

# Current Affairs

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Q2 - The fall of Assad regime came as a surprise.

After 50 years rule of Assad family, Syria went loose from the grip of Bashar Al Assad. The Sunni faction of HTS led by Tolani started capturing lands under the control of Assad. Consequently, Assad fled to Russia where he was given refuge after the hostile takeover. The international community was surprised on the unprecedented changes which were currently focused on wars elsewhere. There are various reasons attributed to the fall of Assad.

The major allies of Assad, Russia and Iran, were focused on their conflicts in Ukraine and Israel. Being a major dependent of these countries, Assad could not hold the control for too long. Moreover, Turkey was being accused of pushing HTS Islamist rebels. The dictatorship of Assad was highly unpopular in Syria. Consequently, Israel advanced more into Golan heights. Turkey celebrated it with concerns regarding the migrants and Kurd separatists. Russia and Iran lost a major influence in Middle East. Finally, currently, the various factions are in deadlock over how changes will be adjusted.

## Reasons of the end of Assad Regime

There are various reasons to fall in autocratic regime of Syria. Firstly, the Bashar al-Assad was highly unpopular and maintained the status quo through force. Secondly, Russia and Iran had their focus on other

geopolitical confrontations. <sup>Lastly</sup> Turkey played a role  
in toppling Assad government

The unpopular regime of Assad and his dependency on  
major powers :

Assad's rule span around 50 years. Before Bashar,  
his father ruled Syria until his death in 2000.  
Bashar was met with resistance from various  
factions. His government was weak and his  
control limited. This was when Russia came  
to help and saved his government. In order  
his over-dependency on Russia and Iran, to ~~help~~  
maintain the status quo, was not sustainable since  
beginning. His atrocities and tactics to silence and  
suppress the opposition made him highly unpopular  
among Sunni-Muslims who were in majority. Millions  
of Syrians fled to Turkey and neighbouring countries,  
as a result.

The fragmentation of Syria under different factions :

Syria was not in total control of Assad. There  
were many opposition groups with their own set  
of agendas. To the North, near the border of Turkey  
were HTS and SDF group. These groups had Turkish  
influence. Near the Turkish-Iraq border were Kurdish-  
separatists who wanted independent Kurdistan. On  
the Eastern side was faction backed by U.S. A  
fragmented force of ISIS still existed in rural  
areas. Hence, these fragmented parties were a



a constant threat to the regime of Assad, and it was one of these parties, HTS, that led to the fall of Assad.

The diversion of attention of Assad's major allies: Iran and Russia:

Iran and its conflicts with Israel:

Iran was one of the major allies of Assad regime. Due to sectarian similarities, Iran easily won over in its influence on Assad regime despite it being secularist. However, since Oct 2023, Iran major focus was its conflict with Israel in Palestine and Lebanon. Majority of its resources were diverted here. The year of 2024, in addition, became a bad year for Iran. It lost the leaders of its proxies, Ismail Haniyeh of Hamas and Hassan Nasrullah of Lebanon. This weakened Iran's influence in Middle East. Hence, Assad was over-dependent on major ally who was diverted in other conflicts and was losing its grip.

Russia and its growing concern of NATO influence involvement in Ukraine:

Russia was in war with Ukraine after it perceived Ukrainian interest as being a member of NATO as a national security threat. The war has been going since 3 year, stretching Russian resources thin. NATO's constant supply of weapons to Ukraine

has prolonged the war further. It was not able to save Assad like it did the last time, as a result.

Turkish concern of Syrian immigrants and Kurdish separatists:

Turkiye felt the burden of three-million in Syrian migrants, as a result of Assad regime. Migrant problem is one of the major issue of Turkiye. Its economy is already grappled with high inflation. Moreover, the separatist Kurdish movement is a threat to its national security. The recent terror attacks by Kurdish separatists frustrated Turkiye. Syrian Kurdish separatists were believed to be providing strong support and haven to terrorists. The regime has accused Turkiye of fueling this situation with the goal of establishing a stable government and suppressing Kurdish separatism.

### Implications of Changes in Syria

The fall of Assad was a major blow to Russia and Iran who lost a key ally and their influence in Middle East. Turkiye also responded with safe passage option to Syrian immigrants in Turkey, and its ambition of suppression of suppressing Kurdish separatist heightened. Israel captured 3 villages in Golan heights and bombarded many sites in Russia. Finally there is uncertainty over new form of govt with an interim government already appointed.



Iran lost a major ally and transit of men and weaponry:

Iran is facing difficulty to support proxy elements of Hamas and Hezbollah. Syria was a command headquarter for Iran to control its proxy against its arch-nemesis, Israel. Fall of Assad regime means Iran lost its command control. Moreover, Syria was a medium of access to Lebanon. The new government has created ambiguities in Iran over its supply in Lebanon. The routes have been compromised.

Syria Russia lost its influence in Middle East:

Influence in Middle East through Syria was one of the way Russia flexed its muscles to US and the West. It gave an impression of Russian revival as major power, post cold-war. Its influence in Syria greatly compromised West influence in Middle East. Fall of Syrian Assad regime has taken away its only source of influence in the region. The military bases of Russia in Syria's coastal region are at a high alert.

Israel territorial expansion into Syria and aerial bombardment of military sites:

After Assad's fall, Israel captured three villages.

in Golan Heights, expanding the buffer zone. This was highly condemned by countries like Saudi Arabia. In addition, it conducted around 200 aerial strikes on major military sites to avoid the weapons getting into the hands of the HTS. Hence, it ensured the destruction of such sites.

Turkiye offering passage for migrant, return and its influence in ~~the~~ the region:

Turkiye offered safe passage to Syrian refugees. Thousands of refugees started returning to Syria. There were huge celebration by Syrian immigrants in various part of the world. Turkish government offered free one way air travel to Syrians. Moreover, it is pushing towards the suppression of Kurdish separatists by mobilising Syrian Democratic Forces.

### Conclusion

The fall in Assad regime was celebrated by some countries like Turkiye and Israel while Iran and Russia considered it as a major setback. Although Syrians celebrated the smooth victory of rebels, the Syria remain fragmented with Alawites forming near Lebanon and other fragments maintaining their position. An interim govt is installed and the future of Syria uncertain.



Q4- Since 2016, there has been rising debate on world switching from uni-polar to Multi-polar world order. This has been majorly contributed to rising power of Russia and China, majorly. They are continuously challenging liberal-world order of U.S. China's growing power through its powerful economy, the new silk road, military expenditure and rising influence is a direct threat to U.S. led world order. On Russia, meanwhile, is countering U.S. influence in Middle East and Ukraine. Through institutions like BRICS and SCO, a joint effort is made to undermine U.S. influence. Lastly, the sanction on Russia has raised concerns and given response.

China and its policies to undermine U.S. world order

Chinese powerful economy.

China has been one of the fastest growing economies world wide. Such rising economic super power is estimated to surpass U.S. in 2030-2035 and become the world economic super power. Rising Chinese economy is already perceived as a grave concern to U.S who would never want its hegemony undermined.

Belt Road Initiative:

China announced its major project worldwide, Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). China termed it as a new Silk road that expand both in land and sea, stretching from China to Russia

and Europe, to the South Asian and Central Asian countries and through China-Pakistan Economic Corridor into Middle East. The project involves investment of \$1.3 Trillion in these routes, covering the construction transportation, energy, Industries and agriculture. Such a huge investment - undermined US influence to rising Chinese influence. In response, US announced Built Back Better World project (B3W). To sum, China is using Russia as a major threat to counter US threat [and technological] in South-China Sea. Chinese rising military power and victory in Middle East:

China is next to US in its military spending. The rising military and technological growth of China is a threat to US hegemony. Communist China has claimed parts of East and South-China Sea as part of its territory. 'Chinese One China policy' includes annexation of Taiwan in its territory, a major ally of US. Artificial Islands have been built and militarised to flex its muscles. High-grade weapons and machinery is countering US cutting-edge technology. China was able to expand its influence in Middle East by acting as a successful mediator between Iran and Saudi. US undermined US in Middle East. In summary, the technology is transferred by Russia to Europe. 40% of Chinese aircraft engines are Russian. US liberal order



## Russian frustration on sanctions and its response with Chinese collaboration:

Russians see NATO a major threat after its interest to add <sup>Ukraine</sup> Russia in NATO. In response, it attacked and annexed parts of Ukraine.

As a result, U.S. slapped many sanctions on Russia that jeopardised its economic growth. Billion of dollars have been frozen by US adding more concern to its National Security.

As a response, Russia decided to collaborate with China on various points.

## De-dollarisation, action by Russia-China collaboration:

Russia and China are greatly concerned over the US bullying act of sanctions. Hence, various measures were taken. Both the countries decided to trade bilaterally in their own currencies. It is estimated that the total trade between both the countries is around \$230 billion, increasing by 170% in the past decade. Swapping ~~the~~ trade in local currency undermines dependency on U.S. dollar.

## Russia being China's greatest hydro-carbon seller:

The rising threats in South-China Sea and Indo-Pacific Ocean threatens Chinese trade and expose its vulnerability. Importing oil from Russia greatly reduces such vulnerability. Russia, on the other hand, is ladened with

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sanction. Trade with Russia eases its economic struggles.

The greater collaboration in the form of BRICS and SCO, UN:

Platforms like BRICS and SCO are providing major platforms to undermine US. For example BRICS has been seriously discussing trading in their currencies with each other. BRICS include countries with healthy economies. Hence they can be effective in their measures to counter dollar. Moreover, Both the countries are permanent members of UNSC. Hence, they can collaborate any measure which is in conflicting interest to U.S.

### Conclusion

The world has become a Multipolar order. U.S liberal order is losing traction with Chinese-Russian collaboration in BRI, economy, military and trade. The process of dedollarisation and the greater collaboration through International platforms like BRICS and UN is playing their part in expanding their influence in the world.



Q7. Middle East has a long history of conflicts. The Arab Spring of 2011 has gravely affected its stability with rise in militant factions, dictators and terrorist organisations. Since then, the region is a breeding ground for proxy wars that interest the outside parties, specifically. The ongoing conflicts include the war of Israel - Palestine and the recent fall in Syrian regime. The main parties among beneficiaries and losers include the following countries: Iran, Israel, United States, Russia, Saudi Arabia, and China and Turkey.

The beneficiaries and losers of Israel-Palestinian conflict

Israel's victory and progress in the conflict and the losses

Gaza, once the largest open air prison in the world, has been obliterated and has come under Israel control. Israel has shown not only the Arab countries but the world about its powerful military capabilities and the strong back of U.S. This has deterred countries to take strict action and hold Israel accountable, especially Iran. Israel proved its military capabilities and gravely weakened the opposition. The direct and indirect attacks of Iran were met with effective response, weakening Iran's decade of supremacy in countering Israel.

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Iran lost major proxy leaders in the conflict:

Iran lost its proxy-faction leaders against Israel, one by one. The leader of Hamas, Ismail Haniyeh, was killed inside Iran through a bomb blast. The leader of Hezbollah was killed by Israel inside a hidden bunker in Lebanon.

The consulate of Iran in Damascus was targeted by Israel, killing top Iranian commanders. Moles in its top intelligence were caught aiding Israel. The newly appointed leader of Hamas, Yahya Sinwar, was killed in Gaza. The latest direct confrontation by Israel was left unresponded. The pager explosion in Lebanon killed and injured key Iranian back leaders, hence, Iran has lost strength in the conflict.

Russia and China have taken advantage of ~~any~~ anti-US rhetoric worldwide.

Russia benefited from the rising anti-US sentiment, worldwide over US and West's dual hypocrisy. Ukraine-Russia war was framed as war against humanity by Westerner politicians while the Israel atrocities in Gaza are termed self-defence. Sanctions were stopped on Russia while military aid of \$3.8 billion annually are funnelled into Israel. China would be able to take the same edge of US hypocrisy on its justifiable claim on Taiwan.



The beneficiaries and losers of Fall of Assad regime

Iran declining influence after HTS hostile takeover.

Syrian regime of Assad was a major ally of China. Syria was command centre for Iran to lead Hezbollah and Hamas. Syria was also the transit to providing Hezbollah and Hamas with weapons, fighters and funds. A large chunk of Syria was lost where Iran could exercise control. The inability to access Hezbollah and Hamas through this route would weaken its influence in Lebanon and Gaza too. HTS, on the other hand, is a Sunni faction with its own Islamist agendas.

Israel expansionism and destruction of Syrian military sites:

Israel's arch-enemy Iran, weakened in the region, as mentioned above. It captured 3 villages in Golan heights, further expanding its territory. Major military sites, once belonging to Assad regime, were destroyed to avoid the HTS taking care of them. Hence, Israel assured its national security and added new land to itself.

Russian only influence in Middle East ended:

Russian Influence in Syria was a great way

of flexing muscles to U.S. This was the only Middle Eastern country where it had strong influence. High alert has been given to its military bases in Syria. There is a huge possibility of evacuating those bases.

Turkiye is sending the migrants back

Turkiye has been burdened with 3 million Syrian migrants, putting a strain on its economy. It has decided to open borders with thousands of migrants, getting back to their country. Free one way air travel has been offered and safe and easy travel of migrants are ensured.

Q8- CPEC projects have slowed down due to various reasons. The terrorist attacks on Chinese nationals have discouraged investment. ITA has placed its restriction on CPEC projects, the country is engulfed in economic and political turmoil. Possible remedies are responding to terrorism, negotiating with ITA, political dialogues and economic sustainability.

Reasons

Terrorist attacks on Chinese Citizens:

Terrorist factions of TTP and BLA have attacked Chinese national, especially investors,



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on various occasions. Suicide bomb in Confucius institute Karachi to the recent Airport bombing has deterred investors from bringing investment inside the country.

IMF restricting SEZs and raising objection on taxes

IMF demanded the halt in development of SEZs of Rashakai and Allama Iqbal. Critics associate it with U.S ambition to sabotage CPEC. Moreover, tax relaxation to Chinese investors were criticized by IMF with its duty to liberal economic order.

Political and economic instability has jeopardised progress of CPEC.

Pakistan, a country with weak historical economic standing was exasperated by political events. Confrontational politics have kept the country unstable. Accusation of election rigging and politicisation of govt institutions has been a hot topic. This has led to the Chinese investors losing confidence to invest, since instability increases the risk to investment.

## Remedy

Dealing with terrorism through force and dialogue:

Although historical dialogues with TTP has failed.

Force is a necessary tool to counter-terrorism.

Intelligence-based operations and critical threats should be identified. Taliban should be diplomatically pressured to take actions and not to provide safe haven to terrorists.

Separatists like in Balochistan should be dealt with dialogue and use force where necessary.

The concerns of Baloch people should be effectively addressed and job opportunities should expand for Balochistan. The issue of missing person and share in resources must be dealt with effectively.

Negotiation with TTF:

Negotiation should be held with TTF on SEZ projects. Their benefit must be stressed.

Tax exceptions to investors shall be persuaded with long-term benefit of rising investments.

Political dialogues between political parties:

Confrontational politics should be ended.

Dialogues should be initiated and a workable solution devised that bring political parties on one page. A stable political environment will result in investment in CPFC projects.