

Protecting the Children and Youth of Syria: Human Security Threats and Their Consequences

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Abstract

The ongoing Syrian civil war continues to devastate the country and put pressure on an already fragile Middle East with the conflict spilling over into neighboring Iraq. This article seeks to focus on the actors that started the Syrian revolution: children and youth. It was several teenagers in the city of Dara'a that sparked a revolution and when the fighting finally stops, it will be up to future generations of Syrians to rebuild their country. This article first conducts a human security analysis of how children and youth are being affected by the Syrian conflict. It then examines the potential long-term implications of not addressing the issues facing Syria's next generation for both Syria and the international community. The final section examines the feasibility of current recommendations that have been put forth by organizations that have had the foresight to try and address the various human security threats to children and youth in Syria.

Introduction

In March 2011, several teenagers in the city of Dara'a spray-painted challenges to the rule of dictator Bashar al-Assad in the midst of the ongoing protests in the Middle East known as the Arab Spring. The response of the Syrian regime was brutal; the teenagers were arrested and tortured, setting off demonstrations that were said to have been the first stages of the Syrian revolution (Fahim and Saad 2013). Three and a half years later, Syria is engulfed in a civil war with almost 200,000 dead and millions of refugees (Nebehay 2014). The longer the conflict lasts, the higher the prospects exist for a potentially "lost generation" that is shaped by violence, displacement, and a persistent lack of opportunity (UNICEF 2014, 16). Growing up in such conditions can make children become increasingly vulnerable to radicalization and the lack of education and poor health can potentially damage Syria for years with a new generation not having the strength and skills to rebuild Syria. Children and youth sparked the events of the Syrian revolution, and thus more attention needs to be paid on how they are affected by this brutal conflict (Kabawat and Lissan 2014).¹

This paper will seek to analyze how the various threats of human security in Syria's civil war are currently affecting young Syrians, and how these threats will affect not only the stability of Syria itself in the long term, but international security as well. The first section will highlight how threats to each of the seven areas of human security, as described in the United Nations Development Programme's 1994 report *Human Development Report*, are affecting children and youth. Secondly, the paper will seek to explain how the affects of these different types of human

¹ In terms of defining the term "children," this paper will adhere mostly to the UN Charter on the Rights of the Child as the basis for its definition of a child: "every human being below the age of eighteen years unless under the law applicable to the child, majority is obtained earlier." In order to simplify, the term children in this paper denotes individuals aged eighteen or younger. The term "youth" (also used throughout the paper), while similar and often overlapping with the age range of children, can include older teenagers (16 and up) and young adults between the age of 18 and 30. An overlap between the two age groups "children" and "youth," is inevitable as children aged 15-16 can sometimes be considered closer to being youth or young adults than children as they may have already joined the work force to some degree.

security will hurt Syria and international security in the long run. The final section of the paper will examine potential recommendations to alleviate these human security issues within the country.

I. Current Threats to the Human Security of Syrian Children

Human Security According to UNDP

The term security has traditionally been interpreted very narrowly, either as security of territory from external aggression, the protection of national interests in foreign policy, or as global security from various threats such as the use of nuclear weapons (UNDP 1994, 22). However, human security focuses on threats to individual people in their everyday lives: “human security is a child who did not die, a disease that did not spread, a job that was not cut, an ethnic tension that did not explode in violence, a dissident who was not silenced.” (UNDP 1994, 22)

While the threats to people are numerous, the UNDP report focuses on seven main categories of human security: economic security, food security, health security, environmental security, personal security, community security, and political security (UNDP 1994, 24-25). Economic security requires an assured basic income, usually from productive or remunerative work. Food security entails that people have physical and economic access to basic food at all times. Health security is protection from disease and access to medicines. Environmental security is protection from environmental degradation. Personal security entails the protection from direct physical violence. Community security is the protection derived from one’s membership in a group, whether it is ethnic, religious, or simply communal. Finally political security is the protection of people’s basic freedoms and human rights.

Economic Security

Looking at issues of economic security for children is rather unique. As was previously mentioned, economic security traditionally denotes some sort of income, often earned by the parents and/or older family members. However, the Syrian conflict has forced children into situations where they have to work as a primary income earner in order to help provide for their family, or to simply survive. Many Syrian refugees both within and outside the country fled the conflict with little more than the clothes on their back (Nader 2014). Faced with the loss of their sources of revenue and livelihood, and insufficient aid provided by humanitarian organizations, families find themselves in a position where they need their children to work in order to help the household gain enough money for food and other expenses (Nader 2014).

Information varies, but some reports estimate that one in ten refugee children are believed to be working, either as cheap labor on farms, in shops, or as beggars on the city streets (UNICEF 2014, 5). Other reports estimate close to half of the refugee children are being used as labor, with many of these children forced to work long hours for very little money (Nader 2014). The reason employment numbers of children vary so much is that it is very difficult to obtain accurate numbers from employers. Child labor is illegal and thus many employers try to hide it for fear of the legal consequences (Nader 2014). Refugee families also sometimes hide the fact that their children are working, as they don’t want to see a reduction in any aid that they receive

(Nader 2014). Girls can be particularly vulnerable when they or their families lack economic security. Increasing numbers of Syrian girls are being forced into premature marriages by their families so that they can be both economically and physically protected (or so they hope). One in every five registered marriages of Syrian refugees is a girl under the age of 18 (UNICEF 2014, 5).

Food Security

Threats to food security such as a lack of access to food and malnutrition remain huge threats in Syria. Doctors across Syria and neighboring countries that receive refugees have reported spikes in the number of malnourished children arriving in hospitals. One doctor reported, “We used to see one child with life-threatening malnutrition less than once per month. Now there are ten cases or more a week.” (UNICEF 2014, 7) It has been estimated that approximately 10,000 Syrian children in Lebanon are suffering from malnutrition with nearly 2,000 at risk of dying if not immediately treated (Hadid 2014). A survey in Jordan found that four percent of refugee children there are suffering of some degree of malnutrition (Hadid 2014). The combination of malnutrition and mineral deficiencies, also known as “hidden hunger,” has led to widespread fears of a generational threat of “irretrievable nutritional damage.” (UNICEF 2014, 7)

The ongoing violence has also destroyed farmland, killed livestock, and displaced farmers, denying children access to foods important for their nutritional well being such as meat, fruits, and vegetables (UNICEF 2014, 7). Nursing mothers interviewed by UNICEF have also reported losing the ability to produce breast milk as a result of extended stress, eliminating the most important source of food security for newborns (UNICEF 2014, 7). To compensate, mothers have forced to dilute baby formula with unsafe drinking water in order to make the powder last longer (UNICEF 2014, 7), increasing a child’s risk to diarrheal diseases.

Food security is also being affected by threats to environmental security. In addition to the collateral damage of the civil war, drought (which will be addressed in more detail in the environmental security section) is threatening the 2014 harvest due to low levels of rainfall (Beer 2014). Wheat and barley crops for 2014 have already been determined as unfavorable due to drought, civil insecurity, and a lack of fuel to operate irrigation pumps and other equipment (Beer 2014).

Health Security

Continued fighting has led to the collapse of health services and left the health security of Syrian children particularly vulnerable. Children have become more susceptible to severe diseases such as the measles and even polio, which had been absent in Syria for 14 years (UNICEF 2014, 8). Since the confirmation of the first polio outbreak in the Deir Ezzour governate in October 2013, 25 cases have been reported in the northern and eastern parts of the country (UNICEF 2014, 9).

The civil war has also collapsed the entire health infrastructure of the country. An estimated 60 percent of Syrian hospitals nationwide and 70 percent of health centers in embattled

areas such as Al-Raqqa, Deir Ezour, and Homs have been destroyed or damaged in the fighting (UNICEF 2014, 8). Less than a third of ambulances still function while pharmacies continuously lack basic medicines. The lack of basic medicines is ruining any chance for doctors to prevent deadly diseases from striking children at an early age; immunization rates have dropped from 99 percent in the pre-war period to just 52 percent in 2012 (UNICEF 2014, 8).

Another contributing factor to the spread of disease has been the collapse of water and sanitation networks, affecting both health and food security. Safe water consumption across Syria has fallen by 40 percent since the conflict started, contributing to the spread of disease (UNICEF 2014, 8). Children in regime-held areas tend to have better access to safe drinking water (80 percent) in comparison to contested areas like Deir Ezzour where access is only 10 percent (UNICEF 2014, 8). The lack of safe drinking water is affecting newborns (mentioned in food security section) as mothers are trying to mix baby formula with this unsanitary water in order to prolong the use of the nutrients. Furthermore, only a third of the country's sewage system is currently being treated compared to 70 percent before the conflict (UNICEF 2014, 8).

An important factor that often fails to be considered in health security is mental health. The widespread violence has left a huge scar on the psyche of Syrian children. Doctors are reporting increases in cases of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) among civilians, especially children. Research by the World Bank indicates that the mental health of refugees is continuously shaped by the circumstances the refugees find themselves in once they leave conflict zones (Cesaretti 2014a). The continuation of stress-related symptoms of mental health in post-conflict environments such as in refugee areas outside of Syria is an alarming trend (Cesaretti 2014a). Members of the organization Project Amal ou Salam, a grassroots organization that seeks to engage with Syrian refugee children, consistently report seeing children drawing scenes of violence in art classes, even when asked by staff to draw something peaceful (Staff Members of Project Amal ou Salam, pers. comm.).

If history is any indication, then Syrian youth are in danger of succumbing to trauma induced problems that refugees in other conflicts have faced: "In Bosnia and Afghanistan, high levels of violence and drug addiction have been recorded in the aftermath of their respective wars, even among second-generation teenage victims." (Cesaretti 2014a) Similar cases in Syria are already beginning to be reported (Cesaretti 2014a). The risk of this problem going untreated is the loss of an entire generation to violence and substance abuse with youths struggling to live normal lives due to hyper-aggression and depression (Cesaretti 2014a). Unless something is done now to provide an outlet for these afflicted children in Syria, "the world will be dealing with the millions of angry, traumatized adults they inevitably will become." (Homer 2014)

Environmental Security

Environmental issues are only threats to the human security of children to the extent that they affect food security and economic security of themselves and their families. As was previously mentioned, drought has led to shortages of food throughout Syria. This problem had actually been occurring prior to the Syrian conflict. In the period leading up to the Syrian Civil War (2006-2011), up to 60% of Syria's land experienced "the worst long-term drought and most severe set of crop failures since agricultural civilizations began in the Fertile Crescent many

millennia ago.” (Nabhan, 2010) In 2009, over 800,000 Syrians lost their entire livelihood as a result of the droughts according to the UN and IFRC (IRIN 2009). By 2011, approximately 1 million Syrians were considered extremely “food insecure” due to the droughts (Erian, Katlan, and Babah 2010). The number of people driven into extreme poverty is even worse, with estimates of two to three million people affected (Worth 2010). Furthermore, 50,000 families along with hundreds of thousands of individuals had left rural areas and moved to cities in the years leading up to the revolution (Femia and Werrell 2012). This exodus of people led to competition for jobs and widespread discontent and political unrest in many urban areas (Femia and Werrell 2012). Today, drought continues to affect crops in Syria with wheat and barley crops for 2014 having already been determined as unfavorable due to drought as well as the ongoing fighting (Beer 2014).

Community Security

Violations of community security have affected children in two different ways: sectarianism and association with the enemy by living within a contested geographical area. The sectarian divide that has been magnified by the Syrian conflict has led to the targeting of children based off of their religious and ethnic affiliation. The UN has reported that the regime soldiers (dominated by Alawites) have been known to target Sunni-majority neighborhoods in various towns in the country, raising the concern that “there was a sectarian vein to the conduct of Government forces.” (Human Rights Council 2013, 48) The government has also established militias that are also based along sectarian lines. These militias use a combination of sectarian affiliation, kinship systems, and regime funding to fill their ranks, which has sadly led to the recruitment of under-age youth (Human Rights Council 2013, 83). The influx of foreign fighters and extremist groups who seek to fight on both sides of the conflict along the Shia and Sunni lines of the population has also reinforced the sectarian divide (Human Rights Council 2013, 88). Many of the opposition groups are said to be recruiting children into their ranks (Human Rights Watch 2012).

Furthermore, children living in geographically defined communities such as cities and villages are being targeted by various sides of the conflict simply because the area is held or in the process of being contested by an opponent. Families have recounted how children have been seized by the armed forces from homes, schools, hospitals, and checkpoints; children as young as 11 are being taken captive and detained with adults (UNICEF 2014, 4). Schools have repeatedly been bombed and shelled by the regime or been attacked by opposition forces throughout the conflict. In some instances fighters were using the schools for military objectives, but in other cases, the destruction of these areas dominated by children seemed senseless, as no military targets were present (Human Rights Watch 2013, 12).

Personal Security

Widespread violence has threatened the personal security of children since the early days of the revolution. With the kidnapping and torture of the teenagers who wrote anti-Assad slogans in Dara’a, the regime indicated that it had no qualms in targeting children. As of August 2013, 11,420 children have been recorded killed in the conflict (it is almost certain that many non-recorded deaths exist as well) out of a total of 113,735 civilians and combatants killed (Dardagan

and Salama 2013, 1). 2,223 children have been killed in Aleppo. 1,134 have been killed in Dara'a, birthplace of the revolution, which translates to roughly 1 in 400 children in a town that has a population only one fifth the size of Aleppo (Dardagan and Salama 2013, 1). The primary cause of death has been explosive weapons, which has killed 71 percent of the 10,586 children whose cause of death was actually reported. Of the children killed by explosive weapons, 2,008 of them were killed by aerial bombardment (Dardagan and Salama 2013, 1). Another huge cause of death was small-arms fire with 26.5 percent (2,806 total) of the children whose cause of death had been reported (Dardagan and Salama 2013, 1). 764 of these children were summarily executed and 389 cases were specifically targeted by snipers (Dardagan and Salama 2013, 1). Finally, 128 children were reported killed as a result of chemical weapons attacks (Dardagan and Salama 2013, 1). Given the difficulty in obtaining data on the ground as well as the time that has passed since this report, it is highly likely that these numbers have increased in the past year.

In addition to killings by various types of weapons, children have been subject to other forms of violence such as torture, sexual violence and being used as human shields. Multiple accounts indicate that children have been held in detention facilities that do not meet the international standards on juvenile justice and they are often forced to share cells with adults (Human Rights Council 2013, 6). Children have been subject to various forms of torture including electric shock and being hung upside down. (Human Rights Council 2013, 6) One hundred and twelve children have been reportedly killed by wounds sustained during torture (Dardagan and Salama 2013, 1), with many more likely not being reported. Various forms of sexual violence such as rape and even gang rape have also been used against children detained by government forces in formal and informal detention facilities (Human Rights Council 2013, 9). Sexual violence is reportedly used to “humiliate, harm, force confessions or pressure a relative to surrender.” (Human Rights Council 2013, 9) In addition to torture and sexual violence, some children have also been forced to the front lines to stand between tanks and fighters to dissuade enemies from attacking (Dardagan and Salama 2013, 1). This tactic has been used predominately by regime forces who threaten to kill the children if the opposition does not surrender (Human Rights Council 2013, 5).

Political Security

Threats to the political security of children can be seen as threats to the basic human rights of young Syrians. The UN Declaration of the Rights of the Child lays out ten basic rights of children. It can be argued that at least part of every single one of these ten rights, many of which are connected to the other various categories of human security, are currently being violated in the Syrian conflict.

The right of children to “develop physically, mentally, morally, spiritually and socially in a healthy and normal manner and in conditions of freedom and dignity” (UN 1959) is currently being violated on all fronts with children facing threats to their physical and mental well being due to violence, poor sanitation conditions, and a lack of food. A child’s right to a nationality (UN 1959) is also not being respected in Syria as tens of thousands of children born as refugees in other countries are without birth certificates or passports, which prevents them from accessing healthcare and education and raises the risk of them being deported from refugee areas in other countries (Khalil and Leigh 2014).

One of the most crucial rights in the “Declaration of the Rights of the Child” that is currently being violated in Syria is a child’s right to an education (UN 1959), of which Syria is a signatory (signed on in 1993) (Human Rights Watch 2013, 28). Currently, 2.8 million Syrian children (about half of total children), both within the country and in neighboring states, are missing from the classroom (UNICEF 2014, 14). Their absence is due to the violence of the conflict and the collapse of the education system within Syria. The country had previously been a positive example of an effective education system in the Middle East with primary school enrollment having been almost universal for a generation, literacy rates above 90 percent, and approximately 5 percent of the national GDP spent on education (UNICEF 2014, 14). Currently, one fifth of schools have been destroyed or closed (approximately 4,000 schools) (UNICEF 2014, 14; Saleh 2013, 88). The destruction of schools in Syria accounted for 70 percent of violent incidents involving schools in 2012 worldwide (Saleh 2013, 88). Two thousand schools are also being currently used as shelters for internally displaced persons (Saleh 2013, 88). An unknown amount of schools are also being occupied by military fighters, both regime and opposition.

The situation outside of the country is equally dire with children being deeply affected by their displacement (Saleh 2013, 88). Host-countries like Lebanon, Turkey and Jordan have made efforts to accept Syrian children into their schools but they simply don’t have the resources to accept all of them. Children in Jordan are forced to go to school in poorly improvised classrooms in the Za’atari refugee camps due to inadequate room in the Jordanian public school system (Saleh 2013, 88). Of the 300,000 refugee children in Lebanon, only 40,000 have been able to enter the Lebanese school system (Jones 2014). In fact, 70 percent of Syrians aged 15-17 in Lebanon are leaving school due to the challenges they face of having been out of school for extended periods of time and being forced to study a curriculum that is far different than what they are normally used to (Saleh 2013, 88).

The lack of a uniform curriculum for Syrian children both in and out of the country is an ongoing problem as the type of education one receives is now very much dependent on who controls the area where children are being educated. Areas controlled by the Syrian regime receive a very different educational curriculum than areas associated with the Syrian National Coalition (SNC) who have introduced a new curriculum (Cesaretti 2014b). The Islamic Levant Coalition, another group of Syrian expatriates, has also introduced new textbooks (Cesaretti 2014b). Finally extremist groups like the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), now known as the Islamic State (IS) have opened Islamic schools (Cesaretti 2014b).

Children living outside the country are also sometimes subjected to the host countries curriculum although the SNC’s Office of the National Higher Commission for Learning and Higher Education, based in the Turkish city of Gaziantep, is attempting to generate a common curriculum for as many children affected by the conflict as possible (Cesaretti 2014b). It has printed an extra 7.2 million copies of their post-Assad curriculum to meet demand in the region (Cesaretti 2014b).

II. Implications for Long Term Stability of Syria and International Security

Implications for Long-Term Stability of Syria

The continued conflict has led to the possibility of creating a lost generation among Syrian children. If the various human security threats towards these children are not addressed, there could be far-reaching consequences for both Syria and international security. The impact a conflict has on a country even after hostilities conclude is far reaching, and can affect a wide range of areas including the economic, educational, and health sectors. While the Syrian conflict is ongoing and thus solid data on long-term consequences are difficult to determine, one can get an idea of how a country is affected in the long run through the use of previous research and case studies.

The consequences of conflict include the widespread destruction of physical capital and infrastructure, reduced human capital, disease, displacement, capital flight, lost livelihoods, weakened institutions, reduced state capacity, and diminished social capital (GSRDC 2008). As a result, the country's rate of economic growth can decline dramatically. In general, conflicts lead to a decline in output; an Oxfam report estimated the loss of GDP growth suffered by 23 African countries that had been embroiled in a conflict between 1990 and 2005 to be 18 billion dollars annually or 284 billion in total (Ohiorhenuan and Stewart 2008, 35). Conflict also leads to structural changes in the economy as much of the formal sector is often destroyed in the fighting and replaced with informal economies, which can complicate the recovery process (GSRDC 2008). Finally, continued fighting can contribute to lost employment and livelihoods as employment can be affected by factors such as disrupted markets and lower levels of expenditures (GSRDC 2008).

The unemployment problem is particularly prevalent in societies where youth are a significant portion of the population. According to Henrik Urdal, "in countries where youth make up 35 percent of the total adult population, the risk of conflict, with all other factors equal, increases by 150 percent compared to countries where youth make up only 17 percent of adult population, as in most developed countries." (Urdal 2006, 617) However, one cannot simply label societies containing a lot of youth as prone to violence. It is the combination of high percentages of youth and a lack of economic opportunities due to the underlying socioeconomic and political barriers for young people that lead to an increased likelihood of violence. Young men and women, after returning from the conflict or refugee camps, may be frustrated by their lack of social recognition and by deficient educational and economic opportunities, which leaves them feeling alienated and susceptible to recruitment of armed groups to either express their anger or simply secure a livelihood (Ohiorhenuan and Stewart 2008, 21). More on this final point will be discussed in the section on implications for international security.

A conflict's devastating impact on education and human capital also affects the stability of a country in the long-term. The destruction of a country's educational infrastructure can have a devastating effect on the possibility of training a country's future work force with the skills and knowledge they will need to thrive, causing serious long term effects on a country's post-conflict economic recovery and development (Ohiorhenuan and Stewart 2008, 30). The loss of

educational personnel during a conflict can also have a substantial impact, as a lack of teachers will slow down the recovery process of education even if the infrastructure is back in place. Cutbacks in educational expenditures in favor of military spending, which often occur during a conflict, can also lead to deterioration in the quality as well as quantity of education in conflict countries (Ohiorhenuan and Stewart 2008, 30). Finally, war has a negative impact on both the remaining stock of human capital as well as any additions to that capital through the education system (Ohiorhenuan and Stewart 2008, 30). Conflict has this negative impact through the reduction of the human stock of those with a formal education through death, injury, or forced migration. Extended fighting can also lead to “professional deskilling” among combatants where their previously learned professional skills atrophy after having spent so much time fighting (Ohiorhenuan and Stewart 2008, 30). Conflict also affects the conditions of human capital formation (Ohiorhenuan and Stewart 2008, 30), also known as education and training, by reducing its access to children and youth. One study estimated that half of the 104 million children out of school worldwide were living in conflict or post-conflict zones (Ohiorhenuan and Stewart 2008, 30).

Conflicts can also have a long-lasting impact on health, even for years after the fighting ceases. Poor access to clean water can significantly impact a state’s population through the spread of disease for years in a post-conflict society (Ohiorhenuan and Stewart 2008, 30). Poor sanitation in any developing country can have huge economic consequences for a struggling population. Nigeria, a country that is currently embroiled in its own domestic conflicts, presents a frightening example of the financial burden of poor sanitation. A study conducted by Nigeria’s Water and Sanitation Program found that poor sanitation cost Nigerians \$3 billion a year, with \$2.5 billion lost due to premature deaths (Govt. of Nigeria 2012, 1). The health of a population is equally affected by the collapse of the state health infrastructure. In some cases, healthcare may be provided informally or through private sector improvisation, which has had mixed results at best (Ohiorhenuan and Stewart 2008, 25). The combination of poor sanitation and a ruined health infrastructure explains why conflict-affected countries have low-life expectancies for years after the fighting has ended (Ohiorhenuan and Stewart 2008, 25).

While the Syrian conflict is far from over, the previous demonstrations of how conflict affects long term stability are quite relevant for Syria and its children, and may provide a glimpse onto the effects of civil war on the country. Poor health will rob the country of its future leaders and workforce and cost the people billions of dollars in lost revenue and healthcare costs. The combination of unemployment and the destroyed educational infrastructure is going to be a huge problem in a post-conflict Syria. With a fifth of Syria’s schools destroyed and an educational curriculum that is inconsistent in its quality, children are going to be lacking key skills and knowledge as they transition to adulthood and begin looking for employment. This problem, combined with the fact that many older men have been killed in the fighting, could lead to adults of working age being composed of a lot of unskilled youth (the children who have grown up in the Syrian conflict) with no jobs, no skills to rebuild Syria, and no prospects for a bright future. As was previously mentioned, a workforce composed of lots of youth, combined with no economic opportunities increases the risk of violence in a country, something Syria could not afford if the current conflict were to ever cease. Youth may join armed groups to empower themselves and secure a livelihood. Given the fact that Syria has lots of armed groups and some terrorist organizations with extreme ideologies operating within the country and the greater

region, disaffected youth joining their ranks could create larger armed groups of angry Syrians who could cause both Syria and the international community serious damage.

Implications for International Security

In addition to the consequences for the long-term stability of Syria, threats to human security also have implications for international security as the fighting and instability in Syria continue. Children going up in horrible conditions may eventually become angry youth and young adults, perhaps pushing them to join armed groups or even become radicalized and join terrorist organizations. The present operation of various groups such as ISIS and the Al-Qaeda affiliated Jabhat al-Nusra within Syria make this problem very real as they always have a need for more recruits and have the capacity to influence these children in horribly negative ways. In fact, these groups have already to began to actively recruit youth into their fold (Kabawat and Lassan 2014). While there are many factors and drivers of violent extremism (VE), this section will seek to analyze those that are most relevant to Syria's next generation.

One potential driver as children get older and begin to seek jobs is the combination of economic deprivation and frustrated expectations. According to the USAID Report *Guide to the Drivers of Violent Extremism*, there is "much anecdotal evidence to suggest that relative deprivation and frustrated expectations (not only for economic benefits, but also for political power and/or social status) can be important drivers of VE." (Denoeux and Carter 2009, 20) This driver is particularly acute with youth whose expectations are typically left unsatisfied due to a sluggish economy, an educational curricula that is not consistent with the needs of the labor market and the global economy, and/or political or societal discrimination (Denoeux and Carter 2009, 20). Applying this to the context of Syrian children, one can clearly state that all of these issues are present in the current conflict. The economy has been almost completely destroyed by the fighting and will most likely take years to rebuild. The educational infrastructure is also in ruins with schools destroyed and teachers killed or gone. This inhibits children from gaining skills that might help them find employment. Furthermore, Syrian refugee children are likely to be socially marginalized in neighboring countries in the near future. The amount of Syrian refugees in other countries is causing tensions between refugees and their hosts (Mercy Corps 2012), which could potentially lead to acts of discrimination against Syrians.

If the Syrian children grow up and cannot find jobs and feel constantly marginalized, then this can also push Syrian children and youth towards extremism as they become young adults. If many young Syrians cannot find employment, then this can result in lots of youth with too much time on their hands. According to USAID, this context results in several factors that can come together in pushing youth towards terrorist organizations which include "the quest for adventure and fame - and or least, for outlets from dreary lives; the propensity, associated with teenage hood to engage in open defiance of authority figures; the yearning for self-affirmation and social recognition by peers and the broader community; and the search for means of avenging real and perceived wrongs done to oneself and/or to close relatives and friends." (Denoeux and Carter 2009, 20) The USAID report added that the factors described above are more likely to have an impact and youth are more likely to turn to violence in societies that also feature bad governance, heavy-handed repression, and widespread impunity (Denoeux and Carter 2009, 20), very much the case in Syria. Idle youth may be attracted to fiery sermons of extreme religious leaders who

may offer a message of action that may appeal to them (Denoeux and Carter 2009, 20). Their idleness may also make them more receptive to salaries and other material benefits offered by extremist groups (Denoeux and Carter 2009, 20).

The denial of political rights and civil liberties, both threats to political security, is a particularly powerful driver towards extremism. The denial of political rights, also known as “political exclusion” is the “lack of legal avenues for expressing political demands and grievances, and for participating in political processes more generally,” (Denoeux and Carter 2009, 28) something that is usually accomplished through free and fair elections. Civil liberties can include freedom of expression, of the press, and of religion. None of these things are currently being respected in Syria. Voices of opposition were brutally put down in the initial stages of the conflict with both children and adults being tortured and killed. Children have been targeted based off of their association with particularly groups such as Sunnis or simply because they live in the same areas as opponents of the regime. Having children grow up in an environment where their basic rights are denied is very dangerous for international security as there is compelling empirical evidence that demonstrates that political exclusion and the denial of civil liberties represent an important risk factor in pushing people towards violent extremism (Denoeux and Carter 2009, 28). According to Alan Krueger, countries from which terrorists tend to stem are characterized first and foremost by the restriction of civil liberties (2007, 78). Such research is corroborated by Adrian Karatnycky of Freedom House:

Between 1999 and 2003, 70 percent of all deaths from terrorism were caused by terrorists and terrorist groups originating in Not Free societies, while only 8 percent of all fatalities were generated by terrorists and terror movements with origins in Free societies. Moreover, terrorists from dictatorial and repressive societies that brutalize their inhabitants are themselves significantly more brutal than terrorists born and acculturated in democratic societies [as measured by the number of persons killed per attack]... (2005, 9)

It should also be noted that violence inspired by political exclusion is often likely to express itself in a religious idiom and through religious organizations wherever secular opposition groups are weak, often as a result of having been suppressed by the state (Denoeux and Carter 2009, 29). This is exactly what’s going in Syria with the Free Syrian Army, a predominately secular organization, having received the brunt of attacks against opposition groups by the regime. The FSA as an organization now remains mostly fractured while extremist groups like ISIS have not received nearly as many attacks by the regime (Civiroglu 2014).

A similar driver of extremism to the denial of political rights and civil liberties is government repression and gross violations of human rights, also grave threats to personal and political security. USAID indicates that an examination of individuals who are affiliated with violent extremism suggests that exposure to harsh government repression was a significant factor in the person’s radicalization (Denoeux and Carter 2009, 30). Being subject to torture can particularly feed a “burning desire for revenge” as well as the broader belief that violence may be necessary to “purify” a fundamentally immoral order (Denoeux and Carter 2009, 30). One of the most prominent examples in which torture and repression shaped one’s views is Ayman al-Zawahiri, the current leader of Al-Qaeda. His time spent in Egyptian prison is said to have

shaped his outlook in very significant ways, especially in convincing him in the fundamentally evil nature of the secular Arab state (Denoeux and Carter 2009, 30). Saudi militants who joined Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) are also said to have been deeply influenced by their times spent in Saudi prisons where they were subjected to physical and psychological torture (Hegghammer 2006, 46). Like the imprisonment and poor treatment of Zawahiri and the militants of Al-Qaeda, the Syrian regime's indiscriminate use of imprisonment, torture, and sexual violence against children, in addition to adults, can potentially push these children down the road of extremism.

A right to education has been previously discussed as a fundamental human right for children, and the current educational void both inside and around Syria for refugees also represents a potential driver of extremism. No consistent Syria curriculum exists and groups that control territory more or less impose whatever type of education they wish. In ISIS controlled-areas such as Raqqa, the terrorist organization has opened Islamic schools (Cesaretti 2014b). While regular subjects are still supposedly taught, numerous reports have emerged of the enforcement of religious education in favor of math or science (Cesaretti 2014b). Education is also dependent on donors who then become stakeholders in educational projects. If donations come from sources that embrace a more religious and extremist ideology, this can potentially push Syrian children in that direction. Qatar has been giving a lot of money to opponents of the regime and has even opened a school within its borders for Syrian children (Dickinson 2014). However, Qatar has been accused of backing predominately Islamist- leaning rebels (Dickinson 2014) and thus its foreign policy objectives have the possibility of being reflected in the education it might advocate for Syrian children. Furthermore, the profile of members of terrorist organizations has shifted from individuals who are highly educated to members who are consistently less educated and more socially marginalized (Denoeux and Carter 2009, 57). Few have completed high school, with many of them having dropped out of the school system with little more than basic reading skills (Denoeux and Carter 2009, 57). As it stands, half of Syria's children are out of school during the conflict. If something isn't done soon, then many of these children will be prime candidates for radicalization.

III. Protecting the Syrian Youth: Evaluating Recommendations that Address Issues of Human Security for Children

The challenge in coming up with recommendations on how to protect Syria's children is determining what would be ideal and what would be feasible. While there are lots of recommendations for combatants and the international community at large on how to help children, some recommendations, while well intentioned, seem rather unlikely to occur or are simply unenforceable. Nevertheless, these recommendations do deserve to be heard.

The report *Stolen Futures: The Hidden Toll of Child Casualties in Syria* by the Oxford Research Group provides a series of recommendations for states and conflict parties to follow in order to protect the physical security of children. Firstly, all parties need to refrain from targeting civilians and civilian objects such as schools, hospitals and places of worship in order to prevent the unlawful killing of civilians, including children (Dardagan and Salama 2013, 21). Secondly, better training must be provided on international humanitarian law and operational targeting to armed forces and groups (Dardagan and Salama 2013, 21). This training must focus on actions

that armed actors can take in order to avoid putting civilians and children in harms way (Dardagan and Salama 2013, 21). Third, all parties must honor the obligations under the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, 2000 and the Geneva Conventions specifically relating to the commitment of not recruiting children under the age of 18 to fight (Dardagan and Salama 2013, 21). Fourth, efforts need to be made to ensure that armed forces and groups are taking the necessary steps to protect civilians, which includes the recording of casualties caused by their own forces and in tracking other forms of civilian harm (Dardagan and Salama 2013, 21). The report also recommends making public any casualty records produced by armed forces and groups in order to provide a fuller picture of the impacts of the conflict (Dardagan and Salama 2013, 21). Finally, the report requests promoting access to journalists so that they can contribute to the recording of casualties (Dardagan and Salama 2013, 21).

The Stolen Futures report is a perfect example of organizations recommending what would be ideal and not necessarily providing the likelihood of them being implemented. The recommendations are quite disconnected from reality. It is highly unlikely that armed actors will refrain from hitting civilian targets like schools as they have often been used by armed forces as staging areas and/or barracks. Furthermore, the indiscriminate violence by the regime and armed groups like the Islamic State/ISIS seems to indicate little regard if the buildings are occupied by soldiers or not. While providing better knowledge of international humanitarian law does have some merit, it is unlikely that many fighters would be interested in knowledge of these laws given their widespread violent actions such as killing and rape of civilians, actions that have violated international humanitarian law over and over. Giving such knowledge to members of the Free Syrian Army (FSA) opposition may be slightly more feasible, especially if receiving such training was made as a condition for receiving aid, either military or other. In terms of honoring obligations under the various humanitarian conventions to not recruit children, the only way that this seems feasible is, like the previous recommendation, to get a commitment from opposition forces that they will adhere to it, possibly as a precondition to aid. However, one should be skeptical that they would accept anything that may limit their fighting capability, given the violence faced by opposition forces from the regime. Getting a promise to adhere to these rules from Assad's forces is debatable as official Syrian recruiting systems are disintegrating and youth have been seized at checkpoints (Human Rights Council 2013, 18). Finally, making casualty records public and allowing journalists to record casualties are both highly unlikely as neither side wishes to be seen as contributing to the bulk of the killing in the fighting.

Another report that provides recommendations on aiding the children of Syria is UNICEF's *Under Siege: The Devastating Impact on Children of Three Years of Conflict in Syria*. Aside from the common wish of ending the fighting, the report does provide several recommendations, which have a possibility of being achieved.

One potentially feasible recommendation by UNICEF is to address issues of food and health security by granting immediate access to the under-reached 1 million children within Syria in order to deliver badly needed food and medical supplies such as polio vaccines, water purification tablets, hygiene supplies, as well as other services (UNICEF 2014, 16). This recommendation is somewhat feasible. The Syrian state currently allows international aid into regime-controlled, areas, which does reach some of the children. However, aid traveling through

official channels, usually under the aegis of the UN, is not allowed into opposition-controlled areas and operates under NGOs like the Syrian Arab Red Crescent, whose leadership is controlled by the Assad regime (Hussein 2013). For years, the UN followed the guidelines set by the Syrian regime, as UN aid tends to operate only by permission of the host state, so as to not violate the country's sovereignty. However, recent events seem to indicate a change in this policy.

A recent letter published by the International Bar Association announced that providing aid outside of regime channels was not considered a violation of international law and that there was no barrier to the UN directly undertaking cross-border humanitarian operations or supporting NGOs to do so (2014). The International Bar Association gives three reasons that humanitarian action outside of the Syrian regime's jurisdiction is legal. The first is that "United Nations clearly meets the first condition for legitimate humanitarian action, which requires it to respect the principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality, and non-discrimination in delivering aid." (International Bar Association 2014) The second is that in many embattled areas of Syria, the regime is not in control of the territory. When this is the case, "the consent of those parties in effective control of the area through which relief will pass is all that is required by law to deliver aid." (International Bar Association 2014) Finally, the group explains that parties can only withhold consent of aid for valid legal reasons, not arbitrary ones; parties cannot withhold consent simply to weaken an enemy (International Bar Association 2014). If the international community does take the statements of the International Bar Association to heart, then there is a possibility that aid could reach the children trapped in opposition areas in addition to those in regime territory. There obviously would be risk to humanitarian actors if the regime is uncooperative, but such action to aid the children should not be discounted.

In July 2014, the UN Security Council voted unanimously to allow humanitarian aid into opposition-held parts of Syria, regardless of regime permission (Gladstone 2014). Whether this resolution was a direct result of the letter written by the International Bar Association or simply global demand for greater aid in the country is unclear, but needless to say, this action was a positive first step in getting aid to Syrians in areas that in desperate need for attention.

Other important recommendations from UNICEF are to invest in education and psychological support for Syrian children both within Syria and in other countries UNICEF (2014, 16), key issues to reduce political, economic, and health security for the future generations of Syria. UNICEF is currently requesting \$276 million and \$110 million respectively for these tasks (UNICEF 2014, 16). This is likely the most feasible recommendation between the two reports, particularly for children living in refugee areas outside of the country. The previous sections have highlighted the importance of education and psychological support for both the long-term stability of Syria and also for international security. Education provides children with the knowledge and skills to thrive as they grow older and psychological support can help them cope with trauma in positive ways. Failure to fund the embattled education system for Syrians will result in an entire generation that will be unable to find significant employment and be susceptible to the various negative influences of extremist/terrorist groups operating in the region.

A child's right to an education is a fundamental human and political right and the international community must step up to provide this. Otherwise, this void shall be filled by donors and actors with ulterior motives such as ISIS who is beginning to establish Islamist schools within Syria. This has previously happened in Lebanon where the terrorist group Hezbollah filled in the void left by an embattled Lebanese state by providing services to the Lebanese and gained lots of influence among the people. Hezbollah is currently operating in Syria so it seems entirely plausible that they themselves could repeat this scenario with their next-door neighbor. Syrian children need to know that the world cares and has not forgotten them. If no action is done, the anger and feelings of frustration and powerlessness of these Syrians could possibly be channeled into violence both within Syria, and globally. Activists on the ground emphasize that the international security should be less worried about the current terrorist organizations operating in Syria and more worried about the thousands of angry Syrians that are currently growing up in violence and poverty, without aid or education (Syrian Activists, pers. comm.). Activists warn that many of these children are susceptible to terrorist recruitment and their anger could easily be directed towards the international community for its inaction on the conflict (Syrian Activists, pers. comm.).

Conclusion

The international community must act in order to help the children of Syria and they must do so by addressing the threats to the various types of human security. If these threats are not reduced and eventually eliminated, there will be long-term consequences for both Syria and international security at large. Already, the ongoing stability has spilled into neighboring Iraq with terrible consequences for Syrians and Iraqis alike. Aid such as food and vaccines needs to be brought in to help provide food and health security. Action needs to be taken to ensure that personal, community, economic, and political security are protected as well. One of the best ways to accomplish this is by providing them with education so that they have the appropriate skills and knowledge to find employment and help rebuild Syria when they grow up. In July 2014, the United Nations Security Council took a positive first step in increasing aid to refugees in areas of Syria not controlled by the regime by unanimously voting to allow humanitarian aid to Syrians in opposition-held areas (Gladstone 2014). However, it remains to be seen whether or not aid will actually be able to reach many embattled Syrians in these areas, especially those besieged in cities.

If certain actors like the United States cannot find sufficient motivation to act under the flag of humanitarianism, then perhaps they can find sufficient motivation to do so under the aegis of counterterrorism and countering violent extremism (CVE). The United States dedicated 16 billion dollars for counterterrorism purposes to the intelligence community in 2013 (Desilver 2013). The US is already investing heavily across the border in Iraq with military advisers, air strikes, and humanitarian airdrops to prevent the spread of ISIS, now calling itself the Islamic State (Lassan 2014). While it is important to resolve the fighting in Syria, policymakers around the world need to recognize that many of the root causes of fighting in Iraq still lie in the unresolved conflict in Syria.

The US, along with other members of the international community need to recognize that threats to human security can push children towards extremism and terrorism, and as a result

needs to direct more and/or additional funding towards analyzing and addressing these non military human security issues in Syria and other trouble spots around the world. There is lots of evidence that demonstrates that children growing up in violence can devastate their psyches, which can push them towards terrorist groups (Purwar, Dhabal, and Chakravarty n.d.). The terrorist organizations are well aware of this. Documents recovered from the 2011 Osama Bin Laden raid in Abbotabad, Pakistan revealed that Al-Qaeda had turned to the goal of luring and preparing the youth.” (Bloom 2012) If the international community does not address human security for children in Syria, then the long-term consequences could be disastrous.

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