

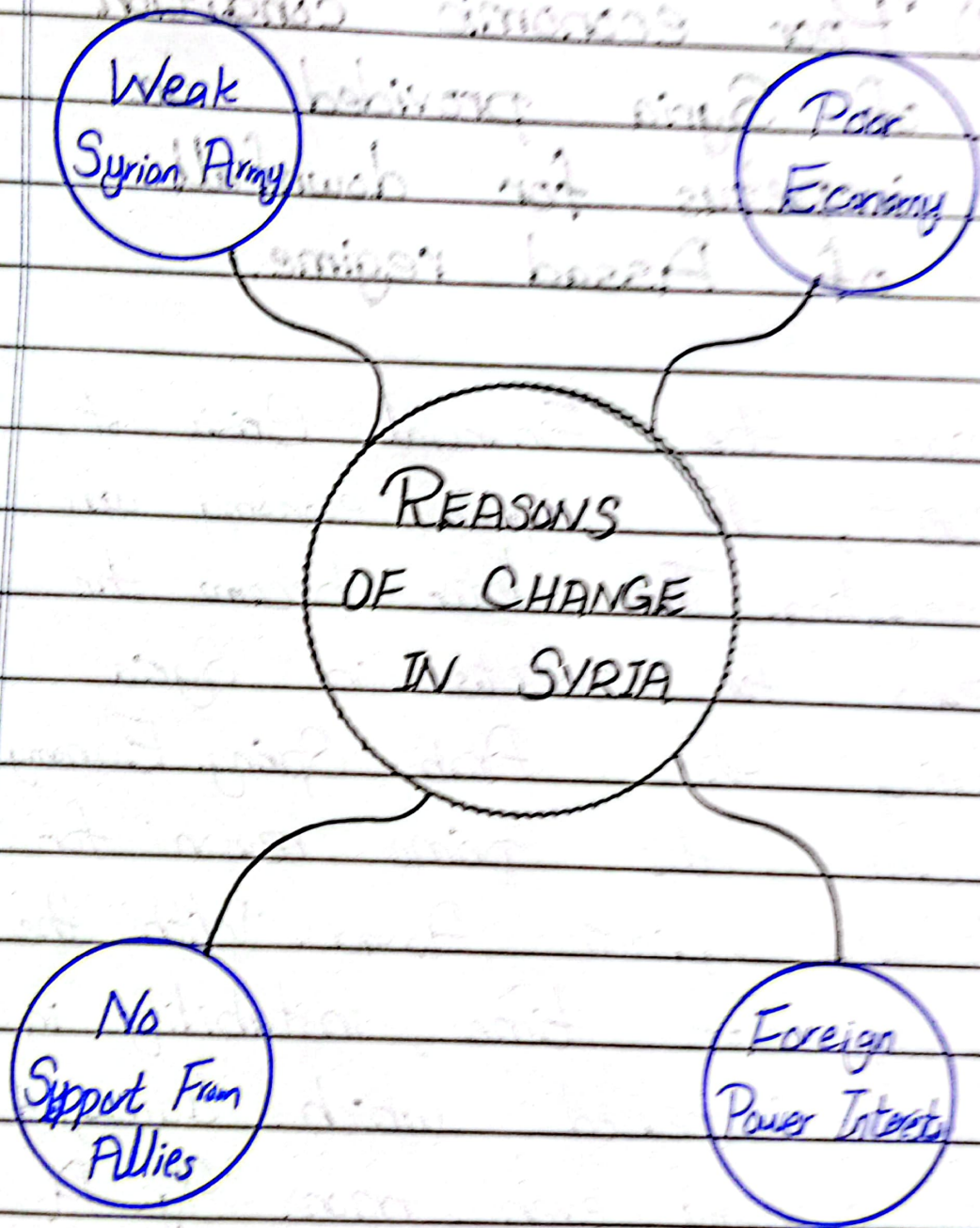
Q. 2. The HTS Islamist rebels have toppled down Bashar ul Asad regime in Syria. Critically evaluate the reasons and implications of the unprecedented change in Syria.

CHANGE IN SYRIA

→ Introduction

On 8 December 2024, the 53-years rule of Assad family came to an end. The regime in Damascus was facing formidable challenges since the Arab Spring. The country witnessed numerous armed groups vying for power, many of those were backed by the foreign powers. The unprecedented change in Syria will have substantial implications for the world, in general and for the Middle East and great powers in particular.

➤ REASONS OF CHANGE IN SYRIA



The reasons of change in Syria are weak Syrian army, poor economic performance, lack of substantial support

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of allies on battleground, and foreign powers backing for rebel groups.

(i) Poor economic condition of Syria provided an impetus for downfall of Assad regime.

Since the Financial Crisis of 2007, the Syrian economy was struggling. This later became the reason for protests in Syria during the Arab Spring. Economy became the prime reason for dissent against Assad. With the passage of time, instability in Syria increased which damaged its economy even more. A large chunk of Syrian population was living under the poverty line with 69% of its population living in poverty. This

poor economic condition widely damaged the popularity of regime.

(ii) Weak Syrian Army due to constant civil war since 2011 and lack of resources paved the way for regime change in Damascus

The Syrian army was constantly fighting the civil war since the Arab Spring, which substantially weakened it. Moreover, the poor economic growth of Syria did not allowed it to restructure and fortify its army. This resulted in a weak army which was unable to fight the onslaught of rebels and Kurds and ISIS for a long time. Hence, it became another reason for change in Damascus.

(iii) Lack of substantial on-ground support from allies like Iran and Russia Syria proved catastrophic for Assad regime.

The military support from allies like Iran and Russia was a big factor, which helped Assad regime sustain during 2014-2018. Most significantly, the Russia aerial support via jet bombers proved very effective in dismantling the rebel groups during 2014-2018. However, now Iran and Russia were engulfed in their own conflicts in the Middle East and Ukraine, respectively. That is why Assad regime failed to get substantial military support from them and it collapsed like the house of cards.

(iv) Foreign powers backing of rebel groups acted as the final nail in the coffin.

Syria was the battleground for many powers that did not want the Assad regime to sustain. The US and Turkiye were main of them. The US had backed the Kurdish groups in Syria against the Assad government and also exhibited support for Syrian Defense Forces (SDF). On the other hand, Turkiye was also allegedly backing the Islamist rebel groups in Syria. Hence, the regime with poor economy, weak forces and no support of allies collapsed courtesy of foreign powers' involvement.

➤ IMPLICATIONS OF CHANGE IN SYRIA

(i) Implications for Syria

The unprecedented change in Syria has caught the world in shock.

The future of Syria is difficult to predict yet, however it mainly depends on the nature of future political setup in Syria. In history this sort of political change results in three kinds of futures:-

1) Case of Libya : More conflict and civil war

2) Case of Iraq : Partial Stability

3) Case of Afghanistan : Stability by
under Taliban 2.0 Consolidation of
Power

If HTS groups remain unified over power sharing, they may become able to consolidate power and revive Syria's economy.

(ii) Implications for Iran and Russia

This regime change is a big setback to Iran and Russia. They have lost a face in the Middle East. Friendly regime in Syria was of paramount importance for Iran in particular. Syria was the main land support for Iran to keep its groups like Hezbollah strong around the Israeli borders. Hence, it is a big backlash to Iran's and Russia's interest in the Middle East.

(iii) Implications for Turkiye and the US

The change in Syria is a big win for Turkiye and the US. Turkiye will now have more power to crush the Kurduh movement. Moreover, this change will also ease the burden of refugees from Turkiye. On the other hand, the US has also managed to overthrow a pro-Russia and pro-Iran regime. However, the increased Turkish influence in Syria may hurt its backing of Kurds.

(iv) Implications for Pakistan

Although, Pakistan has no direct stake in the Syrian change, it can be helpful for Pakistan.

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in Kashmir's case. Bashar al-Assad was a staunch supporter of Indian stance over Kashmir. With anti-Assad regime in Syria, it is expected that the future government setup in Syria may support Pakistan at diplomatic level regarding Kashmir.

→ Conclusion

The unprecedented change in Syria has rooted as far back as the Financial Crisis of 2007 and the Arab Spring. This change has drastically altered the dynamics of the geopolitics of the Middle East, which with substantial implications for all stakeholders.