

**THE ARAB SPRING AND THE CHANCE OF  
DEMOCRATIC TRANSFORMATION IN SYRIA**

**ARAP BAHARI VE SURİYE'DE  
DEMOKRATİK DÖNÜŞÜM İMKANI**

**Abdullah KIRAN\***

**Abstract**

It cannot be denied that the Arab Spring has started a very important transformation process in the Middle East but it is very difficult to expect that this transformation will lead to a democratic change within a very short period of time and contribute to a democratic development in the sense of Western experience. Transition from oppressive and authoritarian regimes to a democratic regime does not take place in a short period of time through uprising and revolution. Democracy is a phenomenon that requires possession of democratic culture and tolerance rather than accepting it as a regime. Besides, the ethnic and religious structure of the countries taking part in Arab Spring is different from each other. In some of those countries, ethnic and religious demands come before the desire for democracy and democratic aspirations. For instance, the Kurds in Syria, who do not have even identity cards and have not been considered as citizens until recently, demand the recognition of the Kurds as a national entity and their participation to Syria government, while Sunni Muslims in Syria essentially want to put an end to the Shiite dictatorship and to establish a majority regime under their rule. On the other hand, the major fear of Syrian Christians is that the Sunni majority government which will be potentially established after the collapse of Assad regime will not recognize their basic rights. In this paper we will focus on different and contradicting demands of Kurds, Christians, Sunni and Shiite Muslims in Syria.

**Keywords:** Arab Spring, Syria, Kurds, Christians, Sunni, Shiite

**Özet**

Arap Baharı'nın Ortadoğu'da çok önemli bir değişim sürecini başlattığı inkâr edilemez. Ancak bu değişimin kısa bir süre içinde demokratik bir dönüşüme yol açması ve Batılı anlamda demokrasilerin gelişmesine katkı sağlamasını beklemek oldukça zordur. Baskıcı ve totaliter rejimlerden demokratik rejimlere geçiş, bir ayaklanma veya bir devrimle kısa bir süre içinde olabilecek bir durum değil. Demokrasi, bir rejimin kabullenmesinden ziyade demokratik bir kültüre sahip olmayı gerektiren bir olgudur. Ayrıca Arap Baharı zincirine dâhil olan ülkelerin etnik ve dini yapılanmaları birbirinden çok farklıdır. Kimi ülkelerde etnik ve dini talepler, demokrasi ve demokratik taleplerden önce gelmektedir. Örneğin Suriye'de, daha yakın zamana kadar kimliği bile olmayıp vatandaş kategorisinde yer almayan Kürtlerin en önemli önceliği ulusal varlıklarının tanınması ve yönetimde pay sahibi olmak iken, Sün-

\* Assoc. Prof. Dr., Muş Alparslan University, Head of Department of International Relations, a.kiran@alparslan.edu.tr

nilerin temel amacı Şii diktatörlüğe son verip kendilerinin yönetimde olacağı bir çoğunluk rejiminin kurulmasıdır. Suriye'deki Hristiyanların en büyük korkusu Esat rejiminin yıkılmasının ardında iktidarı devralacak Sünni çoğunluğun Hristiyan azınlığa yaşam tanımmasıdır. Çünkü bizler her çoğunluk rejiminin demokratik bir rejim olmadığını çok iyi biliyoruz.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Arap Baharı, Suriye, Kürtler, Hristiyanlar, Sünniler, Şiiler

## **The Minority Rules in the Middle East**

Right after the First World War, the borders of North Ireland, Yugoslavia and Middle East were established within 17 months (Fisk, 2007, s.XXi). So the borders of the Middle East were controversial from the very beginning. However, the administrative bodies appointed by the mandatory power were much more problematic. When countries such as Great Britain and France terminated their direct rule in countries under their protection, they introduced minority regimes that would remain faithful to them so that they would be able to intervene in the domestic policies of those countries. Especially in Iraq, Syria and Lebanon, rather than establishing legitimate regimes which are based on the rule of majority, ethnic and religious minorities were assigned as the administrative body. And these minority groups in power preserved their oppressive and totalitarian essence in order to ensure the stability of their power and not to share it with other elements of society. Actually this kind of ruling was in favor of western powers that were ruling the region indirectly and it was in harmony with the spirit of Cold War. But these borders and minority rules never brought peace and tranquility to the region. These problematical borders and administrations are the main reason for the continuous bloodshed in the Middle East.

The minority rules continued for decades in the region and it was not easy for the majorities of these societies to terminate the minority character of these regimes in the Middle East. In Lebanon, it took a 15-year of destructive civil war to abolish the Maroni's dominant rule. Iraq, which was established with the combination of three province of the Ottoman Empire, was one of those to have the most problematical borders in the region. Great Britain formed new Iraq by bringing Mosul, Baghdad and Basra together; the majority of the population was Kurds, Sunnis and Shiites respectively in these provinces. Then Prince Faisal of Hejaz, a Sunni Muslim, was appointed as the head of state. Faisal and his successors ruled Iraq until the military coup of 1958. However, this coup d'état could not overthrow the Sunni reign in the country. Consisting 25% of the total population approximately, the Sunnis would be able to rule nearly half century further over the Shiites who were around 55% and Kurds who were 20% of the population (Galbraith, 2006:7).

It was the intervention of US after which the Sunni reign in Iraq was brought down and terminated. Moreover, Sunnis' struggle for power continued and caused a civil war in Iraq in spite of US. There is a high probability that Syria will also share the same fate with Iraq and Lebanon. The more Basher al Assad stays in power, the more the chance of civil war in Syria will exacerbate. In addition, all parameters show that he will not give up easily and voluntarily. This situation inevitably will prolong the period of the uncertainty

in Syria; because Hafez al Assad didn't repeat the mistake Hosni Mubarak made and did not give the control of military forces to those that were not the members of his family. While Mubarak's son was working in private sector, the gun-shy Hafez al Assad left the supervision of the military forces to his sons. Besides, he educated and trained his sons such that they could keep the military and the politics under their strict control. In his governing process, rather than relying on Arab nationalism, he based his rule on traditional attachment factors such as family, clan, tribe and religious sect. In Egypt, there was no army who could sacrifice itself for the sake of Mubarak and initiate a war against its people. But in Syria, there is an army which will remain loyal to Basher al Assad almost forever (Landis, 2012).

It has been nearly two years since Syria's revolt, no action has been initiated like the one on the Tahrir Square that could overthrow the al Assad reign in Syria. At first, Syria opposition leaders considered that foreign sanctions would be effective and soon after the regime would fall. However, that was not the case. Given that the Special Forces, the Intelligence, elite units and the army's administrative body have no alternative but to gather tightly around Basher al Assad when they think of the aftermath of Assad regime, it seems such an action will not be initiated in near future. When we look at the whole picture in Syria, we see that almost each Nusayrie family has a member either in army, police unit, the Ministry of Education or other public institutions. Not only Nusayries, Shiites or Alawites, there are also some Sunnis that have cooperated with Assad and share the same fate with him. All these factors force Assad Dynasty to maintain their reign of forty years (Haling & Birke, 2012).

### **Baath and Minority Rule in Syria**

With a surface of 185.180 km<sup>2</sup> and a population of 22.5 million, Syria used to have a unique position in the Middle East policies. In modern times, it played a key role in the Arab awakening and with its pan-Arab stance; it has been mentioned as the heart of Arab nationalism (Ismael, 2001, s.237). The geographical position of the country played a critical role in its evaluation. Located on a spot where three continents meet historically, Syria has a heterogeneous social and cultural structure. With Muslims, Christians, Arabs, Sunnis, Alawites, Kurds, Druzes, Armenians and different sects of Christianity, the country turned out to be a real example of social and cultural mosaic.

Right after the independence, the Sunni leaders initiated a struggle in order to undermine the Alawites power over the country, but they failed. This pressure encouraged the Alawites minorities to expand their influence over the army and politics. The first parliamentary election held in 1947 was marked with corruption and disorder in the country. In the first Arab- Israeli war of 1948-1949, when the Arab armies were defeated, the distrust against the government was at peak. This situation made the way for the first military coup in Syria and Colonel Husni al Zaim took control of the country. The military coup brought an end to the ruling of former nationalists, which consisted mainly of rich merchants and aristocrats. The military coups followed one after another and General staffs

always found the opportunity to manipulate the parliament members. Against the weak resistance of the Parliament, the General Staff was always successful in appointing the head of state. In 1951, the army abolished the parliament and banned all the political parties and gave the executive and legislative power to the General Staff. In 1953 a new constitution was accepted and General Staff Colonel Abid al Shishakli became the head of state. But upon the unending unrest and corruption allegation, on 25<sup>th</sup> of February 1954 he escaped to Lebanon. Then he settled in Argentine where he was assassinated two years later. All these events and uncertainties paved the way for Baath Party rule. In 1956 the Baas Party joined the National Union Government and took the major positions in the cabinet. Thus the Alawites, Druzes and Isma'ilis became dominant in the army and Baath Party. Baath Party created great opportunities for other minorities in the country excluding Kurds (Ismael, 2001:237).

In Syria, during the Ottoman period, Sunni Arabs were controlling the army and the Alawites were not allowed to assume public offices. But the mandatory regime acted in the opposite way and deprived Sunnis from all important posts. In 1963, the number of Alawite army officers in Syria was 65%. In 1970, when Hafiz al Assad came to power, he offered a secular constitution which allowed that even Christians could become president. These factors led to frustration among Sunnis and they began to protest him all around the country. In 1976, the sectarian conflict brought Sunnis and Alawites against each other and the Muslim Brotherhood organization called Alawites as infidels. The Alawites, who were intimidated by the Sunni reaction gathered around Hafiz al Assad and the tension continued for six years. Actually the Muslim Brotherhood and other fundamental Islamic organizations were against Baas Party rule since the beginning (Seale, 2012).. When the sectarian conflict reached its peak, in 1982, Hafiz al Assad massacred 20.000 people in Hama in order to suppress the revolt. After 1982 events, the Alawite supervision over the state apparatus increased and nowadays, the major part of the army, which is around 700.000 and intelligence, is mainly consisted of Alawites (Goldsmith, 2012).

When Hafiz al Assad came to power, Syria's population was around 6 million and the majority of people were living in rural areas, but by the time he died, the population had reached 18 million and urban population had increased significantly. In 2000 Hafiz al Assad's son Basher al Assad took power; at the beginning, he wanted to create an impression that he was different from his father and as a moderate leader and supporter of reforms, he wanted to lead his country into a democratic path. At that time both his people and westerners had the hope that he could initiate some reforms, but they were disappointed soon. He was quick in promising reforms; nevertheless he couldn't maintain this policy. In order to liberate the economy he began to take some steps, but soon he came across with Baas Party obstacle. The economy was based on bribe and corruption, Baas Party was controlling this net and was never eager to give up. When Basher couldn't pass over the Party's veto, he began to catch and punish the opposition members that were asking for reforms and imprisoned them (Murphy, 2012). Another issue that distracted Basher's attention to domestic affairs was the country's foreign agenda. While dealing with

an intensive foreign agenda, he closed his eyes to the acts of his family members and of those who were violating rights (Seale, 2012).

As his father did, Basher himself was relying on Alawite population in the country. They had the key positions in security and economy, and Sunnis were deprived from such positions. But if one is a rich merchant or a successful artist, regardless of his sect or religion (Sunni, Druze or Christian), the administration always maintained good relations with such people and was eager to develop a kind of cooperation with them. But the privileges that Alawites owned were totally different. While they are not eager to abdicate their privileges, they fear that if Basher goes, a Sunni administration might replace him, in which case they will certainly pursue a revenge policy and not forgive them. This security concern shapes their attitudes and forces them to be faithful to the current regime (Goldsmith, 2012).. The more the crisis continues, the more the chance that the conflict between Alawites and Sunnis turns into a civil war increase (Byman, 2012).

When the Syria crisis broke out, many leaders and the Syrian opposition representatives predicted that the end of regime was near. The leader of Syria's Muslim Brotherhood Riad al Shaqfa estimated that Assad would fall just within a few months. While US Foreign Secretary mentioned Assad as "a walking dead", Israel Defense Minister predicted that Assad would fall within a few weeks. But this didn't happen. In August 2011 U.S. President Barack Obama and EU leaders explicitly called Basher al Assad to resign, but Assad ignored those calls and continued to proceed on his own way. All those assumptions did not go beyond a wish. While the crisis and the violence in Syria continue, it frequently brings the foreign intervention to the agenda.

### **Foreign Intervention**

Until very recently the Arab world was proud of its longstanding leaders. Muammar Kaddafi came to power in 1969, and Hafiz al Assad family has been ruling Syria since 1970. Ali Abdullah Selah came to power in 1978 in South Yemen and then the country united with North Yemen. In 1981, after Anwar Sadat assassination, Hosni Mubarak came to power and in 1987 Zine Abidin Bin Ali became the president of Tunisia. The Hasimi family has been ruling Jordan since 1920 and Saud family has been ruling Saudi Arabia since 1932. The Alouite dynasty, who rules Morocco, first came to the power in 17<sup>th</sup> century. The wind of democracy blew in East Asia, Eastern Europe, Latin America and even Sub- African countries, but Arabs monarchies were still in power (Gause,2011). The Arab spring shook some of the Arab monarchies, but in some places that kind of a change was not possible with domestic dynamics, therefore there was need for foreign intervention.

Rising in Tunisia, the Arab Spring has brought changes to the form of regimes in four countries till now. More than one and half year passed over the Syrian uprising which started on 15 March 2011 yet the former regime is still in power and in annually of the events there were the supports of Basher all Assad who rallied in Damascus, not members of opposition. During all this time, Assad ignored the call of US, EU leaders and

Turkey Prime Minister to resign and to leave the ruling of country. Besides he wanted to suppress the revolt by violence. When the bloodshed and violence reached at an unbearable level, the call for foreign intervention was put on the agenda.

A few months after Syrian revolt, in June 2011 Turkey came forth with idea to create a “buffer zone” within the borders of Syria. In December 2011, France Foreign Minister Alain Juppe suggested to open a “humanitarian corridor” inside Syria to provide food and medicine to the victims of violence. On November 02, 2011, in her address to UN Human Rights Counsel, Navi Pillay of United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights said that “in order to take urgent and effective measures to protect Syrian people, international community must act urgently.” It was not for the first time that UNHRC brought up the atrocities conducted in Syria; UN Human Right Council had previously explained that Assad regime was committing crimes against humanity (Weiss, 2012).

Although the international community was in expectation of tough measures against Syria, the idea to intervene in the country did not find sufficient support in UN Security Council. Russia and China vetoed the Security Council resolution which called Assad to resign. In November 2011 and February 2012, Russia and China acted jointly and did not let the Security Council to take any resolutions against atrocities conducted by Syria government. According to both countries, the veto resolution would mean an intervention in the domestic affairs of Syria which also meant the breach of the principle of sovereignty (Dyer, 2012). The attitudes of Russia and China drew the reaction of some countries that were in favor of external intervention. Many people consider that this policy of Russia and China stem from their interests in the Middle East and their relations with Syria. Actually the history of Soviet Union’s (Russia) relations with Syria dates back to the independence of the country from France mandate. Especially after Second World War, in 1950’s both countries developed close relations in different fields. In March 1963, when Baas Party came to power their relations were strengthened and both countries came closer ideologically.

Russia, China and Iran are strictly resisting against any foreign intervention to Syria, and justify their claims with the argument that as a sovereign country Syria has the right to suppress the revolt within its borders. Almost regretful for their intervention policy in Libya, the US has a different approach to the issue. While the US does not support the idea of foreign intervention explicitly, it prefers regime change in Syria. If the regime is changed through domestic opposition, the US and its allies may be glad. There are a few reasons why the US pursues such a policy and is in favor of regime fall. Firstly, Syria has a kind of strategic relationship with Iran, which dates back to Iranian revolution; it considers Israel as its enemy and always supports Palestinian groups against Israel. In addition, Syria was the first on the line of the countries that were against the US intervention in Iraq. There are other factors that make US refrain from direct intervention. Washington is concerned about the crisis and the chaotic situation in the event of the total failure of the state of Syria, which will cause terror and even a regional war. The struggle to topple Assad can cause unexpected clashes around the country. Besides, like other dictator-



ships, Assad had converted Syria into a society and state that will be the guardians of the regime. Not only the army and the police organization, but also the courts, the economy, almost everything has been structured to ensure the regime's survival (Byman , 2012).

At this stage, the number of countries who are eager to intervene into Syria is very limited. Neither United States, nor EU and Arab League are in favor of direct intervention. Former US Secretary of State Henry A. Kissinger point out the difficulties why the US is not in favor of an intervention: "In Syria, calls for humanitarian and strategic intervention merge... While the United States accelerates withdrawals from military interventions in neighboring Iraq and Afghanistan, how can a new military commitment in the same region be justified, particularly one likely to face similar challenges?" (Kissinger, 2012). It is estimated that without involving in a direct intervention, US may support Turkey and Arab League intervention, but on the condition that the US will not get involved in such an operation. It is known that in the Middle East, Turkey, Qatar and Saudi Arabia are pursuing a policy of foreign intervention. While Saudi Arabia and Qatar's attitudes mainly stem from fear from Iran and its ambitions over the region, Turkey holds different concerns regarding Syria. Besides, no one can guarantee that a foreign intervention can bring stability to Syria and finish the conflict. There is a high probability that a foreign intervention could aggravate the instability around the country. When Syrians take the Iraq example, even those who are not happy with Assad reign are doubtful about the idea of foreign intervention ( Joshua, 2012)..

Another reason is why many countries refrain from a foreign intervention stem from Syria's antagonistic opposition group's attitudes. It is not only the Free Syrian Army (FSA) that has launched a war against the regime in the country; the groups such as Jabhat an Nusra (Salvation Front), Ahrar al Sham (the Liberation of Greater Syria), Strangers for a Greater Syria Brigade and some fundamentalist Islamic group who call themselves Salafists are also waging a war against the regime. There are also some Islamic groups that came from countries such as Libya, Iraq, Chechnya, and Pakistan and even from Great Britain. Especially the foreign groups are considered to be much more radical and extremists. Even sometimes, some of the representatives of FSA express their concerns about these radical groups. On the other hand, to what extent these extremist groups are cooperating with others and what they are doing are unknown. The FSA, which considers itself as an umbrella organization, has no influence or control on these groups. Mustafa Sheikh, a member FSA Military Council, claims that 60% of those who are struggling to overthrow Basher al Assad are working under FSA umbrella, and their number is estimated to be around 50.000. Considering that the number of government forces who are involving in war is around 280.000, we understand that the opposition groups are no less in number, if only they could struggle in harmony (The Economist, August 4th 2012).

In the list of these different groups who struggle to overthrow Syria government, there is an internationally well known terrorist group, the infamous El Qaida. The organization works independently from FSA and it has members and supporters from countries such as Caucasia, Afghanistan, Yemen, Libya, Jordan, Egypt and Turkey. The organization works

with extremist Islamic groups that have come from different countries. Those countries that are in favor of quick fall of Syrian regime, namely Turkey, Saudi Arabia and Qatar, while providing base and concrete support to the opposition, to some extent, they are indirectly being in cooperation with El-Qaida. According to some analysts, these countries consider El- Qaida as “an organization that inflames the planned struggle” against Syria regime (Düzel, 8 Ekim, 2012).

Especially countries that are ruled by Shiite administrations such as Iran, Iraq and Lebanon think in this way. According to them the Wahabites are targeting Shiite and in Syria the main target is to remove the Shiite administration. For example, when the jihadist groups in Damascus attacked Seid Zeynep neighborhood, they massacred everybody without taking care of women and children. The graveyard of Prophet Mohamed’s granddaughter Zehra was at that neighborhood and that place was holy for all Shiite. This situation directly makes Iranian and Iraqi Shiite groups a part of the conflict. Thus Mehdi Army in Iraq, which acts under the leadership of Muqtada al Sadr and once fought against the US forces, considers Syria’s situation as threat to its existence and proclaim that they will not just sit and watch it. Mehdi Army doesn’t see any inconvenience to proclaim that it has trained suicide teams to act within Syria. This things forces Iran, Iraq and Syria regimes to take Syria disputes as a real sectarian war. According to them, this war which was launched by Sunni jihadists groups such as Wahhabi, Salafies and El- Qaida are targeting Shiites. They know when the Shiite government of Syria replaced with a Sunni administration it will creates a major threat to the Iraq’s Shiite regime and eventually to Iran. Henry A. Kissinger too considers Syria’s interim crisis as a sectarian war and writes in this way: “The real issue is a struggle for dominance between Assad Alawites backed by many of other Syrian minorities, and Sunni majority (Kissinger, August 3, 2012).”

The situation of extremist and jihadist groups in Syria concerns the United States and western world seriously and thus they avoid directly involving into the conflict and having an active role. They realized how Syria’s revolution has been kidnapped by extremist and jihadist groups. Actually at the begging of the crisis the US has some sympathy to the Syrian National Opposition, but currently they try to prevent the provision of heavy arms to opposition groups in centers such as Doha and Riyadh. So one of the reasons why opposition doesn’t have sufficient arms and artillery stems from recently changed US policies. It seems even after the Presidential election the US will follow the same policy (Bozkurt,2002). Because for the US, el Qaida is a sworn enemy and they will not act jointly with this group even if the war is against a common enemy. The US public opinion which has been shaped by the spirit of 9/11 syndrome cannot endure such policy. Obviously if the US has to make a choice between El- Qaida and Syria’s current regime, there is no doubt that it will prefer Assad.

The other disadvantage of intervening into Syria is the possibility of a deepening instability. Especially a unilateral intervention will directly increase the chance of involvement of regional powers such as Iran, Iraq and Saudi Arabia. The regional interventions always have the potential to draw global forces into the conflict, internationalize the prob-



lems and make it more complicated. Another risk of intervention, except for politicized opposition, is to interlock the other segments of society around the regime and force them to be supporter of Assad. Throughout its history, Syria has always been exposed to external intervention which led to a fragile sensitivity among people. In various periods the country has been invaded by Babels, Assyrians, Persians, Macedonians, Romans, Byzantine, Eyyubies, Seljuk, Crusaders, Ottomans and France.

In the case of any intervention, the Syrian regime, in order to extend its life, will pursue such a rigid sectarian policy, which will be harder than the one Iraq and Lebanon had. Saudi Arabia and Qatar were always in favor of external intervention, but their main concern was sectarian sensitiveness. Both countries refrain from revolts which could occur within their borders and devising a proxy war over Syria against Iran. The more the Syria crisis continues, the more the chance that it will spread to neighboring countries. Turkey continuously warns and keeps it in its agenda that it can intervene into the Kurdish region of Syria in order to disperse newly emerging Kurdish autonomy. Even from now the events in Syria have spread to Lebanon and Syria could destabilize this tiny and fragile neighbor at any time. In the case of a dismemberment of Syria, all the borders which have been drawn after the collapse of Ottoman Empire will be discussed again. It is probable that any intervention can prolong the duration of war. Unless the supporters of Syrian government and the opposition groups reach an agreement among themselves, it will be difficult to reduce violence or compromise (Milne, 2012).

### **Kurds as the Milestone of the Revolt**

Assad has been acting very cautiously from the beginning in order to prevent Kurdish people's assistance and support to the revolt. He knew very well that the support of the Kurds would determine the result. In order to keep Kurds outside of the revolt, he began to provide hundred thousand of Kurds with their citizenship rights. In 1962, with the pretext that they were not born in Syria, the government dispossessed 120 000 Kurds of their citizenship rights. When the Syrian revolt started, the number of Kurds that were not citizen was around 300 000. The Syrian regime was pursuing a policy to break the Kurds in every field of life. So it was not enough to deprive Kurdish people of their citizenship rights; in order cut off the connections between Kurds in Syria and Kurds in Turkey, in 1973 the government began to cast all Kurds that were leaving on the border. Within the frame of this policy it evacuated Kurds over a 300 km distance on borders and confiscated their land; replaced Arabs with Kurds in order to create an "Arab corridor" on the border. All this things increased the Kurdish people awareness of the regime policies towards them. They were aware of the Syrian policy adopted against them, which is why they acted very cautiously, in order to not draw the regime's wrath upon themselves. In the past, when they resisted against government policies they were punished brutally and they could find no supporters. That is why they act politically in this last revolt, and they do not want to lose their last chance.

There are a few reasons why Kurds stay away from the opposition groups or keep a

distance between themselves and them. Firstly, the mighty Syrian opposition, which basically consists of Muslim Brotherhoods and Arab nationalists, has never had any sympathy for Kurdish people's legitimate rights. Second, especially this time Kurds do not want to miss the opportunity to rule over them. Not only the Kurds, but also everybody is aware of the fact that Kurds are in a unique position that can determine the fate of war. The side they support will be victorious. Henry Jackson Society, which is located in London and acts as foreign policy center, points out that Kurds are able to determine the fate of the revolt. The Kurds are aware that the opposition is not sincere in their attitude toward them and when they become victorious, their attitude might be worse than Assad regime. It is true, Assad regime was not democratic, but at least, to some extent it was secular towards other minorities. So another reservation of Kurds stems from fundamentalist Islamic regime, which will not be tolerable and inclusive. Last but not least, Kurds do not want to become a part of a game that they will lose (Kennedy, 2012)..

Actually, at the beginning the Kurds never rejected taking part in Syria National Council. But their attempts always failed. The Arabs blamed Kurds on not supporting revolt against the regime; the Kurds accused Arabs of ignoring Kurdish people's national rights and acting in parallel with Turkey. In July 2012 Istanbul Meeting, when the Arabs, without any concession, insisted on the name of "Syria Arab Republic" and didn't take the demands of the Kurds into consideration, the Kurds left the meeting. Later, in Cairo meeting, when the Arabs acted in the same way and insisted on their attitude and did not want to compromise, the Kurds again had to leave the meeting. The Kurds asked the opposition to accept an article stating that "The Kurdish people must be recognized," but the Arabs declined the request. They simply wanted the Kurds to follow them as a "big brother" and do not to hesitate about doing anything. At the end all these conditions caused Kurds to pull themselves away from the opposition and forced them to work on their own solutions. Although once the leader of SNC was a Kurd, the Kurdish people existence in this organization is just symbolic (Tol, 2012).

On the other hand the policies of the neighboring countries deeply affect the Syrian Kurds political deployment and their position. For example Turkey wants Syrian Kurds to act with Iraqi Kurds rather than to act with PYD, which has close relation with PKK. Within this frame Turkey wants Barzani to use his own credit and influence Syrian Kurds to keep away from PYD. But Syrian Kurds do not trust Turkey and they believe that Turkey is mostly close to the Arab opposition rather than the Kurds. The PYD and their supporters think, after the collapse of Assad, Turkey, in collaboration with Arab's Muslim Brotherhood organization and nationalists, will establish a Sunni puppet state and shall not share or give any responsibility to them in the governance of the country. This idea is not limited with the supporters of PYD alone; it is quite common among other Kurds too. While Turkey constantly focuses on the threat of PYD to attack Turkey or violent its borders from the lands that they have taken under their control after withdrawal of Assad forces, Salih Muhammed Muslim, the head of PYD, in one of his interviews with members of the International Middle East Peace Research Center(IMPR) explicitly says that

there will not be such an attack against Turkey. In answering IMPR's member questions such as, "Is there any possibility that there will be attacks by the PKK from settlements controlled by the PYD in northern Syria?" He replies: "I guarantee that there won't be any shooting from security forces towards Turkey. We haven't brought up our community or our young generation with fear of or hostility toward Turkey. But among the Turks I see that there is a Kurdish phobia. If they leave this aside we can live in peace together. We have inherited these lands from our fathers and ancestor"(Ergil, 2012).

### **The External and Internal Factors of the Crisis**

In order to stop the war in Syria and be able to establish peace, two factors play a main role; one of them is internal and the other is external. The internal factor stems from Syria's domestic dynamics, mainly its ethnic and religious structure. If the ethnics and religious components were sharply divided, then to some extent it would be easy for proper and acceptable solution. Rather than such a division, in many centers of Syria, such as Damascus and Aleppo, the ethnic and religious groups are mixed. For example 70% of Aleppo population is Sunni and the other %30 consists of Alawites and Christian minorities. Neither Sunnis, Alawites and nor Christians is homogeneous. Each of them has their own sub- groups. Usually, when the division is on a religious and sectarian base, the ethnic root is not considered. 70% of Aleppo is Sunni, but the Kurds are also included in this figure. In reality they alone constitute 10% of the city.

Jonah Galtung points out different and antagonistic demands of Syria's ethnic and religious community and tries to illustrate their demands. According to him : " 1) Alawites (15%): want to remain in power, fort the best of all, 2) Shias in general want the same, 3)Sunnis: want the majority, their rule, democracy, 4) Jews, Christian, minorities: want security, fear of Sunni rule, 5) Kurds: want high level of autonomy, some community with other Kurds" (Galtung, 2012).

It is clear that external factors are as complicated as the internal factors. Because there are a number of global and regional actors who monitor Syria's events very closely from America to Asia. As global actors of the opposite camp we can mention US and Russia-Middle East bloc. The US comes as vanguard of western block, which includes some EU countries, Turkey, Saudi Arabia and Qatar. Russia vanguard a block of countries, mainly located in Asia and Middle East. In this block nearby to Russia we can mention China, Iran, Iraq and Lebanon to some extent. Although they seem to be in the same camp, the privileges that Turkey and US have show big differences. Both powers believe that Bashar al Assad has lost his legitimacy and has to resign, but they cannot agree on how the balance of power should be reshaped. While Turkey supports a united Syria, with a Sunni majority rule in which the Kurds will not pose a threat in the future for Turkey, the US is keen on the security of oil and natural gas.

Although Israel could be classified under the western group, she has a different agenda and comes forth with various demands and has some priorities. In Cairo, the demonstration in Tharir Square reminded the Europeans the 1989 events, but Israelis looked from a

very different point of view. One of the Israeli officials stated: “We see it as Tehran 1979.” From the beginning Israel was very pessimistic about Egypt’s future and according Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu, “Egypt will go in the direction of Iran.” There upon, in general the Israelis are very sensitive about their security, and with security oriented perception they began to examine how the developments will affect their society. With this point of view they attempt to understand how a regime change in the Middle East could affect their future. Through all history of Israel, Egypt was their most dangerous enemy. In the Arab- Israeli wars of 1948, 1956, 1967, 1969-70, and 1973 Egypt fought against Israel. After a while, with the meditations of US, Anwar Sadat agreed to make a peace agreement with Israel. When he was assassinated, Hosni Mubarak took his place and walked in the same direction. Mubarak was faithful to the peace agreement and on the issues like terrorism he acted with Israel as a strategic partner. Israeli analyst Aluf Been point out that: “Israel has replaced eight prime ministers, fought several wars and engaged in peace talks with multiple partners and Mubarak was always there ( Byman, 2011).

Israel considers, in the event that Assad is overthrown, the new comer to power could easily create a risk for Israel’s security. Although Syrian regime supported organizations like Hezbollah and Hamas, she didn’t want to launch a total war against Israel, especially after 1967. During the period that Hafız al Assad was in power he always refrained from entering a direct war with Israel and, if the war was inevitable, he could appease Syria public opinion and manipulate the events, as he wishes. Basher al Assad, who replaced his father could take some risks, but never was eager to launch a war against Israel. He always wanted to stay away from a war that he could not win. In 2007 Israel bombed Syria’s nuclear facility, but again two countries didn’t go into a war. Syria always supported Hezbollah in Lebanon, but never let the tension rise such that it would go out of control. If Basher Assad is overthrown, it is unknown whether the new administration will take care of these sensitive issues (Byman, 2011).

On the other hand, while Turkey and Israel seems to take part in the same block, it is almost impossible for them to compromise on their demands and expectations. In the first place, Israel will prefer Assad to a new administration which could cause a potential war in the future (Byman, 2011). If Israel comes to a point to choose between Assad and someone else, it is certain that Israel will prefer Assad as his policies with Muslim Brotherhood are known to Israel. If the Muslim Brotherhood comes into power in Syria as it did in Egypt, it will constitute a serious threat against Israel’s security. If in the future, the Muslim Brotherhood or any other Islamic party comes into power in Jordan, Israel will be surrounded from the north, south and west. There is no doubt that this situation will increase its vulnerability. Even the possibility of such a condition would disturb Israel seriously (Engdahl, 2012).

If Basher falls, Syria protects its territorial integrity and a Sunni majority comes into power as Turkey expects, this new situation will absolutely be a disadvantage for Israel. If decline of Basher al Assad is unavoidable, then Israel will not support Syria’s territorial integrity; it will certainly prefer dismemberment of the country. A Syria that has

been divided into small pieces will be in favor of Israel. Besides, in the event of such dismemberment, Iran will lose its control over Syria and lose one of its strategic partners. The change in the borders and a new map for the Middle East shall strategically serve for Israel's interests (Galtung, 2012)". There is no doubt in Middle East, the change of borders and a new map, strategically will serve Israel interest" (Galtung, 2012). Obviously, in the case of a dismemberment of Syria, all the borders which have been drawn after the collapse of Ottoman Empire will again began to be discussed.

Another reason why countries such as US, EU, Turkey, Saudi Arabia and Qatar are organized in the opposite block of Russia, China, Iran, Iraq and Syria is energy geopolitics. Especially natural gas, as clean energy resources is much more preferable than coal and nuclear energy. Following the Fukushima disaster, Germany, one of the leading EU countries, decided to give up the use of nuclear energy gradually and replace it with natural gas, which is known to be environmentally friendly. Other leading EU countries such as Germany, France and Spain have decided to reduce the use of CO<sub>2</sub> seriously by 2020. In order to achieve this target, they have to replace coal with natural gas. When natural gas is used instead of coal, it reduces CO<sub>2</sub> emission by 50-60%. These factors forces EU to reconsider its energy needs and makes EU one of the biggest demanding markets in the world for natural gas.

In the international power struggle, while some members of Western Block were making estimations regarding the time of the fall of Syria regime, in July 2011 Syria, Iran and Iraqi administrations made a mutual agreement on natural gas transmission pipe line among themselves. The pipeline length is more than 1,500 kilometers with capacity to transfer 110 million cubic meters of natural gas a day and it will be constructed within three years (Hafidh & Faucon, 2011). When this natural gas pipe line project is implemented, it will start from Port Assalouhey nearby South Pars natural gas fields, and it will travel over Iraq, reach to Damascus and from there to Lebanon Mediterranean port and via this port it will reach European markets. The South Pars natural gas resources have been divided between Iran, Qatar and Gulf and constitute one of the largest natural gas fields in the world. On August 2011, in Syria, around Qara region which is close to the Lebanon border, a large natural gas field was discovered. Syria plans to add this field to the common line, too. If this line is implemented, the region known as Shiite Crescent will be interlocked economically. Another target of this initiative is to dysfunction Washington-supported Nabucco pipe line project. It is estimated that this "Shiite" pipe line will cost around 10 billion dollars, which is equal to Nabucco project cost. That pipe line, which will come from Iran and will be merged with Syria natural gas line, will be transferred over Russian base of Tarsus. There is no doubt that this situation will strengthen Russia hand in natural gas market and create a kind of monopoly (Engdahl, 2012).

### **The Remedies and Possibility of Democratic Transformation**

It is toughest part to come up with a solution for the ever-increasing and aggravating crisis in Syria. Each drop of bloodshed enlarges the distance between parts of the conflict

and shrinks the hope for solution. Although we know each country has its own conditions and the solution must be derived from country's reality itself, again we can't refrain ourselves from thinking on some other examples that can inspire us. Can a country in the region or in the world become a model of solution for Syria? Jonah Galtung suggests a solution based on Switzerland model. Thus he writes: "One Syria, federal, with local autonomy, even down to the village level, with Sunnis, Shias and Kurds having relations to their own across the borders. International peacekeeping also for the protection of minorities. And non-aligned, which rules out of foreign bases and flows of arms... Napoleon invaded to control Switzerland in 1998- 1806, but gave up" (Galtung, 2012).

If the neighbors of Syria were countries like Germany, France, Italy and Austria, then it wouldn't be difficult to implement solutions that resemble Switzerland model. Unfortunately Syria doesn't have such neighbors and besides this kind of solutions may instigate their ethnic and religious minorities to ask for same rights. Moreover, almost all of its neighbors have got involved in the problem to some extent and none of them even has the chance to meditate objectively. If the aim is to preserve Syria's territorial integrity, it is true then the federal solutions look like the most reliable alternative. In order to implement such a solution we need the consent of the domestic and external parties of the problem. As mentioned above, unless we get the consent of external parties of the conflict, mainly US led western block and Russia-Middle East block; it will not be possible to achieve peace and stability. The external parties of the conflict must agree among themselves and impose a proper and acceptable solution to domestic parties of the conflict. It is clear that when the external parties of the conflict cease their support for the beleaguering parties and when they do not get logistic support, it will not be possible for them to continue on war.

Although the Kurds speak of a kind of autonomy, they actually claim for a federal arrangement as a political solution. They are inspired by the Kurdistan region of Iraq in this case. It was the federalism which brought peace and tranquility to Iraq's restless people who suffered a lot from dictatorship and totalitarian regimes. Just like in Iraq, the Kurds constitute the majority of the population in some geographical areas in Syria and in this way they differ from other ethnic and religious communities of country. After Basher al Assad era, the Sunnis in Syria will probably not be in favor of such a solution and will resist it. It is not secret that they will struggle for Sunni dominant reign and when they came to power, they will be "armed with unlimited supply of weapons from Sunni Gulf Arabs and Turkey (Olson, 2013)" and surely not hesitates to attempt to overthrow Shiite government in Iraq. Even the Shiites will not like the idea of federalism as they are already in power. But when they lose their power, they will take into consideration the balance of power within the country and then will be willing to adopt a decentralized administration. That is the basic reason why Basher, without going a war against the Kurds left the administration of Kurdish region to the Kurds. In the Middle East, in order to terminate the traditional and inflexible monarch rules and transfer them to the democratic and federal administrations is not an easy deal that could be achieved within a short period of time. It



is certainly a matter of time and it requires a democracy culture, a spirit of understanding and embracing the “other”.

After French Revolution, from 1793 to 1794, Maximilien Robespierre was among the 12 members of Executive Organ of the government and was responsible for Public Security. In spite of his powerful position, he still had a restricted area of execution for the policies that were expected to be fulfilled. He confronted a dilemma, which is the fate of almost all revolutions. Without involving the former regime’s crimes, he had to guarantee the individual rights, show respect for universal freedom and preserve people’s property. To that end, he imposed a virtual life to the people. But some parts of the society showed resistance to his impositions. While he tried to break this resistance he became the architect of an era which is known as the Terror Reign in France history. During this period, which continued from 5 September 1793 to the 28 July of 1794, 17000 people were beheaded by guillotine and ten thousand people were imprisoned. The Jacobins executed everybody they regarded as an enemy of the revolution. The civil war erupted after France Revolution costed a hundred thousand of people’s lives and paved the way for Napoleon Bonaparte to come reign in 1799 (Patrice, 2012).

Arab Spring reminds of the France Revolution and 1848 revolutions that occurred in many parts of Europe to some extent. These revolutions caused wide range violence and civil wars, which stemmed from intolerance and the lack of a democratic civil culture. In the viewpoint of many westerners the Middle East has always been considered to be the synonym of terror, Islamic fundamentalism, dogmatism and intolerance (Pappê, 2005). Hence, these features and the identity of the region have been taken as a threat to world’s peace and stability. Unfortunately, due to the political climate of the Middle East, violence and force have always been brought up as the solutions to problems therein. These facts can easily shed light on our prediction about what Assad will do and especially after the fall of his regime, and how a brutal and sectarian war will erupt in Syria. So what about democracy? The answer is hidden in a Turkish idiom: “It has been postponed to another spring.” A spring which might come after the Arab Spring.

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