Committee: Security council

Topic: Question of protection of civilians in armed conflict

Chair: Anna Stone

School: Royal Russell

Summary:

Armed conflicted has existed long before the formation of the United Nations. Rather than combatants, civilians have been affected the most, and continue to have the highest casualty count, with women and children accounting for an unacceptable number of victims. More than 2.5 million civilians have been killed and over 31 million no longer living in their country of origin just in the last decade alone. More recently, three main global issues that coincide with armed conflict have emerged that require our immediate attention: sexual exploitation, commercial exploitation, and terrorism. Protection of civilian populations should be paramount in all theatres of armed conflict no matter the intensity or causes of the conflict.

Definition of Key Terms

Commercial exploitation - unethical business practices

Combatant - a person or nation engaged in fighting during a war.

Sexual exploitation – Sexual exploitation is an act committed through non-consensual abuse or exploitation of another person's sexuality for the purpose of sexual satisfaction, financial gain, personal benefit or advantage, or any other non-legitimate purpose.

Commercial exploitation – it's the manipulation by selling, letting or by any other act to obtain compensation or any other benefit

Terrorism - the unlawful use of violence and intimidation, especially against civilians, in the pursuit of political aims.

Protection of civilians – Depending on the nature of the threat to civilians, the mission will carry out a range of activities including engaging with parties to the conflict and affected communities, providing physical protection and the establishment of a protective environment.

Armed conflict - International humanitarian law distinguishes two types of armed conflicts: international armed conflicts, opposing two or more States, and non-international armed conflicts, between governmental forces and non-governmental armed groups, or between such groups only.

Hutu – also known as the Abahutu, are a Bantu ethnic or social group native to the African Great Lakes region of Africa. They live mainly in Rwanda, Burundi, and the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo,

Tutsis – also known as Abatutsi, are an ethnic group of the African Great Lakes region. Tutsi are a Bantu-speaking ethnic group of probable Nilotic origin, and the second largest of three main ethnic groups in Rwanda and Burundi.

Background Information

Examples of how else civilians are affected in armed conflict:
Access to food and water and medical resources: for example, in the ongoing war of Yemen, there are 18 million people in urgent need of water, sanitation and hygiene. In 2019 there were 400,000 cases of AWD/suspected cholera
Economic stability: armed conflict destroys the infrastructure and conditions necessary to allow job creation or trade opportunities which hinders economic growth and negatively affects civilians whose quality of life and economic security will be affected. Armed conflict also reduces worker productivity which, in turn affects the economic stability as they are being paid for work that they are not carrying out effectively.

Danger of migration: More than 2.6 million children have been forced to flee Syria and are living in precarious conditions in surrounding countries. When emigrants attempt to fleeing their war-torn country, they are risking their lives for example when trying to cross dangerous waterways such as the Mediterranean or the Channel. Immigration can also have a huge effect on education which in turn will make it more difficult for citizens to get a higher paying job to help support them in their new country.

Mental effects e.g., living in fear:
• Afghanistan - population based survey including 799 adult household members aged 15 years and above. Sixty-two percent of respondents reported experiencing at least four trauma events during the previous ten years. Symptoms of depression were found in 67.7% of respondents, symptoms of anxiety in 72.2%, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) in 42%. The disabled and women had a poorer mental health status, and there was a significant relationship between the mental health status and traumatic events. Coping strategies included religious and spiritual practices.
• Cambodia- A household survey of 993 adults from Site 2, the largest Cambodian displaced- persons camp on the Thailand- Cambodia border, found that more than 80% felt depressed and had a number of somatic complaints despite good access to medical services (22). Approximately 55% and 15% had symptom scores that correlated with Western criteria for depression and PTSD, respectively. Twenty-seven Cambodian young people, who were severely traumatized at ages 8 to 12, were followed up 3 years after a baseline evaluation. A structured interview and self-rating scales showed that PTSD was still highly prevalent (48%) and that depression was present in 41%.
• There are few studies on the impact of these conflicts on mental health. A study on 45 Kurdish families in two camps reported that PTSD was present in 87% of children and 60% of their caregivers (33). A study on 84 Iraqi male refugees found that poor social support was a stronger predictor of depressive morbidity than trauma factors

Stunted growth of population: when countries enter an armed conflict, the likelihood of a reduction in population is extremely high due to the deaths of soldiers and civilians which in turn reduces the birth rate due to the splitting of families. For example, In 2011 the Syrian population was 21 million, then the civil war erupted and by 2019 it was 17 million (due primarily to emigration). This can lead to long term economic consequences as there are less people in the country to carry out essential jobs that contribute back to the country.

Human rights violations: In Afghanistan the Taliban and other armed groups deliberately targeted civilians and civilian objects in violation of international humanitarian law; places that were attacked included a maternity hospital and educational institutions. There was no accountability for these crimes as liberty persisted. Women and girls continued to face violence, harassment, and intimidation. Violence against children persisted. Afghan asylum-seekers continued to be forcibly returned to Afghanistan, particularly from Iran where some had been attacked by the Iranian security forces. Government forces in Syria continued restricting access to humanitarian and medical aid to civilians living in government-controlled areas. Security forces subjectively arrested civilians and former fighters who had reconciled with the government and continued to detain tens of thousands of people, including peaceful activists, humanitarian workers, lawyers, and journalists, subjecting many to enforced disappearance and torture or other ill-treatment, and causing deaths in detention.

Major Countries and Organizations Involved

Afghanistan – a war has been going on for decades between the ISAF and Taliban which has caused large effects on the civilians. Afghanistan is continually among the most dangerous places in the world to be a civilian, with casualties caused by explosive violence rising from 4,268 in 2018 to 4,630 in 2019.

Syria – The Syrian war is an ongoing multi-sided civil war in Syria fought between the Ba'athist Syrian Arab Republic led by Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, along with domestic and foreign allies, and various domestic and foreign forces opposing both the Syrian government and each other in varying combinations. The effect of this on civilians within the country is so great that the remaining Syrians have lost all faith in their country, and many of them have fled to neighbouring countries to find safety. The U.N. reports that 408,464 refugees have been registered under their refugee program however as many of them are unable to organise official documents there are probably many more.

Yemen- the civil war has been raging since 2015. The main countries involved are the Houthis, their domestic opponents, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates. The war has left physical, emotional, and economic scars on Yemeni civilians such as the access to healthcare in Yemen, through damage to health facilities, shortages of clinical supplies, fuel, electricity, and essential goods, and risks to the physical well-being of healthcare professional has been largely impacted.

UNICEF- They are in the countries in desperate need of help, providing lifesaving essentials such as; water, food, hygiene, vaccinations and educational resources.

Timeline of Events

World War 1 1914 – 1918: The total estimated casualties for the First World War are estimated at 40 million with 6 to 13 millions of these casualties being civilians caught in the fighting.

World War 2 1939 – 1945: It is the bloodiest and most catastrophic conflict the world has ever witnessed. 50-55 million civilians died. Morale destroying campaigns such as: the blitz, the bombing of Dresden (In which Dresden was not a military target) and the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki saw the highest mortality in non-combatants.

The Vietnam War 1955 – 1975: It saw what could be argued as war crimes with the deployment of napalm weapon system against the Vietnamese. Civilian casualties estimate between 195,000 and 430,000. With post war civilian casualties still occurring due to unexploded bombs.

Cambodian genocide 1975 – 1979: total of civilian's deaths was around 2 million for a range of causes; Executions, Disease, Exhaustion, or Starvation

Gulf war 1990 – 1991: Civilian deaths resulting from the conflict are estimated at between 100,000 and 200,000.

The Rwandan genocide 1994: it saw some of the worst crimes against humanity ever witness when 491,000-800,000 civilian casualties in the space of 4 months

Afghanistan 2001 – present: Most Recently casualties in the War on Terror in Afghanistan civilian casualties are estimated to be around 51,000.

Iraq war 2003 – 2011: 268,000 - 295,000 people were killed in violence in the Iraq war, including 182,272 - 204,575 civilians

Relevant UN Treaties and Events

- Kim Jong-un and Moon Jae-in signing the Panmunjom Declaration. The Peace Treaty on Korean Peninsula is a proposed settlement to formally end military hostilities on the Korean Peninsula as a follow-up to the 1953 Korean Armistice Agreement implemented by the United Nations after the Korean War.

- Geneva convention - an international agreement first made at Geneva in 1864 and later revised, governing the status and treatment of captured and wounded military personnel and civilians in wartime. It has been agreed by every nation in the world (however not created under the UN). The fourth convention is the most relevant to the protection of civilians in armed conflict agreed august 12 1949 where civilians in areas of armed conflict and occupied territories are protected by 159 articles.

- United Nations Security Council Resolution 189, adopted unanimously on June 4, 1964, deplored an incident caused by the penetration of units of the Republic of Vietnam into Cambodia and requested compensation for the Cambodians.

- UDHR: Was written in 1948 in the aftermath of the atrocities of WW2. It clearly outlines all the human rights that the UN has sworn to protect and clearly establishes that everyone is entitled to equal human rights. It is the cornerstone of any UN debate regarding the issue of Human rights violations.

- Other relevant UN resolutions that may be of interest are:
  - Resolution 2286 (2016)(medical personnel) which Strongly Condemns Attacks against Medical Facilities, Personnel in Conflict Situations
  - Resolution 2175 (2014) (humanitarian personnel) which is for the maintenance of international peace and security and, in this context, the need to promote and ensure respect for the principles and rules of international humanitarian law.
  - Resolution 1502 (2003) (UN Personnel, Associated Personnel and Humanitarian Personnel) in which the Council condemned violence against humanitarian workers and called upon all states to ensure that such incidents did not remain unpunished.

Previous Attempts to solve the Issue

Afghanistan: S/RES/2557 (2020) - 18 December 2020 - Reaffirms the assets freeze, travel ban and arms embargo on individuals, groups, undertakings, and entities associated with the Taliban in constituting a threat to the peace, stability and security of Afghanistan as designated by the Committee on the List established pursuant to resolution 1988 (2011). Extends the mandate of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team until December 2021.

Foreign aid to facilitate economic growth and development. In Afghanistan American funds were invested into infrastructure, agriculture, and rural development in the hope of immediate job creation and thus deterring support for Al-Qaeda (though this was minimal compared to the support given to the military). A key problem was that only 30% of the aid's community development fund was channelled through the Afghan government' budget, the rest was administered directly by the USA. Meaning employees were not being trained and institutions were not being established that could manage monetary matters.

Continual humanitarian aid in conflict aid for example UNICEF providing WASH access in countries such as Syria, Yemen, and Afghanistan.

Possible Solutions

Member states should consider the following:
- Demilitarization of conflicted areas
- The evacuation endangered civilians
- Provide living necessities for example clean water, food, clothing, and shelter
- Provide long term health care and support
- Rapid Response Teams to the outbreak of diseases or epidemics.
- Ending open defecation practices
- The maintenance of education programmes
- Foreign aid commitments allocated to necessary areas of an economy - such as rural development, agriculture to help develop farming methods using technology to avoid famine, create jobs and thus stimulate economic growth
- Large scale vaccination programmes

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