

Forum: Special Conference on Health (SPC-2)

Issue: Destruction of healthcare infrastructure due to conflict in the Middle East

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Introduction

The promotion of well-being, security, nutrition, shelter, and various other fundamental needs has perpetually constituted paramount concerns of humanity since its inception. Accordingly, concerted efforts have been dedicated towards ensuring the unequivocal fulfilment of these prerequisites for human existence. In pursuit of this overarching objective, humanity has witnessed multifaceted advancements across cultural, technological, and societal domains. Despite some endeavours, the conflicts are getting more unstable day by day, especially in the Middle East due to its geopolitical location. The most observable conflicts are in the Middle East, where the healthcare infrastructure as a whole is jeopardized. The conflicts are categorized into groups such as political instability, civil war or armed conflict. The common point of these three concepts is that they harm humanity and, therefore, their healthcare infrastructure. The Israel-State of Palestine conflict, the Syrian Civil War, the Yemeni Civil War, the Sudanese Civil War, the instability in Iraq and the Libyan Civil War. affected the healthcare system from different fields due to the various conditions observed at each conflict. Since healthcare infrastructure not only depends on the number of hospitals but also working conditions, healthcare workers and technological developments in the system, the issue should be tackled in the most sustainable way possible in order to prevent the healthcare infrastructure in the Middle East from further collapsing. Therefore, a knowledge of the analyzed conditions of each conflict in the Middle East is important to take sustainable and active actions for developing the healthcare infrastructure in the conflict zones.



Definition of Key Terms

Healthcare infrastructure: The term used for all services and facilities that aim to contribute to the population's health. Healthcare infrastructure contains, healthcare workers, hospitals, vaccination programmes and clinics. The term may also include, access to clean water and sanitation, robust, disease-free housing, and social services. Broader still, roads, communication systems, economic opportunities, planning rules, and a good education might also be included within the category, as these impede or enhance the healthcare outcomes of populations. (Urban Health 360, 1)

Political Instability: A condition which contains volatile or uncertain political circumstances such as conflicts, governance issues, or changes in government. It may also decrease the possible investments outside the country due to some concerns. The twelve variables for determining political instability are; government stability; socioeconomic conditions; investment profile; internal conflict; external conflict; corruption; military in politics; religious tensions; law and order; ethnic tensions; democratic accountability; and bureaucracy quality. (Encyclopedia, 1)

Armed Conflict: Armed conflict is a situation when there is an armed confrontation between two groups that are opposed to each other. Unfortunately, armed conflicts may result in the death of many civilians and problems in humanitarian assistance (Amnesty International, 1).

Civil War: A war between organized groups from the same country or state. The main reason behind is generally to achieve independence for a region or to change policies. (Britannica, 1)

Background Information

With the establishment of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals in 2015, the backbone of the healthcare infrastructure was formed. SDG 3 is focused on 'Good Health and Well Being' whereas SDG 6 emphasizes 'Ensuring availability and



sustainable management of water and sanitation for all. In order to achieve such goals, the aftermath of conflicts should be analyzed and the conditions should be deeply known before taking any actions upon such a sensitive topic. This year the world has witnessed numerous instances of armed conflicts, especially in the Middle East. As a result,

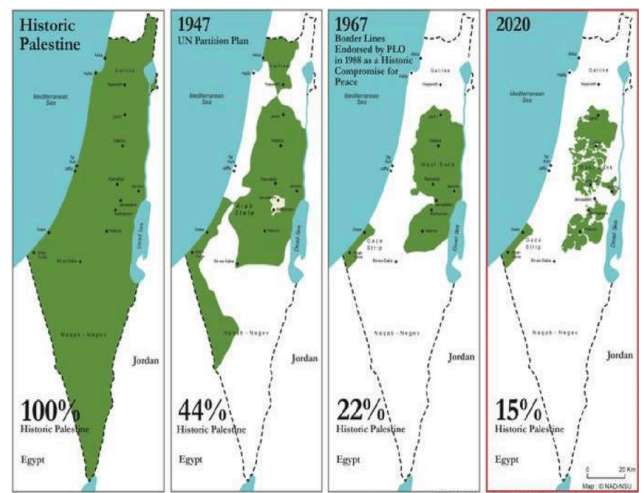
healthcare facilities are often targeted in armed conflicts, particularly in urban areas, leading to further destruction of the healthcare system and hospitals in many countries. The Middle East, which is a geopolitical region



encompassing the Arabian Peninsula, the Levant, Turkey, Egypt, Iran, and Iraq, has seen many conflicts this year. From the Israel-Palestine Conflict to the Sudan Civil War, each conflict has affected its healthcare system which might jeopardise the future of healthcare in the region. To take more productive steps to tackle the issue, the conditions of each situation must be analyzed.

Israeli-Palestinian Conflict

The Land of Palestine was administered by the Ottoman Empire until the end of the 1st World War. After the 1st World War, the land started to belong to the United Kingdom. Nonetheless, the region was a mandate and it was called the Mandate for Palestine. During the 2nd World War, Jewish people who fled from the racist Nazi Germany started to immigrate to the region. With their



high population, the Jewish people demanded their own land, and in 1947, the United Nations recommended a two-state solution for both nations. In 1948, the state of Israel was officially established, but this was not something that most of the Arab nationalists in the region welcomed. Fighting between Jewish and Arab militias



had been intensifying for months, and the day after Israel declared statehood, five Arab countries attacked. (BBC,1).

Afterwards, in 1967, the 6-Day War occurred, and Israel achieved final victory. As a result, Israel became in control of the Gaza Strip, the Sinai Peninsula, the West Bank, and Jerusalem. In 2005, Israel retreated from the Gaza territory and West Bank. Both Israeli military and security forces have always been oppressing innocent Palestinian civilians. Secretary General of Amnesty

International explained the crime against humanity with these words, "We found that Israel's cruel policies of segregation, dispossession and exclusion across all territories under its control clearly amount to apartheid. The international community has an obligation to act." (Amnesty International, 1).

The impact of Israeli-Palestinian conflict has devastating effects on the health infrastructure in the Gazan Region due to its geopolitical location. Since the terrorist group Hamas' attacks started on 7th October 2023, the Israeli military forces have destroyed not just civilian buildings but also humanitarian facilities, especially healthcare infrastructure.



Syrian Civil War

After World War I, like the Palestinian territories, the Syrian region was also divided among the Entente Powers. This portion of the collapsed empire was planned to be given to France. Thus, the French State administered this region from 1920 to 1946. After the French mandate in the region, the first republic of Syria was established. However, the complications that the newborn republic and the Syrian people would face from over; they had only just begun. Until 1958, the government faced three coups d'état, and a functioning cabinet that could never be established. Nonetheless, in 1958, Syria and Egypt formed the United Arab Republic, which couldn't withstand the test of time and collapsed again with a coup d'état in Syria. After this period, the destiny of the Syrian people underwent a complete change in 1963. In 1963, the authoritarian Ba'ath Party came to power, and the Assad family began their rule over Syria. However, on March 15, 2011, the country experienced its worst incident in all of its history: a civil war erupted, driving the country into a deadlock. The civil war remains a pressing issue in the region, with far-reaching consequences for various civilian facilities. Many children have been affected by the war, unable to attend school. Despite this, the most significant impact on civilians in the region has always been the loss of health infrastructure. Terrorist groups like ISIS or Al-Qaeda continue to impact civilians, and even today, not only the prosperity of civilians but also the security of basic infrastructural buildings in the region are at risk.

Yemeni Civil War:

The Yemeni Civil War, started in 2014 when the capital Sanaa was overtaken by the Houthi rebel forces which are predominantly Shia and have been marginalized in Yemeni politics. The Houthis seized control over the capital and forced President Hadi to flee the country. The conflict's devastating humanitarian problems are reported to be food shortages, disease outbreaks and displacement. The



intervention of foreign powers in Yemen's conflict, such as Iran and the Arab States of the Gulf, also drew the country into a regional proxy issue along the broader Sunni-Shia divide. (Center of Preventive Action, 1). A relentless air campaign has also been led by Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, whose support has carried out about twenty-five thousand airstrikes. In conclusion of these strikes, which have resulted in over 19,000 civilian deaths, the Houthis launched a wave of drone assaults against Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates in 2021 and 2022. The war has resulted in a humanitarian catastrophe, with widespread famine, disease, and displacement.

The War in Sudan:

The civil war in Sudan is essentially caused by a power struggle between Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) leaders and the Rapid Support Forces, a major paramilitary force. Since the conflict began on April 15, 2023, nearly 15,000 people have been killed and more than 8.2 million displaced, resulting in the world's biggest displacement crisis. Sudan's collapsing healthcare system and attacks on healthcare facilities and workers have grown dramatically since the outbreak of conflict on April 15th, resulting in the loss of many lives as well as important hospitals. Around 60 attacks on healthcare facilities have been documented so far, many occupied by one or the other side of the conflict, and the rest exhibit medication shortages and safety issues. Hence, two-thirds of the medical centres are currently nonfunctioning. The violence against medical staff has become a huge issue. According to the latest reports, more than 200 violations against medical staff were recorded, which led to the death of 38 healthcare workers. The violations towards healthcare workers were generally killing, kidnapping, and assaulting. Due to such attacks against healthcare workers, a severe staff shortage in the few working facilities (which are very few) was observed. The violation against healthcare workers did not only harm people physically. The surviving health personnel were also frightened for their safety. According to UNICEF, access to healthcare is still a challenge for many Sudanese families, therefore, many infants lose their lives from preventable or treatable



conditions. As well as the child mortality in Sudan, maternal mortality also increased. Furthermore, not all children are receiving the crucial vaccinations (UNICEF,1)

The Instability in Iraq

Since the US-led invasion in 2003, Iraq continues to suffer from political instability. Despite the fall of ISIS's territorial caliphate in 2017, Iraq still faces security concerns such as intermittent terrorist attacks, insurgency activity, and conflicts between ethnic and religious groups. The existence of multiple militias exacerbates the problem. In 2020, Iraq's healthcare system faced many issues. The news agency Reuters explained the issue with these words "The story that emerges is complex. Over the past three decades, the country has been ravaged - by war and U.N. sanctions, by sectarian conflict and the rise of Islamic State. Yet even in times of relative stability, Iraq has missed opportunities to expand and rebuild its healthcare system.". Alaa Alwan, Iraq's Minister of Health, mentioned that "Health is not a priority and the indicators show that. The government did not give healthcare what it deserves.". By the relevant data, we can understand that a further step must be taken for the financial assistance assigned for the development of the healthcare system. For example in 2019, a year of relative peace, the government allocated just 2.5% of the state's \$106.5 billion budget to its health ministry, a fraction of spending elsewhere in the Middle East. By comparison, security forces received 18% and the oil ministry 13.5%. Over the past decade, data from the World Health Organization shows, that Iraq's central government has consistently spent less per capita on healthcare than its less economically developed neighbours - \$161 per citizen each year on average, compared to Jordan's \$304 and Lebanon's \$649. (Aboulenein, Levinson, 1)

Libyan Civil War

Since the overthrow of Muammar Gaddafi because of the Arab Spring in 2011, the country has been divided into two groups. The UN-recognized Government of National Accord (GNA) in Tripoli and the Libyan National Army (LNA) led by Khalifa



Haftar, which controls much of the eastern region of the country. The battle for control over Libya crosses tribal, regional, political, and even religious lines. Each coalition has created governing institutions and each has faced internal fragmentation and division. To find a resolution to the conflict and create a unity government, then-UN Special Envoy to Libya Bernardino Leon, followed by Martin Kobler, facilitated a series of talks between the Tobruk-based House of Representatives (HoR)—based in Libya's east and a key supporter of Haftar—and the Tripoli-based GNC. The talks resulted in the creation of the Libyan Political Agreement and the UN-supported Government of National Accord (GNA) in December 2015. However, the GNA faced obstacles to creating a stable, unified government in Libya. The continuous political instability present in the country, and the foreign involvement have also triggered the conditions to get worse. The terrorist groups which have tried to gain advantage also increased the ongoing political instability. Other nations have also expressed interest in Libya; Haftar's LNA has been supported by Egypt, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, France, and Russia, while the UN-backed GNA has been supported by Turkey, Qatar, and Italy. Fearing that the GNA will be linked to political Islam, Egypt and the United Arab Emirates have been heavily involved in providing military backing for Haftar. Also, Russia enabled the Wagner Group to assist Haftar in his attempt to secure preferential access to Libya's natural resources. Turkey, meanwhile, backs the GNA because of the marine energy and gas agreements. The other foreign allies have adopted a more subdued strategy, offering aid and diplomatic backing to their favoured associate. In terms of military action, Turkey and Egypt have approved the most amount troops. In such political instability, the development of healthcare infrastructure didn't remain to be the first goal (Center for Preventive Action, 1). Furthermore, the armed conflicts increased the question of the strength of the healthcare. Currently, the healthcare system in Libya is combined with state-run facilities and small private hospitals. The 2011 conflict caused the healthcare system to suffer from the insufficiency of the health information system, severe medical supply shortage, and loss of health staff. In this century, it is also important to maintain a developed



healthcare system for the system to be more sustainable. To achieve such an optimal system, the quality of the health information system is crucial. For instance, during the fighting in April 2015, the Al Zahra Kidney Hospital near Tripoli suffered significant damage. Due to security concerns, many hospitals in Benghazi were compelled to close. Meanwhile, Benghazi Medical Center (BMC) emerged as the city of Benghazi's main hospital for medical care. The lack of security and the sporadic delivery of supplies are the main causes of the acute scarcity of vaccines, medical supplies, and pharmaceuticals in the nation. The list of shortages includes supplies for obstetrics and renal dialysis, intravenous fluids, laboratory reagents, anti-tuberculosis, anti-neoplastic, and HIV/AIDS pharmaceuticals, among other chronic disease treatments. The lack of anaesthetics, dressing materials, and internal fixators for fractures is a problem in surgical rooms. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), in 2019, more people were killed in Libya as a result of assaults on healthcare facilities than in any other country worldwide..

Major Countries and Organizations Involved

Palestine

The attack on Gaza's infrastructure has seriously damaged the country's health system, which got worsened by a lack of medical personnel and essential supplies. In the face of this catastrophe, medical staff members toil diligently in overcrowded hospitals, trying to provide care to those in need. More than 600 incidents of violence against, or obstruction of access to, healthcare have been recorded in Gaza since the outbreak of violence in October. International humanitarian law (IHL) states that attacks on hospitals, ambulances, or their staff are prohibited. Attacks against medical personnel and relief workers endanger lives and hinder the provision of life-saving assistance to communities facing a crisis. Unfortunately, Gaza's civilian population of Palestinian descent today lives in this reality. (Rescue,1)



International humanitarian law has demanded that all parties participating in the Gaza conflict observe it and that there be a quick and permanent truce. Since October 2023, there have been about 29,000 Palestinian deaths and 70,000 injuries. As a result of their pain, hundreds of people urgently require mental health treatment. Palestinians no longer have sufficient access to food or clean water due to the conflict. Medical demands are further exacerbated by the fact that 100% of Gaza's population is at urgent risk of starvation, according to an Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) food security study.

Médecins Sans Frontières

Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF), often known as Doctors Without Borders, is a prominent organization that is essential to the provision of medical aid, especially in regions impacted by violence, displacement, and humanitarian emergencies. MSF runs field hospitals, mobile clinics, and medical facilities to provide vital healthcare services to underserved communities in nations including Palestine, Yemen, Syria, Iraq, and Yemen in the Middle East. In Syria, where the ongoing civil conflict has destroyed the country's healthcare system, MSF offers surgical treatments, emergency medical care, and assistance to victims of violence and relocation. MSF provides medical care, mental health support, and aid for chronic illnesses and malnutrition to internally displaced people (IDPs) and communities affected by violence in Iraq.

International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC):

The ICRC is a global humanitarian network that helps people with humanitarian aid across the world. 11,164 forensic items were distributed to facilitate the dignified management, identification and eventual return of human remains to their families. 1,200 items were distributed in Israel. and over 9,800 items were distributed in Gaza by the committee.

United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)



UNDP is funding staffing, communications, gasoline, and operating expenditures in state health institutions and community-based programs to ensure the continuation of TB and HIV services. In addition, UNDP is collaborating with the Federal Ministry of Health, WHO, and humanitarian NGOs to deploy nine mobile primary healthcare facilities in distant, hard-to-reach locations, especially for internally displaced persons. UNDP is providing further assistance to the health-care system's restoration. Supplies and equipment for laboratory diagnoses, solar energy installations at 110 health institutions, oxygen supplied by seven pressure swing adsorption (PSA) plants and cylinders, and two large-volume biomedical waste incinerators keep health services running smoothly. (UNDP,1)

International Medical Corps (IMC)

International Medical Corps alleviates the suffering of persons impacted by conflict, tragedy, and disease, frequently in challenging and dangerous conditions. We provide critical healthcare services and training to assist devastated communities transition from relief to self-sufficiency. (IMC,1)

Libya

More than a decade of civil conflict has left Libya's critical infrastructure in a state of near collapse. Although a ceasefire agreed in 2020 continues to hold, sporadic clashes still occur. At the height of the conflict, hundreds of thousands of people were displaced, and thousands more were killed or injured. Health care was one of the worst-affected sectors. Medical facilities often came under attack from armed groups, forcing many hospitals and clinics to suspend services or close completely. Due to almost ten years of civil strife, Libya's vital infrastructure is in danger of collapsing. There are occasional conflicts even though the truce that was agreed upon in 2020 is still in place. Thousands more were killed or injured, and hundreds of thousands of more were displaced during the conflict's peak. One of the industries most severely impacted was health care. Armed groups often attacked medical



institutions, forcing many hospitals and clinics to either temporarily cease operations or close entirely.

Sudan

Sudan's current healthcare system is fragile. For instance, 78,000 children under the age of five die each year from diseases like malaria that can be prevented, and if funding for the health sector keeps going down, this number is predicted to increase. Also, there are many less healthcare facilities, which makes it harder to the citizens to use.

Timeline of Events

March 2003- December 2011	The Iraqi Civil War
2015 - 2019	Yemeni Civil War
2011-2019	Syrian Civil War
2011 - 2020	Libyan Civil War

Relevant UN Resolutions and Other Documents

- [UN Security Council Resolution 2286](#): Condemns attacks on medical facilities.
- [UN Secretary-General's Reports on Children and Armed Conflict](#)
- [UN Human Rights Council Reports on Syria](#): For violence towards children.
- [UN Human Rights Council Reports on Yemen](#): Report for humanitarian problems regarding healthcare.



- **UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) Situation Reports:** Report for humanitarian affairs. It is important since the assistance of the healthcare system is a crucial need.

Previous Attempts to Solve the Issue

The actions upon developing the healthcare infrastructure were taken by NGOs, governments, international organizations and local communities. Emergency relief reports were an important part of the attempts to solve the issue by providing medical supplies, and healthcare personnel to the affected regions. The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) often led such campaigns throughout the conflicts in the Middle East. Also, UNDP is assisting health personnel, facilities, and supplies in Sudan to continue life-saving medical treatments. UNDP works with the National Medical Supplies Fund and the World Food Programme to distribute medications to health institutions that are still operating. The supplies will assisted by UNDP to meet Sudan's urgent needs, ensuring the continuation of treatment for 11,000 HIV patients and keeping the national tuberculosis programme on schedule to treat a possible 21,000 cases. UNDP collaborate with national governments and local partners to rehabilitate critical infrastructure and improve access to healthcare services. Furthermore, World Health Organization (WHO) provides technical expertise to areas in the post-conflict period. International Medical Corps (IMC), focused on training experienced healthcare workers to develop the healthcare system in the local areas. International Medical Corps is in Gaza, where they have had professionals stationed since 2008. IMC deployed two field hospitals: a 140-bed field hospital that provides surgical, trauma, orthopaedic, obstetric, and newborn care, as well as inpatient, outpatient, pharmacy, and other lifesaving medical services to up to 1,500 civilians affected by the war each day, and a 42-bed hospital that provides lifesaving primary healthcare and emergency services, including comprehensive emergency obstetric and newborn care. In both sites, IMC provides health, protection, mental health, water, sanitation, and hygiene services, as well as a consistent supply of medicines, supplies, and training in the Israel- Palestine conflict zone. International Medical



Corps has been in Libya since 2011, and it currently provides healthcare, mental health, and gender-based violence response services and training to the country's most vulnerable people, including refugees, asylum seekers, internally displaced persons (IDPs), and returnees. Since 2014, IMC's efforts have focused on meeting the needs of Syrian refugees and conflict-affected Iraqis in northern and central Iraq, as IMC respond to ongoing violence and insecurity. Human Rights Watch (HRW), highlights violations of medical neutrality and the targeting of healthcare institutions and staff in war areas. They undertake research, advocacy, and lobbying campaigns to bring criminals responsible and increase awareness about the necessity of preserving healthcare during times of conflict. United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) also played an active role in negotiating with armed groups in order to create a secure corridor for healthcare.

Possible Solutions

Recommendations to tackle this issue consisted of ceasing fire, restoring and resuming healthcare services, and insurance of a safe working environment. International collaboration and sufficient financial support are crucial to restore the healthcare system in the regions affected by the armed conflicts. Sustaining international diplomacy is crucial since a ceasefire is important to prevent the collapse of the healthcare infrastructure as a whole and to start focusing on more healthcare. Since healthcare is an important part of the SDGs, humanitarian aid and emergency reliefs should be continued and managed by analysing the conditions of the conflicts. Reconstruction of crucial healthcare facilities can be assisted. The training of healthcare staff can also be important in order to ensure the local healthcare infrastructure. Encouraging local communities to engage in decision-making and take ownership of healthcare projects. Promoting community-based healthcare models and collaborations to provide long-term access to healthcare services might be sustainable. Psychosocial assistance and



mental health services are provided to people and communities who have experienced conflict-related trauma and stress.

Integrating mental health services into primary care systems and community-based initiatives are also an important part of the healthcare systems. Using technology and creativity to overcome logistical barriers and enhance access to healthcare in crisis zones as well as using telemedicine, mobile health applications, and remote monitoring systems might be used to provide healthcare services remotely and in inaccessible places.

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