

Syrian Civil War

(A Civil War with No Visible End)

Dr.Arpana Bansal¹

¹University School of Law

¹Guru Kashi University, Talwandi Sabo

Article Info

Page Number: 37 – 45

Publication Issue:

March-April 2019

Article History

Article Received: 24 January 2019

Revised: 12 February 2019

Accepted: 15 March 2019

Publication: 30 April 2019

ABSTRACT

Wars always bring destruction. In present a number of countries are engaged in direct or indirect form of war with each other. Civil wars generally torn apart a country. Slow down its speed of economic growth. The problem of terrorism has further confused this problem. When the phenomena of religion get mixed with war then it becomes more

dangerous. Presently Syria is undergoing same problem where both government of opposition groups are fighting with each other. The traditional religious differences among Shias & Sunni Muslims have further made the condition of the country from bad to worst. It has resulted in large scale problems associated with human being and the environment. The involvement of global and regional superpowers has further confused the crisis. A careful analysis of the of the background, causes, consequences and possible remedies have been made in this paper.

Keywords:-Engaged, Terrorism, Phenomena, Traditional, Superpowers.

I. INTRODUCTION

The Civil war has badly torn apart Syria today. No peaceful solution presently seems visible to this bloody war. This civil war is the outcome of 'Arab Spring', the widespread protests which began in Tunisia in 2010 AD and spread across the region. But the present paper is mainly concerned with Assad regime particularly the current president Bashar al-Assad and its routes in his regime. This civil war has made one thing very clear that the relationships between different religious groups of Syrian society were under a lot of pressure. Moreover, the external interference

by superpowers for their dominance and control over this region and the sectarian politics of dominance over this region by regional powers has made the situation in Syria from bad to worse. The entry of terrorist group ISIS has further given this civil war a new and very confusing turn where arch rivals of the region, global superpower and Syrian government all on one side are fighting with a common enemy ISIS or Daesh but on the other hand they have conflicts with each other when question of how to end this war comes. In the present paper a discussion will be done on background, causes, consequences and possible solutions to this Syrian civil war.

II. OBJECTIVES OF STUDY

No study is possible without clear cut objectives.

The main objectives of our study are as follows:

1. To study the ethnic structure of Syrian society.
2. To study the causes behind this bloody civil war.
3. To study the humanitarian issues taking birth from this civil war.
4. To suggest what could be the possible solutions of stop this civil war.

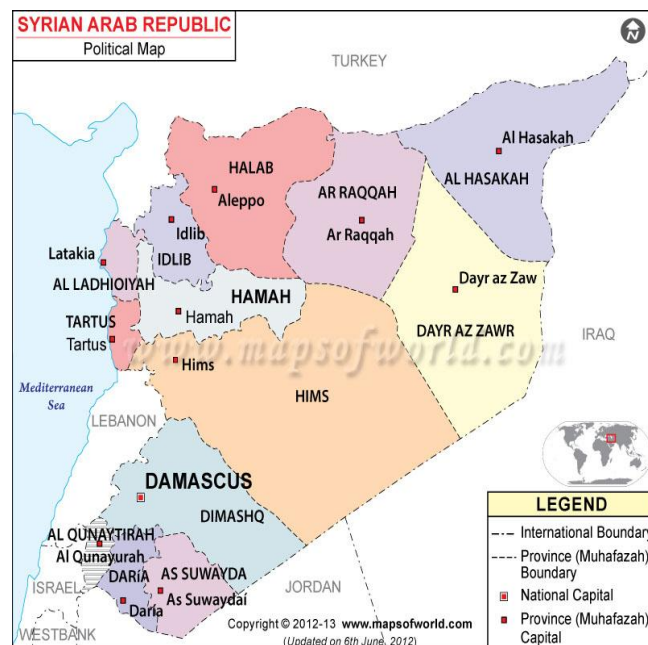
II. METHODOLOGY

This research paper has obtained information through various sources including articles from newspapers, magazines, internet and a number of research paper.

III. AREA OF STUDY

The area which is under study in the present paper is 'Syria'. It is a country of Middle East Asia. Its latitudinal extent is 32°N to 38°N and longitudinal extent is 35°E to 45°E. Lebanon and Mediterranean Sea are in its

West, Turkey in the north, Iraq in the East, Jordan in the South and Israel in Southwest direction.



Courtesy: Wikipedia.com

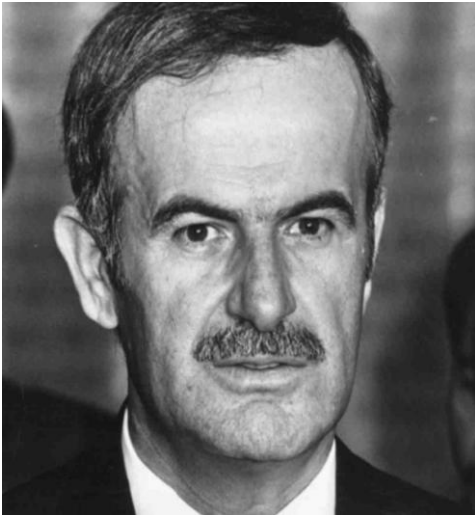
It is home of diverse ethnic groups like Syrian Arabs, Greeks, Armenians, Assyrians, Kurds and Turks etc. While its religious groups include Sunnis, Shias/Shiites, Christians, Yazidis and Jews. Sunni Arabs make up the largest religious group in Syria.

Presently Syria is divided into 14 governorates which are further sub-divided into 61 districts which are further sub-divided into sub-districts.

IV. PRESENT BACKGROUND OF CRISIS

Soon after getting independence from France in 1946 a period of instability started in Syria. Finally 1970, the minister of defense General Hafiz al- Assad seized the power and declared himself as Prime Minister and then President in 1971. He divided the state administration among different communities and centering main powers to himself and his family. As he belonged Alawite community which is a Shiite

(Shia) Muslim group, he gave them higher-level posts than the Sunni majority. Moreover, Hafez al- Assad also gave over reaching powers to the presidency. After his death in 2000 his son Bashar al-Assad took power in his hands.



Hafez al- Assad

Bashar al- Assad

Courtesy: Wikipedia.com

The regime of two Assad had bred discontent among Sunni majority. They were considered themselves as second class citizens in comparison to elite Alawite minority. The ‘Muslim Brotherhood’, a prominent group of radical Sunni Muslims first opposed the government which later on gave space to

terrorist forces like Al-Qaeda and Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) or Daesh.

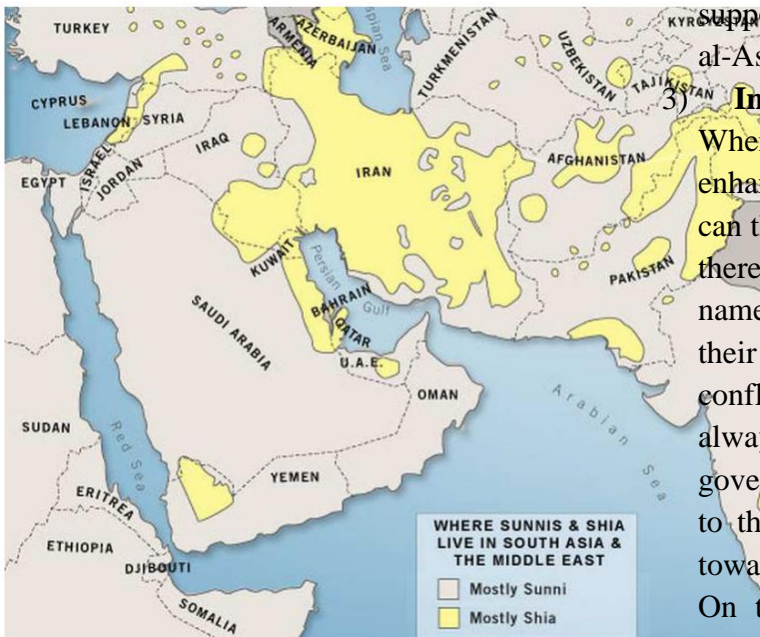
Moreover, the good relations between Shiite powers of this region mainly Syria, Iraq, Iran, Lebanon further forced rival Sunni powers of Saudi Arabia, Turkey and other Gulf nations to meddle in Syrian affairs and support anti Assad groups which led to further deepening of crisis and moreover when super powers like USA and Russia started supporting each other’s allies then it resulted in a full scale civil war that we are seeing today.

The revolutions of Arab spring added fuel to the fire and gave a hopeto anti-Assad forces that they can bring a change in their country resulting in present Syrian Civil War.

V. CAUSES OF CIVIL WAR IN SYRIA

There is no single reason responsible for this Syrian civil war but a number of other causes are responsible for it. Out of them some are as follows :

1) **Shia-Sunni Schism:** - Syrian society is immensely diverse on ethno-religious and linguistic basis. They have 74% of Sunni Muslims, 13% of Shia Muslims including Alawi Community, 3% Druze and 10% Christians. Among Muslims, Shias and Sunnis are not having good relations. As most of the power is concentrated in the hands of Alawi Community which is a Shia Muslim group, the Sunni majority is highly dissatisfied from it. Thus it led to a traditional religious war against Shiites in Syria by groups of Sunni Muslims under the form of anti-Assad group, Al-Qaida, ISIS etc.



Courtesy: Prof. Anshumali Shukla, 'Iraq in the Eye of Terror Storm'

2) **Regional Rivalries** :- There are two dominant regional powers that are struggling to enhance their influence in political, military and religious spheres in the Middle East Asia or Islamic World, The most influential among these powers is 'Saudi Arabia', the proponent of Wahabbi or radical Sunni Islam while the second one is Shiite/ Shia power 'Iran' a proponent of liberal Islam. Both are supporting one and the other group in the Syria. Saudis and their Sunni allies are supporting anti-Assad group also known as 'Free Syrian Army' while Iranians have their alliance with Syrian government of President Bashar-al Assad, Iraq and Hezbollah of Lebanon. As the number of Shia Muslims in total population is much lesser than Sunni Muslims, therefore, Iran and Lebanon are trying their level best to protect their Shiite government bastions in the Syria as well as in fragile Iraq whereas Sunni alliance of Saudis and other Gulf Sunni countries are trying their best to increase their influence in the region by

supporting anti-government forces of Bashar al-Assad in Syria.

3) **Interference of Global Superpowers:** - When regional powers are struggling to enhance their influence in the region then how can their global partners left behind. Similarly, there are three superpowers of the world namely USA, Russia and China are playing their roles both directly and indirectly in this conflict zone of Syria. Russia and China have always been 'silent allies' of Syrian government. The main reason for their support to the Syrian government was its inclination towards socialistic ideology or Communism. On the other hand, USA wants to remove present Syrian government and to establish a puppet government just like Iraq here. US strategy is to set up a military base here in Syria in future so as to keep a strict eye of Russian- Iranian -Hezbollah alliance and assure its alliance partners particularly Israel's security from these hostile neighbors.

On the other hand Russians are the largest arms suppliers to Syrian regimes while China along with Russia blocks proposals of sanctions and actions against Syrian government in UN Security Council. China has more economic ties with Syria. Thus, instead of problem solution everyone is making Syrian crisis deeper and more complex.

4) **Use of Chemical Weapons:** - With the help of erstwhile USSR and Egypt, the Syrian government began developing chemical weapon and reports showed that by 2007, Syria had stockpiled hundreds of tonnes of chemical weapons agents. These were the weapons that it would use extensively in its war against rebels.



Courtesy: Wikipedia.com

These accusations by western countries and U.S.A. along with their use in civil war have further added fuel to the fire in Syrian crisis.

5) **Natural Gas, Russia and Qatar**:- Russia, after annexation of Crimea peninsula from Ukraine has seen deterioration of their relations with European Union coupled with sanctions on each other. But still Eastern Europe largely depends on natural gas supplies from Russia. Thus, to reduce their dependence on it, they looked for alternatives. Qatar was ready to supply but the pipeline route that had to be passed through the territory of Syria was not allowed by President Bashar al-Assad. The reason was strong Syrian-Russian alliance. Only fall of Bashar-al-Assad and establishment of a pro Sunni regime would make this feat possible. Thus this is another reason for this civil war.

6) **Origin of Islamic State of Iraq and Syria**:
- This is the most recent cause of this civil war where a large swath of area in Iraq and Syria has been captured by a global terrorist organization ISIS also known as 'Daesh' in Arabic language. The Syrian government, the rebels, Kurds and their all western allies are fighting here against this evil force to liberate areas under ISIS control. The organization is headed by self declared Caliph 'Abu Bakr al Baghdadi'.



'Abu Bakr al Baghdadi'. Courtesy: Wikipedia.com

This has also deepened and moreover confused this Syrian crisis because on one side the earlier mentioned forces are fighting with each other while on the other side they are fighting together with their common enemy i.e. ISIS but with different strategies and supporting powers.

VI. CONSEQUENCES OF SYRIAN CIVIL WAR

Consequences of any war are always horrible. Similarly, unending Syrian civil war too has a number of consequences at global level. Some of the important are as follows :

1) **Refugee Crisis**:- Since 2011 to May 2017, the Syrian civil war has entered in its sixth year with no hope of its end. According to the data of United Nations Human Rights Commission (UNHCR), till May 2017, the

total number of registered refugees, who fled Syria, was 5,031,622 and the number of internally displaced people was above 6 million. This is by far world's largest humanitarian crisis since World War II. These refugees are moving to the neighboring countries such as Turkey, Jordan, Egypt etc. Moreover a majority of these people are putting their lives in danger and moving to Southern European countries like Italy, Greece etc. and then to central European countries where now governments of those countries are not ready to take them in and there life was become an election issue in various countries of European Union.



Courtesy: Wikipedia.com

2) Loss of Precious human lives

A war always bring along with it, a trail of destruction both human and structural. According to estimates by Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR), the death toll in this Civil war up to 12 March- 2017 was 4, 51,358. A huge number of civilians and soldiers died in this civil war. The entry of terrorist organization i.e. ISIS has made this crisis worst ever as their suicide attacks are also killing a large number of people. A large number of people died while crossing Mediterranean Sea in order to reach countries of Europe. Among the deaths of this civil war,

a majority belongs to women and children. Who can forget the little angle child 'AylanKurdi' who died while his ferry capsized in Mediterranean Sea along with his mother and his dead body was found along the sea coast of Turkey with his face dipped in the sea water. See the picture on next page:



Dead body of AylanKurdi

Courtesy: Wikipedia.com

3) Violence against women and children

(VAWC):- War whether it is between two or more countries or be it a civil war always takes its toll on population. Women and children are always the softest targets in all types of wars. Sexual violence such as rapes, forced marriages etc. ethnic cleansing of women and children of a particular community, use of women as sex slaves or comfort women, use of children as laborers and child troops or in worst circumstances rapes of children are the incidents associated with them. In Syrian civil war too both rebel and regime forces have committed all sorts of war crimes including violence against women and children (VAWC). No authentic data is available for it. But according to Euro Mediterranean Human Rights Network's issued report on Syrian crisis – at least 6000 Syrian women had been raped only in 2013 AD.

On the other hand in areas under ISIS control, there terrorist are using child soldiers as a protective human shield against marching ahead government and other allied forces fighting against them.

4) **Loss of heritage sites:-** Syria is a home of one of the best preserved sites of ancient monuments much before Greek civilization. The temple of BalShemin, the town of Palmyra all fell in to the hands of ISIS which in order to tease the world powers, destroyed these heritage sites. Now these towns are retaken by Syrian government forces yet the damage done by terrorist cannot be repaired again.



Courtesy: Wikipedia.com

- 5) **Syria, a testing ground of new weapons:-** US, Russia, UK and EU have made Syria, a testing ground of their new weapons particularly missiles and drones. With their involvement in this civil war, they are testing their weapons here and promoting them to their allied countries. Thus, in the name of helping one side or the other in civil war these countries are grinding their own axes here and earning dollars by selling these tested weapons in different parts of the world.
- 6) **Spillover Effects:-** It's spillover effect can be easily seen in the world. The Islamic fundamentalists' attacks of EU countries and Britain are the result of this spillover effects.

Recent radical Sunni militia's attacks of Iranian Parliament and tomb of Ayatollah Khamenei in June 2017, attacks of Shia, Ahmadiya Muslims in minority in Pakistan are the examples of spillover effects of Syrian Civil War. Therefore, a strong and stable Syrian government is most to stop this spillover effect.

- 7) **Environmental Pollution:-** The blast of missiles, bombs and adds it to the local environment. Moreover the dead, untreated and decayed bodies of human being and animals also pollute environment. Right from the beginning of this civil war in 2011 to till June 2017, the environment of Syria has been badly polluted. Its effects will be long ranging and be visible in near future if not today.
- 8) **Economic loss of the country:-** The Syrian economy has been badly affected by this civil war. It is almost destroyed. Now its economy is mainly dependent on international aid given by different agencies of UNO, EU, USA, Russia, Iran etc. The war has taken the country into years or backwardness where reconstruction requires billions or trillions of money.



Courtesy: Wikipedia.com

9) **Effects on Population Composition:-** The Syrian population may undergo a change in its composition of population. As males fight the war therefore they die more in number than females. Therefore, if in coming years census takes place in Syria then it may see a decline in its male population in comparison to

females. Moreover, the rate at which people are dying and leaving their country due to fear of civil war, the total Syrian population may see a negative growth rate if the census either takes either takes place today or in coming next year.

VII. POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS OR REMEDIES TO END THIS CIVIL WAR:

Presently, no solution is visible to end this civil war as both sides are adamant on their respective well known stands but the third dimension of this civil war i.e. entry of ISIS and its allied terror groups has made this civil war very much confusing. But this confusion contains a solution to end this civil war. Some possible solutions are as follows:

- 1) **Adjustments by Bashar al Assad and its opposition group:-** There is one thing common here that both Assad led government forces helped by Russia, China, Iran Lebanon etc. and opposition group backed by US and its allies are fighting a common enemy to protect their motherland i.e. against ISIS. Here a compromise is possible. First Assad should give equal representation to all stake holders of Syrian society other than his Alawi community. This will pacify the majority as well as other minority groups. Bash al Assad may remain as President but as a nominal head of state. On the other hand, for the sake of peace of country, the opposition group must shed its demand of removal of Bashar al Assad and rather they should suggest him to be a nominal head of the state and distribution of powers must be among group of ministers belonging to all sections of Syrian society.
- 2) As superpowers are also involved in this crisis. Both USA and Russia should talk to each other and make efforts to stop this war. USA should make some compromise

regarding its stand on the removal of Bashar al-Assad while Russia should make pressure on Bashar al-Assad along with China to decentralize his power and give equal representation to all elements of Syrian society.

- 3) Strict actions must be taken against those Islamic countries that are funding the terrorist organizations in Middle East Asia. The steps taken by Saudi Arabia and its other Sunni Muslim allies to break up their ties with Qatar for its alleged involvement in terror funding in Syria and other Islamic countries is the best example of steps taken to rein in such countries.
- 4) Terrorist organizations like ISIS, Al-Qaida etc. are involved in Syrian crisis. They are making full use of the differences of views between government and opposition rebels forces in Syria. Terrorist are nobody's friend, therefore, all the nation saving forces of Syria, belonging to all sections of society must unite together to defeat these enemies of civilization and moreover they should peacefully talk with each other to sort out their disputes so that no more bloodshed takes place and peace may prevail in their country.

VIII. CONCLUSION

In the end it can be concluded that cultural and ideological rivalries, geopolitical interests, personal and economic interests have made this Syrian civil war crisis very confusing and unending tale of destruction of a nation. Though quite difficult to accept but not impossible, solutions of this crisis are available but a question remains to be seen that whether superpowers, regional powers and domestic powers do have that level of understanding or maturity to understand the situation, make a compromise and end this

civil war? This is a question which will test the maturity of these powers and their handlers in coming future.

REFERENCES

1. BBC News, 'Syria Chemical Attack: What we know'. N.P., 2013. Web. 8 Sep. 2014.
2. Security.blogs.cnn.com, 'Al-Assad's Inner Circle, Mostly Family, Like "Mafia"'. N.P., 2014 Web. 8 Sep. 2014.
3. United Nation, United Nations Mission to Investigate Allegations of the Use of Chemical Weapons in the Syrian Arab Republic. United Nations, 2013. Print.
4. ArnavMariwala, AshwinSreenivas, 'The Syrian Civil War- Of Bashar Al-Assad'. Stanford Model United Nations Regime Conference - 2014.
5. Armanios, Febe, 'Islam: Sunnis and Shiites', CRS Report for congress (2004).
6. Delacoura, Katerina, 'The 2011 uprisings in the Arab Middle East: political changes and geopolitical implications', International Affairs 88:1 (2012).
7. Hashemi, Nader and Danny Postel, 'The Syrian Dilemma' (Cambridge, 2013).
8. Pierret, Thomas, 'Religion and State in Syria: The Sunni Ulama Form Coup to Revolution (Cambridge, 2013).
9. Vaessen, Eline, "The Syrian Civil War – A historical analysis of the role of Syria's inter-religious relations, sectarian politics and regional positioning leading up to the civil war." Master Thesis, Final version, 20-07-2014, (Erasmus University Rotterdam).
10. Noor, Samina, ' War, Violence and Women: a case study of Syrian civil war (2013-14). Journal of Siberian Federal University. Humanities and Social Sciences 4 (2016 9) 733-744A.
11. Beevor, Antony (2000). 'The Fall of Berlin 1945.' New York, USA. Penguin Putnam, Inc.
12. I am Syria.org, 'Statistical Data on Death Tolls' up to 2017, May.
13. Human Rights Watch, 'World Report 2017- Syria Events of 2016.'
14. ECHO Factsheet – Syrian Crisis – 2017 May.
15. Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia, 'Casualties of Syrian Civil War' till mid-March 2017.
16. Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia, 'Human Rights Violations During the Syrian Civil War.'
17. 'Country reports on Human Rights Practices for 2015' by United States Department of State. Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor.
18. Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia, ' Refugees of the Syrian Civil war' till Jan. 2017.