



**RESEARCH PAPER**

**Syrian War in the Context of National and International Aspects:  
An Analysis**

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**ABSTRACT**

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This study reveals the aspects that caused and proved to be game changer from a geopolitical perspective and also analyzes how civil war changes into proxy war. The Syrian War started early in 2011 and expanded into a circle of aggression that not only disturbed Syrian society but also affected regional power balance in the Middle East. The war left devastating results as many people were uprooted from their homes and many had to flee to Jordan, Turkey and Lebanon as Syrian refugees. Qualitative approach was used to reach the conclusion. This study contended that variance of interest among the United States, Russia, Iran, Hezbollah and Qatar had changed the protest against each other. The Syrian war is not only devastating the masses of Syria but also hampering the entire region. This study recommends that mutual cooperation and harmony be brought in ethnical and ideological issues to solve this crisis.

**Introduction**

The longing for power to attain the specific interests, lust for power and expand the influences are some of the reasons. But what is happening in Syria today a civil, a revolution or a proxy War? It proved as civil war in all aspects as people involved all sides of the country fighting each other. The opposition of the regime calls it revolution. But it is also proxy war in which foreign states are exploiting the Syria. Syria conflict is connected with Arab spring, which started from Tunisia when the power vendor burnt himself in front of Tunisian Parliament. This event influenced all the Middle East which resulted over through off rulers who were

ruling tyrannically. When this wave of protest reached in Syria against Assad's regime, the regime remained unresponsive. Consequently, peaceful protest turned into civil war.

All the actors of Syrian war want their interests by neglecting the catastrophic consequences. Foreign Powers, Syrian government, opposition and regional actors are all the architectures of war. Everyone seems to be busy in its interests. But the present condition is indicating that Syrian army and its allies have changed the situation against rebels and Syrian government seems to be on the winningside. However, this war has been much disturbing the Syrian people.

Many Syrian have died and other moved toward neighboring countries. This war has pushed the country toward catastrophic disaster in all aspects like: economic, decrease the living standard and uncertainty. Now it is a time to review on the condition of Syria. World should participate to solve the entire crisis in this region for the sake of Syrian people. Bashar-Al-Assad and his allies should also reduce their violent policies and fulfill the basic rights of the people. Regional and major powers should push forward the process of peace, which is still fail to end the war. To understand the proxy war, it is very necessary to look this issue in historical contextual.

### **Literature Review**

The uprising, civil war, anti-government protest, proxy war is connected with revolution in the Middle East known as "Arab Spring". It was started from the town of Daraa fought between regime and demonstrate on 18<sup>th</sup> October 2011. This uprising for the democracy and anti-Assad regime. On 2011 (SNC) emerged whose purpose was to end the Assad's role and introduced new modern democratic status. The successor and predecessor made such violent policies which were against to the need of public wishes and suppressed demonstration. Lack of freedom and economic crisis were the cause of Syrian conflict and public anger was inflamed by the harsh behavior of government toward the protestor (Blanchard, 2013). Environmental crisis also promoted the Syrian uprising like Syria faced a worst drought between 2006 to 2016 in the country history. Sectarian dimension was also the reason behind this uprising because the president Bashar-Al-Assad is associated with "Alawite" Shia minority unlike the majority Sunni. Meanwhile Alawite always used to dominate the force against protestors and opponents of the regime. So these economic, political and religious lies were in progress that Bashar-Al-Assad linked Sunni extremist to Al-Qaeda and declared against Syria in foreign conspiracies. Regional and global power involved in pro and anti-Assad camps. In international aspects regional neighboring countries are also exploiting Syria with the influence of major powers. Because major powers would not have been able to aloof themselves and remained isolate (Borger, 2015). America is against regime and helping protesters like Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Turkey. On the other hand, Russia and Iran want the continuity of Assad's government and are targeting anti-governments movements. Russia attacks the

rebels who are tightly against government by claiming that they are targeting (ISIL). Present situation shows the defeat as compared to Assad's government.

### **National Factors of War**

#### **Religious Conflicts**

There are many religious groups in Syria like the other parts of the Middle East. But the most involved groups in Syrian civil war are Islamic State, Al-Nusra and Hezbollah. Every group has its own interests, which entangled each other and creates conflict in the form of civil war. These groups are also being used by the other countries. For example: Islamic State is supported by Qatar and Saudi Arabia, Al-Nusra is supported Qatar and it is affiliated with Al-Qaeda. Like these both groups Hezbollah is also supported by Lebanon as it is also based in Lebanon. These groups are escalating the level of war day by day. IS group also wants to expand its proclaimed "Caliphate" as it has captured much of Syria's territory (Cenciottid,2015). This group is against the regime and opposition as well as rebels. US and Russia both want to eradicate it with coalition. This is the most aggressive group. The Syria army has expelled it from the ancient city of Palmyra in March 2016 (Dawn 2016). On the other hand, Fateh-Al-Sham has proved much dangerous as compared to IS. It is also called Al-Nusra. It is known as two pronged strategiesthat are against regime and sometime alliance with IS. It is against Russia, Iran, Hezbollah and Kurds (AFS,2016).

Its main purpose is to strengthen its organization in Syria. It has major guerilla army in Syria. Hezbollah is Shia group and against the other like Sunni, rebels and IS. It defends Assad's regime on the basis of sectarian. It has taken over many areas for the regime from the IS, rebels and Al-Nusra and proved itself successful. But many Syrian people who are not engaged in any group are facing troubles like death, hunger and hopelessness (Aviationist,2015).

#### **Rebellion Groups**

The rebel groups in Syria are fighting each other and some of them against regime. They want to recover their losses in Aleppo and once again have refreshed their energies to fight each other. Their concurrently attacks are launched in Aleppo, so the regime has devoted enough troops to take Aleppo and for recovering all lost land.

The multitude rebel's groups are financially supported by different actors. Turkey, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and USA can all utilize their proxies by sanctioning or increasing support which caused tension in the region. In 2016 one of the most powerful enemies influenced the rebels and turned against each other as supporting the regime. Russia diplomacy in Astana kept away America and Gulf States influence. So Russia succeeded by delighting Bashar-Al-Assad and his supporters as it was creating friction among rebellion. The entire situation in Syria is inflaming

the war in spite of reducing the war. But present situation indicates unity among all rebel groups that are closer than ever before, but this act seems to be like an act of desperation for their own interests not for country(Choucair,2016).

### **Kurdish Role in Syria War**

Kurdish is an ethnic group in Syria and has captured the area of North Syria along the border of Turkey. This group is also influencing the civil war regarding its own interests. Kurdish fighters want a massive gain of territories in North Syria. As this group is anti-regime but with the help of extensive Russia aerial bombardment, the regime not only recovered a large swath of land but turned the balance of power by dislodging many other anti-government groups. This group is not only danger for Syria but also for Turkish as it has advanced swiftly between Tal-Rifaat and Azaz, these are the important cities of Syria near the border of Turkey. Kurdish also captured the most important foothold, the Menahga air base(Gordon,2017).

Assad withdrew Kurdish group from the northeast of country they strengthen their power in North Syria. Since then the Kurdish (military wing the YPG) have been enjoying rule over this autonomous region. The YPG has proved that it scored victories against ISIS as compared to other forces and rebels. This group is being respected, praised and supported by United States despite the intense disquiet felt by Turkey. Since the starting of Feb 2016 this group has been exploited the other rebellion groups and also pushing them eastward from its enclave city of Afrin. Turkey is also against Kurdish activities because of Kurdish occupy Azaz they will be able to control the 100km stretch remaining the IS-held town of Jarablus which means the complete cut off Turkey from Syria (Harris,2012).

### **Assad's Regime**

The "Syria Spring" began gradually but escalated conflict and attracted many regional and international actors that the government and anti-government supported by them. This uprising is against the Assad's regime and I think he is not regarding his country situation. People of Syria were demanding reforms since 1945 as they had never constituted a unified separate political entity. Pres.Assad is also responsible for this conflict which changed into civil or proxy war(Heintz,2015).

Assad wanted to maintain his individual identity with that of the state and the military was not loyal to the state but to the regime. Furthermore, to strengthen his power Assad introduced three important reservoirs:

- Cohesive elite structure of power in direct control of state institution.
- A cohesive business sector which dependent on the regime.
- Violence adaptation for the modality of government.

The Assad regime particularly framed the uprisings as terrorist campaigns led by Islamist extremists (Heydemann, 2013).So Assad appointed his close family members on the high posts to control the state institutions, like Asef Shawkat was

the commander of Syrian intelligence agency. On the other hand, to respond the protestors Assad always used violence which has spoiled the country. Due to the unsuitable policies of Assad the external factors involved in the war for gaining their interests from the region. So Syria problem became regional one and Assad's regime ceased to be seen as the only cause of the instability in the region (Ibish, 2016).

### **Regional Realm also affects a Country**

#### **Arab Spring**

The Arab people inspired the universal ideas to put an end to authoritarian rule having demands of freedom, justice and dignity, so this is called Arab-Spring. Its outcomes were not same because every country is diverse in term of its ruling mechanism, power structure, international relations and societies (Saul, 2014). The main purpose of Arab Spring was to put an end dictatorship and kingship. Every country raised slogan against the brutal policies as they were facing since many decades. Syria its prime example, the uprising against Assad regime started on Jan 20, 2011. The people were demanding freedom politically reforms and civil rights like the other regional countries as Syrian people always faced cohesive policies since the independence 1946 from the French. But the government remained unresponsive and the protest grew and expanded to Homs and part of Syria by changing into civil war. So Arab Spring has proved as the key element for inflaming the Syrian war (Shaheen, 2015).

#### **Iran's Involvement in Syrian War**

Iran wants to stay and to protect the integrity of Syria for keeping its influence in this region. There are many other reasons which urged Iran's involvement in Syrian war. Both countries remained close to each other in the context of same interests and as a first Arab country accepted Iran. On the other hand, Syria is only one country who is sided with Iran regarding Iraq's war. Religion similarities also close the both countries. Totten (2012) defines:

"The overthrow of Assad is the worst thing that can happen to Iranian government and Hezbollah. Iran will lose its only ally in the Arab World and Hezbollah will lose one of two patrons and entire over-ground logistics network."

Syria and Iran have same enemies and Syria has unique geo-political concerns that Iran should get involved with the idea to establish the democratic set up in Syria produced in Geneva III in 2015 also supported this idea by USA. But Tehran did not welcome this idea because a new set up in Syria would put aside Bashar-Al-Assad. Iran's Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) is much involved in Syria civil war since its emergence, favoring that Assad should remain in power. A major General of IRGC, Muhammad Ali Jafari said that: "Tehran sees no better option than him". Both the countries Iran and Syria have come to close after the Iraq war

“Cedar Revolution”. “Iran considers Syria’s security as its own security” stated by Syrian Defense Minister Najjar Ali Akbervelayatias a former foreign minister indicated that: Syria is the golden ring of the chain of resistance against Israel that must be protected.

Iran wants to save the Assad’s regime because it considers if it losses Syria, it would not be able to hold Tehran. From a bird eye view there are US, Israel, Russia, Turkey, Iran and Lebanon in the region and all want to be influence in “Levant”. So if Iran losses Syria then it would not be able to reflect its power in Levant. Iran is providing intelligence, military and advisory support to Syria for the war’s destruction but to save its interests, influence and its integrity.

### **Saudi’s Interests in this Region**

Iran and Saudi Arabia are fighting proxy war as it is proved. Saudi Arabia is supporting rebel’s group as they belong to Sunni sect unlike Bahar-Al-Assad. So it is also religion conflict between Riyadh regime and Syria regime. Saudi regime considers that Iran might expand its influence in the region by exploiting stability in the Arab states. Likewise, Iran believed that it might loss due to the fall of Assad’s regime. Syria is supported by Iran with weapons and fighting units. At the start the whole Arab World remained silent regarding the civil war of Syria. This showed the ineffective policies of LAS in the Syria. That’s why Assad took advantage from the lack of regional authorities and continued to suppress the revolt. But a bird eye view on the war of Syria shows that the Riyadh regime is supporting rebellion as well as IS and Al-Nusra. Its aim to overthrow the Assad’s regime as it is sided by Iran and Iran has sectarian conflicts including many others with Saudi Arabia (Lvent,2015)

America is also using Saudi Arabia to fulfill its aims from the region. Trump’s support for Saudi Arabia may be solace but Saudi Arabia is miscalculating, it is ignoring that what America is going on sharply increasing the vitriol toward Iran. In fact, Saudi Arabia is an ally to the United State in this region. Being a supporter of opposition in Syria it was long term desire of Saudi Arabia to break the alliance of key ally of Iran. Saudi Arabia wants to be chief rival for dominance in the Persian Gulf as well as in the Middle East. Arab Spring proved golden opportunity for Saudi Arabia to strike at Iran’s key ally. Saudi Arabia is inflaming the war by supporting the rebels for democratic system in spite of having monarchy (Starr, 2015).

### **Turkish Diplomacy for Syria**

Turkey has security concerns along its long frontier of Syria. Turkey also has economic interests that it prevents Kurdish independence. The diplomatic relations between Turkey and Syria have become severe due to the civil war. Turkey supported by United State regarding Syrian War, further more Turkey has many goals as it wants to resolve all the Syrian problems through United Nations led political process. Secondly Turkey wants to end the Iranian influence which is

promoted by Russia in the region. Syrian Kurdish is big challenge for Turkey, as they are expanding their territory. As Kurdish’s movements are inside the Syria but Turkey has severe fear if Kurdish occupies the city Aziz then Turkey will lose the link from Syria.

Third point which is very uncomfortable for Turkey and United State is that America is supporting Kurdish against IS. America also trains the Kurdish which is real risk for Turkey. America never neglects Kurdish and Kurdish remained an important element for America. Turkey mounted the pressure on Kurdis in Afrin by deploying troops to Northern part as a deal agreed with Russia and Iran that set up a “Dismount Zone”. (Zapfem,2014; Daoudy, 2016))

Turkey have made allies with rebels and also helped in the united fight in counter of IS. Turkey sometime changed its behavior. For instance, A Russian jet was shot down by Turkey on 2<sup>nd</sup>November, 2015. This made the Turkish hunt for Kurds difficult. So Turkish president went to Russia for solving the issue an agreement signed between the two. Meanwhile Turkey got permission to counter the Kurds and lessen its support for opposition by softening “Assad must go” Rhetoric (DAWN, 2016).

Harkey’s (2014) essay entitled “Turkey’s Syria Predicament” is a deeply researched review of Turkey’s involvement in this conflict that included the facilitation of arms, supplies, and fighters into Syria. Turkey faced a dilemma with ISIS fighting the Kurds; Ankara wanted to see the Kurds weakened, but ISIS’s entry invited regional and Western intervention that dragged Turkey along.

**v. Foreign Power’s role toward Syrian War**

The weak internal state of any country compels the external countries for intervene. So the same situation is being repeated in history like many other historic examples.



## **Russian Interest in this Region**

In theory Russia is bear Syria to tackle IS. But practically Russia also attacks anti-Assad rebels. During the cold war era Soviet Union had great influence in Syria but after the collapse of Soviet Union its influence reduced.

When Bashar-Al-Assad became president in 2000 he promoted the relation with Syria regarding its influence as great power against and dramatically supported Assad regime against Arab Spring. After the overthrow Libyan long term leader, Mummar Gaddafi in 2011 Russia started to see such ally which directly provided her influence in Arab World. Russia did not have interests to save Syria from Civil War but it wants to save its own interest in this region. Like the usage of Syrian sea port, trade agreements regarding oil, economy, commercial and military.

Russia is the supporter of the Assad's regime, since 1950, Russia also has handled strong relationship with Syrian Baath party. Russia is giving significant support to Syria in current war. It has used power of veto many times in UNO along china to protect the Assad regime it is source of ammunition and arms for Syria. Syria wants to weaken Islamic group in Syria as well as to prevent US for determining the fate of such an important region. Russian Defense Minister visited Syria in June 2016 and in the meeting He met AL-Assad and Russian Jets facilitating the Iranian air base of Hamdan to use it aerial raids by Tupolev / Lu -22m3S and Sukoi / SU - 34-34S to Syria. Every power is using the Syria for its own influence. Syria has facilitated Russia by giving naval station at "Tartus" as this port is very important for Russia due to European trade and in flow of oil from the Mediterranean region.

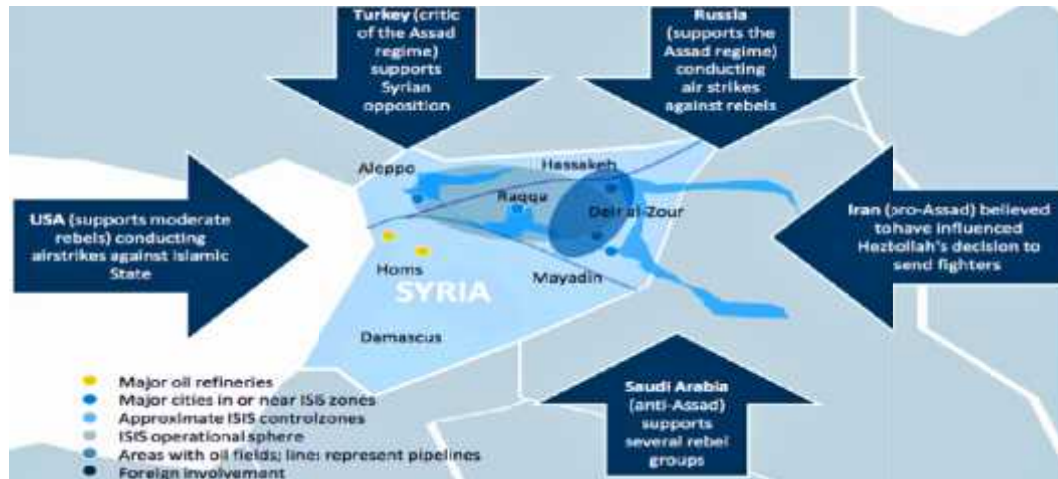
## **American Foreign Policy Regarding Syria**

Syrian war is a proxy war in international arena between two major powers. There major powers United State and Russia are using regional countries and many internal rebellion groups to attain their aims from the region. Like Russia us also want to influence in Syria. Both parties' regime and anti-regime groups have been receiving military and diplomatic support from foreign countries leading the conflict to mostly be described as a proxy war since 2011. America provides politically logistic and military support to the main Syrian opposition body. Rebels are being trained by United State (CIA) at bases in Qatar, Jordan and Saudi Arabia. 10,000 rebels' fighters have been trained at a cost of 1 billion a year by CIA operatives and U.S special operation troops. U.S does not directly involved in the war for instance to secure backing for us-led against ISIL John Kerry met Turkish leaders that they play frontline role against Syrian government. America and Turkish military announced a joint plan to remove regime. America intervention was limited in last six years as compared to Trump; he widened the scope U.S intervention in Syria. Actually America wants to influence because of Syrian geostrategic position. U.S have main interest in this region "Oil flows freely out of the Gulf", and preventing the other countries from controlling all of the crucial



resources. Whilst is not only oil producing country and among the oil production giant and close to the giant continent of Africa. And Africa can be proved an important market for it.

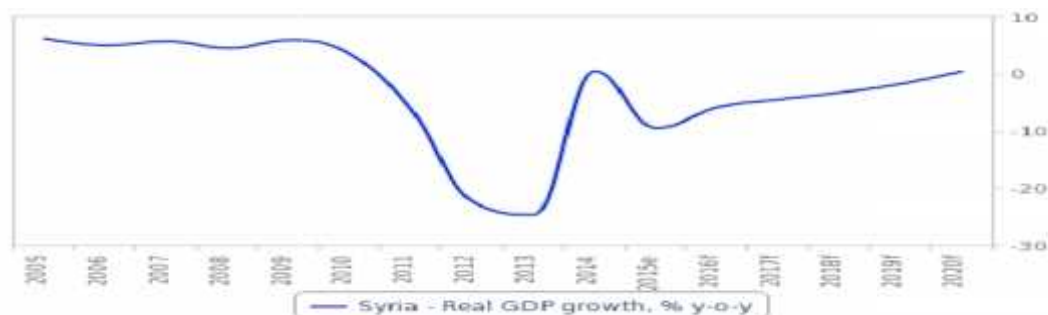
America is inflaming the war in Syria to strength its economy as any war in this country would take a toll on the inflation affected America economy. On the other hand, Syria is important for U.S because of Israel factor. America wanted to disturb to relation of Syria and Iran for the benefit of Israel.



**Effects of war regarding economy, education, culture:**

**Economy**

It is believed that war disrupts the countries regarding economies, infrastructure, trade, transportation and production. The existing situation for making measurements of economic activities is not easy. The war inside Syria has destroyed its economy not only in present but also for the coming years. The Syrian economy will be contracted 3.9% an annually from 2016 to onward forecasted by BMI Research Team. The GDP growth rate is decreased day by day. Exports of the Syria have reached to 80% according to BMI. This chart shows the dropping Syria’s GDP growth rate including the estimated 25% contractions year our year in 2012 to 2013.



Oil outputs also damaged as oil fields are the under control of ISIS, Although Syria is not world's biggest oil producer but its export is considered 50% and 30% for government's revenue in 2010. Every economic sector is affected due to Syria war inside or outside the country. War decreased the living standard in the country as well as regional countries. We can see War's effects on "Levant" area as many countries- Turkey Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq and Egypt are facing the out flows of refugees. These refugees offer themselves for services on low cast which affected the local workers of the related countries as this situation brings the frustration in the region. Property owners have also faced problems due to the refugees' outflow as this outflow badly hits the demand for land. Trade crises in "Levant" are the results of war furthermore it disrupted the intra-regional trade.

### **Education**

Education has significance impact on country's development, progress as well as prosperity. If we see the education scenario in Syria after Arab spring the situation is not satisfied regarding children's education. During the destruction period how can children have strong mind set and how they focus on their studies? Likewise, in a truly tragic twist, schools have become most dangerous zones in Syria. About 4,200 schools damaged during the war and most of the schools are being used as a shelter by internally displaced people.

Many children in Syria are living in those areas which are cut off humanitarian assistance due to conflict. About 2.6 million children are still out of school. About 20% children were uprooted at the time of study. Due to all described reasons the Syrian children having no access to education, as mostly schools are situated in affected areas. Many children have lost their parents in war so they are desperate and cannot get education. So, the future of children to protect the educational system as education changes the mindset, which is very essential for society.

### **Culture**

Every country has specific culture which distinguishes it in international scenario. Syria has its own specific culture regarding historical places which are mostly in Aleppo and Damascus. These historical places are being destroyed in war. The brutal situation also discourages the foreign archeologists for coming into Syria. Many priceless buildings are being destroyed due to armed conflict in the affected region. On the other hand, the second threat which emerged during this conflicted situation is the stolen of historical and antique things from the museum. Many German and other foreigners have turned back to their countries because of this uncertainty. This conflict also disrupted the social culture as well. People feel insecure and this situation is not suitable for a healthy culture.

## **Image of Syria in International Scenario**

Every country has different over look regarding Syria because regional and foreign powers have specific and various interests so definitely every country has different perspective about Syria regarding its own interests. Meanwhile Syrian war has not been proving good for Gulf States as Syria's allies with Russia-Iran has been strengthening Assad's regime. Some states like Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and US now consider the continuation of conflict is dangerous and destabilized the regime. In sum Syria has become hot "a hot own" for the external. International organization are working to save the humanitarian from exploitation and for restoring the basic rights; education, food, health assistance etc. International opinion is against Assad's regime due to his aggressive policies toward public. But having opposite opinion against Assad and anti-Assad no one country is performing to solve the issue and prevent the intervention excepting it exploiting. On the whole the conflict or war on any level has negative impacts and images.

## **Conclusion**

It is concluded that the underneath characters and their interacting affects have had a major part in escalating the war; feeble Syrian nationalism, intemperate Islamism, weakness of the Syrian state, rivalry between the West and Russia, Kurdish activists etc. but question is that why the war has been peculiar long and vicious in Syria? There seem the following factors that are reasons for this violent scene:

Civil War inside the country does not show the united body of a nation. Syria land looks like a land without nation. The cause of this situation is the lack of disharmony among the people as a nation, so the people are involved in the civil war in different perspectives. Intemperate islamization and Syria being as a weak state is also the reasons behind this brutal scenario. Russia and America both are rivals on Syria as well as on "Levant". Sometime America shows detachment which strengthens the regional struggle for leadership in the Middle East. If Russia stops disintegration of Assad's regime by pressurizing the U.S as it has tight capabilities, it would be tragedy. But now a day IS the worst for Syria and also for the external as it took over most of the territory. The external actors are fueling the proxy war by promoting sectarian differences. State-to-nation balance is low in the Middle East. Since 2014/2015 the war is being directly engaged both regional and global powers in the proxy war in "Levant". Two implications are there in this trend. Firstly, it has escalated the threat of increasing the accidental war between actors. Secondly the current condition of the conflict it is unlikely to expect its solution from the local.

What will the future of Syria? And how the war will be ended? No one can predict authentically because interests changed with the new requirements and also circumstances hit the state to change their behavior for the others.

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