

# Indian Council of World Affairs

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New Delhi



## View Point

### Decoding the Syrian Blasts

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Two successive bomb blasts within a span of three weeks in Syria, one just before the arrival of the Arab League monitors and another when the monitors were preparing to submit their observations to the Arab League, has complicated the current situation in Syria. While addressing the Damascus University on January 10<sup>th</sup>, 2012, the Syrian President Bashar Al-Asad blamed these incidents as a “foreign conspiracy” attempting to destabilise the only secular regime in the Arab Gulf region. President Asad expressed his strong resolve and stated that “terrorism” would be met with an “iron fist”. The opposition groups, almost 40 in number headed by Syrian National Council, have blamed the Assad regime for misguiding the monitors and even orchestrating these blasts. The groups are even critical of the reporting of the monitors and are now demanding that the UNHRC send its own mission to Damascus.

However, the “modus operandi” apparently indicates that some professional groups may have masterminded the incidents. The Syrian authorities have blamed *Al Qaida* and the role of ‘external conspiracy’ for the blasts and buttressed their claim that armed rebels and terrorists rather than true reform-seekers, are out to destabilize the secular regime in Syria. These developments suggest that Syria is heading towards a complex situation, which will have its wide socio-political and ideological repercussions across the region. This also shows that the ‘real power transition game in the Gulf has started now’. After finishing Libya and Iraq, the geo-political contest is concentrating now on Syria.

It is perceived from certain quarters that Al Qaida is ensconced in society. The Syrian agencies have reported that *Al Qaida* has entered Syria through the border town of “Arsal.” *Al Qaida* has had long presence in the eastern region of Syria and harassed the US forces in Iraq. This was ended only in 2008 when US launched Special Force operation and killed Abu Ghadiya, a senior *Al Qaida* leader, working as a facilitator for Iraq. The possibility of *Al Qaida*’s complicity in the recent blasts in Syria cannot be ruled out; several new developments in the region indicate that *Al Qaida*, in fact, wants to revive as well as garner ‘brownie points’ for its presence in Syria and collate its forces in the region, especially Yemen and Afghanistan.

News also reports that hundreds of Libyan volunteers have crossed the Syrian border. These opposition groups, are covertly working to carve out “social space” in the Syrian society and “Libiyanise” Syria. For several months arms such as Kalashnikovs, which have been seen in the rebel’s hands, have been smuggled through the borders of Jordan and Turkey into Syria.

This shows that perhaps the interests of the great powers have converged on Syria issue. In October, 2011, Russia and China provided ‘diplomatic cover’ to the *Basahr Al Asad* regime by vetoing the resolution moved by the US-West in UNSC. Again in the recent move to bring *Bashar Al Asad* under International Court of Crime (ICC) scanner, Russia, China, Brazil and India, collectively termed as BRIC nations, have opposed the idea of such proposal. The opposition to the proposal, in fact, has its own logic that once a person is referred into ICC, it does not provide the accused a chance to either correct himself or flee from the situation; he is bound to sustain his position as he would be extradited even if he flees to any other country.

The complex geo-political and strategic situation in Syria needs serious attention. Syria may implode and plunge the entire region once again into an endless war of attrition, and eat away the current bonhomie in Iraq. These blasts and power politics might push a rather secular Syria into sectarian, ethnic and ideological conflict. The Syrian imbroglio needs to be resolved on mutually agreed terms. Looking at the dynamics of the region, any mechanism imposed from the outside, including military intervention, sanctions or abetting violence in Syria, will definitely

not serve the purpose except adding miseries to the lives of the common public; while the Syrian regime which till date enjoys strong domestic and international backing, will hardly succumb to any pressure, at least for a couple of years. The regime in Syria, similar to Iran, is habitual of surviving against such sanctions and boycotts since long.

Since the problems started in the Arab region, India has adopted a consistent policy approach. It abstained from the UNSC resolution against Libya as well as Syria. In recent weeks, some news reports and analyses have indicated that India should revisit its Syrian policy and put pressure on the *Asad* regime to abide with the Arab League's demand. However, the ambiguity involved in the recent blasts at Damascus and demands that India continues to follow its 'principled stand' on the West Asian issues. It should support negotiated settlement and work to bring the warring groups to the table. This will, in fact, buttress India's historical stand. India should not support any activity which is based on either coercion, engineered or intervened militarily from outside and also based on partial truth.

Conceivably, the current stand taken by Russia and China on Syria perhaps vindicates their Libyan foreign policy faux pas, which they don't want to repeat, while India has shown a stable and consistent policy approach, which should not be abandoned without any reasonable cause.

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*12<sup>th</sup> January 2012*