

Shifting Paradigms and Changing Dynamics of Fragile Global Power Politics in Middle East: A Case Study of Syrian Crisis

(Prof. Dr. Iram Khalid*, Ms. Asma Siddique**)

Abstract

The core intention of the study is to elaborate the convolutions and precariousness of the Middle East and the decades long contradictions of regional states on sectarian and ethnic bases particularly between Iran and the KSA, which is severely hampering the stability, peace and security of the region and of entire globe as well. The hostility of Great Powers with regional states is not in their favor to secure the interests in ME and vice versa. As the geo-political, geo-economic and geo-graphical prominence of the region makes hard to neglect it, along with its presence in the mid of Afro-Eurasia and having enormous deposits of fossil fuels which are the life-line of the world's great economies. The US-Iran antipathy for more than three decades on Iranian Nuclear Program and support of terrorist groups adversely affected the region, hence the Nuke Deal between P5+1 and Iran altered the overall scenario. Most of the world esteemed this move but the key regional allies of the US like Israel and the KSA articulated their trepidations on this deal. There is also an instigation of a "New Great Game" between Great Powers and regional sovereignties due to the Syrian issue and also the Yemen crisis, which are causing the pitiless carnage of thousands of innocent people. So, the main aim of research is to ornate the eminence that the constructive diplomacy is the ultimate solution of all the contentious issues of the Middle East and for the establishment of a durable and sturdy peace, prosperity, security and stability for the regional population and states.

Keywords: Ethnic divide, Syrian Crisis, Regional Security Complexes, New Great Game, Power Politics

Introduction

Middle East is relatively a volatile and dynamic zone of the world. After Europe and Asia, it is third most momentous region in the entire globe, accumulate numerous racial and ethnic norms, historical traditions, rich ancient civilizations and cultures, so it is called as "The Cradle of Civilization". The region underwent the extreme impacts of several great empires of the time such as Egyptians, Romans, Ottomans, etc. and also experienced the golden Islamic era, colonial and post-colonial age, dealt with massive ups and downs of the Ottoman's decline and post-WWII period and also coped with the challenges of modern nation-states. The region has immense deposits of hydro-carbons, primarily discovered in 1930s, fascinated the great

* The Author is Professor, Department of Political Science, University of the Punjab, Lahore.

**The author is Ph. D (IR) scholar, Department of Political Science, University of the Punjab, Lahore.

powers to secure their regional incentives, thus pushed the region into extreme resentments and security complexes, which have now reached at their optimum (Bew, 2014).

Iran is amongst the prominent regional states, and has been affected by the Britain and Russian impacts since from mid of 18th century till mid of 1900s. The Ottomans rules over most of the areas of ME till 1922 and the Britain could get the control of only few small zones of the Persian Gulf. The discovery of fossil fuels in some regional states like Iran, KSA and Iraq in 19th century, attracted the Western Powers and their oil exploring companies struggled hard to get the control of extraction and exportation of energy resources and established their monopoly in the fuel's industry. Majority of regional states went under the administrative control of West due to the awful collapse of Ottomans (Leverett, 2013).

In the era of bi-polarity, the US backed the KSA, Gulf States and Jordan, whereas the Iraq, Yemen, Egypt and Syria (i.e., anti-Israel Arab states), were reinforced by the Russia. The major intension of all the Great Powers including the US, always remained the security of their national interests dominated by the oil incentives and the establishment of their hegemony in the region. The regional powers were also concerned to hold the power balance in their favour. This status quo led to the clashes of interest and the external powers mainly focused on the exploitation of mutual and regional affairs of the regional states to achieve their key incentives in the region by pushing them in adverse hatred and antipathy, which ultimately evinced dreadful for the stability, harmony, progress and development of the Middle Eastern region (Jafar Haghpanah, 95-107).

The Geographical and Historical Significance of the Middle East

Middle Eastern region is quite prominent due to its geographical position as it links the Europe, Africa and Asia i.e., the three most significant continents of the globe. Along with the gigantic reserves of hydro-carbons, the region is also blessed by nature with the rich farming and agricultural lands, several deserts, seas and numerous mountain ranges. The region has three main geographical areas such as Near East, Far East and Middle East. These areas are further divided into four zones. These are:

- **Fertile Crescent** (Near East) has Iraq, Kuwait, Jordon, Palestine and Syria with extremely rich and vast cultivated lands.
- **Nile Valley** comprises of Sudan, Libya and Egypt.
- **Maghreb Region** contains Tunisia, Morocco and Algeria.
- **Arabian Peninsula** encompasses the KSA, Qatar, Iraq, Bahrain, UAE, Kuwait, Oman, Yemen and Jordon (Alharahsheh, 2013).

The Middle East has some prominent desert areas and water-courses which connect the different zones of the region with Asia, Africa and Europe. The renowned Sahara Desert is in North Africa and "The Empty Quarter" located in Arabian Peninsula which is well-known for its inauspicious conditions. In the north is Black Sea, the south has Red Sea and Arabian Sea and in the west is Mediterranean Sea which is linked to Atlantic Ocean by Gibraltar. Indian Ocean is connected to the Persian Gulf via Strait of Hormuz. Mediterranean Sea of Europe and the Red Sea are joined by Suez Canal. The water current between the Mediterranean and Black

Sea is accessible by Dardanelles and Bosphorus. The Red Sea is separated apart from Indian Ocean by the Babel Mandeb Strait. The river systems of Jordon and Tigris-Euphrates Rivers together with abundant rainfall are moderately auxiliary for the irrigation and land forming structures of the region (Ibid, 2014).

The region is not only protruding because of its deposits of fossil fuels, geo-graphical location, cultural and ethnic varieties and economic and strategic diversities but it is also dominant due to perilous religious aspects. The world's three most prominent religions like Christianity, Judaism and Islam emerged from this consecrated land, so the followers of each religion contemplate it as their holy terrain. Several great empires of the time like Persians, Assyrians, Egyptians, Macedonians, Crusaders, Mongols, Ottomans, etc. successfully established their regimes in Middle East and it always remained a source of major concerns for all the great powers of globe for the security of their regional interests (Harbi, 2013).

The decline of the Ottomans and the post-WWII era gave an opportunity to the US to intensify its regional influences, to accomplish the military and economic interests and to fill the vacuum generated by the British and European Powers administrative withdrawal from the region. Numerous Arab States seemed on the map of ME because of the collapse of great Ottoman Empire, hence they contained the deep rooted racial and ethnic detachments, mutual antipathy, Shia-Sunni competitiveness and nation states ideologies, which kept on dividing the Muslims since from beginning. The establishment of Israel, a Zionist state with the strong backing of the West, in a region having majority of Muslims from centuries, proved fatal for Middle East and made the region more sensitive, strategically unpredictable and penetrating for the entire globe (Ibid, 2014).

Western Expansionism and the Middle Eastern Region

The presence of Middle East in the heart of Afro-Eurasia and the discovery of energy resources of crude oil and natural gas, made the region prominent for West. As a result, the Western Powers established their imperialism and monopolize the region to control the rich wealth of "Black Gold". The European Powers systematized the region according to their predilections, but their impressions progressively contracted in the post-World War II and post-Cold War era. In the uni-polar world, the US emerged as the global hegemon and the solitary Super Power at international level. By having diverse interests in the ME, the US struggled a lot to reshape the region in accordance of the US preferences, strained for the conservation of its military dominance, to accomplish the safety and security of Israel and strengthening it by military and financial aids, to establish close ties with the regional autocratic regimes and to attain the guarantee of uninterrupted movement of energy resources from the region to the world's great economies. Consequently, these ambitions resulted in the religious and sectarian issues, adverse security environment of the region and severe energy crises as well (Halliday, 2015).

The Key Interests of the US

Following are the US major incentives in Middle Eastern region which are classified as:

- 1) Ethical Interests.
- 2) Strategic Interests.

1) Ethical Interests

Some ethical interests are:

1. Encourage the regional states to work in cooperation with the US for the security of human rights in Middle East.
2. Encounter the extremists and terrorist tactics and to abate the emergence of anti-US ideologies in the regional population.

2) Strategic Interests

Core strategic interests of the US in ME are:

1. The attainment of the guarantee for physical safety and security of Israel from intimidating regional states and to resolve the Israel-Palestinian crisis.
2. To curtail the advent of any menace for the security of the US interests and propagation of WMDs in the region.
3. The maintenance of the unremitting extractions of fossil fuels and their continuous streaming from Persian Gulf to external world (Walt, 2013).

Middle East and the Revolutionary Wave of Arab-Spring

In Middle East, after the Iranian Islamic Revolution in 1979, the Arab Spring was the second most prominent and enlighten derive, generally was a democratic turbulence of the population and hatred chronology against the regional authoritarian regimes and the hegemonic and dictatorial ambitions with the US in the region. This revolutionary movement started in Tunisia on 18 December 2010, by the self-immolation of Bouazizi, which swiftly blowout in 2011 in the Arab World, turned into severe anti-regime protests and armed revolts. The Egypt, Libya, Yemen, Syria, Jordon, KSA and Bahrain bore the perilous impressions of this movement The chief factors of the uprising remained the corruption, extreme rise in prices of goods, lack of employment, political and moral dishonesty, Kleptocracy, sectarian and ethnic divisions, economic downfall, prejudice in judiciary system, the irritation towards the cruelty of safekeeping staffs, severe abuses of human rights, etc (Clarke, 2013).

The Core Fault lines of Arab-Spring in the ME

The commencement of 21st century brought some drastic incidents on international stage which altered the overall global political scenario such as the unpleasant occurrence of 9/11 2001, the US instigation of the “War against Terror” followed by the invasion in Afghanistan and the incursion of the US military in Iraq claiming that it had WMDs but remained unsuccessful to prove and then making it a democratic model was a unembellished blunder. The US motivated the states for the establishment of democracy in the region and held elections in Iraq in 2004-05, in Egypt Hosni Mubarak carried out municipal elections in 2005 as a result Muslim Brotherhood remained successful. In Palestine Mahmood Abbas also agreed to hold elections in 2006 in which Hamas won with great majority, hence the Israel

strictly opposed it as he professed Hamas as “Terrorist Organization”. This democratic awareness was in fact the part of the US secret policies in ME (Clarke, 2013).

Nevertheless, these awakening drives gave courage to people to express their emotions and states of mind. As a result, on 14 December 2008, Muntazir Zaidi, a journalist took a bold step of throwing shoe towards G. W. Bush (the US President) in Baghdad during a press conference. Similarly, the movement of Freedom Flotilla carrying six civilian ships to break the Gaza’s Strip naval blockade by Israel in May 2010, was also a brave move by people to demonstrate their feelings and thoughts. Israel attacked on the ships, killed 19 people but faced extensive criticism from the entire world. However, the uncertain act of Mohamed Bouazizi, a street vender and 25 years old young boy, swiftly stimulated the innovative movement of Arab-Spring (Alharahsheh, *Changing Face the Middle East Aftermath Arab Revolutions*, 2013).

Regional Implications of the Arab-Spring

In December 2010, the revolutionary move of Arab Spring instigated in the North Africa and Middle East and its main target was the removal of all the authoritarian and dictatorship regimes of the region. Since February 2012, the autocratic rulers of Libya, Tunisia, Yemen and the Egypt were overthrown by the revolutionists. Although, the US restrained from any direct or alone armed involvement in any case and only intervened in Libya and Syria for proving support to the NATO forces, hence this uprising demonstrated the extreme anti-US approaches by the protesters as they believed that the US is primarily responsible for all their depravities and evils being the supporter of dictator’s regimes and their suppression policies for them (Kissinger, 2012).

Though, the revolutionists had optimum spirits to get rid of autocratic rulers, but they badly lacked the sensible and esteemed leadership to lead them, consequently remained unsuccessful in developing operational regime in any state. On the other hand, this wave caused the intensification of Shia-Sunni conflicts, inflation of oil prices, stretched the regional instability and prompt the proxy and civil wars, merciless killing and extended migration of millions of people, decline of international oil market, economic collapses, amplified violations among civilians, etc. The social media and several modern means of communications played a dynamic role for the awareness of human rights during the revolutionary move, which produced a new and innovative notion of “Digital Democracy” in North Africa and Middle Eastern region (Hamid, 2015).

Revolutionary Movement in Syria

The Syria also emanated across the drastic impacts of revolutionary uprising of Arab-Spring. Primarily, the slight and nonviolent protests against the regime of Bashar-al-Assad initiated on 26 January 2011, hence these protests aggravated in March and swiftly blowout across the country, due to torcher of the students having anti-government acts, belonged from a southern town “Daraa”. The activists desired for the freedom and reforms in political system and rights for Kurds. The administration offered numerous incentives, hence rejected by the protesters and the Assad’s government adopted the repressive policies by blocking the food,

electricity, flour and water supply and launched crackdown by military to scatter the people. However, these attempts further spoiled the situation (Douglas Bowers, 2011).

All the opposition groups joined under the umbrella of “Free Syrian Army” on 29 July 2011. As most of the population in Syria was Sunni while the high command in army, the elite class of the state and also the Assad (of Alawite Sect) had strong affiliations with Shia clergy and ideologies. Thus, these protests warped up into Shia-Sunni rebellions. The US demanded the Assad to withdraw from his position on 18 August, but he rejected it. Syrian National Council was established by revolutionists such as Damascus Declaration Group, Muslim Brotherhood in Syria, several Kurdish Groups, Local Coordination Committee, some tribal and independent elements, etc. and was recognized by the US, 8 other states and the UN’s 17-member states on 23 August 2011. Hence, the state embedded into civil war in 2012, after the failure of Kofi Annan to develop a diplomatic and durable resolution for Syrian crisis. The brutal assignation of more than 75,000 innocent people forced the people to leave their homes and to take refuge in neighboring states (Ibid, 2014).

Syrian Revolution and the US Response

The US responded differently in each state during the Arab-Spring, depending on its policies and regional interests. After Libya, the NATO forces invaded Syria, hence the conditions here were comparatively diverse as the Libya had low economic and human costs. Kofi Annan’s Peace Plan could not establish peace in the country and the oppositions in the form of Free Syrian Army systematized and settled themselves to fight against government forces which resulted in the casualties of millions of civilian and they started to migrate towards Jordan, Europe, Lebanon, Turkey, and other neighboring countries. In the case of Assad regime, the US reacted with relatively tough attitude towards Syria than Libya, as the Assad was getting full backing from Iran, Russia and Hezbollah while the US, Israel, NATO allies and the KSA, were supporting Free Syrian Army and some other rebellious groups, as having direct hostility with Iran and Russia as well. These antagonisms trapped the state into adverse proxy war (Walt, U.S. Middle East Strategy: Back to Balancing, 2013).

The Contribution of Great Powers in Syrian Crisis

The Syrian crisis worsened the already hostile and conflictual situation in the Middle East. As, the key antipathy in the region is between the KSA and Iran due to sectarian differences which were highly exploited by the Great Powers. So, numerous regional and extra-regional states performed a pivotal role in pampering the regional issues and to worsen the security environment of the region and particularly the Syrian crisis. Iran always developed closer ties with Shia governments and organizations for the promotion of Shia philosophies in the region. So, Iran along with Russia is providing entire sustenance to the Shia government of Assad in Syria, as Iran considers the Syrian land quite significant and sensitive to retain its links and communications with Hezbollah in Lebanon and to counter the ISIS in the region (Zulafqar, 2014).

Russian military is also attacking rebellions groups to support the Assad and continue his government in Syria. Contrary to this, the US, Israel, the KSA, Gulf states and his NATO allies are strictly against the Assad regime and aiding the opposition parties to draw down his rule. However, according to the Israeli website Mossad (debka.com) and some other Israel’s

reports that the US has complete knowhow about all the Russian happenings in Syria, is providing comprehensive collaboration, consultation and instructions to Russian forces and further the US has given the task to Iran and Russia to find out a sensible and durable solution of Syrian crisis. No deal could be successful to bring peace in Syria, without the dynamic contribution of Iran (Farhi, 2015).

Trump's Visit to Middle East and Its Devasting Impacts on the Region

After the 100 days of presidency, Trump's administration planned his foreign trip firstly to Riyadh (KSA) on 20-21 May 2017. It was a solid symbol of restoration of his relations with Muslims which went a lot of criticism by Muslims due to his Anti-Muslim Rhetoric in 2016 election's campaign. During his visit to the birth place of Islam, he met King Salman Bin Abdul Aziz Al-Saud and Deputy Crown Prince Mohammed Bin Salman, a session was held with leaders of Gulf Cooperation Council to discuss Syrian Crisis and "de-escalation zones" for providing save areas for civilians, had a lunch with 56 Arab and Muslim leaders, discussed to counter "extremism" and cracking down of armed groups along with an agreement of \$100bn arms sale with Saudi Arabia. Saudis are considering Trump as a close ally and vice versa, to deal with the twin threat posed by Iran and ISIS, as most of the leaders in Middle East particularly Gulf States and Israel was not happy with Obama's policies in ME (Robert, 2017).

Trump then flew to Tel Aviv, Jerusalem and Bethlehem on 22-23 May, for meetings with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, travelled to the West Bank, to meet with President Mahmoud Abbas of the Palestinian Authority. Then on 24-25 May, he went to Vatican in Rome, to meet with Pope Francis before heading to Brussels for a NATO summit, talked with EU leaders and also on 26 May, a meeting with G-7 industrial democracies including some leaders of America's closest allies, in Sicily to reassure his counterparts about his reliability and not an unpredictable populist. So, it could be assumed that Trump visited with religious theme in the region i.e., firstly Islam (KSA), secondly Judaism (Jerusalem) and thirdly Christianity (Vatican). The basic idea seemed good, however the region of the Middle East is one of the most problematical and sensitive one in the world due to the local differences and rivalries among the regional states. So, it would be quite hard for Trump to deal with the complexities of the region (Mercy Benzaquen, 2017).

Trump anticipated to isolate Iran believing that not IS, but Iran is the leading sponsor of terrorism and major source of instability in the region, as he was also rigorously against Obama's nuclear deal with Iran. On the other hand, Iran is also not innocent due to its critical policies in Syrian, Iraq, Lebanon and Yemen as well. Its ballistic missiles program is also a source of major concern for regional states. Nevertheless, Tehran adhered the Nuke Deal and had a right to expect good relations and trade with West, rather than increased isolation and sanctions, as devised by Trump. There is no solid reason to deteriorate hostility with Iran. Trump simply does not know what he is doing, and his administration also lack the understanding of Middle Eastern realities. He has neither the vision nor the historical understanding to try and fix it (Robert, 2017).

Trump's visit had negative impacts on the ME, as his proclamations regarding Iran and its Nuclear Deal, Terrorism, Islamic Extremists and admiration of President Al-Sisi of

Egypt (worst violator of human rights in the region) placed him in a quite odd position. An attempt to protectorate Saudis in the region resulted in the cutting off trade, diplomatic and transport ties with Qatar and to isolate it in the region by blaming him for providing material support to terrorist organizations like Al-Qaeda and ISIS and having relations with Iran. The KSA, Egypt, Bahrain and UAE, closed their air and sea links with Qatar, sent Qatari nationalist home and blocked the broadcasting of Al-Jazeera (T.V. network) accused for enflaming the Arab-Spring and alleged for provoking terrorism. However, Qatar flatly denied these claims. This happened just within ten days of Trump's visit to the region of ME. Nevertheless, there is a lot going on beneath the surface of this astonishing power play (Ayoob, 2017).

The Instigation of a “New Great Game” in Middle East

Middle East is very critical for all Great Powers of their time to secure their interests but unfortunately this is heading towards a greater catastrophe. The bitterness among the regional states and resentment with the Global Powers caused proxy wars, political detonations, carnages and migration of millions of people, revolutions, revolts and civil wars in the region. Iraqi Kurds were promised to have their autonomous Kurdistan region on their contribution in War against Terror with IS but in the aftermath of war, they were thrown back on the mercy of their enemies as they lack unified political leadership. So, there is something definitely happening but what is it is still anonymous (Jenkins, 2017).

In the KSA some revolutionary steps were taken by the Crown Prince Muhammad Bin Salman (widely known as MBS) like the announcement of a hi-tech city “Neon” in the north-west of the Kingdom, citizenship of first robot in the world “Sophia”, the wave of arresting of corrupt senior princes, business men, current and former officers and ministers on 4 November 2017. At the same time, the prime minister of Lebanon Saad-al-Hariri resigned due to the threats to his life from the Lebanese Hezbollah, as it is widely believed that in 2005, Hezbollah was also behind the assassination of his father, Rafiq. As, in case of Syrian crisis, both the Iran and KSA are in opposite camps and since 2015, the KSA and Yemen also plunged into civil war. Riyadh contemplates that Tehran is behind the scene in both cases as it is providing wide-ranging assistance to Hezbollah in Lebanon and Houthi rebels in Yemen due to the close affiliations with Shia factions (Ibid, 2014).

It is obvious that anything that is good for Iran must be opposed by the US and its other regional allied states, considering Iran as their arch rival for ever. To counter the US and NATO's expansionism in the region, both Iran and Russia are struggling at their optimum to secure the Assad's regime in Syria. So, the political, strategic and ideological competition for the US which particularly deepen after Obama's Nuclear Deal with Iran. Syrian Crisis and Qatar issue made the situation confusing for Trump to make ally and take side of any state in the local rivalries. At present, the US and Iran are also sharing common interests in Afghanistan and Iraq and for dealing with IS in the ME. Nevertheless, it couldn't be feasible for the US to establish close ties with both the KSA and Iran at the same time because of their mutual rivalry. The closeness with Iran might result in isolation for the US at regional level due to the annoying of Sunni Arab States (Pillar, 2017).

On the other side, there are numerous rumours that Israel is also preparing its force on north-eastern border with Syria. The Iranian Nuke Deal caused a twisted situation in the region which lead to the KSA-Israel associations. It seems that there may be another war in the region in which Israel, the KSA and other Gulf States will be on one side along with the US backing and the Iran and Hezbollah on the other side with Russia behind them. However, Saudi Arabia is trying to balance Iran's influence in the region by adopting the engagement policy to make alliance with Iraq and other Shia figures (like Prime Minister of Iraq Haider-al-Abadi, Muqtada-al-Sadr and the senior Shia clerics in Najaf) and with Israel too. In Bahrain, the security situation is more or less under the control of government authorities but in Iraq, Syria and Lebanon, Iran keeps its significant military hold through its IRGC and military supply lines (Ibid, 2014).

Riyadh may be aiming at the involvement of Israel in and outside Lebanon against Hezbollah and Iran in Syria, hence Egypt is reluctant from any involvement. As, Saudis and most of the Emirates consider Iran as a major security threat for their survival, so they are uniting to eradicate the impressions of Tehran. As, the key to success in both external and internal crisis is absolutely can't be the war because in this case the cost of conflict would be very high. No doubt, the major rivalry in ME is between Iran and Saudi Arabia from Lebanon, Iraq, Oman, Syria, Bahrain, Yemen and up to Red Sea which also affects Pakistan and Afghanistan. Therefore, the US and KSA administration is developing a rehabilitated strategy to enhance the political, economic, military and financial pressure on Iran to contract its influences and also to encounter Moscow in the region (Cordesman, 2014).

The current contemporary environment of the ME makes somebody believes that the US is in the mode of new form of competition i.e., a "New Great Game" (or a New Cold War) with Russia, Iran and China as well. The US policies in Syrian civil war and against ISIS are deeply influenced by the political situation in Iraq and Iranian influence in the region. It is needed for the US to think strategically and make decade long policies rather than short term policies. As a decade ago, Israel remained quite successful in destroying the Syrian nuclear facility hence, it is not beyond the imagination that it could also destroy any Iranian nuclear development in Syria (Ibid, 2014).

As, Israel is damn serious about a permanent presence of Iran in Syria, aggression of the Hezbollah and Iranian missile bases in Russian-protected areas, it is mistakenly thought by the West that they could stabilize the region by destroying the ISIS while the region of ME could be easily ignited with a single match i.e., by Israeli attack in Syria due to the increased military transfer which may facilitate a permanent Iranian presence in Syrian territory. In response of these advancements, Israel is preparing the US to know that Israel will not sit idly while Iran is busy in developing its new base and to transfer more and more powerful weaponry to Hezbollah (Mandel, 2017).

The US launched 59 Tomahawk cruise missiles, stroked on the air base in Syria on 7 April 2017, against the Assad's regime and its main allies Iran and Russia. This strike was greatly welcomed by Sunni Arab States and Israel. As, this strike was launched in response of deadly gas and chemical weapons attack by Assad's forces that killed more than 80 civilians

in Khan Sheikhou, northern Syria. A strong and clear message was sent by President Trump that the spread and use of chemical weapons will not be tolerated and was also an attempt to restore the US credibility in the region, especially to encounter the influences of Russia and Iran in the Middle East (Kerr, 2017). Turkey, Russia and Iran are the key players which can play a vital role to shape the final deal. Syrian Kurds have proven themselves as a valuable ally to the US-led coalition fighting against IS and have ambitions of independence, but Turkey has persistent objections on Kurdish aspirations for autonomy and it is probable that Moscow and Washington will ultimately take the side with Ankara (Shaheen, 2018).

Putin's Visit to Syria

On 11 December 2017, Russian President Putin made a short visit to Syria to meet Bashar-al-Assad then to Egypt and Turkey where he discussed numerous issues including economic and defence cooperation. Moscow signed agreements with Syria to use its naval base at Tartus and with Iran to use its military base at Hamedan. It does not want conflict with the US. Hence Moscow has the ability to shape the situation in its favour and its major goal is to minimize the freedom of the US military to operate in the region (Tucker, 2017). According to Arab news reports, Israel fuelled the Syrian crisis by providing the direct aid to Al-Qaeda and Syrian rebels were also treated in Israeli hospitals, as a widely circulated video footage shows Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu visiting Syrian militants in the hospital. UN Disengagement Observer Force alleged about Israeli direct collaboration with Al-Nusra Front. At one occasion, Syrian President Bashar-al-Assad said, "How can you say that Al-Qaeda doesn't have an air force? They have the Israeli air force" (Israel Fuels the Syrian Crisis with Aid to Al-Qaida Rebels, 2015).

Gulf States as "Pawn" of Great Powers

It seems that there is again a new Cold War in the ME as Russia is backing Iran and Assad regime in Syria while US is the patronage of Israel and Saudis in the region. Moscow has no fear with nuclear Iran while it's the major weapons and technology supplier of Tehran and veto any action taken against Iran in UNSC. Iraq also has a Tehran's puppet government and Moscow signed a \$4.2 billion arms contract with Baghdad making the ME more vulnerable and in near future the weaponry of Iran and Iraq may be used against the regional states. The Great Powers are very wisely using the regional states for their interest and the Gulf States are acting merely as their "Pawns" (Habtoor, 2017). In the ME, there are no permanent partnership nor rivalries among the regional states particularly after WWI. The ideological differences, inter-state competitions and jealousies and desires to be the godfather of the region give opportunity to great power to exploit their differences and to secure their interests on the expense of regional states. As, the KSA and Iran are the key players in the region and each one of them wants to be the "Policeman" of the region (Rizvi, 2015).

Establishment of An Islamic Military Alliance (IMA)

The religious divide is the main source of conflict, as the region is divided into two camps i.e., the Shias led by Iran and the Sunnis led by the KSA and they are in collision in several parts, from Syria to Yemen. The overthrow of Saddam Hussein in 2013, also resulted in Shia government in Baghdad. In Lebanon the Hezbollah, in Syria is Bashar-al-Assad and in Yemen the Houthis are supported and used by Tehran. Due to revival of Shia, it is perceived

that it is causing a tilt in Balance of Power. Another conflictual area between the KSA and Iran is oil Pricing. In order to deal with the internal and external threats, the Riyadh has developed a strategic vision, without depending on Western support, by the establishment of an Islamic Military Alliance (IMA), announced on 15 December 2015, by Deputy Crown Prince and Defence Minister Mohammed Bin Salman (Bardaji, 2016).

Thirty-four states' forces joined under this military alliance, in order to fight against terrorism, to coordinate efforts in Iraq, Syria, Libya, Egypt and Afghanistan, to bring Sunnis together, to thwart Iran's regional ambitions, to play the role of a more assertive regional leader to compensate the presence of the US, to avoid a solution that will keep Bashar-al-Assad in power in Syria and to take practical steps to fight against terrorists like IS and Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP). Till December 2016, the number of states for this alliance reached up to 41 by the membership of Oman as well. Northern Thunder Military Exercise, lasted from 27 February till 10 March 2016, comprising over 150,000 troops from 20 Sunni Muslim countries, including Gulf Cooperation Council states, Egypt, Morocco, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Jordan, Sudan and Senegal, was a clear symbol of combat efficiency and readiness to carry out joint missions between the participating states forces (Ibid, 2014).

At present, the region of ME is turned in to a state of chaos, by the antagonism between the KSA and Iran, impassiveness of the US, the economic crisis and political and strategic discontent, the new Russian presence in the region, red liner Syrian Crisis and tilting of the KSA towards Israel, are turning the regional situation towards a most dreadful end than ever. The US intensions are merely making a divided region more divided. Hence, the situation of ME could be heal up by focussing not only on ISIS but to invest in states promoting the coexistence of different groups and ideologies like Tunisia, support the mediate countries like Pakistan and Oman to minimize the war factors, promote trade, invest in education, build economic bridges, fight against climate change, create jobs, promote social media and modern technologies, enhance tourism, etc (Moghul, 2017).

Conclusion

In the entire scenario, it can be concluded that the Middle East is the most complicated, sensitive and ambiguous region of the globe due to the volatile and explosive patterns of amity and enmity. The affiliations of the regional states swiftly fluctuate with the slight variations its interests and policies. The partner of one state may be its challenger in the very next day. So, it is comparatively uncertain to envisage that what will happen next in the region. The history of the region demonstrates that all the Great Powers of time always gave preference to secure their national interests, adopted the imperialistic and hypocritical policies, exploited the inter-regional hostilities and emerged as the key spoiler of the regional crisis and complications. The establishment of Zionist Israeli state, in a region of extreme Muslims majority is a solid evidence of their great game and hypocritic politics in the Middle East. Hence, all these fault lines caused the adverse security complexes and further deterioration of an already fragile zone by entrenching the ME into a war which will never end.

The Iranian Islamic Revolution in 1979 and the uprising of Arab-Spring in 2010, is purely the outcome of the US's failed regional policies and dual standers for adversaries and

the allies. The deep affiliations of the US with the authoritative and dictatorial rulers to dominate the region, not only produced the hatred ideologies among people for their leaders but also severe revulsion for the US as well, which they depicted in each case. This disgust gave birth to the Syrian Crisis and the emerging threats of IS in the region. As, the US regional policies have been collapsed, it remained unsuccessful to understand the environment and complications of the Middle East properly and further ruined the region. The core conflict which is adversely hampering the ME, is the dissection of Muslims on sectarian bases (Shia-Sunni hostility), which encompasses the entire region. The financial and moral corruption, lack of democracy inter-Arab bitterness, absence of socio-political reforms, mutual antagonism and distrust among regional Arab and non-Arab states, etc. resulted in severe complications and turned the ME into a hub of security, energy and environmental complexes.

Nevertheless, the regional Muslim leadership along with the West is equally contributing to the recent sweltering situation and instability of the ME and pushed the region into terrifying civil and proxy wars which is causing the ruthless assassination of millions of innocents. Certainly, the West is responsible for the creation of extremist organizations like Al-Qaeda and now the IS. The War against Terror and the Counter Insurgency Operation was introduced by the US and its allies, during last 14 years to deal with non-state elements, hence they accept that they failed to completely eradicate any of them from the globe. Is the West actually serious about them or targeting something else? Regardless of possessing all resources of development and progress, the Muslim World is swiftly approaching to its terrible end, hence the regional situation is going worse with every day passing and the entire globe is distressing from it. Only the unity of Islamic States is utmost resolution for all the problems of Muslim Ummah. The Muslim leadership should behave sensibly and cooperate for the mutual interests of the region before that its too late.

Recommendations

- The productive negotiations and CBMs (Confidence Building Measures), at both regional and international level could be fruitful to minimize the controversial issues among regional countries and to abolish the ethnic and sectarian divergences.
- War is not the solution of any problem. Iranian Nuke Deal is a great accomplishment of constructive diplomacy and depicts this optimistic approach that all other provocative matters among the regional states and with the external powers should be resolve by dialogues, positive diplomacy and reconciliation.
- The other global and regional powers such as Russia, France, China, UK, Turkey, Pakistan, GCC states, etc. should play their dynamic and vital role to diminish the regional agitations and hostilities especially the aversion between Iran and KSA.
- The practice of “Cultural Diplomacy” and soft power could be a spectacular tool for the enhancement of collaboration and development of close relations among all regional states.
- Mutual interdependence in economic sector and cooperation in all other fields might be profitable to curtail the bitterness between Iran and regional Arab States and to develop better understandings among them.

- The environment of respect for the key concerns, interests, national security and integrity of each state should be established and the regional leadership should abide by the belligerent and irritating languages.
- All Global Powers should avoid hypocritical politics and the double standard policies in the region and make an attempt to work towards the reconciliation and coordination with regional states and powers to stabilize the region and establish peace and harmony in the Middle East.

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