

The Incomplete Democracy and the Onset of War, Causes and Consequences: A Case Study of Syria

Ahmed Bux Jamali*

The Diplomatic Insight, International Relations, Changchun, Jilin, China

*Corresponding author: Ahmed Bux Jamali, The Diplomatic Insight, International Relations, Changchun, Jilin, China, Tel: +923123442216; E-mail: ab_ir92@yahoo.com

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Abstract

The war is not essentially the absence of peace but the incomplete performances of key components and determinants of a sovereign state. In this contemporary international relation, state interaction revolves around the dependency of both friends and foes to gain vital national interests. Different states face wars in different scenarios based on their domestic manufacturing and the concepts of state building to tackle the destructions and upcoming worst-case scenario. Apart from political leadership, there has always been an external factor that plays a systemic role to disrupt the peace and stability of the state. In order to understand that particular factor, the author has applied the Mansfield and Jack Snyder's scholarly idea of incomplete democracy that outbreak the war to help further understand the ongoing Syrian crisis.

The main focus of this article is to understand and evaluate the democracy as systemic factor that is playing a significant role to an unending war in Syria even today. The weak and fragile political institutions accompanied by international pressure to overthrow the Assad's autocratic regime adds more fuel to fire not only for the peace and stability of the middle eastern but also dispersed among the European countries as refugee's crisis. The author claims that, democracy as a systemic factor doesn't mean complete efficient form of government to satisfy the needs and demands of a common citizen. It further brings more destructions and devastations that a state can never expect in this globalized world.

Keywords: Syria; Autocracy; Major powers; Democracy; R2P

Introduction

The end of the Cold War contributed in reconstructing the international system upon a liberalist ideology, where Democracy as a political regime emerged gradually to reach a number of 123 countries out of 192 states. Since then, democracy as a political regime has been favored by many countries including the Eastern Europe after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Political figures such as Bill Clinton highly valued the democratic regime; he claimed that the emergence of the democratic regime would contribute in promoting peace and security¹. Nobody can deny how peaceful the democratic regime is, yet the issue remains in its application. Is there any country nowadays that applies democracy as it is and as it should be? Such question remains usually unanswered even after analyzing democratic states themselves. Democracy is featured complete in a state if the latter ensures the well-being of its citizens and fully applies the democratic principles and those principles ranges from individual power to freedom of speech, freedom of media, right to vote and individual liberty in daily life. Sometimes, the perfectness of the democratic regime formulates its weakness. Complete mature democracy necessitates a number of idealistic principles; the ratification of these principles demands the contribution of each of the government and the citizens. Democracy is

a government of citizen's rule. The democratic rule can only be consolidated if this first stage is achieved. There are many cases where the process of endorsing the democratic rule in a given country results in its collapse and leads to further disasters and devastating outcomes. This leads to the assumption that democracy is a perfect regime, where its application is bigger than the states' capacities and the citizens' potentials.²

When we say democracy, we mean the existence of each of the rule of law, power equality, and freedom of choice and speech. We also mean standardizing human rights and ensuring free and fair elections. In the article "Getting to Democracy"³, Lowenthal and Sergio Bitar studied the democratic transition that Egypt endorsed after dropping Hosni Mubarak from the power [1]. Throughout the article, they showed how valuable it is the cooperation of the opposition and the majority in the country. After erasing the autocratic regime, the opposition by then should share the same targets and principles of the majority, where their role needs to be complementary or even paired instead of being opposed. Though the disparities in their ideologies, they, preferably, have to share the same interests and targets for an effective decision making. In addition, the free participation of the citizens is indispensable at any step in reformulating the regime. Bowlin⁴ goes even further into suggesting that toleration among people becomes a necessary component in any given democratic

¹ Mansfield, Edward D., and Jack Snyder. "Democratization and the Danger of War." International Security, 1995.

² "Signpostlist.new - <http://www.lawanddemocracy.org/pdffiles/amazing.prin..pdf>

³ Abraham F.Lowenthal "Getting to Democracy" Foreign Affairs 1995.

⁴ Bowlin, John R.. " Democracy, Tolerance, Aquinas." Journal of Religious Ethics. June2016.

country [2]. The country that is endorsing the democratic rule needs to consider the issue of tolerance among its population where their views and their political choices should be tolerated and guaranteed. In addition to that, assuring the political good and the good governance contribute in spreading a peaceful and vibrant democratic rule. Those political goods need to be well performed by the political institutions, and led by credible leaders.

The issue does not stand on whether to follow or not to follow the democratic rule, but how can a state endorse it in its sphere. Can an autocratic state move peacefully to a democratic one? Scholars like Mansfield and Jack Snyder⁵ argue that democratization is one of challenging stages of regime reformulations [3]. In their article, they analyzed the relationship between democratic transition and the onset of the war. They claimed that the “incomplete democracy” is a fundamental incentive towards civil wars and wars externalization. They argue that a considerable number of wars in the history occurred due to democratic transition process.

This research article analyzes and evaluates Mansfield and Jack Snyder's theory on the relationship between democratic transition and the onset of war [3]. My argument is, there are a number of challenges and unavoidable consequences through which a transitional state came across with the significant amount of governance problems and failures in institutional performances. Therefore, how does the incomplete democracy lead to war is also based on the already established institutions which are not capable enough to play an important role in the process towards democratization. Thus, an incomplete democracy pays a huge amount of treasury and blood for the long run to an undecided period of time. Out of this chaotic and problematic situation, I have chosen the case study of Syrian crisis as an unending war of Assad's regime to remain in power.

Mansfield and Snyder see the democratization as a gradual process that goes through two major stages including a transitional period [3]. The first phase is the movement from an autocratic state to a partial democracy then from the latter, there is the shift to a fully institutionalized democracy. They claimed that the outbreak of the war occurs during the transitional period which they labelled as “the partial democracy”. Therefore, when a country witnesses a civil war out of the democratic transition, it is characterized as an incomplete democracy. This was a case in Syria's conflict which was devolved from peaceful protests against the Assad's government in 2011, tracing its roots from Arab Spring, the protest suddenly drawn attention of numerous countries. It was partly a civil war of government against people; a kind religious war pitting Assad's minority Alawite sect, which was aligned with Shiite fighters from Iran and Hezbollah in Lebanon, against Sunni rebel groups; and increasingly a proxy war featuring Russia and Iran against the United States and its allies. Resultantly, it has so far killed 220,000 people, displaced half of the country's population, and facilitated the rise of ISIS.⁶ Here Mansfield and Snyder backed up their claim by the fact that such a result can happen when the country owns weak political institutions [4]. Furthermore, the political institutions are the basis of the good governing mechanism and they are the bodies that strengthen or weaken the state out in the international system. We know that the

power in the autocratic system is centralized around the ruler, where neither the citizens nor the political institutions have power to play any critical role in dealing with domestic or outside crisis. We know too that the process of democratization usually leads to a conflict between two parties, which are the majority and the opposition. In order to prevent conflict climaxing, the state build strong political institutions that would be able to face the situation and decreases the negative outcomes. Therefore, Mansfield and Snyder⁷ assert that the effects of democratization are strong when the country has less institutional strength and nationalization [3]. They clearly emphasize the necessity of the regime to handle any possible turmoil and to be able to establish strong rule to regulate the political competition and manage the rivalry of elite factions and minimize the tensions that might happen between the defied groups. Hence, fragmented and weak political institution would not perform such a role. In addition to the outcomes mentioned above, they deduced that nationalism is one of the incentives towards the onset of wars and goes further into being externalized. They claimed that nationalism goes hand in hand with the early phases of the democratization war, which means during the movement from autocracy to partial democratization. Therefore, if the country has weak political institutions, nationalism rises dramatically and then the war ignites.

They, indeed, defined five causes to this incomplete democratization. The failure of the democracy can occur due to the incompatibility of the interests domestically within the groups in a given country. They assert that the diversity of interests stagnates the coalition, and makes it impossible to reach. Also, their interests are most of the time inflexible and unadaptable to the changing political and economic condition. There is also the issue of the internal recruitment of allies, where each group seeks to recruit allies to its cause [5]. This condition intensifies more their relations and contributes in climaxing the conflict. Furthermore, as much as the central authority is weak, as long as the conflict emerges and the probability of war becomes higher.⁸

Back to Snyder and Mansfield, there is a great ambiguity in their characterization of the countries. They said that they started by classifying the countries regime between democracy, anocracy or autocracy [4]. As mentioned above, they employed three criteria to achieve this classification. However, these criteria remain general to distinguish autocracy and anocracy. There is a great uncertainty into applying those democratic criteria on autocratic and anocratic states. There might be obvious to distinguish a democracy from autocracy based on these criteria. There is a great similarity between autocracy and the mixed regime, where both of them would be negative in the provided index. Though this might not have changed the findings, yet it would have clarified the methodology more. There would have been supportive if we, the readers, were able to figure out the characteristics that Mansfield and Snyder depended on to define the poor political institutions [4]. They claim that the transition from an autocratic rule into a democratic one would result into hostilities due to the weakness of the political institutions. We know that the strong state equals strong political institutions. Weak political institutions equal failed and collapsed state like Syria whose infrastructure is totally devastated by many actors ISIS, Al Nusra, US led coalition forces with totally

⁵ “Democratic Transitions, Institutional Strength, and War.”

⁶ Gilsinan, Kathy. “The Confused Person's Guide to the Syrian Civil War.” The Atlantic.

⁷ Mansfield, Jack S. “Turbulent transitions: why emerging democracies go to war.” Leashing the Dogs of War: Conflict Management in a Divided World. US Institute of Peace Press, 2007.

⁸ Crocker, Leashing the Dogs of War.

declining status of human life ratio and we would see collapse and failed states as a one of the most important causes for the incomplete democratic transition in this analysis. The state like Syria at this point of time would not be able to think about the democratic regime by force at any cost because they are seriously harmed. Their recovery would be the step they would initiate by, and then they would pave the way towards the suitable political outcomes of this crisis based on the regime interests of Assad.

The Domestic - International Nexus - From Intrastate to Interstate Conflict in Syria

Since the last ten years of the 20th century that the civil wars earned greater attention than ever before. Scholars like Gleditsch and Patrick James deeply studied the nexus between the domestic and the international conflict. In her study⁹, Kristian Skrede Gleditsch assures that the states that are experiencing the civil war are more likely to become involved in militarized disputes [6]. She further argues that the international disputes related to civil wars are directly tied to the internal endogenous issues at the country level. Therefore, the nexus can be visualized at the level of the actions performed by the country's leaders. Unrest in Syria began when residents in the small Syrian town of Dara'a, took to the streets to protest the torture of young boys, who put up anti-government graffiti on their school building. President Assad responded with heavy-handed force, which further caused the demonstrations to quickly spread across the country. Up to this point in March 2011, President Bashar al-Assad had been ruling over the Syrian people with an iron fist. After the initial protest in March 2011, President Assad started to crackdown on the demonstrations across the country with full might. In April 2011, he began to send tanks into cities and having regime forces open fire on civilians. As Assad's military forces continued to crack down on demonstrations through the summer of 2011, thousands of regime soldiers began to break away from the government to launch attacks against them [7]. As the Syrian crisis is in its fourth year, more than 6.9 million people have been displaced according to UNHCR. Over half of these refugees are children. As the refugee numbers hit over 5 million, the Syrian refugee crisis is going to be the biggest crisis of our era¹⁰. As the opposition in the international community grew stronger, the United Nations warned Syria in its critical situation which was on the verge of a civil war and in an immediate response to stop the human catastrophe, United Nations called for immediate action. The international community, in that case, has the right to intervene for humanitarian purposes what is called "R2P" [8].

It is with the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) concept that the civil wars gradually emerged from being domestic to being international. Tracing back the history, it was initiated in 1990¹¹ with the Balkan and the Rwandan crises. The international community started thinking about the possibility to intervene in other states' affairs during heavy crises for peace making and stability purposes. They labelled this action as the "humanitarian intervention". At that time, the major powers constantly debated the humanitarian interventions for humanitarian purposes including the protection of human rights and

the insurance of good living conditions for common people [9]. They saw humiliation and the deprivation from basic human rights and freedoms as unlawful and internationally unacceptable. In 2001 the "humanitarian intervention" concept was labelled officially as the "Responsibility to Protect" term. The International commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty was established under Kofi Annan's mandate. By then, the states were given the right to intervene in other states' affairs for humanitarian purposes. Therefore, Syrian crisis could be provided as a concrete example for the externalization of wars. It can be seen as a country where the conflict was first started as an intrastate conflict and moved out to be an international issue that has a global concern. When powers like Russia, the USA and Turkey first intervened, it was for the purpose of "civilians' protection." It was internationally shared that the Syrian government is unable to peacefully end up the civil war, which necessitate the intervention of the international community [10].

The government and the leadership in that context are critical. Back to Mansfield and Snyder's theory on the nexus between the political institutions and the civil war, we would argue that one of the factors that keep the Syrian conflict active is the Syrian government itself [4,11]. The Syrian government has never suggested yet any tangible and effective plan for finalizing the issue. It is leaving the decision making in the hands of the major powers. If the government was a great one with strong political institutions, the Syrian conflict would have been given another picture today. We would have even pre-assumed the possibility of having a short- period conflict, where the international intervention would have been more fruitful that it is today.

In measuring the good governance, Hegre and Nygard provided a set of criteria¹². They claimed that the good governance that can prevent the onset of conflicts is the one that has an effective and a highly valuable bureaucracy, the governance under the rule of law, the control of corruption, formal political institution, the non-exclusion of ethnic groups and the favorable participation of the military. What if the Syrian governance was such a good one? Gleditsch mentioned two important reasons for why the externalization of the war happens. The first reason is when the government engages in wars on cross-borders [12,13]. In such a case, the neighboring countries usually respond militarily and they become part of the civil war. Then, the civil war starts embodying an international character. The other reason is when the rebels seek out foreign alliances and get external support. This step usually evolves gradually to reach the international inclusion in the civil war where different national and international players totally reshape, change and manipulate the rules of the game [14-16]. Currently, there are believed to be as many as 1,000-armed opposition groups in Syria, commanding an estimated 100,000 fighters. Many of the groups are small and operate on a local level, but a number have emerged as powerful forces with affiliates across the country or formed alliances with other groups that share a similar agenda.¹³

⁹ http://privatewww.essex.ac.uk/~ksg/papers/GSS_CWMID.pdf

¹⁰ I AM SYRIA, <http://www.iamsyria.org/>

¹¹ "Background Information on the Responsibility to Protect — Outreach Programme on the Rwanda Genocide and the United Nations".

¹² Håvard Hegre and Håvard Mokleiv Nygård, "Governance and Conflict Relapse," Journal of Conflict Resolution (September 1, 2015).

¹³ Guide to the Syrian Rebels, BBC, 13th December 2013.

Conclusion

Studying the civil war effect on the international system has led the scholars into rethinking about the different historical wars and re-analyzing to get new upcoming lessons. Back during the 19 and the 20th centuries, there have been a great number of conflicts and disputes that occurred internally, yet they burst out internationally. Different studies have been conducted on the nexus between intrastate and interstate wars; each one backs it through many and various empirical studies. The roles of the incomplete democracy with weak and fragile institutions provide a playground for a number of fractions to channelize their interests. This is what we have observed in Syrian crisis that there are actually the conditions and the circumstances of the transition that ignites the conflict and make the civil war inevitable. Therefore, democratization in that context plays the boosting role as an increaser for human losses because the process towards democracy is not easy at all. It demands treasury and blood under all circumstances. Therefore, it is not exaggeration to say that, Democracy doesn't mean efficiency; it means it further creates more vacuum and gap for exploiter to explore the unexplored areas of interests and gain through various violent means. Now the question is still unanswered for Syrian crisis that Where will all this misery lead? What does the future of Syria hold? Who can play what role to get Syria out of this unending turmoil? The answer is still vague and unclear because of its huge dimension and implications for the global community. Syria is a complex mosaic of different ethnic, religious, and ideological groups, a tinderbox that was destined to explode if the fragile peace that the Assad regime enforced was disturbed. Now that the country has imploded, there is no easy way out. The conflict could easily last another decade, which is very frustrating for not only the Middle Eastern countries but the world at large. One wonders, there are few turning points if and only if the international community or a neighboring power (such as Turkey) decides its awfulness exceeds the risks of intervention. History has witnessed great examples such as Lebanon's civil war lasted 15 years (1975-1990), and ended only when Syria intervened. Iraq's civil war (2006-08) would have been far worse if there were no American troops in the country so in Syrian case,

there is a dire need for rapid action at this critical juncture in the history of Syria to end the chapter of destructions, human losses and send the refugees back home which is the only remaining lifeline for the peace and prosperity for Syrian citizens.¹⁴

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¹⁴ Seth Kaplan, "Seven scenarios for the future of Syria" John Hopkins University.