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MA Thesis International Studies

Humanitarian Aid and Peace Prospects: are the Effects more Adverse in Proxy Civil Wars than in Non-Proxy Civil Wars? Case studies of Syria, Vietnam, and Afghanistan

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1. Introduction

"Last fall, a 31-truck United Nations convoy laden with wheat flour, health supplies, and emergency aid left Syrian government-controlled western Aleppo bound for thousands of civilians in the opposition-held countryside. UN banners hung from the front and sides of each truck. After extensive negotiations, Syria's government approved the aid convoy, its movements coordinated at every step. Its progress was even monitored by a Russian drone. Still, the aid never reached the people in need. Instead, while en route, masked armed men looted three of the trucks. Then, the convoy was bombed, killing aid workers and other civilians" by Akshaya Kumar, Deputy United Nations Director at Human Rights Watch (Kumar, 2017).

A United Nations (UN) Report concluded that either a Syrian aircraft or a Russian aircraft bombed the aid convoy despite the agreements amongst the involved actors on a ceasefire and the provision of aid to the Syrian population in need. The failure of the ceasefire to provide protection for humanitarian aid shows the dire prospects for peace in Syria when security cannot even be ensured for relief provision. All parties knew that there was an aid convoy on the way to Aleppo to provide humanitarian aid, and despite this the agreement was violated (Perry & Davison, 2016). Even when all involved parties negotiate for a more peaceful situation and reach a consensus, this event illustrates that the actors are not completely willing to establish peace.

This problem is, amongst other things, a result of the expansion of the number of involved actors and their interests. All actors are fighting their own war in Syria on different political levels. Moreover, these various levels of fighting make the civil war a proxy war. The local actors are striving for territorial dominance and power change in the civil war. On the regional level there is a fight between the Islamic Sunni and Shia groups, the Kurds and the Turkish, recently between Saudi Arabia and Qatar, and against the Islamic terrorist organisation IS. On the global level, The United States of America (USA) and Russia are involved with their own incentives and stakes. Each actor is supporting other actors, which creates a complex proxy web that limits prospects for peace, and the international actors can fight their own war without spilling blood on their own territory in the playground called Syria (Spiegel, 2016). Every action in this kind of war becomes highly politicised because of the various fights, and, therefore, to provide neutral aid to the population in need is highly problematic.

1.1. Research Question

Understanding of the relationship between humanitarian aid and peace prospects, and the differences between this in the case of a proxy civil war and a non-proxy civil war is important because these wars are of different natures. There may be a much greater need for a case specific approach when the conflict is fought not only on a local level, but also on a regional and global level. This could mean that the strategy to provide aid must change in order to improve prospects for peace because of the indirect involvement of foreign actors. This research is designed to provide an answer to the following question: How does humanitarian aid affect peace prospects differently in cases of proxy civil war compared to non-proxy civil wars? This answer will be based on case studies of Syria, Vietnam, and Afghanistan. Because there is a difference in type between a proxy civil war and a non-proxy civil war it can be presumed that humanitarian aid affects peace prospects differently. There is a small but important difference between humanitarian aid and peace prospects in the case of a proxy civil war and a non-proxy civil war. Humanitarian aid and the effect it has on peace prospects in the case of a proxy civil war is much more complicated. Peace is differently affected by aid in a proxy civil war because aid providers and their donors are usually from foreign countries, and these foreign countries could be contracting the proxies and have more influence on aid provision. Aid has a certain influence and power because of the provision of necessities to a population and could ‘win the heart and minds’ of these people. Aid could influence these people to continue fighting or the press for a peaceful situation on the local level. However, even when on the local level, like in a non-proxy civil war, a consensus on a more peaceful situation has been reached, on the other layers in a proxy civil war this has to be the same otherwise aid influenced by proxy contractors could remain to affect peace prospects.

1.2. Key Term Definitions

To answer the research question, the key terms of this study must be defined. The most important terms in this research are humanitarian aid, civil war, proxy war, and peace (prospects).

The goal of humanitarian aid (or humanitarian assistance/emergency relief) is to provide basic necessities to the population which is in need of the immediate provision of medical items, food, water, etc. This type of aid is categorised as short-term aid or, in this case, emergency aid. Humanitarian aid is an important component of peace-building, but the consequences of humanitarian aid provision are controversial. The controversy of humanitarian aid provision is that while aid is by nature meant to provide help, it can also unintentionally prolong conflict (Narang, 2015). Moreover, aid relies on humanitarian principles such as neutrality, but tends to be less neutral when the donors have specific interests (Hattori, 2001). Humanitarian aid can shape and influence the behaviour of those who receive it, and therefore donors find aid provision useful to gain support. Aid is used politically by donors and aid providers such as the military (Wood & Sullivan, 2015). On the other hand, aid can help establish a more peaceful situation when it is adapted to the needs of the community (Anderson, 1999). Aid does not have a set format and the provision of aid must be tailored to the situation.

Civil wars rarely take place only within the state in which they mainly occur. In a civil war the government is most frequently in conflict with one of more non-state local actors, and the neighbouring countries are often involved in the conflict because refugees are crossing the borders in search of safety, water, food, and shelter. Moreover, other countries may be involved in peace promotion and conflict resolution. However, the involvement of a foreign actor can both prolong and end a conflict depending on the type of involvement of the foreign country. When a foreign actor's purpose is to mediate, it is more likely that a conflict can be resolved. However, when the foreign actor is directly intervening militarily, the conflict is more likely to be prolonged (Sawyer, Gallagher Cunningham, & Reed, 2017). Foreign actors become involved in a civil war primarily to promote security, nation-building or regional peace (Brown, 2016). However, this is not true in the case of a proxy civil war. A proxy (civil) war is a war which involves local and foreign state and/or non-state actors on the local (civil) level and on (multiple) regional and international levels with actors in the role of "benefactor, proxy, or adversary" (Groh, 2014, p. 150). The benefactor, or other said, the external/foreign (non-)state actor, usually trains and funds the proxy, often "surrogate fighters, tribal proxies, and mercenary militias" (Williams, 2012, p. 1). The training and funding of the proxy by the benefactor is

conditional and are given to accomplish the goals of the benefactor despite of the goals of the proxy itself (Groh, 2014). “Proxy wars are the logical replacement for states seeking to further their own strategic goals yet at the same time avoid engaging in direct, costly and bloody warfare” (Mumford, 2013, p. 40). The proxy is fighting its own war, and the benefactor is fighting its overarching war with the use of the proxy as a tool and/or weapon, and therefore the most convenient proxy is chosen by the benefactor (Groh, 2014). The benefactor is reliable on the proxy and therefore there is a certain cost when the proxy is not pursuing the benefactors goals. Proxy wars enlarge the scale and mostly prolong the conflict (Groh, 2014). As Alexander Pope describes the idea behind the involvement of foreign actors in a proxy war, they are “[willing] to wound, and yet afraid to strike” (cited in Hughes, 2014, p. 523). Instead of using the state’s own military, the government may see it as more effective to use local groups because of their knowledge of the landscape and culture. This prevents casualties within the state of the behind-the-scenes actor while still enabling it to fight for its own interests. By providing material, financial, and economic support to the local group the foreign actors are “fighting their own political war” (Brown, 2016). Proxy groups are policy tools and proxy warfare is part of foreign policy agenda. While a civil war is mostly a conflict on a local level, a proxy civil war is played on different levels: local, regional, and globally, depending on the number of foreign involved actors (Hughes, 2014).

As long as (local) actors are engaged in an armed conflict resulting in casualties and deaths, prospects for peace are poor. In this case, a secure situation for the population and a peace resolution are out of reach. Peace is a broad term and may refer either to a temporary period such as a ceasefire or a long-term period. Peace can mean “to stop a civil war and establish a secure environment and respect for the rule of law” (Steele, 1998, p. 67); put differently, “peace is the absence/reduction of violence of all kinds” (Rossier, 2011, p. 19).

1.3. Methodology

This study is based on qualitative research in order to explore the differences between a proxy civil war and a non-proxy civil war in relation to humanitarian aid and peace prospects. Qualitative research was performed using primary and

secondary sources for a combination of academically underpinned arguments on the key terms and experience and facts on the cases. Primary sources were analysed along with reports on cases from news websites (only news websites which are not from one of the proxy countries were used in order to prevent bias), as well as reports and documents of organisations such as the UN and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC). Secondary sources consist mostly of articles from academic journals and think tanks and the arguments and analyses of the writers of these articles as related to my research. The findings are applied most frequently to the Syrian case in order to determine whether there is a possibility for aid and peace prospects in Syria. Moreover, the cases of the Vietnam and Afghan proxy civil war will be used to reflect on the differences between a proxy civil war and a civil war in relation to humanitarian aid and peace prospects.

The case of Syria was chosen because it is a current complex proxy civil war without prospects for peace at present. The other cases have been chosen to show differences in outcome between the use of humanitarian aid in establishing peace and differences in the outcome of the proxy wars. Other types of aid than humanitarian aid (short-term aid) are excluded, such as developmental aid, which is focussed on the development of a state during and after a conflict and is considered long-term aid. This research addresses only short-term, emergency aid because this type of aid is the most applicable during (proxy) civil wars. Developmental aid is usually provided in a more stable situation to develop a state or region in an environmental, economic, social, and/or political way in the aftermath of a conflict. One limitation of this research is that I am not able to read languages other than Dutch and English, and therefore the research is based on Western literature and will be from a Western perspective. External factors such as war economics and the economics of aid are not included in this research despite their influence in a conflict because they are out of the scope of the research. This research focuses solely on humanitarian aid, peace prospects, and (proxy) civil wars in the cases of Syria, Afghanistan, and Vietnam.

The structure of the research is as follows. First, existing literature on the relationship between humanitarian aid, civil war, and peace prospects is researched and the gap which this research is intended to fill is identified. Second, the link between humanitarian aid and proxy wars in general is examined. Third, the situation in Syria

and the relationship among all domestic and foreign actors is described. Fourth, the provided aid in Syria and the difficulties of this for the aid providers are described. Fifth, the establishment of peace in Syria is reviewed to identify the chances and challenges for creating a more stable and peaceful situation between the involved actors. Sixth, the role of humanitarian aid in previous proxy civil wars in Vietnam and in Afghanistan is reviewed. Finally, a conclusion is drawn regarding differences between humanitarian aid and peace prospects in proxy civil wars and non-proxy civil wars as seen in the cases.

2. Literature Review

Various scholars have researched the relationship between humanitarian and conflict, mostly civil wars. These scholars have several opinions on how humanitarian aid could affect peace prospects. The academic literature regarding humanitarian aid and civil war will be reviewed in this chapter to be able to compare this with proxy civil war with the use of case studies later on. It can be said that adapting aid to local needs and factors and distribute aid equally could create prospects on peace establishment in the case of a civil war. However, aid could be abused by groups to continue war without using the own resources first. If aid resources are not delivered properly, this could do harm because aid has the power to take away influence from groups with the delivery of necessities. Aid could also be used as military and political tool.

2.1. Opportunities for Aid

Anderson states that aid cannot be separated from conflict. Aid can help resolve conflict, but can also make it worse, depending on the impact the aid has on the tension and connection between the groups in a conflict. Several factors link groups in conflict with one another. These include systems and institutions, attitudes and actions, values and interests, common experiences, and symbols and occasions. These factors can either support peace or fuel conflict. Anderson suggests that if aid providers recognise the contribution that these factors may have and adapt aid provision for these factors, aid can improve peace prospects (Anderson, 1999, pp. 24-33).

Meininghaus recognises the usefulness of these local factors and argues that aid could play an important role in peace prospects in the Syrian conflict. However, she also recognises difficulties for humanitarian aid in civil wars. According to the International Humanitarian Law (IHL), states “are obliged to grant access, secure safe passage for humanitarian personnel and goods, and assist humanitarian organisations when needed” (Meininghaus, 2016, p. 4). In practice, humanitarian organisations are often not granted access but rather must strategically negotiate with various groups to be able to gain access and resources. These negotiations by humanitarian organisations place them in the local governance system, which is an

interdependent effect of humanitarian aid (Meininghaus, 2016). However, aid providers are more likely to have access to rebel territory when the rebels are at an advantage in comparison with the opposition and if the rebels can gain from providing access. It is assumed that there is a cost-benefit analysis (Carbonnier, 2015, p. 20). Denied access to conflict areas leads to unequal distribution of aid. It is easier to provide aid where access is safe and the groups present support humanitarian aid and accept its providers. Knowledge of the area is essential. Unequal distribution of aid can dissatisfy local communities, and this might distort peace negotiations. If accomplished well, aid can prevent further fragmentation in a civil war. However, in unsafe areas, usually opposition-held areas, providing aid is difficult. If these areas receive no aid or less aid than needed, this can threaten the peace process and stability. In this case, it is more likely that the community will hinder peace because of this disadvantage. If access is granted, aid may be used as a tool to find support among local groups (Meininghaus, 2016).

2.2. Aid Prolongs War

Narang argues that humanitarian aid can prolong civil war. In his view, providing aid is a paradox because while its goal is to relief the population, the aid indirectly sustains the war itself. The argument for this is that aid is impartial and therefore must be provided to every group involved. Narang identifies four causes based on the existing literature, supported by Anderson and Addison, for why aid prolongs war. First, aid provides (financial) resources to combatants. Every combatant who is not wearing an army uniform blends in with the population, and these individuals can obtain resources which can strengthen insurgent groups. Combatants can also steal resources from organisations providing aid. Second, aid organisations provide safe areas for the population, such as refugee camps. In these areas, combatants can shelter and recruit people. Third, aid may relieve groups and allow them to continue the war. Narang gives the example that when aid is given to a certain group, the aid is used for the group's basic needs, which means that the resources they already have can still be used to sustain the war. Finally, aid (organisations) indirectly contribute to the government or another leading group in a war in the form of administration costs, visas, taxes, charges, etc. for entrance or protection (Narang, 2015; Addison, 2000; Anderson, 1999). In support of the argument that aid can

prolong war, Addison presents the example that in 1993 in Somalia only half of the UN resources meant for humanitarian aid reached the population. Rebels and warlords took the other half of the resources. This provides opposition groups with the strength to continue the battle, and thus the resources of the opposing groups are not exhausted. Addison uses the argument of The Overseas Development Institute in London that “in most, if not all, conflicts the role of humanitarian aid as a source of support for warring factions has probably been slight. Rather, in those situations where relief is blamed for supporting a particular group, this is often the result of political and military failings” (Addison, 2000). In other words, the direct cause of failure to stabilise a situation is not humanitarian aid itself, but the political and military failings to secure the provision of the aid. The value of emergency aid such as food and health supplies is also often devaluated to reduce the use of these supplies to rebels.

2.3. Aid Does Harm

Wood and Sullivan argue that aid causes violence in civil conflicts. The reasons for this are that, first, aid causes rebels to hunt for necessities for their own use that aid organisations are providing. This often comes with violence against aid workers and the population to persuade them to give away resources. Second, aid causes rebels to lose power and support from the local population because the aid providers are taking care of the population. This loss of authority and support can in turn lead to violence. The effect of aid on the government is less apparent than the effect aid has on rebels. The government might attack aid providers or the population when rebels are successful in taking over aid resources for their own use, which would create a situation in which the rebels gain more profit and the government is more likely to use violence. A reason for the difference between aid and violence by rebels and the government is that rebels are generally the weaker actors in a conflict. Violence by opposition forces may increase when the government has ties with aid organisations, and with this support for the government increases. Wood and Sullivan find that during a civil war rebels or opposition groups are not likely to maintain control over aid management because they lack military and operational capabilities. However, for aid organisations to operate in opposition-controlled areas, the organisations have to

cooperate with the opposition authorities otherwise there is a high chance of violence or expulsion (Wood & Sullivan, 2015).

2.4. Counter-Insurgency and Aid

Some policy-makers recognise the usefulness of aid and thus also the usefulness of aid providers to contribute to the 'counterinsurgency toolkit' by convincing the population that supporting the legitimate government is better than supporting (violent) opposition groups. Aid providers can gain political support from the local communities, and this can in turn used by the military to gain support. This can be called the 'winning the heart and minds' strategy (Williamson, 2011). However, misuse of aid is highly detrimental in this case, and it can therefore be said that not all aid providers would cooperate with the military for this reason, despite the fact that protection by the military may be important for the safety of aid providers. However, in the case of an intervention or a civil war in which the national army supports and protects aid workers, this method of winning the heart and minds presents an opportunity to come a step closer to peace and stability with minimal use of force. However, for aid workers this method often goes against their humanitarian principles and is thought to politicise IHL and aid (Williamson, 2011). In addition, aid can be used as an indirect means of counter-insurgency instead of counter-insurgency operations by an army because of the support created by the provision of humanitarian assistance. The danger this poses is related to safety.

2.5. Non-State Armed Groups

Non-state armed groups are generally those which are not acting in accordance with international law and are causing threats to security. In failed or fragile states these groups are likely to occur and seize control over territory and people. While most non-state groups are not seen as legitimate actors, it is important to include them in negotiations to establish peace. Formal negotiations and dialogue are usually not an option because intelligence gathering from the opposition can make the non-state actor vulnerable. NGOs play an important role in mediating between non-state actors and governments because of the relations these organisations sometimes have with governments and other involved parties, which enables them to act more freely.

However, non-state actors do not always have a clear management and organisational network, which means that not every part of the non-state actor may be well informed, and some may violate agreements for this reason. IHL constrains states more than it does non-state actors, and therefore non-state actors are more likely and able to use guerrilla tactics in warfare. States have made attempts to impose conventions and international laws on the provision of arms to non-state actors. However, there has been much resistance against this for political reasons (the USA was one of these states); it is argued that providing arms to non-state actors can serve foreign policy purposes and these arms can be used against repressive and abusive regimes when the non-state actors are fighting for political or economic change. In some cases NGOs are able to make agreements with non-state armed groups to prevent them from abusing human rights. However, non-state actors must be willing to sign and follow such agreements (Hofmann, 2006).

3. Humanitarian Aid and Proxy Civil War

This chapter explores the connection between humanitarian aid and proxy civil wars. While humanitarian aid officially must follow humanitarian principles such as humanity, neutrality, impartiality, and independence, in practice these principles are often very difficult to maintain. On the local civil level there are already obstacles, but in the case of proxy civil wars foreign actors and aid donors are impeding these humanitarian principles even more. When there are more actors and more levels of war as in a proxy civil war it is more likely that humanitarian aid will be used to 'win the heart and minds' and more steered towards a specific group depending on the origin and interests of the foreign actors and donors of the aid.

3.1. Proxy Civil War

Brown draws the following conclusion about the rise of proxy wars after the Cold War: "the temptation to rely on military proxies is systemically driven, being generated by the structure and basic behaviour of an emergent global system which is neither unipolar, nor bipolar, nor even really 'multipolar', but polyarchic – a highly interactive and interdependent, yet decentralized, system of many kinds of actors, large and small, state and non-state" (Brown, 2016, p. 244). In this explanation relations of non-state actors amongst each other and with state actors are volatile because "today's allies, state or non-state, may be tomorrow's adversaries", depending on the context (Brown, 2016, p. 244). This creates uncertain relations and situations, and therefore states are less likely to use their own armies and instead use proxies to pursue their interests. When armies are on the ground intelligence must be gathered, and civilian and military casualties must be minimised. It is safer to use groups which are already on the ground locally to fight the war.

The danger of using proxies to wage war is that the relationship with these proxies may be volatile depending on the motives of the proxies. When the motives for the proxies are narrow, for example, if they are fighting for money, proxies may lay down their arms when the war is causing too much damage. When proxies are fighting for greater motives, such as religious, emotional, or historical purpose, peace initiatives from the contractor who uses the proxies, such as ceasefires and peace negotiations, are likely to be rejected by the proxies because they have their own motives and

purposes. These outcomes drive contractors towards the battlefield. Another danger is that the contracting state may have to justify this indirect warfare to its citizens and parliament, while for the proxy losing the battle is not an option. Otherwise, the contracting state must accept the loss, leading to a decrease in credibility, or else the contracting state must become directly involved in the war itself (Brown, 2016).

3.2. Humanitarian Principles

Humanitarian aid is based on four different principles: humanity, impartiality, neutrality, and independence. The underlying motive of humanity is that “human suffering must be addressed wherever it is found. The purpose of humanitarian action is to protect life and health and ensure respect for human beings” (UN, 2012). Impartiality means that “humanitarian action must be carried out on the basis of need alone, giving priority to the most urgent cases of distress and making no distinctions on the basis of nationality, race, gender, religious belief, class or political opinions” (UN, 2012). The principle of impartiality can be divided into proportionality, non-discrimination, and individual impartiality of humanitarian workers. In this regard, humanitarian aid prioritises the most urgent cases to provide emergency aid and is provided for all human beings regardless of the group they belong to, and individuals who provide relief should not take sides or be subjective (Carbonnier, 2015, pp. 32-33). Neutrality means that “humanitarian actors must not take sides in hostilities or engage in controversies of a political, racial, religious or ideological nature” (UN, 2012). Finally, independence means that “humanitarian action must be autonomous from the political, economic, military or other objectives that any actor may hold with regard to areas where humanitarian action is being implemented” (UN, 2012). It is difficult for the UN to be neutral, according to Carbonnier, because of the interests of the UN member states, and states where the UN operates may believe it to be operating in favour of the more influential countries within the UN, which might be working against the wishes of the state in question. This means that UN missions to provide aid may lack independence and neutrality since independence for humanitarian organisations means that there is a certain “autonomy in relation to states and non-state actors” (Carbonnier, 2015, p. 33) and the UN cannot be seen as autonomous when it is serving the interests of its member states as an international political organisation. In addition, the UN did not adopt neutrality in its December

1991 resolution (A/RES/46/182) on the ‘Strengthening of the coordination of humanitarian emergency assistance of the United Nations’ (UN General Assembly, 1991).

Outside the context of the UN, the funding of humanitarian aid may be an obstacle against the independence of aid-providing organisations when the donor has specific interests. In other words, aid-providing organisations may have to decline funds in order to avoid being dependent on certain kinds of donors. Donors may also refrain from funding aid when it is provided to groups other than the one that the donor wants to support (Carbonnier, 2015, p. 33). These challenges are difficult for humanitarian aid organisations to overcome, especially in a proxy civil war with all the various interests of donors. It is highly problematic for the UN to operate in a proxy civil war with the objective of providing aid when opposing groups (local and foreign) do not support the UN presence.

3.3. Providing Aid in Proxy Civil Wars

When a political system fails, in the case of conflict and war, humanitarian relief is used to reduce the consequences through emergency aid. The ultimate goal of humanitarian aid is to save lives by providing basic necessities. This creates a political legitimacy; according to Stein, “Humanitarian action is designed for the short term, for limited groups, for limited objectives, until legitimately constituted authority can assume its obligations” (Stein, 2000, p. 368). In the case of civil wars the population is often the target of rebels, which prevents the provided aid from getting to the intended recipients. This makes the provision of aid more difficult. In civil wars groups strive to influence the population and to control territory, and may also execute individuals for military and political reasons. To the military these killings are not seen as collateral damage, but these killings are for the purpose of strategic military gains. As noted above, humanitarian aid is exploited by political actors and the military to ‘win the hearts and minds’ of the population. Since aid providers are located in the area of conflict, humanitarian aid can be used by international actors involved in the proxy war. The situation depends on the background of the aid provider. When it is an independent organisation the influence that politics and the military have on the population is probably less than when the organisation is part of

and sent by a specific state. During the past century, humanitarian aid has developed from state-provided aid, to privatised independent organisations partially funded by states. By funding these aid organisations states are still indirectly involved in contributing to humanitarian relief. The difficulty of aid provision is that aid providers do need some political and military support to gain access to an area in need of relief, and the military is needed for the security of the aid workers. The humanitarian assistance that aid providers are able to give depends on the interests of the powers involved. “Humanitarian assistance is the cause of disengagement by the major powers. It is rather the consequence of the withdrawal of the big powers once southern societies were no longer a theater of competition in the Cold War” (Stein, 2000, p. 394). Stein acknowledges that the neutrality of aid providers is a fiction in contemporary warfare. Groups in conflict today are predatory and therefore aid providers must have security from political actors and the military. If this is the case, the political actors and the military are able to steer the aid towards the most preferred group.

4. The Syrian Conflict

The conflict in Syria started with the uprising of the Arab Spring protests which called for government reforms, greater freedom, and better economic conditions across the Arabic countries in 2010 and 2011. During these protests hundreds of protesters were killed and arrested by Assad's army. The Syrian National Council (SNC) and the Free Syria Army (FSA) were created when groups split from the Assad government and the national army to fight along with the protesters against Assad's regime. The conflict shifted towards a civil war when the national army used increasing violence and conducted air strikes against the rebels in 2012. The civil war (and the proxy war) in Syria have displaced many Syrians because of the violence, causing them to flee to neighbouring countries or outside the region in a mass influx of refugees into other states. It is estimated that around 13.5 million Syrians have had to seek refuge (Clarion Project, 2017).

The Syrian war is not a common war. The uniqueness of the war is that it is a multi-layered proxy war. Whereas previous proxy wars were mostly war related to Cold War tensions, the Syrian war is fought as a civil war, a regional war on religious, regional, and strategic dominance, and on the global level for global power and influence. These proxy-layers are overlapping because each actor is supporting another actor on a different level. The involvement of these actors started in 2012-2013 when the Syrian rebels ceded Syrian territory, which led Iran and Hezbollah to support Assad to regain Syrian territory by fighting against the rebels. Moreover, Syria and Iran are allies since the 1980 and Syria has helped Iran during the years. Therefore, Iran has "granted Syria a one billion Dollar import credit line" and Iran sent "senior Revolutionary Guard commanders" to Syria to fight against the opposition (Bitar, 2013). Opposing this, the US, Turkey, and the Gulf Cooperation Council members started to support the rebels against Assad's regime. For example, in 2013 it is estimated that Qatar has armed the rebels with supplied worth of three billion Dollars. Though, Russia's relationship with Syria and the support might be the greatest. Russia's (economic) relationship with Syria is dating from the 1950s, and Russian arms sales to Syria in 2011 are of an estimated value of 4 billion Dollars (Bitar, 2013). In 2015 Russia entered the proxy war with military support when the Syrian government continued to lose territory. In return, the US established training programmes for the rebels to counter Russian and Syrian army attacks. However, the

training was unsuccessful because of the small size of the training programmes (Stewart, 2015). Russia and the US brokered several ceasefires in 2016 (excluding attacks on terrorist groups). However, these arrangements have been violated in all cases. One of the main goals in the establishment of the ceasefires was to provide humanitarian aid. However, during the second ceasefire aid convoys were attacked and the security of the aid providers was threatened. It is estimated that the war has caused approximately 300,000 deaths in Syria (Clarion Project, 2017).

The Syrian proxy civil war is because of the multiple levels extremely problematic. The relationships between the actors and the multi-layered conflict mean that peace prospects are dim and the actors continue to focus on defeating the opposition rather than negotiating for peace. This is described in more detail in the sections below.

4.1. Local actors

The main local actors fighting against each other in Syria are the Syrian Army under control of the regime of President Bashar Al-Assad, the Free Syrian Army (FSA), the Kurds, and the Islamic State (IS). It is the goal of the Syrian regime to remain in power, and therefore Assad refuses to resign. The Syrian government has executed attacks (also with chemical weapons) against its own citizens, and other activities which violate human rights (Clarion Project, 2017).The FSA, comprised largely of defectors from the Syrian army, is fighting against the Syrian regime and is one of the largest rebel groups supported by the US, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and Qatar. The goal of the FSA is the removal of Assad as President of Syria and the establishment of a democratic Syria through the use of guerrilla warfare. Several rebel groups operate under the FSA umbrella. However, because of the lack of a unified strategy by the FSA and its component groups Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and the US have suspended their support (Clarion Project, 2017). Another local group is the Kurds, who want their own autonomous region (Kurdistan) in the north of Syria (and Iraq). Some Christian groups support this goal. The Kurdish group is fighting the IS and terrorist groups to drive them away from Kurd territory. Moreover, the Kurds are clashing with Turkey, which opposes a Kurdish state (Clarion Project, 2017). The last main local group in Syria is the Islamic terrorist group, the IS. Their goal is to establish an Islamic caliphate (an Islamic religious state) in Syria and Iraq, and the group is derived from

Al-Qaeda in Iraq. The group consists mainly of foreigners who have been radicalised in their Islamic beliefs. At the beginning of the Syrian conflict, the terrorist group Nusra Front was a part of the IS. The group committed bombings and attacks on civilians and other groups. In 2014 the Nusra Front and IS separated, which led to the IS taking over territory in Syria. The goal of the IS is to spread the Islamic cause in the region under Sharia Law through violence against citizens. The US launched airstrikes to combat the terrorist groups. During the years of the conflict IS (and other terrorist groups) have lost territory from the Syrian Army and other actors (Clarion Project, 2017). In relation to humanitarian aid, IS wants to supervise aid distribution in the areas it holds. A large percentage of this aid is used by IS combatants themselves, or else the group does not allow aid distribution into its areas. Aid is also confiscated by IS through theft and taxation (Martínez & Eng, 2016).

4.1.1. Supporting Assad

On Assad's side, Russia, Iran, and the Lebanese Hezbollah provide support. Russia's desire for power relative to the US did not end after the Cold War. The US does not want Russia to have more influence in the Middle-Eastern region. Russia has had ties with the Syrian government since the 1950s and is operating against US interests on the UN Security Council with its power to veto any intervention in Syria (together with China, which also supports Assad's regime financially). Russia has made arms deals with the Syrian government and is supporting Assad to remain as Syrian President. It is in Russia's interest to combat religious groups which have ties with Islamists in Chechnya (Al-Masri, 2015; Clarion Project, 2017). Russia's military support takes the form of air strikes against the US-supported rebel groups. Therefore, Russia opposes a no-fly zone. Russia is also interested the naval facilities in Syria for its own fleet (BBC, 2015; Clarion Project, 2017). The other supporter of Assad is Iran, which supports Syrian troops financially, militarily and materially. Moreover, Iran supports Hezbollah militants fighting on the side of Assad. To Iran this conflict is of strategic and geopolitical interest in its conflict with Saudi Arabia for regional power and influence. Moreover, Iran's support of Assad has been an instrument in its nuclear negotiations with the US (Al-Masri, 2015).

4.1.2. Supporting Opposition

Foreign actors which support the FSA are the US, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and Turkey. The US supports the opposition coalition for regime change and democracy and supports rebel groups such as the FSA against both the Assad regime and the IS. The US accuses Assad of using nerve gas and executing mass atrocities against the country's own citizens. The US provides training for the rebel groups and conducts air strikes against the IS. However, the US tries to avoid conducting operations which could benefit the Assad regime and its supporters. The US opposes a no-fly zone (BBC, 2015). Saudi Arabia and Qatar support not only the FSA, but also Sunni Islamic groups fighting Assad's troops and the IS. Saudi Arabia does not believe that Assad can remain in power in Syria and calls on him to resign. To protect the Syrian population, Saudi Arabia would like to impose a no-fly zone (BBC, 2015). Saudi Arabia financially supports the rebel groups and has provided arms and training for them (Clarion Project, 2017). The last major supporter of the opposition groups is Turkey. Turkey supports the Syrian opposition and Islamist group (fighting against the Kurds) and has hosted more than two million refugees from Syria. The refugees to Turkey also include IS fighters who have been medically treated such that they are able to fight again (BBC, 2015). This is a dilemma for Turkey, which also conducts air strikes against the IS.

4.2. Proxy Conflict

One of the proxy conflicts in Syria is of a sectarian nature: the long fight between the Islamic Sunni and Shia groups. In the Syrian proxy war these groups pit Saudi Arabia and Qatar (Sunni) against Iran and Hezbollah (Shia). Iran's religious incentive to take part in the sectarian proxy war is that it wants to prevent Assad's regime from resigning with a Sunni regime taking its place and allying with Saudi Arabia. To prevent this takeover, Iran supports Hezbollah in arming and training the Syrian army, and fighting in Syria against Sunni opposition troops (Laub, 2017). Iran is in conflict with Saudi Arabia not only in Syria, but also in Yemen, which weakens the Saudi position in the Syrian conflict. A large part of the Saudi army is operational in Yemen, and because of this has less capacity in Syria. Saudi Arabia has announced several times that it would send troops or military resources to opposition groups in Syria, but so far this has not materialised. These groups would include 'moderate

Islamic groups', but it is suspected that private Saudi donors are financially supporting the radical groups (Spiegel, 2016). Recently, Saudi Arabia and Qatar have been in conflict with one another. Saudi Arabia claims that Qatar is financially supporting terrorists in the Middle East and is suspected of having ties with Iran. Saudi Arabia has cut diplomatic ties with Qatar (Irish, 2017).

Turkey and the Kurds have been fighting on the regional level for several decades, both in Turkey itself and outside of Turkey. The Kurds in Syria are mainly located in the north, and Turkey wants to prevent the Kurds from obtaining their own state, Kurdistan. In response, the Kurds have accused Turkey of supporting IS combatants financially and medically to fight against them. Turkey's position in this war hinders a shared strategy with the US in the Syrian conflict (Al-Masri, 2015). Turkey believes Assad should resign; Turkish President Erdogan claims that he is not good for Syrian citizens because of the high death rate. This is different from the Turkish position before the war. Before 2011 Turkey and Syria had close relations (Clarion Project, 2017).

On a global level the US and Russia are also fighting in Syria. The conflict between the US and Russia originates from the Cold War and concerns global power. Both states strove to be the global dominant power during the Cold War and this has not ceased, although now it continues without firm capitalist and communist ideological incentives. At the start of the Syrian conflict both states cooperated against the IS. However, this cooperation failed when Russia increased support for Assad, while the US is supporting Assad's opposition. On the global stage Russia and China block UN intervention in Syria with their UN Security Council veto power. Russia's support for Assad started before the US support for the opposition. The containment strategy of the US under Obama, after several interventions in the Middle East, was sufficient for the FSA to sustain the fight against the Assad regime. However, Assad's allies were more supportive. "The result was a 'quagmire' that Barack Obama wanted to avoid at all costs. And Vladimir Putin took advantage of the opportunity to increase Russia's geopolitical influence" (Spiegel, 2016). Under Trump the US has recently launched missile strikes on a Syrian army base, 'threatening' Russian troops at the base, according to Russia. Similar to the bombing of the aid convoy, the US claims that it had warned Russia before the attack (Osborn, 2017). Negotiations on peace prospects in Syria are difficult since Russia positions itself as a mediator while

supporting Assad, and the US supports the opposition and has withdrawn from negotiations in the past because of Russia's position in the conflict (Spiegel, 2016).

5. Aid in Syria

Aid provision in Syria is difficult due to the large number of actors, the denial of access to territory, and the need to work in line with the humanitarian principles and IHL. This chapter describes and analyses aid provision in Syria and the experiences of aid providers. Generally, it can be said that to be able to help the population, aid organisations (and the involved foreign actors and donors) must keep in mind that some of the aid resources will be captured by the local authorities, hindered when possible, and used for the continuation of the conflict, especially when the aid providers attempt to adhere to humanitarian principles. Moreover, on the practical level, aid is mostly affected on the local level. But on the international level, it is technically affected when big international aid organisations want to provide help. When these organisations are linked to proxy contractors, or when these organisations originate from a country which is involved in the war, they are less likely to be able to provide aid.

The experiences of aid workers active in the Syrian civil war between 2012 and 2015 are described by Martinez and Eng. Multiple interviewees have pointed out that aid received from the UN was mostly distributed in government-held areas by government personnel. The population in the government-held areas gained less from the food aid distributed. Despite the principle of neutrality aid organisations were used as a political tool to provide aid. Moreover, because of the lack of access to Syrian regions in need of aid (access has to be approved by the government), the aid was politicised because it was only able to be distributed through preferred channels of the Syrian government and donors. The government and donors did not want the aid to reach areas not under government control, or areas or groups not in the interests of the donors. Western aid providers experience difficulties in providing aid because of the lack of access to Syria. The Syrian government thus prevents aid organisations from distributing aid to areas which are held by opposition groups. Only certain aid-providing organisations have government approval to provide humanitarian aid in certain areas in Syria. The World Food Programme (WFP) of the UN and the ICRC must rely on regional aid organisations such as the Syrian Arab Red Crescent (SARC) because of access and security issues.

Martínez and Eng interviewed two civilians, one living in a government-controlled area, and the other living in an opposition-controlled area. The civilian living in a

government-controlled area stated that the WFP and the ICRC are able to deliver food to the civilians every two months. The civilian living in an opposition-controlled area stated that the area did not receive aid because the government blocks aid into the area. This indicates that most of the approved aid is provided in government-controlled areas, and SARC, supported by the ICRC, and the UN provide this aid. Indirectly, external donors of these organisations are helping the government maintain power and control, as the government is able to focus its expenditures on warfare instead of food and other necessities for civilians (Martínez & Eng, 2016).

Another factor is that Assad cannot completely ban aid provision in government-controlled areas because it is sustaining the government with the provision of aid. Otherwise, the government would lose support, control and funding. Martínez and Eng refer to what they call the 'image of comparative security'. This means that because there is more aid and security in government-controlled areas, there is an increase in migration from opposition-controlled areas to government-controlled areas to improve living conditions. This affects the legitimacy of opposition groups and their support of civilians. Hunger has a political impact on the conflict. Civilians may put pressure on opposition groups to leave an area because this affects the provision of necessities (Martínez & Eng, 2016).

5.1. Aid and State Sovereignty

The problem of access to a state without permission is the violation of state sovereignty. To state actors this sovereignty is important. However, to non-state actors, effective possession and control of territory is much more important. With the permission to access a state to provide aid, IHL establishes the obligation of all involved parties to respect the aid workers, humanitarian principles, and the recipients of aid. Under the humanitarian principle of impartiality, humanitarian assistance to civilians in opposition-held areas does not imply that the providing organisation supports this opposition group. Bouchet-Saulnier states that there is a difference between the UN Guiding Principles on humanitarian assistance and IHL with regard to the notion of 'other parties' (Bouchet-Saulnier, 2014). The UN Guiding Principles state that in armed conflicts "the sovereignty, territorial integrity and national unity of States must be fully respected in accordance with the UN Charter

and that humanitarian assistance should be provided with consent and, in principle, on the basis of an appeal made by the affected country" (UN General Assembly, 1991). The Guiding Principles address only one party in the state whose sovereignty has to be safeguarded. Under IHL aid-providing organisations are able to provide aid without affecting the legal status of the involved parties (state actors and non-state actors), and humanitarian assistance is not an interference in the conflict but rather an act of relief to the population. IHL's inclusion of all involved parties is an attempt to bind all actors to their obligations (Bouchet-Saulnier, 2014). In the case of Syria Assad is using the argument that humanitarian aid is violating the sovereignty of the state. In this case, state sovereignty would mean that Assad has the power to decide. When granting access to Syria to provide aid Assad yields some of this power to aid organisations (Martínez & Eng, 2016). According to the Humanitarian Practice Network aid organisations experienced difficulties in gaining access to Syria and providing aid before the conflict. The Syrian government controlled every facet related to aid and negotiations were required in order to provide aid. The Syrian government is suspicious towards aid organisations because they also provide aid to opposition groups and threaten to delegitimise the Syrian government and create support for international action. While the Syrian government claims that it also granted access to opposition-held areas, administrative paperwork delayed this process. The application for access to areas other than those controlled by the government must go through the SARC. This is the main relief organisation in Syria and the most local one, and international organisations must cooperate with SARC to provide aid in Syria. SARC may be seen as the organiser and gatekeeper of the humanitarian principles and organisations and as the communicator with the Syrian government. This puts pressure on SARC from all sides (Humanitarian Practice Network, 2013). During the years of the conflict Assad has granted access to some organisations but only to some areas.

5.2. Humanitarian Aid Organisations and Their Experiences in Syria

This section describes the largest Western aid-providing organisations in Syria, along with their experiences in Syria and their challenges and opportunities in the conflict.

5.2.1. UNOCHA

United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA) filed a report on its response to the Syrian crisis from 2011-2016. This report states that in 2012 UNOCHA began experiencing difficulties with the implementation of humanitarian assistance because of economic sanctions imposed by foreign actors. These sanctions resulted in shortages of food and higher prices on commodities for the civilians. Aid organisations also experience difficulties with shortages of fuel and the procurement of commodities and medical supplies. In 2013 the urgency of the need for basic commodities increased as the conflict continued. In 2014 Turkey and Jordan were able to provide humanitarian assistance across their borders with the support of a UN Security Council Resolution. In 2015 UNOCHA experienced still more difficulties in providing aid because of increased problems of limited access and security. With the involvement of new local groups in the conflict the violence rate increased (UNOCHA, N.D.). One of the successes over the years was the passage of UN Security Council Resolution 2165 in 2014, in which the Council "[…] 2. Decides that the United Nations humanitarian agencies and their implementing partners are authorized to use routes across conflict lines and the border crossings of Bab al-Salam, Bab al-Hawa, Al Yarubiyah and Al-Ramtha, in addition to those already in use, in order to ensure that humanitarian assistance, including medical and surgical supplies, reaches people in need throughout Syria through the most direct routes, with notification to the Syrian authorities, and to this end stresses the need for all border crossings to be used efficiently for United Nations humanitarian operations" (UN, 2014).

Despite the obstruction by the Syrian government of access to Syrian territory to provide humanitarian aid to civilians in need, the UN was able to create more access points to deliver emergency aid more directly to difficult locations. However, UNOCHA, as an overarching aid-providing organisation, is not able to act in its role as a coordination entity since the Syrian government does not accept this and prefers local NGOs to operate within Syria. The Syrian government and the Syrian Ministry of Foreign Affairs closely monitor the steps the UN takes in providing aid to the Syrian civilians. For the UN the creation of more access points was one of the four main strategic goals of UNOCHA in this crisis. The other three are "scaling up the response, dealing with the refugee crisis and its effect on neighbouring countries,

and unifying the disparate elements of the humanitarian operation" (UNOCHA, 2016, p. iv). The UN recognised that it had failed in response to the humanitarian crisis in Syria. It was unable to provide aid equally in Syria due to access problems, there was a shortage of medical supplies, and security within civilian centres and medical facilities could not be guaranteed. Moreover, the response of UNOCHA was slow.

5.2.2. WHO

The World Health Organisation (WHO) focuses mainly on medical and health facilities within Syria. Because of the war access to health care has decreased. The WHO 2016 annual report states that about one-third of wounded civilians are unable to get medical care and are therefore scarred for life. The WHO is an overarching organisation which helps to coordinate the ICRC and SARC. The WHO attempts to ensure neutral and safe access to Syria with the involved actors in the conflict and stresses this importance on a diplomatic level. WHO has strong ties with the International Syria Support Group, SARC, ICRC, the Office of the Special Envoy for Syria, and religious leaders and the community itself in Syria. UN Security Council Resolution 2165 helped the WHO obtain access into Syria to provide emergency medical for civilians. Despite attacks on aid convoys, such as the attack on the UN aid convoy with SARC personnel in 2016 (MSF, 2016), WHO has succeeded in providing aid in areas which were long inaccessible with the help of inter-agency aid convoys. Still, aid provision is generally difficult. In 2016 the WHO filed 41 requests to supply medicines, and more than half of these requests were denied by the authorities. In early 2016 authorities granted approval for medical evacuation of those in urgent need from besieged areas and areas which are difficult to access. However, since hundreds have been evacuated the authorities grant permission only occasionally, and even when evacuation was allowed the treatment sometimes arrived too late (WHO, 2017).

5.2.3. ICRC

ICRC works closely with SARC to provide aid in Syria. Combined, these organisations are the largest aid providers in Syria, but both have lost many staff members to the conflict (American Red Cross, 2016). In 2014 the ICRC provided

emergency aid mostly in government-controlled areas. The ICRC has provided food, water, materials, and health supplies. Some volunteers have provided these necessities to opposition-controlled areas. ICRC access was limited to a few cities in the government-controlled area. ICRC's and SARC's successes are mostly related to the provision of water and water facilities, the provision of medical supplies and electricity generators, and financial support (ICRC, 2014). Over the years ICRC and SARC have managed to operate in opposition-held areas as well. However, access to these areas has been temporary (American Red Cross, 2016). ICRC has identified key issues that must be addressed to decrease the suffering of the civilians. IHL must be obeyed. The need of military use and military protection of civilians has to be considered. Moreover, depoliticised access must be granted and it must be unconditional and unimpeded. The impact the conflict is not only local but regional. Syrians have fled from the conflict and this affects the whole region (ICRC, 2017).

5.2.4. MSF

Doctors Without Borders/Médicins Sans Frontières (MSF) operates in Syria to provide medical care. During the conflict five staff members have been abducted in Syria. MSF supports local doctors and medical staff and operates in the most strongly affected regions by providing training and materials in areas controlled by the government and in areas held by opposition groups (Médecins Sans Frontières, 2015). MSF has recognised international failures of aid provision in 2013. The health care system, health care facilities, and health workers were attacked and their work and lives were insecure. Not only the international aid providers but also the local aid providers were unable to do their jobs. The local authorities saw these health care workers "enemies of the regime" because they were providing medical assistance to citizens in need, and the consequence of this was "arrest, imprisonment, torture or even death" (Tung, 2013).

At the beginning of the conflict MSF did not operate in Syria because the government refused to grant access. To help the civilians MSF donated medical supplies and medicines to local health facilities. In June 2012 MSF was able to open medical facilities in the north of Syria secretly. Later that year MSF (unofficially) opened two hospitals in the opposition-controlled areas. These hospitals were targeted by the

(Syrian) military, and small private clinics or hospitals had to open to take care of the wounded. Areas were taken by the FSA, and they often took over the local hospitals or located their hospitals close to the public hospitals, which made them targets of the government. Medical supplies scarce because of the war (sanctions have been imposed on Syria by Western countries, and this affects the internal medical supply and health system) (Tung, 2013).

Power facilities are targeted by the military, which in turn affects health facilities. Moreover, there is a shortage of medical staff because of the fear of attacks, and many people have fled the country. The civilians are victims in the war. While there are many casualties in the civilian public health facilities, civilians are turned down by hospitals for medical care and combatants are given priority. The obstacles for providing aid are the government, which controls the foreign aid flow into the country, the refusal of access to provide aid, and security issues. Even if organisations have found ways to provide aid, cross-border provision of aid is generally accepted by neighbouring countries, but there is a lack of administrative and logistical support by these countries. This delays aid provision and affects donor funding because of the financing rules that the organisations face. MSF stresses that “to cover the needs of civilians, the capacity of humanitarian actors to provide impartial aid throughout Syria must be increased and cross-border operations must be facilitated” (Tung, 2013).

6. Establishing Peace in Syria

At the beginning of the war in 2012, a six-point peace plan was created by Kofi Annan, calling for “the Syrian authorities to cease military repression and the use of heavy weapons in populated areas. Annan guaranteed he would seek similar commitments from the armed opposition groups to bring about a sustained cessation of armed violence in all its forms by all parties. The plan also demanded a provision of humanitarian assistance to all areas affected by the fighting, the release of arbitrarily detained persons and those involved in peaceful activities, ensure freedom of movement throughout the country for journalists, and respect the right of Syrians to demonstrate peacefully” (UNOCHA, 2016, p. 7). Five years after the creation of this plan, peace is still far from being established. Attempts at peace are usually made through mediation and negotiation. However, in the Syrian proxy civil war, with many actors and different levels of war to negotiate about, peace prospects are far more hazy. In a civil war situation with third parties the local rebel groups tend to prolong peace negotiations to gain as much as possible. But in the Syrian proxy civil war the ethnic and political divisions between the local groups are not the only factors at the negotiating table. The multiple other conflicts on top of this create further demands and different negotiating tables, and even when concessions can be made on one table, the others must reach an agreement too. This makes prospects on peace even more difficult.

6.1. Termination of War

When civil wars turn into proxy civil wars with the involvement of external states pursuing their own interests via local actors, these external actors can either help to establish a stable situation or prolong the conflict. When external parties are able to make guarantees to the involved parties it is more likely that the local actors can make settlements. Sawyer, Gallagher, Cunningham and Reed have concluded that rebels in a civil war who are financially supported by external actors are not likely to agree with peace settlements with a government and instead prolong civil conflicts in the hope that they will gain more. Governments tend to agree to concessions on peace settlement when they are more profitable than proceeding in the conflict. When there is an asymmetry in power and materials, where the government has the advantage, the government is remains uncertain as to who will win. However, there is

also uncertainty regarding how much the government army will be damaged and how costly will it be when the government uses violence to overcome the rebels. The costs of fighting to the rebels are difficult to estimate because they depend on the utility, ability, resources, and support these rebels have. These factors are to the advantage of rebels when negotiating. There is also uncertainty when the support of the rebels is fungible. For example, financial support can be used in various ways other than for fighting, and it is difficult for the government to estimate the usage of this support. This leads to further uncertainty in the costs of fighting off the rebels. When rebels are supported (financially or through the provision of arms) by external actors, this has a significant effect on the termination of war. With external support conflicts last longer because rebels are able to sustain the war. However, when foreign troops physically enter the war and support rebels, it becomes more likely that the war will come to an end (Sawyer, Gallagher Cunningham, & Reed, 2017).

6.2. Division and Peace Attempts

Internally, Syria is divided between the government and non-state actors with various ethnic and religious backgrounds. After the First World War Syria's borders were drawn by the allied powers, and several disparate groups were put into one state. This caused violence and divergence. Hafez Al-Assad, the father of the current President, Bashar Al-Assad, seized power in a coup in 1970. The powers of the President have increased over the years, accompanied by the limitation of individual freedom, until the point where we are now. When Bashar Al-Assad became President he promised change and restored some of the relationships with neighbouring countries and the West. However, in 2007 Syria was suspected of enrichment of uranium and therefore the creation of weapons of mass destruction, which concerned the external actors in the conflict. During the Arab Spring, the Syrian internal division widened as a result of the governing of Assad and the differences between the groups within the Syrian state whose borders were drafted by the Western allies almost 100 years ago. The external actors in the conflict in the UN Security Council wanted a resolution to force Assad to step down as a President. However, Russia and China were against this resolution and used their veto power. This mirrors the support of these external powers for the Syrian internal actors in the conflict. The Arab League suspended the membership of Syria and began imposing sanctions

against the country. “In 2012 an international coalition was formed (later known as the Action Group for Syria), consisting of the U.N., Arab League, and EU (China, France, Russia, the U.K., the U.S., and Turkey, Iraq, Kuwait and Qatar)” (Pitrof, 2015, p. 167). The goal of this coalition was to reach a consensus on the situation in Syria and the future of this state through the creation of a transitional government and holding of elections. Opposing opinions from the US and Russia were among the reasons why these plans failed and a consensus could not be reached. Over the years the UN has attempted to impose several ceasefires, but these attempts have failed. Attempts to have all internal actors at the negotiating table have failed and the actors have been unwilling to capitulate. One factor that strengthened the conflict is the provision of arms from international actors to internal actors. Russia provided arms to the Syrian government and its supporters (Pitrof, 2015). The UA and Saudi Arabia provided arms for the opposition groups such as the FSA, and the IS is receiving arms from extremist supporters who want the establishment of an Islamic Caliphate with Sharia Law.

6.3. Problems and Solutions

Pitrof identifies several hurdles to peace in Syria and proposes solutions to overcome them. Pitrof addresses the question of whether negotiations could bring peace. Her answer to this is that a neutral third party, not one of the involved external actors, could provide a solution if the internal actors in the conflict are willing to sit around the table to negotiate. This brings us to the second hurdle, which is that, based on Pitrof’s first suggestion, it is not clear who will represent the Syrian opposition, since there are many groups opposing the Syrian regime. This could mean that all groups would sit at the table, with more voices leading to a smaller chance for an agreement. The various ethnic and religious backgrounds make this even more difficult. Pitrof calls this an internal problem. Mediation is only possible when there is unity within the groups, and otherwise groups are unwilling to lay down their arms. The third problem is related to the previous two problems. The opposition covers a wide “political and ideological spectrum” with groups including “the Muslim Brotherhood, the Damascus Declaration, the National Bloc, the Local Coordination Committee, the Kurdish Bloc, the Assyrian Bloc, and Independents” (Pitrof, 2015, p. 171). The nature of the conflict has changed drastically. At the start of the conflict the opposition resisted the

repression of the government and advocated for more political freedom. More groups with other objectives have entered the conflict in the intervening years, which thwarts peace prospects. This means that the opposition must develop with a shared objective before entering any negotiation on the outcome of the conflict. The fifth problem relates most closely to this research. The international actors with their interests also present a problem in peace negotiations because feed the conflict. The involvement of international actors brings even more objectives to the table and the opposing opinions are not only amongst the internal actors, but also amongst the external international actors. A proposed solution is for the international actors to take a step back. The various internal actors and interests are already presenting an obstacle to peace, and if (external) actors want the conflict to be stabilised then their involvement and interests should be limited. The last problem is public scrutiny; when actors make concessions it seems as if there is not a complete victory, which in public opinion can be considered a loss. The proposed solution is to conduct negotiations ‘behind closed doors’. This prevents damage to images and prevents overwhelming media attention (Pitrof, 2015).

7. Case Studies from the Past

During the Cold War humanitarian aid was used as a tool to influence the population to support either the communist side or the non-communist side. Most proxy civil wars during the Cold War were under the influence of the US and the Soviet Union. In the current Syrian conflict the US and Russia once again oppose each other and have different interests in the conflict and its outcome. To analyse whether humanitarian aid has a different effect on peace prospects in proxy civil wars it is important to look at more than one case. Therefore, in this chapter, the proxy civil wars in Afghanistan and Vietnam and humanitarian aid during these wars are explored. In both cases we see that it is important to adapt aid provision to the specific case, and that the level of proxy support from the foreign actor is important to be able to win a war.

7.1. Vietnam

The Vietnam started as a proxy war until the US decided to join the war against communist influences in Vietnam directly. North Vietnam was under the influence of the communist Soviet Union and China, while South Vietnam was under the influence of the US. The President of the US at that time, John F. Kennedy, called the war ‘their war’ and claimed no intention of waging war directly against communism. The US provided South Vietnam with military equipment and military advisors. When the South Vietnamese were unable to defend and secure themselves, the US took on the task of securing South Vietnamese bases. In this way the US slowly made it ‘their war’ with military involvement, creating another layer in the conflict, especially with the aid provided to fight against communism. The US became the main actor against the North Vietnamese communists when South Vietnamese troops shifted from military tasks to political tasks to control the South Vietnamese population. According to Brown, because the US and South Vietnam lost to the communists, the US learned that it could not completely rely on proxy groups, and must always be able to directly enter the war itself (Brown, 2016).

From 1954 to 1961 the Cooperative for American Relief Everywhere (CARE) and Private Voluntary Organisations (PVOs) provided aid to South Vietnam. This provision of aid was political rather than neutral since it had as its objective to take

away communism from the Vietnamese and save them from it. The South Vietnamese and US government cooperated with these organisations to reach the objectives, suggesting to the US that it could duplicate its ideology and institutions in another state. This was CARE's vision while the Cold War developed into "an effective instrument of foreign policy [...] in breaking down barriers between nations and creating everywhere a feeling of friendship for America and Americans" (Pergande, 2002, p. 3). While (Catholic) people were fleeing from North to South Vietnam, the South Vietnamese government and the US government-supported aid organisation cooperated to provide emergency relief to these people and to 'win their hearts and minds'. This even went so far that the South Vietnamese and US government forbade CARE from providing aid to the North Vietnamese people so as to 'not help the enemy' (Pérouse de Montclos, 2014; Pergande, 2002). Though CARE had helped many Vietnamese people with emergency assistance, the organisation retained strong ties with the US government and operated in concert with their foreign policy objectives in the 'American way', which was not effective enough and resulted in waste of food and materials.

Pergande has described why aid from the US failed in Vietnam. First, the South Vietnamese government was too weak. Second, the US made mistakes and followed the wrong approach. Last, the communists were too strong. These factors, in combination with South Vietnam not having the historical bond of a nation-state, caused the failure of US aid and the US proxy war (Pergande, 2002).

7.2. Afghanistan

Until the 1970s both the Soviet Union and the US attempted only to influence Afghanistan to adopt either a communist path or a capitalist path. Both countries sent aid to various parts of Afghanistan. Since the Soviet Union was in direct geographical proximity to Afghanistan, the influence of the Soviet Union dominated over the influence of the US. After the abolition of the Afghan monarchy and the rise of Islamic leadership throughout Afghanistan after a military coup by pro-Soviet officers, the Soviet Union entered Afghanistan to take control of the situation (Barnett, 1997). In the Afghan war of the 1980s, the Afghan government was supported by the communist Soviet Union. The Soviet Union installed a puppet Afghan government

after the Afghan communists caused the situation to get out of hand by seizing power. The force that the Soviet Union used led to an increase in Afghan nationalism (Brown, 2016). The Mujahidin, of Pashtun and Tajik origin, were among these nationalistic insurgents and were eventually supported by the US Central Intelligence Agency to fight against communism, receiving arms and anti-helicopter and anti-tank materials. To counter this, the Soviet Union trained and armed ethnic 'Afghanistani' groups who were not part of the Mujahidin. The local knowledge of these Afghanistani groups was seen as useful to the Soviets. By mapping ethnic groups and their interests, the Afghan government and Soviets were able to find supporting tribes, groups, and Mujahidin defectors to fight against the Mujahidin. Williams has argued that the tribal support for the communist Soviet Union and Afghan government resulted from the tribes being bought off and promised more autonomy (Williams, 2012). However, Soviet funding came to an end at the end of the 1980s because the Soviet President Gorbachev had other priorities (Brown, 2016). This created a fear that tribes would turn against communism and join the Mujahidin. This fear turned out to be grounded, as the tribes were targeting the Afghan government, which quickly collapsed (Williams, 2012).

After the Vietnam War, the US established Governmental Non-Governmental Organisations to prevent aid organisations from providing aid to the enemy and to work with the anti-communist policy. Afghanistan is one example of this (Pérouse de Montclos, 2014). Baitenmann recognises three groups of NGOs that operated in the Afghan war. The first group includes NGOs active in Pakistan to provide relief to Afghan refugees. The second group consist of NGOs which conducted cross-border operations from Pakistan into Afghanistan. The third and last group was advocacy NGOs. Through the first group, the UN was able to distribute emergency aid equally, but the smaller NGOs' aid was divided more unequally because of security issues and problems with distribution. Still, it is estimated that these organisations were able to provide most necessities to at least one-third of refugees. However, this aid was not completely apolitical because of the interests and pressure of Pakistan and the US. Pakistan wanted to retain control over its territory and its influence on the NGOs and therefore imposed restrictions on the provision of aid, such as prohibiting provision of aid outside of the refugee camps. This was also to prevent the aid organisations from clashing with one another. Moreover, Pakistan was concerned

that if aid was not provided well, this could have an effect on Pakistan's economic and political stability. The US feared that without aid the refugees might clash with the Pakistani government and that either the refugees or Pakistan would be driven towards the communist Soviet Union.

In addition to the political struggles, the UN experienced problems in Pakistan because of corruption, bureaucracy, and shortage of staff. This last resulted in discrimination in aid provision because local tribes were used to distribute aid. In the second group, some of the NGOs conducting cross-border operations claimed that it is much more efficient to provide aid to the Afghan population inside the country than outside the country. This was to prevent people from fleeing "and stress that aiding the refugees is to play the Soviets' game by encouraging the Afghans to give up the fight and leave the country" (Baitenmann, 1990, p. 11). The US supported this by being the biggest funder of cross-border operations to keep the population in the country with the incentive that these people would turn against the Communists and their supporters. One of the problems of cross-border aid was unreliability. NGOs were not sure whether their staff was allowed by local commanders to enter Afghanistan (this was seen as illegal), and these commanders could be corrupt and bureaucratic. Aid sometimes strengthens these commanders and aid became politicised. This cooperation of NGOs with commanders gave the organisation intelligence that international actors such as the US found useful.

The approaches of the NGOs differed significantly, which caused unbalance, inequality, and division among the recipients and aid providers. The last group, the advocacy NGOs, are those which advocated for support for the resistance against the communist Soviet Union and the Afghan government and their supporting groups. Besides these objectives, the advocacy NGOs were also advocating for humanitarian assistance for the Afghan refugees (Baitenmann, 1990). The soft power of the NGOs, Western and private aid, and the hard power used by the US proxy Mujahidin, together with the priority decrease of the Soviet Union, helped the US to defeat the Soviet Union in the Cold War in Afghanistan in 1989 (Stockton, 2004, p. 12). Both Nicholas Stockton and Pérouse de Montclos describe the use of humanitarian aid in the Afghan proxy war as a 'force multiplier' (Stockton, 2004; Pérous de Montclos, 2014). In this conflict aid contributed to the victory of the US

along with the use of proxy force. However, the proxy war turned into a civil war after the defeat of the Soviets (Stockton, 2004, p. 13).

8. Conclusion

There is a small difference between humanitarian aid in the case of a civil war and in the case of a proxy civil war as concerns the establishment of peace. Peace prospects in relation to humanitarian aid in the case of a proxy civil war are much more complicated than in the case of a non-proxy civil war because of the disparate interests of all the foreign and local actors and the various layers of war. All groups are not likely to give up their interests because there is too much at stake. Even when actors on the local level are able to reach consensus, the same must be the case on the other layers of war. Otherwise, these international actors will continue to feed the conflict. To ‘win the heart and minds’ of the population is a military and political strategy to influence the population often via aid. The method of providing aid must be adapted to a specific case and situation and must be distributed as equally as possible for aid to have a beneficial effect on peace. The population can then press more for stability when their own lives are less endangered by deprivation of necessities. But this is still only on the local level. The best way for humanitarian aid to support peace prospects is if the international actors withdraw from the conflict. Otherwise, aid may continue to feed other groups. However, this is highly unlikely because these international actors will not give up easily, and will remain to use humanitarian aid as a tool.

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