Sectarian Dynamics and Foreign Intervention in the Syrian Civil War: An Examination of Key Concepts and Its Impact

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ABSTRACT

The ongoing conflict in Syria, which began as a civil war in 2011 and has evolved into a complex multifaceted crisis involving various foreign actors, presents unique challenges to understand the dynamics between sectarianism and foreign intervention. This research paper aims to analyse the role played by religious affiliations and political ideologies in shaping the conflicts within Syria's civil war while examining how external powers have engaged in interventions designed to address these issues. This paper seeks to explore the underlying factors driving the emergence and persistence of sectarian tensions during this protracted conflict while evaluating the effectiveness of foreign interventions aimed at mitigating their impact. By doing so, it contributes valuable insights towards enhancing the understanding of the intricate relationship between religion, politics, and violence in contemporary conflicts worldwide.

KEYWORDS: *Syria, civil war, religion, sectarianism, politics, foreign intervention, tensions, violence*

INTRODUCTION

The Syrian civil war, which erupted in 2011 and continues today, is one of the most devastating conflicts in recent history. Initially sparked by protests against President Bashar al-Assad's regime, the conflict has since escalated into a complex web of regional and global power struggles. Understanding the root causes and drivers behind this catastrophic event requires examining the role played by religious affiliation and ideology as well as foreign intervention. Religious divisions have been at the heart of much of the violence experienced throughout the conflict, but the involvement of foreign actors adds another layer of complexity. This paper explores both aspects – sectarian dynamics and foreign intervention – in order to shed light on the multiple factors contributing to the Syrian civil war. This study will evaluate the effectiveness of different interventions designed to mitigate the impacts of sectarian tensions on the ground. Ultimately, this research paper provides valuable insights into the intricate relationship between religion, politics, and violence in contemporary conflicts worldwide.

Methodology:

This research employs literature reviews to gather previous findings and theories surrounding the topic under investigation. Analysing empirical data collected from diverse sources enables us to capture nuanced perspectives and understandings regarding the roles of sectarianism and foreign intervention in the Syrian Civil War. Employing such a comprehensive approach ensures capturing rich and robust evidence-based results essential for providing meaningful contributions towards existing academic discourse around the Syrian conflict.

Objectives:

The primary objective of this research is to investigate and examine the sectarian dynamics influencing the Syrian civil war and its response to foreign intervention attempts. Furthermore, identifying potential areas of improvement within current policy frameworks could assist decision makers and practitioners in designing more effective measures to combat similar situations globally. The paper strives to provide a comprehensive examination of how religious and ideological fractures interact

with foreign intervention tactics to shape the trajectory of armed conflicts. Through rigorous investigations combined with critical theoretical analyses, seeks to deepen scholarly knowledge about the Syrian civil war while offering practical implications relevant to resolve ongoing crisis.

Results:

Results from this research indicate that sectarian dynamics play a significant role in fuelling violence within Syria's civil war. Evidence suggests that Sunni vs Shia sectarian tensions are particularly pronounced due to historical animosity and competition for power among influential religious institutions and political factions. In addition, Islamic extreme groups exploit these sectarian divisions to recruit fighters and garner public support for violent extremism. Furthermore, foreign intervention attempts targeting Syria's conflict have had limited success primarily because of conflicting interests among outside actors, inadequate planning and execution, as well as inability to comprehend the complexities of local dynamics thoroughly. While certain countries have contributed military aid, others have pursued diplomatic solutions without fully considering the ramifications of removing Assad's regime, which may destabilise Syria further.

Discussion:

This research offers valuable insights into the intersectional nature of sectarianism and foreign intervention in the Syrian civil war. It highlights the importance of examining cultural, social, and religious contexts when attempting to understand why conflicts emerge and how they might potentially be resolved. Findings suggest that sectarian divides serve not only as catalysts for violence but also as barriers to reconciliation efforts, indicating the need for targeted interventions aimed specifically at reducing tensions rather than substituting one group's dominance for another's rule. Moving forward, it underscores the urgent need for greater cooperation among participating nations and careful consideration of community dynamics prior to launching interventions. This would allow for more fruitful outcomes and likely prevent further bloodshed driven by religious tensions.

Conclusion:

The conclusion of this paper affirms the significance of exploring sectarian dynamics and foreign intervention in relation to the Syrian civil war. Insights gained through thorough research demonstrate that sectarian tensions are deeply embedded within Syrian societies, serving as powerful motivators for violence and hindrances to peaceful resolution. Furthermore, finding indicates that foreign intervention efforts frequently falter due to unclear goals, inadequate preparation, and misunderstanding of local conditions. Considering these findings, this paper emphasises the necessity for holistic approach to manage religious tensions in Syria. Solutions centred on inclusivity, education, and promoting national unity seem promising in creating favourable environments conducive to lasting peace.

Importance:

The publication of this research paper holds significance for four major reasons:

➢ Firstly, it provides invaluable insights into the influence of sectarianism and foreign intervention on the Syrian civil war - a conflict characterised by widespread violence and profound humanitarian suffering.

➢ Secondly, it advances the understanding of religious dimensions contributing to armed conflicts worldwide, giving rise to discussions that could inform future interventions globally.

➢ Thirdly, the conclusions outlined recommend practical steps governments and organisations could adopt to foster peace and stability in regions grappling with similar problems, thereby encouraging reflection on conflict prevention strategies internationally.

➢ Lastly, publishing this type of detailed analytical research serves as a foundation for academics studying conflicts and crises, helping lay the groundwork for future comparative studies on other instances of violence rooted in sectarianism and foreign interference.

Introduction:
The beginning:

The Syrian civil war began in March 2011 because of popular discontent against the government's oppressive rule, high unemployment, corruption, and lack of political freedom under President Bashar al-Assad. Outraged residents came to the streets to demand political and economic reforms after learning that several kids had been detained and subjected to abuse by the government for drawing anti-regime graffiti. Security personnel reacted violently, making a large number of arrests and even opening fire on protesters.[1] The uprising started as a peaceful protest against the government, with demonstrations erupting in the southern city of Deraa. The Syrian government responded with a harsh crackdown, killing hundreds of demonstrators and imprisoning many more. This led to a rapid escalation of violence, with opposition supporters taking up arms to defend themselves and later to rid their areas of security forces. President Bashar al-Assad vowed to crush what he called

foreign-backed terrorism, leading to widespread unrest and escalating into a full-blown civil war. This complex conflict involved various non-state actors and other nations, and has led to significant loss of life, displacement of populations, and the ongoing suffering of the Syrian people.[2]

Several key sectarian divides exist within Syrian society that have contributed significantly to the escalation and perpetuation of the country's conflict. One prominent divide exists between Sunni Muslims and Alawites who belong to the Shia faith. Historical rivalries between these two religious communities trace back centuries, dating back to the Ottoman Empire era. Another sectarian split occurs between Christians and minorities such as Kurds, Druze, and Yazidis.[3] Ideological differences and competition for power have historically existed between these Christian groups, adding complexity to an already strained religious landscape. Moreover, sectarian divisions emerge within Islam itself, notably between moderate Islamists and extreme Islam groups. Each of these split fuelled resentment and mistrust among different religious communities, making it difficult for Syrians to find common ground and advance towards peace. Consequently, investigating these sectarian dynamics becomes crucial to understanding the roots of the conflict and charting possible paths towards resolving it.

The Syrian civil war exhibits clear signs of sectarian division, reflecting ancient rivalries and religious tensions between Sunnis and Shias. Sunni Muslim majority regions are predominantly located in western and northern Syria, whereas the Alawite minority belongs mainly to the ruling elite and resides mainly in eastern parts of Syria.[4] These religious communities hold vastly contrasting views on governance, law, culture, and politics. Historically, relations between Sunnis and Alawites remained tense even after Baath rule ended in 2011. Political appointments, recruitment patterns for militias, territorial control, and resource allocation heavily favour Alawites. Many Syrians view this favouritism as evidence of systemic discrimination, contributing to anger and frustration among other religious communities.

Christian minorities represent approximately 10% of Syria's population and comprise ethnic Greeks, Armenians, Assyrians, Roman Catholics, Protestants, and others.[5] Despite sharing core Christian beliefs, these groups differ in traditions, languages, histories, and cultures. Disunity among Christians further complicated conflict resolution efforts. They are often caught between Sunni Arab neighbours and minority Assyrian leadership, struggling to protect their rights and maintain autonomy. Some Christian leaders feared marginalisation or persecution if they align too closely with either side in the conflict, hampering collective action necessary for ending hostilities.

Sectarian dynamics:
The sectarian differences within Syrian society have played a critical role in escalating and perpetuating the country's conflict. Communal tensions created divisions and fostered mistrust among citizens, undermining the possibility of constructive dialogue, compromises, and agreements needed for sustainable peace. Religious affiliation shaped individuals' perceptions of self, their place in society, and how they relate to others. Differences in religious doctrine caused confusion, suspicion, and fear among members of opposing communities, igniting latent conflicts when provoked. Past experiences of oppression based on religious affiliations intensified negative emotions and increased resistance to negotiation. Furthermore, religious communities rallied around leaders who championed their causes, feeding into polarisation and deepening sectarian divisions. As these divisions expanded, they transformed into drivers of violence, driving extreme movements and violent attacks, causing casualties, destruction, and displacing millions of civilians. Therefore, understanding and addressing these underlying sectarian factors remained central to any initiative aiming to resolve Syria's conflict effectively.[6]

Religious differences within Syrian society have fuelled conflict escalation and perpetuation multiple ways.[7] *Firstly*, tensions arising from religious affiliation bred mistrust among communities, impeding open conversations, compromises, and agreements required for meaningful peace talks. Misunderstandings related to religious teachings have led to misconceptions, prejudices, and intolerance that stoked conflict flames. Religiously motivated attacks instigated violence, terrorising innocent civilians and worsening societal divides. Additionally, differences in religious practices and interpretation drove followers towards extreme ideologies like jihadism or suicide bombings, pushing entire communities to take sides in armed struggles.

Secondly, history played a huge part in shaping religious divisions within Syrian society. Prior to the 2011 revolution, religious tensions shaped political relationships between Sunni Arabs and minority Alawites ruled by the Assad dynasty since 1970.[8] This legacy contributed significantly to the animosity experienced in the present times. Discrimination experienced by minority religious groups fuelled resentment and distrust, prompting segments to turn

to violence in defence or pursuit of revenge. Minority religious communities felt threatened by dominant religious communities dominating politics, economy, and social structures. Such feelings eroded confidence in political systems, limiting citizens' willingness to engage constructively in peace-making dialogues.

Lastly, external actors exploited religious divisions and created another layer of complexity in the Syrian conflict. Foreign states sponsored religious extreme groups to achieve strategic objectives in Syria, deepened conflicts beyond domestic concerns. Conflicts sparked by foreign intervention generated a cycle of violence and retaliatory actions, rendering solutions harder to attain. Hence, religious divisions cannot be separated from wider socio-political contexts affecting Syria's conflict evolution and sustainability.[9]

Factors contributing to the protraction of the Syrian conflict:

➢ **Use of chemical weapons:** Chemical weapons have played a destructive role in the Syrian Civil War, beginning with the initial deployment of sarin gas in 2013 by the Assad regime on civilians in Damascus suburbs killing hundreds.[10] Later on, chlorine gas attacks took place targeting opposition-held neighbourhoods, causing respiratory illnesses and fatalities amongst children. Chemical weapon usage heightened violence levels, drove distrust between rival factions, aggravated the humanitarian crisis and provoked international condemnation. Thus, chemically weaponised attacks became symbols of terror and atrocities committed during the conflict. Multiple efforts were made at negotiating their elimination through diplomatic channels but without much success. Chemical weapons have contributed substantially to escalating brutality, destabilisation, and devastation throughout Syria's civil war.[11]

➢ **Complexity of root causes:** The origins of the Syrian civil war stemmed from multiple factors ranging from socio-economic disparities, sectarian tensions, political corruption, authoritarian rule, foreign intervention, to extreme ideologies promoting hatred and violence. Resolving each of these causes would require addressing deeply entrenched systemic issues requiring extensive reforms and cooperation.

➢ **Foreign intervention:** Various foreign powers have provided varying degrees of support to opposite sides of the conflict. Russia backs Syrian president Assad, whereas Turkey supports opposition forces. America has supplied arms to rebels, while Iran assists Assad's army. Foreign interference complicated negotiations, prolonged conflict, and strained relationships among regional allies.

➢ **Division among opposing forces:** There exists little consensus among opposition forces themselves regarding a unified approach to ending the conflict. Various rebel factions compete for dominance, hindering efforts to reach a peaceful settlement. Moreover, ISIS emerged as a separate entity causing additional devastation and confusion.

➢ **Humanitarian crisis:** Millions of Syrians were displaced internally and abroad, putting immense strain on receiving communities. Basic needs like shelter, food, water, medical care, and education are scarce, worsening conditions for those left behind. Humanitarian crises compounded conflicts, exacerbated poverty, crime rates, social unrest, and more.

➢ **International legitimacy deficit:** Absence of international consensus on what constitutes acceptable intervention leaves room for multiple interpretations of responsibility and authority. Questions arise concerning whose duty it is to stop the bloodshed – whether UN Security Council members or individual nations acting independently.

Emergence of ISIS:

ISIS, formally known as the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), emerged as one of the deadliest terrorist organisations globally.[12] Established in 2014 primarily across Syria and Iraq, ISIS controlled vast territories characterised by brutal governance, systematic persecution of minorities, forced conversions, kidnappings, beheadings, sexual enslavement, mass killings, chemical attacks, and exploitation of oil resources. Their goal was to establish a caliphate spanning Sunni Arab lands. At its peak, ISIS controlled roughly 25% of Iraq and Syria's territory. Although ISIS lost control over its once dominant territories in 2017–2018 after prolonged campaigns conducted by coalition forces led by America, Russia, Iran, Turkey, France, and several Arab nations, its remnants continue sporadic acts of terrorism globally.[13] ISIS recruited mainly from marginalised Sunni Muslim youths struggling economically or socially excluded groups feeling alienated, radicalised, or seeking revenge for perceived injustices perpetrated against Muslims globally.[14]

Islamic extremists have capitalised on these divisions by recruiting militants from vulnerable sections of society belonging to a particular religious

background, exacerbating tensions further. ISIS actively recruited Christians from Iraq to fight alongside them in Syria, fuelling religious hatred and violence.[15] Thus, assessing and addressing these sectarian divides become imperative for facilitating dialogue, negotiating compromise, and establishing trust among conflicting parties. Addressing religious grievances and promoting inclusion, tolerance, and equality is pivotal in laying the foundations for durable peace in Syria.

Regional interventions:

Major foreign players involved in the Syrian civil war include Russia, Iran, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and the United States.[16] There are two main categories of foreign intervention methods used by countries participating in the Syrian conflict: military intervention and non-military diplomacy. Military intervention encompasses the deployment of soldiers, aircraft carriers, tanks, and other heavy weaponry to the region to assist one party over another. On the other hand, non-military diplomacy refers to attempts made by foreign governments to negotiate peace deals, impose sanctions on belligerents, establish ceasefires, monitor compliance, offer humanitarian aid, and participate in international forums discussing the conflict resolution process. Diplomatic strategies employed vary widely; some focus on direct negotiations between warring parties, while others prioritise multilateral channels facilitated by organisations like the United Nations Security Council or regional entities such as the Arab League. While both categories of foreign intervention have had mixed success rates in resolving conflicts in Syria. Effective intervention calls for a comprehensive approach that addresses both violent and peaceful aspects of the conflict simultaneously. Moreover, international cooperation is crucial to finding sustainable solutions that benefit all stakeholders and lay the foundation for peacebuilding efforts in Syria.

Iran has played a significant role in the Syrian Civil War since its outbreak in 2011.[17] Initially, Iran expressed neutrality but later shifted its stance towards supporting Bashar al-Assad's regime due to ideological similarities and strategic interests. Iran's decision came amidst fears that Western powers might exploit Syria's instability to advance their geopolitical agenda in the region. Iran has extended economic, military, and political support to Damascus throughout the conflict. Iranian military forces have participated in battles alongside Syrian troops, offering advanced weaponry, equipment, and training to bolster Assad's defences. Iran's approach leverages proxy forces such as Hezbollah, Iran-trained fighters,

and Shia militias allied with Assad's army to challenge the opposition. In addition, Iran has deployed thousands of militiamen trained by the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) to fight alongside Syrian government forces and combat opposition groups.[18] Iranian involvement centred on preserving Assad's rule and defending Shiite interests across Syria. Their strategy focused on using proxy forces to inflict damage on Israel by Hezbollah, which shared borders with Syria.

Economically, Iran has invested billions of dollars in rebuilding Syria's infrastructure destroyed during the conflict, particularly in key sectors like transportation, energy, telecommunications, and housing. Iranian banks have granted loans to facilitate reconstruction projects and promote trade, demonstrating Tehran's determination to maintain its influence in Syria.[19] Politically, Iran has used Syria as a platform to project its influence across the Middle East. Tehran maintains close ties with Lebanese Hezbollah, which receives substantial financial and military aid from Iran. Iran has also used Syria as a base to launch missile strikes targeting Israel and other regional rivals, asserting its military capabilities in the process. Despite Iran's active role in shaping Syria's destiny, its efforts have faced criticism from Western nations accusing Iran of violating international laws and escalating tensions in the region. Despite criticisms, Iran continued to back Assad's regime believing that preserving Syria's unity serves Iran's best interests.

Turkey backs Syrian opposition forces operating primarily along Turkey's border region.[20] Its goal involves curbing the spread of Islamic State activity near Turkish soil and weakening Assad's regime through aiding anti-government groups resisting Russian and Iranian influence. Turkey enjoys military corridors connecting it to NATO allies in Europe through Syria and sees supporting opposition forces as instrumental in achieving this objective. Saudi Arabia provided funds and logistics support to Syrian rebels seeking to depose Assad. Saudi Arabia perceived Iran and Russia as adversaries and feared growing Iranian influence in Syria would threaten regional stability.[21] Support for opposition forces bolstered its broader effort to counter Iran's expanding influence throughout the Middle East. Saudi Arabia has provided financial and logistical support to the Syrian opposition, while the United States was involved in providing military aid and support to various factions in the conflict.[22]

Other foreign interventions:

Russia has provided support to the Assad regime through military intervention, including the deployment of air power. Russia offers substantial

military assistance to President Bashar al-Assad's regime, supplying advanced weaponry and conducting aerial strikes targeting opposition forces.[23] Military cooperation includes joint exercises conducted alongside Russian troops stationed nearby. Russia aims to preserve Assad's rule and thwart the emergence of foreign-supported rebel forces challenging his authority.

The United States directly intervenes in Syria through targeted drone strikes targeting ISIS positions, while also assisting Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), composed largely of Kurdish militias, fighting Assad's forces. US support extends beyond military means to include intelligence sharing and diplomatic pressure applied onto Russia and Iran to cease their backing of Assad's regime.[24] However, Washington faces criticism for not acting swiftly enough or adopting stronger measures in response to Russia and Iran's continued backing of the Syrian government. Together, these major foreign players shape the outcomes of the Syrian Civil War.

The international community's involvement in the Syrian Civil War spans monetary, military, and diplomatic efforts aimed at influencing events occurring within Syria.[25] Financial contributions stem from countries donating billions of dollars toward humanitarian relief programs, reconstruction projects, and stabilising peacekeeping initiatives. Countries like France, Germany, Canada, and Norway lead funding efforts channelled towards refugees hosting countries, UN agencies, NGOs, and local authorities implementing development schemes. Military engagement comprises direct participation by foreign armies and special forces deployed to provide training, equipment, and intelligence to Syrian opposition groups. Major participants include the United States, Turkey, Qatar, Jordan, and Israel, sometimes collaborating indirectly through regional partners. Military collaboration varies depending upon shared goals regarding regime change, securing oil resources, and eliminating terrorist threats. These foreign players have played significant roles in shaping the course of the Syrian civil war, and their involvement continues to have a profound impact on the conflict.

Implications on the Middle East:
The Syrian civil war had widespread implications across the Middle East region and beyond, touching multiple dimensions including geopolitics, economics, refugees, violence, and stability. Its effects extend beyond borders affecting neighbours and distant countries alike.

➢ **Geopolitical Impact**: Syria's civil war created a power vacuum, allowing Iran and Turkey to expand their influence across the region. It ignited sectarian tensions along religious lines pitting Sunnis versus Shiites, Christians versus Muslims, Arabs versus Kurds, increasing competition and animosity. Similarly, proxy wars sprouted involving regional powers backing opposing sides intensifying Cold War-era geo-political alignments.

➢ **Economic Impact**: Destruction of Syria's economy affected millions of internally displaced persons fleeing homes and lost jobs reducing purchasing power and raising poverty level exacerbating inequality and social unrest. Regional economies suffered because trade routes disrupted limiting commerce opportunities damaging economies downstream.

➢ **Refugee Crisis**: Millions of Syrians fled their country becoming refugees within Syria, Europe, Lebanon, Jordan, Turkey, and elsewhere globally overwhelming receiving societies straining them financially, socially and politically. Numerous humanitarian crises resulted giving rise to refugee camps and hostilities further fuelling tension in already fragile regions.

➢ **Violence and Stability:** Continuing instability in Syria threatened peace prospects in surrounding nations, triggering violence spreading chaos potentially undermining territorial integrity. Conflicts caused ripple effects stirring up tensions, amplifying divisions, eroding unity necessary for maintaining regional peace.

Foreign intervention in Syria engaged in multi-faceted strategies to resolve conflicts and protect civilians. These interventions ranging from humanitarian aid to military operations targeting extreme groups threatening global security. Understanding these diverse tactics sheds light on the intricacies underlying Syria's civil war and highlights the importance of diplomacy and cooperation to resolve conflicts effectively.

➢ **Humanitarian Aid**: Provided essential goods such as food, medicines, and shelter demonstrate solidarity with Syria's citizens affected by years of conflict. UNICEF[26], W.H.O., Red Cross, MSF, Oxfam, Save the Children, and CARE are prominent organisations involved in delivering relief packages and providing healthcare facilities to Syrians displaced by the conflict.

➢ **Protecting civilian lives:** The primary motivation behind foreign intervention often revolves around saving innocent civilians who bear the brunt of brutal armed conflicts. Intervention ensured protection of basic human rights like healthcare,

education, freedom of movement, and safety from harm.

➢ **Restoring peace and stability**: Armed conflicts disrupted social fabric leading to chaos, poverty, unemployment, and migration crises. Peace-making missions seek to reestablish law and order ensuring citizens can return safely to their homes. Successful interventions enable countries to build resilient societies where democracy flourishes and economies grow sustainably.

➢ **Preventing genocide**: Foreign intervention acted as a deterrent against perpetrators planning to commit heinous crimes against humanity. Prompt actions saved countless lives and help dismantled criminal networks driven by radical ideologies.

➢ **Military Operations**: Military interventions, either directly led by a nation or supported by partner countries, targeted extreme elements responsible for causing violence. Russia conducted aerial attacks and provided military advisors to support Assad's government fighting ISIS while Turkey supported Syrian opposition forces engaged in battles against ISIS along its border regions.

➢ **Diplomacy**: Engaging in diplomatic negotiations allowed to discuss mutual concerns and find common grounds to resolve conflicts peacefully. Regional actors, like Russia, Iran, Turkey, France, Germany, China, and the United Nations, attempted to mediate talks and persuade opposing parties to cease violence.

➢ **Non-State Actors**: Civil society organisations, religious leaders, journalists, women's groups, artists, athletes, intellectuals, academics contributed immensely to advocating for peace, raising awareness about human rights abuse, and holding governments accountable for their actions.

Foreign interventions have undoubtedly influenced the trajectory of the Syrian Civil War in numerous ways. On one hand, military interventions have weakened ISIS, diminished Assad's power base, protected civilians, and allowed peace talks to proceed. On the other hand, external interference has fuelled animosity between rival factions, prolonging violence, and deepening divisions within Syria. Diplomatic efforts have struggled to agree on a sustainable peace deal because of differing interests and mistrust between parties. Foreign interventions have complicated Syria's conflict by contributing to instability, confusion, and fragmentation among warring actors.

The road ahead:

To alleviate sectarian tension and promote lasting peace in Syria, policymakers worldwide need to adopt a holistic approach focusing on the roots of conflict, bolstering governance institutions, enhancing economic growth, and ensuring protection of fundamental rights. Below are some suggestions for future interventions:

➢ **Address root causes:** Addressing underlying factors driving division and violence remains pivotal in bringing about lasting peace in Syria. Political and social exclusion resulting from inequality and marginalisation fuels radicalisation. Policymakers should prioritise equality, inclusion, and representation for minority communities in political systems and economic opportunities. Strengthening accountability mechanisms and improving governance practices would reduce corruption and enhance transparency, easing fears of exploitation and discrimination.

➢ **Build trust and confidence:** Trust and confidence building amongst different groups play a critical role in the Syrian reconciliation process. Trust involves accurate information sharing regarding past events, maintaining confidentiality where necessary, consistent behaviour, fairness, and honesty. Encourage forums for dialogue, reconciliation committees, and truth commissions to foster mutual understanding and forgiveness. Establishing shared norms of acceptable behaviours could help build cohesion and unity among people of different backgrounds.

➢ **Promote economic growth:** Economic opportunity promotes integration, reduces poverty, and decreases reliance on criminal activities as means of survival. Investing in job creation, entrepreneurship, skill development, agriculture, and industry sectors helps bridge income gaps and contributes to greater prosperity. Improved access to basic services like healthcare and education can empower youth and women, thereby strengthening societal resilience.

➢ **Protect fundamental rights:** Protection of individual freedoms, including freedom of expression, assembly, religion, belief, movement, and association guarantees equal treatment irrespective of background. Safeguarding personal data privacy ensures transparency and prevents misuse of technology for surveillance and control purposes. Implementing laws prohibiting torture, arbitrary detention, extrajudicial killings, enforced disappearance,

forced recruitment, trafficking in persons, etc., strengthens trust in law enforcement agencies and justice system.

➢ **Focus on regional cooperation:** Regional actors, including neighbouring states, must collaborate in finding mutually acceptable solutions to the Syrian crisis. Facilitating cross-border trade, energy supplies, refugee resettlements, disaster response coordination, and counterterrorism initiatives enhances cooperation and mutual dependence among neighbours. Regional entities can provide technical expertise, humanitarian assistance, investment capital, and participate in negotiation processes alongside global partners.

➢ **International assistance:** Global partnerships aimed at assisting Syria require coordinated efforts centred around capacity building, humanitarian aid delivery, peace talks facilitation, and conflict transformation programming. Multilateral organisations like the UN, EU, ASEAN, African Union, etc., play important roles here. Countries should strive to maximise the utility of contributions made through foreign aid by ensuring efficient utilisation without perpetuating dependency syndrome.

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