



View Point

Unabated Violence in Syria and the Divided Global Community

*Dr. Fazzur Rahman Siddiqui**

In the post-Arab-spring phase, when other nations are engaged in laying down their future political module through legislative elections, referendum and drafting of the constitution, Syria is witnessing the worst form of violence with more than 9000 dead and 1.3 million homeless. Besides, thousand have fled to Lebanon, Turkey and Iraq as refugees. The government action against the opposition is intensifying every day and people in Homs and other most affected cities are crying—"Where is the United Nations?" The Syrian army tanks are patrolling the street to crush the uprising but have failed to deter the people from coming out on the street to challenge the regime despite constant rise in death toll.

Cities of Homs and Idlib are besieged and have been bombarded constantly for almost three weeks and people in large numbers are fleeing these cities. One of the biggest surges of refugees to Lebanon took place after attacks in Homs and Babe Amr which are described as catastrophic.

The Syrian crisis, since the inception, has adopted a diverse trajectory. The early involvement of Lebanon and Iran one hand and Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and Turkey on the other hand has taken it on a sectarian platform. The involvement of Russia later pushed the country back to the Cold War era when Moscow along with Beijing vetoed twice the UNSC resolution. Turkey was the first country to host the conference of Syrian opposition group and Saudi was the first to call its envoy back

from Syria. Iran and Iraq were the first to declare its support to the regime of President Bashar Al-Assad. As a result, the Syrian crisis has acquired a global dimension where the interests of different parties are in direct clash with each other.

There are several opposition groups in Syria like Coordination Committee of Forces for Domestic Changes (CCFDS), Syrian National Council (SNC) Muslim Brotherhood, Damascus Independent Block and Free Syrian Army and each is having different view. SNC is supportive of external military intervention to overthrow the regime while CCFDS is against any form of foreign intervention but does not view Arab intervention as foreign intervention. Free Syrian Army is enjoying the support of Arab League and is working independently of other political blocks in Syria.

It is this factionalism that has deterred other nations to recognize them unlike Libyan opposition. French President Nicolas Sarkozy has called on the Syrian oppositions to unite and also exhorted that Syrian future could not be decided abroad and it must be steered from within as it happened in Libya, Tunisia and Egypt. The absence of internal unity among the opposition groups is providing space to the regime to maneuver and use one faction against the other. But unfortunately, the discord among western powers, global body and Arab regimes has further strengthened the position of President Assad. United Nations General Assembly too has been divided into two camps—those countries that support US and Arab efforts to resolve the crisis and those who agree with Russia to support the regime in Syria.

Russia does not want a Libyan kind of scenario in Syria that would exclude it from global arena and because it could lose its bastion in the Mediterranean Sea. Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin has been more vocal and has observed that Russia would not alter its position on Syria to please the US and Moscow does not intend to demonstrate that Russia is always ready to say yes to the US.

Former Russian President Dmitry Medvedev justified Moscow's stand, saying that it vetoed UNSC resolution to stop US intervention. It was at the behest of China and Russia that President Assad held a referendum on political reforms last month but opposition called it a 'gimmick' and people in large number boycotted it. The US President Obama has termed the situation in Syria as 'massacre' and called the regime

of Assad a 'Mafia' one avowing that US will do everything to stop this enduring violence. Republican Senator John McCain has called for unilateral US air strike against Syria.

US did not approve the proposal from Qatar and Saudi Arabia of arming the opposition fearing that it would further vitiate the situation. US Secretary of State Ms. Hillary Clinton equated it with arming of the al-Qaeda and opposed foreign intervention on the line of Libya. UN Human Rights Commissioner Navanetham Pillay also opposed it, saying that it will cause civil war in the region. Britain and Germany, so far, has opposed any intervention in absence of UN resolution. Instead of envisaging any military intervention, EU Secretary General, Catharine Day has called for stern economic sanction against Syria. NATO does not favor any intervention at the moment but its General Secretary Anders Fogh Rasmussen claims that arming the opposition would help in removing the regime of Assad

The division among the Arab countries came in the open during "Friends of Syria" conference hosted by Tunisia in which Saudi Arabia walked out amidst the deliberation, calling vehemently for arming and financing the opposition groups arguing that merely economic sanctions would not be helpful. In "Friends of Syria" conference, Qatar called for deployment of Arab League force in the country to stop the killings and bring about peace and implement the Arab League Plan.

One section of the Arab League called for establishing human corridors to help the victims. Algeria and Morocco along with Egypt and Jordan expressed their opposition to any kind of foreign intervention and called for peaceful solution given the sectarian nature of the Syrian crisis. Turkey too stood by other Arab nations, calling for non-intervention and declared that in case of NATO interventions, it will not join it. The visit of Kofi Anna, former UN Secretary General and Arab League and the UN envoy to Syria failed to bring the opposition parties to the negotiating table since they rejected his call for negotiations while President Assad described the opposition a bunch of terrorists.

The Syrian crisis is not merely an indigenous phenomenon but it is also a hostage to external power politics among different regional and global players. This is

an issue of contestation between political principles and values on one hand, and political diplomacy and strategic calculation on the other.

**Dr. Fazzur Rahman Siddiqui, Research Fellow, at Indian Council of World Affairs,
New Delhi 110001*

26 March 2012