

## THE ARAB SPRING AND SYRIA SECURITY

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**ABSTRACT** *The article discussed the Arab Spring and the uprisings it brought to leading to the overthrow long-serving regimes Syria. The article focused on Syria by analyzed the disastrous impact the Arab Spring has on Syria, particularly on how it has affected Syria security. The uprising was influenced by anti-government protests by some group of Syrians who were demanding the resignation of President Bashar al-Assad. The impact of the Syrian civil war was the effect it had on regional security through the activities of violent extremist groups which forced majority of its citizen to seek refuge in neighboring countries.*

**KEYWORDS:** Arab, spring, Syria, security

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### INTRODUCTION

Beginning in 2011, the Arab region has been hit with series of mass uprisings following the Arab Spring which has led to the overthrow of many regimes including Egypt, Libya and Yemen. Motivate by the results of the Tunisian Uprising, the people of Syria responded protests, which soon spread to other cities within the region. They called for the overthrowing of Bashar al-Assad the authoritarian president together with a completely broad spectrum of reforms that would see the country increase its democratic space. The authoritarian rule of President Bashar al Assad stifled the freedom of the press and any attempt at rebelling attracted torturous punishments from the authorities. The government responded by unleashing terror on its citizenry thereby starting the now rampant violation of human rights in the nation. The Arab Spring has caused changes to political structure which have brought about a new spectrum of governance as well as social structure of the country. The uprisings have also resulted in the creation of violent conflicts and civil wars as in Syria. Regime survivability is more crucial to the leaders of those countries affected by the Arab Spring than the survival of the social structure in Arab country. The uprisings of the Arab Spring have given greater opportunity to some moderate Islamists to form political parties

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who later participate and win presidential and parliamentary election as witnessed in Tunisia and Egypt. As moderate Islamists are established through the Arab Spring, other radical Islamist groups have also emerged from it. These violent extremist groups include Jabhat al-Nusra 4, Islamic State (IS) found in Syria. The emergence of a new political organization with different Islamic ideologies such as Non-state group, Shia and liberal Islam has generated bad blood among the people and compounded the problem of insecurity. The States' inability to control people's resistance have caused some uprisings to degenerate into civil wars as well as internal conflicts which further creates room for external intervention in the affected countries.

The article aimed to analyzing the impact of the Arab Spring on Syria and will analyze the chaos and the civil war in Syria and the analysis of the Syrian civil war will include how the Arab Spring resulted in the civil war and prolong the conflict, how did the civil war affect Syria security and the impact of the Syrian civil war outside Syria to include other parts of the region

### **Background about the Arab Spring**

The Arab spring encompassed a number of anti-government protests and uprisings that hit countries in North Africa and the Middle East (Khondker 2011). The demonstrations began in the later part of 2010 and continued into the year 2011. Lotan et al (2015) also mentioned that the Arab revolution took the form of peaceful and non- peaceful or violent demonstration and protests which resulted in coups, military action by the international community and in genera a civil war in most of the North African countries and the Middle East. Millions of people hit the streets to raise red flags against the governments for the system of governance in the respective countries. Apparently, the populations in the countries where the uprisings and the unrest took center stage were disinterested in the authoritarian system of government that is engrossed in corruption, plain abuse of human rights and dignity, dictatorship, high levels of unemployment, increasing rate of inflation, poverty and sectarianism etc. (Howard et al, 2013).

This was practically the state of affairs in the Arab society and the people revolted to make a strong statement to the governments to register their displeasure as seen the magnitude of the revolutionary waves across the countries. The governments did not succumb to the protests and pressure from the people but engaged in brutalities just to contain the situation. In the heat of the crisis, virtually all the governments of the countries involved used violence, arrests, executions and detention of the anti-government protesters which was exercised under a grave abuse of power and incumbency (Aljazeera 2011). The governments used state machinery and resources to crack down on its own people leading to mass killings, destruction of property and displacement of millions of citizens into foreign lands (Bellin 2012). However, the civil protests and strong activism led to the ousting of the presidents of these countries and subsequently the overthrow of the governments. Most of them were charged and sentenced to serve jail terms by the courts for crimes against humanity and political corruption. For example, the presidents of Tunisia (Zine El Abidine Ben Ali) and Egypt (Hosni Mubarak) respectively were ousted and charged accordingly.

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<sup>4</sup> . Front nasra for the people of Syria a Salafist jihadist organization was formed in late 2011 during the Event of Syria.

Muammar Gadaffi of Libya was ousted and killed by the antigovernment forces and the help of foreign military intervention leading to the overthrow of the long-standing regime. But some of the governments such as (Bashar al-Assad) in Syria fiercely resisted the pressure and the demonstrations resulted into a civil war. Countries such as Tunisia and Egypt etc. managed the situation particularly better and having the benefit of a stable constitutional rule and a smooth system of government in the present moment. Nonetheless countries like Libya and Syria experienced degenerate and complex revolutionary waves which deteriorated into a civil war (Stepanova, 2016). It is important to note that the people of Syria for instance are still on the battle field in a full scale civil war just about seven years since the uprising commenced in the country. Many people have lost their lives through the uprising while the situation has caused others to becoming refugees in other countries. Many properties worth billions of dollars have been destroyed in Syria as result of the sustained street demonstrations, riots, civil war and insurgencies. the uprising actually affected five major countries which included Libya, Yemen, Syria, Egypt and Bahrain (Trombetta 2012). Other countries such as Morocco, Jordan, Oman and Kuwait etc. were forced to formulate and implement constitutional reforms in response to the series of protests and demonstrations (Stepanova, 2016).

## **METHOD**

The study utilized the qualitative research method. The suitability of the method reflects its agreement with the interpretivism philosophy, which supports the use of the explorative approach to an investigation. Under the qualitative research method, the investigator trained his focus on obtaining data from various sources such as books, journals, articles, and official websites. The study will attempt to contribute to the impacts of the Arab spring on Syria and aim to the prolonged Arab spring has dealt on the rights of the civilians in Syria.

## **Syrian civil war**

There had been several governmental regimes before the Arab Spring in Syria.

The name al-Assad rings a huge bell in the long history of the political system as regards the Syrian Arab Republic. The Assad family have ruled the country or have remained a dominant force in the political history of Syria for over four decades now (Inci et al 2015). This is to mean that the Arab Socialist Ba'ath Party<sup>5</sup> whose leaders mainly constitute the al-Assad family has been the party for the ruling government since 1970 (Bhardwaj, 2012). The inference reflects the basis that there has been a monopoly of the system and structure of government in Syria for several decades. One regime, thus the al-Assad regime ascended to the corridors of power and remained dominant and much powerful for such a long period of time as defined. Bhardwaj (2012) revealed that Hafez al-Assad took over the reins of political power as far back in 1970 through a coup. Hafez established and thrived over an authoritarian system of government under the control of the Ba'ath party for three decades from 1970 to 2000. He employed highly dictatorial and controlling measures to rule the country until his demise in 2000. Following his demise, Bashar al-Assad, one of his sons succeeded him and has also ruled the country under the same party from 2000 till present. It means

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5. The Arab Socialist Baath party was founded in Damascus, Syria in 1947 under the banner of one Arab nation with an immortal message and its objectives, a unit of socialist freedom that embodies Arab unity, liberation from colonialism, imperialism and the establishment of the Arab socialist system. The ruling party in Syria since the revolution of March 8, 1963 until now.

that President Bashar al-Assad has been in power for about 18 years now taking after a regime he inherited from his father for about 30 years.

The Syrians people wanted to change the Assad regime. Millions of people hit the streets to protest against the governments for the system of governance in Syria. Apparently, the populations in the countries where the uprisings and the unrest took center stage were disinterested in the authoritarian system of government that is engrossed in corruption, plain abuse of human rights and dignity, dictatorship, high levels of unemployment, increasing rate of inflation, poverty and sectarianism etc. (Howard et al, 2013). The governments did not succumb to the protests and pressure from the people but engaged in brutalities just to contain the situation. In the heat of the crisis, virtually the governments used violence, arrests, executions and detention of the anti-government protesters which was exercised under a grave abuse of power and incumbency (Aljazeera 2011). the governments used state machinery and resources to crack down on its own people leading to mass killings, destruction of property and displacement of millions of citizens into foreign lands (Bellin 2012). The anti-government protest continues and turned to conflict and civil war.

The Syrian civil war for the past six years has taken more than 250,000 lives of Syrians. The conflict in Syria began as a result of anti-government protests before it escalated into a full-scale civil war. In 2011, a pro-democracy protest emerged in Deraa, a city in southwestern Syria which is located in about 13 kilometers north of the border with Jordan. The city of Deraa witnessed the arrest and torture of some group of teenagers after they were found guilty of paintings of revolutionary slogans on a school wall (Akturk, 2017). The civil war was triggered by the action of security forces who opened fire on demonstrators and killed several of them in the process. The actions of the security force generated into a nationwide protest demanding the resignation of President Bashar al-Assad.

Violence heightened in Syria after the nationwide protest and the country was plunged into civil war amidst the formation of rebel brigades who fought the government forces for control of cities, towns and the countryside (De Juan and Bank, 2015). The fact presented gives a description of the entire conflict in Syria and also helps to bring up a better understanding of the scope and motivation behind the uprising. The war was between forces loyal to President Bashar al-Assad and those opposed to his rule including the jihadist militants from the Islamic State, (Cohen 2016). A pro-democracy protest resulting in a battle between those for or against President Bashar al-Assad has attained sectarian overtones (Davis 2015). The opposition groups in the country merged and formed the Free Syrian Army<sup>6</sup> (FSA) which later fought and acquired areas surrounding Aleppo and other parts of southern Syria. Report by the UN commission of inquiry into Syrian civil war indicated that factions of the Syrian opposition later denounced their support for the opposition forces and joined various Islamic groups including al-Nusra Front and ISIL (United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commission, 2017).

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6 . The free Syrian Army is a loose faction in the Syrian Civil War founded on 29 July 2011 by officers of the Syrian Armed Force who said their goal was to bring down the government of Bashar al-Assad.

The effect of the civil war in Syria resulted in severe and escalating sectarian tensions and insecurity in the country Davis (2015). Since 2011, thousands of casualties have been recorded in Syria. This situation exemplifies the level of human insecurity that the people of Syria faced within the period of the uprising. In 2014 for instance, the Islamic State group were able to complete a takeover of Raqqa in the eastern city of Syria. What is clear in the Syrian civil war is that, the country has almost witnessed a daily violent attack and this has had a direct implication on the shared border region with Iraq (Acinar, 2016). The fighting between the Syrian regime forces and rebels located at the shared borders has led to the regular closure of the shared border most of the time.

The increase in terrorism in the country by the Islamic terrorist has affected regional security in the sense that the civil war has enabled ISIS to recruit and train civilians in order to gain experience in conflict. De Juan and Bank (2016) indicated that, the crisis in Syria which has affected security is seen in the series of terrorist attacks at the regional level. In 2013, there were reported cases of about 46 attacks per month by ISIL. The activities of the Islamic State in the country is linked to the slaughtering of minorities, institutionalizing sex slavery, vanquishing state armies and executing opponents in gruesome spectacles of violence (Davis, 2015). The act of terror by the radical Islamist groups demonstrates the level of human insecurity in the country. Research by Biswas et al (2016) indicate that, the civil war in Syria has affected security issues in the country in that there have been destructions in heritage sites including the temples in the ancient city of Palmyra. The insecurity created as a result of the civil war in Syria is a recipe for the Islamic State who capitalizes on the chaos and seizes control of large areas of Syria (Cohen, 2016).

The civil war has resulted in humanitarian crisis with more than 4.5 million people fleeing Syria to neighboring countries (Davis, 2015). Women and children form the majority of affected individuals who migrate to other countries like Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey. The same report by the UN commission of enquiry indicate that, these countries are the top three countries that have struggled to cope with one of the largest refugees in the history of the world (United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commission, 2017). In 2015, more than 1.2 million Syrians were driven away from their homes as a result of the civil war. This shows the level of insecurity suffered by the people of Syria in the uprising of the Syrian civil war outside Syria. A statement in the UN commission enquiry on the crisis of the refugees suggest that a total of about \$3.2 billion required in the form of humanitarian assistance for the displaced number of Syrians (United Nations Refugee Agency, 2017).

The impact of the civil war in Syria has contributed to the stagnation of the country's standard of living affecting healthcare, schools, water and sanitation systems (De Juan and Bank, 2015). The war has taken away the childhood of millions of children in that the situation has jeopardized the long-term physical and mental well-being of these affected children (Akpınar 2016). Children in the midst of the refugee crisis usually miss vaccinations and regular health checkups and since they are susceptible to ailments brought on by poor sanitation, they are prone to diseases such as diarrhea and cholera. The stability situation in Syria. after the Arab Spring was uncertain and worsened. Democracies in Syria is limited and results in minimum freedom of action and liberty for the people to voice their needs and hopes. The structures of political are unable to cope with

the needs of the people in a democracy. The two fundamental effects of the Arab Spring on Syria's security are the survivability of the Al Assad Regime and the intervention of Alliance forces in the Syrian internal conflict. These two effects determined Syria's security situation and also gave a new understanding of the security atmosphere in the Middle East region. The regime used its full military power to repress the anti-regime and control their influence and relevancies. The main approach used in the fight against opposition in Syria was the deliberate attempt to clear the Free Syrian Army which were tagged terrorist by the regime. However, this plan did not work as strategized and the situation degenerated into civil war. The free Syrian army was inadequate planning and cooperation and not well organized and also isolated from any external support. The civil war in Syria has attracted various external interferences especially from major powers such as the US and Russia and other countries such Turkey and Iran. extremal countries were seeking for their interest. External involvement compounded the unstable situation in Syria.

## **CONCLUSION**

The desire for a democratic system of governance, economic freedom and respect for human rights in addition to change of regimes inspired the revolutions in Middle East. The Arab spring constituted a fierce revolt in the Arab communities in the world by the people to register their disapproval of the governance systems. The people hung on demonstrations, strike actions, internet social media and activism, civil resistance and defection to resist the rule of the oppressors in the Arab world. The wave of revolutions stopped by the middle of 2012 in most of the Arab countries after achieved their goals.

Even though people in Syria took part in the Arab Spring because of a justified cause for social, economic and political development, the way in which the al-Assad regime handled or reacted to the uprising made it impossible for the goals to be achieved. This is in sharp contrast with what happened in most other affected Arab countries. That is, in most of these other Arab countries, the Arab Spring was welcomed as a legitimate right of people to protest, to which the government took steps in addressing some of the key issues they raised. There was therefore hardly a country that lived through the Arab Spring for more than six months. However, the persistent nature of the al-Assad government not to listen made the social, economic and political situation in his country worse. As will be seen in other chapters, the economic and political state of hardship that was experienced as a result of the al-Assad handling of the Arab Spring created in itself a form of human insecurity. In sum, the Arab Spring made the economic and political situation in Syria worse but this was not directly caused by the presence of the uprising but the approach of the government in handling it, which resulted in the many years of Syrian Civil War, which is still being fought.



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