

# Syria

## Break the Wall of Silence

October 2015

Issue IV



### *Syrian Refugees*

### *A journey in Gaziantep, Turkey*

There are Syrians who deserve to be heard

*Syria, Break the Wall of Silence* is a series of journals published by ARCHumankind.

Established in Belgium, ARCHumankind is a non-profit organisation which aims at stimulating sustainable cooperation to promote democracy and a respect for human rights, while putting an end to religiously, politically or ethnically motivated oppression and violence. It also seeks to promote justice, peace and security within international alliances. ARCHumankind wishes to promote the application of the UN's general principles and resolutions regarding human rights.

© 2015 Copyright by ARCHumankind, Brussels

All rights reserved. No part of this journal may be reprinted or reproduced or utilised in any form or by any electronic, mechanical or other means, now known or hereafter invented, including photocopying or recording, or in any information storage or retrieval system, without permission of the publisher.

Executive Director: Paulo Casaca

Editor: Laura Berlingozzi

Publisher:

ARCHumankind  
Avenue des Arts 19  
1210 Saint-Josse-Ten-Noode  
Brussels, Belgium  
Registration Number: BE0831084518  
Tel: (+32) 2 808 42 08  
Email: [info@archumankind.com](mailto:info@archumankind.com)  
Website: <http://www.archumankind.com>

Cover photograph by © Kemal Vural Tarlan, taken at the Syrian-Turkish border of Afrin Canton-Kilis in the summer of 2014

Design, Layout, Typeset by © Laura Berlingozzi

All photographs unless otherwise specified by © Laura Berlingozzi

Back cover photographs by © Laura Berlingozzi. Pictures taken in Gaziantep city in August 2015

Manuscript offers, review copies, exchange journals, and other requests are to be sent to the editor. The responsibility for facts and opinions in this publication rests exclusively with the authors and their interpretations do not necessarily reflect the view or the policy of ARCHumankind.

# Index

|  |           |
|--|-----------|
| <b>Editorial</b>   |           |
| Paulo Casaca.....  | 4         |
| <br>   |           |
| <b><i>When everything is lost. A journey in Gaziantep, Turkey.....</i></b>   | <b>6</b>  |
| Laura Berlingozzi  |           |
| <br>   |           |
| <b><i>Safety Zones, Fake Zones and Responsibility to Protect in Northern Syria. Hopes and Doubts over US-led Coalition Effectiveness (and willingness to be.....</i></b> | <b>18</b> |
| Giacomo Cuscunà  |           |
| <br>   |           |
| <b><i>Syrian refugees: a common European position is essential.....</i></b>  | <b>21</b> |
| Isadora Loreto   |           |
| <br>   |           |
| <b><i>Syrians in transit, From Catania to Malmö.....</i></b>   | <b>23</b> |
| Anna Pasotti   |           |
| <br>   |           |
| <b><i>Iran, The American enigma. The fantasy and the nightmare.....</i></b>  | <b>27</b> |
| Paulo Casaca   |           |
| <br>   |           |
| <b><i>Assad and his success in instrumentalising ISIS/SIL in Syria.....</i></b>  | <b>31</b> |
| Djan Sauerborn   |           |
| <br>   |           |
| <b><i>The economy of a state beyond repair.....</i></b>  | <b>33</b> |
| Johan Fukken   |           |
| <br>   |           |
| <b><i>Syria, my life.....</i></b>  | <b>36</b> |
| Mazin Albalkhi   |           |
| <br>   |           |
| <b><i>Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action signed in Vienna on 14 July 2015. Potential impact on Iranian opposition.....</i></b>   | <b>38</b> |
| Paulo Casaca   |           |



# Editorial

## **Alan Kurdi broke the wall of silence**

After so many years of suffering and destruction, the photo of the drowned baby Alan Kurdi, who survived Kobane onslaught but not the Mediterranean crossing, finally made the headlines. Suddenly, everyone noticed the plight of the million Syrians who perished, were seriously injured or lost their livelihood.

In the West, a visible humanitarian effort was at last initiated, but still there is no strategic vision or will to act coherently on a playground where most of the principles and values some of us thought to be indisputable are being overridden.

NATO leaders try to fool themselves confining the issue to the struggle against the most strident and aggressive Jihadi group, as if its split and declaration of Caliphate would have been absolute novelties.

The development of the Mesopotamia Caliphate, from its roots in the Kurdish Iranian-Iraqi border in 2001 – in close connection with September 11 – to its proclamation in 2014, is a process full of lessons.

The group grew exponentially out of the ill-advised decision to dismantle the Iraqi state and in particular the Iraqi army. Its domain on large parts of Iraq was only seriously questioned when the Allied forces finally decided to support the Arab Sunni popular resistance to jihadi terror from 2007 to 2009. Conversely, when the former policy of sectarian persecution re-started in 2009 by PM Maliki, the group grew again, reinforced by a long battling experience and the jihadi call.



From 2004, the group's main logistical basis has been in Syria. After the March 2011 democratic uprising against Assad, at first it did not target the Syrian forces, then it started targeting Syrian opposition and minorities as well as rival Sunni Jihadi groups and Syrian forces.

In Syria, like in Iraq before, the Sunni Jihadis and Assad supporting forces reinforce each other by terrorising different segments of the population into believing that the only possibility of survival is to search for shelter under the other competing terror force.

The direct engagement of the Russian armed forces opens a new chapter in the war. A new map based on sectarian divides is drawn in what used to be Syria and Iraq. The missile attack by the Iraqi Hezbollah on US forces stationed at Baghdad airport on September the 21<sup>st</sup> is a message from Tehran that it considers again US presence as unwelcome.

The new geopolitical reality asks also for a different approach from ARCHumankind. After the break of the wall of silence and the carving of Syria, we shall be looking now at the wider area. Yemen, Libya, Syria and Iraq join now a growing area of the Muslim World where the state collapsed and Iran and other competing Jihadi forces seek to reinvent Empires.

Those who think Europe will only feel the consequences of the region's collapse through the boat people trying to escape are living an illusion. A dangerous illusion! Our contribution will centre on a research in depth of the political logics in operation in the Greater Middle East.

Paulo Casaca





**Laura Berlingozzi** is a Researcher in the Democracy Research Programme at the South Asia Democratic Forum (SADF). She is also the editor of the present bulletin.

She holds a 2nd level Master Degree in Diplomacy and International Politics from the University of Bologna and a Master's Degree magna cum laude in International Politics and Diplomacy. She previously worked for the Cabinet of the Secretary-General of the European Parliament, No Peace Without Justice and at the Permanent Mission of Italy to the United Nations. She studied in Sweden and in the US. Her main interests are women's rights, international politics and the Middle East and South Asia.

## When everything is lost A journey in Gaziantep, Turkey

### *Preface*

*For a long time, Europe has closed its eyes to the Syrian bloodshed, trying to keep the hordes of the needy out. Though, in the second week of September 2015 something changed. A moral awakening driven by a powerfully striking image has brought Germany to say "Salam Aleikum" to all refugees that reached the country. While migrants move faster than the EU, and European leaders are debating on how to relocate 120,000 migrants, only Turkey host 1.9 million refugees. This article is based on a personal experience, a trip to Southern Turkey, which I undertook on behalf of ARCHumankind in August 2015<sup>1</sup>. The purpose was to understand, see and experience, the living conditions the refugees are under, what relations are like with their host community, and*

*what varies between different types of refugees. In this piece, I will explore the situation of the refugees in Turkey, and I will report interviews made in the city, with families, students, orphans, as well as to the refugees that are living in the Kilis and Nizip camps. I will conclude with interviews with local NGOs and a News Agency. After 5 years, and all sorts of reports, news items, documentaries and pictures, the idea that there is still something to be told is daunting. I went to Gaziantep with the will to find a new perspective and new stories and new voices to disclose. The truth is, there is no new perspective or untold story in a conflict of such bloodshed that has torn a country for half a decade, reducing it to half a battlefield and half a cemetery, and which has unbalanced the whole Middle East. I immediately realised that not only was I looking for the Holy Grail, but it was also a futile exercise. The situation is troubled by the presence of an authoritarian regime, ISIS, and infinite groups of sectarian jihadi fighters. The enemy changes its face, in a field with no rules and no referee, staging a seamless conundrum of interests and powers.*

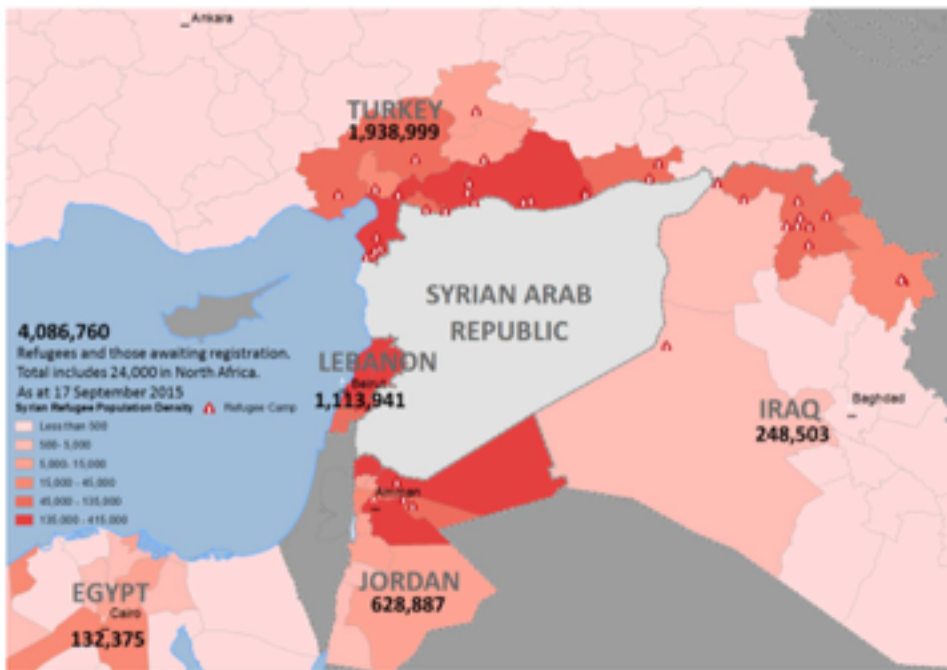
### **Context**

The number of refugees fleeing the conflict in Syria to neighbouring countries has exceeded four million according to the official statistics<sup>2</sup>. Tragically, and with no end in sight to Syria's war, now in its fifth year, the crisis is intensifying and the number of refugees is rising. By September 2015, the number stood at 4,086,760 people. More than 4.2 million refugees are expected to be hosted in neighbouring countries by the end of 2015. Deteriorating conditions in Syria and neighbouring countries are driving thousands of Syrians to risk everything on perilous journeys to Europe. Human rights violations and abuses continue to occur in the

---

<sup>1</sup> For the realisation of this article many people offered their help, thoughts and kindness. I would therefore like to thank many people without whom, nothing of this would have been possible. I wish to thank all for their unconditional support Alessandro, Giacomo, Somar, Kemal, Mazin, Hussein, Isabella, Maan, Isadora, Davide, Djan, Talam, Talat. Last but not least, I would like to thank the good-hearted spirit of ARCHumankind organisation, that gave me the chance to undertake the trip to Turkey, and that never stopped believing in me.

<sup>2</sup> Syrian refugees, Inter-agency regional update, August 2015, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) – [www.unhcr.org](http://www.unhcr.org). The statistics take into account only registered people. The number could be much higher considering all refugees that decide not to register, and remain invisible to the legal system.



context of widespread insecurity and in disregard of international law, international humanitarian law, and human rights law. In Turkey, the registration of Syrian refugees continues under the supervision of the Director General for Migration Management (DGMM) and at the end of August, more than 1.9 million Syrian refugees were registered. Almost one out of two Syrian refugees in the region is now hosted in Turkey, the vast majority in urban areas. Turkey is being

deeply affected by the refugees flows, in spite of having the largest economy in the region and a strong state tradition. Its resources and public patience are wearing thin. The Syrian refugee issue certainly plays a role in the current political instability in the country.

Traveling to Gaziantep, near the border with Syria, the host town of 500,000 Syrian refugees, with a laptop, a camera and a notebook, there were many questions I craved to ask that were gathering in my head: most of them concerned their living conditions, their journey, their hopes and their worst fears. I spoke with many people, from various backgrounds, fleeing from different parts of Syria, people who pledged their alliance to different factions, from different ethnic and religious groups. Surprisingly, the answer to these very questions didn't differ. "I want to go back to my home country", this was the mantra I kept on hearing, witnessing a vastly spread disillusionment for their daily lives in Turkey and their future.

In Gaziantep, life flows drowsy and slow-paced, under an average of 42 degrees' C° in August. Life in the town is scheduled by five daily prayers spread through speakers located on every street corner. The world capital of pistachios, and therefore of baklava, hosts a staggering number of more than 500,000 refugees (according to official surveys, but the number could be as high as 800,000 people), around one quarter of the 1.9 million refugees hosted by Turkey. If you are a regular tourist, you can't spot clear evidence of their presence. Traffic jams, followed by a common disregard of driving rules, people sipping enormous quantities of tea. Nothing seems out of the ordinary. But Gaziantep is located just 60 kilometres away from the Syrian border, hosts hundreds of international NGOs, and has experienced a boom in its economy since the arrival of the first large wave of refugees after the Syrian war broke out. Discrimination between the Turkish and the Syrian communities is the order of the day. The latter are accused of being responsible for public order and economic issues, in particular the increase of rent prices and lowering of wages. Since they are mostly unemployed, many refugees wander around the streets to collect paper or plastic





Syrian restaurant that serves traditional food while being a vibrant meeting point for NGOs and Syrian opposition activists

bottles to recycle and you can see them sticking their heads into garbage bins. Among them, there are also many children.

Former Aleppo businessmen opened new factories (employing also Turkish workers, because the Turkish law provides that for every three Syrians hired, one Turkish person must be hired as well), new bakeries (making the typical flat bread that Syrians normally eat) and new restaurants (that serve *fatteh*, *fattoush*, *hummus* and *mahshi*). These are the so-called “rich refugees”. During a war, the wealth doesn’t disappear, but it’s relocated. The economy of the

city in fact flourished for both ethnic groups. Educated Syrians that have good knowledge of English can know be translators for 100\$ per day and former Turkish bakers or teachers, turn their careers into working in logistics to make life for international organisations easier.

Talat is one of the “rich refugees”. I met him in front of Gaziantep university, where he studies Agricultural Economics. His father is a doctor who moved to Saudi Arabia. He is 24, comes from Idlib, and came to Turkey in 2013. “I don’t support anyone anymore, I got fed up by never fulfilled promises. At first, I was demonstrating in my university against Assad, then I saw many friends and relatives die in the streets during one of the worst conflicts in Syria between the FSA and Assad’s forces”, he said. There is no Manichean division between good and evil. In his words, while his eyes are drowning in tears, hope is nowhere to be found, and everything is bad. He, like many other Syrians, wants to attend school, carry on with his daily life as a normal student, leaving the space for the materialisation of their fears to nightmares.



Typical Syrian household in the city

The majority of them are from the northern Syrian city of Aleppo, which has always had strong ties with Gaziantep, so despite the linguistic differences, host communities and Syrian refugees have a lot in common, and they often refer to each other as “relatives”. But this communitarian rhetoric is superficial. Just as the official numbers mask the scale of the crisis, the two groups’ differences set the tone of relations much more than their similarities<sup>3</sup>.

At the same time, before the refugees influx, Gaziantep was facing a serious shortage of workers for unskilled jobs in its construction and agricultural sectors. Therefore, at least for the private sector, the current refugees’

<sup>3</sup> “The economic effects of Syrian refugees on Turkey: a synthetic modelling”, Center for Middle Eastern Strategic Studies, Report no: 196, January 2015, [www.orsam.org.tr](http://www.orsam.org.tr)



influx has proven to be very beneficial, as the supply of cheap informal workers has dramatically lowered the cost of labour. But that has also badly undercut the wages that the local workers can expect to earn<sup>4</sup>.

Rim, 25, studies Economics, in Gaziantep. Her brother, a doctor, was arrested for delivering medicine to the FSA. Rim left during the night, with her brothers and sisters, carrying one bag each. They were smuggled inside Turkey. “We paid 400 TRY (Turkish Lira) each, it was much cheaper back in 2013”, she said. She spent the first five months in Kilis refugee camp, but she didn’t receive assistance from anybody. So she decided to plunge her head into books, as she had always been a good student. She improved her English skills, but she also learnt Turkish, because she understood, that for as alone as she was, only knowing the local language would have helped her. She worked in a telephone shop, and her employer was very happy because she was the only one that could speak English and communicate with the many international clients that the war brought to Gaziantep. As soon as the university reopens its gates in the fall, she will go back to studying Economics as she did in Aleppo. “I can now follow classes in Turkish, and in one year, I will graduate. I only want to go on with my life, and I don’t care anymore about anything. I don’t even turn on the TV anymore. Only bad things can come out of there”, she said.

### Refugees in need living in town

Many Syrian families live crammed into tiny houses, mostly a one-room space, in unhealthy conditions. Running water and heating are often a luxury, and the rent is very high, even with no basic services. Ahmet, 55, fled in his pyjamas, the same ones that he wears almost every day. He left under the bombs, by car with his two



Ahmet and his family in their one-room apartment



Inhabited derelict house

wives, and four children. Then they waited for ten days to be smuggled into Turkey, paying 100 euro for each person, basically their earnings for a year. They sit all day on a carpet found in the dump. Following heart surgery, he is unable to work, therefore his children must provide for all 8 members of the family. He doesn’t have ties with the Turkish community, as he doesn’t speak the language. “At this point, I don’t support either faction”, he said, “We receive 80 TRY [around 24 euro] from the government every month, and even though its is not enough, we are grateful for the little we have here”.

However, in some cases, the refugees have occupied abandoned buildings, many of which will soon be

<sup>4</sup> “The economic effects of Syrian refugees on Turkey: a synthetic modelling”, Center for Middle Eastern Strategic Studies, Report no: 196, January 2015, [www.orsam.org.tr](http://www.orsam.org.tr)

destroyed. The family I interviewed cannot afford to pay the rent. The children beg on the streets, and this has to suffice for a family of seven. A woman, 54, with five children between the ages of four and thirteen, and her brother-in-law live in the centre of the town, 100 meters away from one of the most crowded boulevards of the city. The roof is falling down, and they just hope that it will eventually fall down after the winter.

#### **Educated refugees in town**

Saleh<sup>5</sup> is 15 and his command of English is astonishing. He is a “sort of” TV personality since he has been interviewed by CNN, BBC, RAI International and other news broadcasting agencies whilst he was living in Kilis refugee camp. One of his sisters lives in Istanbul, while the rest of his family lives in Gaziantep. One of his two brothers died in the field, fighting against Assad, while the other leads an army of 1,000 soldiers. When I asked him how he felt about the war he candidly admitted: “I know. I feel like a piece of chess being moved around. I know that the players are the most powerful countries”. His family believes in peace and democracy but he understands why his brother still keeps on fighting. “Nobody likes fighting, but it’s the only option that we have at the moment”, he said.



#### **Refugees in the camps**

In Turkey, the population of Syrian refugees in 22 of the government-run camps is estimated to be around 217,000 people<sup>6</sup>. The rest do their best to make ends meet in communities across the country. These main camps are situated in: Kilis Oncupinar, İslahiye, Kahramanmaraş, Osmaniye, Nizip Karkamış, Akçakale, Ceylanpınar Telhamut.

#### **Kilis camp**

Before reaching the border, in the days when clashes between ISIS and the FSA are intensifying, I expected a pre-war scenario even in the Turkish border town of Kilis. Instead, life is running smoothly, unmistakably normal, and frequent tea breaks mark time in a slow rhythm. Strolling in the dusty streets that climb up the hill, it’s hard to imagine that 6 km from the town, ISIS is fighting to keep control of the area, and beyond a war-torn country stretches out. To the left of the camp entrance, a metal archway announces the customs gate to Syria.

The camp is considered one of the best of its kind<sup>7</sup>. It has a market that sells food and basic supplies along with a mosque, school and medical centre. Although the shop allows payment with special 80 TRY pre-paid cards issued by the Turkish-government, there is a



<sup>5</sup> Saleh interviewed by the CNN at <http://edition.cnn.com/videos/world/2014/02/04/natpkg-saleh-one-year-later.cnn>

<sup>6</sup> UNHCR, 2015 UNHCR Country operations profile – Turkey, <http://www.unhcr.org/>

<sup>7</sup> Mac McClellandFeb, *How to Build a Perfect Refugee Camp*, 13 February 2014, The New York Times, [http://www.nytimes.com/2014/02/16/magazine/how-to-build-a-perfect-refugee-camp.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2014/02/16/magazine/how-to-build-a-perfect-refugee-camp.html?_r=0)

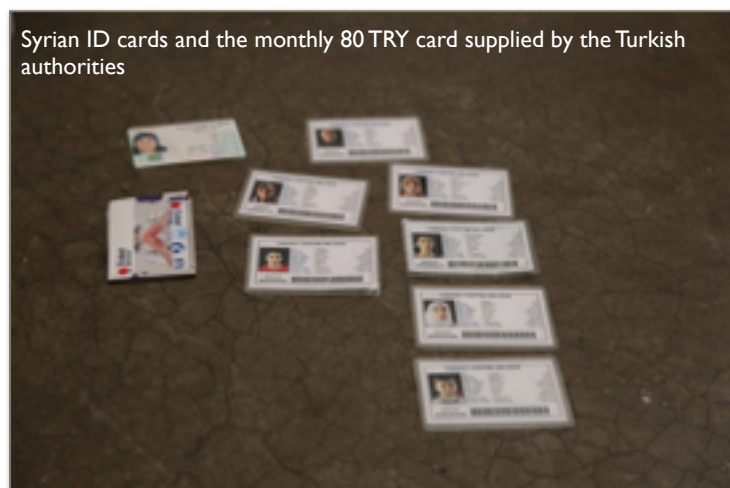
black market for cigarettes, makeup and other kinds of contraband goods. It is strange to see how little a refugee camp resembles to what I had figured in my imagination. Everything is orderly, oddly so. The residents scan a card with their fingerprints to enter inside the camp, then they have to go through metal detectors and scan their belongings in an X-ray machine. Inside, there are around 2,000 identical containers spread out in neat rows. In this camp, there are no tents.

Hamid Ramadan, 25, comes from the northern Aleppo suburbs. He has been living in the camp for one year. He fought with the Free Syrian Army and he left after ISIS took control of the area. “I fled before ISIS could take me, as I would be punished for being a *kâfir*”, said Hamid while his mother orders him to stop talking. Placidly, he lowers his head, “My family is here in the camp, we live in good conditions. I would like to go back but if I leave the camp for more than 12 hours I cannot come back. I like it here, but we don’t do anything during the day”, said Hamid, “I sit and wait”.

A woman of 65, Nour, lives in the camp with her husband and her two sons. Her other two sons died in the war while another two aged 18 and 20 are still fighting along the ranks of the FSA. “I’m happy that they are still fighting, and I’m not scared. Assad’s army burnt my house down”, said Nour with a petrified and proud look on her face. She has another daughter of 17, married in Syria but her husband died during the war. She remarried a Turkish man and she lives in the city centre. She complains that sometimes she cannot exit the camp as they close the door and don’t let anybody out.

Ahmad is 20, comes from Aleppo’s suburbs. Before arriving to Kilis camp one year ago, he lived for four years in the camps inside Syria. “The situation was dramatic”, he said, “We lived in the tents during winter and it was freezing at night. When it rained, the tents were flooded. The common toilets were unhygienic and the smell of rotten rubbish would follow you everywhere in the camp”. He talked in a hectic way, trying to hide the right hand in his trouser pocket as far as he could. When a fly landed on his left eyebrows, he suddenly scared it away with his hand revealing a *Zulfiqar* tattoo on his wrist. It’s the legendary sword of Ali ibn Abi Talib which is said to have been given to him by Muhammad, that is an important symbol for Alawites. As his mother comes to take him away because she fears that a struggle could arise, Osman, 27, a blacksmith from Jisr al-Shughur, a significant suburb for the revolution, approaches saying “In the end we are all Syrians, it doesn’t matter on which side of the fence you were standing. In Syria, we loved each other, and the most important thing is to go back to that: we have to love each other once again”. He works to support his two children and his wife that live in the camp. He sells bread, chips and water inside, but as it is forbidden to bring more than two loafs of bread, a few bag of chips, and a few bottles of water, per person, he asks as many people as possible to bring little by little all his products inside. Rami, 21, a young bearded man, approached him, making sure that the guards didn’t see him and he revealed that the conditions inside the camp worsened in last years. “Now, they open the water supply for one hour per day, and you have to be ready”. Osman corrected him, “It actually depends on

whom is in charge of the water”. Rami, continued carelessly, “The prices in the market inside the camp doubled in the past two years, and with 80 TRY that we receive every month from the government we cannot afford to buy anything”. They told me there are never incidents inside the camp, as they never fight over politics, whichever faction they support because they know that misbehaviour would not be allowed and will result in being kicked out of the camp. Inside they have to follow strict rules, almost like a military doctrine. They can have only one fan per tent, only one TV, and often up to 15 people share a 15 square meters’



space. Most of them, during the 12 hours' time that they are allowed to go out every day, have to work to support their families, and if they earn a little bit more, with some small bribes they can try to bend the rules allowing them to have a better treatment. Until recently, virtually every family imagined an imminent return to Syria as soon as President Bashar al-Assad fell. Now, many see their beloved homeland as lost, and grudgingly accept that Kilis is somewhere they will be a while.

### Osmaniye camp

I met Omar in the crowded streets in the old city centre of Gaziantep. He is 14 and works for 100 TRY (around 32 euro) per month as a shop boy in one of the many spice shops in the bazar. "I know English and Arabic, so I can help clients. My boss speaks only Turkish", he whispered, hiding from the manager. He has lived in the Osmaniye camp for a year, and then he moved to Gaziantep with his family this year. "Nobody ever came from the outside to visit the camp. The situation inside was so bad that we decided to move here. Now, I can provide for my family". He told me that also his brother, who is 17 years old, works as a waiter. In the camp, the refugees are supposed to receive health assistance, food and shelter. Therefore, when a family decides to leave, one wonders which miserable conditions they had to be facing daily, since Omar and his brother make 80 euro per month which has to suffice for a family of 5.



Gate entrance to Nizip camp

### Nizip Camp

Salwa, 52, is the teacher of the camp. She speaks English fluently, and she is not afraid to shout out her opinions on the crowded bus going towards the camp. "We are human bodies, we are not numbers", she said. She is very grateful for her living situation, because "We are living in much better conditions than in Zaatarı [Jordan] and Shatila [Lebanon]", she argued. "There's order, in terms of security, in terms of services. Anything I can think of I can find it in the market", she concluded.

### Education and child labour

Since the start of the civil war in Syria in 2011, almost two million Syrians have streamed across Turkey's borders and only 10% of them live in refugee camps. The majority of Syrians in Turkey (about 80%) live outside of refugee camps, without access to the education system. A report released by AFAD (Disaster and Emergency Management Presidency of Turkey) indicates that there are large disparities in access to basic necessities between Syrians living inside and outside of camps, none more striking than those differences regarding access to basic education. Currently, about 80% of the Syrian children residing inside the camp of school age (ages 6-17 years) are attending school within the camp facilities, while only 27% of their peers in host communities are attending. Only 522,140 Children (5-17 years old) enrolled in formal education in 2015<sup>8</sup>. This extremely low attendance rate is alarming. Furthermore, according to UNHCR, 75% of the Syrian refugee population is



A Turkish school that opened its gates to Syrian children

<sup>8</sup> Syrian refugees, Inter-agency regional update, August 2015, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) – [www.unhcr.org](http://www.unhcr.org)

composed of women and children. In Turkey, it is estimated that about 22% of Syrian heads of households outside of camps are women, although this number could be much higher. Few school age Syrians attend school in urban areas. The school quality remains a concern, due to the potentially limited capacity of teachers and low or non-existent salaries, as well as the Ministry of Education's limited ability to monitor and support Syrian schools. Furthermore, for those Syrians attending Turkish schools, language barriers limit their quality of learning<sup>9</sup>.

The construction of four new schools in Ceylanpinar, Suruc, Gaziantep and Adana Yuregir has been completed which will accommodate over 8,000 students in two shifts. This will help to some extent by addressing the issue of insufficient and inadequate learning spaces which remains a major barrier to upscaling access to education<sup>10</sup>. The most worrisome fact concerning children of the schooling age, that are out of school, concerns child labour in the urban context. In the industrial district, all companies employ Syrian children, that earn around 15 TRY per week (4.50 euro). With a rough estimate of 20 euro per month, the children have become the new means of support for the household, where the parents cannot work because they are either unskilled, old, or suffered injuries and traumas in the conflict.

Those who should have started primary school in Syria, but couldn't because the war broke out, left the country without ever stepping a foot inside a classroom. Most of them are not even able to write the alphabet in Arabic. They don't know a word of Turkish, and no one can know for how long they will remain in Turkey. Only the lucky ones can attend the school in the afternoon, once Turkish students finish classes. Many have lost a parent, and all of them their houses.

**School interview, Amal for education, Kilis.** Children from 6 to 14 years old found a safe haven in a school in the rural area five km away from Kilis city centre. They are 270 students and most of them were living in a spontaneous refugee camp now dismantled, and others come from other areas of the town. The place where the school is located is a boundless swath of desert land interrupted only by a few olive and pistachio trees. In the school, located five km from the Kilis-Ocupinar border, news travels fast. The children heard of an imaginative "safe zone" that will be created in the north-west of Syria. "We will be there soon. We will be safe", said Raja, 12. "We will be in Syria, finally", adds her sister Aman, two years older than her, "My



name is Aman, it means safety, my sister's name is Raja, it means hope. It is safety that we hope for". Afterwards they looked at the head mistress, with dreamy shy eyes, and they added "We feel safe here as well, but we want to go back". The president of the non-profit organisation that runs the school is Italian, a university professor of linguistics, drawn to Kilis by the desire to create a secure "bubble" for the Syrian children that attend her school. It's a white building, with blue windows and doors, that would look fitting on a Greek island, while in this remote part of Turkey, it stands out like a sore

<sup>9</sup> Stephanie Dorman, *Educational Needs Assessment for Urban Syrian Refugees*, Duke University, September 2014.

<sup>10</sup> Syrian refugees, Inter-agency regional update, August 2015, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) – [www.unhcr.org](http://www.unhcr.org).

thumb. The place is peaceful, and the children can go there after school to do some recreational activities (drawing, reading books in the library, painting) and study languages (Arabic, Turkish and English). The main challenge faced by the director is the lack of trust by the families, so she also offers courses for adults. Significantly, the school gives literacy courses in Arabic for the mothers of the children. “First, we gained their trust, and when they started to come, they saw the place and the teachers and they also started to send their children to school”, reported Isabella Chiari, the president of “Amal for Education”. These children, residing near the border, live in a sense of absolute uncertainty, because every other day they hear rumours they will return to their homeland, so they are not put in the state of mind of settling down. There is a big vacuum in the planning of their future, and no aspiration in resettling. The director also reported that a big challenge in their education is that these children have never developed a suitable “schooling behaviour” and are not used to staying seated to attend classes, wait for their turn to speak or concentrate for more than 20 minutes straight. One might wonder if this is the consequence of war trauma, but in reality she said that they haven’t developed violent behaviour and sometimes they are forced by the adults to think about war in stereotypical terms. Sometimes they are asked by grown-ups to draw airplanes dropping barrel bombs instead of green fields with flowers, because this is what is expected of a child escaping the war. Portraying dark images of conflict, suffering and despair, as part of the collective imagination of children that experienced the war might be considered as normal, but is more the exception to the rule in this school.

### Women and girls

When I visited “Dar-Salam” orphanage, I expected to see the worst living condition ever. The director was very suspicious of every question I asked, scared by my big camera hanging down my neck. Instead, the institution



Dar-Salam orphanage’s playing room

was clean, full of toys, and drawings hung on freshly-painted orange walls. The centre hosts 40 children, provided with health assistance, schooling, clothing and food. “We receive private funding, and this is why the centre is the best place in town”, said Hussein, the director. He and his wife started the project by bringing two siblings from Syria, a boy, 12 and a girl, 14. They stayed with his family for some time and he was amazed by how they would be able to communicate and interact with his children that could speak only Turkish. Then, he decided to go back to Syria and rescue as many orphans as he could. Sometimes, in the darkness of the night, he

would hear Zahra scream. He later found out that she had been raped by a *Shabiha*, a fighter in Assad’s army, when she was 12. “In a war, those who suffer the most, are always the children”, he concludes.

The UN and many international and local NGOs that are carrying out studies in Syria and countries in which Syrian refugees have taken refuge, reported that rape has become a part of the Syrian civil war. International human rights organisations state that thousands of women throughout the country have been raped by regime military forces and militants of the armed opposition.

A woman in Kilis camp told me: “Now, it is not the time to think about it, our kids are hungry, there are deaths and mourning in each home. Therefore, while everyone commits violence against one another, we do not have any time the luxury to become deeply



Syrian girls proud of their report cards

occupied with our troubles”. Syrian women suffer sexual attacks by the armed forces of both government and anti-government supporters. No matter if a woman supports the opposition or the regime, all Syrian women assemble these painful memories in a part of their hearts.

What can women do? “Being all on my own, as a woman, I am just a helpless woman in the eyes of every man I went to to ask for a job. And they think “poverty brings deprivation” but I want to work and get my money’s worth. I don’t present my body but only efforts, and in return, I want my children’s bread, as it is the only way to live humanly.”<sup>11</sup>

In the end, I found something different from what I expected. The most giving people that share the next-to-nothing they have, many smiles, and welcoming hearts. Syrian people are very proud, hardworking and I just wish this sense of hopelessness that hides in all their thoughts will soon disappear. Hope will be restored as soon as barrel bombs will stop falling from the sky, a protected haven will be created, and Assad will step aside.

## Interviews<sup>12</sup>

### **Interview with General Coordinator of Qasioun News Agency, Mr Ali Youssef<sup>13</sup>**

- **What do you think about the role of ISIS in the region?**

There are 120 journalists that are working for us inside Syria, and what has been reported is that nowadays, following the Turkish raids against ISIS, it became clear that it is beginning to shrink and lose its power. There are many reports from our journalists in Raqqa city that state ISIS’s power is collapsing.

- **Why do you think Turkey joined the bombing campaign against ISIS?**

I am happy that Turkey joined the race. Here, they say that Turkey wants to fight the Kurds but it’s not true. If they actively fight them, there will be a civil war. The problem is PKK not the Kurds, like with the Syrians, the problem is ISIS and jihadists, and not Islam. It has been more than 10 years since the PKK went to Syria to kidnap young males to recruit them for fighting and the PKK is known worldwide as a terrorist organisation.

- **Have you ever seen, met, and talked with an ISIS fighter?**

I have seen ISIS fighters before in Raqqa. They are the most dangerous fighters in the world.

- **What is your opinion on US targeted action against ISIS?**

If the US-led coalition didn’t exist, we would be lost. If the US can’t strike ISIS, no one can. And without the help of the US, Kobane would never have been freed.

- **What about the future of the people that are living in Syria?**

90% of Syrian children that are living in Syria are either injured or suffer psychological problems. Many have been kidnapped by ISIS, or work illegally. There is no rule of law. Our next generation, it is a lost generation. They are damaged, and they will probably not recover easily.

- **What about next generations’ leaders? Do you believe in the National Council?**

These people have been living outside Syria for too long. Even if some of them could be good leaders, they are not recognised by the people. They didn’t live the sufferings, the hunger, the shelling. I believe there are many good leaders inside Syria that can draw a future for the country.

- **How do you think it will end?**

We will continue fighting until the last Syrian is still standing. Everything that is built illegally and in the wrong way [Assad’s regime] will not continue.

- **And what about ISIS?**

---

<sup>11</sup> Statement collected by Kemal Vural Tarlan in his paper “Middle East Women Raise Their Voices” Ekphrasis, [www.ekphrasis.net](http://www.ekphrasis.net)

<sup>12</sup> All the interviews have been carried out by me during my stay in Gaziantep in August 2015.

<sup>13</sup> For security reasons, his name has been changed.

It's a temporary organisation destined to fall, because the Syrian regime help it to grow. There are many ISIS leaders that were intentionally put in prison together by Assad, so that they could plan, strategize and organise themselves. The Syrian regime kills the revolution and the rebels. ISIS kills the revolution and the rebels. Therefore, they are the same thing.

- **Can you give me an example of how Assad and ISIS are collaborating?**

A few weeks before ISIS took Raqqa's airport, the regime started to evacuate all the commanders and officials from the military airport saying that ISIS was surrounding it. The rebels that were in Raqqa were arrested and put inside the airport so that when ISIS entered in the airport, it killed all the Sunni soldiers and rebels. I can give you another example of their collaborations. Many of our journalists reported that when ISIS takes control of areas rich in oil then they sell it to the regime, so that it can be transformed into fuel by the regime, and then it returns to ISIS in that form in Raqqa, Damascus, Homs, among other areas.

- **How can this war come to an end?**

There are thousands of solutions for this war to end, and all of them would require the EU and the US to guarantee a no-fly zone. If the regime would stop dropping barrel bombs, then the next day the regime would fall. When you cut the snails head, the tail is finished. We only want a democratic country to live in, and we don't want to be ruled by a family. Assad and ISIS are killing Syrians in the name of Islam, but ISIS, Iran, and Hezbollah, are jihadists, while Islam is peaceful.

- **What will you do when the regime falls?**

I was living in Raqqa, and after 6 months after the city was freed from the regime, we elected local coordinators to manage the province. These were local people not involved in political parties. Those were the best days of my life, those were democratic days. A lot of young people were active and involved, and we were building something. Then, ISIS took control of the city and our worst nightmare begun.

- **What do you think about foreign fighters?**

We are in contact with 12 foreign fighters who left ISIS, and with another 30 that are leaving at the moment. ISIS doesn't want them to leave, because they will reveal ISIS' lies. If a foreign fighter reveals that ISIS is a lie, then also Syrians would start to understand that it's a lie. The ones we interviewed told us that ISIS commanders portray themselves as great fighters, but those who managed to escape reported before the battle they shout Allah's name, but then they disappear, as they never fight in battles. So, if Syrians would see foreigners defecting from ISIS, they would understand that there is something wrong with it. Right now there are between 20,000-30,000 Syrians fighting for ISIS, and 5,000 foreign fighters, considering those coming from the West and from Arab countries. But ISIS is a lie, and will be defeated, and Assad as well.



### **Interview with Mr Alessandro Manno, Syria Project Interim Coordinator, International Criminal Justice Program, No Peace Without Justice**

- **What are the goals of your project in Gaziantep?**

The main goal of No Peace Without Justice's work on Syria is to reduce the expectations and rewards of impunity, and building a culture of accountability. Through support to Syrian civil society, we want to encourage peaceful processes and the creation of a pluralistic, inclusive and democratic society. The purpose is to equip citizens to demand accountability and justice for violations taking place on a daily basis for the past four years.

- **What kind of activities does your project entail?**

The mainstay of the project is capacity building. A series of advocacy and training events mostly being held in Gaziantep, Turkey, with Syrian judges, lawyers and civil society activists from Syria who can bring the skills and, perhaps more importantly, aspirations for justice back to their work and their constituents inside Syria.



The training series focuses on specific themes and issues that are relevant to justice and the accountability process, rather than provide generic training on human rights and transitional justice.

- **What are the most difficult aspects concerning the development of the project?**

There are two main concerns related to our current project, one is more practical and another is more abstract. The first is related to the current policy that Turkey adopted about the Syrian borders, which basically impedes Syrians (unless they hold special permits) to cross them, as they did before. This means that our trainees, who are mostly located in the North of Syria, could find it very difficult to reach Gaziantep, undermining our capability to provide them with trainings. The second concern is due to a general sense of mistrust, dissatisfaction and frustration that is permeating across Syrian civil society, which is no longer able to believe in a solution of the crisis or in the “day after”, that they have been waiting for too long.

- **What is the criteria for considering the benefits that your activities bring?**

It is never easy to measure the result of projects like this. We are not aiming to build shelters or equip camps, nor at providing fresh water access to refugees. At its core, the project aims to build and further the knowledge of Syrian human rights activists on transitional justice and accountability processes, thus ultimately enabling civil society organisations to play an active and informed role in the reconciliatory and reconstruction processes starting with the end of the conflict. The overall impact therefore consists in laying foundations of understanding for transitional justice mechanisms for broader civil society, and providing it with the means, knowledge and capacity to replicate their knowledge and continue to raise awareness through civil society organisations and society as a whole. The social impacts of our project relate to the improved status of civil society as part of the new Syria which is where the benefits will be tangibly measured.

### **Interview with Mr Somar Zein, Aman “Peace Building Program Coordinator, Center for Civil Society and Democracy” (CCSD)**



- **What type of projects does your organisation carry out?**

The Center for Civil Society and Democracy in Syria is an independent Syrian centre that seeks to support and strengthen civil society and democracy and promote the values of freedom, justice and coexistence through the analysis of the current situation and developing and implementing solutions.

At CCSD we have 4 work areas each area includes different programs:

- Activate (Organisation Development, Leadership); \* Aman (Peace building network); \* White (Transparency, Elections); \*I am she (Women network)

- **Which do you think is the most viable solution to stop the bloodshed? A military solution or a political solution?**

I think a political solution supported by military force should only be used to ensure the solution.

- **Do you think that the establishment of a safe area will help Syrians? Or would it actually endanger Syrians who have fled their homes to further violence from militant groups and the government (given the absent consent of the warring parties and the complete closure of the borders)?**

Making a safe zone will help if it stops the bombing for the many displaced people, but in the end it is not a solution. Anyways, it is still a way to stop more people from being killed.

Do you think that ISIS can be defeated? When and how?

Yes, ISIS can be defeated. It needs a long time for sure because, at the end they have a nursery in some areas of Syria. Awareness on one hand, and finding the replacement forces that applies law on the other hand will defeat their existence and their thoughts.

- **Do you think that a peaceful reconstruction of Syria not based on a religious or political divide is possible?**

Yes, it is possible. It will take a lot of time though, because of the different demands expressed by the various Syrian Groups on every level.



**Giacomo Cuscunà** is an Italian freelance photographer and journalist. Currently based in Erbil, Iraq, he has been in Southern Turkey since 2012 covering the Syrian conflict and focusing on civilians' living

conditions. He traveled extensively in southern Turkey and northern Syria and published reportages and pictures from Syria, Turkey, Jordan, Lebanon, Kosovo on the main Italian media outlets and cooperates with the Italian NGOs "No Peace Without Justice" and "Un Ponte Per".

## Safety Zones, Fake Zones and Responsibility to Protect in Northern Syria

### Hopes and Doubts over US-led Coalition Effectiveness (and willingness to be)

According to the First and Fourth Geneva Conventions the possibility of setting up *hospital* or *demilitarised* or *neutralised* zones in conflict situations is given, if an agreement for the establishment of such zones, is undersigned by the warring parties. These *zones* are intended to shelter civilians from the effects of conflict; they can be used by humanitarian personnel to support the population and can not be targeted by combatants<sup>1</sup>.

The hypothesis of the establishment of *safe havens* in northern Syria was widely spread among media and analysts after the launch of the US-led intervention against the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL or IS) in June 2014. The military operation intensified during the siege of the Kurdish city of Kobane in Syria, in September 2014. Although the coalition military efforts' were not particularly significant, if compared to those of other operations carried out in the last decade (e.g. Iraq 2003, Libya 2011), they enabled Kurdish militias to retake the city of Kobane and to limit the IS expansion in northern Iraq.

Following this first international response against IS offensive in Iraq and northern Syria, Syrian Kurdish armed groups (mostly PYD – Democratic Union Party)<sup>2</sup> advanced toward IS territory in Aleppo and Raqqa provinces, backed by Free Syrian Army (FSA) brigades and Iraqi Kurd Peshmergas<sup>3</sup>, liberating the bordering region of Syria on the eastern side of the Euphrates river. Until now the US-led coalition continues targeting IS forces, pursuing a strategy aimed at weakening the Islamist presence on the ground, enabling FSA and Kurdish forces to enlarge their areas of control over IS territory.

After 4 years of bloodshed and over 220,000 of estimated victims in Syria<sup>4</sup> something seemed to be changing at an international level. It's undeniable that the possibility to create *safe havens* or *safety zones* in northern Syria could be a tool to normalise the situation in certain regions, allowing a number of refugees among the 2 Million displaced in Turkey, to travel back to their Country, and the Internally Displaced People (IDPs)<sup>5</sup> to find secure locations where to shelter.

<sup>1</sup> J. Henckaerts & L. D. Doswald-Beck; *Customary International Humanitarian Law*; Cambridge University Press; 2009; pg. 119 (available at <https://www.icrc.org/eng/assets/files/other/customary-international-humanitarian-law-i-icrc-eng.pdf> – last visit on 7 September 2015).

<sup>2</sup> The party is affiliated with the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), The Democratic Union Party is a Rojava political party established in 2003 by Kurdish activists in northern Syria.

<sup>3</sup> Iraqi Peshmergas were allowed to cross into besieged Kobane after travelling from Iraq into Turkey.

<sup>4</sup> Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator Stephen O'Brien briefing the Security Council at its meeting on the situation in Syria on 28 August 2015.

<sup>5</sup> OCHA estimates the number of IDPs in Syria in about 7.6 Million people (to date 8 September 2015).

This would be not only the first step for an infrastructural reconstruction, but also a chance to open a concrete path for the development of a new, inclusive and democratic society in northern Syria.

However, questions remain open over the wiliness of the international actors involved to put in place an effective plan to establish and protect these areas, and about the implications that this plan might cause.

As rumours spread in the media, it was clear that the possible *safety zone* to be established was the strip of territory between the Syrian border towns of Jarablus and Marea, a region 110 Km-long and 65 Km-deep inside the Syrian territory, in the northern countryside of Aleppo. What is now a IS stronghold in Syria, strategic supplies route, could become a free protected area.

But the picture emerging from the field is different, and must be taken into account.

Activists and human rights defenders working on the ground renamed this hypothetical *safety zone* as a *fake zone* due to the ineffectiveness of the US-led coalition airstrikes. In the latest weeks the frontline of Marea<sup>6</sup> represents one of the harshest battlefields in northern Syria, with IS militants using artillery and chemical weapons trying to surround the strategic area defended by FSA forces<sup>7</sup>.

Here aircrafts and drones seem to have a limited impact, and until now the US-led coalition was not able to replicate the effects obtained during the battle for Kobane. Marea is a strategical location on the main supply route between Aleppo and the Turkish border and represents also the door the IS could open to reach A'zaz city and the near Bab al-Salam border crossing with Turkey.

But the battle of Marea is not only strategic for IS militants: it is also a controversial and strategic point defining US policy on Syria: if in Kobane the support was given to Kurdish groups firmly opposed to IS, sieging its territory, in Marea the forces on the ground are different: those who are fighting against the *black terrorists* are armed groups forming at the same time the largest anti-regime front in Syria.

The violence in that Country, as the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic reports is “endemic, regrettably proliferating in its scope and extent”<sup>8</sup>, but the same commission states in its latest report that:

“Government forces have directed attacks against the civilian population. The attacks have included widespread shelling and bombardment of civilian-inhabited localities and the targeting of civilians for arrest, detention and disappearance on the basis of their association or perceived opposition to the Government. As part of this widespread attack on the civilian population, in accordance with State policy, Government forces have perpetrated crimes against humanity of murder, extermination, torture, rape, enforced disappearance and other inhumane acts.

Government forces have committed gross violations of human rights and the war crimes of murder, torture, rape, sexual violence and targeting civilians. Government forces disregarded the special protection accorded to hospitals and medical personnel. Indiscriminate and disproportionate aerial bombardment and shelling by Government forces led to mass civilian casualties and spread terror.”<sup>9</sup>

---

<sup>6</sup> Marea is a village in the northern countryside of Aleppo

<sup>7</sup> As reported among the others by members of the Syrian Institute for Justice and Accountability, a Syrian NGO documenting violence and crimes perpetrated in the whole of Syria.

<sup>8</sup> Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, A/HRC/30/48, pg. 21.

<sup>9</sup> Ibidem

And at the same time that:

“ISIS has directed acts of violence and terror against the civilian population under its control in Raqqah, Dayr Az-Zawr, Hasakah, Aleppo, Hama and Homs governorates. ISIS, a structured group, directs and organises these acts of violence against civilians, evincing an organisational policy.

ISIS has committed murder, torture, rape, sexual slavery, sexual violence, forcible displacement and other inhumane acts as part of a widespread attack on the civilian population, amounting to crimes against humanity. ISIS has committed war crimes, including murder, execution without due process, torture, hostage-taking, rape and sexual violence, recruiting and using children in hostilities and attacking protected objects, as well as other serious violations of international humanitarian law.”<sup>10</sup>

While:

“Anti-Government armed groups have committed the war crimes of murder, execution without due process, torture, hostage-taking and attacking protected objects.”<sup>11</sup>

It could be argued that the US-led intervention is not aimed to put an end to Syria tragedy as a whole, but it is carried out to limit the rise of one possible global threat, leaving the Assad regime free to play its role with impunity and unaccountable, as far as the crimes and hostilities remain within Syria's borders and within some Iraqi regions, of none strategic interest.

If this is the case, the Responsibility to Protect<sup>12</sup> seems to be overthrown once again by international interests and diplomatic knots too difficult to unravel in an overall stalemate of the UN Security Council and the other relevant international assemblies.

This doubt is one of the main sources of concern regarding the effectiveness of any *safety zone* in northern Syria. Overall, safety zones have saved many lives, but establishing them, preventing military activity in them, and protecting them from external assault is difficult and demanding: *safety zones* rarely provide an enduring haven from the horrors of war<sup>13</sup>.

And this is a even bigger problem if *safe zones* are just *fake zones* that mislead people of leaving refugee camps in neighbouring and safe Countries to return to their homes, without anyone willing and ready to protect them.

---

<sup>10</sup> Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, A/HRC/30/48, pg. 21.

<sup>11</sup> Ibidem

<sup>12</sup> Recognising the failure to adequately respond to the most heinous crimes known to humankind during the United Nations 2005 World, a new commitment was elaborated by international leaders, called Responsibility to Protect. This commitment includes the duty to protect populations from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity. It stipulates that: a) The State carries the primary responsibility for the protection of populations from genocide, war crimes, crimes against humanity and ethnic cleansing. b) The international community has a responsibility to assist States in fulfilling this responsibility. c) The international community should use appropriate diplomatic, humanitarian and other peaceful means to protect populations from these crimes. If a State fails to protect its populations or is in fact the perpetrator of crimes, the international community must be prepared to take stronger measures, including the collective use of force through the UN Security Council <http://www.responsibilitytoprotect.org/index.php/about-rtop/learn-about-rtop>; last visit on 8 September 2015.

<sup>13</sup> A. Roberts; “Safety Zones”; <http://www.crimesofwar.org/a-z-guide/safety-zones/>; last visit on 7 September 2015.



**Isadora Loreto** is specialised in human rights, humanitarian law, conflict resolution and security. With a special focus on the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region,

Isadora has worked for several NGOs and think tanks. After being Head of research at the Polis Project at ReSeT (Centre for Research on Security and Transnational Governance), she is currently project and strategy officer at P.A.U. Education.

## Syrian refugees: a common European position is essential

These past years the Mediterranean Sea has become the most dangerous natural frontier with many thousands of migrants dying whilst trying to reach Europe<sup>1</sup>. By mid-September 2015, more than 430.000 people<sup>2</sup> reached the European Union via the Mediterranean since the beginning of the year. Europe is facing its biggest refugee crisis in 70 years, disintegrating into a chaotic series of border confrontations and diplomatic disputes. The vast majority of those arriving in Greece and moving onwards come from conflict zones such as

Syria, Afghanistan, and Iraq. The United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR) has been urging Europe to unite behind emergency proposals to manage the refugee and migration crisis that has become increasingly chaotic and unpredictable. On Tuesday 22 September, in a rare move for an issue involving national sovereignty, EU interior ministers approved the resettlement scheme by majority vote rather than by unanimous approval. At the emergency EU summit that followed on Wednesday 23 September, European heads of government met in Brussels to try to hatch a common plan on refugees. The refugee situation can only be addressed through a holistic and comprehensive approach, with all EU Member States working together in a constructive manner. This approach includes working closely with neighbouring countries and adopting a common European position.

### The situation in Syria's neighbouring countries

There are 4 million Syrians are refugees in neighbouring countries and 7.6 million are internally displaced persons (IDPs) within the country<sup>3</sup>, and in total they represent half of the Syrian population and almost a fifth of the global refugee population, which is currently 60 million. 1.1 million Syrian refugees are currently in Lebanon which has a population of only 4.5 million. Another 1.9 million are in Turkey, 250.000 in Iraq, 630.000 in Jordan and 130.000 in Egypt according to the UNHCR<sup>4</sup>.

Syrian refugees constitute about a fifth of the population of Lebanon. The country's dysfunctional political system is not equipped to deal with the refugee crisis. There are high concerns about a spill over of the Syrian conflict which revives old religious tensions between Sunnis and Shiites and endangers the delicate sectarian balance of the country. 250.000 Syrian refugees are in Iraq while the country is also suffering from a long lasting conflict. Syrian refugees have low chances of finding the peace they are often looking for in Iraq. With nearly two million people, Turkey serves as shelter to the largest contingent of Syrian migrants. As they do not

<sup>1</sup> "Globally, IOM estimates that at least 4,077 migrants died in 2014, and at least 40,000 since the year 2000. The true number of fatalities is likely to be higher, as many deaths occur in remote regions of the world and are never recorded. Some experts have suggested that for every dead body discovered, there are at least two others that are never recovered", *Fatal journeys, Tracking lives lost during migration*, International Organization for Migration, 2014, [http://publications.iom.int/bookstore/free/FatalJourneys\\_CountingtheUncounted.pdf](http://publications.iom.int/bookstore/free/FatalJourneys_CountingtheUncounted.pdf).

<sup>2</sup> Don Melvin, *EU ministers choose quota system to address migrant crisis*, CNN, 22 September 2015, <http://edition.cnn.com/2015/09/22/world/europe-migration/>.

<sup>3</sup> UNHCR, *Syrian Regional Refugee Response*, Inter-agency Information Sharing Portal, <http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/regional.php>. These statistics take into account only registered people.

<sup>4</sup> Ibidem

have official refugee status and are only considered temporary guests, they cannot work officially. The refugees hardly receive government support if they live outside camps, which is the situation of almost 80% of them. Given the turmoil in Syria, Jordan is still remarkably stable. It is however reaching the limit of its capacity with over 600.000 refugees<sup>5</sup>.

After four years of conflict, no political solution is in sight in Syria and ISIS is entrenched both in Syria and in Iraq. Refugees and IDPs know that the situation is not temporary, but will last for a certain period of time. This is reflected in the policy focus of the United Nations in neighbouring countries, which has shifted from emergency assistance to resilient livelihood strategies<sup>6</sup>. How well refugees and IDPs will be integrated in the neighbouring countries is a current challenge for the crisis management<sup>7</sup>.

### **The need for a EU comprehensive approach**

Europe started to realise the magnitude of the refugee crisis when it arrived at its borders. It may want to look further and focus on where the perilous refugee journey began. The situation in neighbouring countries is critical, with lack of funding and support for humanitarian programs<sup>8</sup>. The World Food Programme (WFP) provides basic food items to 1.3 million refugees in neighbouring countries and 4 million people inside Syria. Its humanitarian programs are underfunded by 81% in Lebanon and Jordan where humanitarian assistance budget to Syrian refugees has been cut by half this year. 1.8 million Iraqis currently benefit from WFP humanitarian programs but they are also severely at risk with programs being underfunded by 61%. EU countries have pledged at least \$1,1 billion to UN agencies to help refugees in the Middle East on 24 September but more will need to be done in terms of support and collaboration with neighbourhood countries in order to have a real impact on refugees lives<sup>9</sup>.

Together with several other EU countries, Germany has pushed for a burden sharing among Member States but Eastern European countries have continuously been opposed to adopting an EU common policy. German Chancellor Angela Merkel has warned on Thursday 24 September that a solution to the migrant crisis is far off and that measures agreed between Member States were only a “first step”<sup>10</sup>.

It is essential that EU countries come to an agreement and define a common European approach. The EU should give more support to Lebanon, Turkey, Jordan and other countries neighbouring Syria, as well as consider offering possibilities to file for asylum in the host countries of the Middle East which would require close collaboration with the respective governments. It should also sustain robust search and rescue operations in the Mediterranean and expand safe and legal channels into the EU, including increasing resettlement quotas, wider access to humanitarian visas, and facilitating family reunification. Finally, EU countries should ensure an equal share of responsibility for asylum seekers, and implement common EU standards on reception conditions and asylum procedures. Europe can no longer afford to continue with this fragmented approach that undermines efforts to rebuild responsibility, solidarity and trust among States. Only a united European emergency response can address the present refugee and migration crisis.

---

<sup>5</sup> Mercy Corps, *What you need to know about the Syria crisis*, 2 September 2015, <http://www.mercycorps.org/articles/turkey-iraq-jordan-lebanon-syria/quick-facts-what-you-need-know-about-syria-crisis>.

<sup>6</sup> Roger Guieu, *With decreasing humanitarian aid, more development must come for refugees and hosts in Kurdistan*, Middle East Research Institute, 16 August 2015, <http://www.meri-k.org/with-decreasing-humanitarian-aid-more-development-must-come-resilience-building-for-refugees-and-hosts-in-kurdistan/>.

<sup>7</sup> UN News Centre, *In Jordan, top UN relief official calls for greater support for Syrian refugees, hosts communities*, 20 September 2015, [http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=51922#.VgUoPrQ\\_uRt](http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=51922#.VgUoPrQ_uRt)

<sup>8</sup> World Food Programme, *Syria Emergency*, <http://www.wfp.org/emergencies/syria>.

<sup>9</sup> Al Jazeera, *EU pledges aid for Syrian refugees*, <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2015/09/eu-pledges-11bn-agencies-refugees-150923182915943.html>.

<sup>10</sup> BBC News, *Migrant crisis: Merkel warns durable solution far off*, 24 September 2015, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-34345640>

**Syrians in Transit:** *The project "Syrians in transit", and the namesake photographic exhibition, comes from the desire of three intercultural mediators, Alessandra Pezza, Anna Pasotti and Marta Mantegazza, and a photographer, Anna Ruggieri, to tell the difficult and excruciating journey that the EU forces Syrians fleeing the war to undertake, through their own voice. The project, which focuses on Syrians, actually cuts across all war refugees. Weaving together stories and images, the exhibition tries to tell a collective story that can give birth to a new reflection on the processes of acceptance and inclusion in Europe. Behind the project there is the firm conviction that everyone should have the right to choose the country they want to live in, that freedom of movement is a right and that it must therefore take place with safe and legal means and that, therefore, there must be in this sense a different national and European policy.*

## Syrians in Transit, From Catania to Malmö

It is an usual spring morning in 2014 and there must be around 50 of them<sup>1</sup>. They sit dispersed between the top of some luggage and atop the grass in front of Catania's train station. They are smiling, laughing and chatting. At a brief glance they look like they are a family out for a picnic or perhaps a group that has just arrived to the city for a family visit. In reality, they are a group of Syrian refugees who arrived the previous night from Libya after spending one day at sea, at last, in Europe after fleeing their war-torn communities in Syria.

Five months earlier a group of friends and I decided to document the trip that Syrian refugees are forced to undertake within Europe once they arrive on the Sicilian shores through images and quotes of their

personal stories. Our group was comprised of a photographer, and three intercultural mediators. The decision to do this came from our shared desire to try and grasp the reality of the stories that refugees bring with them to Milan, our hometown. We knew that the details we were told by refugees we met in Milan were only fragments of a wider story that represents the experiences of many people who try and move within Europe as they escape violence in their home country. In the following months, we collected images and stories from refugees in Catania in Sicily and in Milan as well as Malmö and Jönköping in Sweden. After a year of work, these stories gave form to the project and photographic exhibition called "Syrians in Transit".

We learned through our work that Catania is the first place where Syrians arrive after they have been rescued by Italian military ships and assigned to camps or emergency shelters established around southern Sicily. Catania is the starting point of their second journey, the one that takes them across Europe. Most do not know upon their arrival how difficult it will be to undertake this part of their journey. People typically arrive here one day after reaching the Italian shores. Their stories told us that the initial day is generally one of confusion as the Italian authorities commonly ignore the refugees and delay in giving them legal support or explanations of their rights as asylum seekers.

In Catania refugees will also meet Nawal, the 28 year-old Italian-Moroccan volunteer activist who spends six days a week and every night helping and supporting people who are arriving from the sea. Nawal answers phone calls from the boats and sends coordinates to the Italian coast guard. Once people arrive in Catania, she welcomes them, helps them buy the train tickets and SIM cards, brings them to the hospital and finds clothes for the ones most in need.

---

<sup>1</sup> [Editor's note: In the first issue of the bulletin "Syria, Break the Wall of Silence", published in October 2014, ARCHumankind already addressed the issue of a travel from Italy to Sweden of Syrian refugees].

Nawal is the only reference point for refugees here in Sicily as the municipal, regional and state authorities pretend their work is not needed. Despite the approximately 40.000 arrivals in 2014 and 36.000 among Syrians and Eritreans in the first nine months of 2015 no institutional support has been given to refugees



inside the city of Catania. Once our group arrived in the city, we followed and depended on Nawal trying to help her as much as possible with finding food, translating for people in the shops and escorting a Syrian man to see his 2 year-old son to the hospital. Our team was initially concerned about how difficult it would be to speak with people who just survived the “suicide trip”, as the refugees call it. We were surprised and overwhelmed to hear many stories of happiness and gratefulness of being alive. We learned that in Catania people are happy because they survived the trip

across the sea; people are excited and hopeful because they made it to Europe. However, few know that their long, difficult journey has just begun, and many find that their happiness will quickly turn into torment.

“Once in Sicily,” says Nur a 32 year-old mother of three, “we felt like we had arrived.”

The problem is that Italy has not granted official refugee status to Syrian refugees fleeing war (this is in contrast to Sweden, which has opened its doors to Syrians since October 2013). Additionally, Italy has very long and tedious asylum seeking procedures and no long-term plan for refugees. Therefore, Syrians decide to travel north to other EU member states and apply for asylum. However, in order to do that, they have to make sure to not to be stopped at any border and not to have their fingerprints taken. This is because the European asylum regulation, Dublin III, states that people who wish to apply for asylum in any EU member state can do so only if they apply in the first European country they enter. The procedure to do this implies the taking of fingerprints of each applicant in order for authorities to verify that the person has not passed from another European state before or to avoid them from seeking asylum somewhere else after their initial application.

Because of this, the Italian government decided to start ignoring the Dublin Regulation and not to register the people passing through its territory as soon as refugee arrivals from Syria began to increase. However, the police at the borders with neighbouring countries often stop people and register them with fingerprints as asylum seekers in Italy, thus forcing them to stay in this country.

At the end of our stay in Catania we took the night train to Milano with a group of 74 Syrians (among which many were families and children). Only during the 24 hour-long trip North did tiredness and realisation of the long journey ahead come to the refugees. This realisation was defined by the magnitude of what they had survived, the horrors that they had witnessed, and anxiety of how long and difficult their trip will undoubtedly be. On the train, people also realised how dirty their clothes were and how long it had been since they had slept in a normal bed. We explained to people as much as was possible where we were and how many countries there were between us and Sweden and what it means that Switzerland is not part of Schengen.



“The information we had learned was not correct, we had not realised what Europe is. Even to pass from a country to another, we thought it would have been easier, faster. Instead, it is difficult. We did not know we had to stop in the first country we arrived in, we thought we would arrive North quickly; on the train to Milan each family had 1000 euro, we had not understood we needed the same amount per each one of us,” Nabeel, a wife and mother of two from Aleppo told us.

Things start to change once the refugees arrive in Milan. Here, the municipality opened shelters for Syrians only, where people can rest for a couple of days or a week, change their clothes, see a doctor, and shower without being registered within the European system. Unfortunately, this choice guided by good feelings and intentions, has made Milan and its centres the perfect business spot for human traffickers. Here in Milan a car ride to Sweden or Germany costs around 700 euro per person and does not guarantee safe arrival. Traffickers commonly take the money the day before the trip. We heard many stories of people not showing up to give rides after receiving payment and families left at the first fuel station on the highway or near the border with Austria, where street signs are bilingual, and told that they are in Germany. In other circumstances, the cars are stopped at the border and people are arrested and registered before being released on the Italian side of the border.



The most tragic result of having to use traffickers is what we call the broken families. Syrians usually move in families, which are groups of sometimes up to 10-15 people including children, grandchildren, elderly people, uncles and cousins, most of them usually underage. Standard cars can only bring four people. Often someone, usually the young boys, have to wait in Milan for a second car (or the money to pay for the second car) while part of the family leaves. This makes it difficult for families to maintain communication and contact.

In Milan we met Raya, an eight year-old girl who waited seven months in the centre with her uncle and aunt while her mother, grandmother and little brother were already in Sweden and her father was lost

somewhere in Germany with the rest of their family.



We also met Ahmad, a 17 year-old boy from Northern Syria, who stayed behind to wait for a second car while his mom and younger brothers and sisters left squeezed into the first one. He has never been able to discover where they went. In Milan, most people leave with traffickers. Some travel by train through France or Austria. Most of them stay in Milan for fewer than two nights. The others who stay to wait for money to come are forced to wait in a limbo without rights in a country

that does not want them and where they do not want to stay.

After Milan, we went to Sweden. We chose Sweden because most of the people we met in Milan and who passed through the centres had risked their lives and the safety of their families to get there. Sweden is the milestone for most Syrian refugees, the dreamland. Once there we realised how much of it was not actually a dream. Sweden has a very efficient asylum system. Refugees are first accommodated into hotels and later in apartment buildings for asylum seekers where they wait approximately six months for their papers to be processed. After that, if their asylum request is accepted, some are given an unfurnished house, a subsidy, intensive Swedish language lessons and job orientation support. However, Sweden is very expensive and spread out and people need cars to move around as well as furniture, food and clothes. Everything has a high price and it is very difficult for a large family to start anew.

In Sweden we found high levels of disillusionment. People realise that they have now arrived to Europe, but that they need to start their lives over again and that they have actually and definitively left their native home.



Sweden, different from Italy, is based on state efficiency rather than charity and volunteering, and this increases the disorientation of people who have just arrived and their sensation of loneliness. In Sweden, the Syrians we met had the time to look back and realise how Europe and its regulations disregard people's rights to run from war and look for a safe place to be. As Waleed told us:

“Everything in the trip makes you weak, the most difficult thing is realising that you could have lost your family, yes. We ran away from

war in order to be better and it surprises that the trip can be so much worse than war.”

Once in Sweden, people realise that Europe has been treating them as second-class people, and that is just painful.



**Paulo Casaca** is the founder and Executive Director of the South Asia Democratic Forum. He is also the founder of the international co-operation association ARCHumankind, of the "Euro Reform Initiative" and of the consultancy company on sustainable development, Lessmeansmore. Mr Casaca was a Member of the European Parliament from 1999 to 2009.

## Iran: the American enigma The fantasy and the nightmare

Can you imagine a planet where the most powerful country, say Alfa, sees its embassy to a previously allied country, say Iota, ransacked, and its diplomats turned into hostages?

For decades Iota leaders organise weekly ritual chants asking for the death of Alfa. Iota spiritual leaders' organise, mastermind or closely cooperate in multiple terrorist attacks causing thousands of civil and military victims to Alfa and its allies.

Iota leaders terrorise, threaten or actually invade Alfa's allied countries in Iota's vicinity; impose the most cruel, middle-aged and fanatic regime of assassination and torture to its subjects; institute a totalitarian theocracy where a spiritual leader commands, its citizens being only allowed to choose one among his closest aids as the second figure of the Islamic Republic. Iota avowedly abhors all the symbols associated to Alfa: freedom, religious tolerance, equal rights for women or democracy. Iota considers that every man belongs to God and its Constitution explicitly aims to worldwide absolute sovereignty of its State religion.

Five Alfa successive leaders try unsuccessfully every possible appeasing tactic: from the acceptance of Iota religious credits, arms supplies to defeat Iota opponents, getting rid of Iota's enemies through military operations, accepting to persecute its opposition, offering all sorts of economic cooperation to turning a blind eye to Iota's nuclear aggressive programme. Reluctantly, however, they give up their appeasing efforts as nothing results from them.

Now imagine that a sixth Alfa President, although in no way more successful than his predecessors, makes a step forward, announcing a great bargain where Alfa gives nearly everything requested by Iota, but yet fails to get anything in exchange, not even the end of the "Death to Alfa" chants.

What seems a script for a horror film is the summary of the US-Iranian relations since 1978.

One of the reasons why we allowed this absurdity to become reality is because intellectuals have been focusing too much on Iota's side of the equation and too little on Alfa's side.

Religious fanaticism, broadly in the defensive side of the game since the eighteen century enlightening till the Islamic revolution, has a long and multi-faith history. Ambitious and unscrupulous individuals have been misusing religion as a means to control people and obtain power repeatedly throughout history. Ruollah Khomeini and his followers were particularly successful in this exercise and certainly deserve special attention.

But what about appeasement? Great totalitarian threats to humanity were only allowed to develop inasmuch as humanity failed to understand and take them in due consideration. Appeasement is as dramatic as Fanaticism as a political phenomenon and deserves no less attention.

## The moderate myth

The President of the US recently accused those who oppose his deal with the theocracy to be promoting hardliners, implying he was promoting the “moderates”.

That a zealous theocracy servant which was nominated as President after faithfully serving the regime all his life, a gentleman that routinely participates in the weekly death to America celebrations, could be considered as a “moderate” is utterly incongruous and can only be understandable in a historical perspective.

Ian Kershaw is widely considered as one, if not the most, important historian authority on Hitler and Hitler's Germany. His credits as the historian of Hitler's counterparts, namely counterparts from his native United Kingdom, should not be underestimated either.

His classic “Making Friends with Hitler” should be an obligatory reading for President Obama and Secretary Kerry. I am sure they would never dare to publicly argue the way they have been doing if they ever read it.

Kershaw's analysis on the obsession of the English public opinion for finding a moderate in Nazi Germany is outstanding. For instance:

“The Times, the most important newspaper for the British political class, agreed that Hitler was a “moderate”, compared with some of the more radical figures in the Nazi party, and thought that he was gradually gaining a sense of responsibility. It even suggested that Hitler should constitutionally be made President of the German Reich, imagining that the Nazi movement might break apart if its leader was to be elevated “above politics”<sup>1</sup>.

Appeasement mixes wishful thinking and reality; confuses the superficial with the essence and ultimately turns the absurd into established dogma. One way for appeasement to overcome reality is through the dissociation of the aggressor in two different personalities, a bad one – the radical hard-liner where reality is cornered – and a good imaginary one: the *moderate*.

## The made-up guilt

A second characteristic of appeasement is the need to find a way to make acceptable the motives of the aggression by fomenting the idea that there is some sort of guilt from the victim and therefore, the aggression is somewhat justified.

Whereas the US, through covert and not-so-covert operations, has been intervening in the American continent and elsewhere in the World, namely in South-eastern Asia and Africa, there is a single foreign intervention for which a complete CIA report was declassified and a full apology was handled: the 1953 coup in Iran.

The apology was organised by Secretary Albright during the Clinton Administration and handled to NIAC, a sort of unofficial Iranian Embassy in the US. It is a blatant insult to historical reality and the Iranian people.

The August 19<sup>th</sup> 1953 coup in Tehran against Prime Minister Mossadegh had as its main instigator the terrorist Islamist organisation called Fadiyan-e Eslam, directed by Navvab Safavi spiritually guided by Ayatollah Kashani – former Majlis' speaker – who had as mid-ranking member Ruhollah Khomeini<sup>2</sup>.

---

<sup>1</sup> Kershaw, Ian, “Making Friends with Hitler – Lord Londonderry and Britain's Road to War”, Penguin, 2004, pp. 29-30.

<sup>2</sup> The official biography of Ruhollah Khomeini conveniently makes him disappear from the political scene in the period of 1951-1953. Staging a coup against a nationalist Iranian Prime Minister and doing so with Western support was definitely not going well with the Iranian theocracy propaganda image.

The Fadiyan-e-Islam were certainly not alone in the complex set of forces unhappy with the liberal nationalist Prime Minister, and the US also played its role, secondary however to the British one<sup>3</sup>. Nevertheless, Islamists were the main driving force of the coup.

So, the US apologised for something that it was only secondarily responsible for, in sharp contrast to the complete absence of apologies for the multiple interventions the US was actually responsible and that were not wise. Far more absurd than this, they did not apologise to the Iranian people or to the Iranian political relatives of Mossadegh, but to the regime installed by the real plotters against Mossadegh: the Islamist terror fanatics!

What the US could have apologised for was to have not understood back in 1953 how erroneous it was to sponsor Islamist terrorist groups like the one of Khomeini that would be responsible for so many crimes against the Iranian people, its neighbours and indeed against US citizens. But still, sixty years afterwards, these lessons from history are not yet drawn.

### **The Stockholm syndrome**

The last and most serious stage of appeasement is the so-called Stockholm syndrome, a situation where you do not only try to justify by all means the acts of your aggressor but where you actually start feeling empathy for him and even cooperate with him.

Some actions and declarations of some Western leaders indicate this stage has also been reached.

Concerning the present Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action signed in Vienna, 14 July 2015, the most striking provision is the one included at point D10:

“Co-operation through training and workshops to strengthen Iran’s ability to protect against, and respond to nuclear security threats, including sabotage, as well as to enable effective and sustainable nuclear security and physical protection systems”.

What was supposed to be an agreement that would guarantee the end of the aggressive Iranian nuclear programme does not only fall short of the necessary provisions to that end but is even transformed into an agreement for the US to protect the Iranian nuclear programme.

As we all know, the most effective way found up to now to hamper the Iranian nuclear programme was through the so-called stuxnet, a computer worm Israel is suspected of having used against this programme. So the wording of this clause cannot be taken to be innocent, it implies the US is giving guarantees to Iran against possible attacks from Israel.

The whole saga around the Islamic State is another symptom of the syndrome. The Islamic Republic has been consistently engaged in the support of numerous terrorist outfits that are not necessarily affiliated to its specific brand of Jihadi interpretation.

---

<sup>3</sup> Most of what is available in the web on the subject is direct or sponsored Iranian regime propaganda. However, one can also find some serious and reliable sources, namely: (1) Abrahamian, Ervand, *Khomeinism: essays on the Islamic Republic*. Berkeley: University of California Press, c 1993. 0-520-08173-0 available in the net in <http://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft6c6006wp&chunk.id=doe30&toc.depth=1&toc.id=&brand=ucpress> (2) Fariba Amini, *History Revisited: on Mosaddeq, the Clergy and the Coup in Iran*, interview about the book published originally in Farsi, available in <http://www.payvand.com/news/10/jun/1157.html> and (3) Iran decade assassinations by Ebrahim Norouzi and Arash Norouzi in the Mossadegh Project <http://www.mohammadmossadegh.com/news/irans-decade-of-assassinations/>.

There is no other creation of a terrorist group where the Iranian theocracy fingerprints are as clear as on the creation of Jund-al-Islam in September the first 2001<sup>4</sup>. Eventually, after several renaming and mergers this organisation became the Islamic State.

The group was never solely controlled and directed by Tehran and became ever more autonomous as it developed. Nevertheless we cannot fail to notice that even nowadays it never directly threatened Iran. The much publicised Iranian involvement in fighting Islamic State, awkwardly, never produced very tangible results either.

Other than the similarity of doctrines, names and procedures – assassination in particular gruesome ways, body mutilations, misogyny, military organisation, fanatic suicidal terrorism – the strategic co-operation between the two Islamic States is not possible to conceal.

Reading the Western appeasing public opinion we are however led to believe that the Islamic State was a recently created organisation and Iran is our best hope to get read of it.

## Epilogue

Appeasement ideology is at least as serious a threat to the West as fanaticism itself. The history of Western appeasement towards global totalitarian regimes like Nazism is full of clear examples of irrational absurd compromises of Western leaders and public opinion with the devil that nearly led our the World to irrecoverable disaster.

It is the right time to remember these lessons if we want to avoid falling in the traps we very narrowly escaped seventy five years ago.

In one of the most popular quotations attributed to Winston Churchill he would have said: "Americans will always do the right thing, only after they have tried everything else."

While rightly hoping that the famous prediction of Winston Churchill will still be valid, we should not trust providence as our sole mean to insure it will, and we have to fight the Iranian regime lobby propaganda and psychological warfare in every field, occasion and opportunity.

A serious academic effort to substitute historical reality for doctored Iranian theocracy propaganda in disguise is a priority.

---

<sup>4</sup> See the masterpiece of Jean-Charles Brisard "Zarkaoui Le nouveau visage d'Al Qaida" Fayard, 2005.



**Djan Sauerborn** is the Manager of South Asia Democratic Forum (SADF) Democracy Research Programme as well as a Policy Advisor. His main

fields of interest are Democratisation, Fundamentalism and its negative impact on emerging civil societies as well as the geopolitics within South Asia and beyond. He is also a contributor and editor at the International Security Observer, an online Think Tank which focuses on supporting young up-and-coming analysts as well as a contributor at ZERO Magazine.

## Assad and his success in instrumentalising ISIS/ISIL in Syria

The growing impact and power of ISIS/ISIL is a consequence and not the root cause of the conflict in Syria. While ISIS/ISIL has proven to be very efficient promoting its cause through publicizing gruesome acts on social media and attracting mostly young men from all around the world, its success would not have been thinkable without Assad turning a blind eye or even supporting ISIS/ISIL. It has partly been allowed, i.e. not

hindered to create mayhem and wreck havoc because Damascus profited from terror. Each act of barbarism, each killing posted by ISIS on social media bolstered Assad's own message of being the sole alternative to terror.

The terror he fostered in order to be able to sell this claim. Or in the words of US secretary of State John Kerry:

*"[Assad is]" trying to make himself the protector of Syria against extremists, when he himself has even been funding some of those extremists – even purposely ceding some territory to them in order to make them more of a problem so he can make the argument that he is somehow the protector against them"*

In addition, the brutality of Assad and his loyalists, using chemical weapons and barrel bombs, carpet bombings of entire cities has fostered support for terrorist outlets. This relentless policy of destruction and intimidation has created a scenario where support for moderate rebel groups is waning, because Syrian civilians realise that the regime in Damascus will cross every red line in order to prevent rebel progress in Western Syria. This perpetual motion of creating terror by applying terror in order to point the finger at terror and promoting the regime as the sole counterweight to terror has been the core of Assad's strategy. And he is succeeding.

There are countless perpetrators of violence and destruction, with varying goals. Syria is increasingly becoming a proxy war ground, especially for neighbouring states. Iran supports Assad's regime not because it is Alawite as is often claimed, but because it needs access and control over the Syrian border to Lebanon in order to entrench and increase Hezbollah's resupply routes. Turkey has joined the so-called war against ISIS, but has mostly focused on targeting Kurdish fighters, which have become the most efficient entity against ISIS/ISIL.

Russia, which is increasing its military footprint day by day in Latakia and has blocked investigations revolving around war crimes committed by Assad in the UN, does not want to lose its naval base at Tartus, the only military facility Russia currently controls that is not in the former Soviet Union and wants to entrench its role as a great power as well as distract from the Ukraine Crisis.

Looking at the most recent comments made by US officials and other Western counterparts Assad's approach is bearing fruit.

Removing Assad, initiating regime change has ceased to be a core priority of the West. The war on ISIS/ISIL has become the sine qua none of Obama's Syria strategy.

No one is arguing that removing ISIS/ISIL, putting an end to its barbaric acts is not essential. But this cannot be done without removing Assad. The Assad vs. ISIS/ISIL narrative is flawed and only further plays into the cards of Damascus.





**Johan Fukken** works for ARCHumankind as a consultant. He studied Dutch Language and Literature in Amsterdam and History of Arts in Utrecht. In Holland, he was a member of Dutch FOFI

(Friends of a Free Iran). In The Hague, he taught Dutch and Literature. Previously, he was active in housing and education for young asylum seekers and worked for the art foundation Stroom in The Hague.

## The economy of a state beyond repair

The attention in daily news on the warfare in Syria shifted somewhat from the dreadful atrocities to the devastating pictures of the migration of Syrian refugees and their reception in the European Union. There are many economic aspects to mass migration. Several

analysts estimate the consequences for our economy of the influx of refugees as positive or disastrous according to their political views. We think therefore, it is important to have a more objective view of the conflict from an economic viewpoint.

A range of different ethnic and or religious sects coexisted for a long time relatively peacefully in Syria. However, everyone was closely watched, guarded and despotically harassed by the Mukhabarat, the pervasive secret service of the Assad's Regime. In a state of emergency since 1963, the Syrians lived under brutal oppression. The press was in total control of the government. Appointments to the University staff and even to the clergy depended on patronage of the regime and therefore candidates and authorities had to work closely with the intelligence services. They became tools and accomplices of the corrupt system.

The guards of the state were not only a political instrument to maintain stability and to prevent uproar. They were also helpful in favouring a clan of a religious minority and in protecting friendly businessmen. Mukhabarat favoured the Assad clan in controlling business by introducing private monopolies in the private sector. This can be illustrated by taking a close look on Mr Rami Makhoulf business emporium.

Mr Rami Makhoulf, cousin of Bashar Assad, owns Syriatel and other telecom services. He owns banks and real estate, a chain of duty free shops and, according to the Financial Times, he is involved in 60% of the Syrian economy<sup>1</sup>; he owns an airline (Syrian Pearl Airlines) and has a big share in luxury tourism developments. Among other ventures, he is active in a British oil company and real estate in the Virgin Islands.

Licenses and concessions were never a problem for Mr Makhoulf and the small privileged business community, as long as the Assad clan could rely on their support. Other unrelated contenders would have never had access to the lucrative deals the members of the clan had their eyes on and, if they would dare to attempt to get there, they would be intimidated out of it. Mercedes representation was one of the few exceptions to the rule. When Mr Makhoulf tried to grab Mr Wassim Sanqar from the car concession his family had, Mercedes' management was able to stop him, threatening to withdraw from the country unless Mr Sanqar was kept in the business.

---

<sup>1</sup> Lina Saigol, *Assad cousin accused of favouring family*, Financial Times, 21 April 2011, <http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/e29a73f8-6b78-11e0-a53e-00144feab49a.html#axzz3myx41rGJ>.

These mafia-like business methods are hardly unique in the world. For totalitarian regimes it is common practice. They are rarely sustainable, though.

Assad's clan does not own Syria anymore and lost a lot of its tax and business revenues. The civil war is costly and the regime relies heavily on the support of its allies. Of course, the allies support comes at a price.

The Soviet Union constructed the Kirkuk–Baniyas pipeline in the fifties to connect the oil fields in the North of Iraq to a harbour on the Mediterranean coast. In return it was allowed to build a naval base in Tartus. Russia continued the cordial relations with the Assad clan ever since. The Gulf Wars damaged the pipelines but Gazprom repaired them. Although oil stopped flowing in 2014, Russia strategic interest in the naval base continues.

The oil wells are situated in the North East of Syria and the North of Iraq, in the hands of either Kurdish forces or the Islamic State. When Kurds were in control of the oil production, the export via the Kirkuk–Baniyas pipeline had to be negotiated with Assad's forces.

The Kurdish population never liked the Assad clan and most want to be independent. However, logistics is fundamental in a war, so regionally army commanders with or without the consent of the politicians have to make deals to secure trade and to feed their men.

The Islamic State took control of parts of both Syria and Iraq and as a result the export of oil via the Kirkuk–Baniyas pipeline staggered in 2014. Kurdish forces and Islamic State battled heavily for this territory and part of the pipeline came into the hands of IS and within the Islamic State borders.

The oil production of the IS is mostly traded in Iraq or finds its way via a pipeline to Turkey. Iraq is a state on the brink of collapse. However, some trade, especially the oil and weapons trade, flourished. The role of Turkey in this issue is murky. A Kurdish activist<sup>2</sup> who was at the heart of the revolt in 2011, reported that the transport of goods or persons across the border between Kurdish controlled areas and Turkey is severely hampered if not made impossible by the Turkish authorities. However, Turkey hardly checks the traffic of persons or goods on its borders with other parts of Syria. He stated that between 10 p.m. and 5 a.m. a constant row of heavily loaded trucks are crossing this border without difficulty. On the Syrian side Islamists groups depend on these cargos. IS welcomes daily new recruits coming this way. Kurdish forces had to rely for a good part on Iran for the delivery of weapons.

### **There is money to be made in the terrorist trade**

While most opposition groups in Syria relied heavily on donations from the Arab states in financing a costly war against Assad's Syrian army, IS Caliphate is believed to generate most of its own income.

Though IS uses an advanced bookkeeping system, its economy is not simple to analyse. Oil revenues, taxation of the inhabitants of the occupied territories and gifts from all over the world from supporters are responsible for a good part of the income. Raqqa is well positioned as a market for energy, water and oil. IS controls oil wells and refineries, and obviously depend on unscrupulous traders to sell it out of its frontiers. However, the Islamic State is not functioning as well as its propaganda claims.

Like other rival Islamist groups, IS generates a lot of dollars by kidnappings and extortion. IS desperately needs this income as the price of weapons in the region quadrupled since the beginning of the civil war.

---

<sup>2</sup> This information comes from a first-hand interview with him.

Precious archaeological artefacts find their way to auctions for the less scrupulous collectors. In the slave trade IS is active selling young women and children to the highest bidder, when it does not use them as payment in kind to their fighters.

Looking at the luxurious yachts in Nice and Monaco, a novelist could easily connect the contrasting luxury yachts to the ships full of refugees, vessels of death and despair. I am not a novelist, though. As an ordinary Dutch citizen I have the obligation to contribute to a pension fund and I have several insurance policies. Pension funds and insurance companies trust their billions to investment banks. Though these investment banks claim to be transparent, information about their investment policy is murky or unobtainable.

Can't we force our pension funds to demand openness about the billions we deposit? Can we make sure it is not our money that is used to help financing shady weapon deals? The answer goes as the slogan of the 2008 Obama's election campaign.

### **Bibliography<sup>3</sup>**

Loretta Napoleoni, *The Islamist Phoenix, The Islamic State and the Redrawing of the Middle East*, Seven Stories Press, New York/Oakland, September 2014.

Maarten Zeegers, *[Syrië], Wij zijn Arabieren, Portret van ondoordringbaar Syrië*, Uitgeverij Podium, Amsterdam, 2012.

Jonathan Littell, *Syrian Notebooks, Inside the Homs Uprising*, Gallimard, 2012.

---

<sup>3</sup> This article was mainly based on direct interviews undertaken by the author.



**Mazin Albalkhi** is Syria Programme Manager at the International Legal Assistance Consortium (ILAC). ILAC is a non-profit organisation headquartered in Stockholm, Sweden. It

is an umbrella organisation for associations of legal and human rights experts. The membership is constantly growing. Today, ILAC has 50 member organisations representing judges, prosecutors, lawyers and academics world wide. ILAC's work concerns Syria, Iraq, Libya, Tunisia, Haiti, Liberia, South Sudan, Rwanda, Kenya, Democratic Republic of Congo and Myanmar.

## Syria, my life

### In Syria

atoms of dust we became  
every cell wants to redeem  
changing winds all we wait  
everybody lost his head  
empty shoes we used to have  
curved backs, thin nicks were the staff  
long hair, heavy beard should be shaved.  
renting car is our dream, or just to wave?  
we are Syrians, the pioneers of hope  
we are Syrians and living in Pandora's robe  
here the cradle of light, here the end of fight  
here the beginning of the Christ flight  
here the platonic love in black and white  
in Syria  
atoms of dust we became  
every cell wants to redeem  
from global warm and American womb  
to live in peace and stay at home  
the Syrian fate is to end the global hate  
and emerge in every heart and every mate  
Syria is a meaningful word  
Syria means the heart of world

## Syria, my personal story

The Syrian Revolution began on 18th March 2011. We started to gather in Daraa City to protest, asking the regime to release 15 children who wrote on the walls of their school. “Assad it is your turn after Hosni Mubarak”, we shouted.

The Security forces opened fire against us, and killed on that day two protestors. Because of that, hundreds of thousands of Syrians started to protest in the streets of many cities all over Syria. The regime opposed the freedom and dignity demands of the people by asking the Syrian army to interfere. They used the military option, after 7 months of the peaceful demonstrations, more than 6500 civilians were killed, while at the same time thousands of the Syrian soldiers of the Syrian army defected and established the Free Syrian Army who started to protect the peaceful protests.

Now, almost 5 years passed, we have more than 12 million internal displaced people, more than 4 millions refugees out of Syria, more than quarter million were killed, more than quarter million who disappeared. Before the Syrian revolution my first interest was to protest against the Syrian Regime policy against women, demanding to give them the right of giving their children the Syrian Nationality, and to stop the criminal acts against women. When the revolution started, I found myself organising demonstrations against Assad, and then I started to call for international media attention from Daraa city, which was the cradle of the revolution. I was wanted by the security forces, therefore I had to leave Syria for Egypt where I got a sentence of 5 years to prison for a demonstration in front of the Syrian Embassy in Cairo, and then I worked with the Syrian National Coalition for more than a year. I then had to flee to Turkey, and started to work for the International Legal Assistance Consortium as Syria Programme Manager in Sweden.

Currently, I am based in Stockholm. I am trying to get a travel document, so I will not be stuck in any country, because Assad’s Regime refused to renew the validity of my passport.

The aim of the project I am managing is to establish a number of documentations centers in Syria in areas not controlled by the regime. These centers will provide simple legal services – such as: recording births, deaths, marriages, land registration, and so forth.

And we are coordinating this project with the free independent judicial council, with the Free Aleppo lawyers’ association, and with Daraa lawyers bar association.

The Ministry of Justice in the interim government has endorsed the program and is the guarantor that the information collected in the centers will be registered in a coordinated and professional way. By setting up the documentation centers in co-operation with both the independent judicial council and the Ministry of Justice, this project will serve the need of recording civil issues while building confidence in rule of law institutions among the Syrian people.

At the end I can say, I am wanted to be killed by Assad and by ISIS, five years to prison Sentence in Egypt, I can’t go to Lebanon and other countries, I don’t even want to mention them, beside my family were enforced to leave Syria and they are scattered in 7 countries, I believe that Syrians will have Freedom, if not me and my friends, then my son and his friends.



**Paulo Casaca** is the founder and Executive Director of the South Asia Democratic Forum. He is also the founder of the international co-operation

association ARCHumankind, of the "Euro Reform Initiative" and of the consultancy company on sustainable development, Lessmeansmore. Mr Casaca was a Member of the European Parliament from 1999 to 2009.

## The Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action signed in Vienna on 14 July 2015 and the Iranian opposition

When we refer to the JCPA, I think it is necessary to take into consideration its assumed and its implied meaning as well as the numerous readings from several actors.

The JCPA text has seven major characteristics:

1. It leaves aside the history and motives of the nuclear programme, to be dealt with bilaterally by IAEA and Iran;
2. It sets broad and generous limits and controls for Iran's enriched uranium possession and production capacity;
3. It sets a broad and generous control system on weaponisation procedures;
4. It does not deal with nuclear potential delivery systems;
5. It offers protection and guarantees of the international community to Iran, in sharp contrast with the absence of protection or guarantees from Iran either to their subjects, their neighbours or the international community;
6. It sets a roadmap for sanctions reversal providing a financial windfall that might get as high as 150 billion \$;
7. It was accompanied by lifting of restrictions to some of the major terror operatives of the Iranian theocracy.

From the point of view of the US Administration, there is a clear appeasing logic. This logic has been resisted by most of US representatives and public opinion.

The European actors seem to be happy leaving the task of containing global threats to the US and concentrating on grabbing business opportunities.

China and in particular Russia think that the potential danger of nuclear proliferation by Iran and other countries is outweighed by the benefit of further eroding most of Western and US power.

Most of the business community will focus only on immediate opportunities, as it happened in the past. We should not forget that there is ample evidence that even after the US fully engaged in the war with Hitler, a lot of the US business found ways to make money dealing with the Nazis.

No one can seriously believe that the Western business community is concerned with anything but to make short-term money out of the deal with Iran. In fact, all the theocratic leaders and their families became very rich out of previous deals they made with the West. In no way did this wealth diminish their fanatic zeal, but quite on the contrary.

We could of course hint that an opening strategy to Iran could be a way to initiate Western soft-power pressure in Iran, in the line of what was done with the Helsinki Final Act, that opened the way for a massive Western campaign for respect of human-rights and to stop Soviet expansionism.

But nothing could be further from the truth. The signing of the agreement – that does not say a word about the human rights of the Iranian citizens or limiting the expansionist agenda of the theocracy – was followed by an increase in political assassinations, body mutilations, misogyny fury (including acid attacks) and repression of the Iranian people.

None of the signatories to the deal raised its voice against these blatant crimes of the theocracy.

From the point of view of the P5+1, the deal cannot possibly be seen as a way to question the theocracy.

Although the deal does not prevent any serious effort of Iran to go ahead with nuclear plans, however, it is true it does not give it any incentives for Iran to proceed immediately to final stages, as this could bring isolation similar to the one experienced by North Korea and to lose the benefits the deal gives it.

From the point of view of the theocracy, the deal is broadly positive. It leaves the regime off the hook; it gives it an immense wealth it will use to reinforce its financing of terror inside and outside the country, to increase its armed potential and to increase the already vast wealth of its leaders.

The regime does not only get the means, but gets the clearance to pursue its present politics.

Otherwise, the already shaky ideological framework of the regime gets even weaker. How comes the “Great Satan” becomes in effect the God-father providing the theocracy protection?

From those who were left out of the conversations – mostly the Arab World and the Iranian people – the deal means they are on their own to counter the Iranian terror machine.

At the present time, the Iranian regime has been suffering setbacks on its expansion. According to Lebanese sources, Lebanese Hezbollah detained 180 of its soldiers that refused to engage in the war on Syria, whereas Iran has used more and more Afghan and Pakistani mercenaries to replace the Iranian Revolutionary Guards that are unwilling to be sent to the battlefield. In Yemen, Iranian militias are losing ground, whereas in Iraq, the Shia Arab majority is starting to rebel against the Iranian power.

Things do not look brighter in the internal arena. What is the main reason for the poor state of the Iranian economy? Is it the sanctions or the theocracy mismanagement? Nurses, teachers, workers have been demonstrating more and more loudly against the regime.

The theocracy might feel the JCPA as an important victory. It risks to downgrade the Western influence in the region. However, it will not manage to curtail the opposition to the regime.

Iran is overwhelmingly an Islamic country, and the Iranian people has been able for ages to make the distinction between their faith and those who speak on its behalf: the clerics. The social opposition to the Iranian opposition is manifold, but the political opposition is easier to understand.

In Iran there is a strong opposition from ethnic/religious minorities, especially from Kurds, Arabs and Baluchis, whereas at the national level, there is a single organisation that managed to survive the theocracy onslaught, the Council of the National Resistance of Iran.

The JCPA will not make life easier for the Iranian opposition, but is not an unsurmountable obstacle. In the end, I think it will prevail.



Syrian children in Turkey, August 2015 © Laura Berlingozzi for ARCHumankind