The War in Syria and Europe's Refugee Crisis

Tim Anderson

Abstract

The roots of refugee crises lie in much larger human displacement crises, though Eurocentrism may not see it that way. In 2015 the top three sources of asylum seekers in the EU were Syria, Afghanistan and Iraq, countries subject to invasions and proxy wars involving several European powers. The numbers of displaced people within and without those countries are 20 times higher than those seeking refuge in Europe. Further, the Middle East wars have been driven systematically by the Washington-NATO plan for a 'New Middle East', not simply by factors endogenous to the region. These refugees are not fleeing oppressive regimes; they run to escape invasions and proxy wars backed by the western powers. Evidence makes it clear that NATO countries have backed every single terrorist group in Iraq and Syria, directly or indirectly, to weaken and dominate these countries.

With Iraq and Syria we have seen an aggravation of the standard war-drives-emigration phenomenon. The terrorism fomented by NATO and the Gulf monarchies has 'blown back', provoking further European intervention. Yet disinformation campaigns have driven racial reactions in Europe to the target cultures and their emigrants, adding to the confusion over just who is responsible for the crisis. There is legitimate fear of terrorists joining the waves of refugees. Europe's militarised responses in turn enhance European fears of an emigrant threat. In short, the USA and European powers are in large part responsible for the creation and aggravation of the displacement crisis, which led to a European refugee crisis. No real solution is conceivable without addressing the repeated wars, the root of the problem.

Those concerned about refugees cannot ignore the wars that drive them, especially when they share responsibility for those wars. Many of the Europeans powers have backed wars in Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya and Syria which have caused massive displacements of peoples, a small fraction of which end up as refugees in Europe.

In April 2016 Syria's Grand Mufti, Sheikh Ahmed Badreddin Hassoun told this writer: "Tell [the Europeans] to stop the war on Syria. The refugees will stop within one day. Within one month they will return" (Hassoun 2016). His words were reinforced by Professor Francis Boyle: 'All these refugees are fleeing because the

United States government has been destroying their states' (in Nevradakis 2016). These messages contradict some popular western myths, that the Syrian conflict is a 'civil war', that the Syrian Government is mainly responsible for the refugees, that displaced people are 'fleeing the regime' and that the western powers are playing some angelic, humanitarian role.

It is widely acknowledged that the Syrian refugees arriving in Europe would prefer to go home. It has even been reported that many refugees in Germany have trouble when they try to do so (ABS 2016). Some in Canada and many in Lebanon say they want to return (Tharoor 2016; Holt 2016). So how might we best appreciate the mass displacement and the links between war and refugees?

This paper argues that the US and European driven wars of the last 15 years, and in particular the proxy war on Syria, must be properly understood to appreciate the roots of displacement and the refugee issue. It begins by distinguishing actual history from the key myths of the war on Syria, then addressing the links between that war, human displacement and the subsequent refugee crises, before commenting on some appropriate understandings of these very human tragedies.

1. Disinformation in the War on Syria

How can we credibly assess the ongoing war in Syria, where a large number of interested parties have invested such a lot in both its image and its outcome? The starting point must be by reference to principle, including international law and independent evidence. International law presumes that a sovereign country will resolve its own internal problems, and urges other nations to support that sovereign process. It follows that an intervener, in breach of international law, must present some extraordinary rationale. Failure to do so, or the presentation of fabricated pretexts for intervention, must attract concern that this is a war of aggression, the supreme international crime.

To judge any such extraordinary claim, including that of 'humanitarian intervention', we should look for independent evidence and discount 'self-serving' evidence, which bolsters the propaganda of an aggressive power. Where there is little independent evidence, we can resort to evidence against interests, such as admissions. Such principles are common in criminal investigation. It so happens that, after more than five years of armed conflict in Syria, there is substantial independent evidence and many admissions. If reasonable discussion matters, we must examine this evidence.

This section will demonstrate some key false pretexts and fabrications, characteristic of a war of aggression. It will also demonstrate links between the war in Syria and the previous interventions in Afghanistan, Iraq and Libya.

1.1 'Peaceful protestors' took up arms

The centrepiece of the Washington-led story is that there was a popular uprising in Syria during the 2011 'Arab Spring' and, after many months of repression, peaceful protestors felt obliged to take up arms against the government, to defend themselves. The war is thus an internal or organic conflict, a 'civil war'. That story is succinctly expressed by the semi-official US NGO, Human Rights Watch: 'The protest movement in Syria was overwhelmingly peaceful until September 2011' (HRW 2012). However, independent evidence shows that claim is quite false.

There certainly were large rallies in Syria in early 2011, both anti and pro-government. Yet most people in and around these rallies had nothing to do with the violence. Criticisms of the government and calls for 'reform' came from a longer standing opposition movement which was chiefly concerned with corruption and the Baath Party monopoly. The most widely inclusive opposition statement on demands for reform, the Damascus Declaration (2005), made a long list of demands; but all parties rejected violent attacks on the Government and opposed outside interference. Almost one year into the conflict a genuinely independent poll run by a Turkish agency said only 5% of Syrian people backed violent attacks on the government (TESEV 2012). Yet police, doctors and civilians were targeted and killed by snipers, in the first serious violence in the southern city of Daraa (Anderson 2016: 54-72). After that the army was called in. More than eighty soldiers were killed, in the first month of the violence (Narwani 2014).

Those responsible for the initial violence were extremist Islamists around the al Omari Mosque in Daraa. Saudi official Anwar Al-Eshki later admitted his country had armed the jihadists (Truth Syria 2012). This insurrectionary violence mirrored a Muslim Brotherhood insurrection almost 30 years earlier, which began with sniping and sectarian massacres. At Hama in 1982 the Syrian Army crushed the insurrection in several weeks. US intelligence (DIA 1982) estimated 2,000 were killed, many of them Muslim Brotherhood fighters. The Syrian Government said 3,000; British writer Patrick Seale said it could have been 5,000 to 10,000 (Seale 1988 : 335). The contemporary myth, from Muslim Brotherhood sources, is that as many as '40,000

civilians' were slaughtered; and no mention of a violent jihadist insurrection (Lefèvre 2013). In Daraa as in Hama, jihadists began rooftop sniping, attacked local government agencies, drew in the army then, when confronted by the army, cried 'civilian massacre'. In March 2011 Syrian Muslim Brotherhood leader, Muhammad Riyad Al-Shaqfa, issued a statement which left no doubt that the enemy was 'the secular regime' and that Brotherhood members would 'have to make sure that the revolution will be pure Islamic, and with that no other sect would have a share of the credit after its success' (Al-Shaqfa 2011). The Brotherhood went on to dominate the first groups given arms by a western-backed arms supply group called the 'Free Syrian Army' (Ramadani 2012).

From Daraa the violence spread to Homs, reinforced by jihadists from Lebanon. Al Jazeera, the principal Middle East media channel backing the Muslim Brotherhood, blacked out the reinforcement of the Homs offensive by armed foreigners. Former Al Jazeera journalist Ali Hashem was one of many who resigned from the Qatar-owned station, complaining of deep bias over Syria. He had footage of armed men arriving from Lebanon, but this was censored by his Qatari managers. 'In a resignation letter I was telling the executive … it was like nothing was happening in Syria' (Hashem 2012).

Western governments and media backed the jihadist story of a revolution of 'freedom'; but there were independent witnesses. One was the late Father Frans Van Der Lugt, who lived in Homs for 48 years and was murdered there by Jabhat al Nusra in 2014. In early 2012 he said:

"Most citizens in Syria do not support the opposition … from the beginning the protest movements have not been merely peaceful. I have seen from the beginning armed protestors … they were the first to fire on the police. Very often the violence of the security forces comes in response to the brutal violence of the armed insurgents' (Van der Lugt 2012).

The 'peaceful protestors turned gunmen' story was contradicted by multiple reports throughout 2011. On 6 June 2011 the BBC reported 'the deaths of at least 120 security personnel in battles with hundreds of gunmen in the north-western town of Jisr al-Shughour [Idlib]' (BBC 2011). A report by Hala Jaber from demonstrations at Ma'arrat al-Numan [Idlib] show that protest numbers were decimated – from 5,000 to 350 - after 'bearded militants' began shooting police (Jaber 2011). Gunmen drove

peaceful protestors off the streets. After one year, when the total death toll was about 5,000, the UN's Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights reported: 'a total of 478 police officers and 2,091 individuals from the military and security forces [i.e. 2,569] were killed between 29 March 2011 and 20 March 2012' (OHCHR 2012: 2; Narwani 2014). That is, half the casualties in the first year were government forces.

The Saudi backing of jihadists in Syria, and the US aim of 'regime change' in Damascus were not isolated acts. Five years earlier US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice had announced plans for a 'New Middle East', which would be sought through 'creative destruction' (Levine 2006). Indeed, the invasions of Afghanistan (2001) and Iraq (2003) were followed by the failed Israeli operation against Hezbollah in South Lebanon (2006), then the jihadist-NATO partnership (2011) which overthrew the Government of Libya. Unilateral disarmament moves against Iran had been stalled by an international process. Syria was next.

Contrary to western assertions that there was a secular internal rebellion in Syria, US intelligence knew the violence was led by jihadist extremists and observed that 'a declared or undeclared Salafist principality in eastern Syria [i.e. an 'Islamic State'] … is exactly what the [NATO-GCC] … want, in order to isolate the Syrian regime' (DIA 2012). In that same year Secretary of State Hilary Clinton wrote in a private email that: 'The best way to help Israel deal with Iran's growing nuclear capability is to help the people of Syria overthrow the regime of Bashar Assad (Wikileaks c2014). These statements confirm that 'regime change' as part of a regional strategy was underway in Syria.

1.2 The 'humanitarian intervention' pretext

In the manner of war propaganda everywhere, the enemy leader and the enemy army must be demonised and vilified, to help defuse any sentiment of pity or sympathy for those under attack. That is why the war mantra of a 'brutal dictator … killing his own people' was recited over Syria for years on end, with stories of mounting atrocities that built on the 'gunning down of peaceful protestors' opening gambit. The popular media of western countries said little about Syria confronting armies of jihadists, instead claiming almost endless and 'indiscriminate' Army attacks on 'civilians'.

It is widely accepted that the Syrian secret police (Mukhabarat) was feared, that the Syrian Arab Army has killed captured terrorists, and that in war of this scale there must have been some 'collateral damage' from the Army's actions. Yet two things

stand out. First, the jihadist armies set against Syria regularly filmed and publicise their own atrocities against Syrian soldiers and civilians alike. The Syrian Army did not do that. Second, when major atrocity stories against the Army are examined closely, most emerge as fabrications. In particular, there is little credible evidence, upon careful examination, that the Syrian Army has targeted or gassed civilians or bombed civilian hospitals. Table 1 shows several major massacres and other incidents which were wrongly blamed on the Syrian Army.

Table 1: Major 'false flag' massacre claims in Syria

Incident	US and Jihadist claims	Rebuttal
Houla massacre, May 2012	Syrian Govt. "thugs" said to have murdered 108 villagers, no motive.	15 independent witnesses identify Farouk (FSA) leaders as responsible.
Daraya massacre, Aug 2012	245 killed: "Assad's army has committed another massacre"	FSA massacres hostages after a failed prisoner swap.
Aqrab massacre, Dec 2012	120 villagers killed. "Members of Assad's sect were responsible"	FSA held Allawi villagers hostage, then killed many as the Army closed in.
East Ghouta chemical weapons, Aug 2013	Incident during visit of UN CW inspectors, claims 1400 killed. Eight bodies buried. SyG blamed.	US MIT experts: "these munitions could not possibly have been fired from the … Syrian Government controlled area". Other evidence.
Qatar: 'mass prisoner murder', Jan 2014	Qatar-paid defector 'Caesar' shows 1000s of photos of bodies from a Syrian morgue. Said to be prisoners.	HRW admits almost half the bodies are 'soldiers or members of the security forces' and other victims of terrorist attacks.

Let's briefly explain the evidence on these notorious incidents, before moving on to the question of what multiple fabrications say about the character of this war.

The terrible Houla massacre (near Homs) of 108 villagers, in May 2012, took place on the eve of UN talks. Many of the families killed were government supporters or those who had participated in recent elections. A first UN committee, which went to Houla, then under jihadist control, heard conflicting stories. A second UN committee, co-chaired by a US diplomat, tried to blame unnamed Syrian Government supporters. At stake were talks which might have authorised UN military intervention in Syria, as had happened the previous year in Libya. However Russia and China, concerned at NATO's abuse of UN Resolution 1973 over Libya (which called for protection of civilians; NATO instead used the opportunity to help overthrow the Libyan Government) refused to support a similar move against Syria. As I demonstrate in my book The Dirty War on Syria, the report of the second UN committee was a travesty. That committee ignored published evidence from 15 independent witnesses who blamed specific members of the US-backed Farouq brigade (FSA) and their local collaborators (Anderson 2016: Chapter 8).

Three months later an even bigger massacre of 245 people in Daraya, just south of Damascus, was blamed on the Syrian Army. A Reuters report headlined 'Syria activists report 'massacre' by army near Damascus' (Oweis 2012). A few days later this 'activists' story was exposed by Robert Fisk as the slaughter by Free Syrian Army' jihadists of kidnapped civilian and off-duty soldier hostages, after a failed prisoner swap (Fisk 2012). Similarly, the *New York Times* blamed the massacre of over 100 villagers at Aqrab (close to Houla) on the Syrian Army. Their headline, based on 'activist' sources, read: 'Members of Assad's Sect Blamed in Syria Killings' (Stack and Mourtada 2012) . Once again, just days later, another western journalist exposed the fabrication. British reporter Alex Thompson (2012) went to Aqrab and discovered that armed groups linked to the 'FSA' had held 500 Alawi villagers for nine days, murdering many of them as the army closed in and the gang fled. There were no retractions or corrections by Reuters or the *New York Times* for their false headlines. Gross defamation of the Syrian Army did not trouble them. Instead, the privileged media treatment given to jihadists boosted their relative impunity, allowing them freedom to continue with their public executions and 'false flag' crimes.

The most famous scandal of this nature came with the East Ghouta chemical weapons accusations of August 2013, from jihadists of Jabhat al Nusra (al Qaeda) and Jaysh al Islam, who were occupying parts of eastern countryside Damascus. They blamed the Syrian Army for what they claim was a sarin gas attack which killed many, including children. Blaming the Government was implausible, without motive, and very soon all the independent evidence contradicted it. The incident occurred just as UN chemical weapons inspectors were in Damascus, at the invitation of the Syrian Government. They had been called to investigate a sarin attack by jihadists at Khan al Assal (Aleppo), earlier that year, where a toxic rocket had killed 25 people, both soldiers and civilians (Barnard 2013).

The Khan al Assal investigation was delayed because of the East Ghouta scandal; and because the White House, Human Rights Watch and other western groups backed the jihadists' claim, the al Qaeda groups had a free ride in the western media. The New York Times backed the White House claim 'that only Syrian government forces had the ability to carry out such a strike' (Gladstone and Chivers 2013), arguing that vector calculations of the rocket trajectories suggested they must have been fired from Syrian Army bases in Damascus (Parry 2013). The rest of the western media followed this line, with few exceptions.

Yet independent evidence came in quickly to demonstrate that the White House, Human Rights Watch and the *New York Times* were wrong. I have documented this evidence in a chapter of my book *The Dirty War on Syria* (Anderson 2016: Chapter 9) and provide just a brief summary here. A Jordanian journalist interviewed people in the East Ghouta area who blamed Saudi agents for bringing chemical weapons to the jihadists (Gavlak and Ababneh 2013). A Syrian team led by Christian nun Mother Agnes Mariam demonstrated that video and photographic evidence had been staged manipulated, casting doubt on the claim that many of the pictured children even came from the East Ghouta area (ISTEAMS 2013). US intelligence officers said that Jabhat al Nusra, which earlier had been caught with sarin gas in Turkey, 'should have been a suspect'. They said President Obama had 'manipulated' the evidence to justify a strike on President Assad (Hersh 2013). Importantly, two MIT scientists discredited the rocket telemetry evidence, saying that the range of the rockets was much shorter than suggested and that put the affected areas out of range of any nearby Syrian military base. Their final report said that the rockets 'could not possibly' have been

fired at East Ghouta from the 'heart', or from the eastern edge, of the Syrian Government controlled area 'shown in the intelligence map published by the White House on August 30, 2013' (Lloyd and Postol 2014). Later on, a UN report determined that the chemical agents used in Khan-Al-Assal attack 'bore the same unique hallmarks as those used in al Ghouta' (HRC 2014: 19). All that evidence should have been conclusive. Sarin was used in the East Ghouta, but the numbers affected was unknown and the charges against the Syrian Army were false. The only logical consequence was that this incident was another provocation on the part of the jihadists, in their search for greater western support.

One final incident deserves comment. In January 2014 a Syrian defector was publicised by the monarchy of Qatar (a key financier of jihadist terrorism in Syria) as showing thousands of photos of dead bodies. They were said to have been prisoners tortured and killed in Syria's jails (Black 2014). The defector, called 'Caesar', remained anonymous and was uncorroborated. Yet this event attracted massive publicity. The photos were shown throughout the US and at the UN, like a traveling roadshow. However there was no corroboration of Caesar's story on how or at whose hands these people had died. Almost a year later Human Rights Watch (HRW) got access to the entire file and published its own report called 'If the dead could speak'. The report basically adopted Caesar's story, noting that most photos seemed to have come from a morgue attached to a Damascus Hospital. However there was a telling admission at pages 2 and 3: 'over 46% of the photographs (24,568) do not show people 'tortured to death' … [rather] dead Syrian soldiers and victims of car bombs and other violence' (HRW 2015). That is, before any critical evaluation, almost half the entire file did not at all relate to 'prisoners tortured and killed'. This HRW admission did not seem to be reported in the western mass media.

By extreme bias the western media channels were sending a clear message to the jihadists and their 'activist' sources: commit any massacre you like, blame it on the Styrian Government and Syrian Army, we will run your story, virtually uncontradicted. The existence of several demonstrable fabricated incidents, or false flag crimes, shows not only a modus operandi on the part of the jihadist groups, but also complicity in the promotion of fabricated stories on the part of the US Government and much of the western media.

1.3 The 'protective intervention' pretext

In 2014 there was a switch in US intervention strategy in Syria, away from 'humanitarian intervention' and towards 'protective intervention'. This may have been due to the failure of multiple pretexts for humanitarian intervention, or because the sectarian jihadist character of the 'revolution' had become apparent. In any case the Obama administration, which had by then made public that it was providing arms and finance to what it called 'moderate opposition' groups, announced it would support those groups to fight against the extremist jihadist groups, Jabhat al Nusra and ISIS/DAESH. On 10 September 2014, after the cinematically publicised murders of some US citizens, President Obama announced that:

'ISIL poses a threat to the people of Iraq and Syria, and … American citizens, personnel and facilities … we will conduct a systematic campaign of airstrikes against these terrorists … [and] we will increase our support to forces fighting these terrorists on the ground' (Obama 2014). Those 'forces' included Iraqi security, US operatives and anti-Syrian armed groups. A US 'coalition' renewed its military presence in Iraq (on invitation from the Iraqi Government) and from there set up operations in Syria (without invitation from the Syrian Government).

This was an odd proposition to begin with, as both the widely banned terrorist groups had openly worked together in Syria (despite the odd violent squabble) with the various US-backed FSA groups (Anderson 2016: 244-245). Indeed, when Jabhat al Nusra was banned in the USA in December 2012, most of the openly US-backed armed groups protested with the slogan 'We are all Jabhat al Nusra' (Sherlock 2012). In late 2016, after an apparent Russian-US agreement to attack al Nusra (rebadged as 'Jaysh Fatah al Sham') and ISIS, the US-backed armed groups once again refused to dissociate themselves from al Nusra (Hill 2016).

The bizarre character of this alleged protective intervention was underlined by admissions from senior US officials that their 'major allies' had been arming and financing the very groups against which they now pretended to fight. Just a few days after Obama's effective renewal of the former President Bush's global 'war on

terrorism', the head of the US armed forces General Martin Dempsey told a US Senate committee that their 'major Arab allies' were financing ISIS: 'I know major Arab allies who fund [ISIS]'. To this committee chair Senator Lindsey Graham replied: 'They fund them because the Free Syrian Army couldn't fight [Syrian President] Assad, they were trying to beat Assad' (Rothman 2014).

Three weeks later US Vice-President Joe Biden admitted that those same allies were financing and arming every variety of anti-government armed groups in Syria, including ISIS. He said that Turkey, Qatar, the UAE and Saudi Arabia: 'were so determined to take down Assad … they poured hundreds of millions of dollars and tens, thousands of tons of weapons into anyone who would fight against Assad … [including] al Nusra and al Qaeda and extremist elements of jihadis coming from other parts of the world … [and then] this outfit called ISIL' (RT 2014). While Biden was trying distance the US from the actions of its close allies, he confirmed what Syrian officials had been saying for years, only to have their statements treated with disdain by most of the western media.

Remarkably, neither the repeatedly expressed loyalty from the Syrian jihadists for the mostly foreign al Nusra jihadists, nor the admissions at the most senior levels of the US administration that their closest allies were funding all the anti-Syrian armed groups, made any difference to the official war story. The US and its coalition of dozens of loyal state partners were still said to be backing the 'moderate rebels' and fighting the extremist terrorists.

There was little ideological difference between the 'moderates' and the extremists. The brutal and genocidal actions of ISIS and al Qaeda are well known; while those of the so-called 'moderate rebels' have been suppressed, as a matter of war-time media control. Yet western media sources did report, in mid-2011, the Farouq Brigade (FSA) slogan: 'Alawites to the grave and Christians to Beirut!' in Homs, over April and May 2011 (Matheson 2011; Krause-Jackson 2011). Farouq acted on that slogan. The FSA group was identified by eye-witnesses as responsible for the Houla massacre (Anderson 2016: 181-186) and for the ethnic cleansing of Christians from the Homs area (CNA 2012). After Farouq and al Nusra were expelled from Homs, the remnants of these groups, backed by the Saudis, formed a base in rural areas around Damascus. The FSA jihadists formed new groups, Jaysh al Islam and Ahrar as Sham, working closely with Jabhat al Nusra.

Despite the often violent squabbles between these armed groups, and despite the failed merger of al Qaeda in Syria (Jabhat al Nusra) and al Qaeda in Iraq (ISIS), the US knew very well that attacks on the Syrian Government were always led by extremists. US intelligence in 2012 had welcomed the jihadists' plan to form an Islamic state in eastern Syria (DIA 2012).

The language of FSA 'moderates' remained genocidal. In 2015 US-backed FSA leader and lawyer Lamia Nahas praised Adolf Hitler and the Ottoman Sultan Abu Hamid, writing on her Facebook page:

'The more arrogant Syria's minorities become I become more certain that there should be a holocaust to exterminate them from existence and I request [God's] mercy upon Hitler who burned the Jews of his time and Sultan Abdul-Hamid who exterminated the Armenians … we need to rid and to cleanse Bilad Ash-Sham from them … to finish off all those filth from Kurds to Alawites' (Angry Arab 2015).

Another FSA leader, Abdullah al Ali wrote that: 'exterminating Nusayri [Alawi-Christian] villages is more important than liberating the Syrian capital' (Fadel 2015). This genocidal talk combined with public atrocities did little to shift the western war narrative.

The combined myths of the massively internationalised Syria conflict as a 'civil war' has malformed understandings of Europe's refugee crisis. Neither the evidence refuting false stories about supposed Syrian Army massacres nor evidence of the genocidal intent of the 'moderate rebels', did much to alter the popular narratives that fuel this war. Nor did the multitude of polls and informed estimates, including from Syria's enemies, that show President Bashar al Assad as remaining very popular in Syria (Anderson 2016: 96). Yet, to reasonable people, evidence must matter.

2. War and the Displacement Crises

It is essential to understand the character of the Middle East wars, especially the proxy war in Syria, to properly appreciate and address the refugee phenomenon in Europe. This is especially the case in a war where, even after more than five years, every tragedy and accusation is contested, and the official war narratives remain poles apart.

For example, if Europeans accept the myth that there is simply a 'civil war' in Syria they would regard the flood of refugees from that country as an external imposition;

perhaps a threat but in any case, an external development which must be met, probably with some mix of regulation and 'charity'. If, on the other hand, that war were recognised as an attempt by the NATO countries to overthrow yet another Middle Eastern government, there might be greater reflection on European responsibility for both the war and the refugees. Observers would be more conscious of aggravation of the mass displacement by the European states arming and financing the many thousands of internationalised 'jihadists', often wrongly called 'rebels' or 'opposition'. Misunderstanding the character of the Middle East wars and their relationship to the displacement appears through several inter-related myths: that a 'civil war' in Syria has little to do with Europe, that Middle Eastern peoples pose a threat to Europe peoples (rather than the reverse) and that the priority must be to block or regulate the refugees, rather than end the war.

2.1 'Civil war', 'revolution' and 'fleeing Assad' myths

It is logical to imagine that people would flee from terrorist groups who publicly chop off heads and declare war on minorities and other 'unbelievers'. Indeed, after the genocidal slogans of 2011 in Homs ('Alawites to the grave, Christians to Beirut') and the violence of the first 'Free Syrian Army' groups, 50,000 Christians were said to have been driven to Lebanon (CNA 2012).

Nevertheless, in propaganda wars, the image of such tragedies can get turned on its head. A US-funded organisation called 'The Syria Campaign' helped drive a claim that most of the Syrian refugees were 'Fleeing Assad'. One of several interlocked groups (Avaaz, Purpose, the White Helmets) which have campaigned for a Libyan-style 'no fly zone' in Syria, this one worked for NATO intervention (see Sterling 2015). The Syria Campaign (2015) commissioned a poll in Germany which was carried out by German academic Heiko Giebler. In it, 889 Syrian refugees were said to have been interviewed in Berlin, Hanover, Bremen, Leipzig and Eisenhüttenstadt. Candidates 'were approached on entering or leaving registration centers'. However the survey does not specify how sampling choices were made, nor is there any mention of a sampling error (TSC 2015). Yet without a clear sampling method and a stated sampling error, we cannot know to what extent the survey might represent a broader population. The results are then almost useless, except as anecdotes.

The poll cover note, headline and graphics highlight a claim that '70% of refugees are fleeing Assad'. To begin with, this is a false characterisation of the actual survey (TSC 2015). It had no question at all about fleeing Assad, nor anyone else. It did have questions on whom the respondents blamed for the violence and of whom they were afraid. Of the 30 survey questions the three relevant ones seem to be number 9 ('Who was responsible for the fighting?), number 14 ('Who did you fear getting arrested or kidnapped by?'), and number 18 ('What was the main reason for you to leave Syria?').

The Syria Campaign's headline and graphics have drawn, very loosely, on some combination of those three questions. In response to question 18, 69% said that 'the main reason' for leaving Syria was an 'imminent threat' to life, but without an identified source of that threat. In Question 9, 70% identified 'Syrian Army and allied groups' as 'responsible for the fighting'. However this was a multiple option question in which we also see that 82% have identified other armed groups (ISIS, al Nusra, FSA, YPG, other rebels). If we remove the Kurdish YPG, which has generally fought in coordination with the Syrian Army, the total is 74% anti-government armed groups. Question 14 shares the 'multiple option' structure of Question 9. Here 77% said they feared 'getting arrested or kidnapped by' the 'Syrian Army and its allied groups'. However the combined total of anti-government groups is 82% and, if we add the YPG, 90%. The answers to both questions suggest these respondents feared the anti-government armed groups more than they feared the Syrian Army. Most likely many feared getting caught in the crossfire.

So, even before we examine the representative validity of the poll, there is no basis in any of those three questions – or anywhere else in the poll - for saying that '70% of refugees are fleeing Assad'. To the contrary, the poll shows that more are fleeing anti-government armed groups. This contradicts The Syria Campaign's quite dishonest headline. Nevertheless, a *Deutsche Welle* report faithfully noted: 'Survey leaves no doubt: Syrians are fleeing Assad' (Fuchs 2015). Apparently this reporter did not read the survey.

Further internal analysis, combined with UNHCR (2016) data on the wider Syrian refugee population, shows The Syria Campaign's survey to have been quite unrepresentative, and therefore no basis for claims about the wider Syrian refugee population. As Table 2 shows, the respondents in Germany had massive over-

representation from young men. Put together we see a 1.76 over-representation of males and a 2.25 over-representation of people between 15 and 55 (UNHCR: 18-59; TSC: 15-55). Women and children barely exist in this poll. The poll also shows that 51% came alone to Europe, 61% had no children and that 68% (0.78 x 0.88) were young men between 15 and 35 years old.

Table 2: Syria refugee population profile, 2015

	UNHCR, Syrian refugee registration (4.8 million)	**TSC survey, Germany, October (889)**
Male	50%	88% (1.76 over-rep)
15-35 years old	n.a.	78%
18-59 / 15-55 years old	44%	99% (2.25 over-rep)

Other data within the poll indicates that 74% were from areas held by anti-government armed groups, as they reported government shelling. There is no credible evidence that suggests the Syrian Army shells areas which do not contain armed anti-government groups. That is reinforced by Question 1 on area of origin, which shows hardly any respondents (just 19 people) from Tartus, Latakia and Sweida, areas which in 2015 had a combined population (swollen, from internal refugees) of at least 5 million. Respondents from Damascus (170 or 19%) are also seriously under-represented. Damascus in 2015 held over 7 million, or one-third of Syria's population. There were many displaced people in all these areas, controlled by the Government. On the other side, we can see an over-representation of respondents from Hasakah (164 or 19%). There are certainly a lot of refugees from the Hasakah district, in large part due to the presence of ISIS and Turkish-Kurd clashes; but its population of half a million, less than 10% that of Damascus, had almost equal representation in respondents. In other words, the TSC survey has a very large over-representation of young men, many from anti-government or jihadist held areas. Quite a number of them are likely to be ex-fighters.

Putting this all together we can conclude that the poll commissioned by The Syria Campaign (2015) did not show anything like '70% fleeing Assad'. To the contrary, results of the poll (TSC (2015) suggested that slightly more amongst that cohort were

fearful of anti-government armed groups. On top of that, that poll was quite unrepresentative of the Syrian refugee population, as it contained a very large group of young men from anti-government or jihadist held areas, some of them likely former fighters, and many of whom had indeed come under Syrian Army fire. Reasons for corruption of the data most likely include a combination of biased selection in Germany (selection was made by the associates of a partisan group) and a possible over-representation of young men and former fighters amongst the actual cohort of refugees arriving in those German cities. The absence of a sampling process and a stated sampling error simply underlines the unprofessional nature of this survey.

Other western polls of Syrians and refugees, during the conflict, have looked for acceptance or approval of outside military intervention. They have used 'push poll' techniques (loaded questions) and their sampling methods are often obscure. For example the British ORB poll of 2014 suggested that 'Three in Five Syrians Support International Military Involvement' (ORB 2014: Table 1). ORB's undisclosed sampling method, erratic claims and inconsistency with other polls casts doubt on its results. Their 2014 poll showed 4% of support for ISIS/DAESH (4% agreed that ISIS/DAESH 'best represented the interests and aspirations of the Syrian people') yet, that number rose dramatically in 2015, when 21% were said to view the terrorist group 'positively' (ORB 2015: Table 3). That sort of support for a foreign-led group, best known for its massacres of opponents and 'unbelievers', is simply not credible, and does not sit with the other genuinely independent polls, such as the Turkish poll (TESEV) of 2012.

If it were imagined that most Syrian refugees are 'fleeing Assad' then the illegal foreign backed attacks on Syria might not seem so bad. Yet the weight of evidence is strongly against those claims. First, the great bulk of displaced Syrians remain within Syria, where they overwhelmingly flee to government controlled areas, for example, to Damascus, Sweida, Western Aleppo and the coast. The population of jihadist-held Eastern Aleppo, over 2015-2016, was estimated at somewhere between 40,000 (Chulov 2015) and 300,000 (Rycroft 2016), compared to 1.5 million in western Aleppo (Bartlett 2016). The UNHCR at 31 December (2016) put Syrian refugees at 4.8 million and internally displaced Syrians at 6.6 million (IDMC 2016). The vast majority of these displaced people have sought shelter with Syrian Government agencies.

2.2 Displaced peoples: threat to Europe or victims of European policy?

It is useful to get some perspective on the relationship between displaced people and refugees arriving in Europe, and also some idea of the links between the war in Syria and the large movements of people. A Eurocentric focus simply on refugee arrivals is insufficient.

Let us get some perspective on the displaced peoples. First, in 2015, the top three origins of people seeking asylum in EU countries were Syria, Afghanistan and Iraq (Eurostat 2016), all countries subject to NATO backed invasions and interventions. From Europe the UK, Norway and Germany participated in the invasion of Afghanistan; another 18 European countries (Poland, Spain, UK, Albania, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Georgia, Hungary, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Macedonia, the Netherlands, Portugal, Romania and Slovakia) assisted the USA in its the invasion and occupation of Iraq; and at least another three (the UK, France and Germany) have backed anti-government armed groups in Syria.

In 2015, one in three asylum seekers in Europe came from Syria (Eurostat 2016). However these were quite a small fraction of the numbers of displaced peoples. Table 3 shows us that asylum seekers in Europe from Afghanistan, Iraq and Syria, for 2015 were between 3.3% and 5% of the total numbers of displaced peoples (IDPs + refugees). That is, the impact on Europe of the movements of displaced peoples from the wars in which Europeans have engaged is relatively small.

Table 3: Displaced peoples in and from Afghanistan, Iraq and Syria

data as at 31 December 2015	**Afghanistan**	**Iraq**	**Syria**
Population	31.3 million	36.4 million	18.5 million
Internally displaced	1.17 million	4.40 million	6.6 million
Refugees	2.69 million	277,000	4.18 million
Seeking asylum in Europe, 2015 *	178,230	121,535	362,775
Asylum seekers (Euro) as % of IDPs + refugees, 2015	5.03 %	3.32 %	3.36 %

Source: UNHCR 2016, UNHCR 2016a, UNHCR 2016b, IDMC 2016, *Eurostat 2016

It is apparent from the IDP figures that the societies and governments of those countries carry most of the burden of displaced peoples. Neighbouring countries have carried the greatest burden of refugees. After the US-led invasion of Iraq, Syria took around 2 million Iraqi refugees. A UNHCR survey in late 2010 shows that many Iraqi refugees in Syria were reluctant to return home (Wilkes and Dobbs 2010), while the Syrian Arab Red Crescent estimates that, prior to March 2011 there were still 1.2 million, the majority unregistered with the UNHCR (al-Saadi 2014).

The UNHCR reported 28,919 Iraqi refugees in Syria in mid-2014, after two years of war, but the Syrian Arab Red Crescent said the number was around 450,000, and that they were getting aid from local agencies (al-Saadi 2014). Even after five years of war in Syria, many thousands of Iraqi refugees were still occasionally fleeing into the 'relative safety' of Syria, for example in Hasakah, which also held many Syrian IDPs (Hasan and Alazroni 2016).

In the case of Afghanistan, most refugees went to Pakistan but most have since returned; overall since 2002, 4.7 million have returned (UNHCR 2016c). With the Syrian conflict, the great majority of the four million refugees have been camped in Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey, often in very poor conditions. Another 6.6 million IDPs were cared for within Syria. In late 2015 thousands of refugees were returning to war-torn Daraa, in south Syria, because of a lack of supplies in Jordan's al Zaatari camp; indeed 'departures [from that camp] by far outnumbered arrivals' (AP 2015). This illustrates the fact that the impact of displacement within the region has been 20 times greater than that of the sea arrivals in Europe.

The Syrian arrivals in Europe in 2015 (about one third of the one million asylum seekers) seem to have been driven by a combination of war events in Syria plus internal developments in Turkey. Around 80% of the European arrivals in 2015 came from Turkey, and almost none directly from Syria (Bajekal 2015). Figure One shows a timeline of the numbers of sea arrivals in Europe, between April 2015 and 2016, and certain key war events. First was the invasion by a Turkey-Saudi-Qatari sponsored 'Army of Conquest' (Jaysh al Fatah), an alliance of Jabhat al Nusra and various 'FSA' groups, launched from Turkey into northern Syrian in March-April 2015. This militia soon took over much of Idlib and large parts of Hama, driving many people south to Homs and Damascus, west to the Syrian coast or north into Turkey. In May

2015 ISIS took over Palmyra and, over July-September the Government of Turkey carried out attacks on the Turkish Kurds, along the Syrian border. This war activity must have contributed to displacement and refugee flows within Turkey. However the timing of the transformation of these populations into the coastal exodus from Turkey must be questioned. One important indicator of the likely manipulation of these peoples is the fact that President Erdogan was able to reverse the flows after the conclusion of an October 2015 refugee agreement with EU leaders. The deal was that the EU would pay Turkey six billion Euros plus some political concessions to contain refugees from various countries, the largest group from Syria (Alkousaa et al 2016). Turkey already held a 'reservoir' of 2.2 million refugees (Bajekal 2015).

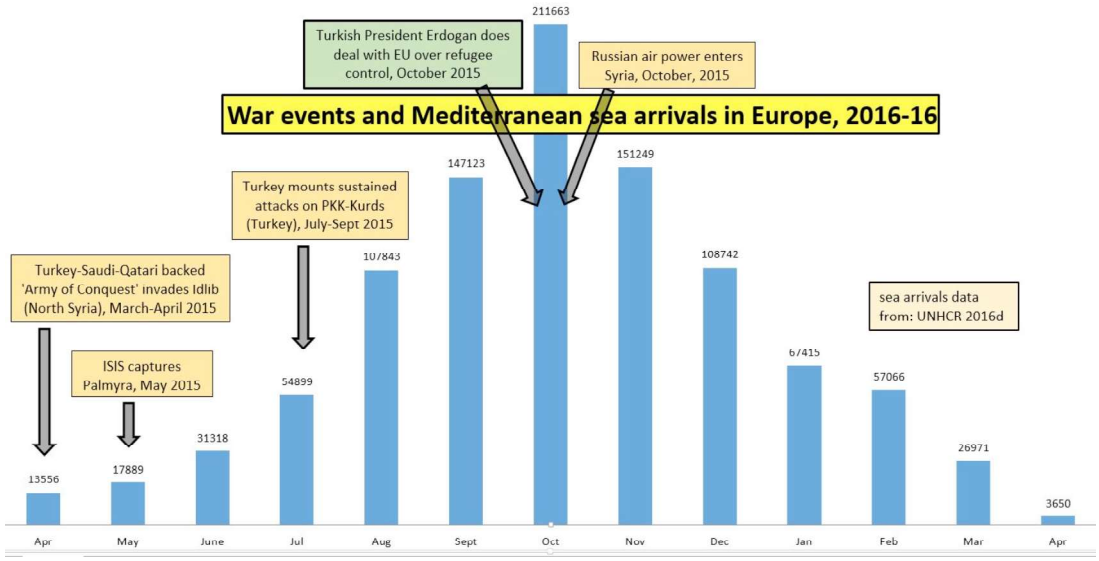

Figure 1: Key war events in Syria and refugee sea arrivals

The invited intervention of Russian air power in Syria began on 30 September and was more or less consistent over following months. This period is associated with a steady decline in sea arrivals. There is thus a negative correlation between European sea arrivals and greater Russian involvement in Syria. We can conclude that new waves of the war in Syria and southern Turkey may have contributed to the spike in Turkey-Europe asylum seekers, but that internal Turkish policy considerations may also have facilitated this big outflow, and its fairly rapid reversal.

The deal with Turkey may have initially 'worked' because Mr Erdogan had the power to turn off the 'tap' he had most likely helped turn on. However the European attempt

to avoid its responsibilities under the refugee convention is causing a number of problems: Turkey is hardly a 'safe haven' for repatriation, the commitments to numbers of refugees accepted has not been met; and there is European dissatisfaction with a selection process which leads them receiving 'serious medical cases or refugees with very little education' (Alkousaa et al 2016).

2.3 Priority: end the war or stop the refugees?

Greater involvement of Russian air power and greater Iranian assistance with ground forces, led to a turning of the military tide in favour of Syria, over 2015-16. At the same time there have been multiple reports of Syrians returning to their homes. Those returns provide substance to the argument that helping stop the proxy war on Syria is foundational to dealing with displacement and the refugee problem.

As with the internally displaced, it is logical that refugees flee war and jihadists, following years of well-publicised atrocities against civilians. Public mutilations and beheadings must be intended to terrify. Anecdotal evidence that refugees want to go home is widespread. Video interviews with individual refugees show many non-politicised statements, such as: 'I miss everything', 'I want to go back and see my friends and family in Syria', 'I wish to come back to the lovely country when the war will end', and 'Just stop the war … we don't want to go to Europe'. Even the above-mentioned and flawed survey of refugees in Germany records a large majority wanting to go home. Top of their conditions for return was, unsurprisingly, that 'the war has to stop' (TSC 2016). The most logical understanding is that 'going home' means to the Syria of recent decades, before the conflict.

Wider evidence of refugee or IDP returns has emerged in the last year, since Syria's alliance has reclaimed hundreds of villages and towns from the jihadists. Some of this was due to poor conditions in the refugee camps. In October 2015 several dozen per day were returning from Jordan to Daraa, preferring to face war at home than starvation in Jordan's al Zaatari camp. At the same time, 94,000 returned to Syria from Turkey, half of these to Kobani after ISIS was defeated there; while another 140,000 left Lebanon, some for Turkey and some for Syria (AP 2015). In January 2016 hundreds of displaced families returned home to parts of Damascus, after some ceasefires took effect (AP 2016). After six months of Russian air power support for the Syrian forces, dozens of 'reconciliations' (ceasefires or surrenders) had been signed and, with the relative calm, there were steady returns of IDPs. In March dozens

of families returned to rural Hama, after jihadist groups had been ejected under Syrian Government 'reconciliations' (Syrian Observer 2016). More than 1,000 IDPs were said to be returning home every day (Valiente 2016).

By April, Syria Deputy Prime Minister Omar Ghalawanji told the IOM in Damascus that 1.7 million IDPs had returned to their homes, that the government was constructing more than 500 temporary shelters and another 2,000 houses in Damascus and Homs (SANA 2016a). In May Syrian Reconciliation Minister Ali Haidar reported that 35,000 families were expected to return home, after improvements in the security situation (SANA (2016b). These reports show an ongoing trend towards return of IDPs and refugees, once they are reassured the conflict has abated. That should reinforce calls to prioritise ending the conflict, as the key means of stemming the movement of displaced persons and refugees.

The conduct of the dirty war on Syria has caused confusion over the displaced peoples, aggravating the refugee crisis in several ways. First, the terrorism fomented by sponsors of the jihadist groups has 'blown back' to Europe and Turkey, helping provoke further European intervention and generating fear of terrorists joining the waves of refugees. Second, disinformation campaigns over the responsibility for this conflict has helped inflame European racial reactions to the asylum seekers. Third, militarised responses to the refugee phenomenon (the multi-national naval presence between Turkey and Greece) enhance European fears of an emigrant 'threat', reinforcing NATO hostility to the Syrian state.

3. Failures in responsibility

We have seen an aggravation of the standard war-drives-emigration phenomenon, with consistent disinformation over the proxy war on Syria and its links to the European refugee crisis of 2015. Terrorism fomented by NATO and the Gulf monarchies against Syria has 'blown back', helping provoke further European intervention and greater displacement. Disinformation about the series of Middle East wars has helped drive confusion and fear over the refugees.

Disinformation over the war in Syria, in particular, has been founded on the repeatedly asserted myth that 'peaceful protestors' took up arms against the government, that the Syrian government targeted, gassed and murdered its own civilians and that the western powers were then obliged to re-enter the region to protect both themselves and the world from extreme terrorism. In fact, as independent

evidence makes clear, those same powers with their regional allies (particularly Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Turkey) remain the key patrons of every single anti-government group in both Syria and Iraq.

Looking at displacement more widely, we can see that the burden has fallen far more heavily on the war targeted countries and their neighbours. Only 3 and 5 percent of displaced peoples in Afghanistan, Iraq and Syria became sea-arrivals in Europe, in the peak year of 2015. Some of the spike in 2015 arrivals might be linked to war events in Syria and Turkey in the first half of 2015. However as 80% of sea-arrivals in Europe came from Turkey, the Turkish government's management of peoples within Turkey is probably a significant factor. The Turkey-EU deal over refugee management led to a strong, controlled decline in sea arrivals. The Turkish Government most likely knew how to turn on and turn off the 'tap'. There is no link between arrivals in Europe with the entry of Russian air power into the war in Syria, in fact there is a negative correlation. There is evidence of significant returns of IDPs within Syria, as Syrian forces advance against the western-backed jihadist groups, with ceasefires, 'reconciliation' agreements and the liberation of hundreds of towns and villages.

Western liberals often imagine that assimilating refugees from other countries is a great charity, but that is not the case when their governments are fuelling wars which drive those refugees. Archbishop Jean-Clément Jeanbart, the Melkite Archbishop of Aleppo said he was 'not happy' to see Syrians driven out of their own country. He would rather see western countries 'making more efforts to allow the Syrian population to stay in Syria' (in Vaillancourt 2016).

The USA and several of the European powers are in large part responsible for the creation and aggravation of the Middle East displacement crisis, which produced a European refugee crisis. Many millions are affected, yet no real solution is conceivable without addressing the roots of the problem. The series of Middle East wars must be fully understood, along with their aggravating factors. The European and NATO states' acceptance of responsibility for their part in both the wars and the refugees remains central to any lasting solution.

Bibliography

ABS (2016) 'Syrian Refugees Who Want to Return Home Are Stuck in Germany', 1 June, online: http://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/syrian-refugees-return-home-stuck-germany-39522124

Al Saadi Yazan (2014) 'Iraqi refugees in Syria: Between a rock and a hard place', Al Akhbar, April 11, online: http://english.al-akhbar.com/node/19388

Alkousaa, Riham; Giorgos Christides; Ann-Katrin Müller; Peter Müller; Maximillian Popp; Christoph Schult; and Wolf Wiedmann-Schmidt (2016) 'The Many Failures of the EU-Turkey Refugee Deal', *Spiegel Online*, 26 May, online: http://www.spiegel.de/international/europe/the-refugee-deal-between-the-eu-and-turkey-is-failing-a-1094339.html

Al-Shaqfa, Muhammad Riyad (2011) 'Muslim Brotherhood Statement about the so-called 'Syrian Revolution'', General supervisor for the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood, statement of 28 March, online at: http://truthsyria.wordpress.com/2012/02/12/muslim-brotherhood-statement-about-the-so-called-syrian-revolution/

Anderson, Tim (2016) *The Dirty War on Syria*, Global Research, Montreal

Angry Arab (2016) 'This is what the candidate for Syria's provisional (opposition) government wrote on Facebook: a holocaust', The Angry Arab News Services, 4 August, online: http://angryarab.blogspot.com.au/2015/08/this-is-what-candidate-for-syrias.html

AP (2015) 'Syrian refugees return home due to intolerable conditions in host nations', *Indian Express*, 5 October, online: http://indianexpress.com/article/world/world-news/syrian-refugees-return-home-due-to-intolerable-conditions-in-host-nations/

AP (2016) 'Video: 100s of displaced Syrians families return home in Damascus', Globe and Mail, 20 Jan, online:

http://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/world/hundreds-of-syrian-families-return-to-homes-near-damascus-as-part-of-truce/article28283547/

Bajekal, Naina (2015) 'Why the E.U. Is Offering Turkey Billions to Deal With Refugees', Time, 19 October, online: http://time.com/4076484/turkey-eu-billions-dollars-refugee-slow/

Barnard, Anne (2012) 'U.S. and Turkey to Step Up 'Nonlethal' Aid to Rebels in Syria', *New York Times*, 25 march, online: http://www.nytimes.com/2012/03/26/world/middleeast/us-and-turkey-to-step-up-nonlethal-aid-to-syrian-rebels.html?_r=0

Bartlett, Eva (2016) 'Western Corporate Media 'Disappears' over 1.5 Million Syrians and 4,000 Doctors', Global Research, 14 August, online: http://www.globalresearch.ca/western-corporate-media-disappears-over-1-5-million-syrians-and-4000-doctors/5541005

BBC (2011) 'Syria troops 'killed in clashes' in Jisr al-Shughour', 6 June, online: http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/mobile/world-middle-east-13672725

Black, Ian (2014) 'Syrian regime document trove shows evidence of 'industrial scale' killing of detainees', The Guardian, 22 January, online: https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/jan/20/evidence-industrial-scale-killing-syria-war-crimes

Chulov, Martin (2015) 'The worst place in the world? Aleppo in ruins after four years of Syria war', The Guardian, 12 March, online: https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/mar/12/worst-place-in-world-aleppo-ruins-four-years-syria-war

CNA (2012) 'Syrian violence drives 50,000 Christians from homes', Christina News Agency, 27 March, online: http://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/syrian-violence-drives-50000-christians-from-homes/

Damascus Declaration (2005) 'The Damascus Declaration for Democratic National Change', English version in Joshua Landis blog 'Syria Comment', 1 November, online: http://faculty-staff.ou.edu/L/Joshua.M.Landis-1/syriablog/2005/11/damascus-declaration-in-english.htm

DIA (1982) 'Syria: Muslim Brotherhood Pressure Intensifies', Defence Intelligence Agency (USA), May, online: https://syria360.files.wordpress.com/2013/11/dia-syria-muslimbrotherhoodpressureintensifies-2.pdf

DIA (2012) Intelligence Report 'R 050839Z Aug 2012' in Judicial Watch, Pgs. 287-293 (291) JW v DOD and State 14-812, 18 May, online: http://www.judicialwatch.org/document-archive/pgs-287-293-291-jw-v-dod-and-state-14-812-2/

Eurostat (2016) Record number of over 1.2 million first time asylum seekers registered in 2015, online: http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/en/web/products-press-releases/-/3-04032016-AP

Fadel, Leith (2015) 'U.S. Backed Syrian Opposition Official Calls for the Extermination of Alawites', Al Masdar News, 7 December, online: https://www.almasdarnews.com/article/u-s-backed-syrian-opposition-official-calls-for-the-extermination-of-alawites/

Fisk, Robert (2012) 'Inside Daraya - how a failed prisoner swap turned into a massacre', 29 August:

http://www.independent.co.uk/voices/commentators/fisk/robert-fisk-inside-daraya--how-a-failed-prisoner-swap-turned-into-a-massacre-8084727.html

Fuchs, Richard (2015) 'Survey leaves no doubt: Syrians are fleeing Assad', Deutsche Welle, 11 October, online: http://www.dw.com/en/survey-leaves-no-doubt-syrians-are-fleeing-assad/a-18775789

Gavlak, Dale and Yahya Ababneh (2013) 'Syrians In Ghouta Claim Saudi-Supplied Rebels Behind Chemical Attack', MINT PRESS, August 29, online: http://www.mintpressnews.com/witnesses-of-gas-attack-say-saudis-supplied-rebels-with-chemical-weapons/168135/

Gladstone, Rick and C.J Chivers (2013) 'Forensic Details in U.N. Report Point to Assad's Use of Gas', New York Times, 16 September, online: http://www.nytimes.com/2013/09/17/world/europe/syria-united-nations.html?_r=0&adxnnl=1&adxnnlx=1387381766-55AjTxhuELAeFSCuukA7Og

Hasan, Mustafa and Qusai Alazroni (2016) 'Iraqis flee Mosul clashes for relative safety of Syria', 27 May, online: http://www.unhcr.org/news/latest/2016/5/57482e0e4/iraqis-flee-mosul-clashes-relative-safety-syria.html

Hashem, Ali (2012) 'Al Jazeera Journalist Explains Resignation over Syria and Bahrain Coverage', The Real News, 20 March, online: http://therealnews.com/t2/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=31&Itemid=74&jumival=8106

Hassoun, Ahmad Badreddin Hassoun (2016) Personal communication from Syrian Grand Mufti Hassoun to this writer, 12 April, Damascus

Hersh, Seymour M. (2013) 'Whose Sarin?' London Review of Books, Vol. 35 No. 24, 19 December, 9-12, online: http://www.lrb.co.uk/v35/n24/seymour-m-hersh/whose-sarin

Hill, Adam (2016) 'Russian Marines Take up Positions in Aleppo as 'Moderate' Rebel Groups Reject Ceasefire', Russia Insider, 13 September, online: http://russia-insider.com/en/russian-marines-take-positions-aleppo-moderate-rebel-groups-reject-ceasefire/ri16421

Holt, Kate (2016) ''I want to go home': Syrian refugees in Lebanon', The Guardian, 12 march, online: http://www.theguardian.com/global-development/gallery/2016/mar/12/syrian-refugees-in-lebanon-want-to-go-home-zahle

HRC (2014) 'Report of the independent international commission of inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic', Human Rights Council, A/HRC/25/65, 12 February, online: http://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/HRC/IICISyria/Pages/IndependentInternationalCommission.aspx

HRW (2012) 'Syria: Armed Opposition Groups Committing Abuses', Human Rights Watch, 20 March, online: https://www.hrw.org/news/2012/03/20/syria-armed-opposition-groups-committing-abuses

HRW (2015) 'If only If the Dead Could Speak: Mass Deaths and Torture in Syria's Detention Facilities' Human Rights Watch, Washington, online: https://www.hrw.org/report/2015/12/16/if-dead-could-speak/mass-deaths-and-torture-syrias-detention-facilities

IDMC (2016) 'Syria IDP Figures Analysis', Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, update as at 19 September, online: http://www.internal-displacement.org/middle-east-and-north-africa/syria/

ISTEAMS (2013) 'Independent Investigation of Syria Chemical Attack Videos and Child Abductions', 15 September, online: http://www.globalresearch.ca/STUDY_THE_VIDEOS_THAT_SPEAKS_ABOUT_CHEMICALS_BETA_VERSION.pdf

Jaber, Hala (2011) 'Syria caught in crossfire of extremists', Sunday Times, 26 June, online: http://www.thesundaytimes.co.uk/sto/news/world_news/Middle_East/article657138.ece

Krause-Jackson, Flavia (2011) 'Syrian Christians Say Regime Change Could Hasten Extinction', Bloomberg, 12 May, online: http://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2011-05-12/syrian-christians-say-arab-spring-changes-could-hasten-extinction

Lefèvre, Raphaël (2013) *The Ashes of Hama*, Oxford University Press, London

Levine, Mark (2006) 'The new creative destruction', *Asia Times Online*, 22 August, online: http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Middle_East/HH22Ak01.html

Lloyd, Richard and Theodore A. Postol (2014) 'Possible Implications of Faulty US Technical Intelligence in the Damascus Nerve Agent Attack of August 21, 2013', MIT, January 14, Washington DC, online: https://www.documentcloud.org/documents/1006045-possible-implications-of-bad-intelligence.html#storylink=relast

Matheson, Alison (2011) 'Christians Under Attack From Anti-Government Protesters in Syria', CP World, 5 may, online: http://www.christianpost.com/news/christians-under-attack-from-anti-government-protestors-in-syria-50104/

Narwani, Sharmine (2014) Syria: The hidden massacre, RT, 7 May, online: http://rt.com/op-edge/157412-syria-hidden-massacre-2011/

Nevradakis, Michael (2016) 'Human Rights Lawyer Francis Boyle on US War Crimes, the Refugee Crisis in Europe and More', Truthout, 4 April, online: http://www.truth-out.org/news/item/35486-human-rights-lawyer-francis-boyle-on-us-war-crimes-the-refugee-crisis-in-europe-and-more?tmpl=component&print=1

Obama, Barrack (2014) 'Obama's speech: Read the full text', USA Today, 10 September, online: http://www.usatoday.com/story/news/politics/2014/09/10/obama-speech-full-text/15415287/

OHCHR (2011) 'OHCHR (2012) 'Periodic Update', Independent International Commission of Inquiry established pursuant to resolution A/HRC/S - 17/1 and extended through resolution A/HRC/Res/19/22, 24 May, online: http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/HRBodies/HRCouncil/CoISyria/PeriodicUpdate24May2012.pdf

ORB (2014) 'Three in Five Syrians Support International Military Involvement', ORB International, July, online: http://www.opinion.co.uk/article.php?s=three-in-five-syrians-support-international-military-involvement

ORB (2015) 'ORB/IIACSS poll in Syria and Iraq gives rare insight into public opinion', ORB International, July, online: http://www.opinion.co.uk/article.php?s=orbiiacss-poll-in-iraq-and-syria-gives-rare-insight-into-public-opinion

Oweis, Khaled Yacoub (2012) 'Syria activists report 'massacre' by army near Damascus', 25 August: http://www.reuters.com/article/2012/08/25/us-syria-crisis-killings-idUSBRE87O08J20120825

Parry, Robert (2013) 'NYT Backs Off Its Syria-Sarin Analysis', Global Research, 30 December, online: http://www.globalresearch.ca/nyt-backs-off-its-syria-sarin-analysis/5363023

Ramadani, Sami (2012) 'Between Imperialism and Repression', Information Clearing House, 13 June, online: http://www.informationclearinghouse.info/article31570.htm

Rothman, Noah (2014) 'Dempsey: I know of Arab allies who fund ISIS', YouTube, 16 September, online: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nA39iVSo7XE

RT (2014) 'Anyone but the US! Biden blames allies for ISIS rise', 3 October, online: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=11l8nLZNPSY

Rycroft, Matthew (2016) 'Eastern Aleppo City is now encircled by the regime...300,000 people are now effectively besieged', UK Government, 25 July, online: https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/eastern-aleppo-city-is-now-encircled-by-the-regime300000-people-are-now-effectively-besieged

SANA (2016a) 'Ghalawanji: 1.7 million displaced citizens returned to their areas, 11 April, online: http://sana.sy/en/?p=74121

SANA (2016b) 'Reconciliation Minister: 35,000 families expected to return home in Southern Damascus', 12 May, online: http://sana.sy/en/?p=77091

Seale, Patrick (1988) Asad: the struggle for the Middle East, University of California Press, Berkeley CA

Sherlock, Ruth (2012) 'Syrian rebels defy US and pledge allegiance to jihadi group', *The Telegraph* (UK), 10 December, online: http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/middleeast/syria/9735988/Syrian-rebels-defy-US-and-pledge-allegiance-to-jihadi-group.html

Stack, Liam and Hania Mourtada (2012) 'Members of Assad's Sect Blamed in Syria Killings', *New York Times*, December 12, online: http://www.nytimes.com/2012/12/13/world/middleeast/alawite-massacre-in-syria.html?_r=0

Sterling, Rick (2015) 'Seven Steps of Highly Effective Manipulators', *Dissident Voice*, 9 April, online: http://dissidentvoice.org/2015/04/seven-steps-of-highly-effective-manipulators/

Syrian Observer (2016) 'More villagers return home as Hama reconciliations push forward', 24 March, online: http://syrianobserver.com/EN/News/30758/More_Villagers_Return_Home_Hama_Reconciliations_Push_Forward

TESEV (2012) 'The perception of Turkey in the Middle East 2011', Türkiye Ekonomik ve Sosyal Etüdler Vakfi, Istanbul, February, online: http://www.tesev.org.tr/the-perception-of-turkey-in-the-middle-east-2011/Content/236.html

Tharoor, Ishaan (2016) 'Some Syrian refugees in Canada already want to return to the Middle East', The Washington Post, 26 January, online:

https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2016/01/26/some-syrian-refugees-in-canada-already-want-to-return-to-the-middle-east/

The Syria Campaign (2015) 'Care about refugees? Listen to them', 9 October, online: https://diary.thesyriacampaign.org/what-refugees-think/

Thompson, Alex (2012) 'Was there a massacre in the Syrian town of Aqrab?' 14 December: http://blogs.channel4.com/alex-thomsons-view/happened-syrian-town-aqrab/3426

Truth Syria (2012) 'Syria – Daraa revolution was armed to the teeth from the very beginning', BBC interview with Anwar Al-Eshki, YouTube, 7 November, online: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FoGmrWWJ77w

TSC (2015) 'Listen To Refugees - First Survey of Syrian Refugees in Europe', survey results spreadsheet, The Syria Campaign, online: https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1WYn4N7STdP2eW3EYdX86Gsb6lxE4VrcNvZ4aEczsFwI/edit#gid=833561282

UNHCR (2016) 'Global Focus, Syrian Arab Republic', United Nations High Commission for Refugees, update as at 19 September, online: http://reporting.unhcr.org/node/2530#_ga=1.245483460.1547106981.1474264789

UNHCR (2016a) 'Global Focus, Iraq', United Nations High Commission for Refugees, update as at 19 September, online: http://reporting.unhcr.org/node/4505#_ga=1.250864198.1547106981.1474264789

UNHCR (2016b) 'Global Focus, Afghanistan', United Nations High Commission for Refugees, updated as at 19 September, online: http://www.unhcr.org/pages/49e486eb6.html

UNHCR (2016c) 'Afghanistan Fact Sheet 2015', United Nations High Commission for Refugees, August, online: http://www.unhcr.org/protection/operations/50002021b/afghanistan-fact-sheet.html

UNHCR (2016d) 'Refugees/Migrants Emergency Response – Mediterranean', United Nations High Commission for Refugees, update as at 19 September, online: http://data.unhcr.org/mediterranean/country.php?id=83

Vaillancourt, Philippe (2016) 'Archbishop tells Canada: accepting refugees won't help Syria', Catholic Herald, 2 May, online: http://www.catholicherald.co.uk/news/2016/05/02/archbishop-tells-canada-accepting-refugees-wont-help-syria/

Valiente, Alexandra (2016) 'Syrian front: Over 1000 IDPs return home daily', 30 March, Uprooted Palestinians, online: http://uprootedpalestinians.blogspot.com.au/2016/03/syrian-front-over-1000-idps-return-home.html

van der Lugt, Frans (2012) 'Bij defaitisme is niemand gebaat', from Homs, 13 January, online: https://mediawerkgroepsyrie.wordpress.com/2012/01/13/bij-defaitisme-is-niemand-gebaat/

Wikileaks (c2014) 'NEW IRAN AND SYRIA 2.DOC', Hillary Clinton Email Archive, online: https://wikileaks.org/clinton-emails/emailid/18328

Wilkes, Sybella and Leo Dobbs (2010) 'Iraqi refugees in Syria reluctant to return to home permanently: survey', UNHCR, 8 October, online: http://www.unhcr.org/news/latest/2010/10/4caf376c6/iraqi-refugees-syria-reluctant-return-home-permanently-survey.html

View publication stats