

**IBN HALDUN UNIVERSITY
SCHOOL OF GRADUATE STUDIES
DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE AND
INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS**

MASTER THESIS

**CONCEPTUALIZING WAR CRIMES IN SYRIA 2011-2020:
BETWEEN GENOCIDE AND ETHNIC CLEANSING**

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**THESIS SUPERVISOR
ASSIST. PROF. HEBA RAOUF MOHAMED EZZAT**

ISTANBUL, 2021

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BETWEEN GENOCIDE AND ETHNIC CLEANSING**

by

SANA DARKAL

**A thesis submitted to the School of Graduate Studies in partial
fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in
Political Science and International Relations**

THESIS SUPERVISOR

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ISTANBUL, 2021

APPROVAL PAGE

This is to certify that we have read this thesis and that in our opinion it is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a thesis for the degree of Master of Arts in Political Science and International Relations.

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This is to confirm that this thesis complies with all the standards set by the School of Graduate Studies of Ibn Haldun University.

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I hereby declare that all information in this document has been obtained and presented in accordance with academic rules and ethical conduct. I also declare that, as required by these rules and conduct, I have fully cited and referenced all material and results that are not original to this work.

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ÖZ

SURİYE'DEKİ SAVAŞ SUÇLARINI KAVRAMSALLAŞTIRMAK (2011-2021):
SOYKIRIM MI ETNİK TEMİZLİK Mİ?

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Savaşın ikinci on yılına girilirken, Suriye’de mezhep ve etnik açıdan büyük farklılık gösteren yeni bir demografi oluştuğu gözlenmektedir. Hayatlarını kaybedenlerin çoğunluğunu, Suriye nüfusunun yüzde 76’sını oluşturan Sünnilerden olduğu açıktır. Alevi azınlığın (nüfusun yüzde 11’i) hakim olduğu Suriye Hükümeti, ölümcül kitle imha silahları, ayrımcı kanunlar ve daha da önemlisi ‘kuşat ve aç bırak’ stratejisi ile Suriye bölgesinde tahliye ve göçe zorlamak suretiyle nüfus temizliği uygulamıştır. Sonuç olarak 13 milyona yakın Suriyeli (nüfusun yarısından fazlası) yerlerinden olmuştur. Tahliye edilen bölgelerin bir kısmına Şii kökenli, İran tarafından desteklenen yabancı milisler yerleştirilmiştir. Suriye Hükümeti’nin bir yanda yeni bir Suriye ‘milliyeti’, vatandaşlığı ve nüfusu yaratırken, öte yanda milyonlarca mülteci ve eve dönüş yolları kapanan yerinden edilmiş nüfusla öngörülebilir bir çatışma başlatmış; bu süreçte ilk müttefiki İran olmuştur. Bu fenomen, işlenen suçun tabiatı ile ilgili, etnik temizlik çerçevesi içinde olup olmadığına dair hukuki bir soruya yol açmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Demografik değişim, Etnik Temizlik, Mezhepçilik, Şii, Suriye, Sünni.

ABSTRACT

CONCEPTUALIZING WAR CRIMES IN SYRIA 2011-2020: BETWEEN GENOCIDE AND ETHNIC CLEANSING

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As the Syrian war enters its second decade, a new demography in Syria that significantly differs in terms of sectarian and ethnic backgrounds appears. It is clear that the majority of the conflict's casualties are Sunnis who form around 76% of the Syrian population. The Syrian government, dominated by the Alawite minority, which is 11% of the Syrian population, used lethal weapons, weapons of mass destruction, discriminatory legislations and more importantly the 'siege and starve' strategy to depopulate, forcibly evacuate and cleanse whole areas in the Syrian territory. This resulted in the displacement of around 13 million Syrians comprising more than half of the total population. Some of the evacuated areas started to be reinhabited by foreign militia of Shia backgrounds supported by Iran. With Iran being its primary ally, the Syrian government has created new characteristics of the Syrian nationality, nationals and population. It also perpetuated a protractable conflict for the millions of refugees who appear to have no possible means to return to their homes. This phenomena raise legal question about the nature of this crime, and whether it is within the borders of ethnic cleansing or not.

Keywords: Demographic Change, Ethnic Cleansing, Sectarianism, Shia, Sunni, Syria.

DEDICATION

It is dedicated to all those who carry the hope and work for a real homeland.



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I would like to thank my family for there endless support. I would like also to thank Mr. Nazir Atassi for his valuable help.

Sana DARKAL
ISTANBUL, 2021



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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The Syrian war, which has been going on for 10 years, has left behind enormous destruction which the international powers are considering how to efficiently rebuild with their reconstruction programs. However, they are not similarly concerned with the destruction of the Syrian society. They have left the 500,000 deaths to increase freely, and they have also been ignoring the targeted cleansing of the Sunni majority of the population.

The totalitarian, minority-ruling government of the Assad family which has been ruling Syria in the last half-century does not publish official data on national demography. Academically, all the data related to demography in Syria lacks accuracy due to manipulation of collection, analysis and presentation of data. However, based on the statistical data prior to the Assad regime, the Shiite percentage was less than 1% while Sunnis were 70-80% of the total population. In the last decade, Syrian society witnessed highly remarkable changes. Since 2011, more than half a million people were killed, 6.7 million individuals were internally displaced, and 6.6 million Syrians sought refuge in other countries. A total of 13 million Syrians were forced to leave their homes. Considering that the Syrian population in 2010 was 21 million, more than half of the population were displaced. Out of 8 Syrians, 5 became refugees. The exact number of detainees is unknown and the estimate for the number of missing people is said to be hundreds of thousands.

However, these numbers do not fully capture the actual circumstances on the ground. It fails to emphasise that most of the victims are Sunnis. The targeted areas of displacement, siege, chemical weapons, massacres, bombardment and shellings are mostly Sunni settlements. On the other hand, the government has blocked those who were displaced from returning to their original regions of residence, and started repopulating some areas by the Shiite foreign militias who are backed by Iran. This

will result in a re-designed demography of the post-war Syria. This will mean that the refugee issue will be a locked crisis, and more threateningly, if the Syrian conflict continues for a longer period, the cleansing of Sunnis will probably continue in a larger scale.

1.1. The Research Question

Conceptualizing war crimes in Syria 2011-2020: between genocide and Ethnic cleansing.

The study will focus on the conduct of the Syrian government and its allies during the war in light of ethnic cleansing. This study will not focus on groups such as ISIS or other terrorist groups. This is because terrorism has already been extensively covered by many studies. It will not discuss the crimes that occurred between Arabs and Kurds in the North of Syria. Finally, this study refers to Sunnis, a religious group, including Arabs and Kurds. Racial lines are not in the interest of this study.

1.2. Research Methodology

In addition to exploring the historical context, the methodology of this study is a qualitative one. It includes two main approaches:

1. The conceptual analysis.
2. In-depth interviews which were conducted with four Syrian political elites:
 - a. Radwan Ziadeh: Ziadeh is a senior analyst at the Arab Center - Washington D.C. He is also the founder and director of the Damascus Center for Human Rights Studies in Syria, and co-founder and executive director of the Syrian Center for Political and Strategic Studies in Washington, D.C. He wrote more than twenty books in English and Arabic about Syrian politics.
 - b.
 - c. Anwar al-Bunni: Anwar al-Bunni is a Syrian Christian lawyer and human rights defender who is famous for his struggle against the regime and his criticism of the government. In 2006, he was imprisoned for five years. He fled Syria in 2014 and is

currently working in German where he is suing Syrian criminals. He has won several awards.

d. Haytham al-Malih: Haytham al-Malih is a judge and a human rights activist. He was imprisoned several times due to his criticisms against the Syrian regime. As part of his protests, he went through several hunger strikes. He has received awards in recognition of his struggle. He was the first human rights activist to warn against the 'Shiitization of Syria'.

e. Husam al-Hafiz: Husam al-Hafiz is a Syrian diplomat. He was the legal counsel of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Damascus. He has served in Syrian embassies in Tahrán, London and Yerevan. Al-Hafiz has participated in the Syrian negotiations and has worked in the Syrian Interim government. He spearheaded the legal committee in HNC.

1.3. Challenges Of The Study

Similar to the typical challenges that studies on conflicts and wars encounter, the main challenge of this study is the lack of data sourced from the government regarding the religious backgrounds of the population, the lack of accurate statistics about the causalities in Syria, the lack of accurate official or non-state sanctioned data about the scale of Shiitization in Syrian towns and Urban areas, and the lack of official data about the exact role of the Iran-backed militia during the conflict.

In this study the approach of conceptual analysis is important to differentiate between the nuances in meaning of every term used. Many crimes during armed conflicts were not classified under international crimes, and were often regarded as singular events despite the common features and implications. Political will and power relations play a major role in defining what falls under one criteria and what does not.

As Gaus stated: "Language is a game -or rather, many different types of games, that is an element of a forms of life" (Gaus, 2000). And this game effects a lot our notions and the way we make our judgement. The situation in Syria is usually described by concepts like "civil war" or "armed conflicts" which will drive imagination toward a

political dispute between two armed parties. When words like "terrorism" or "fundamentalism" are used in rhetoric they justify automatically any act against the other side in a conflict. When using concepts such as "Genocide", "ethnic cleansing" or even "Holocaust" the notions can significantly call for a humanitarian intervention against what cannot be justified morally, but the consequences of crimes should be faced and scrutinizing the conceptual tools becomes of ultimate importance for accountability, punishment and transitional justice.

International law has articles regarding crimes of genocide, crimes against humanity, war crimes and crimes of aggression, yet the international system has been selective and political consideration had always consequences on the results of them.

In Syria an average of one child has been injured or killed every eight hours over the past 10 years (UNICEF, 2021), yet the media and official statements have been promoting a shallow image of the Syrian crisis, marginalizing the sufferings of people in favor of covering the policy making or diplomatic negotiations. The right to justice for victims and right to return to their homeland to the displaced is rarely a subject of discussion, claiming the war has to end first in order to discuss these issues.

The importance of conceptual analysis in this study stems from the research question; the need to find a legal definition that describes best what is happening in Syria. The first chapter of this study analyze concepts that have common features with the Syrian crisis, their origins, classifications, borders and limits. The main target is to address mass murder and the depopulation of the civilians.

An important challenge is the continuity of war, which prevents exploring the full image and prevents as well the field research that could have been conducted in areas controlled by the government and regions controlled by some armed groups. The suppressive nature of the government impedes people who are within the country from speaking facts and clarifying the reality to the outside-observers. Even refugees abroad who want to return to Syria retreat from testifying in public against the regime out of fear that if Assad remains in power, returning to Syria will be fatally difficult. Similarly, the misleading propaganda of the Syrian regime about fighting terrorism perpetuated by some groups like ISIS shift the attention away from the regime's crimes

which they perpetuate with their allies. Therefore, the study pursued in-depth interviews with Syrian personalities.

Lastly, as the crisis is a recent one, it is hard to find academic resources about the conflict that cover the whole events which have occurred so far. This means that the academic resources that include the full chronology of the war are very scarce. This study has tried to restrict itself to the academic resources currently accessible as well as basing on reliable NGOs and media reports.



CHAPTER II

THE ORIGINS OF ETHNIC CLEANSING THE DEFINITION, HISTORY AND CONCEPT

Ethnic cleansing is an effort to render an ethnically mixed country homogenous by expelling a particular group of people and turning them into refugees while demolishing the homes they were driven out from. There may well be a master plan, but most of the troops engaged in ethnic cleansing do not need direct orders: they know beforehand what is expected of them. Massacres accompany the operations, but where they occur they are not part of a genocidal plan: they are a key tactic to accelerate the flight of the population earmarked for expulsion. Later on, the expelled are then erased from the country's official and popular history and excised from its collective memory (Pappe, 2006, p. 3).

2.1. The Definition of Ethnic Cleansing

Though the concept is well-known in today's world, it needs to be defined accurately as it shares factors with other international crimes. It is defined by some as a process, while others classify it as a systematic policy, very often connected with military operations (Petrovic, 1994, p. 351). Ethnic cleansing, though not mentioned as such in international treaties, is an international crime, "designated as a crime against humanity in international treaties (...) in other instances, ethnic cleansing was defined as a war crime even when no legal process was instigated as such" (Pappe, 2006, p. 5). It could also fall within the meaning of the Genocide Convention (UN Commission of Experts, 1994, par. 2).

The statement released in 1994 by United Nations Commission of Experts mandated to look into violations of international humanitarian law committed in the territory of the former Yugoslavia defined Ethnic Cleansing as "Rendering an area ethnically homogeneous by using force or intimidation to remove persons of given groups from the area (UN Security Council, 1992, res. 780).

This creates a confusion a bit between crimes similar to ethnic cleansing, making defining it harder, for "at one end it is virtually indistinguishable from forced

emigration and population exchange while at the other it merges with deportation and genocide"(UN Security Council, 1992, res. 780).

2.1.1. Genocide And Holocaust

As acts that fall within both crimes; ethnic cleansing and genocide, can be similar, the intents of both varies. The object of ethnic cleansing is to cleanse, to remove a certain, undesirable population from a certain territory, to create an ethnically homogenous society. The empasis of homgonizing the society ethnically or religiously, etc., depending on the basis of the act of cleansing, is appearent in the many definitions of ethnic cleansing. While in genocide, it is the destruction of the group itself (UN Security Council, 1992, res. 780). However, this distinction have no strong impact outside the legal field for two reasons. First, despite the many events of mass murder, whether a genocide or an ethnic cleansing, only few cases were brought to the court. Second, in many instances, it is hard to define the perpetrators' aims. These can be deduced from the strategy, the tactics and the related official statements they have publicly made.¹ In rare cases the perpetrator would openly announce his intention of ethnic cleansing, or annihilating a certain group, as how Hitler did it.

Genocide, which until the Second World War, was a "crime without a name," in the words of British Prime Minister Winston Churchill, could also be "a coordinated plan of different actions aiming at the destruction of essential foundations of the life of national groups, with the aim of annihilating the groups themselves" (Jones, 2006, p. 8; Jacobs, 2004, p. 2017).

Though many scholarly definitions exists in the literature of genocide, it varies in conceptualizing the same exact meaning due to the approaches used to capture the term.²

¹ A related example is the announcement of Assad in 2017 " We lost the best of our youth and our infrastructure, it cost us a lot of money and a lot of sweat, for generations. But in exchange, we won a healthier and more homogeneous society in the true sense".

² A chronological table of genocide definitions is set in Appendix A.

2.1.2. Defining The Combinations Of A Genocide's Approach

In defining genocide, as to what are the elements that characterize this term is a debatable issue. Some literature focus on the genocide's agent, victims, goal, scale, intent and strategies (Jones, 2006, pp.19-21). Other scholars restrict it to the intention, acts, victim's nature and the role of the state as a perpetrator (Harris, 2001, par. 7). For example, Vahakn Dadrian (1975) defines genocide components as the agent, the acts, the nature of victims, and the intent:

Genocide is the successful attempt by a dominant group, vested with formal authority and/or with preponderant access to the overall resources of power, to reduce by coercion or lethal violence the number of a minority group whose ultimate extermination is held desirable and useful and whose respective vulnerability is a major factor contributing to the decision for genocide (Jones, 2006, p. 15).

While Henry Huttenbach (1988) defines the main component of a genocide as the intent: "Genocide is any act that puts the very existence of a group in jeopardy" (Jones, 2006, p. 17). Jack Nusan Porter (1982) clearly states in his definition of genocide that it "involves three major components: ideology, technology, and bureaucracy/organization" (Jones, 2006, p. 17).

2.1.3. The Hard Approach Or The Soft Approach

Two main approaches, the hard and the soft, are followed in the inclusion or the exclusion of a certain event from the criteria of genocide. As discussed in the succeeding sections, this is a scholarly debate mostly seen in the issue of the holocaust to be a single, irrepitative crime, or a type of genocide that can still occur today. It is also seen by some scholars to have the bearing of the "political" nature of victims, while others restrict it to ethnicit, race and other factors. Similarly, while some definitions stress that a genocide is a biological process, others include a cultural dimension.

An example of defining genocide with the soft approach is Jack Nusan Porter's (1982) definition: "Genocide is the deliberate destruction, in whole or in part, by a government or its agents, of a racial, sexual, religious, tribal or political minority. It can involve

not only mass murder, but also starvation, forced deportation, and political, economic and biological subjugation. Genocide involves three major components: ideology, technology, and bureaucracy/organization". While he defines only three components, he makes them clearly inclusive in his definition, enabling us to characterize many events as genocides.

On the other hand, an example of the hard approach is Yehuda Bauer (1984), who distinguishes between "genocide" and "holocaust":

[Genocide is] the planned destruction, since the mid-nineteenth century, of a racial, national, or ethnic group as such, by the following means: (a) selective mass murder of elites or parts of the population; (b) elimination of national (racial, ethnic) culture and religious life with the intent of 'denationalization'; (c) enslavement, with the same intent; (d) destruction of national (racial, ethnic) economic life, with the same intent; (e) biological decimation through the kidnapping of children, or the prevention of normal family life, with the same intent.... [Holocaust is] the planned physical annihilation, for ideological or pseudo-religious reasons, of all the members of a national, ethnic, or racial group.³

Historically, "the word 'genocide' was first coined by Polish lawyer Raphaël Lemkin in 1944 in his book *Axis Rule in Occupied Europe*. It consists of the Greek prefix *genos*, meaning race or tribe, and the Latin suffix *cide*, meaning killing" (United Nations Office on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect, n.d., par. 1):

The Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide notes that genocide is any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such:

- a. Killing members of the group,
- b. Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group,
- c. Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part,
- d. Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group,

³ According to this definition, we can claim that the mass killing of Sunni in Syria, by indiscriminate weapons like chemical gases, and by directly targeting the civilian vital institutions (schools, hospitals, bakeries, refugees' camps, is a holocaust.

- e. Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group (United Nations Office on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect, n.d., par. 4).

By far we can point to many examples where such acts took place but the event itself was not recognized as a "Genocide". This again refers us back to the difference between defining through the hard approach or with the soft categorisation. However, the critical point in proving a genocide by law is defining the real intention of the perpetrators. In a Genocide, victims are targeted for annihilation due to their identity as such. Therefore, we can imagine that the perpetrators' aims are well set in their plans before they start committing the crime. While in ethnic cleansing, it emerges in a complex way due to factors of politics, history, sociology, economic and so on. It will come as a plan C, as Mann (2005) refers to it. After going through plans A and B, it becomes a final strategy, and it is also carried out by ordinary people, not only by the evil minds. For It is hard to imagine that only evil minds plan such terrible acts, because in that sense, we will be whitewashing the role of ordinary people who participate in committing these crimes in many cases. Further, as Mann (2005, p. 9) notes, "ordinary people are brought by normal social structure into committing murderous ethnic cleansing, and their motives are much more mundane". He also quotes from Charny (1986, p.144) that "the mass killers of humankind are largely everyday human beings- what we have called normal people according to currently accepted definitions by the mental health profession".⁴ It is true, "the harsh reality is that collective violence is planned and executed by ordinary men"(Browning, 1998, p. 50). As scary as it is, it is very true. For those who have executed these crimes must in their own judgement and sense have a measurement of acceptance of it, which is legitimised by them for some reasons and through other means.

This role is largely and efficiently played today by the media. The creation of a certain image for the enemy can easily mobilize the masses to the already-designed direction. Conesa (2011, p. 37) remarks "How is the enemy built in the context of common fears? The answer does not always come from cold, sedate analysis, but often from the general production of literature, media or cinema. Anxiety represent a market,

⁴ Let us remember Milgram experiment in 1961 and the Stanford Prison Experiment 1971.

Hollywood did not miss that". He gives a strong example about the role of media in mobilizing toward a constructed enemy:

a study about Iraq war was conducted on a sample of 3334 viewer of different American channels, made by a program of international politics in 2003 and 2004, showed that 80% of Fox News viewer believe at least in one of these four (wrong) ideas: the axiomatic relation between Baghdad and Bin-Laden (..), Iraq involvement in the bombing operation of 11 September, the discover of weapons of mass destruction in Iraq, and finally the universal support of the war of Iraq, the motto of Fox News was 'we report, you decide (Conesa, 2011, p. 54).

a. But Are Genocides All Alike?

The typology of genocide's approach is also a critical point in the scholarly literature of genocide. Some scholars classify genocides according to certain types. Others characterise the term genocide in a more specific manner in consideration of instances pertinent to mass murder, ethnic cleansing, and other factors:

a third alternative has been to avoid the term altogether. Scholars have employed terms such as 'democide', 'state-sponsored mass murder', 'ethnocide', 'ethnic cleansing' and 'politicide' to describe events otherwise referred to as genocide. Many of these terms have been utilised in situations where a label of genocide is contentious, for example in describing the persecution of a political group. While this is a valid option, it is one that only a minority of scholars have preferred. Those who have preferred this option must address many of the issues faced by scholars using an alternative definition of genocide, and are often left with a term that is not as readily understood (Harris, 2001, par. 9).

b. Why Are These Concepts Recent?

Since the 20th century, ideas were developed about peace, liberty, disarmament, individual freedom, and religious freedom. However, this century has also witnessed a rise in mass killing, and the appearance of these concepts in the field. Why is this the case?

Mann (2005) explains it by linking mass killing with the emergence of ideas related to the rise of nationalism, nation state and democracy.

Democracy means rule by the people. But in modern times the people has come to mean two things. The first is what the Greek meant by their word demos. This means the ordinary people, the mass of the population. So democracy is rule by the ordinary people, the masses. But in our civilization the people also means

“nation” or another Greek term, *ethnos*, an ethnic group – a people that shares a common culture and sense of heritage, distinct from other peoples. But if the people is to rule in its own nation-state, and if the people is defined in ethnic terms, then its ethnic unity may outweigh the kind of citizen diversity that is central to democracy. If such a people is to rule, what is to happen to those of different ethnicity? Answers have often been unpleasant (Mann, 2005, p. 3).

Fein (1979) also refer to the role of the nation-state in generating genocide (Jonassohn & Chalks, 1987, p. 9). While Kuper (1981) also emphasize on the factor of nation-states that have plural societies in genocidal studies, especially when it occurs during colonization or decolonization era (Jonassohn & Chalks, 1987, p. 10).

Raphäel Lemkin (1944), who firstly used the concept "Genocide" in his book "Axis Rule in Occupied Europe" used it to describe the Holocaust done by the Nazis. Holocaust in literature refers to the singular event of executing six million Jews by the Nazis. This leads us to the question, is holocaust a concept that we can use to label other crimes that match its criteria, or a concept used exclusively on the crime of executing Jews by the Nazis?

The term “Holocaust” is often discussed in connection with its etymology. There are two approaches here. The first emphasizes that the term “Holocaust” is quite old and goes back to early English Bible translations, where it was used to refer to a “burnt offering” in a sacral sense. The NS regime may also have viewed the Holocaust as a redemptive act of sacrifice. Hitler thought of the Jews as quasi-negative *Doppelgänger* (doubles), and their destruction would be a sacrificial act from his perspective. The term has also been used in modern times, including the Twentieth Century in a non-religious, secular sense. It was also used in reference to other mass killings before World War II, for example the Armenian genocide. The gypsies also have a word “*Porrajmos*” or “fearful catastrophe” to refer to the mass killing of the Sinti and Roma in (or concurrent with) the Holocaust (...). In English, the term ‘holocaust’ developed the meaning in the Nineteenth Century of a complete destruction or great massacre. It could be used to refer to a fire, much like inferno. It was sometimes used in reference to the two world wars, but in regard to their destructiveness, not to the Jewish catastrophe. The association of the term with sacrifice is criticized as an intrusion of Christian meaning into the study. However, many people are unaware of these associations or ignore them and orient themselves to the current usage, as found in books and public discourse (Brice, 2005, pp. 13-14).

The Holocaust, horrible as it was, is an act that could be seen as repetitive, probably in a smaller and more limited context, but on the same ground. It is a genocide, and genocides still occur today, unfortunately, regardless of the "international efforts" to

prevent the occurrences of such act. The ICC has authority to persecute individuals for committing genocides, crimes against humanity, war crimes and crimes of aggression. However, it is only authorized to do so in crimes that took place in member states, committed by nationals from member states, or crimes referred to it by UNSC. Apparently, state authorities who commit such crimes will not willingly sign the Rome Statute to be under ICC jurisdiction. This deficiency which the ICC has and other similar international bodies that promote to stop genocide is costing the world expensively.⁵

To date, the court has opened investigations on 13 cases since its establishment in 2002. It issues decisions but it does not have the capacity to implement its decisions. It theoretically punishes with imprisonment, life imprisonment, confiscation of property or issue a financial penalty (International Criminal Court, n.d.)⁶.

Thus, mass killing still finds its way worldwide. This map shows incidences of mass killing in 2019-2020:

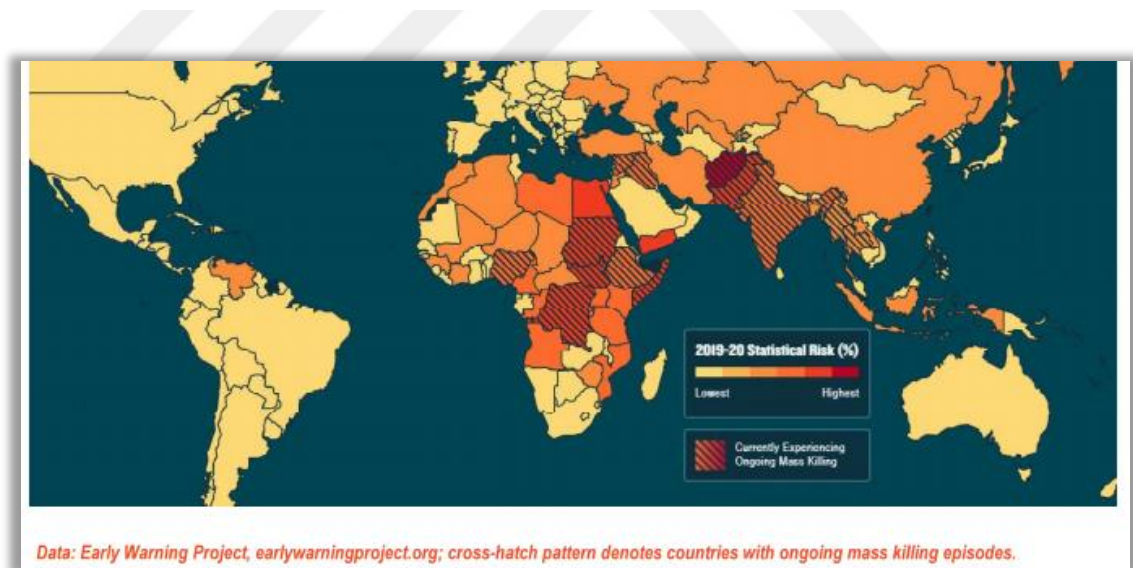


Figure 2.1. Heat Map of Estimated Risk Of New Mass Killing, 2019-2020

⁵ In 2015, ICC was looking into crimes in occupied territories in Palestine, the genocide had to continue for 67 year before being "investigated" officially, and 7 years passed ever since, the case is still ongoing but unfortunately more civilians have to die still. <https://www.icc-cpi.int/palestine/>...

⁶ The failure of the international system in dealing with the international crimes had a direct impact over the growing terrorism wave. The deficit in imposing the law over the perpetrators and the availability of means (weapons) persuade victims and their family members to take revenge by themselves and join extremist groups.

Whereas;

by our definition, a mass killing occurs when the deliberate actions of armed groups in a particular country (including but not limited to state security forces, rebel armies, and other militias) result in the deaths at least 1.000 noncombatant civilians in that country over a period of one year or less. The civilians must also have been targeted for being part of a specific group. Mass killing is a subset of 'mass atrocities' which we define more generally as large- scale, systematic violence against civilian populations (United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 2019, pp. 3-4).

But what are the criteria to define a mass killing as a genocide, or as a holocaust? What transform a violation of human rights, a massacre or a violence to be considered as a genocide or, another holocaust?

Some argue that the holocaust is a unique event, that it was not a repetitive event and that we cannot categorize another event as one, mainly because of the number of victims. Feierstein questions thus

This raises the question of how many million victims are required before the criterion of exclusivity applies. Is an accounting system necessary to determine whether genocide has taken place? And if so, do victims who died in Europe score more points than those who died elsewhere? Enzo Traverso has partly exposed this ethnocentric fallacy by suggesting that Europeans were much less afraid of genocide when it took place in their colonies than when the Nazis brought it into their own backyard. (...) If numbers are a key consideration in determining our choice of research methods, what happens when there are "only" tens or hundreds of thousands of deaths, as in the Latin American genocides carried out during the era of the National Security Doctrine or the genocides of Indonesia, Rwanda, or former Yugoslavia? Can the number of victims really be definitive in these cases when often entire cities, towns, or villages were razed to the ground and their inhabitants completely annihilated? Is there really a quantitative way of distinguishing between qualitatively different social processes and, if so, how many deaths are needed to join the exclusive club of genocide victims: 10,000? 100,000? 1,000,000? If this last question sounds sarcastic, it is meant to be. By treating extermination as something concrete or material, this obsession with numbers objectifies and dehumanizes the deaths of the individuals who were annihilated (Feierstein, 2014, p. 75).

However, not everyone agree on this perspective regarding the holocaust. Gerstenfeld believes that there is an attempt to manipulate Holocaust history and its memory, and the main category of this manipulation is Holocaust promotion, where

Campaigning for the mass murder of Jews is often done without specific reference to the Holocaust. At other times the perpetrators refer to Hitler or the Germans having failed to complete the extermination of the Jews and say their programs should be continued. Such Holocaust Promotion is practiced mainly in the Arab and Muslim world and by neo-Nazis. One prominent variant of Holocaust Promotion is propagating the view that the Jewish state has no right to exist and

should be eliminated. This would have to involve elements of genocide and mass murder. In this context the perpetrators rarely if ever explicitly use the word Holocaust (Gerstenfeld, 2007, p. 39).⁷

Ilan Pappé, the Israeli historian, also thinks that the "Holocaust" was being ill-treated, but unlike Gerstenfeld, he thinks so because Zionism used it as a tool to "promote" Al-Nakba:

What the political version of Plan Dalet and the military directives had in common was the overall purpose of the scheme. In other words, even before the direct orders had reached the field, troops already knew exactly what was expected of them. The venerable and courageous Israeli fighter for civil rights, Shulamit Aloni, who was an officer at the time, recalls how special political officers would come down and actively incite the troops by demonizing the Palestinians and invoking the Holocaust as the point of reference for the operation ahead, often planned for the day after the indoctrination had taken place (Pappé, 2006, p. 17).

Considering the Holocaust to be an exceptional case leads to a risk as it spontaneously links the crime to an exclusively one kind of perpetrators, the Nazis. This is problematic because it does not highlight the role of the ordinary people, nor the roots of the conflict, which has many causes and consequences that have similarities with the Holocaust. Brice (2005, p. 72) mentions that "the demonization of the Nazis—also present in films and literature about the Second World War—served as a subtle device to ward off the specter of genocide lying at the heart of modern civilization". Feierstein criticizes the idea of regarding the Holocaust as a "German phenomena" rather than a modern phenomena, and stressing Germany's "unique" anti-Semitic culture because:

this, together with the sheer scale of the Holocaust, allows readers to distance themselves from questions of wider responsibility (...) explicit condemnations are avoided because the social conditions that breed genocide are (re)constructed each day in our contemporary nation-states (...) By demonizing the perpetrators of the Holocaust as madmen and monsters, we turn a blind eye to the "normalization"⁸ taking place in our own societies. (Brice, 2005, p. 72).

Nuremberg trials took place between 1945-1946 to try leaders of the Nazi party for war crimes, aggression and crimes against humanity. The tribunals were carried and arranged by the Allies. The penalties of the perpetrators were death penalty, life

⁷ Apparently, the author thinks that the rejection of occupying the Palestinians territory, and the resistance against Israel mass murder and genocide of disarmed civilians in Palestine is only inspired by Hitler ideas, and not because those people should defend their lives, houses or homeland.

⁸ The author refers here to Foucault concept "normalization societies".

imprisonment, and specified years in prison ranging from 10 years, 20 years, or more. It was a turning point in history. It was the first international tribunal to try war criminals. Though the international courts would continue in other cases such as the ICTY, ICTR, and others. However, these tribunals are only formed due to a decision from United Nation Security Council, meaning that the extreme violence and the horrification of the crime is not the major factor, rather the "Harmonization" among the UNSC's positions toward this crime is. This justify in part why so limited international tribunals were established, and why many international crimes end with impunity.⁹

2.2. Reconstructing The Concept Ethnic Cleansing, Ethnocide And Similar Terms

The Hutchinson encyclopedia defines ethnic cleansing as expulsion by force in order to homogenise the ethnically mixed population of a particular region or territory. The purpose of expulsion is to cause the evacuation of as many residences as possible, by all means at the expeller's disposal, including non-violent ones. (Pappe, 2006, p. 2).

Petrovic relates the origins of the term to military roots, as;

The conclusion could be drawn that the expression 'ethnic cleansing' has its origin in military vocabulary. The expression 'to clean the territory' is directed against enemies, and it is used mostly in the final phase of combat in order to take total control of the conquered territory. In general terms, the idiom 'cist'-'clean' means 'without any dirt' or 'contamination'. The word 'ethnic' has been added to the military term because the 'enemies' are considered to be the other ethnic communities (Petrovic, 1994, p. 343).

The concept of ethnic cleansing was firstly used to describe Bosnia- Herzegovinian war, which means that the use of this terminology can be traced back within the past three decades. Many examples of Ethnic Cleansing that come to our minds have occurred long before that date. Another point is that though the cleansing that occurred could also be described as religious in the previous conflict, the concept remains "Ethnic". On the later sections, cleansing on the basis of Religion, ideologies, and political opinions will also be discussed.

⁹ We should address as well the slowness of the tribunals due to the nature of the process in gathering testimonies and clues to be able to give the charges, and the several sessions that takes years probably.

The purpose of ethnic cleansing, according to the definition of it, is to create a homogenous population within a certain territory. In Petrovic's words;

An irreversible change of the demographic structure, creation of ethnically homogeneous regions and achieving a more favourable position for a particular ethnic group in ensuing political negotiations based on the logic of division along ethnic lines. (Petrovic, 1994, p. 349).

The 'Homogenous' word could involve much more than ethnicity. It could involve any shared bonds that deeply shape people's identity, and form their essential life's features. It could be ideology, class, religion, sect, or political opinion. These bonds, when shaping a group's identity, automatically develop a form of inclusion to those who share it, a homogenous community, and exclusion that varies in levels. In this sense, it becomes easy to regard the whole group as an entity, an enemy, when a clash of interests happen, usually during a time of tension.

Alternatively, ethnic cleansing can be a military strategy. War is a process where two opposing military organizations try to achieve victory by systematically destroying each other's forces. If recruitment in a war occurs predominantly along ethnic lines then displacing all members of the opposing community is a potent strategy.

Displacing all members of the other group removes both active militants and the threat of future mobilization (Hagerdal, 2016, p. 8). However ethnicity in this sense could be tricky, as in many cases it fails to be totally accurate in defining loyalty. Hegerdal (2016, p. 8) relates that despite that, "it is easier to identify someone's ethnic identity than their ideological beliefs, political loyalties, or propensity to act on either".

Appadurai (2002) refers to the same point, where there is a security dilemma but we are not 'certain' who is the other because we cannot easily identify him by his appearance, and we live a case of uncertainty therefore:

This is also partly a matter of the preemptive quality of such violence: Let me kill you before you kill me. Uncertainty about identification and violence can lead to actions, reactions, complicities, and anticipations that multiply the preexisting uncertainty about labels. Together, these forms of uncertainty call for the worst kind of certainty: dead certainty (Appadurai, 2002, p. 21).

Though it happens in wars and conflicts, it is used to be regarded internationally as an excellent solution to solve conflicts that occurred in line with ethnicity in mixed societies. Mass removal, mass transfer or population exchange were exercised, seen as a solution rather than a cause of a new conflict as Robson notes (2017, p.2).

Appadurai (2002) links nation-state policies and ethnic violence as well, remarking that "the ethnic labels and categories involved in contemporary ethnic violence are frequently products of recent state policies and techniques, such as censuses, partitions, and constitutions". (Appadurai, 2002, p. 2)

2.2.1. Ethnocide, Classicide And Politicide

Mann (2005) classifies types of violence and cleansing in intergroup relations with a special category:

Ethnocide refers to the unintended wiping out of a group and its culture (...) Classicide, to refer to the intended mass killing of entire social classes (...) classicide seems to be distinctive to leftists, since only they are tempted to believe they can do without opposed ("exploiting") classes. Rightist regimes of capitalists and landlords always recognize that they need workers and peasants to do the work for them", and "Politicide, a recently coined term, refers to killing where the intended target is the entire leadership and potential leadership class of a more generally victimized and feared group (...) politicicide has a more cleansing intent. Wiping out leaders and intellectuals is intended to undermine the out-group's cultural identity, whereas cities cowed into submission through exemplary repression may retain their identities (Mann, 2005, pp. 12-17).

Table 2.1. Mann (2005) Types of Violence and Cleansing in Intergroup Relation

Types of violence	Types of Cleansing		
	None	Partial	Total
1. None	1. Multiculturalism/tolerance 2. Consociational/Confederalism	Partial abandoning of identity, e.g., through voluntary official language adoption	Voluntary assimilation
2. Institutional coercion	Discrimination	1. Official language restrictions 2. segregation	Cultural suppression
3. Policed repression	Selective policed repression	1. policed partial repression of out-group's language and culture 2. policed out-group settlement/displacement	1. Policed total suppression of out-group's language and culture 2. Population exchanges 3. Policed deportations and pressured emigration
4. Violent repression	Generalized policed repression	1. Programs, communal riots, some forms of rape 2. Violent settlement/displacement	1. Wild deportation and emigration 2. Biological: sterilization, forced marriage, some forms of rape
5. Unprediated mass deaths	Mistaken war, civil war and revolutionary projects, fratricide	Callous war, civil war, and revolutionary projects	Ethnocide
6. Premediated mass killing	Exemplary and civil war Repression, systematic reprisals	1. Forced conversion 2. Politicide 3. Classicide →	Genocide

Note: Darker shading indicates the core of the zone of murderous cleansing discussed in this book; lighter shading indicates a borderline zone in which it may occasionally occur.

2.2.2. Urbicide

Another related term is Urbicide. Interestingly, it focuses on the destruction of cities, and urban areas, but for the same reason of 'cleansing'. According to Coward, urbicide "refers to the destruction of buildings as a condition of possibility of being-with-

others" or, a "manifestation of political exclusion" (Coward, 2009, p. 14; Coward, 2017, p. 419). It is also known as

A deliberate wrecking or "killing" of a city. Urbicide can be done by razing historical quarters of a city or demolishing buildings of great symbolic value. By demolishing the urban spaces that are an essential part of a culture, one also destroys that culture itself (Caksu, 2020, p. 12).

It is done to "destroy a certain existential quality constituted by those buildings" (Marian, 2012, p. 5). Though this seems indirectly linked to the previous terms, it is related. These areas remain unliveable for an unknown period of time because reconstruction process is frequently interrupted by related conflicts domestically and regionally (Kaldor 2012). This forms the features of these areas, and we can argue that these features can create an ethos of conflict as well. Sowers (2017, p. 412) also emphasises its effect in creating "norms of conflict in which all parties employ indiscriminate and punitive tactics".

Coward (as cited in Marian, 2012) links genocide and urbicide as both being the results of a systematic political violence, even when the target differs:

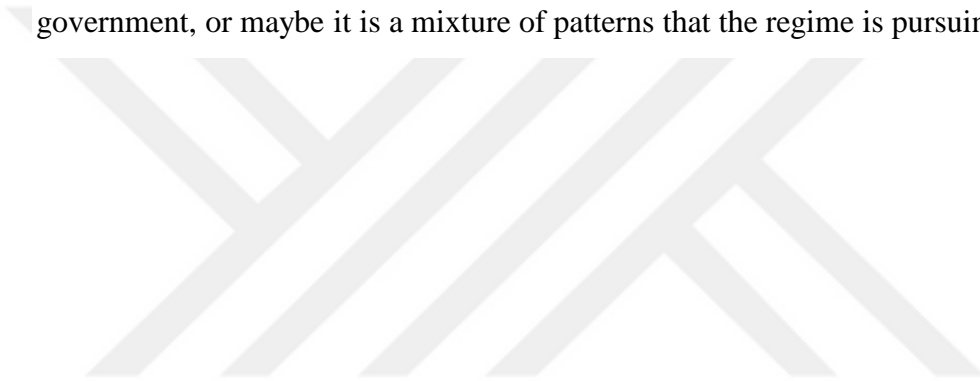
Genocide, it is argued, is a concept that indicates a systematic form of political violence. It is this systematicity that those using the concept of Urbicide intended to draw upon in order to show that, whilst targets and political entailments may differ between genocide and Urbicide, the nature of the execution of these forms of violence did not. Put simply, the analogy with genocide was intended to show that, despite different targets and entailments, there was a logic of Urbicide that could be said to be similar to that of genocide (Marian, 2012, p. 40).

2.2.3. Ideocide And Civicide

Alongside the previous terms, we can shed light on two additional terms. These are "ideocide" in reference to ideology and "civicide" in reference to civilization. As these terms end with 'cide', it is evident that whole ideologies, or whole civilizations are being targeted. (Appadurai, 2006, p. 117).

In sum, the mass murder is a repetitive phenomena that occurs on different bases and scales. Scholars have been defining its characteristics and limits, each of them according to his viewpoint. But as mass murder continues, new related concepts will be introduced.

If we want to analyze the Syrian case, it raises a question that I hope to answer in this study; Is it a genocide, an ethnocide, an urbicide, a civicide or an ideocide? Why does it happen? and considering that the majority of the victims in the Syrian war are Sunnis, we should ask, are they targeted because they are Sunni – a sectcide, because they opposed the regime – a politicide, because they lived in specific areas – an urbicide, because of their culture – a civicide, or due to these Sunnis' disloyalty to the current government, or maybe it is a mixture of patterns that the regime is pursuing?



CHAPTER III

A HISTORICAL OVERVIEW THE FOUNDATION OF SYRIA, MINORITIES AND THE RISE OF BA'TH

if France is claiming that it occupied Syria to protect us, Christians, from Muslims, then as a Christian I seek protection from my Syrian public, and as a Christian from this stand, I witness that there is no God but Allah 'la Ilah Illa Allah'

*Faris Alkhouri
Umayyad Mosque, Damascus, during the French mandate.*

From an international perspective, the discussions on the Syrian war are usually accompanied by the words like: "sectarianism", "sects", "intolerance", "fundamentalism", etc. However, people from different sects, religions, and ethnicities have been living in Syria for a long time. Some of these groups are descendants of those who settled in the region centuries ago. Their traditions, having been preserved, continue until now. This serves as the basis of the multi-ethnic feature of the country. The current crisis in Syria do involve in depth factors of ethnicity, religion, sects and so on. However, these factors were already existing in Syria centuries ago. If these factors were the sole causes of this current war, it would have happened way back earlier than 2011. Hence, before analyzing this current conflict, historical studies have to be considered first. In this chapter, three periods will be discussed; Syria under the French mandate (1920- 1946), Syria since its independence and until the 1970 coup, and the stabilized, tyrannized Syria (1970-2010).

3.1. Syria, A French Colony (1920-1946)

3.1.1. Drawing The Border Lines

Eight of Woodrow Wilson fourteen points addressed the question of self-determination. Unfortunately what were thought to be solutions were only the foundation for new minority problems, and now we see that after two world wars the problem of national minorities in Europe and Asia looms even larger (Killian, 1996, p.20).

After WWI, the territories of the Ottoman Empire in the Middle East were distributed and claimed by France and Britain as mandatory powers. The Sykes-Picot agreement, which is now a century old, still shapes the states of the Middle East today. During the French mandate, the Syrian population was about 3,800,000 person (Kawtharani, 2013, p. 41). The Mandatory system, which was proven to be just another concept for colonialism, was recognized and approved by the League of Nations as these territories were considered incapable of ruling as independent states by their own. Syria and Lebanon (Greater Syria) were under French control, while Iraq and Transjordan under the British who later on issued the Balfour declaration in which Palestine was transformed under international control to become the state of Israel. This has caused the establishment of these countries as we see them today. It has also partly influenced major internal problems that emerged afterwards.

Syria, Iraq, and Lebanon were historic and geographic terms, but the states that came to carry these names had limited relevance to realities on the ground. The creation of Greater Lebanon was a grave mistake that undermined the coherence and durability of the smaller Lebanese entity. The imposition of a Sunni royal family on an Iraqi state with a Shiite Arab majority and a large Kurdish minority was a recipe for instability. The policy of divide and rule and cultivation of minority groups in Syria was a major obstacle to the emergence of a Syrian entity" (Rabinovich, 2016, p. 2).

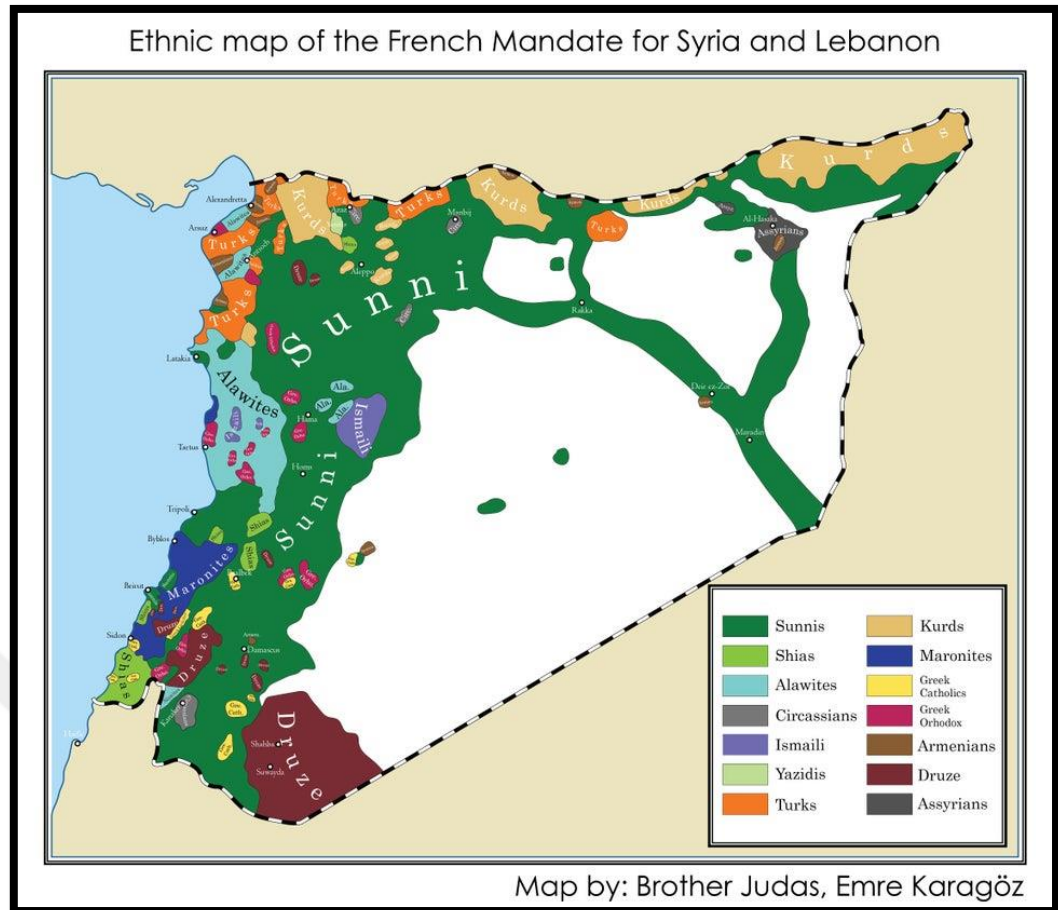


Figure 3.1. Ethnic map of the French Mandate for Syria and Lebanon

3.1.2. The Mandate Policies In Syria

As the borders were drawn for Syria, the social construction of the cities and locations differed dramatically. The French pursued an ethnic-religious strategy. They planned to divide Syria into four small states or local governments: the state of Damascus, the state of Aleppo, the state of Druze in al-Druze mountain and the state of Alawites along the coast. They also pursued a sectarian policy in the army in a disproportional way (Fildis, 2011; Fildis, 2012; Neep, 2012). This disproportionality had set the ground for future power struggles between the ruling Sunni bourgeoisie and the minorities who dominated the army (Mahmoud & Rosiny, 2015, p. 7). "And by the end of 1930s the Middle East had become a space for a massive experiment in demographic engineering" (Robson, 2017, p. 6).

We realize from the demographic tables that the state, which the French mandate aimed to form on the base of "autonomous group" (Groupes autonomes), does not really include one sect, but rather a group of sects whereas one sect outnumber others. Syria, which the French occupation formed on the base of Sunni-outnumbering was with a clear multiple composing. (..) In the Druze Mountain

the majority become the Druze, and in the Latakia the majority become Alawite. Hence we can speak about minorities' islands in the Islamic Sunni Sea, about minorities of minorities, and about majority in a location becoming minority in another" (Kawtharani, 2013, p. 56).

This strategy contributed largely to a security dilemma in the state where each group regard the other with mistrust, and which also had a role in the future when the current regime pursued a segmentarian cleansing strategy as we will discuss later.

The mountainous and rural areas of Alawites and Druze are somehow isolated due to the old conflictual religious situation between Sunni and Alawite, whose peak point in history was the fatwa of Ibn-Taymiyyah, one of the Ulama, against Nusayris-/Alawis in the 14th century.¹⁰ This divisive tension has survived for centuries. But despite the French efforts, the local governments issue failed, as the elites of Alawites and Druze demanded that all regions be integrated in one Syrian state (Tabler, 2016, pp. 13-14).

The French support for minorities had a double-edged result. The first was the massive inclusion of the Alawites as members of the colonial police and intelligence agency (Laktisch, 2017, p. 93). Living in rural areas, the majority of the Alawites worked as farmers and laborers. On the other hand, this policy has also caused some leaders of the minority groups to strongly oppose the French mandate by invoking Arab nationalism as a collective identity against foreign intervention. The revolution led by Salih Al-A'li, an Alawite leader, against the French was mainly in response to their proposal of establishing a separate state for the Alawites. The protest was intended to mark the unity of the Syrian territory. It should also note here that Ali was a public leader in his area. He was not an unknown person who tried to gain popularity by such an act. In honor of his struggle, the 17th of June 2011 during Syrian Revolt was named after him. "The French could not create lasting stability by playing the minorities against the Sunni Muslim majority, the countryside against the towns, and local urban leaders against one another" (Khoury, 1991, p. 1387).

¹⁰ For more details check the fatwa texts is in the link:
<https://shaykhulislam.wordpress.com/2009/08/13/ruling-on-the-nusayrialawi-sect/>

3.1.3. The Economic Impact Of The Mandate

Economically, France was paying the cost of the WWI, but it was not going to let its own economy pay alone. As the mandate system established itself in the new colonies, France designed its economic policies in Syria in accordance with its own interests, not with the needs of Syria, and this was a major obstacle to advancement in Syria (Willian, 2010, p. 188). This was a clear breach of the mandate system articles that were agreed upon by the League of Nations. The agricultural lands were re-arranged to produce French desired products, rather than in consideration of the needs of the locals (Kawtharani, 2013, pp. 119-128). The nature of the Syrian state was ignored (Willian, 2010, pp. 189-190). This caused an increase in the rates of unemployment, inflation and instability (Khoury, 1991, p. 1387). The imposition of the mandate system destroyed the old network of regional trade of post-Ottoman territories, which was used to be done within the same empire. This has decreased dramatically the size of trade among these areas (Kawtharani, 2013, p. 163).

In addition to the taxes and the economic deficits of the French strategy, a basic part of the budget was allocated for the military and the police. The taxes collected from the Syrians were spent on weapons, artillery and soldiers who suppressed their revolts. "From 1926 onwards, approximately one third of the tax receipts of Syria and Lebanon was spent on the public security budget. Moreover, of the five billion French francs which France invested in Syria during the mandate, four billion went on defense" (McHugo, 2015, p. 74). Furthermore, the Syrian currency was tied to the French franc, which automatically caused the Syrian economy to be affected negatively by the economic crises in France (Khoury, 1991, p. 1387).

When concluding about the failure of the mandate system's economy, Jacques Weulersse asserts that even from a pure economic perspective, there was a calculation mistake as "the mandate's administration could not avoid the risky results of the sudden intervention of an agriculture economy which lasted as a closed economy, almost till now, to the international market" (Weulersse, 1946, p. 186).

3.1.4. The Social Impacts Of The Mandate

Socially, the mandate created a gap that still causes conflicts in the identity issue, not only in Syria but also in other Arab countries which, for long time, identified themselves as Muslims or Arabs. There is a need to realize the difference in understanding the concept "citizenship" between colonial countries and their colonies. While European countries were developing their own notions of the "nation-state" and "nationalism" with strict adherence to ethnicity, the post-Ottoman countries in the Middle East were new to this understanding of "ethnonational identity". The results are often "toxic visions of national belonging" (Robson, 2017, p. 3). This is remarkably important because nation-state and ethnic cleansing are linked, even if these terms are indirectly related. According to Mann (2005, p. 4), most of these countries became mono-ethnic due to ethnic cleansing. Other scholars discussed the link between modernity and mass killings, like Wimmer (2002) and Kuper (1981), Fein (1979) who links nation-state and genocide and Appadurai (2006) who links globalization and mass killing.¹¹

The mandatory states imposed themselves in the post-Ottoman applying their notions to practice there. The nationalism and nation-state carried by the mandatory powers introduced also another concept; majority and minority. This dimension formed a new perspective within the frame of nationality. The diversity of the society became a burden as it did not match the European criteria. With the French policy of using the minorities against the majority, and its claim of being their protector in the Syrian territory was construed as the self-evident reality. The issue of minorities in Syria will remain as a protractible conflict (White, 2011, pp. 132-135). The sensitivity of this issue will reach its peak in the decades of Assads, and present itself brutally as a main line of the current civil war. Therefore, we need to address the concept of minority and its origins in relation to that era. The concept minority often "refer to relatively powerless, self-conscious groups whose members were subject to discrimination" (Killian, 1996, p. 18). Wirth (1945, p. 347) mentions that discrimination is a collective one. Killian (1996, p. 25) refers to 'victimology' that comes along with the minority concept and that an exploited minority may have been previously a suppressive

¹¹ Discussed in more details in the previous chapter.

dominant group or could be one in the future. In establishing the boundaries of the identity of the excluded, Wirth states that they possess an inherited status. Without presenting the influences of divergent power relations, he and other sociologists thought of a minority as a group singled out from others for "differential and unequal treatment". Indeed, the term minority introduced a toxic vision of nationality effecting the Syrian community (Hanley, 2016, p. 4).

3.1.5. The French Withdrawal

During the French mandate, Syria witnessed several revolts that were inspired by Arab nationalism and inflamed even more by France's policies in the territory and the provocative acts of General Gouraud who saw the mandate as a complication of the Crusade and a victory over Saladin (Lamaziere, 1926, pp. 156-157).

As they perceived Arab nationalism as a threat that could spread to other similar countries, France's policies in dealing with the protests did not include any other options other than the use of extreme violence (Provence, 2015, pp. 137-138). France didn't follow the British example who did not entirely curtail the wave of Arab nationalism but rather contained it and wisely tied the interests of the Arab leaders with Britain, so they would maintain the relationships as desired (Khoury, 1991, p. 1387). The French did only succeed in creating more resistance against themselves. Suppressing the revolts was costly and often ended with dissatisfaction of the French public, and in an isolated case the commander of the French forces committed suicide on the battlefield in 1925 (Milles, 2019, p. 29).

With few exceptions as in with the uprisings led by the Alawite Saleh Al-Ali in 1919 and by Sultan pasha al-Atrash, a Druze, in Jabal al-Druze in 1925, the series of resistance were led mainly by Sunnis who were marginalized as a majority: the 1920 revolts of Ismail al-Hariri in Huran and of Ibrahim Hananu in Aleppo, and the sixty-days strike which compelled France to negotiate for Syria's independence which was only gained several years later (McHugo, 2015, p. 109)¹².

¹² For more details see Atassi, Karim, Syria, The Strength of an Idea, The Constitutional Architectures of its political regimes, Cambridge University Press, 2018, Pp 116-119.

3.2. Syria After Independence

3.2.1. The New State

The years between 1946- 1963 was indeed politically unique not only for the newly established state but also for that period's global and international contexts. The independence of Syria came along with the end of WWII, the beginning of the cold war and the emergence of new Arab states as new regional powers. This era was distinguished by international rivalry between the two great powers, USA and USSR, regional tension and shifting in alliances. Domestically, Syria suffered a series of military coups that caused an inconsistent foreign policy. These coups were a result and a reason of a weak economic system.

Among the states which were under a mandate system, Syria was probably a unique case as it ceased to have special relation with its mandatory state almost right after independence (Dostal, 2015, p. 13). Though it made the Syrian position harder as a new independent state, the French policies, unlike the British one, could not bind the elites' interests to its own nor did it gain the people's approval. The new state was almost left to the discretion of the ruling elites. Quwatli, who was the first Syrian president after independence, had close relations with the House of Saud. This made Syria an ally of Saudi Arabia and Egypt. Such alliance did not meet the expectations of either Iraq or Transjordan which intended to apply the projects of Fertile Crescent and Greater Syria respectively, wherein Syria was supposed to be part of their unity project. The Hashemites which had two branches, one in Iraq and the other in Jordan, were competing in their Pan-Arabism projects. However, as the military coups would be lunched frequently in an endless series, the regional position would be shifty and unstable (Seale, 1987, p. 46)¹³. The personal influence on the foreign policy of Syria was one aspect of the new state which lacked an institutionalization in its structure as a nation-state. It was a "weak" state by the definition of Ayubi, a state that lack capacity to enforce laws, break traditional patterns, and adapt to changing conditions (Kuran, 1998, p. 113). "Syria was in many respects a state without being a nation-state, and a

¹³ For further readings check "coups in the current Arab states' file", Nabil Khalil Khalil, Georgetown University-Center for Contemporary Arab Studies, Washington DC, 2008, Pp221-244.

political entity without being a political community" (Van Dam, 2017, p. 5). This attribution to Syria was shared by other Arab states as well.

3.2.2. Pan Arabism And Arab Nationalism

It soon became apparent that the new Arab 'state nations' jointly faced a number of challenges. First, they were initially unable to act like modern states since they all lacked an effective domestic administrative and economic system. Second, they commanded only weak loyalty from citizens since state nationalism and the concept of citizenship had to compete with older and more established forms of belonging and collective identity at the level below and above the Arab state entities such as kinship, sect, religion, and tribe. Third, modern Arab nationalists frequently emphasized primary allegiance to pan-Arabism rather than loyalty to individual Arab states (..) This (regional) system was characterized by the absence of a regional hegemon and consisted in the main of five states, namely the two branches of the British-backed Hashemite monarchies in Jordan and Iraq, the newly independent Lebanon and Syria, and Saudi Arabia. In addition, Egypt belonged to this system as an important 'out-of-area' neighboring state that differed from the five other states due to its long pre-modern history of independent statehood (Dostal, 2015, p. 15-16).

And despite the rise of Arab nationalism idea, and the collective vision of Pan-Arabism in the region, none of these projects succeeded in practice, and those who were established did not last for long. Van Dam (2017, pp. 11-12) explains that "this became a more general phenomena: many Arab nationalists wanted the Arabs to be united in the form of an Arab union, but only if they themselves were to play the dominant and leading role in it, not a subservient one".

3.2.3. The Domestic Challenges

Alongside these regional factors, Syria was going through a domestic political instability. Even the longest period of what seemed to be a stable ruling, the six-year Quwatli presidency, has witnessed three changes of prime minister, a bad economy and the catastrophic events of al-Nakba in 1948. The last incident proved the inefficiency of the military, the corruption committed by some government officials, and the public perception of the overall failure of the governments in the eyes of public. It was ended by the first military coup in the Middle East which was led by Husni al-Zaim in 1949. Since this coup took place, other succeeding coups followed shortly within a period of two decades:

- Coup led by Husni al-Zaim on the 30th of March 1949
- Coup led by Sami al-Hannawi on the 14th of August 1949. This was the first coup wherein the army hand over the authority to civilian government.
- Coup led by Adib al-Shishakly on the 29th of November 1951
- Coup led by Faisal al-Atassi on the 25th of February 1954. The army forced al-Shishakly to resign from the office, and handed over the power again to a civilian government, starting a democratic era that lasted for four years.
- The Military coup which ended up in unity with Egypt under the rule of Jamal Nasser on the 22nd of February 1958.
- The military coup on the 28th of September 1961 which ended up the unity, and subsequently instituted a constitutional democracy.
- A military coup on the 28th of March 1962 which formed a new government.
- Ba'ath military coup on 8th of March 1963, whose anniversary is celebrated in Syria by the Assad regime until today. Since this coup, the state of emergency was announced. (it was denounced de jure in 2012, as to reduce the protest against the regime, but de Facto nothing was changed, and the rebels at that time had enlarged their demands beyond it).
- A military coup on the 23rd of February 1966. It was an intra-Ba'ath party coup.
- An attempted military coup on the 8th of September 1966 which failed but caused the exclusion of some Ba'ath members (Mustafa, 2007, p. 18).
- Lastly, the military coup of Hafez Assad on the 13th of November 1970. It was named as "The Corrective Movement" which started the era of Assads' tyranny, extending up to the present time.

The Western powers probably knew about these coups before they took place.¹⁴ However, whether their role was more than intelligence alone remain uncertain for most of the coups. Further, it is obvious that the international responses toward the coups were not framed in such a manner to discourage coups. Each of these military coups offered a new chance for the newly installed government to join either of the two cold war camps, and adopt a foreign policy in accordance to whichever faction

¹⁴ For more details see the original documents between embassies and their governments in west, some mentioned in "The file of coups in modern Arab states", Nabil Khalil Khalil, Georgetown University-Center for Contemporary Arab Studies , Washington DC, 2008, Pp 144-162. Also: McHugo, John, Syria, A recent history, Saqi Books, London, 2015, Pp 127-128.

they preferred.¹⁵ However, the Syrian international position remained unclear (Dostal, 2015, pp. 22-23). The Syrian state was pushed to join the Soviet camp when the Israeli state was established and the western support for Israel became evident.

On the other hand, political freedom between 1956- 1963 was flourishing in Syria. We can note that although a lot of military coups occurred, the ruling would occasionally, in two out of ten coups, turn to democracy before falling again to the military, and so on. This reflected people's tendency to democratic regime in Syria. The era also witnessed political parties that represented different ideologies: Islamists, Communists, Conservatives, etc. (Ziadeh, 2013, pp. 46-47).

The liberal movements were formed by the leftist and National groups at that time, represented by the Communist Party, the Syrian National Social Party, the Arab Ba'ath Party and its brother; The Arab Social Party. While the Muslim conservative movement was led by the Muslim Brotherhood and its leader, Mustafa Al-Siba'ai. The Christian conservative movement, meanwhile, sided through the negotiations with the Liberals (Al-Za'abi, 2020, p. 48).

Newspapers, publication of books and other print media had a degree of freedom of expression and alongside the military coups people would participate in protests or strikes to express their opinions on government policies. However, the political entity at that time was not proficient. Both the parties, and government institutions relied on the community, family relations and clannish bonds rather than on ideological and political programs.

The rapid, top-down structuring of the Syrian nation-state did not allow the democracy to reach the roots of the society. As the two opposing factions of states in the region continued to exert pressure on Syria to join their respective alliances, internal factors

¹⁵ Khaled al-Azem wrote about al-Zaim coup: "it was obvious that the parliament did not want to sign either of the two treaties: the treaty with France and the Tapline agreement, both arousing remarkable hostility against, for some deputies feared the American intervention which might accompany it, others, less loyalty, perhaps hoped in showing rejection to be bribed in exchange for their votes, a third part were being pressured on or lured by these interests, and distrusted the West, frustrated by the Western support of Israel. The United States thought, wrongly or rightly, that there is a slight hope in having the Parliament ratification, so perhaps it looked with sympathy toward any individual that undertakes demising this obstacle, the facts speak for themselves, both of the treaties were ratified after al-Zaim overtook the power". Seale mention this in his book (The Struggle for Syria) but he comments, that both American and British intelligences knew about the coup before taking place but did nothing, as for the ratification of the treaties it could reflect more al-Zaim need of friends after the coup, rather than a price for the foreign support to launch the coup, (Pp58-59).

were not less problematic for the democracy there, especially the minority\majority, rural\ urban and civil\military divisions which still intertwines in complexity today.

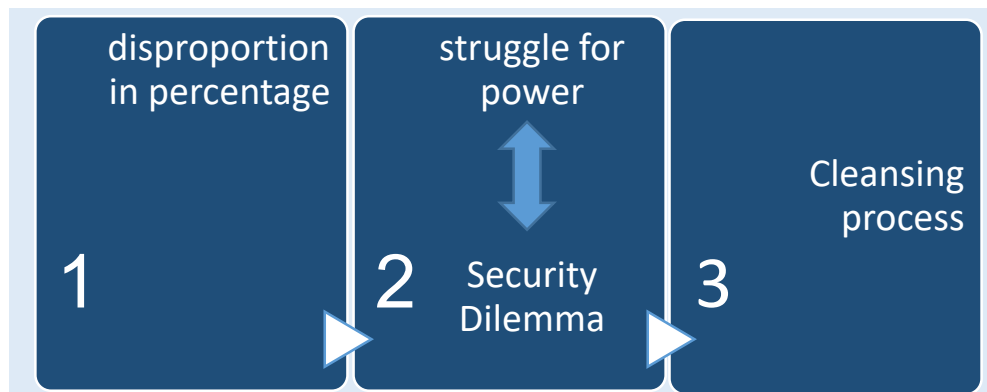
The polarization of the political parties was linked to social and religious backgrounds. Sunnis led the conservative, rightest parties, while minorities joined the leftist parties. This linkage reflected a phenomena of joining parties and adopting ideologies according to ethnic and religious belongings, and in the purpose of strengthening their family or their tribes. Zain Al-Abdin (2020, par. 33) refers to this phenomena among the minorities by citing as an example how Alawites and Druze families recruited and appointed their immediate family members and relatives to join the Ba'th party and to become officers of the army. Al-Atrash, the Druze family was dominating in the military institution leadership, headed by Muhammad, Hamad and Zaid al-Atrash, while in Ba'th leadership Mansour Sultan al-Atrash took place. The Alawite family, Jadid, also had members in the Leadership of the Syrian Socialist National party, Ghassan Jadid and Fouad Jadid, while their brother Salah Jadid, and relative Izzat Jadid belonged to the military staff of Ba'th party.

(..) The military council that executed the second coup in the same year (August 1949) had among his distinctive members the colonel A'lam al-Din Qawas, the chief Muhammad Ma'rouf (Alawite), the lieutenant colonel Amin Abu Assaf (Druze), the colonel Bahij Kalass (Christian), the chiefs Hasan al-Hakim, Muhammad Diab (Ismaili) and Khaled Jad (Circassian).

(..) The civil rule institutions collapsed in the face of military tyranny between 1949- 1954. Then the military institution collapsed in face of a more effective factor in the general life at that time, which we may call the **Sectarian institution**, as it was a basic motivator of the Syrian army first-generation officers" (Zain Al-Abdin, 2020m par. 33).

This exclusionary practice cause a disproportion in the representation of sects in the army.

The Alawites (...) rise within the Baath party and the army began. Both were attractive due to their emphasis on a common national and Arab identity (..) Soon Alawites were represented to a disproportional high amount in the army and the Baath party" (Laktisch, 2017, p. 93).



We can suggest according to the historical context of Syria that this process took place on three levels. Each level occurred in a different period. The disproportionate representation of sects in the military and key positions in security institutions due to French policies, which led to power struggle, and the cleansing process which became more evident after the 1963 coup wherein Sunni generals and officers in the army were excluded in a huge percentage. The second level was implemented at government institutions which began since the Ba'th party took over the government in 1963. Afterwards, it proceeded to the third phase. In the third level the regime pursued the segmentarian cleansing strategy. Defining his enemies and then excluding and cleansing them.

Figure 3.2. Levels of sectarianist tension

3.2.4. Ba'th Party

The origin of Ba'th party is traced back to the era of the French mandate, it was established by Michel Aflaq and Salah Bitar in 1947. The ideology of the party had three goals: Unity, Freedom and Socialism. However, despite its utopian description, the party faced several problems. Although it was established in 1947 and merged with the Arab Socialist movement in 1952 to become Arab Socialists Ba'ath party, their members did not exceed 400 in 1963. Although the movement was also founded in Iraq, and seized power in the same year as in Syria in 1963, but no kind of unity took place between the two neighboring countries who raised the "Arab unity" as a slogan. For the party in Syria, when the union between Egypt and Syria was discussed, Nasser

wanted the dissolve of Ba'ath party as one of the conditions, and it was done. The only problem was that the civilian section of the party was not informed (McHugo, 2015, p. 11).

The unity between Egypt and Syria was the beginning of the split in the party. The leadership of the party supported the unity for the sake of 'Arab unity'. It was dissolved thus to match the conditions of Nasser. But as the unity between the two Arab states turned out to be an extended tyranny of Nasser who marginalized Syrian politicians and the military (Van Dam, 2017, pp. 10-11), a new military entity was born in Cairo founded by five Ba'ath Syrian military officers, Muhammad Imran, Salah Jadid, Ahmad al-Mir, Abdulkarim al-Jundi and Hafiz al-Assad, who were transferred to Egypt by Nasser, who despite the dissolution of the Ba'ath party kept regarding it with mistrust and caution. The Military Committee of Ba'ath, as they called themselves, continued to meet secretly and planned for their next steps. There was no longer a connection between the civilian and the military leadership of the party. Even though the party was re-established after the union ended, it seems that the civilian leadership did not know about the military group as they were still working in secret. But after the coup of 1963, the military leadership and the Qutriyin took over power "with the aim of pushing the traditional civilian leadership aside"(Van Dam, 2017, p. 13).

3.2.5. The Ideology Of Ba'th

Bashir Zain al-Abdin believes that the ideology of Ba'ath itself was problematic as it held the roots of division. He mentions two examples. The first is on "revolutionary Socialism" as a paradigm of the party. In his writings and speeches, Aflaq was keen to emphasize the essence of revolution in transforming the society and the progress of the state. He criticized the reform movements for being gradual, unlike the 'deep' transformation which has the meaning of violence (Aflaq, 1978, p. 80). Revolutionary Socialism pushed Ba'th to divide the society into classes, the merchants and land owners were feudal lords, the Ulama, religious preachers and conservatives were backwards, and the farmers and labor were the proletariat. This moved fast to cause and develop the intra-party disagreements, which turned to classification of party members as leftists, rightists, nationalists, and many others. This fragmentation gave way to dissents and later, intra-party military coup. The second example is the

"minority party" as Zain al-Abdin calls it, referring to the limited popularity of the party whose leaders did not wish, nor try, to attract the majority of the public who are Sunnis. As Aflaq put it

As you know, the revolutionary era in a nation life is the era when most of life aspects are exposed to deviation and distortion, becoming contradictory with the interest of the public, the progress, the revival and the strong reemergence. Therefore, the revolutionary era is characterized by having the revolutionary movement leadership in the hand of a minority that interprets the deep needs of public" (Aflaq, 1958, p. 18).

Zain al-Abdin claims that this idea belongs originally to Lenin with whom Aflaq was inspired by his modification of the Marxist thoughts. When at the Ba'ath party reigned, the minority party idea resulted to the position of hostility against majority (Zain Al-Abdin, 2008, pp. 354-359).

We might as well regard the relation between Ba'ath and the Syrian public from the core-periphery perspective of Sharif Mardin in a general view. The party being the core, and the periphery being the mass majority of Sunni in Syria. Mardin wrote about the Republican People's Party in Turkey: "The Republican People's Party, the single party through which Republican policies were channeled, was unable to establish contact with the rural masses. The movement "toward the people," for which so much clamor had gone up in the first years of the Ankara government, was thin, and the possibilities opened up by the Republic for establishing new links between government and peasants were not fulfilled" (Mardin, 1973, p. 183). The difference here is that the Ba'th party did try to attract the rural masses, peasants among them, but even in this. The success was limited. Until 1963, the party had only 500 members with a limited representation at the parliament.¹⁶

In post-1963 coup, the party had an increased popularity accompanied by an unorganized membership that resulted in a new generation of party members, who in time would set aside the traditional leadership of the party (Zain Al-Abdin, 2008, p.

¹⁶ In 1949 Ba'th got 1 seat out of 114 in the Parliament. In 1954, 1962 14% of seats. In 1952 the party had 500 members, and in 1954 (when merging with the Arab Socialists party of Akram al-Hourani) the number of members became 2500, but after the party dissolved due to the union between Egypt and Syria, the membership remarkably faced a problem in regaining its older status (Zain al-Abdin, Bashir, Military and Politics in Syria 1918-2000, a critical study, Dar al-Jabiah, London, 2008, Pp 361-362).

363). In 1971, 8 years after the coup, the number of members jumped to reach 65.398 member, ten years later, 374.332 member, and in 1992 it reached 1.008.243 members (George, 2003, p. 15).

But there were disturbing consequences for Ba'thism as an ideology when the Ba'th party actually gained real power. Sami al-Jundi, a founding member of the party and now the minister of information, revealed these in a book published in 1969: Three days after my entering the ministry (after the 8 March coup), the (party) comrades came to ask me for an extensive purge operation... the measure of a minister's success (was determined by) the lists of dismissals, since party members as well as their relatives and the members of their tribes (came to) demand their campaign and kinship rights. From the time the party appeared on the stage, caravans of villagers started to leave the villages of the plains mountains for Damascus. And while (rural accents) started to predominate the streets, coffee houses and the waiting room of ministries, dismissals became a duty so that (those who had newly come) could be appointed (McHugo, 2015, p. 144).



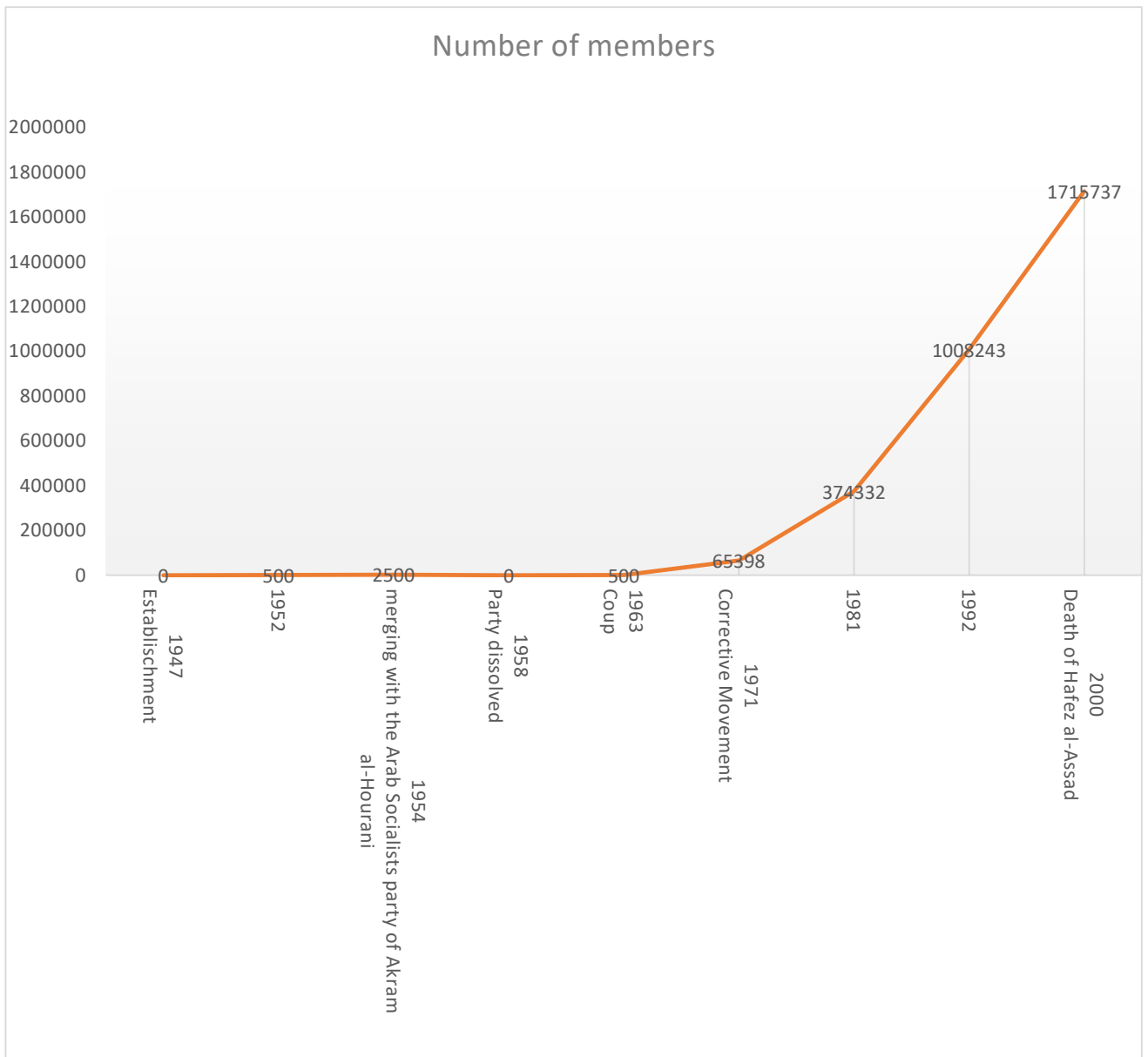


Figure 3.3. Ba'ath membership throughout years

The relation that bind the Ba'athists to their party has a special nature regarding that those Ba'athists were part of the "Military Committee", an organization much distant from the party's civilian leadership whether by its social structure or political line. As for the party, who was reformed only nine months ago, since it was dissolved during the unity with Egypt, it was not ready to hold power, admitted by its Secretary General himself, Michel Aflaq, and the 8 March-coup was committed against his will: that was the first sign to the trespass of the military over the civilian side. And it was done at the new system beginnings. Then, over years, if not months, Ba'ath (..) would give up on his liberal modernizing mission, which it was able to form in the parliamentary- struggle years in 1950s, as the sixth National Congress - held in October 1963, which resolutions were published in a handbook titled as "Theoretical premises" and becoming the only officially recognized reference till today- directed the Ba'ath parlance toward the Marxist

one. The neo-Ba'ath was able to seize the power progressively by bidding on the Left- regarded with high importance by the Arabic ideology during the 1960s – in a masterful game directed against the party's "old guards" and the Nasserite dominance at the same time. The word "neo-Ba'ath", an Anglo-Saxon concept, is used to describe socially the sweeping wave that split the party according to levels positioned relatively on top of each other: military\ civilian, of course, but also on the sectarian level: minorities\ Sunni, and even the geographical level: rural citizens\ urban citizens (Seurat, 2017, pp. 112-113).

This complicated connection between these divisions, military-civilian, Sunni-minority, and rural-urban, form root causes for the current crisis. The minority Alawites inhabited mainly the rural areas since hundreds of years. As their numbers increased in the military and in state institutions, more of them started to migrate to the urban cities to have a better life and make use of their familial relationships in those areas. Another reason for the increased migration from rural areas to the city is mentioned by Ziadeh;

Increased rates of education in rural areas caused a new class to migrate to major cities to improve their social status. However, these cities did not develop productive, industrial, or agrarian projects able to absorb the influx from the countryside that would have eased their assimilation into the urban social fabric. As a result, many resorted to employment in various state institutions—particularly the army and security agencies—which do not require educational or scientific qualifications. (Ziadeh, 2016, pp. 7-8).

This has caused, in Ziadeh words, a "ruralization of Syrian cities that led gradually to a ruralization of political power".

3.2.6. The Ba'th And The Army

The 1963 coup of the Ba'ath party placed dangerous consequences on the state's foreign policy. In 1967, Mustafa Khalil, an intelligence officer assigned at the Golan Heights, wrote his book about the Syrian army before, during and after the six-day war. His testimony focuses on the transformation of the military structure in that period. His book costed him twenty years in the worst prison in Syria, the Palmyra prison (Tadmur prison), though the book is available in Al-Assad National Library. Mustafa starts the book by linking Ba'ath party and the loss of the war due to treason, a linkage that a lot of Syrians acknowledge secretly but dared not to talk about it explicitly before 2011. The author reveals first, that the since 1946 until 1967 two-

thirds of the state budget amounting to more than 5 billion USD were spent on the military (Mustafa, 2007, p. 18). Second, the series of dismissal of officers that took place before the war:

After 8 March coup by five days, which mean on 13 March 1963 a military publication announced the dismissal of 104 army officer (...) On the date of 16 March (...) another publication dismissed 150 officer who are the real energy of the army (Battalions leaders, Brigade chiefs and heads of military operations) involving myself. The publications continued thus, dismissing, referring for retirement and moving officers to civil services in a way I couldn't follow in details until the total of officers out of army on May 1967 exceeded two thousands officer, along with the double of this number from elder non-Commissioned officers and volunteer soldiers (...) The removed officers were replaced by large numbers of reserve officers (who previously did the mandatory military service) and almost all of them were Ba'athists, and most of them were Alawites. (...) Criminal operations included dismissing of some military units, and forming new ones exclusively on the base of sects. Exactly as the French did in the colonialization days (...) That period in the army **cleansing** was distinguished by violence and suppression which included killing, arresting, the arbitrary judgments and executions, the non-based accusations, the money and property seizures and making people suffer to survive" (Mustafa, 2007, pp. 29-30).

The 1948 Nakba and the establishment of the state of Israel was a shock to the Arab people, but what was even more shocking was the defeat of the all Arab armies by the Israelis. The defeat was destructive for the national sentiment, and the collective wave of Arab nationalism and Pan-Arabism declined remarkably afterward.

The book of Khalil descriptively explains the equipment, the capabilities and the armaments that were in the possession of the Syrian army. He also includes the official announcements and the newspaper coverage that kept showing to the very end that the Arab victory is so close, and then the last official announcement—number 66, signed by the defense minister Hafez Assad that declared the fall of al-Qunaitra 17 hours before the Israeli troops actually reached it and controlled it (Mustafa, 2007, pp. 59-91).¹⁷ And though the Golan Heights was lost in the war, it was less than a catastrophe for the Syrian government as Prime Minister Ibrahim Makhous commented on this event by saying:

It is not important that the enemy invades Damascus, or even Homs or Aleppo, for all these are territories that could be compensated and buildings that could be regained, but if the enemy ended Ba'th party, how could we compensate that, since

¹⁷ the Syrian Health minister Abdulrahman al-Akta' was at Qunaitra at that time, and when he heard the statement from the radio he called Assad to inform him that there was a mistake, as no troops nor fight were at Qunaitra, but Assad insulted him and ordered him to remain quite, as it is none of his business, so al-Akta' went to Damascus the next day and resigned

Ba'th is the hope of the Arab nation? (..) Don't forget that the first aim of the Israeli attack is the overthrow of the progressive rule in Syria, and anyone requesting to replace Ba'th party (from rule) is an agent for Israel (Mustafa, 2007, p. 190).

This announcement, and the rest of the official statements since 1963, marked the end of multi-ideological political life in Syria.

The 1963 coup d'etat impacts over the military will be seen in two basic points: first, despite the military failure in external conflicts, especially on the Israeli front, it will come to dominate politics. Second, the "cleansing" in the military, though not by direct genocidal means. Appointments, dismisses and the party membership which opens many doors. In 1965 the Sunni officers' percentage in the army were estimated between 25% - 30%, while the minorities' officers were no less than 70% (Drysedale, 1979, pp. 359-373).

The six-day war of 1967 increased the instability and violence, and certainly worsened the new government's credibility. Official statements about the war kept assuring the public on the inevitable victory of the Arabs over Israelis till the last hours, when it suddenly started reporting the bitter truth, that Israel won over three official Arab armies, not to mention the volunteering groups, and the gossips about a potential treason which secretly spread.¹⁸

In Syria, having a civil democratic life is only a memory now, and

Nobody could shut their eyes to the fact that it was the army that now ran Syria, and that it was controlled by officers who tended to come from rural or small town backgrounds, and were also often from minorities. Except for military training, these officers had generally had no tertiary education, (...) there were military purges throughout this period of turmoil. Many of these had the effect of reducing the number of Sunni in key positions (McHugo, 2015, p. 148).

The policies of the Ba'ath party caused tension to sensitive religious issue, especially that religious minorities, as such in the case of the Alawites, held power to rule a religious majority that already have intensely problematic relations with it. "But the regime had not learned from the uprising in Hama and the disturbances of 1964 that it had to co-exist with public expression of Islam" (McHugo, 2015, p. 148). MCHUGO (2015) describes the rulers of Syria at that era as "arrogant, bitter, indifferent to public sentiment and unaccountable to an electorate".

¹⁸ For more see the official statements and announcements mentioned by date in, Mustafa, Khalil, The fall of the Golan Heights, Bibliotheca Alexandrina, Alexandria, 2007,

On the 13th of November 1970, Hafez Assad took over control from Salah Jadid after a series of fierce armed political manoeuvring. During a national conference, Assad was dismissed from his position as a defense minister by Jadid. The latter did not expect that Assad men would storm into the conference and arrest him and others. Before Jadid was taken to prison, he told his rival: "If I ever take power you will be dragged through the streets until you die" (Seale, 1989, p. 164). He didn't, however, as he remained in prison till his death.

In 1971, Hafez Assad became officially the president of Syria, his rule would last till 2000.

3.3. The Stabilized, Tyrannized Syria 1970-2000

Since 1963, Syria shifted from a multi-ideological, unstable and vulnerable electoral democracy, to a stable authoritarian state. During the time of Hafez Assad Syria was a clear example of authoritarian states (Büchs, 2009, Heydemann, 2020, Ziadeh, 2011, Athamneh and Marji Sayej, 2013). It could be claimed that the shift was gradual. The chronology of this transformation is highlighted in this timeline:

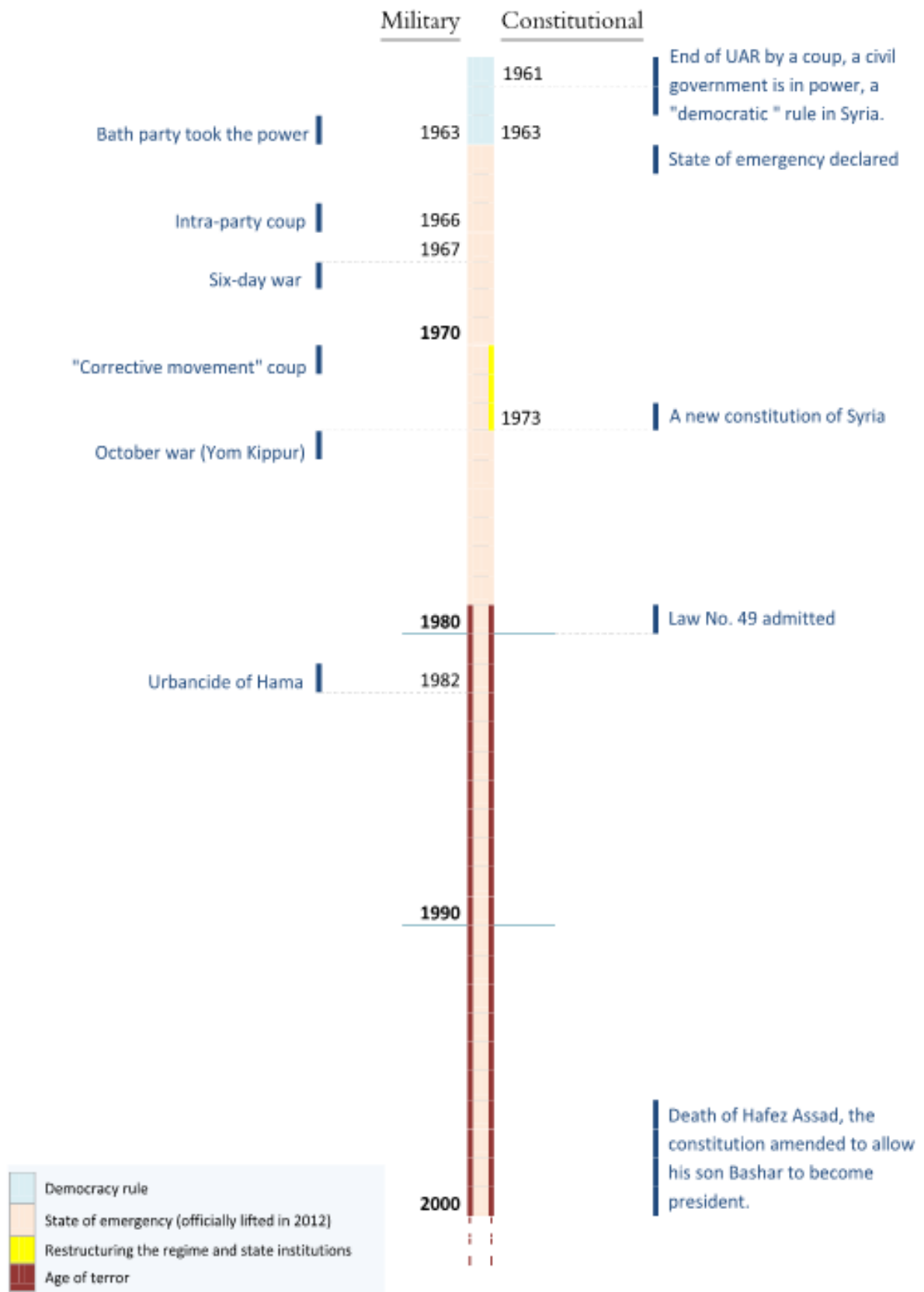


Figure 3.4. Timeline of the transformation of Syria

To avoid new military coups, Assad changed the political structure in Syria and re-designed the constitution for him to exclusively monopolise power. The president had absolute power codified in the constitution to legitimize his control over the army, governmental institutions, the Ba'th party and all other political parties, the judiciary and the parliament.¹⁹

The powers vested in the president by the 1973 Syrian constitution reflect the extent of his —constitutional domination over non-executive branch institutions. The regime formed a three-sided pyramid whose sides symbolize the government bureaucracy, the military and security agencies, and the Ba'ath Party. Together, they supported an authoritarian structure that centralized power in the hands of Hafez al-Asad. These three sets of institutions extend in parallel from the president down to the city, village, and neighborhood. For example, the governors of Syria's fourteen provinces represent the president, implementing his direct orders. The chief executive of administration, they oversee all work in the province, down to the village level, affiliated with the central ministries and other public sector entities. The governor is also the chief of the provincial council (al-Majlis al-Baladi). In states of emergency (Syria has been under emergency law since 1963) the governor is the commander of the police and army troops stationed in his province" (Ziadeh, 2009, pp. 8-10).

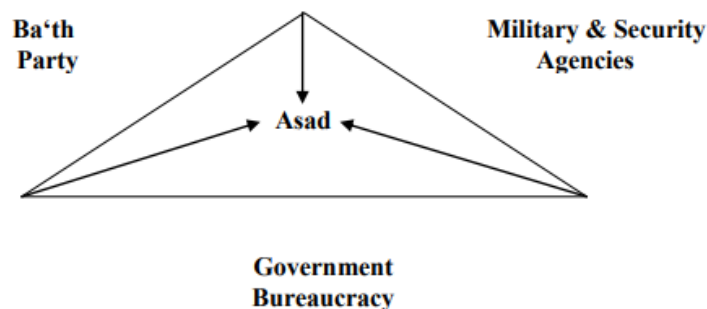


Figure 3.5. Three-sided pyramid of Assad monopoly of power (Ziadeh, 2009)

The the number of the officers of different intelligence agencies was extensively expanded. Having 65.000 full-time employees in the security agencies in addition to hundreds of theousands part-time employees, in relation to the total Syrian population, it means that there is one intelligence agent for each 153 Syrian citizens, the highest percentage in the world (George, 2003, p. 15). A policy of Bathification was also initiated for the purpose of transforming the party to be another security instrument

¹⁹ See articles 8, 95, 100, 101, 103, 107, and 111 of the Syrian Constitution.

similar to the Soviet communist party. The Ba'ath party membership has increased gradually and it reached 1,008,243 by mid-1992 (Ziadeh, 2009, p. 11).²⁰

3.3.1. The Foreign Policy And Alliance Formation

Internationally, the Arab-Israeli conflict had its long-term impact on the orientation of Syria's alliance. The six-day war, the West's support of Israel, and the USSR support for Arab states gave further motivation for Syria to draw itself nearer to the Eastern bloc. In addition to this is the fact that Ba'ath leftist ideology seemed to make the alliance compatible. Though USSR appeared to be willing to intervene directly in the Arab- Israeli wars, other historical analysis argue that the USSR support was not going to exceed beyond financial aid and supply of weaponry (Fukuyama, 1980, p. 11). The USSR-Syrian relation significantly influenced Syria's foreign policy. Below is a timeline of the Russian-Syrian relationship from 1955 to 2011.

²⁰ See the membership graph shown previously in the chapter.

Syrian-Russian relations 1955-2011

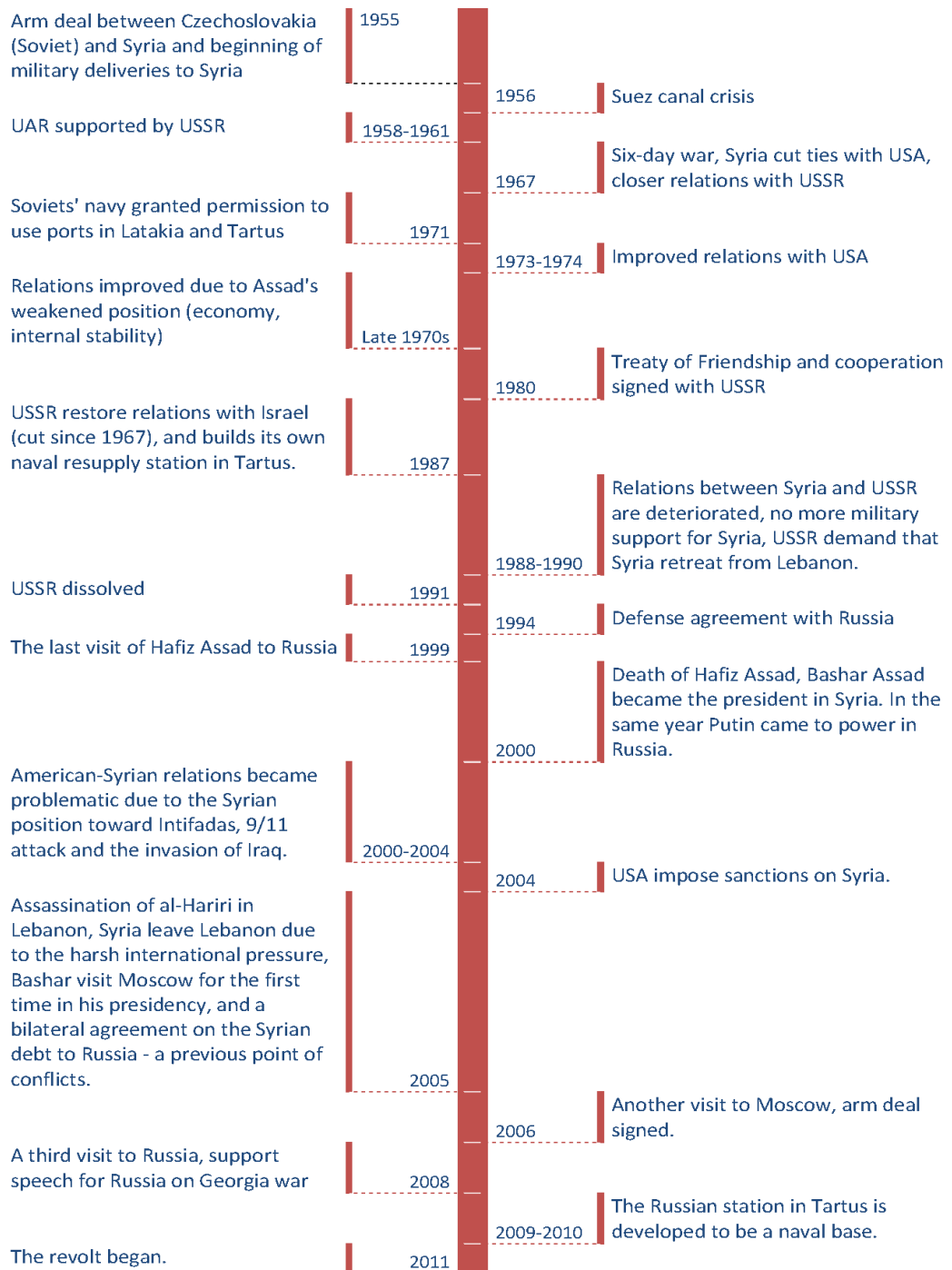


Figure 3.6. Syrian-Russian Relations 1955-2011

However, despite what appeared to be a strong alliance, the USSR-Syrian relations had several disagreements on contentious issues especially after Assad came to power in 1970.

Assad tolerated no dissent from his population and no interference from his allies (...). the Syrian government would bank on Soviet support and sing Moscow's praises in public, while pursuing its own interests with ruthless pragmatism and little regard for the Kremlin's point of view – unless it was offered something in return. Assad emerged as one of the Soviet Union's most valued and well-supplied Third World clients, but even the Kremlin found him exhaustingly stubborn and demanding. "It's true that Syria accepts from the Soviet Union aid, loans, student exchange, military programs – when you think of it, it accepts everything from us", said Nuritdin Mukhitdinov, a Soviet ambassador to Damascus from 1968 to 1977, and paused before adding: 'Except advice (Lund, 2017, p. 7).

The USSR-Syrian relation was shadowed by suspicion and spying, disagreements about the war in Lebanon, and the reality that Ba'ath party was no more than a tool for the regime. For its ideology and other founding principles did not went beyond the pages of its founders' books was disappointing for USSR who hoped to have communism as an inspiring model for their clients. But beside that, the their alliance remained cooperative, until the USSR was dissolved. As the cold war ended and Russia took steps toward the West, Assad could no longer benefit from the competition of the two blocs. He realised that he could no longer demand more military aid from Russia without paying. In 2000, new rulers came to power in both countries. Bashar Assad succeeded his father, and Vladimir Putin became Russia president. Both men were facing a new international order. Putin was restructuring the new Russia, while Bashar, inheriting a state with weak economy alongside a heritage of regional hostilities due to his father's policies in the region, tried to strengthen the state by liberal economic reforms and, a limited, certain, political freedom which only lasted for 7 months. These policies, however, could not rescue the economy of Syria which was deeply implicated in corruption and nepotism to a large extent.

Bashar seemed, at the beginning of his rule, to have a more friendly position toward the West than his father was. However, Bashar's relation with the West did not improve significantly. In 2004, US imposed sanctions to Syria, whose government was designated as a State Sponsor of Terrorism since December 1979, due to the Lebanese case and its position on the invasion of Iraq. In 2005, Al-Hariri was assassinated and

Syria was accused of committing the act. Later that year, the Syrian army had to withdraw from Lebanon due to international pressure led by the USA. The harsh year for Assad rule did not pass without gains, for in that year he visited Russia for the first time since his presidency. His initial meeting with Putin was followed by several more meetings in 2006, mainly resulted to an arm deal, in 2008, where Assad openly supported Russia's position on Georgia, considering it as "a reaction to provocation by Georgia" (Weitz, 2008). Between 2009 and 2010, Russia developed and restructured its station in Tartus to be a naval facility. Later in 2015, Russia had its Khmeimim air base in Lattakia. The construction of the Russian air base was after the uprising of 2011, when Putin-Bashar relations reached a totally new level.

3.3.2. The Regional Policy

Regionally, Syria during Hafiz al-Assad's regime did not pursue a friendly foreign policy with its neighbors. Next to Russia, Syria's major alliance with Iran has endured 11 years of costly, devastating war.

The Middle East was almost never a stable region. In the last decades, it witnessed several wars and violent crisis. Alongside other crisis, the 1948 Al-Nakba caused a refugee crisis that still remains unsolved, and its scale of devastation has multiplied. The 1956 Suez Canal crisis in Egypt, the 1967 six-day war and the 1973 Yom Kippur war were the three wars fought between Israel and Arab states. Mainly led by Egypt and Syria, the Arab states suffered high casualties, loss of territories, and lastly a de-facto situation that Arab states, and the Palestinian population (most unwillingly) had to deal with. Some Arab governments decided to declare peace with Israel. Egypt signed Camp David peace Accords in 1978, and Jordan signed peace with Israel in 1994. But that was not a motivation for the Arab population to accept the new imposed state of Israel. Al-Sadat was assassinated three years after the Camp David Accords. The Intifadas were publicly supported by the Arab nations, and so was the 2006 Hizbullah attacks on Israel. Though Pan-Arabism was not as popular of as before, Arab solidarity became more evident for the Palestinian crisis.

Syria, Jordan and Lebanon hosted the Palestinian refugee camps in one hand, and regarded them as a political card on the other hand. Even in these camps, displaced

Palestinians were not fully safe. In 1970, the refugee camps in Jordan were bombarded. In 1976 and 1982, thousands of refugees in Lebanon were massacred. Though it was Syrian troops who participated in committing the first massacre in 1976, Hafez Assad used his act of hosting Palestinian refugees in Syria to legitimize his rule. By allowing refugees in Syria was his way of publicly projecting that he was denying the state of Israel. It was aimed to obtain popular support and it was his tool to label those who resist his rule as treacherous. This strategy was pursued further as the *Axis of Resistance*. The truth is, however, that during the current Syrian war the Palestinian camps in Syria had to witness the same destruction Syrian areas endured by the regime forces; when Syria promised that the Palestinian refugees in Syria will be treated equally as the Syrians, they did mean it.

On the East, the year 1979 witnessed a new balance of power. In Iraq Saddam Hussein came to power, and the Islamic revolution took place in Iran. Hussein – Assad relation was conflictual. Though both are Arabs, Ba'athists, rule (or claim to rule) by the same ideology, Ba'athism, which promotes pan-Arabism and Arab unity, the two countries had history of tensioned relations under Hussein and Assad. We should remember, however, that Assad witnessed closely the Arab unity with Egypt, realizing what could 'unity' mean in practice, especially when it is implemented between asymmetric states. It simply implies that the dictator of the more powerful state will extend his rule and hegemony over the weaker state in account of his own interests. It is possible also that Saddam being a Sunni, like the majority of Syria, and unlike Assad, played a role in shaping a threat to Assad. And in the end, a strong state in the region is always a threat firstly to its neighbors. This perhaps what pushed the Syrian-Iranian relations to be further strengthened.

- Syrian-Iranian Relations

Syrian- Iranian relations flourished after the Islamic revolution of 1979. In the following year, when the first Gulf war started, Syria supported Iran against Iraq. In 1982, a new agreement between the two states was signed which made Syria get subsidized by Iranian oil and in return Assad's regime closed Iraqi oil pipelines within the Syrian territories. In the same year, "the US became aware of the presence of 2,000 Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps troops traveling through Damascus, whom Hafez al-Assad helped move into Lebanon after the Israelis surrounded Beirut" (Harper, 2012, par. 5).



Figure 3.7. Syria's regional map

The relations intensified even further after the establishment of Hezbollah 1985, and in 1997 a military agreement took place as Iran was going to participate in the development of the military equipment in Syria. However, similar to the relations with USSR, Assad senior accepted the alliance and cooperation without the ideology.

Although Iran was very keen to promote its Islamic revolutionary example (led by Shia rule), at the same time when Assad was facing troubles at home due to the Sunni resistance, led mainly by Muslim brotherhood movement, we don't see Shi'atization of society or promotion of Shiasm as the era of Bashar's regime witnessed, even before the protests in 2011. We can also analyze it due to the previous factor, the conflict between Assad and the MB movement were ended at last by the destruction of a whole city. It was not wise to provoke more resistance by creating new motivation for it.

The implicit popular divide between Sunni-majority Syrians and largely Shiite Iran underscores a key area of divergence. Iranian efforts to project Shiite religious influence could easily backfire in Syria where Salafist Islamist sentiment—which, at its most extreme, considers Shiites to be apostates—is on the rise. Mindful of simmering sectarian tensions, the Syrian regime will (the article was published pre-2011) remain wary of Iranian attempts to promote Shiite religious and cultural influence in Syria (Yacoubian, 2007, p. 2).

- The Relations with Neighbors

Other than Iran and the particular relation it has with Lebanon, Syria had no other allies, nor any other friendly relationships with neighboring countries. Similar to Iraq's conflict with Syria, Jordan too had faced negative relations with its northern neighbor. Although the hostility goes back beyond Assad's rule, he certainly did not improve their political relationship. The tension was due to issues related to the ideological differences between the USA and the Soviets, ancient claim of territory, monarchy-presidency as system of governance, and in addition to the fact that each state accused the other of intervening in their own domestic affairs as such in the case of Black September crisis in Jordan, wherein the Jordanian claimed that it was supported by the Muslim Brotherhood in Syria. Turkey, the last of among Syria's neighbors, has its share of hostility as well, and the deterioration of its relations with Syria peaked in 1998 when the two countries were at the brink of a war. It was only avoided by signing the 1998 Adana Agreement which was aimed to resolve the issues on the PKK and

their leader, Abdullah Ocalan. The post-1998 Adana Agreement relations was later smoothed - even reaching a "golden age" within a decade (2008- 2009), that is during the time of Bashar, economic treaties, agreements on tourism and military cooperation were signed. However, this once promising Syrian-Turkey relation gradually deteriorated after the Arab spring. At this time, war broke between these two countries in the form of military intervention in recent years by Turkish troops in Syrian territory. The Turkish government made reference to the Adana agreement to justify its actions within Syrian territories.²¹

To comprehend the foreign policy of Hafez Assad during his 30-year rule, we need to understand that, similar to all the other decision making institutions and leading authorities in Syria such that of the legislative, executive, judicial, military and intelligence agencies, the foreign policy making body was related directly to the president. Indeed, as we are going through the domestic situation in Syria in the succeeding pages, we will discuss how Assad designed the 1971 constitution to legalize this hierarchy of state structures ensuring his totalitarian control over the entire country. (Ziadeh, 2013, pp. 199-202).

Being surrounded by states such as Turkey, Iraq, Iran and Israel which are more powerful than Syria, Hafez Assad's strategy in forming his foreign policy was based on "balancing the contradictory interests of states", and by using their conflicts to its benefits, and this became beneficial in a complex way to the regional and international structure (Nahar, 2020, par. 14). Hafez's pragmatism unleashed the possibilities for Syria to freely choose a side among the many conflicts in the region (Byman, 2005, p. 17).

To summarize, we see that the regional and international contexts in the time of Hafez Assad were explicitly used by himself in his foreign policy. Perhaps the most

²¹ In the agreement the context code that if the Syrian side did not remain to his word in ceasing the support of PKK and their military camping, Turkey would have the right to intervene to stop such activities, etc. Syria used the PKK card, empowering them within the current civil war to decrease the Turkish pressure on itself and to gain, if possible, a reciprocal form of dealing (Syria stop supporting PKK if Turkey stop supporting the FSY and opposition). The result is, however, that the PKK and later on SDF (Syrian Democratic Forces) grow to be a separate party of the multi-party civil war, though the actions of this party draw the doubt of whether it is still a semi-autonomous agent of the Syrian regime or an ally, or that the "played card" grow strong that it is no longer in the player control?

determined policies he had was based on his position toward the expansive states: the Soviet and the Iranian ones, which he had alliances with and relied on their assistance in a pragmatic form without ideological commitment. While the Iraqis (Saddam Housseine Ba'th) and the Israelis were considered as threats. And in accordance he placed the set of enemies – friends. However, as Bashar succeed his father, he tried to copy his father's foreign policy as well as his domestic policies. However, Bahsar was not able to efficiently implement the same policies that his father had. Though the set of enemies and friends is still the same, the form of the relationships differed. Whether it is due to the lack of his father's charismatic leadership, the transformation of the international and regional balances, or simply because the circumstances of the civil war that caused him to allow foreign ideology and direct interference of his allies to domestic issues, and thus Basher was not able to counter his enemies as efficiently as how his father did. These are questions that need to be asked.

3.3.3. The Economic Policies Of Assad

In consideration of the state of the Syrian economy during Hafez and Basher's regimes, there was a variation in the degree of foreign interferences. Perthes (as cited in Haddad, 1996, pp. 156-157) analyses the two waves of 'Liberalization' that took place in 1970s and in mid-1980s, characterizing it as *Authoritarian* Adjustment, a concept that refers to "economic reform as politically motivated: economic rationality is subordinated to the regime's political rationality which has regime's stability, maintenance and control as premium goals".

Hafez Assad sought to rescue the deteriorated economy – which was the result of long years of military coups, lost wars by the army who used to receive two-thirds of the state finance, the imposed, unorganized nationalization that took place in the 1950s and 1960s, and lastly, the state's deeply entrenched corruption. However, Hafez was very careful as to the mechanisms he would follow to improve the economic situation. Even coming from an ally, a conditional foreign aid that would interfere domestically was an unacceptable threat as accepting such would increase the dependency of the regime and decrease the state's sovereignty (Haddad, 1996, pp. 157-158). But these policies were costly;

The result of these neoliberal policies was increased poverty among the lower social strata and the rapid emergence of a new bourgeoisie, which derived its fortunes from having close ties with the Assad regime. This, to quote Raymond Hinnebusch and Tina Zintl, meant that the cost of the stabilization of the state Hafez started was 'a gradual deterioration into neopatrimonial rule (Bonfatti, 2017, par. 6).

Haddad (1996) regards the economic liberalization also from the perspective of the regime pragmatism, which shifted to its ally and the private sector as the public sector was exhausted and eventually collapsed. In that sense, it did not aim at liberalizing the state, and failed to liberalize the economy, too. As the private sector was exclusively a class of elite closely connected to Assad (Haddad, 1996, pp. 159). This liberalization strategy of Hafez remained the same in the time of his son. It was framed with a more obvious corruption as 60% of Syria's economy was estimated to be in one man's hand, who supposedly belonged to the private sector. Makhlouf, who is Bashar's cousin, has a personal fortune, estimated to have a value of six billion USD and controls many sectors in the state (Bonfatti, 2017, par. 10). During the era of Bashar Assad, we see two direct phenomena, the direct foreign interference in Syria, especially the Iranian influence, and the increased rampancy of corruption.

Based on the 2010 Corruption Perceptions Index reported by the Transparency International, Syria was ranked 127 out of 178 countries (Bonfatti, 2017, par. 7). The corruption in Syria is mounted as a 'structural violence', a concept set by Galtung (1969) as every citizen is forced to bribe or rely on nepotism to survive. The monthly income of most of the working class in Syria is so trifling, that without having a bribe, or a second job, and sometimes a third, will mean that their families will starve. "80% of state employees have a monthly income of 40\$ to 120\$, and this is not enough to support their families"(George, 2003, p. 20). The famous slogan summarizes the situation 'Ya Mukhalif Ya Makhlouf'– Either you are a breacher of the law, your daily income is obtained illegally, or you are working with Makhlouf. George (2003, p. 20) summarizes it as "corruption is not only permitted, but encouraged as a crucial component of the informal guardianship networks system, which is an important means of political control". Thus, the liberalization efforts were in vain, and in a poor country like Syria, this meant clear vulnerability to foreign intervention (Byman, 2005, p. 22).

3.3.4. Sectarian Tension During Hafez Assad Rule

At the very beginning of Assad's regime, sectarian sensitivity became more evident. The article requiring that the president must be a Muslim was removed from the new constitution. In response to this, infuriated protests occurred, which compelled Assad to reverse the deletion of the said article. This brought back the old sensitive question about whether an Alawite is a Muslim or not, the sect that has been regarded by suspicion and mistrust due to its historical context (McHugo, 2015, p. 180). This time the question had to be answered for political stability. 80 Alawite religious figures announced a statement which affirmed that they are Muslims and a fatwa came from Imam Musa al-Sadr about the Alawites being a sect from Shi'ism (Ziadeh, 2009, p. 14). Initially, Assad tried to avoid creating a tension between him and the Sunni Ulama along with the Muslim Brotherhood at first, this constraint did not endure long. Being an Alawite president in a country where the Sunni is estimated to reach 70% while Alawite constitutes 11% of the population, the majority was hardly receptive of Assad's presidency (Van Dam, 1995, p. 16). A combination of factors has increased sectarian sensitivity during the Assad regime. The Sunni-Alawi lines reflect a cultural dimension.²² The tension between the Urban and the rural has increased even further when many Alawites would move from rural areas to the major cities, and were given preferable treatment by the regime and many of them would hold key positions.

(All of us are Arabs) is the official line for Syrian Ba'athists, but this confirmation is used to cover the regime's Alawite origins and they tend to prefer Alawites in the bureaucratic and military management and the security services. The Syrian rulers are too sensitive to be accused of being – an exaggerated, but not a baseless accusation – a small bunch of Alawite minorities who grab the state (George, 2003, pp. 9-10).

With his policies, Assad could secure well his position, but not without cost. The religion question remained an issue during his time. Since 1963, newspapers, journals and political parties were banned due to a state of emergency. In 1972, Assad

²² One of the shocking incidents about that cultural tension is when an Alawite medical student in Damascus confessed his love to a Sunni girl in his university, she firmly rebuffed him, complained to the faculty management and told her brothers who came and searched for him for several days in the university, but he didn't appear for some time. The story became known between the university students. Later on, this Alawite student became the Tadmur prison's doctor, the prison where Muslim Brotherhood members (or accused to be) were held. He systematically killed 14 of the prisoners who were students with him in the university at the time of the girl's story. (The Shell: Memoirs of a Hidden Observer, Mustafa Khalifa, Interlink Pub Group, Northampton, 2016, Pp62-65)

established the National Progressive front, a coalition of political parties, supposedly led by Ba'ath. In reality, the parties lost their identities and ideologies, and became only another instrument for Ba'ath and the government. At the beginning of his presidency, Assad tried to increase his popularity by visiting local areas and by having meetings in public. He even increased the budget of the ministry of Awqaf. Few years later, the previously allotted budget was significantly reduced while the other ministries had their funding increased (Pierret, 2013, p. 21). However, for the Sunni public and the Muslim brotherhood movement, which clandestinely operated, these policies did not deceive them nor had these altered their negative view of the ruling system (Van Dam, 2017, pp. 47-48). The protest against the post-coup rule of Assad mainly took place in Sunni areas; Hama, Homs, Idlib, Aleppo and Damascus. The regime did not clear itself against the accusation of shelling mosques and arresting people inside these mosques.

Al-Sultan mosque in Hama and Grand Umayyad mosque in Damascus were among those that were targeted. While the civil unrest remained, the year 1967 brought another sensitive incident. An Alawite Ba'thist officer published an article in the army journal, *Jaysh al-sha'b*, in which he insulted Islam, and claimed that God [forgiveness of God], and religions must be put in the museums along with the mummies as both are out of date. The article caused another wave of outrage and demonstrations faced with more violent suppression.

3.3.5. The Muslim Brotherhood Movement And The Fighting Vanguard (Al-Tali'a Al-Muqatila)

The movement, though working in secrecy, has maintained a civil resistance and tried to retain such approach. However, the regime's brutal suppression tactics led to a new fragmentation of the Muslim Brotherhood. A faction preferred an armed response while the other members supported a non-violent strategy. A group in the movement called itself the Fighting Vanguard (*al-Tali'a al-Muqatila*) and decided that the Assad regime had to be confronted with violence. They started training themselves in the use weaponry and tried to encourage others to join them in their armed struggle as the regime's brutal suppression of civil protests left them with no other choice. The

Fighting Vanguard planned and committed several assassinations targeting security institutions. Most of those that they have killed were Alawis. These operations were not known to the rest of the Muslim Brotherhood movement, but it intensified the regime's violent response. This was also used by the regime to claim that it was fighting traitors who were collaborators of the Americans. In 1979, the Aleppo Artillery school massacre occurred, where a number of cadets who were mostly Alawis, around 50 to 82 students, were killed by Ibrahim al-Yousif, a Ba'thist officer who was executed later by the regime. The Fighting Vanguard adopted the operation. In the same year, an attempt of assassination against Assad failed. Following day of this attempt, Tadmur prison, where members of the Muslim brotherhood were imprisoned, was attacked by the Defense Brigades, led by Rif'at Assad, and randomly shot prisoners. An estimate 1000 to 1200 prisoners were murdered. This marked the beginning of the age of terror which Syrians remember bitterly but dare not to mention or talk about even in their homes or to their family members. Law No. 49 was issued penalizing every member of the Muslim Brotherhood with death penalty. This law was followed by a series of executions, arrests, violence, terrorizations, and discriminations not solely restricted to the movement's members or those being accused to be so, but it also included people who knew any of the Muslim Brotherhood members, people who prayed in certain mosques or who attended certain religious lessons, and even to women who wore headscarves. A news of a person being arrested or executed meant a direct threat to his entire family, relatives and their neighbors. Even those Sunnis in military preformed their prayers in the bathrooms in fear of being seen and reported as members of the Muslim Brotherhood.

The regime relied on two-pronged strategy to regain control of the religious field. Its first component was, of course, coercion. During the dark 1980s, the most benign religious activities were subject to drastic limitations. Many mosques kept their doors closed between prayers, which prevented the holding of lessons, dhikr assemblies, and celebrations of the Mawlid. The second pillars of the state's strategy was more surprising. Although one might have expected a revival of the process of institutionalization of the religious field, what actually occurred was exactly the opposite. While discouraging the intensification of religious observance in society (in 1982, for instance, a decree banned the wearing of headscarves in schools), the authorities could not afford to ignore it, especially the growing demand for religious education. In order not to entirely abandon the latter to private networks such as the elusive but influential Qubaysiyyat, a female upper-class movement relying on home-based study circles, the regime relied on 'subcontractors' selected from among the most loyal clerical faction (Van Dam, 2017, pp. 70-71).

3.3.6. The Strategy Of Urbicide

Earlier, the regime had already combed out cities like Aleppo, Homs and Hama, cordoning off whole areas, carrying out mass arrests and allegedly killing numerous people in the process, Hafiz al-Assad's military right hand at that time, Alawi General Shafiq Fayyad, supervised such an extremely repressive operation in Aleppo, and is reported to have said to the local people: 'if a thousand of you will be killed every day, I shall not care'. According to Muslim Brotherhood sources several bloody confrontations with the regime already took place prior to the battle of Hama in February 1982, including what they described as 'the massacre of Jisr al-Shughur' (10 March 1980), 'the first massacre of Hama' (5-12 April 1980) and 'the second massacre of Hama (21 May 1980) (Van Dam, 2017, p. 52).

The massacre of Hama of 1982 was in a much larger scale. The Fighting Vanguard were preparing to throw off the regime in Hama, the military forces surrounded the city, sieged it and shelled it for 27 days (Todman, 2017, pp. 9-10). After that, military forces broke into the city, dragged the men from their homes, collected them together and started shooting until they killed them all. Though the real number is unknown, it is estimated that around 40,000 people died.

The 1982 Hama uprising provides one of the first examples of institutionalized Urbicide, in which Hafez al-Assad used Urbicide as a tactic of counterinsurgency. The impact of the massacre committed by the regime was far beyond the destruction of infrastructures and the bodies of those who were killed. There was now a new strategy in the field that aimed to change the history, culture, and the population of Hama, and to use it as an example for the other cities.

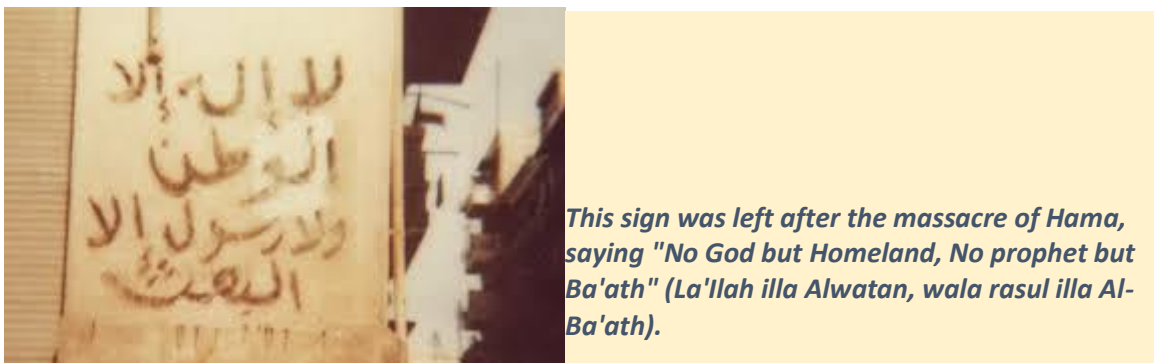


Figure 3.8. Sign left in Hama's urbicide

Syrian immunologist Bara Sarraj reported on his visit to Hama following the 1982 onslaught by the regime, "Not a single tombstone was in its place." In the

aftermath of the conflict, the regime reformed the urban fabric of Hama. Instead of political and socio-economic reform, the regime doled out public largess in the form of roads that tore through the urban fabric, large public buildings, parks, and an Olympic-sized swimming pool. The Assad regime was not just remoulding the urban fabric but the Hama citizen. The Assad regime desired to transmogrify the Hama Islamist into the Hama Ba’thist. Seale noted, “Among the revolutionary changes was the introduction of mixed bathing in 1983 and the first college dormitory block in the whole of Syria to house both male and female students (Sharp, 2012, par. 5).

Since Hama's Urbicide, there were no uprisings against Hafez Assad’s rule. Urbicide strategy is an enemy-centric counterinsurgency (Todmann, 2017, pp. 4-5). It crushed the resistance and planted a culture of fear among the people. The details of Hama massacre and the exact number of the victims are vague due to the silence of the public out of fear of retribution.

It is hard to exaggerate in describing the fear aroused by this brutality in the Syrians' hearts. Hama remained to the end of 1980s a subject forbidden to be mentioned while talking to foreigners. I visited Hama in 1986 when the reconstruction of it was taking place, and I asked one of the elders passing by about the directions to get to the Grand mosque, located in the middle of the destroyed square, he replied: 'there is no such mosque here'. I urged him, telling that I visited that marvelous mosque in 1967, and he replied again: 'no, there is no such mosque here'. Behind him were ruins of old, demolished houses and walls still carrying marks of bullets and shrapnel, and close by there was a security branch's man wearing a civilian's outfit, firm looks and a machinegun on his chest. One of hundreds still standing in the city around it four years after the massacre" (George, 2003, p.23).

Hafez Assad remained in power for thirty years. In 1985, 1991 and 1999, there were 'public referendums' for his presidency, and he won by the results 100%, 99.99%, 100% in all three respectively. In 2000, he died due to an illness, and he was succeeded by his son, Bashar.

CHAPTER IV

SECTARIANISM AND CLEANSING IN THE SYRIAN CRISIS

4.1. Introduction

Sunni residents in the heartland of Bashar al-Assad's Alawite sect say they are being repeatedly threatened and forced to flee their homes, amid fears that the likely fall of the nearby city of Homs will lead to widespread sectarian cleansing in parts of Syria (Chulov & Mahmood, 2013, par. 1).

The Guardian published this article in 2013. Today, cleansing is no longer a predictable threat but a reality shown by numbers. In 1985, the official statistics reported that the population of Syria was of 10,648,632 in which Sunnis at 76%, Alawites at 11.5%, Christians at 8%, Druzes at 3%, and Shi'as at 1.4%

However, these numbers differ today, and though there is no clear statistics, the estimated population of Syria in 2010 was 21,362,529 (World Bank, 2010). In March 2021, UNCHR announced that there is 6.7 Million internally displaced Syrian, and 6.6 Syrian refugees abroad. A total of 13.3 million Syrians were forced to flee. This is more than half of the entire population. 5 out of 8 Syrians were forced to abandon their homes. It should also imply that the expected population in 2021 would have been significantly decreased. In contrary, the Assad regime has announced that the current population is 18, 091. 769., barely referring to any problem.

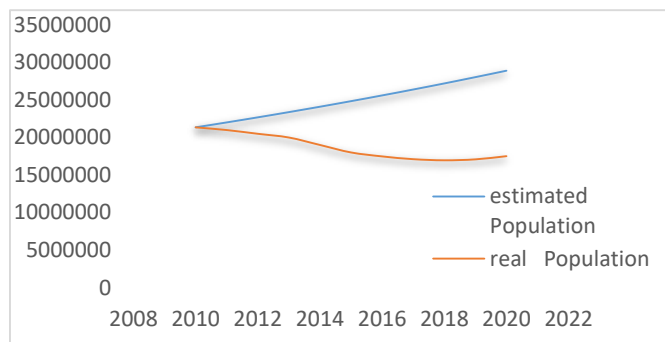


Figure 4.1. A compare between estimated and real population, 2010-2020

The growth rate value is not the same in each year. From 1955 to 2010, it is within the range of 2.27 – 3.58. Since the growth rate in 2010 was 3.07, Therefore we will base our calculations on this last known value. The results will show that **if** the growth rate in Syria has remained within this range – meaning that no cleansing took place – the population today should be approximately around 28 million. This estimated number tells us something about what is going on in Syria.

Table 4.1. A compare between estimated and real population, 2010-2020

Year	Growth rate	The increased number	estimated Population	real Population
2010	3,07	21362529	21362529	21,362,529
2011	3,07	655829,6	22018359	
2012	3,07	675963,6	22694322	
2013	3,07	696715,7	23391038	
2014	3,07	718104,9	24109143	
2015	3,07	740150,7	24849293	17,997,408
2016	3,07	762873,3	25612167	17,465,575
2017	3,07	786293,5	26398460	17,095,678
2018	3,07	810432,7	27208893	16,945,057
2019	3,07	835313	28044206	17,070,135
2020	3,07	860957,1	28905163	17,500,658

4.2. From 2000 To 2011

When Bashar came to power in 2000, it was a new reality for Syrians as more than half of the population, about 12 million, did not know any other president other than Hafez Assad in their life (Ziadeh, 2013, p. 109).

For the Syrian public, the change in leadership was filled with hopes, but it also came with challenges at the regional and international context.

In the era of Hafez, Syria was a regional power, while in the time of Bashar, its' role has decreased gradually (Van Dam, 2017, pp. 59-60). Though no great difference was made in the policies of Hafiz, whether foreign or domestic, the nature of the relations changed.

During the first decade of Bashar' rule, he made five visits to Tehran (2001, 2006, 2007, 2008, 2010). The build-up of strategic relations was agreed on in the first visit, but since 2006, treaties on military cooperation was signed as Hizbullah's war with Israel took place at that year. However, another dimension of the Iranian-Syrian relations was taking place internally, which is more related to the topic of this study, that is, the Shiitization (*Tashayyu*) in Syria.

The Iranian role became obvious during the Syrian civil war. Iran's prominent influence is a result of its 4-decade sociopolitical interactions with Syria. Earlier, the Iranian- Syrian relations caused a shift of the Syrian state religious culture. Since 1979, the bilateral relations between Syria and Iran started a new stage as the Islamic revolution in Iran took over the rule. Syria was the third state to recognize the Islamic republic.

Regionally, the new alliance could counter their common enemies; Iraq on one side, and Israel on the other side. In the previous year, Israel signed the Camp David Accords with Egypt, an event that made Syria lose Egypt as an ally in its conflict with Israel, and increased the international pressure over Syria to follow the Egyptian example.

Syria also proved beneficial for Iran. Remarkably, during the Iran-Iraq war from 1980 to 1988, Syria closed a part of Iraq's Kirkuk-Baniyas pipeline which was in its territory to further pressure Iraq, and aided the Iranian side by providing military training and supplying Soviet arms. In exchange, Iran provided Syria with discounted oil.

The Lebanese field was another area for the strategic alliance between both countries. Hizbullah, which was founded 1982, was able to perform its activities in Lebanon with the support of the Syrian state. Thus, the hegemony of these two countries was extended in the Lebanese territory.



The Shiism expansion in Syria

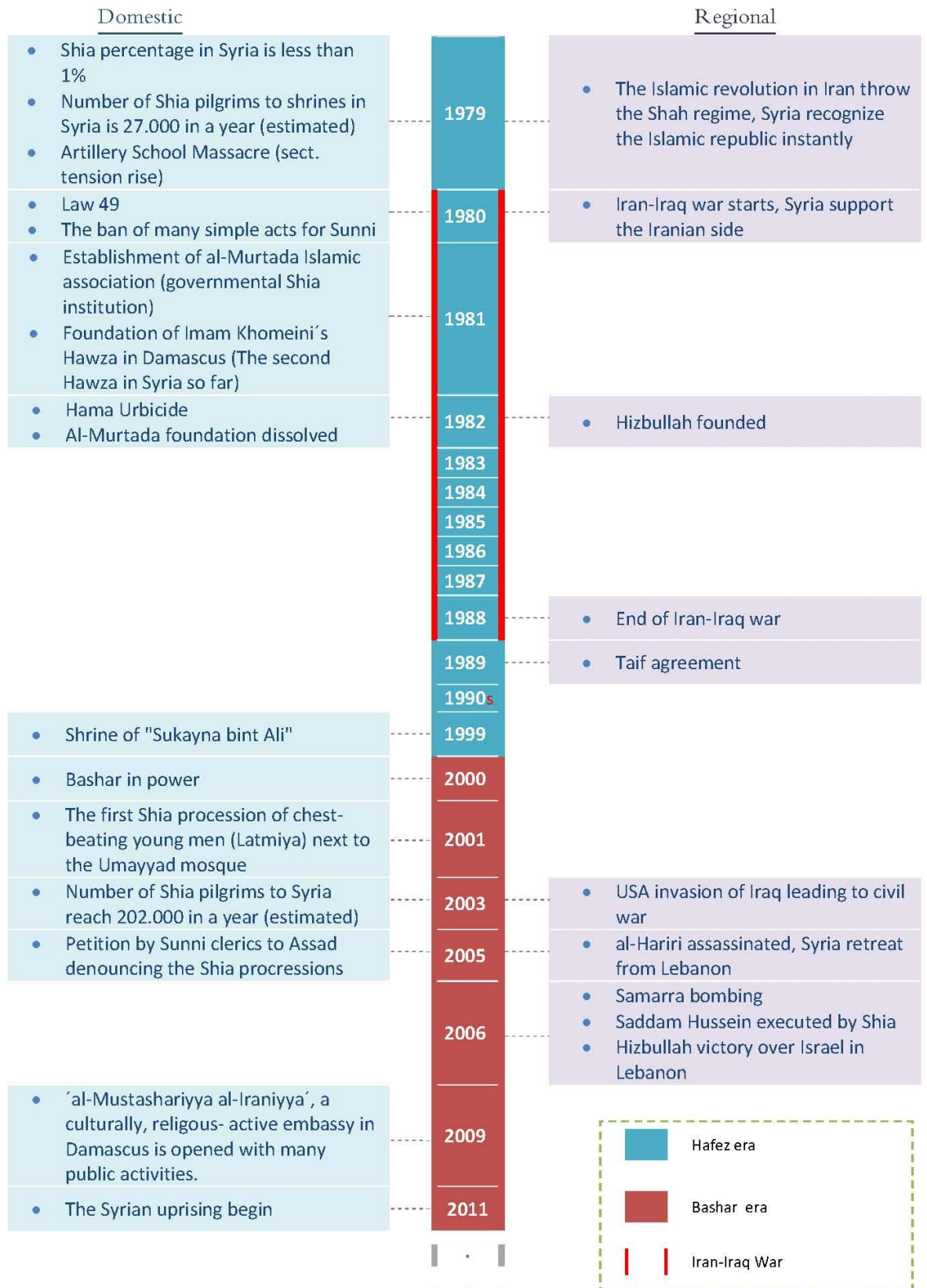


Figure 4.2. The Shiism expansion in Syria

4.2.1. Sectarianism Tension In 2000s

As the Syrian-Iranian alliance grew stronger, mistrust and unrest increased among Sunni-controlled states. Especially as

The takeover and rebuilding of the shrines by Shiite actors generally occurred at the expense of local Sunnite inhabitants. (..) as well as the replacement of the local imam with a Shiite staff. Moreover, the mushrooming of Shiite hawzāt in Sayyida Zaynab has been seen by Sunnite clerics as a proof of the double standards applied by the regime, which has only allowed for the opening of a couple of Sunnite religious institutes since the 1970s. Finally, and as already mentioned, many Sunnite believe that Shiite institutions based in Syria actually serve missionary projects (Pierret, 2013, pp. 106).

The Shia pilgrimage to the shrines in Damascus increased remarkably at the time of Bashar Assad. Bringing along religious educational centers, tourism and other businesses, these areas became Shiite spots. Though these were originally Sunni areas as such were close to the Grand Umayyad mosque. Hussam al-Hafiz, the consul of the Syrian embassy in Tahrān from 2001 to 2002, estimated that the number of Shiite pilgrims in Syria was between 100,000- 200,000 (H. Hafez, interview, 2021). While most outdoor Sunnite religious activities are banned, and those allowed need security permits to be exercised, the Shiite celebrations and shiitizations activities spread throughout Damascus, and even though the Shiite percentage in the Syrian population was less than 2%.

The Iranian role enlarged during the time of Bashar Assad. Attracting pilgrims, Possession of houses and the religious organizations promoting Shiism, like the Iranian Cultural Center which had wide activities and a political and security role, the area of Sayyida Zaynab became an Iranian Shiite and security center by the possession of houses in that area and provoking the people by security to leave their houses (A. Al-Bunni, interview, 2021).

This discrimination is shown clearly in the example of Darayya, a Sunni city in Damascus countryside, where

The shrine of Sukayna bint Ali had been under construction since 1999. As will be shown below, the latter initiative aroused strong suspicions among Sunnite religious leaders, who dismissed the very historical existence of Sukayna bint Ali as a Shiite invention and consequently interpreted the building of her mausoleum in a Sunnite area as part of a strategy of progressive encroachment: a shrine attracts pilgrims, the presence of pilgrims entails the creation of shops selling religious literature and souvenirs, and Shiite influence inevitably spreads among the local population (A. Al-Bunni, interview, 2021).

The city Darayya witnessed a group of Sunni youth who were arrested for activities like protesting against the American invasion of Iraq, boycotting the American products and even by cleaning the streets of their city. This incident occurred in 2003 in the time when the Shiite shrine of Sukayna bint Ali was being built. Since 2016, Inhabitants of Darayya were evacuated. They were mostly Sunnis who were forcibly displaced to the North of Syria. Even if it became almost an abandoned area, there seems to be a plan to repair a Shiite shrine in Darayya. Another factor that aggravated sectarian tension was "the arrival of hundreds of thousands of Iraqi refugees after the 2003 war which played a major role in reinforcing the feeling of “invasion” by making Shiite religiosity more visible". (Pierret, 2013, pp. 107-108).

The victory of Hizbullah in 2006 had a doubled-edged effect. This victory promoted Shiite and Hizbullah in Syria, alongside spreading Shiite culture like songs, poets, photos, etc.²³ The flags of Hizbullah and a sense of Islamic solidarity were among those that were allowed to spread in public. On the other hand, there was a sense of a growing threat from Shiite dominance. Some Sunni religious leaders started warning against the Shiitization process. The human rights activist Haytham al-Malih publicly spoke of 'Shiite Danger' in turning the Syrian society to a Shiite society. (H. Al-malih interview, 2021).

Being perceived as a threat to the very existence of the Sunnite community, Shiite proselytizing has also been the only issue that evenly worried all categories of Syrian Islamic actors during the past decade. (..) Indeed all of them agreed, however, on castigating the Shiite “invasion” (Pierret, 2013, p. 113).

In its part, the Syrian government did not modify its behavior to contain such fears. The systematic discrimination and marginalization of Sunni continued. A clear

²³ Pierret wrote: "admiration for Hizbullah’s military performances sometimes translated into a more strictly religious interest in Shiism. In October 2006, while visiting a young committed Sunni of Aleppo, I found a video CD containing a hymn in honor of Imam Ali sung by Iraqi Shiite artist Basim al-Karbala’i, with the mausoleum of Najaf as visual background. When asked about the place where he had bought this CD, my informant told me to go to Bab al-Faraj, a quarter of downtown Aleppo where all kinds of videos are sold, from Friday sermons to erotic movies. By way of advertisement, shopkeepers usually display the novelties on a TV overlooking the pavement. One of them was showing al-Karbala’i’s videos, which were proving highly successful since I saw several of them being sold in about fifteen minutes—all of this in a city that is not home to any sizeable Twelver or Alawite community. Of course, such a popular interest in Shiite Islam did not amount to conversion—my informant, at least, never renounced his Sunnite faith—but it was sufficient to spread panic among circles that were already afraid of Shiite “invasion”, (ibid p110).

manifestation of these is the Sednaya prison massacre of 2008. During the prison riot, guards stepped on copies of the Quran and torn them apart.²⁴

Overall, the dimension of alliance between Iran and Syria varied between Hafiz's rule and Bashar's rule. Though the obstacle of accurate numbers faces us again. In spite of allowing Iranian religious educational institutions and activities, the Shia percentage in Hafiz Assad's 30-year era remained less than 1%. Until his death in 2000, there were seven Iranian Hawzas in Syria). It is true that Hafiz restricted public religious Sunni activities, and even monopolized Quran teaching activities exclusively to a state-owned, directly-governed institution M'ahad al-Assad, but he also banned the Shia al-Murtada Islamic organization, which was founded and run by his brother, Jamil al-Assad, as he felt the increasing threat of it becoming an entity that semi-independent from his direct rule.

As for Bashar's era, the number of Shia schools jumped from one in his father's time, al-Muhsniyah School in al-Amin district in Damascus, to more than 60 Shiite seminaries and secondary religious schools in 2016 (Qutrib, 2016, p. 12). The number of pilgrims and shrines were increased. Public Shia activities were allowed. An example of this is the chestbeating '*latmiyya*', which took place in Damascus for the first time in 2001. Iranian Cultural Center in Damascus was also permitted to hold public activities.

This difference between the two eras is due to several factors. According to al-Bunni, the main reason is the inexperience of Basher Assad who enabled his Iranian partners to expand their influence freely (A. Al-Bunni interview, 2021). Al-Hafez highlights the weakening of the state in the time of Bashar Assad since 2000 which made it vulnerable to bow down to Iranian demands. (H. Al-Hafez interview, 2021).

Pierret (2013, p. 100) claims four reasons that have led to increased Shia presence in Syria. These are, the revival of the small community of Shia in Syria, the reconciliation between Alawites and twelver Shiasim, the fled of Iraqi refugees to Syria and finally

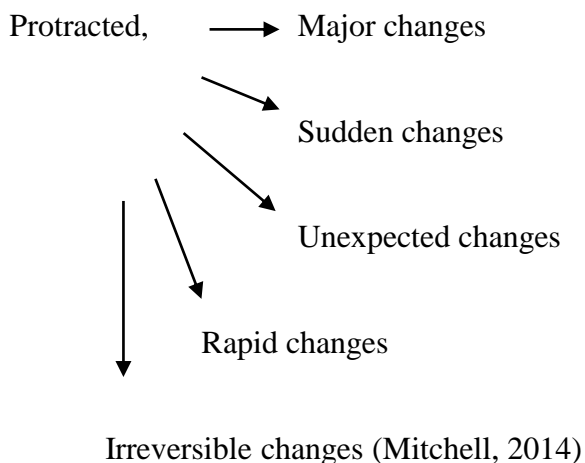
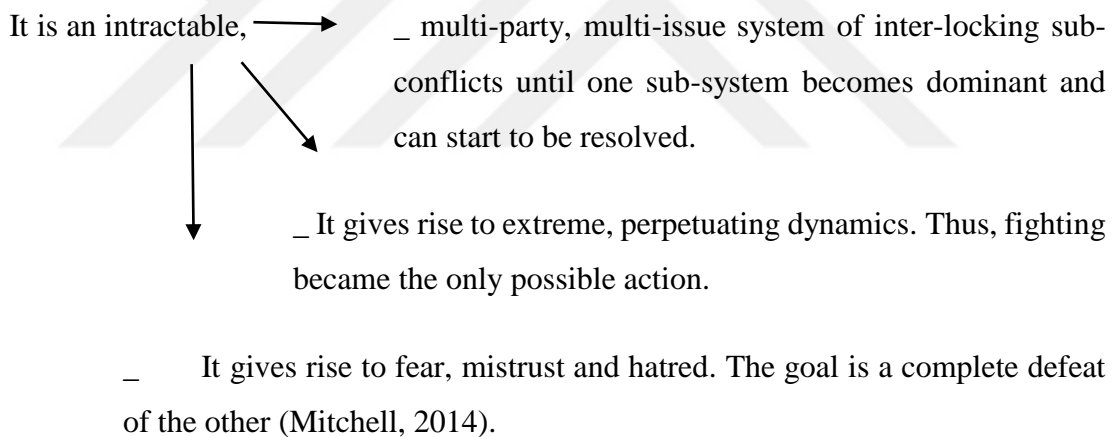
²⁴ For more details check the testimony of a massacre survivor published on the Syrian Human Rights Committee website, <https://www.shrc.org/?p=9831>

the strategic alliance formation between Syria and Iran. We might as well add a fifth: the transformation of the alliance to an asymmetric one which is clearly seen today, as the Syrian government became too dependent to Iran in its current civil war to the extent of losing its sovereignty over its territory.

4.3. The Syrian Conflict (2011- Up To Date)

A transformation from Alawi- dominated dictatorship to democracy in Syria would imply that the existing repressive institutions were to be dismantled, and that the regime would have to give up its privileged opposition. A scenario in which the Alawi-dominated power elite were to be overthrown or removed was bound to be extremely violent. (Van Dam, 2017, pp. 67-68).

Before discussing the dimensions of the Iranian role in Syria during the crisis, it is important to map the Syrian conflict first. This is because it has undergone several transformation since it started.



Asymmetric conflict promises to continue for decades. It has already resulted to more than 500 thousand fatalities, around six million internally displaced and another six million refugees in other countries, along with thousands of detainees and missing people whose number could not be reported accurately (Human Rights Watch, 2019, par. 4). Five states have already actively fought in Syria. These are Russia, Iran, USA, Turkey and Israel. The prospects of peace remain ambiguous and weak as the conflict passed its tenth year.

4.3.1. Chronology Of The Conflict

Table 4.2. Chronology Of The Conflict

17 February 2011	A spontaneous protest in Damascus after the beating of a civilian by traffic police and the arrival of the interior minister to calm down angry people.
09 March 2011	The detention of Dara'a children for writing freedom slogans on their school walls.
15 March 2011	The beginning of protests.
22 March 2011	UN and EU condemned the use of force against peaceful protesters.
27 March 2011	The regime lifted the state of emergency which was imposed since 1963.
9 June 2011	The first desertion of Syrian soldiers, which evolved later to become the Free Syrian Army.
02 October 2011	Establishment of the Syrian National Council in Istanbul.
04 October 2011	Russia and China use their veto against a UNSC resolution to sanction the Syrian regime.
22 December 2011	Arab League sent observers to Syria.
23 January 2012	The foundation of Al-Nusra front.
03 February 2012	The Syrian regime forces launched an assault on Homs for a week, resulted in the killing of more than 700 civilian. The first time scud missiles were used.

Table 4.2. (cont.)

04 February 2012	The second Russian veto in UNSC.
18 February 2012	The biggest protest in Damascus' Mazzeh neighborhood took place. Thousands of civilians participated in the protest. It was followed by a brutal campaign of raiding houses and arresting people.
27 February 2012	A new constitution was formed.
10 April 2012	Anan peace plan takes place, starting with a ceasefire, that did not last for more than a month.
30 June 2012	Geneva negotiations started.
18 July 2012	bombing of the National Security headquarters in Rawda Square, Damascus, killed and injured a number of top military and security officials of Bashar al-Assad's government. Among the dead were the Syrian Defense Minister and Deputy Defense Minister.
19 July 2012	The third Russian veto in UNSC.
22 July 2012	Free Syrian Army controlled areas and started "Liberation of Aleppo". it would remain in Aleppo until 2016 when the Russian intervention took place.
02 August 2012	Resignation of Anan, the Air Force participated in battles.
11 November 2012	The Syrian National coalition was founded.
December 2012	The Free Syrian Army Staff was established.
08 April 2013	ISIS appeared in Syria
5 May 2013	Israel bombed targets around Damascus.
12 May 2013	The Syrian regime bombs Reyhanli town in Turkey, killing 46 and wounding 155 citizens.
13 May 2013	A Turkish F16 aircraft crashed near the borders. It was hit by the Syrian regime's air defense system.

Table 4.2. (cont.)

20 May 2013	Hizbullah forces entered the battlefield in line with Assad, and committed massacres.
3 August 2013	Islamist rebels launch an attack in latakia against. Alawite villages. Massacres were committed.
21 August 2013	The use of chemical attack on Damascus suburb.
22 January 2014	The second round of Geneva negotiations.
January 2014	The beginning of an era of inter-rebel conflicts.
22 May 2014	The fourth Russian veto in UNSC. Russia aimed to stop the filing of the Syrian case to the International Criminal Court.
29 June 2014	ISIS claimed to have established the Caliphate system.
August 2014	ISIS controlled large territories, including the main Syrian oil and gas fields.
26 August 2014	Disputes between Al-Nusra and Israel occurred.
29 August 2014	UN announced that 3 million refugees had fled Syria and 6.5 million are displaced within. almost half of all Syrians have now been forced to abandon their homes and flee for their lives.
September 2014	The international military intervention against ISIL-ISIS started.
23 February 2015	Turkey moved the tomb of Suleiman Shah from Syria.
September 2015	The Russian intervention started with a bloody campaign in Aleppo.
25 November 2015	Turkey shot down a Russian Sukhoi Su-24 over Latakia.
December 2015	Evacuation of Aleppo started.
25 February 2016	Third round of negotiation in Geneva.
24 August 2016	Beginning of Operations Euphrates Shield

Table 4.2. (cont.)

19 December 2016	Andrei Karlov, the Russian ambassador to Turkey, was assassinated in Ankara.
23 January 2017	Astana, first round of negotiations.
15 February 2017	Astana, second round of negotiations.
14 March 2017	Astana, third round of negotiations.
29 March 2017	End of Euphrates Shield operation.
April 2017	Geneva, fifth round of negotiations.
04 May 2017	Astana, fourth round of negotiations.
May 2017	Geneva, sixth round of negotiations.
4 July 2017	Astana, fifth round of negotiations
July 2017	Geneva, seventh round of negotiations.
14 September 2017	Astana, sixth round of negotiations.
30 October 2017	Astana, seventh round of negotiations.
November 2017	Geneva, eighth round of negotiations.
20 January 2018	Olive Branch operation was launched by Turkey.
25 January 2018	Vienna, ninth round of negotiations.
April 2018	The end of the five-year siege on Eastern Ghouta. The evacuation of the last area controlled by rebels. (other than Idlib).
23 September 2019	The foundation of Syrian Constitutional Committee.
09 October 2019	Turkey launched Peace Spring process.
03 January 2020	U.S. bombed Baghdad, killing Qasem Soleimani, major general in the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps and commander of its Quds Force.

Table 4.2. (cont.)

28 February 2020	Tension between Turkey and the Syrian regime burst into direct battles.
05 March 2020	a ceasefire took place.

4.3.2. Escalation And De-Escalation Timeline

In the diagram below, the peaks of escalation and de-escalation are presented. Remarkably, most of the escalation peaks occurred whenever a new actor interfered in the field. The measurement criteria of this timeline is the monthly record of victims. These data are mentioned in the diagram.

However, there are some outliers particularly at the last event wherein Russian forces bombarded rebels areas. Because only few of the rebels remained in Idlib, the number of victims became an inaccurate indicator of escalation.

The first escalation in 2012 was due to FSA's integration and control of large territories in Syria. The second escalation in 2013 was the first use of chemical weapon in Syria, the third point of escalation was in 2014, it was due to the involvement of new actors: the ISIS and the international coalition against ISIS.

The fourth point of escalation was in 2015. This was due to the involvement of a new actor: Russian air force. The fifth escalation was in 2016. It was due to the involvement of a new actor: Turkey. The sixth point of escalation was in 2018, it was triggered by the Ghouta campaign which resulted in the extermination of the last rebel area in Syria, other than Idlib.

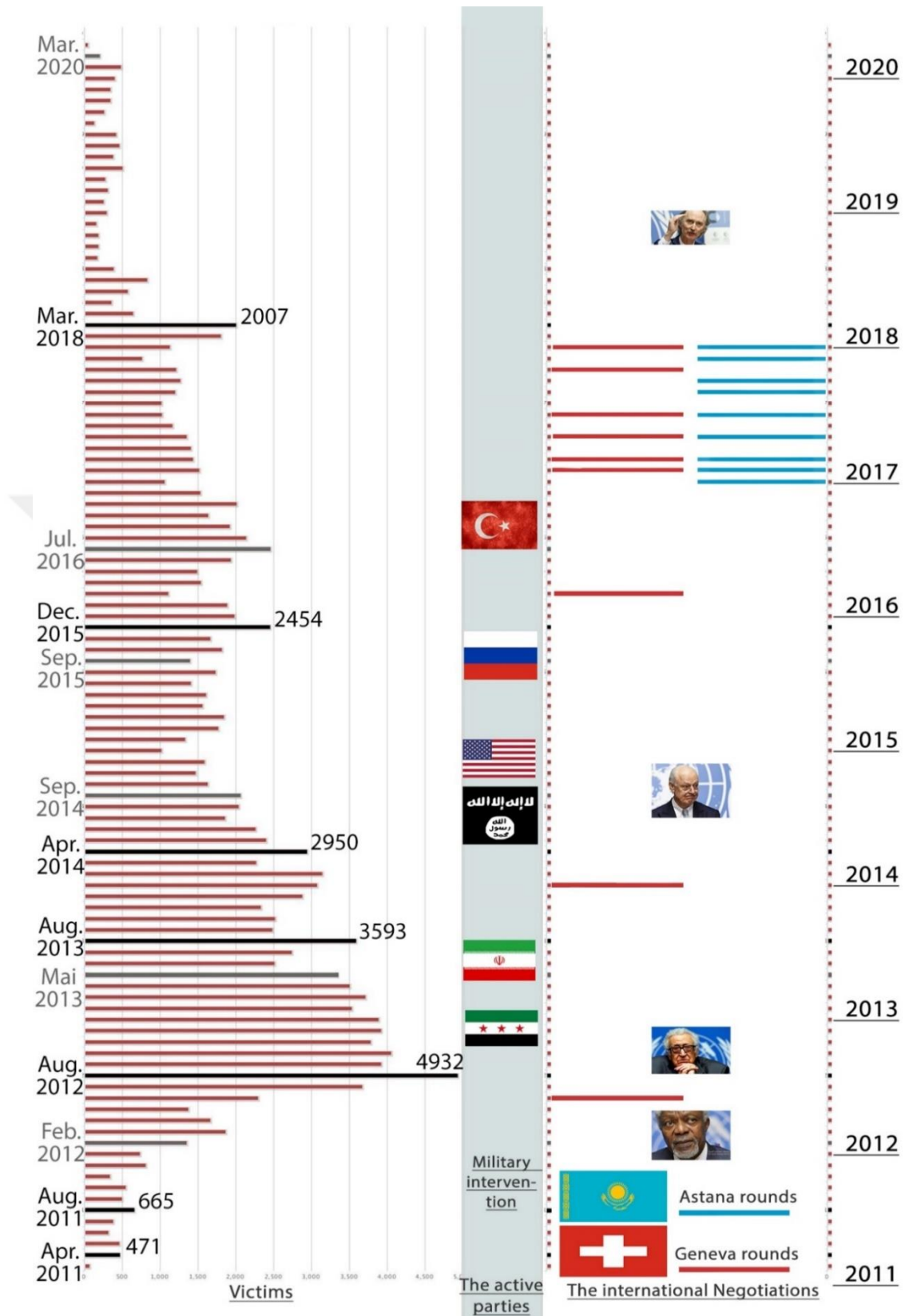


Figure 4.3. Timeline of escalation and de-escalation

4.3.3. Levels Of Analysis

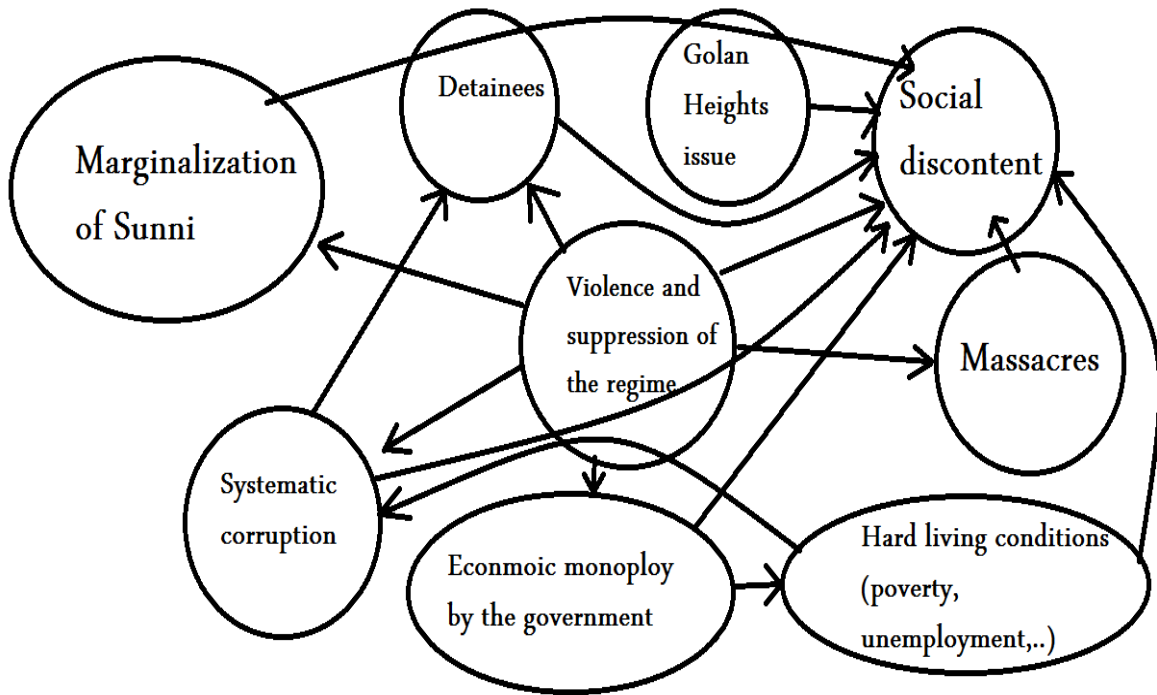


Figure 4.4. Local issues pre-conflict and root causes

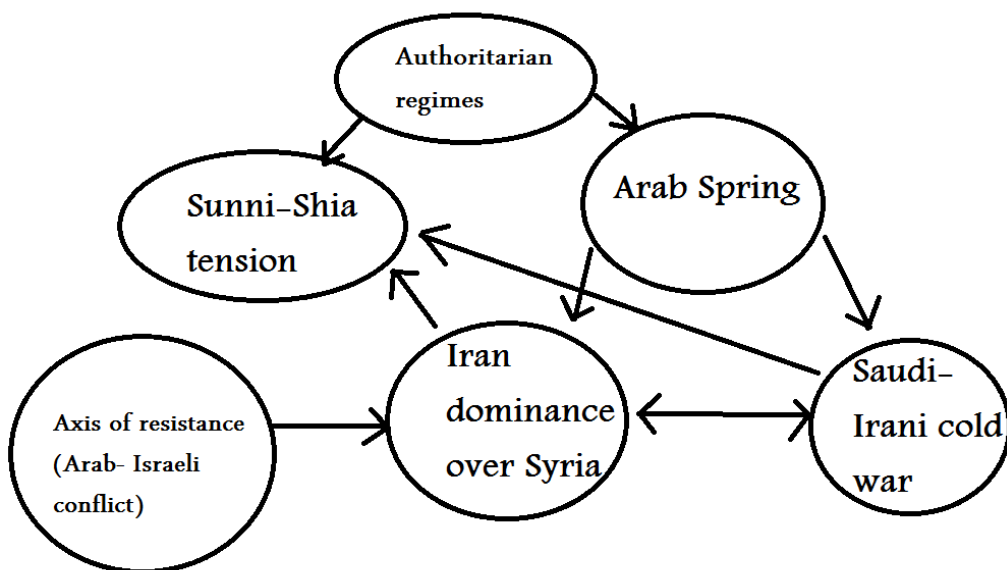


Figure 4.5. Regional issues pre-conflict

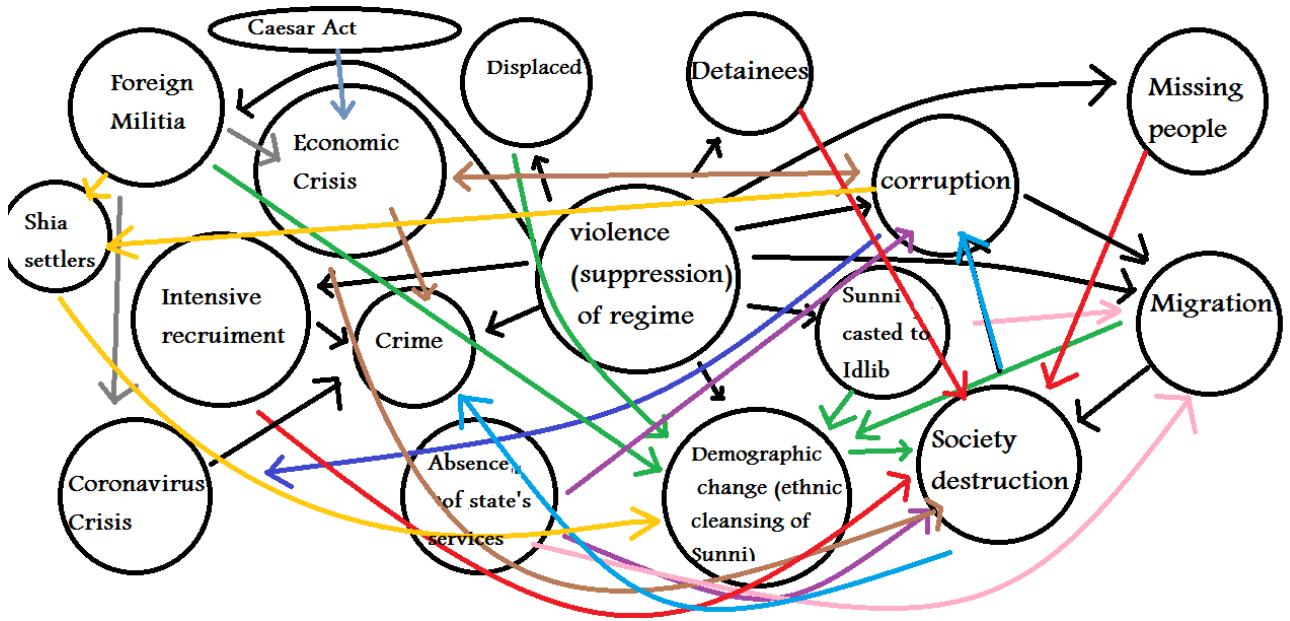


Figure 4.6. Local Issues during the conflict (currently)

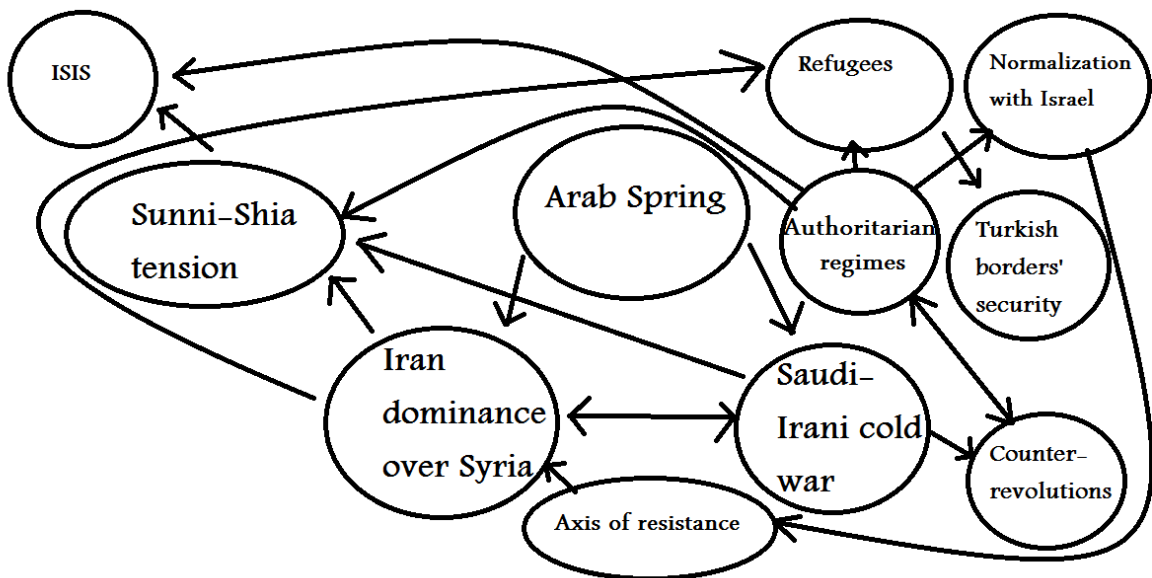


Figure 4.7. Current Regional Issues related to the conflict

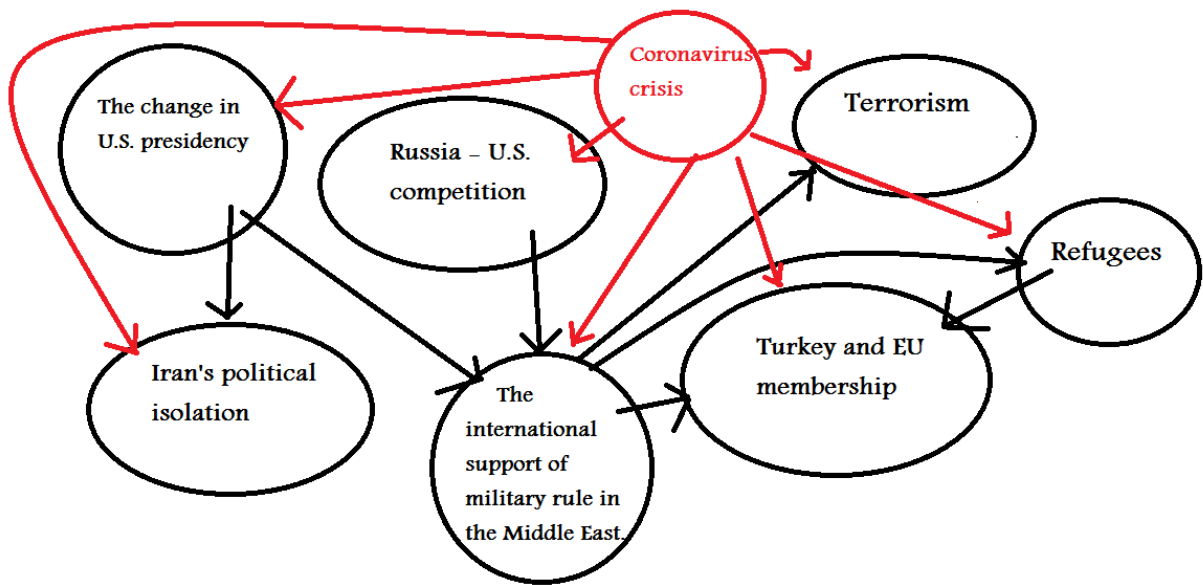


Figure 4.8. Current International issues related to the conflict

4.3.4. Parties And Relationships

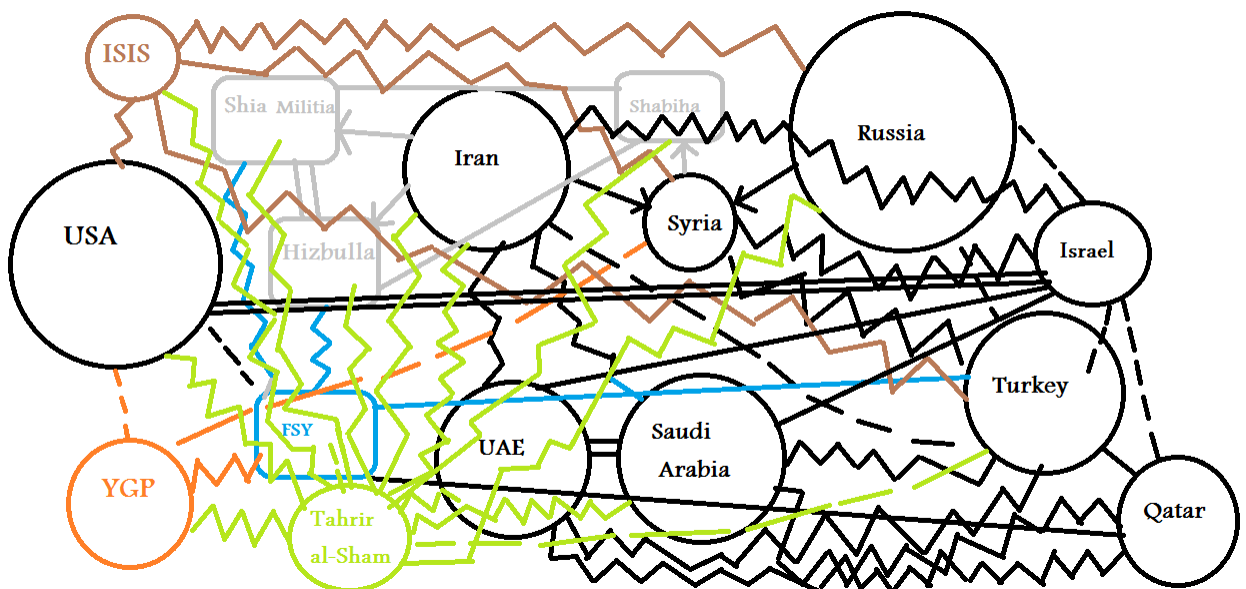


Figure 4.9. Parties and relationships

The analysis of the interests, threats, means and prospects of each party is mentioned according to the overview of the party's conduct and role during the 10 years of the conflict.

These are the actors within the Syrian territory. Other external actors who do not have physical presence within Syria such as those other influential states in the Middle East have roles restricted to financing or cutting the aids in accordance with the will of Great power:

Saudi Arabia used to support the rebels in Syria for the first years until it stopped when Russian intervention started.

United Arab Emirates supported the counterrevolution wave. It financed in part the Russian intervention, and recently released some announcements about "standing with the Syrian Arab republic during the coronavirus crisis since it's an Arab country". Qatar intermittently supported the rebels in Syria. Turkey initially supported the uprising through diplomatic means. It then welcomed refugees and made crossing the borders easier for fleeing Syrians. Afterwards, it moved inside Syria for the first time in 2015. In the succeeding years, many other military operations followed until today. Israel bombed Syria several times, but has avoided direct involvement in the Syrian crisis.

Table 4.3. Parties of the conflict

Party	interests	Threats	Means	Prospect
Syrian regime forces (and Shabiha)	Expelling the rebels, restoring the whole Syrian territory.	Rebel recovery A new uprising	Hard power (relying on allies power)	Comply with its allies' prospect.

Table 4.3. (cont.)

<p>Armed opposition</p>	<p>Overthrow Assad and the regime.²⁵</p>	<p>The power of the allies and the political desire to prevent the change.</p> <p>The conflict turning into a deadlock.</p> <p>The ethnic cleansing of the Sunni majority</p>	<p>Partial support from Turkey.</p>	<p>Restoring rights and applying democracy in the entire Syrian territory, not merely on their rebel-controlled areas.</p>
<p>Hizbulla\ Iraqi militia\ Afghan militia \ Islamic Revolutionary Guard corps and other Iranian Militias</p>	<p>Comply with Iran's interest: supporting the existing regime.</p> <p>For the militia, having a new field for illegal income: smuggling and drug trade.²⁶</p>	<p>An overthrow of the existing regime in Syria, because it will cut the road between Iran and Lebanon, and it's likely that the orientation of the new government will not comply with their interests.</p>	<p>Hard power: Arms, men and dominant position in Syria.</p> <p>Ethnic cleansing of Sunni.</p> <p>Soft power: Settlement of Iranian Shias in Syria.</p> <p>Establishing Shia</p>	<p>Restore control of Syria to the current regime.</p> <p>Constructing Syria religiously as a Shia nation in compliance with Iran's interests.</p>

²⁵ As the armed opposition groups became too many and the war extended too long, we might consider that some "war lords" exists whose interest actually may be in the struggle lasting, so their dominance, power and economy last as well.

²⁶ Those, along with Shabbiha, were reported to pursue a policy of plundering and looting the abandoned houses and properties of the displaced, contributing to make it impossible for the refugees and displaced to go back.

Table 4.3. (cont.)

			educational and religious institutions in the capital and other important locations.	
ISIS	Attacking and controlling more territories in Syria and Iraq.	Annihilation	Hard power: arms and men. Soft power: Ideology that attracted some foreign youth and Europeans to join them.	The Islamic State of Iraq and Levant, with a caliphate system.
Al-Nusra Front. previously a part of al-Qaida and currently a member of Tahrir al-Sham	Control territories	The international coalition against ISIL, the remaining of the current regime.	Arms, Men.	Overthrow Assad's regime
Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF)	Controlling the Turkish border strip (the area between Qamishli and Afrin).	The Turkish forces control of North Syria. ISIS.	Arms, men, support from the international coalition against ISIS,	Establishing a Kurdish state in their preferred area.

Table 4.3. (cont.)

		Armed opposition.	and support from the USA.	
Turkish army forces	Securing the Turkish borders and territories.	Not reaching an agreement with Russia regarding North Syria The increasing flow of refugees.	Arms, soldiers.	A united Syria with a new government and a sustainable peace so as to allow refugees to go back and to entirely eradicate threats against Turkey. The possible alternative is reaching an agreement with Russia which secure its borders, and establish a safe zone for returning refugees, or reaching an agreement with the EU to allow the flow of refugees to Europe. This is not likely to happen.

Table 4.3. (cont.)

Russian military bases	Protecting the bases	Losing or having them damaged or threatened.	Arms, men	Preserving these military bases regardless of the regime position.
The Russian air force	Supporting the current regime. Not necessarily exclusive for the Assad regime.	A new regime with a new orientation and Alliances. Losing the Mediterranean coast.	Air forces	United Syria with the same regime. If Syrian is to be divided, there will be a chance for Western dominance. For example, if a Kurdish state is to be established, it would be under U.S. influence.
Wagner group soldiers	Receive payments for their services	The end of conflict or of the need for its services.	Men, Arms	Comply with the hiring party's prospect
International military intervention against ISIL	Annihilation of ISIS	An increased power of ISIS. A conflict with the Russian side.	Air force	Extermination of terrorism (only the one U.S. recognizes it as "terrorism").

4.3.5. The Regime And Its Allies' Transformation Of Strategies

At the end of 2010, the Arab spring broke out in Tunisia. It quickly spreaded to Egypt, Libya, Syria and Yemen. In a short period of time, Egypt and Libya successfully removed their dictators. The Egyptians ousted Mubarak in 9 days, and the Libyans stripped Khadafi of power in 18 days. These victories were met with strong solidarity among the Arab public across state borders. Assad confidently announced on the 31st of January 2011 that it is not possible for the protests to reach Syria because "the ruling class in Syria is too attached to the beliefs of the Syrian public". For a long period during the conflict, he remained in denial of any civil protests in his country. Not long after this interview, the first incidents of the revolution started to take place.

On February 2011, some solidarity movements by the Egyptians and Libyans occurred along with incidences of social unrest. On the 17th of February, a young man was insulted and beaten by a traffic policeman in al-Harika area, which caused an arbitrary demonstration joined by hundreds of people who started shouting "Syrian public is not to be humiliated" repeatedly, and then suddenly "Thieves! Thieves!", pointing to widespread corruption in the government. The police were gathered and soon followed by the Interior minister, who tried to contain the situation by directly communicating with the protesters. Ten days later, this event was followed by a more serious incident. On the 27th of February, authorities arrested and tortured 18 children in Dara'a province for writing revolutionary slogans on the wall. When their parents went to inquire about them, Atif Najib, Assad's cousin and head of political security branch in the city insolently told the parents "forget about them, and let your wives deliver new kids instead, if you don't know how to do that, we will teach them how". This insult inflamed series of protests in the conservative, traditional society of Dara'a, which spread later to the rest of Syria.

From that point until the 22nd of April 2011, the strategy of the regime in dealing with the protests was the stick and the carrot approach. The regime tried to contain and threaten at the same time. The first speech of Assad in light of these event on March 2011 contained his admission of the existence of "civilian needs that are not met" and the warning against a **Sectarian conspiracy** planned for Syria. It is not very clear why did he choose to use that expression in an early phase, when there is no single reference

to the sectarianism issue in the protests as the public demands at that time were restricted to reforms against corruption and the lifting up of the state of emergency which has been in effect since 1963. However, the regime tried to also use the sectarianism card to mobilize the minorities against the Sunni "threat".

In his strategy of mobilizing against the protests, Assad focused on the minority card. By blurring the boundaries, the regime aimed at forming a block of minorities against the majority, whom, in case of overthrowing the regime, would embark on a cleansing campaign against the minorities (Rousseau, 2014, pp. 42). This was the initial propaganda which the Assad regime was promoting. With this propaganda, many people who were not supporters of Assad retreated from joining the revolt, because they felt that opting for Assad was the only choice, and the alternative to Assad was chaos, or worse, a sectarian civil war similar to what happened in Lebanon.

In simultaneous processes of expansion, inversion, repositioning and blurring of boundaries (...) Assad has redefined in-group membership in order to exclude Sunnis, while simultaneously portraying them as the enemy (...). These images of minority unity were not enough to convince many Syrians. The Assad regime took further steps by explicitly warning of Sunni domination. In many parts of Syria, the security forces and army handed out guns and sandbags to ethnoreligious minorities, at the same time spreading rumors of Islamist gangs (Rousseau, 2014, pp. 42-43).

Since the 22nd of April 2011, the strategy of the regime switched to the "security solution" as the regime itself called it. The attempts to attract protesters to his side stopped, the last was on the day before when the state of emergency was lifted. Violence increased dramatically as the number of killings continued to increase. The Great Friday, as the protesters called it, also witnessed an escalation as the demonstrations swept through Damascus, its countryside, Aleppo, Homs, Hama, Dara'a, Dir al-Zur, Latakia, Idlib, al-Hasaka and other cities. The protesters demanded the fall of the regime. In Darayya, the statue of Hafiz al-Assad was broken by the protesters, and in Dir al-Zur the same happened to the statue of Bassel al-Assad. However, the sectarianism trap was still unanimously avoided by the protesters, who called that Friday 'Great Friday' in recognition of the Easter Holiday. In Harasta, an area in Damascus countryside, protesters carried olive branches to the church.

The role of Iran in supporting the Syrian regime is not very clear at this period. There were international accusations about sending arms to Syria in order to suppress the revolt, but there was no official declaration about such an effort. However, according to Husam al-Hafez, the former consul in the Syrian embassy in Tehran, the Iranian military trainers, snipers and Basij forces were sent to Syria after the third month of the revolt. (H. al-Hafez, interview, 2021). In addition, the diplomatic and logistic supports were already in effect before the uprising, and continued afterwards, probably in a larger phase. "Since the beginning, Iran has been supporting Assad's regime, there were videos documenting the presence of Iranian consultants on different areas in the streets of Damascus, its suburbs, as well as in Homs and Dara'a. The orders to shoot peaceful protesters in order to create fear were exactly like the Iranian policy with the green revolution in 2007, to prevent people to join the demonstrations" (R. Ziadeh, interview, 2021).

The strategy of "Military Solution" was soon switched on, marked especially by the Ramadan crescent massacre in Hama on the 31st of July 2011 which left 100 dead in a day in Hama. This was only highest number of killed victims in a single day to that date. The clear indicators of this strategy were the reassignment of the main actors from the intelligence agents to the official army, the use of the tanks to storm in cities for the first time, and the policy of attacking whole cities. The regime's strategy held on an indiscriminate character since then. The international condemnations by the USA, UK, Germany, EU and others also indicated the discernible rise of violence.

The protest escalated in another dimension as it transformed slowly toward an armed opposition. On the 10th of June, military dissents started by al-Harmoush became the base of the Free Syrian Army.

The escalation throughout 2012 reached a peak; the heightened use of bombs inside cities, which was firstly used in December 2011, the number of massacres the regime committed increased dramatically, 2012 had the highest number of casualties compared to the previous and succeeding years, and a new strategy entered the scene, the besiege strategy.

Sieges imposed by the Government in the Governorates of Homs, Rural Damascus and Damascus have been ongoing since 2012 and intensified in the

spring of 2013. Information gathered by OHCHR demonstrates that maintaining a siege requires a high degree of control over entry and exit points to the area in question, and is primarily enforced by installing checkpoints. A pattern appears to have emerged where sieges were initially partially imposed, with civilians and goods allowed through checkpoints. As the conflict escalated, Government forces began to prevent all entry of goods, and proceeded to shell and, in some instances, carry out aerial bombardment of the area (United Nations Human Rights, 2014, p. 4).

On the other hand, the armed opposition, composed of moderates and non-moderates, came to control more than half of the Syrian territory. The military operations reached the heart of the regime on the 18th of July, when the National Security headquarters was bombed, killing military and security officials, including the defense minister Rajiha and Bashar's brother in law, Shawkat.

There are no documented data about the exact dates of the participation of foreign Shia militia or Hizbullah in the massacres the regime committed. In some massacres, like the Houla massacre on the 25th of May, testimonies of survivors pointed to the participation of Alawite inhabitants from nearby villages in the killing the Sunni residents of Houla and that some of the attackers were not in uniform. However, this description could also refer to the Shabbiha militia. Similarly attributable to the year 2012, another fact of this massacre is the emergence of 'cold weapon' as a tool that was employed in an indiscriminate manner. Testimonies and physical evidences from the bodies of the victims have revealed that they were slaughtered by knives, many of them women and children. One can argue during a shelling or bombing that the killing of vulnerable groups, women, children, and elderly, was an unavoidable accident. But slaughtering children by knives in a mass scale explains the way the regime forces and their supporters addresses the civilians who stand against the regime.

The regime has relied upon shabiha groups to carry out some of the worst sectarian atrocities of the civil war against Sunni civilians (..) Shabiha militias have been responsible for what Heydemman (2013: 65) calls “partial **sectarian cleansing** in rural areas,” and Rabil (2013: 1) defines “irrefutable precursors of **sectarian cleansing** in Houla, Qubeir and other mixed areas in Syria.(..) Such massacres have occurred across Syria in predominately Sunni areas (Rousseau, 2014, pp. 48-49).

Another weapon which appeared in 2012 are the barrel bombs, which Assad strongly denied in 2015 in his interview with BBC News, and then he added "there is no indiscriminate weapon, when you shoot, you aim, and when you aim, you aim at

terrorists in order to protect civilians. Again if you are talking about casualty, that is war, you can't have war without casualties" (BBC News, 2015). The targeted enemy here became a whole group of people. "Assad has worked to portray Syria's majority Sunni population as the enemy. The rhetoric employed by the Syrian regime represented the initially peaceful protesters of the Syrian uprising as Islamist terrorists working for al-Qaeda" (Rousseau, 2014, p. 46). This became the justification for the indiscriminate use of weapons. Few months later, in 2013, the regime would start using chemicals as weapon of mass destruction. "Assad has launched at least 188 chemical weapons attacks against besieged areas, 89 of them in Damascus and its suburbs" (Syrian Center for Statistics and Research, 2017). In 2012, Hizbullah also participated in acts of committing massacre along with the Syrian military.

The regime heightened its brutality in the massacres it committed against the civilian areas, which resulted in the inhabitants fleeing and abandoning their districts in fear of more massacres to occur, like the al-Beyda massacre in May 2013, when 248 people were gathered by the regime forces, eventually killed by slaughtering and burning them, and then buried in mass graves. About 500 family left the area afterwards in fear of another massacre (Al-Qasem, 2014). The emergence of Iran as a party in the civil war had two major impacts. The first was the gradual loss of sovereignty of the Assad regime. Iran would not only participate, but would lead operations and manage strategies of the war. This is obviously marked by its militia activities and role, and by holding negotiations with the opposition in the conflict zones without the regime involvement as such was the case of the four-town deal in 2017. The other impact was the obsession in the use of the Urbicide strategy; the collective punishment of the groups inside an urban area and the destruction of infrastructures, particular targeting of schools, hospitals, and civilian spots. What happened to the targeted cities' population was annihilation. Whether it was for the sake of annihilation, as in genocide, or for cleansing was to be clearly manifested by the tactics used by the regime which were implemented after the Urbicide strategy. The displacement of some opposition areas was followed by a settlement process of the Iran-backed Shia militias' fighters (Uskowi, 2018, p. 2).

The enforced displacement of Sunni population, resettlement of Shia population and the demographic change of the Syrian cities could be called Iran's final solution, or

plan C as in ethnic cleansing according to Mann, that was proven to be effectively valid after years of switching between different strategies that did not bring about the desired results. The compromise between an Alawite, Shia-backed regime and a Sunni majority population could not be sustained whether by containment or by coercion, and to change the Alawite regime is not a choice. What remains then is the change of the population itself, and "settlement of 'appropriate' population affiliated to the same nation, very often refugees, in the region" (Petrovic, 1994, p. 345). A strategy which has been highly preferred by the Russian intervention since 2015.

Assad's official position toward this vision is clear: "There is no place for compromises in the fateful stage". He said in 2015, in the same speech, "Syria is not for those who hold its passport or reside in it, Syria is for those who defend it". In 2017, he announced, "We lost the best of our youth and our infrastructure, It cost us a lot of money and a lot of sweat, for generations. But in exchange, we won a healthier and more homogeneous society in the true sense".

The diagrams below show the change in the demography of Syrian cities between 2011 and 2016 (Qutrib, n.d., pp. 21-26).

**Comparison between Population Distributions in
Terms of Religion or Sect in the Damascus Governorate, 2011 and 2016**

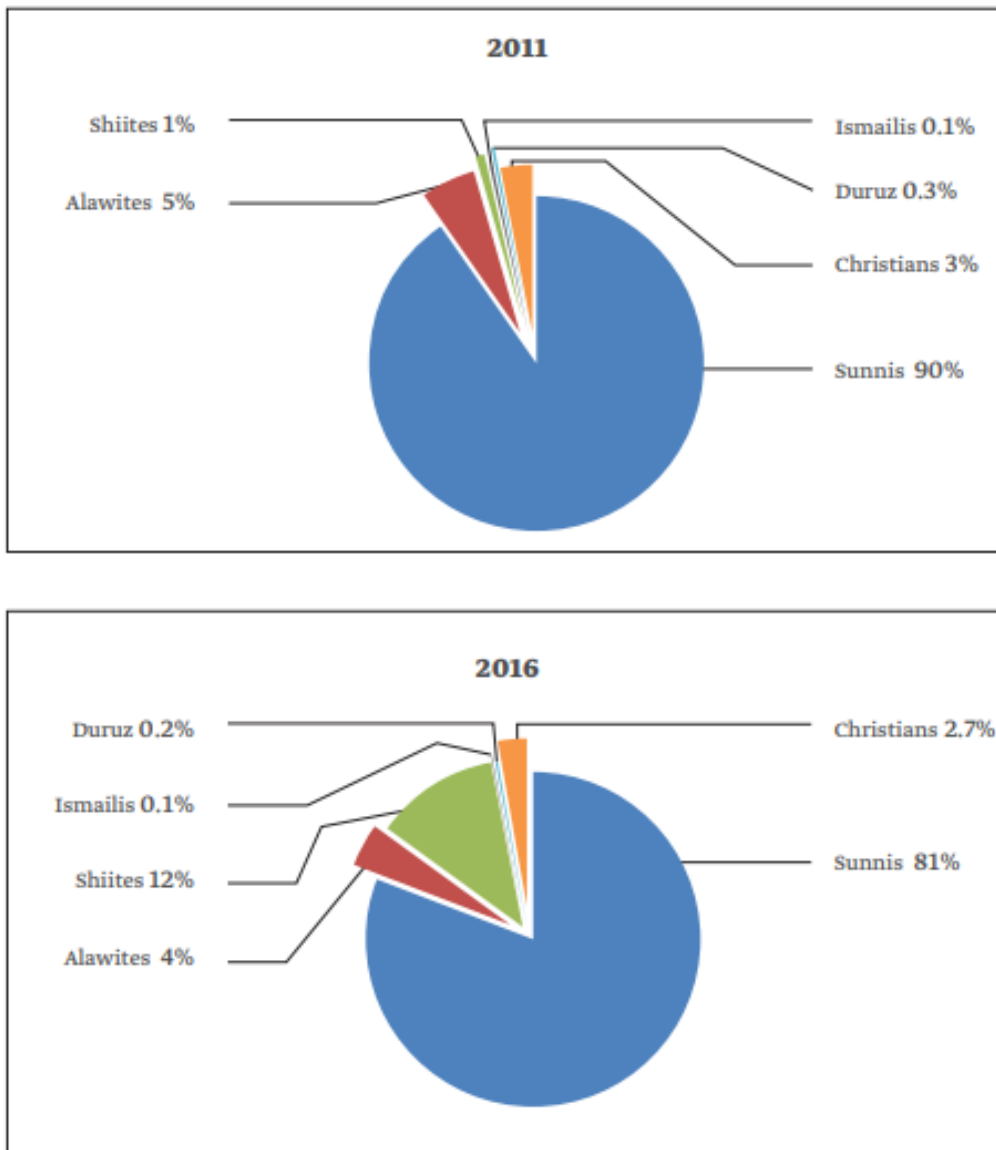


Figure 4.10. Population Distributions in Damascus

**Comparison between Population Distributions in
Terms of Religion or Sect in Rif Dimashq, 2011 and 2016**

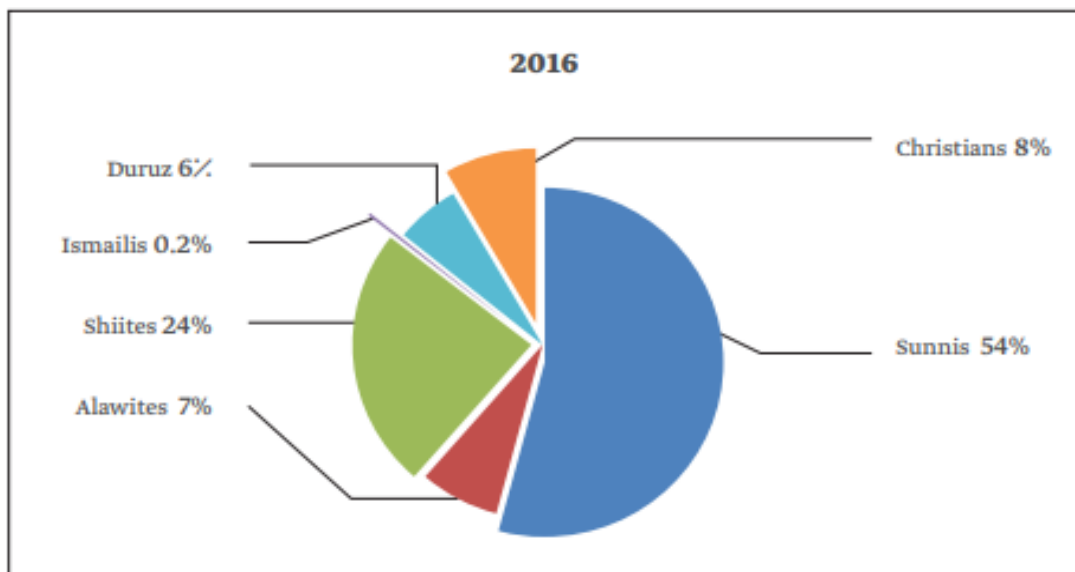
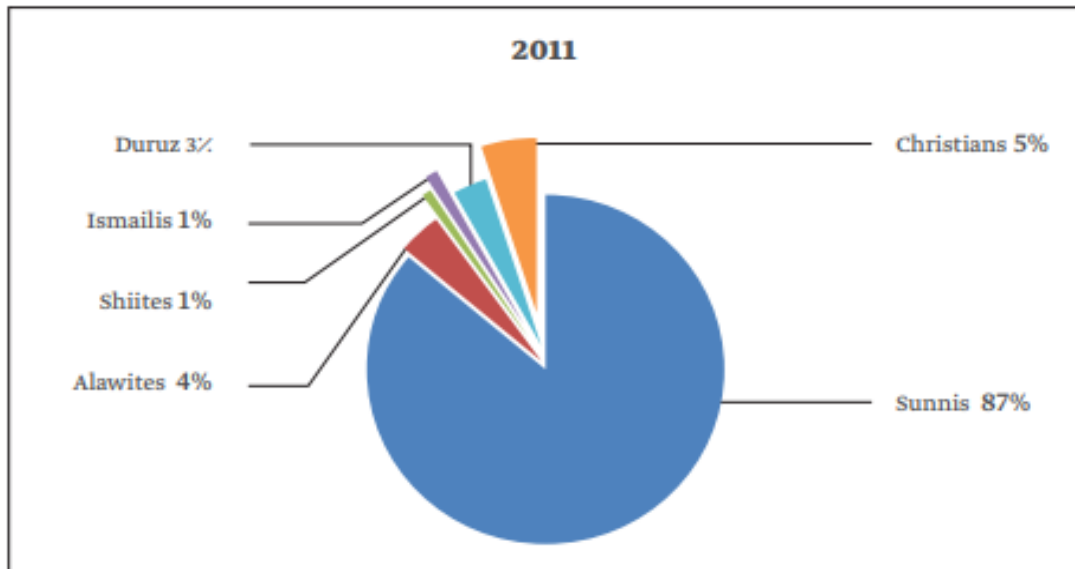


Figure 4.11. Population Distributions in Rif Dimashq

Comparison between Population Distributions in Homs in Terms of Religion or Sect, 2011 and 2016

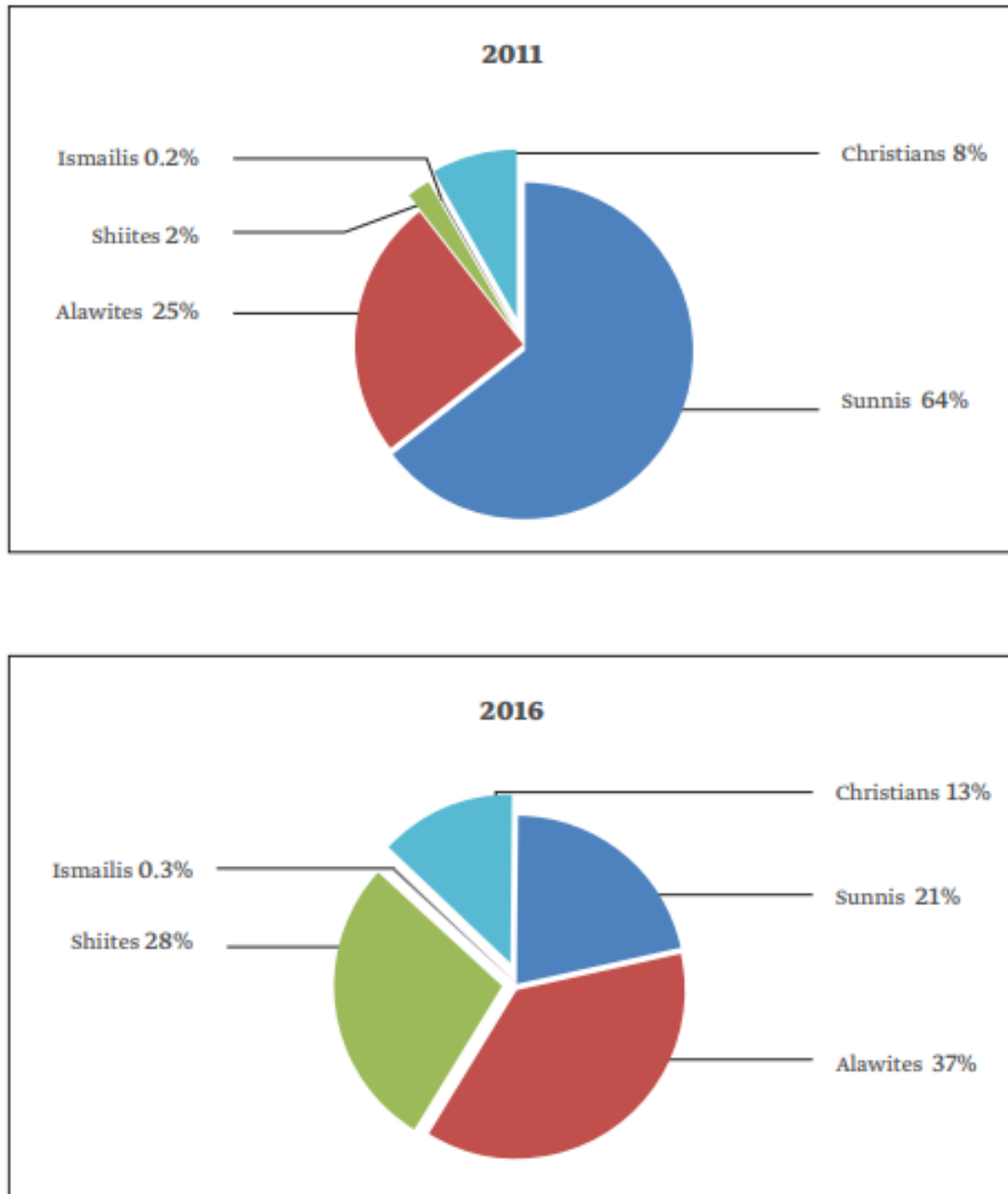


Figure 4.12. Population Distributions in Homs

**Comparison between Population Distributions in Latakia in
Terms of Religion or Sect, 2011 and 2016**

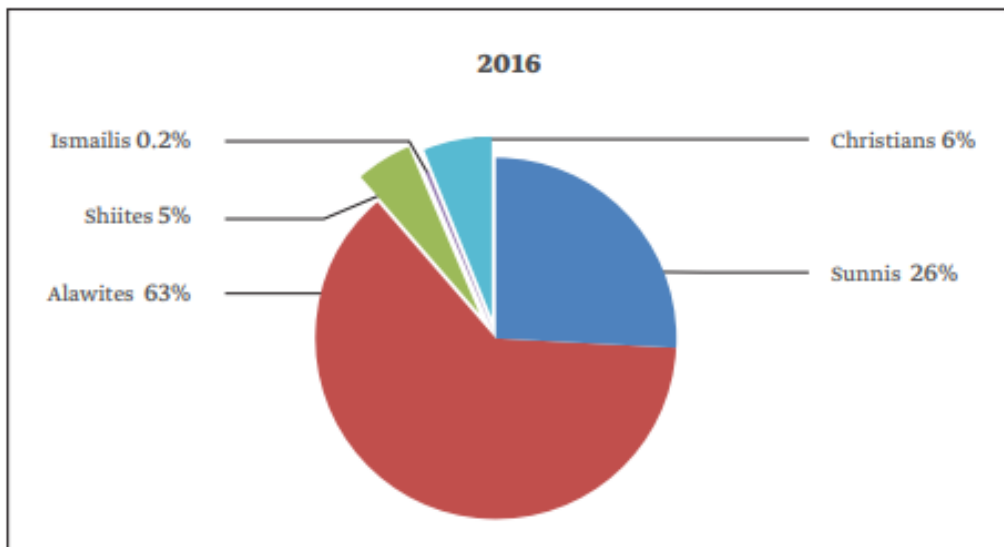
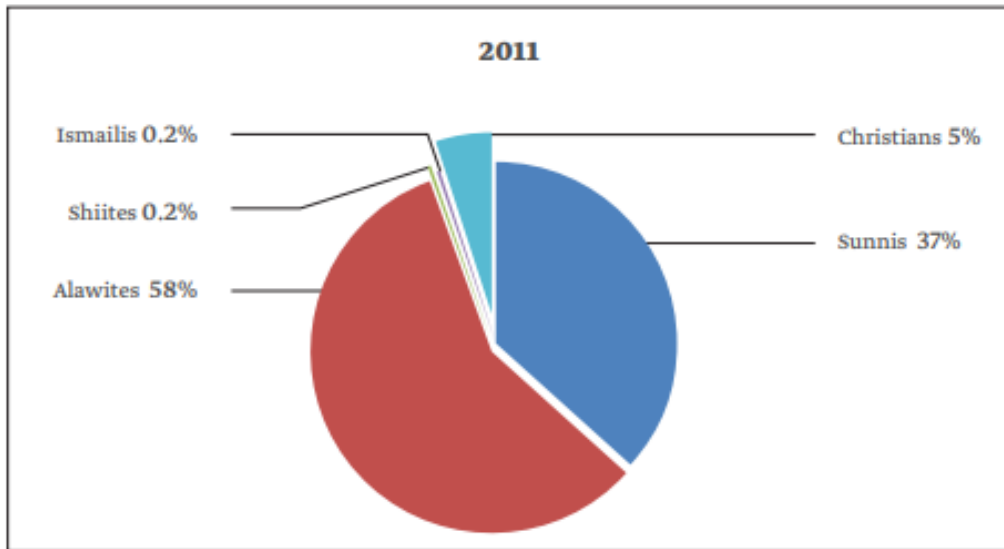


Figure 4.13. Population Distributions in Latakia

Comparison between Population Distributions in Tartus in Terms of Religion or Sect, 2011 and 2016

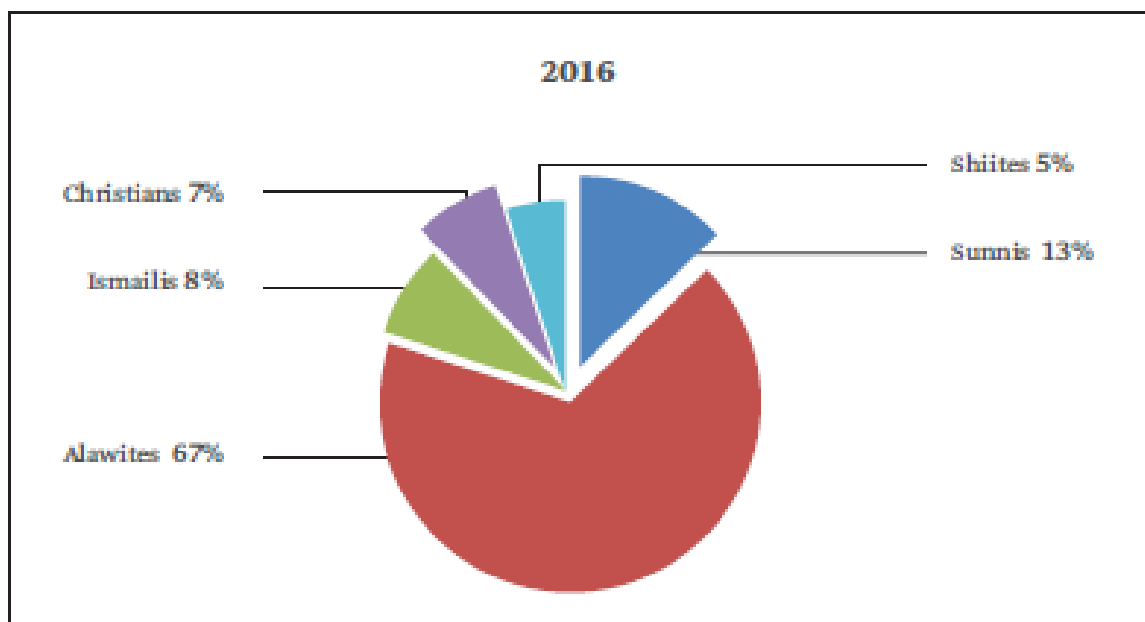
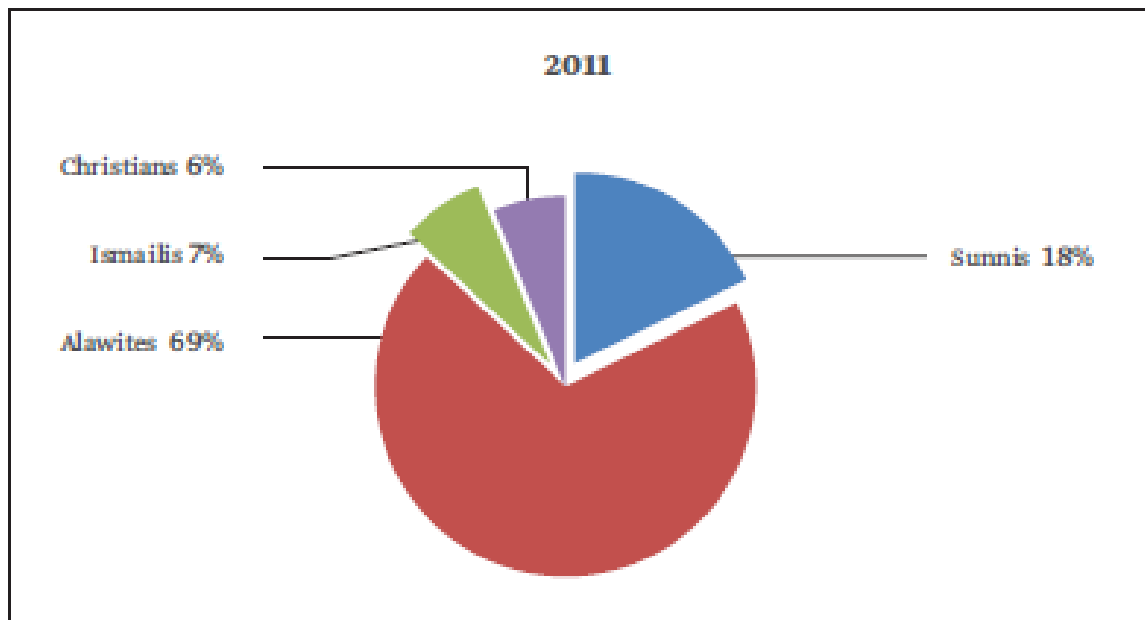


Figure 4.14. Population Distributions in Tartus

4.3.6. A Closer Look, How Did That Happen?

a. The Strategy Of Cleansing

Ziadeh defines five factors that led to the depopulation, or transfer, of the displaced Syrian population. In his book, "Accountability in Syria: Achieving Transitional Justice in a Postconflict Society", that studies especially the Syrian case,

The main factor is the intensive use of the air force, especially the barrel bombs. The Syrian war is almost the first war where the air force is used against the opposition in such a range, particularly the barrel bomb a study by Harvard University stated that 96% of the barrel bombs' victims are civilians, while 4% are combatants. These barrel bombs were targeting civilians, so each barrel bomb is a war crime because it violates the IHL basically. The second factor is the sectarian –background crimes, in which primitive weapons was used like knives; slaughtering. The main purpose of these was to create terror, show the range of violence and hatred, forcing people to flee and leave their homes out of fear. The third factor is the use of chemical weapons, which according to the United Nation was used more than 37 time. The fourth factor is the arbitrary detention and torture till death, like we saw in Caesar's file. The fifth and last factor is the asylum. When people fled the country by large numbers, Assad's regime announced a series of laws, law no. 6, law no. 10, which seize the money and property. These five factors – in addition to the siege factor- almost expose a part of a plan policy by Assad's regime not only to end the opposition but also to displace as much as possible Syrians accused of supporting the opposition and the changes in Syria (R. Ziadeh, personal communication, 2021).

SNHR (2015) reports that 75% of the casualties of the Syrian conflict were civilians including at least 20,000 children. Both the Assad regime and the armed opposition groups contributed to these fatalities. The report adds that Assad's regime is responsible for 96% of those murdered civilians.

In 2015, Russian airforce entered the war fiercely causing the death toll to increase dramatically, "Airstrikes are the biggest killer in Syria, in 2016 airstrikes were responsible for 54% of civilian deaths. Airstrikes killed more than 9,350 civilians in 2016, on average of 780 civilians a month" (Syrian Center for Statistics and Research, 2017). The Russian airforce targeted non-combatant and civilian buildings, especially bakeries, hospitals, schools and even refugee camps.

The siege strategy appeared for the first time on the first weeks of the protest,

On April 25, 2011, the Syrian Arab Army (SAA) deployed its first siege in the current conflict. After seven weeks of unrest, the SAA surrounded and laid siege to the southern city of Dera'a as part of a ten-day military operation that would leave over 500 Syrians dead, and 2,500 detained. Following this initial use of siege

tactics, the regime then began imposing longer-term partial sieges in rural Damascus in 2012, limiting the entry and exit of civilians and goods (Todman, 2017, p. 2).

The siege strategy's implementation was extended and its coverage was further expanded with the Iranian intervention from 2013 to 2015, and again with the Russian intervention from 2015 to 2018. Both allies contributed to maximize gains out of sieges. Before their intervention, the regime was capable of enforcing the siege over towns for a limited time only as their military capabilities were insufficient and there were not enough militias to displace the population. The Iranian intervention provided experience and militias, and the Russian provided the air assets to speed up the process.

During the major offensives carried out against key strategic targets like Darayya, Eastern Aleppo, or Eastern Ghouta, the government and its allies would first acutely tighten the siege to weaken the trapped population and then launch a final devastating scorched earth offensive. These final offensives involved the intensive targeting of civilians and civilian infrastructure, and the use of banned or indiscriminate weapons such as chemical weapons, cluster bombs, and incendiary munitions. These major offensives were used to send a clear message to smaller, weaker besieged enclaves that continued resistance was futile. Accordingly, in the aftermath of each major scorched earth campaign a series of besieged and Watchlist enclaves surrendered to the government and its allies with the application of significantly less force, generally a brief but acute intensification of siege conditions accompanied by a volley of attacks when surrender negotiations stalled. During the coercive 'negotiations' – usually led by Russian or Iranian officials – targeted communities were explicitly threatened that they would be the next Darayya, or Eastern Aleppo, or Eastern Ghouta, if they did not concede completely to the government's demands" (Pax Siege Watch, 2018, p. 17).

Pax (2018) codifies these sieges since 2015. The table below shows the degree of depopulation in Syria. Forced population transfers from besieged areas since 2015

Table 4.4. Forced population transfers from besieged areas since 2015

Forced population transfers from besieged areas since 2015			
Surrender Date	Community	Enclave & Governorate	Notes
2016			
AUG	Darayya	W. Ghouta, Rif Dimashq	Estimates range from 4,000-8,300 total forcibly transferred. The community was completely depopulated as a result.
OCT	Moadamiya	W. Ghouta, Rif Dimashq	Estimated 3,000 people forcibly transferred.
OCT	Qudsaya & al-Hameh	Rif Dimashq	Watchlist community - situation escalated to fully besieged and surrender too quickly for classification shift. Estimated 1,000-2,000 people forcibly transferred.
NOV	Khan al-Shieh	W. Ghouta, Rif Dimashq	Watchlist community - situation escalated to fully besieged and surrender too quickly for classification shift. Several thousand forcibly transferred.
DEC	Al-Tall		Watchlist community - situation escalated to fully besieged and surrender too quickly for classification shift. Estimated 1,000-2,000 people forcibly transferred.
DEC	Eastern Aleppo City	Aleppo	An estimated 45,000 people were forcibly transferred.
2017			
JAN	Wadi Barada	Rif Dimashq	Watchlist community - situation escalated to fully besieged and surrender too quickly for classification shift. Estimated 2,100 forcibly displaced.
MAR-MAY	Al-Waer	Homs City, Homs	Estimated that more than 20,000 people forcibly displaced.
APR	Madaya & Zabadani	Rif Dimashq	Estimated 3,700 forcibly displaced.
MAY	Barzeh & Qaboun	Damascus City, Damascus	Estimated more than 5,600 forcibly displaced.
DEC	Beit Jinn	Rif Dimashq	Watchlist community - situation escalated to fully besieged and surrender too quickly for classification shift. Estimated 270 forcibly displaced.
2018			
MAR	Al-Qadam	S. Damascus Suburbs, Rif Dimashq	Approximately 1,351 forcibly displaced. The neighborhood was almost entirely depopulated.
MAR	Harasta	E. Ghouta, Rif Dimashq	Approximately 5,250 forcibly displaced.
MAR	Jobar, Arbin, Ein Tarma & Zamalka	E. Ghouta, Rif Dimashq (Jobar is part of Damascus City)	More than 41,000 people forcibly displaced. Convoys departed from listed communities but included IDPs from all parts of E. Ghouta: including Autaya,

Table 4.4. (cont.)

			Beit Naim, Beit Sawa, al-Bilaliyeh, Bzeina, Deir Assafir, Eftreis, Hamouriya, Harasta al-Qantara, Hazzeh, Hosh al-Dawahirah, Hosh al-Fara, Hosh Nasri, Jisreen, Kafr Batna, Madeira, Marj al-Sultan, Misraba, Nashabiyeh, Nouleh, Al-Rayhan, al-Salhiyeh Saqba, Al-Shaifuniya, and Zebdine. Some of these communities were left completely depopulated.
APR	Douma	E. Ghouta, Rif Dimashq	Approximately 20,000 forcibly displaced.
APR	Yelda, Babbila & Beit Sahm	S. Damascus Suburbs, Rif Dimashq	Approximately 9,250 forcibly displaced, including displaced persons from Yarmouk and Hajar al-Aswad. Yarmouk was almost entirely depopulated.
MAY	Talbiseh, al-Rastan & al-Houleh	N. Rural Homs, Homs	Approximately 35,650 forcibly displaced.
MAY	Yarmouk & Hajar al-Aswad	S. Damascus Suburbs, Yarmouk is part of Damascus City, and Hajar al-Aswad is in Rif Dimashq	The government made a deal with ISIS to evacuate approximately 1,200 of its fighters to the Badiya area of southern Syria, and transfer approximately 600 of their civilian family members to Idlib.

The aftermath of a siege process has two stages. The first is to depopulate, and the second is to ensure that the displaced population will not return. The object of the siege as a strategy is not only to control the territory, but also to evacuate the 'undesired' population out of the controlled areas. Between 2012- 2013, the siege process was followed notably by demolishing of the controlled areas even though active clashes had already stopped. The regime claimed that these demolitions were necessary as the buildings in those neighborhoods were illegally constructed and there was also the need to develop those areas with proper construction plans. These demolitions were carried out despite the fact that many residents have valid legal documents for their properties (HRW 2014).

Human Rights Watch (HRW) reported the demolition of thousands of residential buildings in five opposition-held neighbourhoods in Damascus between 2012 and 2013. The report stated that demolitions served no necessary military purpose and were therefore unlawful and thus constituted war crimes. Areas of demolitions included 41.5 hectares in the Mazzeh area, 15.5 in Tadamoun, 14.5 in Harran al-`Awamid, 5.3 in Barzeh, and 18 in Qaboun (..). Targeted neighbourhoods in Qaboun were razed to the ground immediately after the government pushed back an opposition offensive in 2012. The regime-instated governor of these areas claimed that those demolitions were essential to drive out opposition fighters (..) (Abou Zainedin & Fakhani, 2019, p. 4).

But after the Russian intervention with heavy air bombardment, the post-siege demolition was no longer needed as it already occurred during the air raids accompanying the siege, and even before the implementation of their selective evacuation plan. According to the UNITAR report, the number of buildings damaged or destroyed in Aleppo in 2016 was 35,722, Eastern Ghouta in 2018 was 34,136, Homs in 2014 was 13,778, Ar-Raqqa in 2017 was 12,781 and Hama in 2016 was 10,529, Deir-ez-Zor in 2017 was 6,405, and another 18,075 buildings in other cities and towns (UNITAR, 2019, p. 4).

The cities and towns which were spared from total destruction could no longer be accessed to by its previous inhabitants. The regime has blocked the return of the displaced population. Despite the official propaganda which appeared to portray that the regime has set of laws to allow the return of those who were displaced, there exist the actual military policy that is strictly intended to eliminate the possibility of the undesired population to return to their homes and towns. As mentioned before, some of them are being repopulated with a new population. It is very likely that in the future, these towns will have a totally different identity (Abou Zainedin & Fakhani, 2019, p. 10).

Todman (2017) refers to the regime's tactic of siege as an enemy-centric counterinsurgency approach affected by the regime's authoritarian nature. It imposes collective punitive measures over the entire population of the besieged area. Unlike the population-centric counterinsurgency by which the government or the besieging side try to provide security, services and protection to the affected population in rebel areas (Todman, 2017, pp. 1-4).

The siege strategy applied by the regime and its allies had a clear sectarian character. Targeted areas were mainly Sunni areas, especially those who are close to Alawite areas. While mixed areas and non-Sunni areas witnessed distinctly less or no violence at all (Poppe & Timreck, 2018).

Moreover, the manipulation of HLP rights, for example through the falsification of transactions, is actually benefiting members of particular population groups, as properties in evacuated former opposition areas are reportedly being awarded to Shia and Alawite loyalists and fighters (..) All in all, the regime's war tactics bear clear markings of a plan to establish a new social and demographic order, ensuring

the homogenisation of post-war Syria (Abou Zainedin & Fakhani, 2019, p. 10-11).

4.3.7. Why Cleansing, And Why Not?

According to the United Nations Commission of Experts which was mandated to look into violations of international humanitarian law committed in the territory of the former Yugoslavia, Ethnic Cleansing is:

Rendering an area ethnically homogeneous by using force or intimidation to remove persons of given groups from the area. (..) a purposeful policy designed by one ethnic or religious group to remove by violent and terror-inspiring means the civilian population of another ethnic or religious group from certain geographic areas. (...) (it's) constitute(s) crimes against humanity and can be assimilated to specific war crimes. Furthermore, such acts could also fall within the meaning of the Genocide Convention (United Nations Commission of Experts, n.d.).

This definition clearly applies to the Syrian crisis, but then the question follows, why is cleansing taking place in Syria?

Hagerdal (2016) relates ethnic cleansing to several factors. He finds ethnic cleansing is more likely when the perpetrators lack detailed information about their enemy, so in an intermixed society, a co-ethnic society is not probable because each civilian population provides sufficient information for the militia it is loyal to, which makes selective violence more likely rather than cleansing the whole population. But he also recognizes that if the ultimate aim is depopulation in itself, this will not be related (Hagerdal, 2016).

In the Syrian case, it is naturally in the interest of the Assad government to gain public support and therefore the regime should have chosen selective violence rather than sectarian cleansing. Preferring cleansing is not due to the regime's lack of information, as it possesses an infamously strong and complicated intelligence network. This guides us to the alternative explanation, that selective violence did not and would not be sufficient to win the conflict. Firstly, in reference to Hagerdal's conceptualization, though Syrian communities are intermixed, the 'non-coethnics' Sunni communities are the vast majority while the perpetrators led by the Syrian government are the minority. Thus, selective violence will probably be costly and insufficient. Secondly, to comply

with the demands of these non-coethnics in a compromise is not a choice for the regime because any compromise will result in a loss for the minority-ruling regime, as it already lives under the threat of sectarian majority ruling over them. Thirdly, though not all Sunnis are part of the uprising against the regime, the relation between the government and the public has long been characterized with mistrust and suspicion due to the political context in which the current regime based itself in and the manner its predecessor ruled during the previous era. There are no new key personalities who could be involved nor new methods which could be applied that may actually enhance the public credibility of the regime. Similarly, the regime on its part regard the population with a mutual mistrust. This is due to the frequent protests and insurgencies since the regime was established. Being perceived of bearing the religious feature of the Sunni majority, the protesters have always been deemed dangerously suspicious by the regime.

Mann and other scholars highlight the role of nationalism and the difference between *demos* (people) and *ethnos* (ethnicity) which through a complicated process with other factors might result to ethnic cleansing. This draw us to reemphasise another problematic announcement of Assad in 2015, "Syria is not for those who hold its passport or reside in it, Syria is for those who defend it". Though this may be regarded as a justification for the cleansing process, it should be understood as a result rather than a cause. It also shows the vagueness of nationality and sense of belonging concepts in a state like Syria, where direct loyalty to the ruling regime is the key factor that shapes national sense of belonging to the state's ideology– Ba'thism.

Mann (2005, pp. 502-503) also argues that murderous cleansing does not result merely from differences as it has a hierarchy of causes: a plausible tale of exploitation and defense of democracy by one group, and defense of privilege as civilization or survival by the other. This applies to the Syrian crisis as the population protested the regime's exploitation and demanded a list of democratic reforms, and the regime, on its part, was defending its survival.

Actual mass murder required one of two further scenarios. In (a) the less powerful rival was bolstered to fight rather than submit (which does not produce mass murder), believing that help would be forthcoming from coethnics or allies abroad. In (b) a stronger group fears its power is declining in the long run, but can use its present strength to create its own cleansed state without much physical or moral risk to itself. Scenario (a) produces mass murder as an ethnic civil war

begins and escalates; (b) produces genocidal preemptive strikes (Mann, 2005, pp. 502-503).

These two scenarios were also witnessed in the Syrian crisis. In the scenario, the protesters refused to submit, hoping that the Tunisian or Egyptian scenarios will apply, or that the Sunni support will come from Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and from other Sunni dominated countries. In the second scenario, the Syrian government felt the threat was growing rapidly as a large part of the territory became under the opposition control and sought to carry out a cleansed state with the Iranian and Russian support.

But Mann (2005, pp. 503-504) also believe that “murderous cleansing is rarely initially intended by the perpetrators. They feel themselves forced into what is in effect a Plan C by the frustration of earlier Plans A and B, which may involve repression but not mass murder”.

And this again remind us of the evolvement of the regime's strategies. As for Petrovic (1994, p. 2) he explains that “the word 'ethnic' has been added to the military term because the 'enemies' are considered to be the other ethnic communities” and the act of ethnic cleansing is often carried out during the last stage of combat for the prime purpose of establishing full control of the conquered territory. The categories of conduct which constitute an act of ethnic cleansing can be classed as administrative, other non-violent, terrorizing and military measures (Petrovic, 1994, p. 4). If these types of conduct are to be related to the Syrian case, we find that almost all the points Petrovic mentioned in each category are evidently manifested in the Syrian crisis. The table below provides further details to support this claim.

Table 4.5. Administrative Measures of ethnic cleansing in Syria

Administrative Measures of Ethnic Cleansing mentioned by Petrovic	Corresponding acts committed by the Syrian regime
Forced removal of lawfully elected authorities	The military coup of Ba'th in 1963.
Dismissal from work especially from important public service positions.	The series of dismissal targeting Sunnis that in the military and in other government institutions since the military coup of 1963 (Rousseau, 2014, p. 26)..
Restrictions on the distribution of humanitarian aid	The Syrian government restrict issuance of visas to UN humanitarian staff and other nongovernmental organizations. This inhibited the delivery of food and urgently needed medical supplies to the areas controlled by the opposition (Detsch & Lu, 2021, par. 9).
Constant identity checking of members of "minority" (in our case, majority) ethnic groups	Setting checkpoints since 2011 on areas were demonstrations occurred and later in entire Syria.
official notices to the effect that security of the members of other nations cannot be guaranteed	Among several example, the official statement by one of the official army officers, Issam Zahreddine, telling refugees not to come back as the army would never 'forget or forgive' those who fled. ²⁷ A widespread slogan that appeared since 2011 among the Syrian government militia, shabbiha and fighters, "either Assad or we burn the country", in Arabic ' <i>al-Assad aw nahriq albalad</i> '. this phrase was used as a threat that points out to the verge they were willing to go to for the sake of restoring control.
Settlement of 'appropriate' population (affiliated to the same nation, very often refugees) in the region	The settlement of Shia is mentioned earlier in this chapter.
Discriminatory and repressive legislation	Restrictions in law mentioned earlier on simple religious activities for Sunni, while permitting wide range of Shiite activities at the same time.

²⁷ He later appeared in another video apologizing for the statement, and then killed in unknown circumstances.

Table 4.5. (cont.)

Refusal of treatment in hospital	There were reports at the beginning of the uprising about protesters in hospitals being systematically put to death, a recent judicial case in Germany was brought against a doctor who is accused of ending the life of protesters at the military hospital of Homs. ²⁸ Later the Syrian government and its' allies pursued targeting of hospitals by shelling and bombarding as a strategy of war (Amnesty International, 2016).
Making the departure of one member conditional upon the departure of the entire family	In some depopulation cases, it was conditional that all the inhabitants must leave (Darayya, as an example). Other indirect examples of such measures could be found in the government conduct of arresting family members as hostages when they fail to find the wanted person, which force whole families to flee. "Often, when the security forces are unable to locate the person they were seeking, they detain family members" (Human Rights Watch, 2011). along other measures that include families in the punishment of one individual, the last of these announced was in February 2021 by the Recruitment Public Administration. It was an announcement revealing that those who did not do their military service nor paid for exemption will face expropriation of their properties and their family properties. ²⁹
Disconnection of telephones	Telephones, internet services, television channels have been closely monitored and suspected individuals were arrested or killed, and later these services were being disconnected frequently. Disconnection of telephones was remarkably a tactic that the Syrian government would follow before, during and after committing a massacre in order to hide and strict the spread of news,. This tactic has been continuing since the first siege in Dara'a when "Electricity, water, and mobile phone networks were cut off and government forces set up checkpoints to quarantine Deraa" (Rousseau, 2014, p. 30).

²⁸ For details check: Syrian doctor accused of war crimes in Germany, Alarabiya News 2020, Dubai. <https://english.alarabiya.net/News/world/2020/05/22/Syrian-doctor-accused-of-war-crimes-in-Germany->

²⁹ The announcement took place in 5 February 2021 and was done by head of the Recruitment public administration, Ilias al-Bitar, and published on the official site of the Ministry of Information.

Table 4.5. (cont.)

<p>Forced labour very often including work on the front lines of armed conflict</p>	<p>The youths who had to do their military services were forced to fight on the front lines of the armed conflict. There are reports about the execution of those who refused to participate in attacking and killing people or taking orders of killing³⁰</p>
<p>Prohibiting women of particular ethnic groups from giving birth in hospital</p>	<p>The similar act that could be mentioned pertain to the situation of women during the sieges as they were unable to give birth in hospitals, and many newborn died due to lack of medical care or hunger.</p>
<p>'Voluntary' transfer of property by forcing people to sign documents stating that the property was permanently abandoned by the owner.</p>	<p>Collective transfer of property took place through series of law: law no.10 of 2018, law no 66 of 2012 and the last announcement in 2021 about the expropriation of property for the military service.³¹ However, seizing property in Syria is not restricted to these measures, as usually attacking neighborhoods and the siege processes result in capturing houses, looting and plundering property.³²</p>

³⁰ For more details check: Syrian soldiers shot for refusing to fire on protesters, The Guardian, London, 2011.

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2011/apr/12/syrian-soldiers-shot-protest>

³¹ Law No. 10 of 2018, passed by the Syrian government on April 2, 2018, allows for creating redevelopment zones across Syria that will be designated for reconstruction. The law does not set out any criteria for which areas can be designated as redevelopment zones or a timeline. Instead, redevelopment zones are to be designated by decree. Within one week after a decree is issued, local authorities are to request a list of property owners from the area's public real estate authorities. Public real estate authorities must provide the lists within 45 days (..) Displaced residents, particularly those from areas considered to be anti-government, will be more vulnerable to property seizure under Law No. 10. According to the United Nations Refugee Agency, over 11 million Syrians have been displaced either internally or to host countries since the start of the Syrian conflict. Many will not be able to return to their properties to make a claim themselves, and the 30-day window for sending a relative or an agent will be insurmountable for many. Further, 70 percent of refugees lack basic identification documentation, according to the Norwegian Refugee Council. This documentation is needed in order to make a property claim and to appoint a legally recognized agent (HRW2018 <https://www.hrw.org/news/2018/05/29/qa-syrias-new-property-law>).

³² Widespread Looting by Syrian and Iranian Regime Forces in and Around Idlib Threatens the Return of the Displaced People and Sows Religious Hatred, Looting Documented in Nearly 30 Areas Since April 2019, Constituting a War Crime, Syrian Network for Human Rights 2020.

<https://sn4hr.org/blog/2020/03/31/54831/>

Table 4.6. Non-violent measures of ethnic cleansing in Syria

Other non-violent measures of ethnic cleansing mentioned by Petrovic	Corresponding acts committed by the Syrian regime
Local media inflaming fear and hatred	The official Syrian media adopted the official Syrian narrative which claims that the protests are part of "foreign conspiracy", the rebels to be terrorist armed groups, radical Salafists, agents of foreign countries, etc. ³³ There were reports about hate speech and encouraging violence in the official media ³⁴ .
Harassing phone calls including death threats	Harassment and threats made through phone calls took place inside and outside Syria against protesters and their relatives, particularly in 2011 (Amnesty International, 2011). ³⁵
Publishing lists of citizens indicating their ethnic origin	This measure was not witnessed, probably for two reasons first, this is due to the regime's secretive character. It tends to keep data related to demography unpublished and unknown. Second, this might be related to the uniqueness of the Syrian case itself as the cleansed here are the majority, rather than a minority.

³³ As Salafism is exclusively a charge related to Sunnism, the official media confirmed that term wildly creating a sectarian tension in the time when the protesters were affirming the unity of the Syrian community and no sectarian signals were seen yet.

³⁴ For more details check Hate Speech in Syrian media, OHCHR, 2017, <https://www.ohchr.org/AR/NewsEvents/Pages/HatespeechSyrian.aspx>

³⁵ Famous cases of threatening and harassment took place against celebrities and actors who supported the revolution. The threat took place by frequent calls, assaults, and threat or assaults of family members.

Table 4.7. Terrorizing Measures of ethnic cleansing in Syria

Terrorizing measures of Ethnic Cleansing mentioned by Petrovic	CORRESPONDING ACTS COMMITTED BY THE SYRIAN REGIME
Robbery	Acts of looting and plundering as mentioned in the previous sections of this study.
Terrorization and intimidation in the street	Since 2011, the Shabbiha militia committed acts of terror involving assaults on civilians, pillaging houses and shops, destroying properties, rape and torture (Al-a'awour, 2014).
Massive deportation, detention and ill-treatment of the civil population and their transfer to prisons and camps	The massive deportation, or displacement has been discussed in the previous sections of this study. The number of detainees and forcibly disappeared and those who died under torture cannot be known nor could such be estimated precisely. ³⁶
Shooting on selected civilian targets or blowing-up and setting fire to homes, shops and places of business	Discussed in the previous sections of this study under regime strategies.
Destruction of cultural and religious monuments and sites	Ancient and heritage sites didn't escape the destruction ³⁷ , The targeting of mosques took place since the beginning of the uprising. Demonstrations used to start in mosques every after Friday prayer. Thus, mosques were bombarded. later on the shelling and the bombarding would also target mosques, many videos and testimonies are available on the internet that document the mosques' destruction in Syria.

³⁶ For more details, check: *Gone Without a trace, Syria's Detained, Abducted, and Forcibly Disappeared*, by Megally, Hanny and Naughton, Elena. International Center for Transitional Justice, New York, 2020.

³⁷ For more details, check: *The Syrian Cultural heritage tragedy: cause, effect and approaches to future protection*, by Kanjou, Youssef, *Journal of Disaster Mitigation for Historical cities*, Kyoto, Vol.8 2014.

Table 4.7. (cont.)

Mass displacement of communities	Internally displaced and refugees abroad account to more than 13 million of the total population. 5 of every 8 Syrians were forced to leave their houses.
Discrimination of refugees on the basis of ethnic differences	The refugee camps were shelled by the Russian air force more than once, and the similar camps in Lebanon faced attacks perpetuated by Hizbullah militias. On December 2020, a refugee camp was set on fire causing high casualties among the refugees.
Rape and other forms of sexual abuse such as castration	"Sexual violence against women, and especially rape, has been no exception. Massive harassment of female prisoners, sexual assaults and repeated rapes have become part of the repressive arsenal of the Syrian government as it started to feel under threat. (..) The UN Secretary General estimated that it 'has been a characteristic of the Syrian conflict from its inception' and further noted in April 2016 that 'sexual violence continues to be systematically used as a tactic of warfare, torture and terrorism' " (Forestier, 2017, p. 1).

Table 4.8. Military measures of ethnic cleansing in Syria

Military measures of Ethnic Cleansing mentioned by Petrovic	Acts committed by the Syrian regime in accordance
Summary executions	It is an old practice which has been taking place since the 1980s when the Syrian government forces committed massacres in several cities as a reaction to an Islamic insurgency. Without due process, thousands of detained people were executed with no just courts (or none at all). This has also been occurring in the among current detainees in prisons and the same method was used in recent massacres. Caesar's photos documented these.
Deliberate killing and torture of leading citizens such as religious and political leaders, intellectuals, policemen and members of the business community	Many public personalities who joined the protests were tortured and killed in a brutal way. Among them were the activists Ghiath Matar and Ibrahim al-Qashoush whose tortured bodies were delivered to their families. Many religious leaders also faced detention or assassination like Saria al-Rifa'ai and Abdul-Karim al-Rifa'ai.
Holding towns and villages under siege	Mentioned earlier in the regimes strategies.
Deliberate attacks and blocking of humanitarian aid	Discussed in the previous sections of this study under regime strategies.
deliberate shelling of civilian targets (especially bakeries, water and transport facilities, means of communication, post offices, cultural monuments and religious objects, and medical institutions	Discussed in the previous sections of this study under regime strategies.

Table 4.8. (cont.)

Reprisals against civilian targets and population	The cities and towns that witnessed the first protests and demonstrations of 2011 until 2012 suffered the first indiscriminate massacres.
Taking hostages and detention of civilians for ransom or in exchange of something	The regime also used to hold hostages as an old tactic since the 1980s and till the current conflict in order to create pressure on certain persons, a family member usually, to surrender to the authorities.
Use of civilians as human shields	The Syrian regime used civilians as a human shield to avoid opposition attacks (Human Rights Watch, 2012).
Attacks on refugees camps	Mentioned in the previous section of this table.

Petrovic (1994, p. 348) warns that each of these acts could be seen as an isolated event, which prevent regarding the full image, that these acts are related and form together a crime of ethnic cleansing. While all these events in Syria are connected and fall within the frame of cleansing there is an international denial over calling what happened in Syria a cleansing. Rather each deadly event is regarded as an isolated event which leads to a misleading view of the crisis.

The crisis in Syria has been classified under several criteria. Some of them lack accuracy in fully describing the events. 'Civil war' is the most used classification, however,

If one compares the conflict in Syria to other conflicts that have occurred throughout the world labeled “civil wars,” it is clear that the term “civil war” is far from the reality of the situation in Syria. In fact, Syria is in the midst of a popular revolution against an authoritarian regime. If we conduct a simple comparison of the number of victims in Syria with the number of victims in countries in which a civil war has actually occurred—in Peru, for example—we can see that the conflict in Peru, which lasted for twenty years, from 1980 to 2000,

and had more than 70,000 victims, is nearly incomparable to the 120,000 victims in Syria during only the past three years (Ziadeh, 2014, p. 95).

War crimes and crimes against humanity are also parts of what occurred, but they failed to see the whole picture as Petrovic warned. Despite cleansing is reshaping the current Syria, why is there still an international denial to recognize it as such?

4.3.8. Arguments Against Cleansing In Syria

Looking back at the arguments above I can see while writing the conclusion and revising my analysis that there is a lacuna.

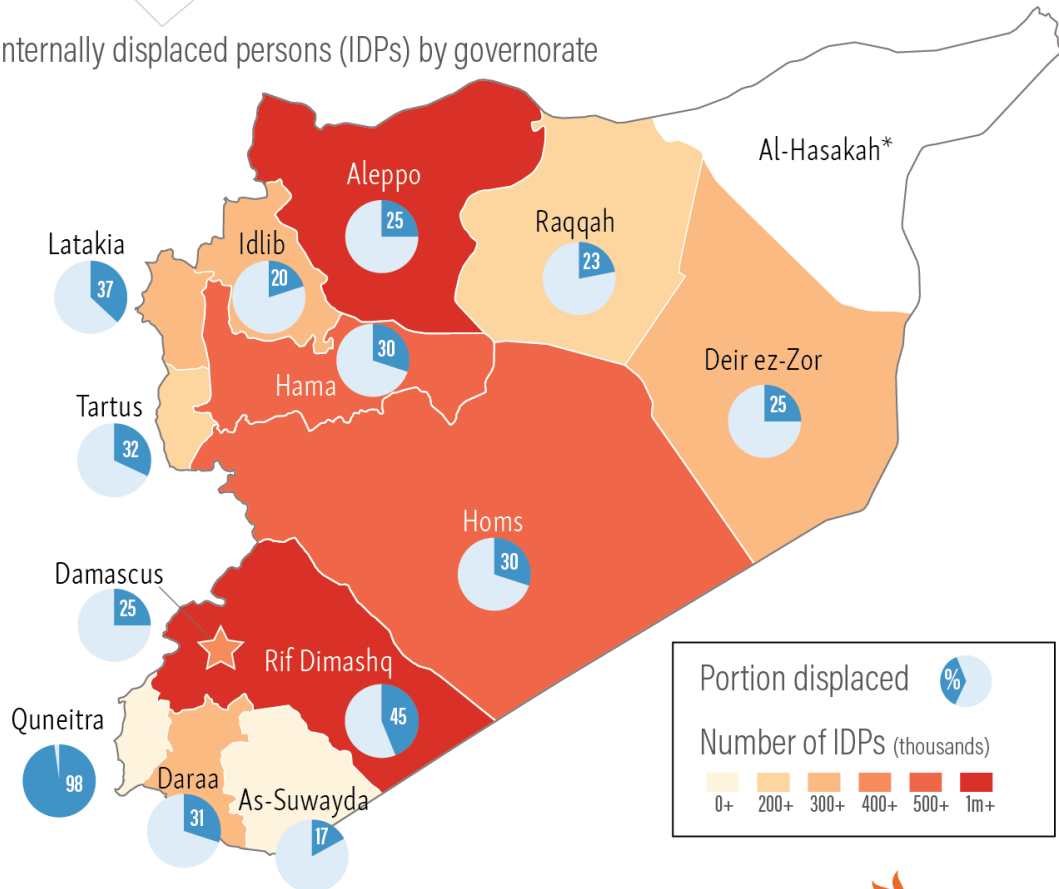
It is true that the regions where urbicide and forced dislocation took place are predominantly Sunni, but there are other areas that were not. And it is also true that there are officials and state ministers who are Sunni.

Referring to the table above of Packs we realize that the areas sieged had two features, being Sunni, and/or being opposed to the regime. So how can comprehend the relation between these two variables in a complex manner?

POPULATION DISPLACEMENT IN SYRIA

The UN Security Council has described Syria as "the largest humanitarian emergency crisis in the world today."

Internally displaced persons (IDPs) by governorate



Source: United Nations, UNICEF

Notes: 1. No data on Al-Hasakah Governate
2. Figures do not include refugees



Figure 4.15. Population Displacement in Syria

4.3.9. The Effect Of Sectarian Tension

The sectarian tension timeline in Syria passed through stages in the Syrian recent history. The policies pursued by the French mandate deepened the conflictual relations between Sunni and the Alawite and Druze, who used to inhabit rural areas away from the cities, located mostly by Sunnis. But the mandate overlapped that social structure and created new dimensions for it by systematically placing the minorities in military and key positions in disproportion way to their percentage in the Syrian population, and marginalizing the Sunni majority.

After the independence of the Syrian state, a fragile electoral democracy started, but it was not strong enough to stand in the face of the military coups which occurred often between 1949 and 1963 counting up to 11 military coup in these 14 years. But the sectarian tension here was eased due to two main factors, the ambition for an Arab unity fed by the Arab- Israeli conflict, and the shifting between governments after every coup, which meant that there were no monopolization of power by one group, and hence no security dilemma.

The 1963 military coup marked the beginning of Ba'th rule, in which the sectarian tension were heightened. The party were formed by sectarian minorities, whose membership in the party pathed the way for them to dominate the military and the government, resulting of course of dismissing Sunnis who used to be in these positions.

This tension continued in the time of Hafiz Assad but at a different level. The pragmatism of Hafiz made him balance his situation as an Alawite by taking advantage of the dissent between the Sunnis. (Pierret, 2011, p86-92); the two main groups, Kaftaru's group (the general Mufti of the state) and Zayd group, which aim to change society. While the first supported Ba'th rule and legalized religiously Hafiz rule, promoting for a Sufi Islam modified by the state's clergies. Zayd group, on the other hand, worked on raising the political awareness and developing social activities in the society in purpose of changing society.

To sum up, we may say that there has been a clear distinctions of the Sunnis in Hafiz time, a reductionist stream, and a revisionist stream. The reductionist stream were acceptend and encouraged, as it was necessary to portray Hafiz rule as inclusive, non-sectarian. The latter stream aim to change a current reality, and therefore it forms a threat. We will call them the obscurantist Sunnis, due to the image the regime portrayed them in, justifying their cleansing later. They belong to the revisionist stream, they don't necessarily belong to a certain religious movements or schools, but they adopt an understanding of religion other than the state rhetoric. This was the way the regime labelled any group that found a fundamental contradiction between Islam and despotism. Needless to say that the Sunnis who joined the revolt were seen as fundamental radicals who deserve to be quietened by all means or outlawed.

If we want to examine their vision of Islam as a civilization as different and more comprehensive than the mere political ideology they were seen to adhere to, we can clearly call the cleansing to be a civicide. Appadurai (2006) consider civicide more dangerous than genocide and ethnic cleansing, because it targets people's way of living, their civilizations. Indeed, whole groups of people were displaced, areas were evacuated, and some of them were settled with a new different groups, Shia population, from Afghanistan and Iraq and Lebanon and other countries brought by Iranian efforts.

It became more than cleansing, it is a whole change of demography. The Iranian intervention is usually based on the presence of Shia in any country, in Iraq, Lebanon, Yemen and Oman there are Shia in the population of these countries. But in Syria we had no Shia, therefore the demographic change is necessary to control the territory. At the beginning, perhaps, Iran did not plan to commit cleansing, it had the ability for domiciliation of settlers and provide them with citizenships, making a demographic change without war. However, the outbreak of war, shelling, demolishing and evacuation of areas made a chance for it to pursue its plan in a larger and faster phase. We believe that the number of those settlers could reach two millions Shia, a step also for the possible future elections if needed (A. Al-Bunni, interview, 2021).

For al-Hafiz (2021), what happened in Syria; evacuating a group of people by all means possible and settling instead another group in a territory applies to the definition of ethnic cleansing. However, the international denial of it is due to three main reasons. First, the lack of accurate data. Second, the unintended clearing of the Syrian regime done by some Syrians (even oppositions) who denounce the presence of sectarianism in Syria. Finally the lack of political will in the international society side to regard the crisis in Syria from the sectarianism perspective as it will be costly for it to do so on the regional (Middle East) level, as sectarianism issue in Syria is deeply connected to many states in the region (H. al-Hafiz, interview, 2021).

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

When analysing the Syrian war, there is a dilemma in finding a legal concept that would be encompassing and satisfactorily, as well as accurate, to refer to the humanitarian crisis that this war has caused. Such a concept must take into account the thousands who have been killed, detainees, those who disappeared and went missing for years, and the millions of internally displaced, and refugees who live abroad who constitute more than half of the total population of Syria before the war started. Conceptual analysis is essential because keeping the crisis in the vague terms of "conflict" or "civil war" marginalizes the core issues, and fails to grant the basic rights to the Syrian people, and their right to justice and safe return to their homeland. Through conceptual analysis we study the related concepts and their backgrounds and look for the applicability to the Syrian crisis.

There is a need to remember that the international crimes target civilians and threaten their existence, which could not be justified and should be punished legally. Some concepts might veil the essence of a crime, and fail to describe the ugly reality. They turn to be yet another weapon against innocent victims.

The majority of Syrians affected by the war share a common religious identity as Sunnis, were systematically targeted by the Assad regime, and have been subjected to series of atrocities perpetuated by the ruling minority- with a great support by neighbouring countries and foreign allies. These atrocities are aimed to an irreversible change in the demography of Syria. Depopulation of Syrian radical Sunnis, and the repopulation of their neighbourhoods with new Shia settlers will make it difficult to restore justice in Syria in the future.

The absence of reliable data pertinent to the exact population of Syria and details of other demographic variables is due the lack of transparency by Basher Assad's totalitarian regime. Examining the historical context of the Syrian state was an

alternative indicator to prove the occurrence of cleansing, its complicated process, and the reasons the regime claimed were necessary to act upon.

After the first World War, the Ottoman Empire collapsed and the Middle East states were placed under French mandate. France applied discriminatory policies in Syria to maintain its control. In fear of the Sunni majority, French policies empowered the minorities and placed them in key military and governmental positions, which caused increased tension and suspicion between the majority and the minority groups. The Alawites have the most rigid relationship with the Sunnis due to a complicated religious historical background. The growing tensions between Sunnis and Alawites continued after the independence of the Syrian state. After a series of military coups, and with the rise of Ba'ath party, Hafiz Assad took over power.

The sectarian discrimination during the Hafiz regime became very violent, and to avoid the clash he promoted a form of Sunni Islam that complies with his rule and legitimizes his dictatorship, establishing a monopoly of the state's understanding of Islam and the boundaries set around its practice. The clash was inevitable, and in the 1980s and after. The genocide and urbicide of Hama was the 'final solution' for the fighting vanguard and any possible Sunni resistance that might emerge afterwards.

During the time of Hafiz Assad, the alliance of Syria and Iran was very strong. Iran was keen to promote its Islamic revolution and Shi'ism as tools to expand and dominate the Middle East. Iran's strong relations with Syria during a period of international isolation was an opportunity for Shi'ism to spread regionally. With its alliance with Iran, Hafiz Assad politically and economically capitalised on Syria's historical importance to serve Shi'a religious culture. However, he regulated Iranian activities in Syria to mitigate any possible threat to his power. In contrast, Basher Assad did not maintain the same approach due to several economic and political factors. Syria's alliance with Iran shifted dramatically, allowing the Iranians to further expand their influence in Syria and control Basher's regime.

As the current regime tried several unsuccessful strategies to contain the civil uprising since 2011, it shifted from selective limited violence in the form of 'politicide'- meaning excluding leaders of opposition from the political realm- to civicide.

Remembering the efficacy of the urbicide of Hama in ending the Sunni resistance, the regime applied this strategy again, causing the displacement of 13 million people, more than half of the Syrian population. Furthermore, the regime launched a new set of laws and military tactics to block their return to their homes and to maintain the status-quo. This served well the Iranian interest in expanding its influence in both Syria and Iraq. The foreign Shi'a militias backed by Iran started settling in some of the evacuated areas, and it is very likely to have more settlers in the rest of the so-far abandoned areas.

This form of cleansing 'civicide' could lead to prolonged conflicts as it is shaping a new demography in an unstable reality.

Naming is an important aspect of politics. To define the Syrian crisis in accurate terms reserves the rights of civilians to be further protected, the right to justice, and the ability to prosecute the criminals, to release the detainees unconditionally, to compensate the victims' families and to provide a safe return for the refugees to their homeland.

Civicide is an international crime because it involves acts that are internationally recognised and scholarly categorised as crimes against humanity, as well as war crimes.

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APPENDIXES

APPENDIX A

A Chronological Table Of Genocide Scholarly Definitions

In a chronological order by Jones (2006, pp. 15-18), definitions of genocide:

Peter Drost (1959) “Genocide is the deliberate destruction of physical life of individual human beings by reason of their membership of any human collectivity as such.”

Vahakn Dadrian (1975) “Genocide is the successful attempt by a dominant group, vested with formal authority and/or with preponderant access to the overall resources of power, to reduce by coercion or lethal violence the number of a minority group whose ultimate extermination is held desirable and useful and whose respective vulnerability is a major factor contributing to the decision for genocide.”

Irving Louis Horowitz (1976) “[Genocide is] a structural and systematic destruction of innocent people by a state bureaucratic apparatus.... Genocide represents a systematic effort over time to liquidate a national population, usually a minority... [and] functions as a fundamental political policy to assure conformity and participation of the citizenry.”

Leo Kuper (1981) “I shall follow the definition of genocide given in the [UN] Convention. This is not to say that I agree with the definition. On the contrary, I believe a major omission to be in the exclusion of political groups from the list of groups protected. In the contemporary world, political differences are at the very least as significant a basis for massacre and annihilation as racial, national, ethnic or religious differences. Then too, the genocides against racial, national, ethnic or religious groups are generally a consequence of, or intimately related to, political conflict. However, I do not think it helpful to create new definitions of genocide, when there is an internationally recognized definition and a Genocide Convention which might become the basis for some effective action, however limited the underlying conception. But

since it would vitiate the analysis to exclude political groups, I shall refer freely . . . to liquidating or exterminatory actions against them.”

Jack Nusan Porter (1982) “Genocide is the deliberate destruction, in whole or in part, by a government or its agents, of a racial, sexual, religious, tribal or political minority. It can involve not only mass murder, but also starvation, forced deportation, and political, economic and biological subjugation. Genocide involves three major components: ideology, technology, and bureaucracy/organization.”

Yehuda Bauer (1984) N.B. Bauer distinguishes between “genocide” and “holocaust”:
“[Genocide is] the planned destruction, since the mid-nineteenth century, of a racial, national, or ethnic group as such, by the following means: (a) selective mass murder of elites or parts of the population; (b) elimination of national (racial, ethnic) culture and religious life with the intent of ‘denationalization’; (c) enslavement, with the same intent; (d) destruction of national (racial, ethnic) economic life, with the same intent; (e) biological decimation through the kidnapping of children, or the prevention of normal family life, with the same intent.... [Holocaust is] the planned physical annihilation, for ideological or pseudo-religious reasons, of all the members of a national, ethnic, or racial group.”

John L. Thompson and Gail A. Quets (1987) “Genocide is the extent of destruction of a social collectivity by whatever agents, with whatever intentions, by purposive actions which fall outside the recognized conventions of legitimate warfare.”

Isidor Wallimann and Michael N. Dobkowski (1987) “Genocide is the deliberate, organized destruction, in whole or in large part, of racial or ethnic groups by a government or its agents. It can involve not only mass murder, but also forced deportation (ethnic cleansing), systematic rape, and economic and biological subjugation.”

Henry Huttenbach (1988) “Genocide is any act that puts the very existence of a group in jeopardy.”

Helen Fein (1988) “Genocide is a series of purposeful actions by a perpetrator(s) to destroy a collectivity through mass or selective murders of group members and suppressing the biological and social reproduction of the collectivity. This can be

accomplished through the imposed proscription or restriction of reproduction of group members, increasing infant mortality, and breaking the linkage between reproduction and socialization of children in the family or group of origin. The perpetrator may represent the state of the victim, another state, or another collectivity.”

Frank Chalk and Kurt Jonassohn (1990) “Genocide is a form of one-sided mass killing in which a state or other authority intends to destroy a group, as that group and membership in it are defined by the perpetrator.”

Helen Fein (1993) “Genocide is sustained purposeful action by a perpetrator to physically destroy a collectivity directly or indirectly, through interdiction of the biological and social reproduction of group members, sustained regardless of the surrender or lack of threat offered by the victim.” Steven T. Katz (1994) “[Genocide is] the actualization of the intent, however successfully carried out, to murder in its totality any national, ethnic, racial, religious, political, social, gender or economic group, as these groups are defined by the perpetrator, by whatever means.” (NB. Modified by Adam Jones in 2000 to read, “murder in whole or in substantial part...”).

Israel Charny (1994) “Genocide in the generic sense means the mass killing of substantial numbers of human beings, when not in the course of military action against the military forces of an avowed enemy, under conditions of the essential defencelessness of the victim.”

Irving Louis Horowitz (1996) “Genocide is herein defined as a structural and systematic destruction of innocent people by a state bureaucratic apparatus [emphasis in original]. . . . Genocide means the physical dismemberment and liquidation of people on large scales, an attempt by those who rule to achieve the total elimination of a subject people.” (N.B. Horowitz supports “carefully distinguishing the [Jewish] Holocaust from genocide”; he also refers to “the phenomenon of mass murder, for which genocide is a synonym”).

Barbara Harff (2003) “Genocides and politicides are the promotion, execution, and/or implied consent of sustained policies by governing elites or their agents – or, in the case of civil war, either of the contending authorities – that are intended to destroy, in whole or part, a communal, political, or politicized ethnic group.”

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