

RESEARCH NEWSLETTER

BI-WEEKLY RESEARCH NEWSLETTER ISSUE #3

04 December 2015

EDITOR'S NOTE

Unfortunately, the Syrian Crisis is turning into an international problem. Although, all countries are agreed to eliminate IS and its alliances like Al-Nusra from Syria and Iraq, there is no consensus on action plan. In addition this, the relations between Russia and Turkey damaged seriously. The last thing needed is the tension between NATO members and Russia. World does not need another cold war period.

Our focus should be establishing peace in Syria and clean the terrorists from Middle East. The only way to do is that to move together as a single voice against the terrorist groups. This can start by having a single definition for terrorist groups. We all need to remember that there is no moderate terrorism..

Over 3500 migrants died at Mediterranean Sea in 2015. It is now time to end this tragedy. If countries look the problem only from the humanitarian emergency angle, solution can be found easily. Transparency and trust based relations between the main international players in Syria are the key for success.

“A lack of transparency results in distrust and a deep sense of insecurity “

Dalai Lama



The topics included in this edition

- Moderate Terrorism
- Billions Dollar Smuggling Road to Europe
- The Migration Route from Afghanistan to Europe; A Story of an Afghan Migrant.



Alhrar Al Sham: Sunni—Salafi Jihadist terrorist Group , fighting against Assad Regime

There is No Moderate Terrorism

March 2011, conflict started in Syria. Four years later, conflict turned into an international chaos. Syria became an international military podium. All of suddenly, Syria related news became hot topic. The news about IS terrorism group became a regular part of international media. Though, until that date, Afghanistan was taking most of the attention.

Photos showing the violence of IS are almost daily in media and all of suddenly, AQ and Taliban were forgotten. As soon as IS became very famous, then suddenly several other terrorist groups appeared in Middle East as well. Now, lands of Syria turned into paradise for number terrorist groups including IS, Al Nusra Front, Ahrar Sham, Sham Legion and etc. There are estimated at least 100,000 well armed and well trained terrorists based in Syria and part of Iraq. Apart from armed terrorist groups, there is Free Syrian Army which fight against Assad regime as well. Then, there is Kurdish YPG Army. Finally, Assad forces exists as well. So, there are four main groups fighting in Syria now;

- 1- Terrorist groups
- 2- Free Syrian Army
- 3- YPG Forces
- 4- Assad Regime Forces

Interestingly, all terrorist groups and vast majority of Free Syrian Army members are Sunni but Assad forces are Shia. YPG Forces are mixed.

When we look the picture from that perspective, there is a Sunni-Shia war in Syria. While an ethnic religion war is going on, the international actors are supporting some of these groups according to their interest in the region. The main disagreement between the international players is the definition of the group 1 (terrorists) in the region. They only agree about IS and Al Nusra Front that these two are terrorist. It is estimated that Al-Nusra and IS have around 60,000 fighters. But there is no agreement about definition of terrorist about the rest of the illegally armed fighters within group 1 , which is around 40,000 . According to the some of the countries, these people are moderate terrorist. So, now, we have a new definition of terrorism so called “ moderate terrorist groups” as well.

The disagreement about definition of terrorist is the main problem of the international players in Syria. Somehow, this disagreements is benefitted by the terrorist groups and causing a serious damage on relations of countries with each other. As a result, on 24th of November 2015, Turkey down a Russian warplane. Since that day, the focus is now how to repair the relations between these countries. It is now forgotten that IS killed almost 500 innocent people in different parts of the world between October and November 2015. If we look at the crisis from that perspective, the problem between Turkey and Russia is on the advantage of IS and other terrorist groups in the region. Was it really necessary to down a Russian warplane? No, it wasn't, and we strongly believe that Turkish Authorities are also regretting. But, we know that countries do not apologize from each other openly. There are always other ways to express it in a different way. Turkish and Russian people are more integrated compare to the Turks living in Europe for many years. There are at least 50,000 Russians married with Turks in Turkey. The trade and social ties between these two countries are much stronger then it is estimated. Therefore, it is essential that both Turkey and Russia gets calmer and find a political solution. Now, it is time to cooperate but not to fight.

We all have to remember that the main enemy is terrorist groups in Syria but nothing else. First and most importantly, UN should call member states to discuss about the definition of terrorism and terrorist groups. Without having such an agreement, it will not be possible to bring peace to Syria. If this situation continues, then the relations between countries will be more and more damaged and unfortunately, it will take ages to recover again. I believe no one wants to go back to the old cold war days. Terrorism is the most important threat for the peace and safety in the world. If UN member countries do not talk a single voice against terrorism, then we will all lose. Everyone should not forget that there is no moderate terrorism but there is terrorism.

Billions Dollar Smuggling Road to Europe

Between April 2011 and October 2015, total of around 500,000 Syrians reached to EU Countries through Turkey and Greece. This figure reaches to 700 000 if we include non EU countries (Balkan countries, Norway and Switzerland) as well.

Each Syrian refugee is estimated to spend around 5000 during this journey. Out of this figure, some US\$ 1500 is paid for the smugglers based in Turkey, another US\$ 1500 for the ones in Greece and the rest is spent for food, travel tickets and accommodation.

For the non-Syrian irregular migrants, this cost is between US\$ 5000 – 10,000. Especially, Afghan and Pakistani migrants needs to pay at least US\$ 5000 to reach Turkey. Then, they pay some US\$ 3000 more to reach EU countries like Austria and Germany.

It is estimated that migrants have spent around US\$ 3.5 billion to reach European countries since beginning 2011. Out of this amount, at least half of it went to pockets of smugglers based in Greece and Turkey. Thus, Syrian Crisis is somehow feeding the organized crime in the countries located on the migration route.

The migration road to reach Europe is not easy and cheap. Only the ones who can afford this journey can reach to Europe. Others have to stay wherever they are or they somehow need to find the money. There are still at least around 4.5 million Syrian Refugees currently living in Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan and Iraq and want to reach Europe as well. The only way, they reach to Europe is through Turkey and Greece, unless they get residence permit through different official application channels. However, EU countries announced that they will not get more migrants. That means, the journey from Turkey to EU countries will be more difficult and thus more expensive. Because, if a migrant can reach to the EU countries, then it is very likely that will stay there. This is well-known by the migrants. Therefore, they will be ready to pay more to smugglers both in Turkey and Greece to reach borders of EU.

The solution is not putting blocs on the migration route. The real solution is to find a way to avoid the further migration to Europe. This can only be done;

Bringing peace back to Syria,

Increasing the camp and non-camp facilities in Turkey and other hosting countries.

EU Countries promised to provide Euro 3.5 billion funding for Turkey to host the Syrian Refugees in Turkey but do not let them to reach EU borders. First of all, this amount is not enough to provide a better living conditions for all the Syrian Refugees living in Turkey.

In addition to this, due to the increasing tension in Syria and Iraq, more refugees are reaching to Turkey every day. Therefore, EU needs to provide not only cash money but should provide better conditions in camps and hosting communities.

It is very clear that Syria crises will last longer than expected. Even a political solution is found in Syria about the status of Assad, vast majority of the Syrians can not go back their countries, as there is no infrastructure left. It will take years to re-build Syria. Therefore, container cities should be established in Turkey and other neighboring countries for Syrian refugees. Then, proper education, health and other social facilities should be provided in these locations. Furthermore, Syrian man-power should be integrated into the systems in these countries.

Centuries ago, there were no borders. We all used to live together and share. In addition to this, there is a strong historical relation between Syria , Turkey , Iraq , Jordan and Lebanon. So, it is time to provide better conditions together for the people of Syria. EU, US, Russia, Norway, UK, Germany, France and other developed countries should give more financial help for the Syrian Crises.

Otherwise, Syria crises will continue to feed the organized crime. This will create more problem for EU and countries in the region, including drug trafficking, terrorism and extremism. Either everyone spends more now to avoid further negative developments or otherwise cost will be much higher.

The Migration Route From Afghanistan to Europe

After thirteen years of international community presence and spending of billion dollars in Afghanistan, the situation got worst and Afghans lost their hopes for a prosperous and better future. Therefore, thousands of people have already left the country and reached in Europe. After Syria, Afghanistan nationals are the second large group who sought asylum in European countries. According to Eurostat newsletter (163/2015 – 18 September 2015), in second quarter of 2015, 27,000 Afghans sought asylum in European countries.

People usually face a lot of problems during the exhausting trip from Afghanistan to Europe. Most of them are not aware of the hardship and problems of this journey, they only experience as they live. However, they can't return back to Afghanistan when they reach Istanbul or Greece.

I am one of the Afghans who experienced this migration route from Afghanistan to Europe. I am going to explain you all aspects of this dangerous journey and how the human smuggling has flourished and human smugglers can do their business without any fear from law enforcement.

The real losers of this journey are the migrants, both those who lost their lives and left their home land behind.

Smugglers:

Smugglers are the main winners who get benefits from the misery of these poor people. Smugglers are based in Afghanistan, Iran, Turkey and even in Greece. There is a strong network between them, for instance a smuggler in Afghanistan is in contact with the one in Iran and Turkey. Most of Afghans get in touch with smugglers whether in Afghanistan or in Iran.

After the financial agreement, smugglers take the Afghan migrants to Nimroz province of Afghanistan. From there they are transferred to Baluchistan of Pakistan and then to Zahidan province of Iran. Then they continue their journey to Turkey border.

Smugglers hand over the migrants to the other smugglers as soon as crossing the border. Each time, migrants make a financial agreement with smugglers for each leg of the journey separately. But sometimes, migrants can make a deal for entire journey from Afghanistan to Greece. There is no fixed price for smuggling these people from Afghanistan to Iran or to Turkey. It changes regularly and depends on negotiation capacity of the migrant. Such as, some paid around US\$ 1000 from Iran to Turkey and another US\$ 1000 from Turkey to Greece.

Smugglers have their own hostels in Iran and Turkey. Smugglers provide accommodation and food but not for free. This service also had to be paid by the migrant.

Some people travels from Afghanistan to Istanbul (Turkey) by air. Then, they find a smuggler to organize the pass to Greece.

There are agents in Afghanistan and they can organize visa for Turkey. It costs US\$ 4000 per visa. Air ticket cost from Kabul to Istanbul is US\$ 1000. Afghans migrants (who came directly to Istanbul by air) mostly find Afghan smugglers in Istanbul. There is a famous place in Istanbul by the name of “ Zeytinburnu” , where the smugglers’ hostels/houses are located. Smugglers and migrants meet at around this place and then they negotiate about travelling from Istanbul to Greek Islands.

If the deal take place in Istanbul, the person needs to put his money as guarantee in Istanbul but some smugglers have good connection in Iran and Afghanistan, so one can put his money there in money exchanger/ Hawaladar shop. for my case, my money was sent to Istanbul by Hawala from Afghanistan then I put it as guarantee in money exchange shop (actually it was not a money exchange shop, it was a telephone communication shop) which was introduced by smuggler in Istanbul, the money exchange owner gave me a secret Number (19010) and his phone number, he asked me to call him when I reach Greece Island and also give the secret number to smuggler in order to be able to get his money. The money exchange shop in Istanbul got 70 Euro as commission for keeping the money, the smuggler paid the commission.

Hawala dealers based in Afghanistan, Iran and Turkey organize the money transfer for smugglers.

Problems and difficulties of the journey:

Difficulties and danger starts from the moment people start moving from their cities, obviously it is illegal migration, so there is a lot of danger. Such as, border police of Iran or Turkey might shoot at you, one might fall down from mountain when walk the distance between Iran and Turkey or fall out of the car going with high speed due to fear of being caught by police, or may die while crossing the sea between Turkey and Greece.

Smugglers do care only how to earn more money by any means and this is why they put two or three times more passengers on the boat then they should. For instance on a boat of 9 square meters, they ride up to even 90 persons which means hundred percent suicide. Sometimes the migrants reject to ride the boat when they see such situation. If so, the smugglers who are armed with pistols or cold weapons force the person to ride. The person who drive the boat, is one of the migrants who most of the time doesn’t have any experience and didn’t receive any training how to drive the boat, smugglers only show him how to start the boat and how to use the controller.

Our boat was 6 square meters and we were 17 people on board. We paid more money so that smuggler put less people. The prices start from 400 USD and goes up to 1800 USD. I and one of my friend paid 1300 USD each but some of the guys in our boat paid 1800 USD.

The cost of the journey in the crowded boats is around US\$500 per person. There are different size of boats, such as 7.5 square meters or 9 square meters but all size of boats are overloaded, at least three times more than the normal capacity.

Mytilini city of Lesbos Island

There are several Greece Islands that migrants reach from Turkey. We were rescued and disembarked in Lesbos Island. Mytilini city is the center of the Island. Migrants have to register here and receive a temporary permission letter to leave Greece.

It took three days to get this letter. Registration office is run by Government of Greece. UNHCR's role is very insignificant and there are few UNHCR tents. Migrants had to wait for hours to get the registration documents. The registration office for Syrian migrants is different the one for migrants from Iraq, Afghanistan, Iran, Pakistan and other countries.

However, the entire registration system was very disorganized and as a result migrants rioted several times and police intervened. The logistics around the registration office was very poor, at there was no toilet, no water and no food. I had to wait in the line for 2 days. It was first time in my life to experience such a horrible situation. Time to time there was fights between the migrants as well as everyone was tense, tired and hungry.

I had everything in Afghanistan and I was forced to leave my country but I never knew that I will face such situations in an European country, I never thought that a situation come that I will not be able to use toilet or wash my hands and face for two days.

Those who are with family definitely will face more problems and difficulties, children and women had to sleep in open environment and face a lot of other problems.

The Greece authorities in this camp were very weak in terms of management and organization of the facilities. I don't know whether they wanted to annoy people or really didn't know how to deal with these disobedient people.

From Mytilini to Authon

After receiving the registration letter, people had to take ticket to go to Authon, some people booked from Mytilini to Authon and from Authon to Macedonian border in Mytilini city because they were concerned that European countries might change their migration policies. They didn't want to lose the time. Ticket cost 60 Euro inside the camp but outside it costs 45 Euro, if one booked outside the camp, there was possibility of wait for next day. We traveled with Blue Star 1 ship from Mytilini to Authon, There were two to three thousands migrants on board.

Authon to Macedonian border

On the day we arrived in Authon, we went to meet the the Afghan Smuggler who lives in Authon. He asked for 1200 Euro from each of us to organize our travel from Greece to Austria. But we didn't reach to agreement and told him that we can go by ourselves. Some of the poor families who don't have enough education and have not traveled abroad and don't know English language, had to pay such amount to these smugglers. Smuggler only book tickets of auto-bus for them in Authon, it costs 30 Euro, from Macedonian border to Croatia and then to Slovenia and to Austria is free, the government of each country send the migrants to the border of neighboring country. When migrants reach in Austria, they can go to different directions. So, in short, smugglers in Authon charge Euro 1200 for almost nothing.

On the way to Austria, there are camps in each country and migrants are kept for one or two days to be registered. There are serious logistics problems in all camps. Macedonian and Croatian police were very organized and they could control the crowd very well. Austrian police and army in the border camp were very polite towards the migrants.

Time to time, migrants are making rush unnecessarily and causing serious problems. Such as, two women and their children were almost dying under the feet of hundreds people who were forcing and pushing to go out of the camp and find a seat in the buses.

On the way from Greece to Austria, food and drinks were given to people for free. I talked to several volunteers who were assisting the people, all these services were provided by people of these countries not government or international NGOs. Young girls and boys of the countries on the route were present at the border and at the camps gates.

Thanks

I would like to especially appreciate the coffee place in Authon where we had breakfast. The owner was very nice, helpful and understanding. We also met several other nice persons who were helping to migrants between Greece and Austria. They distributed food, tea, blankets, clothes and shoes, their sincere assistant and support is appreciated.



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