

THE DEVELOPING GLOBAL CRISIS AND THE CURRENT WAVE OF MIGRANT/REFUGEES HEADING FOR EUROPE

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Abstract

A “Developing Global Crisis” is unfolding today that reflects synergistic interactions among demographic pressures, authoritarian politics, militant religion, corruptions of governance and other factors worldwide. All of these four and several other relevant factors are complex, and many interact synergistically (e.g. non-linear interactions) so they will be illustrated by the case of Syria here.

Keywords: global crisis, migrant, Syria, demographic pressure.

Introduction

A “Developing Global Crisis” is unfolding today that reflects synergistic interactions among demographic pressures, authoritarian politics, militant religion, corruptions of governance and other factors worldwide. All of these four and several other relevant factors are complex, and many interact synergistically (e.g. non-linear interactions) so they will be illustrated by the case of Syria here. Much commentary on that crisis focuses on the personalities of Bashar al-Assad and Vladimir Putin of Russia. Other observers focus on emergent forces of evil like the death cult ISIS (ISIL, Daesh or Islamic State – the name does not matter here) – or their leaders.

These are all relevant to many questions, but they can obscure ultimate causes of war like the demographic pressures that generate so many global problems today, and pervasive corruptions of governance that prevent solution of them. For example, before the current crisis, the population growth rate in Syria was about 2.4% per year which yields a doubling time of less than 30 years (CIA World FactBook, 2010). That puts enormous pressure on natural resources like farmland and water. Climate change is a derivative factor caused by population growth and industrial development. Syria endured its worst drought in 150 years (recorded history of rainfall there) for four years before the conflict began. The World Bank reports that at least 1.5 million people (8% of Syria’s population) left unproductive rural areas for cities that were already overburdened with millions of unemployed youth (Liverani, 2015). Sources on

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the ground have claimed even more to me. These internal migrants poured into cities bereft of opportunity for already large teenaged populations. Another effect of high birth rates is pyramidal age distributions with many youth compared to elders.

Assad reserved the best opportunities for his Alawite prime constituency and for minority allies like Christians. Peaceful protests began in cities over lack of opportunity for the rest, and other corruptions. Security institutions over-reacted and repression morphed into civil war(s). Even if Bashar al-Assad had been an angel of God (or a potted plant) he would have been faced with a wicked problem.

Caught between barrel bombs, chemical attacks and forced conscription on one side, and ISIS or Al Qaeda on the other side, millions of people fled into Turkey, Lebanon and Jordan, putting great pressure on those countries also well over 4 million, with another 8 million internally displaced (UNHCR, August 29, 2015). In time, the richer, better educated and more entrepreneurial decided that a life in refugee camps was not acceptable for their children. So a trickle of migrants into Europe became a river. When Angela Merkel announced that Germany would welcome hundreds of thousands of them, the river became a flood (Wagstyl, 2015). This will not end soon, and this is not just a German or even a European issue. Note how long North America has struggled with mass immigration from the south, and how paralyzed US politics has become on these issues.

Following sections will provide more detail on some of these factors. But the bottom line deserves emphasis now. "Solutions" to crises like this that do not at least acknowledge root causes like:

- a) Population pressure;
- b) Climate change;
- c) Authoritarian law;
- d) Militant religion;
- e) Corruption of governance;
- f) Income inequalities within and between nations, and
- g) The special power of demagogues in conditions like this to mobilize the desperate by focusing their anger on easily identifiable others, are doomed to fail.

This will be a generational problem with very large consequences for the whole world. Add weapons of mass destruction, and taboos on discussing many of these factors, and you have what some have come to call a "wicked" problem¹.

Population Growth, Population Pressure and Climate Change

¹ For a definition of "wicked problems" see https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wicked_problem.

Population growth and population pressure are not the same thing, but both increase competition for resources. If resources become scarce, some people are always tempted to fight over access to them. If critical resources become very scarce, many people will support wars of their group against others. If starvation is imminent, even sophisticated, "civilized" people may fight over bread, or steal from wealthier neighbours. Climate change is a derivative factor, a consequence of centuries of population growth on earth and reliance on fossil fuels to power our societies. It has become quite clear that increased levels of carbon dioxide in the air and other by-products of burning oil, coal, gas and forests are causing significant increases in global temperature that have other consequences for marginal populations and even for the living system that sustains us all.

How many people can thrive on any particular area of land is very dependent on the technology available to those people and the quality of that land. Population growth is simple arithmetic, absolute numbers of people, birth rates, death rates, fertility rates, doubling times, net migration and similar numbers (Andregg, 2014). A high-tech society on fertile land can support many more people than could be fed on the same land with 19th century agriculture. So **population pressure** reflects economic, technical and cultural factors among many others. No matter how fertile, all land has limits and none can support endless growth. That is elementary ecology. But societies often resist this basic law of nature. If a society keeps growing once those limits are reached, there is increasing pressure for some people of the society to expand into neighbouring lands, or just to move there. Vast though it is, our earth is finite. And every culture on earth has fears about being overwhelmed by such migrants, because this has happened many times in human history.

Climate change matters today because we already have over 60 million permanent refugees on this earth, most of whom have fled violent conflicts in their nations of origin (Mocanu, October 17, 2015). Hundreds of millions more are on the move, migrants of one kind or another. Reports like the annual report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (2014) indicate that as the earth warms droughts will become more common in many places, flooding in others, storms will become more energetic on average, and oceans will acidify as CO₂ is absorbed, and rise as glaciers and polar ice melts. This has vast implications for international security. Syria is one example.

Authoritarian Law and Militant Religion

Authoritarian Law is not the same as Militant Religion, but they both increase the probability of organized armed conflict in several ways. As importantly, they react synergistically such that both in combination are more

dangerous than either alone. I dealt with this in more detail in a book on the causes of war in 2001 (Andregg, 2001, chapter 13, pp. 74-83), but the essence is that authoritarian law provides the practical means for political repression or conquest, with or without justification, while militant religion provides “moral” rationales for the use of state violence against others. Consider ISIS for a current and extreme example. But there have been many other moral crusades against designated others in history based on some theory of religion (like, the Islamists often point out, the medieval “Crusades” to “free” Jerusalem during the 11th – 13th centuries CE).

In the Syrian case, the government of Bashar al-Assad always was authoritarian (his father Hafez infamously killed an estimated 20,000 people in Hama in February 1982 for resisting his rule). That authoritarian law legitimized violence, and funded well-armed police and soldiers who repressed the early protests in 2011. After years of abuse, ISIS arose on the principle of militant religion, claiming that the regime was an agent of Shaytan (Satan) and that “good Muslims” had a responsibility to attack that evil regime. And if you are Muslim but don’t agree, well you are a “bad” Muslim, subject to execution. There is no middle ground with ISIS; you are with them or against them, but cannot be neutral. The current ISIS leader, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, takes this goal and style to its limit by claiming a mission from “god” to rule everyone on earth under a “new Caliphate”.

Either factor is very dangerous. Put the two together and you can get intense reactions, like sodium with water, because both authoritarian law and militant religion intend to be the *only* legitimate user of violent methods. They cannot tolerate each other, and innocents in their territories are always at risk. The most dangerous of all is when religious moral zealotry and authoritarian political power fuse. Those dictators think they are actually God’s designated rulers of the earth. Such people know no shame in their abuse of others to “accomplish god’s will”. This provides extremely fertile ground for “demagogues”, a particularly dangerous type of political personality. We will cover that briefly after the section on corruptions of governance.

Corruptions of Governance and Income Inequalities

Corruption of governance has been with us since the beginning of time, but it is among the least studied basic causes of war. The main reason for this is that most funding for social science comes from governments, which are generally not pleased by people studying corruption of governance. In the context of this paper, this factor is important because it prevents many governments from solving obvious and sometimes even lethal problems for their peoples.

Income inequality is also global and eternal, and is more obviously related to the civil wars that predominate today. The case of Syria is actually a

small example of a very global problem. In general, the probability of conflict increases with income inequality, both within and between nations. These topics are too complex for a simple review, so I will illustrate them very briefly with how both factors affect external actors, specifically the US response to the Syrian crisis.

As the civil wars unfolded and metastasized in Syria, the USA wondered what to do. But its frame of reference for understanding the conflict had to be military. And because of our own domestic political dynamics, it had to focus on personalities like Bashar al-Assad and Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi rather than impersonal forces like population growth, climate change or systemic corruptions of governance. So rather than deal with any of those expensive and very difficult problems, the practical question has been whether to bomb targets, and if so which ones?

In fact, denial of the reality of climate change (encouraged by large investments of money and influence by fossil fuel companies) was so great when things fell apart in Syria that a very large majority of one of our two main political parties were on record as doubting that this was even a problem, despite a Pentagon report as early as 2003 that climate change would have dramatic national and international security consequences (Schwartz & Randall, October, 2003). Such Congressman preferred to think of Syria as a military problem caused by one or more evil leaders in foreign countries. The fact that military responses, especially bombs, have zero positive effect on climate change and no therapeutic value when applied to mass migrations and corrupt governments does not even cross their minds. They prefer simple good-and-evil stories. Meanwhile, failures of US policy pile up along with failed states in the Middle East, while forces of tribal rebellion against corrupt governments there grow inexorably. Tens of millions of very poorly educated teen aged males are now maturing into desperate circumstances where demagogues are eager to focus their anger.

Demagogues, Psychopaths and WMDs

As with the preceding sections, demagogues are not identical to psychopaths, but they are both common in high politics and dangerous to polite society because they are fundamentally parasitic on societies. Both are especially adept at manipulating gullible people, and ruthless in their methods. They do not produce anything of value themselves, but often focus the anger of desperate people on some easily identifiable “other” usually a minority ethnic or religious group. Where governments are notoriously corrupt, they may be the best target. When the psychopath or demagogue

seizes power of a major nation, the target becomes neighbour nations or some symbolic “fifth column” of dual loyalists, like the Jews of Adolf Hitler’s Germany.

The best reference I know on psychological evil in high politics is very difficult to read, but I will cite it anyway because of its unusual authorship. It was created by social scientists and psychiatrists in Poland who survived first the Nazi occupation, and then “liberation” and further subjugation by Soviet forces at the end of World War II. So they were VERY highly motivated to understand how evil forces could capture entire nations. The title is *Political Ponerology* and the nominal author is Andrew M. Lobaczewski, who died in 2007 (Lobaczewski, 2008)².

WMD’s (Weapons of Mass Destruction) are, of course, weapons, not humans. But they matter intensely in this context, because every psychopath on earth would love to have some. One of the defining characteristics of truly evil people, however you label them, is an inordinate desire for ever more power (Peck, Simon & Schuster, 1983). There is no natural limit to that appetite. As Kevin Dutton (2012) notes, psychopaths are often very successful in both high politics and industry due to their exceptional focus, high intelligence, extreme ability to manipulate “normal” people and general indifference to moral norms especially prohibitions on hurting people. Pure, clinical psychopaths appear to be incapable of empathy, lack compassion and possibly conscience of any kind.

In the case of Syria, there can be little doubt that Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi is a demagogue and possibly a psychopathic leader of a death cult, empowered by the general chaos in failed state Iraq and the similar distress in Syria which has become their main power base. Bashar al-Assad responds, and who actually killed the first innocents becomes an academic question more than a practical one. If either leader had nuclear or other weapons of mass destruction they would use them against their enemies. That brings attention from those who actually do have nuclear and other WMDs.

Conclusions

² Is based on a Polish original titled *Ponerologia Polityczna* published in 1984, translated into English in 1985 by Alexandra Cheiuk-Celt and corrected by the original author in 1998. “Pathocracy” is a term they use to describe nation-states coopted by and often ultimately destroyed by psychopathic leaders. Lobaczewski always maintained that the book was written with many collaborators, mainly social scientists and psychiatrists in Poland who were slowly ground up by the Soviet system as they tried to express their work.

In my opinion, the current wave of migrant/refugees heading for Europe is not temporary, and will not end even in the theoretical event if conditions in Syria improved dramatically overnight. It would be great to achieve a new peace there, as anywhere, but the point is that this is a global phenomenon caused fundamentally by high birth rates among peoples living in lands that are already mostly desert. In fact, hundreds of millions of young men are now maturing in desperate circumstances with very limited job opportunities. They are being exploited by demagogues who promise fantastic rewards to fighters, and even sometimes significant salaries, payable if they live to collect. These conditions prevail not just in Syria, but in large areas of North Africa and the Middle East today, among other places. All of these areas are generating migrants who naturally move along "opportunity gradients" towards prospects of a better future.

Consider for a moment that North America has also seen two generations of significant legal and illegal migration from Mexico and increasingly Central America. They have nothing to do with Syria, and many come from lands which have not yet turned into unproductive desert as lands often do that endure overpopulation for long periods of time. But all seek opportunity, and many flee violence, corruption or oppression in their nations of origin.

So I call the world's attention to these more difficult factors: population pressure, authoritarian law, militant religion, and corruptions of governance, demagogic or psychopathic leaders and the variety of other, derivative factors like climate change and income inequality.

In medicine if you seek cures for major problems it is critical to distinguish between "symptoms" and "causes". Yes, symptoms call for relief. But if one treats only them and neglect cause, like a fever caused by infection, you can cool a patient down and reduce pain but still watch them die. The mass migration out of Syria in 2015 is similar in that it is a symptom of much deeper problems. And the tens of millions of people on the move today do not all come from Syria.

So Europe, like North America, can absorb many migrants productively, and could help many more refugees for excellent humanitarian reasons I support. But it should never lose sight of the fundamental causes of distress in the nations of origin, because no one can absorb unlimited numbers of migrants without significant adverse effects in the destination countries. Help now buys time to deal with the fundamental causes. But if you do not use that time wisely, and fail to recognize or deal with root causes, relief will be temporary while nations of origin are destroyed by the chaos that continues.

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