

An Assessment of the Causes and Impacts of Contemporary Political Crisis in Syria and Yemen

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Abstract

In Islam, the crisis does not provide a solution to the problem. This has been stated in the religious doctrines and principles of the Glorious Qur'an, Hadith and consensus of the *Ulama*. In addition, Islam is the religion that comprises the total way of life of Muslims, where the Qur'an and Sunnah serve as guiding principles. The recent political crisis in Syria and Yemen is a violation and lack of strict adherence to the teachings of Islam. Against the above prism, the paper examines the impacts of the political crisis on Muslims in the two countries. Searches from books, internet sources, the Qur'an, and Sunnah were used as a finding and data elicitation method. The finding revealed that the crisis had resulted in an increase of disunity among Muslims; many Muslims' lives were lost and were economically downgraded and devastated. Therefore, the paper recommended that Muslims remain united and solve their problems amicably in line with the teachings of the Qur'an and Sunnah.

Keywords: Syria, Yemen, Impact, Political Crisis and Muslims.

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Introduction

Muslim population constitutes about 90% in each of the Syria and Yemen. The two countries are geographically situated in the Gulf of the Middle East. Wealthy people have various means of

living and are good at learning different fields such as religion, languages, science, technology, and other branches of knowledge. They are venerable in promoting the religion of Islam and Muslims in general, to the chagrin of the Western countries. Unfortunately, the two countries ran into an internal political crisis for some years, and by implication, it brought setbacks to the two countries. Many people lost their lives; some were injured, and many others were displaced from their homes. The incident affected not only the people of these two countries but also Islam and the Muslim world.

The Syrian Crisis

With the spate of governance, the French colonizers favoured Christian, Alawi and Druze minorities at the Sunni majority's expense. Moreover, France granted Alawi coastal mountain communities considerable autonomy, further influencing sectarian loyalties (Lister, 2017). It is worth noting that the colonial minority policies exacerbated regional confessional antagonisms. Of this status, France split Lebanon from Syria in 1943, hoping to secure Minority Christian dominance. Consequent upon this, the Sunni majority coexist uneasily with Alawi, Kurdish and Christian minorities. With Syria ethnically and religiously stratified, the seed of the sectarian war was sown.

While the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood (M.B.) was formed a decade later, its early development was influenced by the 1930s anti-colonial struggle. The 1940s French departure accelerated Islamist political development. Unlike the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood branch, the Syrian Brothers developed along a moderate path that embraced free elections and parliamentary politics (Lister, 2016). Parliamentary politics in Syria during the 1950s featured a Sunni Muslim Brotherhood clashing with a Christian and Alawi-led Baathist party (Thomas, 2017). Deprived of

private sector opportunities, the Alawi are overrepresented in Syria's armed forces. By the Late 1950s, Baathist party loyalties had penetrated the officer corps, who became alienated from the civilian government and its discriminatory policies.

The Baathist 1963 seizure of power radicalized the party and facilitated the rise of Aleppo and Hama party elites committed to jihad against the Alawi Baathist elite. The Baathists responded by banning Muslim Brotherhood membership, turning the organization into a violent insurgent network. In 1964, the Muslim Brotherhood was formed as an extremist combatant Vanguard that assassinated the Baathist party officials. This action gave Marwan Hadid the strength to seek cleansing of the Baathist and Alawi impurity to create a Shariah state (Al-Tamimi, 2017). By implication, in 1965, Hadid was arrested and died in prison a year later, hence becoming a martyr for an extremist organization.

By the late 1960s, the Baathist socialist revolution had stalled as Syria's economic stagnation produced ruling party divisions. Baathist militants in Syria's officer corps supported Air Force Colonel Hafeez al Assad, an Alawite, who consolidated his position within the party's hierarchy. Colonel Assad's 1970 military coup was designed to temper the radical thrust of Baathist social and economic policy to placate Sunni economic elites (Al-Tamimi, 2017). Assad's early rule assuaged Syria's entrepreneurial class through marketplace reforms. While hoping to pacify the relative Sunni, Assad never less reinforced Alawi's dominance of the armed forces and promoted family members to top-level governmental positions. Brotherhood opposition to Baathist rule grew throughout the 1970s, mounting a serious challenge to Assad's regime—many factors derived from the brother's antipathy toward Assad's government. The government's secular Pan-Arabist socialist ideals offended their Islamist worldview, as did the Alawite presence in top political and security positions. The Alawi are followers of the tenth-century religious movement that evolved from a

Shia branch of Islam that believes the twelfth imam will liberate the world from justice (West, 2018).

Assad's constitutional reform asserted that the country's president needs to be a Muslim, sparking widespread protest and violence (West, 2018). The brotherhood combatant vanguard continued its targeted assassination and urban guerrilla campaign. The exile of the M.B.'s damascene moderates secured the ascendancy of radical factions that wanted to intensify the insurrection (Gambhir, 2016). Influenced by Sayyid al Qutb's writings, Aleppo and Hama-based radicals urged for armed assistance.

Contemporary Political Crisis in Syria

The Syria insurrection was driven by the Arab Spring, where street protests and rebellions brought down Tunisia, Egypt, and Libyan governments, debilitating authoritarian regimes across the region. The 2011 protests against Bashar Assad's regime surprised many regional experts (West, 2018). Bashar assumed the presidency after his father died in 2000, and analysts hoped that the London-trained optometrist would unshackle the regime's authoritarian system. Western governments engaged Bashir, hoping that he would renew peace negotiations with Israel. Despite such expectations, Bashir continued to use the Israeli threat to justify his dictatorial rule. He dismantled the state's control through this standard and phenomenal development and liberalized vital industries, services, and agriculture. It is interesting that privatization disproportionately benefited Assad loyalists and family members. Some analysts believed that the resulting economic inequality and crony capitalism contributed to widespread resentment that surfaced in Daraa in March 2011 after security forces killed teenagers who sprayed the town's wall with anti-regime

graffiti (Cockburn, 2014). Many protesters gave tribute to 1984 martyrs and denounced the Assad family for its violent past.

Throughout 2012, protests escalated as hundreds of thousands demonstrated in Syrian towns, cities and villages. The severity of the regime representative actions with Shahabiha militias and secret police brutalizing protesters marred the demonstrations. Government forces even destroyed mosques that were symbolic centres for the resistance movement. The 2011 protests had a sectarian caste with Sunni towns and cities marked by violent demonstrations. Homs and Hama were centres of anti-regime resistance and fervour. Homs, in particular, was devastated by fighting that victimized many civilians. Much of the city was destroyed after regime forces conquered a debilitating siege in 2015. Fouad Ajami compared Homs to Bosnian Sarajevo, a Muslim city repeatedly savaged by Serbian militias some two decades ago (McCants, 2015). Assad regime killed hundreds of peaceful protestors, which led to the emergence of armed rebellion. Syrian army did not stand aside in trying to ensure the survival of Bashar's government. The Alawi-dominated corps, Special Forces Brigades and militias facilitated Bashar's repressive tactics.

Extent and Dimension of the Syrian Crisis

Some of the key moments and milestones in the Syrian crisis are as follows:

- March 2011: Anti-government demonstrations began as part of the Arab Spring.
- July 2011: The violence became widespread.
- July 2012: Zaatari Refugees' Camp was opened in Jordan and hosted 120,000 refugees in its first year.
- March 2013: The number of registered Syrian refugees reached 1 million.

- July 2014: The U.N. Security Council adopts a resolution authorizing cross-border aid delivery into Syria.
- September 2015: Conflict intensifies as outside parties become involved. Many Syrian refugees arrive in Europe, and Mercy Corps expands its response.
- July 2016: The battle for Aleppo, Syria's largest city, begins and lasts through August, displacing thousands.
- July 2017: The number of registered Syrian refugees surpasses 5 million.
- December 2019: Renewed airstrikes and bombings begin in Northwest Syria and forced 961,000 people to flee over three months- the most significant displacement since the beginning of the conflict.
- July 2020: The cross-border resolution is further curtailed, resulting in the closure of one of two remaining official border crossings used to deliver humanitarian aid.
- July 2020: The first case of COVID-19 is documented in Northern Syria (West, 2018).

Republic of Yemen

Yemen, which is officially known as the Republic of Yemen, is a country in Western Asia on the southern end of the Arabian Peninsula. It borders Saudi Arabia to the north and Oman to the northeast, and enclaves people's maritime borders with Eritrea, Djibouti and Somalia. It is the second largest Arab sovereign State in the peninsular, occupying 555,000 square kilometres (214,000 square miles). Yemen's constitutionally state capital and largest city is Sana'a, but it has been under Houthi rebels' control since February 2015. Its executive administration resides in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. The Kingdom of Yemen was established before the creation of the Yemen

Arab Republic in 1962. The two Yemeni States united to form the modern republic of Yemen (Al-jumheriyya al-Yemeniyyah) in 1990 by President Ali Abdallah Saleh, the new republic's first president, until his resignation in 2015 in the Arab Spring.

Yemen Political Crisis

Since 2011, Yemen has been in a state of political crisis, starting with street protests against poverty, unemployment, corruption, and President Saleh's plan to amend Yemen's constitution and eliminate the presidential term limit (Heneghan, 2014). This crisis led Saleh to step down and transfer power to Abdullahi Mansur Hadi. Since then, the country has been in a civil war (alongside Saudi Arabia-led military intervention aimed at restoring Hadi's government). The war has resulted in famine affecting 17 million people (West, 2017) and has distracted the country's water infrastructure, causing a most prolonged outbreak of cholera where over 2,226 people died since 2017 (West, 2017). The situation of Yemen crisis has been labelled as genocide (Bale, 2013).

Synthesised Impacts of Contemporary Syrian and Yemen Political Crisis on the Muslims

The political crisis in both countries seriously affected Muslims, especially in the following:

- The crisis promoted disunity among Muslims, which is prohibited in Islam. Qur'an says:

”واعتصموا بحبل الله جميعا ولا تفرقوا“ (ال عمران) 103

"And hold fast, all of you together, to the cable of Allah, and do not separate."

(Qur'an : 3:103)

The verse encouraged Muslims to remain united and should not allow any separation.

The Prophet (SAW) further says:

- الجماعة الرحمة والفرقة عذاب” (رواه إمام أحمد) -

“Coming of people together is a blessing while separation leads to dangerous situations.”
(Narrated by Ahmad).

- The war shows some alliances between Muslims and Non-Muslims of the West.

In the Glorious Qur'an, Allah says:

"يأيها الذين ءامنوا لاتتخذوا اليهود والنصارى اولياء....." (المائد:51)

O you who have believed, do not take the Jews and the Christians as allies. They are (in fact) allies of one another. Moreover, whoever is an ally to them among you – then indeed, he is (one) of them.

Indeed, Allah guides not the wrong-doing people

(Q,5:51)

- The crisis resulted in the loss of the Muslim population in the World against the teachings of Islam. The Qur'an says:

"ولا تقتلوا النفس التي حرم الله إلا بالحق" (الإسراء:33)-

“And do not kill the soul [i.e., person] which Allah has forbidden, except by right. Moreover, whoever is killed unjustly, We have given his heir authority, but let him not exceed limits in [the matter of] taking life. Indeed, he has been supported (by the law)” (Qur'an17:33).

In another verse, Qur'an says: If anyone kills a person, unless it is for murder or spreading mischief in the land, it would be as if he killed the whole people (Qur'an 5:32).

The verse showed that whoever killed innocent Muslims, it seemed like he killed the whole people of the World.

- Most of the Muslims' towns, wealth and properties were destroyed unnecessarily by Muslim brothers. The prophet (SAW) said:

"إنى حرمت الظلم على نفسي وجعلته بينكم محرما فلا تظالموا"

Verily, He (Allah) said: Oh, My servant! Indeed, I have forbidden tyranny on Myself, and I have made it forbidden among yourselves, so do not torment each other (Bukhari and Muslim).

- Their brothers in Islam assassinated some of the Muslim experts in science and technology and other scholars. This is seriously against the teachings of Islam and resulted in setbacks in the religion.

- Thousands of Muslim children were unnecessarily killed who would have contributed toward the progress of the Islamic community in the World.
- The crisis affected the Muslim countries.
- Worship and learning centres such as mosques and Islamic schools were destroyed.

Conclusion

Islam is a religion of peace, and it teaches Muslims the way of life and how to love each other. Islam is a monolithic religion that serves as a binding force for the creation of formidable unity towards the growth of the religion and improving the life of the Muslim Ummah irrespective of the socio-cultural and political milieu in which one finds him/herself. Historically, Syria and Yemen are two strong Islamic States striving to progress their countries and Islam. Unfortunately, they fell into an internal political crisis for many years due to political interest. The study revealed that the crisis affected Muslims in many ways. Notably, it promoted disunity among Muslim brothers and enhanced the forbidden unity among Muslims and non-Muslims of the West; many Muslims, both adults and children, were killed, some were displaced from their houses, mosques and Islamic schools were destroyed, and Muslims were economically down. Muslims are advised to remain united to live according to the guidance of the Qur'an and Sunnah and resolve their political and sectarian problems amicably for the peace and progress of Islam.

Recommendations

1. Muslims should remain united and disallow their separation.
2. Muslims should not unite with the non-Muslims to attack their brothers in Islam.
3. Muslims should live in line with the teachings of the Glorious Qur'an and Sunnah and deprive the Western system of life like democracy.

4. Muslims should not fight with their Muslim brothers for whatever reason and try to solve their misunderstanding amicably in line with the teachings of Islam.
5. Muslims should improve their technological experience to face the Western challenges against Islam.
6. Top Muslim countries like Saudi Arabia and Iran, as highly influential Islamic States, should unify and cooperate to tackle their differences for the progress of their countries and Islam in general.
7. A strong and formidable Muslim organization that unites all Muslims needs to be formed, and the existing one should be repositioned to create renewed hopes for global Muslims.

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