Climate Change Ultimately Caused the Syrian Refugee Crisis

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“Climate Change” is real. Hillary Clinton recently predicted a water war in which rival governments will eventually fight over declining resources, and experts labeled this scientific phenomenon as the “threat multiplier” in contemporary society. Glaciers in the Arctic are melting, and polar bears are drowning underwater without having habitats to live. However, this intimidating change is now detrimentally affecting humanity as well. As Secretary of State John Kerry warned the formation of climate nomads or migrants, a tragic exodus is taking place near the Fertile Crescent, a fertile region in the Middle East where humans first settled to practice agriculture. In regions where rebels chose violence to defy their totalitarian governments, 10.6 million Syrians chose to search for different places to live either abroad or within the border after inevitably leaving their motherland. 85% of Syrian livestocks and the Halaby peppers hopelessly withered, and people started gathering into hugely overpopulated urban cities, such as Damascus and Daraa. This unbalanced distribution of the population caused social unrest and violent riots led by radical teenagers who sought for better lifestyle. Recently, Prince Charles of Wales pointed out a fascinating correlation that climate change has been one of the main factors that has caused social instability and mass migrations across the world. Though this phenomenon is not the only factor of international migration, it surely is the most neglected one despite its strong link with the current refugee crisis. Thus, a solution is urgently needed in order to
prevent the Syrians from losing another 50% of their agricultural security and 57% of their economic development by 2050.

In Northern Africa and the Middle East, where political unrest has caused violent civil wars and riots, climate change has deteriorated people’s lifestyles and drastically changed the weather. According to Christopher Schär, a rise in temperature and humidity around the Persian Gulf will create extreme conditions that are intolerable to humans within the next century. Statistically, with the temperature rise of 0.65°C for the past century, nearly 200 million people are living in regions that are at risk of sinking below sea level by the end of the century. Stadium construction workers in Qatar unfortunately lost lives due to such high temperatures in Doha, and the Sahara Desert is keep expanding due to the aggravation of desertification that has taken away forests and farmlands in Africa. In places where effects of climate change are explicit, political unrest has always taken place because citizens cannot conform to the government that often avoid dealing with the damages from climate change. For instance, the Arab Spring revolutions took place in Libya, Egypt, and Tunisia several years ago since the dictators could not effectively deal with massive crowds from rural areas that suddenly settled in cities and caused overpopulation. In addition, Syria has suffered from an ongoing civil war against the al-Assad regime as al-Assad has maintained his authoritative rule even after a long-term, catastrophic drought. Based on these coincidences, one can easily assume the geographical significance that factors in when one overhauls the correlation between social instability and climate change. According to the climatologists at the Strauss Center for International Security and Law, climate change already has affected weather in the Arabian and Northern African region. If this devastating geographic trend continues along the equator, human population residing around the line will
innocently be damaged from future geographical changes. In order to prove the correlation, case study of how the Syrian drought affected Syrian welfare and politics best exemplifies the phenomenon.

The Syrian drought, lasting from 2006 to 2011, is often characterized as “the worst long-term drought and most severe set of crop failures since agricultural civilizations began in the Fertile Crescent many millennia ago.” 75% of the Syrian population had to suffer from crop failures, and herders inevitably lost 85% of their livestocks. Due to this calamity that dismantled the nation, 800,000 Syrians lost all their livelihood in 2009, and over a million people claimed themselves as food “insecure.” Even though some might argue that this drought was a necessary part of the ecological cycle, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) has proved through scientific data that the recent droughts in Syria and the Mediterranean have been the results of climate change, using the decline of precipitation and an increase in average temperature as key evidences. Thus, experts are predicting that Syria will face a harsh national regression up to 57% by 2050 if the current global greenhouse gas emission trend continues.

This drought not only took away properties and ruined the Syrian economy, but also served as a driving force towards a refugee crisis. As industries in rural areas mercilessly collapsed in Syria, families started to gather into urban cities to find new hopes. Statistically, over 200,000 rural villagers in 2011 chose to go on an exodus to the cities, and this phenomenon has been causing social and political unrest as the general population started to concentrate only in urban areas. Eventually, Syrians could not attain more raw materials to eat or produce, and many rural villagers decided to protest against the al-Assad regime, creating rebel armies to overthrow the futile government.
Clearly, explicit correlation exists between climate change and the current refugee crisis, and Syria is not the only region that is directly victimized by the phenomenon. Despite some radicals’ suspicions toward the existence of climate change, the occurrence itself can be traced back to every trash people littered with ignorance. Luckily, international efforts have been made by communities, including the COP21, which brought accordance in regulating carbon emission and many harmful activities, and these attempts will hopefully better the migration crisis throughout the world. Most importantly, people, no matter where they live, should care more about saving environment in their daily lifestyles, and more non-governmental and governmental supports should help areas like Syria reconstruct themselves from calamities and take preventative measures, such as building reservoirs and irrigation systems to prevent repeated droughts.

**Word Count:** 992