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## The Ongoing Struggle: Analyzing the Middle Eastern Humanitarian Crisis

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### Abstract

The purpose of this study is to analyze the current crisis in the Middle East. The humanitarian crisis in the Middle East is a major challenge for the international community. The Arab Spring, which began in Tunisia, marked a pivotal shift in the Arab world, as people demanded their rights and called for political reforms. The movement spread throughout the region, with citizens in various Middle Eastern countries seeking to address their basic needs. Tunisia was the only country to achieve its goal of overthrowing the political system and implementing democratic reforms. In contrast, other countries continue to struggle against their governments. The governments of Syria and Yemen responded to the protests with violence, resulting in numerous casualties and driving many citizens to join radical militias, which ultimately led to civil wars in both countries. The term “Middle Eastern humanitarian crisis” emerged as the conflict intensified and devastated the region. By 2015, as fighting escalated between rebel factions and government forces, millions of people fled the region, seeking refuge in Europe. After nearly a decade of civil war and widespread destruction, millions remain homeless, and the international community continues to grapple with the refugee crisis and the search for a resolution to the Middle Eastern humanitarian disaster. This situation highlights the global interconnectedness: when the Middle East faces political, economic, and humanitarian crises, other parts of the world—especially Europe—are inevitably impacted, as people flee in search of safety, with Europe often being their primary destination.

**Keywords:** Middle Eastern Arab Spring, Humanitarian crisis, Syrian civil war, International community, European Union

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### Introduction

The Arab Spring, which originated in Tunisia, Egypt, and Libya, sparked large-scale protests in Syria as people demanded changes to the country's political structure and basic rights. The violent response from the Syrian military escalated into major military operations to suppress the opposition. In reaction, opposition groups formed to confront the government forces, ultimately plunging Syria into a civil war. As the conflict intensified, a humanitarian crisis began to unfold. Known as the Middle Eastern humanitarian crisis or refugee crisis, it became particularly pronounced in 2015, when millions of people fled their homes in search of safety from the ongoing violence. This conflict and the resulting tension have turned the contemporary Middle East into a living nightmare for countless people, forcing them to abandon their homes [1].

This study aims to analyze the ongoing crisis in the Middle East. It will address key questions such as: When did the Middle Eastern humanitarian crisis begin? How has the civil war in Syria affected the region? What role have Gulf countries played in this crisis? Why are Middle Eastern refugees trying to reach Europe? And why does the humanitarian crisis persist? Ultimately, the research will offer recommendations for resolving the ongoing civil war in Syria [1, 2].

*Origination of the middle eastern humanitarian crisis*



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The 2011 uprising in the Arab world, known as the Arab Spring, began in Tunisia and quickly spread to other Arab nations such as Libya, Yemen, Egypt, and Syria. The protests were sparked by the region's widespread dissatisfaction with dictatorial regimes. The roots of the crisis, however, extend far beyond this moment, as many factors contributed to the rise against governments, including low standards of living, mismanagement, political corruption, dictatorship, human rights violations, and high unemployment rates. Academics often refer to this movement as “Arab awareness.” The events of the Arab Spring marked a pivotal transformation for the region, with Tunisia being the only country to successfully change its political system and structure [3].

The Middle Eastern humanitarian crisis traces its origins back to 2015, following the escalation of the Syrian civil war. As the conflict intensified, it forced millions of people to flee their homes, triggering widespread instability across the region. The people were the driving force behind the demonstrations, demanding basic human rights and better living conditions. This moment provided a unique opportunity for people from diverse backgrounds—racial, religious, and cultural—to come together in opposition to their governments. Minorities who had long been excluded from fundamental rights seized this chance to join anti-government protests [3, 4].

Corruption played a significant role in motivating the uprisings. Since the 1980s, many Arab countries faced pressure from international financial institutions such as the IMF and World Bank, as their economies remained closed to foreign investment. Economic reforms were forced upon these countries, and the political systems in those nations were typically autocratic and authoritarian, with power concentrated in the hands of a small group, often led by the families of dictators [5].

The lack of basic human rights and freedoms further fueled the unrest. Governments in the region showed little regard for human rights, leaving people without freedom of speech, a multiparty system, or the presence of non-governmental organizations—key components of a functioning civil society. Minorities, such as the Kurds, faced ethnic and religious discrimination and were excluded from essential services and opportunities. Faced with these harsh conditions, people were determined to change their lives through the Arab Spring [5, 6].

### *Civil war and its impact on Syria*

The Syrian civil war began on March 15, 2011, when protests reached Damascus and Aleppo, calling for democratic reforms and the release of political prisoners. In response, the Syrian government used violent force against the demonstrators, leading to a dramatic escalation of the conflict. As the government's response intensified, armed opposition groups began to form and took up arms against the regime. The situation soon spiraled out of control as various militia groups emerged, each seizing control over different parts of the country and implementing their own rules [7].

As the civil war escalated between the opposition and government forces, foreign powers intervened, further exacerbating the conflict. Nations such as Hezbollah, Iran, and Russia supported the regime of President Bashar al-Assad, while countries like the United States, Saudi Arabia, and Turkey backed opposition forces seeking to remove him from power. This has transformed the war into a “proxy war” with various international players backing different factions, which has turned the conflict into a struggle for regional and global hegemony, primarily between the USA and Russia [8].

The consequences of the Syrian civil war have been catastrophic. Millions of Syrians have been displaced, leading to a large refugee crisis, with many fleeing to Europe in search of safety. The war has also led to widespread droughts in parts of Syria, a food crisis, and severe destruction across the country. The aftermath of the civil war will have long-lasting effects, as the country's infrastructure is shattered, and recovery will take decades. One of the most devastating consequences is the impact on children—millions are out of school, which will result in a significantly lower literacy rate in Syria and other war-torn countries like Libya and Yemen [9].

### *The role of Gulf-rich countries*

From the onset of the Syrian conflict, Gulf-rich countries played a key role by funding militia groups aligned with their political and strategic objectives, particularly countries like Saudi Arabia, which sought to remove Bashar al-Assad from power. A significant question that has arisen, however, is why Gulf countries, despite sharing cultural, linguistic, and historical ties with the Middle Eastern refugees, have not opened their borders to host them. Countries such as Turkey, Jordan, and Lebanon have hosted millions of refugees, but the Gulf countries have not taken in any refugees [10, 11].

Gulf countries argue that they have contributed millions of dollars to international humanitarian organizations and the United Nations for refugee resettlement. However, critics contend that these nations should do more to help those fleeing the conflict. They claim that Gulf countries have avoided hosting refugees by citing the fact that they have not signed the 1951 UN Refugee Convention, which defines the rights of refugees and the obligations of host countries. This legal argument has been used to justify their reluctance to take in displaced people.

While some refugees may prefer to seek refuge in neighboring countries due to geographical proximity and cultural similarities, they face the obstacle of visa requirements, which make it nearly impossible to obtain asylum in most Gulf states. Before the Arab Spring, Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries typically assisted with financial donations to the United

Nations rather than directly hosting refugees. Critics argue that these countries have focused their investments on the Syrian civil war, funding militia groups in efforts to overthrow Assad, rather than contributing to the refugee crisis [11].

Countries like Jordan, Lebanon, and Iraq have absorbed significant numbers of refugees but are facing immense financial strain due to their limited economic resources and domestic instability. Lebanon and Iraq, in particular, are struggling to cope with the refugee burden, as their economies cannot support the influx of displaced people. Therefore, there is a growing call for Gulf countries to open their borders and engage in diplomatic negotiations to find a sustainable solution for the future of the region, as the instability in Syria threatens to spill over into neighboring states [11, 12].

### *Why refugees are tending to reach Europe*

Immigration to Europe is not a new phenomenon, as European citizens have historically migrated to other continents. During the First and Second World Wars, millions of Europeans fled to the United States. However, after the escalation of the Syrian civil war and the loss of hope in their home countries, a significant wave of refugees began trying to reach Europe. The ongoing instability in the Middle East left people disillusioned, and Europe became their preferred destination due to its proximity and relative ease of access compared to the US.

One primary reason for refugees seeking Europe is the geography: Europe is much closer to the Middle East, making it a more viable option for those looking to escape violence and instability. Additionally, after Gulf-rich countries closed their borders to Syrian refugees, Europe became the only realistic destination. Refugees did not want to stay in neighboring countries where they would face hardships such as being forced to stay in camps or struggling to rent housing. These living conditions, along with a lack of resources, made Europe a more attractive option.

The security of the region is another factor. Europe is seen as a haven, where the European Union (EU) provides stability and protection through its cooperative agreements between member states. This collective security system makes refugees feel more secure in Europe compared to unstable regions like the Middle East. Additionally, Europe's high standard of living, quality of education, and perceived potential for a better future are significant draws for those fleeing conflict zones.

Employment opportunities are also an important reason why refugees seek Europe. Many refugees are young and capable of working, and Europe, with its aging population and declining fertility rates, needs a steady labor force to maintain its economic development. Contrary to critics' claims that refugees are taking jobs from Europeans, Europe benefits from an influx of labor to sustain its workforce and economy.

While refugees often face challenges in Europe, particularly in terms of integration, NGOs and governmental organizations play a critical role in helping new arrivals adjust. Integration can be especially difficult for children, who may have to spend long hours away from their families as they try to learn and adjust to their new environments. However, not all European countries are equally welcoming. Nations like Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic have been resistant to hosting refugees, while others like Sweden and Germany have opened their borders. Countries like Greece and Italy, which act as transit points, are struggling with the large number of refugees passing through, and they require more support from other EU members [13, 14].

### *Why the humanitarian crisis still exists in Syria*

The humanitarian crisis in Syria is rooted in the ongoing civil war, which is driven by a complex mix of internal and external factors. The conflict is primarily between those loyal to President Bashar al-Assad and various opposition groups, with regional and global powers further complicating the situation. The involvement of foreign powers with different agendas has prolonged the fighting and created divisions that have made peace elusive.

At the start of the war, many foreign powers had a common goal of eliminating ISIS fighters. However, even after ISIS was defeated, the civil war continued, now fueled by geopolitical rivalries and the pursuit of regional hegemony. For example, Turkey seeks to assert itself as a regional leader, while other actors, such as Syria, resist this influence. Syrian Kurds have also sought autonomy, which has led to tensions with Turkey, further complicating the situation.

The war has now become a proxy struggle between regional and global powers, each supporting different factions with their interests. This makes it difficult to bring all parties to the negotiating table and find a solution that will end the conflict. The absence of trust between the opposing sides, combined with the influence of foreign powers, has hindered any meaningful peace process.

For the humanitarian crisis to improve, political tensions must be resolved, and trust must be rebuilt between the various factions. This requires cooperation among regional and international actors to reach a consensus. Additionally, the ongoing civil war has made it difficult for humanitarian aid to reach all areas of Syria, further exacerbating the crisis. Providing aid to the people in need and addressing the political issues surrounding the conflict could help mitigate the humanitarian disaster [13].

## **Conclusion**

The escalation of the refugee crisis in 2015 was primarily driven by the conflict and chaos in Syria. Neighboring countries of Syria, already burdened by economic and social challenges, have reached their limits in hosting refugees. The ongoing humanitarian crisis is a direct consequence of the Arab Spring and the subsequent civil war in Middle Eastern nations, which has now evolved into a global crisis. To effectively address this issue, not only regional players but also global powers must actively engage in finding a solution to the Syrian civil war. As long as the conflict persists in Syria, refugees will continue to seek refuge in Europe, unable to return to their homeland. This instability in Syria ultimately affects Europe as well, making it imperative for European Union (EU) members to reach a consensus and work together in resolving the humanitarian crisis. In light of this situation, the following three key recommendations are proposed to bring peace and stability to Syria:

1. **Restoring Peace and Security:** The priority should be to restore peace and security to Syria, which is essential for ending the conflict between militia groups that represent regional powers. This would involve halting the ongoing “proxy war.” A unified agreement among key international actors, particularly the permanent members of the United Nations Security Council, is crucial. These powers should impose a ceasefire and open negotiations to facilitate dialogue between all parties involved in the conflict.

2. **Political Reform:** The underlying cause of the demonstrations in Syria stems from dissatisfaction with the government structure. A change in the political system is critical, allowing for a democratic framework where political parties can participate in fair elections and contribute to shaping the country's future. As a diverse and multicultural nation, Syria should implement a parliamentary-federal system that distributes central power and ensures the inclusion of various ethnic and religious groups in governance.

3. **Reconstruction and International Support:** As a war-torn country, Syria urgently needs reconstruction. The civil war has left the country devastated, and the Syrian government cannot rebuild the nation alone. Therefore, Syria requires substantial foreign support through investments from regional and global powers. The infrastructure of Syria has been destroyed, and it is essential to secure foreign direct investment to rebuild the country. Regional wealthier nations should take the lead in providing financial assistance, while global powers could contribute by establishing a “Marshall Plan”-like initiative, similar to the US's support for European countries after World War II.

In conclusion, the humanitarian crisis in Syria cannot be resolved without a coordinated effort from both regional and global powers. Achieving peace, political reform and reconstruction are essential steps toward ending the conflict, addressing the refugee crisis, and ensuring stability in the Middle East. The international community must act decisively and with a shared commitment to bring about a lasting resolution.

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