



Scottish Centre for  
International Strategic Affairs

## **The UN House Scotland/SCISA Report on ‘Pathways to Peace’ Seminar on Syria. 19.9.2016**

### **1. Background**

1.1. On September 19 2016 the Scottish Centre for International Strategic Affairs (SCISA) and UN House Scotland, hosted a seminar dedicated to understanding what is involved in peaceful resolution of the Syrian conflict. This was the third in a series of SCISA seminars, the two previous seminars on Russia/Ukraine and Iran were held in May 2015 and April 2016. As with the other seminars, the main aim of the Syria event was to bring together people who would not ordinarily meet so that through discussion and debate, possibilities for peaceful resolution of conflict might be advanced.

1.2 Although conversations, in themselves, do not make peace, the organisers and participants of the SCISA seminars shared a strong belief that discourse is one of the many pathways to peaceful resolution of conflicts. The third SCISA seminar offered the invited experts, humanitarian practitioners and community stakeholders working with Syrian refugees opportunities to share and enrich their expertise and their understandings of the conflict. Through this Report, we outline their understandings of possible pathways to its peaceful resolution.

### **2. Executive Summary**

2.1 It was noted that the narratives surrounding the source(s) of the current conflict in Syria are multiple, complex and frequently mutually exclusive. The complexity of Syria's history and colonial legacy, societal and generational divisions, economic challenges, and the role of international actors ought to be taken into account when attempting to examine the underlying

causes of today's conflict. There is no single cause behind the events of the early 2011 and its subsequent evolution into the current conflict. The most perilous explanation of all is the one that would ignore the mosaics of grievances and interests that motivated the Syrian people to take to the streets during their Arab Spring rebellion.

2.2 The narrative which attempts to explain the conflict as a result of the worsening economic situation of the country does not account for the relatively positive condition of the Syrian economy in the early 2011. Severe drought that affected Syrian population prior to 2011, has been another recurrent feature in the search for the causes of the Syrian conflict. Yet, this explanation does not account for the fact the protesters who took to the streets did not inhabit the areas directly affected by droughts. Instead, it was the Syrian middle class who led the first protests against Al Assad.

2.3 The violent response of the Syrian government to peaceful protests is frequently mentioned as another cause behind the current crisis. Yet many revolutions, met with similarly brutal reaction by their governments, did not evolve into full-scale wars. Also, the extent to which the President is responsible for the current devastation of Syria is also debatable, given the presence of many domestic, regional and international actors, with their own agendas and different interest in the conflict.

4. The historical perspective on the roots of the Syrian crisis has also played important role in the attempts to understand its underlying causes. The process of state-building in Syria has been profoundly impacted by colonial policies, which in turn exploited deeply rooted societal hierarchies. Although the first Syrian constitution was seen as progressive and inclusive (it enfranchised women and included no reference to religion), the 'divide et impera' tactics deployed by the French colonial power soon erased those early achievements of the post-WWI Syria. The inter-ethnic and inter-religious strife fomented by the colonial governments was not resolved when Syria gained its independence in 1946. The political crises and rebellions that troubled the country, including the current conflict, may be traced back to the unaddressed issue of Syrian unity as a nation. "Syria was prepared to stand, but its foundations were built on soft sand, so it collapsed" is a view often expressed.

5. A deep generational divide has been present throughout the Arab world. The power structures dominated by 'older men with older ideas' significantly limited the agency of younger generations – a pattern visible in all the countries swept by the Arab Uprisings.

6. Therefore, whilst it is important to enumerate the possible and plausible causes leading to the Syrian conflict, as well as addressing those continuing to fuel its severity, such discourses risk ignoring potential ways out of the crisis. "If we are overly consumed by the explanations we lose sight of this as a situation that can be solved" was stated more than once.

2.7 All conflicts seem intractable and different to all the others. Peace mediators notice that both sides of the conflict frequently view their situation as different to anything that has ever occurred in history. Yet history shows that as conflicts share many similar characteristics, it is possible to learn from the others' experiences, how to mediate, and – ultimately - reconcile the seemingly irreconcilable.

2.7.1 The peace process in Northern Ireland could offer such lesson. At the height of the Troubles,

the Northern Irish conflict seemed impossible to resolve. Both sides of the conflict were unwilling to sit in one room, let alone to seek together an avenue for a peaceful resolution of the crisis. Then two years of negotiations resulted in a peace deal that significantly reduced the violence and allowed communities to heal, but it has not ended the conflict. Instead, the Good Friday/Belfast Agreement and its aftermath has demonstrated to the international community the need for continuous effort to make and remake peace, as it stumbles on obstacles and suffers setbacks.

2.7.2 The Northern Irish conflict and the peace process that followed, provided a powerful message that many conflicts share the same traits. Understanding those similarities, such as problems with governance, economic development, fight with corruption is an important step towards peaceful resolution of a crisis, including the Syrian conflict.

2.8 Steps including ceasefire as well as sound and feasible timescales are crucial in the process of peace making. Ceasefires have been viewed as important stepping stones on the way to sustainable peaceful solutions, as they provide much needed 'breathing space', allowing many issues treated as secondary during the military stages of the conflict to resurface. That creates new dynamics and a different framework for subsequent negotiations.

2.9 Reasonable timescales are needed to strengthen the achievements of ceasefire, but there is no 'one-size-fits-all' timeframe. An assumption that a conflict must run its course of ten or seventeen years before negotiations can be established could be extremely harmful for all stakeholders.

2.10 The role of international actors in conflict resolution cannot be ignored, but their presence can be both a blessing and a curse. The example of the Northern Ireland demonstrates that international stakeholders can play positive roles in a peace process. The negotiations and peace agreements were supported by the Irish government and the administration of US President, Bill Clinton. In fact, the willingness of the British government to cooperate with those external stakeholders, especially the Irish side, was crucial in the process of building up towards a sustainable peace agreement.

2.11 However, in the Syrian situation, unlike in Northern Ireland, international participants have been viewed as obstacles to peace rather than its facilitators. Their disparate political agendas further adds to the complexity of the domestic dynamics of the Syrian conflict. The involvement of Russia, for example, indicates that the end of the conflict in Syria is not an immediate aim. This is especially the case if Russia can use the situation on the ground as leverage to achieve its own interests; but equally, to have 'resolved' Syria will boost the legacy of Putin and lend momentum to his eventual successor. Further, the Russian state can utilise the threat of extremism as a means to crack down on other forms of internal protest, such as pro-democracy protest. The external threat of terrorism has been and is used in a similar way by America to legitimise certain courses of action and dismiss others. The role of Saudi Arabia, particularly through the financing of fundamental religious schools and arms deals, is crucial. In countries such as Somalia, for example, Saudi money has destroyed organic Islamic cultures such as Sufism. Saudi Arabia acted as a proxy for America in Syria until it was necessary for America to become involved more directly. The role of Turkey could become increasingly problematic. Since the shooting down of a Russian jet by Turkish forces in 2015, Russian tourism in Turkey has collapsed. As of today, Erdoğan is turning towards Putin and cracking down on the Kurds. This poses the problem of having a NATO member that is intent on pursuing a strategic policy in the Middle East that is counter to that of other members.

2.12 By focusing on external dynamics and actors, the core focus must necessarily still be given to the internal and local dynamics of the Syrian conflict. External powers and other international strategic conspiracies can be peripheral to local groups and citizens. However, to understand instigating factors (i.e. to understand why the Assad regime turned to violence at the moment that it did) external factors such as financing, the alignment of interests and the prior momentum of conflict in the region must be considered.

2.13 March 2011 – June 2012 is a crucial time for understanding the origin/escalation of the Syrian conflict. During these months, there was an incremental increase in violence perpetrated by the regime. Arguably, even as late as the Hama siege in July 2011 the conflict could have been de-escalated; but consideration must be given to the experience of Syrian civilians in different parts of the country at this time, some of whom were suffering to a greater degree than others.

2.14 The survival of the regime in Syria largely depends on the key supporters of Russia and Iran/Hezbollah. There may be an expectation held by some Syrian citizens that Russia should take responsibility for paving the way towards the removal of Assad and a transitional government; however it is highly unlikely that Russia will be enticed to take such actions in the near future.

2.15 Syria is one of the worst conflicts that will have lasted longer than World War II by March 2017. Three things are needed: 1) Understanding. This comes through academic research and through dialogue with people from the country and neighbouring countries; 2) Engagement. In order to have true understanding and passion, we must be engaged in working to help with the conflict. 3) Influence. Civil society influence is instrumental, but it will ultimately end in a political process (Geneva). We need grassroots activity and pressure to make this political process happen swiftly

2.16 With this background, presentations and subsequent discussions concentrated around five themes:

- The internal context of the conflict in Syria
- The international and regional context of the Syrian conflict
- Support for Syrian refugees
- Rebuilding post-conflict Syria
- The Syrian conflict: Pathways to Peace

### **3. Opening Sessions – Welcome and Origins of the Conflict**

3.1 We are here to address the issues generating and maintaining conflict in Syria and through that understanding to work towards finding pathways to peace. These SCISA seminars follow in the footsteps of international meetings of the 1970s and 1980s, the ‘Edinburgh Conversations’. During the years of the Cold War key nuclear arms control experts from the USSR and USA came to Edinburgh for informal, under-the-radar Conversations. The importance of these meetings was that, through conversations and dialogue, opportunities were created for mutual understanding, bridge building and even ‘pathways to peace’.

3.2 Our concerns focus upon the processes that led to the Syrian conflict. What are the impacts? How can we move forward? How can we extract ‘pathways to peace’ from that myriad of complexity? We are in a fast-moving environment especially with the recent ceasefire. The Syrian conflict is intense. Some say it will take 10 years to resolve itself but having that timeframe is really

not very helpful. The current day ceasefire is a good first step. Research shows that once you get into ceasefire agreements, it is a good stepping stone because it creates a dynamic of ‘what else can we do? What else can we negotiate?’ It can lead to more formal negotiations.

3.3 For every argument about how we got to where we are with the Syrian conflict, there is a counter argument. Understanding the complexity in the creation of the conflict is not easy but should be done. For example, some say this was an economic issue. Bashar Al Assad changed and liberalised the economy. In the 1990s it was not possible to speak about poverty in Syria; after 2000 it was encouraged. There were microfinance and unemployment programmes. In late 2010, Syria’s GDP was satisfactory and not seen as a cause for concern.

3.3.1 Others argue the origin of the conflict was about a drought. But protests did not take place around the time of the drought, nor in the most drought-impacted areas. The drought explains support for a challenge to the leadership, but it did not start the conflict in Syria.

3.3.2 Another issue is the way government dealt with protestors. But is not tenable to suggest that all of this is traced to one person, the President.

3.3.3 There are also conspiracies that could explain the Syrian conflict - regional rivalries and a gas pipeline. There is also the argument about what the West did or didn’t do (politically, strategically, economically, and militarily).

3.3.4 But it is evident that there must be something else - something already there: maybe a deep political wound left unhealed. If we take an historical view of Syria, we see the way minorities and majorities were played against each other. There was a hierarchy. The kingdom of Syria had a Constitution that was really advanced. It included women having the vote and being able to hold office. But there was a playing of minorities and majorities against each other. Those elected in the 1940s were, mainly, Sunni urban nobles (and Christians) who then failed to reach out to various groups of people in Syria. Thereafter, after 1963, it was predominantly Alawite in leadership positions.

3.3.5. Looking at the origins of the conflict it seems it is internal and external as well. The UN High Commission on Refugees (UNHCR) worked with the 1m Iraqi refugees as they moved into Syria. But the UNHCR was delayed in its response and it began pushing Assad to recognise the rights of refugees under international law. They were integrated into Syria. There was a feeling then, of “How come Iraqis have rights, but we, Syrians, don’t?” This was seen as ‘rights for some and not for others’. The way the UNHCR address the refugee issue in Syria, helped build up alienation within sections of society. There was an issue with nationality and integration.

3.3.6 Then alongside these factors, young people with knowledge in social media contributed to discourse by demanding greater freedoms and rights. Young people may have new ideas, but in practice authority and power rests with the old, older men. Young people are not given opportunity to provide ideas. There is a generational problem because of power lying with the older generation.

3.3.7 Iraqi elections took place in Syria, with ballot boxes and Observers. Iraqi refugees voted freely. Many say it was incredible and others in the region were very envious. The vote was for dignity, people were tired of having to involve an Alawite in everything they did (including enrolling a child into school) so the big monster was the minority Alawite rule.

3.4 Assad essentially cut Syria into smaller regions - some places were ok while others were quite scary. Also, Al Assad attacked civil society in 2011. But this is really a global problem not just

about the region. Talking about whole globe and how countries elsewhere perform (how, for example, the US bypasses the UN).

3.5 There is no point in claiming that no one cause explains the conflict because nobody believes that there was just one cause, but a combination of all of them contributed. But the claim that we have to blame the French/the US/the West/the Aluwites is also too simple. You can't dismiss the context of what it was like in 2011: we have to understand that first. We can't blame it on some deep wound in the Syrian psyche, because then we are essentially blaming the Syrians themselves for not knowing how to do a state in the right way. There were lots of external factors destabilising Syria and putting constraints on state-building. It is not because of their own inherent failure in getting it right. That is explaining the Syrian past too simply. So too is saying Syria was prepared to stand but was built on soft sand so it just collapsed. We need a fuller analysis than that.

#### **4. International and Regional Contexts of the Syrian Conflict**

4.1 *Russia.* Russia's sponsorship of the Assad regime, combined with Russia's direct and indirect interventions in Syria's war, are crucial dimensions of the conflict and its continuation to date. Russia's overall interest in exerting influence over the situation in Syria is complex, encapsulating component interests that operate on (a) Russia's internal, domestic level; (b) the regional security level and the role that Russia occupies, or aspires to occupy, in the Middle East; and (c) the global level and Russia's global assessment of its position relative to competing state powers.

4.2 The Assad regime is essentially Russia's last remaining ally in the Middle East and therefore the most effective means through which Russia can influence the overall regional security dynamic. It is especially crucial to Russia to maintain the ability to shape outcomes in the region due to the fact that an estimated 12% – 15% of Russia's population are Muslim; and the importance of the Russian base at Tartus.

4.3 'Islamic' fundamentalism, particularly violent extremism, is a domestic security concern of Russia, particularly in how it might impact Chechnya and the North Caucasus. That extremism may be exported into Russia's homeland is a consideration; however, the Syrian conflict is at present affording Russian forces the chance to monitor those Russians who are becoming foreign fighters with extremist groups in Syria; and then to target and/or render them.

4.4 At a time of economic uncertainty further complicated by the approaching need to find a successor to Putin, the Kremlin can act externally in Syria in a way that may bolster Russian citizens' sense of security. In 2012, the majority of citizens expected that Russia would seek to strengthen its international military capability. Similarly, when Russia did not veto the UNSC resolution on Libya in 2011, Putin's domestic popularity plummeted. Revolution also does not have the positive connotations that it denotes in America, but rather is perceived as a force of destruction: Russia is traditionalist and so naturally opposes opposition groups seeking to destabilise the Syrian regime. These factors have provided an internal logic and momentum to Russia's involvement in Syria and the direction it has taken. To *have not intervened* would have been contrary to Russian domestic and civil expectations. These expectations coalesce around ideas of Russian strength, national pride and identity, respect on the international stage etc. External action therefore provides internal coherency and cohesion for Russia.

4.5 On the international level, events in the Ukraine have resulted in a rapid deterioration of

Russia's relations with America and Europe, leaving Russia at risk of being marginalised within global affairs. Syria's conflict allows Russia to occupy a more central position. America is forced to not only consider Russia's strategy in Syria as a variable, but has repeatedly been forced to cooperate with Russia in attempts to contain hostilities. Through militaristic interventions in Syria, Russia reaffirms its role as a global power that cannot be dictated to. It is a key element of the Kremlin's strategy to retain a position of global influence, to retain its internationalism, and to retain its militaristic capability, aims which are under pressure due to the weakness of the Russian economy. Syria therefore becomes an ideal 'showcase' of Russia's continued influence and ability.

4.6. For Russia to discover the political will to authentically seek a resolution on Syria a number of criteria would have to be met, namely (a) the continuation of a Russian military presence vis-à-vis Tartus Port; (b) a settlement that foresees Assad remaining in power for the interim before a transitional government can be internally elected; and (c) recognition for Russia's positive role in achieving the settlement combined with a lessening of Russia's isolation and recognition for Russia as an equal.

## **5. The role of External Actors.**

5.1. In order to understand the ways in which the roles of external actors have been emphasised in the Syrian conflict, events need to be charted to the US invasion of Iraq: only by taking this longer/broader perspective can the severity of the Syrian conflict be understood. The Syrian conflict can essentially be placed in the ongoing continuum of violence that erupted first in Iraq and then in Lebanon.

5.2 Throughout the Iraq war, non-state actors were drawing lessons from the nature and outcomes of that conflict. These lessons have now been developed into the tactical policies being deployed in Syria by a plethora of non-state groups and their particular forms of fighting.

5.3. Post-2003, there was a decided shift towards framing Iraq through a sectarian lens, but it was also a power conflict in which sectarianism was used as an extension of strategy. The prime departure between the conflicts of Iraq and Syria is the changing role of America as the primary security architect: in Iraq, America intervened directly, whereas in Syria America's campaign is remote and fought through proxies. The role of Iran in the Gulf is also central, particularly through hostilities between Iraq and Iran. The zero-sum rivalry between the two states has opened up a security vacuum that powerful groups have sought to exploit and to occupy.

5.4 From Iraq, these non-state regional dynamics migrated to Lebanon, but here they manifested in a more static way. Israel saw the regional destabilisation as a 'green light' to act; and this consequently provoked a more active role by Hezbollah. Non-state regional dynamics then moved on to Syria, where they both constrained and informed the actions of the Assad regime. When confronted with the encroaching regional security vacuum and the fragmented map of 'enemies', the Assad regime perceived limits on external action and instead embarked upon a brutal internal crackdown. This is how we arrive at the Syrian crisis: a conflict which emphasises the role of external and non-state actors and particularly severe forms of violence.

5.5 The survival of the regime in Syria largely depends on the key supporters of Russia and Iran/Hezbollah. There may be an expectation held by some Syrian citizens that Russia should take responsibility for paving the way towards the removal of Assad and a transitional government;

however it is highly unlikely that Russia will be enticed to take such actions in the near future.

## **6. Support for Syrian Refugees**

6.1 This session will focus on Syrians who have crossed borders. The current international architecture of humanitarian assistance run by UNHCR is built on camps and containing people who are a threat to stability. This policy of containment is not working. It did originally did work for Syrians because of the regional hospitality idea, which worked in the short term.

6.1.1 None of Syria's neighbouring countries are signatories to the 1951 refugee convention (except Turkey but this doesn't make a difference because they haven't signed the 1967 additional protocol). Local hospitality has now collapsed and people are seeking protection elsewhere.

6.1.2 Containing people take their agency away from them. Zaatari originally had no police, no law enforcement, no social structures, and the refugees were not permitted to leave, work and education very limited.

6.1.3 Lebanon has no UNHCR camps which has led to a bit more agency for the refugees there. The work force recruited 0.5m refugees into agriculture in Lebanon. Many refugees refuse to register for fear of not being able to return.

6.1.4 The Turkish model for refugee camps is more progressive compared to UN. The camps are set up, no more than 20,000 people are allowed to live there. Informal work is allowed and not criminalised. Doors are open for the refugees to go in and out.

6.1.5 Practical measures are needed for long term support: allowing refugees to work is crucial. Without livelihoods they are really just long-term guests who are depending on the good will of the host country.

6.1.6 Jordan promised good terms of trade etc. from Europe if Syrians are allowed to work. The future really depends on giving Syrians a way to support themselves.

6.1.7 International assistance to governments is also needed: health and education provision for Syrians and local communities. A resolution depends on positive relationships between host communities and refugees.

6.1.8 Iraqi refugees in Syria can provide an example: all aid was funnelled through the government and distributed to refugees and locals. This could be applied in other countries today.

6.1.9 There is focus on special vulnerabilities of different groups, but male youth is a forgotten group. Their needs are not addressed by international aid organisations, as there has been much more focus on child marriage and other issues. UNICEF has not extended its mandate and is forgetting 18-25 year olds as they are not recognised in "the lost generations" and education for this transitional age group is totally ignored. That's why male youth is appearing in Europe and places like Calais, this is an outcome of the lack of attention put on this group. People say it may have to do with fear of radicalisation, but a recent study shows that it's more about employment and where you can go to get work. You can get work in Europe or within armed groups, which lets them send money back to their families.

6.2 Five key questions emerge to address this issue: i)How can Syrian refugees best be supported? ii)What are practical measures that can be undertaken in the long term to help with the Syrian refugee crisis? iii)What lessons that have we learned can be applied to Syria/ What lessons can be learned from Syria? iv) What is the role of the UK government in the Syrian refugee crisis? v) What examples do we have of existing models for dealing with Syrian refugees?



i) *How can Syrian refugees best be supported?*

Syrian refugees in this context refers to the people who have crossed the Syrian border, meaning this does not include people who are internally displaced. UNHCR has historically dealt with refugees through camps. This is a “policy of containment,” but it has quite a number of issues: 10% of Jordan’s Syrian refugee population in camps, 25% of Lebanon’s. Camps take away agency: people are often not allowed to leave the camps or to find work within the country. In Jordan, there is no police force and, therefore, no security in the camps. Lebanon has no camps, and many refugees are part of the work force. Turkey is very progressive, with no more than 10,000 people in each camp. People in these camps can work and leave the camps at their leisure.

ii) *What are practical measures that can be undertaken in the long term to help with the Syrian refugee crisis?*

Syrian refugees need to be able to work! They cannot remain dependent on the state or charities. The World Bank has offered assistance to Jordan in order to allow Syrian refugees to work. International assistance is needed to be given to host countries’ governments in order to improve the healthcare system and the education available to the refugees. A positive relationship between the refugee and the host country must be cultivated. The way the Iraqi refugees were treated in Syria should be looked to for lessons. Aid was given to the Syrian government, who distributed it to both Iraqi refugees and to poverty-ridden Syrians. The needs of young males in particular have not been addressed by international aid agencies. Education: 20-25 year old males and females are not included in UNICEF programs and in the UN’s Lost Generation initiative. More and more young men are coming to Europe (particularly Calais) not because of fear of being radicalised, but because there are no economic opportunities for them in Syria. They want to be able to send remittances back to their families

iii) *What lessons that we have learnt can be applied to Syria? What lessons can be learnt from Syria?*

UNHCR has learned through the Syrian refugee crisis about the urban living needs of the population. In the 1920s, a passport for refugees was issued by the League of Nations for Russian and Armenian refugees. There was no universal definition of ‘refugee’ and in the 1920s only Russian and Armenians were given them. By 1920, German refugees were not given the same opportunity. Working allows not only for refugees to make a livelihood, but also gain self-esteem. Ottoman refugees in 1857 were given small plots of land, were exempted from taxes during their first year living as refugees, and were exempted from military service.

People, such as women and children, tend to move from the place of crisis to a safer city, such as Lattakia. In Lattakia, the government received people in a sports stadium and a large school. Lattakia’s population has doubled in size, and needs all the international support it can get. People who work for certain Christian organizations can move in and out of Syria from Lattakia to Beirut. They don’t have to deal with the government since they work under the church. Christian organizations supported these people with financial aid and food, but didn’t actually go into the shelters. The Church received Christian immigrants, but no other people. Helped Christians find accommodation and provided them with other services

What are the impacts of the conferences with the youth? Youth, generally, are depressed and need support. The Syrian refugee situation is highly political: 4 million Syrian refugees are currently in neighboring countries of Syria. The conditions in Kurdistan’s camps are awful. Only

primary school is offered. All other children must go without education. However, the UN considers it acceptable because refugees have tents and water.

Most Syrian refugees have been internally displaced many times. 6 million are internally displaced presently. Many who stay in Syria are worried that if they become asylum seekers, they won't ever be allowed to return to Syria. They are especially scared this will be true if Assad remains in power. Jordan and Lebanon do not want to move beyond emergency aid. It is not that Jordan and Lebanon are not interested in moving beyond humanitarian aid; it is that they just do not have the funds to do so. International aid needed to help this problem. It is also an issue that all of the aid coming to Jordan is going to Syrian refugees when there are Jordan citizens who are very poor. The West tends to throw money at problems and hope that it sorts itself out, but aid needs to be carefully considered and targeted. We need to learn lessons from Iraqi refugees: aid packages need to be given to the whole community that is suffering, not just designated for the Syrian refugees who live in those communities. 200 refugees a day in Lebanon are leaving (going back home??) because there are no opportunities for work or education. There was a second wave of refugees in 2015 when many of the educated Syrians, who were hoping to wait out the war, gave up and fled

Since the 1951 Convention, and the creation of the UNHRC, refugee passports no longer exist. It is the host country that houses the refugees that decided what their status is and what their benefits/opportunities will be. Issuing humanitarian travel visas could be the solution instead of refugee passports. Humanitarian travel visas would give Syrian refugees the right to enter the UK or Europe for a set period of years, and they could be renewed as long as the conflict continues. This would remove the burden of Syrian refugees gathering in mass numbers right at the border. This would need to be done at a very large scale. This would be helpful as some Syrian refugees don't want to register as asylum seekers because they want to return to Syria someday

In Turkey, most camps are along the Southern border. Erdogan has been talking about possibly granting citizenship to some Syrian refugees. Syrian refugees believe that if Assad continues to be in power, then they will never be able to go back and will become stateless. This possibility needs to be discussed when trying to find a political resolution to the conflict

*iv) What is the role of the UK government in the Syrian refugee crisis?*

The UK needs to focus on increasing the number of Syrian refugees admitted and increasing the number of places for them to stay. UK also needs to focus on family reunification. UK agreed to receive 20,000 Syrian refugees last year, but we need to keep calling for more. There are people in Calais with family in the UK. Need to have better family reunification programmes.

The UK community sponsorship program was launched in the last few months. There was/is resistance from local governments because they need additional funding from the central government in order to provide all the extra services for these people.

Most Syrian refugees have professional experience in a specific line of work and want to get back to that type of work they used to do. The UK needs to help them find jobs in the areas they used to work in. Some problems with this though - Language is an issue. Once the Syrian refugees are in the UK, they should not be prioritised or given preference over other people for certain jobs.

It would be hard to create such a programme anyway, though some organisations do exist that help specific people (academics, for example) find jobs. There are very few types of these organisations

Civil society organisations need to be vocal and vigorous about this. Civil society is extremely important in bending the arm of the government. Civil society's voice need to be heard at the level of the government. Perhaps civil society organisations should focus attention on getting refugees passports? That helped Russians and Armenians in the past to get visas in order to be able to work. In Canada, half of the Syrian refugees were sponsored and helped by civil society organisations. The UK does not allow private sponsorship of Syrian refugees

v) *What examples do we have of existing models for dealing with Syrian refugees?*

Canada's private sponsorship model. This could be expanded to other countries.

In South England villages, people are offering up their empty homes/rooms to refugees  
We need to push the UK to follow through on international law

We need to have the same definition of family. The definition needs to be expanded beyond the immediate family. It needs to include uncles, aunts, grandparents. Afghan youths can easily unify with people who they have no proven blood connection with while Syrians often can only be unified with their immediate family. In the US, the definition of family is considered to be only the nuclear family. The definition of family must be expanded to fit the culture of the people who are trying to unify with their families

Brazil has granted humanitarian visas, which combats the very big problem of the lack of legal routes to enter and exit the country. This is a big problem in all countries. The Canada program was well-received by the participants. We need to start looking at how such a sponsorship programme could actually enrich the lives of the people accepting Syrian refugees

Commonly cited statistic of it taking 17 years for refugees to return to their country, if they ever return, is problematic. This figure was published in a 2004 UNHCR report. It is a useless and meaningless statistic that is used to justify the length of the conflict and how long Syrian refugees have been out of their home country

## **7. Rebuilding Syria**

### *Sheltering*

7.1 This session is dedicated to rebuilding a post-conflict Syria. This deals with economics, education and structure. It also looks at prospects of rebuilding habitats for the future. Sheltering aid is very important during crisis. There is a cycle of how they deal with the tents. It starts with tents and moves into other more concrete housing. The goal is to find reusable, relocatable, recyclable, resalable housing. 1 in 123 humans are internally displaced. There are 4.8 million refugees displaced in Syria. When people fled they fled to neighbouring countries, predicted that 1.3 million. Half are living in hosting community and 20% live in camps.

7.1.1 During emergency situations, there is a scale of housing types that can be used to shelter displaced persons, ranging from impermanent emergency tents to more consolidated forms of housing. Ideally, the type of housing to be deployed should be reusable, recyclable and transportable.

7.2 Jordan is one of the major recipient countries for Syrian refugees. The number of refugees currently residing in Jordan is estimated at roughly 650,000; however, the actual figure is likely twice as high (1.3 million) with half of all refugees unregistered. 20 percent of Syrian refugees in Jordan are housed in the camps; and 80 percent are residing within Jordanian communities. Jordan thus has a long history of absorbing refugees; and the refugee camps within Jordan's territory have developed from impermanent emergency tents into a more permanent, embedded 'slum' settlement.

7.3 The Za'atari camp in Jordan is the largest in the Middle East and the second largest in the world; and has followed the development pattern whereby tents have been gradually replaced by more permanent prefabricated shelters. However, these shelters are substandard in manifold ways: they are often infested with rats; leakages are common; they provide insufficient weather protection especially in the dust storm-prone locale; there is insufficient ventilation which is compounded by inhabitants using curtains to gain privacy; space and privacy are insufficient, especially in view of cultural needs; communal toilet and showering arrangements again are culturally/gender insensitive forcing inhabitants to build their own toilets and shower in their huts minus correct sanitation, leading to waste water run-off; flammability is an additional threat.

7.4 These shelters are substandard and do not facilitate other services such as education or PTSD recovery. Women may need to rely on male relatives to access essential facilities and children often have to travel to collect water. The policy is generally that modifications are prohibited. The UNHCR has developed a framework for assessing sheltering for refugees and it can be observed that (i) the shelters in place in the Za'atari camp fall far short of meeting this criteria that (ii) is itself an insufficient framework for providing robust guidance on sheltering refugees in a way that respects culture and dignity.

7.5 In terms of driving improvement for refugee shelters, two questions need to be answered. First, how to achieve housing on a scale that provides quality in the interim; and second, whether there is a possibility of providing housing that can be deconstructed and reconstructed in Syria once the war is over and refugees begin to return.

7.6 Three major failures are observable in the current sheltering paradigm. When the camps were initially constructed, developers were not thinking long-term enough. Secondly, the camps currently do not allow for dignity or culture to be safeguarded. Thirdly, there are not enough architects dedicated to resolving this issue for the future.

7.7 Housing is segregated all over the world and speaks of inequality in society. Often, the sorts of emergency housing solutions adopted rely heavily on the Northern hemisphere and related cultural norms. There is often a harmful focus on trying to capture a 'fits all, ideal' model, but it is unrealistic to expect one form of housing to be suitable across different cultures and contexts.

7.8 The Za'atari and other camps in Jordan are very restrictive and many Syrian refugees seek to live in the local community, for example, if they can be sponsored to do so. Living outside the camp minus the provision of free food and shelter can be prohibitively expensive; and so many refugees are forced to return.

7.9 Often the emergency housing shelters are received from other Gulf donors and so there is

pressure to actually put them to use, even if they may be unsuitable. The emergency housing used in Jordan is developed from an UNHCR model but is fabricated in Jordan. IKEA has committed itself to the delivery of a model housing solution that would be fit for twenty-first century emergencies (i.e. with power outlets), however, the UNHCR has been slow to adopt this, most likely due to cost restrictions of roll-out.

7.10 While it is imperative that housing be fit for the longer-term in a way that protects dignity, the improvement of emergency housing is undermined by the mismatch between aid pledges and the amount of money that is actually being released. As much as 60 percent of pledges are not received. In other countries, there has been greater capacity for communities to take a more active role in developing the camps they occupy (i.e. Eritrea); however, this has not seemed to be the case so far in Jordan.

7.11 Refugee camps can often be built in a way that undermines both cultural needs and basic gender considerations that are essential for the security of women and children.

7.12 The hard distinction between those inside a refugee camp who are eligible for aid and those outside a refugee camp who are not eligible for aid is arbitrary. In Jordan, many poor local citizens lack basic services and cannot buy food; and yet they do not qualify for aid in the way that Syrian refugees do. With a more holistic, flexible and better-resourced housing/ aid policy, there is the potential to both provide for refugees and empower local Jordanian communities.

### *Education*

7.13 Approximately 5 million refugee children are out of school (70 percent). Within the Turkish education system, only a very small proportion of Syrian children are admitted and they are overwhelmingly primary school students who will find Turkish instruction less challenging. Extra Turkish classes are often provided for Syrian students, however, the struggles of studying the Turkish curriculum (vastly different from the Syrian curriculum) and the difficulties that the parents have with the Turkish language are significant obstacles. There are a number of Turkey-based Syrian schools teaching in Arabic, however, they use as many as nine different syllables, leading to educational fragmentation. The Turkish government recently announced a new road map to integrate all Syrian primary-school students into the Turkish education system; and this u-turn policy puts the future of these Syrian schools in doubt.

7.14 Often, the education that Syrian children are receiving does not provide relevant information, skills and developmental support. There is no consensus over a suitable curriculum to be taught to Syrian refugee students and international learning programmes are not always allowed to be used as an alternative. Many parents feel pressurised into sending their children to work rather than sending them to school. This impairs the future potential of post-conflict Syria, as young learners are not acquiring the necessary skills they will need further down the line.

7.15 There is prejudice against Syrian students, who are seen by the local population as weakening Turkey's own education system and stretching its resources/ resulting in fewer places for Turkish students. Syrian students of high school age are completely marginalised in educational planning. The focus is solely on the primary level.

7.16 In order to improve education provision for Syrian students, there is a need to identify those

groups who are most in need and ensure that they are admitted into educational structures. Combined with this, there needs to be greater thinking around new ways to educate in crisis situations and how to deliver suitable curriculums and education solutions.

7.17 With regards to the teaching of social subjects, it is difficult to unify the current Syrian curriculum which is vulnerable to certain narratives about Syrian modern history. The current Syrian curriculums are thus being ‘adapted’, with place names and events being changed to fit with current perspectives. However, there are many attempts to focus on core skill acquisition in literacy and numeracy to ensure that Syrian children do not fall behind the international peer group.

7.18 There are many obstacles to Syrian students accessing the Turkish education system. Often, Syrian refugees lack the necessary documentations and are reluctant to seek them in case it problematises their right to return to Syria after the war. Syrian parents often do not prefer the Turkish education system, however, there is always a fee involved with a Syrian school even when ostensibly they are free. Admissions to Turkish schools can be capped at low levels. However, there are initiatives to provide free university education to Syrian students in Turkey. Civil society further contributes school buildings and organises additional Turkish lessons.

7.19 There is a need to motivate Syrian students about education and the benefits it will provide. Arabic teaching needs to be combined effectively with Turkish instruction that will allow for Syrian families to integrate more effectively. Parents need help to fund their families so that education is not pushed down the list of priorities. Education today needs to activate the skills that will be called for in the post-conflict reconstruction of Syria.

## **8. Pathways to Peace**

8.1. Syria is one of the worst conflicts that will have lasted longer than World War II by March 2017. Three things are needed: 1) Understanding. This comes through academic research and through dialogue with people from the country and neighbouring countries; 2) Engagement. In order to have true understanding and passion, we must be engaged in working to help with the conflict. 3) Influence. Civil society influence is instrumental, but it will ultimately end in a political process (Geneva). We need grassroots activity and pressure to make this political process happen swiftly

8.2 It is hard to say where the turning point for peace will be, just as it was hard to know why the revolt of 2011 started exactly when it did. If a political solution keeps the regime in place with no significant changes to it, it will not work and there will not be peace. We need and can negotiate power-sharing. Assad’s regime will not negotiate in good faith unless it feels threatened. The way the regime is currently structured shows that it never had power-sharing on the table. The UN must realize this.

8.3. The key to making the regime feel threatened is Russia. Russia will only threaten the regime if Russia runs out of support for the war at home or if Russia runs out of money with which to support the regime. It is impossible to know why Russia and Iran are able to keep the regime going when they know what they have done (what atrocities they have committed). Russian policy must change for the conflict to be resolved. This may happen when Russia’s isolation from the West is reduced. If Trump wins the U.S. elections, maybe things in Syria will get better

Trump will be friends with Putin, and what is needed to end the conflict is a Russian-American alliance. More than likely, a Trump presidency will result in Assad reigning over Syria again.

8.4. Our key concern, therefore, in developing Pathways to Peace seems to be – ‘How does Russia back into the International Community?’ This is the key issue. Isolation and sanctions do not help, as it causes people to fall back on USSR stereotypes of the West being untrustworthy and the cause of their problems. The West must work with Russia. After the first weeks or months of the U.S. elections, there should be a push for an agreement to end the war in Syria. This will perhaps be possible under Clinton. While there are many issues between the opposition and the regime, what is impeding an agreement is the disagreement between Russia and the U.S.. The last truce/cease-fire agreement had no Syrian present. This is a problem as Syrian voices are not being included.

8.5. If international governments left Syria alone, they would find a solution as Syrians have a lot in common. They would draw together based on their consonances. Part of the West and Russia’s trajectory in the media is that they always focus on differences instead of common traits. Dividing Syria is not a good solution. It will just make things worse. We need to unite Syrians around what they have in common.

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