

# Is Ethning Cleansing Happening in Syria?

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## Extended Abstract

### Introduction & Backgrounds

The Syrian war, which has been going for 10 years, left an enormous destruction behind which the international powers are considering how best to reconstruct it with their reconstruction programs. However, they are not similarly concerned with the unfixable destruction in the Syrian society, not only by leaving the 500,000 killings to increase freely, but also by ignoring the targeted cleansing of the Sunni majority of the population.

The authoritarian, minority-ruling government which has been ruling Syria for the last half-century (Assads' family) doesn't publish official data about the demography in Syria, academically, all the data related to demography in Syria lacks accuracy as they tend to estimate. What is known, however, is that pre-Assad rule the Shiite percentage was less than 1%, while Sunnis are 70-80%. But the last decade in Syria witnessed much alters within the Syrian society, the following numbers tells:

Since 2011 and till now, there has been:

More than half million killed<sup>1</sup> (HRW, 2019).

6.7 million internally displaced, 6.6 million Syrian refugees<sup>2</sup> (UNHCR, 2020), (meaning that 13 million Syrian was forced to leave his home. Considering that the Syrian population in 2010 was 21 million<sup>3</sup> (Worldometer 2021), more than half of the population fled his home (out of each 8 Syrians 5 left).

Unknown number of detainees and missed persons (estimated to be houndreds of thousands).

However, this is not the full image, as most of the victims are of the Sunnis. The targeted areas of displacement, siege, chemical weapons, massacres, bombardment and shellings are mostly Sunni areas. At the other hand, the government block the return of the displaced, and started repopulating some areas by the Shiite foreigner militia (backed by Iran<sup>4</sup>(U.S. department of state, Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, 2018, p.7 ). This will result in a re-designed demography of the post-

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war Syria. This will mean that the refugees issue will be a frozen crisis, and more threateningly, that if the Syrian conflict continued for a long time (as it promises to be), the cleansing of Sunnis will probably continue in a larger scale.

## **The Research Question**

Is Ethnic cleansing happening in Syria?

The study seek to know is ethnic cleansing happening in Syria. It will focus on the conduct of the Syrian government and its allies during the war. This study will not focus on groups such as ISIS or other terrorist groups, as the terrorism has been covered by a large literature already. It will not discuss the crimes that occurred between Arabs and Kurds in the north of Syria. Finally, this study refers to Sunnis, a religious group, including Arabs and Kurds. (Racial lines are not in the interest of this study).

## **Research Methodology**

The methodology of this study is a qualitative one. It included three main approaches:

1. The literature review:
  - Literature of the legal concepts of mass murders, its boundaries, components and factors.
  - Literature of the historical politics of the Syrian state, as it will points out to the origins and indicators of the mass murder that took place during the conflict.
  - Literature of the conflict in Syria.
2. In-depth interviews.
3. FGD, a focus group discussion.

## **Challenges of the study:**

Alongside the challenges that face a study in a conflict or a war, the main challenge of this study is the lack of governmental resources regarding the religious backgrounds of the population, the lack of accurate statistics about the causalities in Syria in terms of numbers, religious backgrounds, and facts, the lack of official (or accurate non-official) data about the exact Shiitization of the Syrian towns and Urbans, and the lack of official data about the exact role of the Iran-backed militia during the conflict. The study therefore adapted the qualitative approach, the literature review especially the historical context of the Syrian state indicates to the murder on the basis of sectarianism, and the sectarianist strategy executed by the Syrian government.

An important challenge is the continuity of war, which prevent exploring the full image and prevent as well field research that could be conducted in the areas controlled by the government and areas controlled by some armed groups. The suppression nature of the government makes people inside retreat from speaking facts and clarifying the reality to the outside- observers, even some refugees abroad who want to return to Syria retreat from confessing testimonies against the regime, in fear that if Assad

remained in power, returning to Syria will be threatening if they opposed the regime in public. Similarly, the misleading propaganda of the Syrian regime about fighting terrorism shift the attention away from the regime's (and allies) crimes to the terrorism of some groups like ISIS in Syria. Therefore, the study pursued conducting in-depth interviews with Syrian elites, and a FGD for displaced Syrians was conducted in Idlib.

Lastly, as the crisis is a recent one, it is hard to find academic resources about the conflict that covers the whole events that occurred so far, which means that the academic resources that include the full chronology of the war are very scarce, the study tried to restrict itself to the academic resources as well as reliable NGOs and media reports.

### **Reference List**

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