



**RESEARCH PAPER**

**Geo-Politics of Syrian Conflict: Role of Regional, Extra-Regional and Non-State Actors in the Situation**

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**ABSTRACT**

This study aims to examine the complex functioning of Syrian conflict with respect to involvement of various actors like state as well as non-state actors on national, regional and international levels. It analyzes and identifies the actors, their role and strategies and future prospects regarding the Syrian Crisis. The qualitative approach following the document analysis has been used to get profound and diverse information about the issue and all the actors and factors involved in the Syrian conflict. The actors involved in the conflict are found to be in three blocks; Pro-Assad, Anti-Assad and Non-aligned. The role of Islamic State has been distinct by fighting with all actors involved including the Pro-Assad regime and Anti-Assad forces. Israel in early phase expressed neutrality but became part of the conflict to counter the increasing Iranian influence and IS factor. The study predicts that the complex functioning of the Syrian conflict with respect to various state and non-state actors on all levels from regional to international levels will go on for next few years

**Introduction**

The uprising in the Middle East, widely recognized as "Arab Spring", started to happen in Tunisia in the last month of 2010 and continued to unfold itself in various dynamics with its extreme turbulent nature throughout the 2011 and even enters in tenth years in March 2020 (Williams & Carlson, 2020). The "Arab Spring" has hugely impacted on regional as well as the international politics. The masses across the region protested against the long installed authoritarian regimes for various reasons, like dictatorial rule, corruption, lack of democracy, lack of accountability, less free society, deteriorated economic wellbeing, religious divides etc. The uprising in the region created a socio-political turmoil in the Middle Eastern countries. The chaos is much visible within its various socio-political manifestations across the borders. One of the most significant manifestations is change of long installed regimes in the region. The demonstrations resulted in overthrowing of various governments including Tunisia,

Egypt, Libya and Yemen. Even, the governments which survived could not get away with the massive protests leading to challenging the legitimacy of the states (Muzaffar, et. al, 2018)

The regimes in response elsewhere came hard at the protesters in quest to safeguarding their respective governments. The use of power by state authorities converted the demonstrations into severe long conflicts. The situation became more lethal as civil wars erupted in the countries Middle Eastern countries like Syria, Iraq, Libya, Egypt, and Yemen. The power struggle between various stakes holders together with extreme socio-political divides have risked the lives of million in the region leading to alarming human security situation. The situations across the region get further worsened with deep penetration of lethal phenomenon like Islamic State. The civil strife and insurgency in the region together with involvement of international actors has made the situation more complex with respect to resolution of the crisis. In this regard, the most significant example to understand ever evolving complexity in the lethally turmoil region can be said to as Syrian crisis, where the participants to the conflict are exceeding to more than dozen from within state (non-state actors) to international level (regional and international actors).According to the Congressional Research Services Report (2020), the Trump Administration has keenly interested in dealing with Syrian Crisis under three perspectives; targeting ISIS, political settlement of conflict and withdrawal of Iranian Command Officers. Thus, this paper intends to understand the complexity of the Syrian crisis with respect to the internal and external dynamics in context of involvement of state and non-state actors on local, regional and international levels (Humud& Blanchard, 2020).

### **Literature Review**

After multiple observations of the fall of dictators in Tunisia and Egypt, discussions about Assad revolved around these dictators' intentions to execute harsh responses. The Assad regime particularly framed the uprisings as terrorist campaigns led by Islamist extremists (Heydemann, 2013). Bashar al-Assad in conducting operations against the opponents relied upon a small group of military unit. Moreover, pro-Assad militants were also effectively used by the Syrian military for enhancing their influence across the country (Holliday, 2013).

The role of opposition in this critical situation was of utmost importance and since it is comprised of multiple ethnic, political and religious backgrounds therefore, may perform a productive role in transforming the diversity into a national identity. Without developing a sound political system or structure, the conflict cannot be completely resolved and opposition has the capacity to handle with the situation (Çakmak, Ustaoglu&Ustao?lu, 2015).A detailed analysis of Syrian's fragmented opposition indicates that the Free Syrian Army's failure led to the proliferation of many other groups(Abboud, 2016). The situation became further complex by dividing of Sunni backers into two regional camps, namely, the Pro-Muslim Brotherhood (Qatar and Turkey) and Anti-Muslim Brotherhood (Saudi Arabia), led to repercussions on the diverging support for the opposition (Berti& Paris, 2014).

The interplay between the regional powers present in this conflict, namely, Iran that is supporting the regime and on the other side, Saudi Arabia and Qatar that favored the opposition, was consistently highlighted by Hokayem (2014). Yassin-Kassab and Al-shami (2016) in their book *Burning Country* emphasized the United States' duplicity as they only openly intervened when ISIS attacked Syria. The United States not only attacked ISIS but also other Islamist groups that fought against Assad. The internal and external factors gradually and continuously shaped the Syrian crisis; however, the role of domestic or internal politics remained more dominant in challenging the ability of Assad (Tan & Perudin, 2019).

The conflict in Syria should not merely be understood with in single and individual dimension rather the deep rooted historical patterns also need to be incorporated (Baltes, 2016). European Union has remained active in dealing with this crisis and even imposed sanctions on the Syria and withdrew from the EU-Syrian partnership. However, it was realized that by taking such steps EU reduced its influence in the region and this dis-engagement of Europe from the region more complicated the crisis particularly in the form of refugees' crisis and extremism (Turkmani & Haid, 2016)

### Data Analysis

The lethal crisis with all its destructive nature escalated over the years and is going through its ninth year, since it was started in 2011. Apart from the contested claim of controlling majority of the territory, the President Bashar al Assad is still fighting hard along with its allies, state and non-state actors to ensure legitimacy of his government. On the other hand, the anti-Assad forces are also active from national to regional and international levels, for achieving their objectives with respect to the outcome of the crisis in context of geopolitics. The opposition forces are found to be continually engaged in their respective strategies to topple the Assad government. In the ongoing conflict, the regional and extra-regional actors are in complex partnership with national and regional non-state actors and are involved in one of the deadly conflicts of the current times. For convenience of understanding the intricate nature of Syrian conflict, various stake holders of the crisis are divided into three broad categories, *Pro-Assad* supporting the Assad for its regime survival, *Anti-Assad* working for the elimination of current status quo on national and regional level and indeed and *non-aligned actors*.

The Pro-Assad category supporting the status quo generally recognized as Pro-Shiite block includes Iran, Hezbollah and Russia (Blanchard, Humud, & Nikitin, 2014) On the other hand, the alliance of opposition forces generally recognized as Pro-Sunni block includes Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and small countries of Gulf Cooperation countries, Libya, Jordan, the United States of America and its NATO allies. There is a distinct category other than the mentioned actors which the non-aligned category and the ISIS phenomenon. The most interesting phenomenon of alliances among various stake holders involved in the Syrian conflict is the nature of the alliances as all three

categories pursue their convergent as well as divergent objectives. The following figure explains the gradual development of Syrian Conflict.

Interestingly, the opposing groups at times came in alliance with each other to fight against a common enemy in the wholesome scenario. In this regards, the cooperation of opposing forces against the lethal threat of ISIS is a significant example. The Islamic State is found to be going against all actors, in their pursuit to establish independent territory, comprising of the areas of Iraq and Syria. In this whole context, the connection of internal and external actors with respect to involvement in Syrian crisis indicates the complexity of patterns prevailing in geo-political situation of Middle East. All three categories have been analyzed comprehensively with respect to the Syrian Conflict as given follows;



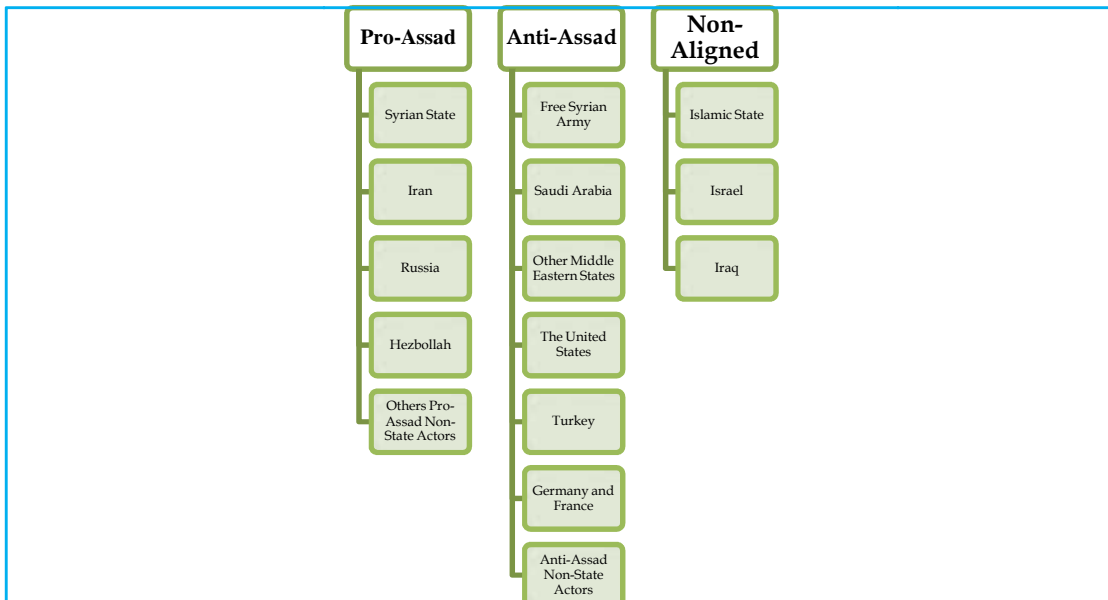
Figure 1: Timeline of Syrian Conflict Development (2011-2019) Source: CRS

**Pro-Assad Actors**

The Pro-Assad is a complex mix of local, regional and extra-regional actors. At large, the Pro-Assad forces are combination of Syrian regime, local Shiite, regional and extra regional forces.

**Syrian State**

Amidst all the chaos, Assad regime has managed to survive by utilizing extremely violent strategy; with the support of its allies within and without the state, against the rebels. Indeed, the regime survival was majorly possible due to the all-out support of its allies assisting the Assad regime on multiple fronts. In fact, the accused use of chemical weapons by Assad regime created reluctance among its allies, in providing the much needed support (Martini, York & Young, 2013). But as a matter of fact against all odds, Assad regime has got enormous support in multiple dimensions, i.e., political, economic and military from Russia, Iran and the resilient Hezbollah. (Blanchard, Humud, & Nikitin, 2014). Indeed, each actor is supporting the Assad regime for their own respective strategic objectives in context of national, regional and international dynamics. On one hand, the support from the allies has assisted the Syrian government to maintain somewhat territorial integrity but on the other, the phenomenon of the dependency has also increased. Above all the Syrian regime following a shrewd strategy, involving intensive surveillance and all-out violent actions, imprisonment, together with the intensive efficient propaganda, Assad is still maintaining the Presidential authority. Indeed, the survival of regime is linked with the devastated socio-economic situation, killings of thousands and thousands of people, forced migration of millions of people.



**Figure: 2Active Players and Allies in Syria Source; Developed by Authors**

## **Iran**

Islamic Republic of Iran with its theocratic legacy is one of the most enduring allies of the socialist-secular-nationalist state of the Arab world. Indeed, the alliance indicates a unique pattern in regional politics of Middle East. Both states share some common strategic goals as well as threats in regional and international dynamics. In order to get their respective objectives, both states have effectively engaged each other. Even, the start of Syrian crisis, the alliance between Syria and Iran is much visible on geo-political issues, e.g., Palestine and Lebanon. With strategic depth in shape of Hamas and Hezbollah, both Syria and Iran forms a tough challenging nexus for Israel and other regional and international powers. Historical analysis suggests that Syrian territory remained a permanent transmission line for Iranian extension of support to Hezbollah, a significant opposition to Israeli military.

Right from the very start of conflict, Iran is supporting the Assad regime against the rebel forces. It has deployed troops on Syrian soil to safeguard Assad regime and also extending its support by sending cargo flights to Damascus on routine basis. As the conflict is unfolding, multiple forces from within the region and extra-regional, have joined the conflict for their respective strategic goals (Martini, York & Young, 2013). Iran came hard to defend the Assad regime against all other forces. Indeed in current times, a friendly government in Damascus is in supreme most interest of the Iranian state, in order to have enough cards to counter the strong opposition under the leadership of Saudi Arabia in regional geo-politics (Saloukh, 2013). Iran not only sent its regular military personnel along with heavy military support to defend the Assad regime but also has used influence to persuade Shiite non-state actors and fighters from Middle East, South Asia and other part of the world to reach out Syria for serving their purpose. More importantly, in context of influencing the Syrian conflict, non-state actor, i.e., Hezbollah in alliance with the Iran played a significant role with respect to safeguarding the Assad regime.

## **Russia**

In recent times, Russia is emerging in international politics as a resurgent power. In fact, the Syrian conflict is the most suitable example, where Russia is one of the most significant powers in the regional politics. Russia is supporting the Syrian state armed forces in the battle field but also fighting for the survival of Assad regime in the United Nation Security Council by taking up steps to avoid any resolution intended to topple the government (Wimmen & Asseburg, 2012). Indeed, the active involvement of Russia in Syrian conflict made a significant impact on the patterns of regional as well as international politics in a way that world has once again started to recognize Russia, as one of the major power in international politics (Yaseen, et. al. 2019).

There are multiple factors behind this enormous Russian extension of support to Assad regime. Firstly, Russian support to Syrian government is acting like a symbol of state legitimacy with respect to its functioning of governance structure. This support from Russia is assisting Assad regime in ensuring its survival in chaotic times but also

became an integral part of its policy. Secondly, Russian active role in Syrian conflict has regained its role in global political system as a major power. Indeed, the Russian resurgent approach has ranged alarms in the power centers of the world, more specifically, the United States of America. This is very much evident from the interaction patterns among the United States and Russia in the battle field of Syria, where, rifts can be observed among the major powers of the international system, even in the specific case of fighting against the common enemy like the deadly terrorist organization, i.e., ISIS. Thirdly, Russia considers the establishment of religious extremist regime in Syria against its interest. Indeed, the connection among various non-state actors involved in the phenomenon of terrorism is a matter of concern for Russian internal as well as external security.

### **Hezbollah**

One of most powerful non-state actor, "Hezbollah", with the help of Iran has strengthened the Assad regime against the opposition forces which includes Sunni forces and its allies (Bohman, 2016). Hezbollah, predominantly, a Shiite movement was once very popular in the Arab world for its armed struggle against the Israel but the involvement in Syrian conflict has resulted in lessening of same popularity, as now the Arab world for its active support for Iran and Syria considers it a party in Sunni-Shiite conflict. In fact, the alliance between Iran, Syria and Hezbollah is very much evident well before the start of Syrian conflict, where, the Syria acted as a gateway to pass on Iranian arms to Hezbollah to be further utilized against the Israel. Currently, Hezbollah has strong presence in the Syria and is fighting side by side with Iran and Russia against the opposition forces. But indeed the future presence of the vibrant non-state actor in the country is dependent on the will of Iran and Russia, in context of possible option of peace building.

### **Other Pro-Assad Non-State Actors**

The Iran and Hezbollah's fight against Sunni forces is supported by Shiite Militias from across the region. The Shiite militias are considered as a vital asset by Pro-Assad forces and have played a significant role in getting edge over the opposition forces. One of the main objectives of the Shiite militias was to protect the holy places in the region and in way through this it has extended all out much needed support to Assad regime. The heavy material and non-material losses inflicted upon the Assad forces was catered significantly by these foreign Shiite fighters by fighting all-out against the US backed Sunni forces, across the Syrian territory.

### **Anti-Assad Regime Forces**

The opposition forces to the Assad regime are a complex mix of local, regional and extra-regional actors. At large, the opposition forces are combination of local Sunni and regional forces together with the support of western allies. The opposition, on one hand is comprised of liberal forces who desire a pluralistic Syria and extremist religious groups on other hand, which look for a nationalistic fundamentalist regime.

Interestingly, the diversified nature of opposition forces is supported by the US along its Western allies, either against Assad regime or the lethal IS.

### **Free Syrian Army**

The use of force by Assad regime against the peaceful protestors, give rise to division among the state run military and as a result, one of its faction got separated from the state run machinery and emerged as a loosely organized force named as, Free Syrian Army (FSA). Since then various forces within the Syria are recognizing it with the name FSA. As the civil war got intensified, the FSA became weakened as the conflict moved on but indeed is considered as a significant part of the conflict (Khan & Khan, 2017). With the support of the US together with Western allies and Gulf countries, the FSAs recognized as having the capability to inflict huge damages to the Assad regime (Martini, York & Young). In fact, the FSA is highly dependent for the military support from its regional and extra regional allies. During the course of Syrian conflict, it has successfully engaged, the IS, which is considered as a major threat by the US and other regional and international powers. The complexity of the functioning of opposition forces is an interesting scenario, as the FSA has mainly fought the Pro-Assad forces and IS in alliance with US and its allies but at the same time alongside the Turkish forces, FSA has effectively countered the Kurds, who is a major ally of the US

### **Saudi Arabia**

Saudi Arabia remained one of the major regional actors in the geo-political affairs in Middle-East. In broader terms, there are two blocks in the Middle East; one is headed by Saudi Arabia and other by Iran and both blocks are involved in continuous struggle of power. In context of Syrian conflict, Saudi Arabia along with Gulf allies tried to seize an opportunity to counter the Iranian influence in the region (Wimmen & Asseburg, 2012). The real matter of concern for the Saudi Arabia was to deter the Iranian in the regional politics. Another important point for Saudi jumping in the conflict was the IS phenomenon, whose expansionist design are considered threat to the regional stability on one hand and even more precisely dangerous was the attacks of IS inside and outside Saudi Arabia on the other. Saudi Arabia is allied to various regional and extra-regional actors including the Gulf States, Turkey, the US and Sunni non-state actors either revolutionary or status quo, to get their multiple objectives resulting in intensification and complexity of the Syrian conflict (Berti & Paris, 2014). Firstly, one of the primary concerns of the Saudi government is to overthrow the Pro-Iran Assad regime from Damascus. Secondly, to ensure that Assad regime is not replaced by democratic form of government, which is considered against the interest of not only Saudi Arabia but also other authoritarian and dictatorial regimes of the Middle East. Thirdly, to counter along with its allies, the emerging lethal phenomenon of IS, not only in the Syria but also in the region as well.

Saudi Arabia is one of the chief backers of the FSA and other Jihadi non-state actors and has extended massive military and non-military support to get their respective strategic goals. Here, again the complexity of the Syrian crisis politics is



very much evident, as on one side Saudi Arabia is allied to the forces planning to overthrow the Syrian regime and bring democratic structure in the country and on other side is supporting the jihadi non-state actors, who are against the democratic rule in the Syria.

### **Other Middle Eastern States**

Under the leadership of Saudi Arabia and the US, the Gulf States and other allied regional countries are involved in enduring rivalry with Iran. Since, 1979 Islamic revolution in Iran, the Gulf States are under a constant fear of Iranian expansionist designs. Syrian regime is considered as the only ally of Iran in the region. The conflict in Syria provided the Gulf States an opportunity to eliminate the Damascus support for Iran, sending the latter in isolation in regional politics. The Gulf States are supporting Anti-Assad forces including FSA in collaboration with the US and Saudi Arabia to overthrow Assad regime as well as to counter the IS (Blanchard, Humud&Nikitin, 2014).

Moreover, the Gulf States are supporting the extremist organization to get their strategic objectives in Syria (Hokayem, 2017). Their key ally, the United States, has shared serious reservation on their support of the extremist organization like, 'Jabhat Fatah Al-Sham' in the Syrian Crisis. It is pertinent to mention that Turkey and Russia are working with the Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), a combination of forces led by JFS for a possible settlement in the Syria (Blanchard, Humud&Nikitin, 2014). HTS is declared as a terrorist organization by the US, once again indicating the complexity of the functioning of the conflict.

### **The United States**

The United States remained a key extra-regional actor in the politics of Middle East. It is considered by the Assad regime and its allies that the US was very much in the Syrian conflict indirectly, right from the start of the crisis. In fact, the US direct involvement in Syria started under the cover of two main reasons (Blanchard, Humud&Nikitin, 2014). Firstly, the accused use of chemical weapons by Assad regime against the innocent civilians to maximize its reach out and secondly, the expanding nature of ISIS in the Syria and Iraq. US has been taking great interest in Syria and still in 2020, about 600 troops exist in Syria.

The United States has along with its regional and extra-regional allies are involved in confrontation with ISIS. The United States is supporting the opposition forces within the Syria to counter the ISIS (Blanchard, Humud&Nikitin, 2014). Even so and so, the United States in supporting the Kurd forces in northern part of Syria opposed to Turkey, who is United States ally and also a part of North Atlantic Treaty Organization. Additionally, the US is supporting the opposition forces functioning under the coalition of Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), the Kurds and other Arab non-state actors (Blanchard, Humud&Nikitin, 2014). Indeed, there can be many objectives of the United States direct and indirect involvement in the Middle East, but one thing is

for sure and that is the US is going all-out along its allies in countering the ever increasing influence of Russia as well as Iran.

### **Turkey**

Turkey is a major and important regional power involved in Syrian conflict and indeed has a decisive role along with one or two other actors in formulation of the future dynamics. Turkey, in start of the conflict was supporting the opposing forces to topple Assad regime but with the unfolding of conflict started to play at both sides to secure its strategic gains. Turkey assisted in transferring the military and non-military support to the rebels through its border. Turkey in alliance with the US operated against the ISIS in the initial phase of the conflict. It assisted the US to conduct its military operations from the Turkish Air Base Incirlik, resulting in increase of bargaining power on part of Turkey in the conflict situation. Turkey too conducted air strikes against the ISIS and Kurdish forces. Interestingly, the Turkey went out against the Kurdish forces, an ally of the US, creating shear rifts among the two NATO members. The success of Kurdish forces in the Syria resulted in creation of fear in the Istanbul as it can assist in construction of intensive nationalistic inspiration among the Kurdish community inhabited at the Turkish side of border, which may invoke civil strife (Okyay, 2017).

### **Germany and France**

Germany is another extra regional actor who has accommodated huge number of Syrian migrants has considerable stake in the wholesome scenario. Indeed, the Germany along with its allies including the US and other European partners consider the change of Assad regime as part of their strategy in the Syria for long term peace. Germany considers the ISIS lethal to the regional and global stability and is working along its partners to eradicate it from the Syrian territory. Moreover, Germany is one of the major contributors in extending its humanitarian support in shape assistance and aid to the Syrian refugees. Moreover, France like the US had expressed serious reservation against the accused used of chemical weapons by the Syrian regime. In 2017, the French President declared that it will not condition the resignation of Assad regime for any kind of peace building strategy.

### **Anti-Assad Non-State Actors**

The involvement of non-state actors backed by different regional and extra-regional countries make the Syrian conflict even more crucial. The non-state actors who oppose the Assad regime are distinct in their own kind and objectives. These groups include Jaish al-Sham and Ahrar al-Sham who have huge number of fighters together with ample amount of weaponry and funding making it lethal actors in the conflict. These groups are supported by the Gulf States like Saudi Arabia and Qatar together with the Turkey. Along with these States, these groups are found to be involved in alliance with Jabhat Fatah al-Sham (JFS) formerly known as Jabhat al-Nusra an affiliate of al-Qaeda. Nevertheless, at times they not only fight each other but also with Syrian Democratic Forces, IS and the Kurdish forces.

In July 2016, Jabhat al-Nusra became Jabhat Fatah al-Sham (JFS), when Abu Muhammad al-Julani, parted its ways from al-Qaeda. The JFS is majorly comprised of the Syrian fighters and has claimed to not having any transnational ambitions. The change in strategic designs of avoiding transnational ambitions by JFS is looked in resemblance with the Taliban approach in Afghanistan in the 1990's. The JFS is comprised of the experienced fighters who are formerly involved in Iraq war against the US. The US has targeted JFS and at other times, both forces are fighting together under the Syrian Democratic Forces against the Pro-Assad regime forces. The JFS inflicted considerable loss to the ISIS in 2013 conflict, resulting in lessening of ISIS reach out in the northern part of the Syria.

## **Non-Aligned Actors**

### **Islamic State**

The Islamic State is one of the most lethal non-state actor fighting in Syria in general and Middle East in particular. It is considered as one of the most threatening and deadly outcomes of the recent past (Hashim, 2014). IS leadership announced the establishment of Islamic Caliphate, comprising of the areas of Iraq and Syria expressing its expansionist ideology (Roggio, 2014). The affectivity of the most violent terrorist entity rests in its lethally ideological indoctrination, well trained fighting fleet and also huge financial resources (Lister, 2014). The IS phenomenon is unique in Syrian context, in which almost all regional and extra regional actor fighting against it. The IS achieved significant successes in Syria as well as neighboring Iraq in the year 2014. Since then, the regional as well as extra-regional actors fought the deadly IS and shrunk its huge reach-out. Due to the military operation against the IS, the latter has lost majority of the captured territory during the years of 2015-16. Even then the deadly IS is considered to be posing serious threat to the regional and global stability as the same successfully executing its violent tactics not only the Middle Easter region but also across the globe and to be more specific in the Europe.

The IS is fighting in all direction and against almost all actors involved in the conflict. It is going all-out against the Assad regime as well as the Syrian Democratic Forces a coalition supported by the US and its western allies. Additionally, Saudi Arabia along its regional allies are fighting with the IS too. In Syria, apart from all these opposing forces, the IS has strong footholds in the northern and eastern part of the country, in bordering region of Turkey and Iraq. Indeed, the IS has countered hard resistance from the Syrian Democratic Forces lead by the Kurds in the northern part of the country. The YPG has inflicted significant material and non-material loss to the IS which is very much evident in the province of Kobani located at the Syrian-Turkey border. In March 2019, it was tough month for IS and they lost their stronghold territory in Syria; moreover, in October 2019, IS leader Abu Bakr al Baghdadi was killed by US airstrike in province of Idlib. Since then, U.S. military officials have warned that the group is defeated but not eliminated, and that it continues to pose a significant threat to local and regional stability (Humud& Blanchard, 2020).

## **Conclusion and Recommendation**

The “Arab Spring” has changed the socio-political dynamics of Middle Eastern countries in particular and international system in general. The Syrian conflict is not an exception to this and is changing its patterns with respect to changing times, so as the alliances among various state and non-state actors involved in the conflict. For a general understanding, the actors can be divided in to two general categories; Pro-Assad actors and Anti-Assad actors. In fact, various regional and extra-regional actors involved in the conflict are perusing their respective strategic objectives. The role of IS has also remained quite unique because it is fighting against the all existing actors in Syrian conflict. Further to this, the recent developments where IS has lost most of its influence as well as the top leadership and Turkey has come more openly against Kurds, the scenario is taking a new turn. The pro Assad forces especially Iran has significantly succeeded in creating its influence and on ground strength in Syria. On the other hand, the ever increased pressure of US economic sanctions has put Iran in a situation where its own citizens have started raising objections on the hegemonic and regional influencing approach of the country. With regards to the situation in overall region, it is imperative to initiate a comprehensive dialogue with the involvement of the local, regional and international actors. Ad-hoc responses that target, engage or support these groups without addressing the strategic and structural conditions that promote their emergence are unlikely to have any long-term prospects for success. Looking at all the stakeholders involved and their consistent role in the whole regional scenario, the EU countries can play the role of facilitation in this regard.

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