

Introduction in blame the conflict in syria due

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Introduction In March 2011, Syria as a state completely changed. What was once a fast-growing economical state now turned into a battleground full of violence and war. It is too simplistic to blame the conflict in Syria due to sectarianism. Other factors definitely triggered the current divergence in Syria. In this essay, I will address all the factors that contribute to the atrocities in the Syrian society today.

I believe it is simplistic determining the conflict due to religion and there are many factors that contributed to the conflict. Firstly, I will talk about the government and its allies, followed by the revolution and finally the sectarian implications of the conflict in Syria. All three factors are intertwined with other complicated factors. Overall the current conflict in Syria is due multilayers of conflict starting with the revolution and an oppressive regime, International Actors contributing to the regime and lastly the implication and exaggeration of religious and ethnic divisions by actors to benefit their own agenda. History of Syria It is thought that conflict in Syria was due to underlying ideologies about religious sects.

However, Syria had sectarian divisions long before the Baathist dictator who later try to cohere Syria into an Arab Nationalist state. Philips (2003) argues that Syrian has always been a semi-sectarian state, within this ethnosectarian groups existed. Syria was made from 12% Alawi (who are normally supported by Assad) 64% Sunni Arab who dominated Syria 9% Christians and 3 % Druze and 1% others such as Judaism. An ethnosectarian divide also exists which is the Kurdish ethnic group who although consist of many Sunnis and identify themselves ethnically rather than religiously. It can be argued that previously Syria existed as a multi-ethnic country with little

conflict amongst these different groups how did this change? In order to analyze this the development of Syria needs to be taken into consideration. Modern Syria was only established in 1920 and a clear politicized minority group did not exist.

After the desolation of the Ottoman Empire, it was replaced by a French mandate (1920-46) (Polk, 2013). During this period Syria and sectarian identities became politicized and Arab nationalism was promoted by Hafez Al Assad who ruled Syria till 2000. The ideology behind this sudden surge in Arab nationalism was due to the opposition with Israel who had now taken charge of Palestine. In the 1980's a new concept was formed by the Muslim Brotherhood and this was known as an ethnic entrepreneur.

This group was from a strong Sunni background who felt oppressed by Hafez Al Assad regime. In order to contain a revolution and to maintain his regime, Hafez Al Assad responded with a violent massacre in Hama. This led to 1000 people dead in Hama in 1982 and suppressed further uprisings. Although this limited people from going against the government, and caused a state where there were public compliance and rebellion in the private sphere. It can be argued although the massacre in Hama contributed much contestation amongst the Syria people it was the start of a regime rebellion of change.

Therefore, sectarianism did play a factor but so did the fight for freedom from an oppressive government. Alliance and Opposition There are many international actors that have intervened in Syria. This is due to the breakdown of the state no presence of a strong political leader. This led to a

political vacuum in which others could intervene and potentially project their own interests.

Throughout this essay, two main International Actors will be addressed, which are Iran and Saudi Arabia. Iran's involvement may have a sectarian ideology behind it, however, Iran benefits from a geostrategic aspect. If Iran continues to have a strong presence in Syria this will strengthen the trans tie with Hezbollah and Lebanon. This gives Iran more leverage in the Middle East as they do have limited authority compared to other states in the Middle East (Brady, 2016). In contrast to this Saudi Arabia has also contributed to the conflict alongside the USA to curb the opposition. This is due to them limiting Iran's influence in the Levant. In intervening and funding opposition this allows regional balance of power and limits what Iran can do.

Alongside Saudi Arabia, there are also other GCC countries who have intervened these are normally Sunni majority countries and this is due to promoting Sunnism as the main ideology. Furthermore, Saudi's intervention is crucial due to them maintaining their own strength. By taking extra precaution this contains the unrest before it reaches Saudi's border alongside other GCC states (Manfreda, 2017). Therefore, it can be argued although the current conflict in Syria may have some underlying sectarian issues. International powers such as Iran and Saudi Arabia have used the concept of sects within religion to benefit their own regimes or project their own ideologies.

This concept is known as the 'cold war rivalry' in the Middle East and is due to constant competition between Iran and Saudi Arabia to have a geographic upper hand in the Levant areas (Maoz, 2016). Geopolitics and Sectarianism

Sectarianism is defined as an excessive attachment to a particular sect or party. This term has been used widely in regard to the conflict in Syria. It is widely believed that the current dispute in Syria is due to conflict between the minority (Alevites) and the majority Sunni. Although this could be the case I believe that the sectarian divide is not only internally disputed but used as a tool by external influences due to strategic geographic gain. Some elements of conflict do exist between both Sunni and Shia communities due to Assad's distribution of power and wealth. However, this was amplified by using sectarian identities as a tool to mobilize individuals into either supporting or opposing the Assad Regime.

For example, external states who intervene use Syria as a way to maintain their regional balance of power, this is known as asymmetrical interest. (Martini, York and Young 2013) . Countries such as Iran, Saudi Arabia use their own political interest to promote their dominant religion or for them to gain a geostrategic benefit in a particular region. This can be evident with Iran's intervention in Syria and their alliance with the Shia group Hezbollah. Iran has been funding Hezbollah for many years due to them following the same religion. By intervening on the basis of religions and sects this allows Iran to have some dominance in the Middle East.

As mention above the only 'legitimate' alliance is currently Syria. And with losing influence over Syria, Iran also can no longer fund Hezbollah and no

longer has influence in the Middle East. The ties between Damascus and Tehran will also weaken as Assad's regime allows Iran to have leverage in the Middle East as it consolidates the region. Also, due to the power Shia community produced by Assad, this will dissolve if Saudi Arabia is successful with demolishing the regime. and this once again will weaken ties amongst other Shia communities.

Similarly, Saudi Arabia's involvement is due to Saudi Arabia being largely Sunni dominated country and by intervening with a country with a Sunni majority this will benefit them to having control. This will also strengthen Saudi Arabia's stronghold in the Middle East due to the fall of other states such as Egypt and Libya who now contest Saudi. Revolution The Revolution started in Syria in 2011, this later ignited into a civil war, which leads to more than half a million to die, and 10. 9 million to flee from their homes (Polk, 2013). The revolution had many layers of conflict. I argue that the revolution was based on inequalities produced by Assad's oppressive state during his regime, this will be addressed using sectarian values, and ethnic divisions, and class inequalities produced by the state. Firstly, the civil society in Syria was deeply based on cult ideology (Weeden 1998).

This was reproduced by many institutions, such as the military, schools and the media. This produced a state of obedience where opposition was highly contested. Syria was highly militarized with limited freedom against the government, although there was election it was believed they were rigged due to the results and military officials standing by polling stations (Berti & Paris, 2014). However, this all changed during the Arab spring of 2011, when

neighbouring countries to Syria started an uprising that led to the fall of key figures such as Gadhafi and Mubarak. This led to peaceful demonstrations in Damascus however this changed due to fifteen boys being detained and tortured due to anti-regime graffiti.

Assad responded to this by killing protesters which led to the Free Syrian Army who opposed to Assad and aimed to overthrow the oppressive regime. This emphasizes that conflict in Syria today had multifactor and was not purely based on sectarian. Although there was clear favouritism by Assad's regime, the conflict today started with oppression and limited freedom and has now been intertwined with religious sectarian factors.

The Syrian state pre-revolution had many socio-economic weaknesses that impacted the society. Other than unequal distribution of power amongst specific sects, the social condition in Syria was deteriorating. There was a rise in inflation and the decrease of oil price. This previously helped the Syrian states due to rentier mentality however the privatization of the market affected Syria.

On top of this on the macro level the Syria society was suffering due to the oppressive regime. Syria was quickly turning into a military state; the government was corrupting on the local level as well as political. There was limited freedom therefore this inevitably caused cracks in society which led to the civil war in Syria today. Overall the Conflict in Syria today all factors need to be addressed. Starting with the history, the revolution and sectarian values. Syria was highly oppressed and neighbouring Arab countries allowed them to revolt. Which in essence contributed to the conflict today amongst

other multi-dimensional factors. Kurdish Minority Although I argue religious sectarianism played a role in the conflict today, the ethnic element of sectarian also needs to be addressed.

This started with the Baathist regime which promoted an Arab national with little regards to religion. Although this may seem positive due to integration this excluded the Kurdish minority as they were not classed as Arabs and did not receive the same benefits. This was furthered by Hafez in his regime which once again promoted Arab nationalism and reinforced via many institutions. In doing this it created a division of identity in Syria with being Syrian Arab or Syrian Kurdish.

This caused much contestation amongst the Kurdish as they were limited to freedom, an example of this can be evident during Hafez economic reform in which he favoured the Arab Syrians rather than the Kurdish Syrians (Philips, 2015). Also, a lot of money was invested in Arab dominated regions such as Aleppo and Damascus with little regards to the Northern region which was dominated by a Kurdish Yazidi population (Majjar, 2017). The current conflict today is between this Islamism and the Kurds who once again have suffered from little supported from other neighbouring states. This emphasises to an extent that the ethnic-sectarian divide in this situation is more prominent than the religious. As now, other extremist organisations from a Sunni majority have now used the unstable state in a way to cleanse the Kurdish population. This shows that sectarianism does play a part but more so with ethnic identities rather than religious identities.

Sectarianism and Economic inequalities Firstly, as mentioned above Syria is/was a multi-ethnic society. It consisted of individuals that were Arabs, Kurdish etc. Within this, there were many religions such Islam (Sunni and Shia), Christians and Druze. Once Assad came to power in 2000 the institutions were changed and many previous Sunni authoritarian figures with higher jobs were replaced with Alevites. For instance, Syria's Fourth brigade is fully Alawites and the republic guard is led by Assad brother. This emphasizes that the Syrian state was organized by Assad and individuals that supported his regime. People that did support Assad or were from the Alawi community were more likely to receive better jobs compared to other religion ethnic groups (Viksand, 2014).

This was done in order for Assad to ensure compliance amongst his people he attempted to maintain Syria's coercive apparatus. He distributed power to the minorities such as the Druze and Ismail's and the overall power was amongst the Alevites which is the sect Assad was from (Alhendi, 2011). This allowed a disproportionate amount of power and cause contestation amongst the Kurdish and Sunni Majority. In addition to this, the Syrian Kurdish population in the northern rural areas was not receiving the benefits distributed amongst other groups from Aleppo.

This socio-economic inequality obviously caused tension which later led to people demonstrating. Due to this, it can be argued the conflict in Syria did start with economic inequalities and this can be parallel with societies such as Tunisia. However, the reason it has not been contained is due to international powers being involved amongst other factors such a

sectarianism being amplified and used as a tool. (al-Aita 2014). Although this shows some elements of sectarianist roots there is a clear social economic cause. There was a surge in youth politics as many youths that had graduated and had the skills to have a well-paid job but were discriminated due to their ethnic group or religious preference (Heydemann, Leenders, 2011). Once again this conjoins economic and sectarian factors that have both led to the conflict of Syria today.

Not only was their mass unemployment amongst youths there was a grossly unfair distribution of development in regions. Assad regime failed to distribute goods to rural areas and there was a clear poverty between the poor and rich (Saleeby, 2012). The rural area was also deeply affected by the climate which weakened the economy. There was a draught in the countryside between 2007-2010 and 1.5 million Syria's migrated to the city in hope of better jobs (Verner, Bersinger 2013). This furthered weakened the economy as everything had risen in prices and the quality of life decreased quickly. This led to a class difference in Syria with bourgeois and peasants and this was against what Assad father promised to Syria.

This shows that both Religion and economics played a huge role in the conflict of present-day Syria. For instance, the uprising started due to inequalities produced but now it is multidimensional and linked with all types of oppression such as the right to have a job based on your religious/ethnic sect. Weeden (2013) uses this in her literature to highlight the corruption and exploitation in the Syrian army in line with what particular sect you were from. Therefore, I argue that once again the conflict in Syria is due to

sectarian views amongst other oppression such as economic factors.

Conclusion Overall the concept of sectarianism does explain some aspect of the Syrian conflict, but it is not the major contributor, due to the complicated nature of the conflict.

I do agree that it has some influence on the present-day conflict, however, there are many other factors that need to be taken into account in regard to the conflict in Syria. For example, international, superpowers such as Saudi Arabia and Iran's influence and involvement that has geographic, strategic and religious sectarian agenda. Leading on from this the conflict cannot be explained without the recognition of the revolution and the aftermath of the revolution. For instance, the unfair distribution of the economic wealth, in addition to this the killings and oppression produced by the regime.

not only was this based on economics again it had a sectarian aspect to it, for example, Awaits benefited more from the regime than other individuals. Overall, I conclude that it is too simplistic to argue that the Syrian conflict is based on one single factor, there are multilayers to the conflict and in order to understand the conflict other attributes need to be taken into consideration.