The Syrian Refugee Crisis: A Short Orientation

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Introduction

Following decades of internal religious, political, and economic turmoil and international actions, a civil war broke out in Syria in 2011, sending unprecedented numbers of refugees to the surrounding countries, to Europe, and gradually to North America. While the international and Canadian communities are struggling to address this humanitarian crisis, background knowledge about the unfolding situation is needed. This report will provide: (1) a summary of the recent history of the Syrian crisis, starting in the 1970s; (2) an orientation to the Syrian refugee flows; and (3) an outline of the Canadian and international refugee resettlement efforts.

Origins of the Syrian Crisis

The complex history of the Middle East is a much longer story than can be told here, with roots extending far beyond the last four to five decades, which are the focus of this paper (June 2016). A full treatment of the events of this more recent era in Syria is very challenging, as we have opted to focus on the current events and their precedents which shed light on the present humanitarian crisis. Outlined below are the main players, and a brief look at how we arrived here.

1970-2000 (Hafiz Al-Assad regime)

Although the history is much longer, the seeds of the 2011 civil war are to be found in 1970, with the foundation of the country's authoritarian regime. In that year, in reaction to the surge of the nationalism bolstered by the loss of Golan Heights in the war against Israel, President Hafiz (also spelled as Hafez in some sources) Al-Assad put in place a "neo-patrimonial" strategy that concentrated power in a "presidential monarchy" buttressed by his faction of the army and security forces (Hinnebudch, 2012, p.96). The regime was established on the political foundation of the Arab Ba'ath Party which was established in Syria in 1947, espousing an ideology of pan-Arabism against the Sunni Arab majority and its western allies under its motto "Unity, Liberty, Socialism". Although the civil war cannot be explained as merely the result of these conflicts, it is the foundation for the issues that have unfolded in Syria.

Syria is a multi-religious and multi-cultural country. The Syrian religious demography includes Sunni Arabs, Shia Arabs, Christian Arabs, Muslim Kurds, and Syrian Palestinians (Fargues, 2014). The majority (87%) are Muslim (the official religion in Syria, includes 74% Sunni and 13% Shia, which includes 8-15% Alawites and a smaller portion of Ismailis) (CIA 2016, BBC 2011). The religious minorities include Christian 10% (Orthodox, Uniate, and Nestorian), Druze 3%, and a small number of Jews remaining in Damascus and Aleppo.

While the Sunni Arab population has constituted the majority in Syria, since

the regime of Hafiz Al-Assad, it has been dominated by Alawi elite government and military officers. Although only forming a minority of the total Syrian population, Alawites have dominated the Syrian army, a legacy of French colonialism. This sectarianism has played an important role in forming a solid political identity for the regime of the Alawite Al-Assad family, personified in Hafiz Al-Assad, and now Basher Al-Assad.

The Alawite sect of Muslims is not acknowledged as such by the Sunni community, including the Society of Muslim Brothers (Muslim Brotherhood), founded in Egypt in 1928 and spreading through other surrounding countries including Syria, particularly following the revolution and overthrow of President Hosni Mubarak in 2011, also known as the Arab spring. In Syria, the majority Sunni community, represented by the Muslim Brotherhood, reacted to the Alawi elite rule, engaging in several urban rebellions, including a major insurrection in northern cities in the early 1980s (Hinnebudch, 2012, p.97). In order to deflect public antagonism and legitimate his regime backed by rural Ba'ath constituencies and Alawi elites in Damascus, President Al-Assad took a hard stance against Israel's war for Golan Heights. Positioned as resistance to western imperialism, these policies led to Syria's alienation from western countries and also buttressed its closer relationship with the Soviet Union and the Arab Gulf countries.

The Al-Assad regime's unpopular economic policies, patronage and corruption, and its secular stance aggravated internal religious and political divisions (Hinnebudch 2012) leading to conflict with the urban merchant-clerical Sunni Arab population (Institution for the Study of War 2011). The economic slump of the late 1980s negatively impacted the public sector, froze social benefits, and degraded the lives of the state-employed middle class. In parallel with the detrimental economic status of Syria, the collapse of the Soviet Union and the 1990s peace processes regarding the Israeli war increased the distrust for the regime. The fall of the Soviet Union shut down the significant amount of external aid which had buttressed the regime economically and militarily. The loss of aid resources from Syria's biggest patron forced the regime to compromise its stance regarding Israel, leading to peace processes led by the U.S. At the same time, in order to make up for the loss of external aid, the regime partly opened foreign investment to Western countries, and turned over the monopolies to the private sector and the military budget (Hinnebudch 2012).

2000-2011 (Bashar Al-Assad regime)

Following the death of Hafiz Al-Assad in 2000, his son Bashar Al-Assad inherited the Presidency of the authoritarian regime, establishing what Perthes (2014) calls "modernizing authoritarianism". The liberalizing promise of the regime change was short-lived as Bashar el-Assad initiated a military crackdown of the Arab Spring protesters, resulting in a civil war.

Modernizing authoritarianism saw an unprecedented period of economic development in Syria. This rapid top-down economic development benefited the elites and enriched the Al-Assad family (Hinnebudch 2012); it also left economic

and social welfare for middle and lower classes lagging far behind. At the same time, the 2003 Iraq war provoked the resurgence of sectarian conflicts. Internationally, Syria's isolation from Western countries directed its attention to Arab Gulf countries (particularly Iran, Turkey) and Russia, bolstering Pan-Arabism. However, it also resulted in a deteriorating relationship with the USA (Perthes 2014, Thomas 2013, Hinnebudch 2012).

Bashar Al-Assad's support for the Iraq war posed another problem to the new regime by bolstering the sectarian violence which had continued since his father's regime. According to Phillips (2015), the politicized national identity through sectarianism was provoked by the similar topology of the Iraqi war: Sunni vs. Shia (mostly Alawites), with the majority in the military being Alawites loyal to the Al-Assad regime.

Meanwhile, rapid economic development restructured the social base of Syria. The military and rural nationalist constituencies which formed the base of the Al-Assad regime were joined by so called "crony capitalists" (Hinneburdch 2012, p. 99), but the new bourgeoisie and technocratic class started to raise their voices against the regime, destabilizing the Ba'ath Party. Widespread corruption arose out of this situation, resulting in further concentration of wealth in the elite groups. Inequality widened as Al-Assad cut spending on social welfare, and rampant speculation on the urban housing market resulted in increased homelessness. The country's deteriorating infrastructure exacerbated poverty, as the poor water supply system failed to adequately support rural agricultural and drove thousands of people to cities in the drought of 2007-2010 (Hinnebundch 2012, Haddad 2011). Syria saw a 10 percent increase in poverty between 2005 and 2011 (Haddad 2011).

While unrest and political pressures necessitated the shift to a more pluralistic regime, Bashar Al-Assad responded with wide spread repression. The regime also attempted to maintain national unity through pan-Arabism, lending support to Iraq (Salloukh 2005) and intervening in Lebanon, with renewed support for Hamas and Hezbollah (Hinnebudch 2012). These foreign policies based on pan-Arabism gave a certain legitimacy to the regime but also fostered tensions within Syria.

2011- present (The civil war)

It is imperative to note that the civil war which started in 2011 and is ongoing, cannot be reduced to purely sectarian conflicts. Not only did the intervention of foreign countries add another layer to the civil war, but additionally the domestic unrest was also shaped by religious, class, ethnic and political interests. The interaction of these factors have perpetuated and exacerbated the maelstrom of the civil war.

According to a BBC report (Rodgers, Gritten, Offer, & Asare, 2016), the lightning rod for the civil war in Syria in the spring of 2011, in the southern city of Derra, was the protest against the arrest and torture of teenagers who painted revolutionary slogans on a school wall. The repression by the government

through military force increased the growing distrust of the regime. This antagonism towards authoritarianism was bolstered by the similar topology of Egypt's Arab Spring. In Hinnebudch's (2012) account, the Syrian regime's reliance on the Alawite military precipitated an overreaction to the local protest and also temporarily bolstered the pro-Assad regime which had shown signs of weakening through defections as internal tensions increased, as discussed above. The duration of the war provided the leeway for foreign countries to intervene.

While the Syrian economy was being decimated by the civil war, its neighbours and former allies (Arab League countries, and Turkey) began to impose sanctions against the repression by the Al-Assad regime (BBC, "Syria Profile", 2016). In addition to the institutional isolation from the West, the ending of economic ties with Turkey and Arab Gulf countries accelerated distrust of the regime by the new bourgeoisie. In Hinnebudch's account, this created regional opposition power centres within Syria. Dividing lines came to be drawn between the pro-western Sunni axis (backed by U.S., Canada, EU, and Turkey) and the Shi'ite Resistance axis (supported by Russia, Iran, Iraq, and Hezbollah). Russia and Iran are the only two countries with economic trade relations with Syria.

By December 2012, the U.S., the U.K., France, Turkey and Arab Gulf states formally recognized the opposition National Coalition, which was composed of rebels as legitimate representatives of the Syrian people. In June 2013, pro-Assad groups and allied Lebanese Hezbollah forces recaptured the strategically-important town of al-Qusayr, located between the western city of Homs and the Lebanese border. During this period, the intervention of foreign countries' governments remained indirect, supplying military aid and training, maintaining economic ties, and accusing countries of the opposite side of escalating the violence (BBC, "Syria Profile", 2016).

This indirect intervention was transformed by the disclosure of the use of chemical weapons by pro-Assad groups in an attack on Damascus in August 2013, based on a United Nations (UN) inspection (Spencer, 2013). This provoked conciliatory talks between the U.S. and Russia, and led to UN-brokered peace talks in Geneva from January to February in 2014, with representatives from the Bashar Al-Assad regime and the Western-backed political opposition (Basma, 2014). However, the talks failed as President Bashar Al-Assad refused to step down, which was the crucial requirement for the political opposition groups ("What is the Geneva Talk II", 2014).

2014: Enter ISIS

The civil war became even more complex and violent because of the surging presence of ISIS in Iraq and Syria (ISIS is also known as Islamic State and the Levant, ISIL, and Daesh). In 2014, this group, consisting of Sunni insurgent groups originally supporting Al-Qaeda, declared the restoration of a "caliphate" in the territory of Iraq and Syria where historically a caliphate regime once was, and claimed authority over Muslims worldwide. This emergent group, which was put on the list of terrorists by the U.S. government, now constituted a third party in

the Syrian turmoil. In 2014, the U.S. declared that in cooperation with Arab Nations, it would expand its military intervention to the civil war in Syria in order to help Kurdish people battling against IS (Marsden, 2014). For the same reason, Russia carried out air strikes in Syria the following year. By March 2016, France, Jordan, Qatar, Turkey, and Israel implemented air strikes and the majority of countries changed their opinions to support military interventions in Syria in reaction to the terrorist attack on Paris ("Syria's ally and enemies", 2016).

The surge of Islamic State and their attacks on the northern part of Syrian territory and the southeastern area of Turkey where Kurdish people live, revealed the ethnic aspect of the civil war. A Kurdish group called Partiya Yekîtiya Demokrat (PYD) joined the war against IS and added another layer to the civil war. Despite PYD's huge contribution to the war against IS, Turkey is still reluctant to form a coalition with the Kurdish group because of its fear of the rise of this group in Turkey. These politics add to the difficulty of forming a unified coalition of opposition groups to the pro-Assad forces and the IS (Salih 2015).

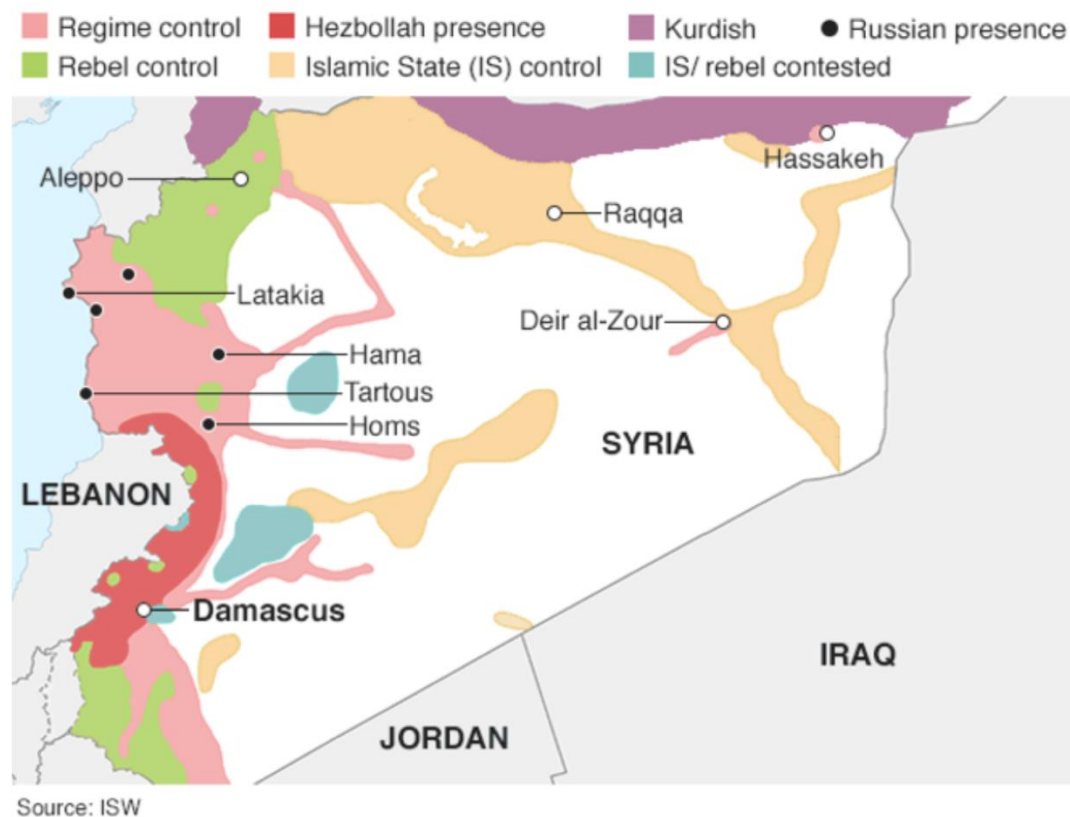Figure 1 shows the geographical composition of the actors in the civil war.

Figure 1. Map of the groups involved in the Syrian civil war cited from the BBC (Rodgers, Gritten, Offer, & Asare, 2016)

The situation got increasingly complex after the attempted coup d'état in

Turkey in July, 2016 (Stevens 2016). Turkey is the largest single recipient of Syrian refugees (UNHCR 2017), and the political chaos surrounding the coup attempt created further political issues with neighbouring countries. In order to solve this complicated stalemate, the UN took steps in February 2016 to approach each local rebel group rather than the whole nation state to advance peace talks. Based on a United Nations Security Council Resolution, Russia and the U.S. agreed on a ceasefire. A month later (Brian, 2016), Russian President Vladimir Putin made it clear that Assad's departure from Syria will be essential to stop the prolonged civil war and that the EU should urge rebel groups to accept peace talks with the transitional government. The ceasefire agreement was bound to be time-consuming and complicated, considering the over 1000 independent rebel groups forming the opposition to the Assad regime (Abboud, 2016). As of February, 2017, peace talks continue with the Al-Assad government, punctuated by a number of failed ceasefires. The latest round of "Astana Process" talks (Doucet 2017) occurred in January and the UN-backed Geneva IV Conference in February, between the large Syrian opposition delegation and the Al-Assad regime, along with Turkey, Iran, Russia, and the Kurdish National Council (Security Council 2017).

Human Impact in Syria and Among Refugees

As a result of the conflict, approximately 250,000 people have been killed and 13.5 million people inside Syria are urgently in need of humanitarian assistance (Amnesty International, 2016). The concentration of wealth and resultant widening of the gulf between the elites and masses of the poor prior to the conflict has continued to deepen, reaching crisis proportions in the country and among the refugee populations resulting from the turmoil. Over the course of the conflict, 80% of Syrians now live in poverty (UNICEF Canada, 2016). A third of the hospitals and a quarter of the schools in Syria are no longer operating (UNICEF Canada, 2016). Health services are collapsing and immunization rates have fallen from 99% before the conflict, to 52% in 2012 (UNICEF, 2014). Polio has returned to Syria as of 2013, after a fourteen year absence from the country (UNICEF, 2014).

Children and youth have been hit perhaps the hardest. Before the conflict in Syria there was a literacy rate of 90%, but now 2.8 million Syrian children are out of school (UNICEF Canada, 2016). As of March 2014, three million Syrian children are unable to go to school regularly, which is about half the school-age population (UNICEF, 2014). According to UNICEF (2014), a 'lost generation' is being created through lack of education, malnutrition, and poor healthcare among children.

The Refugee Flows

According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees Filippo Grandi, "Syria is the biggest humanitarian and refugee crisis of our time" (UNHCR, 2016c). As of March, 2016 there were 4,812,204 registered Syrian refugees, according to the government of Turkey (UNHCR, 2016a). The UNHCR has registered 2.1 million Syrians in Egypt, Iraq, Jordan and Lebanon, there are

1.9 million registered in Turkey, along with over 28,000 Syrians registered in North Africa (UNHCR, 2016a). The receiving countries of Lebanon, Jordan, and Iraq do not grant proper refugee status and term refugees from neighbouring countries as 'guests' (Fargues, 2014). Countries such as Qatar, United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and Bahrain have not offered any resettlement for Syrian Refugees (Amnesty International, 2016).

The infrastructure and development of neighbouring countries has been negatively affected by the influx of Syrian refugees, as the hosting communities are mostly poor themselves (UNICEF, 2014). Humanitarian organizations are working with these neighbouring countries to provide shelter and services for refugees, but the influx has increased the demand for already scarce resources such as electricity and water (UNICEF, 2014). In Jordan, a country that hosts 635,324 Syrian refugees, 86% of the refugees in urban areas are living below the poverty line (Amnesty International, 2016). In Lebanon, where Syrian refugees live in crowded and unsanitary settlements, the life-threatening malnutrition rates among children increased to almost twice the average rate from 2013 to 2014 (UNICEF, 2014).

There are 90% of Syrian refugees located in urban, peri-urban, and rural areas, as 4,321,335 reside in these locations (UNHCR, 2016a). The remaining 10% of the total demographic are located in refugee camps, which totals 490,869 (UNHCR, 2016a). Although there are no precise statistics on the refugee populations, it bears noting that UNHCR reports that the highest age demographic among refugees is 18-59, which consists of 21.5% of the overall Syrian population for males and 24% for females (UNHCR, 2016a). The second largest age category is children aged 5-11, which is 11.2% for males and 10.6% for females (UNHCR, 2016a). Worldwide, as of 2013 there have been 37,498 babies born as refugees. By March 2014, the number of children in need of humanitarian assistance had risen to 5.5 million, which had doubled since the previous year (UNICEF, 2014).

The numbers of Syrians travelling to Europe have risen since the conflict first began, but it is still relatively low in comparison to Syria's neighbouring countries (UNHCR, 2016a). There are two important migration routes through southeastern Europe: the eastern Mediterranean to the Greek islands, and the Western Balkans through the Serbia-Hungary border (Hampshire, 2015). The proportions of women and children arriving to Europe by sea rose from under 30% in June 2015 to nearly 60% in March 2016 (UNHCR, 2016b).

The crisis has resulted in further calamities as desperate refugees attempt to cross the Mediterranean. In 2015, a total of 3,771 persons drowned or went missing while trying to reach Europe by sea (UNHCR, 2016b). Within the first three years since the conflict in Syria began, Greek port authorities arrested 16,211 Syrian refugees who were attempting to reach European destinations by sea (Fargues, 2014). According to the UNHCR (2016d), the demand for human smuggling and dangerous sea arrivals would be reduced through more resettlement and humanitarian admission, family reunification, private

sponsorship, and visas.

During the timeframe of April 2011 to December 2015, there were a total of 897,645 Syrian asylum applications in Europe (UNHCR, 2016a). The top European receiving countries have been Serbia and Germany with 59%, Sweden, Denmark Hungary, Austria, and Netherlands with 29%, and all others receiving 12% (UNHCR, 2016a). The European countries which previously welcomed Syrian refugees are now closing their borders by imposing entry restrictions, which has meant that tens of thousands of refugees are currently in Greece (UNHCR, 2016c). To put the European response to the Syrian refugee crisis in perspective, the twenty-eight European Union countries have pledged approximately 30,900 resettlement places, which is only 0.7% of the entire Syrian refugee population (Amnesty International, 2016).

European Reception of Refugees

The Schengen Area was established in Europe in 1995, creating a "borderless zone in which it [is] relatively easy for asylum-seekers and irregular migrants who crossed the EU's external border to move freely" (Hampshire, 2015, p. 8). Contrary to the Schengen Area, the Dublin Regulation of 2013 states that "asylum seekers can make only one application for international protection and that this should be in the first state through which they enter the EU" (Hampshire, 2015, p.8). Northern European states have benefitted from the Dublin Regulation, but countries such as Italy, Malta, and Greece have had disproportionate burdens placed on them (Hampshire, 2015). The European Union Commission has put forward proposals for an emergency relocation scheme of 120,000 refugees in Italy, Greece, and Hungary (Hampshire, 2015). In 2015 commitments to relocate 66,400 refugees from Greece to other European states were made, but only 1,539 have been pledged and only 325 relocations have actually occurred (UNHCR, 2016d).

The Syrian refugee crisis has occurred during Europe's worst economic crisis since World War Two. The response of European nations has been uneven, and the majority of asylum seekers has been accepted by Germany and Sweden. Though asylum opportunities have grown in Europe, they have not been in proportion to the conflict in Syria (Fargues, 2014). The German government announced in 2015 that it would no longer return Syrian refugees to their first country of entry, which was a move against the Dublin Regulation (Hampshire, 2015). The previous north-south tensions in Europe about asylum burden-sharing have been replaced with a new east-west divide, as the mandatory relocation of refugees has been opposed by Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Slovakia, and Romania. Hungary has taken the restrictive measures of building a razor-wire fence at its border (Hampshire, 2015). Already in 2013, Bulgaria had built a 30km fence on its Turkish border (Migration Policy Centre, 2014).

Immigration policies have been created in some European states as a means to reduce the influx of refugees. Denmark passed a bill in January 2016 that would allow police to confiscate any valuables of asylum seekers that exceed $1400. The country also passed a law that refugees would have to wait three

years rather than one year for their families to join them. United Nations refugee spokesperson Adrian Edwards states that Denmark's decisions "run the risk of fuelling sentiments of fear and discrimination rather than promoting solidarity with people in need of protection" (Schlein, 2016).

The opposition to receiving refugees is about the "domestic politics of sovereignty and identity" (Hampshire 2015, p. 10), rather than a concern about the numbers of migrants. Anti-Muslim sentiments have arisen during the migration crisis in defense of "European identity being rooted in Christianity" (Hampshire, 2015, p.10). This is exemplified by the Prime Minister of Slovakia stating that he would not tolerate "Muslim immigrants who would start building mosques" (Hampshire, 2015, p.11). Thus, anti-Islamic sentiments and actions are evident in European policy discussions around the Syrian refugee crisis.

The latest chapter in the history of migration to the European Union is "Brexit" - 52% of the population of the United Kingdom voted in a referendum on June 23rd to withdraw UK from the EU ("EU Referendum Results..." 2016). Immigration, and recent moral panic about the large numbers of Syrian refugee arrivals, were major factors in the outcome of the vote ("Eight reasons leave won..." 2016).

Canada, Syria, and Syrian Refugees

Canadian foreign policy towards the conflict in the Middle East has been mixed, and its components will be outlined below. The Canadian Conservative Government of Stephen Harper began, through diplomatic means prior to the civil war, to pressure the Syrian government to cease its attacks against its own people. As the crisis unfolded, they sent humanitarian and development aid, and finally joined military efforts against ISIL in Syria during Prime Minister Stephen Harper's Government. With a change in government and the election of Liberal Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, Canada's foreign policy towards Syria changed with offers to resettle 25,000 refugees in Canada.

Security and stability initiatives

According to Global Affairs (2016a), "Canada has committed $82.91 million in security-related assistance to address the impact of the Syrian crisis, including $58.91 million for Jordan…This also includes $3.8 million in stabilization assistance in areas including civil administration, accountability, independent media and secure communications to the Syrian activists and civil society members" (2016a).

In 2013, when chemical weapons were used by the Syrian government against its citizens, Canada contributed $17 million toward an inquiry which produced a report revealing that this was the 14th such use of chemical weapons by the Syrian regime. The report concluded that these attacks "could not go unpunished", yet Canadian "military-to-military consultations" with the United States, United Kingdom and France through the Syria Multilateral Working Group resulted in a decision to provide "no robust allied military intervention in current

conflict" (Bell 2015). Though the federal government supported the destruction of Syria's declared chemical weapons (Global Affairs 2016 d), Canada's primary objective was to "strengthen the liberal democratic opposition to promote the emergence of a stable, democratic pluralistic Syria" (Bell 2015). Canada's official position after the report on chemical weapons was released was to coordinate with Canadian 'allies' and actively call on the international community to "come together and defend the rights of the Syrian people to determine their own future (Global Affairs 2016 d).

Peacekeeping and Military Efforts

Aside from expressing support for UN observers in their delivery of humanitarian aid to Syria, and urging Syria to comply with the UN envoy in 2012 (The Canadian Press 2012), Stephen Harper's Conservative government refrained from military involvement in 2013 when the U.S. committed to such action in the aftermath of the chemical weapons attack (Payton 2013, Janus 2013). Prime Minister Harper worried that the lack of international action would set a dangerous precedent (The Canadian Press 2013).

Around the time of these developments, Canada's peacekeeping missions were in support of other nations. In 2013, Canada's existing mission in Iraq threatened to spill over into Syria. Shortly after Harper remarked that Canada had no intention of becoming involved in Syria, the Canadian military met generals from some of the main countries backing Syria's rebels to discuss the prospects of building an international coalition force with US and Jordan. Reports also claimed that the Canadian government funneled aid to Syrian rebels to help them set up a pirate radio network, train bloggers and journalists, as well as paying for the rebels' satellite Internet communication devices (Engler 2013).

Canada joined the military efforts against ISIL in 2014, through Operation IMPACT. This contribution to the Middle East Stabilization Force (MESF) – the multinational coalition to halt and degrade the so-called Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) – conducts air operations, provides training and assistance to the Iraqi security forces, provides capacity building capabilities to regional forces, and supports the coalition with highly skilled personnel (National Defence and the Canadian Armed Forces). In 2015, Harper introduced a motion to expand its involvement in the fight against ISIL (Wyld 2015). Parliament voted 142-129 in favour of expanding the mission for one year (Kennedy 2015). The Conservative government joined the US-led coalition, providing Royal Canadian Air Force fighter jets to attack terrorists in Iraq and Syria (Bondy 2015). In the House of Commons, speakers of the house raised questions on the legality of this intervention mission (Berthiaume 2015).

Canadian military efforts did not end with the election of the Liberal government. Up until March 2016, the Air Task Force in Iraq conducted 2218 sorties. The CC-150T Polaris (Airbus) conducted 405 sorties, delivering some 23,870,000 pounds of fuel to coalition aircraft; and CP-140 Aurora (long-range patrol aircraft) conducted 435 reconnaissance missions (National Defence and the Canadian Armed Forces). This total includes 1378 sorties conducted by CF-

18 Hornets between the 30th of October 2014 and the 15th February 2016 (National Defence and the Canadian Armed Forces). The total number of CAF members deployed under Operation IMPACT has increased from an estimated 650 to 830. This number includes personnel charged with training, advisory, and assist missions in support of the Iraqi security forces (National Defence and the Canadian Armed Forces). Under the Liberal government, the military engagement in Iraq and Syria under Operation IMPACT was extended until March 31st, 2017. The estimated costs of the campaign up to March 2017 are about $528 million (Chase 2014, Brewster 2015).

Humanitarian and Development Assistance

Humanitarian assistance programs have been in operation since 2008 and have an international scope. Canada has committed to $653.5 million in "international humanitarian assistance funding" in response to the Syrian crisis, with $227,643 given to Syria alone (Global Affairs Canada 2016a). This support has been distributed through humanitarian partners to deliver food, shelter, health, protection and emergency education needs to Syrians affected by the crisis (Global Affairs Canada 2016b). The Canadian Red Cross is one such partner, with the Canadian government matching donations to Syrians between September 2015 and February 2016 (Red Cross 2015). British, German and Norwegian governments requested a doubling of funding to Syria in February 2016, and the Department of Global Affairs indicated that it was investigating the amount and type of funding and its delivery (Levitz 2016).

Since 2008, Canada has a commitment of $233.3 million to support development projects in the Middle Eastern region in order to strengthen government services and infrastructure (Global Affairs Canada 2016a). This is in direct response to the influx of Syrian refugees, and will target health, education, the delivery of basic services, and address Jordan's specific development challenges (Global Affairs Canada 2016c). As of May 2016, the Canadian government's allocation to humanitarian assistance for Syria and Iraq amounts to $860 million since the conflicts began in the region (The Canadian Press, 2016).

Refugee Resettlement

As a campaign promise in the fall 2015 federal elections, Liberal leader Justin Trudeau proposed to enable Canadians to extend their help to Syrians directly through government and private sponsorship (Liberal Party of Canada). Upon election, the Liberal government made good its promise to accept up to 25,000 Syrian refugees. This process began on November 9th, 2015, and ended on January 29th, 2016. In addition to the initial 25,000 Syrian refugees, the Liberals have promised to bring another 10,000 to Canada (Levitz, 2016).

The policy for selecting Syrian refugees involves a multi-layered screening process, according to Citizenship and Immigration Canada (2016), in which:

1. A refugee is identified before referral to Immigration, Refugee and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) (previously known as Citizenship and Immigration

Canada, CIC, and renamed by the Justin Trudeau Liberal government).

2. They undergo an immigration and security interview by experienced visa officers

3. There is an identity and document verification; biometric and biographic collection

4. There is a health screening

5. They have an identity confirmation prior to departure

6. And finally, an identity verification upon arrival.

In setting a new agenda for Canadian immigration and refugee policies, and parting with the previous Conservative government's anti-immigration measures, the new Liberal government dismantled some previous policies and set in place more welcoming ones. In addition to restoring elements of the Interim Federal Health Program for refugees, previously cut in 2012 by the Conservative government, the program added health coverage for refugees prior to arriving in Canada, including "their immigration medical exams, pre-departure vaccinations, and medical services en route to Canada" (Scharper, 2016).

Initially, while government-sponsored refugees continued to have their expenses paid, privately sponsored refugees who arrived after March 1st were expected to pay back the expense of their medical exams and airfares, under penalty of refusal of travel documents or citizenship (Keung, 2016C). Scott McLeod, spokesperson for the Council of the Canadian Refugee Sponsorship Agreement Holders Association, said that "[A]lthough the repayment of the loan is capped at $10,000 per family and interest-free for up to three years, privately sponsored Syrians approved after March 1st will end up suffering" (Keung, 2016C). Following protests, the Trudeau Government reversed this policy in November, 2016, exempting Syrian refugees from repayment of costs for their medical exams and flights (O'Neil 2016).

Who are the refugees and their sponsors?

A total of 26,202 Syrian refugees arrived in Canada between November 4th 2015 and March 30th 2016 (CIC, 2016), and others arrived by June 20, 2016, bringing the total to 28,449 (CIC, 2016b). There are three main categories: Government-Assisted (15,355), Privately Sponsored (9,494), and Blended Visa-Office Referred (2,341) (CIC, 2016). Both privately sponsored and government sponsored Syrian refugees have been resettled across Canada. The majority of the Resettlement Assistance Program (RAP) communities are concentrated around urban areas including Toronto, Montreal, Regina, Ottawa, Halifax, St. John's., London, Vancouver, Toronto and Quebec City (CIC, 2016b). Privately sponsored refugees have been resettled near their sponsorship groups and are thus located both in rural and urban areas across the country. These cities include: Lethbridge, Red Deer, Hamilton, Guelph, Kitchener, Winnipeg, Windsor, London, Ottawa, Toronto, Vancouver, Victoria, Charlottetown, Halifax,

Saskatoon, St. John's, Fredericton and Saint John (MIRC 2016). A detailed map of destination communities and service provider organizations in Canada is available at: http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/refugees/welcome/map.asp. A detailed outline of the process of refugee determination and resettlement can be found at: http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/refugees/welcome/first.asp.

According to the CIC (2016c), private sponsorship excluding that in Quebec is classified into five categories: Sponsorship of Agreement Holders (SAH); Groups of five; Community sponsors; Blended Visa Office-Referred Program; and Joint Assistance Sponsorship Program. Sponsorship of Agreement Holders are entitled to an organization which signed the agreement with the CIC. Upon this agreement, they can sponsor refugees by themselves and help other organizations or groups of individuals to sponsor refugees. According to our analysis of the list (which was updated on 28th of April 2016 by IRCC) 103 organizations registered, out of which 58 are Christian organizations (including Roman Catholic, Anglican, Baptist, Presbyterian, etc.), 14 are ethno-cultural organizations, 10 are Christian and ethno-cultural organizations, 3 are Muslim organizations, 11 are Immigration or Refugee support organizations, and 7 are other humanitarian organizations. Sorted by location of the organization, 19 are located in Alberta, 17 in British Columbia, 6 in Manitoba, 4 in New Brunswick, 2 in Newfoundland and Labrador, 3 in Nova Scotia, 48 in Ontario, 1 in Prince Edward Island, and 4 in Saskatchewan.

Individuals can sponsor refugees under the administration of a SAH. This group is called Constituent Groups (CGs). All CGs must meet the requirements which each SAH independently sets up as well as must have their own application and settlement plan approved by the SAH for the sponsorship of a refugee(s) who is expected to settle in the community in which the CG is rooted. After this process, the application and settlement plan undergoes the assessment of the Centralized Processing Office in Winnipeg (CIC 2016d).

Groups of five (G5s) and Community Sponsors (CSs) are other ways to sponsor refugees. The G5s avenue is a group of five or more individuals aged at least 18 who have Canadian citizenship or permanent residency. If an organization applies for a CS, the organization has to be located in the community where refugees are expected to settle. In both cases, sponsors must meet the financial requirements of the Sponsorship Cost Table under section E of the Settlement Plan (CIC 2016d). Blended Visa Office-Referred Program (BVORP) is intended to share the financial commitments to sponsor refugees. In the program, the CIC is obliged to provide six-months financial support and up to a year of emotional support. This sponsorship is restricted to SAHs and CGs. Sponsorship through three avenues used to be restricted to the applicants who are recognized as refugees by either the United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR) or a foreign nation, but a new act passed on September 19, 2015 tentatively exempted this requirement for applicants fleeing Syrian and Iraqi conflicts (CIC 2016d).

Joint Assistance Sponsorship Program is set up for refugees having special

needs such physical or mental disabilities, unaccompanied minors, elderly persons, etc. The commitments are shared between the CIC and private sponsors. Basically, the CIC takes the responsibility of financial aid for food, housing, and essentials, and private sponsors provide settlement and emotional assistance (CIC 2016e).

The different avenues for refugees to come to Canada, under private sponsorship or government assistance, may influence one's settlement experience. Experiences may vary according to differences in financial budgets, processing times, and settlement aid upon arrival.

All private sponsors support refugees with finances for one year including the cost of food, rent, household utilities, clothing, furniture, other household goods and day-to-day expenses (CIC, 2016f). In addition, private sponsors will assist refugees on an emotional front with introducing the newcomers to community members, assisting with application processes for necessary documents, helping with the enrollment of children in schools and adults in language classes, providing orientation in regards to banking services and transportation, and helping refugees search for employment (CIC, 2016f).

In contrast, government-assisted refugees will provide support up to one year or until the refugees are self-supporting, whichever comes first (CIC, 2016). Government-assisted refugees will receive basic financial and emotional support including accommodation, food, clothing, employment assistance, and other resettlement assistance (CIC, 2016f). For Syrian refugees, the Canadian government has noted that the Resettlement Assistance Program (RAP) will help refugees within the first four to six weeks upon arrival, whereby Service Provider Organizations (SPO) in one's community would then take over (CIC, 2016f). The government indicated that the RAP would use funds for meeting refugees at the airport or port of entry, toward temporary accommodation, basic household items, and general orientation in Canada (CIC, 2016f).

There are different settlement patterns for different refugee categories. Government-assisted refugees have been resettled in primary city centres in Canada, such as Vancouver, Toronto and Montreal where immigration service hubs are most accessible. Privately sponsored refugees are subject to resettlement at the convenience of their sponsors. Family connections are taken into consideration during the application process for both Privately sponsored and Government-Assisted refugees (CIC 2016f).

December, 2016 marked "Month 13" in the lives of the first large group of Syrian refugees to arrive in Canada. With an end to government aid, including the monthly living allowance, they face further challenges with their settlement and integration process (Ormiston 2016) while world leaders continue to deal with this ongoing humanitarian crisis.

Conclusions

This report is intended to serve as a backgrounder to the Syrian refugee crisis, its history, and the actions of the international community, along with an orientation to the Canadian government's involvement in military and humanitarian support, along with Syrian refugee resettlement. The content is descriptive, aimed at giving a comparatively quick reference point on some of the main aspects of the issue to a Canadian audience of academics and members of the wider community. What has emerged is that the Syrian refugee crisis encompasses a complex combination of global and local factors, pointing to a need for further and ongoing analysis of this major humanitarian crisis.

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