

## **The popular uprising in Syria: Complexity of the problems.**

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### **I. Introduction**

From the early 2010s, countries of Middle-East; Egypt, Libya and Syria witnessed popular uprising against the ruling dictatorial regime of their respective country. While in Egypt and Libya, the uprising eventually, dislodged the ruling dictatorial regime in their respective country, in Syria, however, the popular uprising has been dragging on for more than 6 years, and there is no end in sight as of now. Initially, in Syria, the popular protest movement was launched to demand democratic reforms, released of political prisoners, abolition of emergency laws and an end to rampant corruption in the country. Therefore, the protest movement, initially was not directed towards regime change. However, as the protest movement continues, it soon turned into an open violent protest movement, not only for the democratic reforms, but also the protesters started demanding the stepping down of President Assad and his ruling Baath party from power; and the government, with the aim to crush the uprising, started adopting a more and more violent method. The protest movement, virtually turned into a full-scale armed movement from the middle of 2012. As the government forces started adopting repressive measure with iron hand, the opposition rebel groups took up armed to fight the governments troops in different parts of the country. Each and every passing day, casualty was mounting on both side, and by now, 6 years after the protest movement started, more than 3,50,000 people, including women and children were killed; and almost equal number of Syrians were wounded and millions flee their homes to become unwanted guests in different parts of the world.

### **II. Fastly Detetoreating Situation**

As the pro-democracy protest movement turned more and more violent, more and more number of people took to the street and the security forces on many occasions open fire on demonstrators, which instead of demoralizing the protestors, hardened the resolved of the protestors to dislodge President Assad and his Baath Party from power. By 2011, hundreds of thousands of people took to the street demanding an end to dictatorial rule of Assad regime.

As fighting goes on the opposition rebel groups belonging to both extremist and moderate Islamic groups, eventually took up arm; first to defend themselves and second to expel security forces from their area of domination. The pro-democratic movement escalated and the country descended into Civil War in the later part of 2012. Rebel brigades were formed to fight the government forces for control of cities, towns and the country side as well. Damascus, the capital city of Syria and Aleppo, the second largest city of the country had virtually been converted into battle fields between government forces and combined rebel force. Fightings were intensified in the entire length and breadth of the country; and casualty was mounting rapidly. By June, 2013 as per UN report, 90,000 people were already killed and by August, 2015 the figure of people killed crossed 2,50,000. As by now, it is estimated that over 3,50,000 to 4,00,000 people were killed and more than the same number of people were injured. The number of refugees fleeing the country was not in terms of thousands but it was in terms of millions.

### **III. Complex Nature of the war.**

The conflict in Syria has become more and more complicated as more and more groups from within and from outside the country joint the conflict on either side. It is, practically not possible to decide as to who fought who and, as to who is on which side. The conflict is now, much more than the conflict between forces loyal to Assad and his Baath Party and forces supporting the popular uprising. The conflict assumes sectarian overtones, pitching the country's Sunni majority against the President's Shia Aawite Sect. and down-in regional and world powers. The coming in of Islamic State jihadist group into the conflict in Syria has added to the complexity of the problem.

#### **IV. War Crime**

Civil war in Syria has drawn the attention of UN, particularly on the issue of war crime. As per the report of UN Commission of Inquiry all parties to the conflict have committed war crimes, including murder, torture, rape and enforced disappearances. They have also been accused of civilian suffering such as blocking access to food, water, health services sieges etc. as a method of war. The UN Security Council has demanded all parties to the conflict to stop the indiscriminate use of weapons in populated areas, but this demand of UN was not bothered by parties involved in the conflict as a result of which, unarmed civilians, including women and children continue to die in their thousands. Many have been killed by barrel bombs dropped by government aircraft on gatherings in rebel held areas- attack which the UN says may constitute massacre. With the entry of ISIS in Syria Civil war, cases involving serious war Crime and human right violation have been on the rise. The UN has also been reporting that the ISIS was waging a campaign of terror by inflicting severe form of punishment on those who transgress or refuse to accept its rules. They carried out mass killing, execution of prisoners, amputation of parts of the body of their captives, etc. They beheaded a numbers of minority Christians, western journalists, members of security forces etc. All these, as a matter of fact, constitute war crimes.

As the civil war in Syria dragon, parties to the war, both forces loyal to President Assad and opposition rebels volunteers started using more and more sophisticated weapons. While the opposition rebel groups including the free Syrian Army got supply of such weapon from USA, and its western allies, the government forces got supply of such weapons from Russia and Iran. The Syrian Army started using the most sophisticated weapon in its arsenal, Scud-missiles which it possessed from Russia. Supposed to be used on external aggressors, was believed to have been used by the Syrian government forces on its own people. With the increase in use of more and sophisticated and deadly weapons, casualty has still been rising each day.

#### **V. Used of Chemical weapons.**

Thousands of people were killed in August, 2013 when rockets filled with the nerve agent Sarin were fired at several suburbs of Damascus which were, by then the stronghold of opposition rebel groups. There were blames and counter blames between the government forces and the Syrian rebel groups. While the rebels and western powers including USA pointed fingers on the government forces for the act, the government forces blamed the rebel forces for the act. The western powers maintained that it could only have been carried out by Syrian government. The US, while accusing the Syrian government of perpetrating the act, threatened to militarily intervene and punished the Syrian government and its forces; President Assad, facing the prospect of US military intervention, agreed to destroy all stockpile of chemical weapons in government's arsenal. The process of destruction of chemical weapons in the arsenal of Syrian government was completed in the following year, but the Organization for the Prohibitions of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) has continued to document the use of toxic chemicals in the conflict Investigators found that chlorine was used systematically and repeatedly in the deadly attacks on rebel held areas between April and July, 2014. It has been proved beyond doubt that it was the government's forces that actually used the banned chemical weapons. Apart from government forces, ISIS forces were also believed to have use chemical weapons in Syria Humanitarian crisis.

#### **VI. Humanitarian Crisis**

The OPCW said that The Civil war in Syria has created untold miseries and suffering to innocent women, children and elderly people of the country. More than 4.5 million Syrians fled their country since the start up the war in 2011 to become unwelcomed guests in Europe, Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey. These countries have struggled to cope with one of the largest refugees exoduses in recent time with some 10% of Syrian refugees sought refuge in Europe, the rest were accommodated in neighbouring states. Apart from 4.5 million people who fled their country, some 6.5Million people are internally displaced inside Syrian itself. In 2015 alone, 1.5 million people were displaced from their homes. As per UN report, the UN will need 3.2 billion US Dollar to help the 13.5 million people including 6 million children, who will require some forms of humanitarian assistance inside Syria itself in 2016. About 70% of the population of Syria are without to adequate drinking water one in three people are unable to meet their needs for survival like; food, clothes and shelters, more than 2 million children are out of school, and four out of five people live in poverty. The humanitarian problems and crisis were compounded by the refusal of the warring parties to provide free access to humanitarian agencies in civilians areas. It should be noted that some 4.5 Syrians live in hard to reach areas , including of course, 4,00,000 people in 15 besieged locations who do not have access to life saving aid.

Occasionally, UN relief workers were under attack by either of the warring party, which really and seriously hampered relief work. The extend and seriousness of humanitarian crisis in Syria could not sufficiently be explained. The Civil war in Syria is supposed to be the internal problem of Syria which is to be solved internally. The conflict, though is the internal problem of Syria, has slowly been internationalized and solution to the conflict has to be found not from within, but from outside powers. Right from the beginning of the

conflict there were involvement of outside power. Iran has always been there behind the screen helping and backing Assad and his government. It was believed to have helped Syrian government by providing all possible helps. The intervention of USA led coalition in Syria in support of the rebel groups, and the intervention of Russia in support of Assad's government, instead of creating congenial atmosphere for solving the Civil War, further aggravated the situation. In September, 2014, the US led coalition launched airstrike inside Syria in an effort to degrade and ultimately destroy IS in Syria. While the coalition's real intention was the destruction of IS and its force operating in Syria, it seeks to avoid, as far as possible to attack IS and its forces, which it at the same time, believed would give operational advantage to Assad's forces.

A year later, Russia started its own air campaign targeting terrorists in Syria. But the rebel fighters reported that Russia was actually attacking those rebel forces supported by the USA led coalition. This in other words means, Russia and US led coalition were fighting proxy war which could escalate into a full scale confrontation between Russia and the US led coalition. In political front, it has been seen that opposition groups fighting the ISIS forces and Assad's government forces were deeply divided and rival rebel groups within the opposition rebel group are battling for supremacy. The most prominent rebel group, the National Coalition for Syrian Revolutionary is backed by several Western and Gulf Arab state. However, since the National coalition for Syrian Revolutionary is an exile group, it has no much influence on the ground, and many opposition rebel groups rejected the primacy of the group.

### **VII. Peace Initiatives**

Since neither side in the war able to have a decisive victory over the other, the international community has the opinion that negotiated settlement is the only option available for solving the Syrian Crisis. The UN Security Council has called the Geneva Communiqué which envisages a transitional governing body with full executive power formed on the basis of mutual consent.

Talk in Geneva in early 2014, referred to as Geneva II broke down after only two rounds, with the then UN Special envoy, Lakhdar Brahimi blaming the Syrian Government for refusing to discuss opposition's demand. The successor of Brahimi, Staffan de Mistura, focused on establishing a series of local cease-fires. His plan for 'a free zone' in Aleppo was rejected, but three years siege of Homs suburb of at-Wair was successfully implemented in January, 2016. However, solution to the conflict, as of now appears to be still a far cry.

### **VIII. Involvement of external forces**

As mentioned in the preceding discourse and intervention of external forces in Syria, Civil war in the country has created a new dimension. What has been seen in the initial stages of the conflict, was that conflict was essentially the internal affairs of Syria and any solution to the conflict will have to be initiated internally. However, since the two warring parties are unwilling to sit for negotiation; and since neither of the two warring parties are unlikely to eliminate the other, the intervention of world power has become inevitable. Since such is the situation on the ground, unless there is international intervention, solution to the ongoing Civil war in Syria would not be possible, and more and more people will be killed, and more and more people will have to leave their country. Time will come when Syria will be a country without population.

As far as external intervention is concerned, Iran and Russia have already intervened in one form or the other. They intervened in support of one party to the conflict i.e in support of President Assad and his Alawite led government. They propped up the Alawite led government's and gradually increase their support. Iran is believed to have already spent billions of dollars a year to bolster President Assad and his government, providing, military advisers and supplying weapons at subsidized rate. Russia, in the meantime, launched an air campaign against the rebel groups opposing Assad regime. Moreover, Assad's Syrian government has also been supported by Lebanon's Shia Islamist Hezbollah movement Hezbollah fighters are directly fighting the battle on the side of government forces.

On the other hand, the oppositions, dominated by the Sunnis, has been getting supports from Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and Jordan along with US, UK and France. The rebels groups appealed to US, UK and France to supply anti-aircraft weapons to stop devastating government air strike. But the appeal was turned down by US and its allies amid concern that they might end-up in the hands of Jihadist militants.

### **IX. Conclusion**

It is, therefore, necessary to bear in mind that foreign intervention in Syria so far is, intervention in support of one party to the conflict. Iran and Russia intervened in support of Assad regime. On the other hand, USA and its Arab collision partners intervened in the war by providing weapons to rebels groups fighting government forces. Therefore the nature of foreign intervention so far is not an intervention with the aim to bring about negotiated settlement of the conflict, but to find a solution by suppressing one party to the conflict or by making one party to the conflict to have preponderance of power position over other. It is, therefore, to be maintained that, Civil war in Syria could not be contained or settled internally as there exists right from the beginning of the conflict, a kind of balance of power between the two conflicting parties. What is needed,

however, is not one sided intervention, but rather, what is needed is the international of big powers, US and Russia through UN Security Council on common and United front. As and when USA and Russia, could intervene, if possible though UN, by not taking side in the conflict but rather on united common front, then and there only the Syrian Civil war would come to an end.

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