

How do the competing interests of regional and international actors such as Iran, Turkiye, Russia and US have impacted the geopolitics of Syria and what are the implications of fall of Assad for Middle East power dynamics ?

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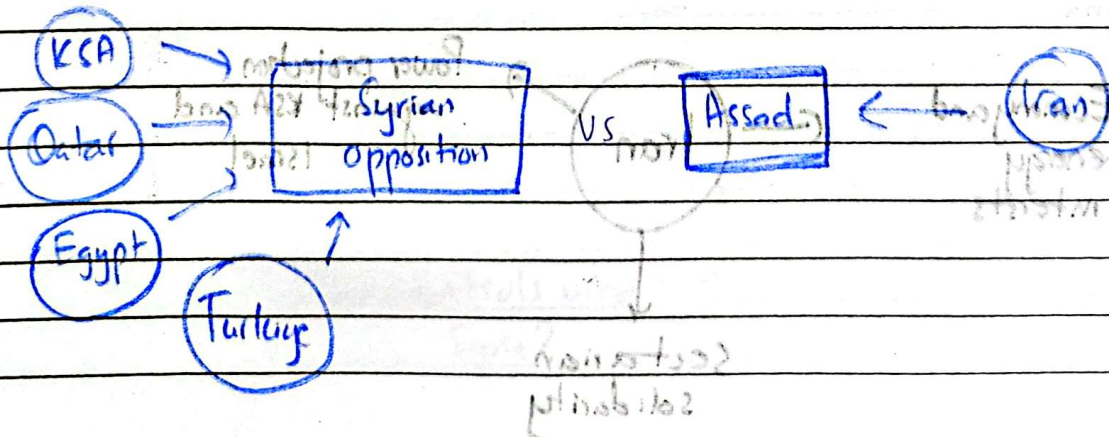
Syria: A Playground of regional and international powers

December 8, 2024 will always be an important day for Syria as the country won its fight against the leader Bashar al Assad since the infamous uprisings of 2010 Arab Spring. A peaceful protest against oppressive government became a protracted civil war with huge scale proxy involvement from regional powers to the global players. The tug of war between different entities has shaped Syria today and will continue to do so until a stable government is formed.

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Regional Interests in Syria: What were Iran and Turkiye eyeing?

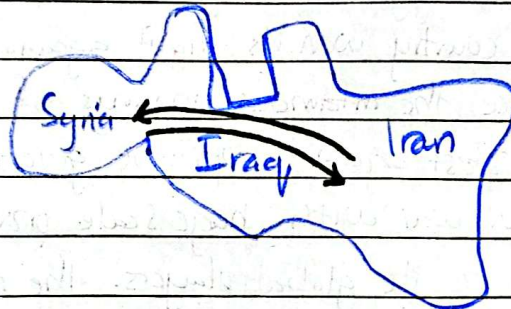
Iran and Turkiye were against each other in the Syrian crises as two important players with massive stakes.



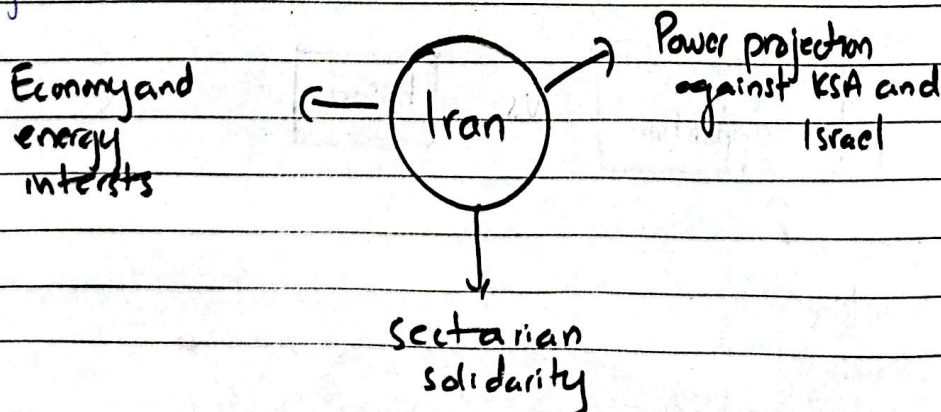
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(i) Iranian Stakes In Syria

The already weakened and sanctioned Shiite majority country in Middle East working hard to find its long lost glory, with brewing hatred for West and western ideas served as an important player in the Syrian conflict. The major interest of Iran was maintaining and preserving a buffer state on western side which not only can support security and economy but also serves as a bulwark against the US and its allies especially Sunni KSA and Israel.



By maintaining support to Assad, Iran maintained a strong foothold in Levant region. Its support to Assad also stemmed from the fact that Bashar al Assad is an alawite shia muslim while the opposition groups belonged to the Sunni sect. In such manner, Iranian support to Assad is deeply intertwined with sectarian solidarity. Lastly Iranian support to Assad was also based on economic gains. Due to western sanctions on Iran, it has shifted its economic and energy interests towards Syria.



(ii) Turkiye Stakes in Syria

The Turkiye interests in the region are broadly related to the Kurdish population. Due to its long border of 900km with Syria, Turkiye has been on its knees due to massive refugee influx and a threat of spill over of Kurds actions in Syria to the Kurdish one-fifth minority of Turkiye. The fear of separatist movements since formation of Kurdistan Workers Party in 1985 has prompted Turkiye to take sides in the conflict.

Kurdish separatist movements

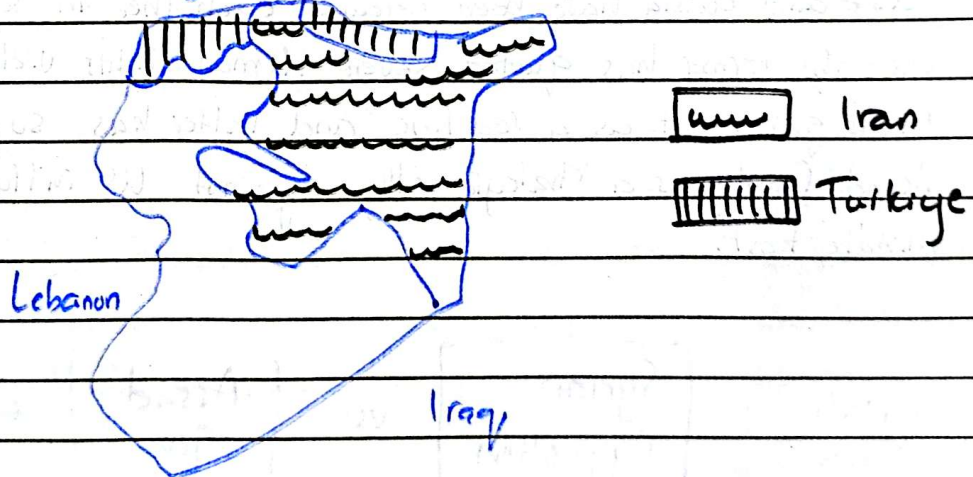


Refugee problem

Iran vs Turkiye in

control of Syria

Turkiye



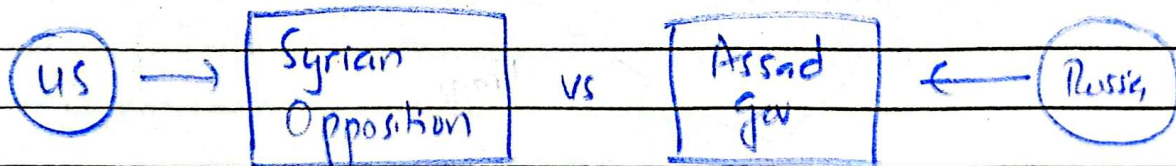
Who controls what in Syria?

Broadly speaking, Iranian interests in the regi Syria have been much old than Turkiye. Iran has a much more comprehensive set of interests which range from sectarian to economic and power projection in Middle East. However for Turkiye it more about containing Kurds in Syria and protecting its minority from similar uprising. Iranian moves can be traced backed to desperation and projection power whereas for Turkiye the idea is protection of self interest. Turkiye has been hosting 3.6 Mn Syrian refugees and while it is a burden on its economy and demography, it has enabled it to showcase itself as a state with responsible stature. This also helped strengthen its ties with EU which can pave way for its membership too. The recent EU bailout package for Turkiye and its applaud for latter's hosting of refugees has been a positive step. It provided a platform for Erdogan to again push for membership and trade.

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International Players in Syria: Flashbacks of US - Russia proxy wars

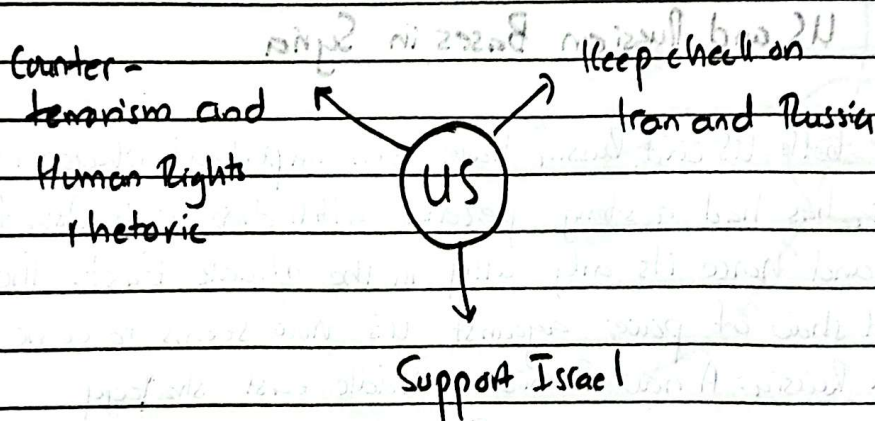
USA and Russia have been against each other in Syria, cases where the former has quoted severe human rights violations of Assad government as a red line and latter has supported the Assad family as a strategic ally against US influence in the Middle East.



at the end of the world
Camp

(i) US interests in Syria

US has around 900 troops in Syria and has given more than US \$1 billion to anti Assad groups in their fight against government. The major interests of US in Syria have been to counter terrorism originating from the volatile situation, support its rhetoric of Human rights and peoples will while keeping an eye on Russian interests and Iranian actions. By its involvement in Syria, US has also been support to Israel - its only democratic ally in the region.



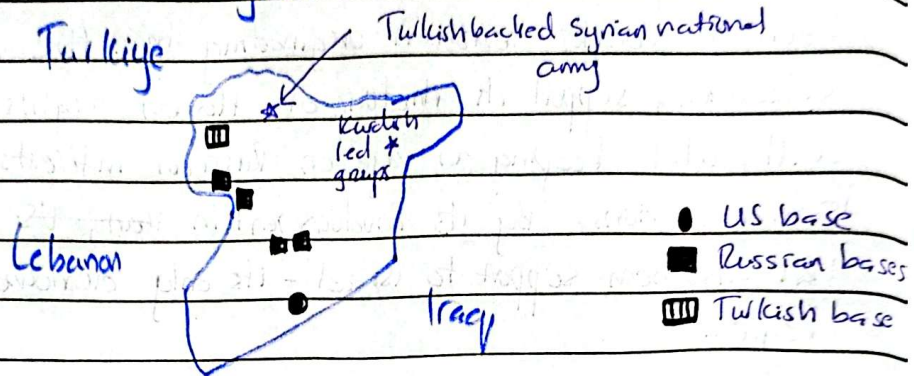
(ii) Russian Interests in Syria

Russia has been a supporter of Assad family since long. Its other main interests in Syria are to counter Western dominance and US in the energy rich region. The significance of Syria for Russia can be identified by the fact that it has around 4 bases in Syria in key locations. Moreover, Russian support to the Syrian government was a strong pillar and if it would not be for the Ukrainian war engagement of Russia, Assad would still be ruling Syria. With Bashar al Assad now in Russia, the

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future of Russian engagement in Syria seems bleak as there are low chances of the new government opening up to the sponsors of their oppressive leader.

US vs. Russia in Syria



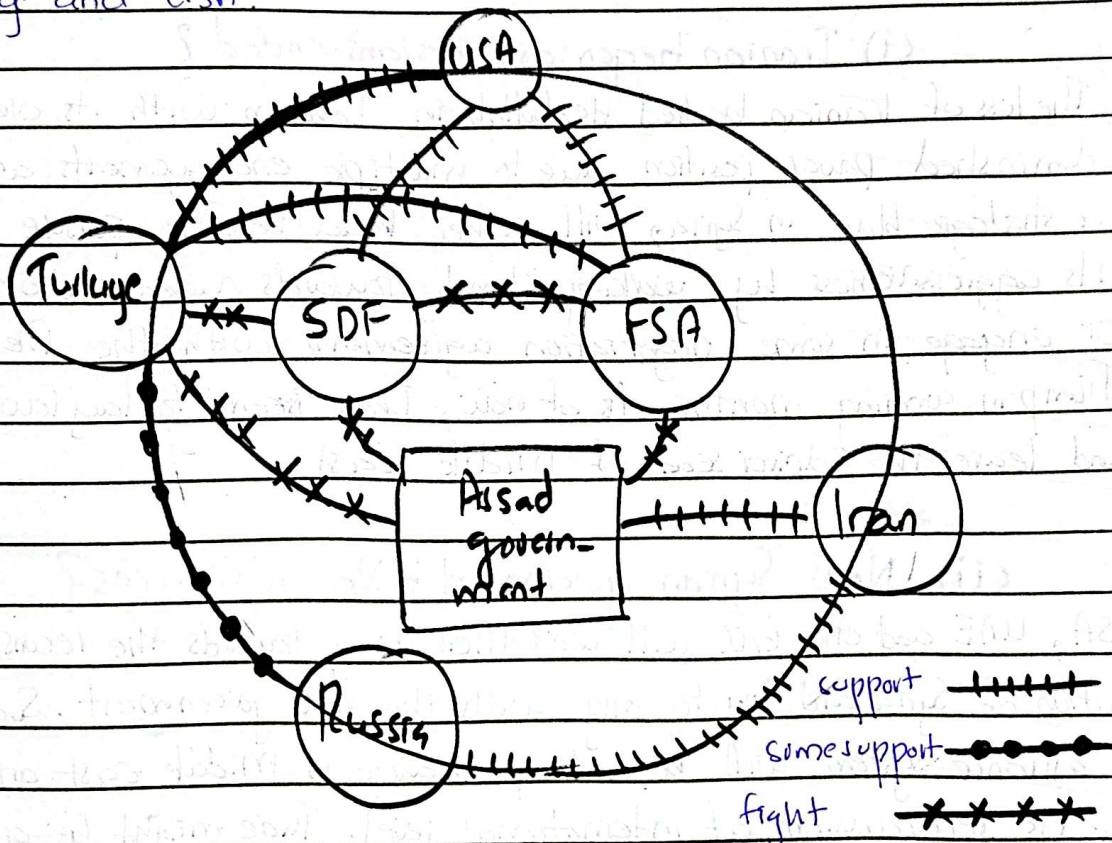
US and Russian Bases in Syria

Generally, both US and Russia have been important players in Syria. Russia has had a strong personal affiliation with Assad government and hence its only ally in the Middle East. The aim of and show of power against US now seems to come an end for Russia. A new Russian Middle East strategy may not be on the cards now. For the US, it has successfully promoted its Human Rights rhetoric and paralyzed Russia in Middle East and limited Chinese future designs. For now, the fall of Syria is a strategic win for Trump and his policies will further shape the political contours of the region, much to the benefit of Israel.

(4)

Regional vs. International Power:
Who prevailed?

The regional competition between Iran and Turkey along with international elements of USA and Russia have deeply impacted the landscape - political, economic and humanitarian - of Syria. On the surface, the geopolitics of Syria have played out in the favour of Syrian opposition groups of SDF, and FSA, Turkey and USA.



Due to this complex network of alliances, as of now Syria is presided by chaos only. The diverging and add national interests of both regional and international powers have led to a loss for all.

(5)

Fall of Assad: What is next for Middle East?

The fall of Assad government has sent ripples all across the middle east. The historic tug of war is now to an end where the losers of this great game are the civilian population of the country. With their future in a dark space ruled by more power grabbing, chaos and uncertainty the effects on the region as a whole are quite significant for now and years to come.

(i) Iranian hegemonic designs ended?

The loss of Iranian backed Hezbollah in Lebanon with its overall diminished power position due to multiple engagements and a strategic blow in Syria, will either lead Iran to pursue its aggressiveness by working strongly towards nuclearization or engage in some negotiation agreements with the President Trump in coming months. As of now, Iran seems to lay low and leave the driver seat of middle east.

(ii) New Syrian government: New alliances?

KSA, UAE and other GCC will walk their way towards the reconstruction of Syria and try to ally with the new government. Such an alliance system will be a huge change in Middle east and show its repercussions at international level. There might be a much different bloc that can help US maintain its role, support Israel, guide KSA 2030 Vision Strategy and sideline Iran and Russia.

(iii) Greater Israel

The quick action of IDF in capturing their territories after loss of Assad hint at a aggressive Israel design where it may capture more territory to follow its greater Israel designs or for the time being lay low and become a rational friendly ally for Syria. In any case, the dynamics of middle east will change for the good.

of Israel.

(v) Russia's Strategic Goals

The fall of Assad hints at Russia's exhaustion in Ukraine and a much weaker political and economic influence than a decade earlier when it was able to swiftly support Assad. The diminishing influence also supports the hypothesis of a weaker Russian involvement in Middle East in the coming years.

(v) Turkish Gains

With the fall of Assad, Turkey can help create a more sympathetic alliance government in Syria and rid itself of the Syrian refugee crisis. Moreover, it can at the same time cash on its positive role in Middle East to get trade and membership opportunities at EU. Lastly, Turkey can strategically assert its control over its border security and ^{crush} offset any future Kurdish separatism once and for all.

(vi) Syrian Governance Challenges

Syrian government will now face immense challenges and security vacuum. The role of foreign powers will increase each looking to gain something and a new tug of war can open. By strategically navigating the bloodshed in Middle East, foreign power interests and working on rebuilding and reconstruction, Syrian government will have much different role to play now.

(vii) US, Trump and new Middle East policies

The fall of Assad has opened new window of opportunities for the US in checking Iran, supporting Israel and pursuing its own national energy interests. However, the new Trump administration will be cautiously navigating the changed terrain of Middle East, only time will tell.

(viii) Blood or Oil : What is next for Middle East

The conflict has already disrupted the transit routes in the region where middle eastern economies are already suffering. After the fall of Assad, Syria could provide a stable investment location for major powers. However due to loss of Assad, Iran's trade route is now sever and could prove disastrous for the country. Another angle in the middle east power dynamics could be increased role of Kurdish forces if they gain more oil fields. There will be some grave impacts on Middle East oil power thus shaping the regions overall dynamics.

(ix) Kurdistan : A new battle field ?

The potential for Kurdish statehood and independence can be on the rise in the future which can again push Syria in another bloodbath. By the fall of Assad, the Kurds in Syria, Iraq and Turkiye can pursue more assertive policies and lead to destabilization

(x) Iraq : Sandwiched between Syria & Iran

The threat of Kurds, increase in sectarian tensions and rise of extremists from the disgruntled groups in Syria and Iran are the major challenges for Iraq. By virtue of its location, it will be heavily influenced by declining Iran and chaotic Syria. The future seems bleak.

(xi) Palestine : Forgotten ?

With fall of Assad or the protector of Israel who detained Hamas fighters and oppressed palestinians, the debate on the Palestinian cause is pushed to the back seat. With increasing volatility in

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in Syria and Lebanon, some disgruntled groups might still pursue the holy cause but as of now HTS and other major groups seem to be busy in consolidating power themselves.

(6)

Conclusion

The competing interests of regional and international powers have deeply impacted Syria. With the fall of Assad regime, the future of middle east seems grave and looming in uncertainty.