Islamist militia attacked the northern border in Turkey to get antiaircraft and antitank weapons. Also, since 2012, Salim Idris, a commandant leader for the Free Syrian Army Division, has been leading this group due to the fact that Colonel Riyad al-Asaad had an accident in which he lost part of his right leg and could not longer lead.

However, Idris has been criticized for its development in the field, including errors and oversights in combat besides a poor distribution of weapons among the rebels and inadequate training needed to fight (BBC News, 2014). Which means that this opposition group is starting to weaken and giving enough strength to the government allies and military groups. Later, he was replaced by Colonel Abd al-llah al-Bashir as the new head of the Free Syrian Army, which strengthened the role of this opposition group.

Next, three most powerful Islamist forces will be analyzed that apparently are even more powerful than the above mentioned, in which two of them have close ties to Al Qaeda, which is a paramilitary organization, jihadist and designated as an international terrorist network.

ISLAMIC FRONT

Illustration 4 Islamic Front

Source: Wikipedia [Acceded on March 28, 2014. Retrieved from:
http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Flag_of_Islamic_State_of_Iraq.svg

10

The Islamic Front is an organization that was formed by the union of 7 powerful rebel groups. Liwa al-Tawhid, the largest rebel group in Aleppo, the Salafists of Ahrar al-Sham, The Army of Islam, which is concentrated around Damascus Suqour al-Sham, Liwa al-Haq, the Ansar al-Sham battalions and the Kurdish Front (EFE, 2013), which announced its formation on November 22, 2013 to fight not only the Syrian Armed Forces but also against other Syrian opposition groups.

It is estimated that there are around 45,000 fighters under their control (The Independent, 2013), and its primary objective is to overthrow the regime of Bashar al-Assad and to establish an Islamic state that is based on the *Sharia*[6] law. Also, trough this coalition of forces, it will weaken other opposition groups, where some are already debilitated, as the Free Syrian Army, which experts say, will reduce their secular leadership in some Syrian territories.

Furthermore, this new grouping seeks to counter the extremist Al-Qaeda force that is linked to another rebel group, the Al-Nusra Front, which has strengthened its dominance in the North of Syria in recent months. Finally, the Islamic Front calls for groups or anyone who wants to join, pointing out that "The doors are open to all military factions" [...] who want to join this front to strengthen its dominance in the main areas of the country (Manfreda, 2014).

AL-NUSRA FRONT

Illustration 5 Al-Nusra Front

Source: Wikipedia. [Acceded on: March 29, 2014] Retrieved from:

http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Flag_of_the_Al-Nusra_Front.svg

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[6] Sharia is the body of Islamic religious law, based on obedience and unconditional submission to God's will. It constitutes a legal framework in the public and some private aspects of life are regulated by several hundred million people living in a legal system based on the principles of jurisprudence (Standke, 2008).

The Al-Nusra Front or Jabhat al Nusra meaning the Front of Victory is an opposition group established in January 2012, which is also considered powerful along with other opposition groups that were analyzed above. Additionally, it is a US-designated terrorist organization that is associated with al Qaeda´s operations in Syria and Lebanon.

This opposition group consists mainly of Sunni Mujahideen (permanent fighters of Islamic faith), in which the primary objective is to overthrow the government of al-Assad to create an Islamic state under the Sharia law, besides encouraging civilians to be part of the group

This group is formed by Islamist militia fighters deserters from the Free Syrian Army (F.S.A.), as well as mercenaries from other countries. In addition to Al-Nursa Front, they have been linked to some of the bloodiest attacks in 2012 against government buildings in the northeast city of Aleppo and Damascus (Europapress, 2014). According to analysts of HDI Jane's Terrorism & Insurgency Centre, there are about 5,000 to 7,000 active fighters in 11 out of 13 Syrian provinces (IHS Jane's Terrorism & Insurgency Centre, 2013).

However, the Syrian government is not the only enemy of this group since over the last year different other groups have emerged and have occurred clashes among them to control key points of cities and territories. The main enemy of the Al-Nusra Front is the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (I.S.I.L.), which is an active insurgent group in Iraq and Syria, which will be discussed in the next section.

ISLAMIC STATE OF IRAQ AND THE LEVANT

Illustration 6 Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant

Source: El Medio. [Acceded on: April 30, 2014] Retrieved from: http://elmed.io/al-qaeda-repudia-al-estado-islamico-de-irak-y-el-levante/

12

The Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (I.S.I.L.) is the last opposition group analyzed, which has played a significant role in the Syrian conflict. This group was formerly known as the Organization for monotheism[7] and jihad[8], next to the terrorist group Al Qaeda, to fight against the Iraq invasion back in 2003, where it was officially reestablished on April 9, 2013, with about 5,000 fighters. It is a jihadist[9] group that is active in Iraq and Syria, belonging to the Sunni branch and has had a significant strategic impact in the North of Syria, taking total control of the cities of Aleppo, Idlib, and Al Raqqa. Likewise, this group is present in the provinces of Anbar and Ninawa that are located in the eastern region of Syria near the Iraqi border.

On the other hand, the same day the I.S.I.L. was founded, its leader, Isi Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi announced the joining of Al-Nusra Front, to work along with the support of al Qaeda. However, the successor leader of Osama bin Laden, Ayman al-Zawahiri and the Al-Nusra Front leader, Abu Mohammed al-Golani, rejected the announcement stating that "The I.S.I.L. has no link with us, we have not been informed of its creation, we do not give orders, or advise them (Euronews, 2014). This declaration was made a year ago since Zawahiri had tried to deter the ISIL; therefore in May 2013, he sent a statement saying that this group should return to Iraq and six months after he stated that the I.S.I.L. must dissolve.

Nevertheless, this group chose to ignore these wars and continue to operate in Syria. Similarly, the rejection and indifference correspond to years ago when the ISIL was born from the Islamic State of Iraq, which was rooted to al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI), where the head of this group was often rebuked by Osama bin Laden for not conforming to al-Qaeda strategies. Moreover, the I.S.I.L. leader mentioned ignoring the demands of Ayman al-Zawahiri since he accused the ISIL of promoting *Fitna[10]* in Syria (Gebeily, 2014), prompting al-Qaeda to reject entirely this group and to recognize and support the Al-Nusra Front group only.

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[7] The doctrine of recognizing one God; It is typical of Judaism, Christianity and Islam (Vox Encyclopedic Dictionary. January, 2009).

[8] For traditional jurisprudence, has always associated with the term >> jihad<< just war, which, in his view of things, is running against unbelievers, apostates, rebels, thieves and road the rebellious to the authority of Islam (Esparza, 2015).

[9] The word jihad refers to those promoting << holy war >> against those who are considered << infidels >> (Esparza, 2015).

[10] Fitna means <<division>> or <<civil war>>, but is a term laden with religious meaning in the Islamic world. The word comes from metallurgy: Fitna was originally the metal refining process to remove slag (Esparza, 2015).

Thus, these two strong opposition groups operate separately even if the rivalry between these two is about taking over the region. However, they share the same goal as any other opposition group that is to overthrow the Syrian government and establish the Sharia as their law.

1.3 International forces involved in the armed conflict

Finally, we will discuss another important actor in this armed conflict, which is the international force. It is represented by different countries that are in favor and against the regime that have focused on supporting the Syrian opposition to overthrow the government. On one hand, as mentioned earlier, Russia, China, and Iran are supporting the Syrian government through military and economic resources that have reinforced the regime to stay in power. On the other hand, we have countries that are against the government willing to help opposition groups with different resources whether military or economic. Next, a review of both sides involved in the armed conflict will be analyzed.

One of the main allies of the Syrian regime is Russia, dating back since the Syrian independence in 1946. Syria had always been indifferent to the Western world and even more when the United States decided to support Israel, one of the principal rivals of Syria, making Syrian leaders choose to ally with the most dominant force in the East: Russia. This partnership has been consolidated through the exchange of commercial and military resources, and Russia has benefited from the strategic position that Syria has: the Tartus port, which is an important trade center in Syria, and where the Russian naval base works in the Mediterranean. So, this shows that both countries depend on each other and also have kept good bilateral relations, which have served as a strategy for this conflict that is currently happening in Syria; thus its government feels backed with a powerful international partner as Russia.

On the other hand, Syria has another ally that is Iran, which supports the Syrian government to stay in power. Relations between Iran and Syria have always been based on mutual interests; both countries reject US intervention in the Middle East, as well as Israel. Both defend the Palestinian resistance, and they maintain trade preferences among themselves. Now that the current armed conflict in Syria has become relevant, since, in

1998, the two countries signed a military cooperation agreement, the same that was extended towards their mutual defense if either of the two nations was attacked by foreign forces (Tajeldine, 2011). Lastly, Iran provides weapons and military support to the regime.

Additionally, China has also been supporting the government but not as intensively as Russia and Iran. China depends on Syria´s oil; also it has developed strong ties with the economic, military and energy sectors in the region. However, this country has no data on sending military aid to Syria; therefore China has a low profile in this conflict.

Furthermore, we have two groups listed as terrorists by Europe and the US that are the Hezbollah and Hamas groups. The first one is a Lebanese organization that was founded in response to the Israeli intervention in 1982; its goal is to establish an Islamic state in Lebanon. Also it receives financial support, weapons and training from Iran and Syria, so this is why they support the Syrian government to remain in power since it is considered as an important ally. Both defend the Palestinian resistance and share the same opponent that is Israel.

As for Hamas, it is an Islamic resistance movement that shares similarity with Hezbollah; seeking to establish an Islamic state, but in Palestine. Similarly, this group has the approval of Syria, which makes this group part of the Syrian government. However, there are no records reflecting any exchange of weaponry to the regime; instead these groups support the government with armed services.

Finally, we have numerous countries that are against the Syrian regime. Since the conflict began, they have supplied armaments, training, and support to the Syrian rebels to overthrow the government. An obvious example is the National Coalition of Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces supported and funded by France, Turkey, Britain, and the United States with arsenal and military aid. In this context, we also encounter the Free Syrian Army, similarly supported by foreign forces such as Saudi Arabia, USA, and the UK.

To conclude, we have one of Syria´s oldest enemies that is Israel, which is also against the regime. Both countries have had a territorial conflict since 1967, during the Six-Day War where the Arab-Israeli conflict began, and Israeli forces attacked Arab territories, including

Syria. Israel emerged victoriously and conquered the majority of Arab territories being the Golan Heights one of them, which at the time belonged to Syria. But through the UN Security Council, this plateau was considered as occupied territory.

On the other hand, Israel considers it as a disputed territory, stating their retreat under a peace treaty. But the agreement has not happened yet; instead, it has remained as a conflict between these two countries, aggravating the situation for the Syrian government.

1.4 What has happened during these four years of conflict?

Syria has entered its fourth year of conflict, which has caused great damage to the civilian population suffering severe consequences, such as thousands of deaths, as well as an enormous number of displaced civilians that have fled from Syria to neighboring countries. Currently, there are around 3,979,125 (UNHCR, 2015) registered refugees in UNHCR camps and numbers continue to increase. According to a study by The Journal of International Women's Studies, the high influx of refugees has reached a total of a quarter of the population in Lebanon.

One of the most important events during these four years of conflict occurred on August 21, 2013, where the use of chemical weapons in Damascus affected civilians killing about 1,500 people. Later, studies carried out by United Nations determined that sarin gas was used; a pesticide that attacks the nervous system causing immediate death. The General Secretary of the United Nations Ban Ki-moon condemned the incident and said that the use of chemical weapons is a war crime; adding an immediate destruction of them. Likewise, the use of chemical weapons is a grave violation of the Protocol of the prohibition of the usage of asphyxiating, poisonous or other gasses and bacteriological methods of war signed in 1925, which Syria signed on December 17th of 1968 (United Nations Treaty Collection, 2015).

The international community had a responsibility for disarming any chemical weapons in Syria, in addition to a rapid intervention of international organizations in order to safeguard the lives of civilians who have been affected. However, no one was found guilty of the sarin attack, since the government of Bashar al-Assad has denied any responsibility, and so the rebel groups.

16

Illustration 7 Militants of the Islamic State

Furthermore, the presence of the self-proclaimed Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (Daesh in Arabic, ISIS in English) has become an incredibly dangerous force that has already been considered a global threat. The Islamic State has been occupying several areas between Syria and Iraq, leading to the control of at least 40,000 square kilometers, space that could be compared to the size of Belgium. The territories include the cities of Mosul, Tikrit, Fallujah and Tal Afar in Iraq and Raqqa in Syria (BBC, 2014).

Also, this group has a high economic stability through the sale of oil and gas by the control of territories that are oil producers (El País, 2015). Due to the extreme nature of Islamic State, those who do not follow Islamic or *sharia* law are tortured, crucified and finally killed for not following the rules. Throughout the four years of conflict, this group has increased their strength, worsening the situation of the conflict in Syria, making it harder to end. Unfortunately, civilians had to face all these events where this has become a grave humanitarian crisis, considered the worst of the century.

On the other hand, since the beginning of the conflict Syria has stopped exporting oil, which has caused significant economic losses. According to the United Nations

Development Program, Syria fell into financial losses accumulated at $ 203 billion by the end of 2014, representing four times the GDP at constant prices of 2010 (UNDP, 2015). Additionally, this conflict has affected the education of Syrian girls and boys significantly, as many of Syrian schools have been destroyed, and some of those have been used as shelters for the displaced, a topic to be discussed in more detail in the next chapter.

Parallel to this, it is important to mention the structural and heritage damage caused in the cities where rebel groups opposed to the regime and military forces have settled for battle. This situation has produced the increasing flow of displaced people as rebel groups take territorial control, forcing Syrians to flee. According to a report by the Minister of Local Government in Syria, Omar Ghalawanii, notes that the damage caused by the civil war within the last four years has been US $ 21,600 million and at least US $ 333 billion will be needed to rebuild the country.

In summary, it is difficult to know how long the Syrian conflict will last as it depends on many factors such as non-foreign intervention, especially since the United States is a country that is against the Syrian government; the United States supports the Syrian opposition. Additionally, the United States has the support of France, Britain, Turkey and others. In my opinion, if the United States and other allied countries continue to provide strength to rebels in their fight against the Syrian government, the worse are the consequences for the conflict in Syria.

CHAPTER 2: REFUGEES AND DISPLACED SYRYANS DUE TO THE CONFLICT

This chapter analyzes the situation of refugees and displaced Syrians, especially the conditions of the Syrian children who represent the largest number of victims that the armed conflict has caused. Moreover, an analysis is offered of the five countries where displaced Syrians are hosted and their situation regarding protection, food security, education, health, shelter, basic needs, social cohesion and livelihoods. Also, the role of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), along with other NGOs, which have represented an important part of humanitarian aid for Syrian refugees are included. Finally, a brief analysis of the Kurdish situation in Syria is presented.

To have a better understanding in what the refugee term stands for, the Convention relating to the Status of Refugees adopted in 1951, states that:

> A refugee is a person persecuted due to race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group or political opinion, lives outside their homeland and is unable, to such fear, is unwilling to adopt the protection of that country (Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, 1951).

On the other hand, we have the definition of Internally Displaced People, established by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees:

> They are individuals or groups of persons who have been forced to flee their homes to escape armed conflict, generalized violence, abuse of human rights and man-made or natural disasters (UNHCR, 2015).

As we see, a refugee and a displaced person have similar features but are not the same. Both flee their homes for some reason that violates their human rights, welfare and protection, with the difference that refugees cross an international border while the displaced do not and have remained within their country.

According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees UNHCR, every 15 seconds a Syrian citizen becomes a refugee, which means that there is a massive flow of people leaving the country daily to neighboring countries, resulting in a total of 3,977,211 refugees (to May 2015) (UNHCR, 2015). It also happens with displaced people where the number fleeing from the armed conflict has doubled between 2012 and 2014, to around 7.6 million people that are displaced internally (Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, 2015), emphasizing that 90% of Internally Displaced People in the Middle East are concentrated in Syria and Iraq because of the armed conflicts.

2.1 Refugees Situation: children and adolescents displaced by the conflict.

Illustration 8 Syrians crossing the border.

Source: Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre. [Acceded on: April 20, 2015] Retrieved from: http://www.internal-displacement.org/assets/library/Media/201505-Global-Overview-2015/20150506-global-overview-2015-en.pdf

In an armed conflict, where violence and systematic attacks are common, vulnerable victims are always civilians, especially children. Therefore, due to the armed conflict in Syria since 2011, three-quarters of the refugees in the host countries, are children who have managed to reach and enter the refugee camps established by UNHCR, including North

Africa and Europe as shelter countries (UNHCR, 2014). There is a similar situation with children who are displaced within the country, in some cases they flee to their relatives´ home or shelters mounted by the government.

2.1.1 Education

"Education is a fundamental human right and an essential tool for the development of individuals and societies" (UNICEF, 2014). Based on this concept, we can assert that education is a decisive factor in the growth of society and an important element of each individual. In Syria, education has been disrupted by the conflict, where more than 3,000 schools have been destroyed, which has caused at least 2.3 million children with no schools (Syria Regional Response Plan, 2014).

The attacks carried out by the Syrian armed forces, and rebel groups are unpredictable and deadly. Therefore, the population lives in constant anxiety, fearing that any time a missile or mortar may land on their homes or schools. For this reason, many parents are afraid to send their children to school and must choose between the safety of their children and education, so children are in the plight of dropping out of school.

Within this context, access to education for children and teenagers who are in different host countries such as Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq and Egypt is quite limited because they have to face several barriers to access education. For example, tuition fees, exams and documentation requested in the area, plus children have to deal with a new environment in addition to the different languages taught in schools that are a challenge for them. Additionally, those who manage to enter usually attend school in crowded classrooms and not in suitable conditions making the education system face a serious risk.

Meanwhile in host regions where refugees are established, many children and teenagers are forced to leave school or college. Instead, they help at home by getting a job near refugee camps. For example, in Lebanon a group of teenagers ranging between 11 to 15 years, work in coal storage for eight hours earning an equivalent wage of less than $ 0.70 cents an hour (The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2014). Among its tasks, are the filling and loading of heavy coal sacks. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees estimates that 1 out of 10 Syrian refugee children is involved in child labor.

21

Illustration 9 Syrian child in Lebanon working in a coal store.

Source: The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. [Acceded on: June 16, 2015] Retrieved from: http://www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/page?page=49e486a76&submit=GO

However, according to the International Labour Organization states: "Child labor is a violation of fundamental human rights, and has been shown to hinder the development of children" (ILO, 2015). Although this activity is carried on host countries, many children in need do clandestinely. Thereby the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), along with the governments of each host country, aim to establish strategic plans to prevent child labor and ensure the rights of children and teenagers that due to the war have been violated; pretending to comply with Section 32 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. According to Article 32 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child states:

"States Parties recognize the right of children to be protected from economic exploitation and from performing any work that is likely to be hazardous or to interfere with their education, or to be harmful to their health or physical, mental, spiritual, moral or social" (Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989).

2.1.2 Child marriages

A factor that directly affects Syrian girls and adolescents are marriages at an early age; although it was a practice done in feudal times it is still a tradition in Africa, Asia and the Middle East. Gomez-Limon and Gonzalez (2011) explain that:

> Early marriage of girls, a practice widespread in India and other countries, constitutes a violation of human rights, as a child lacks the maturity to freely and fully consent. Also, it has devastating effects regarding physical, intellectual, psychological and emotional; limiting educational opportunities and possibilities for personal growth… (321)

In several cases, child marriages occur when the family does not have the resources to sustain their children, especially for girls, who are considered an economic burden; thus, marriage is a necessary measure for family survival. This situation happens very often within refugee camps in host countries, due to the poor environment they have to live; added to this the insecurity and being exposed to rape and sexual harassment assault. A refugee mother stated that: "The reputation of a girl is like a glass, once broken, no way to fix it" (UNHCR, 2015). This is why they prefer their daughters to marry an older man to defend their safety and prevent further economic family expenses.

Nevertheless, the consequences of early marriages bring serious health hazards, because girls are exposed to early pregnancies, this endangers the health of mother and child. Also, girls are exposed to physical and mental abuse, and in many cases are forced to leave their homes to live in the house of their families' in-law, where they are abused and even used as domestic slaves (ONU Mujeres, 2013).

Organizations such as Save the Children, invest in childhood rights at times of crisis in the United States and around the world. They are making efforts to raise awareness in refugee camps, primarily teaching mothers about the dangers of child marriage and encourage fighting for a decent education for their children.

2.1.3 Psychological and social effects

"Children have experienced war, have seen air combat, artillery, and missiles" (UNHCR, 2014), affirms a refugee father in Lebanon. Children and teenagers of all ages have had to experience the brunt of the war in Syria. Many have suffered severe psychological trauma, injuries sniper shots, missiles and falling debris of their houses, where most have been rescued, some others are alive with torn limbs, being disabled for life and others dead.

As a result of these actions, children have developed Post Traumatic Stress Disorder which is "the outcome of a variety of trauma, such as robbery, rape, torture, being kidnapped or held captive, child abuse incidents, traffic accidents, train accidents, plane crashes, bombings or natural disasters like floods or earthquakes" (National Institute of Mental Health). That is why several children and teenagers experience serious psychological consequences as stress, depression, sleep problems, terrible memories, and even speech problems. Even some children had to witness the murder of their parents and then bury them (Syria Regional Response Plan, 2014).

Another issue that affects Syrian children and teenagers is the difficulty in adapting to the environment in the host countries. An example of this is the lack of acceptance from people of Syrians, especially to children who manage to enter school; many are harassed, shunned and discriminated by their classmates. Also, the lack of confidence from parents being in a strange country generates frustration. They fear that their children might get injured; therefore many have to stay at home.

2.2 Main cities and routes of Syrian refugees and displaced.

Illustration 10 Map of the main cities of destination for refugees and displaced persons.
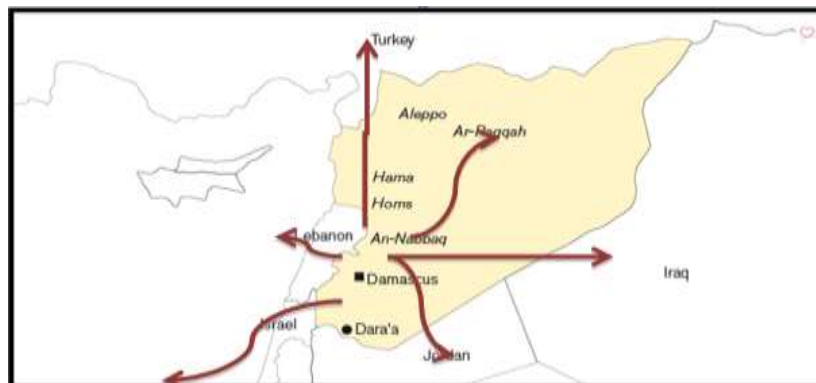
Source: Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre. [Acceded on: July 24, 2014]
Retrieved from: http://www.internal-displacement.org/middle-east-and-north-africa/syria/summary

Since March 2011, the conflict situation in Syria has been taking some violent forms, from an organized state repression resistance to jihadist[11] violence and criminal activity. Scenarios that have dramatically changed the situation of the Syrian population forcing them to flee their homes towards relatives´ homes and public shelters; becoming internally displaced persons. Around half of the Syrian population has been forcibly displaced since the conflict began. According to the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC), 173,000 people have fled to government shelters. On the other hand, at least 108,000 people live in refugee camps and 25,000 living in temporary shelters along the Turkish border.

Damascus, Aleppo, and Homs, three major Syrian cities, have been the most affected by the conflict since rebel groups have settled in to establish and strengthen its dominance to overthrow the al-Assad government. In Homs, an important economic engine for Syria has been damaged structurally; leaving schools, hospitals, houses, basic services, buildings, etc., devastated. Previous to the war, 900,000 people were registered in the city, that reaches no more than 300,000 due to the massive emigration. Therefore, the population of Homs is one of the Syrian cities with a higher displacements flow.

With the above mentioned, in most Syrian cities along with insecurity, mass destruction of buildings, and hopelessness to end this war has caused a massive Syrian migration towards the neighboring countries of Lebanon, Turkey, Iraq, Jordan, and Egypt. A graph of the Syrian refugees' situation in host countries is shown on the next page.

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[11] Jihadism is a religiously inspired ideology which teaches every Muslim to have a moral obligation and to use any mean at its reach to force the rest of the world to submit to Islam (Neuhaus, Richard)

Chart 1 Syrian refugee's status in host countries.

Country	Number of refugees*	Entrance Restriction	Labor Access	Food Assistance	Education and Safety Access
Turkey	1,761,486	No	Restricted	Yes, only with vouchers	Limited
Lebanon	1,183,327	Yes. Visa request since 2015	Restricted	Yes, only with vouchers	Limited
Jordan	628,160	No	Restricted	Yes, only with vouchers	Limited
Iraq	249,266	No	Restricted	Yes, only with vouchers	Limited
Egypt	134,329	Yes. Visa request since 2013	Restricted	Yes, only with vouchers	Limited
TOTAL	3,956,568				

*Taken as of May 31, 2015

Source: United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Syria Regional Response Plan 2014.

Elaborated by: Jessica Tenesaca

According to the previous table, the Syrian refugees face several obstacles in different host countries, situations that aggravate their lives. That is why the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), along with the governments of each host country, the United Nations agencies and NGOs have developed strategic plans, pretending to attend eight key points:

1. Protection

2. Food access

3. Education

4. Health

5. Shelter

6. Basic Needs

7. Social cohesion and livelihoods

8. Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene

One of the most important key points is protection, where according to the International Human Rights Law states the following: "States assume obligations and duties under international law to respect, protect and fulfill human rights" (Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, 1945). Therefore, each country's government commits to provide protection and to prevent human rights violations. For example; in the case of Lebanon's neighbor country, many refugees feel insecure settling in refugee camps fearing explosions of missiles in Syria, which is why they prefer to settle in makeshift shelters such as tents, construction buildings, parking lots and warehouses (Syria Regional Response Plan, 2014).

Therefore, throug the response plans of each country, local governments are taking care of providing the necessary assistance for both displaced Syrians inside the country and refugees living in refugee camps. Likewise, the International Organization for Migration (IOM), provides the necessary assistance to migrants and governments through the Immigration and Border Management Division which is strategically organized within the conflict areas along with the IOM headquarters. Furthermore, the IOM helps assists voluntary return and reintegration is provided, making sure that those who wish to go back to their country of origin, comply with the conditions for their return (IOM, 2015).

Regarding food security, local governments work together with the World Food Programme (WFP) and the United Nations Food, and Agriculture Organization (FAO). Those agencies are responsible for providing humanitarian assistance in times of emergency and war, delivering food to all people in need, also, ensuring that all individuals have access to good quality food, enabling them to lead an active and healthy life.

For example, an economic assistance program has been established, through the use of vouchers, people located in different refugee camps may exchange them for food and other necessities; subsequently, it is intended to harmonize economic assistance through the introduction of an ATM card. The money introduced by these organizations allows users to use money the most convenient way according to their needs and help inject money that will benefit the local economy (Syria Regional Response Plan, 2014).

In the educational field, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and other partner organizations such as the United Nations Fund for Children (UNICEF) is responsible for assisting children and teenagers. These organizations assure children and teenagers have free access to school and high school through strategic plans and with local governments in each country.

With the arrival of large numbers of refugees in the host countries, access to health and basic water, sanitation and hygiene needs have been collapsed for both nationals and refugees. Therefore, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and Red Crescent (specialized in assisting Arab countries) have the aim of providing humanitarian aid to people who are in areas of armed conflict. The Red Crescent is based on Article 25 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, in which:

> "Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control" (Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948).

Also, the World Health Organization (WHO) is the lead agency in charge of coordination in health within the United Nations system (WHO, 2015), work in conjunction with the Red Crescent. Both organizations coordinate hospital services and medical care in refugee camps and outside them, to assist the sick and the handicapped. Additionally, the World Health Organization (WHO) works supporting sanitation and hygiene services as they consider that proper handling of the water prevents the spread of disease and, therefore, the high number of deaths (WHO, 2015).

For optimal assistance, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) has been operating in Syria since 1975, providing help in times of war and peace, becoming an integral partner in the relief efforts and humanitarian assistance. This organization provides aid not only within the country but also in the host countries, by improving infrastructure, promoting local economic and employment opportunities, especially for vulnerable groups such as young people, handicapped and women (UNDP, 2015).

Illustration 11 Zaatari refugee camp in Jordan

Source: Huffington Post. [Acceded on: July 24th 2014] Retrieved from:
http://www.huffingtonpost.es/2013/07/19/campo-refugiados-zaatari_n_3622227.html

Additionally, it is important to mention the humanitarian assistance to people who have been displaced to other Syrian cities. According to the Syrian Regional Response Plan,

people who have fled to other Syrian cities have managed to shelter in schools and buildings that have been partially destroyed. On the one hand, the displaced have been assisted by the Syrian government and on the other; they have been assisted by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR, 2014). Likewise, this organization has been the cornerstone for the Syrians who have decided to escape from Syria to neighboring countries, trough the construction of refugee camps outside the host countries.

In Jordan the second largest refugee camp in the world is located: Zaatari. This camp is located 15 km south of Syria, controlled by the Government of Jordan and the Administrative Council of Syrian Refugee, with the support of ACNUR (SRRP, 2014) work together to carry out a better management on the registration of refugees, which is increasing every day. Also, they take care to assist all the people that are coming. However, it is hard to ensure newcomers free access to water and other basic needs. Therefore, these requirements are completed gradually with the help of the other aid organizations.

Additionally, just as host countries welcome and provide assistance to refugees, they must also fulfill certain obligations to make their stay the best possible, avoiding conflict with other people who share the same location. Those requirements are set out in the Article 2 of the Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, which states:

> "Every refugee has duties to the country in which he finds himself, which require in particular that he conform to its laws and regulations as well as to measures taken for the maintenance of public order" (The Refuge Convention, 1951).

Finally, in host countries the high flow of Syrian refugees had caused uneasiness in the national population, creating tension towards refugees. So they have been accused as participants in armed conflicts and kidnappings, as well as, criminal incidents (SRRP, 2014).

In this context, in 2013 in Egypt the situation of refugees had a decisive turn. First, the government allowed free entry of people into the country. However, this situation changed in summer of 2013 with the start of anti-government protests, where several

Syrians were involved and were linked with the organization of the Muslim Brotherhood[12]. These facts were combined with the departure of Egyptian President Mohamed Morsi (ibid.). Therefore, visa restrictions entered into force for all Syrians entering the country, and that situation created a bad image of Syrian refugees among the Egyptian population, creating tensions between them. Consequently reducing the number of entries and generating deportations for those Syrians without visas.

As a result of the uneasiness in the host countries, there has been a serious problem of social cohesion, which can be defined as: "a sense of belonging to a common space or the degree of consensus among the members of a community" (Definicion.De, 2015). Having this concept in mind and taking into account what has happened in the host countries regarding the arrival of Syrian refugees, the possibility that it may be a good level of coexistence between nationals and refugees, becomes increasingly difficult.

In Lebanon, there is such a great discrimination against Syrian refugees in the work area. Refugees arriving in a host country generally cannot work unless they establish their legality in the country that is provided by the Convention relating to the Status of Refugees in Article 17 that states:

> "The Contracting States shall accord to refugees lawfully staying in their territory the most favorable treatment accorded to nationals of a foreign country in the same circumstances, as regards the right to engage in wage-earning employment" (The Refuge Convention, 1951).

However, many refugees work casually earning less than any citizen. Therefore, many nationals of the host countries say "it is impossible to compete with the cheap Syrian workforce, where they work in the informal sector. This fact makes local citizens attack Syrian refugees" (El País, 2015). This situation makes the stay of refugees much more difficult to achieve and to reach a sustainable coexistence between nationals and foreigners.

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[12] The Muslim Brotherhood is the oldest Islamic organization in Egypt, whose ideology is based on the teachings of the Koran. At first, they aim was simply to spread the moral and Islamic principles. But not long afterwards they assumed the political struggle, particularly against British colonialism in Egypt, with the aim to eradicate Western influence.

2.3 The role of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) on the conflict.

The earliest forms of social organization were established by several groups of human beings, divided into hordes, clans, and tribes. Later, with the arrival of colonization and the creation of great empires, where the strong dominated and won territory, expelling their enemies of their new land, forcing victims to flee and seek refuge in neighboring towns. Thus, they began the first forms of shelter, forming the first landmarks in the history of human mobilization (UNHCR, 2014).

As societies have evolved, there have been several reasons for a person to flee from their home country in search of shelter and safety. Including racial, religious, political, ideological or war and violence in their country of origin (ibid.). In this context, war and violence are the primary reasons why a person feels the need to leave their country and search refuge in other countries.

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees UNHCR or ACNUR (for its acronym in Spanish) "emerged at the end of World War II to help displaced Europeans due to the conflict" (UNHCR, 2015). It was created in 1950 by the United Nations General Assembly and began its activities on January first, 1951. UNHCR's Statute was drafted in parallel with the Convention relating to the Status of Refugees of 1951 so; it would later become the primary source of refugee protection.

Since the beginning of the conflict in Syria, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees is responsible for providing assistance to Syrians, for those displaced within the country and those refugees in the host countries. The primary role of the UNHCR in Syria is to safeguard the rights and welfare of refugees and displaced so that in a short or medium term they can rebuild their lives with dignity (UNHCR, 2014). Therefore, the UNHCR has been assisting refugees with humanitarian aid to major host countries such as Lebanon, Turkey, Jordan, Iraq, and Egypt.

Likewise, UNHCR has been coordinating with the governments of each host country to join forces and provide excellent aid for the displaced and refugees as well. The United Nations Refugee High Commissioner coordinates the provision and distribution of food,

water, education, health, protection, shelter and health care. Similarly, manages the construction and expansion of refugee camps in different host countries, in addition to providing essentials to the refugees in these camps.

Also, the assistance provided by UNHCR is not only in refugee camps but also outside of them. Since some of the refugees rent homes and apartments in different locations in each city (UNHCR, 2014), UNHCR has also developed community outreach projects targeting women and children who are usually victims of sexual violence and gender-based abuses that are not reported due to social stigma and fear of being identified.

UNHCR's presence in Syria has been a key tool to the survival of the displaced as well as for refugees in host countries. To achieve this, UNHCR has worked in collaboration with partner agencies of the United Nations, including:

- World Food Programme (WFP)

- United Nations Fund for Children (UNICEF)

- World Health Organization (WHO)

- United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)

- Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA)

- United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR)

- International Committee of the Red Cross and Red Crescent (ICRC)

- International Organization for Migration (IOM),

and other 640 non-governmental organizations (UNHCR, 2014).

However, UNHCR's challenge every day becomes more difficult as the conflict in Syria grows, therefore, the number of people in need of assistance increases. Especially:

"Within the Syrian border, the humanitarian situation is very unstable. Unfortunately, the number of displaced people continues to rise. Sadly, the

dangerous situation in the country has prevented the assistance to enter, making impossible to assist those who need it most" (UNHCR, 2015).

On the other hand, it is important to mention through voluntary contributions, particularly from governments and intergovernmental organizations, public and private entities. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees has managed to carry out the necessary assistance; to meet the needs of refugees and displaced Syrians such as home reconstruction, community infrastructure such as; schools, clinics, roads, bridges and wells (UNHCR, 2014).

It also coordinates the social integration and resettlement in host countries and ensures safe return for people who wish to go back to their country of origin, providing safety and making sure they are not in danger in their country.

So that, the humanitarian assistance provided by the United Nations for Refugees (UNHCR), has been the cornerstone for victims of the Syrian conflict. As we saw, this organization is in charge to assist the Syrian people since the conflict began, working with local governments helping the newcomers. On the other hand, for displaced Syrians it is tough to get humanitarian aid from UNHCR and UN partner agencies, becoming a biggest challenge for aid agencies due to the daily clashes between government and rebel forces, humanitarian aid has reached only a few. I consider that without this organization, the lives of refugees and displaced persons would be very different due to the fact that the international community has been involved very little.

2.4 The situation of the Kurdish minority in Syria

"In the territory where the world knows as Mesopotamia and its surroundings are where Kurdish people live, and it is their homeland, the Kurdistan" (Besikçi, 1990). Kurdish people are an ethnic minority, considered one of the largest in the Middle East that is not a nation-state form. The Kurdish population as Besikçi (1990) explains, "is considered an ancient village full of unique culture and own language" (5). Before the First World War, the Kurdish were a nomadic people who lived by their livelihood and livestock farming in the Mesopotamian plain and the highlands of Iran and Turkey.

However, after World War II when several international agreements resulted in the creation of a region of many nation-states and today are concentrated in the region called Kurdistan that was distributed in five states: Turkey, Iran, Iraq, Syria and Armenia.

Illustration 12 The Kurdistan Region

"Approximately, twenty-five million Kurds are scattered across the Middle East, mainly in the four states of Syria, Turkey, Iraq, and Iran. However, another percentage of Kurds has moved beyond the Middle East, finding a place to live in Europe and Russia. These Kurds may be placed within the group of the Kurdish diaspora" (Velázquez, 2007, 379).

The total size comprising the Kurdistan region is about 400,000 square kilometers, rich in oil fields located in the path of petroleum lines connecting Central Asia and Europe (RTVE, 2013). In Syria, the Kurdish minority is respected but does not have its administration. The Kurds settled in Syria longs for to be independent along with the rest of Kurds who are in other countries, hoping that their rights are respected and taken into account by the international community.

Since the Syrian conflict began, "for the Kurdish community, the unrest in Syria provided an opportunity to seek compensation for historical injustices, the abandonment of the state and especially the denial of citizenship to more than 300,000 people" (Hokayem, 2013). This means the Syrian conflict represents an advantage for the Kurdish minority, after many years of discrimination from Bashar al-Assad regime and his father, Hafez al- Assad, who did not recognize them the same rights as the Arab population (El País, 2014).

In the same way, it is important to clarify whom the Kurdish support. Hokayem (2013) states that:

> In fact, as young activists Kurds showed their enthusiasm for the revolution, the main factions[13] remained largely out of the conflict. They considered whatever the outcome is, the weakening of the Syrian state would work on their side, and their priority is to protect their region of fight and chaos that involves the country (80).

While the Syrian conflict is an opportunity for Kurds, on the other hand to Turkey means the entry of thousands of people seeking refuge in their country. This scenario worsens the situation of the Kurds-Syrians as in "Turkey since 1925, the Republican government Kemalist refused to recognize the existence of the Kurdish people [...] Trend that have inherited all governments of modern Turkey to today" (Cabo, 2005).

On the other hand, unlike Turkey, Iraq recognizes the Kurdish population, where there is the so-called Iraqi Kurdistan a state still on conformation. The so-called Iraqi Kurdistan is composed of all elements of a nation, such as elections, parliament or government, but with no foreign policy, budget, and army (El País, 2014).

Additionally, this region is strategically located and has the best stability, security and economic level. Due to a lot of oil resources that are exploited by around two thousand foreign companies that managed to enter this region through an Investment Law established in 2006.

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[13] The main factions refer to the Kurdish parties: the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP), Democratic Union Party (PYD) and the Kurdistan Workers' Party.

In Iraqi Kurdistan, it is estimated that there are about 45,000 million barrels of oil and untold quantities of natural gas (Ibid.), which means that the economic stability and security in the "other Iraq" as many call it is on the right path. This guarantees its citizen's greater security and independence, and in the future they will become a metropolis with broad opportunities of expansion.

So far, no agreement has been reached between the Syrian government and the Kurdish people. The greatest desire for the Kurds is to have recognition and autonomy of their people, like the Kurds in Iraq. Regarding the Syrian conflict, the Kurdish population, especially young people, prefer to stay out of the conflict, having in mind one way or another, what is happening in Syria will work in their favor of getting their autonomy. In my opinion, the Kurds in Syria should have more recognition from the international community and find a solution to the Syrian conflict and their situation as well.

CHAPTER 3: CHALLENGES AND EXPECTATIONS OF REFUGEES AND DISPLACED SYRIANS

This chapter will discuss expectations and challenges faced by refugees and displaced Syrians. We have analyzed factors such as poverty caused by the conflict, shelter issues and especially the threat of the Islamic State. Subsequently, we will briefly study the situation of refugees and displaced persons from the Arab Spring countries. Finally, closing this study case, an interview with an expert on the Syrian issue is performed, which will help us get a better picture of the situation of refugees and displaced Syrians. Furthermore, a possible solution is set so that the international community could intervene in a much more reliable and successful way.

3.1 Challenges arising from the displacement of Syrian families.

Throughout this analysis we observed that the armed conflict has caused considerable harm to the Syrian population; both, displaced and refugees in neighboring countries. In particular the great impact on children and teenagers, their lives changed overnight, causing them difficulties in adapting to different environments from what they were used to. For displaced persons and refugees, every day is a struggle, always waiting for the conflict to end, so they can return to their homeland and eventually start again. Below, we will discuss three factors that are facing and will face the Syrian population.

3.1.1 Poverty generated by armed conflict

For many Syrians, the armed conflict has meant the beginning of death and destruction. They have been forced to leave their homes with very few belongings, adding to the misery and lack of resources, forced to restart a new life elsewhere. According to a study by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), "direct damage caused by the fighting are translated into devastated infrastructure, collapsed services, economic disintegration and increasing unemployment, all of which its development level goes

back at least 35 years of regression" (2014). This scene has pulled Syrian population into poverty, resulting in the worst humanitarian crisis since 1994.

In Lebanon, a country with a much smaller popullation than Ecuador, with 4.467 million inhabitants, hosts 1,183 million Syrian refugees, where 1 out of 4 are Syrians. Even before the Syrian crisis, around 25% of the Lebanese population was living below the poverty line with US $4 a day and it was anticipated that the influx of refugees would push another 170,000 Lebanese to poverty (UNDP, 2014). Furthermore, Jordan had a big problem with water resources, even before the arrival of Syrian refugees, and now this problem has been increasing as more refugees arrive in the country. In the Zaatari refugee camp hosts more than 85,000 Syrian refugees, lots of people awaits for water bottles to reach. A similar situation that Jordanians face all the time since the lack of water is a constant factor (Sarah, Abu Aziz, 2014).

However, the economic situation for the Syrians who are displaced within Syria is far more complex. According to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), currently there are about 7.6 million displaced people, 75% of the population lives in extreme poverty, and half are unemployed (ibid.). Aziz Abu Sarah, adds that:

> "Many people cannot get out due to border restrictions, the ideology and belief that they should not leave their country, or the fear of crossing into the unknown. Some go to camps while others stay with family in other cities or build tents where they can" (Sarah, Abu Aziz, 2014).

As we have seen, the armed conflict has pushed the majority of the Syrian population into extreme poverty, both refugees, and displaced Syrians. As the conflict takes its course, an increase of vulnerability and challenges towards the people will occur. The challenge for the Syrian population is to reach and achieve greater international aid and to stabilize its precarious financial situation, creating sustainable strategies for the population to overcome gradually this chaos.

3.1.2 The pursuit of shelter: Europe

As we mentioned in the previous chapter, about 97% of Syrians have fled to neighboring Turkey, Lebanon, Iraq, Jordan and Egypt in search of shelter and protection. However, as time goes by the conflict continues and the flow of refugees has increased. Therefore basic services, economy and infrastructure in the host countries are collapsing. This situation has affected both the host population and Syrians as well. Many Syrians feel they have invaded territory; therefore they have planned to flee beyond host countries. That is why people are looking for new refugee protection in Europe. In Jordan, for example, where the second world's largest refugee camp is located, many Syrians think about leaving the refugee camp and traveling to Germany. Nuria Mejias states:

> "Syrians with a favorable economic position have fled from refugee camps. Many managed to fly to some European countries offering asylum. However, it has not been so easy for the vast majority of refugees who usually require an invitation letter from the country they wish to go, a document that in most cases are denied at the embassies" (Radio y Television Española, 2015).

Within this context, since 2013 Germany established a host program in which they agree to receive 20,000 Syrian refugees. This program carried out by the German government, is one of the highest refugee support programs besides the neighboring countries of Syria (Infobae, 2015). So far in 2015, in less than a month Germany received over a thousand requests for political asylum from Syria and had already accepted more than 10,000. According to the newspaper El Mundo, refugees arrive in a transit camp in Gottingen, where they stay two weeks and receive language classes and cultural learning. They are then distributed among different German states, while social services handle finding them a suitable job (El Mundo, 2015).

Nevertheless, with the arrival of Syrian refugees to Germany, people in the south of Berlin have expressed their opposition to the Syrian refugees. Many have expressed dissatisfaction with graffiti against new arrivals. Others, however, have burned shelters to avoid a possible stay (El País, 2014).

Furthermore, Germany is not the only country that offers shelters to Syrian refugees, but Sweden, Switzerland, Bulgaria and the Netherlands, have been responsible to host 70% of the asylum applications of Syrian refugees in recent years (Radio y Television Española, 2015). However, according to an Amnesty International report, the opposite happens within the Gulf countries (Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, UAE, Qatar, Iraq, Kuwait, Iran and Oman) and other European Union countries that have not offered asylum whatsoever.

Nonetheless, families who do not get asylum in the above-mentioned countries decide to cross the Mediterranean Sea illegally and achieve their dream of reaching Europe. For most Syrians, the easiest way to escape is through mafias or smugglers, costing around 6,000 euros for a trip by sea. Approximately six days and 12 hours is the estimated time that is needed to cross by sea to Europe (El País, 2015). This situation has also risked lives of many people. So far in 2015 thousands of deaths of victims have been reported, therefore failing to reach their destination.

Illustration 13 Syrian refugees' route by sea

Source: Diario El Pais. [Acceded on July 7, 2015] Retrieved from:
http://internacional.elpais.com/internacional/2015/04/21/actualidad/1429642811_194934.html

42

On the other hand, Uruguay has been the only Latin American country who joined a group of other European countries to host Syrian refugees so far. From June 2014, the Uruguayan government agreed to host a total of 120 Syrian refugees from Lebanon, which was completed in three stages. It constitutes a political challenge for Uruguay that carries out an important role on the international stage (El País, 2014). The UNHCR office for Latin America, Michelle Alfaro said that only selected families with "the greatest degree of vulnerability will be accepted" (ibid.).

3.1.3 The threat of the Islamic State

In the first chapter of this study, we reviewed the self-proclaimed Islamic State as one of the groups opposing the Syrian regime. However, as time goes by this group went from being an opposition group to one of the most extremist groups in recent times, becoming a global threat.

The Islamic State is characterized by carrying out a sectarian discourse[14] violently conquering several territories in Syria and Iraq. The leaders of the Islamic State believe that replicating Muhammad's role is their duty so they can revive forgotten traditions from more than hundreds of years (El País, 2015). The Islamic state intends to establish *Sharia* as the main rule in Syria. In this context, the main commitment of the Islamic State is to purify the world by killing a huge number of people (El País, 2015). Most of the victims are "apostate"[15] Muslims (ibid.), including sects and groups in Syria who reject the ideology of the Islam State.

The modus operandi of the Islamic State is characterized by carrying out summary prosecutions in the territories of Syria and Iraq, which usually end in crucifixions, slavery and beheadings. Beheading is one of the most popular methods used. Taking journalists, especially Americans, to show the world their radicalism using The Internet

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[14] It refers to intolerance, discrimination and hatred arising from giving importance to perceived differences between different social, political or religious groups. Members of a religious or political group may believe that their salvation or success of their particular objectives requires aggressive pursuit of conversion of other groups or supporters of a particular faction may believe that to achieve their political or religious projects. Therefore, opponents must be purged (B´ezrat hashem, 2013).

[15] A person who denies religious doctrine with which she/he was raised (K Dictionaries, 2013).

as a broadcast tool beheadings have been carried out. According to the Spanish newspaper El País:

> "Tuesday night August 19, 2014 it was known that James Foley, (US reporter) who worked for Global Post and Agency France Presse, was killed by his executioners in retaliation for the attack of American aviation positions of the Islamic State in Iraq. The Islamic State requested a ransom of $ 132 million in exchange for the journalist" (El País, 2014).

Immediately, after several threats, on September 2, 2014, the jihadists in another video showed the execution of Steven Sotloff, 31, stating that this is "the price to pay" for the US intervention in Iraq (ibid.).

To achieve further strength, the Islamic State uses the Internet as an essential tool to spread their propaganda. Therefore, they recruit people around the world to join its mission to "purify the world". The I.S. has reached tens of thousands of Muslims; recruits from France, UK, Belgium, Germany, Holland, Australia, Indonesia and the United States, among other countries (El País, 2015).

Illustration 14 Map showing who controls the cities in Syria.
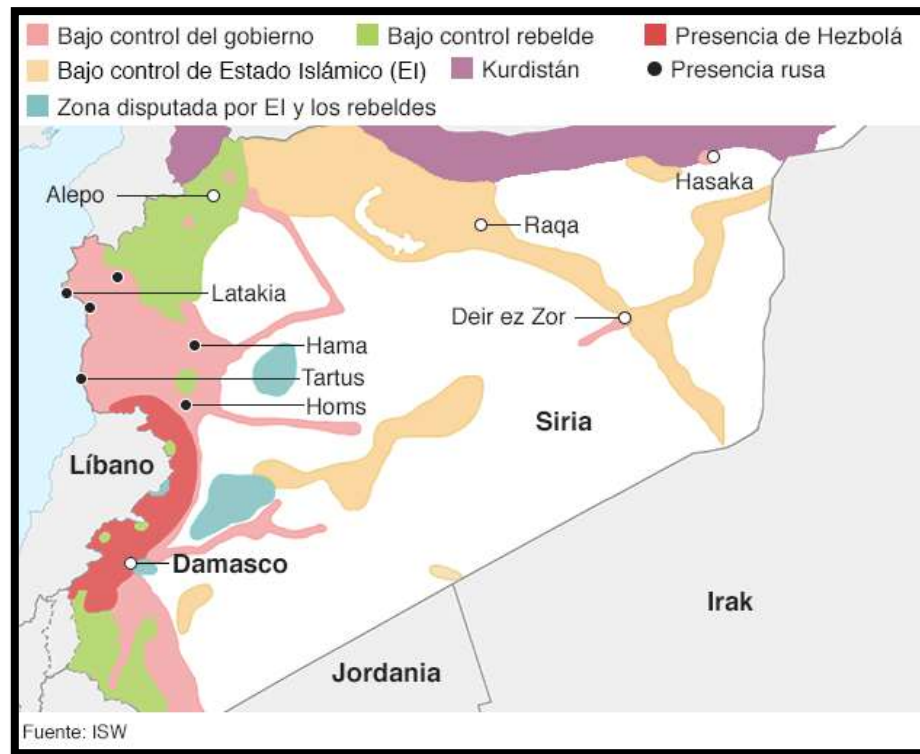
Source: BBC Mundo. [Acceded on October 12, 2015]. Retrieved from:
http://www.bbc.com/mundo/noticias/2015/10/151001_siria_guerra_quien_rusia_eeuu_az

That is why the West is facing the Islamic State with Kurds and Iraqis in the battlefield with air strikes (El País, 2015) which involve grave consequences for the Syrian population who are already displaced, therefore, forcing them to flee to other countries in search of shelter and worsen even more their vulnerable situation.

However, analysts said, a way to undo the "spell" the Islamic State exercises over their followers, would be to dominate militarily and occupy territories of Syria and Iraq, which are under their power today (El País, 2015). This way, if they lose territory they will no longer be a caliphate since a caliphate cannot exist as an underground movement, and the territorial authority is a requirement; if it is snatched, loyalty oaths cease to be binding (ibid.)

3.2 Brief comparison of the situation of refugees and displaced people located in other Arab countries.

The Arab Spring began with widespread protests in Tunisia, and the issue grew

systematically, and the civil uprising took a global leadership. Since 2011, the domino effect collapsed into Egypt, Libya, Yemen and other countries in the Middle East and parts of Africa. Being Syria the country that is still in conflict ever since.

As we have seen throughout this study, the conflict in Syria is still ongoing, and there are no signs of ending. Having in mind the situation in Syria, in the following paragraphs, we will study briefly the other Arab countries leading the Arab Spring, highlighting those who were mostly affected by the conflicts.

Illustration 15 The Arab Spring by countries
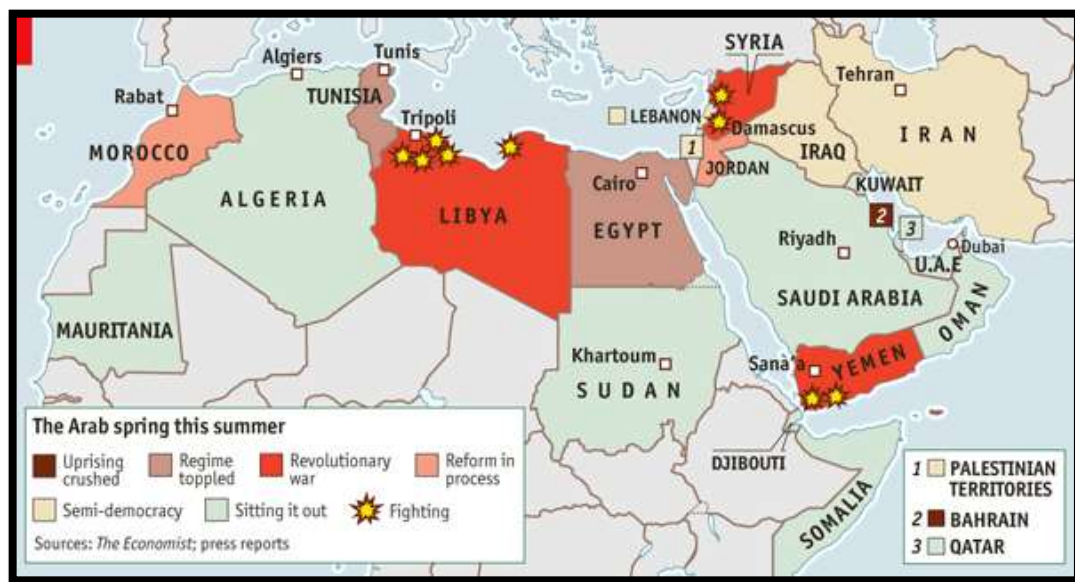
Fuente: The Economist.[Acceded on July 7, 2015] Retrieved from: http://www.economist.com/node/18958237

Addressing what happened in Tunisia in late 2010, the birthplace of the Arab Spring, thousands fled the country because of the conflict that coupled with the interception of various armed groups against the government unleashed the deaths of many civilian victims on making it difficult to stay in the country. The constant attacks on schools and public places added the use of weapons, explosives and toxic gases that have forced at least 20,000 Tunisians to flee the country to Italy, heading to Malta and The Lampedusa Islands (BBC, 2011). Due to the massive inflow of refugees, the situation became overwhelming. Therefore, the Italian government has given a temporary residence

permit for refugees to move freely around the zone for a year only (ibid.).

Also, the Italian government sought support from other members of the European Union inviting them to be supportive and help with the reception of thousands of migrants. However, its responses were not the expected especially from Germany and France, which have expressed their opposition, arguing that the Tunisian government is the one who should take care of its population, as well as Italy (ibid.).

Currently, each year hundreds of young Tunisians are trying to cross clandestinely by sea to Europe. Many of them do not have much hope that Tunisia will get on the right path. Insecurity and political instability in the country persist (Spanish Radio and Television, 2011). So far, after Ben Ali was overthrown, two presidents have been elected. The last president elected in the first presidential election after the Tunisian revolution is Mohamed Bejí Caïd Essebsi.

Meanwhile in Egypt in February 2011, after 18 days of protests they succeeded in forcing the resignation of President Mubarak, ending 30 years of mandate (Spanish Radio and Television, 2011). After his ouster, the Egyptian people went through a process of transition. Later Mohamed Morsi was the first democratically elected president. His presidential mandate was marked by harsh economic conditions generated by the drop in tourism and foreign investment. Thus, he did not last more than a year in power, which caused discontent among the population through new protests that had called for his resignation and new elections (ibid.). After the overthrow of Morsi, General Abdel Fatah al-Sisi took power in Egypt, ruling until now.

Several protests by the Egyptian people were very strong and along with the armed forces managed to topple two presidents. There were no higher levels of repression from the Egyptian government towards people, although about 850 deaths were recorded (EuropaPress, 2015). Therefore, there was no persecution and mass destruction in the country. So no fleeing or displaced persons were registered. Somehow there was hope for a change of government. However, the Egyptian people still struggle for political stability in the country to avoid a new civil war.

In Libya, the third country of the Arab Spring, protests against the Muammar Gaddafi

regime began in February 2011, to be the first civil war to emerge as a result of the Arab Spring. Conflicts were characterized by the extreme violence of the regime towards its people. This situation forced the population to flee the country to neighboring countries, especially Egypt and Tunisia. In less than a month of the riots in Libya, the president was overthrown from power (El País, 2011). According to UNHCR, it was estimated that about 5,000 people had to leave the country in search of asylum.

Meanwhile in Yemen, protests also began to emerge as the Arab Spring was rising. The protests took the lives of several people and in response President Ali Abdullah Saleh promised to resign and not to propose his son for future elections. However, most rebels were not happy with this and attacked the presidential palace injuring Saleh; thus, he had to ask for asylum in Saudi Arabia (Manfreda, 2011). As a consequence, about 2,000 people died, and according to international observers around 200,000 people had to flee from the capital city of Sanaa towards other cities in Yemen. Therefore, they did not have to flee to neighboring countries.

Also, the armed conflict in Yemen lasted ten months, and finally, the president left the power and elections took place opening a way to the transitional government in charge of the vice president Abd al-Rab Mansur al-Hadi. Currently, the instability returned to Yemen through attacks on landmarks of the capital, killing nearly 150 people (El País, 2015).

In Bahrain, protests began in February 2011 just after the fall of former President Hosni Mubarak in Egypt. Bahrain was the fifth country to rise against an authoritarian government that ruled the region for 40 years. The protesters, mostly belonging to the Shiite Muslim community, took over the streets to protest the mistreatment by the government, which belongs to the Sunni Islamic branch that represents a minority. Civil strife soon became sectarian conflicts taht still continue to a lesser extent today. However, there was no registration of refugees in neighboring countries. Instead, there was a massive displacement within the country (UNHCR, 2015), besides there were about 60 people dead.

To sum it up with this brief study, we have two countries left: Jordan and Morocco. There were minor protests and changes in political cabinets, along with reforms in the

constitution of Morocco (Manfreda, 2011). According to reports, in total six people were found dead. However, they also found reports of people who have had to flee to neighboring countries. Nevertheless, currently amongst all countries that were protagonists of the Arab Spring, there are still violations of human rights, political and economic instability, insecurity and restrictions on freedom of expression are notorious.

3.3 Interview and opinion of Ignacio Alvarez-Ossorio, a professor of Arabic and Islamic Studies.

To strengthen and emphasize the study an interview conducted via email to Ignacio Alvarez-Ossorio, a professor of Arabic and Islamic Studies at the University of Alicante in Spain is presented. His experience and expertise on the topic, contributes to his judgment of the situation in Syria, thus helping us to have a better picture. The questions emerged as this study was being developed and researched. The replies are incorporated in textual form, which are supported for later reference in Annex 2 of this work.
(JT: Jessica Tenesaca, IA: Ignacio Álvarez-Ossorio):

JT: Do the Syrian people are on the side of the government or the opposition?
IA: The population is divided. At first, there were large segments of the Syrian people who took to the streets to demand more freedom and democracy, all in the context of the Arab Spring. Four and a half years after the war, there remains a significant rejection of the regime; the government has not hesitated to massacre their people and retain power. One of the biggest problems is in the rebel areas where the situation is far from being stabilized, and the progress of the Salafist and jihadist groups has caused part of the population, especially officials and religious minorities see the regime as a minor evil.

JT: Why do you think the conflict has not ended until now?
I.A. For several reasons, including the determination of the regime to retain power at any cost. Also the fragmentation of the moderate opposition, the outbreak of jihadist groups and, above all the involvement of external actors such as Iran, Saudi Arabia, Turkey and Qatar. Those countries are fighting a proxy

war in Syria through interposed actors. These players have added fuel to the fire and have not helped to calm the situation, but rather made it worse. Their arrival on the scene has led to an intensification of sectarianism in Syria.

JT: Why has the Syrian population not sought refuge in Israel?
IA: Because the Golan borders are closed and guarded since Israel took over back in 1967. In fact, the Golan was officially annexed to Israel in 1981.

JT: Why has the access to jobs been denied to refugees in host countries?
IA: None of the Arab countries have signed the international convention on refugees, so they do not feel obliged to implement the existing legislation. It should be noted that neighboring countries have had the responsibility of receiving four million people (Almost 20% of the Syrian population) while Western nations have evaded its responsibilities in this concern. For Lebanon, a country with only four million people, it is tough to accommodate more than a million and a half refugees and the assistance provided by UNHCR has been very important, however insufficient. In many cases, children do not attend school because they need to work to support their families. Also, parents have become part of cheap labor that competes with locals, having the lowest paid jobs.

JT: Do you think international intervention could put an end to this conflict?
IA: In my opinion, the only way to resolve conflict is through peaceful ways. Only negotiations involving all countries' interests in Syria can stop this bleeding. It is obvious that Bashar al-Assad, primarily responsible for the situation, cannot be part of the solution. The idea would be that Iran and Saudi Arabia, main supporters of the regime and the opposition, bury the hatchet and start a negotiation with a gradual pacification of all the crises that embraces the region, including the situation in Iraq and Yemen. The problem is that neither seems willing to give up their maximalist approaches. For Iran, Syrian regime represents a key ally who guarantees its participation in the region. Saudi Arabia,

50

meanwhile, interpreted the conflict as sectarian and tries to defeat the Alawites to extend the Wahhabi creed in the zone.

JT: If President Bashar al-Assad is dismissed, would it improve the situation in Syria?

IA: I think it is the first step to take to ensure reconciliation with the Syrians. Second, to form a coalition to expel the non-Syrian groups that have taken over vast territory thus the self-proclaimed Islamic State as well, since it has taken advantage of the situation to settle in the country. Third, would be to prevent Syria from becoming a war zone from any actor who intervenes for interest only, requiring that none of the parties would manipulate. The problem is that the longer the war last, the deeper will be the hatred and desire for revenge.

JT: Do you think that the presence of the Islamic state is worsening the situation in Syria, why?

IA: With no doubt whatsoever. The Islamic State is not Syrian but Islamic. This group aims to test Syria as an experiment to impose their old-fashioned interpretation of Sharia. The Syrian people under its domain have become experiment targets to control. But we must emphasize that this group is not Syrian but is made up mostly of Muslims from around the world. Moreover, its sectarian and extremist speech is destroying local minorities who had lived in harmony for centuries. This totalitarian project is based on imposing a Wahhabi Muslim identity and to eliminate any who is not part of them.

From the opinion of Professor Alvarez-Ossorio, it can be argued as we had been mentioned in this analysis, the Islamic State and progress in Syria constitutes a growing threat to the Syrian displaced and refugee population, further worsening the situation. Similarly, his opinion has served as a contribution to confirm that it is necessary to stop international sponsorship to the opposition since much of this "aid" is used to attack the Syrian population.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

After having analyzed the situation of the Syrian displaced and refugees caused by the armed conflict in Syria since 2011 when the conflict started with massive protest from its people, demanding equal rights, high rates of unemployment, and corruption were evident, therefore a chaotic scenario was replicated in other Middle Eastern countries, causing the so-called Arab Spring, thus reaching the following conclusions:

➢ The rise of the Syrian conflict came up with the historical role that the Assad family played in Syria since 1970. Their long political career started by the father of the current Syrian president, who ruled Syria for 30 years and was succeeded by his son Bashar al-Assad since 2000 until today resulted into the longest tenure of Syria's history. Other issues joined this factor such as unemployment, corruption and religious inequality, which were essential elements to encourage people to demand a change, provoking a hostile response from the government. In this context, the conflict has grown with harmful consequences to the Syrian population.

➢ Due to the dimension of the conflict in Syria, much of its infrastructure has been destroyed leaving very few places safe. Therefore Syria's population has been forced to flee their homes and the country, moving to neighboring countries such as Lebanon, Turkey, Iraq, Jordan, and Egypt.

➢ In this context, the obstacles that Syrians face in host countries were highlighted: shelter camps collapsed restriction of entry (especially in Lebanon and Egypt), limited access to basic services, problems of social cohesion, discrimination, and lack of freedom of movement and labor restrictions.

➢ After analyzing the situation of the displaced and Syrian refugees, it was established that the Syrian children are the primary victims of the conflict, being

the weakest and most vulnerable in a conflict characterized as one of the most violent and aggressive of the last century. According to official UNHCR reports, three-quarters of the refugees are Syrian children, a situation that has interrupted 2.3 million children in their education; exposing child labor, early marriage and psychological problems, a stage that is repeated in the five host countries: Lebanon, Turkey, Jordan, Iraq, and Egypt.

- ➢ The plight of Syrian refugees and displaced persons has led the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) to be an essential element in providing assistance to refugees and displaced, in charge of the supply and distribution of food, education, health, protection, shelter and health care. This organization, along with others such as the International Committee of the Red Cross, the World Food Programme, World Health Organization, UNICEF, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), have developed a Syrian Regional Plan Response in order to assist the displaced and refugee population, both inside Syria and in the host countries. However, it was observed that the assistance provided by these organizations is crucial when assisting the displaced, particularly inside Syria due to fierce clashes that take place in the country.

Due to the severe consequences the Syrian conflict is constructing, we could identify three key points that the Syrian people will face:

- ➢ First of all, the extreme poverty due to the economic meltdown and massive destruction of infrastructure. This situation has pushed 75 percent of the displaced population to extreme poverty.

- ➢ Second, the high influx of refugees that have arrived in the host countries has caused the collapse of the basic services and the economy and the infrastructure, which led refugees to seek new refuge places such as Europe becoming, the newest destination for refugees. Thus, many Syrians are risking their lives trying to cross Europe by sea or land, turning this situation into a severe humanitarian

crisis. However as refugees arrive in Europe, we see that the countries of the European Union have done little to shelter and protect Syrian refugees.

➢ In addition to these challenges, there is the threat of self-proclaimed Islamic State which seeks to establish Sharia coercively in Syria and Iraq, implementing its doctrine of world purification by killing and pursuing those who do not follow their extremist laws. Due to the radicalism of this group; the Internet has become an essential tool for them to spread violence and fear targeting people to executions and beheadings, especially of US citizens. In this sense it is possible to conclude that this group represents a threat not only to the Syrian people but also a global menace that took advantage of the weakening of the Syrian government to progressively take over the land and sow fear in the Syrian population, thus aggravating the situation of displaced Syrians.

➢ As we have seen throughout this study, the situation of Syrian refugees and displaced persons has worsened as the conflict progresses, becoming probably the worst humanitarian crisis of recent years, such circumstances adding to the challenges and dangers that face the Syrian population. With the above mentioned, future expectations for refugees and displaced Syrians are not good, in the sense that the conflict has intensified over the years, and there is no guaranteed peaceful solution. The response of the international community has been almost nothing regarding humanitarian aid. Instead, the international community has contributed to the conflict with military and economic support to the opposition groups fighting against the Syrian government.

➢ Regarding refugees from other Middle East countries such as Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Yemen, Bahrain, Jordan, and Morocco it was noted that the protests did not become violent (except Libya), which resulted in the dismissal of governors, the implementation of a transition period, presidential elections and a small number of displaced and refugees. We only found refugees from Tunisia and Libya, who fled to neighboring countries and Europe. As we have seen in this

study, a very different scenario happens in Syria, where the refugee population has increased to more than 4 million people and 6.8 million displaced. In addition, the Syrian government is still in power up to today.

➢ Finally, the interview with the Spanish professor Ignacio Alvarez-Ossorio, through its contribution, allows us to agree that it is necessary to use peaceful means to resolve the Syrian conflict, thus avoiding the Syrian population bearing the brunt of the conflict. It is also necessary to expel non-Syrian groups such as the Islamic State. As we noted in this study, this group has become a real threat to the Syrian population, aggravating its precarious situation.

RECOMMENDATIONS

From this study and the prior conclusions, it is possible to make the following recommendations:

- The international community must help to stop as soon as possible the attacks on civilians, thus achieving a ceasefire by a peaceful intervention in Syria, calling the Syrian President to a dialogue with opposition groups. Establishing a peace plan for Syria should involve the United States and Russia, along with the European Union who have been being involved in the conflict since its start.

- Once the Syrian situation is established, the Syrian government along with the humanitarian aid organizations must restore basic services to the Syrian population that is displaced internally, through the development of strategic plans to strengthen the precarious situation in the country.

- It is important that the Syrian government guarantees security for Syrian children and teenagers, as well as to free children from child labor and restore their right to study. It is also important to avoid early marriage to which they are exposed. This plan could be achieved by developing a key strategy to ensure their rights

and their protection, both in Syria and in the host countries; likewise, to involve non-governmental organizations specialized in childhood and local governments of the host countries.

- The international community should achieve a greater commitment to Syrian refugees who are arriving in Europe, getting involved and giving more considerable importance to the serious humanitarian situation unleashed in the Arab nation. That situation has caused the displacement of millions of Syrians to Europe through the participation of all members offering asylum and security. Similarly, to invite countries of the Persian Gulf to be involved in solidarity with Syrian refugees due to their proximity.

- Host countries should allow refugees greater freedom of movement and especially the right to work and to earn a wage, by implementing social projects for the refugees to integrate into society instead of being denoted as invaders, to acquire the ability to be valued as agents of development in the host countries.

- As for the Islamic state and its extremist nature, it is tough to reach a dialogue between the government and this group for a peaceful solution. Having in mind this group has become a global threat; the international community should join efforts and establish a strategic plan for progressive intervention. First, to recover the occupied Syrian territories from this extremist group, because the Islamic State cannot exist without a territory. Similarly, with the response of the international community it must disarm this group and achieve a military and economic weakening.

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APPENDIX 1

Appendix 1 Ignacio Álvarez-Ossorio Brief Résumé

Researcher
Professor in the Department of Integrated Philolophy (Department of Arabic and Islamic Studies) from the University of Alicante.
Teléfono.: (+34) 965 903 408
Fax: (+34) 965 909 443
Email: ialvarez@ua.es

ACADEMIC BACKGROUND:

• Degree in Arabic Studies from the Autonomous University of Madrid (1993).

• Master in International Relations from the Instituto Universitario Ortega y Gasset (1997).

• Doctor of Philosophy (Arabic Philology) from the Autonomous University of Madrid (1999).

CURRENT TEACHING ACTIVITIES:

• Professor in the Department of Modern Languages (Department of Arabic and Islamic Studies) from the University of Alicante.

RESEARCH PROJECTS:

• Contemporary History of Palestine and Syria
• Processes of democratic transition and elections in the Middle East
•Civil society in the Arab world
• Peace process in the Middle East and the Arab-Israeli conflict

RECENT PUBLICATIONS:

Books

• Report on the Arab uprisings, Madrid, Editions of the East and the

Mediterranean, 2011 (with I. Gutierrez de Teran)

• Is it still viable a Palestinian state? Obstacles and alternatives to the peace

process, Madrid, Alternatives Foundation, 2011.

• Contemporary Syria, Madrid, Synthesis, 2009

• Elections without Choice. Electoral processes in the Middle East and the Maghreb, Madrid, Editions of the East and the Mediterranean, 2009 (with L. Zaccaria)

• Why has peace failed? Keys to understanding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, books Waterfall / Institute for Development and Cooperation, 2005 (with F. Izquierdo). Reissued in 2007.

• Report on the conflict in Palestine. Agreements Oslo to the Road Map, Editions of the East and the Mediterranean, 2003 (editor)

• Spain and the Palestinian issue, Madrid, books Waterfall / Spanish Agency for International Cooperation, 2003 (with I. Barreñada)

ARTICLES AND BOOK CHAPTERS

- "Syria´s Struggling Civil Society", Middle East Quarterly, Spring 2012, volume 19, number 2.

- "Le Conseil National Syrien: genèse, développement et défis", Maghreb Machrek, nº 213, Automne 2012.

- "Primavera democrática árabe: ¿otoño islamista?", Anuario 2012-13 del Centro de Educación e Investigación para la Paz (CEIPAZ), Madrid, 2012.

- "The Syrian Ruling Elite and the Failure of the Repressive Trend" en F. Izquierdo (ed.), Political Regimes in the Arab World. Society and the Exercise of Power, Londres, Routledge, 2012 (con I. Gutiérrez de Terán)

- "Las revoluciones árabes: hacia un cambio de paradigma", Anuario 2011-12 del Centro de Educación e Investigación para la Paz (CEIPAZ), Madrid, 2011.

- "Las paradojas del Islam político en Siria", Revista Cibod D'Afers Internationals, abril 2011, 93-94, p. 162-178.

- "La crisis de los refugiados iraquíes en Siria, Jordania y Líbano", Foro Internacional (México), nº 198, 2009, pp. 929-959 (con P. Buendía)

- "Chavez wa Teheran... Tahalufat kawniya wa mashari`a wahmiya" ("Chávez y Teherán...Alianzas universales y proyectos imaginarios"), Afaq al-Mustaqbal (Emiratos Árabes Unidos),nº 2, 2009 (con I. Gutiérrez de Terán)

- "La Hoja de Ruta de Hamas: del irredentismo a la realpolitik", Scripta Nova. Revista electrónica de Geografía y Ciencias Sociales, nº 270, vol. XII, 2008.

- "Minorías en Siria: entre la supremacía alawí y la discriminación kurda" en Droits humains et diverté ethnoculturelle dans l´espace euroméditérranéen: réalités et perspectives / coord. Por Abdelkader Sid Ahmed y Carlos De Cueto, París, Publisud, 2007.

RESEARCH PROJECTS

• Principal Investigator of the I+ D: "Civil society and political protest in the Middle East: dynamic internal and external strategies" (Ministry of Science and Innovation: CSO2009-11729)

• "The Arab uprisings: emerging political actors and reconfiguration of the public scene in North Africa and the Middle East" (Ministry of Economy and Competitiveness: CSO2012-37779)

APPENDIX 2

Appendix 2 Backup of the interview with the academic Ignacio Alvarez-Ossorio

De: Jess Tenesaca <jesstenesaca@gmail.com>
Fecha: 25 de abril de 2015, 23:59
Asunto: Re: Por favor su ayuda
Para: ialvarez@ua.es

Estimado Profesor,

Muchas gracias por su respuesta, para mí es muy valiosa su opinión por lo que puede responderme cuando usted tenga un tiempo libre.

En primer lugar, como le había comentado, mi tema de trabajo es sobre la situación de los desplazados y refugiados sirios a causa del conflicto armado desatado a partir de marzo de 2011. Como sabe ya han pasado 4 años de conflicto y que hasta ahora no se ha logrado visualizar una salida clara a lo que está sucediendo, por lo cual me gustaría que me ayude con su opinión sobre el conflicto y los desplazados y refugiados. Además he formulado unas preguntas que han ido surgiendo a lo largo de mi investigación, las cuales son las siguientes:

1. ¿La población siria esta de lado del gobierno o de la oposición?
2. ¿Porque cree usted que el conflicto no ha terminado hasta hoy?
3. ¿Porque la población afectada siria no ha buscado refugio en Israel?
4. ¿Porque a los refugiados que se encuentran en los países de acogida se les ha negado el acceso a obtener un trabajo?
5. ¿Piensa usted que una intervención internacional podría terminar con el conflicto?
6. ¿Si el presidente Bashar Al-assad es destituido, la situación en Siria mejoraría?
7. ¿Cree usted que la presencia del Estado Islámico está empeorando la situación en Siria, porque?

Esas serian mis preguntas estimado Profesor, le agradezco inmensamente por su valioso tiempo, puede responderme cuando disponga de tiempo.

Gracias y espero su respuesta,

Saludos cordiales

Jessica Tenesaca

_____

El 22 de abril de 2015, 4:18,
Ignacio Álvarez-Ossorio <ialvarez@ua.es> escribió:

Hola, Jess

Disculpa que no te haya contestado antes, pero estos días no tengo mucho tiempo

libre. Si me envías algunas preguntas, intentaré contestarte, pero no te puedo

garantizar que lo haga pronto porque ahora mismo apenas tengo tiempo libre.

Un saludo cordial,

Ignacio Álvarez-Ossorio Alvariño

Profesor titular de Estudios Árabes e Islámicos de la Universidad de Alicante

Coordinador de Oriente Medio y Magreb del OPEX de la Fundación Alternativas

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Asunto: Re: Por favor su ayuda

Hola Jess
Perdona, pero he estado bastante ocupado estos meses. Intento responderte
brevemente a las preguntas.

1. ¿La población siria esta de lado del gobierno o de la oposición?
La población está dividida. En un primer momento hubo segmentos importantes de
la población siria que salieron a las calles para reivindicar más libertades y

más democracia, todo ello en el marco de la Primavera Árabe. Cuatro años y medio después de la guerra sigue existiendo un rechazado importante hacia el régimen, que no ha dudado en masacrar a su propia población para conservar el poder. El problema es que en las zonas rebeldes la situación dista mucho de haberse estabilizado y el avance de los grupos salafistas y yihadistas ha provocado que parte de la población, sobre todo los funcionarios y las minorías confesionales vean al régimen como un mal menor.

2. ¿Porque cree usted que el conflicto no ha terminado hasta hoy? Por varias razones, entre ellas la determinación del régimen por retener el poder a cualquier precio, la fragmentación de la oposición moderada, la irrupción de grupos yihadistas y, sobre todo, la intervención de actores externos, como Irán, Arabia Saudí, Turquía y Qatar, que están librando una guerra por delegación en Siria a través de actores interpuestos. Estos actores han echado más leña al fuego y no han contribuido a calmar la situación, sino más bien todo lo contrario. Su irrupción en escena ha provocado una intensificación del sectarismo en Siria.

3. ¿Porque la población afectada siria no ha buscado refugio en Israel? Porque las fronteras con el Golán están cerradas a cal y canto desde su ocupación por Israel en 1967. De hecho, el Golán fue anexado oficialmente a Israel en 1981.

4. ¿Porque a los refugiados que se encuentran en los países de acogida se les ha negado el acceso a obtener un trabajo?
Ninguno de los países árabes del entorno ha firmado las convenciones internacionales sobre los refugiados, de manera que no se sienten obligados a aplicar la legislación existente. Debe tenerse en cuenta que los países vecinos han cargado con la responsabilidad de recibir a cuatro millones de personas (casi un 20% de la población siria), mientras que los países occidentales han eludido sus responsabilidades en este sentido. Para Líbano, un país con tan sólo cuatro millones de personas, es sumamente complicado acoger a más de un millón y

medio de refugiados y la ayuda que presta ACNUR es, aunque muy importante, del todo insuficiente. En muchos casos, los niños no asisten a la escuela porque necesitan trabajar para mantener a sus familias. También los padres se han convertido en mano de obra barata que compite con la local en los trabajos peor pagados.

5. ¿Piensa usted que una intervención internacional podría terminar con el conflicto?

En mi opinión, la única manera de resolver el conflicto es mediante vías pacíficas. Sólo unas negociaciones en las que participen todos los países con intereses en la región puede detener la sangría siria. Es obvio que Bashar al-Asad, principal responsable de la situación, no puede ser en ningún caso parte de la solución. Lo ideal sería que Irán y Arabia Saudí, principales sustentadores del régimen y la oposición, entierren el hacha de la guerra y negociación la pacificación gradual de todas las crisis que asolan la región, incluida la situación en Irak y Yemen. El problema es que ninguno de los dos parece dispuesto a renunciar a sus planteamientos maximalistas. Para Irán, el régimen sirio representa un aliado central que garantiza su profundidad estratégica en la región. Arabia Saudí, por su parte, interpreta el conflicto en clave sectaria y pretende derrotar a los alawíes para extender el credo wahabí en la zona.

6. ¿Si el presidente Bashar Al-assad es destituido, la situación en Siria mejorara?

Creo que este es el primer paso a dar para garantizar una reconciliación entre los sirios. El segundo sería formar una coalición para expulsar a los grupos no sirios que se han apoderado de vastas porciones de territorio y, con ello, me refiero esencialmente al autodenominado Estado Islámico que es un actor externo que se ha aprovechado del vacío de poder y de la descomposición del estado para asentarse en el país. El tercero sería evitar que Siria se convierta en un territorio donde las potencias regionales libran sus guerras a través de actores

interpuestos, lo que requeriría que ninguna de las partes se dejase manipular por ellas. El problema es que cuanto más dure la guerra más profundos serán los odios y el deseo de venganza.

7. ¿Cree usted que la presencia del Estado Islámico está empeorando la situación en Siria, porque?

Sin duda alguna. El EI no tiene una agenda siria, sino islámica. Pretende convertir Siria en un laboratorio de experimentos para tratar de imponer su retrógrada interpretación de la sharía. La población siria bajo su dominio se han convertido en cobayas con las que se experimenta. Pero debemos recalcar que dicho grupo no es sirio, sino que está integrado en su mayoría por musulmanes provenientes de distintas partes del mundo. Además, su discurso ultraviolento y ultrasectario está acabando con las minorías locales, que habían convivido en relativa armonía desde hace siglos. Su proyecto totalitario se basa en imponer una identidad musulmana wahabí y eliminar toda esta heterogeneidad étnico-confesional existente en la región.

Espero que sea suficiente. Siento, una vez más, el retraso.

Un saludo cordial,
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