



RESEARCH PAPER

Conflict in Syria: A New Wars Theory Examination

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ABSTRACT

This research paper analyzed the Syrian conflict using New Wars Theory by Mary Kaldor. The central argument of New Wars Theory is that modern warfare are completely different from traditional warfare. The Syrian conflict which started with local protests and has engulfed the whole country with its regional and global impacts. This study tries to examine the complexities and dynamics of the conflict in Syria, which was particularly affected by the Arab Spring. This is mainly done to examine how this conflict has been shaped through Role of State and Non-State actors, identity politics, war economies and blurring of combatant and non-combatants distinctions. Therefore, a comprehensive analysis utilizing peer-reviewed journals, academic books and reliable sources has been done to understand the complexity of modern warfare as demonstrated by the Syrian war. The results demonstrate that how the Syrian conflict fits well with New Wars theory, challenging the traditional notions of warfare. The analysis helps us to understand the contemporary conflicts, and also gives an insight on how to resolve these conflicts and offers pathways for conflict management and peace building.

KEYWORDS Identity Politics, New Wars Theory, Non-State Actors, Sectarianism

Introduction

The 21st century mayhem commenced in 2011 with the Syrian crisis being one of its most intricate and devastating wars. It is a conflict marked by numerous state and non-state actors, sectarian violence, and serious humanitarian crises that are all consistent with Mary Kaldor's New Wars Theory. Henceforth, this paper will employ New Wars Theory in analyzing the Syrian conflict focusing on regional and global actors who have shaped its dynamics than outcomes.

Theoretical Context: New Wars Theory

According to Kaldor (2012), Mary Kaldor's New Wars Theory holds that contemporary conflicts are fundamentally different from traditional interstate wars in terms of many aspects. Examples include non-state actor prominence, centrality of identity politics, war economies, and the eroding lines between combatants and non-combatants. The theory can therefore be used for understanding the complexities of Syrian war.

The Syrian Conflict's Relevance to New Wars Theory

The Syria conflict closely coincides with the basic concepts of Mary Kaldor's New Wars theory. The Syrian war began in 2011, with local protests against economic hardships and has transformed into a regional problem that has implications for international actors. The involvement of state and non-state participants in the conflict has exacerbated it. This paper will look at each tenet of Kaldor's New War Theory individually.

Involvement of Non-State and State Actors

A central argument in New Wars Theory is that both non-state as well as state actors play significant roles during current day conflicts (Kaldor 2012). The chessboard for this rivalry is Syria which includes Iran, Turkey, Saudi Arabia regional players; United States-Russia superpowers among others ISIS rebels like Kurdish forces etc where it gets complicated.

Identity Politics

The Syrian conflict has witnessed intense identity politics such as sectarian (Sunni vs. Shia), ethnic (Kurds vs. Arabs), and ideological (Islamist vs. secular) distinctions. These aspects are in line with Kaldor's argument about identity as a major driver of the contemporary conflicts.

Blurring of Combatant and Non-Combatant Lines:

Civilians have become targets in this conflict, it has been a situation which has involved both state and non-state actors resulting into the commissioning of various atrocities. In essence, the disappearance of neat divisions between combatants and non-combatants is one of those features that Kaldor speaks about in regards to new wars.

War Economies

The Syrian war is underscored by certain economic dimensions such as smuggling, looting, sale and trade of stolen artifacts and external funding that explain its longevity. The issue of war economies as analyzed by New Wars Theory can be used to discuss them.

Material and Methods

This study is based on qualitative approach which uses secondary data from peer-reviewed journals, academic books and credible reports. It examined how regional key players like global powers influence the Syrian conflict according to New Wars Theory perspective.

Results and Discussion

Involvement of Non-State and State Actors

ISIS and other extremist groups are an example of how non-state actors have become a central part in the Syrian conflict. They used the disorder as an opportunity to take control over territories, engage in illegal economies, and commit atrocities (Fakhoury, 2020; Weiss & Hassan, 2015). Certainly, non-state actors have significantly influenced the Syrian Conflict. Rebel groups, armed factions, and humanitarian organizations among others have had major impacts on what happens within this war and its outcomes. Local Syrian providers played a critical role in delivering health services for humanitarians in northwestern Syria that reached out to vulnerable populations while restructuring coordination mechanisms within the country (Duclos et al., 2019). Additionally, cities controlled by armed non-state actors have led to significant differences in land registry management and territorial control vis-à-vis the Syrian regime (Alsamar, 2023). The state of being influenced or controlled by these outside forces has turned Syria into a mosaic where each territory is under different powers thereby eroding traditional principles sovereignty (Menshawy, 2018). The fragmentation of the rebel movement in Syria has been influenced by historical factors as well as structural and geopolitical ones thus indicating complex nature forces involved in shaping conflicts (Pedersen & Walther, 2018). Furthermore fragmented governance structures at host states such as Lebanon were affected by geo-political conflicts involving government institutions alongside non-state actors power struggles with local communities which impacted refugee rights provisions

return processes (Yaseen, et. al., 2018; Fakhoury, 2020). Besides their absence robust government support faith-based organizations educational initiatives among refugees show that non-national players too can provide essential services when governments failed (McCarthy, 2017). Various regional extra-regional also participated directly indirectly different stages during this civil war contributing towards making it more complicated (Imran, 2020). Many multiple ethnic-sectarian driven agendas represented themselves through participation in ethno-sectarian wars which led people believe that the conflict was more sectarian than anything else (Abbara et al., 2015).

Regional and Global Actors

Iran

Iran has been instrumental in propping up President Bashar al-Assad's government providing financial aid military advisers intelligence services proxy militias like Lebanese Hezbollah. It does so because it wants to maintain a Shia crescent and counterbalance Saudi Arabia (Akhmedov, 2023; Fulton, Holliday, & Wyer, 2013; Goodarzi, 2013). These actions align with new war dynamics where both state and non-state actors get involved in complex wars. Iran's active policy in the Middle East since early 2000s indicates its strategic interests within the region as well its involvement with regards to the Syrian conflict (Akhmedov, 2023). This backing could be seen as part wider plan aimed at maintaining leverage safeguarding geopolitical assets around this area. Furthermore, among other countries such as Russia Turkey played crucial roles shaping outcomes within Syria's civil war otherwise they would not have ended when or how they did. These main players heavily impacted what happened next affected power balances on the ground altered overall nature conflicts (Vogel, 2023). In addition economic motives resource grabs also took place during these new wars thus viewing Iran through lens of new-war-economics might help one understand why got involved. Essentially it is mainly driven by strategic economic interests that include gaining access natural resources trade routes regional supremacy

The economic dimensions of the war and competition for power in the aftermath of hostilities are highlighted by Russia, Iran and Turkey's involvement in the rebuilding attempts made in Syria (Hinnebusch, 2020). In other words, according to Kaldor (2013), such phenomena as non-state actors' participation, states fighting each other indirectly through proxies and economic interests being among key drivers Continue reading.

Saudi Arabia

In order to curb Iranian influence and advance its own regional goals, Saudi Arabia has provided significant backing for a range of Sunni rebel groups. This participation has further fueled sectarian dynamics and dragged out the war (Wehrey, 2014; Matthiesen, 2015).

From Mary Kaldor's New Wars theory perspective, the role played by Saudi Arabian in the Syrian conflict depicts features of contemporary wars where nations are involved alongside other non-state actors with economic interest at hand, as well as combatants mingling freely with civilians. Supporting opposition forces within Syria is consistent with new wars being multi-level affairs among states as well as between them; Saudi backs rebels against Assad not only because it wants him out but also due to this being one part among many others that make up what is happening there. Therefore, any attempt made so far could be seen as just an effort or even more broadly speaking still part which aims keeping control over regions around it while safeguarding geopolitical concerns too. Furthermore we can look at economic motives behind Saudi Arabia's intervention in Syria as part of understanding these types new conflicts better known for their resource based characteristics too Since such strategic moves always involve interests like those related with gaining access into various parts through land routes etc., then this could be viewed

from another angle (Zulham et al., 2020; Muzaffar, et. al. 2018; Elshtain 2003)). Support given towards opposite sides can also serve another major aim that strives towards controlling economies indirectly thus helping foster development within them even if they seem unrelated initially Similarly rivalries between countries such Iran have played out elsewhere including here on earth during our time frame where both powers struggle against each other over who controls what part until now? It seems likely then that all what I've said above might just reflect back again since no one knows how things will turn out later?

Turkey

The role of Turkey is multi-faceted that includes backing opposition groups, military intervention against ISIS and Kurdish forces as well as dealing with the refugee crisis. Insecurity, regional ambition and internal politics are among the reasons behind Turkey's actions (Taşpınar, 2018; Stein, 2020). The participation of Turkey in Syria has many dimensions just like other contemporary conflicts which are characterised by involvement of state and non-state actors, economic interests, blurred combatant versus noncombatant lines etcetera as analyzed using Mary Kaldor's New Wars theory framework. Strategic interests within this region coupled with intentions to create safety have caused different armed factions fighting each other receive weapons from Turkey (Sever, 2020). According to (Zulham et al., 2020), national defense and economic considerations form part of wider approach towards protecting security during Syrian conflict where turkey is involved. Being a regional power itself also played part in shaping its engagement with other key players such as Russia during the course of events there. This proximity coupled with need for unfettered access through Turkish straits onto Russian bases located within Syria acted as catalyst for this development (Akturk, 2019). As time goes on so does turkeys foreign policy shift in response to changes taking place on ground vis-à-vis alliance building or opposition dynamics inside it. Therefore (Luerdi, 2022) states that but for latters influence we would not comprehend what is happening now in Syria. let alone (Truevtsev, 2017) knows that since 2016 there has been more intensified Turkish involvement into Iraq too apart from its greater role within Syrian theatre. To sum up, if Turkey's role in the Syrian conflict is considered with Mary Kaldor's New Wars theory framework; we can see that this country takes into account strategic interests, economic motivations and complexifying engagement around interactions among states as well as non-state actors.

United States

The US has several objectives in Syria such as fighting against ISIS, supporting some rebel groups and trying to influence the broader regional balance. The American involvement in this war shows how complicated it is (Laskar et al., 2022;Lund, 2019; Phillips, 2020). Indeed, when one analyzes us participation within these terms new theories of war proposed by Marie Kaldor she must admit that they represent contemporary conflicts best characterized by state/non-state actor involvement mixes economic interest with blurred lines between fighters and civilians. American policy towards Bashar al-Assad's regime has always been ambiguous but its main aim was his removal from power. U.S backed different opposition forces giving them military aid along with training while joining hands with other states or non-state participants involved into new types of wars (Laskar et al., 2022). According to (Gillani, 2023), this strategic objective reflects those economic factors which frequently motivate countries' intervention into current conflicts Suchlike actions could not but provoke international rivalries for supremacy over territories such as Syria where Americans have already interfered many times before because it is their sphere influence being challenged by Russia at present moment too! There were also some terrorist organizations targeted like ISIS however Washington never succeeded getting rid of all extremist groups supported by Moscow either. In fact both sides are still using terrorism as an excuse justifying their presence there since situation remains unstable anyway due numerous overlapping reasons connected mainly with political economy of

underdevelopment accompanied by violence mixed together in places like this one which make them so hard understand what happening around let alone resolve anything at all there whatsoever (Wai, 2022). In brief terms if you look through Marie Kaldor's New Wars theory US involvement strategic interest's economic incentives complex conflict environment states actors non-state Russia Syria power struggle; then will be able to see everything clearly.

Russia

Moscow's military operation in 2015 became turning point for the civil war as it helped Assad regime regain control over some territories and rebalance forces there. Russia acted out of desire to keep its positions middle east protect own Syrian interests counterbalance USA dominance (Trenin, 2016; Borshchevskaya, 2017). On the other hand, when we talk about Russia's part within these terms new theories of wars suggested by Kaldor it does not fit them at all because they were created specifically for contemporary conflicts characterized state/non-state actor mixes economic interest with blurred lines between fighters and civilians but this is not what happened in Syria. According (Lund, 2019; Phillips, 2020). As a matter of fact if one looks through Mary Kaldor's New Wars theory framework; they will understand that there was something wrong from very beginning till end during whole time when Russian federation interfered into civil war which can be explained only through such factors as state-non state involvement, terrorism or political economy of underdevelopment accompanied by violence mixed together in places like Syria where Moscow has been acting against Americans many times before considering current situation too difficult comprehend let alone resolve anything whatsoever (Miron & Thornton, 2021). Economic concerns are also important for Moscow since country wants maintain its strategic position within region secure access military bases while increasing influence over Middle East – thus mirroring those elements that make up new types wars according (Miron & Thornton, 2021). Russia's approach to Syria involves limited moves and selective interventions which have helped shape the outcomes of the conflict. The Russian military presence in Syria and its support for President Bashar al-Assad's regime have considerably affected dynamics within the country, reflecting new war models that feature state-led military interventions (Miron & Thornton, 2021). Moreover, Moscow's participation in the Syrian civil war has been part of wider geopolitical power plays and rivalries with Washington D.C., particularly so considering that this represents another theatre for competition between these two global powers. Consequently, (Nuruzzaman, 2021)ss argues that US-Russian competition over Syria has changed routes as well as results for conflicts thereby revealing contemporary geopolitics' dimensionality. A New Wars perspective according to Mary Kaldor suggests that when looking at Russia's involvement into Syrian armed struggle one should pay attention not only strategic interests but also economic motives within complex conflict environment characterized by state-based military interventions and geopolitical struggles.

Identity Politics and Sectarianism

Sectarian tensions

The Syrian conflict is rooted in deep-seated sectarian divides between Sunnis and Shias, with Sunnis constituting the majority of the population while Shias are only a minority group. As such, it was not surprising to see that President Bashar al-Assad who comes from an Alawite background faced opposition mainly from his own people – Sunnis. What made matters worse however were external players like Iran or Saudi Arabia fueling this already existing schism on religious lines by supporting different factions based on their sectarian affiliations (Khan, et. al 2019; Hinnebusch, 2012; Deeb,2018). It can therefore be said without any doubt that identity politics along with sectarianism played significant roles at all levels of analysis during this particular event in history known as The Syrian Civil War

Sectarianism and Identity Politics

Identity politics have had a major impact on shaping events throughout the course of the Syrian conflict and this is particularly evident in the Levant where sectarian identities have become increasingly salient (Kausch, 2018). This rise can be attributed to a combination of factors including weak Arab states, existing ethno-sectarian divisions, power vacuums left by both the 2003 Iraq war and subsequent 2011 uprisings as well as wider regional international interests (Wahab, 2021). In light of these circumstances it becomes clear that what we are witnessing here may best be described as a religion-infused struggle for power among different groups vying control over territories within Syria. According to (Ari, 2020), there has been an increase in cases where elites manipulate sects so as to instigate violence either directly through regime forces or indirectly by supporting armed opposition factions aligned along sectarian lines. Moreover, various regional actors have also fueled this fire further through their direct involvement in supporting particular sides to such an extent regionalism itself has now taken on sectarian colors throughout The Middle East with countries like Saudi Arabia aligning itself more strongly towards Sunni groups while Iran backs Shia militias fighting alongside government troops loyal to President Assad. In other words, the conflict has witnessed unprecedented levels of sectarianism being manipulated strategically by certain actors who seek gain advantage economically politically socially etcetera at expense others – it is not about ancient hatreds but rather present interests. (Turan, 2018) suggests politicization Islamism could lead even bloodier civil wars within Muslim communities globally especially if identity politics based around religious beliefs continue to take center stage like never before. (Hadaya, 2020) notes that there were elements within some opposition organizations linked with extremist ideologies which sought exploit.

Kurdish Dreams

The Syrian's Kurdish minority has been instrumental in this regard as well – it strives for independence and exploits the war to gain self-rule in places such as Rojava. Turkey is getting involved due to its fear of strong Kurds who might then fight for their rights at home (Tayyab et al., 2020; Gunter, 2014; McDowall, 2019). The presence of Kurds significantly affected the dynamics of the Syrian conflict itself. According to researches held among Syrian refugees in Kurdistan Region of Iraq, a high number of people suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder and depression (Mahmood et al., 2019). Kurdish media have played a key role in shaping the war as well – both broadcasting and online ones (Smets, 2018). In Turkey there are different views on what is thought about Kurdish conflict: some see it as an economic problem related with underdevelopment in that area (Oyvat & Tekgüç, 2019). Neglectedness of education among other factors causing educational backwardness in Southeastern Anatolia was also caused by not giving enough attention to Turkish Kurds during years when armed clashes were occurring there continuously (Oyvat & Tekgüç, 2019). The multi-ethnic SDF dominated by YPG was essential for fighting against ISIS especially considering their role as a main part of it (Tillo, 2022). Moreover (Sarıgil, 2020) notes that “The ability of the Kurdish conflict to impact neighboring regions should not be underestimated” Securitization theories can help understand how security concerns have spread beyond Syria itself into neighboring states because they view these areas through lens securitized threats associated with both non-state actors like PKK or state ones like Turkey which has securitized its approach towards Syrian Kurds (Joobani & Adısönmez, 2018). Therefore, the Kurds have influenced, steered and fueled the Syrian war which would not have taken such course if they had not done so.

Blurring of Combatant and Non-Combatant Lines:

The Syrian war has been significantly influenced by the blurring of combatant and noncombatant lines. This shift has changed the scope of international conflict by obscuring distinctions between states and other actors (Azubuike, 2023). Agents like unconventional

warfare as well as hybrid warfare are among the new strategies and tactics which have come up against traditional military methods rendering them useless in addition to confusing conflict with peace (Alvi, 2022). Injuries resulting from hostilities in Syria reflect this blurring when they involve people formerly excluded from direct ground fighting roles (Dye et al., 2022). Non-combatants are now affected by air strikes that treat the home front no differently than any other area where wars are fought due to such line blur (Linden, 2021). Scholars point out how civilians become fighters too since they perform different roles within a wider fighting community (Mironova et al., 2019). Thus creating enduring “conflict gaps” between those who fight and those who don’t thereby complicating reintegration efforts for ex-belligerents (Cassar et al., 2011). It should be noted that land rights can be weaponized during wars so that belligerent groups manipulate these systems towards their goals (Liu, 2024). Complex operational environments make it hard for international armies engaged in conflicts to differentiate between insurgents or terrorists on one hand and innocent civilians on the other (Orbons, 2010). Furthermore; toxic gas chemical weapons may also be used when there is no clear distinction between enemy soldiers and unarmed citizens thereby affecting large numbers of people living away from battlefields (Unruh, 2016). Ultimately therefore; nothing has transformed warfare more than the Syrian conflict where everything seems fair game once you join an armed group.

War Economies

Conflict maintenance has been performed by war economies. The Assad regime, rebel groups and ISIS have all participated in smuggling, extorting and looting for financing their activities. These economic networks have been further complicated by the involvement of external actors (Martínez & Phillips, 2021). ISIS has engaged in different illegal activities like oil production and smuggling; kidnapping for ransom; looting and selling stolen artifacts; extortion; organ harvesting and controlling crops for funding its operations (Makama, 2024). Looting and smuggling archaeological materials to fund violent acts against civilians were among the ways through which ISIS was reported to generate income (Greenland, 2022). Weapons, fighters as well as funds have been smuggled into Syria through Turkish borders from groups such as Islamic State and Jabhat Al-Nusra (Hadaya, 2020). Smuggling of natural resources has been used by rebels to finance their operations where this provides flexibility and mobility against government repression (Conrad et al., 2018). The governance structure of the country has been impacted on by the Syrian conflict that led to division among conflicting political factions over territory (Akik et al., 2020).

Conclusion

The Syrian conflict represents an illustration of New Wars Theory by Mary Kaldor characterized with identity politics’ complex interplay with non-state actors’ war economies supported through regionalization/globalization that involves many players directly or indirectly. This research therefore gives us a more detailed understanding about what happens during conflicts according to this model while considering different roles played by various individuals involved in it at different levels but not only those who are partaking in fighting alone. Thus findings emphasize the necessity for comprehensive multi-dimensional approach towards peace building as well resolution processes within contemporary contexts which are marked by multiple wars.

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