

Syrian Crisis: A Case Study

Naheed Anjum Chishti¹

Abstract

The state of Syria is facing the problems of political instability. The current situation is creating the socio-economic problems. International community has lot of concern over it. The main objective of the research is to high light the factor behind this crisis. The research also discusses the role of international communities including big powers. It is obvious that this crisis will convert into global crisis. This is high time to take it serious as an issue. The study finds out the solutions. The approach is analytical and descriptive. The researcher uses the original and secondary sources. The references and conclusion are in the end.

Key Words: Modern Syria, problems of socio-economic and political instability, policies of Bashar Al-Assad's Regime and international concern

Introduction

Modern Syria was established as a French mandate in 1920. After Syria declared independence in 1946; it struggled for next two decade under the political instability. Series of coups ended in 1963 when the Baath party took control over Syria. However, the power struggle within the Baath party continued until 1970, when Hafez al Assad took over the leadership position in the Bath party and established an authoritarian rule over Syria for the next 30 years. The regime violently suppressed an armed uprising led by the Muslim Brotherhood in 1982 with tens of thousands of dead. (Current Crisis in Syria)¹.

Demographics

The Syrian population is similar to other Middle Easter countries. The 90 % of 22.5 million inhabitants are ethnic Arabs, followed by 9% of Kurds and small minorities of Armenians, Circassia's and Tukmans. The sectarian religious differences seem to be more important for the current situation in Syria as these previously determined the political orientation of the ruling regime. A majority of more than 70% are Sunny Muslims. There are Alwites 12%, Druze 4% and a small minority of Ismailis who originate from the Shia branch of the Islamic religion. The Christian minority plays also an important role with about 10% members of the total Syrian population. The current regime comes from the Alawite religious group.

Beginning of the Dispute

Syria have been facing with similar repressive conditions as those that led other Arab nations to revolutions and uprisings known as the Arab Spring in 2011. A lack of political freedoms alongside with economic difficulties created a strong pressure on the majority population. The first attempt to organize protests in February 2011 was not very much successful. The demonstrations gradually spread across the country as severe clashes with the security forces increased the public anger with Assad's regime.

Bashar al Assad

Bashar al-Assad took over the office from his father in 2001. As an ophthalmologist and with an older brother who was to become the presidential successor, he had no political

¹ Associate Professor and Chairperson, Department of Political Science, University of Balochistan, Pakistan

ambitions until his brother died in a car accident in 1994. After the death of his father Hafez in 2000, Bashar became an unopposed candidate of the Baath party for the new Syrian president and has ruled Syria ever since.

Bashar took some measures that launched the economic liberalization and limited political reforms. The most notable event was the release of hundreds of political prisoners. As the regime opposed the US Iraqi invasion in 2003 and aligned with Iran, Hamas and Hezbollah, it became isolated on the international scene. However, the government was careful to maintain its traditional partnerships for instance with Russia.

Bashar al-Assad introduced some measures to satisfy the protesters. He formally lifted the widely-criticized State of Emergency in April 2011. The State of emergency previously suspended most constitutional protection of citizens and was in place from 1963, commonly used to suppress the dissent. The regime was criticized for introducing only formal gestures to silence the protesters. Bashar called for a national referendum, which was held in February 2012, to introduce a new constitution through which the space would be open for the political competition outside the Baath party. It was approved by a vast majority of participants; however, it lacked the legitimacy due to the low turnout and ongoing deadly clashes between the regime forces and demonstrators. Under the new constitution, the first parliamentary election that reintroduced other political parties beside the Baath party took place in May 2012. According to the sources, 51% of eligible voters took part in the election, in which the regime supporters won over 90% seats in the parliament. (Landis)².

The Assad regime's forces are estimated to number between 100,000 and 200,000. They dispose of heavy military weapons including tanks, fighter helicopters, armored personnel carriers and artillery. Due to this professional military technology, the regime forces have an advantage in the direct military confrontations with the demonstrators.

A vast majority of the Alawite community is loyal to the regime for several reasons. A majority of Alawites have at least one member of their families in the regime's security forces. The government security units are also careful to not damage any Alawite districts. High-ranking military posts are held by Alawites, therefore they strongly identify themselves with the regime and they also fear revenge by the Sunni majority in a case of regime's fall. (Sharp & Jermy)³.

When talking about the regime forces, the Shabiha units played a significant role in the clashes. Shabiha are likely recruited mostly from Alawite groups, and are sometimes considered to be connected to the drug trafficking business. They are sometimes considered to be connected to the drug trafficking business. They are feared as extremely brutal, spotted in some of the worst massacres in Syria so far, often in black clothes. There is no official link between them and the regime. It is impossible to find out how much they cooperate with the regime forces, but given the fact they were spotted fighting alongside with the army, it is assumed they do the "dirty work" for the government and the regime tolerates their mafia activities in exchange. (Moussaoui, & Rana)⁴.

The Role of Opposition

There are two main opposition coalitions in Syria.

1. The Syrian National Council (SNC)
2. National Coordination Body for Democratic Change (NCB)

The SNC was formally created in Turkey in October 2011 by a range of mostly exile activists. It includes many members of the Muslim Brotherhood movement and it is dominated by the Sunni community. The SNC serves as a contact point for the international community, but it struggles with the internal disunity and a lack of efficiency. It advocates for an international military intervention, which leads some Syrians in the country to suspect the SNC as a tool of the foreign regional powers. (BBC)⁵.

National Coordination Body for Democratic Change (NBC) is sometimes referred to as The National Coordination Committee for Democratic change. It is based on an opposition bloc inside Syria and includes many long-term dissidents, who are allegedly afraid of Islamists within the SNS. Unlike SNC, the NBC is willing to negotiate with Assad's regime, opposes foreign military intervention and communicates with Russia. (Sharp & Christopher)6

Free Syrian Army (FSA)

Thousands of Sunni Soldiers have deserted the army since the uprising began. These soldiers are mostly light-armed and trained on elementary level, as the core of the regime's high-ranking and well-trained military officials are from the Alawite religious group. Some of those deserters create the core of the FSA, which returned to arms in its fight against the current regime. Although its leader Riyadh al-Asad claims around 40,000 men directly under his command. It is likely that the number is not even a half of this figure. (Al-Jazeera)7.

Other Minority Groups

Christians and Kurds remain mostly aside from the current uprising. They fear that the violent conflict could end up in a full-fledged civil war in a case of Assad's regime fall. These fears stem likely from the allegedly sectarian character of the current confrontations, as promoted by some media and the regime, even though the opposition forces claim that they seek to create a tolerant society. In particular, Christians are believed to fear sectarianism that may result in repressions against the minority groups. On the other hand, they refuse to be associated with the regime's crackdown. (Sharp. Christopher) 8.

Key Events and Milestones of the Uprising

Demonstrations were started in Daraa in March 15th 2011. These were sparked by arrest of a group of teenagers who were accused of drawing political graphic with oppositional narrative. As some demonstrators were killed by the security forces, it invoked anger and the protests gradually spread across the country.

In April 19 2011, the emergency law was formally lifted as a concession to the protesters. There was crackdown on protesters. There were more than 70 killings on this day. Tens of security forces were killed by armed gangs in Jisr Al-Shugar. This indicated that the protests changed into an armed conflict.

In Turkey, the opposition bloc Syrian National Council is formed. The constitution referendum was held with voters approving the open political competition. In February-March 2012, Syrian forces cracked down on the city of Homs with heavy bombardment and the death toll estimated at 700 people killed. In March 2012, the Kofi Annan Peace Plan for Syria was submitted to the United Nation. Syrian parliamentary election were held and boycotted by the opposition. The Baath party wins a vast majority. The Syrian army shot down a Turkish fighter jet on June 23, 2012. The plane mistakenly entered the Syrian airspace.

Turkey disagreed with Syria over where the jet was shot down. Ankara claimed it was a few minutes after the plane had returned to the area above the international waters only close to the Syrian coast, but not above the Syrian territory. As a NATO member, Turkey could apply the Article 5 of the NATO treaty, if attacked by Syria. In July 18, 2012 Syrian defense minister Daud Rajiha and his deputy were killed by a suicidal attack in Damascus. It showed that the opposition was able to get closer to the regime officials. (Background Report)9.

Current Situation

A late 2012 UN report described the conflict as “overtly sectarian in nature” between Alawite Shabiha militants and other Shia groups fighting largely against Sunni-dominated rebel groups, though both opposition and government forces.

According to the United Nations, the death toll surpassed 100,000 in June 2013, and reached 120,000 by September 2013. In addition, tens of thousands of protesters have been imprisoned and there are reports of widespread torture and terror in state prisons. International organizations have accused both government and opposition forces of severe human rights violations. The UN and Amnesty International’s inspections and probes in Syria determined both in 2012 and 2013 that the vast majority of abuses are done by the Syrian government; whose are also largest in scale.

The severity of the humanitarian disaster in Syria has been outlined by UN and many international organizations. More than four million Syrians fled the country and became refugees, and millions more were left in poor living conditions with shortage of food and drinking water. The situation is especially bad in the town of muadamiyat al- sham, where 12,000 residents are predicted to die of starvation by the winter of 2013 from a Syrian army enforced blockade. Chemical weapons have also been used in Syria on more than one occasion, triggering strong international reaction (BBC)10.

Use of the Chemical Weapons and the Reaction of the International Community

The Syrian government has been accused of conducting several chemical attacks, the most serious of them being the 2013 Ghouta attacks. The rebels have also been accused of conducting several chemical attacks, the most serious of which was the Khan al-Assa chemical attack. The 25 people were died due to this attack. Both sides immediately accused each other of carrying out the attack, but neither side presented clear documentation. Russian experts later visited the site, found samples of sarin, and assigned responsibility for the attack to the rebels. On 29 April, another chemical attack was reported in Saraqib, in which 2 died and 13 were injured. On 5 May Turkish doctors said initial test show no traces of sarin had been found in the blood samples of victims. French intelligence acquired blood, urine, earth and munitions samples from victims or sites of attacks on Saraqeb, on 29 April 2013, and Jobar, n mid April 2013. The analysis carried out confirms the use of sarin (Wikipedia) 11.

On 13 June the United States announced that there is definitive proof that the Assad government has used limited amounts of chemical weapons on multiple occasions on rebels’ forces, killing 100 to 150 people. The activists claim up to 400 people were affected by the attack in Adra and Houma of the Damascus sbrubs. The content of the chemicals used has not been identified yet. ON 9 September Russia urged Syria to put its chemical weapons stockpile under international control. On 14 September, US and Russia announced in Geneva that they reached a deal on how Assad should give up his chemical weapons.

The Syrian army began using cluster bombs in September 2012. Steve goose, director of the Arms division at Human Rights Watch said “Syria is expanding its relentless use of cluster munitions, a banned weapon, and civilians are paying the price with their lives and limbs”. (Steve Goose) 12

In December 2012, the Syrian government began using Scud missiles on rebel-held towns, primarily targeting Aleppo. On 19 February, four Scud missiles were fired, three landed in Aleppo city and one on Tell Riffat town, Aleppo governorate. Suicide bombings began in December 2011; Al-Nusra front has claimed responsibility for 57out of 70 similar attacks through April 2013.targeting government officials, the bombings have claimed numerous civilian casualties. The Syrian army has itself claimed to have prepared 8,000

soldiers for suicide bombings in the event of NATO military intervention, including 13 kamikaze pilots.

Thermo baric weapons, also known as “fuel-air-bombs”, have been used by the government side during the Syrian civil war. Since 2012, rebels have claimed that the Syrian Air Force is using thermo baric weapons against residential areas occupied by the rebel fighters, such as during the Battle of Aleppo and also in Kafr Batna.

The Arab League, European Union, the United Nations, and many Western Governments condemned the Syrian government’s violent response to the protesters, and many expressed support for the protester’s right to exercise free speech. The Arab league and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation suspended Syria’s membership. On 4 October 2011, Russia and china vetoed a Western drafted resolution which would have threatened the Syrian government with targeted sanctions if it continued. Military actions against protestors

On 10 September, US President Barack Obama postponed a Congress vote on military action in Syria, vowing instead to pursue diplomacy to remove the regime’s chemical weapons. The Russian proposal on the eve of the vote for Damascus to place its entire chemical weapons stockpile under international control. The Russian initiative came off the back of an apparently off-the-cuff suggestion by the US Secretary of State John Kerry.

Mr. Obama tried to garner support among leaders at the G20 meeting in ST Petersburg. At the summit, he argued action was required even when the UN Security Council was paralysed, as the international consensus against the use of chemical weapons had to be upheld. Ten members of the G20 joined the US in a joint statement accusing the Syrian government of carrying out the attack and calling for a strong international response against the government of Syrian President Bashar al- Assad.

The UK is working with the US and France to draft a UN resolution on the Russian plan for Syria’s chemical weapons to be put under international control. Prior to Russia’s diplomatic initiative, a government motion in support of military action in Syria was rejected by MPs in Parliament, forcing the UK to rule itself out of any joint intervention. Prim minister David Camron says he still supports military action. Mr. Cameron announced that the UK would give an additional 80 million dollars in aid for Syria-much of it for medical training and equipment to help civilians targeted by chemical attacks.

France is working with the US and UN resolution on the Russian plan. However there remain serious divisions, particularly with Russia. French MPs have held a debate on the issue in the National Assembly. President Francois Hollande called for Europe to unite on the issue, but said he would wait for the US congress vote and a UN report on chemical weapons before any military action.

Russia is one of Mr. Assad’s most important international backers and has warned the US and its allies against taking one-sided action against Syria. In a opinion piece published by the New York Times, president Vladimir Putin said” a strike would increase violence an unleash a new wave of terrorism. (BBC news) 13

China has joined Russia in blocking resolutions critical of Syria at the UN Security Council. Berlin has ruled itself out of participation in any military action. Foreign Minister Guido Westerwelle told a German newspaper that “such participation has not been sought nor is it being considered by us,” On 6 September, Foreign Minister urged the United Nations to speed up its publication of a report into chemical weapons use in Damascus. He said he wants the UN Security Council to take a unified position.

Humanitarian Help

The International humanitarian response to the conflict in Syria is coordinated by the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA) in accordance with General Assembly Resolution 46/182. The primary framework for this

coordination is the Syria Humanitarian Assistance Response Plan (SHARP) which appealed for USD 1.41 billion to meet the humanitarian needs of Syrians affected by the conflict.¹⁴

Financial information on the response to the SHARP, as well as assistance to refugees and for cross-border operations, can be found on UNOCHA's Financial Tracking Service. As 18 September 2013 the top ten donors to Syria were: United States, European Commission, Kuwait, United Kingdom, Germany, Canada, Japan, Australia, Saudi Arabia and Denmark. USAID and other government agencies in US delivered nearly \$385 million of aid items to Syria in 2012 and 2013.

The United States is providing food aid, medical supplies, emergency and basic health care, shelter materials, clean water, hygiene education and supplies, and supplies, and other relief supplies. Islamic Relief has stocked 30 hospitals and sent hundreds of thousands of medical and food parcels,

Other countries in the region have also contributed various levels of aid. Iran has been exporting between 500 and 800 tonnes of flour daily to Syria. Israel has granted special entry permits for over 100 wounded Syrians to be treated at Israeli medical facilities, and has set up a field hospital on the Syrian border. On 26 April 2013 a humanitarian convoy, inspired by Gaza Flotilla, departed from Turkey to Syria. Called Hyat(Life), it is set to deliver aid items to IDPs inside Syria and refugees in neighboring countries: Turkey and Lebanon.

Conclusion

The crisis of Syria has global impact. This is a threat to the International peace. The reaction of the international community is very strong. The constant violation of human rights has been seen during the uprising, particularly the Use of Chemical weapons.

It is suggested:

- The free and fair elections must be held under the auspices of United Nations;
- The withdrawal of foreign forces are needed;
- International community should start developmental projects in Syria on humanitarian grounds;
- There should be permanent solution through peace process. The peaceful settlements of disputes like negotiation, dialogue, mediation can be adapted in this regard.

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