Human Needs Theory: A Case Study of Syria

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Abstract

This research papers aims to explore the different dynamics of 'Human Needs Theory' with its special reference to Syria. The pattern of emerging any conflict in the middle east is somehow the same. Protests are organized and later they met with the strong measures of the forces. More suppression and marginalization backfires as the people grow more anti-state and the destructive conflict erupts in that country disrupting the peace of entire region. Human Needs theory mainly enlightens about the reason of the conflict that are originated due to unmet human needs. The reason that the destructive conflict erupted in Syria and 'Human Needs Theory' suggests the reasons and resolution to the conflict would be presented.

Key Words: Human Need Theory, Middle East, Syria, Arab Spring, Conflict resolution

Middle east has been on the chess board of global powers since the colonial times. Syria, which is the birthplace of many civilizations has been on the brink of havoc since Arab Spring.[1] The brutal measures of the regime had catapulted Syria into a civil war. Presence of various state and non-state actors have only added fuel to the fire. Immense criticism of United Nations, global powers and other various International Governmental Organizations (IGOs) was not headed by the Bashar al-Asaad regime.[2] Around 600,000 people have died in the conflict and the regime had been using chemical weapons on their own citizens making the conflict even worst.[3]

The Human Needs Theory has immense importance and significance in solving any conflict as the theory helps in understanding the conflict and proposes a solution based on human needs. As Human needs that were defined by John Burton is a state in which deprivation is felt which is mainly of necessity and must be satisfied. In his book *Conflict: Resolution and Prevention* argues that the human need given any environment and state remains constant. These needs are to be fulfilled in certain social environment. Deprivation of these needs would result in some kind of frustration which would eventually raise towards a conflict. The needs that are fulfilled bring raw impact on society which will result in social attitudes and the conflict in that particular society

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[1] Angela Joya, "Syria and the Arab Spring: The Evolution of the Conflict and the Role of the Domestic and External Factors." *Middle Eastern Studies/Ortadogu Etütleri* 4, no. 1 (2012).

[2] He is the 19th and current President of Syria since 2000.

3 Daniel Byman, "Containing Syria's Chaos," *The National Interest* 140, no. 140 (2015): 30–40

would be resolved or prevented. As this theory highlights the basic needs that are required to live a secured and healthy life and within the same context the difference between wants, interests and needs can be characterized.[4]

These needs are non-negotiable for the human as they are internally motivated to fulfill these needs as a mere cause of existence given that there is vital difference between needs and interests. Interests are negotiable and needs are otherwise. Human needs to be precise are the sole source which explain the social fabric of the society and how the society claims to be evolving towards the fulfillment of their innate needs.[5] Throughout the course of history, it can be observed that the major reason of every conflict is the exploitation of basic human needs, whether they were physical or non-tangible. Any adversary exploits or deprives other adversary from their basic needs and it follows to the rising of the new conflict. Another concept of protection or exploitation of values of certain society is also redeemed as the main cause of social unrest in the society.

There are various reasons that the human need theorists have immense importance. Mainly, the theorists tend to find out the main reason of the dispute between or among adversaries. The reason that prolonged the dispute and most of all the origin of that dispute which would help in eradicating all the factors that prompted the conflict. Along with it the theory and theorists undoubtedly promote universality and binds human beings together in order to fulfill their basic needs. This will eventually help the adversaries to understand the basic needs and will eventually help in conflict management, prevention and resolution.

Human need theorists have bought some of their characterizations from famous psychologist Abraham Maslow[6] and renowned sociologist Paul Site. Abraham Maslow characterized five basic human needs that go beyond water and shelter as these needs are essential for human survival. As Maslow argued that these needs are so essential that a person who is hungry would be in the search of food putting all other needs aside, which concludes for human motivation to live these needs are top in priority. Maslow's hierarchy of needs go beyond it. These include "security; stability; dependency; protection; freedom from fear, anxiety and chaos; need for structure, order, law, and limits; strength in the protector; and so on."[7] He emphasizes how the deprivation of one need brings it forth and that sense of deprivation install frustration.

Abraham Maslow illustrated by making a pyramid showing the way hierarchy of needs work in human social behavior. The basic human needs without which the human survival is near to impossible are placed at the bottom of the pyramid like shelter and water. After that safety needs are important to human beings such as security and freedom and they are put above the basic needs. As the pyramid goes up, the need of love and belonging overwhelms human nature. The need of self-actualization is placed at the of the pyramid above the esteem needs.[8]

Elaborating the above-mentioned needs and the role of these needs in the formation, prevention and resolution of a conflict is vital. The proportionality between the violence or conflict and the need for security has always existed throughout the course of time. As security is the basic need which remains constant no matter the situation or the environment a human is in. Theorists further argued that this particular need comes forth at the time of its deprivation, when the fear or any threat fell upon human. The main inhibitor that acts against the need of security is mainly fear. Many examples are present in the history that the conflicts are envisaged due to the deprivation of

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[4]John Wear Burton, *Conflict: Resolution and Prevention*, (Macmillan, 1990).

[5]Kevin Avruch and Christopher Mitchell, *Conflict Resolution and Human Needs*, (New York: Routledge, 2014).

[6]H. B Danesh, "Human needs theory, conflict, and peace" *The encyclopedia of peace psychology* 4 (2011): 63-67.

[7]John Wear Burton, *Conflict: Human Needs Theory,* (Hampshire: Macmillan, 1995).

[8] H. B Danesh, "Human needs theory, conflict, and peace." *The encyclopedia of peace psychology* 4 (2011): 63-67.

the need of security as the conflict that erupted in 1971 between Pakistan and India is due to the security dilemma. This concludes that the safety human being is utmost important without which the peace in the society is hard to prevail.

Another need that is very important is the need of identity. The need to differentiate from one another and the need, to be identified in a specific group and providing no access to any of outsides to the resources or the assets that are in the possession of that particular group. These all needs characterize as the need of identity. The major example of conflict that can be chalked out from the history which resulted from the deprivation of the need of identity is Israel-Palestine conflict.

The need of well-being has immense importance in the Maslow's pyramid of hierarchy of needs. It confers to the development and sustainable growth that is carried out by the human beings. For development and self-growth, it requires certain materialistic and immaterialist resources that are essential for the fulfillment of this need. Maslow here draws the limit of well-being as he states that the people who are living above the poverty line are regarded as the people who are living a life that already comes in the domain of well-being. This need is essential for the development of human life and for a healthy and prosperous society. The deprivation of this need would result in the frustration and complex which would eventually result in a conflict as in the history we have witnessed at the time of Arab Spring.

Self-determination, self-actualization and self-development are the top-most needs in the Maslow's hierarchy of needs. The need refers to raise the living standard ad the native who are living in any particular place have the right to determine their future and their needs. The deprivation of this need would eventually result in frustration and complex that would pave a way towards a conflict. The period of 'Apartheid'[9] is the best suitable example that regards to this human need as the blacks were not given same rights and facilities that were provided to whites which resulted in the frustration and later a violent conflict.

Burton has also taken some of the ideas regarding human needs from renowned sociologist Paul Site from his book *Control: The Basis of Social Order*.[10] Burton incorporated that work of Abraham Maslow and sociologist Paul Site matches in various ways. Sites proposes eight needs in the individual: the needs for response, security, recognition, stimulation, distributive justice, meaning, to be seen as rational, and a need to control.[11] These needs further supplement the human needs theory and explain their immense importance in the conflict. The major contribution that runs parallel in the work of Maslow and Site is the interpretation how the unmet needs pave a way towards a conflict in a particular society? As he elaborates that the unmet need would create a sense of frustration in the person which he named, using a psychology term 'schizophrenia'[12] which would eventually result in the transfer of same psychological complexes in the society that would eventually lead to a conflict.[13] The conflict would take place when human being would try to control the situation through their own rational and it would disrupt the peace and hence the conflict would prevail. Burton confessed his debt to Paul Site for incorporating and bringing forth the eight basic human needs to observe a normal human behavior of individuals.

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[9]H. Giliomee, "The making of the apartheid plan, 1929-1948", Journal *of Southern African Studies*, *29*(2), (2003): 373-392.

[10]Paul Sites, *Control: The basis of social order* (Dunellen Publishing Company: 1973).

11H.B Danesh, "Human Needs Theory, Conflict, and Peace",*The Encyclopedia of Peace Psychology*, November 13, 2011.

[12] Schizophrenia is one a serious mental illness. It affects how a person thinks, feels, and behaves. Usually, people with schizophrenia may seem like they have lost touch with the real world, which can be distressing for them and for their family and friends.

13 John Wear Burton, *Conflict: Human Needs Theory* (Hampshire: Macmillan, 1995).

The basic human needs laid the foundation for Burton to analyze the modulation of conflict resolution. According to the orientations the needs theory, he stated the most destructive conflicts were envisaged due to the unmet and exploitation of basic human needs such as security, recognition and identity. As there are numerous steps due to which a conflict takes place and so is the evolution and resolution. Human need theory incorporates certain integrated approach for a conflict resolution proposing win-win situation for the adversaries. Such integrated approach helps the theory to stand vital under conflict resolution and management against all other theories. The conflicts that take place all over the world is due to the enrichment of the of the conflict of interest. The difference between the need and interest demands more segregation as sometimes the interest of any adversary is conflicting with the need of that particular adversary. Nevertheless, the work of Burton illustrated the basic idea to analyze the conflict that originate from the deprivation of needs. In order to analyze and access the conflict resolution and conflict management, the work of John Burton is quite significant. The idea that this theory provides is universal despite some of the criticism that is coined by the conservatives. Nevertheless, in the international political arena, there are various number of conflicts that are based on the exploitation of need due to the prior interest of an adversary. Hence, there is no particular limit that is set forth between 'interest' and 'needs'. We have also witnessed in the history, there are various occasions when a limit is put on the need to regulate right or wrong or assess the interests of particular party. To cap it all, and concluding on the basis of historical evidences and experiences, it is hard to find that realism with all its different variant and proposition has become obsolete to observe international politics. John Burton took a step further in underlying the basis of conflict that erupt based on human needs. The essence of this theory is universal provided that it proposes a win-win situation for the adversaries that are present in the conflict and it proposes that conflict must be resolves on the basis of fulfillment of human needs.

Human Need Theory: A Case Study of Syria

The Middle East has been bearing the shockwave of Arab Spring since it erupted in Tunisia, when a street vendor lit himself with fire due to the corrupt regime and harsh measure of autocratic rule in that state. The 'pandemic' of protests spread across its borders like a bush fire bringing Syria into its parameters. Various political scientists and historian argue that the eruption of a grown conflict happened due to the cold war residues and the rivalries that the region has drenched itself in. No matter the reasons of the conflicts were, but the complexities of the Syrian conflict have been increasing with the passage of time since its eruption. Various actors that have followed their interests and entered themselves into the conflict have just added more fuel to the fire.

Since the Evacuation day April 17th, 1946, when the state was freed from French colonialists and declared its independence, it has been seen that Syria has remained on the limelight and the hotspot of various conflicts.[14] Various political and social unrest can be seen throughout the course of history. After the Iraq invasion in 2003, entire Middle East has turned into some kind of security hotspot. Non-state actors that were already present in the region have jumped into the conflict choosing designated sides based on their ethnicity and alliance system that was present at the time of cold war making conflict more deplorable.

Huge demonstrations were seen at the time of protest in the main city of Damascus and Darra. Bashar regime, who was ruling Syria since his father died, notorious of his heinous crime against his own citizens. He ordered for the troops to be deployed at the place of protest. No sooner, protests got increased day by day throughout the country. By the order of the regime, troops tried to suppress the protests through killing of some citizens, which lead the US and the UN to impose

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14 O'Hanlon, Michael. "Deconstructing Syria," *The National Interest* 140, no. 140 (2015): 23–29,

sanctions on the regime. Most protestors who were abducted were mainly students and the main thing that triggered the regime was the wall painting that was drawn on the school wall, when many dictators of neighboring countries were stepping down. The painting explicitly said, "it's your turn now, doctor."[15] This resulted in the abduction of many protestor, mainly students and it was reported that they were treated harshly in jails. More the regime was marginalizing its citizens, more protests were carried out throughout the country demanding release of protestors, end of corrupt government and end to the state of emergency that was imposed since the death of Hafez Al Assad. He fired the cabinet of the main city of Darra and responded with some strict anti-protest laws resulting in protests and state machinery turning against the state.

Now, how the conflict started. The protestors gathered in the city of Homs around the clocktower and made it a permanent sit-in place until and unless their demands are not entertained by the regime. The city was named as 'Capital of Revolution' as the regime on April 18, ordered the troops to suppress the protestors through harsh measures which resulted in the killings again. 'Shabiha', which was a faction of pro-government force started gaining more and more dominance by using some harsh measures against the citizens. The Soldiers of Syrian Arab Army(SAA) started refusing the government to obey their orders and soon started disbanding of from the main army and joined Free Syrian Army(FSA), purely anti-government force. Many factions of the disbanded army came up and vowed that they would protect their designated area from the Bashar regime's brutal measures. All those places where the stronghold of the regime was halted by the FSA, local coordinating bodies were turning into local councils and hence started electing their own leaders. Many activists and local leaders sprung up and made their own body known as ETILAF, National Coalition of Revolutionary and Opposition Forces. It was formed because it would form an interim government after the removal of the regime. Excessive harsh measures that were used by the regime made the death toll increasing with the passage of time as the number had surged to 80,000 by the end of 2012.[16] The threat that the civil war would spread throughout the region, hence certain steps were taken by the different states to limit the uprising. As the civil war erupted, certain state and non-state actors stood up to pursue their interests in the wake of the conflicts. Certain actors among them were designated terrorist outfits which grew on the main front to fill the vacuum that was created by the regime and the state. As after one year, by the end of 2012, there were around four groups that were struggling in Syria, Assad's forces, Free Syrian Army, YPG which is a Kurdish militant group and factions of Al-Qaeda. The war that was fought within the Syria, now disrupted the global balance of power as soon the regime used chemical weapons on their own citizens. The act was condemned by many International Organization and as well as global policeman, the USA, as Obama stated that the regime has crossed the red line.

Analyzing the ongoing Syrian conflict under the scope of John Burton's Human Needs Theory helps in understanding the reason why the conflicted erupted at first place and how this conflict would have been contained. The people of middle east have been drenched into conflicts, sometimes at interstate and at times at intrastate level. The living standard of most middle eastern countries regarded as the third world living standard. Poverty and illiteracy have paved its way to the grass root levels of the society, and it is the sole reason that the unmet needs of the society have prone themselves more anti-state and anti-government. The state itself left no stone unturned to exploit the basic rights and need of its citizens. Thus, the anti-state attitude of the citizens and the conflicted could be predicted through aggressive introspection of society.

15John McHugo, "Syria: Apex of the Arc of Instability", *Irish Pages* 9, no. 2 (2015): 107–124
16Nicholas Rostow, "The Dog that Doesn't Bark: Syria and Article 51 of the UN Charter." In *Proceedings of the ASIL Annual Meeting*, vol. 106, pp. 215-216. Cambridge University Press, 2012.

The people of Syria were devoid of having any type of security from the state, rather the state machinery was using some excessive harsh measures against its own citizens. Protest is regarded as the basic right of the citizens which later not only was not given, rather those who put demonstrations were met with harsh measures of the society. The use of chemical weapons against its own state fanned the complex security dilemma, as the protectors, guarantee and assurance of the security were not provided to their own people, rather exploited. Hence, the anti-state protests could easily be predicted as people would act according their own rational. The frustration would lead them to attain maximum security at and expense. The need of the people and the conflict of the state would collide together resulting in a conflict.

Some scholars view the Syrian turmoil as an ethnic conflict as the identity crisis prevails in the state. Syria has different ethnicities residing in the state majority Sunni around 74%, Alawites, which is a sub-sect of Shia Muslims approximately 11% of the population, 5% Christians also reside in Syria.[17] Most of the Sunni population turned against the regime as an Alawite was ruling a majority Sunni country.[18] This fanned the already existing disputes between two ethnicities. Hezbollah and other Shia militant outfits subsided with the regime helping them out against Sunni rebels. Sunni population were prompted as they had specific anti Alawite attitude and did not want to be ruled by a Shia regime. Later, alignment of Iran with the regime providing manpower and arm support proved more of it as an ethnic conflict. This was characterized as a Sunni-Shia ethnic conflict. Identity crisis, as John Burton depicts, is the basic human psychological need. This is the need which people do not share with any outsider, which would lead to frustration of the society and eventually a conflict would erupt.

Syria is the state that worked on the state of emergency most of the period of the history. State has been grappling with poverty, illiteracy and corruption. No jobs were provided to the citizens and the stories of corruption of the government circulated throughout the country. There was no self-esteem of the people as the economy of the state was growing at a snail's pace relative to the rest of the countries. A state where the citizens have to face with unmet needs, and they know that there is no better picture to be predicted in the future. Such is the time where the citizens would grow anti state and hence the chances of conflict would grow.

Curbs on media and activists who were working in Syria and they had to face certain harsh measures. Students and protestors were marginalized and oppressed amid several warnings from the UN. No matter how much the freedom is curbed or how much the protestors are suppressed by the brute forces of the regime, they would implode, which happened and hence the conflict went to broader level. Citizens living in fear and choked freedom are to grow anti state, no matter how the regime iron clad the situation, one day or other it has would implode. The right of self-determination is one of the basic rights and need of citizens. we have witnessed throughout the course of history that the conflicts erupted, whenever the group of people are not given their due right of self-determination. This was seen in Syria as the citizens wanted to depose the dictator and install the government that is purely democratic and works for the government. Human Needs theory pretty much suggest the reasons of the conflict in Syria and that is due to the unmet needs of the citizens.

Conclusion

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[17] Z. B. Dalaman, and H. M. Lehimler, "Reshuffling Ethnic Composition of Cities by Migration in Syria", *Migration Letters*, *19*(5), (2022) 717-729.

18 Daniel Pipes, *Syria beyond the Peace Process* (Washington, Dc: Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 1996).

The work of John Burton extracted from the ideas of Maslow summarizes the eruption of the conflicts due to the unmet needs of human. The Human Needs theory pours light on the reasons of the eruption of the conflict and the resolution that it proposes after a win-win situation for the adversaries. The distinction between needs and interests is underlined by Burton, but it often happens that the interest of an adversary sabotages the need of another adversary. The Syrian turmoil is also one of the reasons that it suggests the eruption of civil war started due to the unmet needs of humans. From security to freedom and from wellbeing to self-determination, no single need was met and due to which a frustration in the society grew and the conflict was seen. The case study of Syrian conflict concludes that several reasons are there due to which a conflict grew from state to regional level. The word schizophrenia used by Maslow and Burton pertains within the citizens of the state. Human Needs theory proposes a resolution that is universal and depicts that throughout the history most of the conflicts have erupted due to unmet human needs, but a conflict that grows to a global level, such as the parties that were in the Syrian conflict that are at global powers, conflict resolution among them is difficult, but still the method of conflict resolution that is proposed by John Burton is tied to Human Needs Theory. Burton identifies that using that protagonists usually do not represent the consent of the majority. Nevertheless, Burton provides us with a perspective to understand conflict while focusing on underlying issue pertaining to human needs and urged the win-win outcome.