

Received: 07 June 2024, Accepted: 20 July 2024

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.33282/rr.vx9i4.11>

The Root Causes of the Syrian Crisis: Analyzing Internal and External Factors

Najaf Ali¹, Jalal Ud Din², Kousar Ali³, Dr. Muhammad Ismail⁴, Dr. Muhammad Azhar⁵

¹PhD Scholar, Department of Political Science GC University, Faisalabad

²MS Scholar, Department of International Relations Muslim Youth University Islamabad

³Lecturer, Department of International Relations, Superior University, Lahore, Punjab, Pakistan

⁴Visiting Lecturer, Department of Political Science Government College University, Faisalabad.

⁵Assistant Professor, Department of Political Science Government College University, Faisalabad. (Corresponding Author muhammad.azhar@gcuf.edu.pk)

Abstract

The Syrian crisis, a protracted and devastating conflict that has gripped the nation since 2011, stands as one of the most pressing and complex challenges of the contemporary era. This research paper endeavors to provide a comprehensive analysis of the underlying causes that have contributed to the outbreak and continuation of the Syrian civil war. Focusing on both internal and external factors, this study aims to shed light on the multifaceted dynamics that have perpetuated the conflict and hindered its resolution. The research delves into the internal factors that have shaped the course of events within Syria's borders. Socioeconomic disparities, political grievances, and historical antecedents are examined to uncover the long-standing tensions and systemic issues that laid the groundwork for the crisis. Beyond internal dynamics, the study analyzes the significant influence of external actors on the Syrian conflict. By examining the geopolitical interests and regional power struggles, this research unravels how interventions by foreign nations have exacerbated the conflict and prolonged its duration. The involvement of international players in funding, arming, and supporting various factions has not only heightened the violence but has also complicated prospects for a peaceful resolution. Through a rigorous review of academic literature, expert reports, and other sources, this research paper presents a holistic understanding of the root causes behind the Syrian

crisis. It highlights the intricate interplay between domestic grievances and external influence, revealing how these elements have interacted to form a complex mesh of conflict.

Keywords: Syrian crisis, civil war, internal factors, external factors, conflict resolution, geopolitical interests, humanitarian intervention

Introduction

Syrian Arab Republic (Sham) is a Western Asian country that shares its border with Turkey to the north, Iraq to the east, Jordan to the South, and Lebanon and Israel to the southwestern side. Syrian history dates back to the Neolithic period¹ and a large part of its history is rooted in bloodshed and battle. From the beginning, Syria fought different battles and wars with several foreign empires such as Hittite Empire², Egyptian Empire, Persian Empire, and the Greek Empire (Eilam, 2019). However, in the mid-7th century, the Umayyad dynasty shifted its capital to Damascus and Arabic became their official language. Owing to its immense strategic importance Damascus was the epicenter of different historical events. The Ottoman Empire invaded Syria in 1516 and annexed it into its empire (Phillips & Gritzner, 2010). Since the invasion of the Ottoman, Syrian faced several ups and downs but people enjoyed a period of peaceful coexistence. Syria is also known as its religious center for Christianity, Islam, and Judaism

¹ Last stage of the stone ages also called New Stone age 7000-1700 BCE. The term is used in connection with agriculture.

² An ancient group of Indo European who migrate to Asia and formed an empire at Hattusa in Anatolia (Turkey) around 1600 BCE. During mid-1300 BCE the empire was at its peak however the empire ended in 1180 BCE and divided into several independent Neo-Hittite (city states)



The Ottoman Empire decided to join Germany in the First World War (WWI) and due to its defeat, she lost control of its empire on Syrian soil. Then after WWI the control of Syria went to France under a mandate system. Despite the number of revolts and strategies, Syria did not get independence from French rule until 1946 (McHugo, 2006). The bloc politics dragged the Syrian Arab Republic towards it and in 1956, she signed a pact with the Soviet Union for the weapon (Lovotti, 2020). Owing to the pact Syria became the part of Soviet bloc. Then in the 1960s several civil unrests occurred in Syria and Hafez al-Assad came to power through a military coup in 1963 (Khan & Khan, 2017) then became the president of Syria in 1970 and ruled Syria from 1970 to 2000. Hafez Assad died on June 10, 2000, then his son Bashar al-Assad came to power.

Source: Council of foreign relations

The civil war in Syria erupted as the offshoot of the Arab Spring in 2010. The civil war in Syria is a multi-party civil conflict between the Ba'athist-led Assad government and other opposition groups (Carpenter, 2013). Under the wave of Arab Spring, the Syrian people demanded political and civil reforms, the release of political prisoners, the resignation of Bashar al Assad, and the end of the Ba'ath party rule to eradicate corruption and unemployment then the police opened fire on protestors in March 2011 which caused several dead and injuries (Kozak, 2015). In late April 2011, the Assad government launched full-scale military operations against the demonstrators that caused many civilian casualties.

The civil war caused thousands of deaths and millions of refugees as well as billions of economic losses. There are several conflicting groups in Syria but we can divide these into

three major groups that are a pro-government group led by Bashar al Assad, an anti-Assad group led by the Syrian National Coalition (National Coalition for Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces), and the Kurdish supreme committee. The Syrian government led by the Assad regime has support from Russia, China, and Iran while the rebel group has support from the USA, Great Britain, France, Saudi Arabia, and Turkey (Bosetti et al., 2017). The primary objective of the Assad government is the unification of Syria under his rule but the opposition group wants democratic reforms in the nation. Interestingly the rebels are from different backgrounds and their objectives are different such as the Democratic Federation of Northern Syria (DFNS), they want autonomy, a federalized system where they can act autonomously but not fully independence.

The Syrian National Coalition was the alliance of different groups such as the Free Syrian Army, the Islamic front, the Al-Nusra Front, the Ahfad al-Rasul Brigade, and others (Erlich, 2014). Another important group in the Syrian conflict is the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) and they want complete control to take an important part of state territory (Gerges, 2021). The majority of the anti-Assad group's desire is to change Syria into the secular and democratic state while ISIS has two goals in the crisis; to establish a Salafist Islamic Caliphate in Syria and then put the whole world under their Caliphate. Owing to these two objectives of ISIS they are considered a threat to other groups. The participation of global power in the civil war has their interest in the Syrian civil war such as Russia had good relations with Syria during the cold war and after the fall of Muammar Gaddafi in Libya, she needs a new ally in the region as well as it is also known as Russian revival in the global politics after the disintegration of Soviet Union. US, UK, Turkey, and Arab League, supporters of the rebel, have their interest. The US provides military assistance and training to anti-Assad forces (Blanchard et al., 2014) till 2017 then Washington shifted her support towards Kurds to counter ISIS. Later the Trump administration withdrew her forces from Syria owing to failure in achieving their objectives.

Conflicting groups in the Syrian crisis

The Syrian civil war is one of the worst crises in the contemporary era to its destructiveness and huge impacts on international politics. The crisis started a decade ago but it is continuing. There are several conflicting groups in the Syrian civil war but we can divide these groups into three major groups by categorizing their objectives and goals these groups are the pro-Assad group, the anti-Assad group, and the Kurdish supreme committee.

Pro-Assad group

The current president Bashar al Assad's father Hafez al Assad came to power in 1963 through a military coup and later he became president of the Syrian Arab Republic in 1970. Hafez al Assad governed Syria for about thirty years as a president and Bashar al Assad succeeded the government after Hafez al Assad's death in 2000. Assad belongs to the Alawite³ community and the majority of the Syrian population belongs to the Sunni school of thought. Both Hafez and Bashar al Assad were belonging to the Ba'ath party and the Ba'ath party was founded in 1952 under the leadership of Michel Aflaq and Saleh ed-Din el-Bitar. Their primary agenda was based on three objectives; socialism, secularism, and Arab unity. Hafez al-Assad tried his best on the agenda of pan-Arabism and Arab unity during his presidency (Akpınar, 2016; Vanhullebusch, 2015). But later his successor failed to maintain that influence due to limited public support. Bashar al-Assad was not popular with the Syrian public as he was serving in the military as an ophthalmologist before came to power. Hafez al Assad's first son Bassel al Assad was popular with the Syrian public. Hafez al Assad was schooling his first son to be a successor but he died in 1994 in a car accident (Karnieli et al., 2019). Then Bashar al-Assad came to the public but not succeeded in gaining public support as his father.

Initially, Bashar al-Assad tried to impress the public by promising new political and economic reforms but he never tried for such reforms. The unemployment rate was too high and the economic condition of Syria was also at its worst condition. The record-breaking drought in Syria during 2006 -2010 further increased troubles for the Assad regime (Karnieli et al., 2019). The sudden mass movement of peasants and other rural populations rapidly increased the unemployment and inflation rate that's further increased the mistrust and uncertainty among the majority population. Though there were hues and cries after the failed policies of the Assad regime but the majority was silent then the pro-democracy demonstrations in the Middle East generate a ray of hope for Syrians and they started a protest against the Assad regime in late December 2010. The 'wall chalking' against the Assad regime turn into the initiator for demonstration (Walther & Pedersen, 2020).

³ The Alawite sect originated in Iraq and then moved to Syrian city Aleppo during the government of Sayf al-Dawla al-Hamadani (890-1004). They are estimated 10 – 13 percent of Syrian population and now they are demanding to accept them as an independent sect of Islam.

President Assad and his forces tried to control the uprising by force and used armed forces to suppress the demonstrator but as a result of the government's reaction several people lost their lives and several were injured then the peaceful demonstration turned into a civil uprising. The Syrian public was divided into two blocks; pro-government and anti-government and Assad forces also separated into two groups. This division affected the whole country and the support of the Ba'ath party and Alawi's supported Assad who was a minority while the rivals are in majority but the emergence of Al Qaeda and other militant groups further increased the distress (Marco Scartozzi, 2015). The objectives of the Syrian government under president Assad were to crush the insurgence and maintain the pre-demonstration status quo of the Assad government.

Anti-Assad group

The anti-Assad group was a combination of several small groups with different objectives and narratives but there was a single common goal which was regime change. The anti-Assad group was a coalition of several different groups and was normally called the Syrian National Coalition (SNC). The Free Syrian Army (FSA) was the first recognized military against the Assad government (Sary, 2015; Walther & Pedersen, 2020) and the majority member of that group was from Assad military forces. FSA was not successful to captured the majority area of Syria under their control due to weak bounding in-group members. Another important group was the jihadist group that was against the Assad regime on a sectarian base and the member of this group was both Syrian and international. The anti-Assad group was consisting of several different groups with multiple agendas and multiple governing methods that's there was a communication gape which leads weakness in bounding.

The Islamic jihadist group was the third main group against President Assad's government that was further divided into two parts; Ahrar al-Sham and Jaysh al-Islam (Shay & Karmon, 2016). Though there were differences in the command system, structure, objectives, and funding, as well as composition between both Islamist group but they, have the same enemy. Both the Islamic State (IS) and Nusra Front (NF) was the prominent jihadist group since the civil war erupted in Syria. The NF and IS were split in 2013 when IS announced that they are going to introduce Caliphate in Syria and Iraq (Ibrahim, 2014; Karim & Islam, 2017). The Nusra Front also considers the Al Qaeda franchise in Syria.

By mid-2014 there was only three major opposition militant group in Syria that was FSA, the Islamist rebel group, and the international jihadist group later in 2015 Jaish al Fateh was created by the anti-Assad government states particularly Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and Qatar. There was not a combined objective among the fighters some wanted to found an Islamic government in Syria but the majority was in favor of a secular state (Hubbard, 2015). In 2015 the Nusra Front and Ahrar al-Sham was an effective group in countering the influence of IS and Assad forces in the northern part of Syria. The main objectives of the anti-Assad group were replacing the Assad government, dismantlement of the security forces, unifying and supporting the FSA, no dialogue with the Assad government, and accountability of those responsible for civil war and other crises (Tokdemir et al., 2021). According to Karim and Islam (2017) there were more than 13 rebel groups fighting in Syria.

Kurdish National Council

Kurds have considered another important group in the Syrian civil war and their motives in the civil war are different from other groups. Kurds are known as one of the indigenous people of the region of Mesopotamia and they are living in south-eastern turkey, north-eastern Syria, northern Iraq, northwestern Iran, and southwestern Armenia (Savelsberg, 2018). Their culture and language are different and they have no common dialect. More than 15 % of the Kurdish people in Syrian were stateless and they were treated in a legal vacuum and deprived of fundamental rights (Zisser, 2021). The deprived Kurds saw the Syrian uprising in 2011 as a chance to get their rights and the youth joined the protest for regime change.

In mid-2014, Kurds properly entered the Syrian civil war when IS captured the northern part of Syria. Initially, Kurds fled towards the Turkey border but later they start fighting under the umbrella of the Syrian Democratic Force (SDF). Kurds also introduced different fighter groups to protect themselves from the civil war, particularly from IS such as People's protection unite- the armed wing of the Syrian Kurdish Democratic Union Party. Kurd fighter was backed by a US-led coalition with air strikes, weapons, and adviser to fight with IS (*Who are the Kurds?*, 2019). In October 2017, Kurds recaptured the major part of northern Syria from IS under the banner of SDF. Later in 2019, SDF became successful to eliminate IS control from the Kurdish territory. The objectives of the Kurdish people under

the Kurdish Supreme Committee were full citizenship and rights, full representation in the Syrian National Council, and other basic rights.

Peaceful demonstration of Civil War

The Arab Spring began in December 2010 with the self-immolation of a Tunisian fruit seller. His actions sparked protests in Tunisia, and then throughout the Middle East and North Africa, forcing the old rulers of Tunisia, Egypt, and Yemen to step down (Mushtaq & Afzal, 2017). Inspired by these previously unimaginable events, fifteen boys in the southwestern Syrian city of Daraa spray painted a school wall: “People want the end of the regime” (Ahmad, 2016; Kerr, 2020). Demonstrators who had gathered behind them clashed with the police, and protests erupted. Many protesters were calling for something more modest than regime change; the release of political prisoners, half an end to the century-old state of emergency, freedoms, and an end to corruption; unlike Tunisian President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali and Egypt's Hosni Mubarak, Assad responded quickly to the protests, introducing only symbolic reforms and enabling the security services to quell the protests (Laub, 2021).

The protest against the Assad regime was started from late 2010 to mid-March 2011(Lynch, 2013). It was the first-ever demonstration against the 40 years of rule of the Assad family. Till now thousands of Syrians have been killed and more than half of the country's population is displaced. Damascus entered into a complex civil war where jihadist groups, revolutionary groups, and several types of fighters are fighting with the Syrian government as well as each other. The regional powers are supporting different fighting groups to protect their interest in the Syrian civil war. The United States, Russia, Turkey, Iran, and the Arab league are directly backing the different fighting groups. US and Russia are conducting air strikes against different groups in Syria while Turkey is the key ally of the USA in the civil war (Sever, 2020).

Russia and Iran are supporting Bashar al-Assad's government and they defending the Assad government. Iran is backing the Assad government to protect her only Arab ally in the region, to secure the Iran-Iraq-Syria gas pipeline and secured and direct route to Hezbollah. While Russia is backing the Assad government to protect her gas supply to Europe and its naval base in Syrian port Tartus (Karim & Islam, 2017). Russian forces are using airstrikes while Iranian and Hezbollah fighters are supporting on the ground. Syria faces several years

of uncertainty and the ray of hope for regime change has mostly died out and the peace talk initiatives are proved fruitless. Now the Assad government has regained control of a major part of the country and he is remaining in power despite decade-long bloodshed and civil war. Kurd people are still fighting for their dreams of recognition and fundamental rights (Ali, Azhar, et al., 2022; Savelsberg, 2018). Indeed, the Syrian people are suffering from economic, political, social, and security crises.

Divisions in the protestor

In July 2011, defectors from Assad's army announced the formation of the Free Syrian Army (FSA), and soon after began looking for sanctuary in Turkey (Can, 2017). However, the Free Syrian Army, which was sacked by the government, struggled to bring its loose alliance under central command and control. FSA militias often did not coordinate their operations and sometimes had conflicting interests, reflecting the diversity of their regional supporters. Lacking resources, they sometimes preyed on the population they were tasked with protecting. A civilian counterpart to the Free Syrian Army was also established in Istanbul in the summer of 2011 (Winter, 2013). The Syrian National Coalition (SNC) claimed to be the Syrian government in exile and was soon recognized as the "legitimate representative of the Syrian people" by the United States, Turkey, and the Gulf Cooperation Council. But the Syrian National Council and its successor, have failed to provide significant diplomatic or material support to the opposition, and many opponents of the regime inside Syria have given it little legitimacy. Competing coalitions began to spread, and Free Syrian Army fighters turned into Islamist brigades that made significant battlefield gains against the regime, funded and armed by Gulf donors (Karadjis; Walther & Pedersen, 2020).

The Emergence of Al-Qaeda and Islamic State

Al-Qaeda fighters were enthusiastic to take advantage of the anarchy in Syria and they take advantage of the regime's loopholes. In January 2012, a group called the Nusra Front declared itself a franchise for al-Qaeda in Syria, and the following month al-Qaeda leader Ayman al-Zawahiri called on Sunnis from across the region to join the jihad against the government (Kerr, 2020; King, 2015). Jabhat al-Nusra attracted Syrian and foreign recruits because it had more success on the battlefield than rival opposition groups. In April 2013, a group from the remnants of al-Qaeda in Iraq emerged, calling itself the Islamic State

of Iraq, surpassing Jabhat al-Nusra in its brutality. Within months, his forces had established control over a strip of land in eastern Syria and western Iraq (Byman, 2018).

The rise of the Islamic State and other extremist groups has fueled growing sectarian conflict and civilians living in Islamic State areas such as those controlled by the Free Syrian Army and pro-government militias have been subjected to misuse. The rise of extremist groups in Syria was the doing of the regime itself, as Assad wanted to present the world with a stark choice between his secular rule and the jihadist alternative. In mid-2011, the government released hundreds of radical Islamists from prisons for discrediting the coup. They will create extremist groups like Ahrar al-Sham that support a sectarian agenda (Abrahms et al., 2018).

Impact of Civil War on Civilians

Government forces and rebel groups have regularly targeted civilians in areas outside their control. The Western media and intelligence agencies accused Assad government for the killing of nearly 1,400 civilians by the use of chemical weapons in Ghouta in the summer of 2013 prompted international powers to dismantle the regime's chemical weapons (Chapman et al., 2018; Pita & Domingo, 2014). While the Bashar al Assad government denied the blame but on the other hand Russia forced the Syrian government to joined the Chemical Weapon Convention (CWC) and Damascus joined it in September 2013 and promised to destroy the all types of chemical weapons. Then Syria submitted the first declaration of its chemical stockpiles to the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapon (OPCW) on September 20, 2013. Later in August 2014, Assad government declared that the destruction of its chemical weapon facilities is completed (Chapman et al., 2018; Deutsch, 2014). However, the issue of chemical weapon is still pending because after the Assad declaration of removal of its chemical facilities the chemical weapon watchdog OPCW obtained evidence of the use of chemical weapon from war zones. According to the Al Jazeera reports and OPCW briefings Syrian governments are not cooperating the experts to investigate in the war zones. According to Laub (2021), these collective punishment tactics serve a dual purpose: they raise the intensity of civil resistance to pressure insurgents to surrender and they make local commissions a practicable option for the government instead of offering alternatives.

Despite the 2014, UN Security Council resolution aimed at securing humanitarian aid routes, the aid has been politicized as Assad has prevented UN convoys from distributing food and medicine to government-controlled areas, allowing them while denying them access to areas controlled by the rebels (Ali, Ullah, et al., 2022; Sosnowski, 2020). In 2020, Syria's ally Russia used its veto in the Security Council to allow the delivery of UN aid to the rebel-held north through just one border crossing (*Russia and China veto UN extension of cross-border aid to Syria*, 2020). Now this year, the UN report says that civilians in rebel control areas are still facing issues in receiving aid due to strict government policies. In this regard during a UN Security Council resolution in July 2022, 13 members agreed to provide aid from Turkey without the permission of Damascus but Russia vetoed it while China remained to abstain (*Russia vetoes UN resolution extending cross-border aid to Syria*, 2022). More than 2.4 million people are living in the northwestern region of Idlib- under rebel control- and they are still watching for humanitarian aid.

Domestic Uprising to Internationalized Civil War

The expansion of the Syrian civil war has left pro and anti-government forces dependent on outside backers such as the US, Russia, Iran Saudi Arabia, and Turkey. As the major powers extend their involvement, Syria has become a battleground for geopolitical rivalries in the region. With increasing casualties and leavings weakening Assad's army, the government has become increasingly dependent on Iran and Russia. Iran, a longtime ally interested in protecting a key land route for its Lebanese proxy, Hezbollah (Goodarzi, 2019), has invested billions in Assad's government support. The Iranian Revolutionary Guard is providing training and support to Assad's army.

Russia provided vital diplomatic support to Assad initially and then came into direct conflict with the deployment of its air force in September 2015 (Hale, 2019). Although Moscow has claimed that its airstrikes will primarily target the Islamic State and al-Qaeda, western media claimed that they have often targeted other rebel groups, some backed by the United States and many of them Close to the front lines with the government (al-Qaeda branches) (Souleimanov & Dzutsati, 2018). Opposition forces also enjoy foreign support for years, the United States has secretly trained and armed rebel fighters. France and Britain provided logistical and military support (Karleskint & Matusitz, 2021).

Major Powers and Syrian Civil War

The role of major powers both regional and international involved in the Syrian civil war since its origin. Initially, foreign powers diplomatically backed their favorite groups in Syria such as the USA and its allies welcome the pro-democracy protest in Syria while Russia and Iran backed the Bashar al-Assad regime and tried to crush the protest by using military power. When foreign power saw the turning of the ‘street protest’ into revolt and civil war then they directly intervene in the Syrian civil war. The rhetoric speeches turned into direct military interventions when the Assad regime lost more than 75 percent control of Syrian territory. From day one USA, Britain, France, Turkey, and GCC led by Saudi Arabia was in favor of regime change and were a supporter of anti-government groups while Russia, China, and Iran are in backing the Assad regime. Both regional, as well as international powers, are involved in the civil war to fulfill their objectives and these interventions led to the ‘Syrian Street Protest’ into international civil war.

Russia’s intervention in the Syrian Crisis

Russia is one of the major actors in the Syrian crisis from day one and Syria has great importance in Russian Middle East policy (Bahgat, 2021). When the Syrian street protest started in 2011 against the Assad government Russia is one of the major supporters and advisors to President Assad. Russia’s stance in the Syrian civil war has been unchanged and she was in favor to preserve the status quo of the Assad government. According to Antonyan (2017), Russia’s intervention in the Syrian crisis is to control Europe’s oil supply and to deter NATO and the western bloc in the case of Ukraine and Georgia(Antonyan, 2017). Russia was openly involved in the Syrian crisis on September 30, 2015 (Ali, Ullah, et al., 2022; Oligie, 2019), and before this Russia was diplomatically engaged with the Assad government as well as they provided financial and military assistance to the Assad government.

In September onward Russia started airstrikes against anti-Assad forces but during Munich Security Conference in 2016, Russia’s Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev says that they have no intentions to stay in Syria and they want to fulfill their specific national interest. “We must preserve Syria as a United State and prevent its dissolution. The world will not survive another Libya, Yemen, or Afghanistan” (Tasch, 2016). There were four main drivers behind Russia’s intervention in the Syrian crisis: first and the most important driver was Russian history because in the 1990s Russia faced the same issues in Georgia, Ukraine, and

Kyrgyzstan as the consequence of the ‘color revolution’⁴ propagated by west same as Arab Spring. Therefore, Russia abstained from the Security Council resolution on Libya after Arab Spring. Secondly, Syria is of great importance to Russia due to geopolitics and power projection as well as Moscow has a military base in Syria. Russia has good relations with Syria during the cold war and later when it lost its influence in the Middle East after the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Syrian civil war was the best opportunity for Russia to protect its national interest in the region of Middle East (Antonyan, 2017) (Tan & Perudin, 2019). Another important driver behind Russian intervention in the Syrian civil war due to the fear of radicalization of minorities in Russia.

From the Russian perspective, the growing militancy and Islamization may create trouble for Russia. Furthermore, if the pro-democratic uprising was successful in Syria, then it may start on Russian soil, particularly among the Circassian population. Lastly, Russia intended to talk with the west on the Ukrainian issues by using Syrian cards. Russia is still supporting the Assad government and on several occasions, she vetoed in UN Security Council resolution to provide aid in the north-western side of Syria which is under the control of rebels (*Russia vetoes UN resolution extending cross-border aid to Syria*, 2022).

USA and the Syrian crisis

The United States initially supported the regime change agenda of a protestor and appeal to the Syrian government to resolve the issue peacefully. The Syrian forces tried to crush the uprising with massive forces then in April 2011, the US imposed sanctions on several Syrian officials (Hughes, 2014). Then in August 2011 Obama administration and its western allies openly call on the Assad government to step down but the Assad government refused it. In October of that year, the US recall its ambassador from Damascus in the name of a security threat while Syria did the same. In August 2013, the western media claimed the use of Chemical weapons by Assad forces caused more than 1400 civilian death (Lundgren, 2019). Obama administration openly criticized and warned the Assad regime that they cross the red line and the US threatened Syria with punitive strikes to destroy chemical weapons but later in September US tried to talk with Russia to dismantle the chemical weapon arsenal.

⁴ a term used since around 2004 by worldwide media to describe various anti-regime [protest movements](#) or the popular democratic protests that occurred in Georgia, Ukraine, and Kyrgyzstan from 2003–2005 and overturned the pro-Russian regimes in those nation

On September 23, 2014, the US and its Arab allies launched airstrikes in Syria to counter the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), and then Washington deployed 2000 special forces in Syria (McGurk, 2019). In October 2015, the US launched Syrian Democratic Force (SDF) and Kurdish Syrian-Arab alliance with fifty thousand fighters. The US provides training, arms, intelligence sharing, and other equipment to these fighters. On April 7, 2017, US forces attack the Shayrat airbase with a cruise missile and the US claimed it as the first direct action against the Assad government while justifying this attack by affirming the airbase as the launching site for the chemical attack. This attack killed more than 88 people in Idlib province (Phillips, 2019).

On December 19, 2018, US President Donald Trump announced the withdrawal of US forces from Syria owing to the defeat of ISIS. Later in August 2019 Turkish and US officials agreed to create a buffer zone between the Turkish border and areas under Syrian control under Kurdish People Protection Unit (YPG) (Ali et al., 2023; Schaer, 2022). The US is supporting Syrian IDPs and civilians since the eruption of the crisis and she provided more than \$ 12.2 billion in humanitarian assistance.

Effects of the Syrian Civil War

Since 2012 UN Security Council adopted more than 28 resolutions on Syria (Obaid, 2022). There are several facts and findings published by different think tanks and international or private organizations about the effect and consequences of the Syrian civil war. According to the UN report more than the half of Syrian population have fled their homes, 6.9 million were internally displaced, 2 million are living in tent camps, and 6.8 million are refugees and asylum seekers. Turkey Lebanon and Jordan are hosting more than 84 percent of the Syrian refugees (Genc et al., 2022). The UN report of January 2022 says that more than 12 million people in Syria are struggling to find enough food each day. COVID-19 further destroyed the flickering economy of Syria and conform death was 3100 as reported World Health Organization (WHO) from March 2020 to August 2022, 199191 cases of Covid reported in Syria where 28.6 % of cases from areas under government control and remaining were from north-west Syria and in the same period 7249 death were reported (*Analysis of epidemiological data for the Whole of Syria 2022*) (Forman et al., 2022) while according to WHO, only 7.4 percent of the population are vaccinated.

The humanitarian crisis is increasing day by day and this year more than 14.6 million people need humanitarian assistance (*Why has the Syrian war lasted 11 years?*, 2022).

According to the UN report, more than 35000 infrastructures are damaged and destroyed in Aleppo city. The crisis affected the whole population without any discrimination the UN reported 599 attacks on 350 different medical centers which cause the death of 930 medical personnel. The civil war also damaged six UNESCO world heritage sites in Syria (Mantilla & Knezevic, 2022). The current situation in Syria is alarming because the humanitarian crisis is increasing rapidly the resettlement of refugees and IDPs is a herculean task for both the Syrian government and the international community. According to the BBC report of March 2022, the Syrian government led by President Bashar al Assad controlled the major part of Syrian soil such as Damascus, Aleppo and Homs while the rebel controlling the Idlib and the Kurdish forces controlling Raqqa, Hassakeh and Deir al Zour.

Conclusion

The Syrian crisis started in early 2011 when the people demonstrated against president Bashar al-Assad. The demonstration was the offshoot of the Arab Spring that overthrow the regimes in Tunisia and Egypt. The primary objective of the protest was regime change and political as well as economic reforms in Syria. The peaceful protest turned into civil war when the Assad government used forces to crush the protestor. The government forces used full-swing operations against the demonstrator which caused several casualties in different cities. President Assad belongs to the minority group Alawites – 10 to 13 percent of the Syrian population- while the opponents are in majority. Then the street protest turned into civil war when the Assad security forces divides into pro and anti-government groups and they start a resistance against the Ba’ath-led government. United Nations and other international organizations urged the Syrian people and government to resolve the issue peacefully by introducing a caretaker government for reforms but that proposal was rejected by Ba’athists.

After the start of the civil war, Syria was divided into multiple groups with different narratives from the different regions but the most prominent groups were the pro-Assad group, anti-Assad group, and Kurds. Then Al Qaeda and other different militant groups emerged in Syria to protect their interest. The emergence of Al Qaeda, ISIS or ISIL, and other jihadist groups further enhanced the intensity of the civil war. The intervention of regional and great powers in the Syrian civil war turned it into a major crisis. The bilateral relations with the USA declined in 2012 when both states recall their ambassador due to

security issues. USA, Britain, France, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and other Gulf states were supporters of anti-government groups while Russia and Iran backed the Assad government. Initially, the USA and its allies backed the opponents with arms, training, and intelligence service to SDF and other groups but later in September 2014, the USA deployed 2000 special forces in Syria to protect their national interest. The Syrian National Coalition was backed by the US and its allies while Russia was backing the Assad regime. The primary objective of the US and its allies was to overthrow the Assad government while Russia and Iran backed the Assad government to restore the pre-civil war status quo.

In 2015, Russia explicitly joined the civil war and start airstrikes against different jihadist and militant groups that turned the situation in the government's favor. Iran deployed troops and Hezbollah to Assist the Assad army and the Assad government regain control of the major part of Syria. Before the intervention of Russian forces, the Assad government has control of only 22 percent of Syria but with the help of Russia, Iran, and Hezbollah Lebanon the Assad government not only regain control of a major part of Syria but it strengthened its hope. Russia has a strategic interest in Syria as Russia has only a military base in Syria, Russia wants to control the energy supply route of Europe through Syria, Syria is the only ally of Russia in the Middle East and Russia wanted to deter NATO and the West in the Ukraine issue. Moreover, Iran spent billions of dollars in Syria to protect the Assad regime because Syria is its only friend in the Middle East, Iran wants to secure its gas pipeline and logistic route to Hezbollah and Tehran expands its sphere of influence in the Middle East, as well as both governments, are anti-Israel and west. While the USA ally's objective was to overthrow president Assad and install a pro-west government in Syria, to counter Russia's revival in global politics, to fulfill the dream, Israel led the Middle East, and to breakdown the supply route of Hezbollah. Saudi Arabia's main goal in the Syrian crisis was to counter the Iranian growing influence in the region and to install a pro-Saudi government in Syria.

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