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Historical Sciences

THE EMERGENCE OF THE SYRIAN CRISIS AND THE IMPACT OF THE EXTERNAL FORCES ON IT

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Abstract

The article analyzes the causes and historical stages of the political crisis in Syria, which lasted 8 years. Although displacement in many Western countries is seen as a step towards democracy in the region, the “Arab Spring” has caused instability in North Africa and the Middle East. These issues included religious and ethnic conflicts. This, in turn, posed a threat to political instability in the region.

Keywords: the Arab Spring”, the Syrian crisis, the Ba’ath regime, Syria, the Nusayriys, the Kurds, the KWP, the DUP, “the Euphrates Shield”, “the Olive Branch”, “the Spring of Peace”.

I. INTRODUCTION

The struggle against authoritarian rule that began in the Arab world by 2010 encompassed all the countries of the North and the Middle East. In December of that year, a chain of demonstrations called “The Arab Spring” began in Tunisia as a fruit-selling retailer named Muhammad Bouaziz set himself on fire in dissatisfaction with the authorities. These protests have turned bloody and have led to a change in political power in Arab countries such as Tunisia, Egypt and Libya in North Africa. People's protests became so intense that Zainal Abidin bin Ali, who had been in power in Tunisia for 23 years, had to flee abroad. Egypt's 30-year president Hosni Mubarak also announced his resignation on February 11, 2011, after a public demonstration. In a short time, popular protests have spread to countries in the Middle East, such as Yemen and Syria [1].

II. METHODOLOGY

The article uses chronological data, systematic periodic data, comparative and quantitative methods, and previous researches. More than ten scientific works on sources and textbook issues are used to explain “The emergence of the Syrian crisis and the impact of the external forces on it”. Besides that, the researcher had used journals and articles to collect data related to the research.

III. DISCUSSION

Although these demonstrations in the region are viewed as steps towards democracy by Western countries, the "Arab Spring" has created instability in North Africa and the Middle East. These problems included religious, sectarian, and ethnic differences. This, in turn, has created a threat to the region's political instability.

This political instability has been going on for eight years in Syria. Demonstrations against the Baas regime have connected to the civil war.

It must be noted that in Syria there is the only Russian military base in the Mediterranean, and it is Iran's only ally among the Arab states. However, the Syrian crisis has become internationalized as a result of the intervention of regional and global forces. And because of its neighborliness, the political situation in Syria has also been important for Turkey.

Accordingly, we discuss the Syrian crisis, the armed opposition forces formed against the Assad regime, and the influence of regional and international forces on the Syrian issue, as well as the impact of the Syrian crisis to the socio-political processes in Turkey.

Having borders with Turkey, Iraq, Jordan, Israel and Lebanon and with its Mediterranean coastlines, Syria has its own strategic positions in the Middle East and the Arab world. Syria is geographically close to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The ruling authorities are Shi'ite in Islam and have a 911-km-long border with Turkey, a Sunni sect of Islam. The area is of great importance in the official Tel Aviv, Tehran and Ankara. Syria is important for Turkey and Israel from a security point of view, geographically important for Iran's foreign policy in the region and a direct factor in the stability of Lebanon.

The Bashar al-Assad regime did not know that the protests in Arab countries would affect Syria. He told "The Wall Street Journal" on January 31, 2011: "The protests in Egypt, Tunisia and Yemen have triggered a new era in the Middle East. The authorities of the Arab states should further take the necessary measures to meet the political and economic needs of the people" [2]. But protests began in February 2011 in the Syrian city of Daraa. Protests spread across Damascus, Aleppo, and Homs as a result of the military's use of force to suppress protesters in Daraa who opposed the Assad regime.

The protesters in Syria have demanded political and economic reforms from the Assad government. These demands included abolition of the emergency regime in Syria since 1963, to revise the powers of the internal affairs and judicial staff, to adopt new civil rights laws (to give citizenship to ethnic minorities in Syria which have no citizenship), and fair distribution of the country's budget among all regions, the removal of the barriers to the activities of political parties, and the restriction of the Ba'ath party's authorities [3].

Following the demands made by the protesters, Bashar Assad had to make some reforms. On March 29, 2011, the current government was dissolved and a new government was formed under the leadership of Syrian Minister of Agriculture Adil Safer. Bashar Assad has instructed the new government to abolish the state of emergency situation since 1963. At the same time, some 300,000 non-Syrian Kurds were granted Syrian citizenship.

The Assad government has taken a number of steps to address the opposition's legal framework, but has not been quick to implement political reforms. As a result, popular demonstrations increased. For example, Assad has promised to hold fair elections for the presidency in 2014, but by enacting a referendum, he has extended his term of office until 2028.

By April 2011 the regime of the state of emergency situation imposed in Syria in 1963 was abolished. But the Syrian Interior Ministry continued to punish opponents and demonstrators mercilessly. The government was aimed at preventing Kurdish nationals from joining the Syrian opposition by recruiting Syrian Kurds for military service. However, they have partnered with the KWP terrorist organization (Kurdistan Workers' Party) and the DUP (Democratic Unity Party), in the north and northeast of the country. Thus, the Syrian people's movement has split into groups and changed their aims.

The people demanding reforms first, began to demand his resignation after being put under pressure by the Assad regime.

As a result, the government armed forces took action against the protesters using the weapons. These actions violated relations between the Syrian people and the Ba'ath regime.

The Assad government has ignored the reform demands of the people, the use of force by the military against them, and the brutal treatment of the opposition has led peaceful meetings into mass protests with the use of weapons in the country. As a result of armed confrontation between the two sides, more than 100,000 people died and several million people were forced to flee their permanent residence.

The aftermath of the ongoing civil war in Syria has threatened the national security of other countries in the region and has sparked various cross-border problems. The Syrian crisis has sparked a regional and global political crisis and has sparked tensions between the Shiites and Sunnis in the Middle East, and the escalation of the fugitive issue and the Kurdish issue for Turkey adjacent to Syria.

In the Syrian problem, as mentioned earlier, of course there is a big role of the regional and external forces in the transition from a local problem to a global crisis. Turkey and a number of Arab countries in the region support the satisfaction of the political and economic demands of the Syrian people and the change of political power in the country. Iran, on the other hand, is interested in preserving the current Assad regime, who is from Nusairiy sect of Shi'ite group, taking a different approach to the Syrian crisis. Resignation of Ba'ath' in Syria is a major threat to Iran, and the next regime change could open the way for Iran. The Tehran government also believes that Assad's departure could hinder his implementation of the "Shia Crescent" project in the Middle East.

There are two global trends in Syria's political instability. Countries such as Russia and China regard the civil war in Syria as the internal affairs of the country, promoting the sovereignty of international relations of states in the Westphalia Treaty. They believe that there is no need of interference from outside forces. The US-led Western world recognizes the sovereignty of states and believes that human rights are being violated in Syria.

It should be noted that demonstrations in Syria, like in other Arab countries, were not successful. The protests that ended in the overthrow of the authority regimes in Tunisia and Egypt have failed to find a way to defeat the Assad regime in Syria for eight years. It is worth to mention some of the key factors that led to the survival of the Assad regime in Syria and the failure of the opposition movement. The Syrian population is not as homogenous as Tunisia, Egypt and Libya, and power has been dominated by Nusairiys, a religious minority in the country for nearly 40 years. As the protests in Syria turned into an armed conflict, Bashar Assad received support from outside forces to fight the opposition, unlike the others. In addition, the lack of unity among the Syrian opposition groups has led to the preservation of Assad's power and prolong the crisis. In Syria, Bashar Assad's religious group Nusairiys are 12% of the country's population. They have held senior positions in the military, court and judicial systems, various ministries and departments since the Ba'ath regime was established. This factor also means that the Assad regime cannot be easily overthrown. The main factor that the regime still holds the government in Syria is the help of external forces, as described above. Russia and China oppose a number of UN Security Council resolutions on changing the political regime in Syria [4]. Russia and China are in a constant position on the Syrian issue. In 2011, Russia sold \$ 1 billion worth of weapons to Syria, saying it was important for the Russian government to defend the Syrian legitimate government [5]. The Iranian government has so far supported the existing regime in Syria. Iran has protested since the beginning of the Syrian issue to the UN Security Council agenda. It is even known that the Iranian side has sent troops, including the Iranian Revolutionary Guards, to defend the Syrian regime [6]. To better analyze the Syrian crisis, it is necessary to focus on the opposition and terrorist groups operating there. After all, the existing groups in the region are provided by various countries. According to some analysts, the US geopolitical interests in the Middle East are to control the production and trade of oil and gas products in the region, and to ensure protection of ethnic and religious isolation Israel in the region. That is why the US does not want a whole Syria that poses a threat to Israel's security. Since 2012, military and economic support has been provided to several opposition forces in the region.

In 2016, the US established a military base in al-Tanf, near the Iraq and Jordan border. At this base, the militants of “Megavir al-Tavra” were trained by the US military. In 2012, the “Kurdish People's Defense Unity (KPDU), a local Kurdish group in Syria, which has grown significantly with the help of the United States, has taken control of the northeastern parts of the country. The United States has reported that they have been armed Kurds against ISIS fighters in Syria [7].

In order to keep control of the situation in the region the United States supporting not only the Kurdish opposition groups, but also the local Arabs.

IV. RESULTS

With the help of US allies, a group of Kurdish and Arabic united group - "Syrian Democratic Forces" has formed against the Assad regime in Syria. Currently, the group “Syrian Democratic Forces” maintains control of the country's east part of the Euphrates, including Raqqa, the capital of ISIS, with rich oil and gas resources. The entry of the “Syrian Democratic Forces” into Munbich in western Euphrates in 2016 was a matter of great concern for Turkey, as Turkey views the “Kurdish People's Defense Union” (KPDU) as a branch of the “Kurdistan Workers' Party” (KWP) in Syria. Munbich's control of the Kurdish militia has left the US-Turkey relations even worse.

There is another country that is not indifferent to the developments in Syria, and it is unfair if we cannot dwell on it. This is Russia. The friendship between Russia and Syria dates back to the 60s of the 20th century. In 1971, the USSR established a military base in Tartus, Syria. After the collapse of the USSR, control of the military base as its political successor was transferred to Russia. The Tartus military base is the only Russian naval base in the Middle East and the Mediterranean. The Russian government is very much interested in keeping the Assad regime in Syria. That is why it completely supports the Assad regime during the Syrian crisis.

Turkey is one of the countries in the region that sees the Syrian crisis as a serious threat. The crisis in Syria, which has been continuing for 8 years, has had a profound effect on Turkey's national security and its socio-political processes. After all, the relations between the two countries were not good at the beginning. Bashar Assad's father, Hafiz Assad, has been instrumental in helping the leader of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (KWP) and its members, who is regarded as a terrorist organization in Turkey, and it was seriously affected the relations between two countries. A clear example of this is his political asylum to the Kurdish leader Abdullah Ocalan (Abdullah Ocalan was captured in Kenya by a special operation by the Turkish National Security Council in 1999, and is currently serving life sentence in prison in Turkey).

As a result of the Syrian crisis, Turkey has been subject to a influx of refugees and has received a significant number of Syrian refugees in its eastern provinces. According to the Turkish National Statistics Committee, there are now about 3 to 4 million Syrian refugees in the country. Reception of such refugees is causing great damage to the country's economy. In addition, increasing tensions between the local Turks and refugees and a sharp rise in crime rates have become a major problem for Turkey.

Turkey has conducted three military operations in Syria to help the opposition forces in the country in 2016 with the "Euphrates Shield", "Olive Branch" in 2018 and "Spring of Peace" in 2019. Trans-boundary military efforts were aimed at removing the militant Kurds, which were seen as a threat to Turkey's national security, from their border to the south. Meanwhile, Turkey has said it wants to return Syrian refugees to their own countries and to create a safe area for them near the Syrian territory. Turkey has also been providing support to several Syrian military groups. For instance, one of them is the “Syrian National Army”. The “Syrian National Army” is a group of Arab and Turkmen (also known as “Bair-Bujak Turkmen”) opponents of the local Assad regime and Kurds. Since 2017, the group has been overseeing large areas in northern Syria with the help of Turkey. It should be noted that the Turkish side carried out joint actions of the "Olive Branch" and the "Spring of Peace" [9].

In October 2019, the Turkish National Army launched a “Spring of Peace” military operation, concerned about the convergence of Kurdish terrorist groups on the Syrian border. As a result of this, Rasalayn and Tel-abiyod towns were surrounded by Turkish and Syrian troops. As a result, a US delegation led by Vice President Mike Pence held talks in Ankara to protect the interests of the Kurds. According to the results of the talks Kurdish fighters were given 5 days to leave the above mentioned areas. According to the agreement, Ankara government informed that if the “Kurdish People's Defense Union” (KPDU) does not leave within 120 hours, the military will resume military operations. It was also noted that the US delegation has been guaranteed that Kurdish military will leave the territory.

V. CONCLUSION

To conclude, "Civilization without tolerance is difficult to reconcile" [10]. Syria has now become a site where the geopolitical and geo-economic interests of the world “power centers” collide. The countries of the world with huge political and economic potential use Syrian territories to demonstrate their superiority in their interests in a completely different direction.

This demonstration covers the military, economic, political, legal, trade, ideological and many other areas, and Syrian people is suffering from it. On the one hand, the main reasons of these problems are the state itself and the people of Syria. Because there are still many who have been tricked into little pennies and who have argued extensively on national, religious, ideological, political and other issues, which is a good thing for "sponsors" abroad. If the Syrian people of different nationalities do not reach an agreement on this matter, there will be no hope to the end of the conflict.

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ВОЗНИКНОВЕНИЕ СИРИЙСКОГО КРИЗИСА И ВЛИЯНИЕ НА НЕГО ВНЕШНИХ СИЛ

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Аннотация

В статье анализируются причины и исторические этапы политического кризиса в Сирии, который длился 8 лет. Хотя перемещения людей во многих западных странах рассматриваются как шаг к демократии в регионе, «арабская весна» вызвала нестабильность в Северной Африке и на Ближнем Востоке. Эти проблемы включали религиозные и этнические конфликты. Это, в свою очередь, создало угрозу политической нестабильности в регионе.

Ключевые слова: «Арабская весна», сирийский кризис, режим Баас, Сирия, нусайрийцы, курды, КРП, ДУП, «Щит Евфрата», «Оливковая ветвь», «Весна мира».

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