

Syrian Refugees; a Card in The Internal Political Conflict

A great tension has been sparked in Turkey following the Ankara riots against Syrian refugees after two Syrians were accused of killing a Turkish teenager a few weeks ago. This tension affects not only Turkish society but even among the Syrian refugees residing in Turkey. The riots happened following inflammatory statements from some opposition political parties, which can be described as a proactive election campaign that seeks to crowd and mobilize the masses.

Rioters usually constitute a social event that should not be ignored or considered as a temporary situation, especially if such events are repeated or involved hostile behavior targeting a specific segment of society. Such behaviors must not be met only with pacifying speeches on the media or even with political statements; it needs a strategic plan that can contain the problem and prevent its recurrence so it can't be used for destructive purposes.

A look at the Turkish scene

It is clear that the instigating media campaigns against Syrians on social media have taken a more organized approach and have repeated with a higher frequency, which indicates that these parties want to invest the refugee's issues to the fullest, whatever its cost. On the other hand, it was remarkable that these campaigns used a lot of misleading information, whether about the "good situations inside Syria" or about the aids that Syrians receive. They ignored the reality of what is happening in The Dara'a governorate for example, which has been besieged and bombed by the Assad regime, and the daily casualties of Syrian civilians in Idlib near Turkey's military bases.

This sentiment was created to increase the public anger within the Turkish people who are suffering due to the economic crisis and the Corona pandemic.

Some politicians also made false promises to their voters that they will return the Syrian refugees to their country within two years should they win, but these promises are misleading and hiding the very important fact that Turkey signed the Geneva Convention in 1961, which is binding on all countries with moral and legal obligations that cannot be easily overridden or evaded, including when it comes to refugees. Moreover, solving the Syrian refugee's problem can only be achieved within the framework of a United Nations political solution agreed to by the states concerned, and it is, therefore, a bigger matter to be handled just by a single political party or state efforts.

There has also been a clear shift when the incitement of social media campaigns transferred to the street, and the electronic armies with their hashtags have turned into groups working on the ground and destroying, breaking up everything owned by the Syrians. All the while the security forces and police appear powerless.

The campaign organizers may think that they have succeeded in mobilizing the street, but they are not aware of the danger of their actions. Encouraging the masses to break the law is a threat to civil peace in society. It means that any future dispute that may happen between any political, social, or other parties will turn into an internal division and each party will try to achieve success even if they cross all the red lines.

The Invisible effects on the Syrian side

Riots - such as the one in Ankara - are usually approached from one side only. The rioters are blindly biased to the Turkish side, without being interested in considering the Syrian side. The riots in Ankara have increased the panic and fear level among the almost four million Syrians residing in Turkey who are under temporary protection, and they feel more threatened of being exposed to collective punishment without law or police protections. On the other hand, some people exploit this situation to spread inflammatory rhetoric to the Turkish society, calling them to defend themselves outside the law framework, reinforcing their fears by false agendas about the Syrian refugees.

The media have given great attention to this riot, but they didn't give the same extent to the legal

proceedings that follow. This may give the impression that the law is turning a blind eye to those involved, leaving space for the recurrence of such abuses in the future.

An important element that has gone unnoticed is that the images of how Turkish people resent outsiders and how they violently destroyed people's properties have gone viral, and this may affect Turkey's tourism sector. These images will depict that Turkey is an insecure and risky country for some nationalities, especially Arabs, which may have negative economic repercussions in the future. Syrian and Arab investors may flee Turkey if they feel that their economic interests and business may be threatened if the incitement continues, and this may happen in the middle of today's global economic challenges; they will need to find a new place to run their activities that will be safer and more stable for them.

Addressing these riots is the Turkish government's responsibility in the first place by stopping media incitement campaigns and holding the perpetrators accountable according to the law. However, this does not cancel the responsibility of the Turkish people and the Syrian refugees to stop this xenophobic attitude and create the Syrian refugees' presence into a mutually constructive situation for both peoples. This process is vital because Turkey is a stable country and must remain so; no one is admissible to destabilize its internal security or disturb its civil peace.