

Current Affairs

Part II

QUESTION NO. 2

1) Introduction

The recent fall of Bashar al-Assad's government in Syria marks a pivotal moment in the politics of the Middle East, ending over a decade of authoritarian rule and conflict. Assad's regime, once sustained by a combination of military force, strategic alliances with powers like Russia and Iran, succumbed to fierce fighting by HTS in a matter of weeks. The fall reflects the culmination of years of civil unrest, exhaustion of resources, and a loss of protected welfare, exacerbated by shifting allegiances among regional and global powers. This has far-reaching implications for Middle East politics in general and world politics in general.

2) Reasons for Fall of Assad government

a) Iran's declining support due to geopolitical constraints

One of the main reasons for the fall of Assad's government was Iran's declining support due to geopolitical constraints. Iran was a staunch ally of Assad's government throughout the Syrian civil war. It extended millions of dollars in financial aid and strategic

ground support through Iran Revolutionary Guard and Corps (IRGC) & Hezbollah.

This resulted into being one of the reasons for the fall

"Iran's regional overstretch and domestic fragility has left Damascus exposed to regional rivals" —(Fareed Zakaria)

b) Türkiye's transition from ally to strategic opponent

Türkiye once had good ties with Assad government with both nations have and cooperation. Erdoğan, the President of Türkiye previously mediated between Syria and Iran before Arab Spring. Ankara allegedly supported HTS militarily and logistically, actively opposing Kurdish forces. According to Richard N. Haas: "Turkey's strategic goal is to curb the rise of Kurdish autonomy in Syria".

c) Russia's reduced support to Assad due to Ukraine crisis

Russia previously was an active supporter of Assad government with military intervention in 2015 including air strikes, which enabled Assad to regain key areas like Aleppo and Deir e Zor. Moscow also supported Syria diplomatically, vetoing UNSC resolutions.

Ukraine war has shifted Russian priorities, redirecting military and financial resources away from Syria. According to Vali Nasr, a Middle East political analyst, "Russian current disengagement exposed fragility of Assad's regime".

d) US Economic Sanctions on Syria

Syria being a strategic ally to Iran greatly antagonized United States. US placed sanctions such as Caesar Act that crippled Syrian economy. Also, US supported Kurds in North Syria to counter ISIS and Syrian government. US support for Kurds threatened Türkiye and resultantly Türkiye supported HTS on north-west, which resulted in the fall of Bashar al Assad government.

e) Saudi increased support for Anti Assad Rebels

Saudis viewed Assad government as a proxy of Iran which posed challenge to Saudi regional dominance. Riyadh has allegedly provided substantial financial support covertly to HTS, to replace Assad with a government more aligned with Sunni Arab interest. Saudi Arabia has prevented Syria from becoming Iranian Satellite State. This also resulted in the fall of the regime.

3) Impacts of the Assad Government Fall.

a) Increased Sectarian and Proxy Conflicts

Fall of Assad's regime would prompt sectarian divisions and in Middle East the power vacuum by Assad departure would embolden

Sunni factions and Iran would continue to back Shia militias and groups covertly.

This would exacerbate sectarian conflicts

in Iraq, Lebanon, Yemen and Sunni-Shia

rift would be fostered destabilizing region.

b) Kurdish empowerment and Territorial disputes

Kurdish group in North Syria specially

SDF would seek to increase its influence

and capital on non presence of Assad.

This could prompt territorial dispute with

Türkiye which view Kurds as a threat to its internal security

c) Türkiye expansion in North Syria

Ankara has already taken steps to establish

control over northern Syria and counter

Kurdish forces to create buffer zone against

SDF and ensure control of separatist

movement in Ankara.

d) Reshaping Arab League Dynamics

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With the fall of Assad government, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Egypt are now more likely to support anti Assad rebels which will have certain impacts on Arab League dynamics

e) Shift in Global Power Dynamics between Russia, US & Iran

Iran has lost a key ally with Assad out of the picture. Russia has lost access to the Mediterranean sea. So, now it seems that balance of power is in favour of United States. There will be an increased rift between the Global Powers.

f) Escalation of Refugee Crisis

There will also be an increased influx of refugees into the neighboring countries just like in 2015, because of the illegitimate government.

4) Conclusion

The fall of Assad regime will have many impacts for the Global Powers and will likely change the global and Arab League dynamics. This has, as discussed, far reaching implications for Middle East in specific and world politics in general.

QUESTION NO. 3

1) Introduction

State-owned Enterprises (SOEs) in Pakistan have indeed been a significant fiscal burden due to their inefficiency, mismanagement, and chronic losses. Privatization offers a solution to reduce their strain on the economy and improve their performance.

2) Why SOEs are a burden on Pakistan's budgetary economy

a) Chronic Losses

Many SOEs, such as Pakistan International Airlines (PIA), Pakistan Steel Mills and power distribution companies, operate at a loss.

These losses require continuous government subsidies, diverting resources from vital sectors like education, health and infrastructure.

b) Inefficiency and Mismanagement

State owned enterprises often suffer from overstaffing, corruption, lack of accountability, and outdated operational models. Political appointments and interference further exacerbate inefficiencies.

c) Debt Accumulation

Loss making SOEs contribute to public debt.

as the government borrows to cover their deficits. This worsens the fiscal deficit and reduces funds available for productive investments.

d) Market Distortion

State owned enterprises often monopolize sectors like aviation and energy, stifling competition and innovation, leading to higher costs for consumers.

e) Opportunity cost

The resources tied up in SOEs could be better utilized in other productive or high-growth areas if privatized or managed more effectively.

3) How Privatization can Help

a) Efficiency and Profitability

Transferring ownership to private entities incentivizes efficiency and profit oriented management. This can lead to improved services, reduced costs, and higher revenue.

b) Reduced fiscal burden

Privatization eliminates the need for government subsidies, freeing up funds for development projects and reducing the fiscal deficit.

c) Encourages Investment

Private ownership attracts Foreign Direct Investments and also domestic investment, fostering economic growth and job creation.

d) Promotes Competition

Privatizing sectors dominated by SOEs introduces competition, leading to better quality and lower prices for consumers.

e) Debt Reduction

The proceeds from privatization can be used to pay off public debt, easing the overall debt burden.

3) How SOEs Should be Privatized

i) Developing a Comprehensive Strategy

A clear privatization framework should be established, identifying which SOEs to prioritize based on their fiscal impact and market potential.

ii) Transparency in the Process

The privatization process should be transparent to avoid corruption, ensure public trust, and attract credible buyers.

iii) Restructuring Before Privatization

Some SOEs may require restructuring to make

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them attractive to investors. This could involve downsizing, modernizing infrastructure or resolving existing liabilities.

iv) **Regulatory Reforms**
Strengthening regulatory frameworks is essential to prevent monopolistic practices post-privatization and ensure fair competition.

v) **Gradual Implementation.**
A phased approach can help address public resistance and allow the government to learn and adjust as privatization progresses.

vi) **Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs)**
For sectors with high public sensitivity, PPPs can be an intermediate step before full privatization, balancing public welfare with private efficiency.

vii) **Stakeholder Engagement**
Engaging labor unions, consumers, and other stakeholders is crucial to mitigate resistance and build consensus.

4) **Challenges and Mitigation**

a) **Public Opposition**
Privatization is often met with resistance due to fears of job losses. This can be

mitigated by offering retraining programs and ensuring transparent communication of benefits.

b) Valuation and Corruption Concerns

Past privatizations in Pakistan have faced allegations of undervaluation and corruption. A strong legal and institutional framework is needed to ensure fair pricing and transparency.

c) Regulatory Gaps

Privatization must be accompanied by robust regulatory mechanisms to avoid monopolistic practices and protect consumers.

5) Conclusion

Privatizing SOEs in Pakistan is not only an economic imperative but also a critical step towards sustainable fiscal management and economic growth. With careful planning, transparency, and stakeholder engagement, privatization can transform these enterprises from a burden into a catalyst for progress.

QUESTION NO. 6

1) Introduction

The long-standing tensions between Islamabad and Kabul have become a pressing concern due to the use of Afghan territory by the Tehrik-e Taliban (TTP) for launching terrorist attacks in Pakistan. This issue not only destabilizes Pakistan's security landscape but also strains bilateral relations with Afghanistan. Despite the Taliban's assurances to prevent their soil from being used for terrorism, ideological alignments and governance challenges in Afghanistan hinder effective action against the TTP. Coupled with Pakistan's economic vulnerabilities and a trust deficit between the two neighbors, the situation risks escalating into a broader regional crisis.

A nuanced and strategic approach is essential to address these challenges, ensure stability, and foster cooperation between the two nations.

2) Critical Evaluation of the Situation

- a) Afghanistan's Stance: Ambiguity in Taliban Policy and Internal challenges
- b) Pakistan's domestic Implications: Rising terrorism, Strained economy
- c) Impact on Bilateral Relations: Trust Deficit and Border Tensions
- d) Regional and Global Dynamics: Lack of

International mediation and instability spillover over the region.

3) Recommendations for Mitigating Islamabad - Kabul Tensions.

- a) Diplomatic Engagement
- b) Strengthen Border Management
- c) Address Underlying Grievances
- d) Leverage International Pressure
- e) Domestic Counterterrorism Measures
- f) Contingency Measures: Selective Cross-Border Strikes

4) Conclusion

The Islamabad - Kabul tensions rooted in TTP's activities represent a multifaceted challenge that demands both immediate and long-term solutions. Diplomatic engagement, enhanced border security, international mediation, and robust domestic counterterrorism measures are critical to resolving the crisis. While Pakistan must safeguard its national security, a collaborative approach with Afghanistan remains essential to achieving lasting stability.