

THE POLITICS OF HUMANITARIAN INTERVENTION IN SYRIA'S CIVIL WAR: A STUDY OF INTERNATIONAL COMMITTEE OF THE RED CROSS

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Abstract

The domino effect of the Arab Spring in Syrian has degenerated into a civil war which began in March 2011. Using secondary data, this study examined the politics of humanitarian intervention in the Syrian conflict. It argues that the ineffective management of the crisis by the international community and global powers as well as the disrespect of the Laws of Armed Conflict or international humanitarian law by combatants has allowed the gross violation of human rights. Over 200,000 people died since the war began in Syria and millions of civilians displaced within Syria and across its borders to neighboring countries. In the light of the above, international humanitarian agencies such as the International Committee of the Red Cross dwelling on the Responsibility to Protect civilians and ameliorate their plight have intervened in the conflict. The paper argues that the activities of the International Committee of the Red Cross in cooperation with the Syrian Crescent have had positive results in this regard. However, it proposes that effective measure be put in place by the international community to ensure that all parties in the conflict comply with the rules of international humanitarian law and to allow humanitarian agencies to deliver aid, including much-needed medical supplies to all people in need whoever they may be.

Keywords: *Civil war, Red Cross, Humanitarian, Syria, foreign policy*

INTRODUCTION

Humanitarian Intervention has been an instrument of foreign policy, hence the basis for its formulation and implementation is discussed often and yet no one has reached a consensus concerning it so far. All major multilateral humanitarian interventions of this decade have been in Somalia, Bosnia, Rwanda, Libya among others, which have proven to be more problematic than the one in Syria, only the operation to provide a safe zone for the Iraqi Kurds who were persecuted at the beginning of the Second Gulf War has been a success. The idea of

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"Humanitarian intervention" as rationale for a military intervention of one or several states within the territory of another sovereign state is more than 180 years old. Already, the Russian intervention in the Greek War for independence (1821–1827), the French intervention in Greater Syria (a part of the Ottoman Empire in the 1860s), the Russian engagement in Bulgaria (1876–1878), and the threat of force of some European powers to stop the genocide of the Armenian people in Turkey (1894–1917), are explicit examples of humanitarian interventions. Since the idea of protecting civilians was introduced the scope of humanitarian intervention changed in its planning, execution and justification, but the existing foundation of violating the sovereignty of another nation remained unchanged (Martha, 1996).

The idea of Humanitarian intervention has been driven by state evolution and norms over the last 180 years. As well as idea of affecting another's nations sovereignty predicated on their norms contradicts the usual international pattern of politics and its behavior since it emerged. These norms still presently undergo development which explains the several variety of intervention per time. The definition of human and which norms violation justifies an intervention has changed since World War II, the general human definition, and which violation of norms justify an intervention, has changed over time. Additionally, in 1989, after the cold war came to an end, "norms about multilateral action had been strengthened, making multilateralism not just attractive but imperative"(Martha, 1996). Therefore, humanitarian interventions of today are dependent on several factors most especially a wide and general approval of the international community of states, a mandate of the United Nations that has been institutionalized, and also the need for additional support of other supranational institutions may arise. Those formal institutions simultaneously shape norms that legitimize international interventions in sovereign states and shape the implementation of the intervention (Hasler, 2012).

The rate of human suffering in the Syrian war which started since February 2011 is, a tragedy for the Syrian people as a whole, but also evidently a crisis of international intervention. The international community has hence failed to protect and assist civilians who in their multitude are being, injured, killed, brutalized, displaced, bereaved and impoverished by the war. Given the prevailing approach to international intervention since the end of the Cold War, this failure isn't a surprising one. The conflation over time of political and humanitarian objectives has damaged the concept of impartial humanitarian action, without which as Syria shows innocent civilians are without protection. According to the UN Under-Secretary General for Humanitarian Affairs, "the appalling suffering inflicted on ordinary women, children, and men by this conflict is completely unacceptable... words, despite their ability to shock, cannot really paint a picture of the grim and gruesome reality of Syria today" (Aaronson, 2014). As at December 2013, 9.3 million people inside Syria needed humanitarian assistance, including 6.5 million who had been forced to flee their homes and forced to face one of the harshest winters ever in the region; the number of Syrian refugees in neighboring countries has approached 2.3 million; unemployed people were reaching 3million people; 3 million children had also been forced to leave their education. Also there is a confirmed evidence of the deliberate targeting of civilians and humanitarian workers.

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These constitute war crimes and crimes against humanity and are taken to the International Criminal Court (ICC) for adjudication. One of the most shocking reports, produced by the Oxford Research Group, showed that by the end of August 2013, 10% of all recorded civilian deaths in the conflict were of children under 18 (11,420 out of an overall total of 113,735). Of these, 7 out of 10 were caused by explosive weapons and one in four by small arms fire “including children summarily executed and targeted by snipers.” Of the 764 children recorded as summarily executed, “112 were reported to have been tortured, including some of infant age” (Dardagan, 2013).

Since September 2011, the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic has recorded the many violations of human rights in the war (OHCHR, 2011). In September 2013, it described “the deliberate targeting of hospitals, medical personnel and transport, the denial of access to medical care, and ill-treatment of sick and wounded,” mainly but not exclusively by government forces. The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), with the aim of maintaining its tradition of neutrality, called on all parties to comply with the rules of international humanitarian policies and to allow humanitarian agencies to deliver aid, including much needed supplies medically, to all civilians in need whoever they may be. As of November 2013, of no less than 32 Syrian Arab Red Crescent aid workers were killed. This lack of respect for humanitarian impartiality though not peculiar or unique to Syria is nevertheless one of the most concerning and devastating dimensions of the crisis (Aaronson M. , 2012).

The failure by the Permanent Members of the UN Security Council (P5), to help the Syrian government and its opponents proffer a political solution has been catastrophic. From the early days of the crisis in 2011, the members were adamant on the issue of regime change, with the West’s calling for President Assad to be ousted, which was blocked by the newly-assertive Russians and Chinese. Thus, Kofi Annan’s role as mediator was doomed from the very beginning. For example, how they allowed themselves disagree so publicly and outspokenly, Susan Rice, the US Ambassador to the UN, called the Russian and Chinese decision to block a Security Council Resolution “disgusting and shameful” (Aaronson M. , 2014) the P5 forfeited the chance to place the weight of their collective moral authority behind the independent humanitarian action of the ICRC and the other humanitarian agencies. When neutrality flew out the window in New York, impartiality became an utopia in Syria (Michael, 2012).

Syria thus represents the low point of the liberal interventionism that was born in 1991 which was a response to the humanitarian crisis in the mountains of northern Iraq, it reached its apogee in 1999/2000 when Tony Blair gave a speech at Chicago and the military interventions in Kosovo and Sierra Leone, was discredited by the 2003 invasion of Iraq, which has arguably been in steady decline ever since (Blair, 2014). It was labeled “humanitarian intervention,” which is not a new phenomenon, but, in this context, is used somewhat by politicians and scholars as well.

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Not only does this usage fail to acknowledge the essentially political nature of such interventions, it also degrades the notion of humanitarianism.

Hence, using a qualitative research method, the paper is structured thus; following the introduction, the second section examines the theoretical framework appropriate for the study while the third interrogates the history of Syria's civil war; causes and effects (humanitarian crisis). The fourth segment examines the issues surrounding humanitarian crisis, human rights violation and the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) and the fifth attempts a critical appraisal of the politics of humanitarian intervention in Syria, espousing the roles of the ICRC and the Doctors without Borders which concludes this study.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: REALISM

The 'Reagan policy' of the 1980's has been thoroughly criticized for its self-absorbed and imperialistic nature. While secretly trying to overthrow leftist governments, it emphasized 'superior values' of national security and freedom (Schachter 1991). This example demonstrates the intricate nature of justifications for interventions because we see integration of motives and intentions.

Realists refer to those usually hostile to any involvement said to be motivated by moral reasons. Their major criticism is that interventions, charitable or not, are always guided by 'real' (such as political) interests and thus can never be solely moral in nature. As Smith (1998) puts it, they are 'incapable to act in other than self-absorbed ways'. This is an argument heard over and over again that cannot be taken nonchalantly. However, it might be possible to structure a realist, or 'quasi-realist', dispute for intervention by allowing space for some moral ideology to emerge. In order to do so, we would have to expand our notion of national interest as a wide one. For example, the following report from the U.S. National Security Strategy 2002 states:

As we pursue the terrorists in Afghanistan, we will continue to work with international organizations such as the United Nations, as well as non-governmental organizations, and other countries to provide the humanitarian, political, economic, and security assistance necessary to rebuild Afghanistan so that it will never again abuse its people, threaten its neighbors, and provide a haven for terrorists (Michael S. , 1998).

The United States, in its logic for intervention in Afghanistan, has attempted to make a express link between its national interest (military power over terrorists seeking asylum in Afghanistan) and moral duties (providing humanitarian and other assistance to injured people). In other words, intervening for national interest, and to protect people from human rights abuse, have become part of one justification. A realist would dispute that the former, national interest is the only and 'real' motive involved (Seay, 2007).

HISTORY OF THE SYRIAN CIVIL WAR (CAUSES AND EFFECTS).

Following independence in 1946, years of unsteadiness culminated in the Ba'ath Party's Coup d'état of 1964. In 1970, the minister of defense General Hafez al Assad seized power and affirmed himself Prime Minister in 1971. In consolidating power, he reinvented the face of Syrian politics and the Ba'ath party, dividing the state equipment between different communities and put power around him and his family. He particularly favored the Alawite community, started by giving them control over the state military and intelligence apparatus, and later favoring them for high level government positions. At the same time, he gave overarching powers to the presidency; the president was given veto over all government decisions and so multi-party elections for the presidency did not take place; al Assad would carry out referenda confirming him as president. When he died in 2000, his son Bashar al Assad took power. The regime of the two Assad's had bred dissatisfaction among the Sunni majority; although Sunnis were placed in several high level posts in the government, they were considered secondary to the elite Alawite minority. Therefore, one of the most prominent groups to oppose the Assad's primarily were the Muslim Brotherhood, creating a Sunni opposition from start, and arguably giving scope for radical elements like Al-Qaeda and the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) to become prominent forces in the future (Mariwala, 2017).

Syria's conflict has evolved from peaceful protests against the government in 2011 to a violent rebellion. This rebellion has drawn in numerous parties and it's partly a civil war of government against people; partly a religious war pitting Assad's minority Alawite sect, united with Shiite fighters from Iran and Hezbollah in Lebanon, against Sunni rebel groups; and also a substitute war featuring Russia and Iran against the United States and its allies. This war has thus far ended the lives 220,000 people, and displaced half of the country's population, and facilitated the rise of ISIS. At the same time there is a de-facto international coalition one that makes informal allies of Assad, the United States, Russia, Iran, Turkey, the Kurds, and others focus on defeating ISIS in Syria, the battlefield features several other overlapping conflicts (Kathy, 2015).

On one hand, by 2013, 13 "major" rebel groups started operating in Syria, counting smaller ones; the U.S. Defense Intelligence Agency decided the number of groups at 1,200. Meanwhile, on the other hand, the number of other countries involved to various degrees has grown; including the United States. Nine countries have participated in the U.S.-led airstrikes against ISIS in Syria; also, Russia had conducted its own bombing against other rebel groups and ISIS as well, with ground operations by Hezbollah fighters and Iranian fighters. Thomas van Linge, a Dutch teenager who is well known for his detailed maps of the Syrian conflict, grouped the combatants into four wide categories: rebels (from "moderate" to Islamist); loyalists (regime forces and their supporters); Kurdish groups (they are not currently seeking to oust Assad, but have won

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autonomy in the north-eastern region in Syria, which they have fought ISIS to protect); and finally, foreign powers. This division amongst them is based on whether to outrightly keep Assad in power (Russia and Iran), or to maintain that he must be ousted eventually while focusing on the Islamic State at the moment (the U.S.-led coalition), (Kathy, 2015).

Basically, the Syrian conflict is one that could be seen as caused by the inabilities of the Syrian government to satisfy the socio-economic aspirations of its people. A great level of discontent towards the actions of Assad has been visible via the harsh actions of the rebel groups. Syrian civil war escalated from a popular uprising plotted against the regime of President Bashar al-Assad in March 2011, as a direct consequence of the 2011 Tunisian revolution, spilling across North Africa and the Middle East. A reaction was triggered by the brutal response the people got after they carried out a peaceful protest aimed at putting an end to the authoritarian nature of the government and the end of repression in the region. The Syrian crisis or rather civil war began six years ago, when the people of Syria protested for a free political system and also the eradication of poverty to liberate the impoverished. The failure of Assad to positively respond to the request of the masses led to a rebel movement after which the people of Syria took up arms against the state and declared the start of a civil war. Within the last six years this crisis has lingered and there have been several attempts to bring it to an end, all to no avail (Bitar, 2013). The International community has interfered in the Syrian civil war to bring an end to the brutal killings and casualties that has led to a large number of Syrians fleeing to Turkey, Jordan and other neighboring states to form refugee camps, children, women and men have been displaced in their thousands and the city has been crushed into ruins, yet the state has refused to surrender same as the rebels.

HUMANITARIAN ISSUES AND HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS

Chemical Weapons

Syria's Chemical Weapons program had began a long time ago with preparation and weaponry sourced from the erstwhile Soviet Union and Egypt. In the mid 1980's Syria began increasing its own chemical weapons and reports showed that by 2007, Syria had stockpiled hundreds of tons of chemical weapons agents. These were arsenals that would be used extensively in its war against rebels. In March 2013 Khan al Asal, a village in northern Syria which has a strong rebel presence was hit with chemical weapons containing sarin gas, a potent nerve agent. The attack led to at least 26 fatalities with a lot more injured. The government and the opposition hurriedly held each other responsible but later UN investigations showed that the sarin used in the attack was surprisingly similar to that in other Syrian government stockpiles. Other attacks as such was constant on the rebels, with many sources saying that restricted use of chemical agents on rebels had become the contingency strategy for the Syrian military. In the early hours of August 21, 2013 several rebel controlled in the region of the Ghouta, Syria was hit brockets containing sarin, killing hundreds, with death tolls ranging from the 200s to the 2000s. President Bashar al Assad straight away denied claims that the Syrian government was behind the attacks, saying as an alternative that rebel groups had used the chemical agents because they were on the losing side.

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A report from the UN later showed that the sarin used in the attack was exceedingly purified and of a much superior quality than that generated by Iraq's chemical weapons series (Krishnadev, 2017).

Refugees

By early 2013, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees announced that over a million refugees had fled war torn Syria to seek asylum in Jordan, Lebanon, Turkey, Iraq and other neighboring countries. A few countries such as Jordan and Turkey erected a shift "tent cities" where the refugees stay now due to the unavailability of urgent settlement for the growing refugee population. With these local refugee camps reaching their flouting point, several countries all around the world have assisted in easing the circumstances by providing financial assistance and allowing refugees to immigrate to their country and resettle. Monetarily the European Union has been the sole largest contributor with aid totaling over \$2.4billion. Other countries like Sweden, the United Kingdom and the United States have allowed refugees to everlastingly resettle in their country (Krishnadev, 2017).

By the end of 2014, an estimated 7.6 million people were internally displaced and 3.7 million Syrians had fled the state since the conflict began. During 2014, more than one million Syrians were newly registered as refugees in neighboring countries, bringing the total number of registered refugees in the region to 3,688,402 by year end. As large as the number of newly registered refugees is, in a sense it underestimates the current crisis as it excludes the 117,590 Syrians who were in anticipation of registration at the end of 2014 (UNHCR 2015a), and de facto Syrian refugees who were resident in the region but who were not officially registered or awaiting registration(Ostrand, 2014).

Homelessness

A third of Syria's accommodation stock and thousands of schools have been shattered during the war, forcing some 4.25 million people to desert their homes and 2 million children to drop out of school. The destitute are mostly women, children and the aged who fled their shelters with no private possessions and are staying with other families, who are themselves surviving on very inadequate resources. More than 2 million more have fled the country. Nearly 200,000 others are in swarming communal centers without hygienic water, electrical energy or hygiene, according to a report by Chaloka Beyani, the UN independent expert on the rights of internally displaced people. It said 1.2 million houses have been shattered in the conflict that began in March 2011. More than 3,000 schools have been destroyed or damaged and almost 1,000 more are being used to house displaced citizens. "Parents say their children are experiencing frequent nightmares, they are behaving recklessly and aggressively and their drawings are often angry, violent and full of images of bloodshed, explosions or destruction," UNICEF spokeswoman Marixie Mercado said (Reuter, 2013).

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Extremist Islamist groups Jabhat al-Nusra and ISIS dedicated organized rights abuses, including knowingly targeting and abducting innocent civilians. On March 31, ISIS intentionally killed at a whopping 35 civilians after they temporarily seized the village of Mab'oujeh in Hama countryside, according to local inhabitants. ISIS also consciously targeted civilians in a June 2015 attack on the northern Syrian city of Kobani (Ain al-Arab in Arabic) assassinating between 233 and 262 innocent civilians. According to witnesses, the attackers assassinated civilians using mechanical weapons including machine guns and rifles with bullets. Grenades and snipers were as well used to fire on harmless civilians from rooftops as they tried to recover the dead. Witnesses reported to Human Rights Watch that they saw ISIS put to people to death in public and open places in towns the group controlled in the governorates of Raqqa and Deir al-Zor. The victims were shot, beheaded, crucified, or stoned to death depending on the accusation. Some people were put to death for profanity, infidelity, or treachery, the witnesses reported (World Report, 2016).

HUMANITARIAN INTERVENTION IN SYRIA

The Doctrine: Responsibility to Protect (R2P)

The international community after 2001 began to normalize how it responds to act of violent crimes. This phase marked the first use of the term “responsibility to protect.” In addition, numerous advanced commissions and panels were convened to codify criteria for the lawful use of force for humanitarian purposes. Later part of the decade, R2P gained prevalent prop up amid the international community. Notably, the UN General Assembly and the Security Council authorized R2P, invoking the principle in response to the 2006 Darfur crisis and the 2011 Libyan conflict.

In 2005, the UN adopted “The Responsibility to Protect” (R2P),(waal, 2014) which responded not only to failures to get involved in Rwanda and Srebrenica, for example, but also to G77 anxieties about humanitarian intervention itself. However, while R2P is an immaculate statement of the obligations of states towards their own citizens and those of the wider international community in the face of mass massacre crimes, it does not essentially change anything when states show aggression to their own people. No new enforcement powers or mechanisms have been agreed, and any decision to apply the doctrine of R2P in a given situation depends on the existence of the political will to do so.

However, what R2P involves is that where a political agreement for coercive intervention is lacking, everything should be done to defend and support civilians. Nothing illustrates the failure of the Permanent Five better than the fact that only in October 2013 by which by now was far too late to have an unambiguous declaration to this effect from the Security Council even then it came in the form of a non-binding Presidential proclamation rather than a Resolution (UNSC, 2006). Even in cases where they cannot agree to go to war to defend human life, they can at least

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be resolute on compliance with international humanitarian and human rights law, and coherent practical measures to make them a reality, e.g. freedom of access for humanitarian staff and the migration of civilians from war zones.

Humanitarian relieve during the Syrian Civil War has been supported by various international bodies, organizations and states. The main effort is coordinated by John Ging of the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA). In 2014, U.N. Security Council Resolution 2165 sanctioned humanitarian aid to be supplied through four border crossings not controlled by the Syrian government, generally to supply rebel-controlled regions.

Humanitarian aid to refugees and their host communities in the neighboring countries to Syria is coordinated by the United Nations Resident Coordinator/Humanitarian Coordinator.

Examples of these humanitarian agencies granted right of entry into Syria are analyzed below, including the roles they have played so far in the conflict;

International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC).

Over the past years, the ICRC and its cohorts in the faction built a principled and equipped structure supporting their work, consequential in the adoption a century later of the seven Fundamental Principles of the Movement at the 20th International Conference of the Red Cross held in Vienna in 1965. The first four principles; humanity, impartiality, neutrality and independence, would heavily persuade the normative improvement of the wider humanitarian division. Indeed, the United Nations (UN) General Assembly adopted and acknowledged them as guiding doctrines for international humanitarian action under the UN structure (Dunant, 1862). The ICRC and the Movement inclined the improvement of IHL and the ethics underlying humanitarian work to such a degree that it encouraged historian Katherine Davies to speak of a “master-narrative” on condition that the ethical, operational and legal foundations for modern humanitarian actions (Pictet, 1979). The ultimate and sole aim of humanitarian action, born on the battlefield of Solferino, is to avoid and ease suffering, defend life and guarantee respect for the self-respect for people in distressed situations as a result of conflict or tragedy, in spite of their population or ethnic background, political or ideological views or social status. This singular objective, contained in the principle of civilization, is the embodiment of a moral imperative that views a human being from an ontological standpoint and refuses to take anything else into consideration. According to Jean Pictet, author of the observations on the Fundamental Principles of the Movement, humanity is the “essential principle” fundamental the humanitarian endeavor and the only one whose nature is intensely moral. Humanity is crucial; it is what should keep recipients of humanitarian assistance from being reduced to their needs. It also recognizes every individual as simply (Daudin, 2016).

The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) has been assisting millions of people in Syria since the beginning of the conflict 6 years ago. Working in partnership with the Syrian

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Arab Red Crescent to reach millions of displaced and resident people across the country, to also respond to their needs in terms of food, water and health. The ICRC, and in assistance with the Syrian Arab Red Crescent, provides over half a million people with food and other rudiments every month. The ICRC keeps seeking for access to all areas affected by the conflict. In 2014, the ICRC was able to cross front lines and to convey medical provisions, food and other essentials to Aleppo, Homs and Rural Damascus. The ICRC assistance was dispersed as follows:

Food Items

- Food parcels, consisting of rice, beans, lentils, oil, tomato paste, tea and sugar, canned food, were distributed to over 5.5 million people all over the country;
- Nearly 250,000 people living in shelters for the displaced in Aleppo, Lattakia, Rural Damascus, Homs and Damascus had daily meals prepared for them in ICRC-supplied collective kitchens supported by the Syrian Arab Red Crescent;
- Hygiene kits, towels, mattresses, blankets and other household essentials (kitchen utensils, sleeping mats, buckets, rechargeable lights, etc.) were distributed to almost 1.5 million people across the country (ICRC, 2014).

Clean Water and Upgrading Sanitation

- Ensuring that 16 million people have contact to clean intake of water by providing neighboring water boards throughout Syria with the chemical provisions required for treating water;
- Providing technical support, materials and equipment, including spare parts, pumps, motors and generators, to local water boards for more than 500 projects all over the country;
- Delivering water by truck to 360,000 people in Rural Damascus, Homs, Hama, Deir Ez-Zour and Qunietra;
- Distributing water bottles to 170,000 displaced people in Daraa, Damascus, Rural Damascus, and Hama;
- Improved 210 facilities serving as transitory shelters for displaced people (by installing showers, water heating units, and by increasing the capacity of the sanitary facilities and water units) in all Syrian governorates assisting around 160,000 displaced people;
- Providing pesticides for municipalities' public health and vector control programs in eight Syrian governorates, assisting around 3.5 million people (ICRC, 2014).

Healthcare for the Sick

- Provided surgical and first aid supplies to 27 public and private hospitals and a number of Syrian Arab Red Crescent branches for the treatment of more than 5,000 patients;
- Supplied medicines to the Syrian Arab Red Crescent and many health facilities across the country for the treatment of 100,000 patients with chronic diseases;
- Provided the Palestinian Red Crescent in al-Yarmouk Camp in Damascus with chronic diseases medicines sufficient to treat 5,000 patients and 50 safe delivery kits;

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- Provided medical supplies for the nine Syrian Arab Red Crescent mobile health units in seven governorates;
- Provided consumables for 700 hemodialysis sessions in Al BirHospital, Al Waer in Homs;
- Provided 770 disabled patients with wheelchairs in Damascus and Aleppo in addition to 700 pairs of crutches.
- Provided 2 hospitals and 2 polyclinics in Aleppo with generators (ICRC, 2014).

CONCLUSION

People from all over the globe do not ordinarily flee their homes, communities and countries except they observe that they have no alternatives. The enormous and quick displacement of millions of Syrians reflects collapse: the failure of the Syrian administration to resolve domestic conflicts and to reverence the basic rights of its people; the failure of both sides of the conflict to respect international humanitarian law; and the failure of the international community to avoid the atrocities and widespread human rights violations which have mandated a third of the country's population to leave their homes. Of course, there are different and lawful arguments about what could and should have been done early in the Syrian conflict. Perhaps a more vigorous diplomatic effort earlier in 2011-2012 or earlier and more express support for the opposition to the Assad regime could have prevented the acceleration of the conflict and its current deadlock. But regardless of the roads not taken, the fact that so many of Syria's people have been displaced is an suggestion of the inability of the international community to prevent the large-scale hostility that has wreaked disaster with millions of lives.

All parties to the armed conflict including the Syrian government, paramilitary forces and the many opponent groups should comply with the basic principles of international humanitarian law (IHL) and uphold basic, internationally-recognized human rights. Under IHL, states and non-state armed actors have the commitment to ensure support to and protection of people within their jurisdiction. The Syrian administration and resistance movements therefore need to understand and value international humanitarian law and to sustain the rights of all individuals under their jurisdiction, including the internally displaced. There is a vital need for training on IHL and humanitarian principles for parties to the conflict and contribution in such training should be a situation of any support by the US government to the opposition. The failure to consider the protection of all civilians, regardless of which side they support, will result in the undermining of hopes for any alliance government. There should be steps to protect minorities who are mainly important not only for the needed protection of susceptible groups but also in distressing the course of the country's political future. There is above all a particular need to equitably protect and assist Palestinian refugees who had been existing in Syria and are now either displaced internally or turned back at borders of neighboring states.

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