Chapter 10


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ABSTRACT

Syria is in a devastating war brought by the Arab Spring. The country witnessed perhaps the bulk of the brutalities of the Arab Spring evidenced by the massacre of civilians and obliteration of historical and valuable property. In view of the brutal and global nature of the Syrian conflict, this chapter examines the significance of flight as a survival strategy developed by the Syrians in the wake of the Syrian conflict which began in 2011. This approach is not only significant in appreciating the fact that civilians are not necessarily passive recipients of violence but also gives us an opportunity to reflect on how superpower involvement deprived Syrians of the chance to come up with home-grown solutions before the conflict degenerated into an all-out war. The civilian strategy of flight thus shows the vulnerability of civilians in conflict and the significance of local solutions and ownership of peacebuilding programmes.

INTRODUCTION

This research was motivated by the abundance of studies which view the responses of civilians during times of conflict merely as a sign of catastrophic disaster while ignoring how civilian strategy can help remove the root causes of conflict. The challenges common in civilian survival strategies help shape up what actually needs to

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be done to remove the causes of violence. Historians and strategists are fundamentally interested in the causes and prosecution of conflicts, military technology, strategies and tactics, and the socio-economic and political effects of conflicts. The impact of civilian survival strategies is given peripheral attention despite the fact it is pivotal in as far as eradicating the causes of the conflict is concerned. Civilian survival strategy defines the nature, actors, international dimension and impact of the conflict. Civilians always find their situations complicated during and after the conflict. The refugee crisis generated by the Syrian conflict has been described as the worst since the end of the Second World War in 1945. One can reasonably argue that the crisis could not have reached its crescendo if the United States had shelved its policy of regime change in unfriendly countries. Libya, Yemen, and Iraq already bear testimony to the dangers of militarism in dealing with the so-called dictators. The Syrians were initially following the principles of nonviolence fully knowing the consequences of violent action but all hell broke loose when the US supported a military solution to the Syrian problem. This expectedly culminated in a chain of events as other powers such as Russia adopted a military option in order to thwart US dominance in the region. The net effect was the suffering of ordinary civilians in Syria.

In brief, the Syrian War demonstrates the significance of civilian survival strategy in times of crisis. While an array of survival strategies was employed, flight was widely used as the conflict escalated. Civilians in Syria fled to countries where they expected to find relative safety. Syria was on fire and many if not all sources of livelihoods were in disarray. The war brought uncountable insecurities which led civilians to flee to almost all countries around the globe. The strategy of running away from Syria was not mere coincidence. It rather shows how civilians take the initiative when they are surrounded by danger. The magnitude of the desertions serves as a constant reminder to all stakeholders involved about the imperativeness of peacebuilding in Syria. This essentially involves short-term peacebuilding – the cessation of hostilities, conflict transformation and long-term peacebuilding. The flights, in fact, demonstrate the anarchy in the international system. Multi-pronged peacebuilding strategies are thus imperative in restoring normalcy to a country once called Syria. Nonetheless, these peacebuilding strategies should revolve around civilian-centred solutions. While a temporary arrangement can be made, a political solution that lasts should be backed by the people who bore the brunt of the conflict. While in the immediate term the superpowers hold the keys to the negotiation processes, long term peace process can only be sustained with the input of the civilians. Whatever happens should reflect the true will of the people. Stability is the first thing to be achieved in Syria before structural violence is dealt with.

The visibility of America’s hand in conflicts around the globe is testimony to the challenges posed by superpower domination in managing conflicts in the Middle
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