

## **The Syrian Crisis and Refugee Situation**

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The Outbreak of the Syrian war did not come much as a surprise to the world, especially after the Arab spring. However, the dragging of the war has puzzled anthropologists and political analysts. To understand the Syrian war and the refugee crisis, one has to understand the players in the Syrian war theatre. Several players have different interests in the Syrian war. On one side is Bashar al-Assad, supported by Russia and other rebels considered terrorists by the United States. On other side was there ISIS, which majorly fought against the Syrian government and the Yazidi population. On another side of the conflict are there Yazidis ethnic minorities that had to fight for their survival against a strong terror group called ISIS. The Syrian government did not see any urgent need to support Yazidis. The Syrian government has nothing against them but does not support them nonetheless. Akgül (2020) observes that the conflict involves Kurdish forces who had to fight against two forces initially and then fight against three when Turkey attacked them. On the one hand, the Kurdish forces are fighting government troops and advancing ISIS and other terrorist groups. They did so for some time with the support of the United States, where most of them served in the US military as a translator. However, when the US pulled out of Syria abruptly, the Kurdish forces had to face a new enemy: Turkey. Turkey is a US ally, but it fights against US allies in Syria. However, Russia, which supports Bashir al-Assad's army, is careful not to engage in conflict with the United States in Syria, but occasionally, they run into challenges.

Observably, both Russia and the United States are contributing indirectly and directly to the refugee problem in Syria. However, the refugee situation and the presence of many players in the Syrian frontier can be understood in terms of religion, military Alliances, and interests in the Middle East region. Syrian refugees have found themselves pressed from all sides by various

advancing armies with different interests. Such differences have complicated the refugee situation in Syria.

### **Different Refugee Experiences**

Kurdish refugees and Yazidis are perhaps the most affected groups of people in the Syrian conflict. Cevik & Sevin (2017) suggest refugees from different ethnic and religious backgrounds feel the heat of being refugees differently. They offer that other Sunni, Shia, and Arabic-speaking people from the capital feel different war experiences. To begin with, an analysis of the Refugee crisis will shed light on the problem of the Syrian war and why it has become such a protracted war. To understand the Kurdish forces and the refugee crisis, one must understand their population distribution in the region. The Kurdish people live in an area that has been cut by a political boundary between Turkey and Syria. While some Kurdish ethnic communities live in the Syrian territory, others live in Turkey, where a political boundary separates them.

Surprisingly most Kurdish people are Sunni Muslims like the majority of other ethnic communities in Turkey. However, Turkey is worried that the Kurdish forces in Turkey have been pressing for independence. Turkey feels that any association with the Kurdish people are a direct threat to its independence and security. It feels this group is a threat to the existing status quo and a significant influence on power relations in Turkey. Many scholars have pointed out that the Kurdish people in Turkey are the largest minority group, making up to 20% of the population (Akin & Akin, 2017). When combined with the other Kurdish community in Syria, their sheer number makes the Kurdish forces a significant threat to Turkey (Hale, 2019). Turkey is concerned that should the Kurdish in Syria decide to make an alliance with the Kurdish community in Turkey, Turkey will likely face one of the biggest rebellions in its history.

Therefore, a situation arises which is quite different from what is common in the Arab alliances. In many cases, the Arab Alliances are usually formed based on religious sects. One would have expected that since Turkey is a majority Sunni-Muslim country. Since the Kurdish people in Turkey are also Sunni Muslims, the Kurdish community in Turkey and elsewhere would not be a threat to the Turkish government. However, Kurdish forces in Syria also have a political ambition. Gulmez (2019) notes that the Kurds declared secession from Syria at the height of the Syrian war, pronouncing themselves an independent Kurdish state. Turkey is worried that the Kurdish forces in Syria may influence the Kurdish community in Turkey and cause internal strife. Therefore, Turkish forces deployed to fight against the Kurdish forces due to a situation that could spill over and cause further refugee problems inside Turkey. Of course, such a problem would also be a political problem. Turkey is mostly concerned that the Kurds in Syria should be tamed before they spill over their rebellion into Turkey

When the Syrian war began and the United States entered the war, one of the strongest allies of the United States in the conflict was the Kurdish forces. The United States relied on the help of the Kurdish troops to counter other terrorist groups scattered all over Syria. According to Adem, Childerhouse, Egbelakin, & Wang (2018), Kurdish forces offered logistical support and various assistance needed by the US Army. In other words, the Kurdish forces and the United States worked as one entity in the Syrian conflict. The weakness of the Syrian central government had opened up room to the sprouting of various terrorist groups. Although the Kurdish forces were committed to fighting the ISIS terror groups, it came as a surprise that Turkey only chose to attack Kurds. It is unclear why Turkey does not bother to attack the ISIS group but instead attacks the Kurdish forces. That demonstrates that there is an ethnic perspective to the war.

As far as Russia is concerned, she never strongly attacked the Kurdish forces, although sometimes she attacked innocent civilians in brutal air raids. The US moved in to support their Kurdish allies and prevented, for some time, what could have been a worse refugee crisis among the Kurds. Hadi, Farah, Lauren, & King-Okumu, (2020) believe that the refugee crisis usually worsens if no strong force is on the ground. Therefore, the US might have prevented what could have been a bloodbath and humanitarian crises among the Kurds. In terms of aid, much of the United States' support was given during the Obama administration. The Obama administration had ordered the CIA to train and arm friendly forces and moderate terrorist organizations inside Syria. Unfortunately, Turkey had designated the Kurdish forces in Syria as a terror group. Therefore, the US decision to support the Kurdish forces was a thorn in the flesh of Turkey. Turkey was constantly looking for any loophole to attack the Kurdish forces so much that she did not care about the NATO military alliance with the United States.

At the end of Obama's second term, President Donald Trump was elected the new US president. Scholars such as Poyraz (2021) observe that Trump was bent on reversing all that Obama ever did. Therefore, it is not clear whether the decision to pull out the US troops from the Kurdish region was part of Trump's reversal plan against Obama's policy or whether it was a normal military strategy. Whatever one makes of it, it was a big mistake. The United States moved out of Syria, leaving their Kurdish allies exposed to attack from various fronts. As soon as the United States gave orders for the troops to pull out of the Kurdish territory, Turkey began a military campaign against the Kurdish forces. The Turkish military onslaught led to another refugee crisis among the Kurdish communities in Syria. Many Kurds felt betrayed by the United States in a war in which many had sacrificed so much for. The US military why not amused, but

they kept away from the politics. Observers note that US withdrawal from her allies portrayed her as an unreliable ally.

Consequently, one can say that the Kurdish refugee crisis was politically instigated and fueled by shifting Alliances. Moreover, one can also observe that the Kurdish refugee crisis was not only a product of Turkey's internal strife but also a product of geopolitics calculations. Turkish contribution to the Kurdish refugee crisis was born out of fear. However, one can also say that it was an unnecessary and unprovoked attack against a people that had not directly threatened Turkey's political interest or stability. Turkey's attack on the Kurdish forces was based on the assumption that the Kurdish forces in Syria might influence the Kurds in Turkey and agitate them to join them in the liberation struggle. Apart from Turkey's internal politics and fear, there was no justification for Turkey to further a refugee problem in Syria.

On the other hand, one can also say that Russia's military campaign in Syria also aggravated the country's refugee situation. However, Russia supported by Bashir al-Assad and efficiently conducted air raids against military forces perceived as anti-government. Most of the air raids that the Syrian troops purported to have conducted were primarily conducted by Russian military planes. Richardson, Karam, & Afiouni (2020) note that Russia conducted brutal and unconventional war against the civilian population to weaken any resistance against Bashar al-Assad. The raids aggravated the refugee crisis as most people continued to pour into neighboring countries to seek refuge. The use of white phosphorus in the war caused the indiscriminate killing of both children and adults. It created fear among the people, thereby forcing women and children to move to neighboring countries as refugees.

On the other hand, the Sunni Muslims at the Capitol experience a different type of refugee crisis. Sunni Muslims and their capital mostly had to contend with the refugee crisis as a minority group surrounded by Shia Muslims. Bashir al-Assad and his Associates are mostly Shia Muslims, although they belong to a religious sect called Alawites. The Alawites practice a heterodox form of Shia Islam. This means that the Sunni Muslims and the capital were mostly associated with the Rebels in the periphery. One of the Rebels in the periphery is the Kurdish forces that received the support of the United States. Given that the United States was considered an enemy, then Arabs believe that the friend of your enemy is your enemy. The implication of this is that the Sunni Muslims and their capital also lived in fear under Suspicion of what would happen next. They were not trusted neither did they trust. There is no way Sunni and Shia Muslims would openly trust each other during war such as the one in Syria. Although the leadership might pretend that all is well on the camera, at the back of their minds, they were all aware that the Sunni- Shia religious conflicts always play out whenever there is a conflict. That is the same reason why Iran supported Bashir al-Assad unconditionally because both are a Shia majority.

In the Confusion of ensuing multi conflicts on the Syrian front, several refugee crises emerged. The Yazidis were mainly the target of the worst terrorist groups that ever existed. Since most of them were not Muslims, the ISIS group forced them to convert to Islam, turn them into jihads, and use them. Those who resisted were shot dead or had their throat cut and their bodies exposed on the streets. Therefore, while Yazidis may have suffered one of the worst refugee crises, it is also observable that they suffered one of the worst humanitarian abuses of the century. Many of them were killed and buried in mass graves as various parties continued the conflict in the Syrian War Theatre.

Consequently, one can understand that the Syrian refugee crisis was beyond the political questions that started the war but preceded as a religious sect conflict and the balance of power act between major world powers such as the United States and Russia (Kizilkaya, 2017). The Pursuit of various interests in Syria is believed to cause their prolonged refugee crisis with no political or economic gain on the other side. What is currently being witnessed is a military bravado by Russia, Turkey, and the United States. Scholars believe that the original reasons for the conflicts have been overtaken by time and that it is high time those differences were reconciled for a lasting resolution.

Another perspective that anthropologists can use to understand the Refugee crisis in Syria is the political lens. However, many anthropologists always want to base their studies on communities the Turkish refugee problem arrivals from community political alignment. Turkey enters into Syria but does not attack the Isis group, which has caused global terror and threats. Instead, Turkey feels that the Kurdish forces are more of a threat to its interest more than the Isis group (Piotrowski, 2017). Its decision to bypass the Isis group by not attacking them and directly attack the Kurdish forces demonstrates that all countries in Syria are pursuing national interest but not global interest. That explains why Russia enters the war and is willing to use chemical weapons alongside the al-Assad regime to quell what they term as rebellion. That also explains why the United States entered the war and fought alongside the Kurdish forces for some time but later withdrew its forces hastily. The matter concludes that the foreign powers do not care much about the Refugee crisis the actions are causing in Syria. Instead, they fight the war and stay as long as what they do reflects their interests.

In short, the Refugee crisis in Syria needs to be assessed from an international law perspective. None of the countries that have sent their forces to Syria have Syrians' best interest at heart. Although the leadership of Bashar al-Assad did not give enough room for democratic views, it had managed to keep the country stable for quite some time. The Outbreak of the war and the entry of various military forces into Syria only partially failed to flush out the terror threat but have done little to the ordinary people who are still in refugee camps. The Refugee crisis in Syria is likely to continue as long as the different foreign players continue to pursue their selfish interests. However, there's a need for the world to intervene in the Syrian refugee crisis by coming up with resolutions that would Force the foreign countries in Syria to address human rights questions, especially during the war and in the Refugee camps.

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