

Syrian Skirmish: Security Hitch and Complexity in the Middle East

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Abstract *The Syrian skirmish, vis-à-vis Middle East region and complexities, has been analysed at three main levels - domestic, regional and extra-regional. The internal vulnerabilities of the Syrian state and society at a domestic level is dominant in paving the way for the origin of the conflict and providing the vacuum to the regional and extra-regional actors to further deteriorate the condition of Syria. The Syrian conflict is the central security issues within the Regional Security Complex of the Middle East. Although extra-regional relations influence regional security, the Syrian conflict poses more security threat to the regional actors. This paper will explain these questions; What role is being played by the extra-regional [global] powers in the Syrian conflict, and how the Syrian crises are increasing challenges to the security of the Middle East region?*

Key Words: Syria, Conflict, Regional Actors, Extra Regional Actors, Security, Hitch, Complexity.

Introduction

Syria has been ruled by many Empires. It was ruled by several regional and extra-regional empires- Egyptians, Hittites, Assyrians, Persians, Macedonian Greeks, Romans, Umayyad, Abbasids, Mongols, Ottomans, British and French (Khoury, 1991). It was the Umayyad caliphate that left the Islamic legacy, and for many centuries, the Syrian people have been [dominantly] Muslim. Historically Syria was inhabited by various minority groups of Christians, various types of Shia Muslims like Alawis, Ismailis and other, Yazidis, Kurds, Jews along with Sunni Arab Muslims (Polk, 2013). Throughout the Ottoman rule, the people live according to their own codes of life. Muslims shared Islamic values, and laws with the government and the other religious groups were self-governing except in foreign and military affairs.

After the First World War Syria fell into the hands of French, colonial power, in 1921, in order to get a stronger hold over the Levant, the French tried to make it Christian dominated, divided Syria into different administrative units, attempted to change the cultural and social orientation with French language and

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customs and to control the Muslim majority they favor the minorities. As a result of French policies, European type of nationalism emerged in the native Syrian politics.

After the French were forced out, and Syria got independence in 1946 the coup leaders and military dictators “spoke in nationalist rhetoric” and failed to establish stability in the State (Andy, 2013). Then in 1958, Syria became part of United Arab Republic Union under Egypt’s president Gamal Abdel Nasser, but Syria separated from the union after the 1961 coup.

As Muslim Arab constituted the majority of the Syrian population and with the growing influence of nationalism there was a split among the nationalist over the idea that a nation must be Sunni Arab while other argue it should be state nationalism not on religious but territorial base. Finally, pan-Arab or Folk nationalism was adopted by the Baath party, which means “Syria is not a separate nation-state but a part of the whole Arab world” (Polk, 2013).

The Assad’s Regime

Independent Syria was never stable, and there were eight successful military coups and counter-coups until 1970 when Hafiz al Assad overthrew Jadid from power. However, the minorities started embracing [ideological] political parties such as the Communist and Ba’ath, which solidify national politics. Due to French, over recruitment of minorities in the military, the Alawi officers lead the last three coups of 1963, 1966 and 1970 (Phillips, 2015). Hafiz al Assad came from Alawi family, and he increased significant Alawi military existence in his regime. Moreover, some Alawis enjoyed economic benefits but not all. The Ba’ath Constitution has condemned the sects and predicted that it would, sectarian difference, vanish (Tabler, 2011). Hafiz al Assad promoted Syrian -Arab nationalism via education, state and institutions. He gave significant civilian official positions to Sunni allies in order to achieve Syria’s support -particularly the peasantry class. However, most of the people believed that the more empowerment of Alawi sect connected to the politics was sectarian (Phillips, 2015).

In 1982 the Muslim Brotherhood uprising broke out in the country mainly in the Hama city against the Alawi regime, also supported by external enemies along the sectarian lines. The Hafiz al Assad regime’s bloody repression resulted in the Hama massacre. (Rugh, 2017), which clearly reflected his philosophy of monopoly of power that people would live a better life unless his rule was not challenged. In 1980, he sided Iran, in Iraq-Iran war, and sided the US in 1991, coalition forces against Saddam Hussain when Iraq attacked Kuwait. Hafiz al Assad regime was paradoxical. He officially dismissed the sects through Syrian Arab nationalist rhetoric but also allowed cultural separateness that leads toward the production of politicized identities or sects either by the regime itself or by the external and internal enemies. Hafiz al Assad was unable to solve the ethnic problem in Syria and to maintain his position; he personalized his rule to the extent that he was a sole power to hold the State with weak institutions. Thus, there was clear “cultural empowerment but political disempowerment” the main sectarian problem is evident in Syria today (Phillips, 2015).

Bashar al Assad came in power in 2000. Initially, he tried to reconciliatory efforts with the oppositions including Muslim Brotherhood, but once he legitimized his regime through an election, he started following his father authoritarianism style of politics “Run your own lives privately and enrich yourselves as you wish but do not challenge my government” (Polk, 2013).

Assad emerged as a powerful president and dismissed his father’s older Sunni supporter and favored his family members, thus making more Alawi dominant ruling elite. Economically he did some major reforms to meet the growing population demands for jobs. However, the new economic opportunities were given to his cousins in the ruling elite and cut the subsidies for the public in order to bring social market reforms-this policy greatly affected the Sunni peasantry, which was the main supporter of Ba’ath regime, got offended. These reforms also affected the social structure like reduction was observed in most of the institutions’ budgets, and reduced social reach of the regime created a gap which was partly filled by the

sub-state actors (Phillips, 2015). Thus, the social contract established between the State and society by Hafiz al Assad broke down. Moreover, he allowed more conservative Sunni Islam believing that he would direct it toward the society and keep away from politics.

Indeed, during the regime of both the Assad's the country also made economic progress and according to Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) World Fact Book "the Syrian enjoyed an income of \$5000 GDP per capita, but the Bashar al Assad's narrow down his political base in favor of Alawite family members and the prominent increase in their wealth leads toward deprivation among the ordinary Syrians".

An Overview of the Pre-Conflict Syria

Understanding the pre-conflict economic, social and political circumstances of Syria are imperative to analyze the roots of the uprising in 2011. In his inauguration speech in 2000, Bashar al Assad made many promises with the Syrian nation. He started reforming the country and tried to establish proper international trade, but soon everything falls into the same earlier corrupt ways as he started favoring his Alawi family members. According to Kaufman, one of the factors that push the co-existence order in multi-ethnic society into violence is the economic rivalry existed between the groups (Kaufman, 2015).

The Syrian society, despite the sectarianism and religion division, has been living together. The diversity in society was exploited by the extra-regional groups. These groups succeeded after the Syrian uprising and found the space "if state-society bonds were weakening while sect-society bond was strengthened" (Phillips, 2015). Moreover, the sectarian divisions always have existed in the Syrian society, but the politicization of sectarian identity by the sectarian entrepreneurs and state actors (Zubaida, 2014) and also by ruling elite as a political strategy to rule adds to the semi-sectarian nature of the Syrian conflict.

Although Bashar al Assad legitimized his position through an election, he was unable to find satisfactory ways acceptable to the public of enlarging political participation of his regime. For Syrians, it was more important to fill the gap between the role of the Alawi community and the demands of Islam than foreign hostility toward his regime. His failure leads toward devastation in Syrian affairs "the lack of political participation, fear of public demands, and severe police measure made the regime appear to be tyranny" (Polk, 2013).

Origin of the Syrian Conflict

The Syrian conflict erupted in March 2011 when the people demanded the release of teenagers arrested and tortured for revolutionary graffiti. But the security forces killed many demonstrators; the unrest escalated and triggered nationwide protests which demanded President Assad's resignation. Anti-Assad's forces took up weapons against the security forces (Lucy, 2016). President Assad adopted a two-way strategy that was promising political reforms while conducting a harsh crackdown on the demonstrator. The government's brutal repression provoked worldwide condemnation and sanctions imposed by the US, European Union and the Arab League. Syrian opposition became organized and established the Free Syrian Army against the regime. The United Nations Security Council condemned human rights violation in Syria, but the two global major powers, Russia and China, vetoed a resolution and threatened sanctions against Syria. The armed conflict between the Free Syrian Army and the government's forces was unembellished, whereas Russia continued to support Assad's regime (Glass, 2015) politically, economically and more important was the military support. Thus, the repression of the regime turned a local protest into a civil war and invited regional and extra-regional forces as interventionists.

In 2012, al-Qaeda affiliated al-Nusra Front appeared Sunni Muslim support to Syrian revolt. Saudi Arabia and the Gulf States pledged to support for Free Syrian army, whereas, the US and United Kingdom provided non-military funds to the rebellious. Moreover, the US, UK, Turkey, France, and the Gulf States accepted the National Coalition and Opposition Forces- established by opposition groups as a legitimate representative of Syria. Whereas China and Russia continued to veto any resolution passed in United

Nation Security Council against the Assad's regime. Charles Glass states that "the conflict escalates to all-out civil war. Foreign assistance to both sides fuels the violence and adds proxy wars to the internal conflict" (Glass, 2015).

In April 2013, the Syrian army, along with Hezbollah militia of Lebanon, conducted collective attacks to retake the strategically important town from the rebel. ISIS and al-Nusra Front carried out atrocities by targeting the Alawite community. This was a phase when the terrorist groups dominated the opposition increasingly. The US and UK suspended their support to the rebellions after the Islamist rebels capture Free Syrian Army Bases (BBC, 2017). The UN accused Assad of the use of chemical weapons. The Syrian forces launched assaults against the rebel as well as the terrorist groups, Hezbollah and Iran, with the help of Russian forces. The rebel forces along with the Free Syrian Army, supported by the West, especially the US, Turkey, Saudi Arabia and the other Gulf States, launched an assault against the ISIS and the Assad's army. Thus, the civil war turned out to be a multi-forces complex war in the region. The US started arming Kurdish fighters in 2014 (Glass, 2015) and also carried out airstrikes claiming to target the ISIS forces in Syria. This action showed a shift in the US foreign policy from calling Assad's dismissal to bombing his opponent ISIS. In 2015 Russia started carried out airstrikes claiming to target the ISIS groups, but the opposition accused Russia of targeting anti-regime rebels. The Turkish groups crossed into Syria in 2016 to support the rebels to fight the ISIS and Kurdish rebels (BBC, 2017).

The Plight of Syria

The complex multi-sided conflict of Syria is still not completely over. Since 2011, chaotic incidents in Syria have deteriorated the Syrian state society. Assad's regime, however, regained of the control of important parts of the country. As said by Robert Ford "Bashar al-Assad government has won the war militarily, and I can't see any prospect of the Syrian opposition being able to compel him to make a dramatic concession in a peace negotiation" (Bulos, 2017). This was achievable because of Assad's allies, Russia and Iran, in the battlefield as they were laser-focused on keeping Assad in power and made it impossible for the opposition who were initially supported by the US. The opposition spokesman Osama Abu Zaid argued: "The nation who supported us the most... they're all shifting their position, we're being pressured from all sides to draw up a more realistic vision, to accept Assad staying" (Bulos, 2017).

Syria's violent conflict has gravely devastated the social-political and economic conditions of its [Syria] society. Various factors that contributed to the onset of the conflict in which rebellions kept going by the support of various, regional and extra-regional, powers and especially the sectarian character of the conflict has made peace impossible in Syria.

The present environment of the Syrian conflict has gravely destroyed the Syrian economy and increased a large number of casualties and displacements. The Gross Domestic Product (GDP) loss has been estimated at \$226 billion, about four times the GDP of Syria in 2010 (World Bank, 2017). The conflict has immensely boosted the regional inequalities, the war economy and further depressed civil liberties and highly polarized the society of Syria. The internal crisis has immensely played a role in the onset and further worsening of the Syrian conflict and will make the resolution of the conflict difficult (The World Bank Group, 2017).

Syrian Conflict: Regional and Extra Regional Players

The internal civil war emerged in Syria, as a result of political and economic suppression has roots in the rural Sunni's perception of the periphery's deprivations by the core which is dominated by the Alawis because the protest spread from agriculture cities of Hama and Homs to Damascus and Aleppo. In contrast, the Arab Spring was originated in the urban regions. The conflict further expanded by non-state actors, fighting against the regime and also targeted the opposition forces, established their own strongholds in the state. Bashar al Assad allowed Russia to intervene in the conflict to fight against the regime's rivals forces

including Jihadist; also the US intervened to support the opposition and claimed to fight against the non-state Jihadist groups turn the conflict from the internal civil war to a complex regional and extra-regional war.

We have analyzed three main factors of the Syrian conflict, and each factor provides an overview of how the factors are playing their role in decreasing or increasing the conflict. These factors include; internal confrontation, regional proxy, and global confirmation.

Regional Proxy and the Regional Security Complex

Within the Middle Eastern Regional Security Complex, there is no single [declared] regional major power to dominate the environment but (some) competing regional powers - Saudi Arabia, Iran, Turkey, and Israel may have the capability to change the regional security environment. The prominent patterns of alliance and antagonism in the Middle Eastern security complex are known such as Iran-Arab conflict, Israel-Arab conflict, Turkey-Israel rivalry, Turkey and Syrian Kurds, Hezbollah and Israel, and Iraq-Iran rivalry. These all regional rivals are increasing conflict instead of peace in the Middle East.

The Syrian civil war has become a 'regional proxy war', where various players, including neighbors are involved-all players, have different interests. Syria has become a potent [regional] proxy front line for some group of the regional and extra-regional, states, group. As we know, Hezbollah and Iran have a rivalry with Saudi Arabia. This [ideological] conflict has various dimensions vis-a-vis Syria. Some regional states want to remove the Assad's regime to decrease Iranian dominance in the region. The sectarian character of the Syrian conflict reflects another dimension of this conflict. The Shia-Sunni confrontations demonstrate Iran and Saudi Arabia's influence in Syria as they are supporting the Shia regime and Sunni opposition, respectively. Moreover, there is a struggle between Islamist nationalists (mostly Sunni groups) and secular nationalists, who according to Berzins in Syria "support the regime fearing the establishment of a radical Islamist regime" (Bērziņš, 2013).

Iran is an important player in the Syrian conflict-it continues to provide significant economic, political and military support to the Assad regime. Iran's presence in Syria is driven by its main strategic interests, which includes preservation of its ally, Assad, and ensuring supplies to Hezbollah, fighting jihadist groups (including ISIS). Keeping into account these interests, and with the help of Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps stationed in Syria, Iran is pursuing its policy in Syria and seems that Iran will maintain its presence in the Syrian conflict for longer to further its interests in Syria (Pantucci, 2016).

Nonetheless, this player provides huge support to the Syrian regime. Assad's strategic and political alliance with Iran and Hezbollah has enabled him to secure many strategically important areas of the state from the opposition and jihadist. According to Hussein Ibish "one of Iran's most important assets in the Arab world, Hezbollah, is also dependent on Iran retaining the cooperation of a Syrian regime that can control a significant part of the country" (Ibish, 2016).

Saudi Arabia, as a regional power, has various interests in the Syrian conflict. Saudi Arabia feels threatened by Shiite Iran to mobilize the Shiite minority in the Gulf States against the Kingdom. Since 2015, the main regional powers are providing assistance to assist their groups-anti or pro-Assad regime. Saudi Arabia has opposed the Syrian regime and wanted to remove Iran's ideological ally [Assad] from power and also participated in the US-led coalition air campaign against the non-state actor, ISIS in Syria (BBC, 2015).

Qatar, a small and very rich state in the Gulf region of Middle East, used its affluence to support the religious groups in Syria, "Qatar sees an opportunity in Syria to advance the interests of its longstanding regional clients in the Muslim Brotherhood movement, a major player in the Syrian political opposition" (Ibish, 2016). Qatar's Foreign Minister said, "anything that protects the Syrian people and Syria from partition, we will not spare any effort to carry it out with our Saudi and Turkish brothers, no matter what this is" (Arab News, 2015). However, Qatar works more closely in Syria with Turkey than Saudi Arabia.

Oman is also an important Gulf state it has productive relations with Iran and wants to play an important role in facilitating the nuclear negotiations vis-à-vis the US. Oman's foreign policy is shaped as a conciliator in the highly uncertain region of the Middle East. Thus, Oman appears as a mediator, although not much successful (Reuters Staff, 2015) in de-escalating the Syrian conflict and regional rivalries.

Among the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Abu Dhabi tried to be prominent in its national and foreign policy. UAE tends to maintain strong relations with Iran. As many Iranian are working in UAE, therefore, UAE is cautious about Syria and opposed the Assad's regime. It considers the rise of ISIS in Syria as a threat to the region and also criticized the military intervention of Russia in the Syrian conflict (Ibishi, 2016). UAE states have a variety of approaches vis-à-vis the Syrian issues, but they are much concerned about the unstable situation in the Middle East region owing to the Syrian conflict.

Kuwait's foreign policy is traditional of non-interference in the external issues, but its strong relations with UAE are one of the main factors in shaping its foreign policy. Kuwait has a significant minority of well-settled Shia population; therefore, it has legitimate concerns about the conflict in Syria. However, Kuwait has been, potentially, funding the opposition groups "local and regional funds are channelled through Kuwait to Syrian opposition groups because it is expected as a "zone of privacy" due to its unique legal protection and social expectations" (Dickinson, 2013).

Bahrain, another Gulf state, wants to support Saudi Arabia strategically, including Syrian policy. Thus, Bahrain and UAE are more closely aligned with Saudi Arabia in the context of the Syrian conflict. Bahrain is also among the strong supporters of various rebel groups. It sought to limit the Iran's influence and also opposed the Muslim Brotherhood. Bahrain showed a willingness to participate in a military intervention on the ground; coalition led by the US against the ISIS, Saudi Arabia announced the same pledge (Reuters, 2015). There are convergence and divergence of interests among the regional powers- their role has exposed them as power seeker actors which has detrimental the peace of the Middle East region.

Turkey, like Saudi Arabia, has intended many times to intervene with ground forces into Syria to fight ISIS on the condition of the joint coalition led by the US and promote any movement to isolate the Assad regime politically. For Turkey, however, the enthusiasm to intervene in Syria was limited by the fact that it did not want to confront Russia in Syria as an active supporter of the Assad regime. Turkey foreign policy toward Syrian conflict is mainly on the side of the opposition and against the regime. Turkey and Saudi Arabia are alarmed about ISIS, but Turkey is more concerned about the rise of Syrian Kurdish, opposition which is linked to the Kurdistan Workers Party in Turkey, that is fighting against Turkey. Thus, Turkey wants the Assad regime to stop the Kurdistan Workers Party activities in northern Syria, and this is the main reason for the hostile attitude of Turkey toward the Syrian regime (Ibishi, 2016).

Gulf has seen Kurdish opposition in Syria as a force that could undermine the ISIS, which is a potential security threat to the Gulf States. Hence strengthening the Kurdish opposition groups in Syria provided an obstacle in the relation between the Gulf Arab States and Turkey. The strategic importance of Turkey, however, has prevented the complete collapse of relations among them, but the Gulf States have badly failed to disengage Turkey completely from Iran. Nevertheless, Turkey has proved to be an essential partner of the Gulf in the Syrian case, and it is supporting the rebel groups to overthrow the Assad regime (Gumusluoglu, 2016).

Israel has limited interest to intervene in the conflict and is more concerned about responding to attacks on its territory. However, it does have critical interests regarding its security that it sought to pursue in Syria. Israel is a major regional state in the Middle East. It is in favor of limiting the Russian support, Iran's influence in Syria, and preventing the supply of arms to Hezbollah group which is a serious threat for Israel's survival in the Middle East region. Israel is also preventing Syria and Iran from posing a military threat to Israel. President Assad is representing Iran and Hezbollah interests in Syria; Israel has no soft corner for him. Israel also wants to render the Syria's claims of the Golan Heights ineffective which was occupied by Israel in a war with Syria. Thus, Israel and Syria are technically at war, but the current situation in Syria is suitable to

Israel as the in various actors are fighting with each other rather instead of Israel. Therefore, Israel is passive regarding the solution of the Syrian conflict and is only concerned to protect its citizens and territory for which it focused on political and military efforts to keep the Iranian, Hezbollah and Sunni extremists away from its borders (Hanauer, 2016).

Global Confrontation: Geo-Political Paradigm

The post-Cold War arena has created the new centers of powers, and the geopolitical paradigm has taken a new twist. Statecraft is not the same as it was designed by the two global powers (the US and USSR). Some Scholars of the view that the competition and rivalry between the present powers - Russia, China and Iran versus US, [International conflict], is a revitalization of the Cold war-The worldview is still conflicting (Bērziņš, 2013). Extra-regional powerful players are keener in achieving their geostrategic interests and actively engaged in the Syrian conflict.

The US has lucid objectives behind supporting the Syrian anti-Assad's groups in the conflict. One, the US is interested in establishing a pro-Western democratic regime that would facilitate the US's economic and political dominance in the region. Second is the geopolitical motive. As Assad has a strong alliance with Russia and China, both may pose a great challenge to the US global hegemony. Thirdly, a regime in Syria that would be friendly with the US will strengthen the US interest to secure Israel in the region (Bērziņš, 2013).

The US evaded intervening in Syria and not sending its forces. It has been concerned about the humanitarian crisis. Despite the pressure from its strongest ally Saudi Arabia, there are several reasons for the US non-intervention policy in the Syrian conflict. The US is not that much enthusiastic about balancing Russia- has diminished the need to balance Russia in regional theatres. The US policies to change the regime in Afghanistan, Libya, and Iraq failed despite of intervention with strong military power (A.Gerges, 2014). Another reason is that the Western economic crises in 2008 further reduced the US's capabilities to militarily intervene in the region where its own strategic interest is not threatened (Lynch, 2015). Moreover, the energy resources of the Middle East are not that much important as they were [before] because of its self-sufficient gas and oil resources. Thus, its strategic interest for engagement in the Middle East has been increased particularly, which would determine the future of regional states.

Russia and Syria have a long history of the alliance since the Cold War, as Hafiz al-Assad adopted the Communism; they have an ideological affinity as well. Moreover, Russia has accessed in the inside of Syria having a number of military bases in Tartus town. When the conflict became severe in Syria, Russia expanded its military assistance to preserve the Assad regime and also politically defended the regime on international platforms. The US, along with China, has vetoed any resolution adopted against the regime many times in the United Nation Security Council.

Since the rise of ISIS, Russia has intervened in Syria more aggressively and became an important factor in the region. Thus, Russia turned out to be the main international player in the Syrian conflict -which has been involved in the conflict to provide all strategic support to the Assad regime. Russia is supporting the Assad regime because of many reasons. First, there is despotic solidarity between Putin and Assad. Secondly, Russia considered the Arab spring would pave the way for similar uprising inside Russia as a threat to its internal security. Thirdly, there is an economic and military interest of Russia in the Middle East which is possible via Syria. Russia has naval and air bases in Syria. Moreover, the analyst Dmitri Trenin argued that the ultimate motive for Russia to intervene in the Syrian conflict and making itself most important and unavoidable for settlement of the dispute is its urge to be treated as a great power by the US in matters of interest (Trenin, 2012)

Conflict and Implications on Regional Security of Middle East

Military Security

The Syrian opposition is fighting a war at two fronts against the regime and the ISIS. Iran has a significant position in Syria. It provided military weapons and recruitments to Hezbollah. Turkey views the Syrian Kurds in Northern Syria along the Turkish border as an extension of Turkish-Kurdish rebel groups which are fighting for separation from Turkey since the 1980s. Turkey showed serious concerns over the US supporting Syrian Kurds providing weapons to them against ISIS. Turkey shot down the Russian warplane near (BBC, 2015) and incident raised the security concerns vis-à-vis military confrontation between Turkey and Russia. However, both the states, later on, resolved the dispute bilaterally. Israel's major concern is that the Islamist groups would recapture the Golan Heights occupied by Israel from Syria (Chatham house, 2014). The threats of direct military confrontation among the regional and extra-regional powers and the rise of ISIS have posed serious security threats to Syria and but Middle Eastern regional states.

Political Security

The Syrian conflict resulted in the spread of lawlessness and organized crimes in neighboring states. Similarly, Syria has also been affected by political upheaval in its neighboring states- the vulnerable state of affairs and lawlessness in Iraq provided a vacuum to ISIS- it extended its heavens in Syria. The neighboring states of Syria also faced political pressure because of a large influx of refugees (Chatham house, 2014). Refugees' crises seriously increased security issues and promoted political polarization. Syrian refugee issue led toward political polarization within other states in the Middle East- especially in Turkey (ORASM & TESEV, 2015).

Conflict in Syria conflict continues to be fueled by proxies with divergent political interests of various regional and extra-regional actors. The Syrian conflict has augmented the political security of states in the Middle East, and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation failed to deal with the Syrian political problem in the region. Instead, it suspended the membership of Syria and adopted a stance by calling for United Security Security Council to intervene in Syrian Crises. The extra-regional states have been interested in pursuing a new model of political rule and a new position of regional influence (US Department of State, 2016).

Economic Security

The Syrian conflict has been a great caused economic recession in Syria. The conflict has affected other neighboring states in the region such as Jordan, Lebanon, Tunisia and Turkey. Syria's turmoil also affected Europe (Björn Rother, 2016), because the influx of refugees, as a result of violent conflict in Syria, put burdens on their [European] economies. Moreover, most refugees do not contribute to the economy of the host countries. The massive influx of refugees in the neighboring states has *had* a great impact on their social, political and economic aspects (Chatham, 2014). The Syrian conflict has also posed serious economic threats to the states that are involved in the conflict. These states are spending huge budgets on supporting their respective sides in the conflict, either the regime or the opposition both militarily and economically (Pedram, 2014). The neighboring states are facing economic and security hitch owing to the refugee's crises.

Societal Security

The long-term Syrian conflict has radical impacts on Syrian and neighboring societies. The Syrian battle is actually being fought between the Alawite Syrian regime and the Sunni rebel groups. The Syrian crisis has been described in sectarian narratives which divided the heterogeneous society in Syria into politicized

ethno-sectarian groups. Sectarian divisions have always been existing in Syria, “but their current politicization is the result of political manoeuvring by the states and sectarian entrepreneurs” (Phillips, 2015).

Assad regime is associated with Hezbollah group [Shiite militia] which has deployed many fighters to Syria. Due to geographical proximity, many neighboring states have close ethnic and religious composition. The political parties in the states are divided by either supporting the opposition or regime in Syria. There are also threats of rising tensions among the locals and Syrian refugees. As refugees have been largely targeted in kidnappings, social deprivations and armed attacks, similarly refugees have also been blamed for criminal activities and associated with the terrorist groups in the host states. Clan violence, occasionally targeted kidnappings as a result of conflict spillover in some of the immediate border regions of the neighboring states are observed, most notable in Lebanon (Pedram, 2014). The presence of refugee influences the security environment of various states along the border of Syria. Sunni communities, in the neighboring states which are anti-Assad regime, expect the Western powers to increase their influence to protect the regional security. This may create unrest and violence as a retaliatory response by the anti-Western groups in the country and may spread to the wider region of the Middle East. Sectarian tensions exacerbated by the conflict in Syria might serve to influence the international relationships and political systems. (News 24, 2013)

Environmental Security

Environmental change has been recognized as a security challenge by the UN. The environment change is the “ultimate threat multiplier” and exasperating the institutions in the states (United Nations Report, 2011). The severe drought resulted in large-scale migrations which in turn increase the socio-economic pressure on the Syrian government. Hence the environmental change is also considered as a contributing factor to the descent of Syria into war though no solid evidence is present regarding such pressure (Selby, 2017). The Syrian conflict also resulted in environmental problems and security hitch. The [use of] chemical and traditional weapons have significantly damaged the environment, which is a threat to the whole region of the Middle East (Bensahel (Daniel, 2004). The security hitch and threatening environment in the Middle East have posed a threat in the region and security complex may deteriorate the peace in the Middle East. Regional changes [strategic] have increased security threats which may affect the regional and extra-regional strategic environment.

Conclusion

This paper has analyzed the multi-sided Syrian conflict at four levels. The main factor that resulted in the conflict has observed at the domestic level. Various economic, political and social vulnerabilities contributed to aggravating the Syrian conflict. The Assad regime was incapable of handling the internal situation; consequently, regional and extra-regional powers took the lead to change in the geopolitical environment. The region, which has already been divided into various sects and ethnic blocks, is increasing unrest in the Middle East region. Parallel forces are being sponsored by the regional and external- regional powers. These powers have tremendously increased security dilemma and the region. Security hitch may not be resolved in the presence of regional and extra-regional rival force. The Syrian regime and the opposition sought to get the support of several regional and extra-regional players that further exploited the Syrian situation. Thus, making it a multisided complex war, the spillover effect of it has been observed in the entire security complex of the Middle East. An authoritarian regime of insecure states with internal insecurities, whose major concern is the survival of their regime through military security, is the crucial problem within the Regional Security complex of the Middle East. The Syrian state and society need tangible policies by the regional and extra-regional players-those are responsible for creating the security dilemma and unrest in the Middle East region. Only a rational and comprehensive consensus, among the stakeholders, would guarantee stability and peace in the region.

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