



View Point

Different Dimensions of Syrian Crisis

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When things seem to be settling down gradually in the rest of the Arab world, nothing could be predicted about the political future of Syria. Violence continues in different parts of the country and according to a report of the UN Human Rights Commission, more than 5000 people have been killed so far

The nature of protest in Syria has been different and vague compared to that in Egypt, Tunisia, Yemen or Libya. It has taken altogether a different trajectory which is dominantly sectarian in nature and have its own domestic, regional and global dynamics. This specificity has puts the conflict on different board, far away from the spirit and ethos of the Arab Spring.

Syria is also known to be an autocratic state like most of the Arab states. It has largely been prone to Shiite- Sunni conflict. Alawite Shiite (not more than 12% of the population) has been ruling the majority Sunni for over four decades and this minuscule sect has been in the eye storm of the majority Sunni. The Arab Spring came as a blessing for the Sunnis and provided them an opportunity to get rid of the minority regime. Their fight continues to take advantage of democratic wave to remove President Assad.

Since the outbreak of the conflict in February, 2011, Syria has witnessed both the regional and global involvements in the country. The nature of involvement is

reflective of sharp Shiite-Sunni divide on domestic and regional level having direct impact on the future of the Arab world in general and Syria in particular.

Protest in Syria triggered with the slogan of freedom and demand for the ouster of President Assad. Muslim Brotherhood, a banned organization, wants a military intervention under NATO like in Libya. Syrian opposition leader Burhan Ghalyun is constantly demanding the imposition of no-fly zone there. While Kurdish, the largest ethnic group (2 million) are divided and uncertain about their support to the movement, mainstream Kurdish political parties have tread carefully trying to solve the equation whether their interest will be served better in status quo or in the exit of President Assad.

The conflict in Syria has received different reaction from neighbouring countries. States of Saudi Arabia and Qatar were the first to recall their ambassadors and now Saudi government has threatened ending diplomatic ties with Syria. Turkey has hosted several of the meetings of the Syrian National Council, a Syrian opposition group. Not only that, it has also put up a strong economic sanction against Syria and placed thousands of Syrian refugees on Turkish-Syrian border under its full protection. Jordan has already asked President Assad to step down in the interest of his countrymen.

There are reports in some quarters of western Media that Turkey is training Syrian revolutionary forces and French are providing intelligence and logistic support to the civilians. Arab League, the most prominent body of the Arab countries, has suspended Syria from the Arab League and passed a resolution putting economic and political sanction against it. It was because of the Arab League's pressure that Assad's government allowed the Arab League monitors/observers to visit Syria.

Contrary to this, the response of Iran, Iraq and Lebanon has been very different. Iran has promised to extend all patronage to the regime in its fight against the revolutionaries. Further, it has called this protest a 'US-Israel sponsored design' to weaken the regime, the only power fighting the expansionist design of Israel. But Syrian opposition leader Burhan Ghalyun refutes these claims, saying that regime had done nothing to liberate the Golan Heights. He also declared that after Assad's

departure, the new regime will have no relations with Iran or Lebanon. In an interview to the Wall Street Journal, Burhan Ghalyun said that what concerned his countrymen most was the relation of the regime with Hezbollah and Iran. Iran has signed a free trade pact with Syria with the purpose of rescuing Syrian economy in the aftermath of economic sanctions.

Hezbollah is equally supporting Syria. Its leader Hassan Nasrullah has promised all his assistance to Assad government. Hezbollah's support is so obvious that members of some Sunni organisations have been seen shouting anti- Hezbollah slogans in Beirut.

In the Arab League meet, Iraq preferred to abstain from voting against Syria while Iran and Lebanon opposed the resolutions put forward by Arab League. Iraqi Prime Minister took this as an internal matter of the country and did not approve any kind of foreign intervention. He also sent a delegation to have direct negotiations with the representatives of the opposition and the regime. One of the highly revered Shiite clerics in Iraq, Muqtada-al-Sadr has warned against any kind of interference in Syria and according to some media reports, he is reported to have sent his own Mahdi militia to fight along with Assad's army.

There is not only regional division; the global community is equally divided on the issue of Syria. Russia and China have already vetoed a UN Security Council resolution condemning the crackdown of the Syrian regime against the opposition. There is strong European Union economic sanction against Syria. EU has also called upon Turkey to intervene militarily in Syria on behalf of the Arab League. The US has asked the revolutionary forces not to lay down their arms or surrender.

The present scenario in the region is an indicator of the divergence of regional and global views on Syria. The regional division is more on sectarian lines while the instance of global community is strategic driven. In the Arab world, every act on the part of any one country is being seen as an attempt to establish political clout. For instance, Iraqi Prime Minister said at a press conference that Iraq cannot remain a mute spectator when Turkey is extending all supports to opposition members. He further expressed his apprehension over Turkish over-involvement in the region. It is

the sectarian nature of the conflict that has deprived this movement of the ethos and spirit of the Arab Spring. A revolution that began with a democratic spirit has been transformed into a sectarian conflict and the world does not remain unaffected by its spill over.

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