Centre for Peace Studies (CPS)

Intra State Conflict and Violence Against Civilians

A Study of the Syrian Civil War and the Violence Committed by the Assad Regime Against the Syrian People

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Table of Contents

1 Introduction

Syria can be defined as the lines on a map delineating the pre-conflictual borders, but as the regime has lost control over territory and population Syria is now a failing state. By late 2015, the civil war in Syria has claimed the lives of at least 250 000 civilians,[1] and displaced nearly 11.5 million people out of the pre-conflict population of about 22 million (Jenkins, 2013:4). More than half of the population is currently living as refugees. By January 2017, UN envoy Staffan De Mistura reported more than 400 000 dead, saying; *we had 250 000 as a figure two years ago, - well two years ago was two years ago!"* [2] By early 2017, the U.N. stopped counting the death toll in Syria, due to lack of confidence in its own data.

All major Syrian cities and urban areas now lay waste, bombed and burned. Syria`s entire economic foundation is gone, rendering reintegration of combatants and resettling of refugees exceedingly difficult. If Assad would be toppled or withdraw voluntarily, the civil war that has been fought alongside sectarian and ethnic lines, will not simply end with one man stepping down, like the overturn of Gadhafi led to the end of regime-hostilities in Libya. All of the combating elements in Syria can continue to fight without Bashar al-Assad leading one of the sides. The civil war is no longer about social change or replacing a dictator; the extreme violence between different religious and ethnic groups will create deep identity-based enclaves and demarcation lines, affecting the whole Middle East.

The Syrian people and the International community will have to deal with the fallout of the Syrian civil war in decades to come. Looking at all the different combating actors on the ground in Syria, the words of Thomas Hobbes seems fitting; *Bellum Omnium Contra Omnes –the war of all against all.*

This study will not offer a suggestion on how the remnants of Syria will be ruled in the future, how the broken society can be rebuilt, or how the extreme difficult sectarian situation can be solved. This study will try to learn from the conflict: The different combating forces in Syria actively use human rights abuse and violence against the civilian population as a strategy of war. One could argue that many of the actors in the Syrian conflict is driven by

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[1] UN: Alarmed by Continuing Syria Crisis, Security Council Affirms Its Support for Special Envoy's Approach in
[2] Reported by Foreignpolicy.com, see literature.

religious and identity-motives, acting out at the civilian population different from themselves, with reasons embedded in hate, vengeance or retribution, and that might be true for some of the actors currently fighting in Syria. Still, the Assad regime is responsible for as much as 90% of the civilian deaths, illegal imprisonment and torture – repeatedly abusing human rights.

The case with the violence dictated by The Assad regime is that it follows sectarian lines, but they are act of violence committed by professional trained and equipped state sponsored paramilitary groups and regular armed forces – indiscriminately attacking civilians with modern arms, artillery and airplanes. This study will try to reveal why the Assad regime is using extreme violence to win a conflict Bashar al-Assad himself has called a fight for the Syrian peoples hearts and minds. As a regime, attacking its own people to win a civil war, there has to be logic behind the implementation of the violence.

1.1 Aims and Question of Study

Understanding the causes of violence and inquiring the knowledge is an absolute necessity when a peace-like situation or genuine peace is the ultimate concern, thus providing insights into the nature and causes of conflicts, as well as efforts at building peace and restoring confidence in institutions in conflict-affected societies

Exploring motivation and reasons for engaging and perpetuating in violence aimed at the civilian populace is needed to be able to better protect people caught in a conflict zone. As the protection of civilians is an integral part of most international military interventions, understanding why and how civilians are targeted is a key factor in being able to protect them.

The aim of this study is three-fold: it will provide an understanding of the motivation for harming civilians and the nature of violence towards civilians in a conflict zone (question 1), it will categorize and evaluate the different phases of the Syrian civil war, reviewing the violence civilians experience in the hands of the Assad regime (2), and it will explain the patterns of violence seen in Syria (3).

This study will answer the following questions:

- What kind of violence did the Assad regime commit against the civilian populous in the Syrian civil war (1)?

- Why did the Assad regime commit violence against civilians in Syria (2)?

- What explains this pattern of (escalating) violence seen in Syria (3)?

Question 1 will be answered through part 4 of the study, with a concluding summary in part 5, giving the reader in-depth understanding of the situation in Syria. Question 2 will provide an understanding of the strategic concerns of the Assad regime, before undertaking the study`s main objective: analysing the phases of the Syrian civil war, identifying violence

used against the civilian population. This is done with an aim to explain the escalation of the violence seen in Syria (question 4).

Finally, the project will conclude with a section dedicated to what we can learn by investigating the use of violence against civilians, and how can this knowledge contribute to the understating of the use of violence against civilians in an armed conflict, and the debate on how to protect said civilians.

1.2 Relevance to Peace and Conflict Transformation and motivation

Peace and Conflict Transformation draws on a variety of conceptual ideas. Peace studies being an (historic-academic relativity speaking) "new" science, encompasses both new and old thoughts of philosophy and theory of political science, borrowing from other schools as well as fostering thinkers and theorists of their own.

Conflict Transformation is a process by which a conflict (of any kind and context) is transformed into a peaceful outcome. Theory in Conflict Transformation draws on many concepts of conflict management and conflict resolution: resting on traditional theorising about conflict, and should not be viewed as a wholly new approach; conflict Transformation theory is rather a re-conceptualisation within the field of Peace and Conflict studies and political theory in order to be relevant in the approach of contemporary conflicts (Miall, 2004:3).

Certain crucial changes in the nature of conflict (of which this study will give a brief accounting for) call for this re-conceptualisation: the complexity of modern conflict-situations contrasts with the relative simple core theories of (political science, strategic studies and) conflict resolution theory (Miall, 2004:3-4).

The nature of modern conflict and war becomes protracted: they have no natural endings, leading to the economic ruin of whole regions, displacement of huge numbers of peoples, warping societies and creating complex emergencies – on both local and international scales. Since the very structures of society and parties involved may become

embedded in conflictual relationships extending beyond the site of the conflict, spreading across borders and taking global scopes, the call for a revisited approach is obvious.

John Paul Lederach gives the following explanation: *"Conflict transformation must actively envision, include, respect, and promote the human and cultural resources from within a given setting. This involves a new set of lenses through which we do not primarily see the setting and the people in it as the problem, and the outsider as the answer. Rather we understand the long-term goal of transformation as validating and building on people and resources within the setting"* (sited in Miall, 2004:4).

It becomes evident that to be able to secure peace and a peaceful transition, one must understand the reasons for conflict, thus understand the underlying factors contributing to the violence. To understand why civilians is targeted in a conflict situation, will help decision makers (both political and military) identify the particular nature of threat facing civilians and be able to respond (military or humanitarian) in the way most likely to work (Beadle, 2014:3).

Protection of civilians is emerging as a key objective in most of today's military operations and humanitarian actions, still in many UN-theatres of aid and during military interventions, the protection of civilians under imminent threat has failed: Rwanda `94,[3] Bosnia `95 and in Darfur (2003-present[4]) to mention only but a few.

The failure to protect civilians is not because of the lack of political will or motivation; it reflects the lack of knowledge on how to apply military units to best utilize the force the units represent (Beadle, 2014:7). Exploration of the reasons (strategy) behind violence committed against civilians, categorizing and analysing the civil war in Syria as a case study, using the Norwegian Defence Research Institute`s (FFI) framework of generic scenarios[5] - will give insight in how and why civilians is targeted, leading to better understanding on how to protect civilians trapped in conflictual space. That is the study's primary motivation.

This study aims to contribute to the school of Peace and Conflict Transformation by creating a process-tracing framework for case study analysis, and utilizing theory and "how-

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[3] See *A People Betrayed: The Role of the West in Rwanda`s Genocide* by Linda Melvern (2000).
[4] UN resolution for Darfur 2007, see bibliography.

to" from the discipline to investigate and explain a phenomenon of which the discipline is concerned with.

1.3 Thesis outline

This study will present the context of which we are analysing the Syrian civil war. This is necessary for the following reasons: war is no longer what most people conceptualize when thinking about war. The ending of the Cold War brought with it a shift in war paradigm, total war is no longer a likely option for warfare, Rupert Smith[6] explains the post Cold War-situation as a move away from industrial war, towards what he calls *War amongst the people* (Smith, 2005:3). Smith explains the paradigm-shift with the following words: "War amongst the people is different (from "classical warfare"): it is the reality in which the people in the streets and houses and fields – all the people, anywhere – are the battlefield. Military engagements can take place anywhere: in the presence of civilians, against civilians, in defence of civilians. Civilians are targets, objectives to be won, as much as an opposing force" (Smith, 2005:3-4).

Chapter 2 gives a theoretical overview of the projects' context, explains the methods utilized, and the methodological position of the project, as well as commenting on what kind of sources the project research is based on.

Chapter 3 of the study will give the context for the Syrian civil war and explain the shift in paradigm, explaining its implications on *Intra-state war,* give an empirical walkthrough of the social unrest and conflicts in the Arab world leading to the conflict-situation in Syria, 2011, and the escalation to a fully-fledged civil war. Part 3 will end with an identification of the reasons for targeting civilians in the new type of warfare.

Chapter 4 will explain how this study divides the Syrian civil war into four phases and the parameters used to in-detail analyse each phase. This chapter will contain all four phases, thus containing all empirical data this study will rely on, - expatiating the phase-specific

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[6] Sir Rupert Smith (1943) is a Retired British Army General, author of *The Utility of Force* (2005), KCB, DSO, OBE, QGM. Smith held various British and UN-commands, during e.g. *Desert Storm* and in the Bosnian Intervention, and as Deputy Allied Supreme Commander Europe (NATO) (Smith, 2005: ix-xi).

actions in each phase. Each phase will be analysed by 5 given parameters, allowing a comparison of the phases up against each other. Chapter 3 will answer question 1: what kind of violence is committed against the civilian populous in the Syrian civil war, by the Assad regime, which will be summarised in Chapter 4.

Chapter 5 will give this study`s main analysis and discussion on all research question will analyse, summarise and conclude all three research-questions, and outline what is to be learned from the study and how this knowledge possibly could be used further to try to protect civilians in conflict situations. Chapter 6 will present a short and final conclusion on the research questions.

2 Methods and Sources

This study will use three main groups of sources: (I) previous research in the field of conflict and violence aimed at civilians (II) empirical data on the Syrian civil war, including research and literature on the Syrian conflict, (III) open sources of information: statistical data on violent (civilian) deaths, human rights reports, military evaluation and assessment of the conflict etc.[7] The exploratory approach of document analysis aims at creating a systematic review and analysis of previously written material on violence aimed at civilians (I), permitting and supporting the analysis of empirical data considering the Syrian civil war (II). Open sources of information will provide in-depth insight and statistics (III).

This study will offer a systematic review and analysis of written material and open sources. The approach does not challenge any research ethics; confidentiality and privacy infringement is not a concern. The data used consists of published research, books, articles and other open sources of information.

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[7] Scrutiny of open source information will be given, as well as the motivation for using said sources.

2.1 Case Study

During this project, the civil war in Syria is still on going, presenting the author with a set of problems, concerning difficulties regarding access to reliable sources, as this study will rely on primary and secondary literary sources. Source criticism, and evaluation of available reports, documents and other sources is embedded in the method chosen for the task.

The most important question regarding methodology is thus which tools and instruments the researcher utilizes in order to acquire knowledge. In practice, the question of methodology in social science, and qualitative versus quantitative methodology tends to be linked with both epistemology and odontology, since positivistic social science lends itself naturally to 'hard' methods, seeking unambiguous data, concrete evidence and rules and regularities, while more interpretive approaches require 'softer' methods allowing for ambiguity and contingency and recognizing the interplay between the researcher and the object of research (Porte & Keating, 2008, 26).

Regarding the case study method, case studies have (often) become a synonym for a free form research where almost everything is possible, where the author does not need to specify how she intends to do the research, how and why cases (or sets of cases) are selected, which data is included in the final paper and which are excluded – leading to a vague derivation on how inference comes from the case presented (Maoz, 2002, 164). This leads to the assumption that a case study often is seen as more of an interpretivist (and/or idiographic) tool. Case studies have also been associated with a distinctly qualitative approach (Bryman, 20012, 67-68).

The case study method is a specific research method, investigating a phenomenon as they occur, without any significant intervention by the researcher (Fidel, 1984, 274). Given the amount of time needed to compile a comprehensive case study, careful and purposive selection of the particular cases to be studied is crucial. Becker (1970, 75) identifies and separates case studies from other research methods, as referring to a detailed analysis of an individual case to such extent that the researcher properly can acquire knowledge and a comprehensive understanding about the phenomenon from intensive exploration of that single case: A macro level example could (e.g) follow through the ways in which policies are implemented from their process of formation, through to their implementation by different agencies, at different levels, down to their impacts on individuals and households. Following

processes through in this way is likely to be very useful in indicating the ways in which macro level policies might need to be changed in order to have the desired outcomes. The product of a good case study should be insight, as the case study process can produce accurate and convincing pictures of people and institutions.

With this approach, the case study-method attempts to gain a thorough understanding of an event, and at the same time develop a (more) general, and theoretical statement about the regularities in the observed case. The two-fold outcome will (potentially) be able to describe and understand the situation observed, and in the same time produce knowledge on the type, or category of which the phenomena could be described as. Smaller cases, articles, blogs etc. that all contribute bits and pieces of evidence that embody different units of analysis, all relevant to the central hypothesis, gives different angles and will in sum help the researcher to understand, or explore the main topic being investigated (Gerring, 2007, 173).

The researcher gathers data from a wide specter of sources, and should constantly critique and revisit the different data sources as the research proceeds. While doing so, the researcher must be well aware of the different underlying reasons, rationale or interest the different authors of e.g. articles, blogs, documents etc. have in creating those sources. The researcher must ask him or herself, why has this article been written? Who has written it, and for what institution, organization etc.? Is this article telling me about an objective truth concerning numbers and statistics, how correct are those numbers? How is the numbers gathered etc.? It is important to remember that human sources can be forged, corrupt or severely biased. The Meta sources can also have been interpreted - or read wrongfully.

Alongside source criticism, the researcher will have to describe as clearly as possible the procedures utilized to ensure that the data is recorded accurately, and that the data presented shows as much of the whole picture as possible, and is not "cherry picked" in order to reflect the research questions and hypothesis. When read by others, it is important that the reader can be able to backtrack the data, and be able to understand how the findings emerged from the data. In this text, this is secured with comments in footnotes explaining the source, as well as common academic procedures of siting.

A successful systematic and categorical analysis will provide the project with sufficient data in order to confirm the hypothesis delineating patterns of behaviour, hopefully generalizable to other similar situations as well. The researcher in a qualitative document

analysis does not need to "prove the truth" of their research and interpretations beyond all doubt, as most social scientists operate after different standards, requiring their peers to establish the persuasiveness of their findings against competing interpretations. In sum, qualitative analysis of documents requires rigorous and thorough project-implementation, with special attention to trustworthiness and external validity throughout the whole research process.

2.2 Validity and Reliability

Validity in case studies, and in social science in general revolves around the question *am I (the researcher) able to measure, explain and conclude on the concepts that I initially wanted to investigate*? Internal validity is concerned with the quality of the causal endings (cause and effect) of the cases investigated. External validity explains the potential to which degree the findings can be generalized to a larger population/other cases (Bryman, 2004:273).

The most important sources to internal validity in this case, is a product of the case study method. Case study analysis urges the researcher to take account for different types of source, investigating different sides of the case, and to read and evaluate huge amount of written content concerning the case. To identify the role of the different authors and to be able to accurately describe the data that the different sources provides is crucial. Every source has thus been cross examined in order to "test" what the source is actually saying, preferably identifying secondary sources, confirming the data by identifying them in other sources as well.

2.3 Scenario analysis and process tracing

This study will investigate the violence committed in Syria by analysing it through a given scenario: a table of seven generic scenarios developed by FFI (table 1, see below), describes situations in which civilians are in need of protections, as they are exposed to fundamentally different threats in a conflict space. This study will use the scenario-framework

to understand the Assad regimes actions during the Syrian civil war. The scenarios will help to create a framework and a context to categorize and analyse the empirical data.

This method also involves process tracing, which David Collier (2011) describes as a fundamental tool in qualitative analysis, and defines it as the systematic review and examination of diagnostic evidence selected and analysed in light of research questions and hypotheses posed by the investigator (Collier, 2011: 823). Collier follows George and Bennet`s (2005) within-case analysis-framework idea, where the key idea is that the point of departure is a single case, when reviewed with the perspectives of a wider comparative set of analytical tools, will grant a different, or more diverse narrative.

In this project this is conducted by analysing the different stages of the case, with a set of analytical parameters in order to create a comparative aspect that is meant to grant the reader a conceptualisation on how the case develops. The careful description is therefore fundamental, and the (generic) scenario analysis acts as a guiding tool in order to present the different stages to the reader. This form of process tracing will thus enact close engagement with case-knowledge, providing a good foundation for addressing the problem statement (Collier, 2011; 824).

A generic scenario reduces uncertainty and complexity when analysing a violent conflict. When based on the growing literature on the motivations and methods of violence against civilians, incorporating experiences of post-Cold War military/humanitarian interventions and efforts – a generic scenario can identify threats, and then be able to suggest realistic (military) planning scenarios for the protection of civilians (Beadle, 2014:12 on methodology).

When analysing a violent conflict by using generic scenarios, one is given a framework and a start from which to navigate complex conflict-dynamics. The report from which the scenarios stem from gives the following explanation of utility: *Insights such as these are intended to help military staffs during key planning processes, e.g. when identifying a perpetrator's center of gravity, critical requirements, particularly valuable targets, or when deciding on the most effective course of action from a protection-perspective* (Beadle, 2014:7). This study will transfer the insight to understand the Assad regime`s actions, and use the scenario-framework as an analytical base to review the violence committed during the Syrian civil war.

Combining the qualitative process tracing method with the generic scenario and the parameters presented by FFI`s model (see Table 1, next page), gives the project a framework to situate the different aspects of the conflict, in order to follow the development of the violence committed by the regime.

The key characteristics of each scenario are summarized in Table 1:

Generic scenario	1. Type of actor	2. Rationale	3. Strategies and tactics	4. Relevant mil. capabilities	5. Expected outcome
GENOCIDE Halabja ('88) Rwanda ('94) Srebrenica ('95)	States, or the militarily superior actor	To exterminate a certain group	Destroy existence of a group through several, simultaneous mass-killings, deportation, camps, systematic rape to prevent reproduction	Command and control, freedom of movement for special/irregular units, sufficient small arms	Majority of targeted civilians killed (50+%), in relatively short time
ETHNIC CLEANSING Bosnia ('92–95) Kosovo ('99) Kyrgyzstan ('10)	States, or the militarily superior actor	To expel a certain group from a specific territory	Force targeted group to leave through threats, demonstrative killings, brutality, mass-rape, destruction of property	Command and control, freedom of movement for irregular units, regular units for military control	Only a few per cent killed, but vast majority of victims expelled (~90%) Destruction of victim homes and cultural buildings
REGIME CRACKDOWN Iraq ('86-89) Darfur ('03–) Libya ('11) Syria ('11–) ISIS ('13–)	Authoritarian regimes, or de facto authorities in an area	To control restless populations, on basis of real or perceived affiliation with opposition	Violently repress the population at large, through selective and indiscriminate violence, threats, mass-detention, rape as terror, massive destruction, occasional massacres	Command and control from regime, freedom of movement for regular forces, heavy weapons, special/irregular units in support	Mostly combatant deaths, gradual increase in civilian deaths due to heavy weapons and in accordance with intensity of fighting, large-scale displacement, widespread destruction of population centres
POST-CONFLICT REVENGE Kosovo (post-99) Iraq (post-03)	Individuals or mobs	To avenge past crimes on a tit-for-tat basis	Settle personal scores through criminal acts of violence, such as murder, arson, kidnapping, looting	Freedom of movement for individuals and small groups to access victims	Only a few killed (dozens, hundreds), but groups associated with perpetrator may flee after relatively little violence
COMMUNAL CONFLICT Ituri ('99–03) Iraq ('06–07) Jonglei ('09–)	Whole tribal, ethnic or sectarian communities (possibly with outside support)	To avenge the last round of violence and to deter further retribution out of self-defence	Attempts to coerce other community into submission through massacres, abductions, raids, destruction of homes and means of survival, often seeking to maximise violence	Freedom of movement to reach other communities, access to deadlier weapons and means of communication is associated with higher lethality	Relatively high number of people killed and abducted, especially women and children Livelihoods stolen or killed Temporary displacement in homogenous areas, more gradual withdrawal to 'their own' in mixed areas
PREDATORY VIOLENCE Renamo ('75–92) RUF ('91–'02) LRA ('94–)	Rebel groups (predatory behaviour)	To survive or make a profit by exploiting civilians	Coerce civilians into compliance through plunder, taxation, forced recruitment, opportunistic rape, brutality, especially against 'easy targets'	Freedom of movement to pick time and place of attack, operational secrecy, outside support, possibly central command	Temporary, but large-scale displacement in affected areas and disproportionately many relative to the number of people actually attacked Many abductions, especially of young adolescents
INSURGENCY FARC ('64–) Taliban ('06–) al-Shabaab ('06–)	Rebel groups (classic insurgents with political or ideological objectives)	To control populations upon which they depend and undermine trust in their rivals	Selective and indiscriminate violence, through threats, targeted killings, bombings, retribution, depending on their level of control	Freedom of movement to pick time and place of attack, access to indiscriminate and explosive weapons	Fewer killed and injured than in other scenarios, most due to indiscriminate weapons Gradual displacement from areas of heavy fighting

Table 1

The Scenarios are generic: they are not limited to specific or given locations, actors, time and space or other interchangeable characteristics of conflict. The scenarios describe common characteristics of conflict where certain types of actors target civilians –, in certain ways i.e. how civilians is targeted on similar basis (Beadle, 2014:22). All scenarios describe a situation that possibly can fall within the definition if a civil war. This study will identify which scenarios that are relevant in the case of the on-going Syrian civil war. Since more than one scenario is unfolding simultaneously during some phases, the study will present a model clarifying the scenarios interaction and impact on each other (see part 4). It is important to note that the different scenarios provide a possibility to distinguish between different threats to civilians, again requiring a different response from the international community (in an eventual intervention or humanitarian aid-action).

Regime Crackdown (table 1.2) is the scenario describing the situation in Syria, and is also the base of analysis this study will rely on. Each scenario contains five parameters: (a) the actor performing the violence, (b) the rationale for exposing civilians to violence, (c) the tactics and strategies the actor employs, (d) the capabilities the actor holds (e) the expected outcome when succeeding in utilizing violence.[8]

Generic scenario	1. Type of actor	2. Rationale	3. Strategies and tactics	4. Relevant mil. capabilities	5. Expected outcome
REGIME CRACKDOWN Iraq ('86-89) Darfur ('03–) Libya ('11) Syria ('11–) ISIS ('13–)	Authoritarian regimes, or de facto authorities in an area	To control restless populations, on basis of real or perceived affiliation with opposition	Violently repress the population at large, through selective and indiscriminate violence, threats, mass-detention, rape as terror, massive destruction, occasional massacres	Command and control from regime, freedom of movement for regular forces, heavy weapons, special/irregular units in support	Mostly combatant deaths, gradual increase in civilian deaths due to heavy weapons and in accordance with intensity of fighting, large-scale displacement, widespread destruction of population centres

Table 1.2

These are the parameters that follow the case from phase to phase, as part of the process tracing method. The parameters are identified and implemented into the main

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[8] For a more detailed explanation of the generic scenarios and the five analytical parameters, see FFI-report 2014/00519 *Protection of civilians* – military planning scenarios and implications, by Alexander W. Beadle.

analysis, and by dividing the Syrian civil war into four phases; each phase will be reviewed using these parameters, creating a base for comparison, distinguishing actions committed against the civilian populace during each face. The analytical output of this method is to identify a pattern of escalating violence: violence committed by the Assad regime against the Syrian population.

3 Theory and Context

This project is not aimed at being a theory-heavy academic analysis, but seeks to further the tradition of Peace and Conflict Transformation as a "hands-on" discipline, borrowing analytical method and *how-to* from every social discipline, ranging from sociology, anthropology, political science and others. The main bulk of theory creates more of a backdrop for the project, and a contextual setting. The theory can help the reader to understand the situation in Syria, and how some of the dynamics operate. The project`s goal is to use the theory to help explain how and why situations where a regime (like Assad`s) benefits from using violence against its own population. To do so, this chapter presents theory on conflict, and the nature of modern conflicts, intra-state conflict and warfare, civilians in conflict zones and conflict transformation theory. The chapter also presents contextual theory on war, and intra-state war in the 21st century, and gives a short empirical walkthrough on Syria and the Arab Spring of 2011, and the ethnical composition of the Syrian population.

3.1 Conflict and Conflict Theory

Conflict is a universal function in human society, and derives from any situation that can create opposing parts in a given matter: economical differentiation, social change, cultural dichotomies, political organization, and religious contention is examples of conflict-inherent phenomenon that often leads to conflict. Conflicting parties have, or will have mutual incompatible goals, giving a straightforward definition: a conflict arises when different groups pursue different goals. Jeong adds to this by saying conflict encompasses competition (Jeong: 2008:7): A competition that can be as primal as survival: *a struggle over values and claims to*

scarce status, power and resources (Boulding, sited in Jeong: 2008:5). Conflict thus represents the persistent and pervasive nature of inter-group and international competition among disparate interests and values that underlies power dynamics. This nature could essentially be understood as the difficulties involved in meeting everyone`s aspirations simultaneously (ibid).

The nature of conflict is understood as a zero-sum game, if one party wins in one category, the opposing party will loose in the same category (pyrrhic victories set aside). The ultimate threat in a zero-sum game is power projection, thus power and security is closely linked. The more power one party can project, the lesser is the threat of other parties asserting their power, promoting their own interests on behalf of other parties interests.

The logic of power projection in a zero-sum game can be interpreted as a *security-dilemma*: When one party is enhancing their ability to project power (researches defence-technology, builds advanced weaponry, drafts soldiers etc.), this threatens other parties as they fare the first party will be able to project more power then they could, thus being at their mercy if a conflict would arise. This will lead to the second party enhancing their own abilities, leading to an arms-race, a mutual fear of the other parties capabilities, developing a downwards spiral of mistrust and mutual fear (Ramsbotham et. al, 2011).

The security-dilemma creates an arena of competition and can lead to constructive and destructive conflict. Constructive conflict is the kind of conflict that can bring forth better understanding, enlightenment or reconciliation, operating with a belief that all involved parties can win as long as the party's goals are flexible. A contributing factor to maintaining stable constructive conflicts is the nexus to destructive conflict; if the parties involved are not able to create a constructive conflict, the danger of a destructive conflict arising is imminent. A destructive conflict is a situation where one or all party's goal is to persuade the others to fulfil its will: Part A will use it`s power to control, force or defeat part B, giving part A the pareto efficiency and part B the zero (of the zero-sum game).

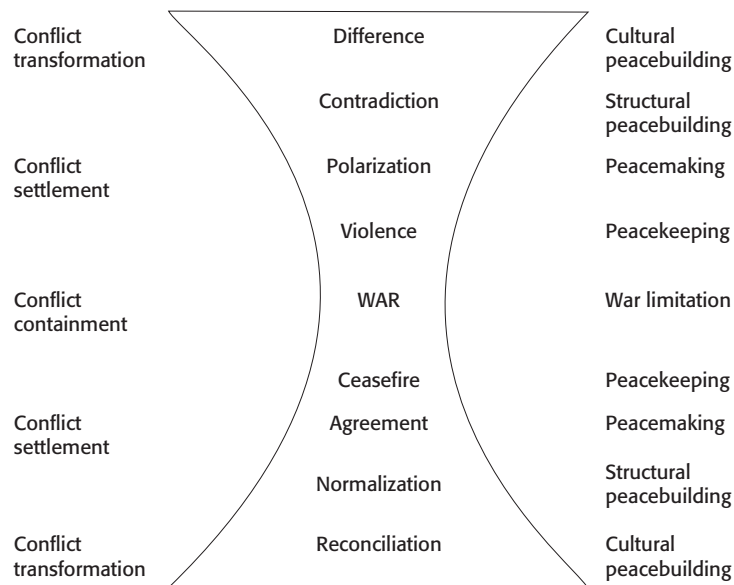As power is seen as the ultimate tool in a zero-sum conflict, a crucial part of a conflict rotates around how power is used. Power in the kind of conflict-situation this study is analysing, relies on the parties use of force; utilizing force to coerce the other party. Max Weber defines power as "the ability of an individual or group to achieve their own goals or aims when others are trying to prevent them from realising them".

The most destructive conflicts are intra-state conflict or civil war. Often notorious for its raw brutality, inhumane methods of war and destructive setting where ethnicities, cultures, religion and/or communities are set up against each other, sparking sectarianism, ethnic cleansing or genocide (only to mention but a few possible aspects of intra-state conflict we have seen the last centuries). Related to the term conflict is conflict-attitude.

Conflict-attitude can be defined as attitude and conceptions aimed at the other party: emotive perceptions and expected actions and patterns of behaviour. Attitudes such as anger, fear, envy, suspiciousness etc. Conflict-attitudes describes how a conflict is perceived and defined, and will reflect the parties actions aimed at modifying the other party`s goals.

Johan Galtung, one of the founders of Peace Studies, explains conflict as a dynamic process where the structures within the conflict are affected by the different parties opposites, attitudes, and behaviour. The conflict-process is thus affected by the conflict-attitude, and the dynamics of the process consists of mutual influence between the conflict-attitudes dimensions. Escalation and de-escalation represents the dynamics within the dimensions, and is a complex interplay of attitudes and behaviour that can have their own reality, depending on the nature of the conflict.

Building on Galtung`s work on dynamic conflict processes, theorists of conflict transformation theory have developed a model utilized to analyse conflict and different phases of a conflict, seeking to identify the appropriate response to each separate phase.

Conflict transformation		Difference	Cultural peacebuilding
		Contradiction	Structural peacebuilding
Conflict settlement		Polarization	Peacemaking
		Violence	Peacekeeping
Conflict containment		WAR	War limitation
		Ceasefire	Peacekeeping
Conflict settlement		Agreement	Peacemaking
		Normalization	Structural peacebuilding
Conflict transformation		Reconciliation	Cultural peacebuilding

Model 2.1.1. (The Hourglass-model, Ramsbotham et.al. 2011:14).

The model shows a conflict arising, from a situation leading to a conflict - conflict transformation, open war and reconciliation, including all stages in-between. The model escalates downwards, showing what state the conflict is in in the middle, which level of conflict transformation the conflict is experiencing to the left, and what kind of response is required to the right (Ramsbotham et.al, 2011:14).

The model encompasses Galtung`s idea of dynamic conflict-processes with possible (theoretical) approaches to peacebuilding. It lies in the very nature of conflict that every conflict is highly subjective and that each conflict will have its own conflict transformation; the unpredictability will be great in terms of when a process is over and a new one begins, e.g. when polarization turns into violence etc.

Different conflicts do share some coinciding features, that can be predictable, and that is what both Ramsbotham et.al illuminates with the Hourglass-model and Beadle et.al (FFI) is doing with their model of Scenario-analysis. FFI`s project`s narrative is similar to the hourglass model, and what both the hourglass model and FFI`s table contributes to this project is structure, and a situating of the on-going conflict in Syria.

3.2 Civilians in Warzones

In this text, violence against civilians is defined here as physical violence that targets individuals causing injury, death, and/or psychological trauma, and violence that destroys or dam- ages private property. Violence is not only a denying characteristic of conflict; it is also intimately tied to its history and perpetuation.[9]

Stathis Kalyvas *The Logic of Violence in Civil War* attempts to demonstrate the mechanisms that can explain violence occurring during a civil war. The dynamics of civil war explored by Kalyvas shows that violence in a civil war has its own logic and rationale. Violence can thus not be reduced to what Kalyvas sees as irrational factors such as emotions, illogical behaviour, pre-existing ideological/religious cleavages etc.

By ignoring ideology and the bigger picture of the war, Kalyvas decouples civil war from civil war-violence: the focus is on the micro-dynamics of types of violence, distinguishing between violence as and outcome and violence as a process. Violence is thus reduces to a dependent variable. This understanding of violence enables a theoretical breakdown in to two basic categories: *Selective violence* and *indiscriminate violence*.

Selective violence describes direct aggression towards individuals who are targeted based on a specific motive: the individual is carrying a weapon, the individual is a known supporters of one side, etc. Indiscriminate violence is executed en masse lacking regards of collateral damage, destruction of infrastructure or housing areas etc. (Kalyvas, 2006:21).

Following Kalyvas logic, the production of selective violence in civil wars is a function of the intersection between the actions of the different combating groups (able and willing to harm civilians) and the actions of the civilians (Balcells, 2010:297). The structural builds of the society often determine how civilians act and operate, within given circumstance. The civilian modus operandi changes as the conflict develops. Factors such as economic perspectives, availability of food, water, medical treatment and such, will affect the civilian population will to stay in the combat zone, or flee. These factors are combat-related structural factors, and are directly affected by how the conflict is fought.

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[9] ARK Group, The Syrian Conflict; A Systems Conflict Analysis. 2016

A high intensity conflict where one or both sides utilizes heavy artillery, air bombardment and such, will indirectly affect civilians, as they can suffer from the weapons splash-effects such as destroyed infrastructure, housing etc. or even directly affected by the ordinance, even if they are not directly targeted. High intensity conflicts produce a battle space where civilian infrastructure is damaged or destroyed, as the nature of the high intensity conflict allows the opposing sides to utilize weapons and tactics that potentially can damage and destroy whole city-districts in one barrage or attack. In these situations, a city or a village that becomes the scene of an engagement, will suffer greatly from the use of indiscriminate use of force, and the societal structural factors such as housing, access to food, water and medicine, electricity and such, will be affected by the combat. The civilians caught in these types of situations is often forced to leave the battle space in share need, as their primal needs will be threatened and their physical safety challenged by the on-going fighting (Kalyvas, 2006:20-24).

A low intensity conflict using only small arms will not directly affect or destroy civilian infrastructure. Political, religious and cultural support for either side however, will affect the incentives of the combating groups to target civilians. Collaboration with either sides, can (and often will) lead to the involvement of larger civilian groups, as factors such as cultural belonging, religion, race etc. can be targeted as a common denominator, leading the actions of one or few members to attract retribution or vengeance to the group as whole. This is what Kalyvas identifies as selective (and motivated) violence.

Civilians might also be targeted as a part of a terror-strategy, to inflict fear, to induce support for either sides, or simply as part of a survival strategy of a warring side that finances their campaign through looting, and predatory violence. The civilians' incentive to stay in the combat zone, when targeted by selective violence, is thus often psychologically motivated. Structural factors such as availability of water, electricity, housing etc. is less common a factor, as the direct and selective violence seeks to target the civilians; the perpetrators will have the will to do so, and an incentive to act in a certain way.

Still, a combination of selective and indiscriminate violence is possible, as indiscriminate attacks on larger urban centres, or civilian zones can potentially be a planned action to target civilians. When one of the warring parties utilizes indiscriminate weapons as a tool to inflict violence directly aimed at civilians, the violence itself becomes a tactic or a part of a military strategy.

When the violence is implemented through a chain of command and executed on the field, the motivation to target civilians exists as part of something bigger, and will often be understood as an expression of evil, desperation, or as pure terror.

3.3 Context

The emphasis and concern for the protection of civilians is a consequence of the changes in the way modern war is fought. Failure to protect civilians in conflict situations is embedded in the (recurring) failures to find utility for the armed forces (Smith, 2005:4). Already mentioned are the Balkan-crisis, Rwanda and the on-going war in Darfur, the same is evident in e.g. the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. Smith attributes this to a deep confusion between deploying force and employing force (Smith, 2005:4).

In Bosnia (e.g.) humanitarian aid relief, UN-observers and peacekeepers was deployed and an international military forces was given the task to keep the warring sides apart and away from civilians and refugees. Nonetheless, genocide and atrocities took place, civilians were harmed, and the operational effort to hinder violence was minimal: the function of the forces deployed was not consistent – the military was not given instructions on how to operate in such a complex conflict-scenario.

The much-needed pre-requisition for how to act and respond was not formulated: the utility of military forces protecting civilians is different from the classical utility and understanding of military forces and their capabilities. Modern armed forces are still built and operated to defend, defeat and conquer – the classical conceptualization of an army`s utility. Today's soldiers are attributed more then just the role of the warrior; the soldier is also a diplomat, humanitarian, constabulary and paradoxically a peacekeeper (Koltke-Rivera et.al, 2004:232).

3.4 War in the 21st century

Clausewitz (2007:13)[10] defines war as "*an act of violence intended to compel our opponent to fulfil our will*". Clausewitz analysis describes war between states; financed by states, fought by states in the interest of states with the use of regular, national armed forces; *Classical warfare*. Classical wars were traditionally fought predominantly due to ideological and geopolitical causes. In *The Utility of Force,* sir Rupert Smith uses *Industrial War* for the Clausewitzean type of warfare (Smith, 2005:68-70.) Industrial war mobilizes all elements of the state, both civilian and military, towards the war effort; war becomes industrialized both in practical terms and in means of production of arms, soldiers etc. This study will use *Classical War* (-fare) to denote the pre-Cold War type of warfare.

Our perception of war and warfare has now changed: the likelihood of one state declaring war against another, motivated by greed, the will to conquer or dominate other states seems vague. Rupert Smith and others[11] argue that this change happened after the end of the Cold War: the need for large, industrialized armies, aimed at defeating another (state-based) army on a traditional field of battle[12] was gone. The "New Wars" (which this study will denote as *Modern Warfare*) is a product of the changed global political atmosphere (post 1991), alongside globalisation of contemporary politics, economy, trade and eventually conflict (Malantowicz, 2013:52).

Contrary to how military leaders planned the onslaught of a potential new world war during the Cold War – now, in many military engagements and interventions since 1991, possession of sophisticated, modern equipment does not necessarily lead to a decisive victory: the *War on Terror* was conducted at delivering one final victory over terror (according to the decision makers who declared it), following the paradigm of classical war, but operating in an conflictual space of modern war (Smith, 2005:25-26).

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[10] Carl von Clausewitz, *On War (Vom Kriege)*, Oxford: Oxford Unicersity Press, 2007. First published in 1832.

[11] R. Smith, A. Malantowicz, A. Beadle, J. Kiszely, H. Münkler, just to mention a few.

[12] Smith actually points out that this paradigm changed with the entry of nuclear weapons, which can eliminate a whole army in seconds.

Rupert Smith identifies the following characterizations of modern war:[13]

- A shift from hard, absolute objectives towards malleable objectives concerning the individual and societies.
- The battlefield is moved to urban centres and is constantly observed by the media.
- Modern conflicts tend to be timeless: the conflicts have no natural ending, no absolute victory.
- Instead of victory at all cost, modern war is fought not to lose the force.
- Old weapon, new tactics: the tools of classical warfare becomes irrelevant in modern war, and is adapted for new use.
- The sides are (mostly) non-state: Multinational alliances or coalitions fight some party or parties that are not states.

"These six trends reflect the reality of our new form of war: it is no longer a single massive event of military decision that delivers a conclusive political result" (Smith, 2005:17).

Part 4 will analyse some of the findings in part 3, using Smith`s characteristics.

To understand the context, of which the Syrian civil war is fought, is crucial to be able to understand the violence and violent behaviour aimed at the civilian population. Many of the aspects of the Syrian civil war are a direct consequence of how war is fought in the 21st century. Kaldor states that contemporary wars are based on identity politics: movements around the mobilization of ethnic, racial and religious identity for the purpose of claiming state power.

It becomes evident that modern war is about state dismantling (rather than geopolitics and conquering the opponents territory): modern wars are in general of an intrastate nature, violence is invoked by social change: demonstrators and rebellions forming paramilitary groups – expulsion of the population and/or alienation of "others" within the state (Malantowicz, 2013:53). This is an evident factor of the Syria civil war, and of the Arab spring in general.

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[13] Smith calls this *War Amongst the People.*

Kaldor suggest that modern war is characterized by a multitude of different fighting units and formations, public, private, state and non-state. Insurgents, foreign mercenaries, warlords and militias (e.g.) alter the objective of warfare: instead of winning battles, different participants in a conflict will aim at gaining local support to topple the states legitimate authorities (Malantowicz, 2013:53-54).

3.5 Intra-state War

Carl von Clausewitz classical theory defines war as "a continuation of policy by other means" – meaning that war was an instrument of governments (Betts, 2005:469). Clausewitz provides conceptual clarity on what war and intrastate war is, and insight into the dynamics of war. In particular Clausewitz can offer a sophisticated conception on the dialectics of war, crucial for understanding unconventional warfare then and now: in symmetrical wars, Clausewitz argues that it is important not to get lost on the tactical level of skirmishes, but to seek the strategic decision.

Conventional big wars are usually waged tactically in the defense, strategically in the offence. In unconventional small wars (and intra-state war), this relationship is reversed. Since the non-state actor is militarily week, he cannot directly assault the enemy forces, but must resort to small-scale attacks against detachments, logistical outposts and lines of communication (Clausewitz, 1980:952). As we will see in chapter 3, Clausewitz thoughts on this type of warfare is highly applicable for the Syrian civil war.

Modern Intra-state warfare tends to erupt within states where authoritarian regimes, has been weakened by the exposure to the globalising world (Malantowicz, 2013:52), and the wave of media and communication technology of the 2000`s that has spread to all corners of the world. John Galvin wrote the following in 1992: "in the immediate future we will see the same causes of low-intensity conflict we have found in the past, including weak national administrations, lack of political infrastructure, economic stagnation, historic problems of disfranchisement for large parts of the citizenry, corruption and mismanagement, and difficult military–civil relationships".[14] Conventional civil war often takes place in clearly delineated

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[14] J. Galvin, 'Conflict in the Post-Cold War Era' in E. Corr & S. Sloan (ed.), Low Intensity Conflict, 1992, p. 60.

spaces. Combatants are generally young men, lured by economic incentives, voluntarily or forcibly recruited by armed groups, who engage in combat primarily on a frontline. To draw the frontlines on a map can be highly challenging, as one (or more of the sides) often have few or non professional military elements within their ranks, and operate cloaked in civilian clothing (Balcells, 2010; 298).

Building on this knowledge on war, and transferring the rhetoric to intra-state war, key-notions of the Syrian conflict is exposed. All these aspects is included in the on-going high-intensity intra-state war in Syria, which include all parameters set by Rupert Smith describing contemporary warfare.

3.6 Syria and the Arab Spring

After Syria gained independence in 1946, 20 years of unrest followed until the Ba`ath Party´s coup d`etat in 1964, consolidating the power of the Ba`ath party, General Hafez al-Assad declared himself prime minister in 1970, and president in 1971.[15] President Hafez al-Assad divided the state apparatus between different communities, strongly favouring his own Alawite community, and centred power around his own figure and family. When Hafez al-Assad died in 2000, his son, Bashar al-Assad took over the presidency. The Assad regime bred discontent in the Sunni majority, as they were considered secondary to the Alawite minority, and the on-going disfavouring starting in the early 1970s created a Sunni opposition, driven by the Muslim Brotherhood, arguably giving scope for radical elements like Al-Quada and later the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS).

The Arab spring was a revolutionary wave of protests, demonstrations, riots and civil wars in the Arab world. Civil unrest started in Tunisia on 18 of December 2010, spreading throughout the surrounding countries and the states of the Arab League through 2012. The initial social mobilisation was instigated by dissatisfaction with the rule of local government, amplified by a variety of factors; dictatorship, absolute monarchy, disproportionate income levels, political and economical corruption, human rights abuse, to mention but a few.

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[15] Arnav Mariawala, "The Syrian Civil War – Regime of Bashar al-Assad". Stanford, 2014, p 5.

In March 2011 demonstrations broke out in Syria, voicing their discontent about the Assad regime and its domestic politics. Syria's president, Bashar al-Assad employed the same response as his father, Hafez al-Assad had done in the 1980s when subduing the uprising led by the Muslim Brotherhood.

The counterinsurgency-campaign of the 1980s relied on three co-employed strategies for generating and use of military force[16]:

- A careful selection of the most loyal and trusted military units to be used.
- Training and deploying pro-regime, local militias.
- Using the militias to flush insurgents out of urban areas and then defeating them with heavy-equipped, regular forces.

Following his father's doctrine during the first half of 2011, Bashar al-Assad relied on a small core of trusted soldiers and paramilitary loyalists, which led to a limited ability to control all of Syria: The rebellion was much larger then during the 1980s, thus gaining stronger foothold and possibility to organize and spread.[13]

The violent response of the Assad regime led to a spiral of violence forming along sectarian fault-lines, as it is (in most regions of Syria) a conflict between the Sunni majority and the ruling Alawite minority. Other minorities (such as Christians, Jews, Kurds) and different ethnicities are trapped in the midst of the conflict (Jenkins, 2014:4). Jihadists and Islamist hardliners has since the conflict erupted grown into a substantial force, predominantly made up of al Qaeda- and al Qaeda linked organisations such as the Jabhat al-Nusrah, and (now separately) ISIL (Jenkins, 2014:9). Al Quada and the al-Nusrah front fields somewhere between 5 and 6,000 combatants, while ISIL`s numbers between 20,000 and 31,500[17] (claimed by the CIA in 2014), even tough the sources vary.

Other rebel organisations, primarily The Islamic Front compromises around 45,000 militants, foreign fighters belonging to all organisations counts between 6 and 8,000 men, coming from mostly Arab countries such as Iraq, Tunisia and Libya, and between 1,500 and

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[16] Joseph Holliday, Middle East Security Report 8, ISW: 2013, page 7.
[17] A claim made by the CIA: http://news.yahoo.com/20-000-31-500-fighters-iraq-syria-cia-230059844.html in 2014.

2,000 volunteers from Europe (Jenkins, 2014:19) - all contributing to the chaotic field of battle Syria has since become. These numbers from 2014 is an estimate done by the Brian Michael Jenkins and the RAND Corporation, compromising a number of reports by different sources, including the CIA, U.S. State Department, The House Committee on Foreign Affairs – U.S. Congress, Institute for the Study of War (in Washington) and the International Institute of for Strategic Studies in London, only to mention a few.[18] An important factor concerning this study is the fact that even though western media depicts ISIL and other Islamists as one of the largest actors in the on-going conflict, the Assad regime is attributed about 90% of all civilian deaths.

3.7 Ethnic composition of Syria and Sectarianism

One of the most difficult and sensitive issues concerning the Syrian civil war is sectarianism: discrimination, bigotry, hatred (etc.) stemming from a strict feeling of belonging to one sect, belief, ethnicity etc. – attaching relations of superiority over other groups (…). Sectarianism is evoking powerful emotions in Syria: Pre-conflictual Syria consisted of about 22 million people, 10-12% Christians and 87% Muslims, of which 16% is Alawite (the ruling minority) and other sects.

The majority of the Muslims are of Sunni faith (74%).[19] Ethnically, about 90% of the population is Arabian, including a group of Palestinian Arabs. Other ethnicities constitutes about 9,7% of the population – made up by Kurds, Turkmen and Armenians.

It is important to understand the complicated composition of ethnicities and religion in Syria to be able to understand the civil war and the violence brought on by it. The sole reason for the initial demonstrations and conflict may not be sectarian. The sectarian nature of the conflict rose forth as Assad`s security and military forces is almost exclusively Alawite, as is the paramilitary organisations and the militias raised by Assad during the first months of the conflict. The conflict-escalation and use of violence is heavily dominated by sectarian elements, as Assad answered the initial demonstrations with profoundly violent responses.

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[18] B.M. Jenkins "*The Dynamics of Syria`s Civil War":* Rand Corporation, 2014.
[19] Syrian demograpich numbers found in the CIA World Factbook:
https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/sy.html

(See the Appendix for a more detailed overview of Syria`s ethnic and religious composition)

4   Empirical Case Study

The unveiling of the Assad regimes violent answer to initial relatively peaceful demonstrations – and the logic behind it, leading to a spiral of violence will be analysed by categorizing the conflict into different phases. Each phase will be analysed by using the generic scenario suitable for the conflict.

When looking at table 1, Regime Crackdown is the generic scenario most suitable for exploring and explaining the conflict situation in Syria. Beadle describes Regime Crackdown as a scenario "where a regime responds to threats against its own survival with *violent repression of its own population*. The threat to civilians comes primarily from the indiscriminate tactics used by the regime to suppress all forms of resistance. Civilians are targeted on basis of real or perceived affiliation with the opposition. This threat is likely to persist until the regime is overthrown, prevails, or it escalates into Ethnic Cleansing or Genocide" (Beadle, 2014:34).

Beadle identifies the possibility for escalation of one scenario, or a shift in to another scenario, either by replacing the original scenario or creating a situation where two or more scenarios overlap each other. The Syrian civil war can thus be defined as a scenario-overlapping situation. The original scenario (Regime Crackdown) led to a situation of Insurgency.From Insurgency we can identify situations found in Predatory Violence. The complex situation in Syria that has developed from early 2011 to 2013 quickly developed a sectarian nature, thus laying ground for Communal Conflict.

The following model depicts the interaction of the different generic scenarios:
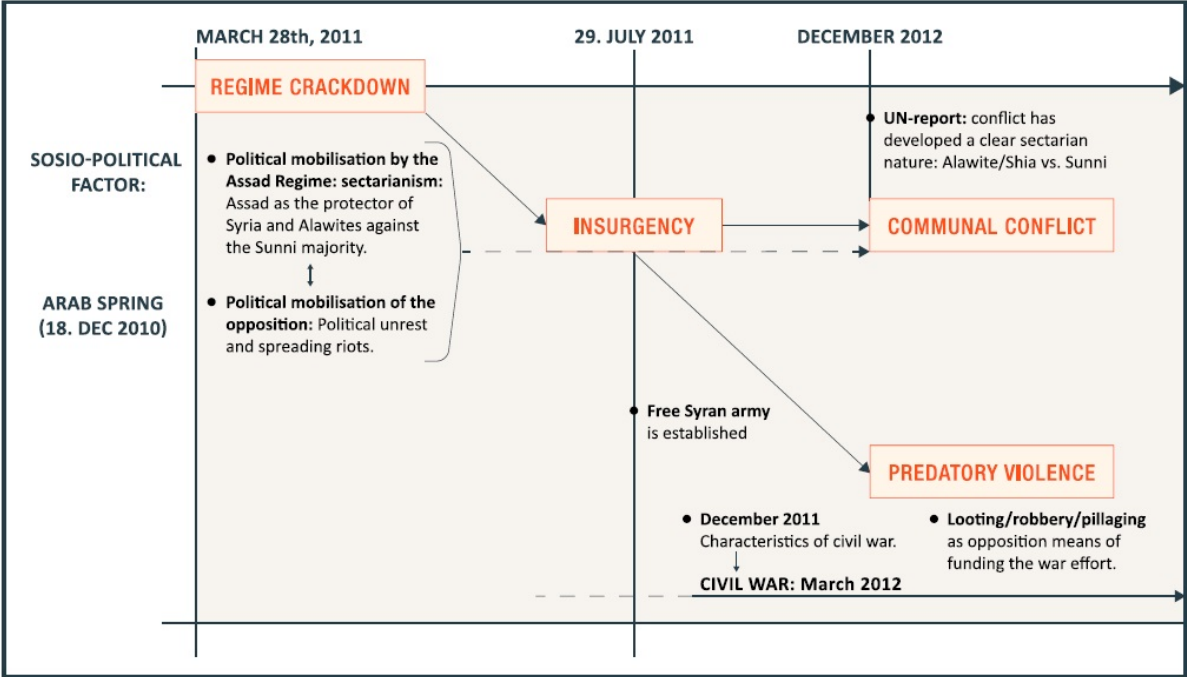
Model 4.1

Model 4.1 shows how the different generic scenarios interplay during the Syrian civil war. Regime Crackdown was triggered by a socio-political factor: demonstrations following the Arab Spring in late December 2010, and the harsh response by the Assad regime created an unstable and conflictual environment, spreading all over Syria.

The initial demonstrations were met with violence to such an extent that new regime-critique arose. As demonstrations spread, the violence gradually increased: the Syrian people saw how the demonstrations in Daara and Damascus were met with violence. Population in other cities, such as Jir al-Shugur, reacted to the violence with shock and awe, protested against the regimes treatment of the demonstrates and were met with the same violence and hostile attitude as the first wave of protesters – creating a vicious downward spiral of mutual and gradually, increasing violence.

Alongside the main conflict between regime forces and protesters, political mobilization on both sides formed around sectarian lines. The Assad family and the core of the regimes security forces is Alawite, and the bulk of the protestors are Sunni. Assad mobilised Alawite mobs and later militias, and used them as "street-fighters", keeping the Syrian Army in the background during the first months of the conflict. This signalled a clear sectarian nature being nurtured in the on-going conflict between the state and the protestors.

Assad presented himself as the protector of order, implying a protection of Alawites, Christians and other minorities from the Muslim Sunni mobs of protestors.

By July 2011, the uprising in different Syrian cities has become an organized, armed insurgency, ratified by the establishment of the Free Syrian Army (FSA). The insurgency became armed in means to protect protestors from Assad`s security forces. Escalation from one side resulted in a response from the other side, a typical tit-for tat situation. As the insurgency was established as a fighting force, taking action against the Assad regime, and with the creation of the FSA, identification of the generic situation of Insurgency is positive. Rebel groups were formed with political and ideological ambitions and objectives as a result of the on-going Regime Crackdown.

Insurgency in urban areas combined with sectarian mobilization led to a situation of Communal Conflict in some parts of Syria: "In Syria, there are clear indications of Communal Conflict occurring between ethnic and sectarian groups in certain enclaves, whilst the threat from Insurgency is the main threat against civilians in Assad-controlled areas. Identifying which of the scenarios represent the greatest and most imminent threat to civilians will help military planners when deciding when, where and for whom resources should be prioritized" (Beadle, 2014:23).

The situation in Syria is complex and to analyse it, this study will rely on the schematics provided by the Regime Crackdown scenario, the original scenario leading to other identifiable scenarios. The Assad regime is reported to be the main perpetrator of violence against civilians in Syria (Reuters: 2012, Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights: 2013). To answer the questions presented in part 1, Regime Crackdown will give structure and a set of parameters to review Assad`s actions.

Analysing the regime violence, Regime Crackdown relies on a set of parameters. The different parameters have been selected since they represent common aspects of violence aimed at civilians today, and identify the perpetrators committing it (Beadle, 2014:12).

Phases of the Syrian civil war and analytical parameters

Every conflict has its own dynamics, going through transformation as the conflict becomes more complex and/or intensifies. In general, every conflict proceeds over time through a series of recognizable and distinguishable stages. Various stages of a conflict are more recognizable when the conflict has progressed over a longer period of time (Ho-Won Jeong, 2008:37). Analysis of a conflict process can help explaining the development and transformation of the conflict, identifying certain characteristics in either military strategic and tactical implementations, or different attitude towards the other warring party etc. Identifying different phases of a conflict as an analytical tool creates a system through which one can view the conflict and compare different aspects.

The challenge when dividing a conflict into different phases is to choose a parameter from which the division is to be made from. One could simply do the division chronological or sequential, enabling the depiction of the conflict as a linear series of events along a timeline. I believe such a timeline gives the impression that a conflict is homogenous and follows a certain order. When analysing a conflict using given prerequisite (generic) scenarios, it is paramount that the analyst understands the chaotic and bewildering nature of conflict in general.

To best depict the uncertainty of an on-going conflict and the enigmatic paths a conflict might take, this study will divide the Syrian civil war into phases by looking at changes in the 5 parameters each generic scenario is described by:

- **Type of actor***: this study is analysing the violence the Assad regime in Syria is committing against its population; this parameter is incorporated inn all phases as the actor of study is the Syrian military, special, police- and security forces
- **Rationale:** this parameter aims at describing what the Assad regime seeks to achieve in the given phase
- **Strategies and tactics:** imposed by Syrian armed forces and security units
- **Relevant Military Capabilities****
- **Outcome**: explaining the expected outcome of the strategies and tactics imposed by Syrian security forces in each phase.

* The presentation of the phases following Phase I will embellish further on changes in units, commands and weaponry, only comment briefly when changes in actors is critical to understand the analyse of the phase.

** One could argue that the Relevant Military Capabilities (accessible to the Assad regime) will change and expand with Russian and Iranian arms trade[20] from phase to phase, going in an in-depth discussion on the Syrian Armed Forces capabilities and equipment – instead this parameter will provide an overview of the capabilities actually employed in that particular phase of the civil war, thus generalizing this parameter contrary to making it into a micro-analysis of pieces of artillery, tanks, planes etc.

Each phase will be given a set start- and end month. The first phase has a natural starting point as demonstrations and riots broke out on the 15-18th of March 2011. The next phase starts when the conflictual situations shifts, making a clear demarcation line between the previous phase and the next.

The date set for each phase (except for Phase I) is an indication on when the situation on the ground has shifted: this study will operate with months as indicators of the end of one phase and the start of the next. Operating with specific dates would be too vague: one can identify shifts in both strategy tactics and weapons in use, but how do you assess their utility and operational impact? By operating with months as the primary indicator, the coarse division into phases encompasses time spent planning, preparing, manoeuvre of troops and vehicles etc.

4.1 I. Dispersed Civil Revolt - March 28th – medio June, 2011

Following the unrest caused by the Arab Spring, demonstrations broke out, fuelled by the early success of the social mobilisation in other Arab countries and modern technology. Unrest and demonstrations spread from one city to another during the spring of 2011, and by June, the rebellion has become organized, the shift to a new phase is identified by the arming

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[20] An overview is given by SIPRI – the Stockhold International Peace Research Insitute:
http://www.sipri.org/yearbook/2013/files/sipri-yearbook-2013-chapter-5-section-3

of the rebellion; the formation of The Free Syrian Army (officially formed on the 29th of July, 2011,[21] but operative (or represented) in most on-going skirmishes at the time.

Unarmed but destructive demonstrations in Der`a between the 15 and 17th of March 2011, prompted the initial violent resolve by the Assad regime. Incarceration of protestors led to great anger, and during what has been dubbed the Day of Dignity protests on the 18th of March, security forces of the Assad regime dispersed the protestors by firing live ammunition into the crowd.[22]Interestingly, the Facebook page *The Syrian Revolution* went viral the same day[23] As the city of Dera`a witnessed the first actions undertaken by the Asaad-regime identifiable as concrete and authorized violence against the civilian, demonstrating populace, similar incidents.

Geographically, protests and riots broke out in almost every major city, as well as several minor ones during the first months of unrest. The violent response by the regime took first place in Der`a, and then in Aleppo and Damascus on march 15th.[24] Initially, the regime was able to quell the uprising in Hama through force, just as it had in Dera'a; however, offensive operations in Homs have only succeeded in encouraging armed resistance and sectarian violence, which have provided further justification for the regime's use of force.

Rationale

During the first phase, the Syrian regime is facing mostly civilian demonstrations, unarmed social revolt. The Assad regime is seeking to maintain its control over the Syrian civilian population. This is done to bolster the Assad regime`s image as the only (viable) legitimate governance structures in Syria (Kozak, 2015:10). During the first months of 2011, The Assad regime was presented with unrest and social mobilisation aimed at changing many of the comparable governments in the Arab world, fearing a similar situation in Syria: when the first demonstrations and uprisings formed during March, 2011, the primary goal of the Assad regime was to stay in power.

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[21] The announcement of the formation of the FSA: http://www.joshualandis.com/blog/free-syrian-army-established-to-fight-the-syrian-army/
[22] Middle East Security Report 2, by Joseph Holliday. 2011.
[23] The New York Times wrote about the Syrian Revolution- Facebook page on the 19th of March, 2011. See bibliography.
[24] In Syria, Crackdown After Protests, by the New York Times, March 18, 2011.

"Regimes determined to crush all resistance will be under pressure to meet most of the operational requirement needed to operationalize violence against civilians, as this scenario quickly becomes a conventional war against its own population" (Beadle, 2014:37).

Due to the aggressive spread of social unrest in Syria, and the general expansionistic nature of the Arab Spring, The Assad regime turned to answering the rebellion with violence. Beadle has thus identified a (potential) critical looming threat to the civilian populace: the main body of the uprising is taking place in heavily populated, urban areas, first in Daraa (spreading quickly to Homs, Idleb, Douma and Hama[25]) the Assad regime`s security forces responded with live fire, killing hundreds in Deraa (e.g.) during the first weeks (Phillips, 2012:37). The rationale for using violence against civilians is to control the population (Beadle, 2014:35). Controlling the population in urban centres and larger cities by using security forces and live fire increases the possibility for collateral damage, i.e. civilians trapped in harms way.

Actor Types

This section will give a brief account of the Syrian armed forces as well as Syrian security forces and paramilitary groups/militias under Assad`s command. The generic scenario Regime Crackdown is built around a situation where a government is attacking its own population, thus will the Actor Types be governmental forces, in some cases aided by external advisors, foreign equipment and military support.

The Assad regime controls the Syrian Armed- and Security forces, but with some limitations regarding the mobilisation of the armed forces as a whole. These concerns revolve the questions of moral and defections: an estimate suggests that Assad only can deploy about one third of his approximately 1.7 million potential fighters (Jenkins, 2014:6), due to the fear of sympathy following sectarian lines and large scale defections.

Following his father's strategy, Bashar al-Assad controls a force consisting of mostly Alawite career soldiers rather than Sunni-conscripts. Para-military and reservists Sunnis are being kept in their garrisons (Jenkins, 2014:6-7). The officer-corps is dominated by Alawites,

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[25] London School of Economics and Political Science: Special report by Dr. Christopher Phillips. 2012. See bibliography.

and almost exclusively Alawite officers linked to the president and his extended family hold higher ranks. In command of the 4th Armoured Division, which has played a major role in besieging larger rebel strongpoints and supressing the rebellion in general, is president Assad`s brother Maher al-Assad (Kozak, 2015:13).

Strategies and Tactics

Assad`s regime did not have time in advance to create elaborate plans on how to put down the social mobilisation, and was <u>forced</u> to respond to the events unfolding in the spring of 2011. The overall strategy governing the regimes armed forces in this phase is dominated by:

1. Re-organization to meet threats and uprisings.
2. Mobilisation of reservists and indoctrination of standing armed forces to meet a Syrian-population-based threat (Internal threat).
3. Fire-brigade action: standing (elite) forces are moved to critical hot spots.
4. Police and security forces first meet uprisings.
5. Low-level tactics adapting to every (new) uprising, no common doctrine.

The un-coordinated and poorly planned response of the Assad regime, including branches of the armed forces, security services supported by ad-hoc militias frequently used lethal force to quell demonstrations and deter other parts of the population to rise up against the regime in similar manner. During the first phase the regime forces committed a range of human rights violations in the context of deterring and punishing rebellions. Operations included arbitrary arrests, torture, unlawful killings of demonstrators and extrajudicial executions.[26]

Relevant Military Capabilities

On the outset of the uprising in Syria, the Assad regime possessed one of the most modern and powerful armed forces in the whole of the Middle East (Jenkins, 2014:5).

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[26] HRW: "He didn`t have to die" indiscriminate attaks by opposition groups in Syria, part I.

The Syrian Arab Army (SAA) consisted of 220 000 professional and full-time employed personnel, while the air force and air defence command consisted of another 70 000. In early 2011 the Syrian Armed forces had about 350 000 reservists (the numbers vary according to source), and theoretically Jenkins estimates that the Syrian Regime could mobilise up to 1.7 million fighters (Jenkins, 2014:6). The SAA could field several thousand tanks, over 4 000 armed personnel carriers, and relative modern arms in general, mostly provided by Russia or Iran.[27] Weapons and weapon systems delivered by Russia after the inauguration of president Bashar al-Assad, includes a series of arms deals signed between 2005-2007, eliminating ¾ of Syria`s arms-related debt, and subsumed a broad spectre of modern arms, weapon systems, armoured and mechanized pieces, helicopters and fighter airplanes, like the Mil Mi-25.[28]

In this text, the terms armour and mechanized, refer to the large numbers of tanks and other tracked vehicles Syrian security forces have utilized during the conflict – tough in varying conditions and standard, Joseph Holliday of the Institute for the Study of war, estimates that the SAA had roughly 5,000 functioning main battle tanks, and the same number in other tracked vehicles[29]. Fearing defections, the 4th armoured division, The Republican Guard and Special Forces (making up 1/3 of the total standing forces) was mobilised, but not put in to action.

Holliday suggests that the Assad regime maintained approximately 60 brigade-level manoeuvre units (on paper) early 2011 (Holliday, 2013:26). Estimating that the regime could only deploy the equivalent of one brigade from each conventional division (which consists of 4 brigades) consolidates the estimate of the mobilisation of roughly 1/3 of the total Syrian Armed Forces. What is certain, is the severe combat power limitations imposed by the conflicts social and sectarian nature on the SAA and other parts of the Syrian Armed Forces.

During Phase I, security forces, paramilitary organisations and pro-regime militias were the primary advocates of the Assad regime.[30] The term security forces is of generic nature given the complexity of the Assad regimes armed forces- and security apparatus,

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[27] Jenkins assesment is based on number of sources; Holldiday 2013a, IHS Jane 2013, Institute of Strategic Studies – see bibliography on Jenkins.

[28] FFI-Report 16/00500 page 10. https://www.ffi.no/no/Rapporter/16-00500.pdf

[29] Middle East Security Report 2, 2011, by Joseph Holliday of the ISW.

[30] International Crisis Group, Middle East Report nr.128, 2012, page 1 (see bibliography).

creating difficulties in attributing responsibility, or to pinpoint given operations to a specific unit or group, based on open source media and reports.

Militias was raised and trained and put into action, thus becoming the most significant source of armed reinforcement of the Syrian Army, following Hafez al-Assad`s strategy from the 1980s campaign (Holliday, 2013:7). Notably the Alawite *shabiha* militias, led by extended members of the Assad family, have been accountable for some of the worst brutality against the Syrian opposition (Holiday, 2013:7). The paramilitary, and loosely organized shabiha militias has been an integral part of the regimes security operations, by terrorizing neighbourhoods and inner-city areas beyond the reach of the uniformed SAA, creating an effective stop-gap, trapping rebels and civilians alike[31]

Malantowicz summarises the Armed- and security forces under Assad`s command in the following words: "…the Syrian Armed Forces, a regular army under the command of President Assad, the National Defense Force, a special unit comprised almost exclusively of Alawites, a pro-government militia *Shabiha* led by members of the extended Assad family, Lebanese Hezbollah and Iranian Revolutionary Guards" (Malantowicz, 2013:57). Regular police and other security forces not included.

Outcome

During the early months of 2011, The Assad regime fought to control a rebellious population. The first demands by the demonstrators were not that Assad would resign, rather the demand revolted around demands for reform (Phillips, 2012:37). The sitting regime had little experience with handling social unrest; unauthorised demonstrations were extremely rare, with the exception of a small Kurd uprising in eastern Syria in 2004 (Phillips, 2012:38). The demonstrators were met with a catastrophic move by the Assad regime; violent reaction to what can be defined as a relatively peaceful mass of demonstrators. This became a key trigger for the spread of the demonstrations, causing new demonstrations aimed at the first shootings and demonstrations in march 2011, funnelling the situation down a spiral of violence; forcing the demonstrating mass to arm themselves for their own protection.

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[31] Middle East Security Report 2, page 10, by Joseph Holliday. 2011.

The Assad's regime`s *expected outcome* of the first phase was to strangle the unruly Syrian population before they could organise and spread.

4.2 II. Country-Wide Civil Revolt - June 2011 – March 2012

Following the formation of the Free Syrian Army (from now denoted FSA), and the (general) level of response to the violence committed by the Assad regime by the (mainly) Sunni population of North and Northeaster parts of Syria, the conflict escalated into a *war-like* situation. The last two months of this phase saw the onset of the 2012 Homs offensive by the SSA, killing around 1 000 civilians[32], displacing tens of thousands more.

Rationale

The rationale has changed from Phase I: Toppling of dictatorial regimes in Egypt and Tunisia, and the empowering effect of the Arab springs success in whole during 2011 fuelled the spread of the uprising. The Assad regime is no longer *only* controlling a revolting population in some parts of the country.

The rebellion spread from mainly urban centres to the rural population, forcing the regime to expand their fronts, heavily reinforcing around larger cities like Homs and Hama. During the Arab spring Facebook, YouTube, Twitter and other social media became a new (people`s) weapon of war: used as an organizational tool, to spread propaganda, slogans, share pictures of rebel`s and uprising`s victories (Phillips, 2012:38).

The fall of Colonel Gaddafi in Libya became the symbol of hope for the on-going uprising in Syria: Gaddafi fielded a large and relative modern army but was still defeated, the international community helped the uprising by establishing a no-fly zone over Libya, and by

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[32] Reuters: http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/03/04/syria-opposition-heavy-weapons_n_1319597.html

October 2011 the rebellion succeeded in reaching their initial goals: murdering Gaddafi and liberating Libya from his regime.[33]

The Syrian rebels mimicked the Libyan uprising`s reversion of the Pre-Gaddafi banner, reverting a pre-Ba´athist national flag (Phillips, 2012:38).The situation where the regime aims at locally controlling the population, coordinated mainly by security forces (Phase I), has transformed into a theatre-level operation, top-down coordinated by the Regime, advocated by pro-regime militias such as the *Shabiha,* police and security forces, with the SSA setting up checkpoints on key roads and around larger regime-controlled cities, but not offensively put in to combat. The regime`s modus operandi changes alongside this shift in the pure size of the uprising.

The rationale during this phase is to stop a nation-wide, ongoing uprising, heavily influenced by international victories of other similar uprisings in the Arab world - taking a sectarian nature of conflict.

Strategies and Tactics

In early 2012 the Assad regime launched a major offensive by using mortars and artillery against residential areas in the besieged cities of Homs, Hama and other opposition-controlled urban areas. The shift in strategy is noticeable due to the fact that more regular branches of the SSA were deployed during the last weeks of this phase.[34]

The shabiha militia and other paramilitary forces still led and conducted most of the major combat operations. Notably the 4th Armoured Division and the Republican Guard, operating at full strength combined could field approximately 26,000 soldiers (Holliday, 2013:26). Combined with the regimes twelve Special Forces regiments 2/3s strength of 12,000 soldiers, these units became highly active during this phase.

Offensive clearance and cordon-and-search operations would by medio 2012 be the main tactics utilized by the SAA supported by the shabiha-militias, as maintaining control of Syria`s most important lines of communications, namely the interior M5 north-south highway

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[33] Reported by Aljazeera 27th Dec. 2011.
http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/spotlight/aljazeeratop102011/2011/12/20111226114023696528.html
[34] HRW: ”He didn`t have to die” indiscriminate attacks by opposition groups in Syria, Part I.

running from the Jordanian border in the south, through Damascus, Homs, Hama, Idlib, to Aleppo in the north.[35] The M5 runs 474 kilometres, and connects all major interior cities and urban areas.[36]The lines of communication through the M5 remained intact until medio 2012, when unrest and combat operations conducted by the SAA significantly disrupted movement through the area around Homs. Homs is situated on the intersection between the M5 and the coastal highways, and elite SAA forces and paramilitary units conducted major operations in order to keep the logistically important route open.

A clearance operations (sometimes denoted crackdown in the media) are an operation consisting of the isolation, clearing and securing entire urban areas, as seen in most major cities in Syria already in late 2011. Combined operations of armour and mechanized units of the 4th Armoured Division, regular infantry, paramilitary shabiha and other security forces (such as local police) would encircle, and besiege cities in which they could not control. In 2016, many of these sieges, most prominently the siege of Aleppo, is still ingoing. Cordon-and-Search operations conducted by SAA special forces unites and shabiha militias, were implemented as part of the bigger strategy, in order to isolate, clearing, and then pulling back out of smaller population centres and neighbourhoods within, or in the vicinity of major cities in order to find and detain suspected rebels.

Relevant Military Capabilities

The concern of loyalty handicaps the regime to the extent that it could only deploy 65,000 to 75,000 (of well above 300 000) of its troops in offensive operations, during the Syrian Army`s military campaign of 2011-2012 (Kozak, 2015:13). Due to this fact, and by bolstering the sectarian conflict, the regime fielded foremost security forces and paramilitary organisations such as the *Shabiha*. Unlike the security forces and other pro-regime fighters, the main army (except from special forces) not been highly exposed. When the SAA was finally put to action, the conflict escalated in the means of Regime Crackdown: the sharp end of the army would spearhead many of the on-going sieges.

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[35] Middle East Security Report 2, page 12, by Joseph Holliday. 2011.
[36] Transport in Syria, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Transport_in_Syria#Road_Transport

Outcome

During this phase, a war-like situation emerges. The Assad regime`s expected outcome by e.g. deploying regular troops and allowing paramilitary organisations and militias to commit violence against the population is the same as in Phase I, to quell a rebellion, but now including the need to *win* back territory held *by* the rebellion. The war-like situation emerges as the SSA plans and goes through with campaign-movement as part of a bigger military plan.

4.3 III. Fully Fledged Civil War - March 2012 – November 2013

The shift from a situation where the conflict was generally spearheaded by security-forces and paramilitary organisations, to a military planned and led situation occurred in late January 2012.[37] By March 2012 the Army had staged a series of operations in and around Damascus, expanding their area of operations to Homs, the self-proclaimed capitol of the uprising and the country`s third largest city. By the summer of 2012, the uprisings and insurgency had transformed into a civil war (Holiday, 2006:9).

Rationale

This phase is distinguished by the shift from the operations concerning controlling the population, deterring the masses from demonstrating and denying rebels movement and supplies, to direct military operations. The Assad regime planned and set to life whole military campaigns set out to secure Damascus, Aleppo and the Alawite heartland in Syria, usurping the whole Syrian army, including elements of the Air- and Naval forces as well.

Strategies and Tactics

In this phase the Syrian Army has become entrenched in strongpoints all over Syria; relying on military outpost in the north and to the east, functioning as bases of operations, from where nominal presence across the entirety of the Syrian territory is achieved. In the

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[37] International Crisis Group, Middle East Report nr.128, 2012, page 6.

southern parts of Syria and around larger urban areas the Syrian armed forces is engaged in larger offensive operations, tying the whole of the Syrian armed forces together in a network of (semi-isolated) regime controlled pockets and campaign movements. Total air superiority secures the lines of movement. The share scale of the unrest and rebel activities in Syria by 2013 made it possible for the Assad regime and its security forces to garrison all of the countries key population centres and lines of communication.[38] This strategy of military presence in all parts of Syria, denying the rebellion movement – forcing them to stay in urban areas, and controlling checkpoints in the south, the north and in the north-east is denoted "an Army in all Corners" by Christopher Kozak (Kozak, 2015:32).

The *army in all corners strategy*, allows the Syrian Regime to control the rebellion, hindering them in physically spreading to new areas. The fortified strongpoints is now fixing a large amount of the rebel force, drawing the rebels into long-running siege operations maintained with minimal investment of regime manpower.

The Assad regime continued to rely on its trusted elite formations of the SAA as a mobile offensive force, cutting lines of supply, operating as fire brigades augmenting regular SAA forces. Still fearing defection, the vast majority of the regular SAA remained bound to their barracks, concentrated in southern Syria in the Damascus and Daara-provinces, continuing the pre-2011 military doctrine designed to defend against an Israeli offensive aimed at capturing Damascus (Kozak, 2015:13). The 4th Armoured Division, the Republican guard and elements of the Special Forces conducted all major regular offensive operations. During this phase, The Syrian Air-Force was for the first time engaged in combat-operations, strafes and direct bombing (Holliday, 2013:23). During the first two phases, the air force provided reconnaissance and logistical support. The shift to combat operations happened in march 2012, when rotary-wing aircraft commenced in bombing and strafing the newly opened rebel fronts at Aleppo and Latakia, beyond the reach of (already) then overstretched ground troops of the SAA.[39]

Notably, in August 2013, the Assad regime (alleged) use of chemical weapons such as Sarin gas against the civilian area of Ghouta in the outskirts of Damascus on the 21st marked

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[38] Middle East Security Report 2, page 13, by Joseph Holliday. 2011 / International Crisis Group, Middle East Report nr.128, 2012, page 6-10.
[39] Joseph Holliday, Middle East Security Report 8, ISW: 2013, page 22-23.

the entrance of a new phase in the civil war.[40] The attack that killed hundreds of civilians raised loud debates about the UN`s (missing) role in Syria, as the Assad regime continued to use barrel bombs and chemical agents in the months to come.

Relevant Military Capabilities

By early 2012, support of the Regime started to loose faith in both security forces and the increasingly militarised Para-military organisations.[41] An official Turkish statement reported that more than 60,000 SAA soldiers had defected by July 2012. The *army in all corners-strategy* had dangerously overstretched the SAA (Holliday, 2013:22-23),[26] combined with the fear of desertion and defection; the Assad regime was in need of a new strategy, or at least a force multiplier.

In June 2012 it became evident that the international community would <u>not </u>impose a No Fly Zone.[42] At the same time the rebel forces went on the offensive in the northern parts of Syria.

The Syrian Air Force was at the outset of the conflict composed of 30-40 squadrons of rotary-and fixed wing aircrafts (Holliday, 2013:56). These squadrons (all under the command of the Syrian Air Force) consisted of training-wings, reconnaissance and transport units. The fighter and bomber force consisted largely of what western military analyst would denounce obsolete airframes. Still, in early 2011, the Syrian Air Force could field approximately 580 fixed-wing and 170 rotary-wing aircraft. Of these, about 500 fixed wing and 150 rotary wing aircraft was suitable to deploy against insurgent and rebellion forces. Of these 650 aircrafts, it is reasonable to estimate that 150 fixed wing and 50 rotary wing aircraft is responsible for the heavy strafe-and bombing campaign set forth in medio June 2012. Joseph Holliday points out that no air force in the world is capable of maintaining a 100 % mission-capable readiness rate, and that as many as 200 of Assad`s fighters are 1960-era MiG-21s (Holliday, 2013:56).

By March 2012, the Syrian Air Force started its first strafing runs over rebel outpost and supply-lines, and by April the same year, conventional bombing of rebel strongpoints,

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[40] Chemical attacks in Ghouda, http://foreignpolicy.com/2013/08/31/syrias-rebels-cry-foul-after-obama-calls-off-strike/
[41] International Crisis Group, Middle East Report nr.128, 2012, page 3.
[42] J. Holliday and C. Harmer: Syrian Air Force & Air Defense Overview, ISW: 2012.

mostly in dense, urban areas commenced. By July 2012, the number of sorties had risen from under 5 pr. Month in March, to over 120 in August (Holliday, 2013:23). A downward trend set in during the last months of 2012, but would rise to record levels during the first months in 2013.[43]

This strategy of heavy bombardment and strafe runs over urban and residential areas was initiated as a response to a rebel offensive aimed at larger cities, and lack of deployable ground troops. By mid-2013, it had become imminent that the strategy of intense bombing in urban areas was primary motivated by strategy of displacement: The regime depopulated large rebel-held areas through extensive use of its total air superiority. By reducing the opposition's ability to provide basic services for its supporters', bombing and strafing rebel held area indiscriminate, and targeting larger crowds in cities like Homs, Hama and Aleppo (e.g.) – manifesting a "target by association"-doctrine, the Assad regime effectively drove the Syrian population away from the frontlines, and rebel-held territory in general.

Outcome

Indiscriminate weapons aimed at rebels in urban areas causes civilian casualties: wounded or killed, when the regime uses heavy artillery or aircraft to target rebel strongholds in cities and residential areas. The regime expects to hit rebels, but is calculating civilian losses. By actively targeting areas containing civilians, the regime is starting to force the population to leave the combat-space: During phase III, more than 112,000 refugees fled Syria to bordering nations such as Iraq, Lebanon and Turkey.[44]

The number of internally displaced refugees was estimated to more then 4 times as many as the refugees that left Syria. The internally displaced population gathered at the Mediterranean coast in regime-held areas. By concentrating the population in regime-controlled territory, Assad achieved two objectives: denying rebel-popular support and profiting morally as he could provide safe havens and shield the population from the on-going conflict, as well as drawing manpower from the fleeing masses.

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[43] See ISW: Syrian Air Force and Air Defense Capabilities of May 2013, page 23 for a detailed summary of air-strike trends in 2012/13.
http://www.understandingwar.org/sites/default/files/Updated%20Syrian%20Air%20Force%20and%20Air%20Defense%20Capabilities%20Brief_8May.pdf
[44] UNHCR: Number of Syrian refugees triples since April 2012: http://www.unhcr.org/500530136.html

By the end of this phase, the number of civilians killed in the conflict would statistically be dominated by indiscriminate bombing by artillery and (especially) rotary-winged aircraft. Assad`s use of barrel-bombs, improvised devices constructed from oil-drums and dropped by helicopters, allowed him to destroy urban areas more effectively then ordinary ordinance could. Incendiary barrel-bombs were dropped for the first time on Homs in August 2012, and has been used in different sieges since.[45] Civilians and persons hors de combat, in particular fighting-age men, were the primary victims of violence since the unrest began in 2011 up until this phase. Women and children were also targeted, in most incidents during indiscriminate artillery-barrages and air bombardment. The UN reported that men and women who sought to aid the wounded or those in need of humanitarian assistance have been arrested, detained, tortured and killed for "collaborating" with the armed opposition (UN General Assembly, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, 2015, 8).

The International Crisis Group summarized the conflict in the end of 2012 with the following words: "From a military standpoint, it is becoming clearer by the day that the outcome of the struggle will be much messier than either party once hoped. On the one hand, the regime will not succeed in suppressing the armed groups. If any- thing, its ruthless practices have guaranteed a virtually limitless pool of recruits prepared to fight with the opposition no matter the costs. Conversely, both the regime (by design) and its opponents (through negligence) appear to have ensured that a large portion of the Alawite community now feels it has no option but to kill or be killed" (ICG, 2012:34).

4.4 IV. Civil War and Humanitarian Catastrophe - November 2013 – January 2015

By November 2013, over half of Syria`s population had become displaced, refugees in their own country. By the end of December more than 3 million refugees had left the

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[45] The use of barrel-boms in Homs, August 2012:
http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/middleeast/syria/9514698/Syrian-regime-forces-filmed-dropping-barrel-bomb-on-Homs.html

country.[46] The massive numbers of refugees leaving Syria and internally displaced population defines 2013 to mid 2014.

In February 2014, The UN demanded that all parties in the conflict respect international law and desist from attacks and indiscriminate fire/bombing that is directed against civilians or civilian objects/infrastructure.[47] Throughout 2014 the UN Secretary-General noted an increase in the use of barrel bombs (which symbolizes indiscriminate attacks on urban areas) and artillery barrages aimed at besieged civilian districts in rebel held cities. During the autumn of 2014, as international military actions (primarily aimed at IS/ISIS in northern/eastern Syria), the Government of Syria reportedly doubled its use of barrel bombs and indiscriminate air attacks in civilian areas, including attacks on medical facilities, markets, schools, and ad-hoc refugee-camps in the vicinity of the many on-going combat operations (Hartberg, Bowen, & Gorevan, 2015:9).

Rationale

By November 2013 it had become clear that the main motivation for indiscriminate attacks on cities and urban residential areas, was to displace the Syrian population, forcing the populace into regime-controlled areas: Indiscriminate bombing-and strafe runs over rebel-held areas drained the population out of any major urban on-going siege: a part of Assad`s counterinsurgency plan was during this stage to deny the rebels any popular support, recruiting possibilities, and legitimacy as an option to the regime.

A heavy reliance on the Alawite *shabiha*-militia as a main combat force inside most on-going sieges such as e.g. Aleppo, Homs, Latakia, Kobani, continued to drive the conflict more so ever into sectarianism. The main portion of the SAA was still held in their barracks (or remained within 10-15 kilometres of their base), fearing defection, but stationed spread out over most of Syria, continuing the army in all corners-strategy. The strategy of selective deployment of politically reliable troops ensured Assad that the SAA avoided significant defections, and also explains why the regime has been unable to generate sufficient numbers

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[46] UNHCR: A Year in Review, 2013: page 7-8. See bibliography.
[47] Failing Syria, Assessing the impact of UN Security Council Resolutions in Protecting and Assisting Civilians in Syria, March 2015, see bibliography.

to control the whole of Syria: pre-2011 estimates suggests that Assad doctrinal order of battle would allow him to field enough troops for this task (Holliday, 2013:26).

Strategies and Tactics

Assad`s strategy of an army in all corners of Syria included laying siege to larger rebel-held cities to deny the rebellion aid, supplies and movement. Regime ground forces is thus forcing large-scale displacement by indiscriminately targeting rebel-held urban areas by artillery, fixed wing airstrikes and improvised barrel-bombs dropped by rotary winged aircraft (Kozak, 2015:11). These strategies had by this phase been implemented all over Syria, and the internally displaced population had reached over 1/3 of the entire population (Jenkins, 2014:4).

The Syrian regime continued to rely upon its trusted elite SAA units throughout 2014 as a mobile offensive force often dispatched to augment regular SAA forces along critical battlefronts. Throughout 2014 and early 2015, the Republican Guard and 4th Armoured Division, units specially designated to protect the regime, conducted most of their operations in the vicinity of Damascus targeting major pockets of opposition forces occupying the Eastern and Western Ghouta suburbs of the city (Kozak, 2015:13)

The strategy of using violence committed solely against civilians, by indiscriminately bombing urban areas is possible due to the asymmetric air-capabilities of the combating sides. From 2011 and up until this phase, the Assad regime has been accused of hundreds of arbitrary air sorties, attacking cities and residential areas indiscriminately. In December 2014 alone, 1,232 civilian deaths in Syria were registered (lowest number available, some sources goes much higher). The Assad regime was accountable for 85% of these killings.[48] In comparison, ISIL took the lives of 49 civilians in the period of time. Attacks on health facilities and medical personnel became commonplace during this phase of the conflict. Between February 2014 and February 2015,at least 83 separate attacks on health facilities of different types (hospitals, clinics, ad-hoc medical treatment stations etc.) were reported, constituting a 20-25 % increase compared to the same time-period one year earlier (Hartberg, Bowen, & Gorevan, 2015:9).

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[48] Masi, International Business Times, feb.2 2015.

During this phase, housing and civilian infrastructure were targeted in a more direct manner as compared to earlier stages. During 2014, over a million civilian houses, and more than 1/3 of all water infrastructure had been damaged. Water supplies in Northern- and central Syria was reduced by at least 50 % compared to pre-war levels (ibid.). The result of the different bombing- and artillery campaigns aimed at besieged civilian areas, resulted in a population displacement-situation with more than 11.5 million people displaced, of which were externally displaced. The impact of the Syrian regimes strategies to reduce the level of infrastructure, in order to impose extreme attrition (logistically and supply-wise) on the rebellion, resulted in large-scale destruction of homes, livelihoods, hunger, disease and death amongst the civilian population.

Humanitarian needs increased by a third compared to 2013, with more than 11.6 million people in urgent need of clean water supplies, and about 10 million people lacking sufficient amounts of food. In these figures, about 5.6 million of which are under the age of 18 (Hartberg, Bowen, & Gorevan, 2015:3). The Syrian regime also hampered the work of aid agencies, regularly preventing international humanitarian organizations and workers from accessing the besieged areas where the help was most needed. To exemplify the scope of the on-going sieges at this point (medio 2014), more than 212, 000 people are trapped in besieged locations. About 4.8 million Syrians reseeded in areas controlled by the Syrian Regime, cut off, or only sporadically reached by foreign aid agencies (ibid).

Violent and indiscriminate tactics used by the Assad regime, deemed unlawful by most of the international community and by several human rights groups, had developed and continued to escalate as the war progresses: the use of banned weapons such as incendiary shells, cluster munitions, antipersonnel mines, and weapons that not gives the user enough control to avoid collateral damage such as rockets, artillery, thermobaric weapons and improvised barrel-bombs, has been gradually introduced throughout the conflict.[49]

Relevant Military Capabilities

"The Syrian regime escalated its countrywide conscription campaign throughout 2014 in order to meet its pressing demand for additional manpower.

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[49] HRW: "He didn`t have to die" indiscriminate attaks by opposition groups in Syria, page 1.

David Kilcullen estimated in March 2014 that pro-regime forces maintained at maximum only a 2.5- to-1 soldier-to-insurgent force ratio against the Syrian opposition" (Kozak, 2015:12). The Assad regime has increasingly relied upon mobilization and training of loyal militias and paramilitary forces as manpower reserves dwindles.

The Syrian regime also passed decrees in October and November 2014 restricting the ability of military-aged males to leave the country and tightening standards regarding military service deferments provided to university students and state employees (Kozak, 2015:12).

In early 2014, the National Defense Forces (NDF) officially became a branch of the regime`s military forces (Kozak, 2015:15). The NDF is a paramilitary organisation, made up of different militias and armed groups, licensed, funded and to some extent trained by the Assad regime, e.g. the *shabiha* militia was incorporated in the NDF early in 2013 (Kozak, 2015:15). Different estimates on size and organisation are made, ranging from 60,000 to 100,000[50] fighters in mid-2014. Common tasks of the NDF are to hold and guard territory, deliver supplies and augment SAA forces in the field. The shabiha militia serves as the NDF`s main-purpose combat force.

Between February 2014 and January 2015, Human Rights Watch determined at least 450 major damage sites that showed damage consistent with barrel bomb detonations. One local group estimated that by February 22, 2015 aerial barrel bomb attacks had killed 6,163 civilians in Syria, including 1,892 children, since the passage of the UN Security Council Resolution 2139.[51]

Outcome

As regime attrition is growing higher, focus on the use non-military forces such as the NDF and other militias and paramilitary forces subsequently increase. The Syrian Air-force bombing campaign, and the SAA`s siege-tactics of rebel-held cities and territory lays ground for the Assad regime`s main strategy of forced displacement. By forcing civilians out of reach of the rebels, Assad aims at crushing the insurgency by denying it popular (and thus economic

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[50] ISW: Middle East Security Report 26, 2015, page 15. See bibliography: Christopher Kozak.
[51] Reported by Human Rights Watch, Desember 2016, https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2016/country-chapters/syria

and infrastructural) support. The Syrian government also continues to impose sieges, which are estimated by the UN's Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) to affect over 200,000 civilians. The sieges violate council Resolution 2139, which demands that all parties "immediately lift the sieges of populated areas," including in Homs, Moadamiya, and Daraya in western Ghouta, eastern Ghouta, and the Palestinian refugee camp in Yarmouk in south Damascus. The government has used siege strategies to effectively starve civilian populations into submission and force negotiations that would allow the government to retake territory.[52]

4.5 V. Internal Crisis and External Involvement - Jan 2015 – Jan 2016

During 2015 the refugee-catastrophe spread from the Middle East to Northern Africa and Europe. 4.1 million people had fled Syria by medio 2015, most of which had fled to Jordan and Lebanon, and about two million fled to Turkey or attempted to cross the Mediterranean to seek refuge in Europe. [53] Internally, more than 6.5 million people were refugees within their own country. Bashar al-Assad`s strategy of forced displacement was the major contributing factor for the high numbers of refugees, as heavy bombing and discriminately targeting of civilian areas and infrastructure is used as siege-tactics in the rebel-held cities. As civilians leave areas, regime advances can become easier. These tactics are also applied as a means of raising the price of resistance to the communities as a whole, so that communities pressure the fighters in their area to accept what the regime offers as cease-fire terms, but also, effectively, to surrender (CFR, 2016: *Will Cease-Fire Agreement Bring Syrians Relief?,* see bibliography).

In April 2015 the U.N. Security Council reported that "The Security Council expresses grave alarm at the significant and rapid deterioration of the humanitarian situation in Syria, including at the fact that over 220,000 people have been killed, including well over 10,000 children since the beginning of the conflict; around half of the population has been forced to flee their homes, including over 3.9 million who have sought refuge in neighbouring

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[52] Reported by Human Rights Watch, Desember 2016, https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2016/country-chapters/syria
[53] Council on Foreign Relations, February 12, 2016: http://www.cfr.org/syria/cease-fire-agreement-bring-syrians-relief/p37542

countries, among which are nearly 2.1 million children; and that more than 12.2 million people in Syria require urgent humanitarian assistance including 440,000 civilians in besieged areas".[54] The U.N. Security Council denotes the Syrian civil war as the largest humanitarian crisis in the world today, threatening peace and security in the region, acknowledging the diverse implications for neighbouring countries and the spill-over effects.

What also is prominent for this phase of the conflict is the involvement of external actors, especially by Russia, Iran, the US and France. This involvement was two-fold, as Russia and Iran intervened in behalf of Bashar al-Assad, while the France and the US (together with other NATO-countries as well) was targeting the Islamic State (ISIS/ISIL).[55] In October 2015, the Obama administration authorized the use of special operation ground forces for the first time in the fight against the Islamic State. Following a series of coordinated terrorist attacks in Paris on the 13th of November 2015, France expanded its air strikes in Syria, and the UK launched an air-campaign of its own. As the fight against Islamic extremists in Syria/Iraq continued throughout 2015, all major external participants in the conflict-zone met for the first time in late 2015, led by the U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry to explore the modalities of a nationwide cease-fire, with a request to the U.N. to oversee a transition of power. [(Ibid.)]

The use of artillery to maintain many of the on going sieges, Russian air strikes and Iran-facilitated foreign fighters becomes an integral part of the Assad-regimes strategy during this phase, as high attrition and dissertation has led to an unresolvable manpower problem.

Rationale

As civilians has been forced out of many of the on-going sieges of major Syrian cities and rebel settlements, the regime is fighting an ever more concentrated insurgency. Attrition on non-Alawite soldiers especially has been growing larger during the on-going conflict, and the mortality-rate for fighting combat-forces is also climbing.

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[54] The U.N. Security Council, S/PRST/2015:
http://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/s_prst_2015_10.pdf
[55] Council on Foreign Relations, February 12, 2016: http://www.cfr.org/syria/cease-fire-agreement-bring-syrians-relief/p37542

Still, the main rationale is still to control major urban centres and the North-South M5 highway. On going sieges is still the major source of civilian combat-related deaths. Controlling the civilian population, and thus cutting the rebellion`s movement capabilities and logistical needs, is how the regime will strangle the rebellion; the rebels does not need to match the security forces' numbers or repower because the rebels can force the regime to fight everywhere at once, taking advantage of their superior mobility and flexibility to mount executive raids and ambushes where and when it suits them; lightly armed insurgents who avoid regular battles and instead engage the regime`s forces when the variables favours the underdog.

Thus, the Assad regime is facing a classical guerrilla scenario, where the enemy hides in plane sight between the civilian populace. Unable to distinguish a civilian from a rebel fighter, the regime lays siege to whole urban areas, shelling it indiscriminately. The rationale is embedded in the threat; a cost-value analysis tells the regime that the only way to utilize its armed forces in order to eliminate the opposing force is to sacrifice civilians in the process.

Strategies and Tactics

Most important in this phase of the conflict, is the introduction of heavy foreign involvement, spearheaded by the Russian bombing, and Special Forces campaign. Russian foreign aid to the Assad government started already in late 2011 in the shape of politically and military (material) aid. Since the 30th of September 2015, Russia has contributed with direct military involvement, marking the first armed conflict intervention by Russian forces since the end of the Cold War.[56]

Relevant Military capabilities

The non-Syrian parts of Assad`s available military forces, Russian air strikes and Iran-facilitated foreign fighters became during this phase a difference-maker for the regime. Russia has taken a rm position in support of the Assad regime since the beginning of the Syrian

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[56] Reuters; http://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-syria-russia-insight-idUSKBN12Y0M6

revolution, most recently by intervening directly in support of Assad's troops through air strikes that have, in the main, targeted the non-ISIL opposition to the Assad regime.[57]

Bogged down with an essentially unresolvable manpower-problem, led the regime to an increasingly dependency on its foreign allies. Iran provided boots on the ground in form of foreign militias and Shiite fighters, many of who are Iraqis and Afghan refugees, facilitated by the Iranian Revolutionary Guars Corps. IRCG personnel are also playing out a role as Special Forces operating in some parts of the Syrian theatre.[38] Iran have supported Assad since 2011, but the prominence of Iranian soldiers and Iran-facilitated foreign fighters has not been seen in a theatre-wide scope earlier.

Russian material aid in form of the refurbished MI-25 helicopter gunships, the BUK-M2 air Defense system, the Bastion missile system, the S-300 Surface-to-air missile batteries, and MI-8 and MI-17 helicopters, all belong in the category of complex and modern arms, in which the Russian Government has provided the Assad regime with.[58] The MI-8 and MI-17 helicopters have since been utilized in barrel-bomb runs in the Homs region.

Russian arms deals with Syria is reinforcing Assad`s ability to conduct, and further exploit his air supremacy. The Syrian Air Force bombing campaign is believed to have taken more than 18,866 civilians lives by this point.[59]

The escalation of Russian direct intervention is not integral in this text, even if Russia is one of Assad`s strongest supporters, and the Russian armed forces contributing on the regime`s side might in the long run be a decisive factor in eliminating resistance. For further reading on the Russian military intervention in Syria, see FFI-Rapport 16/00500 (link in the bibliography, category II).

Outcome

The number of civilian deaths from airstrikes and artillery decreased slightly following internationally brokered ceasefires in February and September, but only briefly, and unlawful

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[57] The Ark Group: The Syrian Conflict: A Systems Conflcit Analysis, 2016.

[58] The Wall Street Journal, U.S. Is Warned Russia Plans Syria Arms Sale, published on May 8th, 2013 http://www.wsj.com/news/articles/SB10001424127887324059704578471453006383248

[59] CNN, Deaths in Syria. Published 14th September 2015. See bibliography.

attacks on civilians by all parties to the conflict persisted throughout the year. Syrian and Russian airstrikes continued to target, or indiscriminately strike rebel held areas, including civilian homes, markets, schools, and hospitals, using wide-area explosives, barrel bombs, cluster munitions, and flammable incendiary weapons.[60]

5 Analysis and Summary

The empirical case study analysis above is conducted by process tracing the violence conducted by the Assad Regime, from phase to phase during the conflict from the initial outbreak of hostilities, to the full fledged civil war with support from international actors and third party states, that is still on-going. The four parameters that has been presented in each phase above, is now analyzed in order to extract greater meaning from the empiric material, and to identify patterns to analyze, and answer the research questions.

The map below shows how the Assad regime controls the Syrian Coast with the important cities of Latakia and Tartus, as well as the whole stretch of the M5 highway from the boarder against Jordan to Homs. The pocket North of Homs has been contested since may 2011, as regime forces were unable to secure this vital stretch of the M5 highway during the opening months of the conflict, contributed to the lack of available maneuver forces (see next section).

The regime controls the stretch of the M42 highway, going east from Hama, and parts of the M4 and M15, connecting Aleppo to the rest of the regime controlled areas. The map tells us how the regime focuses on control of the major cities, and leaves the countryside to the rebels and other combating groups (like ISIL). This has been the situation since 2011, as neither sides has the combined strength to fight each other both in urban and rural areas. The regime is controlling key urban areas, while the rebels' moves freely around the Syrian countryside.[61]

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[60] Reported by the Human Rights Watch, February 2017: https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2017/country-chapters/syria
[61] Middle East Security Report 5 Syria`s Maturing Insurgency, page 11, by ISW, 2012
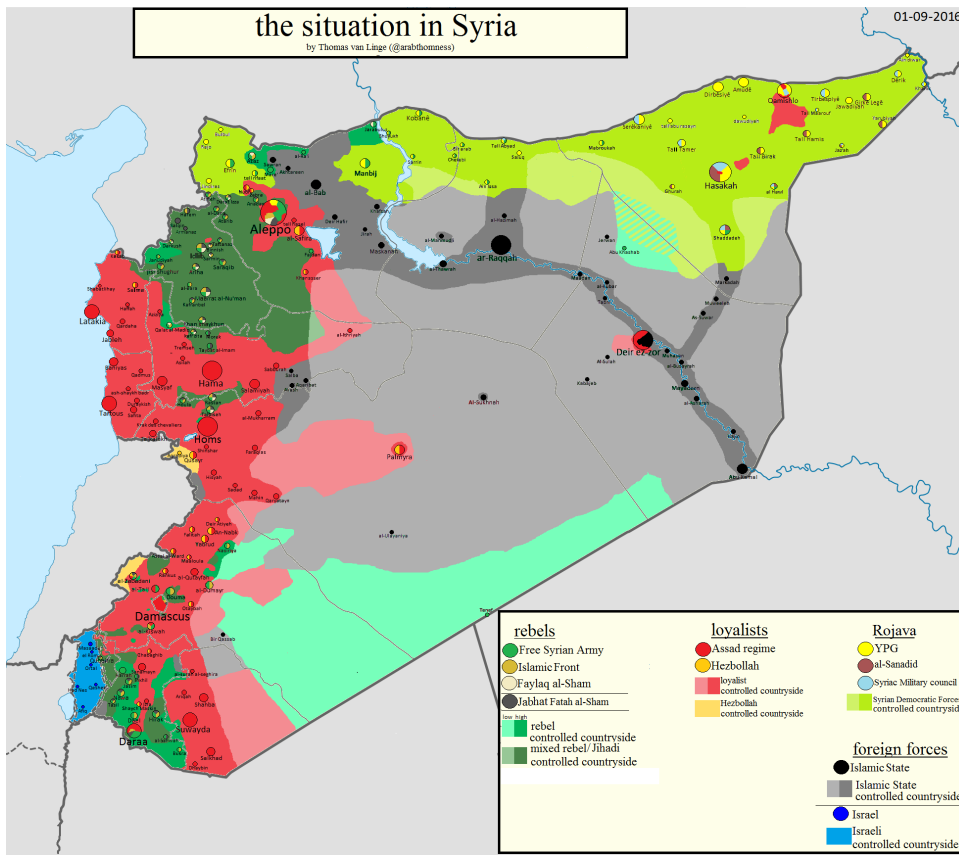
Model 5.1.
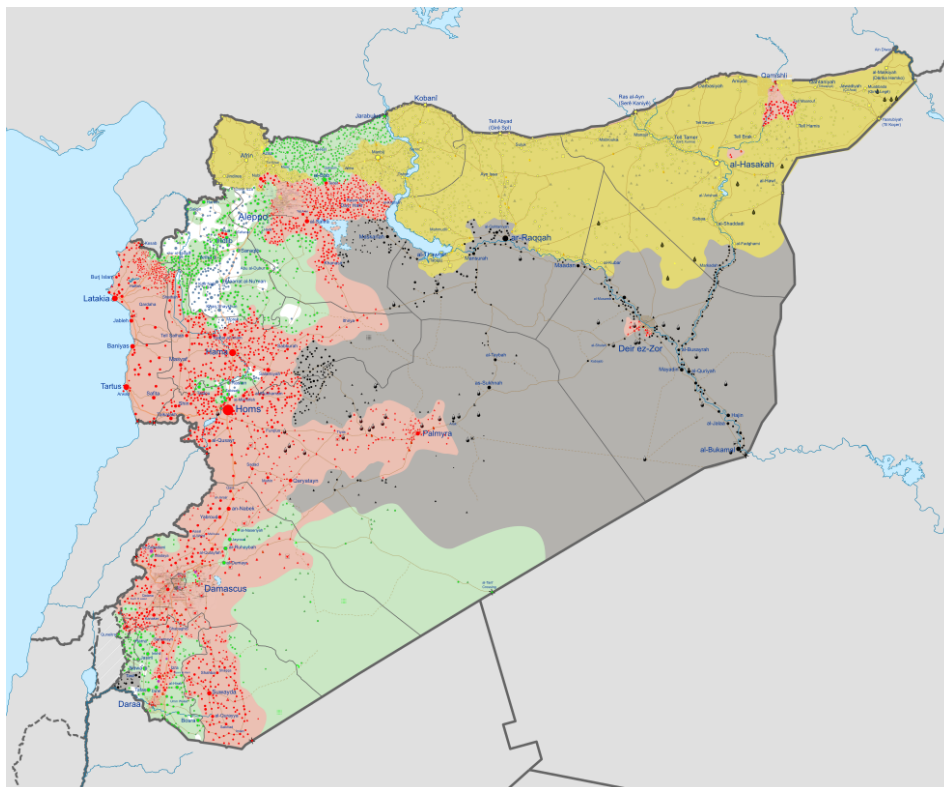
Model 5.2

The map in model 5.2 shows the current situation in Syria. The map models the situation on the 27th, April 2017. Red is controlled by the Assad Regime, green is controlled by the rebels, black is controlled by the Islamic State, tallow is controlled by the Rojava movement, and white by the al-Nusra Front. Control of the different areas has not changed much on the map since the different front-sections became set after the different rebel factions consolidated force and created the Free Syrian Army in July 2011.

5.1 Regime Restrictions in Command and Control, and Maneuver Forces

The regime conducted sequential large-scale operations in Dera`a and Homs, and minor scale operations in the Baniyas-region, while smaller infantry and militia units conducted security operations simultaneously during late spring, and the summer of 2011.[62] To exemplify the restraints and restrictions the regime has been experiencing, created by the mistrust in Sunni regular soldiers, and (mass scale) defection experienced during the first two phases of the conflict, the armored units of the 4th Armored Corps, pulled out f Dera`a on may 5th 2011, in order to initiate cordon- and control operations in Baniyas.

In Homs, 250 kilometers to the north, regime security forces were conducting clearance operations, lacking maneuver units, the regime was not able to consolidate its gains, and secure its ground operations in Homs. The Early June Crisis again diverted the 4th Armored Corps to Jisr al-Shughour, then focusing on inland operations in Latakia and Hama. This meant that the regime could muster enough troops to engage in multiple offensive operations within a given timeframe, but could not consolidate its gains. By late September 2011, when armored and mechanized units of the 4th Armored corps were relocated to Homs, the district of Rastan (in the Homs province) had become the center of armed resistance against the Assad Regime[63]. Rastan is located strategically on the M5 Highway, and thus controls a chokepoint between Homs and Hama, splitting Syria in two at the middle.[64] Rastan is still under (partly) rebel control (see Model 5.1`s map over the situation in Syria), and became the cradle of the armed revolution, as it became the first city to resist the regime with

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[62] Middle East Security Report 2, page 16, by Joseph Holliday. 2011
[63] Middle East Security Report 5 Syria`s Maturing Insurgency, page 16, by ISW, 2012
[64] Middle East Security Report 2, page 16, by Joseph Holliday. 2011

organized armed opposition in September 2011, when armored units of the 4th Armored Corps were allocated to the area to conduct offensive operations in order to secure Homs.[65]

Homs also became a focal point for sectarian violence and crimes, with both large Sunni and Alawite communities. The siege of Homs that started in mid 2011 lasted until early May 2014.[66] Notably, in the Rastan and Baba Amr- neighborhood, rebel resistance was so strong and imbedded in dense urban areas, that the regime laid siege to both areas, digging trenches and shelling the neighborhoods indiscriminately.[67] While regular infantry of the SAA conducted the siege, security forces and most prominently the shabiha militia was tasked with clearance missions, rooting out defectors and rebels. The heavy siege around Rastan, led to a statement on the 5th of March by captain Ammar al-Wavi, explaining that the rebel forces in Rastan would conduct a tactical withdrawal, in order to not give the regime any excuse to kill more civilians.[68] Without any signs of lifting the siege, the rebels counterattacked from the countryside, and Rastan is still contested.

Lacking control over the shabiha, and lacking sufficient maneuver troops, the regime`s combined security forces did not have the troops required to simultaneously conduct offensive operations, and securing the areas cleared in a manner that could prevent the sectarian violence during the first two phases of the conflict. Since the beginning of the conflict, the regime has shown that it is not capable of conducting major simultaneous operations. Consolidating forces, and freeing the 4th Armored Corps to mount countrywide, sequential campaigns like the regime tried in mid 2011, would come at an unacceptable cost, exemplified by the case of Rastan.

If the regime would deploy regime protection units from the capital of Damascus, to say, Homs, Rastan or Aleppo, the regime could mount a combined and sufficiently heavy force to crush the rebellion at one of these locations, but this would risk the regime`s grip on the capitol. The regime is reliant on the strategy of an army in all corners, and cannot spare sufficient well-trained and equipped troops to effectively fight the rebellion both in the countryside and in the major cities.

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[65] Middle East Security Report 5 Syria`s Maturing Insurgency, page 12, by ISW, 2012
[66] Retreat from Homs – Assad Conquers Cradle of Revolution. The Times, may 8th, 2014.
[67] See footnote 49, page 10.
[68] McCain calls for Airstrikes On Syria. Published by CNN, march 6th, 2012. See bibliography.

5.2 Understanding the Importance of Artillery and Air Superiority

The regime`s use of artillery is a strategic decision, embedded in the situation the regime has been experiencing throughout the whole conflict, namely the lack of troops to conduct several large-scale operations at the time. The lack of sufficient trained and equipped (mobile) troops, combined with the high cost of retaking rebel held areas with armoured and mechanized forces alone, led the regime to the logical conclusion of blocking of lines of supply, hindering the rebels movement in and out of their stronghold, and shelling them with artillery rounds to cause sufficient attrition to break the rebel lines; rather than isolate a rebel stronghold and clear the area of opposition, the regime stayed on the periphery and used indiscriminate shelling to force the opposition to capitulate. The regime's use of artillery demonstrates its strength but also exposes its weakness. Artillery has become the regime's primary tool for maintaining an economy of force. When it lacks the necessary ground forces to defeat the rebels, it relies on indirect re to suppress them.[69]

During phase I and II, (2011- June 2012), the regime avoided using its rotary winged aircraft in order not to spark an international debate calling for a no-fly zone over Syria (comparable to what happened in Libya, 2011). The regime utilized some of its fixed wing aircraft to conduct regular ground support missions during this phase, but when it became evident by June 2012, that there would not be a no-fly zone, both helicopters and fixed winged aircraft was used to carry out bombardment of rebel positions and besieged areas. The regime`s air capabilities works as a force multiplier for the ground forces artillery, and combined these two branches of the Syrian Armed Forces is responsible for most of the civilian deaths and injuries. At least 27,006 civilians had ben killed by mortar, rockets and artillery shelling, and as many as 18,866 civilians has been killed by Syrian Air force` bombing raids, by January 2015.[70] Artillery and bombing and strafing runs conducted by the Syrian Air Force have combined taken more than 45,000 civilian lives (by mid 2015), and wounded more than ten times that number.

Artillery and air bombardment is an integral part of the Assad regime`s strategy to destroy housing, disable infrastructure, and spread fear as part of the strategy of displacing the

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[69] Middle East Security Report 5 Syria`s Maturing Insurgency, page 17, by ISW, 2012
[70] Interactive statistics, published by the New York Times, 14th of September 2015.

population. As of January 2017, more than 6 million Syrians are internally displaced, and over 5 million are refugees. [71]

5.3 Regime Crackdown analysis

As a generic scenario, Regime Crackdown explains a situation where a regime responds to threats against its own survival with violent repressions of its own population. As Assad was faced with demonstrations, protests and eventually armed insurgents, a conflict arose, eventually leading to a civil war and a situation identifiable as a Regime Crackdown.

Beadle`s theory on Regime Crackdown identifies the regimes rationale to harm civilians: "To control restless population, on basis of real or perceived affiliation with opposition". Assad followed this rationale from the beginning: as seen early in Phase I, Assad responded to demonstrations with excessive violence and repression. Throughout the phases, the rationale did not change, but as the regime`s fight for survival intensified alongside the growing resistance movement, professionalization of the dissidents and as the conflict drew foreign fighters from all over the Arab world – regime survival became the main rationale, while control of the population still was the main strategic goal.

In a theoretical Regime Crackdown, the regime will use strategies and tactics to "violently repress the population at large, through selective and indiscriminate violence, threats, mass detention, massive destruction, occasional massacres" (Beadle, 2014: 24). The SAA, NDF and other groups affiliated with the Assad regime implemented most of the strategies and tactics mentioned, already in 2011. The main strategy implemented by the Assad regime has been to maneuver elite units between sieges of major cities, cutting of the rebels lines of communication, garrisoning most of the country`s urban based population. From this vantage point, large-scale cordon-and-search operations have been conducted by the main fighting force of the SAA, the 4th Armored corps. These operations created imbedded resistance in deep urban areas, out of reach of armor and mechanized uniformed units given the nature of urban warfare, provoking continues besieging operations and clearance operations by paramilitary units of the shabiha and Special Forces.

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[71] Reported by UNHCR, April 4th, 2017

These operations combined has lead to the situation where the bulk of an armed forces assigned to a given area, will operate in the outskirts of the urban center, directing indirect fire towards rebel strongpoints within the city. The regime has demonstrated the ability to conduct large-scale operations simultaneously, relying on infantry units and militias to hold and control rural areas around cities, and elite (Alawite) units to function as fire brigades, actively seeking and targeting rebel strongpoints. The regime has at no point been able to conduct more than one major inland operation at a time, given the scale of, and the geographical scope of the rebellion. Once regime forces has cleared a major population center or city, it has attempted to hold the are with local police and security forces as the armored and mechanized units would be needed elsewhere, leading the 4th Armored corps to mainly operate along the M5 North-South Highway. This strategy has been notably successful along the Syrian coastline, eliminating dissent in the early stages of the conflict by conducting of high intensity clearance operations.

When the conflict reached Phase III, all strategies and tactics were in use, some of which to a larger extent then others, such as indiscriminate bombings of urban areas, leading to massive destruction of housing areas and economical centers such as Homs, Hama, Aleppo, Damascus, and numerous other cities. By Phase III, the conflict had turned in to a civil war, an Assad`s rationale and strategies follows the theory of Regime Crackdown in the following ways, summed up by Joseph Holliday: "Bashar al-Assad's forces have displaced populations in opposition strongholds, which has deepened Syria's sectarian division. The regime has employed artillery, air power, bulldozers, sectarian massacres, and even ballistic missiles to force Syrian populations out of insurgent held areas. This strategy ensures that even when the rebels win towns and neighbourhoods, they lose the population" (Holliday, 2013:7).

The Relevant Military Capabilities of the Assad regime is coherent to what is described in the theoretical framework: "Command and control from regime, freedom of movement for regular forces, heavy weapons, special/irregular units in support" (Beadle, 2014:24). Assad controls (often through his extended family) the SAA and the other security forces and militias directly, in a strict top-down coordination of forces. By setting up a system of *an army in all corners*, besieging all larger rebel-controlled urban areas, combined with total air supremacy, the SAA is guaranteed campaign freedom of movement. The rebellion us thus denied freedom of movement, supplies, and is forced to stay in their strongholds, hindering the rebellion in achieving traditional guerilla tactics.

The theoretical expected outcome of a Regime Crackdown predicts "mostly combatant deaths, gradual increase in civilian deaths due to the heavy weaponry and in accordance with intensity of fighting, large-scale displacement, widespread destruction of population centers" (Beadle, 2014:24). The theoretical prediction correlates perfectly with the Syrian civil war.

During the onset of Phase I, most (rebel) combatants was killed in direct action with security forces, but the number of civilian casualties rose during Phase I and especially as military operations gradually grew more organized and larger in Phase II.

"The emergence of a number of contentious issues pushes the parties to move further apart, accentuating differences and submerging similarities between them in order to justify a desire to inflict harm on one another. The mistrust of enemy motives hinders an ability to sympathize with the other party and strengthens a tendency towards an zero-sum calculations" (Ho-Won Jeong, 20008:155)

5.4 Sectarian Violence

Until late 2012, when the civil war was a fact, most sectarian violence was conducted by un-uniformed security forces, paramilitary shabiha groups, and civilian individuals (on both sides) seeking retaliation. Post 2012, regime violence did not only include random shootings and indiscriminate bombing of individuals or groups in urban areas, but became a more profound part of the regime`s security forces tactics in order to break moral and quell the unruly populace supporting the armed rebels.

A string of assassinations, including a number of academics and doctors, none of whom had clear ties to the rebellion, accredited armed gangs loyal to the regime, attempting to spark further sectarian violence in Homs. ISW reported in 2012, that every time the shabiha and other security forces conducted violence and massacre of Sunni villagers, the rate of retaliatory extra-judicial killings grew (on both sides). Until June 2012, (most) rebel groups had limited attacks to military targets, but reports of civilians targeted directly by sectarian violence increased in the months that followed. An example in Homs, highlighting this is recorded by journalist Nir Rosen, who found Alawite expelled from Sunni neighborhoods, after unknown assailants stopped a bus and executed 9 Alawite passengers, as a retaliation for

a similar attack the day before, in which 13 Sunni factory workers was pulled from a bus and executed in the same area.[72] Similar cases has been recorded over the whole of northern Syria in particular, as crimes committed against civilians on the basis of their religious affiliation, and (presumed) political loyalties has been regularly reported since medio 2012.

Sectarian violence in nature often leads to a downward spiral, as one side will retaliate the atrocities committed by the other side, as cultural, religious and ethnic affiliation is often cited as a conflict-prone and inducing societal cleavage, this being the case of the Syrian civil war. The effectiveness of religion as a banner for group boundaries might illuminate the level of violence committed against civilians (by both sides) in Syria. The abundant anecdotal evidence that confirms these assumptions and assertions of sectarianism in Syria, are vast. Alawite farmers in the Al-Ghab Valley were "routinely abducted and killed" by armed opposition groups operating from nearby Sunni villages. Similarly, in Damascus, civilians were detained and tortured "for their religion alone." (Adams, 2015, 9). On the ground government troops and allied militias have conducted massacres of unarmed civilians.

Documented cases include numerous killings in Idlib and Homs, including at Houla, a cluster of villages northwest of Homs City, where entire families were executed with guns and knives by forces that went door-to-door on a nine-hour killing spree on 25 May 2012. Some of the perpetrators wore army uniforms, but others wore civilian clothing and identified their victims by name before killing them (ibid, page 8). Uniformed regime soldiers also contribute to the sectarian violence directly, as SAA snipers are routinely deployed to terrorise, maim or murder civilians, as part of clearance campaigns in urban areas. Victims of (regime) snipers are often left to bleed to death in the streets to target other individuals that approach the wounded victim in order to provide them with health care. Although many conscripts in the Syrian army are Sunnis, they are (most often) commanded by Alawite officers who are seen to perpetrate atrocities against civilians. Conversely, victims of violence by regime and pro-regime forces are overwhelmingly Sunni.

Geographically clustered and isolated groups (see appendix page I) like the Alawites in Syria are more likely to find themselves parties in (ethnic/religious) conflict (Caselli & Coleman, 2012, 24). This underbuilds Matuszeski and Schneider (2006) assumption that geographically clustering of ethnic groups is significantly related to the incidence, duration

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[72] Syria Agrees to Arab Leagues Plan. Published by Al Jazeera English.

and severity of civil war (Caselli & Coleman, 2012, 24). Minority dynamics also play a role. It is a relatively widespread trope in opposition discourse that while regime areas as a whole still contain many Sunnis, both military actors and civilians in regime-held neighbourhoods contain large groups of minorities. Pro-regime militias are largely Alawite or Shi'a and are trained, funded, and equipped by Iran and Hezbollah; and Iranian, Iraqi, and Hezbollah Shi'a militias continue to play direct fighting roles. Conversely, opposition groups are overwhelmingly Sunni Arab. This has helped give credence to a narrative of an identity-based existential con ict pitting Sunnis on the one hand against Alawites and Shi'a on the other.[73]

The sectarian angle crept into the conflict gradually, as the armed rebels, mostly Sunnis, began targeting minorities. The situation worsened after external forces dispatched Takfiris and Salafists to Syria and the involvement of al Qaeda expanded (Adams, 2015, 3).

While al-Nusra, al-Qaeda, and the other extremists groups are becoming more influential, most fighters in Syria are Syrians and are fighting an inherently decentralized chaotic campaign against the Assad regime.[74] The instrumentalisation of ethnic and sectarian identities has further increased the prevalence and power of extremism.

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[73] The Syrian Coflict: A Systems Conflict Analysis. Published by the ARK Group, February 2016, page 48.
[74] Reported by M. Suhdi Jasser, Sectarian Conflict in Syria,

5.5 Violence, casualties and displacement
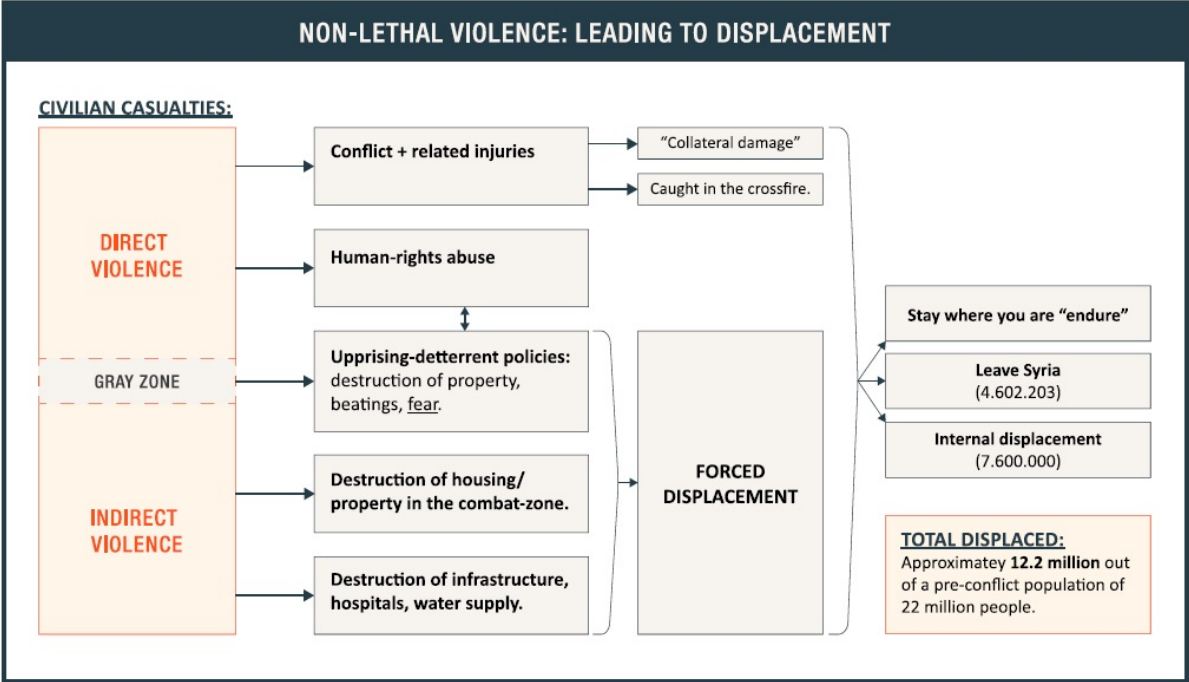
Model 5.4.1

The Assad regime`s key rationale for exposing civilians to indiscriminate violence is to forcedly displace the population, thus answering <u>question 2</u>: the Assad`s regime strategic objective for committing violence against civilians in Syria is to forcibly displace the population, denying the rebellion support, and to control the population. How the strategy of forced displacement is implemented is summarised in model 4.1 above. The level of violence against civilians defined here as physical violence targeting non-combatant individuals, causing death, injury.

Forcing displacement of the population in mostly rebel-held territory, Assad is concentrating the Syrian population in areas under his control. This disparity in population distribution across Syria offers the regime several advantages over rebel forces: Controlling the majority of the population provides manpower reserves for the regime and restricts the population from joining the rebellion (Kozak, 2015:11-12). The displacement-strategy also ensures that no economic activity takes place in the rebel-held areas.

To acquire exact figures of civilian and insurgent casualties from a conflict zone is challenging. Model 3 shows a categorization of civilian and insurgent combat-related deaths

in Syria 2011-2015. The table operates with direct and indirect causes, and a large grey-zone. The problem when gathering statistical data on combat-related deaths from a conflict-zone with the characteristics of modern warfare is the interchangeable role of the insurgent. The insurgent is dressed and acts as a civilian: his camouflage is the people, and urban residential areas are his strongholds. The only aspect of the insurgent`s role separating him from a civilian is his weapon. Rupert Smith notes this as one of the key aspects of modern war: the "enemy" hides in plain sight, and becomes an enemy first when he aims a weapon at you (Smith, 2006: 156-157).

As regime forces has been targeting medical personnel in rebel-controlled areas, death tolls linked to indirect violence rises. The civilians situated in a battle space are in need of professional medical personnel, as physical and mental trauma e.g. after an airstrike or artillery bombardment causes complex, and potentially fatal injuries. Research collated by Physicians for Human Rights revealed that, "government forces committed 90 % of the confirmed 150 attacks on 124 facilities between March 2011 and March 2014.[75] During many of the larger sieges (Homs, Hama, Aleppo, e.g.), regime troops and militias have forcibly denied civilians medical supplies and treatment, in direct violation of the Geneva Convention.

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[75] Failure to Protect: Syria and the UN Security Council. By Dr. Simon Adams, 2015, page 9.
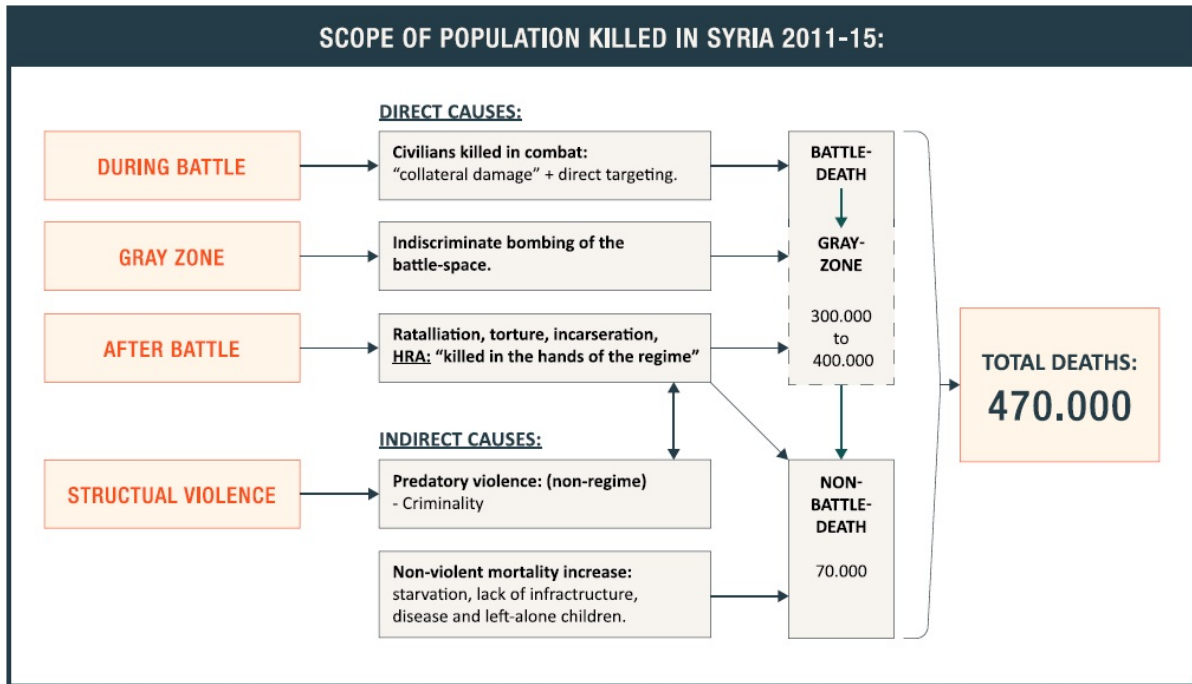
Model 5.4.2

Gathering statistical data on people killed in a combat-zone will lead to scrutiny on how you count bodies: does the body belong to an insurgent only when lying next to a weapon? Most fighting in Syria has been taking place in large urban areas and cities. Most victims (by far) belongs to the Syrian civilian population: The Syrian Centre for Policy Research (SCPR) operates with approximately 470 000 dead. 400 000 of those deaths is directly linked to combat, while 70 000 deaths is linked to harmful structures prohibited by the war: destroyed housing, infrastructure and hospitals, lack of clean water and food, spread of disease and so on[76].

Out of the 400 000 combat-deaths, the SCPR and the ICG figures between 80- and 90 000 of which were insurgents. Contemplating different sources, the grey-zone will vary between 280 000 to 430 000 civilian deaths. According to the Syrian Center for Policy Research, an independent Syrian research organization, the death toll from the conflict as of February 2016 was 470,000. The spread and intensification of fighting has led to a dire humanitarian crisis, with 6.1 million internally displaced people and 4.8 million seeking

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[76] http://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/feb/11/report-on-syria-conflict-finds-115-of-population-killed-or-injured

refuge abroad, according to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. By mid-2016, an estimated 1 million people were living in besieged areas and denied life-saving assistance and humanitarian aid.[77]

The grey-zone is created by the nature of "war amongst the people" (smith): modern warfare erases or grinds down the line between combatant and civilian to the bare minimum. This notion is reinforces by aspects of the Syrian civil war itself. Assad started in 2011 a ruthless counterinsurgency-campaign, targeting civilians and combatants alike. Indiscriminate targeting of dense residential areas and cities, aimed at flushing the insurgents out of cities and in to the open, where The SAA`s modern and mobile troops would defeat the insurgency with ease. This is the same plan as Hafez al Assad implied with success during the rebellion in the 1980s.

The rebellion of 2011 waged war in a different manner, digging inn and enduring heavy shelling and airstrikes of the city-centres of Damascus, Homs, Hama, Aleppo and many other, with the civilian population caught in the middle. President Bashar al-Assad`s political line and impetus in defeating the rebellion, has been (commonly) considered to be synonym with the Ba`athist Party regime, and its security forces. Assad`s options is likely to have been constrained by the influence of the older guard of the party, and the regime`s inner circle – in which many of the prominent figures was instated by his father, Hafez.[78] This (possible) dynamic of the Syrian Regime, might add to an explanation of *why* the regime answered the (relatively) peaceful (but destructive) demonstrations in march 2011 with the level of violence, that sparked the civil war.

5.6 Characteristics of the Syrian civil war

Rupert Smiths characteristics of modern war follow the Syrian civil war almost with perfection (Smith, 2005:25-26):

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[77] Reported by the Human Rights Watch, February, 2017; https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2017/country-chapters/syria

[78] Middle East Security Report 2, page 13, by Joseph Holliday. 2011

1. The Assad regime`s objective concerns the whole Syrian society; there is no absolute objective that can be seized to secure a victory.

2. The Syrian civil war is exclusively fought in urban areas: skirmishes do take place in rural areas, but these are minor clashes, not meant to strategically influence the conflict. Attacks on supply-depots and single SAA-trucks are classic guerrilla tactics meant only to hamper and frustrate the enemy.

3. Timeframe: even if Assad or the insurgency would cave inn and give up, the sectarian conflict and involvement of neighbouring states and countries such as USA, Russia and Iran, has created deep cracks within the Syrian society. The religious aspect of the conflict is further magnified by the presence of extremist groups such as ISIL, al-Nusra Front, al-Qaida and other groups with different religious affiliation. A situation of positive peace is not imaginable in the foreseeable future. The gloomy numbers of internally displaced people and refugees further dims the blurred future of Syria.

4. Assad has stationed most parts of the regular SAA along the southern borders, maintaining the pre-war mission of border-patrol and deterrence. This is mainly because the Assad regime fears mass desertion of Sunni soldiers, which would cause the regime to loose soldiers and the insurgency to gain (desperately needed manpower). Assad thus concentrates his (Alawite) forces in heavy sieges of insurgent strongholds: he fights not to loose force.

5. The Internet provides the insurgency with everything from instruction videos on how to operate an AK-47 to tactical movements of troops and blueprints for technologically advanced weaponry. Guerrilla tactics is learned and adapted to the new scenario: the dense urban areas are the jungle of the 21st century.

6. Assad representing the state is fighting multiple groups of insurgents with different allegiance and religious belonging.

Christopher Kozak says the following about Assad`s strategy of displacement: "Continuous e orts to depopulate opposition-held zones and consolidate civilians into regime-held areas feed into the narrative that "the majority of the Syrian people...support their president." This argument manipulates Syria's recent history and portrays the staying power of Bashar al-Assad and his government favorably in political negotiations" (Kozak,

2015:11).[79]

5.7 Violence as a product of intra-state conflict

As seen in the empirical analysis and the analysis above, Stathis Kalyvas correctly identifies a difference between direct and indiscriminate violence aimed at civilians. In the Syrian civil war, both types of violence is present,- and often interchangeable. As the Assad regime utilizes every thinkable form of violence against the Syrian people, it is complicated to trace the different types of abuse the civilians have experienced.

Kaldor suggest that modern war is characterized by a multitude of different fighting units and formations, public, private, state and non-state. Insurgents, foreign mercenaries, warlords and militias (e.g.) alter the objective of warfare: instead of winning battles, different participants in a conflict will aim at gaining local support to topple the states legitimate authorities (Malantowicz, 2013:53-54). This has been flipped in parts of the Syrian conflict, as sectarianism, desperation and total disregard for human life has led both parties to deliberately attack civilians. Civilians do to some degree voice their support for either side, but this marks them for potential direct (and aimed) violence. Strategies linked to gaining local support has disappeared in the chaotic strategy of forced displacement; instead of getting local support, the people able to give support is forced out of the combat space.

6 Conclusion

The Assad regime has committed extreme brutality towards its own populace, and is responsible for almost half a million deaths over the last 6 years in Syria. The regime strategic objective for committing violence against civilians in Syria is to forcibly displace the population, denying the rebellion support, and to control the population. The regime's response to the rebellion has 'mutated' through several phases, from initial half-hearted

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[79] Published in ISW: Middle East Security Report 26, April 2015.

reforms through to the current military solution. However, the evolution of the rationale behind the violence is not linear, and the regime's use of violence against civilians serves multiple purposes. These purposes must be understood in the context of the regime's desired political goals, and it is necessary therefore to briefly outline the regime's core security interests. First and foremost the regime's overarching security interest is its own survival. The regime is convinced that 'any immediate concession or political compromise would be seized upon by enemies at home and afar to bring it down.

Three main points can explain the pattern of escalating violence:

1.   The Assad regime grew more and more anxious and desperate as the rebellion grew, when the immediate responses by the security forces aggregated the initial protestors.

2.   In order to decouple the civilians and exhaust the rebellion, the regime relied more and more on heavy artillery and air bombardment to force displacement, and disrupt and destroy the rebel infrastructure and logistics. Indiscriminate use of these types of weapons and tactics are extremely dangerous and deadly when utilized in urban environments.

3.   Sectarianism has fuelled the ever-rising levels of violence seen in Syria. The sharpest split is between the ruling minority Alawite sect from which President Assad's most senior political and military associates are drawn, and the country's Sunni Muslim majority, mostly aligned with the opposition. The conflict had drawn in other minorities, including Armenian Christians, Assyrian Christians, Druze, Palestinians, Kurds, Yezidi and Turkmens. As militias and non-Syrian Shia—motivated by pro-Shia sentiment rather than loyalty to the Assad government—have taken over fighting the opposition from the weakened Syrian Army, fighting has taken on a more sectarian nature.

The variation in levels of violence appears to be largely explained by the incentives of armed groups, which in this type of conflict decide to target civilians according to their public identities, but also by the civilian incentives for collaboration with the groups, which are associated with strategic political considerations at the local level.

Bashar al-Assad's scorched earth counterinsurgency campaign accelerated Syria's sectarian atomization, and his over-reliance on a hard core of loyalist soldiers and militiamen has reduced hafez' Ba'athist institutions to a narrow sectarian militia. The longer Assad pursues his depopulation campaign, the less likely it will become for the opposition to reconcile with the Alawite community. As the opposition becomes less likely to reconcile, the

Alawite community will become more likely to cluster around Assad or the remnants of his regime (Holliday, 2013:41).

In order to stop the atrocities and the violence the civilians of Syria is experiencing, an herculean task lies ahead given the different combating groups and different affiliations, the support the sides are receiving from abroad – beyond the purview of international law, and the gruesome dynamics of a civil war described earlier in this text. The Syrian government and the opposition will both have to agree on endless resolutions concerning the wounds left by a devastating, sectarian conflict, dividing the nation, creating and fuelling hostilities and violence along social, religious, ethnic and political divides.

In sum, violence against civilians, a factor that initially helped spark the conflict in Syria, is now entrenched in national conflict dynamics, with international support for the various warring sides. The Syrian civil war that started as protests and demonstrations voicing democratic rights and improvement for the people of Syria turned into one of the most destructive and gruesome civil wars of this time.

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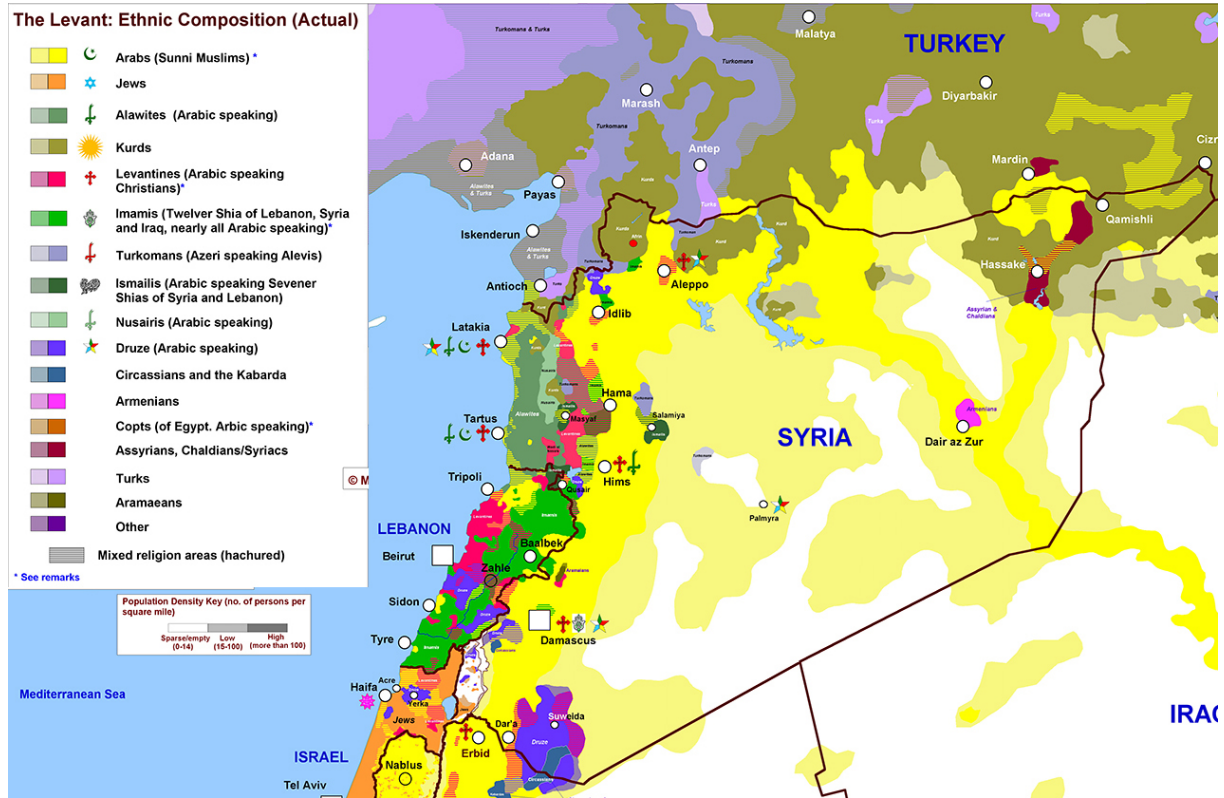
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7.1 Appendix

I. Ethnic/religious composition in Syria

II. Distribution of Alawites in the Levant

Legend:
- = Alawite Majority
- = Significant Alawite Minority
- = Little/No Alawite Presence