



THE IMPACT OF THE SYRIA CRISIS ON THE GLOBAL AND REGIONAL POLITICAL DYNAMICS

Suriye Krizinin Küresel ve Bölgesel Politik Dinamikler Üzerine Etkisi

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ABSTRACT

The popular movements in the Middle East and North Africa since December 2010 have stood up for historic changes in regions. Syria has become central focus as it has been the only country is still experiencing insurgency and civil war. The power game politics and the growing rivalries among the big regional players pushed the Syrian crisis high on the international diplomatic agenda. The way in which the future of the country will be shaped is to have a dramatic impact on the strategic geometry of the Middle East. Turkey's actively involving in Syria as regional player issue is a historical deviation from the Turkish mainstream foreign politics. The article, in summary, will analyze the impact of Syria's crisis on the global and regional political dynamic including Turkey.

Keywords: *The Arab Spring, Syria Crisis, political dynamics, Turkey, Middle East.*

ÖZET

Orta Doğu ve Kuzey Afrika'da Aralık 2010'den itibaren başlayan halk ayaklanmaları bölgede önemli tarihi değişikliklere işaret etmektedir. Suriye, bölgede halen ayaklanma ve iç savaşı yaşayan tek ülke olması nedeni ile merkezi odak durumundadır. Güç oyunu politikaları ve büyük oyuncular arasındaki büyüyen rekabet. Suriye krizini uluslararası diplomatik gündemin üst sıralarına getirmiştir. Ülkenin geleceğini şekillendirecek yöntem, Orta Doğu'nun stratejik geometrisi üzerinde dramatik etkisi olacaktır. Türkiye'nin bölgesel bir aktör olarak Suriye krizine aktif olarak müdahalesi, ana akım Türk dış politikasından tarihsel bir ayrışmadır. Makale, özetle, Suriye krizinin, Türkiye' dahil küresel ve bölgesel politik dinamikler üzerine olan etkisini inceleyecektir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: *Arap Baharı, Suriye krizi, politik dinamikler, Türkiye, Orta Doğu.*

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1. INTRODUCTION

The Arab Spring is the wave of demonstrations and protests, beginning in December 2010, which has led to the overthrow of regimes in a number of countries in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. The developments can be attributed to the demands of people in the region for democracy, freedom, liberty, rule of law, and fairness against the repressive regimes. Additionally, democratic values such as pluralism, political representation and respect for the human rights have not been embraced by the governments in the entire region. Thus, the general causes of popular uprisings are rooted in a common set of conditions: autocratic regimes, lack of representative institutions, flagrant inequities, corruption, unfair distribution of economic resources, poor living conditions, nepotism, and exploitation of public resources by the ruling classes.¹ The people in the region has been rebelling against oppressive governments in order to gain democracy, freedom, prosperity; to attain better living conditions and to be respected as individual.

On various dates, several powers influenced the region and steered the Arab nations and MENA. With the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, Western colonization had supremacy in region.² Europeans changed the geography of the region at the San Remo Conference held in 1920, and put “the whole of Arab Rectangle under mandatory rule.”³ This led to a political narrative, with nationalism and anti-imperialism articulated by an educated group in the first half of the twentieth century. This political forces ended the era of colonization,⁴ replaced it by a nation-state period. However, those national forces that toppled pro-colonial and pro-imperial regimes found themselves in defensive positions that turned them into regimes as ruthless as their colonial predecessors.⁵

The Arab spring is historical event that transform the Arab world. The consequences of Arab instabilities have deeply implicated the Syrian crisis. It becomes international focus

¹ General causes and assessment of Arab Spring were expounded comprehensively in:

Shibley Telhami, “Egypt, Tunisia and Iran”, **Digest of Middle East Studies**, 20, Spring 2011; Francis Ghilès, “A New Deal for Arab People”, **Insight Turkey**, 14/1, 2012, 13-27; Jonathan Steinberg, “1848 and 2011, Bringing Down the Old Order is Easy; Building A New One is Tough”, **Foreign Affairs**, September 28, 2011; Perry Anderson, “On the Concatenation in the Arab World”, **New Left Review** 68, Mar-Apr 2011, 5-15; Anthony Cordesman et al., “Arab Uprisings and U.S. Policy: What Is the American National Interest?”, **Middle East Policy**, 18/2, 2011; Lisa Anderson, “Demystifying the Arab Spring”, **Foreign Affairs**, 90, May/Jun 2011; Ema Sky, “Arab Spring American Fall”, **Harvard International Review**, Summer 2011.

² Phillip K Hitti, *History of the Arabs From the Earliest Times to the Present*, Palgrave Macmillan, New York, 1970, 750-75; Arshad M. Abbasi, “The Arab World: Democratization and Islamization?”, **International Journal on World Peace**, 29/1, March 2012, p.8; Bernard Lewis, **The Arabs in History**, Oxford University Press, New York, 1992, Sixth Edition, p.3.

³ Nazmi Al-Shalabi et al, “The Reception of American Culture in the Middle East after “The Arab Spring”, **Canadian Social Science**, 7/5, 2011, p. 157.

⁴ Samir Amin, “An Arab Springtime?”, **Monthly Review**, October 2011, p. 10.

⁵ Mohamad Alkadry, “Colonialism in a Postmodern Age: The West, Arabs and “the Battle of Baghdad”, **Public Administration and Management**, 9/1, 2004, p. 41.

and caused global actors and regional players to intervene. Therefore, the Syria crisis and Turkey's policy toward Syria crisis will be studied in first part of article.

The power game politics and the growing rivalries among the big regional players pushed the Syrian crisis high on the international diplomatic agenda. Syria plays an integral role in the broader competition over the future leadership of the region and the way in which the future of the country will be shaped is to have a dramatic impact on the strategic geometry of the Middle East, with serious consequences over the global political scene. The dynamics of the positions adopted by the major regional and outside powers and their specific interests towards the Syrian crisis will be further developed in a second part of article.

The article will come to the conclusion that the developments of the Syria crisis and the re-shaping of the Middle East political landscape are strongly interconnected even so there are not overlapping. The way in which the two events are to further developed will decisively impact upon the final strategic design of the regional political architecture.

2. ANALYZING THE SYRIAN UPRISING

Syria has for many decades been the bellwether of Arab politics, especially in times of intense ideological competition. This is the consequence of its strategic location between the two traditional centers of Arab power, Egypt and Iraq, and the perception that it is the heartland of Arab nationalism.⁶

The features that are peculiar to Syria are the rigid state structure based on the Nusayri minority, a continued anti-US and anti-Israel policy, close relations with Russia and Iran, and finally its profound influence on Lebanon. The repressive years of management by the Baath regime through the secret police in Syria has established the rooted and well-set governance that cannot be overthrown with internal dynamics. Since the start of the revolt in Syria, the country's Alawites have been instrumental in maintaining the Assad's family hold on power. A sect of Shia Islam, the Alawites comprise roughly 13 percent of the population and form the bulk of Syria's key military units, intelligence services, and ultra-loyalist militias.⁷

Coming to power in 2000, Baser al-Assad has implemented neo-liberal economic policies which have deteriorated rather than ameliorated the harsh conditions of life labors.⁸ Despite popular notions of a rich, privileged Alawite class dominating Syria, the country's current regime provides little tangible benefit to most Alawite citizens. Rural Alawites have

⁶ Mohammed Ayoob, "The Arab Spring: Its Geostrategic Significance", **Middle East Policy**, 19/3, Fall 2012, p. 84.

⁷ Leon Goldsmith, "Alawites for Assad; Why the Syrian Sect Backs the Regime", April 16, 2012, <http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/137407/leon-goldsmith/alawites-for-assad?page=show>, (accessed January 25, 2013), para 1.

⁸ Angela Joya, "Suriye ve Arap Baharı: Çatışmanın Evrimi ile İç ve Dış Faktörlerin Rolü (Syria and the Arab Spring: The Evolution of Conflict and the Role of Internal and External Factors), September 14, 2012, <http://www.orsam.org.tr/tr/yazigoster.aspx?ID=3878>, (accessed 28.11.2012).

struggled as a result of cuts in fuel subsidies and new laws restricting the sale of tobacco – their primary crop for centuries.⁹ So, Assad has lost the confidence from his main supporters consisting of labor and villagers. On the other hand, coming to 2009, religiously affiliated groups had a well-set structure, both in commercial life and the religious arena as the limitations on religious activities have been alleviated. Salwa depicted this ‘religious-commerce-complex’ restructuring as unification between Islam and commerce¹⁰ that has occurred in other countries.

Syria’s ruling system has some specific conditions that need to be explained. The Syrian ruling system has some differences from those in other Arab countries affected by popular unrest. First of all, the economic gap between the ruling elite class and poor young mass in Syria is not as much as great as in other Arab countries. That is why widespread poverty and unemployment has not caused a sudden regime change. Further, the autocratic Baath Party has melted Syrian nationalism and socialism through secular society in which all various groups have enjoyed much of their religious and sectarian differences. During its decades of rule, the Assad family developed a strong political safety net by firmly integrating the military into the regime.¹¹ The Syrian regime has embraced the labor movement and villager’s alliances. After the Sunni uprising and the massacre of the Muslim Brotherhood by Syrian forces in 1982, Sunnis have been incorporated into governance and more Islamist approaches have been embraced. Contrary to what is commonly thought, Christians, Dourzhis, and other minorities also support the Assad regime. During the Lebanon and Iraqi crises, Syria hosted numerous displaced persons and refugees, which taught that sectarian conflict was quite harmful in any case.

Influenced by the developments in the region in the context of the Arab Spring, the people of Syria have expressed their democratic demands through non-violent means in the beginning. However, the first protesters were the leftist and secularist groups. These groups voiced their politic and social rights. However, starting in the summer of 2011, religious groups supported by Saudi Arabia, Libya and Qatar deliberately began to protest against the Assad regime. There are two kinds of opponents struggling to depose Assad. The first one is a more peaceful secular group called the National Coordination Committee (NCC) for democratic transformation. The second is the Syrian National Council (SCC) supported by the Muslim Brotherhood. The second one has the advantage of Western support and linkage to the Free Syrian Army (FSA) and eager to use every method possible to drive out the Assad.

The Baath administration has demonstrated its intention to make reforms; nevertheless, Basher Assad removed the state of emergency in practice for 40 years, returned

⁹ Goldsmith, op.cit., para 5.

¹⁰ Ismail Salwa, ‘Changing Social Structure, Shifting Alliances and Authoritarianism in Syria’, (ed.) Fred Lawson, in **Demystifying Syria**, Saqi Press, London, 2009, 13-28.

¹¹ Michael Bröning, “The Sturdy House That Assad Built: Why Damascus Is Not Cairo”, March 7, 2011, <http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/67561/michael-broening/the-sturdy-house-that-assad-built?page=show>, (accessed 19.01. 2013).

the rights of citizenship and identities to the elements that lacked those qualities and began to take steps to conduct other reforms. However, these reforms have been insufficient to pacify the uprising.

The Syrian leaders have become the most resolute group to not leave power despite all external and internal pressures. The continued unrest in Syria has dramatically weakened the Basher Assad regime. The decision to use lethal force against demonstrators raised negative feelings and anti-Basher views in the world. In this situation, it would be very unrealistic for the Syrian leader to be able to sustain his power.

As the peaceful protest did not achieve its goal, it turned into violence that rapidly spread and covered most of the streets. The U.S. and Turkey took steps to help the opposition and revolutionary forces to get better organized. Therefore, the Syria National Council was established and settled in Turkey to manage the political aspects, while the FSA was organized as its military wing to fight against the Syrian Armed Forces.

However as the Syria National Council has not enthusiastically embraced all opponents and, moreover, due to its fractured structure as well as possible connection to al-Qaida, it was thought that it was necessary to redesign the opposition organization and give it a larger base of representation by bringing together the various political and military opponents of the regime. The Syrian National Coalition was founded with U.S. assistance in Qatar in November 2012. Besides, in Marrakesh in December 2012, the Friends of Syria – a group of over 90 countries, including the United States – recognized the National Coalition as Syria's legitimate government. Additionally, opposition forces also have made some progress toward uniting the numerous armed groups. In December 2012, in Antalya, Turkey, 500 representatives from different Syrian armed factions created the Supreme Military Council, an elected body of 30 representatives, from their ranks. The relationship between the National Coalition and the Supreme Military Council is still evolving.¹² The United States, Turkey, Saudi Arabia and Qatar have restructured Syrian National Council as National Coalition in order to assemble various moderate religious opponents under a common umbrella. To normalize and gain deceive victory in Syria, SNC was recognized as legitimized Syrian government.

The Syrian government employed the full force of its military leading to the death of about 60,000 people (according to the most recent figures), and more than half a million people have fled the country, of which 300,000 are in refugee camps in Turkey. However, the violence shows no signs of subsiding. It is worth mentioning that the rebel forces seem to have gained the upper hand in the conflict, and they are in direct control of about 40 percent of the country.¹³

The West has been backing the dissident groups in what is seen as a window of opportunity to normalize the political situation in Syria, but the instability in the country

¹² Michael Bröning, "Time to Back the Syrian National Coalition Arms For Peace", December 17, 2012, <http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/138509/michael-broening/time-to-back-the-syrian-national-coalition>, (accessed 19.01. 2013).

¹³ Ibid.

still continues. How the unrest will further evolve is still unknown. However, the support provided by Russia and China to the Assad regime complicates even more the internal dynamics and makes a possible external intervention remote. Russia's stance towards Syria is rooted in particular strategic interests:

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General

The Syrian crisis is also the center of gravity of complicated and unpredictable dynamics strongly connected to a growing power struggle among the main regional players. The conflict and instability occurring within Syria, exacerbated by the on-going process of reshaping the strategic environment under the impact of the Arab uprising, has the potential of profoundly affecting the existing political geometry and strategic equation of the region. As Michael Bell, a former Canadian ambassador to Egypt, Jordan, Israel and the Palestinian territories, put it: "*We are facing the world of realpolitik, where different, and committed actors, inside and outside Syria, are playing by standards that liberal internationalists abhor... Tighter teams are playing hardball, pursuing their own distinctly sovereign interests through clandestine diplomacy.*"¹⁴

Syria under Bashar al-Assad regime has developed along a few major features: strong relations with Iran and Russia, close ties with its neighbor Turkey, cold peace with Israel (including Syria's official statement made in 2007 that there is no intention of waging war against Israel to regain the Golan Heights), and a large room of maneuver in Lebanon politics through its and Iranian political client, Hezbollah. The relations with the USA remained tense, its inclusion on the additional "axis of evil" list in 2002 being such an indicator, primarily motivated by Damascus' efforts to acquire chemical weapons and its relations with various terrorist organizations, leading to severe sanctions against Syrian government.¹⁵

The revolutionary waves in North Africa and the Middle East dramatically changed Syria's strategic posture and its security environment. The overthrow of the autocratic regimes in some of the neighboring countries, others being under massive social pressures as well, and the rise of Islamist movements completely changed the web of policies and strategies developed among the major players, as well as their political calculus and strategic alignments vis-à-vis the new emerging developments in Damascus. The spread of revolution into Syria dramatically complicated the overall strategic picture and deepen the divisions among the main interested actors as their political and diplomatic agendas collide. Syria split the international community in two opposite camps. The first one includes players that

¹⁴ Michael Bell, "In Syria, The Powers Play Hardball", 23 July 2012, <http://www.the-globeandmail.com/commentary/in-syria-the-powers-play-hardball/article4431894/>, (accessed 04.02.2013).

¹⁵ Jeremy M. Sharp, "Christopher M. Blanchard, Armed Conflict in Syria: US and International Response", **CRS Report for Congress**, Congressional Research Service, 21 August 2012, <http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/mideast/RL33487.pdf>, (accessed 20.10.2013).

support the revolutionary forces calling for regime change as the only solution for ending the Syrian crisis and answering to the democratic aspirations of the Syrian people. These countries are: Turkey, USA, France, Britain and other EU countries, the Arab League, the most active being Saudi Arabia and Qatar. The second camp is represented by Iran, Russia and China that continues to show support to the Assad regime although their rationales broadly differ even diverge.¹⁶

The way that the two camps are positioning towards the Syrian crisis answers to particular interests and strategic goals as well as on their particular vision on the future regional architecture. There are vivid debates concerning the growing regional competition around two major power centers: on one hand, the *Sunni axis* bringing together Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Egypt, and, on the other hand, the *Shi'a crescent* comprising Iran, Iraq, Syria (Allawi regime) and Lebanon (through Hezbollah).

A brief analysis of the current strategic scene might help decipher the main rationales behind various positions adopted by the main players concerning the Syrian crisis, their complicated network, interests, security objectives and prospects for the future.

The Analysis of Turkey's Policy in Syria Crisis

Turkey is the most affected country by the uprising in Syria. Historically, Turkey-Syria relations persistently deteriorated until 2002 because of Syria's claims on Turkish city of Hatay, Grand Syrian claim, water problem and supporting PKK terrorist organization. However, the relations normalized after signing the Adana Protocol in 1998 in which Syria committed not to support or provide safe haven for terrorists. Between 2002-2011 Turkey and Syria have experienced smooth and cooperative neighboring approaches driven by international environment and the transformation of Turkish foreign policy toward Middle East and the Arab world. Relations with Syria epitomized the very principles on which the "new" Turkish foreign policy was based, a combination of economic interdependence and cultural affinity with no explicit agenda for democracy promotion.¹⁷

Turkey adopted a proactive approach towards the Syrian crisis. In the initial phase, it tried to get Assad to initiate political reforms and end the use of violence against his fellow citizens. Facing Assad's stubborn position, Ankara changed the course and provided political support to the opponents of Assad regime.¹⁸ Following the deterioration of the relations with Syria, Turkey's policy developed accordingly: it pursued disengagement and isolation policy towards Assad regime; maintains supporting the Syrian opposition; provides shelter to

¹⁶ See Kayhan Barzegar, "The Arab Spring and the Balance of Power in the Middle East", 30 October 2012, <http://www.powerandpolicy.com/2012/10/30/the-arab-spring-and-the-balance-of-power-in-the-middle-east/#.UTB07fKStkg>, (accessed 12.15.2012); Aram Nerguizian, "Bracing For An Uncertain Future In Syria", **Center for Strategic and International Studies**, 20 June 2012, <http://csis.org/publication/bracing-uncertain-future-syria>, (accessed 14.8.2012).

¹⁷ Ziya Öniş, "Turkey and the Arab Spring: Between Ethics and Self-Interest", **Insight Turkey**, 14/3, 2012, 46.

¹⁸ Michael B. Bishku, "Turkish-Syrian Relations: A Checkered History", **Middle East Policy**, 19/3, Fall 2012, p. 48.

Syrian Free Army; buttresses the anti-Syrian regime chorus. However, Turkey has emphatically denied these allegations.¹⁹

Turkish attitude seemed to conflict with that of Iranian's over Syria. Turkey's involvement in Syria has further complicated the picture, with Ankara and Riyadh lined up on the side of the opposition and Iran on the side of the regime. Iran's role in the current regional cold war has introduced sectarian (Shia versus Sunni) as well ethnic (Persian versus Arab) divisions into the competition for pre-eminence in the region.²⁰ The competition between Iran and Turkey on Syria issue looks like a breakdown of the "Myth of Kasri Sirin" that suggests four centuries of amicable ties between Turkey and Iran. However, Cagaptay put forth that Turkey and Iran have repeatedly fought since 1639, and since the 1979 Islamic Revolution Iran has supported terror groups inside Turkey.²¹ So, the agreement has been violated several times and the myth is no more a truth.

Turkey has assumed a similar role in Syria as the one that was assumed by Pakistan vis-à-vis Afghanistan in the 1980s, in the sense that it has become a base for the Syrian opposition, has provided home for Syrian refugees and has become a transmission belt for transfer of weapons to the FSA. Turkey however, has to be cautious about the coming decades and how the intensification of the conflict and instability in Syria could spill over into its own border as happened in the case of Pakistan.²² This is a historical deviation from its main foreign policy course which has always considered peaceful implementation with her neighbors.

On the other hand, Turkey has also been accused of being facilitator and executor of American policy in region. This has become an internal political discussion as well. Despite Turkey and the United States' common desire to oust Assad, Washington and Ankara have two distinctly different visions of a post-revolutionary Syria. The United States insists that any solution to the Syrian crisis should guarantee religious and ethnic pluralism. But Turkey has been perceived to see the conflict in sectarian terms. This policy has considerably been critiqued for not being inclusive and pluralist given its close ties with Syria's Muslim Brotherhood-dominated Sunni opposition seeking to suppress the rights of other minorities in Syria²³.

Turkey's policy of "zero problems with the neighbors" strategy failed in general, in Syria in particular. Turkey started to experience problems with countries like Syria, with which it previously enjoyed favorable relations.²⁴ Under these circumstances, there continue

¹⁹ Ibid, p. 49.

²⁰ Ayoob, 2012, p. 84.

²¹ Soner Cagaptay and Duden Yegenoglu, "The Myth of 1639 and Kasri Sirin", <http://www.bitterlemons-international.org/inside.php?id=541>, (accessed 28.01.2013).

²² Joya, *op.cit.*

²³ Halil Karaveli, "Turkey Is No Partner for Peace: How Ankara's Sectarianism Hobbles U.S. Syria Policy", September 11, 2012, <http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/138104/halil-karaveli/turkey-is-no-partner-for-peace?page=show>, (accessed 28.01.2013).

²⁴ Öniş, *op.cit.*, p. 49.

to be diverging and conflicting regional interests regarding Syria. Turkey has neither the interest nor the experience in waging a proxy war in a neighboring country, in undertaking regime change or unilateral intervention (except in the Cyprus case).²⁵ Turkish action to date has involved taking a clear stance against the Syrian regime, housing and supporting the opposition, welcoming refugees, helping to build an international coalition, and working to provide humanitarian assistance.²⁶

Turkey has incurred a huge sum of economical lost during his active strategy toward Syria. The number of refugees accessing 200.000 has cost Turkey more than half million dollars until April 2013. This cost is increasing day by day. Additionally, 2.5 billion dollar foreign trade with Syria and, one billion-dollar revenue from Syrian tourists has also been cut off. Approximately 107.00 Turkish trucks have lost travel ability through the cheapest route annually. Turkey's military spending is enlarging day by day to protect its border and deter Syria for any attack. Additionally, Turkey demanded from NATO the deployment of Patriot missile and early warning system at Syrian border to prevent any attack from Syria. Turkey has incurred to meet the deployment of patriot missile and foreign troops. Additionally, the missile deployment provoked Russian apprehensions and caused some frictions between Moscow and Ankara.

Turkey started to control all military and civilian flights that transit its airspace as to detect those carrying military equipment and weapons to Syria. Turkish government also received a mandate from the parliament to station troops abroad if necessary for responding to Syria's attack. Considering all these, Turkey heavily involves in Syrian uprising and becomes a counter party at conflict.

Additionally, Turkey's Syria policy has caused deteriorated in its relations with Iraq, Iran and Russia. The deterioration of the relations with its neighbors has begun to shake Turkey's security and to influence domestic and Turkey's foreign policy radically. Turkey's "zero-problem –policy with its neighbors articulated by the Turkish Foreign Minister, Ahmet Davutoglu, has lost its ground due to ongoing crisis with the neighbors.

Assad's reaction to Turkey policy was more hostile than expected. Turkey's averted policy has received unexpected outcomes. One of the Turkey's aircraft was hit down by Syrian missile in June 2102. The shells of Syrian artillery fell down several times Turkish soil and killed several Turkish citizens. Naturally, the crisis has damaged Turkish-Syrian relations, which are now under review.²⁷ The Assad regime has painted Turkey as trying to "meddle" in Arab affairs with a Sunni "neo-Ottomanist" agenda.²⁸

Furthermore, Basher Assad allowed some parts of northern region to be under the control of Kurdish Democratic Union Party (PYD). Thus, Syria's goal is both to keep FSA

²⁵ Erol Cebeci and Kadir Üstün, "The Syrian Quagmire: What's Holding Turkey Back?", *Insight Turkey*, 14/2 2012, p. 21.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Michael B. Bishku, "Turkish-Syrian Relations: A Checkered History", *Middle East Policy*, 19/3, Fall 2012, p. 47.

²⁸ Cebeci and Üstün, *op.cit.*, p. 8.

away from the borders and to put Turkey in a difficult position by creating another Kurdish issue at its border. With Lebanon, Turkey is the society most exposed to the consequences of protracted conflict and chaos in Syria. The threat posed by the re-establishment of terrorist group Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) camps in Syria, may be the most prominent threat to Turkish security. But there are many others. From the refugee crisis to the threat of violent spillovers, possibly involving armed jihadist groups, Ankara faces a growing security challenge from this quarter.²⁹

Non-Arab Turkey and non-Arab Iran are the leading central actors in the Arab world due to fact that the accumulation of numerous dynamics has paved the way for the emergence of Turkey and Iran as the major players in the Middle East. These include the shift in the strategic and political balance in the Middle East in favor of Turkey and Iran as well as combination of factors, some domestic, some regional and some global. These factors contain the incapacity of major Arab powers to influence the course of regional events as well as what increasingly appears to be the end of “America’s moment” in the Middle East. Furthermore, both Turkey and Iran possess a combination of varying degrees of hard and soft power that equip them to affect regional events to a greater extent than their neighbors.³⁰ Ankara and Tehran have been able to maximize these assets in particular situations.³¹ Non-Arab Turks and non-Arab Iranians are now in competition with each other to lead the Arab world employing sectarian, ethnic, economic, military and cultural tools in different manner. This can be deemed for both nations to redesign the Middle East region which shared with the Kasr-i Shirin agreement in 1637.³²

Turkey reached a historical crossroad being pushed to reconsider its geostrategic vision and readapt its policies to a profoundly changed regional strategic landscape. Once a close ally and a key piece in its strategic setting, Syria became the great challenge that Ankara needs to face in order to preserve its leading role and regional posture and avoid the emergence of a counterweight to its regional preeminence. Nevertheless, Syria’s future might highly determine Turkey’s future role and its say on the evolution of the Middle East architecture.

²⁹ Ian O. Lesser, “Three Troubling Scenarios for Turkey and Transatlantic Partners”, **the German Marshall Fund**, September 12, 2012, http://www.gmfus.org/wpcontent/blogs.dir/1/files_mf/1347638976Lesser_3TroublingScenarios_Sep12.pdf, (accessed 01.12.2012).

³⁰ Ayoob, **2012**, p. 91.

³¹ Mohammed Ayoob, “Beyond the Democratic Wave in the Arab World: The Middle East’s Turko-Persian Future”, **Insight Turkey**, 13/2, 2011, p. 59.

³² The papers describing Turkish modeling for Arab Spring can be found at: Richard Javad Heydarian, “Arab Spring, Turkish Summer?,” **Foreign Policy in Focus**, May 16, 2011, http://www.fpif.org/articles/arab_spring_turkish_summer, (accessed 12.11.2012); Kadri Kaan Renda, “Turkey’s Neighborhood Policy: An Emerging Complex Interdependence,” **Insight Turkey**, 13/1, 2011; Ash U. Bali, “A Turkish Model for the Arab Spring?,” **Middle East Law and Governance**, 3, 2011; Kemal Kirişci, “Turkey’s “Demonstrative Effect” and the Transformation of the Middle East”, **Insight Turkey**, 13/2, 2011, 33-55.

The removal of the Assad regime became an imperative for Turkey's policy in the region but, however, its intransigent stance complicated Ankara's posture and limited its room of maneuver. The rationales behind Turkey's strategy need to be understood from different perspectives. First, with Assad's removal, Turkey might strengthen its influence over Damascus's policies gaining an important asset in the geopolitical struggle with Teheran. Second, a Turkey-friendly Syria would play a key role in managing the Kurdish problem that poses an existential threat to the Turkish state. Third, a success in Syria would highly increase Turkey's regional posture as well as its credibility and political prestige among the Arab nations. It is worth mentioning that a success in Syria correlated with its overwhelming support provided to the revolutionary forces in the Arab world will consolidate Ankara's political prestige and its diplomatic agenda, as well as its credibility as the leading nation in an extremely complicated region. The popularity enjoys by the prime minister Erdogan would be a real asset as well in projecting Turkey's soft power in the neighboring area. Forth, changing the power distribution by weakening Iran-Syrian axis would enhance Ankara's influence in shaping the future of a "new" Middle East. Moreover, a friendly Syria and a weaken Iran might readjust Iraq's own strategic positioning and soften up its pro-Iranian stance. Fifth, Turkey could increase its regional leading standing through building the Sunni axis with Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Qatar, countries that share similar anxieties towards the Iranian growing influence. Sixth, from the economic perspective, the end of the Assad regime will soften up the huge financial and economic pressures over the Turkish economy that increased with the flow of the Syrian refugees, now reaching the limit of 175.000 people, a burden that is getting more difficult to handle. This is why the Turkish authorities let know the Western allies that it is possible to ask for financial assistance to manage the growing economic pressures³³.

In the given circumstances, getting rid of Assad seems the only option that Turkey might go for. In the same time, its intransigent position on the matter highly reduced Ankara's ability to play a more diplomatic role in the Syrian dossier. Turkey is constrained to play the hard card, rather than assuming a position of mediator among the two parts involved in the conflict. Practically, Turkey lost its ability to negotiate being replaced by Russia whose role in the Syrian affairs strengthened as well as its power of influence on other key areas.

Therefore, Ankara is urging for a more practical Western involvement, either through military force, the enforcement of "no-fly zone" to support the rebel forces, or by arming the Syrian rebels although the risks to see these arms falling in the hands of the terrorist groups raised serious concerns in Ankara.³⁴ But the room of maneuver is narrowing. Despite

³³ Asli Ilgit, Davis Rochelle, "The Many Roles of Turkey in the Syrian Crisis", 28 January 2013, <http://www.merip.org/mero/mero012813>, (10.02.2013); Turkey asks Europe for help with Syrian refugees, 15 October 2012, <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/number-of-syrian-refugees-in-turkish-camps-exceeds-100000.aspx?pageID=238&nid=32446>, (17 .10.2012).

³⁴ Joshua W. Walker, "Turkey's Time in Syria: Future Scenarios", Middle East Brief, 63, May 2012, Brandeis University, <http://www.brandeis.edu/crown/publications/meb/MEB63.pdf>, (accessed 8.11.2012); Michael Weiss, "Turkey Asks NATO About a No-Fly Zone As Syria

Turkey's urging calls, the Western backing, in terms of military involvement, is pending. This reluctance needs to be understood in a broad strategic picture. Finally Turkey's involvement in Syria crisis is non-traditional foreign policy application since founding of Turkish Republic. As Ottoman empires had withdrew from all occupied territory and collapsed, new politicians of the republican era implemented peaceful foreign policy and avoided an hostile act against its neighbors except special cases that threaten its national interests. Current Turkish politicians have assertive ambitious foreign policy. In Syria case, this policy seems more sectarian and religious, pro-active, and more pro-American.

The Analysis of the United States Policy

The United States embraced the idea of regional transformation and supported the aspirations of the revolutionary forces seeking for democratic change, human rights, freedom, and better living standards. Syria is not an exception but Washington's practical involvement in the crisis it is by far a more complicated matter. The relations between Washington and Damascus deteriorated in the last years given Syria's policy towards Iran, its support provided to Hezbollah and its alleged possession of chemical weapons.³⁵ Moreover, the worsening of the situation in Iraq grounded by the American military's withdrawal, and the threatening perspectives concerning the Iranian-Iraqi "rapprochement" was to be perceived as a dramatic blow to the American strategic position on the Middle East scene. Teheran succeeded to establish a strong area of influence in the region emerging as a dominant power with obvious hegemonic aspirations. The Iranian regional power was based upon two main pillars, Iraq and the Alawi regime in Syria, backed by its clients Hezbollah in Lebanon, and Hamas in Gaza. The main American interests in removing Assad from power rests in the need of decreasing and limiting the Iranian influence and its hegemonic claims and avoiding the spill over effects of the Syrian crisis leading to a dramatic destabilization of the whole region³⁶.

Two main concerns are high on Washington's political agenda regarding the Syrian issue: the advance of the extremist-jihadist fighters that infiltrated among the revolutionary forces fighting on the ground against Assad and the lack of a real political alternative to

Makes It Clear That It's Ready To Fight Dirty", 28 June 2012, <http://blogs.telegraph.co.uk/news/michaelweiss/100168059/turkey-asks-nato-about-a-no-fly-zone-as-syria-makes-it-clear-that-its-ready-to-fight-dirty/>, (accessed 05.7.2012).

³⁵ Anthony H. Cordesman, "Syrian Weapons of Mass Destruction. An overview":, 1st Working Draft, 2 June 2008, **Center for Strategic and International Studies**, http://csis.org/files/media/csis/pubs/080602_syrianwmd.pdf, (accessed 5.12.2012); Mary Crane, "Middle East: US and Syrian Relations", **Council of Foreign Relations**, 18 February 2005, <http://www.cfr.org/middle-east/middle-east-us-syrian-relations/p7852>, (accessed 11.1.2013).

³⁶ Ken Sofer, Next Steps in Syria. A look at US Priorities and Interests, **Center for American Progress**, 14 August 2012, <http://www.americanprogress.org/issues/security/news/2012/08/14/11992/next-steps-in-syria/>, (accessed 14.11.2012); George Friedman, 'Consequences of the Fall of the Syrian Regime', **Stratfor**, 24 July 2012, <http://www.stratfor.com/weekly/consequences-fall-syrian-regime>, (accessed 7.8.2012) , 2012.

replace the existing regime and keep under control the stability and integrity of the state. Washington decision to help reorganize the opposition forces through Doha agreement (December 2012) is also an answer to its increased disappointment towards Syrian National Council that remains weak and divided despite the generous Western and Turkish support. However, the United States has been reluctant about arming the Syrian opposition fighters, though supporting them, due to fears that weapons sent to them might reach the hands of Jihadi fighters who arrived to Syria from Iraq, the Arabian Peninsula and North Africa. The worst scenario envisages the radical-Islamist forces seizing the power in Damascus that might turn Syria in a new Afghanistan and a *safe heaven* for the terrorist groups, either or not affiliated to Al-Qaeda.

American policy toward Syria evolved through its experiments in Afghanistan and Iraqi Operation in where it incurred heavy casualties and huge costs. The United States is not keen to be fully committed to the Middle East, since the situation is too complicated and unpredictable. Therefore, the United States hesitates directly to involve the Syrian crisis; instead, it uses FSA and Syrian National Coalition as well as Sunni-Moslem nations. Washington thinks internal civil war is likely to attrite and to help to zero Assad's resistance power in due course. The United States and Westerns have hesitated comprehensively arming the Syrian *opposition* because of ideologically increasing fractured opposition groups, risk of exacerbating violence in the country, and finally the Russian concerns. Moreover, the killing of Ambassador Christopher Stevens, who helped deposed Gaddafi, on September 11, deepened the apprehension of Americans as well. There is a common perception that if opponents win they will likely seek revenge and embrace neither democracy nor liberalism³⁷ as happened in Libya or Iran.

For the moment it seems that America faces a decisional blockage and its further involvement will highly depend on the ability of the National Coalition to develop as a coherent and responsible force. There are not many other options for Washington: on one hand, Assad's survival would help Teheran to forge further its regional power and, on the other hand, his replacement with a regime dominated by radical forces would threaten the stability of the whole region, with unpredictable consequences. A stable transition of power following the Egyptian model might be an option. For sure, a Western-model democratic regime is completely unlikely taking into account the general political dynamics developed in the last two years. Therefore, the United States might support a moderate Islamic regime, most likely having the Muslim Brotherhood as the leading force, able to provide internal stability and external predictability. Another option that cannot be ignored considers the possibility of initiating dialogue between the opposition forces and the Assad regime, scenario that depends on the willingness of the two parts involved to play the compromise card as well as on the positions of two important political actors: Russia and Iran.³⁸

³⁷ Bilal Y. Saab and Andrew J. Tabler, "No Settlement In Damascus, The Danger of a Negotiated Peace", January 2, 2013, <http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/138739/bilal-y-saab-and-andrew-j-tabler/no-settlement-in-damascus>, (accessed 19.1.2013).

³⁸ Asli Bali, Aziz Rana, To save Syria, work with Russia and Iran, 15 August 2012,

Russian Policy in Syria Crisis

Russia and Iran are credited with a high degree of influence over the Syrian regime as they become its closest allies and strategic backers. Moreover, *Russia's* support is crucial because it holds a veto as a permanent member of the Security Council, posture that allows it to obstruct any UNSC initiative against the Assad regime. The United Nations has largely failed, because it depends on agreement among the permanent members of the Security Council. Moreover, either solution, including tougher sanctions against Assad regime, would have limited impact, as long as they are ignored by big players as Russia and China. The worsening of the Syrian conflict and the lack of any real perspective for a rapid solution forged Russia as a key strategic player in this extremely complicated international dossier. It is worth mentioning that Russia has major strategic stakes in Syria and therefore, its position should be understood in a broader perspective strongly related to Moscow's ambitions to recover its place in the global power game.³⁹

Russia's posture, seen in this context, is particularly important considering both its special relations with Syria and Iran and its obvious aspirations of projecting itself as a distinct voice in the big powers game in a strategically vital region. For Moscow, the Syrian crisis, together with the Iranian case, provides an unexpected room to decisively play in the power competition at global scale. It is still difficult to say in what extent Moscow's future plans will be successfully implemented since there are serious questions concerning its real potential to influence the actions of its allies in the region. It is difficult to anticipate the further evolutions on the Middle East political scene. But one thing is certain: Russia will pragmatically play its strategic card seeking to design the future regional political geometry as to answer primarily to its own security and strategic objectives.

Dmitri Trenin gave an accurate assessment of Russia's strategic posture towards the Syrian crisis: To Moscow, Syria is not primarily about Middle Eastern geopolitics, Cold War-era alliances, arms sales—or even special interests, like the under-renovation Tartus naval resupply facility which gives Russia some capacity to operate on the Mediterranean [...] Rather, from a Russian policy perspective, Syria—much like yesterday's Libya, Iraq, or Yugoslavia—is primarily about the world order. It is about *who decides*: who decides whether to use military force; who decides the actors for use of that force; and who decides under what rules, conditions, and oversight military force is to be used.⁴⁰

<http://edition.cnn.com/2012/08/15/opinion/bali-rana-syria>, (accessed 24.8.2012).

³⁹ Dmitri Trenin, "Russia's Line in the Sand on Syria. Why Moscow Wants To Halt the Arab Spring", *Foreign Affairs*, 5 February 2012, <http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/137078/dmitri-trenin/russias-line-in-the-sand-on-syria>, accessed October 05, 2012; "Russia's Syrian Stance: Principled Self-Interest", *Strategic Comments*, Volume 18, Comment 31 September 2012, *The International Institute for Strategic Studies*, <http://www.iiss.org/publications/strategic-comments/past-issues/volume-18-2012/september/russias-syrian-stance-principled-self-interest/>, (accessed 10.1.2013).

⁴⁰ Dmitri Trenin, "Syria: A Russian Perspective", 28 June 2012, <http://carnegieendowment.org/2012/06/28/syria-russian-perspective/ccln>, (accessed 02.8. 2012).

Besides its assumed global ambitions, there are also important strategic reasons that motivates Russia's stance towards Syria: access to the Mediterranean Sea through the navy facility located in the port of Tartus (the only Russian naval military base left in the Mediterranean Sea), a large arms market, a friendly regime that allows Russia to exert regional influence, a large number of Russian citizens (aprox. 100.000 nationals) leaving on the Syrian territory, as to mention some of them. Moreover, Russia voiced real concerns regarding the prospects of a political vacuum emerging in Damascus following the removal of Assad filled by various extremist-jihadist forces that seem to seize the leading role in the internal anti-regime struggle. There are also rising fears in Russia concerning the growing potential of instability inside and in the territories close to Syria and the risks of proliferation of Syria's large cache of chemical weapons. Russia fears what might happen if a collapse in Syria resulted in a deep religious divide and the raise of radical-extremist forces having destabilizing effects on the overall security dynamics in the Middle East. Moreover, Russia is extremely vulnerable to the spill over effects of the Islamic influence especially in the North Caucasus and, therefore, backing Assad might guarantee the stability of the country and a certain control over the radical Islamic forces. Basically, Russia and the West share similar concerns regarding the extremist forces and terrorist groups infiltrated on the ground that might reverse the course of events.⁴¹ They differ on the solution to be adopted and their different approaches regarding the role the Assad regime might have in the further political negotiations led to a complete international blockage.

The growing strategic concerns motivate Russia to push for its own agenda towards the Syrian crisis: it refused to back any UN Security Council resolution threatening sanctions or military force against the Syrian government and refused to back any demand that President Bashar al-Assad step down as a precondition for talks. Russia's stance is motivating by the need to defend the principle of non-intervention in the domestic affairs and respect the national sovereignty of states. The major Russian concern is that by legitimizing the selective application of the international law, Russia and its closest allies from the former Soviet-space might be subject of military foreign intervention, perhaps with the consent of the UN.

From Moscow's point of view, there is no real alternative to the Assad regime able to provide the internal stability and limit the influence of the radical groups. There is no less true that without Russia's support, any solution to the existing crisis it's almost impossible to be reached. However, regardless Turkey who broke up any connection with the Syrian regime, Moscow keeps an important card that can be played to mediate between the opposition forces and the Syrian regime.⁴² Its influence in Teheran also gives an additional room of maneuver in the Syrian affairs. Paradoxically, the overall Syria's security dynamics

⁴¹ Mark N. Katz, "Russia, America, and Syria", 17 October 2012, <http://www.e-ir.info/2012/10/17/russia-america-and-syria>, (accessed 5.11.2012).

⁴²"It's Time to Engage Iran, Russia on Syria", Al Monitor, 25 July 2012, <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2012/al-monitor/battle-for-syria-just-getting-st.html>, (August 14 2012).

provide Russia a window of opportunity to play a decisive role in the regional and global strategic affairs and highly complicate the Western and Turkish strategic setting.⁴³

Iran Policy in Syria Crisis

Iran's position vis-à-vis Syria is, no doubt, part of a complex of decisions that the analysts and pundits associated with the increased tendencies of establishing an arc of influence in the Middle East centered on Iran's dominant power. Iran succeeded, in a short period of time, to strengthen its sphere of influence from Iraq to Syria and Lebanon, meaning from the Arabian Sea and Persian Gulf to Mediterranean Sea, building a network of Arab Shi'a allies, having the capability to define pragmatically the regional power equation. Moreover, the support provided to Hamas helped forge Iran as a key actor in the Palestinian affair.

Iran has clear interests in the survival of the Assad regime and these exceed the religious affinity, centered on common Shi'a roots shared by the Iranian regime and the Syrian Alawi minority. Its diplomatic agenda is built in terms of Realpolitik aiming at increasing its regional hegemonic position and reducing the ability of the other competitors, especially Turkey, to challenge its new assumed role. Its strategy has two main pillars: Syria and Iraq, both countries providing Iran the strategic space to project its power stretching from the Arabian Peninsula into the Levant and further on to the warm waters of the Mediterranean Sea.

The growing influence of Teheran from Kabul to Beirut, using its financial aid to Shi'a clients, its vast energy resources, a special relationship with Russia, China's interests in diversifying its energy sources, changed the existing power balance within the region. Syria is a key piece in the strategic puzzle designed by Teheran and its rationales are obvious: it provides a vital gate to Mediterranean Sea, provides the strategic corridor to reach its regional ambitions, to control and support its clients (Hezbollah, Hamas, and other extremist organizations that answer to Teheran's agenda), complicates Turkey's regional posture and aspirations, activates the Kurdish card as a tool of pressure against Turkey, maintains a strong pressure on Israel-US-Lebanese policies as to mention some of them. From a strategic perspective, the Syrian crisis seems to play in Iran's advantage: it decreases the ability of the other regional competitors to balance against Iran or to focus on their own regional ambitions, and divert the Western attention away from the Iranian nuclear dossier. As long as Syria will remain the hot spot on the regional map, a military action against the Iranian nuclear program it's getting more complicated.⁴⁴

⁴³ Stephen J. Flanagan, "The Turkey—/Russia—/Iran Nexus: Eurasian Power Dynamics", Winter 2013, **The Washington Quarterly**, Center for Strategic and International Studies, http://csis.org/files/publication/TWQ_13Winter_Flanagan.pdf, (accessed 28.1.2013).

⁴⁴ Weighing Benefits and Costs of Military Action Against Iran, The Iran Project, 2012, http://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/IranReport_091112_FINAL.pdf, (5.2.2013), 39-40; Ali Bluwi, Iranian Plan Aims To Protect Its Own Interests In Syria, 18 August 2012; Majid Rafizadeh, Iran Looms Large in Russia's and China's Positions on Syria, **Georgetown**

Iran's regional ambitions highly complicate the regional posture of *Saudi Arabia and the other Gulf Monarchies*. As in the case of Iran's interest in Syria, the main Saudi interest is strategic. Ending the Assad Shia's rule may trigger the break-up of the Iranian-Syrian axis, would create a religious divide between a Sunni Syria (that will likely emerge in post-Assad Syria), isolate Iran and Hezbollah, limit Iran's regional influence, and make Saudi Arabia the Muslim hegemon in the Middle East.⁴⁵ From the Saudi point of view, the breaking-up of the Syria-Iran axis is crucial in advancing its strategic agenda and reducing Iran's ability to dominate the whole region. As George Friedman put it: Riyadh "hopes to be able to break the arc of Shiite influence that reaches from Iran through Iraq and Syria to Lebanon. Having lost the Sunni counterweight to Iranian power in the region with the fall of Saddam Hussein in Iraq and the installation of a Shiite-led government friendly to Iran, the Saudis view the possibility of installing a friendly Sunni regime in Syria as a dramatic improvement to their national security".⁴⁶ The jihadist card played by Saudi Arabia in Syria also raised serious questions on how the internal environment in Syria will be shaped following the removal of Assad regime. One cannot ignore the probability of seeing Syria descends into deeper chaos as heavy radical fighters and terrorist groups expand their influence over the territory. Riyadh regime might, then, face with an extreme situation that might turn into a real threat against its own security.

Moreover, the American strategic shift towards Asia and changing priorities in terms of engagement in the Middle East would bring additional pressures on Saudi Arabia in dealings with the Iranians who see their posture strengthening in Iraq and similar prospects rising in Afghanistan. With the American deterrence decreasing, Riyadh has to focus on Syria with the aim of reshaping the balance of forces existing in the region which, for the moment, plays in Iran's benefits.

Egypt

Egypt is another important actor in the emerging political equation. Its ambitions to settle a stronger strategic profile have raised new questions concerning its historical claims of "leading Arab nation". Egypt has obvious regional aspirations and therefore its natural tendency is to balance against other possible competitors with a special focus on Iran and Turkey. Iran's increased power projection raised serious concerns in Cairo and therefore opened opportunities for shaping a positive Ankara-Cairo relation. It is worth mentioning that a working relationship between Turkey and Egypt might design in a crucial way the power configuration and the regional order in the Middle East. Moreover, Egypt is going through a difficult political transition, after almost 40 years of autocratic rule, facing with

Journal of International Affairs, 18 July 2012, <http://journal.georgetown.edu/2012/07/18/the-four-axes-of-the-east-russia-china-syria-and-iran/>, accessed (accessed 7.9.2012).

⁴⁵ Moran Stern, The Syrian Crisis, **Middle East Policy Council**, January 2013, <http://www.mepc.org/articles-commentary/commentary/syrian-crisis?print>, (accessed 3.2.2013).

⁴⁶ George Friedman, "The Consequences of Intervening in Syria", **Stratfor**, 31 January 2013, http://www.stratfor.com/weekly/consequences-intervening-syria?utm_source=freelist, (accessed 31.1.2013).

deepen economic and financial crisis. The financial support provided by Turkey, Saudi Arabia and Qatar brought Egypt closer to the Sunni Axis highly complicating the political dynamics between Cairo and Teheran.⁴⁷

However, Cairo new leadership was cautious to antagonize Iran by avoiding radical positions or being too critical towards the Teheran regime. A certain tendency of balancing between the two axes could be noticed in Cairo's policies concerning the Syrian issue. The new Egyptian president Mohammad Morsi adopted a tough stance against Assad expressing openly the support for the revolutionary forces. His strategy was developed on a more moderate path: while asking Assad to step out, he sought to forge a kind of regional accommodation by proposing a new regional-oriented format and call for Turkey, Iran and Saudi Arabia to sit at the same table and find a solution to the Syrian question. According to Egypt's approach, Teheran remains a key player in the Syrian affair and, therefore, its involvement is crucial. It is worth mentioning the statement made by Morsi showing that Iran is „a major player in the region that could have an active and supportive role in solving the Syrian problem”, adding that: “Iran's close proximity to Syria and Tehran's strong ties Damascus made it “vital” in resolving the Syrian crisis.”⁴⁸

Turkey has rightly perceived the potential role assumed by Cairo and therefore it undertook a series of actions aiming at building a Turkish-Egyptian strategic alliance, as a counterweight to the hegemonic aspiration of Teheran. Nevertheless, Syria slipping into the Egyptian orbit would highly complicate Turkey's regional posture facing now a difficult strategic rival.

Summary

Considering all analysis, which are the strategic options for a post-Assad Syria to fill the political vacuum left after Assad and how the big players are to respond or accommodate themselves to the new emerging developments?

A first option considers the possibility that the Muslim Brotherhood alone to seize the power based on the Egyptian model. This would play in the advantage of the Sunni powers

⁴⁷ More about Egypt's regional strategic posture, see: Yossef Bodansky, “Power Change in Egypt – Internal and External Repercussions”, 204, September 2012; Hassan Ahmadian, “Turkey – Saudi Arabia – Egypt Regional Triangle in the Offing”, *Iran Review*, 30 August 2012, <http://www.iranreview.org/content/Documents/Turkey-Saudi-Arabia-Egypt-Regional-Triangle-in-the-Offing.htm>, (accessed 5.10.2012); Sarkis Naoum, “Iran and Saudi Arabia Compete For Influence in Egypt”, *Al Monitor*, 16 July 2012, <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/politics/2012/07/saudi-iranian-competition-over-e.html>; Jannis Grimm and Stephan Roll, “Egyptian Foreign Policy under Mohamed Morsi. Domestic Considerations and Economic Constraints”, SWP Comments 35, 2012, http://www.swp-berlin.org/fileadmin/contents/products/comments/2012C35_gmm_rll.pdf, (accessed 7.1.2013); Dina Esfandiary, “Iran and Egypt: A Complicated Tango?”, 18 October 2012, <http://www.iss.europa.eu/publications/detail/article/iran-and-egypt-a-complicated-tango/>, (accessed 12.11.2012).

⁴⁸ M K Bhadrakumar, “Egypt's Morsi Resets Ties with US”, 25 September 2012, http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Middle_East/NI25Ak02.html, (accessed 27.9.2012).

in the region, especially Egypt and Turkey, while Iran will face a dramatic decrease of its influence given the lost of its main ally, a key element of the regional Shia's strategic axis. The second option might envisage the creation of a transitional government to include both representatives of National Coalition and members of Assad's Alawite minority. Recent developments show increasing efforts of the international community to reach a compromise on the matter. Russia and Iran might also agree with such a scenario since it would secure the protection of the Alawite and other minorities and would keep open a certain room of maneuver over the Syrian politics. In the worst scenario, Syria will fall into the hand of extremist forces and various terrorist-affiliated groups along the deepening of the sectarian war and religious violence provoking a general chaos that will deeply affect the entire regional strategic scene. More dangerous still is the possibility that the fall of the Baath regime will lead to a state of civil-sectarian militarization extending into neighboring areas, especially Lebanon.⁴⁹

4 CONCLUSIONS

The Arab Spring bears signs of commencing a new political dynamics in the region. The sectarian separation in the Muslim world is widened as regional and global players use the separation for their own political motives. Political Islam is likely to be greatest power in the next couple of decades; however it is dubious that democratic transformation will take place through political Islam in BMENA as many commentators are pointing towards the possibility of authoritarian reversals and even an "Arab Winter" replacing the Arab Spring.⁵⁰

The general strategic picture and the political geography of Middle East shaped by the interests of the big players and regional actors are both complicated and extremely volatile. Syria is stuck between various and contradictory national ambitions and strategic rivalries and the way it will develop will highly impact upon the overall regional dynamics and even global realignments. The Middle East is now the center of a tough struggle for regional preeminence that is likely to ground a new regional order and a dramatic change in the power distribution.

The overthrow of the autocratic regimes in some of the neighboring countries, and the rise of Islamist movements completely changed the web of policies and strategies developed among the major players, as well as their political calculus and strategic alignments. The spread of revolution into Syria dramatically complicated the overall strategic picture and deepen the divisions among the main interested actors as their political and diplomatic agendas collide. All in all, the developments of the Syria crisis and the re-shaping of the Middle East political landscape are strongly interconnected. The way in which the two events are to further developed will decisively impact upon the final strategic design of the regional political architecture.

⁴⁹ Yusri Hazran, "The Arab Revolutions: A Preliminary Reading", **Middle East Policy**, 19/3, Fall 2012, p. 121.

⁵⁰ Öniş, op.cit., p. 48.

A prolonged sectarian civil war in Syria leads to a battleground for a regional proxy war. At the regional level, Syria is being turned into a battleground for sectarian agendas. At the global level, major powers are concerned with the continuation of their vital interests. These dynamics do not necessarily converge with one another; as a result, Syria is being pulled in different directions.⁵¹ Sunni-Shia conflict in region turns into the primacy struggle within Arab world.

The developments in the region have shown the increased efficiency and prestige of Turkey. The Syrian conflict pushed Turkey in a geopolitical storm that, beyond the need to find the appropriate and politically less costly solutions, requires readjustments of its regional strategies and the adaptation of its potential role to an extremely unpredictable environment which cannot be controlled and managed through the political vision designed in early 2000. The major concern of the Turkish leaders regards the possibility of Turkey being stuck within the limits of some political calculus over which its control capacity is highly reduced. However, Turkey's involvement in Syria crisis is hardly being explained in context of traditional foreign policy implementation since founding of Turkish Republic. Turkey security lies within the international attitude formed by the United States, European Union and Russia.

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⁵¹ Cebeci&Üstün, **op.cit.**, p. 19.

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