

Forum: General Assembly 4 (Special Political and Decolonisation)

Issue: Redefining the role of neighbouring countries in refugee crises

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Introduction

The recent migrant and refugee crisis from the Middle East and Africa into Europe has been well documented during recent years. Millions of migrants and refugees have crossed into European borders, sparking a crisis as European Union (EU) countries struggled to cope with the influx of people; this created division in the EU over the best method to deal with resettling migrants and refugees. But these are just a fraction of the global count, which includes 21.3 million people (UNHCR, June 2016)

It is important to note that the issue in Europe and Nigeria is both a migrant and a refugee crisis - and not one of them interchangeably. This is because some of the people arriving into Europe (and the neighbouring states of affected countries) have been forced to leave due to dangers or persecutions (refugees), whilst others are merely looking for improved living conditions (migrants). The main difference between these two terms is that refugees are protected by international law whilst migrants are not.

The majority of refugees have come from the Syrian Arab Republic, where more than 350,000 refugees crossed into the European Union in 2015 alone. Most refugees fled Syria when their lives were endangered by armed conflicts including the Syrian Civil War (2011 - present) and the fight against Islamic extremist group ISIS (Islamic State of Iraq and Syria or ISIL - Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant). So far, a total of 4,800,000 Syrian refugees have fled their country (BBC, March 2016). Afghanistan and Iraq are two other leading sources of refugees; people flee from these countries due to threats posed by political unrest and extremist religious groups.

The recent migrant and refugee crisis has had a major impact on neighbouring countries in the Middle East. For example, more than four and a half million Syrian refugees have relocated to just five countries: Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq and Egypt. Turkey hosts the most with 2.5 million Syrian refugees. Lebanon's population has the highest percentage of Syrian refugees - around 25% - with approximately 1.1 million Syrian refugees and a population of 4.5 million. Jordan hosts approximately 635,000 refugees from Syria, Iraq hosts 245,022 refugees from Syria and Egypt hosts 117,658. Meanwhile, there is a total of 1,300,000 Asylum seekers in the E.U. (Amnesty International, February 2016)

Redefining the role of neighbouring countries could lead to two possibilities: one is that neighbouring countries allow more refugees into their country and provide them all with asylum. This would relieve the pressure on the borders for EU countries. Another outcome is if neighboring countries close off the door to more refugees, leaving other regions (such as the EU) with having to grant asylum. Another area of focus is Nigeria due to struggles with the terror group Boko Haram. These are just some key issues that will be focused on, although there are many more examples.

Definition of Key Terms

Refugee

A refugee is a person who has been forced to flee from their country of origin due to a well-founded fear of persecution or other forms of violence such as war. This could be due to race, religious, nationality or political reasons. Most refugees are most likely unable to return home or are threatened in doing so.

Migrant

Although the issue at hand pertains specifically to refugees, it must also be noted that a migrant is an entirely different group and the two terms should not be confused. Unlike a refugee, a migrant is a person who voluntarily leaves his or her country without an imminent threat of danger or death. This is usually because the country of destination offers more job opportunities, better health care, or improved education standards. Should migrants return to their home country, they would not face the same persecution or danger that refugees would.

Stateless Person

A stateless person is someone who is not a citizen of any country. Citizenship itself can be defined as the legal connection between a government and a person, which grants certain political, economic, social and other rights that would not be given to people of other citizenships. There are many reasons why a person can become stateless; for instance - sovereign or legal decisions can come into play and even technical and administrative issues can lead to a few oversights as well. It is imperative to note that the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UNDHR) stresses how “Everyone has the right to a nationality.”

The Role of Neighboring Countries

Neighboring countries can be defined as countries which share borders with the country in question, or countries nearby. For example, with the refugee crisis in the Middle East, neighboring countries to the war-torn nations of Iraq and Syria include Turkey, Lebanon and Jordan. Another key area is Nigeria, which has been devastated by attacks from terror group Boko Haram. Neighboring countries around Nigeria include Chad, Niger, Cameroon and Benin. Their role can include anything from healthcare, military involvement, or accepting refugees.

Asylum seekers

Asylum seekers are people who escape from their own country in order to seek sanctuary in another. Hence, all asylum seekers must apply for asylum in their country of refuge (to recognize a person as a refugee so they could receive legal protection). As a result - by definition - all refugees must be asylum seekers.

Background Information

Syrian Civil War

This war has ravaged the Middle Eastern country since mid-2011 and, as of August 2015, has led to the deaths of more than 250,000 civilians. 11 million more people have been displaced from their homes and a large section of them (it is estimated over four and a half million) have looked for refuge abroad. These people are mostly refugees and asylum seekers since they are being forced out of their home country by religious and ethnic persecution as well as war.

Origins

The Syrian Civil War began with pro-democracy protests in March 2011 against the regime of Bashar Al-Assad. They erupted when teenagers, who painted revolutionary messages on school walls, were arrested and tortured. The crowds were put down by an army which fired live ammunition. This angered people even more and by July that year, there were hundreds of thousands of protestors lining the streets. Soon, rebels had to take up fire arms to protect themselves, and later to rid of pro-government security forces.

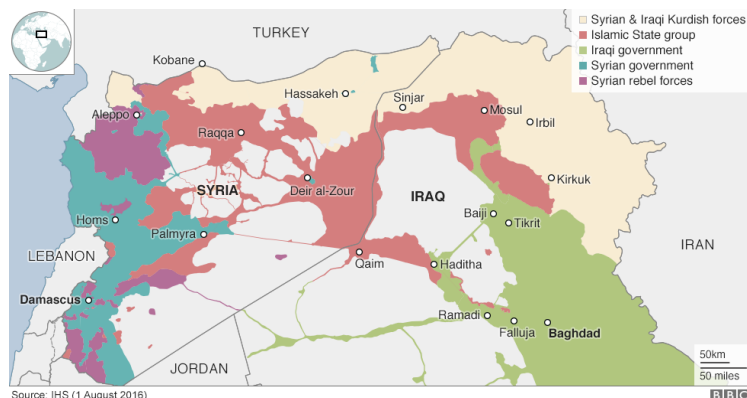
Growth

The Syrian Civil War is also partially a religious war, with the pro-government regime being the minority Alawite sect, which forms a co-alition with Shiite fighters from Iran and Hezbollah in Lebanon. These forces are pitted against Sunni rebel groups. More and more, the conflict is transforming into a proxy war with the United States of America leading a 65-nation strong coalition which spearheads air-strikes in Syria. It also features Russian and Iranian support for al-Assad's government.

Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS)

Amidst the destruction of the civil war, the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), otherwise known as the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) has claimed to start a caliphate, seizing

large land masses from Iraq and Syria. The ensuing bloodshed has left a death toll of over 250,000



and over 12 million displaced persons.

Caption #1: A map of land control in Iraq and Syria

War in Afghanistan

Origins

Ever since Taliban had been forced out of the Afghan government, a NATO invasion, spearheaded by the USA has attempted to flush out terrorism from Afghanistan. This was the end result of the infamous September 11 attacks on the World Trade Centre and the Pentagon in the USA on 2001. The 13-year planned military presence in Afghanistan ended in 2014 as the last troops were pulled out. However, the absence of foreign powers led to a power vacuum and political instability in the country. There was an election in September, 2014 where the two rivals for the Afghan presidency, (Ashraf Ghani and Abdullah Abdullah) sign a power-sharing agreement, following a two-month audit of disputed election results. In the end, Ashraf Ghani was sworn in as president. Peace talks between the Taliban and the Afghan government in Qatar were unsuccessful as the terrorist group refused to stop fighting until all foreign troops were removed from the country.

Growth of Taliban

On March 2015, US President Barak Obama announced that the USA will delay its troop withdrawal from Afghanistan after a request by Afghan President Ashraf Ghani. By September, 2015 Taliban forces briefly captured the major northern city of Kunduz in their most significant advance since being forced from the legitimate Afghan government in 2001. By December the Taliban make another ambitious offensive bid - this time, to capture Sangin (a town in Helmand Province). To improve security, the US deployed warplanes in support of Afghan security forces.

Resolute Support Mission

it adopts a non-camp, and it is also a government financed approach. This makes Turkey's response extremely different from other refugee-hosting nations where they direct refugees to camps supported by humanitarian agencies instead.

Looking ahead, challenges that face Turkey include how it is set to manage the underlying socioeconomic pressures of housing and treating SuTPs at least until the conflict in Syria is over, and by then it should also be well prepared to return Syrian refugees home.

Lebanon's Role

As of June 30, 2016, Lebanon harbors more than 1 million Syrian refugees, including roughly three hundred thousand in its capital city - Beirut. As a percentage of Lebanon's total population (4.5 million), this country has the largest population of refugees. More than half of all refugees are children.

Because of political and infrastructural instability, the Lebanese government has had difficulty absorbing such a large proportion of refugees into the country's population. Hence, in recent months, Lebanon's policy on refugees has toughened up as it has cracked down on border and residency controls. This left many refugees in legal limbo and in fear of jail or harassment. Many face long-term poverty, as third party aid benefits shrink, competition for jobs increase, and an estimated 80 percent of refugee children are unable to attend school. All those factors are pushing more and more refugees to consider the perilous journey to Europe.

Accepting Refugees in the European Union

A major aspect of the migrant and refugee crisis in the European Union is the Schengen Agreement, which was signed in 1985. This agreement was significant because it abolished many of the EU's internal borders, enabling passport-free movement across most of the bloc, taking effect in 1995. As a result, refugees can easily slip between borders in the EU, making the situation more difficult to control.

The Schengen Agreement is often criticised because some people believe it wrongfully leaves the doors between EU countries open for migrants and terrorists. For instance, the November Paris attacks, which killed 130 people, prompted a pressing demand to rethink of the Schengen agreement. There was widespread alarm on how the suspects could have so easily slipped between borders from France from Belgium, and that some had entered the EU with crowds of migrants through Greece.

By 2015, the influx of more than a million migrants and refugees increased the pressure on politicians, and eventually, European Union states imposed temporary border controls. In December that

year, the European Commission proposed an amendment to Schengen, in where non-EU travellers have their details checked against police databases at the EU's external borders.

European Union Deal with Turkey

Despite the voluminous amount of Syrian refugees that Turkey has already absorbed, the country has agreed to take back any further asylum seekers who had landed in Greece. In theory this means the closure of the Aegean smuggling route, through which more than 850,000 people were transported from Turkey to Greece in 2015. In exchange for harboring extra asylum seekers, the EU has promised to give the Turkish government in Ankara 6 billion Euros to help the estimated 2.7 million Syrians now stuck on Turkish soil. Furthermore, it will also become easier for Turkish citizens to attain European visas, and the EU will pay greater lip-service to the idea of Turkey becoming a member state. For each Syrian that is returned to Turkey from the EU, Europe has promised to accept another Syrian living in a Turkish camp.

Terrorism and Subsequent Xenophobia

Terrorist attacks in major European cities such as the 13th November 2015 attacks in Paris (which left 130 people dead) or the March 2016 Brussels bombings (leaving 31 deaths and over 300 injuries) by Islamic extremist groups have scared the public into believing that all refugees are religious extremists. Of course, this is not the case. One example is the 784,000 refugees the USA has accepted since the 9/11 terrorist attacks, only 3 have proved links to terrorism. However, fear of terrorism has led many to protest against the acceptance of migrants into the European Union. One example of this is the UK referendum to leave the EU in June 2016; the 'Leave' vote focused a large portion of its campaign on the security threats and negative economic impacts of migrants and refugees, despite the fact that the United Kingdom had only accepted 2,659 Syrian refugees by March 2016 - a number that pales in comparison to the 158,657 refugees that Germany had taken in by that same year.

Nigeria

A major flashpoint of the migrant and refugee crisis around the world is Nigeria. The country has suffered a multitude of attacks by terrorist Islamic group Boko Haram. Boko Haram is an extremist religious group who believe it is forbidden to follow social, political, or economic aspects of western life. Founded in 2002 and initially just opposed to western education, they soon launched their military operations in 2009 as they sought to establish a Muslim caliphate in Nigeria. By 2013, they were recognized by the CIA as a terrorist organization as they began seizing towns and villages. However, a coalition of regional countries, that included Nigeria, Cameroon, Chad and Niger that effectively reclaimed most land areas held by Boko Haram.

Major Parties Involved and Their Views

Syrian Arab Republic

The Syrian Civil War (2011 - present) has led to the deaths of more than 250,000 civilians as of August 2015. 11 million more people have been displaced from their homes and a large section of them (it is estimated over four and a half million) have looked for refuge abroad. These people are mostly refugees and asylum seekers since they are being forced out of their home country by religious and ethnic persecution as well as war. The Syrian government asks other states to consider the refugee crisis and the war on ISIS with concern.

Iraq

Amidst the destruction of the civil war, the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), otherwise known as the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) has claimed to start a caliphate, seizing large land masses from Iraq and Syria. The ensuing bloodshed has left a death toll of over 250,000 and over 12 million displaced persons.

Afghanistan

Ever since Taliban had been forced from the throne of power in Afghanistan, a NATO invasion, spearheaded by the USA has attempted to flush out terrorism from Afghanistan. This was the end result of the infamous September 11 attacks on the World Trade Centre and the Pentagon in the USA on 2001. The 13-year planned military presence in Afghanistan ended in 2014 as the last troops were pulled out. However, the absence of foreign powers led to a power vacuum and political instability in the country. There was an election in September, 2014 where the two rivals for the Afghan presidency, (Ashraf Ghani and Abdullah Abdullah) sign a power-sharing agreement, following a two-month audit of disputed election results. In the end, Ashraf Ghani is sworn in as president. Peace talks between the Taliban and the Afghan government in Qatar were unsuccessful as the terrorist group refused to stop fighting until all foreign troops were removed from the country.

Lebanon

Under government policy, Syrians cannot make up more than half of the student body in the morning shift. A newly developed second shift for school (in the evening) is fully comprised of Syrian migrants and refugees.

Nationwide, Syrian nationals make up around 40 percent of all Lebanese public school students, according to UNICEF. However, just one out of every five Syrian refugee children are able to attend school. Poorer factions of the Lebanese population have complained that Syrian refugees receive much more

benefits than them from third party agencies and the government. As a result, aid programs have multiplied in effect allowing schools to support financially both troubled Lebanese and Syrian families alike.

European Union

Political tensions in the European Union have been rising because of the disproportionately larger burden some countries face in housing and treating refugees (such as Greece, Italy and Hungary) compared to others. This is because most refugees land in these countries through the Mediterranean. On September 2015, a majority of EU ministers voted to relocate 160,000 refugees across the EU from Italy and Greece. A further 54,000 were expected to be moved from Hungary, but the Hungarian government rejected this plan. It was political tensions such as this which helped spark the 'Brexit' vote where the United Kingdom voted through a referendum to leave the European Union.

Turkey

Turkey now hosts the largest refugee population in the world. The Government of Turkey identifies Syrian refugees as SuTPs (Syrians under Temporary Protection) There are two key characteristics of the Turkish response effort to the refugee crisis: it adopts a non-camp, and it is also a government financed approach.

Timeline of Relevant Resolutions, Treaties and Events

Date	Description of event
July 28 1951	<p>1951 Refugee Convention</p> <p>The Convention clearly spells out who a refugee is and the kind of legal protection, other assistance and social rights he or she should receive from the countries who have signed the document. The Convention also defines a refugee's obligations to host governments and certain categories or people, such as war criminals, who do not qualify for refugee status.</p>
June 14 1985	<p>Shenzhen Agreement</p> <p>This would allow open borders between European Union member countries. Presently, 26 countries are part of this agreement, and it has been an important part of allowing migrants to travel through Europe. This agreement was put to effect in 1995.</p>

9/11 Attacks

September 11 2001 The terrorist group Al-Qaeda claims responsibility for the attacks on the World Trade Centre and the Pentagon

US Bombing of Afghanistan Begins

October 2001 Following the 9/11 Terror attacks, the USA begins to bomb Afghanistan to force the Taliban out of power.

ISI Created

October 15 2006 Abu Ayyub Almasri announces the creation of Islamic State of Iraq

Syrian Civil War Begins

March 2011 It started off as a peaceful pro-democracy protest, but when first protestors were gunned down by law enforcement with live ammunition, public outrage quickly fueled a civil war.

NATO summit

May 2012 The summit agrees that a good action plan for Afghanistan would be to withdraw foreign combat troops by the end of 2014 and train Afghan troops instead.

ISIS Formed

May 3 2013 The result of a merger between ISI (Islamic State of Iraq) and the Nusra Front (an al-Qaeda affiliate)

ISIS Seizes Fallujah

January 4 2014 One of the first major ISIS victories, just 40 miles off Baghdad. Just 10 days later, ISIS took Raqqa - a city in Syria - which became its headquarters

June 10 2014 **ISIS Advances to Mosul**

October 2014 **US and UK end combat operations in Afghanistan**

"Resolute Support Mission" Created

January 1 2015 This is a NATO follow-up mission in Afghanistan with 13,000 troops from 40 different countries to facilitate in training, organization and supplies of Afghan troops.

April 1 2015 **Iraq Army Retakes Tikrit from ISIS**

EU-Turkey Deal

March 20 2016 The Deal was that the European Union would grant Turkey 6 billion euros to help it cope with the almost 3 million refugees on Turkish soil, in exchange for all refugees to enter the EU through Greece return to Turkey.

Relevant UN Treaties and Events

- Monitors' Deployment to Syria, 14 April 2012 (S/RES/2042)
- United Nations Supervision Mission in Syria, 21 April 2012 (S/RES/2043)
- Renews Mandate of Syria Observer Mission for 30 Days, 20 July 2012 (S/RES/2059)
- Humanitarian Aid Access, 22 February 2014 (S/RES/2139)
- Humanitarian Aid Access Part 2, 14 July 2014 (S/RES/2165)
- The Guarantee Usage of Borders, 17 December 2014 (S/RES/2191)
- Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 10 December 1948 (A/RES/217(III))
- UN Convention Regarding the Status of Refugees (1951)
- OAU Refugee Convention (1969)
- UN Refugee Protocol (1967)
- Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness (1961)
- Organization of African Unity Convention Governing the Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa (1969)

- Cartagena Declaration on Refugees (1984)
- Identity Documents for Refugees (EC/SCP/33)
- EU Civil Protection Mechanism

Evaluation of Previous Attempts to Resolve the Issue

One attempt to help solve this issue was the deal between the European Union and Turkey, made in March 2016. The attempt increased the role of neighboring countries in the Refugee Crisis, but limited the role of farther countries such as the European Union by transporting refugees which arrived in the UK through Greece to Turkey. In return, Turkey would receive 6 billion euros to help it cope with more than 2 million seven hundred thousand refugees. This has been rather successful for the EU so far, and Turkey appears to be coping with the flow of refugees due to the additional international aid.

Another attempt to reduce the outflow of refugees was peace talks between the Afghan government and the Taliban in Qatar. The two sides did not reach an official agreement since the Taliban troops refused to stop fighting until all foreign troops were out of Iraq. As such, the Taliban are still at large in Afghanistan.

Moreover, the USA and a coalition of 65 countries have attempted airstrikes on ISIS strongholds in an attempt to calm the situation in Syria and reduce extremist held ground. This was rather successful in removing ISIS's footholds in Iraq and Syria. However, the situation in the region is still considered too dangerous for most refugees to return.

Finally, countries have attempted to appeal to their local citizens to help them understand that refugees need international help and to ease their xenophobia. In Lebanon, for example, both refugees and poorer Lebanese families were given heightened benefits to ease complaints of aid to refugees. This has been rather successful, although right wing politicians frequently blame migrants and refugees for local problems.

Possible Solutions

One possible solution to the issue has been to eliminate the terrorist groups in Iraq and Syria (ISIS or ISIL) and help set the ground for political stability in Syria and Iraq. This could be followed by allowing a transitional government to set up in Syria when the land is secured from ISIS, with elections following soon after. With the Taliban in Afghanistan, the combined forces of the local government along with increased efforts from international aid (both military and financial) can help complete a clearing mission

to eliminate Taliban forces in the country. The Boko Haram in Nigeria can also be dealt in similar ways, with international coalition forces, such as the successful regional coalition of Nigeria, Cameroon, Chad and Niger.

More solutions include opening up farther regions such as the European Union and the United States of America to more refugees, albeit with tighter border control to reduce the impacts of terrorism. This will relieve the pressure off neighboring countries such as Egypt, Turkey and Lebanon which are already harboring millions of refugees.

Moreover, a new international system which improves the efficiency of allocating refugees and the resources / aid that refugees would attain in that country, as well as setting international limits on the amount of refugees a country can receive based on the country's wealth and the size of the refugee population as a proportion of the existing population.

A final solution would be to increase the availability of third party, or United Nations aid. Although the United Nations is willing to give aid to Syrian refugees and IDPs, they are frequently unable to do so due to the sieges and ongoing battles. By opening up the field more to help, refugees would find a safer path to asylum.

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