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THE ISIS AND WOMEN

There is a widespread social drama that strikes the populations of the Middle East. And where there is war, it is generally the weaker part of the population that is most dramatically affected: the women, the elderly and the children. They are the silent victims of this human tragedy: the Yazidi women, who have been raped and sold into slavery; the children who are killed by bombings, drowned in the Mediterranean sea as they seek refuge abroad, or forced to train with the militias of the Caliphate. Then there are the elderly who cannot access medical care anymore, who die from hardship or because they lack the strength to flee or defend themselves.

While all of these innocent actors do not die from the bombings and the torture, many of the survivors still represent lost lives, even after the end of the conflict, because they will be burdened – in the body and in the spirit – by the weight of the terrible experiences that they have undergone.

Women are the ones who pay the highest price because, in this part of the world, they are segregated in a social position that is subordinate to men and do not have any decision-making power. They first become a passive subject in the hands of others, then, because of the cultural factor, women often go from being a subject to being an object, a commodity, a mere instrument of sexual divertissement. This partly reveals the fate of the women of the communities that have been 'defeated' by the ISIS.

The ISIS dedicates particular attention to the role of the women, albeit with the same old contradictions between the treatment reserved to their own women and that reserved to those of others.

The militias of Al Baghdadi have created a special brigade called “al Khansaa”, made up solely of women and dedicated to 'moral' policing. They check on women in the streets to ascertain that their way of dressing and their behavior is in line with the Islamic precepts. The members of the brigade wear the abaya and the niqab to cover their face, a 'precaution' that is asked of all the women living under the Islamic State. A dress too tight, make-up on the face, even if hidden by the niqab, the eyes that are not completely hidden by a double veil or the possibility that a small part of the body or hair could be exposed, trigger immediate sanctions that can go from an initial reprimand to a number of strokes of the whip, depending on the gravity of the offense. The death penalty, through lashing or stoning, is inevitable for adulterers. It is also a rule to wear dark clothing and to leave the house only in the company of a man (the only exceptions to this rule are theology students, doctors and teachers).

The “Khansaa” is also in charge of carrying out security checks on women, if necessary. One can enroll in the brigade after a brief training in the use of weapons and a number of lessons in Islam, especially in the application of the sharia on women. The members of the “Khansaa” receive roughly \$100 per month (a militiaman generally makes \$130), they are not employed in combat and live in their own quarters (the “maqar”, where non-married

women and widows live). There are foreigners among them and there exists, alongside the more renowned “Kahnsaa” (which operates mainly in the area of Raqqa), another, similar unit, the “Umm al Rayan”, with similar goals.

At any rate, just like all the other women of the Islamic State, the members of the “Kahnsaa” and of the “Umm al Rayan”, if young, are invited – or rather, forced – to marry a combatant and, if he were to die, another, even in contrast with the Islamic precepts that compel believers to wait at least three months before remarrying (so that, if the girl is pregnant, there be no doubt on the identity of the father). The Islamic State also deems it legitimate that a 9 year old be married to a Jihadist. There remain certain limitations on the use of women in war because, in the eyes of the Caliphate, a Muslim woman is a mother, wife and housewife, period.

The Western concept of equality among genders is often stigmatized by the ISIS, along with Western culture as a whole, which produces the “tyranny of capitalism”, while it is underlined that there exists an Islamic system of social well-being. The ISIS women must not be illiterate or ignorant, but they must avoid the sciences (which deal with the search for truth, something which lies in the jurisdiction of the Islamic faith). There is a rigid system for the education of girls: from 7 to 9, a girl must study Arabic, religion and natural sciences; from 10 to 12, she should study more religion - with a focus on 'women's' problems, such as wedding and divorce – and more Arabic and natural sciences (meanwhile, she will learn to sew, embroider, knit and cook); from 13 to 15 a girl will undergo yet another round of religious studies, this time with a focus on the Sharia, the life of the prophet and the history of Islam. At this point the scientific studies are abandoned (the basic concepts learned as a child will suffice) and the focus shifts to the upbringing of children. After that, nothing more, because it's time to be married, have children and stay home.

Since the role of the woman in the Muslim world is in stark contrast with her role in the Western world, the ISIS often attempts to center the debate on the more thorny issues such as polygamy. According to the ISIS, Islam is not the only religion to adopt such a practice, which was already trending in the times of Jacob and David, both with multiple wives and concubines. Also, they claim that it has positive repercussions on women because there are more women than men and because the woman have a harder time living through tough times than men. The young Jihadists prefer virgins, but polygamy opens the door to widows and divorced women and, if women are infertile, they are given a chance to remain in the household nonetheless. Then there is a practical side to the issue: women aren't always able to fulfill their duties with regards to their husbands (they may be on their period, be pregnant, or have post-partum bleeding). Polygamy solves the problem. Otherwise, the husband may run the risk of indulging in other temptations.

This is the reality that the women living in the ISIS caliphate have to deal with. Yet on the outside, the propaganda of the Islamic State tries to portray the role of the ISIS woman as being attractive, constructive and socially fulfilling.

This 'optimistic' vision is advertised by the ISIS' propaganda apparatus, which explains why the Islamic State has seen the arrival of anywhere from 400 to 600 women from Western countries (about 1 in 8 volunteers is a woman). These foreign women are called “muhajirat” (the feminine version of 'migrant'), intended to mean 'a migrant that reaches the promised land to serve Allah'.

The ISIS has specific propaganda aimed at both women coming from Muslim countries and those coming from Western countries. In the latter case, the message is much more sophisticated and is less based upon theological justifications, but rather on the description

of a virtual world where the woman's role would be central. The image of the Islamic State that the ISIS wants to portray is that of a place where everything is readily accessible, where one spends time enjoying cuisine or swimming in rivers, etc. A world which doesn't really exist, but that must be emphasized in order to make it more attractive for women accustomed to wealthier countries with higher standards of comfort. It is rumored that a team of Western women has been trained to scour the social networks and lure other Western women to the Caliphate. The image of the Caliphate that the ISIS is busy advertising is a utopia, where the romantic aspects are shown, while the difficulties of living in a war zone are overlooked. This approach is used to counterbalance the negative feedback that some Western women have expressed after reaching Raqqa and is deemed necessary because the ISIS believes that Westerners are, for the most part, religiously unprepared.

What about Arab women? The ISIS lures them by insisting on the right/duty to support the Islamic State in the midst of a war of religion and culture against the apostates and infidels. Religious duties are underlined, as is the presumed persecutions suffered by the Muslim people; the anger for discrimination; the longing for revenge and justice; the sense of belonging; the messianic and ideal aspects of being on the front line for the fulfillment of Allah's design.

The differentiation in the propaganda of the ISIS shows that their media organization is sophisticated and targets its messages on specific groups of individuals, therefore making them particularly efficient. It must be noted that in the Islamic State, Western women are actually privileged with respects to their Arab counterparts.

Overall, the media celebration of the woman's role in the Islamic State is in stark contrast with the role and fate that is ensured to non-Muslim or 'apostate' women (Muslim women that don't support al Baghdadi's organization) when they fall into the clutches of the ISIS.

The ISIS openly practices the commerce of women and their use as slaves or as war loot for the sexual satisfaction of the Jihadists. Once again, the ISIS tries to justify this stance through theology. Daqib, the Caliphate's publication, recently published an article where they stress that the sharia allows for kuffar (non-Muslim) women to be treated in such ways. The same explanation was printed on fliers that were distributed near mosques in Mosul.

These publications made explicit reference to the Yazidi women, who are described as belonging to a pagan minority and consequently not worthy of any form of mercy (as opposed to Christian and Jewish women, whose 'wrong' beliefs can be compensated with the "Jizyah", the Islamic tax). With regards to the Muslim "apostate" (those who oppose the ISIS) women, there are serious doubts about the legitimacy of their being sold into slavery, although the Caliphate is inclined to allow such practice as well. Again, in order to justify their conduct, the ISIS quotes the Koran, important theologians such as Ibn Taymiyyah and the Hanafi and Hambali schools of thought.

International organizations have stated that roughly 2500 Yazidi women have become sexual slaves of the ISIS (overall, about 4600 of them have disappeared). The young women are separated from the more elderly women and are locked up in buildings used as brothels, where they are at the mercy of the Jihadists who periodically come to pick them up (sometimes two or three at a time). They are then sold at a slave market and taken home by their new owner as personal slaves. All of this happens in broad daylight, because it is "Islamically" legitimate. The Islamic State has no moral problems with these practices.

Obviously, this approach has some practical benefits for the ISIS militants, who acquire the right to benefit from their conquests and to balance the counterbalance the suffering of a war with the pleasures of the flesh.

Through a series of other publications, the ISIS has also tried to regulate this sex trade by attempting to suggest the correct behavior for each situation, in adherence to the Islamic precepts. In practice, this boils down to a number of fatwa (religious suggestions) issued by judges and theologians. For every question, no matter how indecent, there was an answer.

Can I have sex immediately with a virgin? Yes.

And what if she isn't a virgin? Wait and see if she is pregnant (three months, to ascertain the identity of the father)

What if she hasn't reached puberty? So long as she is adequate for intercourse, no problem. If she isn't, the you can "use" her nonetheless, without having direct intercourse.

Can I have sex with women or boys/girls who are prisoners? Naturally. And you can sell them, or even offer them as a gift, if you wish. The person who captured them can do as they wish. The only limitation arises when the captive is owned by two men at the same time. Inevitably, one of the two men will not be allowed to have sex with the slave (again, to be able to identify the father in case of a pregnancy).

There are also other limitations: no abortions; one cannot have sex with mothers and daughters together if they are both slaves; the same is true for sisters; also, one cannot have sex with a woman during menstruations.

What happens if the slave-owner dies? The slaves are inherited by his kin, just like any other property.

Can I have sex with my wife's slave? No, because she doesn't belong to you.

Can I free my slave? Yes and, if you do, Allah will be pleased.

Can I kiss someone else's slave? If for pleasure, no.

Can I man have sex with coitus interruptus? Of course, and you don't need to ask for your slave's permission to do so.

Can I marry a slave? No, unless the marriage serves to avoiding the sin of fornication.

There are little bits of humanity thrown here and there:

Can a slave buy her freedom? Yes.

Can a slave be separated from her children? No (if they are minors).

Can a pregnant woman be sold? No. (same old 'father identity' fixation)

Other, more general, recommendations suggest that slaves should be treated well and that one should avoid "humiliating" your slave. You can beat her to educate her and to make her respectful and disciplined, but not for your pleasure. Also, please don't hit her in the face.

What about the slave? What can she do? One of the worst things she can do is try to escape. Allah doesn't have a specific punishment in store, but there will have to be a reprimand that will prevent the attempt from being reiterated, an admonishment severe

enough that it will prevent others from following the bad example. No specific punishment is suggested...

The commercialization of women by the ISIS reaches paradoxical levels in the context of the war. The ISIS Jihadists are literally terrorized of being killed by women fighters like those of the Syrian Kurd YPJ (woman unit for the protection of the people, as opposed to the YPG, which is comprised of men). To die at the hands of a woman would not only discredit the Jihadist in question, but would also jeopardize his merit in martyrdom when faced with the judgment of Allah. In other words, that terrorist would not go to heaven.

LIBYA: TWO POTENTIAL SOLUTIONS AND SEVERAL ISSUES

There aren't that many options left to solve the Libyan crisis: either a negotiated solution is found and a government of national unity formed or yet another international military intervention will be necessary. One way or the other, there is such a high level of social disintegration and chaos in Libya that diplomacy will not suffice and weapons will have to speak.

Despite the efforts of UN's mediator Martin Kobler, the ongoing peace talks face two major issues:

- Time: the advance of the ISIS is becoming dangerous and negotiations can't continue forever;
- Consensus: any agreement will have to obtain the true, and not just formal, consent of all parties, or it will be pointless.

If this will not to happen in the near future, a military intervention, similar to the one that ousted Muammar Gaddafi in 2011, will become necessary. The UN Security Council has already approved, on December 23, 2015, Resolution 2259 that authorizes an anti-terrorism military intervention in Libya if requested by the local government. What if there is no national unity executive? The UN will likely be able to find a representation that will fit its needs. Regardless of the UN Resolution, Chapter VII of the UN Statute still allows the use of force if dictated by circumstances.

Winds of war

As time passes, the military solution becomes inevitable. The ISIS is expanding in Libya, as the Italian Minister of Defense Roberta Pinotti has said. Italian warplanes have been placed in Sicily, surveillance flights take place every day, isolated bombings on islamist militias by unspecified forces (probably French) have already been carried out, and there is talk of US and British special forces boots on the ground. Slowly but surely, diplomacy is leaving room for an armed intervention.

Italy, geographically in the first line, faces two issues: preventing terrorism from taking root in a country across its coasts and stopping the endless flow of migrants coming from a country adrift. It is hence clear that, no matter which option is picked, Italy will have to play a primary role.

The terms of any intervention will have to be agreed with a national Libyan government. Without such a request or authorization, any action would risk being illegitimate – regardless of a UN Resolution granting it – and would require having a political solution already in place in the aftermath of the conflict. But if the latter is hard to find prior to an armed intervention and despite the ongoing negotiations, it will be even more difficult to broker one after a war.

Cui prodest?

In other words, we should understand who we want to fight for and to who the country will be delivered to after an international military action. There is no easy answer to these questions as Libya is now a country where everyone fights against everybody else. The sole institution keeping the country together is the Central Bank, which regularly pays its salaries to all the militias. Furthermore, the lack of consensus around an operation would imply that the forces on the ground would face both the ISIS and a portion of Libyans. Ideally, the war on terrorism should be dealt by Libyan land forces with international support and aerial bombardments.

The second issue is coordination. Once again France is overly active and, as has happened during the war to oust Gaddafi, it is acting without waiting for the outcome of the negotiations. The French recently assisted the Egyptian Rafale planes as they bombed Islamist militias. Russia is also taking its first moves on its own. Without a proper international coordination, the effectiveness of the intervention will be hampered, as shown in Syria and Iraq.

Any political or military solution to the Libyan quagmire faces a number of internal hurdles. The Presidency Council, whose role is to lead to a government of national unity and that is currently led by Fayeze Sarraj, is blocked by a series of vetoes and is the target of endless bargainings. The latter has not been able to move to Tripoli yet due to security concerns and despite the agreement signed by all parties in December 2015 in Morocco. Everyone theoretically agrees on the need to reconstitute a unitary state, but, regardless of this, every actor binds this objective to personal interests and ambitions. As mentioned, time is playing a crucial role.

The enemy advances

The ISIS in Libya has an estimated 5/6.000 combatants. The majority – around 70% – are foreign fighters, mainly from the Maghreb and Tunisia, while the Libyan component can rely on the support of a bunch of Gaddafi loyalists, similarly to Iraq where former members of Saddam Hussein's Baath party led the insurgency. The Islamists are expanding the areas under their rule and getting closer to the oil fields, probably to destroy them. They can rely on heavy weapons and have a portion of the coastline under their control for potential traffics of both men and weapons. The more the Libyan factions in-fight, the stronger the ISIS.

The Libyan branch of the Islamic State was created by Abu Bakr al Baghdadi. He sent out one of his most trusted men to establish it. Abu Nabil al Anbari, aka Abu Mughirah al Qahtani, is an Iraqi former police officer turned terrorist during the time of Abu Musab al Zarqawi. He was arrested in 2004 and held in Camp Bucca where he met al Baghdadi. When the Caliphate was formed, al Anbari was appointed Wali, governor, of the Salaheddin Province. He was killed in a US air strike last December near Derna. He was replaced by another Iraqi: Abu Ali al Anbari. The latter has been a militant extremist since 2002 and is one of the Caliph's commanders and one of its "diplomats" capable of brokering deals with local tribesmen. The choice of these two men underlines the importance Libya has and will have for al Baghdadi. Along the same lines are the

comments of Joseph Dunford, Chairman of the Joint Chief of Staffs and General Joseph Votel, head of Centcom.

The main base for the operations of the ISIS is in Nawfaliyah, close to Ben Jawad, while the command seems to be in Sirte, with its 50 thousand inhabitants the biggest town under their control. As part of their modus operandi, the Islamic State has signed deals with the local population, imposed its laws and rules and killed any opposition. Wherever they go, they try to set up a state. What they did in Sirte was transform a Libyan bank into an Islamic bank. The ISIS in Libya can rely on the help of Ansar al Sharia and its 3/4.000 men, the Shura Council of Benghazi Revolutionaries, the Shura Council of Mujaheddin in Derna and several other fanatic Islamic factions.

The chemical threat

As the terrorists advance, another unsolved issue resurfaces: the stockpile of chemical agents and weapons left behind by the Gaddafi regime and that the ISIS could potentially get its hands on, as some recent articles suggest. Gaddafi's cousin, Ahmed, seems to support this scenario. We wrote about this specific issue in the past ("Invisible Dog #15", March 2013), as we have evidence of the stock of chemicals that were hidden by the Libyan dictator while he negotiated with the international community. Today, groups of loyalists could decide to hands these stockpiles to the ISIS.

Furthermore, someone is trying to get the Rabta chemical plant back on its feet and has started to contact experts abroad. It is unclear who is behind this and what they want. The person leading this effort is Ahmed Hesnawi, the man behind Libya's chemical weapons program under Gaddafi and one of the opponents of a deal to dismantle the chemical arsenal. A Serbian national is currently aiding him.

WHAT THE PEACE CONFERENCE ON SYRIA IS REALLY ABOUT

The peace conference on Syria that was held in the past weeks between Vienna and Geneva is relevant not because of the results it will produce – none in the short term, very few in the medium term, hopefully some in the long term – but because of the scenarios it will define.

The return of Russia in its role as “superpower” and that of Iran following the deal on its nuclear program have changed the balance of power in the region. In the aftermath of the events in Ukraine and the international sanctions that followed, Moscow was playing a defensive foreign policy. It has now turned the tables in sponsoring the Syrian regime. Russia is presently the only country capable of developing a negotiated solution to the crisis; a way out of the conflict that could envisage a “controlled” political transition in Damascus that will safeguard the privileged axis between Moscow and Syria.

Both the United States and Russia are not interested about the fate of Bashar al Assad, whose war crimes make him a disposable asset, but rather of defeating the ISIS. Moscow pursues this target by helping the Syrian regime, while Washington supports a portion of the rebellion and asks, at the same time, that Assad leave power. It is around these variable that the fate of the negotiations will be decided.

Until now, pragmatism has reigned in the talks and has allowed all the adversaries to sit around a table. The same level of pragmatism will have to be used in seeking a solution. As Russia correctly suggests, the removal of Assad from power would create a void and Syria could collapse, thus helping the spread – once again – of the Islamic State. No matter what, there are no options available when it comes to the continuity of power in Damascus, with or without Assad. The Syrian dictator is alternatively a bargaining chip or a contentious issue.

A crowded conference

The negotiations have gathered regional and international actors that, in one way or the other, have a say on Syria: key countries like the United States, Russia, Iran, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Lebanon, Iraq and Turkey; regional organizations such as the European Union, the Arab League and the UN, that hosts the talks led by its representative Staffan de Mistura; other nations with a varying degrees of influence as China, the United Kingdom, France, Italy, Germany, Jordan, Oman, Qatar, the UAE. Such a wide participation should postulate the common goal of achieving a negotiated solution regardless of each party's political views.

Clearly, the leverage of each negotiator varies according to the degree of their involvement in Syrian affairs. Russia and Iran have their forces on the ground, while the United States have to cope with being a superpower unwilling to involve itself directly and with a reluctant foreign policy. This provides the United States with a different bargaining weight.

The President of the Council of Europe, Donald Tusk, has stated over the past weeks that Russia is not the solution for Syria. He probably meant it is not the solution Europe nor the United States envisage. Moscow is currently the only country actually doing something

while other international actors are either too contradictory or totally immobile. As a matter of fact, several actors sitting at the talks have brought along with them a series of issues that have little or nothing to do with the Syrian civil war. In other words, the struggle for Damascus has catalyzed and emphasized a number of exogenous variables that have now become part of the problem.

Non-Syrian issues

Iran represents the most emblematic evolution for the Middle East. A once marginalized country has turned into one of the main actors. It has the military strength, a competitive economy and upholds the rights of the Shia communities of the region. Teheran still faces a number of internal contradictions in the ongoing struggle between reformists – in favor of a moderate foreign policy – and the regime's hardliners. The upcoming February 26, 2016 elections will define where the country stands. However, with 2.500 Pasdarans, 5.000 Lebanese Hezbollah and around 15.000 Shia volunteers from Iraq and Iran that have flocked to Syria to fight, Teheran is one of the key players.

Saudi Arabia does not like this state of things and its relationship with Iran has been under strain since the execution of Shia cleric Nimr al Nimr on January 2, 2016. It still unclear how this downfall of bilateral ties will influence the outcome of the Syrian talks. It is pretty clear where Riyadh stands when it comes to the fate of Assad; a position also shared by Ankara. Saudi Arabia and Turkey are both part of the so-called “Islamic NATO” and are both wary of Teheran's growing prestige. The risk of a Sunni-Shia sectarian war is not so remote. Saudi Arabia is facing an internal power struggle, is failing in Yemen and its economy is faltering because of the drop in oil prices. Wary of Iran's return on the scene, the Saudis could decide to use Syria to regain some ground.

The Kurdish syndrome is instead still central for Turkey. The fear that the Syrian Kurds may benefit from their war on terrorism with increasing degrees of autonomy or – in the worst case scenario for the Turks – independence is dictating the agenda in Ankara. This explains the recent attacks against Syrian Kurds and the fight against the PKK. Both Saudi Arabia and Turkey have come closer, but questions remain on who the enemy to fight is and what the priorities are: Assad to deter Iranian influence, the Kurds to deflect the PKK or al Baghdadi and the ISIS?

After having declared they were unwilling to contribute boots on the ground, the United States are suffering from a soaring Russian role, but are also benefiting from the military response against Abu Bakr al Baghdadi. Washington has been extremely pragmatic when it comes to terrorism. To recapture Ramadi, in Iraq, the US coordinated its air strikes with Iran and the Shia militias.

Every actors in the negotiations has to come to terms with its fears. Russia supports Assad to keep a foothold in the region, continue to sell its weapons and continue to use the Tartous naval base for its fleet. With an eye to what has happened in Libya, the West is leery of a destabilized Middle East, the future role of Iran, the fate of the Christian minorities that have benefited from the support of the Assad regime. Above all, it is clear that without a political deal, the military option will see Russia and Iran define the future of

Syria. This is exactly what is happening now as the talks have stopped and the bombings are on the rise. It is not hence a coincidence that both Turkey and Saudi Arabia are discussing the deployment of their troops on Syrian soil to fight their “terrorists”.

Invitations at the table

The key issue, before talks even start, is to identify who will sit around the table to represent the opposition to Bashar al Assad regardless of the vetoes that hold back the peace process. This is where the first, major problems begin.

Saudi Arabia has shaped its own opposition after summoning a series of groups to Riyadh. The Kurdish factions were left out to please Turkey, but they still managed to form their own front in Hasaka, in Syria. The ISIS and Jabhat al Nusra were obviously not part of the talks, although a number of extremist Islamic groups that benefit from Saudi or Turkish support are present. The Saudi initiative, praised by the US, was stigmatized by Russia for not being authorized or agreed upon. The Syria Contact Group has tasked Jordan with that chore. Moscow has already made clear that it doesn't want terrorist groups at the talks. There will be a huge debate on who is a “terrorist” and who is not.

It is now hard to make sense of the thousand or so armed factions that are fighting against the Syrian regime. The so-called “civil society”, or political opposition, has had to leave the way for the armed groups. The presumably secular Free Syrian Army, with its 40 thousand fighters and US support, will face fundamentalist Islamic factions as Ahrar ash-Sham – 80 or so factions counting on 15 to 20 thousand men and supported by Turkey – and Jaish al Islam with ties to the Saudis. All these groups don't see a need for a “transition” of power in Syria and are asking for Assad to step down before the negotiations and that the bombings stop before talks begin.

An uphill task

The victims, the destruction, the atrocities and the traumas the civil war has brought with it leave very little room for a negotiated solution and for a national reconciliation. There is a clear divide between the Alawites and the Sunnis, the loyalists and the rebels. In other words, any deal will have to come with the necessary follow up from the outside to prevent another escalation. Brokering such an agreement will be extremely difficult, as the recent failures remind us.

The Syrian civil war has become a proxy war for a number of external actors. Their military involvement implies that they can also play a positive diplomatic role. The peace conference has defined some criteria around which talks will not debate: the safeguard of the territorial integrity of Syria, its independence and secularism, the protection of the population regardless of their ethnicity or religion, humanitarian assistance, the defeat of terrorism, and the political transition that will leave Syrians decide on their future. It is still a positive development that all the actors of the Syrian crisis have decided to create a synergy to find a solution.

Five years of civil war have destroyed Syria. Over 300 thousand people have died, 4 to 5 million refugees have left the country. The negotiators claim they can reach a deal within

the next 18 to 20 months. Is this a realistic target? It will definitely prove to be a difficult one. Time will play a role, as the longer it takes to reach a deal, the harder it will become to defeat the ISIS. This could be the decisive factor in pushing the international community in finally finding an agreement to end the Syrian civil war.