

Beyond the War: Syria as the Epicenter of Global Power Struggles

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Abstract

The Syrian conflict, which has ongoing for over a decade, is often seen as a domestic struggle for political power and freedom. However, a deeper analysis shows a complex circumstance of external geopolitical interests shaping the path of the conflict. The hidden agendas of major global and regional powers, including the United States, Israel, Turkey, and Qatar, in influencing the outcome of the Syrian civil war. It focuses on the strategic motivations behind their involvement, such as countering Iran's regional dominance, limiting Russia's influence, securing energy routes, and challenging China's Belt and Road Initiative. Additionally, it discovers how Syria's geopolitical positioning and resources made it a crucial point for competing global powers. By analyzing these factors, this study tries to uncover the broader implications of Assad's regime's collapse on regional stability and global power shift. The findings emphasize that the Syrian conflict is not just a localized civil war but a battleground for the reconfiguration of Middle Eastern geopolitics and the declaration of global influence.

Keywords: Syria, Middle East, P-5 Members, Civil War, Propaganda

Introduction

Syria's location, prosperity, and cultural legacy make it a significant player in the Middle East. Its economy and power were previously strengthened by its status as the sole significant producer of crude oil in the Eastern Mediterranean. Syria also enjoys an impressive textile and industrial sector (Business Standard, 2013). But because of these advantages, it has become an important subject in both regional and global politics, frequently resulting in war. Protests against President Bashar al-Assad in Syria were sparked by the Arab Spring in 2011 and eventually turned into a civil war. Syria became the epicenter of geopolitical strife as a result of the

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involvement of numerous local, regional, and international entities. In particular, Abu Mohammad al-Jolani's rebel group Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) has recently carried out effective military operations. Major cities like Aleppo, Homs, and Damascus were quickly taken by HTS, which ultimately forced Assad to flee to Russia and put an end to his rule (The New York Times, 2024). The political landscape of Syria is impacted by this change, but the humanitarian situation is still severe. As the nation struggles with infrastructure devastation, relocation, and economic collapse, more than 7.5 million Syrian children urgently need assistance. The February 2023 earthquakes made matters worse, resulting in fatalities and further difficulties (TRT World Now, 2024). Additionally, Syria is a battleground for global powers' rivalries, including the U. S., Russia, and Iran, alongside lesser-known influences from China, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and Israel.

China's involvement began with its Belt and Road Initiative, which Syria joined in January 2022, weight its strategic value (Sharma, 2022). The Sunni-Shia divide further complicates the conflict, with the Sunni majority Saudi Arabia and Iran supporting opposing sides and Assad's Alawite regime facing opposition. Turkey also plays a crucial role, initially supporting anti-Assad movements before concentrating on fighting Kurdish forces to secure the land needed for the oil pipeline from Qatar. This challenge has been made worse by U.S. backing for the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF). There are concerns regarding the actual nature of the conflict as HTS increases its level of control. Global and regional countries are competing for influence in the Middle East as a result of the Syrian conflict. By controlling military installations like Tartus and the Hmeimim air base, Russia has improved its standing and is now able to sustain the Assad government and keep a long-term presence (The Defense Post, 2024). As part of its campaign against Russia's worldwide dominance, the United States is trying to reduce Russian influence in Syria. Regional rivalries are in action here, with Saudi Arabia supporting rebel organizations and Iran supporting Assad. The conflict is made complicated by Turkey's opposition to Assad and attempts to restrain Kurdish autonomy. The question raise here is that Syria's liberation at stake, or is it just a shift of power among external forces? The continuous conflict includes not only local politics but also power relations at the regional and global levels.

❖ **The Hidden Geopolitical Agenda Behind the Liberation of Syria**

With several opposition factions always fighting to destroy the regime, it appeared impossible to remove Bashar al-Assad's government in Syria over the past 13 to 14

years. But in just a few weeks, everything shifted, casting doubt on how quickly Assad's regime fell apart. Understanding the broader geopolitical environment in which the rebels functioned is crucial to understand why this occurred. The external involvement of global powers, including the United States, Israel, Turkey, and Qatar, each with their own geopolitical objectives, is the main driving force behind the effort to topple Assad.

❖ **The Role of the United States**

In an effort to offset Russia's expanding influence and Iran's developing regional dominance, the US has long attempted to expand its influence in the Middle East. These objectives were seriously hampered by the regime of Bashar al-Assad, which was backed by Russia and Iran. The United States understood that undermining Assad would reduce the power of Iran and Russia in the area. The West viewed the rebels' struggle against Assad as a perfect chance to challenge this partnership. The truth is more complicated, despite the media's frequent portrayal of these rebels as speaking for the Syrian people and a diverse religious community. The United States, through its support of these rebel groups, has used them as pawns to weaken Assad's regime and replace it with a government more aligned with Western interests. This would not only reduce Iran's presence in Syria but also curb Russia's strategic influence, which has been deepening through military and economic agreements with the Assad government.

❖ **Israel's Strategic Interests**

There are important geopolitical reasons why Israel supports the rebels. Israel and Assad have frequently clashed over Israel's vision of a "Greater Israel," which includes land from Saudi Arabia to Lebanon and from the Mediterranean Sea to the Euphrates River. Israel took control of Syria's Golan Heights during the 1967 Six-Day War (BBC News, 2023), remains a major point of contention. Assad's position as an obstacle to Israel's goals has been strengthened by his unwillingness to engage in negotiations over the Golan Heights. The removal of Assad has been of interest to the Israeli government in this regard. Israel might undermine the Syrian government, which has long opposed Israel's regional aspirations, by aiding rebel organizations attempting to topple Assad. Eliminating Assad would also help Israel's larger ambitions for regional influence and territorial expansion, particularly in light of the Golan Heights dispute.

❖ Turkey and Qatar's Role

Although their involvement in the Syrian crisis is frequently motivated by hidden geopolitical and commercial motives, Qatar and Turkey have also played important roles. The possibility of a massive natural gas pipeline linking Qatar and Turkey, which would enable Qatari gas to reach European markets via Turkey, is a much-overlooked component of the Syrian conflict (Agency, 2024). This project, which could challenge Russia's dominance as Europe's top supplier of natural gas (Gak, Stambaugh, & Cooban, 2025), was first halted in 2009 by the administration of Assad. Syria's opposition to the pipeline was viewed at the time as a tactic to safeguard Russia's energy interests in Europe. The pipeline project might be resurrected when Assad is overthrown, giving Qatar the opportunity to avoid Russia and strengthen its own energy dominance in Europe. Thus, overthrowing Assad would be consistent with the economic objectives of Qatar and Turkey, with the extra advantage of reducing Russia's control over the region's energy resources.

Countering China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)

The Syrian conflict's relationship to China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) is among its least talked-about features. Under Assad's direction, Syria had agreed to join China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), which intends to link nations in Asia, Africa, and Europe by building a massive infrastructural network. Syria was positioned to play a significant role in this campaign by siding with China, directly challenging US control in the area. One major area of conflict for the US was Assad's backing of China's Belt and Road Initiative. The US has been working to reduce China's growing influence globally, particularly in regions like the Middle East, where the BRI could open new trade routes and economic opportunities that undermine US strategic goals. Removing Assad, who had become a partner of China, was a key objective for the US to prevent the further expansion of China's influence through the BRI in Syria.

A Closer Look at the Western Propaganda that shape the Narrative Surrounding the Syrian Conflict

With a narrative heavily influenced by Western media and political agendas, the Syrian war has grown to be one of the most complicated and controversial crises in world geopolitics. One of the most common assertions in this narrative is that the destruction and suffering endured by the Syrian people are entirely the fault of

Bashar al-Assad's regime. However, this representation frequently lacks solid proof and overlooks important information that offers a more complex picture of the situation. In this regard, it is impossible to undervalue the influence that propaganda has on public opinion, especially in the West. The selective reporting, omission of dissenting voices, and manipulation of facts serve to further the interests of Western powers in the region, often at the expense of a more balanced and comprehensive analysis.

The Role of Surveys and Polls in Shaping Public Opinion

Public opinions of Bashar al-Assad's involvement in the Syrian war have been revealed by the START Syria Barometer Survey. "How much do you blame Bashar al-Assad for the killing and suffering in Syria?" was the question posed to the responders. 62% percent said they do not blame him "at all," and 7% said they blame him "a little." By comparison, only 13% of those surveyed said they blamed Assad "very much," and 4% said they blamed him "somewhat." Additionally, 6% of respondents said they were "not sure," and 8% said they "refused" to answer the question. These findings show a clear departure from the mainstream Western media narrative, which frequently presents Assad as the main cause of the conflict. Rather, the research shows that a sizable majority of Syrians do not directly blame Assad for the suffering of their nation. This research underlines the complexities of the conflict and indicates that Western narratives deliberately exclude viewpoints that contradict with larger geopolitical goals in order to oversimplify Syrian public sentiment (Office of University Programs, Science and Technology Directorate, 2016).

The OPCW Douma Report: A Case of Suppression and Manipulation

The 2018 chemical attack in Douma serves as yet another clear example of how misinformation has shaped the discourse surrounding Syria. The inquiry by the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) concluded with the claim that Syrian forces dropped canisters of chlorine gas on the city. Journalist Robert Fisk, however, discovered evidence that the OPCW had suppressed a 15-page opposing analysis that questioned the official account by arguing that the canisters were more likely to have been inserted manually. Despite this, the OPCW's final report, which accused Assad's regime of carrying out the attack, was widely disseminated, while the suppressed findings were ignored. This manipulation of

facts underscores the extent to which information is shaped to align with Western interests, even if it means suppressing or disregarding inconvenient truths (Fisk, 2019).

Polls that Contradict Western Narratives

Surveys conducted within Syria also paint a different picture than what is often portrayed in the West. A 2018 poll by YouGov Siraj, commissioned by The Doha Debates, found that 55% of Syrians wanted Bashar al-Assad to remain president, motivated by a fear of civil war and instability. Many people outside of Syria, on the other hand, supported Assad's departure, which was a sharp contrast. Western media sources, however, mostly disregarded this important evidence in favor of the myth that Assad was universally despised by the Syrian people. These polls reject the idea that there is widespread opposition to Assad and demonstrate that many Syrians, especially those residing in areas under government control, see Assad as a calming force in a nation ripped apart by conflict (Steele, 2012).

ORB International's Findings: Assad's Continued Support

According to a 2014 survey conducted by ORB International, a polling firm that specializes in war areas, 47% of Syrians had a favorable opinion of Bashar al-Assad's administration, compared to only 35% for the Free Syrian Army (FSA) and 26% for the Syrian Opposition Coalition. The Western narrative that Assad's administration was completely illegitimate was further undermined by the poll's findings that Assad had majority support in seven of Syria's fourteen areas. In contrast to multiple opposition groups, which were frequently supported by foreign powers with their own regional objectives, these data show that support for Assad's administration was not just widespread but also stronger (Gowans, 2015).

The Sednaya Prison Controversy: Debunking False Claims

Another example of propaganda in the Syrian conflict involves the widely circulated claim that more than 150k people were detained in Syria's Sednaya prison, a claim that was often used to demonize the Assad regime. However, this number was debunked when the Association of Detainees and Missing Persons of Sednaya Prison (ADMSP) obtained an official document revealing that the actual number of detainees was 4,300, far lower than what had been reported. This discrepancy

highlights how misinformation, often fueled by political motives, is spread to damage the Assad government and generate support for international intervention. By inflating the scale of human rights violations, propagandists can more easily justify foreign involvement in the conflict, regardless of the actual conditions on the ground (The Cradle, 2024).

The Role of Propaganda in Shaping the Syrian Narrative

The spread of propaganda in the Syrian crisis acts as a tool for Western countries to further their geopolitical goals in addition to influencing public opinion. The media has been crucial in promoting a narrative that holds Assad accountable for the devastation of the nation by selectively publishing surveys, silencing dissenting opinions, and misrepresenting important data. However, this narrative ignores the complexity of the Syrian war, such as the involvement of foreign forces, sectarian differences, and the broad support that Assad still enjoys in Syria. Western media outlets have maintained a biased viewpoint that supports Western interests in the region by ignoring the various and frequently conflicting opinions of the Syrian people in favor of concentrating solely on the shortcomings of the Assad administration.

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