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The Emergence of the Syrian Conflict and Exit

Strategies

By

Zouha Shaheen

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Thesis Advisor: _Imad Salamey_ Signature: ▮▮▮ Date: _16/8/16_

Member: _Sami Baroudi_ Signature: ▮▮▮ Date: _16/8/16_.

Member: _Bassel Sallouhd_ Signature: ▮▮▮ Date: _16/8/16_

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To Syria…

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The Emergence of the Syrian Conflict and Exit Strategies

Zouha Shaheen

ABSTRACT

What are the main drivers for the Syrian conflict and how can they be mitigated? This thesis assesses two different explanatory propositions. The first attributes to the conflict domestic sectarian and communitarian contentions, amid rising Sunni-Alawi power imbalance. The second blames growing socio-economic disparities between different regions and groups. Both views suggest that international factors have helped incite domestic strife. The thesis examines both views and highlights an alternative interpretation rooted in globalization theory and the double movement, as being responsible for the deterioration of state power and the incubation of socio-economic and communitarian grievances. The study explores various conflict mitigation models and assesses their abilities to provide satisfactory exit strategy to current impasse. It highlights the prominence of international players in any future reconciliation.

Keywords: Syria, conflict, Arab, Spring, Middle East, Democracy, Causes, Consociational, sectarianism.

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

1.1-Introduction

It was the day of March 15, 2011 when it all began; the day that set the stage for an ongoing Syrian war that destroyed cities and caused massive civilian casualties. Until this day, no accurate number of casualties of the Syrian conflict is documented. However, according to the United Nations and Arab League envoy to Syria Staffan De Mistura, the damage is estimated to be more than 400,000 lives. More than 4 million people had to flee the country while another almost 8 million are internally displaced, in what is deemed the largest refugee and displacement crisis of our time. The protracted conflict in Syria has set development back by decades, with no end in sight and no prospects of resolution happening in the near future. Nevertheless, Syria has turned into a playground for a war by proxy between different powers. The situation on the ground is getting more complicated with time due to the increasing numbers of fighting factions. Statistics indicate that the Syrian crisis is the world's largest humanitarian crisis since World War 2. What had begun as peaceful protests rapidly metamorphosed into an armed fight that escalated into a full scale civil war -that - drew in regional and world powers. The degree of violence escalated and led to the emergence of terrorist groups such as AL Nussra front and the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS). Syria became at the heart of the news, holding the attention of media outlets all over the world. The Syrian crisis spillover on neighboring countries was tremendous; over two million Syrian refugees were registered in Turkey, over a million in

Lebanon and huge numbers scattered around the world, especially in Europe. Together with the pressure imposed by the refugee crisis on relevant countries, Syria's strategic geographical location in the region made it one of the most important issues holding the attention of the whole world.

This paper examines the causes of the Syrian conflict and seeks to explore possible solutions to the protracted crisis. As mentioned above, the Syrian crisis is the world's largest humanitarian crisis since World War 2. Thus, uncovering its motives might be the first step in overcoming these reasons and ending the bloody war that tore Syria apart. Why is it that what started out as an Arab spring turned out to be a bloody one for Syria?

1.2-Literature Review

A substantial amount of research on Syria in general has been conducted throughout the years. Syria was considered one of the most influential states in the Arab region and thus studying Syria throughout history was of interest to many scholars. After 2011, scholars began to analyze the situation in Syria and explore possible scenarios to end the war. Scholars argued about the reasons that led to the emergence of the Syrian uprisings; their studies varied from primordial sectarianism to socio-political reforms during Bashar Al Assad's term and the impact of regional and international actors. As Reese Erlich states, many claimed that Syria is going into sectarian war between the ruling Alawite minority and Sunni groups. While in reality, Syrians had lived in harmony through the forty one year- rule of former president Hafez Al Assad and the current president Bashar Al Assad. After the crisis began, each minority swaddled itself in order to protect its members and interests. While minorities such as Alawites, Christians and Druze gathered around the regime, the majority of Sunnis— specifically the extremely religious fraction that did not

benefit from the regime- gathered around Islamic movements trying to topple down the regime (Erlich, 2014). On the other hand, Carpenter emphasizes the ancient rivalry between Shiite and Sunni dominance. He affirms that the rebellion that took place in 2011 was an attempt by a Sunni majority to take down the "coalition of minorities" regime (Carpenter, Tangeled Web: The Syrian Civil WAr and Its Implications, 2013). While Erlich and Carpenter disagreed on whether sectarianism had been primordial or had been used as a means to achieve a common goal, some scholars dated the causes decades before the emergence of the conflict, such as McHugo. The latter blamed the patronage system of the Baathists which focused on rewarding those who are loyal while neglecting others. This in a way led to the emergence of a class conflict inside Syria and eventually sectarian conflict. (McHugo, 2014). In addition, some scholars such as Rotberg and Kaplan discuss how Syria turned from a rogue state to a failed one. They believe that the strategies used by Al-Assad regime throughout the family's rule were the real reason behind the emergence of the rebellion. These strategies, including abusing power, manipulating the political arena, focusing on one sect –Alawite- , while hindering any attempt to build an open democratic system that consists of representatives of the entire population, together with corruption, eventually led to a political and social malfunction which caused the people to revolt. They believe that Syria was too rogue of a state to even survive such an uprising, but the coercive military power used by the regime prevented the success of the revolution (Rotberg & Kaplan, 2014).

On the other hand, Deeb stated other reasons behind the Syrian crisis. First, he found that the degree of reforms that President Bashar Al-Assad made was considerably acceptable considering the time he had. However, opposition groups being greedy and

manipulated by others, did not accept any of his reforms- even though at some point they met the requirements set by these groups. He believes that the Syrian crisis has many causes including:(1) a systematic diplomatic war against Syria as a result of its Arab nationalism defense status and its rejection of Western imperialism, (2) a rivalry between the Baathists and the Muslim Brotherhood movement which seized the opportunity to re-surface after the Arab Spring and aimed to tear apart the homogenous social fabric of Syria. It is important to note here that Syria consists of Sunnis as a majority, then come the minorities Alawites, Christians, Druz and Kurds respectively. Deeb believes that this diversity in Syria was successfully managed by the Baath regime. However, manipulating the minds of people through religion was a tool to break this homogenous fabric and thus control people more easily. (3) Media channels such as Al-Jazeera and Al-Arabia played a major role in intensifying the situation by hosting religious figures such as Al-Karadawi to tell people that it is their sacred duty to rebel against the regime. Deeb believes that there are many other reasons and instruments that were used to weaken Syria after it was heading into a golden era (Deeb, 2013) .

On the other hand, could the conflict in Syria be an example of a civilizational one? According to Huntington, most of the clashes that will occur in the post-cold war period will probably be civilizational conflicts. He believes that Arabs are more attached to their religion than to their nation and that the Arab culture does not accept liberal ideology and pluralism. He also finds that the world is separated by different cultures and civilizations and that at some point, these cultural differences will eventually clash. However, looking at the events that have taken place over the past five years and the wave of democracy that swept over the Middle East, we see that the Arab people demanded democracy and liberal

reforms and not an Islamic state as foreseen by Huntington . When it comes to Syria, the conflict does not seem to be a cultural one; it emerged among people with the same cultural identity. Apparently, Arab people didn't only demanded for their rights, they also rebelled against their Muslim leaders and conflicts were risen among people with the same cultural background. The conflict in Syria was not a clash between the Western ideology and the Syrian one; it was a clash between the Syrian people and their regime (Brooks, 2011). On the other hand, the spread of extremist thought in the world may be explained through Huntington's theory. Extremist Muslim thought manifested as a rejection of Western ideas that were spreading across the Middle East. For example, Al Qaeda and ISIS both reject Western ideas of liberalism and modernization and strive to build an Islamic nation.

To proceed, Kashefi agrees with Brooks and emphasizes the relation between Huntington's views of the clash of civilizations and the current Arab Uprisings. He affirms that the clash of civilizations according to Huntington is based on the cultural identity, asking the question 'who am I?' and that most of the time identity is related and based on religious perception. On the other hand, Kashefi's explanation of the uprisings was not a matter of a cultural identity and an Islamic driven revolution rather than claiming freedom, democracy, human dignity and human rights. People who revolted were mostly revolting against their Islamic leader. Kashefi further recognizes the socio-economic situation of the region as a reason behind the uprisings. High unemployment rates as well as inequality in the distribution of economical wealth were major forces moving the youth to revolt (Kashefi, 2013).

On another front, Salamey highlights the consequences of the emerging globalization's double movement on the situation in the Middle East. The double

movement theory mainly describes the changes in the global market forces and global politics that will eventually lead to a clash with the rising nationalist movements. In other words, the rise of globalization, interconnected economies and transcending ideologies all over the world, was marked as a reason for the deteriorating role of centralized national economies. This expansion of the global economy does not only affect the state's economic policies but also its political strategies; it weakens the nationalist state's control over the state's economy. The weakening of the state's central power and hegemony over its people combined with exposing its national economy and the declining role of nationalism, led to a rising role of communitarianism. Consequently, sectarianism -which is a part of communitarianism- was a substitute for the deteriorating role of the state and a mean for each sect to preserve its interests economically and culturally. The economic exposure, the weakening of nationalists and the rise of communitarian groups were all aspects of the globalization's double movement that took over the region. As a result, the shift in the Middle East and the region as a whole and the rise of communitarian groups need new governing arrangements in order to bring stability to the region (Salamey, 2015).

Along with Salamey, Geneive Abdo asserts that the rise of the sectarian sentiment in the Middle East is the result of authoritarian regimes losing power and control over their states. Following this line of thought, sectarianism had always existed in the Middle East states but was somehow contained by the strategies pursued by these regimes. However, once these regimes were shaken, sectarianism was the rational replacement of the state's lack of control. (Abdo, 2013)

The importance of regional power politics is also crucial concerning the Syrian case. Regional power balance that was manifested by regional actors involved in the Syrian

conflict, intensified the ethno-sectarian sentiment of the Syrian conflict. Due to the inability of either the Syrian regime or the opposition to win the conflict, the reliance on external factors became essential to the survival for both of them. Therefore, many regional trends helped in shaping the current situation of the Syrian conflict. These trends are: the rise of Iran as a regional power and its extension in the region through Hezbollah as well as the growing relationship between Iran, Hezbollah and the Syrian regime. Another is the rise of Turkey as a moderate Islamic regional power and its support for the Syrian opposition. The third trend is the shift in the power balance towards the Islamic Sunni Monarchies such as Saudi Arabia and Qatar. Consequently, these trends contributed to shaping sectarian alliances throughout the Middle East, especially after year 2000. Furthermore, as ethno-sectarian alliances keep defining the sentiment of regional politics, fragmentation and polarization are more likely to shape upcoming events. Accordingly, the future of the Syrian conflict is not in the hands of Syrians only; the impact of regional politics and interventionists will have a decisive role in determining Syria's future. (Heydemann, 2013)

Another scholar, Carpenter, refers to the Syrian crisis as a "complex and murky" conflict rather than a simple one only aiming to overthrow Bashar Al-Assad. Complexity is increasing in Syria due to many factors, as Carpenter states. The rise of Islamists and the regional context of the Sunni-Shiite old rivalry are both contributing factors that complicate the Syrian conflict. Since Saudi Arabia lost control over the Iraqi regime and the subsequently increasing influence of Iran over Iraq, it is not a coincidence that Saudi Arabia is supporting the Syrian opposition trying to topple down Al-Assad's regime, in order to reverse Iran's growing influence in the region. Turkey also emerged as a key player in the Syrian conflict; it was mainly a religious ideology that led to Erdogan's support for the

Sunni camp in Syria (Carpenter, Tangled Web : The Syrian Civil War and Its Implications, 2013).

The role of international actors has also been key in complicating the conflict in Syria; the western coalition led by the United States versus Russia and China. The two different ideologies only intensified the situation rather than solving it. While the United States affirms on the humanitarian principle of Responsibility to Protect (R2P), urging the international community to intervene in order to protect civilians, Russia and china on the other hand, emphasize the principle of state sovereignty and view the U.S' ambitions as a political play to achieve global hegemony. (Carpenter, Tangled Web : The Syrian Civil War and Its Implications, 2013)

Hinnebush and Zintl summarize much of what was said before. First, the socio-economic factor was a major cause contributing to the class conflict in Syria. The socio-economic reforms made since Bashar AL Assad came into power exposed the improper infrastructure for such reforms as well as the inconsistency in economic reform policies. Furthermore, , while sectarianism existed in Syria and hatred towards the "coalition of minority regime" was repeatedly expressed, it was successfully managed by the security apparatus of the regime and the secular Ba'athist rule of Syria through their Arab nationalism ideology that marginalized religious identities and created a shared national identity despite religious and sectarian differences. However, with the decreasing role of the Arab nationalist ideology, these differences resurfaced again, supported by regional actors, allowing both the Syrian regime and the opposition to use sectarianism as a tool to manipulate masses. The Syrian regime consistently highlighted the urgent need of its survival in order to protect minorities, while extremists seized the opportunity of the

insurgencies and aimed to claim power in Syria. While the conflict became increasingly militarized, there was no place for soft liners to seek political settlement and thus the conflict kept spiraling out of control.

As the war escalated, international and regional players only continued to intensify complexity of the situation. The old U.S-Russian cold war is revived in Syria through a proxy war; the Irani- Hezbollah camp also aimed to counterbalance the Saudi-Qatari camp. It is important to note here the role of Turkey in supporting opposition groups and harboring the so called "enemies of the Syrian state". (Hinnebush & Zintl, 2015)

To summarize, since the beginning of the Syrian crisis scholars tried to explore the reasons of its emergence. Some say that it is primordial sectarianism while others disagree. Some refer to the socio-economic factors while conspiracy theorists believe that it is a thorough plan to destroy the axis of resistance. Due to the short timeline of the Syrian crisis and its fluid nature, the amount of literature is relatively small. In other words, five years is not a sufficient timeframe for scholars to gather and identify all the potential reasons that caused the emergence and escalation of the crisis. This thesis demonstrates and analyzes the direct and indirect reasons in the wake of the crisis and illustrates the possible scenarios that could be implemented in order to stop the Syrian war.

1.3-Research Questions

Defining the main reasons of the Syrian conflict is the major purpose of this research. Is the conflict communally driven by differences over power sharing or is it instigated by other institutional or international contentions? Some scholars such as Carpenter claim that it is sectarian since the beginning while others such as Heydemann

refuse the sense of sectarianism. Heydemann emphasizes the role of regionalization and the sectarianism of regional politics, rather than the Syrian people –most of whom have preserved their national identity as Syrians and are not bound by any sectarian divisions.

Regarding exit strategies, the complexity of the Syrian conflict needs a deep examination of the conflict and its origins in order to find suitable solutions that could end the war. Which political arrangement could be the most effective formula regarding the Syrian situation? Could consociational democracy be a solution for the Syrian civil war if the conflict was indeed a communitarian-based conflict? Or would it only deepen the existing sectarian cleavages and remove any sense of Syrian national identity?

According to Lijphat, consociational democracy is a very useful technique and political model for deeply divided societies. Consociational democracy is a political formula where all the subcultures are represented and governed by an elite cartel. Its purpose is to turn a fragmented society into a stable democracy. Lijphart defines four characteristics in which consociational democracy could be implemented. The first is the establishment or existence of a grand coalition where all parties are represented. Second, the veto power that can be used by one segment in order to topple any decision that could harm its interests. The third is proportionality, which means each segment is to be represented in the coalition in accordance with its proportion of the society. The fourth is segmental autonomy which emphasizes the importance of each segment to have a certain amount of autonomy in its jurisdiction. In accordance with these four characteristics, certain aspects are also preferred to exist in a society such as the existence of an elite cartel that rules the subcultures and a relatively small-size d country in which each segment is respectively located in one geographical area (Lijphart, 1969). After examining the main

characteristics of consociational democracy and its implications on the ground, it is necessary to examine its effectiveness as a solution to Syria's conflict. Is it possible for Syria to implement such a political formula to stop the war? This question will be taken into consideration when researching possible resolution mechanisms for the Syrian conflict.

Furthermore, with the involvement of foreign actors, to what extent are regional and international actors willing to compromise in order to end the war and its spillover? If what is happening in Syria now is a balance of power war by proxy, would it be sufficient for regional and international powers to agree on negotiations and start the process of state reconciliation?

When it comes to the existence of armed groups in Syria, could these groups be integrated in the Syrian civil society? If Syrians have the chance of being integrated, then what is the fate of terrorist groups such as ISIS and Al -Nussra front? What is the role of external factors in the battle against terrorism in Syria?

1.4-Methodology

A qualitative approach is used to identify and analyze the causes of the Syrian crisis. Collecting and investigating secondary data will be the primary source for this research. This thesis will illustrate the given literature to analyze the causes of the Syrian conflict and find suitable exit strategies regarding the causes. Consequently, case studies are used in order to provide a comprehensive view and supporting evidences to the literature. These studies are rich with information that could be missing from the limited available literature.

These same approaches are used in order to identify potential solutions and scenarios regarding the Syrian crisis.

Comparative studies are used to identify possible scenarios that were implemented in other countries, mainly focusing on Lebanon and Syria. By comparing these two countries, the consociational democracy model that took place in Lebanon is examined as an effective model to be implemented in Syria. Consequently, if consociationalism cannot be the solution nor an effective strategy to be applied then what could be the alternative?

1.5-Map of Thesis

After reviewing available literature and gathering all relevant information, it is expected that the analysis answers the given questions and suggest suitable solutions for the conflict. This thesis is divided into five chapters, the second chapter describes the emergence of the conflict and provides a deep insight of how it transformed from mass protests into an armed confrontation among all parties. It enlists the theoretical interpretations of the causes of the Syrian conflict. The third chapter focuses mainly on analyzing the given theoretical interpretations and compare them in light of political developments over the past five years. It illustrates the regional and international drives that intensified the Syrian conflict. The fourth chapter identifies possible solutions and examines the different propositions being advanced for political transition and settlements in Syria. This chapter focuses mainly on comparing between Lebanon and Syria as comparative case studies. It illustrates how a power-sharing formula and other secular models can help in forecasting the potential arrangements. Finally, the last chapter summarizes the argument of this thesis and provides a brief look on the findings. It demonstrates the opportunities and challenges that might affect the political settlement in

Syria and provides the reader with different scenarios and roadmaps that can help facilitate conflict mitigation, prepare the ground for a new Syria and start the process of state reconciliation.

CHAPTER TWO

The Emergence of the Syrian Conflict: the Local Drives

2.1-Introduction

On July 10, 2000, Bashar Al-Assad was elected president succeeding his late father Hafez Al-Assad. Since his inauguration, there was much hope and optimism for this young educated president who is familiar with western ideology .When he married his wife Asma Al-Assad, A Sunni from a well-known family in Homs, the couple portrayed an image of a modern young couple promising a prospering future for Syria. Furthermore, Assad was welcomed by most of the leaders of great powers such as the United States, France and most European countries. Since his inaugural ceremony, Assad promised to modernize Syria and put in action a series of political and economic reforms. People were largely satisfied and Syria started to develop economically due to the economical reformation of Al- Assad. (Starr 2015)

However, Assad's first years were not as simple as they seemed to be. In 2001, a group of Syrian opposition intellectuals formed the "Damascus spring". Their main demands were political reformations including the lifting of the emergency law, releasing political prisoners and establishing the right to form political parties. The movement started to have an impact among Syrians; they formed closed forums where they discussed political issues that were considered taboo by the Syrian regime. When AL Assad

eventually adhered to their demands, his top security chiefs warned him that they cannot

ensure he stays in power if he keeps this pace of political reformation. At that point, the

regime reacted with imprisonments and the closure of these forums with force. It was the

end of Damascus spring. (McHugo 2014)

It was two years later when the U.S -led invasion of Iraq began, posing a turning

point in the Syrian history. The U.S-Syrian relations were not at their best between 2001

and 2003. During that time, the United States declared its war on terror and strived to

change the status quo in the Middle East, including the policies of the Syrian regime. These

strategies were clear in Collin Powel's visit to Damascus during the Iraqi invasion, when

he stressed the need for President Assad to comply with U.S demands. These demands

mainly focused on closing the offices of the Hamas movement in Damascus, ending any

relationships with Khaled Mashaal and other Palestinian leaders in Damascus, as well as

ending the relationship with and support to Hezbollah in Lebanon. It was clear that the

United States was demanding Syria to shift its position from supporting the axis of

resistance, towards peace with Israel and increased cooperation with the United States.

Regardless of the enmity between Saddam and Assad, the latter recognized the risks

accompanied with the American invasion of Iraq. Assad knew that the war in Iraq would

only intensify the religious and sectarian division in the region causing a direct threat to

the safety of Syria. (Erlich 2015).

It was a pivotal point in the Syrian history when Assad refused to comply with

these demands; it was also the time when the decision was made to weaken Syria (Kleib

2016). Furthermore, on December 12, 2003, President Bush signed the "Syria

Accountability and Lebanese Sovereignty Restoration Act". This act stipulated the

withdrawal of all kinds of U.S investments in Syria and the blockage of all U.S exports to Syria. The act also denounced Syria as a state sponsoring terrorism and called for closing all terrorist offices such as Hamas', ending ties with Hezbollah and Iran as well as the withdrawal of Syrian forces from Lebanon. This enmity toward the Syrian regime was a result of the Syrian stand against American ambitions in the region and the Syrian support to all kinds of resistance in Iraq in cooperation with Hezbollah (McHugo 2014). Furthermore , General Wesley Clark , a retired General of the U.S army, demonstrated that the decision to invade Iraq was made without finding any connections between Saddam and Al-Qaeda and that the United States made the decision to take out seven countries in five years, including Syria. (Clark and Goodman 2016)

Hariri's assassination marked a new era concerning the Syrian-Lebanese relations. On April 30, 2005, Syria declared the withdrawal of all its forces from Lebanon, under massive pressure from international and regional powers. A new chapter began between Lebanon and Syria where diplomatic relations were the master of the scene. (Pan 2005). However, even after the withdrawal and despite the demands by the U.S Assad strengthened his ties with Hezbollah and Iran, especially during the 2006 war between Israel and Hezbollah and the Gaza war.

When it comes to the regional aspect, the Syrian Turkish relations were strong; Turkey mediated between Syria and Israel to facilitate the peace negotiations just before the Gaza war started. Economic and personal ties were established between Damascus and Ankara. The two countries signed more than 40 agreements concerning free trade and other economic developments. Turkey's policy of zero problems with neighbors was successful

at that time (Zafar 2012). How turkey changed its policy from zero problems with neighbors to zero neighbors without problems will be explained at a later stage.

Few years later the conflict began. It was the Arab Spring wave that swept over the Middle East and shaped the new Middle East. Just one year after it started in Tunisia, it had spread to Yemen, Libya, Bahrain, Egypt and Syria.

2.2-Emergence of the Syrian Conflict

It was March 15, 2011 when the protests started in the city of Dera'a. The protests broke out after the security forces arrested teenagers who wrote on their school walls freedom slogans. Protests began by claiming freedom, reformation and limiting the role of security forces. Soon enough, these protests were repressed by security forces. People at that time were no longer controlled by fear. On the contrary, people continued protesting despite the massive repression methods pursued by the regime's security forces (Starr 2015). Clashes between the security forces and rebels began to take place in the southern city of Dera'a, the coastal city of Banias and the suburbs of Damascus. The regime deployed fractions of the Syrian army in order to repress any anti-regime movements. Syrians from both sides were killed. The opposition accused the regime of brutally killing peaceful protestors while the regime accused the armed opposition of killing soldiers and security forces. (Starr 2015). At a later stage, President Bashar Al-Assad made a series of reforms including lifting the state emergency law, dismissing the government and releasing many political prisoners. At that time, the opposition was no longer requesting reforms; it was asking to topple down the regime and ending the forty one year- rule of Al-Assad family. Consequently, protests were spreading across the country reaching Hama and Homs. Protestors were divided according to their ideologies. A group of them were non-

sectarian believers who demanded national unity against the brutal acts of the regime and repeatedly announced their famous slogan "peacefully protesting, no difference between Muslims and Christians neither Sunni nor Alawite, we are all a national unity."(Erlich, Inside Syria: The Backstory of Their Civil War and What The World Can Expect, 2014) .On the other hand, especially in Homs and Banias, the conflict was shaped by sectarian sentiment; protestors started to use the slogan "Christians to Beirut and Alawites to the coffin" (Deeb, Crisis in Syria, 2013). Soon enough, a military confrontation started to take place in many cities, declaring the beginning of the civil war in Syria. With a rapid pace, trained militant groups were spread across many cities fighting, the Syrian army and the Syrian security forces. These groups were mainly supported and armed by states such as Turkey, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United States. As the conflict proceeded and increased in complexity, many regional and international players got involved. Each of these players had different intentions and significance. The two tables below clarify the main players involved in Syria and their main interests.

Table 1.Main Armed Groups Fighting Inside Syria

Groups	Positions and Interests
The Syrian army	The official branch of the Syrian armed forces defending the regime.
The Free Syrian army	Consists primarily of soldiers and officers defected from the Syrian army. Its main

	coordination is with the national coalition for Syrian revolutionary and opposition forces.
Al Nussra Front	A Group of extremist muslims aiming to establish an Islamic state in Syria where Islamic legislation is to be implemented.
The Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS)	It originated in Iraq and moved to Syria. ISIS seeks to establish the Islamic caliphate in Syria and Iraq.
The Islamic army	Coalition of minor militia groups mainly based in the suburbs of Damascus lead by Zahran Alloush (before his death in a joint airstrike by the Syrian and Russian air forces)

Table 2. Regional and International Players Involved in the Conflict.

Groups	Positions and Interests
Hezbollah	An armed Lebanese militia and a political party which was involved in the Syrian

	conflict to defend the Syrian regime especially after Al Qusayr battle.
Iran	Iran's involvement was to defend the Syrian regime. The Iranian national guards played a critical role in supporting the regime through their coordination with the Syrian army and Hezbollah.
Russia	Russia was indirectly involved in Syria until the 15 of September, 2015. Before that, Russia provided the regime with intelligence information and army supplies. Since September 2015, Russia declared its commencement of airstrikes in Syria against ISIS.
Kurds	The Kurdish minority of Syria played a critical role concerning the northern borders of the country. Their primary interest is to defend their territories against ISIS and other militias.
United States	The United States repeatedly urged Al-Assad to step down. It supported the

	opposition since the beginning of the conflict. The United States is also leading the international coalition that conducted airstrikes against ISIS in Iraq and Syria
Saudi Arabia and Qatar	Their main role was supporting the armed opposition with weapons and financial support. Their primary goal was to reverse the Shiite influence, led by Iran through its extension in the region "Hezbollah".
Turkey	Turkey's support for the Sunni opposition in Syria was based on its perspective and ideology of furthering political Islam movements, manifested through its positive reaction toward Egypt during the phase of the Muslim Brotherhood. Turkey constantly urged the international community to establish a no-fly zone in northern Syria and frequently supplied the opposition with money and weapons.

Stating all the parties involved in the Syrian conflict seems unfeasible. On the ground, clashes have been taking place among various armed groups. Each faction has its own ideology; there is no common goal or principle guiding these groups. While the Free Syrian Army's aim was to topple down the repressive Assad regime and to establish a secular democratic state, extremist groups were seeking to create an Islamic caliphate. Combatants in Syria are not only Syrians; they have different nationalities and ideologies, including moderate secular Syrian combatants, Syrian jihadists and non-Syrian jihadists mainly from Chechnya, Pakistan and Europe. This diversity makes the situation even more complicated. If Syrian combatants might be reintegrated in any potential political arrangements, what could be the fate of non-Syrian combatants and jihadists (Manfreda)?

A proxy war has been taking place in Syria since the emergence of the conflict between the Shiite axis represented by Iran, Hezbollah and Syria against the Sunni camp, represented mainly by Saudi Arabia and Qatar.

Equally represented, the disagreement between the two major powers of the world, Russia and the United States, makes the situation even more immune to any resolution (McHugo, 2014)(Sayegh, 2014).To summarize, the geopolitics of the region, the regional balance of power, a proxy war and a full scale civil war are what draw the solid lines representing the Syrian conflict.

Map1. Controlled Territories in Syria.
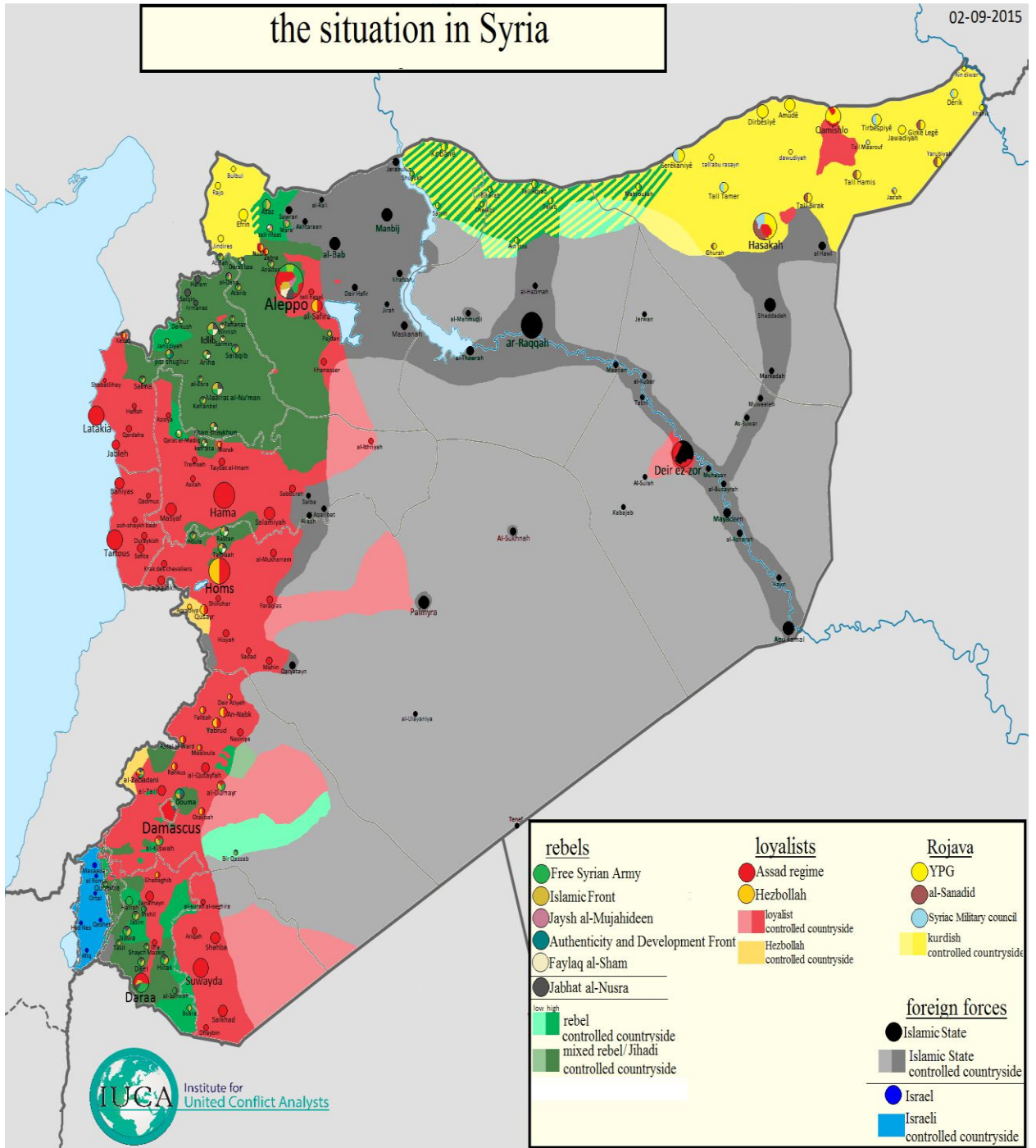
Source: IUCA Database

2.3-Causes of the Syrian Conflict

Syria, or the beating heart of Arabism, was now drowning in a war that destroyed most of its cities and caused the death of hundreds of thousands of its people. Syria that once had a decisive role in the Arab region, has become a playground where all ancient rivalries among Arabs were revealed. What were the reasons behind this conflict? Was Bashar Al-Assad the reason for the emergence of this war or was he the savior that saved Syria from total destruction? Was it all planned from the beginning to destroy Syria or was it legitimate demands claiming democracy and freedom?

It is unfair to say that it was planned from the beginning while there were people who had legitimate claims for reforms. On the other hand, it is unfair to say that it is the security apparatus and acts of the regime that caused all deaths while hundreds of thousands of the military and other security men are being killed and tortured (Kleib 2016). The complexity of the Syrian conflict needs a deep examination of the reasons that caused the emergence of the conflict.

2.3.1-Socio-Economical Factor

Economic reforms were among the priorities on the agenda of Assad's rule. Soon enough after his inauguration, Assad revealed series of economic reforms, moving Syria from a closed economy into a social market economy. Indeed, the Syrian regime applied the Chinese model of economy regardless of genuine reformations regarding the political aspect. It appeared to be that the suburban areas were the most affected by liberalizing the economy. Consequently, these new reformations were mostly concentrated on major cities such as Damascus and Aleppo while other suburban areas were neglected. Indeed, at the beginning of the conflict, these suburbs were the earliest places to revolt (Kleib 2016). In

fact, committing economical reformations without a proper economic plan nor adequate institutional infrastructure led to an increase in the gap among all Syrian social classes. While the rich got richer, the middle and lower classes were striving to keep up the pace of such an open market, limiting the local production. Although the Syrian regime maintained the reform process, it ensured its role as a supervisor of such an open market in a way that could not affect the Syrian political system (Hinnebush and Zintl 2015). Without a doubt, the economy in Syria was controlled and constrained by the bureaucratic rules and malfunctioning of the Syrian state (Deeb 2013). On the other hand, crony capitalism was the dominant feature of the economic reforms. While private banks and insurance companies arrived to Syria, the closest inner circle of regime officials and relatives were the biggest beneficiaries from these investments. Such crony capitalism was manifested in Assad's Cousin Rami Makhlouf. The latter was supposedly owning 60% of the Syrian economy through his companies (McHugo, Syria A Recent History 2014).As a result, the Syrian economy was not able to move beyond the surface, either because of the lack of proper infrastructure and institutions that were able to carry such transformation, or because of the inner circle of the regime's special interests (Hinnebush and Schmidt, The State And The Political Economy of Reform In Syria 2009).

Assad's anticipation of a modernized liberal Syria was soon abandoned. The corruption that is deep rooted in Syria's authoritarian regime and the crony capitalism that emerged after the reforms were key elements, drawing Syria's malfunctioning economy. The policies pursued by Abdullah Dardari were mainly based on "capital accumulation" rather than "fair equality and distribution". Consequently, small businesses manufacturers and enterprises were out of business due to the reduction in Tariffs and increased incentives

for outside investments. Consequently, Syrian middle and lower classes believed that the state is abandoning them for the sake of rich people. Although Assad was warned about the consequences of such policies, it was too late for him to repair the damage caused by the patronage system (Hinnebush, Syria: from "Authoritarian Upgrading" to Revolution 2012).

2.3.2-Secterianism and Geopolitics

The complexity of the Syrian conflict and how it emerged cannot be limited to the explanation of sectarianism. Rather, sectarianism was a tool that was correlated and coexisting with the policies pursued by Assad's regime. These policies focused on rewarding and guarantying privileges to people who are loyal to the regime, mainly based on sectarian identities. Recognizing the importance of the Sunni majority in Syria, Assad made sure to integrate the upper class Sunni business elite into the privileges system and establish a network of clientelism to guarantee his social support. On the other hand, neglected people- mainly from the suburbs- were mostly Sunnis affected by Assad's liberalization of the economy.

The social fabric in Syria is a multi-ethnic society where the Sunni majority coexisted with minorities such as Christians, Druze, Alawites and other minority groups. Since the beginning of the Syrian conflict, protests were mainly based on secular ideologies demanding democratic reforms. Protestors were mostly Sunnis from the suburbs that were affected by the neglect of the Syrian regime and its economic reforms. Thus, the trigger of the uprising was not merely sectarian; it was rather the geographic distribution of the Syrian people that coincided with unequal development and unequal distribution between center and periphery measures (Berti and Paris 2014).

As the conflict proceeded and the protests escalated in scattered areas of the country, the security forces of the regime continued suppressing the protests violently. Assad repeatedly echoed the risks accompanied with the regime fall, threatening the minorities in Syria. While the regime self-defense groups -mainly Alawite- committed atrocities to the protestors, Sunni protestors started to fight back with increased hatred towards the Alawite minority (Berti and Paris 2014). The conflict then began to have a sectarian sentiment, especially in Homs, where sectarian atrocities were committed from both sides. The government declared the death of many Syrian army soldiers and security forces and announced that it was the government's duty to protect the Syrian people from terrorism that had been striking the country. Sectarianism and tribalism were the replacement for the government's neglect of these suburbs. The Ba'ath ideology, based on national identity was no longer effective once the regime was shaken and people got inspired by other successful revolutions in the Arab world. In Dera'a where it all began, the sense of tribalism outweighed the common fear of the regime. Ancient grievances were now revisited and strengthened by the overreaction of the security forces acts (Hinnebush, Syria: from "Authoritarian Upgrading" to Revolution 2012). Fragmentation began to escalate in certain areas of the country where Sunnis and Alawites were deeply divided. Soon enough, peaceful protestors were replaced by hardliner extremists fighting the regime, supported by external agendas and states such as Turkey, Qatar and Saudi Arabia. These events declared the beginning of the civil war in Syria. It was a Sunni uprising against the Alawite dominated regime run by Bashar Al-Assad (Sengupta 2012).

Accordingly, sectarianism in Syria cannot be explained without examining the geopolitical dimension of the region. The best explanation for understanding the

geopolitics of the region is by framing it as a regional cold war between two leading players: Iran and Saudi Arabia. Both states used the existing condition of weak states in the Arab region as a means to achieve their end of hegemony. Sectarian control and hegemony were not the primary goals of these two states; their goal was a regional balance of power and sectarianism was a tool to achieve their goal. While the two camps fighting in Syria -the regime and the opposition- were not able to shift the balance of power to their respective sides, nor survive on their own, external reliance was crucial to their survival. Whereas the conflict in Syria began to experience a sectarian sentiment, it was expected to find sectarian and co-religious supporters to sponsor their existence (Gause 2014). Without a doubt, Syria's geographical location is among the primary interests for these regional powers. Each of these regional players view Syria as an opportunity to counter balance their rivalries as well as assure their own interests in the region (Heydemann 2013). As Salloukh summarizes "the sectarianiation of the geopolitical struggle over Syria, alongside the regime's brutality, has altered its uprising from a peaceful quest for democratic reforms to a civil war that has ruptured the country's national unity" (Salloukh 2013).

2.3.3-Institutional Factor

Corruption was deeply embedded in the Syrian regime. Bribery and abuse of power were common in the public sector in Syria. Whereas authoritarian control, dictatorship and the absence of a free market occur, corruption emerges as a substitute for the government's lack and inability to provide fair and equal opportunities. Capital monopoly and crony capitalism in Syria increased corruption which negatively affected ordinary people (AL-Sheikh and Hamadah Syrian Economic Forum). Nevertheless, the increase in the population without providing the proper strategies to deal with such increase led to higher

unemployment rates and a dramatic increase of population in the capital. People were deprived from their rights of education and medical care. Grievances were accumulating in poor areas that were deprived from their rights due to the lack of institutional infrastructure that can contain population enlargement. Poverty was increasing, caused by higher unemployment rates and corruption. Indeed, a social crisis was piling up (Deeb 2013).

On the other hand, the government's mistakes were manifested in cutting the government's subsidies and an uncontrolled inflation that caused the deterioration in the living conditions of the middle and lower classes in the peripheries of the country (Berti and Paris 2014). In contrary to the Ba'ath secular ideology, Assad persisted on building and spreading Islamic schools and charities. It was his strategy to counter radical Islam in Syria. Mosques were built and preaches were widespread. Consequently, due to the lack of governmental institutions and their ability to provide basic needs of people, Islamic schools and charities replaced the gap. Islamic movements seized the opportunity in the periphery to manipulate people who suffered from an increase in illiteracy and the neglect of governmental support (Hinnebush, Syria: from "Authoritarian Upgrading" to Revolution 2012). Once the government was not able to provide their needs, people resorted to tribalism, sectarianism and religion. Indeed, protests were occurring after the Friday prayers where people were gathered listening to the Sheikh's preach.

To summarize, the lack of governmental institutions, the higher rates of unemployment, illiteracy and people resorting to religion rather than the governments' institutions, were substantial factors contributing to the Syrian conflict.

2.3.4- International Forces

Understanding the Syrian conflict needs a deep examination of the role of international players regarding the Syrian conflict. The conflict in Syria cannot be merely explained as an external conspiracy aiming to destroy Syria. However, the conflict in Syria was intensified upon the interests of major powers.

Since the 9/11 attacks on the United States, the latter changed its foreign policy towards the Middle East from maintaining the status quo to war on terror and changing alliances. Syria was among the main targets of the United States. Syria's support for the axis of resistance and its relations with Iran and Hezbollah were sufficient for the U.S to declare Syria as a state sponsoring terrorism. Once Syria refused to become an ally to the United States, the decision was made to weaken Syria. Syria was labeled as a rogue state while economic and political sanctions were imposed on Syria (Kleib 2016).

Since the beginning of the conflict, the United States declared its position towards Syria; Assad had to leave and give the chance to build a democratic Syria. As an attempt to counter Assad's regime, the US helped in training, funding and arming "moderate opposition groups".

On the other hand, Russia chose to support Assad. Putin believed that Syria and Russia are fighting a common enemy which is political Islam and especially the extreme version. Moscow accepts as true that losing Syria to Islamism is a direct threat to Russia and its core interests. Consequently, Russia always urged the international community to respect the sovereignty of the Syrian state and the right of the Syrian people to determine the future of Syria.

Once each of the two pillars of the world chose their position, a proxy war emerged. Russia and the United States cold war was now being revisited in Syria. Syria's geographical location, its linkage between the west and the east and its historical and present stand as a leading state in the Arab region, were all factors contributing to the importance of Syria to major powers. These same factors are contributing to the intensity of the conflict and the persistence of each involved powers to control Syria. Indeed, the geopolitical opportunities that Syria offers are significant. The oil and gas that Syria lies on are assets that both Russia and the United States are not willing to compromise on (Kleib 2016).

2.4- Conclusion

To conclude, several factors caused the ignition of the protests in Syria, including mistaken economic strategies, corruption and dictatorship. On the other hand, the wave of the Arab Spring was encouraging, especially after the success of some of the revolutions. However, the intervention of regional and international actors in the Syrian conflict complicated the situation even more. In the meantime, a civil war, a regional balance of power and a proxy war are the facts shaping the Syrian situation.

The next chapter applies the theoretical framework discussed in this chapter and illustrates how these factors caused the complexity of the current situation in Syria.

CHAPTER THREE

The Regional and International Players Shaping the Complexity of the Syrian Conflict

3.1- Introduction

Since the Arab Spring began, several Arab countries witnessed revolutions demanding democracy and reforms including Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Yemen and Bahrain. Many of these revolutions succeeded in ousting their current leaders and restoring order afterwards. Syria, on the other hand, was another story. Peaceful protests were rapidly transformed into a war that tore Syria apart. Syria turned from a leading country in the Arab region into a cockpit of regional and international rivalries. On January 2011, just two months before the protests began, Assad declared that Syria was immune to the Arab Spring wave. Apparently, Assad was mistaken. What caused Syria to move from peaceful protests claiming freedom and democracy into the world's largest humanitarian crisis after World War 2, will be further explained in this chapter.

This chapter examines the theoretical propositions presented in the previous chapter. It analyzes the factors that caused the complexity of the Syrian conflict starting from the U.S- led invasion of Iraq, until the time of writing this thesis. Furthermore, it analyzes the role of regional actors in intensifying the sectarian conflict. It also illustrates the role of international players regarding the Syrian conflict.

3.2- U.S Led Invasion of Iraq

The U.S led invasion of Iraq was a turning point concerning the geopolitics of the region and the consequences for such invasion regarding the Syrian regime. Although Assad and Hussein were not allies, Assad declared he was against the invasion. He recognized the risks accompanied by such an invasion that would only intensify the sectarian conflict in the region as a whole. Indeed, Syria along with Iran and Hezbollah recognized that creating a stable democratic Iraq after the invasion would encourage the United States to pursue its reform agenda and democratic liberation process on many Arab States. Thus undeniably, the Syrian regime, accompanied by Iran's expertise and Hezbollah, facilitated and supported the armed rebels in Iraq -especially Sunni Jihadists- fighting the occupation (Erlich 2015) (Salloukh 2013).

The U.S demands regarding the Syrian regime were manifested in Collin Powel's visit to Damascus. It was clear that Powel was demanding Damascus to renounce its stance as a member of the axis of resistance and eliminate any relations with Hamas, Hezbollah and Iran. In other words, Syria was demanded to shift its strategies and policies towards increased and sustained cooperation with the United States. Indeed, once Assad refused these demands, he became a legitimate target to be weakened according to the neo-cons ruling the United States (Kleib 2016).

On the other hand, the U.S- led invasion of Iraq intensified the regional sectarian conflict. The main players were Saudi Arabia and Iran, contesting on regional hegemony. Both of these states were exercising a realistic balance of power using sectarian instruments to achieve their means. Once the balance was shifted into Tehran's favor, Saudi Arabia - backed by the U.S- utilized sectarianism as a tool to rally support from GCC countries to

counter the Irani influence in the region represented by Syria, Hezbollah and Hamas (Salloukh 2013).

3.3- The Complex Situation

Since the beginning of the Syrian conflict, neither the regime nor the opposition seemed to be able to win the conflict militarily. The Syrian army and security forces were trained to fight traditional wars not street fights. This caused the army insufficiency to eliminate any kind of threat. On the other hand, the opposition was not able to unify itself for the greater cause; ousting Assad. The opposition in Syria was deeply divided among democratic secular opposition and extremist jihadists. Indeed, the absence of major defectors from the Syrian army and the inability of the armed opposition to form a national unity that could gain public support, were the major factors contributing to the inability for the opposition to win (Hinnebush 2012).

On the other hand, the emergence of terrorist organizations in Syria such as ISIS and Al Nusra front, rendered the attempts of achieving a political settlement in Syria. Indeed, the Syrian people recognized the threats emerging from such organizations claiming Islamic caliphate in Syria. It was not only the Syrian people who recognized this threat; international actors did too. Even though Assad was seen as the worst case scenario, these terrorists would be even worse if they were to replace Assad. Soon enough, national unity among many Syrians proved to be resilient to any attempt of tearing Syria apart. This national unity, whether based on fear of the replacement or the deeply rooted Ba'ath ideology among Syrians, is what held some Syrian cities together till now (Heydemann 2013).

Consequently, due to the inability of neither the regime nor the opposition to end the conflict, external help was vital. The regime was supported by Russia, Iran and Hezbollah, while the opposition was mainly supported by Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Turkey and the United States. Each of these external state and non-state actors had specific interests in fighting on behalf of their clients. Undeniably, their intervention intensified and complicated the Syrian conflict.

3.3.1- Iran

The Iranian-Syrian relation is dated back to the Islamic revolution in Iran. Despite their ideological differences -Iran as an Islamic state and Syria as a secular state- , Syria and Iran had a common interest in countering Israeli power and furthering their anti-imperialist ideology. Furthermore, Syria was one of the major supporters of Hezbollah which was originally created and trained by Iran. The three of them -Iran, Syria and Hezbollah- created the axis of resistance, or as called by the Bush administration "the axis of evil". Syria was a geographical link that connected Iran to the Arab world and especially Lebanon. Indeed, maintaining Syria as an ally to Iran was a priority in the latter's geopolitical agenda (Erlich 2015). This relation between Syria and Iran was a direct threat to the western ambitions in the region especially after the invasion of Iraq. The western concerns were obvious in Jack Chirac's meeting with Rice on February 8, 2005 when he assessed that their priority was to prevent the establishment of the Shiite crescent in the region. He made it clear that if the Syrian regime was shaken as a cause of the Syrian forces withdrawal from Lebanon, a gap would emerge in the Shiite crescent and the regime would be replaced by a western-friendly leader whether Sunni or Christian (Kleib 2016). As a fact, these western concerns were not a cause that shook the Irani-Syrian relations. On the

contrary; the two states increased their level of coordination as an attempt to counter the U.S' interests in the region, represented by the security of Israel and their geostrategic gains.

When the conflict began in Syria, Iran was one of the major allies to Assad's regime. In fact, Iran declared that it supported Assad against the systematic destruction of the axis of resistance. Iran was not willing to compromise or lose its most important ally in the region (Erdbrink and Nordland 2012). From the international aspect, Iran's support for Assad was justified as their sacred duty for protecting the Shiite holy places in Syria and fighting radical Islamists that could pose a direct threat to Iran's own backyard (Erlich 2015). Indeed, Iran supported the Syrian regime with all means militarily and financially. It was declared that Iranian experts were sent to Syria to train the army and security forces. Iran was paying back the favor to Syria who supported Iran during its 8 years' war with Iraq and their cooperation in the axis of resistance (Kleib 2016). Iran recognized that it was targeted through Syria. As Robert Fisk revealed in his article, the war on Syria was based on lies. It was not a matter of protecting the Syrian people nor their hatred toward Assad; it was an attempt to crush Iran through its most important ally in the region, Syria (Fisk 2012).

To summarize, factors in the region enhanced the urge for Iran and Syria to preserve their shared critical and strategic interests in the region. These developments were illustrated by: The U.S - led invasion of Iraq followed by the Assassination of Hariri in Lebanon, the departure of the Syrian troops from Lebanon and the 2006 war against Israel. These factors contributed to the level of intervention exercised by Iran and Hezbollah in Syria. Direct military support was provided to the Syrian regime as well as financial and

economic support by Iran as a substitute for the U.S sanctions on Syria (Heydemann 2013). Indeed, Iran was not willing to lose its most important ally in the region especially after Iraq's tipping into the favor of Tehran. Although sectarianism was used by Iran to rally support for Assad, it is a superficial facade for what Iran's true intentions were; preserving its interests in the region as a realist balance of power.

3.3.2- Saudi Arabia

Tension between Syria and Saudi Arabia began after the 2006 war in Lebanon. Assad accused Saudi Arabia and other Gulf countries of being *"Ashbah al Rijal"* or half-men, as a result of Saudi Arabia holding Hezbollah accountable for the 2006 war and its position towards the kidnapping of the two Israeli soldiers. On the other hand, other factors contributed to the increased tension; Saudi's support of resolution 1559 and holding Syria accountable for the assassination of Rafik Al Hariri, Syria's facilitation for Saudi people to engage in the Iraq's war against the American occupation and Syria's support to Hezbollah and Iran (Varulkar 2007).

Since the beginning of the conflict in Syria, Saudi Arabia urged Assad to comply with the people's will. However, as soon as the conflict began to escalate, Saudi Arabia was among the first states to support the armed Sunni opposition. The hostile intentions of Saudi Arabia were obvious through its media channel -Al- Arabiya-. This channel hosted all kinds of opposition groups and focused only on one part of the story. Indeed, Al-Arabiya covered only a part of the story and sometimes exaggerated the violence practiced, stating baseless accusations. Being the owner of a channel such as Al-Arabiya gave Saudi Arabia the chance to alter public opinion through its channel that was commonly known in the

region. Media propaganda was among the main approaches of Saudi Arabia to weaken the Syrian regime.

The second approach used by Saudi Arabia was arming and supporting the armed Sunni opposition. Saudi Arabia's main support was presented to the national coalition, the free Syrian army and the moderate Salafists. In other words, Saudi Arabia supported the Sunni camp in Syria with the exception of Al Qaeda-affiliated groups and the Muslim Brotherhood (Berti and Paris 2014). When Saudi Arabia decided that the Free Syrian Army was not achieving its ends, it shifted its main support towards more Salafist groups. In fact, Saudi Arabia essentiality contributed to the emergence of the Islamic Front in 2013 but remained salient towards any group affiliated with Al-Qaeda and the Muslim Brotherhood. Indeed, divisions existed also in the Sunni Camp. The inability of Turkey, Qatar and Saudi Arabia to form a powerful Sunni axis in the region similar to its counter axis of resistance is due to the hostility between the Salafist ideology represented by Saudi Arabia and the Muslim Brotherhood represented by Turkey and Qatar. The moderate Islamic ideologies that were emerging in Egypt and Turkey were both considered as a direct threat to the Saudi monarchy. For Saudi Arabia it wasn't a matter of sectarianism; rather, it was its strategic interests achieved by sectarian means (Gause 2014).

On the other hand, the United States and Saudi Arabia sealed an arrangement for training and funding the rebels in Syria. While the CIA took the lead of training the rebels, Saudi Arabia supported the arrangement with funding and armaments. Jordan was the location for these trainings it must have gotten financial revenue from the deal. On the other hand, the mutual interests of Saudi Arabia and the United States are what had hold the US silent for the Saudis abuse of human rights (Mazzetti and Apuzzojan 2016) .

To summarize, Saudi Arabia's strategic interests in Syria were: 1- to counter the Shiite axis of resistance represented by Iran, Hezbollah and Syria, 2-to preserve its strategic interests as a dominant actor in the region after Assad's regime falls, 3- to maintain its special relations with the United States and preserve its own security against any external threat. 4-to secure Saudi Arabia's own back yard against the emerging threats in Syria, represented by ISIS that is seeking an extremist Islamic caliphate all over the world.

3.3.3- Qatar

Even though Qatar is a relatively small country with small population and no military power, it managed to have an effective role in the region. Qatar's wealth as well as its foreign policy choices as a mediator in the region were among the major factors contributing to Qatar's exceptionalism. Qatar was the mediator among many states during many occasions. On the other hand, Al-Jazeera media channel was a primary media tool used by Qatar to earn a credible regional audience and affect the public opinion. Al-Jazeera was the main diffuser of the Muslim Brotherhood ideology. Consequently, Qatar benefited from a special relation with the United States which created mutual strategic ties between the two states. Overall, Qatar's strategies varied between "balancing and band-wagoning, co-optation and accommodation" (Salloukh 2013).

Syria and Qatar experienced special and personal relations between Assad and Hamad. The two states strengthened their economic ties and signed multiple trade treaties. In contrast, these relations did not prevent Qatar from changing its pragmatic position as a balancer into a bandwagon for securing their interests in post Assad Syria. Qatar repeatedly through its media channel -Al-Jazeera-hosted Muslim Brotherhood figures as an attempt to alter the public opinion and as a support to the Brotherhood in Syria. On October 26,

2011 a meeting was held between the Arab delegation headed by Sheikh Hamad and Assad. It was clear that Hamad's priority was at least to include the Muslim Brotherhood in the regime or take every chance for overthrowing the regime. Just two weeks after the meeting was held, Hamad declared at the Arab league the suspension of the Syrian membership in the league and imposing sanctions on Syria (Kleib 2016).

Syria, on the other hand, recognized that Qatar had further interests in Syria other than claiming reforms from Assad. As the conflict proceeded regionally and internationally, Qatar started supporting the opposition, mainly the Muslim Brotherhood, logistically and militarily. A Special Forces unit was deployed at the Syrian Turkish borders and a joint operation room was established to train the groups and facilitate the weapons smuggling into Syria.

Overthrowing Assad became the first priority to Hamad. He considered the battle with Assad as his personal battle and that his failure in doing so would jeopardize his own position's security. Indeed, Hamad's concerns were true; when Hamad failed in achieving any effective attempt of throwing Assad, he abdicated and was replaced by his son Tamim (Kleib 2016).

To sum up, Qatar's foreign policy and strategies were built on the urge for survival of such a small state. Qatar's mediating role was perceived at the international aspect as a peace broker in a war prone region. On the other hand, Qatar's open channels and communications with various disputants was a strategy to downgrade its opponents in the region. Qatar's lack of military power caused the state to use its soft power as a guarantee of its regional and international role (Kamrava 2011).

Once the Arab spring emerged, Qatar played an essential role in regime changing in Egypt and Libya. As for Syria, Qatar changed its pragmatic position and heavily supported Islamic movement as a result of Qatar's anticipation of more geographical weight in post-Assad Syria. Qatar situated itself as the Muslim Brotherhood's center of attention and pursued influential strategies through its channel -Al Jazeera- and through its military and financial support for the combatants in Syria. Qatar's hopes seem to have gone with the wind as the Assad regime is still in power.

3.3.4- Turkey

Turkey, the bridge between the west and the east, played a major role in the region in the past ten years. Since 2002, after the development and justice party came to rule, Turkey observed a doctrine called "zero problems with neighbors" which had been effective until the past few years. On the other hand, Syria, which was part of the Ottoman Empire till the First World War and a neighbor border state with Turkey, experienced many variable relations with Turkey. Because of the Syrian support for the Kurdistan working party, the two countries almost engaged into war until Syria expelled the PKK leader Abdallah Ocalan. From the period between 2002 and 2011, Syria and Turkey had many diplomatic and economic relations as well as personal relations between the Turkish prime minister Rajab Tayb Erdogan and the Syrian president Bashar Al-Assad. Turkey's doctrine about "zero problems with neighbors" had worked so well until the uprising in the Arab countries began. (Larrabee 2007).

As tension began to spread in the region, Turkey could not stay neutral, especially regarding Syria. Turkey reaffirmed since the beginning of the so-called Arab spring in Syria, the need for the Syrian regime to comply with the will of people and apply reforms

and renovation. This strategy was emphasized in many visits by Turkish officials to Syria and phone calls from Erdogan to Assad. However, all of these demands by the Turkish government were never heard, leading Turkey to change its position towards Al-Assad and support the opposition. Nevertheless, this change in the Turkish foreign policy towards Syria led it to alter its core principle of zero problems with neighbors and give up Turkey's role as a mandate between the west and the east in the whole Middle East region (Mabley 2012).

There are many reasons that lies behind this transformation in Turkey's foreign policies towards Syria, such as Turkey's increased interests in the Middle East rather than the European Union, Erdogan and the AKP's role as an Islamic power trying to dominate the region and s enforce its power domestically and the myth of returning the glory to the Ottoman Empire (Bahman 2013) (Cornell 2012).

.   A the crisis in Syria began to evolve , Turkey considered the domestic issues of Syria as its main concern and cut off all its relations with Syria including diplomatic missions as well as trade. Turkey's role as a mediator failed; its involvement in the domestic issues in Syria and support to the opposition did nothing but intensify the crisis. On the other hand, Turkey frequently repeated the need for the international community and NATO to interfere in Syria, force a no-fly zone and give aids and arms to the militant opposition in Syria, consisting of the FSA -Free Syrian Army- and extremists such as al Nusra front and the Islamic state of Iraq and Syria. These requests led to deploy the patriot missile defense system all along the Turkish-Syrian borders under the NATO in January 2013. However, the international community failed to initiate any military act against Syria, leaving Turkey alone in the scene having some military interactions with Syria;

Turkish air forces shot down a Syrian air force jet and conducted many bombings around the borders between the Syrian army and the Turkish army. After all, the foreign policies that had shaped Turkey's position toward Syria before 2011 gave Turkey the legitimacy to interfere in Syrian domestic issues and the region as a whole, as Erdogan said in his victory of the elections speech in 2011:"friendly and brotherly nations from Baghdad, Damascus, Beirut, Amman, Cairo, Sarajevo, Baku, and Nicosia, The Middle East, the Caucasus, and the Balkans have won as much as Turkey,". This statement by Erdogan shows Turkish intentions to be the major regional power that could influence and interfere in other countries (Pope 2013) (Kleib 2016)

Throughout the years before the revolution in Syria, there was no evidence of differentiation or a religious-biased relationship between Erdogan who is a Sunni Muslim, considered from the Muslim brotherhood and Bashar Al-Assad who is an Alawite Muslim. However, after the crisis began, it was alleged that Erdogan's foreign policies towards Syria and other countries with uprisings were based on religious considerations. In Egypt for example, Erdogan supported the former president Morsi who is from the Muslim brotherhood. He also considered the coups that took place illegal and asked the international community to act against Morsi's departure.

Regarding Syria, Erdogan made it very clear that he supports the Sunni camp in Syria and has been accused of supporting the militias that are Islamist extremists. This foreign policy pursued by Erdogan indicated Turkey's intentions towards helping and encouraging the Muslim brotherhood to control the region. Furthermore, if Bashar Al-Assad was to fail, the Muslim brotherhood, which would take over the regime, could be an added value to Erdogan's regime in Turkey. Erdogan's position will not only be enforced

in other countries; his power will also be imposed domestically inside Turkey. This nested game he is applying where he is trying to empower the Muslim brother hood in the whole region as well as trying to enforce his power domestically, Erdogan is trying to balance between the domestic and international issues while emphasizing on the importance of the Muslim brotherhood.

Many scholars predicted that arming and opening borders to jihadists and extremists will have a reverse effect on Erdogan. First, these extremists might come back to Turkey and create greater instability. Second, Turkish citizens will be aware that Erdogan's intervention in other countries' domestic issues is unacceptable. Turkey, in accordance with mainly Qatar and Saudi Arabia, had a common agenda for supporting the spread of political Islam in the region. However, what seems to be happening right now is that all the agendas related to the domination of political Islam in the region have failed in many countries such as Tunisia, Egypt and also Syria. The coherence of the regime in Syria, the brutal actions by the extremists and the lack of social acceptance to the political and militant Islam were the main reasons for the failure of these agendas. Even western countries such as the United States of America and other European countries that were supporters to the uprisings in Syria are now reconsidering the support they are giving to the opposition because the spread and empowerment of these militant groups can be a threat to international security as a whole

Turkey was allegedly using its soft power in order to oblige the Syrian regime to stop the bloodshed and violence against civilians. However, the level of involvement of Turkey did not stop at the point of soft power; even though Turkey did not conduct a military intervention inside Syrian territories, its involvement in supporting opposition

militant groups is now known to a wide degree. In fact, Turkey had the intentions to militarily intervene in Syria when there was a leak of a conference between Davutoglo and the head of intelligence of Turkey, discussing a way they could find a motive to initiate a military act. The leaks were about Turkey's intentions to send few men to Syria to launch missiles against Turkish territories allowing the Turkish government to assume this act was executed by the Syrian government and giving it the right to reply and intervene military in Syria, in order to secure its own territory. No Turkish official claimed the falsity of these leaks; they only emphasized the need to find out who leaked the conference.

Turkey believe that it has it's the right to initiate a war with Syria and try to take down the regime and help the opposition, to get to the rule when the conquests are done. Many consequences might have been yielded if this act was committed by Turkey. Firstly, it is not only Syria and Turkey that are involved in the scene; there is a whole axis between Russia, Iran, Syria and Hezbollah on one side and, Turkey, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and its western allies on the other. Moreover, the West, including USA and Europe, seems reluctant about any military action against Syria which could lead to a world war 3. Also, Qatar seems to be not as active as it used to be before. Furthermore, , Turkey might need to consider Russia in any further step regarding Syria; Turkey's dependency for energy is mainly on Russia and Iran ,both strong allies to Al-Assad regime. Therefore, any military act against Syrian sovereignty will have a harmful impact on Turkish foreign policies with Russia and Iran (Falk 2012) (Kleib 2016) (Erlich 2015)(Pope, Pax Ottomana? The Mixed Success of Turkey's New Foreign Policy 2010)

Apparently, Turkey chose the Muslim Brotherhood over its most important ally in the region, Syria. Syria, which was a bridge to Turkey's geopolitical interests in the region,

now became its worst enemies. What used to be called the doctrine of zero problems with neighbors is now becoming zero neighbors without problems. Whether it is Turkey's aspirations to become a hegemonic power in the region as the leader of moderate Islamic ideology or strengthen and ensure its geopolitical interests in the region, neither of these two strategies seem to be feasible.

3.3.5- Russia

Russia and Syria have been allies for a long time. Since the Soviet Union, Syria and the USSR established a special relationship as a result of their counter-American/Israeli ideology in the region. Indeed, the two states shared a sense of common ideology between the Syrian secular Ba'athists and the Marxist Leninist ideology of the Soviet Union. Since then, Syria and USSR -now Russia- signed military pacts concerning weaponries trade and establishing a Russian military base in Tartous (Erlich 2015).

Consequently, since then the two states have had a sustained systematic relationship as an attempt to preserve their mutual interests in the region. Due to the collapse of the USSR and the emergence of a unipolar world, Russia's geopolitical interests were shifted towards the Middle East. Russia's aim was to preserve its economic interests regarding the gas and oil pipelines through the Middle East, as a result of Russia's weakened position in Eastern Europe.

Accordingly, the relationship between Assad and Putin was enhanced. Once the Syrian conflict emerged, Russia systematically supported Assad diplomatically and militarily. Both Russia and china vetoed a UN resolution holding Assad's regime accountable for the atrocities committed in Syria. Russia also sent weaponries and military

experts to Syria to help the regime. Russia intervened militarily in Syria by airstrikes, upon the Syrian government's request for help against rebels and jihadist groups. Medvedev declared that these airstrikes were protecting Russia from terrorists threats (Kleib 2016).

Indeed, there are several factors justifying the Russian intervention in the Syrian conflict. First of all, Russia had a consistent fear from political Islam and jihadists. Estimates revealed that by 2050 Islam will be the major religion in the Russian Federation (Kleib 2016). The rise of such extremist and Islamist groups in Syria would pose a direct threat to Russia's own back yard. Such a rise would inspire similar groups in Russia to rebel. Indeed, since the estimates were revealed, extreme Muslim communities began to spread, expanding and triggering religious conflict in Russia. On the other hand, reports revealed that the vast majority of jihadists in Syria are from Chechnya. Thus, Putin's aim was to eliminate these jihadists in Syria before they had the chance to come back to North Caucasus and provoke the situation there (Hill 2016).

Second, Putin's priority was for Russia to become a major power again. Indeed, Russian strategies in the Middle East and especially in Syria, emphasize Putin's will to counter the west and reduce the American-western efforts to oust Assad. Apparently, a new American-Russian cold war is revisited in Syria. By all means, Putin had proportionally won in Syria. The Russian airstrikes caused dramatic shifts towards the Syrian regime's favor and Assad seems to be more resilient than before (Aleksashenko 2016).

The third factor is preserving the Russian strategic interests in the region. Through time, oil and gas pipelines were major contributors to the Russian-American cold war. Since the relations with Eastern Europe deteriorated, Russia's replacement for ensuring its

economic agenda, was the Middle East. All regional and international powers involved in the Syrian conflict recognize Syria's strategic location regarding the pipelines connecting the Middle East with Europe. Consequently, the new findings of a genuine amount of gas that Syria lies on was a major factor contributing to the regional and international conflict. While the United States along with Qatar and other regional players sought to control the Syrian gas and its strategic path, Russia, on the other hand, was not willing to compromise its most important ally and its geostrategic interests in the region for the sake of the West (Kleib 2016).

To summarize, Russia's intervention in Syria is a multilayered strategy containing several aspects. Russia claims that its intervention in Syria is a holy war to protect the Christian Orthodox in Syria and the region. On the other hand, Russia is trying to eliminate any threat emerging from political Islam through Syria to protect its own homeland against any insurgencies. Furthermore, Russia's aim of reemerging as a major power is a strategy pursued in Syria by countering the Western influence in the region. At last, Russia's geostrategic interests are being pursued and preserved through keeping Assad in power.

3.3.6- United States

Inconsistency is the best word to explain the Syrian-American relations. Throughout time, the two states worked together to achieve their mutual interests and at many times they were enemies, but never allies. The United States never understood how a small state in the Arab region was brave enough to position itself as the defender of Arab nationalism and anti-imperialist influence with such limited resources. Indeed, Hafez Al-Assad through his personality, cleverness and diplomacy, managed to turn Syria into a powerful and leading state in the region. The realist Assad recognized the importance of

balanced powers in the Middle East to maintain the status quo and limit the Israeli influence in the region. Indeed, Hafez Al Assad's first priority was to contain the Israeli hopes of expansion. Consequently, Assad's strategies were illustrated by securing his internal front through creating a major external threat represented by the United States and Israel. Even though the United States was the enemy, Hafez Al Assad always made sure to keep a space for dialogue, not eternal boycott. As Henry Kissinger described Hafez Al Assad, "his level of cleverness was abnormal, his patriotic feeling was never questioned." (Seale 2015).

After the inauguration of Bashar Al-Assad, the United States' ambitions were downsized to this young modernized president who was expected to change Syria's position and ideology. However, young Assad seemed to have inherited his father's stubbornness. Through panels of negotiation between the United States and Syria, the latter seemed unwilling to compromise any of Syria's' ideologies or strategies that were once pursued.

The United States' strategies and priorities were never changed regarding Syria, even after the conflict began. The United States supported any action that would eventually lead to overthrow Assad; destroying Syria had many benefits regarding the U.S regional strategic interests. First of all, destroying Syria will secure the Israeli interests and stability in the region. Second, the United States' priority was to counter the Iranian influence in the region and the elimination of the axis of resistance. Third of all, countering the Russian influence internationally and regionally was among the first priorities regarding the Syrian conflict. At last, the United States sought to secure its economic and geostrategic interests in the region through destroying Syria. (Erlich 2015)

As the conflict in Syria emerged, the United States supported the armed rebels and especially, the Free Syrian Army and moderate Islamic rebels. The United States even threatened to strike Syria if Assad crossed the "red line". The tension between the two states was unprecedented. An arrangement was sealed based on destroying the Syrian chemical weapons. This arrangement demonstrated the American willingness to compromise its red line in order to secure its interests (Erlich 2015).

Divide and conquer was the main strategy pursued by the United States. Due to the inability to intervene in Syria militarily, it was the optimal chance to destroy Syria from the inside and take advantage of the Syrian regime's mistakes while intensifying the sectarian and regional conflict (Kleib 2016).

Many reports and leaked classified documents were illustrating how the United States was planning to destroy Syria, leading all the way to Iran. Robert Fisk emphasized how the Syrian war was based on lies and hypocrisy manifested by all powers involved in the conflict. "The big truth" that Fisk's refers to is that the Syrian conflict and its escalation and importance to regional and international powers is a way to counter and destroy Iran and eliminate its nuclear threat. As Fisk demonstrates, it was never a matter of human rights nor the love for the Syrian people, it was all about Iran. (Fisk 2012)

As said before, inconsistency is what shapes the U.S strategies towards Syria, even after the conflict. In fact, the United States wanted nothing more than the overthrowing of Bashar Al-Assad, as long as he is not to be replaced by extremist groups such as ISIS. The United States would like nothing more than reducing the Iranian influence in the region, but at the same time, it's not willing to compromise the regional leadership to radical

Islamists especially in Iraq and Syria. It is better according to the United States to deal with the devil they already know rather than a new one. After the U.S failed till now to oust Assad, new priorities had to be drawn. To sum up, the United States is driven by its regional interests, seeking every strategy as an attempt to secure its regional interests. These interests are driven by: the security of Israel, countering the Iranian influence, countering the Russian influence and securing its economic and strategic interests in the region represented by its regional allies (Gause 2014).

3.3.7- The Geopolitics of the Middle East

The geopolitical analysis is a fundamental factor regarding the Syrian conflict. Syria is a multi-ethnic community that had lived in harmony for decades. Sectarian divisions never seemed to be a problem triggering a civil war in Syria. Indeed, the secular Ba'ath ideology had managed to create a sense of national identity that supersedes any other sectarian/tribal identity. Nationalism was the most prominent factor shaping the Syrian identity (Sadowski 2002).

Consequently, the U.S- led invasion of Iraq was a major factor contributing to the regional conflict in the Middle East. After the Iraqi government collapsed, a conflict rose between Saudi Arabia and Iran as an attempt to control Iraq. A realistic balance of power game was exercised by the two key players in this conflict. The conflict itself illustrated the importance of the geostrategic position of Iraq and the added value for any state who controls it. Iran viewed Iraq as a geostrategic linkage connecting Iran to the Arab world, while Saudi Arabia sought to contain Iraq as an attempt to reverse the Iranian influence in the region. Indeed, a geopolitical conflict was instigated where sectarianism was a tool to

achieve the two states objectives in Iraq. Both of these states had used sectarianism in order to rally allies as an attempt to counter each other (Salloukh 2013).

Regarding Syria, it was the regional geopolitical contest manifested by sectarian means, along with the regime brutality and the increased reliance on the Alawite sect to crush the opposition that transformed the Syrian claims for democracy and reforms into a bloody civil war. Indeed, the weakness of the Syrian state and the domestic insurgencies had drawn in regional and international powers as an attempt to increase their interests as a classic power of balance game. Sectarian identities were not created by the regional conflict; they were a tool to achieve their objectives. The brutal acts and violence committed by the regime forced the majority Sunni groups to seek sectarian affiliates to rally support and oust the Alawite minority rule. Saudi Arabia and Iran had the perfect chance to assert their projection of objectives through Syria. The conflict in Syria was an opportunity to Saudi Arabia to counter the Iranian influence in the region especially after Iran's containment of Iraq (Gause 2014)

Saudi Arabia used the conflict in Syria to ensure its geopolitical calculations in the region. Controlling post-Assad Sunni dominated Syria represented a reasonable compensation to Saudi Arabia for its failure in Iraq (Salloukh 2013). While Saudi Arabia's main support goes to Islamic rebels in Syria, Iran's support for the regime intensified the conflict even more. Sectarianism oversimplifies the conflict in Syria; it is rather a geopolitical conflict between Saudi Arabia and Iran drawn by sectarian elements (Berti and Paris 2014).

With the inability of both the regime and the opposition to win the conflict, regional support was an essential instrument to shore up military and financial aids. This regional support was illustrated and conducted on sectarian basis. Along with the regional conflict, the United States had been supporting the Saudi efforts to overthrow the regime in Syria, as an attempt to counter the Iranian influence and eliminate the threat emerging from the axis of resistance represented by Iran, Syria and Hezbollah (Heydemann 2013).

Therefore, the complexity of the Syrian conflict cannot be merely referred to as a sectarian civil war nor can the regional and international intervention be referred to as an attempt to protect human rights and ensure democracy. If sectarian divisions were the driving element for the emergence of the conflict, then why did it not happen any sooner? On the other hand, if the involvement of regional and international powers was justified by the need to protect human rights and the urge to spread democracy, then why did these powers not intervene in a less democratic states than Syria?

The Syrian geostrategic position gave each player involved in the region a reason to view the Syrian conflict as their own interests. Syria is considered as the key that opens the opportunities to the rich infrastructure of the region. It provides the access to both Iraq and Iran and shares a cut along with Lebanon, Palestine and Israel of a significant amount of gas. Thus, controlling Syria was the key to control such valuable resources. According to the United States and its Western allies, dividing and destroying Syria was the optimal solution as an attempt to control it. After the fall of Iraq, Syria was the main Arab state threatening Israel's security and the Western ambitions in the region. Thus, destroying Syria was essential regarding securing regional and international powers' interests.

3.4-Conclusion

Unfortunately, Syrian blood was shed due to a conflict they had never seen coming. Syria found itself in the middle of an international and regional war that tore Syria apart. Indeed, no one had predicted that the Syrian state could survive such enormous pressure, but indeed till now, it has survived.

The blood scene became regular regarding Syria. Every day, atrocities are committed against the Syrian people. Syria that once used to be among the most secure countries in the world, now became the most dangerous one. Indeed, Syrian people have paid the price for the interests of international and regional powers. A civil war, regional geostrategic interests and proxy war are what draw the solid lines representing the Syrian conflict. After all, Syria's future is no longer in the hands of Syrians only.

CHAPTER FOUR

Political Settlements and Consociational

Democracy as Syria's Exit Strategy

This chapter explores the effect of declining nationalism ideology in Syria and the rise of communitarian ideologies instead. This rise of sectarianism –which is a part of communitarianism - in Syria and the region as a whole, could be attributed to the decline of national identity and the state-centric control of the country. In fact, sectarianism is a prominent factor shaping the Syrian conflict and the consequences affecting the whole region. This trend could be attributed to globalization's double movement theory.

Indeed, increased interconnectedness and the global movement for economic and political liberalization rendered the state-centric control and caused the emergence of counter-movements based on communitarian protectionism (Salamey 2016).

Furthermore, this chapter discusses the effectiveness of applying a power sharing formula as a solution to the Syrian conflict. A comparative case study is used between Lebanon and Syria to assess the effectiveness of a consociational democracy model regarding Syria. Consequently, it manifests the political settlements provided regarding the Syrian conflict and what has been done regarding the conflict resolution.

4.1- Rise of Communitarian Politics

Since the beginning of the Arab Spring, Arab nationalism was not a major contributor to the emergence and escalation of this wave. On the contrary, Arab nationalism was countered by Islamic movements represented by the Muslim Brotherhood and Salafists. Indeed, these movements assumed power in many Arab states such as Egypt and Tunisia. Sectarianism on the other hand, was shaping the ongoing conflicts in the region especially in Yemen and Syria.

This shift in the Arab region can be best explained by globalization's double movement theory. The theory discusses the correlation between the development of the global market and the rising opposing "local protectionism". Indeed, the globalization movement represented by economic liberalization and increased interconnectedness among states, decreased the role of the nation state and the state's control over the vital economical organs. This decrease in the state's control over its vital organs increased the exposure of the nation's local economic and political arena and decreased the state's protectionism. Consequently, due to the state's lack of protectionism, sectarianism was the best substitute. Undeniably, sectarianism was a tool to achieve common economic and political preservation once the state failed to do so. Regarding Syria, Islamic movements and Salafist were major players rallying support based on sectarian identities. On the other hand, regional and international players were involved in the Syrian conflict also based on sectarian identities escalating the regional sectarianism to an unprecedented level (Salamey 2016).

Huntington's clash of civilization is being revisited in the region and especially in Syria and Iraq. The emergence of extremist groups such as Al-Nussra Front and ISIS could

be attributed to these movements' rejection of modernization and global integration. These movements seek an Islamic caliphate countering the western ideology. As Huntington explains, these civilizational differences will eventually clash. Indeed, globalization and the clash of civilization best explain the emergence of extremist groups in the region (Brooks 2011). As long as communitarianism and sectarianism keep defining the regional conflict, fragmentation and polarization are the major elements drawing the future of the region.

In light of the increased communitarianism in the region and the sectarian drives that are shaping the Syrian conflict, would it be effective to formulate a new governing formula similar to Lebanon's consociational democracy? According to Lijphat, consociational democracy is a very useful technique and political model for deeply divided societies. Consociational democracy is a political formula where all subcultures are represented and governed by an elite cartel. Consociational democracy's purpose is to turn a fragmented society into a stable democracy. Lijphart defines four characteristics in which consociational democracy could be implemented. The first one is the establishment or existence of a grand coalition where all parties are represented. Second, the veto power that can be used by one segment in order to topple any decision that could harm its interests. The third one is proportionality which means each segment is to be represented in the coalition in accordance with its proportion of the society. The fourth one is segmental autonomy which emphasizes on the importance for each segment to have a certain amount of autonomy in its jurisdiction. In accordance with those four characteristics, certain aspects are also preferred to exist in a society such as the existence of an elite cartel that

rules the subcultures and a relatively small size country in which each segment is relatively located in one geographical area (Lijphart 1969).

4.2- Syria and Lebanon

A "Syrian Taif" was first proposed by Walid Junblat as the solution for the Syrian conflict. Even though, Lebanon and Syria have a lot in common, differences do exist. Taking into consideration the similarities, Lebanon and Syria both have similar historical backgrounds of "ethnic composition, socio-cultural behavior, economic and demographic developments, the periphery-center dichotomy, and the politicization of sectarianism and the interference of outside actors."(Rosiny 2013). While on the other hand, Syria and Lebanon differ first in their political and economic systems. While Syria has been ruled by an authoritarian regime under Al-Baath Party, the Lebanese system since independence has been characterized by a power sharing formula with a free market economy. Second, whereas Lebanon's sectarianism has its deep roots in Lebanon, Syria was alleged to be a multi-ethnic society and a secular state. Third, Sunnis in Syria constitute the majority of the population whereas in Lebanon there is no one individual majority in the population (Rosiny 2013). These differences makes a Syrian Taif exactly like the Lebanese one unfeasible.

The political formula in Lebanon has not proven to be sufficient to prevent the civil war or to eliminate the instability in Lebanon. On the contrary, Lebanon has been locked in sectarian sentiment enforced by the consociational system which made the state more vulnerable to any outside interference and internal instability. The sectarian driven policies in Lebanon resulted in the absence of any hegemonic control over the society by any institution or ideology which caused the disfunctioning of the state's administrative and

political institutions. Consociationalism in Lebanon preserved the social inequality if not increased it by the growing reliance on clientelism (Makdisi and Marktanner, Trapped By Consociationalism: The Case of Lebanon n.d.).

On the other hand, consociational democracy in Lebanon had an efficient aspect including freedom of expression, plural political formula and a non-autocratic regime, unlike the states surrounding Lebanon. But then again, it also led to weak political institutions and a weak central authority which aided in increasing the political instability and poor homogenous organs. The increased corruption and clientelism in Lebanon resulted in lack of concern regarding the public interest when compared to private interests. Consequently, deepened sectarian divisions in Lebanon smoothed the progress of the interference of external factors which intensified the instability (Makdisi and El-Khalil, Lebanon: the Legacy of Sectarian Consociationalism and the Transition to a Fully-fledged Democracy 2013).

Therefore, after examining the failure of consociational democracy in Lebanon and probing the causes of the Syrian conflict, consociational democracy could not be the optimal solution for the Syrian conflict for many reasons. First of all, the presence of a majority of Sunnis in Syria would have negative impact on the efficiency of equal representation. Second, the Sunnis in Syria do not have a common ideology that the 75% of the population would agree on and act as a homogenous group. The Sunni community in Syria is divided among Sunnis who support the regime, moderate secular opposition and extremely religious groups. It seems unlikely for these groups consisting the Sunnis in Syria to have a common purpose or claims (Rosiny 2013). Second, consociational democracy in Lebanon, as, did not prevent the emergence of the civil war. On the contrary,

it had deepened sectarian divisions that already existed. On the other hand, the fluidity of Trans-regional ideologies and sectarian sentiment as well as the interference of regional actors hinder the possibility of establishing a plural society. Corporate power rearrangements had been shaped by the "regional balance of power" instead of domestic groups interests (Salamey, Failing Consociationalism in Lebanon and Integrative options 2009).

Third, the uprisings in Syria had been shaped at the beginning by an ideological and political frame rather than sectarian affiliations. Later on, due to the sectarian regionalization and the role of external actors, sectarianism played a major role in shaping the conflict. Most Syrians through time reasserted on the principle of national unity and identity. Syrians put forward their national interest as Syrians regardless of their sectarian affiliations. (Deeb, Crisis in Syria 2013). Fourth, when referring to Lijphart, certain requirements are recommended to be present in a state in order to establish a successful model. These requirements include the presence of an elite cartel capable of accommodating the subcultures in a society. These elites must have the ability to persuade and control subcultures and ensure the need for a balanced integration among them (Lijphart 1969). In Syria, such elites do not exist. There is no elite cartel that controls subcultures and has the ability to accommodate them. Political leaders based on sectarian affiliations are not present in Syria. There is no one single leader who controls neither the Sunni majority nor the minorities in Syria.

In a survey conducted by Dr. Deeb, he investigated the proportions regarding the Syrian conflict causes. The survey showed that the Syrian crisis is not totally an outside intervention nor is it a purely internal conflict. In fact, 60% of respondents believed that

the crisis is manipulated by external factors while 40% believed that it is internally originated. Below is a table showing the percentages of the Syrian conflict causes.

Table 1. Syrian Crisis Factors.

How do you describe the Syrian crisis? And how do you rank the factors?	Yes	No	Rank	Weight of rank
As "Arab Spring"	20	80	5	5%
As "Damascus Spring"	30	70	4	10%
As a media and diplomatic war	60	40	3	15%
As continuation of the Syrian- Israeli confrontation	75	25	2	20%
As continuation of the Baath vs. Muslim Brothers struggle	80	20	1	25%
As an internal social and economic explosion	30	70	4	10%
As destruction of Syrian society and state	60	40	3	15%
				100%

Source: (Deeb, Crisis in Syria 2013)

Based on the table above and the causes represented in previous chapters, the conflict in Syria is divided into multi-layers that did not only emerge as an internal

revolution based on sectarian cleavages. Rather, the Syrian conflict is a complex conflict in which a changed political rearrangement such as consociationalism might not be sufficient to end the war. When comparing Syria to Lebanon, a consociationalism that failed in Lebanon which has the primary prerequisites for a successful model of consociational democracy would also fail in Syria that apparently does not have the fundamental requirements of successful consociationalism based on the reasons listed above.

Consequently, as the regional and international actors intervene in the Syrian conflict, consociational democracy might not be an "off the table solution". Rather, these powers might decide that the best exit strategy of the Syrian conflict might be consociational democracy regardless of what might be the consequences of such arrangement. Indeed, once the Syrian institutions begin the process of sectarianizing these institutions, sectarianism would be a permanent feature drawing the solid lines of the Syrian state.

4.3- Political Settlements Provided Regarding the Syrian Conflict

Regarding the possible solutions for the Syrian conflict, it is obvious from the escalation of the Syrian conflict that the United Nations Security Council has failed to implement one of its basic duties of maintaining international peace and security. Many resolutions have failed to be adopted due to the mutual veto of both Russia and china. The UNSC was unable to hold the Syrian regime responsible for the atrocities committed in Syria. Facilitative mediation has also failed regarding effective negotiations to end the war in Syria. Kofi Annan ,who was assigned as a joint UN-Arab League special envoy to Syria, proposed a six point plan which included " the implementation of a ceasefire, release of

political detainees, freedom of movement for journalists, freedom of association and the right to demonstrate, provision of humanitarian assistance to besieged civilians and initiation of political negotiation process led by Syrians.". However, after President Assad agreed on Annan's plan, the ceasefire was broken by both sides; the regime armed forces and the rebels. In June 2012, the Action Group on Syria issued the Geneva Communiqué which elaborated the need for ending the war and establishing a transitional government. Consequently, in August 2012, Annan resigned as an expression of his frustration regarding the peace talks and Lakhdar Brahimi was assigned as the special envoy to Syria.

Another round of negotiations was held in Switzerland in January, 2014. The aim of the second Geneva conference on Syria' was to end the war in by bringing the conflicting parties to discuss the establishment of a transitional government and start the process for a new Syrian republic. The negotiations failed, according to Brahimi, due to the inability and unwillingness of all conflicting parties to agree on the principle of political solution in Syria. By mid-2014, Brahimi resigned. Staffan De Mistura proceeding Brahimi as the special envoy offered a proposal of "Four Committees Initiative" as an intent to start the peace process. The "Four Committees initiative" includes representatives from the government and the opposition to observe the ceasefire, reconstruction, a free and fair political election process and the observation of military and security acts. Even though the government agreed to the proposal, it has not made any binding promises or reforms, while the opposition was totally ruled out of the initiative.

Despite the various attempts of the UNSC to conduct a feasible resolution regarding Syria, the division among UNSC permanent members seems vital. It is clear that all the attempts to end the Syrian conflict including negotiations, mediations and third party roles

have failed. (Erlich, Inside Syria : The Backstory of Their Civil War and What The World

Can Expect, 2014)(Deeb, Crisis in Syria, 2013)(Adams, 2015)(Four Committees Initiative,

2015).

Table 2. List of UNSC Resolutions Regarding the Syrian Conflict.

14 April 2012 RES.2042	**The authorization of the deployment of 30 military observers to Syria**
21 April 2012 RES.2043	The establishment of UNSMIS
20 July 2012 RES.2059	The extension of UNSMIS for a final period of 30 days
27 September 2013 RES.2118	Resolution adopted unanimously by the Council and required the verification and destruction of Syria's chemical weapons stockpiles, calling for the convening of the Geneva second peace talks and endorsed the establishment of a transitional governing body in Syria with full executive powers
22 February 2014 RES.2139	Demanding all parties in particular the Syrian authorities to allow humanitarian access in

	Syria across conflict lines and in besieged areas and across borders and expressed the intent to take further steps in the case of non-compliance
14 July 2014 **RES.2156**	The authorization of a cross-border and cross-line access for the UN and its partners to deliver humanitarian aid in Syria without state consent and established a monitoring mechanism for 180 days
15 August 2014 **RES.2170**	Condemned the recruitment by ISIS and al-Nusra of foreign fighters and listed six individuals affiliated with those groups under the 1267/1989 Al-Qaida sanctions regime
24 September 2014 **RES.2178**	The expansion of the counter-terrorism framework by imposing obligations on member states to respond to the threat of foreign terrorist fighters
17 December 2014 **RES.2191**	Renewed authorization for cross-border humanitarian access until 10 January 2016

12 February 2015 **RES.2199**	ISIS and Al-Nusra's illicit funding via oil exports, traffic of cultural heritage, ransom payments and external donations
6 March 2015 **RES.2209**	Condemned the use of toxic chemicals without attributing blame; stressed that those responsible should be held accountable
7 August 2015 **RES. 2235**	Requesting the UN Secretary-General and OPCW Director-General to recommend the establishment and operation of a UN-OPCW joint investigative mechanism to determine responsibility for the use of chemical weapons in Syria
20 November 2015 **RES.2249**	Called for member states to take all necessary measures on the territory under the control of ISIS to prevent terrorist acts committed by ISIS and other Al-Qaida affiliates
18 December 2015 **RES.2254**	the first resolution focused exclusively on a political solution to the Syrian crisis. It was adopted unanimously.

| 26 February 2016 | The cessation of hostilities and called for the resumption of political talks. |
| RES.2268 | |

Source: UN Documents for Syria, Security Council Resolutions

4.4- Conclusion

The complexity of the Syrian conflict increased the tendency for regional and international powers to be involved in any upcoming political settlements. Indeed, a political settlement in Syria cannot be implemented nor sufficient without the acceptance of the armed parties. This acceptance is linked and correlated with the regional and international powers' intentions to end the conflict. Each one of these powers should impose obligations to their proxy affiliates on the ground to start the negotiation process. Consequently, one primary concern is likely to occur in any round of negotiations which is the Assad's removal from power. Neither one of the two conflicting parties -the regime and the opposition- would accept such outcome. Assad and his affiliates would not surrender and give up the presidency while the opposition would not accept any transitional government including Assad (Cafarella 2015).

On the other hand, the rise of extremists in Syria poses a direct concern to all regional and international players involved in the conflict. Although some of these groups were listed on the terrorist groups list, their advancement in Syria and Iraq poses a direct question on whether Assad's removal would be sufficient to end the war or if it would only

increase the fragmentation and the acts of terror conducted in Syrian territories (Cafarella 2015).

Consequently, the failure of many negotiations regarding the Syrian conflict such as the Geneva conventions and the Vienna Frame work, is due to the inability to decide what parties should be included in these negotiations. The fragmentation of the opposition and the stubbornness of the regime and its allies decrease the tendency of accepting and mitigating any political settlement in Syria. On the other hand, the unwillingness of regional and internal players to achieve a common objective in Syria only intensified the regional and international conflict. Not a single player -whether supporting Assad or the opposition- is willing to compromise its interests in order to end the conflict.

Without a doubt, the Syrian conflict consists of many aspects that shaped its trajectory. First of all, it was the uprisings of the youth and rural suburbs rejecting the crony capitalism of the regime. Second of all, it was the ancient enmity between the Ba'ath ruling party and the Muslim Brotherhood in Syria. Third, it is the geopolitics of the region and the realist balance of power game pursued by sectarian means to achieve different interests. Finally, it is the international powers' interests projected in the region through the Syrian conflict (Salloukh 2013).

In conclusion, without sincere commitments from regional and international players to end the conflict, fragmentation will be the main trajectory drawing the upcoming years in Syria. Without the dedication of all conflicting parties to stop the war, atrocities will continue. Sectarian polarization and fragmentation will increase the Syrian conflict

spillover through the region. Without the limitation of all causes listed above, any political

settlement seems unfeasible.

CHAPTER FIVE

Conclusion and Recommendations

5.1-Conclusion

The main aim of this thesis was to explore and identify the possible causes of the Syrian conflict. The Syrian conflict metamorphosed from peaceful protests claiming freedom and democracy, into a civil war that tore the country apart. The level of regional and international intervention in Syria was unprecedented. Moreover, the conflict caused massive damage to Syria's infrastructure where whole cities were destroyed and atrocities were committed. The level of violence kept escalating until Syria was classified as the world's largest humanitarian crisis since World War 2.

Many reasons caused the emergence and the complexity of the Syrian conflict. In other words, the Syrian conflict is a multi-layered conflict where both domestic and regional triggers intensified the situation. First of all, the economic strategies pursued by Bashar Al-Assad neglected the middle and the poor proportion of the population. These reforms created the emergence of crony capitalism in Syria which affected a major proportion of the population. People suffered from unfair equality and distribution. On the other hand. Proper economic liberalization could not be achieved without proper and adequate infrastructure to accommodate such a transformation. In other words, corruption and clientelism were deeply rooted in the Syrian regime Therefore, at the most basic level

of the conflict, it was the uprising of the youth and neglected people against the crony capitalist system of Assad and his patronage system.

Second of all, although Syria is a multi-ethnic homogenous society, sectarianism was a prominent feature causing the escalation of the events in Syria. At the beginning, people did not revolt on the basis of sectarian grievances but due to the increased regime brutality and the malfunctioning of the Syrian state to accommodate and provide the most basic people's needs; people resorted to their sectarian/tribal affiliation to fill this gap. On the other hand, sectarianism was fueled in Syria by regional players as an instrument to achieve their means and rally support around them. Thus, sectarianism was not a mean rather it was a tool to achieve domestic and regional means.

Third of all, the lack of proper institutional infrastructure affordable to the middle and lower classes in Syria as well as the higher rates of unemployment, intensified people's grievances against the regime. As a result, corruption emerged as a substitute to the government's inability to provide the basic needs of the people. On the other hand, the increased role of religion in Syria was the substitute to the government's insufficiency. To sum up, these domestic factors were the most basic triggers that ignited the conflict in Syria.
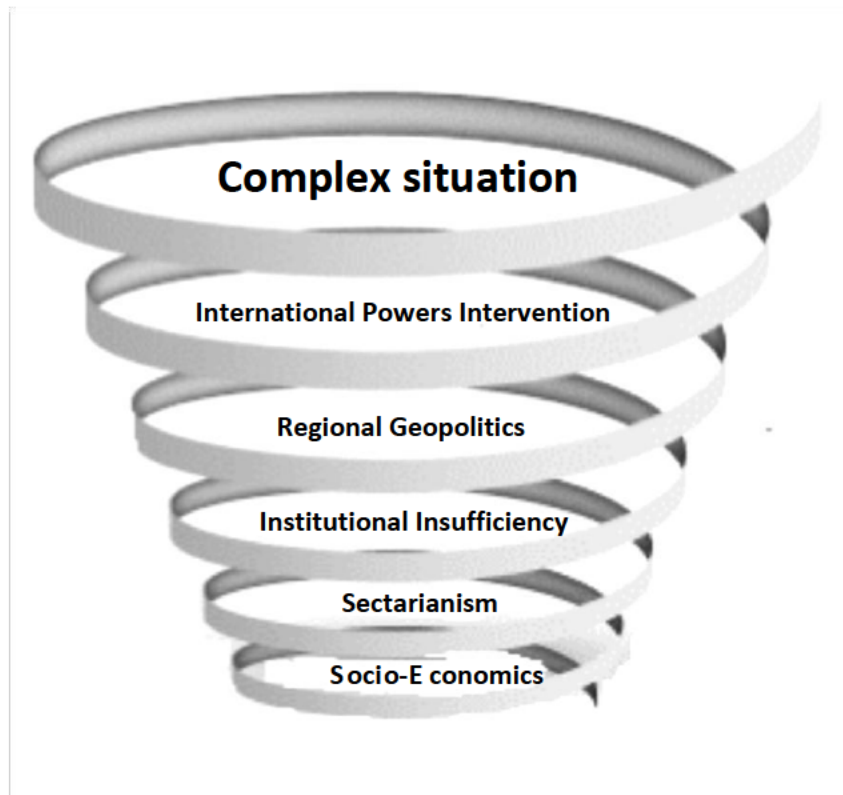
Although domestic factors were essential to the emergence of the conflict in Syria, they are not sufficient to explain the escalation and complexity of the Syrian conflict. Due to the inability of neither the regime nor the opposition to flip the situation, external help and support were vital to their survival. While the regime was mainly supported by Iran,

Russia and Hezbollah, the opposition was supported by Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Qatar and the United States.

Both Iran and Saudi Arabia's main aim was to assure their dominance in the region. The geopolitics of the region best explains the rivalry between the Shiite Iran and the Sunni Saudi Arabia. Their sectarian affiliations and aspirations cannot merely explain their motives in the region and especially regarding Syria; it was their interests pursued by sectarian means. Due to the weakness of the Syrian state and the domestic insurgencies occurring in Syria, the conflict created a vacuum that attracted the geopolitical contest to Syrian territory. While Saudi Arabia used the conflict in Syria to assure its geopolitical calculations as a fair compensation provided to control post Assad Sunni Syria. Iran, on the hand, recognized that the destruction of the Syrian regime will eventually lead to constraining the Iranian influence in the region and the demolishment of the axis of resistance. Iran was not willing to compromise its interests in the region and especially with its most important ally in the region "the Syrian regime". It was all a matter of geopolitical balance of power pursued by two realist players.

To summarize, the regime's sectarianized apparatus and the collapse of the state's power had facilitated the involvement of geopolitical actors in the Syrian conflict. Indeed, these conflicts such as the Syrian one is a fertile ground to be developed, fueled and sustained by outside powers.

Chart.1- Causes of the Syrian Conflict

Complex situation

International Powers Intervention

Regional Geopolitics

Institutional Insufficiency

Sectarianism

Socio-E conomics

Consequently, Russia and the United States' proxy war is revisited in Syria. Russia, the main supporter of Assad's regime, has multi-layered interests in Syria including the elimination of any threats emerging from political Islam, ensuring Russia's role as a key player at the international scene and pursuing and preserving Russia's geostrategic and economic interests in the region. On the other hand, the United States major interests in the region are to counter the Russian and Iranian influence in the region, ensuring the security of Israel, securing its national security through eliminating the threats emerging from terrorists groups in Syria and preserving its economic and strategic interests in the region represented by its regional allies.

To summarize, domestic grievances accompanied by economical faults, corruption, dictatorship and the sectarian sentiment of the regime along with the geopolitical realm of the region represented by the two camps -Saudi Arabia and Iran-and a proxy war between the two pillars of the world -Russia and the United States- are the causes that ignited and complicated the Syrian conflict.

Along with the rising role of communitarianism in the region and in Syria specifically, this thesis assessed the possibility of applying a power sharing formula as an attempt to end the conflict and start the process of state reconciliation. The approach used in this thesis was based on a comparison between Syria and Lebanon as a two neighboring states facing a civil war. After taking into consideration several similarities and differences, the study revealed that consociational democracy model that was applied in Lebanon is not sufficient nor effective as an exit strategy for the Syrian conflict. First of all, the Sunni majority in Syria which consists almost 75% of the population would have a negative impact on the efficiency of fair representation. Second, this Sunni majority does not coincide with its sub-groups neither ideologically nor religiously. Third, the conflict in Syria was not shaped as a sectarian conflict aiming to topple down the coalition of minorities, but sectarianism was a tool to achieve common ends.

Consequently, Syria does not match the prerequisites demanded to establish a successful model according to Lijphart. The Syrian society is a multi-ethnic society whereas the Ba'ath dominated ideology was focusing on the Syrian national identity despite any other identities. An entire generation was raised and convinced with this ideology and any attempt to divide the Syrian community according to ethnicity or sect would only intensify the fragmentation that already exist due to the conflict. Consequently,

with the absence of an elite cartel to rule and dominate the minorities in Syria, insurgencies would absolutely occur and no one will be able to accommodate them.

Thus, a consociational democracy model that has not proven its efficiency in Lebanon which already had the prerequisites for a successful model, would not be the optimal solution regarding Syria which does not have these prerequisites nor the already divided social fabric. Accordingly, even though consociational democracy might be the optimal solution regarding the Syrian conflict, it could be applied as a result of the regional and international players' agreement.

Consequently, this thesis provided the various attempts pursuing an end to the conflict in Syria. Several negotiations were held in Geneva and Vienna as an attempt to gather the conflicting parties and draw common remarks defining mutual points of interests. Unfortunately, none of these negotiations has proven to be sufficient to end the conflict. The inability of the conflicting parties to agree on mutual mode of governance hindered any attempt to apply the peace talks (Koudmani, 2015). Furthermore, the fragmentation of the opposition and the stubbornness of the regime decreased the tendency to achieve a political settlement. On the other hand, the rise of extremist groups such as ISIS triggered the national security of each country involved in the conflict. The expanding ideology of extremism and radical Islam has become among the top priorities to be eliminated according to the countries involved.

The different conflict mitigation processes regarding Syria have failed the key element regarding their failure was the fate of Assad. While the government's representatives were not willing to negotiate any deal before the agreement on the need to

fight terrorism, the opposition representatives were not willing to negotiate any settlement that stipulates Assad's future in power. Even though the conflicting parties had a vital point of difference, Staffan De Mistura announced that Assad must be a part of the solution (Koudmani, 2015). Indeed, after the emergence of terrorist groups in Syria, the world's priority became the elimination of these groups rather than ousting Assad. Even though the United States and its regional allies want nothing more than to oust Assad, they would not take the chance for extremists to take over power. The level of involvement of regional and international powers in Syria makes the situation even more immune to any political settlement that compromises their interests in the region. Although the conflict in Syria began as Syrians claiming freedom, the future of Syria is not in Syrian hands anymore.

5.2-Recommendations

As the Syrian conflict proceeds, the emerging threat is looming over the whole region and the world. The Syrian spillover on neighboring countries is tremendous. Consequently, the increasing numbers of refugees in European countries raises the red flag for the safety of these countries. On the other hand, the fragmentation of the opposition and the lack of adequate representation of the Syrian people among the opposition, raises the question of the availability of an adequate replacement of Assad. Consequently, the overthrow of Assad and what consequences it might have on the army might complicate the situation even more especially with the rise of ISIS. Thus, with time passing by, the need for a political settlement in Syria increases. The catastrophe that the Syrians endured was unprecedented; the economic deterioration of the Syrian economy triggers the alarm of how long the Syrian state can survive; the rising role of extremists needs a rapid solution in order to eliminate the danger emerging in the whole world.

Thus, the possibility of achieving a common political settlement in Syria depends on two main pillars. First of all, the ability of major powers involved in Syria to compromise its interests and agree on a common aim which is to end the Syrian conflict. As a result to their agreement, these powers would affect the situation on the ground by cutting their proxies and decreasing the level of violence. The second pillar is the military balance of powers on the field. The Syrian army or the moderate rebels should acquire the privilege over the terrorists groups such as Al-Nussra Front and ISIS.

Any political settlement in Syria should contain the establishment of a transitional government consisted of representatives from both the regime and the opposition. On the other hand, the role of the military should be one of the priorities concerning this transitional government. It should be defined that the role of the military and the security apparatus is to control the country and fight any terrorists' attacks guaranteeing the safety of the people as a whole. After the establishment of a transitional government and the assessment on the role of military and security apparatus in Syria, all foreign forces must withdrawal. The existence of any external forces could only intensify the situation and break the ceasefire. After the withdrawal of these foreign forces, political settlement and negotiations might have a chance to prosper.

Different approaches have been applied as an attempt to end the conflict in Syria including the conduction of fair elections supervised by international actors, the establishment of a new constitution and new governing options such as decentralization or federalization. None of these options were applied due to the ongoing military confrontation and the role of foreign forces. Indeed, the efficiency of these options was not tested due to the limitation of the study and the ongoing conflict that has not ended yet.

One aspect of the post-conflict Syria that should always be a priority is the establishment of a proper state reconciliation process that could mitigate the consequences of the conflict and provide the basic elements for Syrians to reintegrate in the new Syria. The challenge of the peace process is certainly vital, but every war has to end.

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