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**The American University in Cairo  
School of Humanities and Social Sciences  
Political Science Department**

**INCENTIVES OF VIOLENCE  
Dynamics and Duration of the Syrian Civil War**

Thesis in Comparative Politics

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## **Abstract**

For centuries the world has been plagued with conflict and violence that cause destruction, population displacement, famine, hunger and outright chaos. As the image of warfare has continually changed, internal conflict or civil wars became a more common site. With the end of the cold war, the world has witnessed an increasing number of civil strife enticing debates in the study of civil war on 'new' and 'old' wars and the encouraging theories on civil war onset and duration.

The Middle East region is no stranger to the phenomena of civil war with the area itself home to several conflicts. In 2011, the region ignited with rebellions against ruling regimes in Tunisia, Egypt, Syria, Bahrain, Yemen and Libya. What started as revolutions aiming for political change soon escalated to internal conflict. Six years into civil war the conflict in Syria has left 400,000 people dead and millions seeking refuge across the globe.

To understand the events of the Syrian Civil War and its possible outcomes, this research project analyzes the dynamics of Syrian society, the historic relationship between the different minorities and the regime and the role of the Ba'th Party in the creation of this modern state. This is achieved through tracing the actions of the rebels and the regime in mobilizing past grievances and the opportunities of greed that both have taken advantage of.

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## **Introduction**

One of the oldest states in the Middle East has been caught up in an ongoing civil war for the last six years. What started as a local uprising against the Syrian Ba’th regime and its current president Bashar-Al-Assad across several parts of the country has escalated into a war between more than one opposing side that have left hundreds of thousands of death and millions of refugees. With the involvement of many countries as the war escalated and continued, the violence also increased and the attempts of conflict resolution seem far out of reach. Countries such as Iran, Russia, the United States and Saudi Arabia have taken the Syrian conflict as an arena to further spread their power. Historically, Syria was not a unified state, it was forged out of the region known as Greater Syria after WWI when it became part of the French Mandate.<sup>1</sup> Out of the region of Greater Syria, the modern states of Jordan, Lebanon, Israel and Syria were established.<sup>2</sup> The dynamics of the state and the history of its minority, elite and class relations makes it an interesting case to study and further understand the reasons for civil war onset but more importantly for the continuation and duration of violence. The goal of this research is to analyze the factors that led the Syrian Uprising of 2011 to escalate into a long civil war.

With the end of the Cold War, internal conflicts became a common sight around the world. As rebellions, revolutions and military coups became common in modern history, new fields of research in political science and theories on such phenomena

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<sup>1</sup> Roger Owen, *State, power and politics in the making of the Modern Middle East* (London: Routledge, 2010).

<sup>2</sup> Owen, *State, power and politics*.

explored. Researchers began exploring and analyzing the differences between the types of violence and the new kind of wars that were taking place in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>3</sup> That being said scholars have been paying more attention to new types of conflicts, especially civil wars, which have become more common since the fall of the Soviet Union, “civil war is now far more common than international conflict: all of the 15 major armed conflict listed by the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute for 2001 were internal”.<sup>4</sup> Scholars from different specializations were studying this new pattern in violence from economic, sociological and anthropological points of view. Scholars like Kaldor, Kalyvas and Vasquez<sup>5</sup> studying to distinguish these new wars from previous ones and mapping out the different political, economic and sociological factors that would result in the onset, duration and intensity of such internal conflicts.<sup>6</sup> New scholarly research has been paying more attention to the theories beyond those of Collier and Hoeffler who claimed, that rebel and opposition groups that engage in civil war are merely after the economic profits that will result from the control of natural resources within a state<sup>7</sup>. Another theoretical framework in the field of the study of civil wars, has been paying attention to grievances experienced by groups within a state and play the role of incentives for violence and conflict.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Mary Kaldor, *New and Old Wars* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2012).

<sup>4</sup> Paul Collier and Anke Hoeffler, "Greed and grievance in civil war," *Oxford Economic Papers* 56, no. 4 (2004):563, doi:10.1093/oep/gpf064.

<sup>5</sup> John A. Vasquez, *The war puzzle* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

<sup>6</sup> Stathis N., Kalyvas, *The Logic of Violence* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

<sup>7</sup> Collier and Hoeffler, “*Greed and Grievance in Civil War*”.

<sup>8</sup> David Keen, "Incentives and Disincentives for Violence," in *Greed & Grievance: Economic Agendas in Civil Wars* (Colorado: Lynne Rienner Publishers, Inc., 2000).

In 2011, The Middle East, a region with pre-existing and ongoing major conflicts that has been overshadowing progress and development for many years, was struck by a series of revolutions. The people of Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Syria and Bahrain revolted against their respective governments each with different yet similar demands. Fueled with anger towards their leaders, the protestors demanded better standards of living, political representation, democratic structuring of governments, elections, freedom of speech and religious practices. Yet, these revolutions went different paths some leading to reforms while others developed into civil wars. What we know globally as the Arab Spring might have caused more damage and created more evil than good in of the countries where it had started.

The purpose of this thesis is to explore and analyze a particular phenomenon where the revolutions of the Arab Spring turned into a full on and ongoing civil war with a high death toll and millions of refugees. A particular case study of interest is the Syrian Civil War due to its capacity and large impact on not only the Middle East region, but also the world as a whole. Through adopting a qualitative process-tracing approach of the Syrian Civil War this thesis will determine the impact of greed and state repression on the intensity and protraction of the war. This will be conducted through a historical analysis of the Syrian regime and the dynamics at play within the society since the creation of the Ba'th Party and the ascension of Hafiz Al-Asad to power.



### **Research Questions:**

**Two research questions guide the development of this thesis**

- 1- What is the role of Greed in the protraction of violence and duration of the Syrian Civil War?**
- 2- How did Regime repression affect the escalation of violence during the Syrian Uprising?**

### **Hypotheses:**

Scholars studying the phenomena of civil wars have been analyzing the different economic, political and sociological factors that would lead to the onset of an internal conflict. In order to be able to resolve these conflicts several questions on intensity and duration of these conflicts must be addressed. Questions on how natural resources influence civil war? Why do people rebel against their governments? What are the micro and macro determinants of civil war? Are all valid questions. While some theories particularly economic approaches that depend mainly on empirical evidence have been at conflict or contradict other theories that aim to explain internal conflict in some cases. The opportunities of greed were also opportunities of grievance, which intensified and increased the duration of the conflict. Factors of anger and fear also play part in the willingness of civilians to join in an armed conflict. With that in mind, for the purpose of this thesis, the research and analysis will be focusing on the opportunities of greed that influence the duration and intensity of the Syrian Civil War. The research will not only be focusing on the greed that the rebels are seeking, but also the greed opportunities that the government of Syria seeks to continue the fighting, rather than resolving it.<sup>9</sup> The

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<sup>9</sup> David Keen, *Useful enemies: when waging wars is more important than winning them* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014).

Hypotheses tested for this thesis to answer the research questions presented are as follows:

**Hypothesis One: Short Term Economic Functions of Violence and the International War on ISIS has led to the protraction of the Civil War.**

As the Syrian Civil War developed, research shows that three factors play a role in the duration and protraction of violence. Using the military apparatus that has been at the regime's disposal and which is built on sectarian lines and was used to crush the rebellion and thus increased the Greed opportunities that the regime seeks to continue the fighting. The exploitation of the people and control of society and the economy shows that the Syrian regime was prepared to fight and to escalate the level of violence in order to defeat the uprising and maintain its survival. The ruling elite and supporters of the regime, either participated or approved of the violence to maintain its economic status. Further, as the war intensified, a factional split occurred within the opposition whom also wanted to capitalize on the gains of a prolonged war, such as keeping aid money and looting.<sup>10</sup> Finally, as the war developed and with the rise of ISIS in Iraq and Syria the flow of aid in the form of weapons and Russian airstrikes has intensified the war leading to more casualties and no sight of a lasting resolution. Foreign intervention also brought to light old competition between the Sunni and Shia states' particularly Iran and Saudi Arabia<sup>11</sup> which meant that both sides wanted an opposing outcome to the war and thus this also leads to the protraction of violence.

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<sup>10</sup> Emile Hokayem, *Syria's uprising and the fracturing of the Levant* (London: Routledge for the International Institute for Strategic Studies, 2013).

<sup>11</sup> Marc Lynch, *The Arab uprising: the unfinished revolutions of the new Middle East* (New York, NY: Public Affairs, 2013).

**Hypothesis Two: A combination of Top-Down and Bottom-Up escalation of Violence intensify and prolong the War.**<sup>12</sup>

Due to the patrimonial nature of the Syrian Regime and the polarization of the conflict, a state of two warring sides, one that supports the uprising and another that supports the military and the regime has led to a catastrophic escalation of violence. Historically, Syrian society has been a fragmented one where Sunnis have been in power and often barred the minorities from escalating. Yet with the fall of Greater Syria under the rule of the French divisions between the inhabitants of the state were forged. After the Ottomans lost WWI, and Greater Syria became known as the French Mandate the French operated within the state with the policy known historically as “divide and rule”. The French played minorities against each other, and often separated the minorities such as the Druze, Alawites and other minorities by giving them autonomy. After Syria’s independence and the rise of the Ba’th Party such divisions continued to play a major role in the creation of the modern state of Syria. With the regime being built along sectarian lines and the Alawi minority having all power, the mobilization of violence was possible on both sides. Historically, the regime has used the sectarian and ethnic fragmentation of the society to mobilize the people against the rebels. On the other side, the rebels were able to mobilize Sunnis to join the conflict. As the conflict, continued anger and fear created by the state led to mass murder and an unprecedented number of refugees.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> David Keen, "Incentives and Disincentives for Violence," 24.

<sup>13</sup> Elisabeth Jean Wood, "The Social Processes of Civil War: The Wartime Transformation of Social Networks," *Annual Review of Political Science* 11, no. 1 (2008):545, doi:10.1146/annurev.polisci.8.082103.104832.

### **Methodological Approaches:**

While the field of Political Science has been concerned with the importance of quantitative analysis and empirical evidence, the usage of qualitative analysis has often been at doubt. Scholars were more concerned with the economic aspects of opportunity and motivation of civil war onset but the qualitative aspects of the research have yet to claim the same fame that was granted to quantitative research. For the purpose of this thesis project the trajectory of the research will analyze the different incentives of violence within the Syrian Civil War to understand the dynamics of the war and the factors affecting its duration. To achieve this, I will be adopting a qualitative process-tracing approach particularly, an outcome process-tracing approach in order to understand why the outcome of the rebellion that started in 2011 became a protracted civil war. I attempt to explain a case-specific historical outcome, rather than building or testing a certain theory. This approach follows the same steps as those of the thesis, paying attention to descriptive component of the case study and following how its events unfolded. The usage of finding consequences and causation through this descriptive technique is the foundation of the process-tracing process. Finally using this approach as opposed to any other one gives me the chance to individually analyze the incentives of violence of different actors in the civil war to understand why the rebellion turned violent. That way I can analyze the events of the Civil War in more depth, analyzing the different variables.<sup>14</sup> The same approach will be utilized to breakdown the different economic functions of violence and how each of the actors used these opportunities of

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<sup>14</sup> David Collier, "Understanding Process Tracing," *PS: Political Science & Politics* 44, no. 04 (2011), doi:10.1017/s1049096511001429.

‘greed’ to maintain the fighting and thus affect the duration of the civil war. Since this conflict is ongoing and for the purpose of this research the period that will be analyzed for this thesis will be from first of May 2011 in Deraa, up until February 2016 following the attack on Aleppo and the involvement of the Russians in Air strikes.

Further a historical analysis of Syria will provide a coherent background to the different cleavages present since the formation of the modern state that played a major role at the start of the rebellion and then the civil war. The next chapter of this thesis will explain and bring into perspective the literature on civil war and Syria in particular to frame the history and hierarchy of the regime. The literature used for this thesis will rely heavily on the usage of secondary sources that explain existing theories to understand the development of the conflict. However, primary sources in the form of newspaper articles that give first-hand accounts of the war will also provide information of the escalation of the war and information on the different factors of duration. Chapter Two is a detailed descriptive explanation of the creation of the modern state of Syria and how different aspects of colonization have created a fragmented society. Chapter three will be an analysis of the different incentives of violence that made the civil war possible to erupt, through analyzing the dynamics of the relations between the regime and the local elite and also the dynamics of the relation between the minorities and the opposition. Through this analysis we can explain and understand why this civil war broke out in Syria as opposed to breaking out in Tunisia or Egypt who have went through times of turmoil. Further, chapter four will analyze in more detail the dynamics of the civil war and when it became a full on war. The rest of the chapter will analyze the creation of a war economy within Syria and process the different opportunities of ‘greed’ this new

economy provides to the different actors. This will provide for a better understanding of the civil war duration. The chapter will also analyze the role of the international community and the role of ISIS in the protraction of violence. Finally, the concluding chapter will also discuss the limitations of the research and recommendation for future research.

## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **Literature Review**

*“War is thus an Act of force to compel our enemy to do our will”*

Carl Von Clausewitz

Violence, torture and war, are not new concepts to humans and thus studies focusing on the occurrence and reoccurrence of violence help us understand better the dynamics of such events. For centuries humans have devised techniques to inflict pain on other humans for many reasons all which meant to show power.<sup>15</sup> Violence, torture and war are manifested in many events such as rebellion, revolution and civil wars. There is a clear distinction between the three types and the purpose of this thesis project is study the phenomena of civil wars in particular to understand the different factors of occurrence and duration. In particular, this research project is focused on the case of study of the Syrian Civil War which erupted months after the uprising of 2011, following the movements of the Arab Spring. To better understand the dynamics of the Syrian Civil War, it is important to investigate different approaches to the study of civil wars in general. To trace the genealogy of the study on civil wars, this literature review will analyze the work by Mary Kaldor on the ‘new’ vs ‘old’ war debate to outline the difference between conventional wars and internal conflict which became common after the end of the Cold War and many of the newly independent nations fell into ethnic conflict<sup>16</sup>. Further, this review will address the work of Collier and Hoeffler on the explanations of civil war onset through a ‘greed’ framework<sup>17</sup>. This leads to the different

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<sup>15</sup> Jack S. Levy and William R. Thompson, *Causes of War* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), 5.

<sup>16</sup> Mary Kaldor, *New and Old Wars*, 6.

<sup>17</sup> Collier and Hoeffler, “*Greedy and Grievance in Civil War*,” 564.

developments that took place within this framework to also include the work of David Keen on 'grievances' vs. 'greed' and other scholarly research on opportunity and motivations and the different incentives of violence in civil wars<sup>18</sup>.

### **1.1 They Study of Civil Wars**

War and violence are not rare in human history, for long war was used as means to coerce obedience, legitimacy or increase power and authority. According to Jack Levy in his book on the "Causes of War" he has explicitly defined war as a "sustained violence between political organizations."<sup>19</sup> Violence has been and always will bring about destruction, although it might have been used to bring about change. War has easily become a recognizable force of change of the world which we can use to explain the creation of the concept of the modern nation state. "War made the state and the state made war"<sup>20</sup>. It is no surprise that the world as it exists today will not be the same without WWI, WWII or the Cold War. These wars have had a huge impact on the world and the Middle East in particular. Historians understand that the treaties formed after the fall of the Ottoman Empire, such as the Sykes-Picot treaty affects those living in the Middle East and their relation with the West to this very day. In addition, despite being the source for destruction, economy failure, famine, drought, death and underdevelopment, there are those who find going to war and the use of violence as acceptable. While the use of violence or the declaration of war might not seem to be a

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<sup>18</sup> David Keen, *The economic functions of violence in civil wars* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998).

<sup>19</sup> Levy and Thompson, *Causes of War*, 5.

<sup>20</sup> Charles Tilly, "Reflections on the History of State Making," in *The Formation of National States in Western Europe*, ed. Charles Tilly et al. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975).



rational choice we must understand the reasons why some choose to join in the violence? War becomes the means through which people can achieve that which might become unachievable without the use of violence. Clausewitz in his book “On War” explains how people might choose to wage war. In his definition of war, he outlines that it is a “political instrument, a continuation of political activity by other means, the political object is the goal, war is the means of reaching it, and means can never be considered in isolation for their purpose.”<sup>21</sup> Scholars have been interested when studying the topic of war to understand why although war leads to destruction, involved actors choose to resort to this option. Thus scholars studying this topic focus on the involvement of actors who join war, these actors are organizations and not just individuals. Today war takes a whole different direction with the usage of biological and chemical warfare and technology that minimizes the number of soldiers on the ground and thus reducing casualties. Towards the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century war began to take a different dimension, shifting from interstate wars to intra-state wars. What became known as ‘civil wars’ was a type of internal conflict that began to rise in occurrence from 1945 lasting to the late 1990s,<sup>22</sup> declining in number but not diminishing all together. According to research from the years “1945-1999, 146 civil wars have taken place.”<sup>23</sup> In their scholarly work on civil wars Fearon and Laitin pointed to the death toll of civil wars fought after WWII as being

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<sup>21</sup> Carl Von Clausewitz and F. N. Maude, *On War* (London: Routledge & K. Paul, 1962), 87 .

<sup>22</sup> Stathis N. Kalyvas, “Civil Wars,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Comparative Politics*, ed. Carles Boix et al. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

<sup>23</sup> Carles Boix and Susan Carol. Stokes, *The Oxford handbook of Comparative Politics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

estimated at 16.2 million deaths.<sup>24</sup> Such a catastrophic series of events marked the end of colonization and the collapse of the existing hegemony of the Eastern hemisphere, the Soviet Union, and the remaining of one power, the United States. With the end of the Cold War the study and research of civil war has become a common topic, amongst policy and political science scholars dedicating research to the field.

It is important to point out that in order to identify a certain internal conflict as a civil war, there must have been a specific threshold crossed. According to the “Correlates of War Project” (COW Project), there has to be at least 1,000 battle related deaths among all participants and an annual average of 1,000 battle related deaths for wars lasting more than a year.<sup>25</sup> It is very important to define the term civil war to be able to understand the factors of this research and its conclusions. “Civil war can be defined as the armed combat taking place within the boundaries of a recognized sovereign entity subject to a common authority at the outset of hostilities.”<sup>26</sup> While there is an ongoing debate of what determines a civil war, this research is going to adopt the approach where a conflict within a state that has resulted in the death of 1,000 people will be taken into account as a civil war, to distinguish between this conflict and other violent acts such as riots, massacres and genocide.<sup>27</sup> Further while there are many kinds of political violence such as riots, genocide and terrorism; a clear distinction can be made if we analyze the goals to be achieved from each kind of violence. “A ‘revolution’ is an attempt by an insurgent

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<sup>24</sup> James D. Fearon and David D. Laitin, "Ethnicity, Insurgency, and Civil War," *American Political Science Review* 97, no. 01 (2003): 75, doi:10.1017/s0003055403000534.

<sup>25</sup> Marie Olson Lounsbury and Frederic S. Pearson, *Civil wars: internal struggles, global Consequences* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009).

<sup>26</sup> Stathis, Kalyvas, *The Logic of Violence*, 5.

<sup>27</sup> Collier and Hoeffler, “Greed and Grievance in Civil War”, 565.

group to overthrow the government and fundamentally change or reorient the political system. While a ‘coup d’etat’ is a military takeover that seeks to replace a government or its leaders.”<sup>28</sup> Unlike revolutions and coups, the unique feature of a civil war is that one of the two sides engaging in the violence must be a sovereign entity while the other offensive side is a rebel group. While there can be more than two competing sides in this militarized conflict, “a domestic challenge directed against the authority of the current holder of sovereign authority, which distinguishes it from interstate war.”<sup>29</sup>

Scholars studying the phenomena of civil wars have been analyzing the different economic, political and sociological factors that would lead to the onset of an internal conflict. Scholars were interested in studying a kind of “symmetric” war where both warring sides were equal in strength and equal in weaponry types and power.<sup>30</sup> These were the first generation of researchers who were concerned with framing political violence using structural causes to explain civil wars and guerrilla warfare.<sup>31</sup> In order to be able to resolve these conflicts or to prevent them from happening scholars had to understand the characteristics of such wars and analyze the different variables that influence the onset, intensity and duration of these conflicts. Research was led by questions on how natural resources influence civil war? Why do people rebel against their governments? What are the micro and macro determinants of civil war? These questions led to many theories and conceptual frameworks that have developed over the

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<sup>28</sup> Lounsbury and Pearson, *Civil wars: internal struggles, global consequences*,14.

<sup>29</sup> Kalyvas, “Civil Wars”, 417. .

<sup>30</sup> Stathis Kalyvas, Ian Shapiro, and Tarek Masoud, *Order, Conflict, and Violence*,(Cambridge: Cambridge University Press,2008).

<sup>31</sup>Kalyvas, Shapiro and Masoud, *Order, Conflict, and Violence*.

years since researchers took interest in such events of internal upheaval. The onset of the Syrian Civil War in 2011, has generated a lot of research in order to understand the dynamics of the civil war and the factors that play in its increased duration. Following suit with the Arab Spring, Syria after a year of violence and protesting did not reach a stable state as with other neighboring countries. On the other hand, the country has since been in turmoil with many failed attempts at resolving the conflict. While Syrian Civil war did not occur due to conflict over a natural resource; other incentives of violence were at play. Marginalization of the rural area, and favoritism of the urban cities created tension over the years as Bashar Al-Asad came to power.<sup>32</sup> As the regime responded repressively at the first sight of dissident activities, many incentives of violence were capitalized thus pushing the country into a state of civil war. With the first months of the uprising, many army generals defected along with soldiers and heavy army weaponry. This created a state where both opposing forces were capable of fighting and the destruction that occurred created further violence along sectarian lines.<sup>33</sup> Other dynamics came into play and the alliance of the rebels with terrorist organizations created a whole new level of violence and new capabilities given the elevated strength of the rebels.<sup>34</sup> Legitimate reasons for rebellion were no longer part of the civil war, rather violence occurred due to a difference in ideologies. With this new phase of the civil war, the international community took part in the conflict and its implications increased the duration of the war; as many attempts at peace-pacts failed. As a result, today more than

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<sup>32</sup> Bassam Haddad, *Business Networks in Syria the Political Economy of Authoritarian Resilience* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2012),13.

<sup>33</sup> Emile Hokayem, *Syria's uprising and the Fracturing of the Levant* (London: Routledge for the International Institute for Strategic Studies, 2013).

<sup>34</sup> Hokayem, *Syria's uprising and the Fracturing of the Levant*.

400,000 people were killed and 5 million registered as refugees, according to the latest UN reports on the conflict.<sup>35</sup>

Originally, research mostly dedicated to the study of internal conflict during the 60s and 70s was focused on understanding and explaining political violence in general. They focused on studying rebellions and revolutions that often turned into civil wars.<sup>36</sup> Motivated to rebel, those who participated in such conflicts and restored to the use of violence have always been pushed by poverty that had surpassed certain thresholds of famine and hunger such as the revolutionaries during the Russian revolution in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Yet, scholars were able to theorize that these revolutions were not started by those who were dying from poverty but it was led by those who had an improvement in their living standard and that continuation of progress was retracted or blocked. But no consensus was reached on this matter and so it became problematic in academia.<sup>37</sup>

With the changing image of warfare and the increase in civil wars where the state was no longer the only warring side against another state, but rather the state is fighting not only one rebel group but many different ones with different interest, and motivations. The research on civil wars increased. This approach was adopted by modernization scholars who traced rebellion to economic factors of inequality.<sup>38</sup> These scholars believe that with the spread of globalization a gap was created causes great economic inequalities. Further, as globalization shaped the world into a more tech savvy and open

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<sup>35</sup> Kenneth Roth, Syria. New York: Human Rights Watch, 2017, accessed July 14, 2017, <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2017/country-chapters/syria>.

<sup>36</sup> Edward Newman and Karl R. DeRouen, *Routledge Handbook of Civil Wars* (London: Routledge, 2014), 15.

<sup>37</sup> Kalyvas, "Civil Wars".

<sup>38</sup> Newman and DeRouen, *Routledge Handbook of Civil Wars*, 21.

space, more and more people who wanted to enjoy the same freedoms of those in the Western hemisphere began to demand more political participation and rights, thus shifting the existing status quo leading in many cases to the eruption of violence and thus the onset of civil war. Another development in academia on civil wars came with the rise of civil wars erupting in recently independent Eastern European states and across the globe. With this new line in the research scholars began to reference civil wars in terms of ethnic conflict.<sup>39</sup>

Many of these civil wars were identified by scholars as “identity” or “ethnic” wars, and were identified as “asymmetric” where the state power outmatched that of the rebel groups. In his book, “Ethnic Groups in Conflict”, Horowitz explains that the ethnic composition of the military and police is a resource in the conflict<sup>40</sup>. Explaining that while the military or other coercive apparatus used by the state to control or disperse ethnic riots or rebellions, this particular ethnic composition intensifies the violence. “The army favors one group or another in its interventions may exacerbate the violence.”<sup>41</sup> Here the term ‘Civil War’ began to take a more political weight. As the media began to report on the events of such wars, it was evident that many of the media sources would have a certain political agenda to push and often using this term or denying its usage was either giving legitimacy or denying it to a warring group.<sup>42</sup> The common occurrence of such conflicts led to a later line development in the scholarly research on the topic to analyze yet another change in this kind of warfare with the turn of the century. A later

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Leo Kuper and Donald L. Horowitz, “Ethnic Groups in Conflict,” *Contemporary Sociology*, 1986, doi:10.2307/2069338.

<sup>41</sup> Kuper and Horowitz, “Ethnic Groups in Conflict”.

<sup>42</sup> Kalyvas, “Civil Wars.”

line of this debate in analyzing the changing image of warfare with the turn of the century, became known as the “Old Wars” and “New Wars”<sup>43</sup> debate proposed by Mary Kaldor. According to Kalyvas and Balcells in their scholarly work published in 2009, they divide civil wars into three different categories to be investigated. They find that civil wars are either Asymmetric, where the state is stronger than the rebels<sup>44</sup>. The second type of civil war is conventional where both sides are equally strong and have equal levels of military technology. Finally, the third category is where rebels have low access to military technology and use tactics of unconventional combat. This last category was manifested in the debate of ‘old wars’ vs. ‘new wars’. In her work Kaldor identifies “Old Wars” as being motivated by geopolitical or ideological politics that aim to make territorial and convectional war claims. They are identified through their hierarchal organization of fighters and are financed through centralized means. On the other hand, her analysis of “New Wars” were manifested as wars based on identity politics which often re-create a past glorious identity that once was to claim legitimacy. Such “New Wars” recruit exclusive sectors mobilizing around ethnic or religious and radical identities that further cause fragmentation thus leading to a protraction of violence. Unlike “Old War”, these wars are fought in an unconventional way through gangs, guerilla warfare, who play on the fear of others to gain legitimacy and momentum. Due to the unique factor of being transcendent across borders, New Wars rely on external resources, local resources and other forms of greed to finance the fighting.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Kaldor, *New and Old Wars*.

<sup>44</sup> Laia Balcells and Stathis N. Kalyvas, "Does Warfare Matter? Severity, Duration, and Outcomes of Civil Wars," *SSRN Electronic Journal* (2014) doi:10.2139/ssrn.2206324.

<sup>45</sup> Kaldor, *New and Old Wars*.

This debate inspired another theoretical approach led by David Keen in 1998, which argued that “civil wars were being waged not to capture but to make money. Thus winning wars became less important.”<sup>46</sup> This became known as the greed-motivation theory. More recent scholarly research has led to emphasizing the role of greed, grievance, motivation and opportunity. Theorists of greed question whether rebels would go to war to gain control of loot-able resources or if they became dependent on these resources to finance the conflict? Both Soysa and Ross, in their scholarly work derived that resources were not the motivation for civil war onset yet their existence increased the duration of the war.<sup>47</sup> Thus the literature on civil wars outlines a new debate which became known as the “greed vs. grievance” theories. Yet, although grievances do explain the existence of economic and social and ethnic inequalities, these do not explain alone why or when a civil war would occur.<sup>48</sup> Scholars studying the aftermath of the Arab Spring were interested in studying the outcomes of the rebellion in Libya. According to Wim Van Doorn’s work on the “‘Greed’ and ‘Grievances’ as Motivations for Civil War: The Libya Case”, he analyzes whether Greed or Grievances were the factors of onset in civil war<sup>49</sup>. He finds that grievances were present in Libyan society and in 2011, they found a way to finally express them. Yet, the greed framework does not explain why the civil war in Libya broke out; instead he finds that both ‘greed’ and ‘grievances’ explain the onset of the civil war, only when we look to study the individual motivations and

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<sup>46</sup> Newman and DeRouen, *Routledge Handbook of Civil Wars*.

<sup>47</sup> Michael L. Ross, “What Do We Know about Natural Resources and Civil War?,” *Journal of Peace Research* 41, no. 3 (2004): doi:10.1177/0022343304043773.

<sup>48</sup> Karen Ballentine and Jake Sherman, *The political Economy of Armed Conflict: beyond greed and grievance* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 2003).

<sup>49</sup> Wim Van Doorn, ‘Greed’ and ‘Grievance’ as Motivations for Civil War: The Libyan Case, PhD diss., 2013 (E-International Relations Students).



opportunities that were presented to the rebels to fight against the regime. Van Doorn concluded that the economic agendas present themselves from “opportunity” provided during the rebellion, and that also opportunity combined with grievances make the chances of civil war the highest.<sup>50</sup>

Finally, the latest development in this field has led to the importance of analyzing and focusing on opportunity as manifested in the work published in 2003 by Fearon and Laitin<sup>51</sup>. This new approach finds another dimension to the conflict manifested in transnational rebel groups which gives the conflict a new dimension.<sup>52</sup> With this understanding and awareness of the genealogy of the literature on civil wars we can derive that while civil wars often occur in states where pre-existing grievances such as poverty, lack of political participation and severe inequalities can be detected it is hard to account for where a civil war will occur next. A combination of motivation and opportunity perceived by different parts of a given society members, accompanied with a perception of fear and threat makes it more likely that such a conflict will occur. Yet there remains a problem. “Inconsistencies in the coding within the same datasets, problematic data from civil wars: most civil wars take place in improvised countries where record-keeping bureaucracies are lacking.”<sup>53</sup> This problem with coding leads to questioning whether civil wars are actually an independent occurrence or if they are a factor or a single value in a much larger phenomena being that of political violence.

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<sup>50</sup> Mats Berdal , "Beyond Greed and Grievance – and not too soon," review of *Beyond Greed and Grievance* , *Review of International Studies* 31, 2005.

<sup>51</sup> Fearon and. Laitin, "Ethnicity, Insurgency, and Civil War".

<sup>52</sup> Idean Salehyan, *Rebels Without Borders: transnational insurgencies in world politics* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2011).

<sup>53</sup> Stathis N Kalyvas, “Warfare in Civil Wars,” *Rethinking the Nature of War*, 2005, 88, doi:10.4324/9780203001332.

Processing the events of the Syrian Civil War with an understanding of the distinction between “New” and “Old” wars we can analyze the effect of greed manifested through the rebels and the state who mobilized different and pre-existent ethnicities to increase the duration of the war. The debate on ‘New’ and ‘Old’ wars finds that ‘New Wars’ are motivated by identity politics and are mobilized around ethnic, religious and racial identity to claim power.<sup>54</sup> After the Arab Spring movement, many of the countries that witnessed the breakout of rebellion have fallen into the abyss of civil wars. In order to understand further the factors that lead to a break out of civil war in the Middle East and particularly in Syria, we must understand that the civil war there cannot be easily framed as one that was motivated by sectarian or identity politics alone. In the context of what was happening in the Arab world, the protests that started in Syria were motivated by ideological and political agendas; namely looking for more economic reform in improvised areas in the countryside and political freedom. Therefore, although some research generated since the start of the conflict would dismiss it as a sectarian war making this distinction shows that it is not. However, we cannot deny that later on when the regime responded to these protests with violence; and began deploying Alawi militia in Sunni majority areas the conflict began to take a more sectarian identity.<sup>55</sup> Therefore, we must be able to make a clear distinction between the first few days of the uprising, and a few months later when the regime began labelling the protestors as ‘terrorists’, and calling itself the ‘protector of the minorities thus framing the conflict as a war between

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<sup>54</sup> Kaldor, *New and Old Wars*.

<sup>55</sup> Artur Malantowicz, "Civil War in Syria and the 'New Wars' Debate" *Amsterdam Law Forum* (2013).

the Alawis and the Sunnis.<sup>56</sup> A number of studies have recently focused on the micro foundations of the mobilization tactics, the role of patronage networks and even emotions in the study of rebellions.<sup>57</sup> Thus my research will add to that trajectory by analyzing the different incentives of violence in the Syrian civil war that were present due to the different networks of patronage and methods of mobilization that led to the war. Tracing the historical formation of Syria and the uprising will provide us with more data on the dynamics of the conflict and its duration.

## **1.2 Conceptual Framework**

A popular framework used by scholars to explain civil war and internal conflicts has been the mechanisms of Greed and Grievance theories through which Collier and Hoeffler used three study points of Greed and Four points of Grievance to explain the determinants of such wars<sup>58</sup>. According to their research “Greed and Grievance in Civil War” they came to the conclusion that motives of greed by rebel groups to acquire the profit of obtaining and selling nature resources best explains why civil wars take place. Yet, this theory was criticized by scholars such as Keen, in his book “Complex Emergencies” published in 2008, that greed alone is not sufficient to explain the motives of the actors involved, rather there has to exist a set of grievances such as inequalities in the distribution of wealth, a disintegration of the political structure or an ethnic conflict that would lead to the onset of a civil war<sup>59</sup>. Based on the arguments of Collier in his

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<sup>56</sup> Malantowicz, "Civil War in Syria and the 'New Wars' Debate".

<sup>57</sup> Kathleen G. Cunningham, “Actor Fragmentation and Civil War Bargaining: How Internal Divisions Generate Civil Conflict,” *American Journal of Political Science* 57, (July 2013), <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23496645> (accessed April 4, 2017)

<sup>58</sup> Collier and Hoeffler, “Greed and Grievance in Civil War”.

<sup>59</sup> David Keen, *Complex emergencies* (Cambridge: Polity, 2008).

works, this theory is derived from the school of rational thought, whereas the greed theory is mainly for opportunity gains. “The greed theory is an economic theory that assumes that the control resources if for the purpose of personal gains. The conflict then is started when leaders or groups sought after taking control of a natural resource with the goal or capitalizing of private or personal profits”.<sup>60</sup> According to the theory, conflict is reflected in the competition between groups over controlling loot-able resources. In that sense, a civil war will occur when a rebel group fighting against a government has access to rents. Thus the presence of opportunities of greed will lead to an onset of a civil war, extend its duration and the intensity of that conflict. Collier’s research stands on the assumption that rebel-groups will disguise their true intentions for controlling resources with support for grievances that might exist within a certain society. The greed explanation assumes three aspects of opportunity, the financing of the insurgency, the recruitment of insurgency and the geography that allows the insurgency to spread and make gains. While the existence of a natural resource does increase the ability of a certain group to finance a rebellion, aid from the international community can satisfy that variable in the situation where a natural resource is not present such as with the case of Syria. Therefore, while studying civil wars we must understand why do people choose to use arms and violence rather than more diplomatic measures or more peaceful tactics. A way to understand this is to look at two variables adopted by Gurr in his book “Why do Men Rebel?”. The first variable being “potential for collective violence” and the second

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<sup>60</sup> Ryan J. Connelly, Managing the Resource Curse and Promoting Stabilization through the Rentier State Framework,” *The SAIS Journal of Global Affairs* (2011).

variable being “potential for political violence”<sup>61</sup>. The first variable is a function of the extent and intensity of shared discontent among members of society, while the second variable is the function of the degree to which such discontents are blamed on the political system and its agents. Different types of methods to approach the pressing argument of whether greed factors or grievances within a state are the determinants of civil war. While some theories, particularly economic approaches that depend mainly on empirical evidence have been at conflict or contradict other theories that aim to explain internal conflict in some cases.

The opportunities of greed, were also opportunities of grievance which intensified and increased the duration of the conflict. Factors of anger and fear also play part in the willingness of civilians to join in an armed conflict. With that in mind, for the purpose of this thesis, the research and analysis will be focusing on the opportunities of greed that influence the duration and intensity of the Syrian Civil War. The research will not only be focusing on the greed that the rebels are seeking, but also the greed opportunities that the government of Syria seeks to continue the fighting, rather than resolving it.<sup>62</sup> As scholars we are concerned with “the explanation of conflict in terms of motive: the circumstances in which people want to rebel are viewed sufficiently rare to continue explanation”.<sup>63</sup> For the purposes of proofing the hypotheses this thesis carefully analyzes to understand how the Syrian Uprising escalated to become a full on civil conflict, with a near death toll of three-hundred thousand people. In a case such as the Syrian Civil War the potential and

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<sup>61</sup> Ted Robert Gurr, *Why Men Rebel* (London: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2016).

<sup>62</sup> Keen, *Useful Enemies: When Waging Wars Is More Important than Winning Them*.

<sup>63</sup> Collier and Hoeffler, “Greed and grievance in civil war”.

magnitude for both collective and political violence was high given the circumstances that had been playing before and during the conflict with the failure of the political system, and the many grievances felt by the people were seen as a result of the authoritarian Assad regime. The macro-analysis of the determinants of the extent of violence leads to an understanding of the onset, intensity and duration of the conflict.”<sup>64</sup> Whether violence is used as a motive for destruction or as a motive to reach an ends of building a new system out of the ashes of an older one, the Syrian Civil War has many aspects that determine the intensity and duration of this internal war. The duration and intensity of a civil war can be traced back to the economic interests that were created and ended in chaos. Despite what some people might think of civil war being against rationality, it is in particular this chaotic status of war that can be used to further benefit someone’s agenda. According to David Keen in his book “The Economic Functions of Violence in Civil Wars” economic interests are the push factors behind the protraction of violence whether it is top-down violence that is spurred by leaders and the regime or bottom-up violence that is created and mobilized through rebels or civilians joining in the chaos<sup>65</sup>. Essentially, the continuation of the conflict can be traced back to these benefits and thus the protraction of violence becomes the goal of the war.

### **1.3 Conflicts in the Middle East and the Syrian Civil War**

The Middle East as a region has experienced many conflicts, particularly ones that date back to 1948 with the creation of the state of Israel. The Arab-Israeli conflict has shaped a lot of the policies and the relations between the states within the Middle

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<sup>64</sup> Gurr, *Why Men Rebel*.

<sup>65</sup> Keen, *The Economic Functions of Violence in Civil War*, 24-54 .

East and even the whole region and the rest of the world. The region has also been witness to several civil wars some of which have continued to erupt even after they were resolved such as the civil war in Sudan and also ethnically motivated civil wars as the one in Lebanon in the late 1970s. The case of the conflict in the Sudan was a resource greed motivated conflict emphasizing the arguments of Hoeffler and Collier on Lutable resources and civil war onset<sup>66</sup>. The discovery of oil in the South led the North to attack and to acquire the oil for itself. While the North might have found the opportunity to attack the South by mobilizing pre-existing religious and sectarian grievances, they were motivated to attack after the discovery of a natural-resource such as oil. “The grievances of the Sudan’s people, especially those in the ‘marginalized areas of south, west and east pre-date the development of the oil sector, but oil has exacerbated political mobilization on all sides. Since Sudan’s oil came in stream in 1999 it has increasingly resembled the predatory state model.”<sup>67</sup> On the other hand, the civil war in Lebanon was quiet different in nature although quiet similar to the current conflict in Syria. Although framed as an example of sectarian violence, the civil war in Lebanon was more of a fight for political power. “The conflict lasted for 15 years, cost 150,000 lives, left 300,000 injured and led to the emigration of almost a million people, nearly brought the Lebanese state to a collapse.”<sup>68</sup> As Christian militia clashed with the PLO that had recently arrived to the state, the opportunity for violence was manifested in the sectarian divisions that existed

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<sup>66</sup> Collier and Hoeffler, “Greed and Grievance in civil war”, 564.

<sup>67</sup> Peter Fragiskatos, "Extractive Economies and Conflicts in the Global South: Multi-Regional Perspectives on Rentier Politics, Kenneth Omeje. ed., Aldershot UK: Ashgate, 2008 pp. 251," *Canadian Journal of Political Science* 43, no. 04 (2010): , doi:10.1017/s0008423910000831.

<sup>68</sup> Florence Gaub, “Lebanon's Civil War : Seven Lessons Forty Years on,” (2015): 1–2, doi:10.2815/475463.

since the creation of Lebanon under the rule of the French Mandate in 1920. Like “New Wars” these opportunities accompanied with fear and ideas on restoring and saving a past glory of the Maronite’s being in power, led to the mobilization of such ethnic differences that eventually added to the bloodshed and protraction of violence<sup>69</sup>. While the Lebanese and current Syrian civil war are quiet similar, the Syrian conflict is unique that the events in Syria that had started as a rebellion against the regime escalated into a civil war unlike neighboring states in the Arab world such as Egypt and Tunisia with similar characteristics. The Syrian Civil War is not a case-study where only grievances or greed were manifested, rather both played different roles with the conflict. Past grievances of the rural population were methods of mobilization during the first months of the uprising, and the regime motivated by its patrimonial nature also mobilized ancient sectarian differences to rally up its supporters mainly consisting of Alawis and other minorities. As the civil war dynamics shifted and terrorist organizations infiltrated the opposition opportunities of greed were manifested in looting aid money, controlling some oil fields and capitalizing on fighting terror to stay in power. Thus, this project aims at situating the Syrian Civil War in the larger framework of this new approach in the study of civil wars; to understand the incentives of violence whether manifested through grievances or greed.

The Arab world witnessed mass uprisings, specifically in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Syria and Yemen. The regimes in Tunisia, Egypt Libya and Yemen broke down in the few months following the Arab uprisings, yet the Syrian regime held on to power which later led to the onset of civil war. In an interview where Bashar al-Assad, was asked whether he thinks that the demonstrations ripping through Tunisia and Egypt toppling

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<sup>69</sup> Kaldor, *New and Old Wars*.



both the Mubarak and Ben-Ali regimes would be spreading through to Syria, he denied stating that while there has been slow progress and economic hardships, the regime has been working to fix the problems and the people would not be following that trend of revolting. In fact it was surprise to both the Regime, Syrians, analysts and policy makers that such a movement has caught on in the country.<sup>70</sup> This surprise was due to the smooth transfer of power from father-to son in 2000 that the regime was able to survive that they would withstand such turmoil in the region.<sup>71</sup> Looking closely at the Syrian Uprising one finds that it is extremely complex and that could somehow explain the trajectory that the conflict took in opposition to other revolutions happening in neighboring countries. While Syrians might have not intentionally saw themselves as a sectarian society<sup>72</sup>, the Syrians society is divided along some line of ethnicity (refer to figure 1). The majority of the country being Sunni is being ruled by an Alawi minority which the Assad regime belongs too. These divisions came to light since the Alawi minority was much in control of the security apparatus and militia.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Hokayem, *Syria's Uprising and The Fracture of the Levant*.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> James Fearon, "Syria's Civil War," *The Political Science of Syria's War* (2013):13-18.

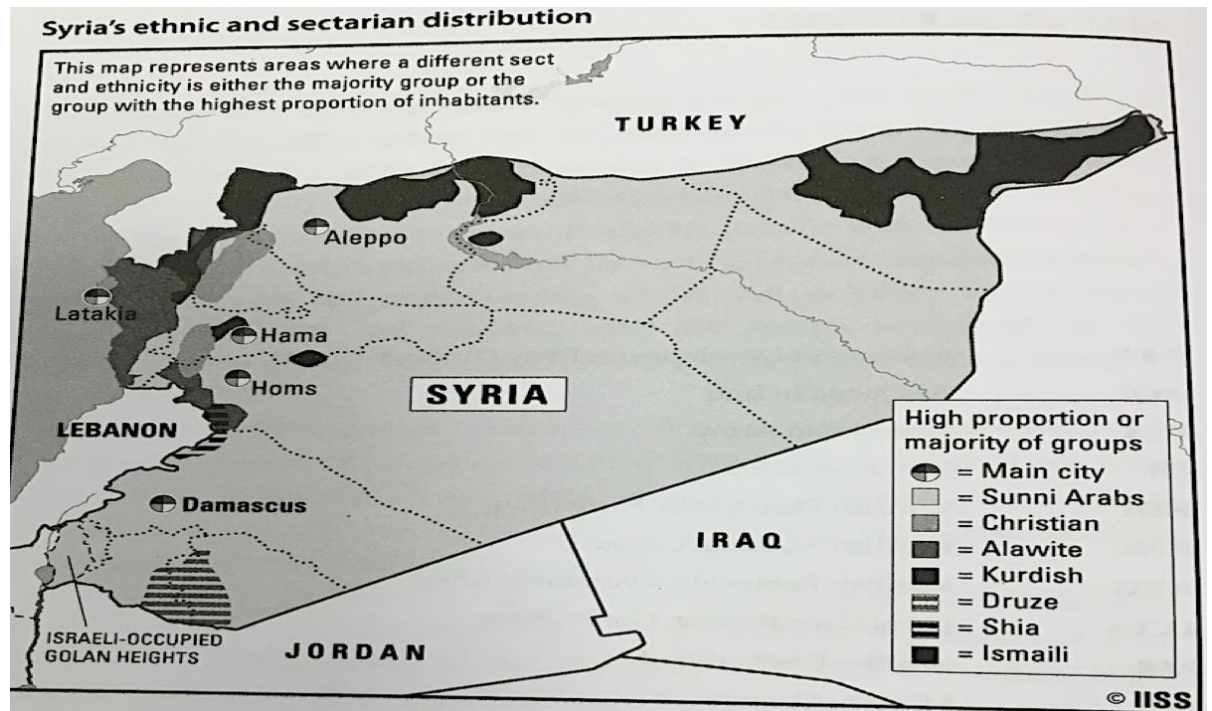


Figure 1. Map showing Syrian Ethnic Divisions<sup>74</sup>

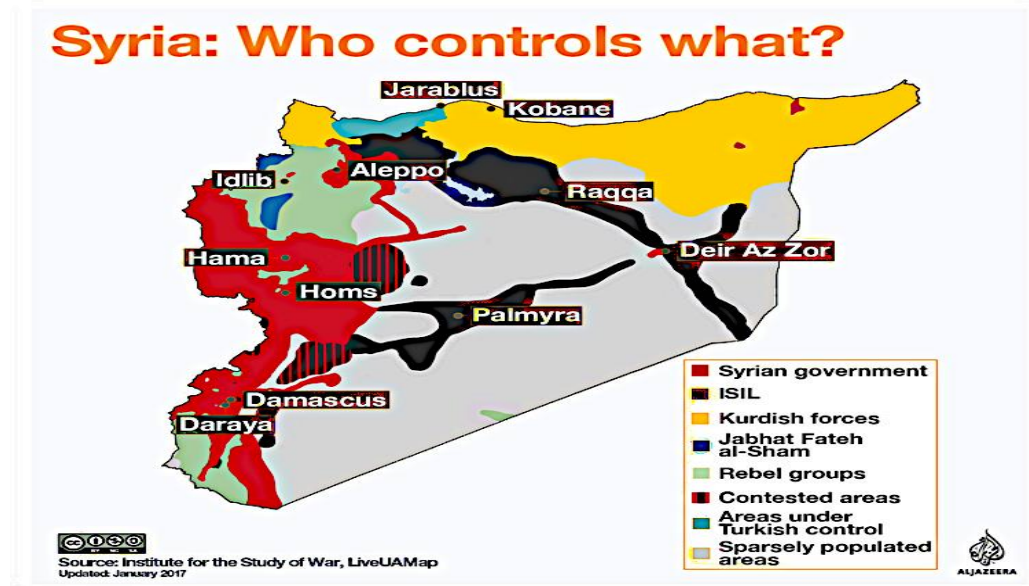
#### 1.4 Uprising to Civil War

The Syrian uprising began in March 2011, when a group of teenagers in the city of Daraa were arrested and tortured after writing anti-regime graffiti. Although the regime declared that there will be reforms, Sunni-majority cities continued to revolt against the regime as police crackdown continued. As this mobilization continued both from the regime and the people factions started to play part in society, with defectors from the Syrian military announced the formation of Free Syrian Army dedicated to fighting and toppling the regime.<sup>75</sup> As the conflict continued many rebel groups began to emerge (refer to figure 2) and as the number of deaths topped the conflict seems to be very distant from any sort of

<sup>74</sup> Hokayem, *Syria's Uprising and The Fracture of the Levant*.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

resolution. Thus as researchers we should understand the uniqueness of the Syrian Civil War and how it falls in the current literature on the topic of internal conflict itself.



**Figure 2. Map of rebel group and government controlled cities in the Civil War<sup>76</sup>**

As described by many news agencies the Syrian Civil War can be traced into being two civil wars or having two distinct phases. The first being the escalation of violence from an uprising where the grievances of a population divided by sectarian lines and loyalty to a political party in control <sup>77</sup> and the second phase, or a second civil war as described by the media starts with the involvement of ISIS in November 2013<sup>78</sup>. Why has the Syrian Uprising developed from protesting against the Assad regime, to become a civil war that continues to exist today since 2011? Despite the Arab Spring protests

<sup>76</sup> "Syria's Civil War Explained," *Al Jazeera*, December 14, 2016.

<sup>77</sup> Nikolaos Van Dam, *The Struggle for Power in Syria: Politics and Society under Asad and the Ba'ath Party* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1996).

<sup>78</sup> Martin Chulov et al. "Syria's Civil War: Five Years of Guardian Reporting." *The Guardian*, March 14, 2016. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/mar/14/syria-civil-war-five-years-guardian-reporting>.

spreading across to different nations, the Syrian Uprising has developed in a trajectory of its own. While grievances experienced by the Syrian people can explain the onset of the civil war as one understands and analyzes these determinants, we can't help but wonder why it continues and all chances at resolving the conflict have failed. With the end of seize fire in cities such as Aleppo and Homs prospects of conflict resolution diminish. This research project is concerned with the trajectory that the Syrian Uprising has taken and an attempt to understand and analyze the determinants of duration and intensity of the Syrian Civil War. In his book "Useful Enemies: When waging wars is more important than winning them". David Keen challenges a traditional view of civil war as a destruction of a previous system and a fight between two different sides as to who will end up winning. Rather he argues that in some wars "winning has taken a back seat."<sup>79</sup> War systems as he calls them instead of simply saying war; as he finds it more appropriate as chaos and destruction are not the goal of such conflicts but it's to gain profit, serve as ultimate opportunity to make certain gains and satisfy components of greed. These opportunities of greed can be traced back to securing protection money from elite groups, securing international aid, gained military benefits and status, or pillage in the form of controlling resources to pay off soldiers. Further, as Keen suggested in his book, efforts of counter-insurgency might also serve as factors of greed to protract the civil war as a government starts labelling a certain group as terrorists or an imminent threat to civilians to be able to stall elections.

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<sup>79</sup> Keen, *Useful Enemies: When Waging Wars Is More Important than Winning Them*.

Tracing the phases of the civil war in Syria to determine the effect of the Syrian regime, the grievances of the people, the greedy rebels, insurgency and greedy outsiders<sup>80</sup> will add to the understanding of the topic and particularly to understand the internal war in Syria and lead to its resolution. The use of violence of escalation could be at many time an irrational decision given that two factors at combat or disagreement might want to cooperate to maintain the status quo.<sup>81</sup> Yet there are many determinants to why certain states would choose to use repression and escalate violence towards non-combatant protestors. Such of these would be regime type, the institutional structure of the government at question, the coercive apparatus of the regime, its abidance with international law and the importance of human rights in the eyes of that particular regime as opposed to its fear from repercussions of the international community.<sup>82</sup> Using this theoretical framework to analyze the escalation of violence this thesis aims to reach a conclusion on the hypotheses of the change of the Syrian Uprising from a revolution to an internal war as opposed to other Arab Spring countries. Following the framework of the study of civil wars will help in determining the different incentives of violence with the Syrian Civil War and how it was used as tactics for mobilization both by the regime and the opposition. The arguments on greed and grievances will also guide this research to make conclusions about the factors that led to the civil war to occur; such as the past grievances of Sunnis in the security forces; which give the opportunity many of them

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<sup>80</sup> Kalyvas, *The Oxford Handbook of Comparative Politics*.

<sup>81</sup> F.C.Zagare, "The Dynamics of Escalation," *Department of Political Science, University of New York Buffalo* (1989).

<sup>82</sup> Daniel W. Hill and Zachary M. Jones, "An Empirical Evaluation of Explanations for State Repression," *American Political Science Review* 108, (2014);, doi:10.1017/s0003055414000306.

defected from the army and the improvement and alienation of the rural areas as a result of the failed economic liberalization policies that were hindered by conflicting ideologies and patronage politics. In addition, economic agendas that were present as the civil war continued will give more details on the many greed opportunities that the rebels utilize to further prolong the war. The second chapter of the thesis will trace the historical formation of the Syrian state particularly under the French mandate to understand further the dynamics of the relationship between the different sects living with the nation state and how that relationship could pose as a war threat in the future. Further, the chapter also examines the politics of the formation of the Ba'th Party and the policies of Hafiz Al-Asad on the Syrian state.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **THE CREATION OF THE SYRIAN STATE: A HISTORICAL BACKGROUND**

*“The Syria that we know today is in some sense ‘a residual entity’; it is the Syria of what is left after all such acts of dismemberment”*<sup>83</sup>

Nazih Ayubi

Following the fall of the Ottoman Empire after the Triple Alliance lost the war, the British and the French divided the area of the Levant amongst themselves. As the Allies emerged victorious, Woodrow Wilson the US president proposed fourteen points to preserve peace in Europe and end all wars. Wilson’s fifth point was dedicated to the independence of the colonies. “A free, open-minded and absolutely impartial adjustment of all colonial claims based upon a strict observance of the principle that in determining all such questions of sovereignty, the interests of the populations concerned must have equal weight with the equitable claims of the government whose title is to be determined.”<sup>84</sup> Wilson’s speech on the self-determination of the colonies meant that colonies such as those under the rule of the Ottoman Empire, would gain independence and enjoy self-rule. Such speech worried the French and the British who appeared to have no intention of doing so. In 1916, the French and the British secretly drew up an agreement known as the Sykes-Picot Treaty that divided territory that was once under the rule of the Ottomans to fall under the sphere of influence of the British and French.<sup>85</sup> The

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<sup>83</sup> Nazih Nasif Ayubi, *Over-stating the Arab State: politics and society in the Middle East* (London: I. B. Tauris Publishers, 2009), 116.

<sup>84</sup> Woodrow Wilson, “The Fourteen Points,” *The Lancet* 251, no. 6503 (1948): 601, doi:10.1016/S0140-6736(48)92009-1.

<sup>85</sup> Edward Peter Fitzgerald, “France’s Middle Eastern Ambitions, the Sykes-Picot Negotiations, and the Oil Fields of Mosul, 1915-1918,” *The Journal of Modern History* 66, no. 4 (1994): 697, doi:10.1086/244937.

French controlled the northern part of the Levant, while the British created a mandate in Iraq, Trans-Jordan and Palestine. While the mandates were supposed to have equal rights and not under occupation, the French practiced the same legacies of control and colonization as they had done for years in their French colonies. Under the mandate system proposed by the League of Nations the land once known as 'Greater Syria' was divided along religious and ethnic lines. Today, in its place stands the independent nation-states of Israel, Jordan, Syria and Lebanon. Syria gained independence in 1946 only after the French were destroyed during WWII and they could no longer control the rise of the Syrian nationalist movements and continuous rebellions. Since independence, the new state lacked political stability where Syria witnessed several military coups and a fight for power. Following aspirations to unit all Arabs, Egypt and Syria formed a union only to be broken three years after it was forged in 1958. The split from Egypt gave power to the Ba'th Party that has previously lost contact with the people due to the recommendations of Gamal Abdul-Nasser who called for the disbanding of all Syrian parties during the unification with Egypt. The Arab-Israeli war had a catastrophic impact on Syria, when they lost the Golan Heights to Israel. Using this turbulent time, one of the military generals, Hafiz Al-Asad was able to rise to power and consolidated in power the Alawite minority and military control. Following his death, his son, Bashar Al-Asad took over power by popular referendum in 2000. Despite the stability that the military control established when Al-Asad came to power, Syria remained a fragmented society. Inspired by the events happening in the Middle East in 2011, Syrians too revolted against the government and Al-Asad. Yet, unlike neighboring states of Tunisia and Egypt, the Syrian revolution escalated to a Civil War.



## **2.1 Territory and Religion**

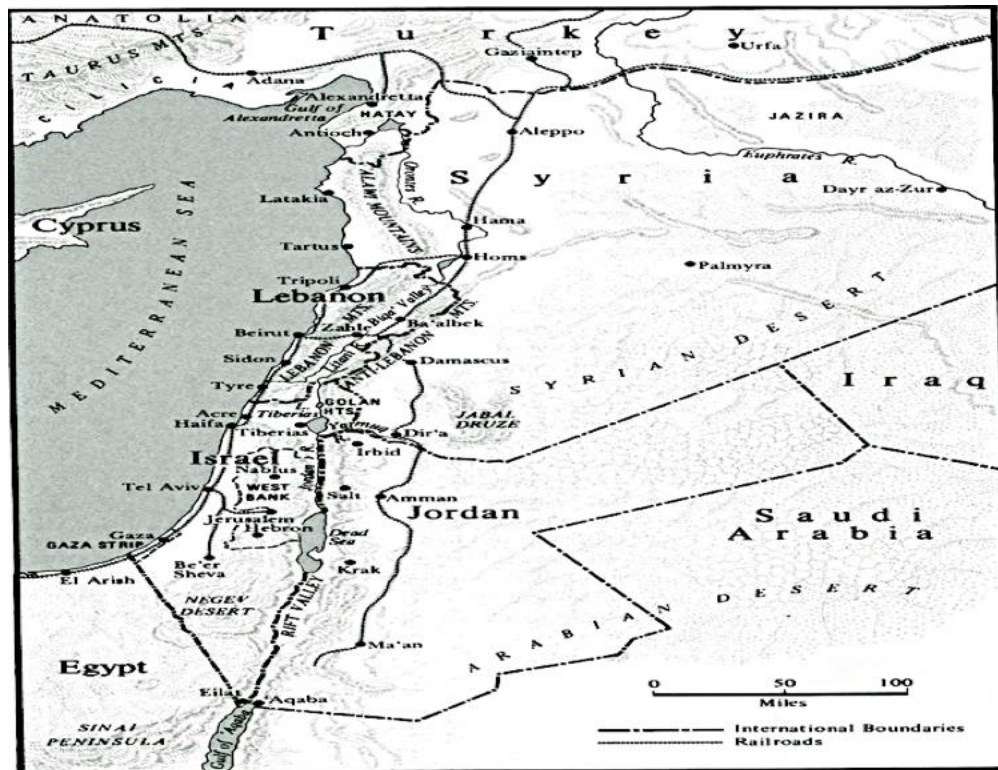
Geographically Syrian territory is divided by the Taurus Mountains to its north, the Mediterranean in the West and to its east stretches the desert across which lies the borders with Iraq, Saudi Arabia and Egypt.<sup>86</sup> To its Arab inhabitants this land was known by its Arabic name of “Sham”, meaning north. It was the Greek and the Romans who had named it Syria, yet in the 20<sup>th</sup> century when the modern state of Syria was established both the Arabs and the West adopted the latter name. From the North to the South the land stretches 800km and 480km in width.<sup>87</sup> The terrain comprises of mountains, a coastal zone, and a large eastern area that includes mountains and vast deserts. Despite its access to the coast, Syria does not have a water source that unifies the country together as opposed to Egypt and Iraq. The Syrian society was splintered and never unified under one government. Thus, Syrians never saw themselves as one Syrian nation. Thus, cities and towns in Syria were not concerned with a unified national identity or nationalistic loyalty to their state. Therefore, scholars do not view Syria as one political entity “it never acquired political form as a single state containing only Syria and nothing else, Syria was always a province of an empire elsewhere.”<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> Derek Hopwood, *Syria 1945 - 1986: politics and society* (London: Routledge, 2014), 3.

<sup>87</sup> Hopwood, *Syria 1945-1986*. 5 .

<sup>88</sup> Daniel Pipes, *Greater Syria: the history of an ambition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 16.



**Figure 3. Map showing Greater Syria prior to divisions by the French in 1920 from “Greater Syria: The History of Ambition.”<sup>89</sup>**

Those residing in the cities and towns were loyal to their families, sect and area of residence whether in large cities or rural areas. While there existed an internal bond between the different ethnic and religious groups they lived separately in towns that were dominated by a single group of people. During times of uncertainty these different groups segregated themselves and build barricaded cities where the Muslims, Christians and Jews lived separately. The inclusive loyalty to the location of birth was manifested in the rivalry between Damascus and Aleppo for power. Damascus, the current Syrian capital, has always been important politically, socially and economically. Situated in the northern

<sup>89</sup> Pipes, *Greater Syria: the history of an ambition.*

region, Damascus became the capital of the Islamic world, when armies from central Arabia conquered the city and with it started an Islamic identity to the city. Built on the ruins of the Greco-Roman city, Damascus remained the capital until it became a province when the Caliphate was moved to Baghdad in 750AD.<sup>90</sup> The city continued to flourish with a distinct Islamic identity but in 1920 it fell into the hands of the French in return imposing their identity on the city. On the other hand, Aleppo developed as an important economic and trading center due to its geographical location, neighboring Anatolia. Gradually, the city was given its autonomy, and at other times incorporated with other territories. Even when it became part of modern Syria, and in 1918 was considered a second capital to the Syrian republic, Aleppo never lost its independent identity.<sup>91</sup> Other regions such as the cities of Homs and Hama in the North-East also flourished and have become the grass-roots for important families in Syrian politics, acting as rivals to the status of Damascus.

Another manifestation of the regional and sectarian loyalties is the dedicated loyalty in Syria to religious identity. Syrian society encompasses of Sunni Arabs, Shia, Ismailis, Alwaites, Druze, and Christian Orthodox. Scholars have described the ethnically and religiously plural polities of the Levant as “The Mosaic State” (Al-Dawla-al-Fusaifisiyya)<sup>92</sup>. While this image might not be entirely perfect because of the Sunni Arab majority residing in the Levant, the region is home to various religious minorities.

Christianity flourished in the region in the city under the Byzantines until 643AD.<sup>93</sup> Islam

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<sup>90</sup> Hopwood, *Syria 1945 – 1986*, 5.

<sup>91</sup> William L. Cleveland and Martin P. Bunton, *A history of the modern Middle East* (Philadelphia, PA: Westview Press, 2016), 150.

<sup>92</sup> Ayubi, *Over-stating the Arab State*, 108.

<sup>93</sup> Hopwood, *Syria 1945 – 1986*, 7.

then spread across the regions when the Arabs conquered the Levant and Islam became the dominant religion in the Greater Syria. The Grand Mosque of Damascus served as the leading position in Islamic traditions. In the provinces and other towns Islam took a less intellectual and was a more popular form of religion that was connected to the local saints and thus became more dominant. Sunnis make up around 74% of the population and are not limited to a particular region in the state. Other Muslim groups make up around 13% of the population. The Alawites are Syria's largest minority. Also known as Nusayri; descendants of a local tribe that prevailed in the 9<sup>th</sup> century live in Latakia. Historically, the Alawites were poor farmers who lived in Jabal- Al Nusayriyyah, near Latakia. Their religion is a combination of pre-Islamic features, Shi'ism and Christian elements as they had converted from Christianity to Islam. Another Muslim minority living in Syria are the Druze, who make up around 3% of the population. The Druze community can be located around the area of the Levant in Syria, Lebanon and Israel, yet they are mainly concentrated in Jabal Al Druze. Although they derive from a Muslim sect, the Druze identify and are viewed by others as Arabs but not Muslim as they are seen by Sunnis as heretics. Finally, Christians live mainly in Homs, Hama, Aleppo and Damascus they make up around 10% of Syria's population. For long Orthodox Syrians have been governed by the Greek patriarch in Constantinople. Yet an important change that took place in the 19<sup>th</sup> century marked an era where Arab nationalism was on the rise, when they successfully elected an Arab patriarch in Damascus.

## **2.2 Syria under Ottoman Rule**

The history of Syria under the Ottomans was important in the formation of the Modern state. During the rule of the Ottomans which began in 1516, after ending Mamluk rule in Syria many institutions were created that slowly shaped the dynamics of Syrian society today. Under the Ottoman rule Damascus became an administrative center of the empire and slowly the Ottomans instilled the Turkish language and governed their tradition. While Syrian society remained Arab and Muslim, slowly there was created a sense of being part of the empire and being Ottoman. Changes in neighboring Egypt directly influence Ottoman rule over Syria. After Muhammed Ali took over power in Egypt his son Ibrahim invaded and occupied Syria during the years 1831-1840. He expelled the Ottomans and introduced many reforms that followed suit those that his father was implementing in Egypt. During his rule Ibrahim was able to introduce a central administration, collect taxes and conscript Syrians into his armies. Further, he created local administrative councils on which both Christians and Jews were represented. As large-scale economic and agricultural development took way in Syria, Ibrahim opened up routes for trade with the European market and soon European goods and ideas began to flow within the region. The emergence of European-modelled institutions in Syria gave way for European influence in the region. The first sign of European influence came through the era of the Tanzimat from the 1800-1840. This was evident in “bureaucratic centralization, registration of land ownership, the building of new armies, modern educational systems, and the attempt to create the control of the government over the economy and to maximize tax revenue were the main aspects of

reforms.”<sup>94</sup> While the era of the Tanizmat or reform intended to deviate European influence from the region and to appease the minorities in the Ottoman Empire, the opposite result took place and the Europeans found ways to intervene in the affairs of the Ottoman Empire, and the French particularly meddled in the region of Greater Syria. The European missions that intervened in local affairs began opening schools and colleges, offering western education to students whom were mainly Christians. They later offered protection to religious groups and minorities all the while their moves upset the existing traditional balance. During this time Muslims were upset that the Christians were gaining the most from European intervention. This opened the way for the French to claim influence over Syria. After overthrowing Ibrahim with the help of the British, the Ottomans came revived their control over Greater Syria. Due to the weakened power of the Ottomans and the authoritarian rule that Othman imposed on the Syrians, a process for independence began. “In 1913 an Arab congress met in Paris, calling for greater participation in the reformed affairs of the Empire.”<sup>95</sup> Yet the First World War didn’t allow them to implement their aims. As WWI came to an end the Sykes-Picot agreement recognized French influence in Syria and Lebanon. While the British controlled Palestine, Iraq and Jordan. Thus the road to breaking up Greater-Syria was under way.

### **2.3 Syria under French Rule**

The French rule over Syria was the most critical in the history of the region. Following the end of WWI, the French claimed authority over the Levant and used their previous influence and relation with the minorities, particularly Christian minorities to

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<sup>94</sup> Ayubi, *Over-stating the Arab State*,71.

<sup>95</sup> Hopwood, *Syria 1945 – 1986*.

claim legitimacy. Originally, the mandate system approved by the League of nations was set-up until the populations of the Levant were able to govern themselves. Yet, while the French might have portrayed their presence in the region as guests with a message for enlightenment in reality they were conquerors. A French publication in the 1930s saw that “in the opinion of the majority of the French, France poses Syria. Its duty is to administer and preserve French interests there. One does not negotiate with the colonies. One keeps them and protects them against outside threats. One administers them. And that is all...for the majority of Frenchmen in effect our mandate in Syria is hardly more than a fiction.”<sup>96</sup> Rather than follow the visions of Wilson on self-determination and self-government the mandate system was created as a means to re-create old colonial aspirations and possessions that were shaped to suit the aspiration of the new era. The French humiliated the Syrians, and in reverse, the Syrians mistrusted the French as they were autocratic and saw the Syrians as inferior to themselves. Their aims to control the Levant, were based on three strategies, the first was achieved due to the diverse composition of the Levant. The French “saw the Levant region as a complex, fragile mosaic of ethno-religious communities locked in conflict”<sup>97</sup>, they saw the divisions between the different sects as ground for the support of the occupation and that the only way to keep the peace between the fragmented society was through an external ruler. They claimed that they were protectors of the catholic minorities. They also had major economic plans for the region, as they were investors in the Lebanese silk industry and they wanted to open up the Syrian market for trade and transform Syrian agricultural into

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<sup>96</sup> Ibid.

<sup>97</sup> Daniel Neep, *Occupying Syria under the French mandate: insurgency, space and state formation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 26.

a more productive and profitable industry. The third reason the French wanted to occupy the Levant was of their interests in North Africa that they believed were being jeopardized by the rise of Arab Nationalism, and British intervention in the region.<sup>98</sup>

French policies in the mandate were interventionist and their policies of being protectionists of the Catholic minorities created a division between them and the Arab Muslims. The French controlled Syria and Lebanon in the 1920s, through a large military and a complex hierarchy of French administrators. The authority of the state was in the hands of the high commissioner.<sup>99</sup> Also Direct-rule imposed by the French meant that while the Syrians held administrative positions there was no real power, since there were French advisors for every Syrian admin and final decision making was in the hands of the French. Electoral politics were also slow. Their direct intervention policies and strategies of divide and rule left behind a fragile and weak political structure that was not able to withstand pressure and political challenges that left the Syrian state facing losing battles. Unlike the British, French colonial rule did not create local political leaders or legitimate rule and so the system finally collapsed after the French withdrew in 1946.<sup>100</sup> The effects of French rule led to more fragmentation of the region and it manipulated the sectarian differences. The French started to breakdown the Mandate and the first move in 1920 was the creation of Greater Lebanon with a Christian majority and a large number of Muslim inhabitants at the expense of Syria. Since that Syria never recognized the partition between it and Lebanon and for long that partition created tensions between Lebanon and Syria, pushing the Syrians to later claim control and legitimacy in Lebanon. Aleppo and

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<sup>98</sup> Cleveland and Bunton, *A history of the modern Middle East*, 200.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid, 210.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid.



Damascus were divided into two states. The area around Latakia was declared another separate state in 1922. Yet in 1924, Aleppo and Damascus were once again incorporated within the state of Syria.

The effect of French rule in the mandate was catastrophic. Although the French had help in the formation of an army and allowed minorities to enlist, this new form of power given to the minorities stirred hatred and unrest. This ultimately changed the Sunni dominance in Syria which existed before the creation of the mandate. Gaining power through enlisting in the military, the minorities were finally taking up arms for independence and the French policies in the region led to more fragmentation. They paved the way for sectarian violence through the separation of Aleppo and Damascus and the creation of greater Lebanon where the Maronite remained the largest religious community there. They even furthered this sectarian tension by creating a distinction between the Alawites and the Druze treating them as new states, up until 1942 when France added them again along with Damascus, Aleppo, Homs and Hama to create what is known today as the modern state of Syria.<sup>101</sup>

The French rule led by an ideology of divide and rule and unrest was a result. A group of nationalists created the people's party with aims to achieve Syrian Unity and an independent state. The founders of the party were urban bourgeoisie. They wanted unity, independence, modernizing reforms, education and industry. The French liked to emphasize the social and cultural differences among the Syrians. The Syrians began to fight against the French and the Druze Revolt took place from 1925-1927. The fighting

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<sup>101</sup> Neep, *Occupying Syria*, 78.

began with a defeat to the French but by the summer of 1927, the French brought the hostilities to an end. Negotiations for a constitution took place, elections resulted in an assembly dominated by the nationalists. The assembly proposed Syrian territories constitute an indivisible political unity which the High Commissioner rejected. The French and Syrian Nationalist movements continued to clash with the changes finally taking place with the break of WWII. The revolt of the Druze became a localized rebellion and a symbol for Arab nationalism, which turned into a nationalist movement. Yet as a result of the revolt the Druze and the Alawites gained their autonomy and further distanced themselves from the Sunni Muslims of Syria. By the end of WWII, Syria was compelled to leave Syria and in 1946, Syria gained its independence. More than twenty years after the creation of the Mandate, the French left Syria a lot different than what it was with, a group of nationalist elite, minorities and other groups all fighting for power. The situation in the Middle East gave the conflict a new perspective, with the creation of the state of Israel, Arab armies rushed to defend Palestine. Although unified the Arab armies were ill prepared and their defeat sparked resentment and hatred towards the existing ruling elite in Syria and Egypt. Egyptian Free Officers led by Mohamed Naguib and Abdul Nasser staged a coup and replaced the King as the new rulers of Egypt. Following suit, Syrian young officers assumed the role of guardians of Syria and believed they had the legitimacy and honor of the state. A series of coups took place in Syria after the French left.

## **2.4 THE FORMATION OF THE BA'TH PARTY**

Known as the Arab Socialist Renaissance Party or Ba'th Party, the ideology of the party was dedicated to the renaissance of the Arab world through secularism and socialism. The founders of the party Michel Aflaq; a Greek Orthodox born in Damascus in 1905<sup>102</sup>, and Salah-al-din-Bitar, also from Damascus<sup>103</sup> grew up in a time where the Ottoman Empire was advocating for an Islamic caliphate but was being bombarded with ideas of Arab nationalism, and European influence. During their time France was setting up schools and institutions in Syria and the founders were a result of this environment. These were the main factors that shaped the party's doctrine and manifesto. Educated in Europe, Aflaq and Bitar were inspired by the rising socialist ideology at the time, both founders believed that the success of the party resided on what is a blend of European socialism and Arab nationalism. "The Ba'th was that its leaders were part of a highly educated minority, and on this basis launched their movement, despite their theory's emphasis on the masses. We shall see the system directly reflected in Ba'athist ideas of a 'socialist vanguard'. Their slogan was unity, freedom and socialism. Aflaq saw three conditions for success of the ideology and the revolutionary ideas through establishing a secular and industrial nation with the party acting as the moral vanguard of the state. As young Syrian officers took over control in Syria after the loss of the Arab armies in 1948, military rule was consolidated in 1951 when the first military general was placed in power as prime minister. The military general Shisihkali, set in motion a legacy that shaped the power struggle in Syria to this very day. He began modernizing the military

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<sup>102</sup> David Roberts, *Ba'th and the Creation of Modern Syria* (Routledge, 2015), 10.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid.

and the over-growing obsession to fight Israel allowed for the population to accept this kind of military rule. As more young people enlisted in the army he began a culture of obedience and conformity was set in place and standing up to or opposition to the leader was not allowed. Furthermore, Shishkali's military rule was opposed to the ideas of the founders of the Ba'th Party as he placed foreigners in the country under surveillance, banned the Muslim brotherhood, and tightened religious and educational activities. With the army meddling into politics and the Ba'th Party joined the ASP and in 1953, they formed the Ba'th Socialist party. The bad experience of the Ba'th under the authority of the three military rulers Hinnawi, Al-Za'im and the Al-Shishakli made them wary of letting military leaders into politics pushed the Ba'th to explore ways to overthrow those leader.<sup>104</sup>

In 1958, a delegation from the military travelled to Cairo to negotiate a union with Nasser to join both armies as a union between both countries. Nasser insisted on an unconditional and complete union and abolishing all political parties. The Ba'th Party and Bitar accepted.<sup>105</sup> Scholars saw that this step was out of desperation and fear that the Ba'th cannot control Syria and so they accepted the union. They believed that Nasser would allow the Ba'th Party to hold political and social positions, even though they would have disbanded their own party to set up the Branch of the National Union Party and they would be able to play a major political and ideological role in the Arab world. On the other hand, Nasser held all power and took all decisions in Cairo and the Ba'athists only controlled the ministries of economy, agriculture, labor and social affairs.

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<sup>104</sup> Ibid.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid.

With the unification of Egypt in 1958, Nasser was undergoing a set of policies. Although the agreement was voluntary to create the sense of Arab unity, Syria was naïve to accept the Egyptian terms. While Egypt always had a strong leader and a unified structure, Syria didn't, rather it was a dispersed population. Nasser was strong and charismatic but the Ba'th party had no outstanding leader and had little mass appeal. And so it was easy for Nasser to take control of both countries and the Egyptian officers had a great influence on the local affairs of Syria. Slowly the Ba'th Party were losing power in their own country and they were unable to achieve their political aspirations. The Ba'th and Nasser relations got worse even further specially after the 1959 elections Nasser set up to the National Assembly and planned to make the Ba'th lose them. Then the Ba'th ministers resigned from the government as a reaction to feeling betrayed by Nasser. Ba'th officers set up a secret military committee while in Cairo in 1959 awaiting the right moment to change the situation. Despite that the moment to overthrow Egypt, in 1961 the move was not carried out by the military organization but by the right wing Syrian officers who were repressed by Nasser. The secession and the failure of the Union led to both the fragmentation of the Ba'th party and consolidating of its position in the Syrian political scene at the same time. On February 8<sup>th</sup> 1963, the Iraqi branch of the Ba'th Party seized power and started to align with Cairo. Syria felt surrounded by enemies and senior officers planned a coup with help from the Military committee, which included Hafiz –al Assad so the Ba'th Party was officially in power.<sup>106</sup> The Ba'th Party believed that development can only be achieved from above by state action, land reform and the creation of rural institutions and through party mobilization. Once in power a new power struggle began to form and

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<sup>106</sup> Olson, *The Ba'th and Syria*.

several figures within the party carried out coups to hold power. One of the most prominent events that took place in the 60s was the purge of the Druze along sectarian lines<sup>107</sup> and the rise of the Alwais to power, soon the Alwais were dominating the regime. This power was consolidated with the rise to power of Hafiz- Al-Asad who insisted on military build-up and dominance.

Following his rise to power Hafiz Al-Asad had to consolidate his authority in the country to avoid facing a similar fate as his predecessors. Thus he saw that the way to do that was to invest in building a strong party and a strong military but both had to be separated. Obsessed with loyalty,<sup>108</sup> he set in motion a political system that would allow him to maintain total control over all the state institutions including the security apparatus which were concerned with keeping the regime safe but also not allow for any kind of defection within the security apparatus itself.<sup>109</sup> Elite conflict that had plagued the political arena in the 1960s between the Ba'th party and the military pushed Hafiz al-Asad to create a decentralized political system, one that too was authoritarian but was quiet different form the system in Egypt. He shaped political life in the country around himself and created power pillars that he would be able to manipulate into controlling the state.<sup>110</sup> These were the military, the Ba'th Party and the security apparatus, particularly the intelligence sector. To avoid fragmentation in society; Asad devised an ideology that can group society around it, and so he manipulated the Arab identity of the party to become that of the state to bring together all groups of people. Through shaping a new

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<sup>107</sup> Van Dam, *The struggle for power in Syria*, 95.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid, p.118.

<sup>109</sup> Joshua Stacher, *Adaptable autocrats: regime power in Egypt and Syria* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2012).

<sup>110</sup> Van Dam, *The struggle for power in Syria*.

Ba'th Party, Asad was able to attract a wide base of supporters; particularly from the rural areas, through which the party had immense mobilization power. Further, by making the party have such a wide base of support he set in motion a party that was parallel to the government itself.<sup>111</sup> In the military and the intelligence agency he positioned loyalists in the highest positions; where his personal guards were composed of members of his Alawi kin and senior non-Alawi Ba'athist officers held the other high ranking positions in the military and acted as a link between the party and the military.<sup>112</sup> The Asad regime cannot be described as minority based or sectarian because he was only able to maintain peace and stability through creating cross-sectarian institutions; even though he kept those loyal to him in the highest ranking jobs.<sup>113</sup> For all the years he ruled, Asad maintained a stable ruling system that gave autonomy to the politicized institutions but his decentralized ruling methods kept the fragmented society together. Fast forward to the year 2000, his son Bashar took over power after his death and at the first few years of his presidency the Ba'th Party still maintain power over the government but this its old guard also seemed to have power over the president. Later, Bashar would alienate the party and the support base in the countryside by reshaping the structure of the state by placing all the country's resources in building modern cities and a liberalized economy.<sup>114</sup> Through his economic projects Bashar would create new clientele amongst the business elite in Aleppo and Damascus who would later support him once political disruptions take place in 2011.<sup>115</sup> Bashar's deliberate decisions of giving power to his family and friends and by

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<sup>111</sup> Stacher, *Adaptable autocrats*, 156.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid*, 64.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid*, 65.

<sup>114</sup> Haddad, *Business networks in Syria*.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid*, 138.

creating whole divisions of Alawis in the military and the elite security services had set off a Pandora's Box of sectarian divisions that were dormant under the rule of his father. These divisions that were long created during the French mandate in the 1920s, were long subdued with Asad's strong personality and his direct control over the party. However, Bashar would once again manipulate these divisions to mobilize pro-government supporters in face of the political activists in the cities of Deraa' and the opposing regions and with that would through the country into sectarian violence and civil war.<sup>116</sup> The next chapter will analyze the dynamics of society under Bashar and the incentives of violence in the country's different regions and those used by the different actors to mobilize whether with or against the regime, once the Arab Spring movements reached Syria.

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<sup>116</sup> Stacher, *Adaptable autocrats*, 73.



## CHAPTER THREE

### INCENTIVES OF VIOLENCE

*“In Syria, the image of President Hafiz al-Asad is everywhere. In newspapers, the television, and during orchestrated spectacles Asad is praised as the ‘father’, the ‘gallant knight’ even the country’s ‘premier pharmacist’.”<sup>117</sup>*

Lisa Wedeen

As protests erupted across Egypt, followed by Libya, Algeria, Yemen, Bahrain and Syria it seemed that a distant idea of Pan-Arabism, a dream once thought to be achieved as new national governments took over in the 1950s and 1960, would be finally achieved. While the protestors aspired to create change calling for political freedom, social equality and a better living standard, not all of the Arab spring movements managed to achieve that democratic transition, soon what was being called a revolution took new names. The movements were no longer considered revolutionaries as they failed to achieve grass-root change and rather in many instances the old elite was replaced with a new elite and no real ideological change took place. In some cases, the uprisings took a more violent turn and were no longer on the path to achieve any form of democracy, rather the violence left those countries in a state of war. For example, in Syria what started out as a continuation of peaceful protesting across the region soon escalated into a civil war and “Syria’s incredibly courageous protestors were met with horrifying massacres and a paralyzed international community.”<sup>118</sup>

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<sup>117</sup> Lisa Wedeen, *Ambiguities of Domination*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1999), 1.

<sup>118</sup> Marc Lynch, *The Arab uprising: the unfinished revolutions of the new Middle East* (New York, NY: Public Affairs, 2013).

To understand the dynamics of the Syrian conflict and analyze why the uprising became a civil war despite different outcomes in similar events happening in neighboring countries we must process the different factors and variables that led to this kind of escalation. Unlike, Egypt for example, Syria has never had a national identity where the regime can rally the people around. Scholars describe the history of the Syrian state as one compromised of fragmented sectarian and ethnic identities. Yet, since Hafiz al-Asad took over power he forged a decentralized regime that was able to maintain its authority and power over the population and maintain its existence. During Hafiz al-Asad's reign he maintained a balance between the different sects by keeping a group of those who were loyal to him close and in power but at the same time playing them against each other in order to keep that kind of control. As explained in the previous chapter, when Hafiz al-Asad took over power in the 1970s he forged a system that relied mainly on three pillars, deeply politicized but the decentralization of the institutions meant that sectarian divisions were not aggravated as we would see after Bashar al-Asad takes over following the death of his father.<sup>119</sup> As the regime realized that it would be faced with the same fate as the neighboring regimes, it reacted in a repressive and vicious. This chapter aims at analyzing the dynamics of the regime under Bashar Al-Asad particularly in the late years leading to the civil war. Further, this chapter will outline the different factors that led to the mobilization of different regions and groups within the uprising and how that affected the escalation of violence leading to a civil war.

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<sup>119</sup> Stacher, *Adaptable autocrat*, 58.

### **3.1 Overview of Bashar's Regime**

When Hafiz al-Asad passed away his son, Bashar, a young cosmopolitan man who studied for a period of time in the United Kingdom, interested in information technology and well-spoken seemed to be a fresh start for many who have regarded his father as harsh. He came with promises of economic liberalization and development projects as he took office in 2000. “Bashar appealed to the largely Sunni and Christian urban elite and middle class who saw that he was different to his father who was more sophisticated and integrated with the elite. They saw him as a reformist because he was married to the Sunni bourgeoisie and he was educated in the UK and interested in technology and well-spoken in English.”<sup>120</sup> During his inauguration speech he spoke of democracy and reforms which increased his support base.<sup>121</sup> The early years of Bashar's regime were dominated with the old guard and the decentralized status of the state remained intact with the main pillars set up during the time of Hafiz al-Asad; the Party, the Military and the Security Services remained intact. The ‘elites’ or so called ‘old guards’ were in control of the presidency when Bashar first took over power, and the first reverse track the regime took against the reform policies of the new president were to be found from 2000-2001 during what was known as the Damascus Spring. Intellectuals felt freer to discuss openly their aspiration for political freedom and economic liberalization. “Riad Seif, an entrepreneur and outspoken member of parliament, went the furthest, putting forward social-democratic ideals of a ‘fair market economy’.”<sup>122</sup> Capitalizing on

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<sup>120</sup> Hokayem, *Syria's uprising and the fracturing of the Levant*.

<sup>121</sup> Stacher, *Adaptable autocrats*, 14.

<sup>122</sup> Carsten Wieland, Adam Almqvist, and Helena Nassif, *The Syrian uprising dynamics of an insurgency* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Pub., 2013).

Bashar's speech on reforms and actions he took such as the release of political prisoners and activists led this movement only to discover that the new regime still had red lines and that their actions were met with severe consequences. Seif made a mistake when he announced that he wanted to create his own party. As the debates on freedom were dismissed the regime paved the way for a tragedy when it ignored constructive opposition and later it would be faced with a new kind of opposition, one that was much more aggravated and unorganized. What could have become an opportunity for the new president to create change and change the dynamics of the state was halted by existing politicized institutions. Although Bashar's inauguration speech might not have actually made promises of political freedom per se, it was clear that the image he created for himself as a reformist resonated with political circles, that for long have been suppressed and were waiting to engage in public space freely. Therefore, it was not a surprise that when the activists arrested on behalf of the Damascus Spring events, it was viewed that Bashar was being apprehended by an old guard that was fighting change to remain in power.<sup>123</sup>

In an attempt to consolidate his power Bashar committed another mistake that would also offset the balance once created by his father. By 2005, Bashar had been able to replace many of the heads of the pillars of the state and the security services with loyal friends and family members. "One of the mistakes that he made was that he began to dismiss some of his father's loyalists such as Khaddam the Sunni and vice-president."<sup>124</sup> He also parted with his dad's habits of surrounding himself with loyalists; from across the

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<sup>123</sup>Eberhard Kienle and Nadine Mourad Sika, *The Arab uprisings: transforming and challenging state power* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2015).

<sup>124</sup> Hokayem, *Syria's uprising and the fracturing of the Levant*.

different sects, often playing them against each other, while allowing corruption within manageable limits and divorcing security matters from business interests. Five years before the crisis unfolded, the Bashar regime became more Alawi compared to the one that existed under Hafiz al-Asad. Despite the circle of trust was being narrowed greatly the decentralized character of the regime remained intact. Just as during the Hama uprising in the 1980s, the decentralization of the state was important to maintain a balance and Bashar did not try not offset that balance entirely. “The coalition included a cross sectarian mixture of Alawis, Sunnis, Shia’s and Druze in the Ba’th Party, security services, military and bureaucracy.”<sup>125</sup> It was particularly evident in the second layer of the regime where he aligned himself with Sunni business elite, especially in the cities of Aleppo and Damascus, whom remained loyal when the uprising gained momentum and as violence escalated. On the other hand, marginalizing important members of the regime from the old guard alienated a lot of the cadres and clients in the rural areas.<sup>126</sup> Two of his direct family members; his brother became the head of the Republican guard, and his brother in law rose through military intelligence and assumed senior positions. Across the country other relatives were in charge in the Ba’th Party, appointed as government, ministers and ambassadors.<sup>127</sup> Once again we find that the Ba’th Party and other institutions of the state, such as the military and the security services were being used for patronage purposes however, this time the demographics of those benefiting from being close to the ruling circle was much more different to that during the reign years of Hafiz al-Asad.

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<sup>125</sup> Stacher, *Adaptable autocrats*.

<sup>126</sup> Kienle and Sika, *The Arab uprisings: transforming and challenging state power*.

<sup>127</sup> Hokayem, *Syria's uprising and the fracturing of the Levant*.

When Bashar assumed power the country was being held back with economic and social problems. While he began programs of economic liberalization, the politicization of the institutions meant that the programs were held hostage by patrimonial interests and bureaucratic fighting. “The privatization of state companies faced ideological and interest-based obstacles, while cutting food and energy subsidies, a major fiscal expense risked alienating the poorer classes”.<sup>128</sup> Bashar focused mainly on the urban cities of the state particularly Aleppo and Damascus for development of the infrastructure there, all the money was being poured into those cities, and the spending on health care and education in the rural regions was diminishing. Such policies created deep distortions in the countryside, and alienated the regime’s traditional support base creating a huge gap between the rural and urban classes meant that when uprising was mobilizing, anti-regime protests found a willing audience within peasants to mobilize against the regime. While civil wars do occur in poor countries, it is not the GDP per say that is a direct factor of civil war onset, rather it is the de-link between the regime and certain regions that is dangerous; as rebel groups can hid away in such regions and then using coercive tools or incentives to gain the support of the people.<sup>129</sup> Therefore, the cutting back on money given to clients in the Ba’th Party that were used for supported the rural regions meant that the people were further away from the regime and its reach.<sup>130</sup> “The government also altered its agricultural policies just as a drought hit the country in 2006, affecting the livelihood of nearly 1.5 million Syrians and leading to the displacement if a

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<sup>128</sup> Ibid.

<sup>129</sup> Helge Holtermann, "Explaining the Development–Civil War Relationship," *Conflict Management and Peace Science*, February 15, 2012, doi:10.1177/0738894211430279.

<sup>130</sup> Kienle and Sika, *The Arab uprisings*.

similar number.”<sup>131</sup> To help solve and ease the troubles that occurred during the drought that hit the rural areas, the regime allowed the Islamic charities to step in and fill the void that the government had left. Come the Arab Spring, the regime would find itself faced once again with a Sunni front.

Elite security forces and the thugs would also play an important role in the escalation of violence that would occur during the early days of the uprising before the country would fall into civil war. Asad relied heavily on the ‘*mukhabart*’ or the security services and external threats always gave the regime the green light to keep the regime safe with no regards to any checks on the authority and the actions of this institution. The security services were being used as a tool by the regime to offer jobs, benefits and favors based on loyalty and not on performance. The same thing was happening with demotion or even discriminatory promotions. One of the counter-revolutionary tactics that the regime has devised when Bashar came to power was to keep the regime safe was within the military. Men in Syria had compulsory recruitment in the military and by giving higher positions in the military and other elite security forces such as the Republic Guard to the Alawis meant that he can keep a circle of loyalists to his side and ensure his safety.<sup>132</sup> This was also evident in the military hierarchy in particular. “The regime crafted an informal hierarchy where a non-Sunni subordinate who had better regime access accompanied a Sunni officer to assert his loyalty.”<sup>133</sup> This specific organization in the military and security services would again create problems come the uprising. The ill-treatment of many of the Sunni officers and the organization of such a hierarchy gave

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<sup>131</sup> Hokayem, *Syria's uprising*.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid.

incentive for many Sunni generals and soldiers to defect when the opportunity presented itself during the first months of the uprising.

### **3.2 From Uprising to Civil War and the Role of Ideology:**

The Syrian Civil War has been portrayed in many different ways by policy makers and the media. While many news agencies have rushed to frame the conflict as a sectarian war there are many identities involved in the conflict and therefore it is important to discuss them and the role of the different ideologies in the dynamics of the war and even its duration. The definition of ideology can be used in many ways one of which “coherent and relatively stable set of beliefs, or values through which people posit, explain and justify ends and means or organized social action.”<sup>134</sup> When protests erupted on March 15<sup>th</sup> 2011 in Syria it was not expected that they would occur there in particular, as the first trends of the protests seemed to be against the western backed regimes and Syria did not fit that trend. The regime in Syria has for long portrayed itself as a nationalist, particularly Arab nationalist and patriotic. The Asad regimes both under Hafiz and Bashar, have been framing their legacy as being anti-Israel and anti-western.<sup>135</sup> For long, this has worked for the regime, whereas Hafiz Al-Asad maintained a balance between different sects and classes and Bashar was expected to follow suit with the Ba’th party representing the regime’s secular identity. As the world watched Egypt, Tunisia, Libya and then Bahrain catch on momentum in the Arab Spring protests the Syrian

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<sup>134</sup> Kai M. Thaler, "Ideology and Violence in Civil Wars: Theory and Evidence from Mozambique and Angola," *Civil Wars 14*, (2012): 546 , doi:10.1080/13698249.2012.740203.

<sup>135</sup> Christopher Phillips, “Sectarianism and conflict in Syria”, *Third World Quarterly*, (2015):357-376, DOI: 10.1080/01436597.2015.1015788.



regime reaction was to state that Syria is not like Egypt or Tunisia. Rather, the regime was quick to state that there have been failures in the past years that will be fixed and policies reformed as a precautionary step to any motives for protests to occur. It was also though unlikely that Syria would protest against the Asad regime as there was no established opposition or political parties or a civil society that might mobilize and organize such demonstrations against the regime like in Egypt and Tunisia.<sup>136</sup> However, soon the momentum caught on and the first signs of opposition began to take form in the rural region of Syria. Initially the protests will small acts of demonstration with a few group of people gathering around government buildings. The marches were not even directed at Bashar rather slogans showed that the people saw him as a savior, the slogan “Bashar save us from the gang”<sup>137</sup> implied that it was the police and corrupt officials who were targeted by the march. Small marches were called for to protest corruption in Damascus and Aleppo but they did not gain momentum. “A group called the Movement of Democratic Youth organized a march in the city of Al-Raqqah in the northern east side of Syria to protest the killing of two members of a Kurd organization by security forces. Another man in the city of al-Hasakah set himself on fire following the example of Bouazizi in Tunisia.”<sup>138</sup> The regime too was watching the events in neighboring countries, and the events that broke out the days following the initial calls for protesting in Syria looked like Asad was not prepared to risk losing any ground. Thus the regime was entirely prepared to react as repressively as it took to end the movement in its tracks

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<sup>136</sup> Lynch, *The Arab uprising: the unfinished revolutions of the new Middle East*

<sup>137</sup> Fred Haley Lawson, *Global security watch Syria* (Santa Barbara (Calif.): Praeger, 2013), 98.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid.

before other events unfolded. The initial wave of protests that was on a small scale where groups of women would protest in front of the ministry of interior, escalated when disorder erupted in the city of Deraa' in the third week of March. It was clear that the first waves of the rebellion in Syria was being organized by secular movements calling for freedom and democracy. "The largely peaceful opposition that emerged in March 2011 was decentralized and local, but with national goals. They spoke for 'the people' and 'Syria' rather than any ethno-sectarian group, even if most were Sunni Arabs. The regime responded by also emphasizing its nationalist credentials and both sides deployed inclusive slogans and symbols, including rival Syrian flags."<sup>139</sup> Inspired by the slogans of the Egyptian revolution, a group of boys between the ages of 10-15 scribbled anti-regime graffiti on the walls. At the suburbs of the city a military base was stationed that housed Alawi officers and their families.<sup>140</sup> After the boys were found spraying the graffiti they were picked up and held hostage for days. Officers from the military base told their parents that they should forget about their children and try to have new ones.<sup>141</sup> When the boys returned it was evident that they tortured. The incident hit a cord with the resident of the city, the fact that the officers were Alawi and tortured 10 and 15-year-old boys for graffiti was an insult to the people. The detention of the small children and the torture that they experienced enticed demonstrations in the center of the city and as a result during the march, the Ba'th party headquarter was set on fire.<sup>142</sup> Members of the armed

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<sup>139</sup> Phillips, "Sectarianism and conflict in Syria" (2012).

<sup>140</sup> Fouad Ajami, *The Syrian rebellion* (Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution Press, Stanford University, 2012), 48.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid.

<sup>142</sup> Lawson, *Global security watch Syria*, 81.

forces reacted with violence and shot on the protestors which in return pushed more people in neighboring towns to go to the streets to protest this act of violence and in return police fired on them with small arms. This cycle of violence was to become a pattern across the country whenever a protest would erupt further creating tension. “The Syrian regime created its own catastrophe by unleashing unnecessary violence and bungling offers of reform, and soon found itself caught in vicious cycle of self-perpetuating escalation.”<sup>143</sup> Anger and fear felt by the protestors led to the them letting go of ideas of the peaceful protesting and so they too resorted to violence which essentially led to the increase of violence and mobilization. The first reaction of the regime was to claim that the soldiers who fired on the protestors acted without the consent of their commanders and a representative of the ministry of interior visited the town to offer his condolences. The Prime Minister soon acknowledged that these areas had faced unfair treatment and promised changes and reform to happen. In an attempt to deflate the tension building up in the region, the government promised several reforms that have long been called for by some activities over the past ten years. They promised an increase in workers’ salaries and the review of the emergency act that had been implemented back in the 1963.<sup>144</sup> However, these concessions did not work, and soon the city was in demonstration again, this time point-blank against the regime. As the clashes began, state television often broadcasted that armed gangs were responsible for the attacks, or Palestinian refugees, and later they broadcasted that it was members of the Muslim brotherhood who were responsible for the attacks.<sup>145</sup> In contrast Deraa’ was surrounded

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<sup>143</sup> Lynch, *The Arab uprising*.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid.

<sup>145</sup> Lawson, *Global security watch Syria*.

by the military and it was being punished for crossing the red tapes. For four weeks there was no water, food or electricity and the protestors were often shot upon although they were peaceful. Snipers began targeting young people in the street. The mosques were also attacked by security officers who wrote on the walls “Your God is Bashar”, “There is no God but Bashar” and in the first ten days of attacks, some 200 people were killed.<sup>146</sup> Security forces were also visiting hospitals to arrest anyone who was had an injury that was related to being part of a protest. As a result of the violence and the number of death in Deraa, the protests were spreading to other rural towns and soon they would hit major cities such as Homs and Hama. In the aftermath of the attack on Deraa’ to members of the People’s Assembly resigned.<sup>147</sup>

Soon, disorder spread to the cities of Latakia, protestors were setting fire to Ba’th party headquarters at the same time the regime was claiming that police agents were being attacked by Sunni elements. On March 30, 2011, the president spoke to the people blaming the unfortunate events that took place on conspirators both foreign and domestic, and promised that reforms will be made but they needed time to be achieved and that things should not be rushed.<sup>148</sup> His speech reflected that he was isolated from the events that had already taken place claiming that it was a conspiracy against Syria and its aspirations to become the hub of the region. He tried to dismiss the idea that anything happening in Egypt for example would not be happening in Syria because Syria was not Egypt for example, implying that his regime was much more intact and stable than the ones on neighboring countries that were already removed from power. However, the

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<sup>146</sup> Ajami, *The Syrian rebellion*..

<sup>147</sup> Lawson, *Global security watch Syria*, 70.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid.

reforms and changes that were proposed were not enough to silence or deescalate the situation and civil rights activists organized to occupy the clock tower square in Homs until the state of emergency was disbanded and all political prisoners were freed. Security forces stayed away from the protestors and occasionally used pepper spray and shot fires in the air. However, on the second day of protesting police forces and armed thugs moved in the square and shot at the demonstrators. Yet again a tactic that the regime seems to be often using, state television broadcasted that it was Islamist militia who attacked the protestors and at that point military units were deployed throughout the northeastern suburbs of the capital to secure the safety of the citizens. They then conducted house-to-house sweeps throughout the residential neighborhoods and arrested suspected activists.<sup>149</sup> Social media played a huge role in the spread of news of government atrocities that took place inside Deraa' and soon the protests spread across to other regions. With this mobilization against the regime spreading, Bashar realizes that this cannot be easily stopped through mere concessions. Rather, the regime started to change its strategy which was a pitfall into more violence. As protestors took to the streets of Hama, Homs and Dair-al Zur the authorities relied on snipers and *shabbiba*; thugs who worked with security forces to instill fear in order to crush the rebellion. Authorities also began to mobilize cadres of party members, including students loyal to the regime and workers through grouping them into small militias, armed, to maintain order and counter the mobilization of the opposition.<sup>150</sup> Homs and Hama were the first urban cities to revolt and the battle to demobilize the opposition there was deadly. "As clashes broke out in

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<sup>149</sup> Ibid, 83.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid.

Homs between the armed protestors and the security forces, armed forces up-scaled the attack on Bab ‘Amru using mortars, heavy machine gun fire and tanks.’<sup>151</sup> As with Hama, tens of thousands of protestors went to the city square to protest the torture and death of a 13-year old boy from Deraa’, during the march the security forces shot on the crowd and news reported that that around 200 people were killed during that march. A week later, snipers shot in the same city on a funeral passing resulting in more deaths.<sup>152</sup> As a result, protestors torched down the state buildings and took over the police station killing eight security forces and stole weaponry.<sup>153</sup> As the protests spread to Idlib, Latakia and other cities, by late May Human Rights Watch estimated that some 887 people were killed, 418 were from Deraa’ alone. As the uprising gained momentum, and with more civilians dying there was transformation in the conflict as defections in many regions from the army started to take place. “The first sign of defection from the army was under Colonel Husain Harmush who formed an anti-regime military formation named the Free Officer’s Movement.”<sup>154</sup> The defection of soldiers from the Syrian Army meant that the opposition had access to weapons they can take up against Bashar’s loyalist forces. “In the town of Al Bu Kamal in the eastern side, activists helped by security guards who joined them attacked the district admin building and stole heavy weaponry. Further, Colonel Riyad Asa’d defected along with six soldiers and started a military formation

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<sup>151</sup> Ibid, 92.

<sup>152</sup> Mark Tran and Paul Owen, "Syrians take to streets over Hama massacre as outrage grows," *The Guardian*, August 2011.

<sup>153</sup> Lawson, *Global security watch Syria*.

<sup>154</sup> Ibid, 86.

known as the Free Syrian Army. They were joined later by Major Abd al-Rahman Shaikh Ali and Captain Qais Qatanah from Dira’.”<sup>155</sup>

With the formation of the FSA, the identity of the rebellion took a different shape. The secular ideology that started the movement was being replaced by a more Islamist identity that was being led by the SNC. The Muslim Brotherhood in the diaspora, mainly in Turkey and Saudi Arabia was leading the new formation of the armed brigades, yet despite that there was still some form of diversity within the opposition movement. “The Syrian Muslim Brotherhood supported a leadership of the SNC that was different from its ideological background and even distanced itself from the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood.”<sup>156</sup> However, this did not last and once again as the violence protracted, the identity of the conflict changed once new factions of opposition were formed upon new ideologies. As divisions within the SNC took place, this was reflected on the ability of the FSA to fight back against the violence mobilized by the regime.

This major turn in the dynamics of the uprising was bringing it closer to reach a civil war as more people were having access to weaponry, after many police stations and security buildings were raided or torched to the ground.<sup>157</sup> Clearly, the opposition and the regime were using different tactics of mobilization; whether it was to gain or maintain loyalty to topple the other side. As the uprising reached its sixth month several battles were taking place between the regime along with its security forces and the *shabbiha* in regions all the way from Deraa’ to Latakia and Homs. “By the 6<sup>th</sup> month of the rebellion

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<sup>155</sup> Ibid 87.

<sup>156</sup> Raphael Lefevre, "Islamism within a civil war: the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood's struggle for survival," *Rethinking Political Islam* (August 2015).

<sup>157</sup> Hokayem, *Syria's uprising*.

the UN estimated that the death toll had reached 2,600.”<sup>158</sup> By Mid-August 2011, there was a coordinated land and sea attack on Latakia, particularly targeting the Sunni neighborhoods, “shabihha and armed forces attacked protestors who continued to mobilize to mourn those who were previously killed by security forces.”<sup>159</sup> Protestors were calling for the cities of Damascus and Aleppo to join in the uprising, which up until the first few months of the uprising, activities there had failed to mobilize due to a large portion of the business elite in the city being supporters of Bashar, whom were skeptical of the motivations and ideology of the rural protestors. Despite that lack of momentum, the force of violence that had spread through the other regions had brought the country into a full on civil war with both sides fighting for survival. In many instances while some people might not want to be part of the violence, anger at the destruction or torture they might experience, or by their loved ones, would push them to resort to violence as well. Therefore, it was clear that when the Deraa boys were tortured, the conflict was bound to escalate and reach a civil war, particularly in a state like Syria. Although the uprising did not start because of sectarian grievances, it quickly became focused on that aspect of Syrian society where the rebels and the regime both capitalized on past sectarian regimes to mobilize. <sup>160</sup>

Reviving this sectarian division, the Syrian regime resorted to recruiting Shia fighters whom were trained by Hezbollah and Iran. Further, fighters from both countries volunteered to travel to Syria in order to come to the aid of the regime and maintain its

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<sup>158</sup> Ajami, *The Syrian rebellion*.

<sup>159</sup> Lawson, *Global security watch Syria*.

<sup>160</sup> Wood, “The Social Process of Civil War: The Wartime Transformation of Social networks”.



fighting grounds.<sup>161</sup> As a result of Sunni death toll rose and it was clear that that the conflict was taking a different rhetoric; particularly as a result when Sunni-jihadist organization infiltrated the lines of the opposition. At this turning point in the conflict, Sunni-jihadist rhetoric was appealing as the conflict took a religious and ideological dynamic; being a war between Shia and Sunni forces. Many young men found Jabhat-Al-Nusra and ISIS; despite being inherently different, both believed in jihad, as a salvation to fight the regime using Iranian soldiers to kill its people. At this point, the regime's repression along with the lack of coordination and weakness of the secular opposition pushed many liberals to flee or to resort to extremism in order to survive.<sup>162</sup> Ultimately changing the trajectory of the rebellion. The remaining part of this chapter gives a more detailed analysis of the different factors at play with the mobilization of the different communities and the incentives of violence at play by explaining the difference between Top-Down and Bottom-Up violence and analyze the motivations and conditions that make such a mobilization of violence possible.

### **3.3 Mobilization and Violence:**

Mobilization and violence during the rebellion in Syria help us understand the dynamics of the civil war once it broke out and its duration. Mobilization that took place during the first weeks of the rebellion can be traced to past political and economic grievances years before the conflict erupted. Methods and incentives for mobilization and violence occurred differently in various regions across the country. According to Balanche, in order to understand the civil war we must examine the political geography

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<sup>161</sup> Ajami, *The Syrian rebellion*.

<sup>162</sup> Salama Killah, "Nusra Front's quest for heaven makes hell on earth," (December 2014).

of the Syrian Uprising. “When Hafiz al-Asad came to power the country was 6 million people made of largely rural society and by the time of the uprising the population was more urbanized and expanded to 22 million people. The population was 50% under the age of 19 and 57% of those under 25 were unemployed.”<sup>163</sup> Over the years the regime spread in the countryside and driven by the ambitions and resentments of marginal men, the new Asad regime would meet its nemesis nearly half a century later in the same countryside. The uprising erupted in the city of Deraa, an administrative center of the agricultural plain of Hawran. This was the town where a group of 10 to 15-year-old boys were tortured. There in the city was the first sign of danger as the torturing of the young boys presented a pattern that had been going on there for years as the regime had constantly alienated itself from the agricultural regions. “The gap between city and country widened as the regime grew disintegrated in the rural provinces. The presence of the state in the life of the neglected provinces reduced to the predatory presence and practices of the security services”.<sup>164</sup> The tribal identity of the city was not easy to be contained especially when the people there regarded the governor and security chiefs as outsiders who disrespected the people of Deraa and tortured its children.<sup>165</sup> Mobilization in Deraa represented a pattern that would be evident in other cities in the countryside, mobilization that was motivated initially by networks of alienation from the regime in addition to repression that was evidently present and manifested in the torturing of the children. In similar neighborhoods, ‘Houran’ like other regions across Syria was also benefitting from the agricultural policies of the 1980s, and was full of resources. As the

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<sup>163</sup> Ajami, *The Syrian rebellion*.

<sup>164</sup> Ibid.

<sup>165</sup> Hokayem, *Syria's uprising*.

new government had different priorities for investment, public investment and infrastructure were cut from rural areas. Public spending on education and health care no longer were enough for the people and the situation was made worse by the drought of 2006. Villagers were relocated and lived in poor alleyways in Aleppo and Damascus. This mix of factors was present in Idlib, once a source of army recruits and party members, poverty and unemployment there led to massive discontent.<sup>166</sup> It was clear that economic grievances that the residents of the countryside had endured due to failed agricultural and urbanization projects were enough to attract supporters to the growing movement of rebellion. Mobilization continued, spreading onwards to the cities of Hama and Homs, were the first urban cities to join the rebellion. Hama is a homogenous Sunni city that was troubled with previous memories of the 1980 rebellion led by the Muslim Brotherhood that the Asad regime had repressively put down claiming some 20,000 lives.<sup>167</sup> Homs is a cosmopolitan city where Christian, Shia, Alawite, Sunni, Christian and Ismailis. The city was very attractive for investment but it seemed that the investment and the benefits of the high growth were unevenly distributed. The Alawite quarters of Homs, were perceived as being favored in terms of infrastructure. Therefore, mobilization was predominantly Sunni, with some Christian and Ismaili dissidents. Yet the Alawis remained loyal.<sup>168</sup> While the first months of the rebellion were not motivated by sectarian lines, yet the progress of mobilization in Sunni majority areas took shape due to unequal distribution of wealth.

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<sup>166</sup> Ajami, *The Syrian rebellion*.

<sup>167</sup> Stacher, *Adaptable autocrat*, 75.

<sup>168</sup> Ajami, *The Syrian rebellion*.

Mobilization amongst anti-regime supporters was met with mobilization amongst the support base of the Asad regime mainly in the urban cities of Aleppo and Damascus. Damascus was affected by the uprising differently, the polarization over the revolution was manifested in the city of Damascus. There the mobilization was to be found in Sunni majority regions in the city that were once rural but became urban in the wave of modernization of the city. These elite circles were mobilized by the regime as they have for long benefited from the many liberalization projects there.<sup>169</sup> Further, there was cross sectarian alliances between the Alawi security officers and the Sunni business class merchants of the city. Mobilization amongst the business elite of Damascus was motivated by economic cooperation between the regime. These networks of patronage would ensure that these business elite would remain loyal to the regime as the conflict unfolds. On the other hand, there were districts of Damascus that were infested with poverty and unemployment these cities were home to middle class, rural migrants, conservatives and poor Sunnis all joined the rebellion early on as they had not benefited from the regime and were left out of the regime's circle.<sup>170</sup> Aleppo also joined the rebellion later, the cosmopolitan city relied mainly on tourism for its booming economy and the obvious urban-rural divide that existed halted its participation, as the urban population was suspicious of the motives of a rural led rebellion and there were also a majority of Kurds and Christian communities that took the side lines. However, since the beginning of the uprising, college students at the University of Aleppo staged several

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<sup>169</sup> Wood, "The Social Process of Civil War: The Wartime Transformation of Social networks".

<sup>170</sup> Stacher, *Adaptable autocrats*.

protests which were often met with violence at the hands of other pro-regime students or even thugs who entered the dormitory beating and shooting at students.<sup>171</sup>

The Alawi community is probably one of the pillars of the regime's resilience since the protests occurred and plays a major role in the dynamics of violence of the civil war. Alawite regions were not debating whether to join the uprising or not since the community improved during Bashar's reign more even than during his father's and with that it created loyalty to the regime. They were also easily mobilized by the regime due to the patrimonial ties with the ruling family. "Elite mobilization is based on kin and family ties to keep interests. In other words, patronage."<sup>172</sup> It is also evident that the presence of the Alawis in cities whether in mixed communities or in ones where the different communities were separated along sectarian lines there was more occurrence of violence. Balanche finds in his analysis of the geo-political map of Syria, that the nearness of Alawi land was a factor in the intensity of the protests. "The coastal cities of Latakia, Baniyas, Jableh and Tartus had Alawi majorities. Tell Khalakh on the western edge of Homs ad a Sunni majority but the villages around it were Alawis lands. The communal fault lines between the Sunnis and the Alawis became lines of trouble and strife."<sup>173</sup>

It is interesting to analyze why the Kurds choose that stance. It is evident that they were undecided, although protests had broken out in the Kurdish community when the regime offered them citizenship; chanting that they did not want the citizenship, that it had been already too late for that. Yet, they decided that if the state was to fall into a

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<sup>171</sup> Hokayem, *Syria's uprising*.

<sup>172</sup> Wood, "The Social Process of Civil War: The Wartime Transformation of Social networks".

<sup>173</sup> Fabrice Balance. "Géographie de la Révolte Syrienne." *Outre-Terre*, (2011), 437-58.

civil war, it would be best to stay away from the rebellion, to be able to establish a de-facto groups to gain autonomy.<sup>174</sup> The regime also withdrew from the Kurdish region counting on an escalation that would come from the tension between the Kurds and the opposite groups as the Kurds did distrust of the Sunnis. Other minorities such as the Druze remained on the sideline, while the Shia were supporting the Asad regime because of the linkage between the regime and Iran and Hezbollah. The decision of the Syrian Christians made up by the events that took place around, they saw that an Islamist government would reverse the freedoms they had gained under Asad and so they remained loyal to him.

As the rebellion took a more violent dynamic the regime had used many tactics that encouraged the spread of violence. During the first episodes of violence that took place while demonstrators arranged protests, was top-down violence. “Top-Down” violence refers to “violence that is mobilized by the political leaders and entrepreneurs whether for political or economic reasons. This existence of powerful groups mobilizing violence creates large-scale violence when coercion is used to get recruits.”<sup>175</sup> While Top-Down violence results in short-term profits, this form of violence is not always motivated due to economic factors, rather some are political.<sup>176</sup> Violence in the Syrian case, during the first stages of the conflict was tolerated in pro-regime circles and clearly motivated by the patrimonial nature of the regime which was exclusive in nature to the Alawi community as shown in the examples above. The first forms of top-down violence as previously illustrated reflected the immense threat the regime felt and was essentially

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<sup>174</sup> Ajami, *The Syrian rebellion*.

<sup>175</sup> Keen, *The economic functions of violence in civil wars*, 24.

<sup>176</sup> Ibid.

the driving factor for Bottom-Up violence that was carried out by protestors. This kind of response by the regime to the demonstrations showed that it had put security over compromise, and a desire to alter the nature of the uprising to provoke an armed conflict that could then be met with forced apparatus was one of its goals, believing that it could then kill the rebellion. Being aware of what has already happened in neighboring countries the Syrian regime was “prepared to stop the uprising in its tracks and not risk its escalation and so the regime initially the regime used traditional security operations in the cities where demonstration broke by arresting activities, intimidation, torture and also quietly reach local chiefs.”<sup>177</sup> As for the rural areas, which posed a bigger challenge the regime deployed military assets. While the uprising was gaining momentum and the methods of torture strategy was counter-productive and the spark of the rebellion and violence caught; particularly with the defection of soldiers and the easy access to weaponry, the regime once again changed its tactics and decided to play on mistakes of the rebellion in terms of abuse and thus with it stirred more violence this time along sectarian lines, which frankly deemed catastrophic.<sup>178</sup> The regime used state media to spread news of attacks by Islamist organization to instill fear into the Alawi community and other minorities aiming to showcase that their survival was dependent on the survival of the regime. That way the regime was able to mobilize these communities when needed. One example of such an incident that the regime used to its benefit was the attack on the resident town of Mezze 86, that housed Alawi officers. This attack was key to mobilize pro-regime demonstrations across social and economic classes. As a result, also,

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<sup>177</sup> Hokayem, *Syria's uprising*.

<sup>178</sup> Phillips, “Sectarianism and conflict in Syria”.

many Alawi militias were formed and give the authority by the regime to patrol areas that has anti-regime protests which eventually gave way to more violence. Often though the regime was also use the same narrative to cover-up atrocities that it actually committed.<sup>179</sup> Another example of an incident where the regime used sectarian division to entice fear and eliminate the opposition was in the city of Baniyas where the population was 65% Alawi. “Sunnis who were deeply offended after the ministry of education suspended 1,500 teachers who wore the hijab. In the city there existed an oil refinery where the Alawis had total control of the jobs and monopolized the profit form the refinery and they hired other Alawis from as far away as Homs. And that was one of the reasons why the population was prepared to rebel against the regime.”<sup>180</sup> Using this environment as an incentive, security forces attacked the city, and snipers shot at Alawi and Sunni communities alike. The media portrayed that Islamists were responsible for the attack and the Alawis living there fled to safer regions. “Baniyas foretold the course of the rebellion: the neighborhoods divided along confessional lines, the Alawis who ran the city deserted it for the safety of the mountain, the forces of order fomented trouble between the sects.”<sup>181</sup> As the armed resistance increased the regime went through different stages and escalated the power that it used to repress the uprising and that added to the violence and quickly escalated the violence. “During the spring of 2011, the regime was using the infantry along with *shabihha* and security services such as snipers, later in the autumn the regime deployed artillery and by spring 2012 they were using the air force

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<sup>179</sup> Ibid.

<sup>180</sup> Hokayem, *Syria's uprising and the fracturing of the Levant*.

<sup>181</sup> Ibid.



by the end of that years the regime was using missiles.”<sup>182</sup> One manifestation of the escalated usage of military was the missile attack on Latakia from the sea.

Following the trajectory of the Syrian Uprising and the nature of the regime we come to the conclusion that a major factor in the escalation of top-down violence to a different outcome to the Arab Spring in Syria; unlike that of Egypt and Tunisia. As the Syrian modern-nation state was created it has witnessed a lot of instability that took place right after the French mandate was abolished. As the new nation witnessed many military coups, by the 1970s a regime was consolidated in power, whose legacy continues today. While the nation never boasted a national identity to unify its institutions and population in times of crisis, as Hafiz-al Asad took over power he had to forge an alliance between the different sects to maintain the stability and continuation of his rule. His success rested on patronage patrimony where the Alawi sect was making progress and rising in power, but an alliance was also forged with the Sunni majority particularly those in the rural areas. During the ten years of his son’s rule, Bashar, was changing the rules of the game. Considered at the time of succession a reformist, he boasted of more economic liberalization and a powerful economy. Yet along the way he managed to alienate large sects of the population, particularly those that have remained the fan- base of the Ba’th Party. Capitalizing on pre-existing grievances activists in the country-side managed to entice a dormant group of people, and got them inspired to oppose the corruption and brutality of the security forces that have been going on long since. As the regime reacted with violence and repression, a larger base of protesters mobilized. Groups of civilians long alienated by the regime and oppressed by its repressive tactics once the

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<sup>182</sup> Ibid.

demonstrations started was reflected in episodes of Bottom-Up violence as shown across Idlib, Latakia, Homs and Hama and in later stages across the country. In order to maintain its survival, the regime framed many its own acts of violence and others committed by the opposition as a sectarian violence. Therefore, the regime opened up Pandora's box essentially, and mobilizing enough violence that has thrown the country into a civil war.

### **3.4 From Bottom-up to Top-Down Mobilization**

As the civil war escalated with the opposition splitting into several groups each with its own agenda the civil war entered another stage of violence. With a fragmentation of the opposition, many were infiltrated with terrorist organization. The rise of organizations like ISIS and Jabhat –Al Nusra that filled a void left by more secular rebel groups, that were unable to maintain financial support as the duration of the war extended, adds more to the dynamic of violence in the Syrian civil war in particular. Here we find, that while the mobilization of violence of such rebel organizations is essentially bottom-up, yet in fact these organizations particularly ISIS can be categorized as top-down mobilization of violence. ISIS recruits are mobilized and employ acts of violence on civilians and on the regime itself. Acting in the same dynamic of a state, ISIS creates space for its recruits and loyalists to function as subjects under a hierarchy and therefore it is able to mobilize violence to achieve an ultimate takeover of power. Further, it employs violence to protect its economic and political assets; hiding its violation of human rights under ideology and sectarianism.<sup>183</sup> Given the weak state of the country, and the presence of a fertile ground for such ideological extremism and greed,

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<sup>183</sup> Keen, *The economic functions of violence in civil wars*, 24.

mobilization of violence takes this top-down form.. “Ideology plays a role in the direction of violence that can be used or held back depending on structural organization and ideology of the rebel group.”<sup>184</sup> In addition, through making profit from greed opportunities ISIS was able to expand within Syria and utilize its ideology in spreading its own version of an Islamic state by directing violence towards groups and individuals the organization views as threat to its expansion. The final chapter of the thesis analysis the factors that play a role in the protraction of violence and increase the duration of the civil war in Syria by analyzing the opportunities of greed for both the regime and the rebels. Further, this thesis will analyze the effect of the fragmentation of the opposition and rise of terrorism on the protraction of violence as well as the effect of foreign intervention.

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<sup>184</sup> Kai M. Thaler, "Ideology and Violence in Civil Wars: Theory and Evidence from Mozambique and Angola," *Civil Wars* 14, (2012): , doi:10.1080/13698249.2012.740203.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **THE DYNAMICS AND DURATION OF THE SYRIAN CIVIL WAR**

*“Those who 'abjure' violence can do so only because others are committing violence on their behalf.”* George Orwell

During the initial calls for protesting there had been no slogans against Bashar or the Ba’th Party. Protestors were merely calling for economic reforms to ease crushing hardships they had been facing.<sup>185</sup> Later activists would form three coalitions; calling for negotiating with the regime, they were the “Syrian Revolution General Commission (SRGC), the Ghad (*tomorrow*) alliance and the Higher Council of the Syrian Revolution”.<sup>186</sup> Following the first protests which were mostly peaceful, the dynamics of the uprising began to change as concessions offered by the regime to appease the protestors did not work. The regime has assumed that the ongoing wave of protesting would eventually subside just as with the movements in Egypt and Tunisia<sup>187</sup>. “Without the military mobilization and violent escalation all parties can reliably expect that that this wave of mobilization and coordination would be temporary.”<sup>188</sup> By offering some kind of reforms; such as giving Kurds citizenship and reviewing the emergency law in place since the sixties, they can override the protests. The opposition knew that the concessions were not serious and that the regime can easily go back on its promises once the mobilization has phased out and so new protests came out in different regions claiming that they don’t agree to the reforms proposed and suggested much extremer

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<sup>185</sup> Ibid, 1.

<sup>186</sup> Ibid, 2.

<sup>187</sup> James Fearon, "Syria's Civil War," *The Political Science of Syria's War* 5 (2013): accessed January 2017.

<sup>188</sup> Ibid, 15.

political changes and reforms. While the protestors refused the offers made by the regime, the regime was concerned with one point and that was not to look weak in the face of the opposition. According to the ICG Report on the uprising, the regime was worried that by offering too much concessions and not acting tough it was risking the creation of more mobilization and maybe regime defections.<sup>189</sup> Thus, it was a duty for the regime to act repressively in order to save its image and to continue to instill the politics of fear into its citizens.

#### **4.1 Dynamics of the Syrian Civil War**

Boasting a military force of about 220,000 men in the army and 70,000 men in the air force and air defense, the Syrian regime had one of the strongest militaries in the Middle East.<sup>190</sup> With such a military capacity and years of training in war combat, the regime's counter-revolution tactics involved using soldiers and military tactics in the face of the opposition. Once the Syrian Regime openly used violence to repress the peaceful protests it was clear that both sides would not be able to solve their disputes without resorting to violence. Scholars find that a key factor of falling into civil war is the regime's inability to decide if the opposing force has the ability to militarize or not and thus this gives more chance for the regime to use force in order to test out the resilience of the opposition.<sup>191</sup> Therefore, following this track of argument we find that extreme factions of the opposition found a window to militarize in order to face off the regime's use of military apparatus and at the same time to maintain the power of mobilization that had taken place in the days after the Deraa' torture incident. Shifting from the coalition

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<sup>189</sup> Ibid, 16.

<sup>190</sup> International Institute for strategic Studies, 2013.

<sup>191</sup> Fearon, "Syria's Civil War".

groups founded through peaceful activists, we see more radical formations of the opposition in Syria.<sup>192</sup>

As the Asad regime resorted to using snipers to attack protests and then deployed the elite security forces such as the Republic Guard;<sup>193</sup> mainly composed of Alawi soldiers and *shabiha* to attack protests across the country, we find many Sunni officers and soldiers defecting from the army. The defecting soldiers formed brigades of fighters and were mainly supplied with light weaponry that they managed to loot.<sup>194</sup> The army-defecting brigades that were formed were all grouped under the umbrella of a command named the “Free Syrian Army”.<sup>195</sup> The FSA was created with the assistance of the Syrian National Coalition (SNC) which consisted of the first activists that initiated the protests and opposition groups that lived outside of Syria but were supporting the opposition; made from Sunnis, particularly Muslim Brotherhood, Kurds, and members of other minorities, whom were calling for the removal of the Asad Regime.<sup>196</sup> The SNC held its very first meeting in Turkey and was supported by Saudi Arabia and Qatar.<sup>197</sup> This type of foreign support would give a whole new dimension to the Syrian conflict, particularly in terms of funding to the FSA. Six months into the uprising, the Asad regime had used artillery on the cities of Idlib and Latakia.<sup>198</sup> Many of the residents of those areas joined the brigades under the FSA. “The Syrian government use of violence as a deliberate tactic by aerial bombings in areas like Deir al-Zour where the city was mainly under rebel

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<sup>192</sup> Hokayem, *Syria's uprising*.

<sup>193</sup> Ibid, 83.

<sup>194</sup> Lawson, *Global security watch Syria*.

<sup>195</sup> Randa Slim, "Meet Syria's Opposition," *Foreign Policy* (February 11, 2011).

<sup>196</sup> Hokayem, *Syria's uprising*.

<sup>197</sup> Slim, "Meet Syria's Opposition,"

<sup>198</sup> Lawson, *Global security watch Syria*.

control pushed the opposition to support the insurgency.”<sup>199</sup> The number of its fighters has been estimated at around 50,000 fighters.<sup>200</sup> By November 2011, peaceful protesting had completely disappeared, the FSA resorted to using guerilla warfare, and suicide bombing tactics to weaken the Asad forces. As the fighting continued, leadership problems began to emerge amongst the rebels and many brigades no longer accepted the control of the FSA or the SNC. Some of the brigades challenged the authority of the FSA and its ideology, and internal conflicts within the SNC damaged the unity of the rebels. In the meantime, the Syrian regime had launched a deadly attack on the city of Bab Amru which it retook under its control in only 36 hours. As FSA forces withdrew, the regime also shelled the cities of al-Rastan and Idlib.<sup>201</sup> A lot of the brigades fled and joined other forces. The fragmentation of the rebellion due to ideology and operation differences weakened them and soon there would be up to 1,000 rebel groups operating in Syria, a factor that would push the conflict more towards a civil war.<sup>202</sup> The fragmented rebel groups began to shape under an Islamist umbrella in 2012, the Syrian Islamic Liberation Front; a moderate Islamist coalition and included strong brigades like the Farouq and Tawheed that operated in Homs and Idlib and along the Turkish border.<sup>203</sup> Other Salafi-oriented forces began to appear around the same time operating in other regions. Rebels that had formed around an Islamist identity were receiving a flow of weaponry from conservative governments such as Saudi Arabia and Qatar, “they were also receiving

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<sup>199</sup> Fontina Christi, "Syria's Civil War," *The Political Science of Syria's War 5* (2013): accessed January 2017.

<sup>200</sup> Slim, "Meet Syria's Opposition,"

<sup>201</sup> Lawson, *Global security watch Syria*.

<sup>202</sup> Marc Lynch, "Syria's Civil War," *The Political Science of Syria's War 5* (2013): accessed January 2017.

<sup>203</sup> *Ibid*, 85.

funding from the Syrian diaspora base in the Gulf and western countries.”<sup>204</sup> On the other hand, more moderate rebel groups were supported by the US government. According to Schulhofer-Wohl “modest external military support to the Syrian opposition ... has in fact exacerbated the dangers of fratricidal infighting and the rise of extremist groups.”<sup>205</sup> The regime was supported by other foreign powers like Iran and Hezbollah who had provided the regime with Shia’ fighters from Lebanon and Iraq and trained another militia group; the *Jaysh –al-Shayby* (the People’s Army).<sup>206</sup> As the uprising reaches its second year since the first protests had taken place in March, the dynamics of the conflict were very different, as violence has spread to every corner of the country and heavy-weaponry, and air strikes were being used by the regime against rebel-held grounds increasing therefore the death toll. By April 2012, the FSA and the regime regular army came into direct contact along the Jordanian border after the collapse of the first ceasefire proposed by the UN peace envoy Kofi Anan.<sup>207</sup> Battles extended on to include Damascus and Aleppo, where both sides were retaliating against each other.<sup>208</sup> According to Doyle and Sambanis “armed conflict with at least more than 1,000 related deaths on both fronts during battles each year that challenged the sovereignty of an internationally recognized state; occurs between the boundaries of the state, with the state involved as one of the combatants and

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<sup>204</sup> Ibid, 86.

<sup>205</sup> Schulhofer-Wohl, Jonah and Nicholas Sambanis, “What’s in a Line? Is Partition a Solution to Civil War?” *International Security* 34,(2009): 82-118.

<sup>206</sup> Andrew Terrill, "Iran's Strategy for Saving Assad" *The Middle East Journal* 69, (2015).

<sup>207</sup> Lawson, *Global security watch Syria*

<sup>208</sup> Ibid.



rebels were able to amount significant casualties to the state.”<sup>209</sup> With Asad’s address to the nation promising to retaliate against the extremists, *shabihha* killed 70 farmers in the village of Mazrah al-Quabir in Hama and the armed forces attacked Deraa’ and once again the rebels retaliated through bombing Aleppo. With the battles moving into the two major cities of Aleppo and Damascus the UN had declared that Syria was in a complete state of civil war since the conflict has long before crossed the threshold of a 1000 deaths. The remainder of the chapter is dedicated to another dimension of the Syrian Civil war in terms of its duration and the opportunities of ‘greed’ emerged as the conflict protracted. The analysis traces the different kinds of the economic benefits that were used by the rebels and the regime to continue fighting the war and maintain its duration.

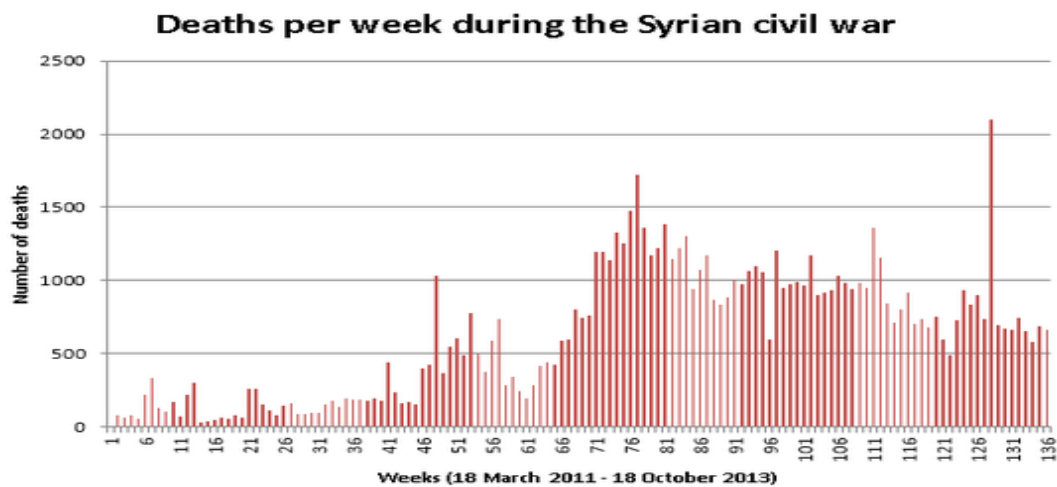


Figure 4. Diagram showing number of Deaths per week during the Syrian civil war.<sup>210</sup>

<sup>209</sup> Lawrence D. Freedman, Michael W. Doyle, and Nicholas Sambanis, "Making War and Building Peace: United Nations Peace Operations," *Foreign Affairs* 85, (2006): doi:10.2307/20032164.

<sup>210</sup> *Syrian Martyr Database*. <http://www.syrianshuhada.com> (accessed April 28,2017).

## **4.2 Greed and Duration of the Syrian Civil War**

The average duration of civil war according to Collier is an average of seven years.<sup>211</sup> As civil wars prolong a set of factors begin to shape the dynamics of the conflict in ways that make it even harder to end. According to the literature on the study of duration of civil war, civil wars might last for a whole decade, others end after a third-party intervention and then conflict strikes again, while some have no sight to an end despite many cease-fires that were not honored.<sup>212</sup> Prolonged conflicts create a war economy that keeps the conflict going where through this war economy rebel groups and regime forces alike capitalize on making benefits from illicit activities that would have not been possible if the political and economic system of the country had not broken down due to the violence. According to David Keen “members of armed gangs can benefit from looting; and regimes can use violence to deflect opposition, reward supporters or maintain their access to resources. Under these circumstances, ending civil wars become difficult and winning them may not be desirable.”<sup>213</sup> These war economies create networks of ‘greed’ that provide incentives for fighting sides to prolong the duration of war. “In short, greed simply means the ‘economic opportunity to fight and should be distinguished from socio-political grievances.”<sup>214</sup> It is measured in terms of the availability to resources that can be used to satisfy or benefit fighting groups whether to

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<sup>211</sup> Paul Collier, Anke Hoeffler, and Måns Söderbom, “On the duration of civil war,” *Journal of Peace Research* (2001).

<sup>212</sup> Jennifer M. Hazen, *What rebels want: resources and supply networks in wartime* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2013), 49.

<sup>213</sup> Keen, *The economic functions of violence in civil wars*.

<sup>214</sup> Syed Mansoob Murshed and Mohammad Zulfan Tadjoeeddin, "Reappraising the Greed and Grievance Explanations for Violent Internal Conflict," *SSRN Electronic Journal*, (2009).

finance their war efforts, recruit fighters or loyalists or to make geographical control.<sup>215</sup> Therefore, the Syrian regime and the opposition both become beneficiaries of a prolonged war, where Greed plays a direct role in the mobilization and spread of violence to achieve these benefits. In addition, to the obvious beneficiaries of the prolonged violence, the existing war economy has led to the rise of a new elite group whose wealth directly relies on the continuation of violence as their status and wealth is made possible through the illicit trade that otherwise would have not been possible once the war ends. These new members of the elite are responsible for “the flow of goods between different parts in Syria and transactions between the regime held areas and the outside world.”<sup>216</sup> Hence, due to increased duration of fighting; economic benefits of fighting create further opportunities of greed and therefore, there doesn’t seem to be an end to this ongoing cycle of violence that both warring sides find lucrative to continue. “The point of war might be precisely the legitimacy which it confers on actions that in peacetime would be punishable as crimes.”<sup>217</sup> Economic functions of violence such as labor exploitation is often employed by rebels or pro-government forces is evident when there is lucrative benefits from looting or smuggling natural resources for profit. In this case civilians are exploited for labor in exchange for protection.<sup>218</sup> Other factors of greed would be extortion through getting protection money from individuals and companies alike and stealing aid money which then can be politicized to maintain loyalty between rebel ranks

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<sup>215</sup> Ibid.

<sup>216</sup> Samer Abboud, "The Economics of War and Peace in Syria," *The Century Foundation*, March 24, 2017, accessed July 14, 2017, <https://tcf.org/content/report/economics-war-peace-syria/>.

<sup>217</sup> Keen, *The economic functions of violence in civil wars*.

<sup>218</sup> Ibid.

of regime-supporting forces whose resources would be diminishing as the war continues. Greed is not only manifested in the economic benefits reaped by the economies of war created but within the Syrian case it also plays a role in the fragmentation of the rebellion and the proxy-war fought by the international community. These examples will be further analyzed in the following section. Greed is referenced in this analysis in terms of any opportunity presented to prolong the violence and thus increase the duration of the war. These opportunities can be motivated by economic agendas to make profits otherwise would not be possible without the usage of violence or could be opportunities where the violence is a cover-up for the Greed to maintain power as the one being carried out by the Asad regime. On the one hand, research has shown that terrorist organizations such as ISIS have managed to operate as semi-states by creating safety-havens for those who would reside in towns controlled by the organization and providing them with services in return for their loyalty and support <sup>219</sup>and therefore further increasing the capacity of ISIS to initiate violence to gain territory and expand its power and influence. On the other hand, the regime has been cutting deals with ISIS, buying oil from the territories under its control and thus essentially empowering the organization.<sup>220</sup>

#### **4.3 Opportunities for ‘Greed’ and Economic Functions of Violence**

While the Syrian civil war was motivated by past grievances and state dynamics built on sectarian divisions that led to the usage of violence and the outbreak of civil war, the duration of the war and the prolonging of violence is directly affected by Greed.

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<sup>219</sup> Cody Brown, "Mobilizing the Caliphate: ISIS and the Conflict in Iraq and Syria," *Croatian Political Science Review* (2015): 4-5.

<sup>220</sup> Sam Dagher , "Control of Syrian Oil fuels war between Kurds and the Islamic State," *Wall Street Journal* , November 2014.

Unlike other case-studies where Greed was a motivation for the outbreak of civil war, the role of Greed in the Syrian civil war can be traced to a later stage of the conflict. It is even often described by news outlets as the ‘second civil war’ particularly with the emergence of ISIS that essentially changed the flow and dynamics of the conflict. This is particularly important in understanding the role of Greed at this later stage and its effect on chances of ending the war. As violence escalated and spread across the country and with the usage of heavy artillery, new players came into the picture. By April 2013, the civil war saw the infiltration of many jihadists from foreign countries that were attracted by the ideology of some of the Islamist rebel groups that began to appear as the civil war continued. These fighters were mainly from Asia Minor and Eastern Europe although many westerners have also joined jihadi fighting.<sup>221</sup> This new force on the rebel side was created under the name of the Islamic Front as more brigades that were once under the umbrella of the FSA split and created their own alliances. Along with the Salafi groups that made up the Islamic Front such as the Army of Islam, and Ansar al Sham, the Jihadi wing of the Islamic Front consisted on Jabhat Al Nusra; which adopts Al Qaeda ideology, and ISIS which is considered by policy makers as an incarnation of the AL Qaeda in Iraq. Both organizations are considered terrorist organizations. Once the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) or known as ISIS, has infiltrated the Syrian civil war intensified fighting amongst the rebel groups has once again changed the dynamics of the war. The FSA posed as a threat to ISIS which was on a mission to create its own state in regions within the Eastern region of Syria. While rebel and opposition groups once fought against

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<sup>221</sup> Kimiko De Freytas, "Foreign Jihadis Fighting in Syria Pose Risk in West," *New York Times*, May 2015.

the regime, with the emergence of new forces such as ISIS, the rebel groups fought amongst themselves. Each following its own agenda, different factions were looking to recruit members in order to expand their authority and therefore Greed plays a role in the fragmentation of the opposition.<sup>222</sup> Due to the deteriorating conditions of the war, and as the level of income of citizens decreased, unemployed youth presented the perfect opportunity as recruits and therefore the fighting sides can continue to resort to violence. This has led to further fragmentation of the rebels itself and further increases the duration of the conflict as it makes it harder to bring all the warring sides to an agreement to stop the violence.<sup>223</sup> “Fragmentation of the oppositions prolongs conflict as this creates more veto players who can and have the power to continue fighting if the agreement on the table is not appealing to their interests.”<sup>224</sup> With these periods of prolonged violence, rebel groups have to be self-sufficient and provide their sources. Prolonged conflict essentially presents and encourages economic functions of violence to exist. “The longer the civil war, the more likely it becomes that people will find ways to profit from it.”<sup>225</sup> These economic functions of violence are opportunities of ‘Greed’ that the warring sides can use to maintain the fighting therefore creating more violence because the continuation of the fighting will ensure that these actors can continue to make profit from them, since these economic benefits would not have been achieved had the conflict been resolved or its duration decreased.<sup>226</sup> The survival of the different warring sides, whether

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<sup>222</sup> Murshed and Tadjoeeddin, "Reappraising the Greed and Grievance Explanations for Violent Internal Conflict."

<sup>223</sup> Lynch, "Syria's Civil War."

<sup>224</sup> Fearon, "Syria's Civil War."

<sup>225</sup> Keen, *Complex emergencies*.

<sup>226</sup> Keen, *The economic functions of violence in civil wars*.

the rebels amongst themselves or on the other hand the government fighting hard to survive, several opportunities of Greed within Syria motivated the continuation of the war by all sides and made it harder for a truce to be drafted and honored. These examples of Greed such as the selling of oil, the illegal trade of drugs and smuggling of artifacts, became a goal for the warring sides in its self to continue the war. These examples are to be further analyzed below.

#### **4.3.1 Oil:**

Oil is the biggest source of funding for the military operations and possess the biggest opportunity for greed to prolong the duration of the war in order to maintain profits from selling it. “Before the war Syria nearly produces 400,000 oil barrels a day of crude oil from its eastern regions and exports nearly 150,000 b/d. Since the outbreak of the uprising in 2011, the production of oil and gas has been affected by economic sanctions placed on the regime and due to the ongoing fighting that has been taking place.”<sup>227</sup> The oil fields are divided amongst Kurdish rebel groups, ISIS and the regime. The oil fields as the war has protracted is divided amongst the “Syrian regime which controls 8% of the oil fields, the Kurds whom control 25% of the oil fields and ISIS which controls 80% of the oil fields.”<sup>228</sup> The presence of oil creates a network of ‘greed’ opportunities because each of the sides that control it are using it for their own profit and without the violence this opportunity would not have been present. For example, ISIS is selling the oil in the black market at a very low price with estimates at around \$15 a barrel when the price of one crude oil barrel on the market is being sold at a price of \$75-

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<sup>227</sup> Hussein Almohamad and Andreas Dittmann, "Oil in Syria between Terrorism and Dictatorship," *Social Sciences* 5 (2016):,doi:10.3390/socsci5020020.

<sup>228</sup> Ibid.

\$80 a barrel before the oil crisis which hit in 2016.<sup>229</sup> Several economic functions of violence are created due to the presence of oil. ISIS is able to smuggle the oil along the Turkish border where others would then sell it on the global market. And so that way it is able to create profit through illicit trade that is estimated to generate \$2-3million per day.<sup>230</sup> In addition to smuggling the oil across the border ISIS also sells the crude oil to warlords in the rebel (FSA) controlled areas, whom have no oil resources and due to the blockade the regime imposes on them have no fuel for daily life activities and electricity. Warlords in these regions buy the crude oil and sell it at triple the price of the legitimate market.<sup>231</sup> Although it holds some oil fields, the regime doesn't have enough maintain its war equipment and thus it too buys the oil from ISIS. Oil presented the epitome of opportunities for greed. ISIS was able to force protection money out of the regime in exchange for protect the gas pipelines that run to its government-run refinery in Homs.<sup>232</sup> As the war drags on, research shows that ISIS rebels and the regime seem to have become business partners, "Opposing forces in civil wars have covertly cooperated in a variety of ways for example through making trading agreements"<sup>233</sup>, and thus they are no longer concerned with ending the war just as ISIS is not concerned with removing the Asad regime, but is capitalizing on all the profits of extracting oil to build and supply its fighters into creating its own caliphate.<sup>234</sup> The existence of oil has also been used to use

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<sup>229</sup> Dagher, "Control of Syrian Oil fuels war between Kurds and the Islamic State.

<sup>230</sup> Hallaj, Omar . The balance-sheet of conflict: criminal revenues and warlords in Syria. Report. Norway: NOREF, (2015).

<sup>231</sup> Dagher , "Control of Syrian Oil fuels war between Kurds and the Islamic State."

<sup>232</sup> Ibid.

<sup>233</sup> Keen, The economic functions of violence in civil wars.

<sup>234</sup> Florian Waetzel and Charles Lister, "The Syrian Jihad: Al-Qaeda, the Islamic State, and the Evolution of an Insurgency, Democracy and Security," (2016):127,DOI:



the civilians in the area to work in the refinery, many of them working in exchange for survival and not getting killed by the jihadi groups. As for the Kurds, rivalry over the oil fields in the northeastern part of Syria along the Turkish border have sparked battles over control with ISIS forces. Kurds have used the profits from the selling of the oil to fund the creation of a coalition calling for the autonomy of the Kurds.<sup>235</sup>

#### **4.3.2 Looting, Smuggling and Illicit Trade**

As the war prolonged, rebel and pro-government militia were encouraged to loot the regions and neighborhoods they control as the high-stipend they were once given, decreased as outside aid failed to keep its promises.<sup>236</sup> Reports from the American Bar Association described the looting to have been conducted by pro-government soldiers, where they looted factories and department stores. This led to the existence to another opportunity for greed where rebels then offered protection the residents of the lootable property in exchange for money.<sup>237</sup> Looting here gives both the rebels and the pro-regime militia, incentives to prolong the violence as they can continue to gain profits and capitalize on the \$1billion source of cash this opportunity has presented them.<sup>238</sup> Markets where the spoils of the looting were being sold turned out to be very profitable and research has shown that whole ‘souqs’ that sell stolen goods have been set up across several towns.

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10.1080/17419166.2016.1167541.

<sup>235</sup> Almohamad and Dittmann, "Oil in Syria between Terrorism and Dictatorship."

<sup>236</sup> Omar, "The balance-sheet of conflict."

<sup>237</sup> Ibid.

<sup>238</sup> Ibid.

Another opportunity for 'Greed' was the looting of Archeological artifacts particularly by the rebels. "Art historians and intelligence officials say that antiquities smuggling by IS has exploded in recent months, aggravating the pillaging by government forces and opposition factions. Looting, often with bulldozers, is now the militant groups' second-largest source of finance after oil."<sup>239</sup> At first small artifacts were easy to sell and would be sold for a few hundred dollars, and pieces such as manuscripts were being sold for thousands. As the war continued, networks were created where it became extremely lucrative to loot and smuggle archeological sites. This allowed for the formation of routes that the stolen artifacts would pass through to the hands of dealers in Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey.<sup>240</sup> Research has shown that the largest archeological sites are in the hands of Jabhat-Al Nusra and ISIS, and that the trade makes an "estimated revenue of 300-400 million dollars that is shared amongst the rebel organization."<sup>241</sup> Pro-regime fighters and FSA rebels were also involved in the trade which was estimated to be an equivalent to \$100 million.

Smuggling goods has also become a very lucrative and profitable opportunity for the regime and the rebels alike to exploit. As millions were under siege, fuel, food supplies, medicine and water were scarce or sometimes non-existent. "At any time in Syria, about 4-5 million people either are under siege or have hazardous access to goods. Profits went to those who managed to exploit the risk of bringing the goods into the besieged areas, whether this was wholesalers, smugglers, army officers, rebels controlling

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<sup>239</sup> Joe Parkinson, Ayla Albayrak, and Duncan Mavin, "Syrian 'Monuments Men' race to protect antiquities as looting bankrolls terror," *Wall street Journal* , February 2015.

<sup>240</sup> Omar, "The balance-sheet of conflict."

<sup>241</sup> Ibid.

the roads or shipping contractors.”<sup>242</sup>The profits of smuggling those goods into areas under siege particular pro-rebel civilian town reaped the profits. As anyone wanted to capitalize on profit as the war prolonged and even pro-government soldiers took the toll of the unavailability of direct funds, no one group could have controlled this network.<sup>243</sup>

### **4.3.3 Kidnapping and Protection Money**

Protection money and kidnaping were also other forms of short economic functions of violence was the opportunity to get cash through the exchange of hostages or prisoners seized by the regime.<sup>244</sup> Kidnapping presented itself as an opportunity for greed to generate more profits and presented itself as an opportunity to get quick cash. At first the phenomena were simply an exchange of prisoners between the regime and the opposition groups but then the motive for greed and to make money and profit was the golden opportunity. Civilians and journalists were easy targets for kidnaping by warlords, pro-regime fighters and rebels whom were all charging high rates for release in exchange for ransom.<sup>245</sup> There was also a connection between random acts of arrests that were motivated by the need to receive ransom money in return. “There is a growing body of evidence suggesting that some of the local peace committees have started acting as middlemen by charging high commissions.”<sup>246</sup> There is even some evidence that as the duration of the civil war increased, terrorist organizations such as ISIS have bought foreign prisoners from other groups to serve their own purpose and agenda.<sup>247</sup> Extortion

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<sup>242</sup> Ibid.

<sup>243</sup> Ibid.

<sup>244</sup> Ibid.

<sup>245</sup> Dagher, "Control of Syrian Oil fuels war between Kurds and the Islamic State."

<sup>246</sup> Omar, "The balance-sheet of conflict."

<sup>247</sup> John, Knefel, "How ISIS gets its hostages." *Vocativ*, 2014.

money was also common. Local business owners that have often suffered from the looting process, were forced to pay protection money to rebel groups in order to keep their business alive.<sup>248</sup>

In conclusion the role of Greed in the Syrian Civil War has been essentially crucial to the duration of the conflict and the prolonging of violence. Despite the belief that wars are expensive to maintain and so it is irrational to wage them, evidence presented above has shown that it is very lucrative to maintain the duration of war. “Ending a conflict often entails the dismantling of these war economies in favor of returning to a normalized legal market system. Those who benefit from controlling the war economy are unlikely to readily surrender this market in exchange for the potential of a regulated market.”<sup>249</sup>

This could then explain why violence has also been a motivation in order to make more profits and gains. “The spoils of war can outweigh the costs of fighting.”<sup>250</sup> Within the case study of the Syrian conflict, evidence shows that the role of greed has played out in many directions that constantly makes it lucrative and important to maintain the usage of violence and therefore increasing the duration of the war rather than end it. Evidently, the opportunities of greed within the Syrian conflict have provided the golden opportunity for terrorist organizations such as ISIS and Al-Qaeda to infiltrate the rebel organizations. As they have access to resources and money made from the smuggling of oil and other forms of illicit trade they attracted recruits and so they began to build a cadre of fighters always ready to wage an offensive attack. This is also another important role as the rise of these organizations and them posing as appealing alternatives to a more secular opposition but

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<sup>248</sup> Omar, “The balance-sheet of conflict: criminal revenues and warlords in Syria.”

<sup>249</sup> Hazen. *What rebels want*, 49.

<sup>250</sup> Ibid.

rather a poorly funded one; eventually shows us that greed has led to further fragmentation of the rebel groups and thus further increasing the duration of the war and prolonging the violence as these different factions fight against each other. The struggle between the different rebel groups whether to make economic or territorial gains has had a catastrophic effect on civilians who are the ones that pay the highest cost in a civil war. Greed has also fueled and led to the fighting between different organizations such as ISIS and Jabhat al-Nusra; further adding another complex layer to the conflict; to achieve hegemony and territorial control as they constantly are expanding to achieve their ultimate goal of setting up an Islamic Caliphate.<sup>251</sup> In addition, such organizations built networks of cooperation with the regime, made tactical moves along the border and even controlled border crossing; therefore, slowly operating as if they are a state themselves; taxing the flow of goods and even at times the people fleeing the war-zones. The networks that ISIS has forged with the regime have extended to the point that they help maintain an oil field refinery that the regime utilizes in Palmyra.<sup>252</sup> In conclusion, greed has motivated terrorist organizations such as ISIS to expand as funding has maintained the structure and the hierarchy of such an organization that resembles that of a state through the implementation of violence in the context of the Syrian civil war. It has also affected the duration of the prolonging of the violence, their outreach and spillover into neighboring countries, by further funding global terrorism. And while the fate of Asad remains inconclusive, the regime will continue to use violence. It wants to prolong the conflict in order to achieve popularity and regain control through secretly providing

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<sup>251</sup>Omar, "The balance-sheet of conflict: criminal revenues and warlords in Syria."

<sup>252</sup>Dagher, "Control of Syrian Oil fuels war between Kurds and the Islamic State."

funding to ISIS as explained previously; to present itself as the post-war liberal opportunity for a new Syria all while using ISIS to crush the rebels who initiated the mobilization of the protests in 2011.<sup>253</sup> Finally, the regime along with the different warring rebel factions including the organizations such as ISIS and Jabhat-Al Nusra have capitalized on funding provided by the international community. Once again, Greed has played a role in terms of the benefits several of the major countries such as Russia, Iran, Saudi Arabia and Qatar have stood to gain from the funding of opposing sides giving further incentives for the usage of violence and continuation of the war. As all sides measure the benefits of prolonging the violence against ending it, greed continuous to directly affect the duration of the civil war in Syria.<sup>254</sup> The following section will explain in detail the dynamics of external intervention within the Syrian Civil War.

#### **4.4 External Intervention, Greed and Duration of the Civil War**

Since the civil war began in Syria, the world has been interested in the outcomes of the war and which side would come out as the winner? The result would have great ramifications on the Middle East and the world too. Despite what some scholars might point to that civil wars are a closed series of events happening and concerning one state; in reality civil wars have a lot of working dimensions that directly affect it. While the Syrian civil war started because of internal factors, its duration rests on both internal and external factors. Recent research has shown that the involvement of rival states in a civil war directly increases the duration of the war, particularly if that intervention is rival to

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<sup>253</sup> Aryn Baker, "Why Assad Won't Fight ISIS." *Time*. <http://time.com/3719129/assad-isis-asset/>.

<sup>254</sup> Michael Bleaney and Arcangelo Dimico, "How different are the correlates of onset and continuation of civil wars?" *Journal of Peace Research* 48,(2011): 145-155.

the regime itself and is in support of the rebels.<sup>255</sup> The existence of rivalry between intervening states also further affects the duration of the civil war by prolonging the violence, “when a civil war country is involved in a rivalry with another state, the rebels’ expectation of aid will increase their desire to fight and prolong the war even before the occurrence of an intervention.”<sup>256</sup> The civil war in Syria has ignited past hatreds, or the Arab cold war as some scholars would describe it,<sup>257</sup> that was kept at bay and from time to time would erupt in events taking place in foreign policy. The long rivalry between the Sunni states and the Shia ones was once again in motion. According to Marc Lynch, civil war duration is directly affected by the number of players within the conflict.<sup>258</sup> As rebel fragmentation increases the duration of the conflict by increasing the number of veto players who can at any time end a peace agreement or refuse to cease fire or end the violence because the agreement is unsuitable, the involvement of external players also follows the same dynamic. When the rebellion started and after with the civil war, several countries and old allies started to take sides as the violence escalated. Funding and supplying the rebels with weapons and dollars, Saudi Arabia and Qatar were the first backers of the opposition following attempts to negotiate with the Asad regime to not use violence against the peaceful protestors.<sup>259</sup> On the other hand, Russia, Iran and Hezbollah had been backing the Asad regime since the start of the rebellion.

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<sup>255</sup> Sedan Akinaroglu and Elizabeth Radiszewski, “Expectations, Rivalries and Civil War Duration,” *International Interactions* (2005): 349-374.

<sup>256</sup> Akinaroglu and Radiszewski, 369.

<sup>257</sup> Curtis Ryan, “The New Arab Cold War and The Struggle for Syria,” review of *The Arab Cold War*, by Malcolm Kerr, *Middle East and Information Project*.

<sup>258</sup> Lynch, “Syria’s Civil War.”

<sup>259</sup> Hokayem, *Syria’s uprising and the fracturing of the Levant*.

According to Elbadawi and Sambanis, “foreign assistance to the opposition is related to longer wars, while aiding governments leads to termination of violence.”<sup>260</sup> We find the intervention of Qatar and Saudi Arabia has been increasing the duration of the civil war of different levels. Once the violence began and it was clear to the Arab states that the Asad regime was determined on using the violence, the Gulf States along with Turkey and Jordan were aiding the opposition activists. Qatar on the one hand, had lobbied the Arab league into giving Syria’s seat to the opposition and then proceed on with setting up an actual embassy for the opposition in Qatar, the only one in the world.<sup>261</sup> The Qatari assistance did not stop there, they further supplied the rebellion with small weaponry that was smuggled across the Turkish border, delivered through middlemen and also financial assistance that has been estimated at around \$3billion.<sup>262</sup> It was clear that Qatari and Saudi military and financial assistance were keeping the rebellion alive, especially when the rebels’ resources began to dry up around the Aleppo invasion in 2012. “The rebel campaign in Aleppo almost came to a halt in August 2012, when Tawheed and other groups ran out of ammunition. They received weaponry from Jordan.”<sup>263</sup> According to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, which tracks arms transfer says that between April 2012 and March 2013, more than 70 military cargo flights from Qatar have landed in Turkey. However, difference between the Qatari’s and the Saudi’s themselves in their intervention plans led to further

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<sup>260</sup> Ibrahim Elbadawi and Nicholas Sambanis, *“External interventions and duration of civil wars* (Washington, DC: World Bank, Development Research Group, Public Economics, 2000).

<sup>261</sup> Roula Khalaf and Abigail Smith, "How a Tiny Gas-rich Gulf State Seized Control of the Syrian Revolution," *The Financial Times*, May 2013.

<sup>262</sup> Khalaf and Smith, (2013).

<sup>263</sup> Hokayem, *Syria's uprising and the fracturing of the Levant*.



fragmentation of the rebellion front and thus further increasing the duration of the war. Qatar at the time was more interested in making a name for itself in the global political area and that was evident through its support to many rebel groups without screening to their ideology or aims.<sup>264</sup> This was clear when Qatar was backing up both extremist rebel groups and Muslim Brotherhood backed rebel groups. The first hurt its relations with the west and the latter hurt its relationship with Saudi Arabia.<sup>265</sup> Saudi Arabia was more concerned with backing up Salafist and Wahhabi led rebels and at times even more liberal rebel groups under the wing of the FSA; but not support MB rebel groups.<sup>266</sup> This rivalry in foreign policy between the intervention Gulf states negatively affected the opposition and thus the duration of the war, as they assistance had kept the war prolonged by making some limited gains against the Asad regime but was not efficient enough to topple Asad out of power and end the violence. Further, the mistrust between Qatar and Saudi Arabia, created opportunities of ‘greed’ within the rebel brigades, where we kept seeing rebel groups seeking support from any side and thus constantly changing their loyalties as they saw more profitable, and so it was in their interest that the violence was protracted.<sup>267</sup> According to Oweis, this shift in ideologies by some rebel factions became clear in 2013 as resources for funding became scarce. Rebels operating under the FSA shifted allegiance when the funding resources to the rebel group dried up and later changed their allegiance again and joined ISIS when the same situation occurred under

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<sup>265</sup> Emile Hoakayem, “Iran, and the Gulf States and the Syrian Civil war,” *Survival Global Politics and Strategy* 56, (2014):59-86.

<sup>266</sup> Khalaf and Smith, (2013).

<sup>267</sup> Ibid, 68.

the Nusra Front.<sup>268</sup> The ideology war between Iran and Saudi Arabia further complicated the dynamics of the Syrian civil war, where many times the Saudis blocked UN initiatives to end the fighting ones that included negotiations involving the Iranians.<sup>269</sup>

The Asad regime has also been receiving military and financial support. Allied by sectarian lines Hezbollah and Iran have been supporting the Asad regime since the beginning of the rebellion at many times we see the infiltration of Shia' fighters from Lebanon and sometimes Iraq joining in the pro-Asad militia; many were trained by the Iranian Guard and were responsible for brutal torture and mass killing in Sunni regions supporting the rebellion.<sup>270</sup> Although Iran witnessed a government change in 2013, and one that was more interested in amending its relationship with the West and also lift economic sanctions, not much has changed in Iran's determinacy in saving the Asad regime.<sup>271</sup> Asad's survival would mean avoiding a new Sunni government that would essentially isolate Iran amongst a group of Sunni led countries and thus end its geopolitical aspirations in the region, particular after the failure of the Shia' led uprising in Bahrain. At times when Asad was running out of resources Russia was also helping in his survival. "Russia's long relationship with Syria meant that it had specific interest in the regime."<sup>272</sup> Should the Asad regime fall Russia would lose an ally in the region one that was its biggest military market in the region with deals of \$500 million made and

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<sup>268</sup> Khaled Oweis, "Local Dynamics in the Syrian Conflict: Homegrown Links in Rebel Areas Blunt Jihadist Ascendancy," *German Institute for International and Security Affairs* (2016).

<sup>269</sup> Hokayem, "Syria's uprising and the fracturing of the Levant", 163.

<sup>270</sup> Andrew Terrill, "Iran's Strategy for Saving Asad" *The Middle East Journal* 69 (2015).

<sup>271</sup> Ibid.

<sup>272</sup> Hokayem, *Syria's uprising and the fracturing of the Levant*, 174.

also provided Russia with a warm water military base.<sup>273</sup> Russia too had a direct effect on the duration of the civil war, by rejecting several initiatives again by the UN to end the violence, however the Russian's would refuse them as long as they were on Western and Arab terms. To Russia, it had long opposed Western plans and initiatives across the globe and it seems that both sides were never going to see eye to eye despite the ongoing rising death toll. Further, Russia was skeptical at seeing the Asad regime fall and another Islamist government taking over; a trend that was evident in all the Arab Spring government that held elections after the old regimes were toppled.<sup>274</sup> Capitalizing on the military aid from Iran and Russia, and after every time Russia stopped a UN resolution to condemn the regime, the attacks on rebel and opposition regions would multiple.<sup>275</sup> The prolonging of the war and the this external intervention provided the regime with further economic functions of violence by holding back or cutting aid food supplies in order to starve certain rebel held regions and cutting back their electricity supplies to turn them against the rebels. Aid given to the soldiers was also sold and to generate money to attract more pro-regime fighters as the regime's financial resources diminished.<sup>276</sup>

With the rise of Islamist and al-Qaeda affiliated rebel organizations such as Jabahat al Nusarah and ISIS, Russia and Iran were even more concerned and further increased their aid to the regime. On February, 2016, Russian led airstrikes hit the city of Aleppo which had been a stronghold for the Islamists since their emergence in 2013.<sup>277</sup>

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<sup>273</sup> Ibid.

<sup>274</sup> Samuel Charap, "Russia, Syria and Doctrine of Intervention," *Survival Global Politics and Strategy* 55(2013):35-41.

<sup>275</sup> Hokayem, *Syria's uprising and the fracturing of the Levant*, 174.

<sup>276</sup> Dagher , "Control of Syrian Oil fuels war between Kurds and the Islamic State."

<sup>277</sup> Chulov, "No-one believes it: Aleppo losing hope amid doubts of seize fire."

The war on terror was the perfect opportunity for the regime to continue fighting hiding behind its narrative that it was supporting the minorities and fighting terrorists. The Russian airstrike gave way for the regime to further attack Sunni civilians that had not been able to flee the seen as the Russians provided Asad with an air shield. On the hand, the rise of these terrorist organizations pushed Qatar and Saudi Arabia to consider their aid plans and we see them negotiating with secular opposition groups to distance themselves from the terrorist organizations. Also having underestimated the regime's resilience meant that the investment of Qatar had diminishing returns. With the airstrikes led by Russia we find that strength had toppled in favor of Asad and not the rebels.

Six years into the civil war, hopes of resolving the conflict in Syria seems far-fetched and day after day the situation in the country deteriorates leaving more people dead. While the situation in Syria might have started as a peaceful protest against crushing matters of corruption and political participation, soon matters got worse with the regime deploying the military in the streets ready to deal as harshly as it would take to defeat the dissidence. Yet, those repressive tactics did nothing but harness hatred and outrage fueling more into the conflict. A fragmented opposition soon took up arms against the regime and from then on Syria has been caught up in vicious cycle of violence. While the international community has been warning of the danger of a militarized opposition, some powers involved in the conflict have been supplying the opposition with weaponry and thus led to a wider scale of violence. Further, with the change in the nature of the conflict and the rise of terrorist organizations like ISIS; that infiltrated the opposition, the Asad regime capitalized on the war on terror and has continuously received aid from Russia. The war on terror has become an important factor

in the new economies of war that are a factor of war duration and protraction of violence. With the changing dynamics of world politics in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the war on terror has taken a huge part of policies created by the West to fight a new threat to its citizens and stability. While Aid is supposed to be a relief to the violence in civil wars, “relief aid may be a short-term benefit form violence or even when it is used to fuel violence as it become part of the political economy.”<sup>278</sup> Thus, regimes in the Middle East such as the Asad regime by framing the rebels as extremists and terrorists have been able to attract relief aid from Russia in the form of weaponry to use in its own fight against civilians to settle their actions of rebellion in 2011.<sup>279</sup> The conflict in Syria has also awakened a dormant conflict between the Sunnis and other Arab countries in the region and the Iran. The violence in Syria was brutal and brought to light a new and shifting power politics and in the region. The violence and the conflict displayed the different alliances formed and the different aspirations both the regime, rebel groups and the international community of policy makers wanted to achieve. At times it seemed that the duration and the ongoing of the violence was more important than to solve the conflict. “The Syrian uprising therefore came to be seen through the lens of regional power politics: a struggle amongst Iran, Saudi Arabia, and Turkey for the center of the Arab world.”<sup>280</sup> The Syrian conflict also brought to light the tension between Shia’ and the Sunni states. Therefore, the removal of the Asad regime or it becoming a collapsed and weak one meant that the Sunni states triumphed over Iran which supported Asad. Yet, for many that was not an option. Basahr’s regime has worked well to tie itself and its fate to the fate of many of the

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<sup>278</sup> Keen, *The economic functions of violence in civil wars*.

<sup>279</sup> Keen, *Useful enemies*.

<sup>280</sup> Lynch, *The Arab uprising*.

minorities, particularly the Alawi community. Through using a particular narrative that framed the uprising as an Islamist movement the regime was able to alienate a large group of people from the movement. Also through state media, the regime was able to use sectarian divisions to mobilize the minorities and the Alawis by enticing fear that the Sunni rebellion if successful would retaliate against the minorities to achieve its ideology of religious control.<sup>281</sup> The minorities particularly feared that the religious freedom they have gained under Bashar's regime would be replaced. Upon that rhetoric and with the continuous violence that the rebels had restored to the fears of the minorities were manifested, as terrorist organizations infiltrated the rebels and opposition and the fighting intensified.

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<sup>281</sup> Hokayem, *Syria's uprising*

## CONCLUSION

The purpose of this thesis was to further study the Syrian Civil War, its dynamics and duration through applying the method of process-tracing to dissect different aspects of the conflict in order to trace back the origins of the Syrian society, its creation under the French mandate, and the rise of the Ba'th Regime to power since Hafiz al Asad to Bashar. Further, through tracing and studying each of the incentives of violence presented by different regions, we can analyze the different dynamics at play such as the rural vs. urban cleavage, Sunni vs Shia' and Alawi vs Sunni. Relying on process-tracing allows us to dig deeper into the case-study in order to study different factors of duration at the same time. Therefore, by analyzing these aspects of the civil war we can address the main research questions leading this thesis which were, why did the Syrian rebellion turn into a full on civil war unlike its neighboring countries of Egypt and Tunisia? And to investigate which opportunities of 'greed' that affected the duration of the civil war and its effect on the protraction of violence?

While this research project was only interested into a specific time frame to study the escalation and duration of the war, the fighting continues to this very day. The latest UNHCR reports on Syria show that the total number of deaths as of February 2016 has reached 470,000. The intensity and duration of the violence has pushed 6.1million people to be displaced from their hometown, and 4.8million seeking refuge abroad.<sup>282</sup> There are around 5 million Syrians currently registered as refugees. Two million refugees are currently residing in Egypt, Iraq, Jordan and Lebanon, while 2.9 million are registered by

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<sup>282</sup> Roth, "Syria."

Turkey. Out of the refugees that resided in Europe, 64% have applied for asylum in Germany and Sweden alone.<sup>283</sup>

Inspired by the movements of the Arab Spring, Syrian young and tech savvy protestors called for demonstrations against the corruption and demanding a dialogue with the regime for reforms. However, a brutal exercise of state repression against a group of young boys who used graffiti to copy slogans of the Egyptian revolution for the removal of the regime soon brought the country into a civil conflict. Soon civilians angered by the regimes brutality took to the streets only to be faced with more repression as snipers shot at demonstrators on Friday protests. Since the rebellion seemed to gather in the rural areas memories of a distant past were brought back to the present as once before, a rebellion had taken place in the countryside in the Sunni majority city of Hama, that was once before crushed by the regime. Yet, a clear distinguish had between both Asad regimes made the outcomes of the both rebellion lie of opposite ends of the spectrum. While Hafiz Al-Asad had managed to forge a unified and balanced regime around his military and Ba'th Party and was able with coercive apparatus crush the Sunni rebellion, Bashar had long before the 2011 uprising aggravated and awakened the grievance of the Sunni majority and alienated the rural part of the country through implementing failed economic liberalization projects that mainly focused on the urban infrastructure of the cities. With the apparent cleavages at play and the different incentives to engage in the violence, the regime had to devise certain tactics and rhetoric to mobilize different segments and regions in Syria. "The narrative that the regime

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<sup>283</sup> "Syrian refugees - UNHCR Syria Regional Refugee Response," UNHCR, last modified 06 Jul 2017 <http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/regional.php>



adopted was that the uprising was being back up by foreign agendas of countries that wanted to alter the Arab nature and identity of Syria and to weaken its position for Israel and that the Islamists were the tools of these agendas.”<sup>284</sup> In some regions it was enough for the regime to secure their loyalty but in other regions they had to develop tactics to mobilize them. Unfortunately, mobilizing the minorities particularly the Alawi community along sectarian lines deemed catastrophic and soon violence was exercised along those sectarian divisions. Through research we find that civilians who were politically attached to the regime and not just through community or sect ties Asad emphasized that he was the core of the regime that was keeping it intact in the face of a radical opposition that was a core threat to the identity of the state and wanted to radically change it. A lot of the supporters of the regime adopted this idea that Asad was keeping a religiously moderate state and his existence prevented chaos. This image appealed to bureaucrats and middle class public sector employees whose status and benefited from the regime. Those who decided not to join in the uprising were skeptical of the Islamist, conservative and peasant background of the opposition that they would reverse the modernization and the liberalization policies that the regime had implemented and thus to them the Asad regime was important. While it was clear that the calls for the rebellion were not inspired by sectarian divisions; the regime’s usage of repression and manipulation of sectarian division to mobilize supports led to the outbreak of the war along such lines. Further, as the attacks on rebel supportive regions escalated, the rebels began to seek ways to protect themselves and so we find that a lot of the rebels would

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<sup>284</sup> Lawson, *Global security watch Syria*,

attack police stations or munition storages to steal weapons. Soldier defection was also common at the first stages of the uprising and as a result both sides were mobilized and had access to weaponry and so the events that unfolded led to the country falling into civil war. By the end of 2012, the UN declared that Syria had fallen into a civil war as battles between the FSA and the regime claimed lives that had long crossed the civil-war threshold and there was no one authority in control; as major cities such as Aleppo and Damascus were under attack.

The dynamics of the civil war changed as it hit its third year and several negotiations for cease fire had failed. The fragmentation of the rebellion weakened their strength and with the rise of terrorist and jihadist organizations such as ISIS and Jabhat-al- Nusra; the rebels were fighting amongst themselves. Other Islamist rebel groups also broke away from the FSA, but they were not affiliated with Al-Qaeda. As the civil war prolonged and the violence continues, the warring sides had to find ways to fund their fighting ranks. Pro-regime and rebel fighters created for themselves a haven with the making profits from illicit trade activities such as smuggling, extortions of ransom money, displacement of people to control oil fields and looting of archeological artifacts that are being sold in the black market. These opportunities for 'greed' have thus created an environment for these actors that the continuation of the war was more important than winning it in terms of political gain or even removing the regime. Miscalculations on part of Saudi Arabia and Qatar and the ongoing mistrust between them further fragmented the rebels and thus increased the duration of the war. The financial assistance that both countries were giving directly to the rebels, was an opportunity for 'greed' and thus we

see rebel groups often reframing their allegiance and ideologies in order to receive that aid.

On the other hand, Iran and Hezbollah and Russia were adding Bashar supplying him with Shia' fighter and weapons. Russia's intervention into the Syrian civil war was particularly catastrophic. Russia was deeply invested to intervene and maintain the Assad regime no matter the consequences as Assad is its last ally in the Middle East and has a lucrative arms deal with the Russians. "The Arms trade has fed conflicts around the world. "US, Britain, France, Russia and china account for over four-fifth of the weapons exported to developing countries."<sup>285</sup> The Russian airstrikes that hit the city of Aleppo highly affected the death toll and left many civilians in direct line of fire and under attack. These airstrikes were the tipping point towards Bashar as we research had shown that Qatar and Saudi funding has decreased due to alerts from the rise of ISIS in the region. As the fighting continued more and more of the population was displaced and the refugee crisis was at its highest. There have been recommendation for a third-party intervention by a country or a group of nations who can act as mediators to solve the crisis, but up to the time-frame set for this study all negotiations and cease-fires had been manipulated by veto-players that wanted the conflict to play out in order to satisfy their own agendas.<sup>286</sup>

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<sup>285</sup> David Keen, *Complex emergencies* (Cambridge: Polity, 2012).

<sup>286</sup> Hokayem, *Syria's uprising and the fracturing of the Levant*.

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