

NO END IN SIGHT.

ANALYSING THE SYRIAN CONFLICT FROM A REGIONAL PERSPECTIVE

No government in the world kills its own people, unless it's led by a crazy person

-Assad, 2012



A Syrian man carries an infant rescued from the rubble of buildings following government bombing in the rebel-held town of Hamouria, in eastern Ghouta, on February 19, 2018

Photograph by- Abdulmonam Eassa / AFP / Getty

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ABSTRACT

Security, identity and policy issues surrounding the region of Middle East are popular among international relations researchers. The war on terror, Gulf war and Iraq-Iran war amongst other conflicts have made the region of Middle East a hub for research and media. For many years before the Trump Administration, when the USA was an active and influential player in the region many regional aspects and regional interaction between states were neglected. In the wake of the Arab Spring, the world's attention has turned to the Middle East once again as we root for democratic transitions, in this autocratic and unstable region. Amongst these transitions, Syria and Yemen are literally buried under the debris of Civil Wars. Through this thesis, the author examines the Syrian Conflict as it will soon enter its 9th year of war and carnage. While international actors like the EU, UN and USA call for Bashar al-Assad of Syria to step down so the process of recovery for Syria and its citizens may start (Wall Street Journal 2011), regional actors do not necessarily believe the same. On the basis of the extensive research done on international intervention in Syria, this thesis chooses a different research path. One that studies the conflict from a regional perspective. This thesis identifies the importance in examining the role of regional states and its link to challenges to conflict resolution in Syria. In doing so, the author has recognized that a sectarian rivalry prevails in the Syrian Conflict. Therefore, the Syrian Civil War goes beyond the standardized meaning of civil war and extends to age old rivalries being played out in Syria from 2011. The thesis uses regional security complex theory to study the role of the states.

Amongst the war and humanitarian crisis, Bashar al-Assad has refused to step down, thus causing a Pro-Assad and Anti-Assad divide in the already unstable and divided region of Middle East. Hence the thesis take this as point of departure to examine the role these divided states play in the Syrian Conflict. Through this thesis the author determines that regional interests have superseded the importance of resolving the Syrian Civil War, thus posing it as a challenge to resolving the Conflict.

ABBREVIATIONS:

AoR- Axis of Resistance

FSA- Free Syrian Army

IDF- Israeli Defence Forces

ISIS- Islamic State of Levant and Iraq

JN- Jabhat al- Nusra

MB- Muslim Brotherhood

MENA- Middle East and North Africa

MERSC- Middle East Regional Security Complex

PKK -Partiya Karkerên Kurdistanê or Kurdistan Workers Party

PLO- Palestine Liberation Organization.

PMF- Popular Mobilization Forces

PYD- Democratic Union Party

RSC- Regional Security Complex

RSCT- Theory of Regional Security Complex

SMB- Syrian Muslim Brotherhood

SNC- Syrian National Council

SND- Syrian National Defence Forces

SOC- National Coalition for Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces

AoR- Axis of Resistance

Keywords.

Syria, Hezbollah, Iran, security dilemma, Assad, Israel, Turkey, regional order

1. INTRODUCTION

“Our country will recover and our citizens will enjoy peace, stability and sovereignty”

- Bashar al-Assad, 2012.

This quote came from the Syrian President in 2012, one year after the conflict in Syria. At this time, the conflict had not escalated as it has today. It was a year into the war when Assad gave assurances at a press conference in Damascus. It is 2019, eight years since the conflict neither is there peace nor stability in Syria (Yacoubian 2019). Syria is one of the many nations that are a part of the ‘*Arab Springs*’. Some of these revolutions made transitions to democracy like Tunisia, while some toppled their governments but did not become democratic like Egypt, others took an unexpected turn towards civil war and gross volatile situation like in Syria, drought and famine plagued Yemen and Libya where the leader, Gaddafi was publicly overthrown (Darwisheh 2014).

The Syrian civil war has garnered attention due to the high number of civilian casualties, extreme Islamist insurgency and displacement of thousands of citizens. The civil war also has many regional and international actors tangled in a war of their own. According to the Uppsala Conflict Data Program 290,639 deaths were reported in the Syrian civil war from 2011-2017 (UCDP 2018). Syrian conflict impacted the everyday lives of citizens, which spiraled into a parallel *Syrian Refugee Crisis*. According to UNHCR, 6.6 million Syrians are internally displaced. Neighbours like Lebanon, Jordan, Turkey took in those who fled war and poverty. These numbers go as high as 5.6 million refugees seeking asylum (UNHCR n.d). Over a period of 8 years, Syrian civil war is a human catastrophe.

United States of America, Russia, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Israel and other nations have continued to play a pivotal role in the Syrian Conflict. International actors play an important role in Syrian Conflict through military interventions, mediating peace talks, by means of security resolutions or provision of humanitarian assistance, or even assistance to Syrian army (Yacoubian 2019).

That said, there has been less focus on the role of regional actors namely; Turkey, Iran, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Hezbollah, Lebanon, Jordan and Qatar. The Syrian civil war is also an internal sectarian war between the minority and majority sects of Islam (Schmidt 2019). Neighbours of Syria play a vital role in influencing these sectarian relations hence regional actors are the center of this study. Syrian conflict has raised questions related to Assad ever giving up his power, who would take over if Assad is removed from power, if Syria would re-emerge from the war and the future of the regional order in the Middle East. Therefore this paper will follow the role of regional players of Middle East in Syrian Conflict.

The regional actors will be responsible for the outcome of the war and its resolution, which will affect the security dynamics among the regional units along with the regional order. Regional actors are also the focal point of this paper because they are divided on their support to the current Syrian regime.

This brings us to the research question that the author has tried to answer in this paper

1.1 Problem Formulation

Based on the importance of regional actors, their role and the puzzle about Assad still being in power the problem formulation of this paper is:

Why is it important to explore the role of Pro-Assad and Anti-Assad regional states in order to understand the difficulties in resolving the Syrian Conflict?

The author wishes to make two very important notes here. Firstly, only some regimes from the Middle Eastern region are chosen for the study. Those that have been excluded is because of their internal conflicts relating to fight against jihadism or rise of islamist movements or internal economic hardships like Lebanon, Jordan etc. (Schmidt 2019). Secondly, as the Syrian Conflict is an ongoing one, a timeline has been drawn for the research of the study¹. The reason behind this is to narrow down the research for the completion of the Master Thesis.

¹ The timeline extends to the role of the regional players until December 2018.

1.2 Background of Syrian Conflict

The Syrian Civil War² is a result of the Syrian Arab Spring which was inspired by democratic revolutions in the neighbouring states of Tunisia, Egypt and Libya. The following sub-chapter includes a brief summary of the Syrian Civil War or Syrian Conflict.

Arab Spring or Islamist Winter are synonymous to democratic revolutions in the Middle East. First such revolution was seen in Tunisia. Unemployment, growing economic and social disparity are all common denominators in the democracy inspired uprisings in the Middle East (Assaad 2011). On the spectrum of authoritarian systems that qualify for a democratic transition and meet most electoral demands (Linz & Stepan 1996), Tunisia, which has a democratic regime today was on a lower level of authoritarian rule. In this sense it fulfilled more prerequisites for a democratic government than Egypt and Syria (Schmidt 2005). The spill over from neighbouring states of Syria started as a revolution for *political reforms* change not a regime change (Schmidt 2005). Linz and Stephan choose to categorize regimes as democratic, totalitarian, authoritarian, sultanistic and post totalitarian. Syria, is a sultanistic state according to the laid down characteristics. In a sultanistic regime, the powerhouse of the state is the ruling family. Main aim of this regime type is to hold as much power as possible, in an autocratic manner. Hence all elections under the guise of ‘democracy’ are rigged, in order to bestow absolute power to one person or family only (Chehabi & Linz 1998). There is also zero independence to state officials, since there are merely household staff of the president and work towards giving more power to the sultan (Linz & Stepan 2013: 26). In the case of Syria, the sultan is Bashar- Al Assad, who inherited the presidency from his father (Linz & Stepan 2013: 28). Another important feature is that political and economic power is concentrated in the sultan family, hence the state officials

² Throughout the paper, Syrian Civil War will be interchangeable with Syrian Conflict. As it has also been so in academic research and media.

are family members; leaving no room for ideological basis in the regime or a democratic transition (Schmidt 2015 & Linz and Stepan 2013: 26).

According to Linz & Stepan (2013), some states cannot separate religion and democracy or even choose to combine the two, like India. Similarly the Syrian regime, has neither been able to integrate religion and democracy nor separate it. Although some government positions were allocated to the majority Sunni population of Syria, most of the absolute power was concentrated in the hands of the Alawites (Vaessen 2014: 55-56). Alawites are a minority in Syria, it is a sub-sect of Shia Muslims. Under Bashar al- Assad, the sectarian division increased because the Shia minority rendered more political freedom and political rights than the Sunni majority (Vaessen 2014: 55-56). Assad family belongs to the Alawite, Shia minority. Hence the current civil war is also engulfed in an internal Sectarian Rivalry.

The meddling of regional actors especially Iran and Hezbollah has not contributed to resolving the sectarian rivalry. It has in fact done the opposite. Shia Muslims are a majority in Iran, hence their obvious support to the same minority in Syria. Hence, Iran supports the Assad regime (Vaessen 2014: 59). The Syrian Civil War has other regional actors. Hezbollah, Turkey, Israel, Saudi Arabia in addition to Arab nations (Schmidt 2019). The interference of regional state actors and non-state actors or international actors in Syria stems from a personal gain. The positioning of Syria in the Middle East, has made it a strategically important state to the regional order (Emil Hokayem 2013).

The Syrian Civil War has descended into inter state proxy wars, between Iran-Hezbollah-Israel and Israel-Saudi Arabia (Schmidt 2019). Adding fuel to this regional war fire, is the international intervention from two major countries, USA and Russia. Although the USA and Russia have one common enemy, ISIS, the two clash heavily on if Assad should remain in power (Kuzhanov 2016; Cox & Stokes 2018). During the Obama administration, there were fluctuating attempts to remove Assad from power. In 2012, Obama warned the Syrian government of military consequences if chemical weapons were used during the course of the war. Obama administration drew a 'red line' warning Syrian Army and Assad to avoid using chemical warfare in order to contain the rebellion (Cox & Stokes 2018). Nevertheless, chemical warfare was used against Syrian citizens which lead to deaths. United Nations has majorly failed in

taking any action against the Assad regime because of the Russian support and Russian vetoes in Security Council resolutions (UN 2018).

The regional actors in Syrian Conflict are divided on their support to Assad in addition to their pro-West, pro-Russia and anti-Western attitudes. The military intervention of Russia, use of chemical weapons by Assad forces, Iran's allegiance to Syria while training militants to fight opposition like Syrian National Council and rebel forces like Free Syrian Army, Muslim Brotherhood and Syrian Brotherhood and the fight against ISIS has made the civil war in Syria a complex one. While the actors are divided on who should be in power of Syria, the regional actors are also in a play-off with another, which has interrupted the regional order of the Middle East. In conclusion, this paper sets out to understand the role of regional actors in order to resolve the Conflict.

1.3 Objective of Thesis

The main objective of the thesis is to determine why the role of pro and anti-Assad regional states in the Middle East is important to understand the difficulties in resolving the Syrian Conflict. Herein, the author tries her best to give the readers an insight into what this role exactly is. The author also expects to give the readers a detailed insight into the inter regional conflicts that the chosen states are engulfed in. As seen from chapter 1 and 1.2, Syria has become a battleground for both international and regional states. There is much research on Russian influence in the Middle East, since Moscow has turned its attention to the Middle East after 2012 (Kozhanov 2016). Similarly, there is continuous research on American Foreign Policy in the Middle East especially since after the September 11 attacks and the subsequent 'war on terror'. That said, this thesis *does not* aim to fill any research gap on the subject but makes modest attempts at the same.

In order, to resolve the Syrian Conflict, the author is aware that all of Middle East must be studied. However, as this is a Master Thesis, the main objective of the thesis extends to only certain states and leaves some out. It is important to keep in mind that the Syrian Conflict is an ongoing war and has been so for 8 years now. Hence a timeline was determined while trying to

achieve a conclusion. This timeline extends to 2018 only. Therefore, the events transpiring after have not been accounted for. The author assumes that the states chosen for the study will be resourceful in determining the challenges that pertain to resolving the Syrian Conflict. The author also aims to examine the stakes that the chosen states hold in the resolution of the conflict. Another objective of the thesis, it to co-relate and link the internal conflicts among the chosen states to the Syrian Conflict. This is because the history of internal conflicts in the Middle East region is very much accounted for in the way that the states have intervened in the civil war. In the authors opinion, the internal conflicts that have bolstered the civil war. Thus it will also influence the final outcome of the Syrian Conflict. Finally, the thesis also aims to give an account of how Assad has been able to hold his position after 8 years of revolution.

2. METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

In this section of the thesis, the author will elaborate on ‘research strategy’ used for the analysis. For the readers there will be short descriptions of ‘selection of theories’, ‘choice of theory’, ‘choice of focus’, ‘analytical approach’ and ‘limitations’. The author has tried her very best to meet the objectives of the thesis using a research strategy that seemed to fit best at the time. The following chapter will aid the readers to get a comprehensive understanding of the research trajectory adopted by the author.

2.1 Research Strategy

For answering the problem formulation, *Why is it important to explore the role of Pro-Assad and Anti-Assad regional states in order to understand the difficulties in resolving the Syrian Conflict?*, the author has adopted a Qualitative Strategy with Deductive Analysis method for the chosen data. The author chose qualitative research strategy basically because of the research method followed throughout this paper, i.e. Content Analysis. Over the years, researchers have faced dilemmas of including content analysis as a qualitative or quantitative research method. However, social science researchers have identified the differences in quantitative and qualitative content analysis. The former uses statistical coding to literature while the latter uses descriptive methods i.e words in the existing literature (Dornyei 2007: 246).

Qualitative content analysis assists in understanding the themes that are attached to a research problem by using various texts, like reports, academic papers, media articles etc (Bryman 2012). Based on the three methods of content analysis, the author has used Direct Content Analysis. In this approach, the researcher aims to validate a theory and extend it to the analysis to seek its relevance. By utilizing this approach, the author can support the theory and use predetermined but defined concepts to the analysis (Aysha 2018). Therefore, the author has used the Theory of Regional Security Complex for the analysis. Here, predetermined concepts like insulator and

buffer states have been extensively found in the literature used, thus proving its relevance in the analysis. This has been useful in understanding the role of regional actors in the Syrian Conflict. Using this approach has been helpful in decoding the underlying concepts related to the region of Middle East. The author has also related to a problem rather than identifying a problem.

Both inductive or deductive analytical approaches can be adopted in a content analysis method (Aysha 2018). In this study, the author has opted for a deductive approach. This means that analysis or research of the paper is driven by the theory. In the process of deductive analysis, a researcher first adopts a theory, then proposes a hypothesis. The theory is then used in the data collected, meaning it is extended to the data. Lastly, the researcher confirms or rejects the hypothesis and revises his theory (Bryman 2012: 24-25). For this particular research, the author has proposed to revise two concepts from the existing RSCT. In a deductive approach, the theory is the driving force to gathering the data irrespective of if the data confirms the hypothesis or rejects it (Bryman 2012: 24-25). In this research, the deductive approach has been helpful especially to understand the changing nature, historical connections and objectives of the regional actors in the Syrian Conflict. Hence, the research is descriptive yet analytical in nature. This will be visible in the analysis part of the thesis.

Perhaps a weakness of the deductive approach is that it follows a very linear sequence according to Bryman and the literature used in content analysis may always be supportive rather than unsupportive of the theory used. This *may* lead to confirming the hypothesis *most of the times not always* (Bryman 2012: 25-26). In conclusion, the author of the paper has opted for qualitative content analysis as the primary method and deductive method on the data collected. These methods are in coherence with the objectives of the thesis.

2.2 Selection of Theories

As seen from 2.1, the research of this paper is driven by the theory chosen. Hence, to complete the analysis of the regional actors involved in the Syrian Conflict the author explored some theories. The following theories hold some relevance because of their application to war and

conflict resolution. Here, the author will give the readers an insight into theories that seemed to fit the Syrian Conflict at first, but were later discarded due to its limitations as mentioned below.

2.2.1 Liberalism

The theory of Liberalism is used to comprehend the events that occur in the international arena and to understand the relationship between states and effects that may come from peace (Jehangir 2012). The theory puts forth the notion that the progress of the human race is inescapable. Liberalism signifies an individual's rights, democracy and limitations to the powers of a nation-state. In contemporary politics, liberalism's prominence is viewed in democratic transitions after the cold-war and the globalization of the world economy (Burchill 2009: 57). With the fall of Soviet Union in 1990, Fukuyama claimed that there was no adversary to liberal democracy in terms of ideology (Fukuyama in Burchill 2009: 28). The end of the cold war was an 'ideal state' and nothing existed beyond. He assumed that democracy is a western form of government and the final path to modernity (Burchill 2009: 58). However, at the time, there was no islamist revolution, jihad or war on terror.

He made another assumption that the differences in the religious beliefs, national identity and culture were not obstacles to liberal democracy and capitalism (Burchill 2009: 58). Thus he made no suggestions for what is the outcome if a state was to refuse democracy or to reject capitalism, free trade and globalization of the world economy, all of which are visible signs in weak Middle Eastern states.

Advocates of liberalism carry two important beliefs, one that when states become democratic there is a natural and complete erasal of global conflict that the state will engage in and two such a democratic state would abide by rules that legitimize the evolution of political order (Burchill 2009: 58). This means that democratic states will willingly give up and disregard the use of force while in a conflicted relationship with another state. Here, this assumption is completed refuted by the example of 'war on terror', in which the democratic state of USA has made use of military while in a conflict with Iraq, Afghanistan and other Islamic states. According to the author of this

paper, a complete disappearance of conflict is also a romantic assumption as there will be no form of continual peace as long as religious and cultural differences exist.

Liberal theorists like Doyle, Kant and Schumpeter believe that wars are undemocratic in nature and they are a mechanism introduced by militaristic men in order to concentrate all of the state's power in the hands of the prince, statesmen and elites in the regime so as to increase their tyrannical power on the people of the state (Howard in Burchill 2009: 60). Thus they provided a solution to this, by states turning to democracy and adopting a capitalist economy. Democratic regimes give the power to people to choose a leader, a leader that refrains from war thus it uniting the world (Burchill 2009: 61). This assumption is unsuitable for the case of Syria, since it is not a democratic state it does not consider that the goods or resources offered by the Middle Eastern states like natural gas and oil are not owned by one state thus jeopardizing the argument of capitalism.

Liberalism also states that liberal states are founded on the grounds of free speech, equality before the law, civil liberties and respect for human rights (Burchill 2009: 61-62). These assumptions do not completely fit even full democratic states like India therefore these assumptions do not qualify for unstable states in the region of Middle East. The state of Syria which is the chosen case is certainly not democratic or even transitioning to democracy. Thus all the above assumptions of Liberalism pose as extreme obstacles for analysing the case of Syrian Conflict.

2.2.2 Structural Realism

Structural Realism or Neorealism is a branch of Realism. We know that the pursuit of power is the ultimate aim of Realism and the answer to why we or states need power? is because of human nature.

In contrast to the origin of realism, human nature carries little importance to why state need power in structural realism (Mearsheimer 2007: 72). In an international system, the will to possess power comes from having no authority higher than great power. According to Mearsheimer, because great powers like USA, France or Germany are trapped in a box where

there is nothing above the status of great power, they have to compete with one another to survive as great powers (Mearsheimer 2007: 72).

Structural realism does not take into consideration the differences in culture when it puts forth the above argument, the theory also ignores the different regimes that rule states. Irrespective of whether a state is democratic, autocratic or authoritative they all chase to be more powerful.

Neorealism also ignores the importance of foreign policy, but acknowledges that in the will to possess more power, some states will be more powerful than other (Mearsheimer 2007: 72). The characteristics of a state that make them unique are ignored in structural realism, thus also failing to regard the nature of the interaction between states (Donnelly 2009: 36).

As the name suggests, the theory only considers the interaction of units in the structure of the international system and their power distribution. In the theory, anarchy and hierarchy are two important concepts to understand neorealism. In anarchy, units do not conform to the system and to the rules put down by great powers. While in hierarchy, units act as subordinates thus conforming to the system (Donnelly 2009: 36-37). According to Kenneth Waltz who believes in defensive realism 'every unit must put itself in a position to be able to take care of itself since no one else can be counted to do so'. (Waltz in Donnelly 2009: 36). This is essentially an anarchic system where the only difference is the ability of states to take care of themselves. By assuming this, Waltz has moved away from an international system where allied forces exist to fight for each other in matters of security. In this defensive neorealism is discounting international actors who are members of organizations that are basically alliances to help one another like NATO, UN or EU.

In hierarchical political structure, a state tends to 'jump on the bandwagon' of a leading state to not jeopardize their security (Waltz in Donnelly 2009: 37). This aspect of neorealism holds some truth to international forces, as small states ally themselves with great powers for security.

However, the theory does not answer what is a small allied state to do when a great power becomes its enemy.

Waltz also states that possession of weapons increases security (Landau 2013). This argument is valid to protect the self state from another state but for the case of Syria, it does not answer to use of weapons against the people of the states.

Neorealism holds some potential to analyse the Syrian Conflict because the anarchic structure fits the regimes in the Middle East. However, negating the function and nature of interaction between units cannot be ignored in international relations especially to this case, as historical aspects and cultural differences are some of the reasons to go to war with another state.

2.3 Choice of Theory

From the two discussed theories above and accounting for their limitations, the author chose another theory to conduct research. The research and empirical analysis of the paper is driven by the theory according to the research method used. Hence in this section, the author discusses *why* Theory of Regional Security Complex is a better theory for the analysis than the discarded ones.

2.3.1 Theory of Regional Security Complex

The Regional Security Complex is a general theory that can be applied to post-cold war regions around the world, as stated by the pioneers of the theory in their book *Regions and Powers- The Structure of International Security*. This theory was formulated by Barry Buzan and Ole Wæver. *RSCT* falls under Copenhagen School, that developed concepts and theories for Security and Strategic Studies. According to the authors of *Security-A New Framework for Analysis*, it is easier for traditionalists to identify a ‘security issue’ than wideners. This is because for traditionalists, security issues pertain to matters of military only. While for wideners like the pioneers of *RSCT*, security means issues relating to economy, society, politics and even environment (Buzan et al. 1998: 1). “Security is pursuit of freedom from threats” (Buzan 1991: 18), although security is not clearly defined here, it can be interpreted that the ultimate aim is independence from the threat. The assumption of what security here means, can be applied to the pursuit of the Syrian regime against eliminating threats like rebels and opposition. For wideners, like the pioneers of this theory, such threats can come from beyond military related issues, which can also be environmental issues as it is relevant today.

Post-cold war, the world was categorized into regions such as South Asia, Middle East, North America, Southeast Asia, Post-Soviet regions etc. Based on this the theorists formulated a general RSCT. This general RSCT can be applied to the regions and the states that it consists of. Unlike Liberalism, pioneers of RSCT acknowledged that the political structures in the Middle East were inherently autocratic and anarchic in nature (Buzan & Wæver 2006: 45). These political structures still exist today, some tried to transition to democracy but have failed. RSCT carries a historical aspect when applied to any region in the world. For example, when the RSCT is applied to South Asian regional complex, the authors keep in mind that past colonial history carries much importance in modern foreign policy especially when talking about Kashmir conflict between India and Pakistan. Hence, historical and cultural aspects are important to RSCT while discussing security issues, which is immensely relevant to Middle Eastern RSCT as will be seen in Chapter 3.

The ontological position of RSCT is more constructivist than objectivist. While traditional realists objectively look at security issues only in the military sense, wideners of RSCT place the theory between realist and constructivist point of view, social reality of security issues is existent as perceived by the social actors. The truth about security according to Buzan et al is a socially constructed interpretation (Ejdus in Sulovic 2008).

Buzan et al. have carefully added a perspective on the international intervention in the regional complexes around the world, thus making the theory also valid for analysing this study. Given that the Syrian Conflict is in Middle East, a region plagued by international interference; RSCT is useful in analyzing that aspect as well.

Like other theories, regional security complex theory also has some limitations. Most importantly, the theory was last reformulated in 2006, more than a decade ago. Since then, geopolitical changes have occurred in the regions to which this theory pertains to. More limitations will be discussed in the theory and analysis chapters.

2.4 Choice of Focus

The author of the paper has chosen to study the case of the Syrian Conflict. When saying ‘Syrian Conflict’, there are of course many areas that be chosen for research. The Syrian Conflict has been a subject of interest for many researchers and students ranging from international intervention, humanitarian crisis or even comparative studies of civil wars in Middle East.

The author of this paper, has narrowed the research on the case of Syrian Conflict to studying the involvement of regional actors. The basic choice of focus for this study is the role of regional actors only. The author has chosen Syrian Conflict because the resilience of the current Syrian regime against world leaders pressurizing the president to step down is alarming. The author has chosen to study Syria under his rule because of autocratic nature of the regime and its responsibility for further destabilizing Syria in a time when it should heal. More than the regime, the author has chosen Syrian Conflict because of the resilience of Syrian Citizens. The case of Syrian Conflict as a point of departure for this thesis brings out many underlying factors that are inevitable while studying Middle East, like religion and regime.

The case of Syria is interesting to the author of this paper, because the state has gone from being a 40 year old stable authoritarian regime to an uprising that may last for a decade (Hokayem 2013: 9). The security interaction that has played out in Syria over the course of 7 years between neighbouring states is speculated to make some long lasting changes to the Levant states. That said, the case of Syria is also a personal choice because of the heartwrenching stories that have emerged in media about refugees, young girls captured as sex slaves, separated families and the brutality that was seen from ISIS soldiers. The Syrian Conflict has radicalized young minds around the world and religion has taken precedence over rationality.

Another reason that has made the choice interesting is that against the largest forced displaced human crisis, after thousands of deaths and against Syria burning to ground Assad’s regime refuses peace talks and negotiations.

Throughout the Syrian conflict some regional states have supported Assad in order to further their own agenda. The civil war has received much media attention so much so that, perhaps the civil war in Yemen has been neglected in comparison. These reasons compelled the author to wonder why?, thus narrowing down the focus to the study of regional actors and challenges to resolving the Syrian Conflict.

2.4.1 Analytical Approach

The focus of the thesis is on the regional actors in Syrian Conflict. Naturally, all the states in the region of the Middle East are regional players in Syrian Conflict. Due to spillover of humanitarian crisis as a direct result of the Conflict, all the states are affected by the Syrian Civil War. However, the author wishes to remind the readers that some regional actors are more involved and affected than others thus making them *major regional actors*. They will be the focus of the study. Arab states like Kuwait, Jordan, Qatar etc are engaged in intra-state conflicts that supercede their engagement in the Syrian Conflict, hence their role is secondary (Schmidt 2019). Therefore, not all states in the Middle East are analyzed in this study. In the section below, the author will elaborate on which states are included, why and how they are categorized. The states for the empirical study will be categorized under two umbrellas ‘*Pro-Assad states*’ and ‘*Anti-Assad states*’. The reason behind this is that there is division in the region on support to the current regime based on each’s gain from the Syrian Conflict as well.

Hence, states in the region of Middle East are categorized on the basis of their attitudes towards the regime of Bashar al-Assad. There could be different categorization based on religion, inter-state conflicts or attitude towards Russia or USA. Hezbollah, a militant organization is included in the paper as a state instead of a non-state actor. The states in the empirical analysis are Iran, Israel, Turkey, Saudi Arabia.

Firstly under *pro-Assad* states, the author has discussed *Axis of Resistance* thus also including Syria in addition to Iran and Hezbollah. These states have been chosen because of their alliance with one another that dates to three decades ago.

Secondly under *anti-Assad* states fall Turkey, Israel and Saudi Arabia. Turkey is a neighbouring state of Syria hence, it is at the receiving end of most of the consequences from the conflict. Turkey also shared a neutral relationship USA and Russia, both of whom have national interests in the outcome of the war. Israel has been chosen because it is the only Zionist state in the region and also shares historical rivalry with Syria. Saudi Arabia as a Gulf state has been chosen

to gain a perspective from the Gulf complex of the region of Middle East, it also shares amicable relations with USA.

Thirdly, the reason for choosing some actors and not all is that the chosen states hold higher stakes in the final outcome of the Syrian Conflict than others. As seen from chapter 1.2 of Problem Understanding, some Arab and Gulf states face internal conflicts hence their role is not as significant as the chosen states, if not insignificant.

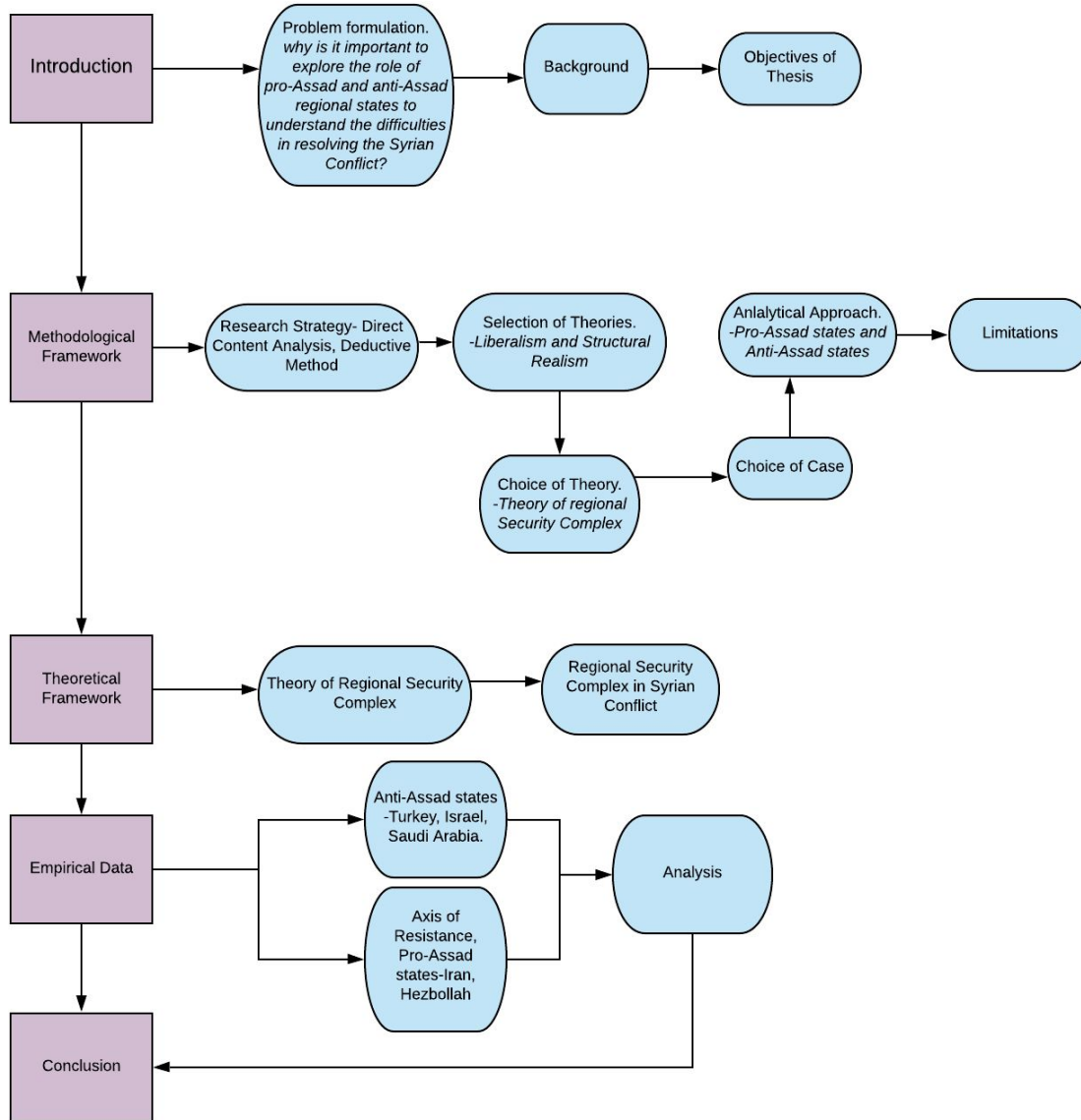
2.5 Limitations

While trying to reach a conclusion for the problem formulation the author of the paper faced some difficulties. One that has proved to be more difficult than the others, is that the Syrian Conflict is an ongoing one. This means that it was quite an obstacle for the author to narrow down the timeline. Hence the events that transpired in 2019 in relation to the Syrian Civil War, have either been looked over completely or not included as much.

Another limitation to the thesis was the discrepancy in the attitude of Turkey towards USA. As seen from 2.3.1, the states have been grouped. Here the author found irregularities in whether Turkey is pro-west or anti-west. The changing nature of Ankara's foreign policy and their aspiration is significant to resolving the conflict. Another limitation is that the primary theory used for the empirical analysis, was formulated and reformulated a decade ago. It was formulated keeping in mind the geo-political changes that had recently occurred or were on going. For example the theory was specifically written for the post-cold war world. The theory's positioning around Middle East is although near to perfect, some important concepts have proved to be obsolete while conducting the empirical analysis.

The author finds it important to mention that the choice of empirical data has also posed a limitation. As seen from 2.3.1, not all of Middle Eastern states are included in the empirical analysis thus their role in the Syrian Conflict is unknown and purposefully neglected in the research. Simply because for a thesis of this scope their inclusion would make it a very broad thesis thus having to also analysis their internal conflict. Nevertheless, it is a limitation that was chosen by the author.

Below is the overall representation of the *Thesis Structure* in the form a flowchart for easier understanding and complete overview:



3. THEORY

As seen from chapter 2.3, regional security complex will be the primary theory applied in the paper. Henceforth, it is referred to as *RSCT*. In the following chapters, the author has elaborated on *RSCT*. This includes the main description, different concepts and the underlying factors that are necessary to understand and rightfully apply the theory to the empirical data. In another sub-chapter, the author describes *RSCT* in the Syrian Conflict thus in the region of Middle East.

3.1 Regional Security Complex Theory

The theory of regional security complex is based on *Securitization*. Securitization is a process that calls for urgent action by members or states of the regional security complex to come together in order to fight an external threat. Wherein, security complex is a *set of states whose major security perceptions and concerns are so interlinked that their national security problems cannot reasonably be analyzed or resolved apart from one another* (Buzan et al. 1998: 12; Buzan & Wæver 2003). The theory is centered around regional actors, wherein the national security issues of each nation are knit together and interdependent on other regional actors. These security issues cannot be addressed independently, without involving the states that are a part of the security complex.

Security is closely associated to 'military', in traditional terms (Buzan & Wæver 2006: 10). The regionalist perspective in *Regions and Powers*, explores security as a concept that extends beyond the traditional meaning of security i.e military. *RSCT*, includes economic, social, political and environmental factors while referring to securitization. The regionalist perspective of security was assumed in the post cold war states. The basis was that global powers refrain interference and involvement in conflict zones around the world because of their own domestic security changes. They pull away from military engagement and cooperation with regional

actors, hence it is upon the local states to deal with the conflict while managing their political relationship with each other.

As believed by the authors, this theory distinguishes between investigating security from a global perspective and regional perspective (Buzan & Wæver 2003: 27). The combination of regional order in a civil war and the influence of neorealist-constructivist aspect are instrumental in deciding the outcome of the war (Schmidt 2019: 2). Hence, RSCT has been chosen for the study. The author uses RSCT to analyze the role and influence of *regional* actors in the Syrian Conflict. Regional security complex theory has aspects of neorealism and constructivism. The theory draws states in three groups through links of realism based on their military strength and political influence, these are *Super Powers*, *Great Powers* and *Regional Powers*. In addition, there are *insulator* states, that are an important part while analysing a security complex (Schmidt 2019: 1). The term insulator states will be dealt with further in this section.

Superpowers are states whose military and political capabilities extend to all states in the international system. Superpower states can exercise these capabilities if need be. However, for a state to be classified as a superpower, states in the international system have to accept this status based on the success superpower states acquire through their actions. Superpowers are allies, threats, or mediators to all or close to all the states in the system (Buzan & Wæver 2003: 34-35). Great powers need not necessarily possess the military and political capabilities on a medium level, it is not as important a criteria to define them as compared to superpowers. The defining feature of great powers is that, states in the international system look up to them as potential to become superpowers (Buzan & Wæver 2003 : 35). Regional powers are the foundation of RSCT. Regional powers, “define the polarity of any given RSC” (Buzan & Wæver 2003: 37). The military and political capabilities of regional powers extends only to the region they are a part of. For example: Iran in Middle East RSC. Regional powers can of course get mixed up in alliances or rivalries with great power or super powers, but their categorization has no change (ibid: 37-39). An important note here is that, it is through these lines of alliances or rivalries that great powers or superpowers are able to penetrate any RSC. The dynamics of an RSC are not affected by the intervention of a higher power.

The work of Buzan et. al in 'Security: A New Framework For Analysis', contradicts the traditionalist view that security and military are inherently the same thing, thus it important while tackling security conflicts in the international order. The theory of regional security complex revolves around the notion that security issues are not inherently only about militarization or military aspects of a region. RSC also accounts for the economic, societal and environmental issues that are impacted by *securitization* (Buzan et. al 1998). RSC, therefore argues that analysis of security in a region must focus on the regional, neighbouring states rather than on the superpowers of the world.

Great powers may also act as insulators because of their ability to have some influence outside their own security complex (Buzan & Wæver 2003: 483-490). *Insulator, buffer state* are important concepts in regional security complex, these will be applied to the analysis of the study. Insulator refers to states in a region, that form alliances with other states from other RSC who neighbor the security issue of a particular RSC so to speak and with international actors. Insulator states are *not* a part of the RSC. Insulator states as stated in Regions and Powers "stand back to back" (Buzan & Wæver 2003: 41). These states in the security complex, stand between two security complexes in order to prevent rivalry. Example- Turkey as an insulator between South Asia and Europe (Buzan & Wæver 2003: 28).

A state at the centre of securitization in RSC is a buffer state. This state normally stands between two enemy state but not two enemy security complexes. A buffer state is not external to the security complex of the region, unlike an insulator it is *very much a part of* the security complex whose function is to prevent conflict between the states in the regional security complex and not between two regional security complexes like the insulator state (Buzan & Wæver 2003: 483). However, buffer states cannot actively engage in the process of securitization. The states of Nepal in the Asian security complex is a buffer state. (Buzan & Wæver 2003: 486).

The basis for the argument being that distance and proximity to the security issues are more important than the power of the super states. Superpowers are farther in distance and "insecurity is often associated with proximity" (Buzan et al. 1998: 75). Therefore geographical proximity is one of the important characteristics of RSC. Buzan et al. characterize regions as a subsystem, the author will therefore follow the same. According to Buzan and Wæver, in a RSC the regions

around a conflict form a sub-system, therefore the network is internal (Buzan & Weaver 2003: 41). The regions or subsystems, therefore deal with security internally, with little or no interference from super powers. The security complex and the sub security complex that were born after the fall of Soviet Union is an example based on the geographical closeness. States that were formerly a part of USSR, one of which would be western states of Belarus, Moldova and Ukraine (Buzan & Wæver 2003: 403). This notion of proximity will be further used in the Middle East security complex.

The regional security complex theory Buzan and Wæver, carries a constructivist aspect to it. In this sense, the inherent features that categorize an issue as a 'security issue', are constructed by the players in the regional security complex (Buzan & Wæver 2003:48). Therefore this theory revolves around security as perceived by the actors.

This brings us to *amity and enmity patterns* in a regional complex. While applying RSCT to a RSC, it is vital to consider the amity and enmity patterns that lie in the particular security complex. RSC's are defined by "durable patterns of amity and enmity taking the form of subglobal, geographically coherent patterns of security interdependence" (Buzan and Wæver 2003: 45). These patterns lay the foundation of interdependence of the members of RSC in security matters. The amity and enmity patterns in regional complex for security analysis is a social construction. This particular apparatus devices the markings of interdependence in the regional complex. The patterns of amity and enmity are not only confined to subsystems but also used in global security analysis or national security analysis; example: state relation of Arab and Persia. Therefore the patterns of amity and enmity are the basis for the security complexes in the world. Patterns of amity and enmity are linked to the distance among the states who are part of the security complex being shorter in distance. Historical relations between nearby states influence the said relations (Buzan and Wæver 2003: 45).

In short, RSCT sets out to give local or regional factors a similar degree of importance as the role of superpowers in security studies (Buzan & Wæver 2003). The simple logic of more proximity in terms of geographical boundaries is used here to state that this leads to more interaction among neighbouring states than states that are far in distance. This impact is strongest thus

causing more impact on matters of security. RSC's around the world are surrounded around "power relations" and "patterns of enmity and amity".

As Buzan and Wæver put it "one fears whoever wields greater power", therefore it can be assumed the amity and enmity are influenced by the nations that yield more power, in order to avoid conflicts with higher powers (Buzan & Wæver 2003: 49). In RCS's amity is prevalent in states that look for support or protection from their regional partners. Enmity refers to relations that are born out of fear or suspicion. The latter, devices conflict formation and the former leads to formation of security regimes.

According to Buzan and Wæver, the patterns of enmity and amity further hint at types of security constellations. Security constellations are clusters that are based on patterns of amity and enmity among actors in the regional security complex. Therefore, when a pattern of enmity is observed, a *conflict formation* regional security complex is born which is 'negative dependency' on one another that makes use of violence. Conflict formation is due to fear of an external but imminent threat that likely pertains to war-like characteristics.

Pattern of amity that is friendship or mere support to one another shows 'positive dependency'. This forms a *security community*. The constellation security community is bounded by non-violence and means no force. They rely on one another without fear or suspicion of higher power (Regions and Powers 2003: 489-491). A security community works to protect and support one another unlike a conflict formation that is formed to fight only conflicts. The regionalist view in security is based on regions being in a firm position on issues of conflict and cooperation well within their geographical boundaries.

An important aspect of this variable is the impact of the global powers in the security complex. As we already know that, global powers can infiltrate these RSC's only to a certain degree because of their extending capabilities. This infiltration in a RSC happens along the patterns of amity and enmity (Schmidt 2019: 1). Global powers simply penetrate these regional security complexes but do not become a part of it. However, we know that they *do not* influence the dynamics in RSC's.

In addition to patterns of amity & enmity and adjacency, power relations and distribution of power is also an important aspect of RSCT. Like patterns of amity and enmity, power relations

have an influence on the inter state relations. Power relations between states is either direct or indirect interaction. This depends on the degree of polarity of balance of power. It is polar, bipolar or multipolar in nature. The strong presence of Turkey, Iran and Israel in MERSC and their relations with global powers can be multipolar balance of power (Buzan & Wæver 2003: 50).

Below is a representation of the patterns of amity and enmity as concluded in the book *Beyond Regionalism?* The author of this paper has made use of the terms *self* and *other*. Two concepts that were put forth by Edward Said. The terms are put to use in order to show *how* and *which* type of security constellations are formed based on the patterns of enmity and amity (Coskun 2008: 93). Regional actors can identify other negatively or positively. This means a state, i.e self, will view another state, i.e other, in the RSC as friend (amity) or rival (enmity).

(Source: Coskun in Vural 2010: 35; Buzan & Wæver 2006: 490; Coskun 2006:93)

Identification with states in RSC	Type of Pattern	Process	Security Constellation
Negative	Enmity	Securitization	Conflict Formation
Neutral (future threats)	Rivalry	Normalization (no threat at present)	Security Regime
Positive	Amity	De-securitization (threat does not exist anymore)	Security Community

The table above has been formed as an integration of Alexander Wendt's 'Collective Identity theory' and Buzan & Wæver's 'Regional Security Complex theory' (Coskun 2006:93).

According to Coskun, RSC is a type of *regionalism*, because regional security and stability in a region like the Middle East are important aspects of regionalism (Coskun 2006:93: 90).

At the negative end of the spectrum lies existential threats to a security complex or region which leads to *securitization*. At the positive end of the spectrum there is *desecuritization*. The spectrum here is patterns in RSC. In desecuritization, the actors in the security complex come together to reduce or even cease their forces to fight an existential threat which has been deemed as non-existent. Buzan and Wæver, also aimed to use one the assumptive roles as enemy, friend, rival in their regional security analysis. This assumption assigns a role to every state in the RSC structure (Buzan & Wæver 2003: 50)

Patterns of amity and enmity as suggested by Buzan & Wæver that lay the foundation of RCST can be integrated along these lines of negative and positive spectrum. Therefore, there is amity on the positive end and enmity on the negative end. On the basis of this, the process of securitization in Middle East regional security complex has more than one threat. Few of these are ongoing while some are continuous, like the Syrian Civil War and Israeli-Arab conflict respectively.

3.2 Regional Security Complex in the Syrian Conflict

The state of Syria falls in the region of Middle East, therefore in this chapter the author sets a similar tone for the Regional Security Complex in the Syrian Conflict and Regional Security Complex in Middle East or *MERSC*.

According to Schmidt, the region of Middle East is one from Egypt to Iran while also including Turkey (Schmidt 2019: 2). These states are Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, Saudi Arabia, Iraq and Iran with Turkey. Unifying features like language, religion, culture and securitization has made this definition a more fitting one for this study. The author has also argued as the borders being clear. In their book *Regions and Powers*, Buzan and Wæver have defined the region of Middle East as everything that extends from Morocco to Iran with the addition of Arab states, Iran and Israel (Buzan & Wæver 2003: 187). Given these two definitions, *the author of the paper has chosen to define the region of Middle East with states Egypt, Israel, Syria, Jordan, Lebanon, Iraq, Iran, Saudi Arabia and Turkey*. Turkey is an insulator between Middle East RSC

or MERSC and Europe. Afghanistan is an insulator state between MERSC and South Asia (Buzan & Wæver 2003: 187).

The MERSC specification in Regions and Powers is quite old, it does not entirely fit to the analysis of this study. Therefore the author will present it in very short, simply to justify the historical aspect of the amities and enmities seen in the Syrian Conflict. MERSC came into existence post Second World War. During the same time, states in the region came into existence, as a result of decolonization. Turkey, Iran and Saudi Arabia, were however never colonized (Buzan & Wæver 2003: 187-189). MERSC majorly consisted of Arab tribes, next to whom in majority were Jews or Zionists. Zionist movement in Middle East led to the creation of Israel, in an inherently Arab region. This gave rise to the age old, Arab-Israeli conflict (Coskun 2006: 94-95). MERSC is divided into three sub-complexes; Maghreb, Levant and Gulf sub-complex. Maghreb sub-complex constitutes the North African states of Libya, Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia. Tunisia and Libya have also been part of the Arab Spring in MENA region. The Maghreb sub-complex is of no importance to this study. The Levant sub-complex, on the other hand holds most importance to the study like the Gulf sub-complex. The states in the Levant sub-complex are Syrian, Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq, Egypt, Israel and the Palestine territories. In the Gulf sub-complex, we have Iran, Saudi-Arabia and the remaining states from Arabian peninsula (Buzan & Wæver 2003: 187-189). They carry no importance to this paper hence have not been named.

Buzan and Wæver include Hamas, Hezbollah and Palestine Liberation Organization in the Levant sub-complex (Buzan & Wæver 2003: 191).

The security complex in the region of Middle East is 'conflict-driven'. The players in RSC of the Middle East come together to fight a foreign threat. Therefore this RSC is born out of fear and not by cooperation or even good faith (Buzan & Wæver 2003; Coskun 2006). The security complex in the Middle East is therefore called *perennial conflict formation* (Buzan & Wæver 2003: 187). One that is continually active during a time of crisis, moreover the region of Middle East is equated to instability and conflict. A security complex in the Middle East is non-existent in times of "stability" (Coskun 2008).

The great powers are strategically interested in the region of Middle East. The large oil reserves and oil production in the region are an important source of gaining wealth to the otherwise overly populated, poverty ridden and inequality plagued region (Khouri 2019). While talking about the RSC in Middle East one cannot overlook the ethnic aspect in the region. Basically because there is diversity but also prejudice among the groups. Arabs, Persians, Jews in Israel and Turks dominate the region of Middle East. However there are also minorities like the Kurds who are scattered around mainly in Syria, Turkey and Iraq. Islam and Muslims are often singled out when Middle East is involved. Furthermore, there is a sectoral division in Islam. Division by faith is a common internal conflict in the Middle East namely between the Shias, Sunnis and Alawites in Syria (Schmidt 2019).

The theorists of RCST categorize Middle East as standard security complex. This means that actors in the security complex have the right of distribution of power in the region. They use geographical proximity to balance out power (Buzan & Wæver 2003: 62).

The Syrian Conflict in MERSC falls under this umbrella of the standard security complex. According to Buzan and Wæver, any standard RSC may face external or internal changes or even get *overlaid* (Buzan & Wæver 2003: 66). Overlaid in RSC means when the security dynamics of the said RSC are controlled by an outside force, mostly an influential global power or a great power (Buzan & Wæver 2003: 62). At such a time, the RSC becomes non-existent because the actors do not undergo any process of securitization (Buzan & Wæver 2003: 62). An example of this is colonization.

To make matters easy, Buzan and Wæver have also put forth how a RSC can evolve or predictive RSC (ibid 2003: 65), this is especially important to the Syrian Conflict.

- a. An RSC will maintain its *status quo*, this means that there are no monumental changes in the inherent structure of the RSC. Even if there is a change, it is most likely an internal change (Buzan & Wæver 2003: 53)
- b. An RSC is undergoing *internal transformation*, this means that the basic structure of the RSC is changing because of security dynamics, change in balance of power, an actor is likely disintegrating from the RSC or integrating, or that there is a change to an existing

pattern of amity or enmity likely because of change in ideology (Buzan & Wæver 2003: 53)

- c. An RSC is undergoing *external transformation*, this simply means that the existing RSC is merging with another RSC (Buzan & Wæver 2003: 53)

According to the political scientists, Buzan and Wæver if a standard RSC undergoes above changes it is very unlikely that the RSC would regress to an unstructured state, even though it may be possible (Buzan & Wæver 2003: 66). In a standard RSC, the interaction between security actors is very high thus the security dynamics are likely to change (Buzan & Wæver 2003: 67) Schmidt in his chapter on Syrian Civil War, has characterized the MERSC as anarchic in nature. In this sense, states in the region have chaotic and unstable regimes, with no rule of law. According to the Schmidt these states give more importance to strengthening their military power (Schmidt 2019: 1). Here this can be linked to Buzan and Wæver labelling, MERSC as a 'perennial conflict formation'. It is because this RSC is solely based on fighting an external threat. For these states in the region of Middle East, their military power and strengthening it is more important than maintaining or forming a stable government. The security complex in Middle East might also be anarchic in nature because of the involvement of global powers like USA in specific, on several occasions like the War on Terror, the conflict between Saudi Arabia and Israel or in the role of "political Islam" (Coskun 2006: 89). Political Islam is an interesting take by the Coksun because it can also be linked to the sectarian rivalry that exists in the region. Israel has been an excluded member of the security complex due to the Zionist rivalry with other members of the complex. Even as an excluded member, Israel plays an important role in Syrian Civil War.

Moreover, lesser the geographical distance between states greater is the degree of threat arrival. Hence the security complex of Middle Eastern states is hinged on building up military power to fight its neighbors in addition to other external threats (Buzan & Wæver 2003; Schmidt 2019). As we already know that patterns of amity and enmity are constructivist in nature. In the case of Syrian Civil War, the three most predominant patterns of enmity are *Saudi Arabia- Iran, Iran-Israel and Israel- Saudi Arabia*; and the amity between *Syria-Iran*. Therefore, it is very

evident here that these states are interdependent on one another not only in Syrian War but also in other security issues pertaining to the entire Middle East. Therefore, it is proven that the *Security Alliance* is very closely linked and not autonomous or independent at all.

These patterns of enmity and amity are historical in nature (Schmidt 2019: 1). Hence the conflicts that are prevalent today in the region are linked to the historical enmity among the states. Given the continuous sectarian war in the Middle East, the historical aspect is very relevant here. One layer of the Syrian Civil War is the sectarian rivalry between the minority Alawites (Shias) and majority Sunni Muslims in Syria. According to RSC, *adjacency* i.e the distance between the boundaries of the states in the region intensifies the dependency on one another over matters of security (Buzan & Wæver 2003: 44-45). Adjacency, a defining factor in RSC is also important in the case of Syria because it can be associated with the sectarian rivalry that persists in the region which is apparent in Syrian Conflict. There is a sectarian war between the minority Alawites and Shia's in Syria and Iran and Sunni majority in Saudi Arabia, Iran and Syria. Bashar al-Assad, the head of the Syrian regime is a member of the Alawite community, while the rebel forces and opposition group members are of the Sunni sect.

Patterns of amity, especially in the Middle East RSC, that imply interdependence, *do not* mean cooperation (Coskun 2008: 91). It just means that states engaged in amity, are preventing spillover from an ongoing conflict. Turkey's interference in preventing the formation of a new Kurdish state is one such example of prevention of spillover. Kurdish Muslims reside in both Turkey and Syria bordering Turkey.

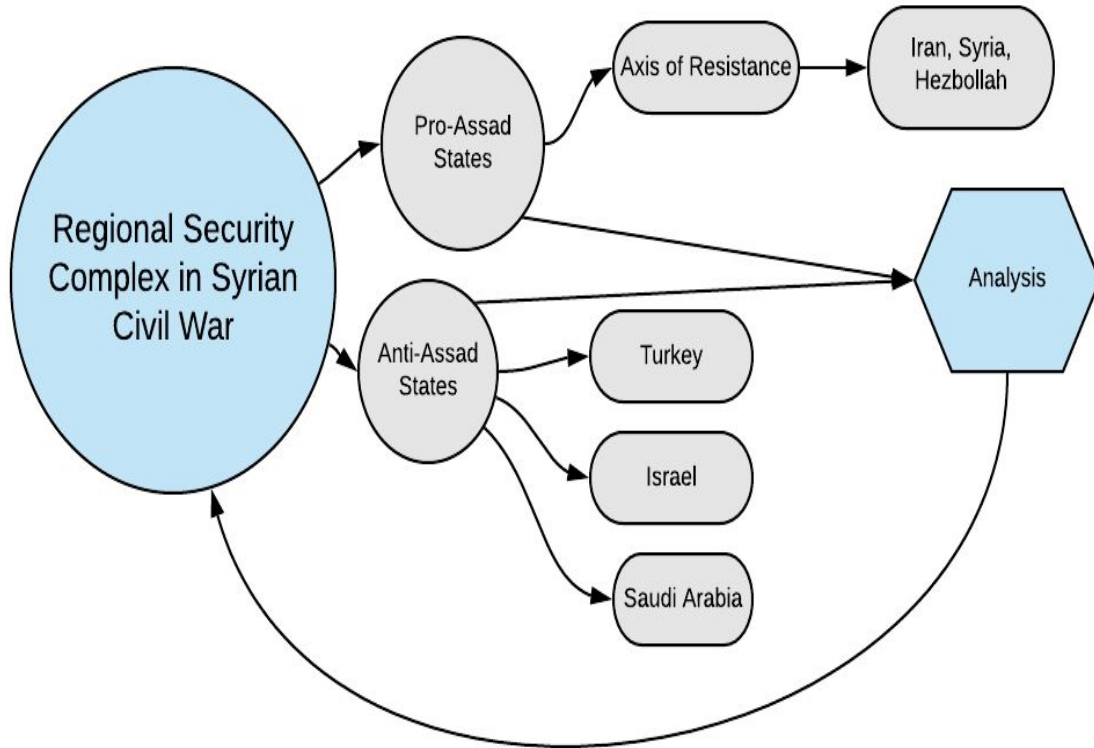
The security interdependence of the states in the Middle East is founded on '*security dilemma*' (Schmidt 2019: 2). This means that there is a military build up when a member of the security complex is threatened due to military build up by a fellow state. This is referred to as 'defensive measure of one state to offensive state by another'. These security dilemmas can therefore also be linked to *why* patterns of enmity occur. Although various reasons like different religious philosophies, dispute over the boundary of a state, rivalry among ethnicities or even conflict over natural resources can be linked to these enmity patterns (Buzan & Wæver 2003: 194-194). In addition to this, it can also give rise to a situation where states in the RSC are locked in a military

combat. An example for this would be, enmity between Saudi Arabia and Iran, wherein one of the thresholds of this pattern is the long standing conflict over oil (Schmidt 2019).

MERSC is nonconformist in nature much like most of the regimes of the states. There is no one entity here, that is more powerful than another or one that could act as a mediator or organizer among the states. The retreat of America from the region has left the security complex to organise itself. Although this retreat gave Russia, another superpower, the opportunity to exert its influence (Salem 2019; Schmidt 2019). However, the author will not deal with USA and Russian presence in the Middle East.

States in the MERSC, have historically been bad at balancing power. This is largely because of the constant presence of a higher power in the region . Historical rivalries, also prevent states in the RSC to form a cooperation that will fight an external force as *one unit* (Coskun 2008: 92). Hence, in the wake of the Syrian War, there are proxy wars between Iran-Israel and Iran-Saudi Arabia. Instead of fighting ISIS, an external threat together.

“Middle East RSC has operated for several decades, autonomously despite impositions of global powers” (Buzan and Wæver 2003: 187), this can also possibly be another reason for failure to form co-operations to fight threats in the unstable region of Middle East.



4. EMPIRICAL ANALYSIS

In this chapter the author will use the empirical data to analyze the case of the Syrian Conflict by using the Theory of Regional Security Complex, in order to reach a conclusion. The empirical data is the states that are chosen for the study, which are also categorized in two groups: *Pro-Assad and Anti-Assad*. The theoretical framework for the analysis is the Theory of Regional Security Complex as seen from chapter 3.

In sub chapter 4.3, the theoretical reflections will be discussed. The following chapter is dedicated to the empirical data answer:

Why is it important to explore the role of pro-Assad and anti-Assad regional states in order to understand the difficulties in resolving the Syrian Conflict?

4.1 Anti-Assad states

TURKEY

In case of Syria, the role of Turkey has been to be crystal clear. Erdogan's regime rooted for the fall of Assad's regime. Similar to its support to the opposition in other Arab Springs around MENA. When the events following Arab Spring transpired, there was rise of opposition to regimes in Tunisia, Egypt, Syria and Libya. Erdogan had publicly claimed support to the new political opposition. In this way he portrayed Turkey as a *dominant power* in the Middle East, one that supported Islamist democracy. (Schanzer & Tahiroglu 2016).

Initially, Ankara was an ardent supporter of the Assad regime when Erdogan was elected, the two states enjoyed a cordial relationship right until 2011. Even before Arab Spring in Syria, Erdogan pushed Assad regime to accept a more pro-democracy trajectory and towards political reforms. Turkey and Syria also held joint military operations and engaged in intelligence co-operation before the relationship went sour. The Syrian regime had much to gain from their close ties with Ankara. Turkey had a flourishing economy until 2017 and it has also been critical of Israel (Hokayem 2013; Yilmaz 2013). However soon Turkey realized that its sphere of

influence does not extend to Assad, it supported the downfall of the regime (Schanzer & Tahiroglu 2016: 28).

Before the Arab Springs started, Ankara stated a *zero problems strategy* with neighbours in 2002 (Schanzer & Tahiroglu 2016: 27). However, the regime had time and again shown no opposition to the Islamist extremist militants in Syria. The zero problem policy was in vain when the Syrian Conflict broke out. Turkey's south eastern border was packed with incoming refugees who were fleeing war and militant soldiers. As a result, Turkey became weak and open to vulnerability, like military and social threats (Kohei 2016).

Failure of the zero problem strategy is also because, in the region of the Middle East, the regional relations of Turkey have been established on the basis of sectarian ideology. Until 2015, Turkey was an active regional player in the Syrian Civil War, it supported opposition to the regime as stated above. This opposition came from Syrian National Council (SNC) and the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood (Schmidt 2019: 7).

In November 2015, when Turkey accidentally shot a Russian jet, it was forced to move a few steps back because of the obvious Russian support to the regime which was contradictory to the policy of Ankara. Consequently, Turkey had to withdraw its opposition to Assad thus it developed deeper ties with Moscow in order to avoid a military combat with Russian forces. Hence, Turkey backed off in order to not ruin its relationship with Moscow (Schmidt 2019; Al monitor 2015). Another reason for Turkey to backoff was the support of Iran to Assad regime. Iran and Turkey have shared good relations for years, it has been Turkey's biggest supplier of natural gas and oil. Thus it did so to avoid hostile relations with Iran (Schmidt 2019: 7).

Coming to the sectarian war in the Middle East, Turkey is not far behind. Kurds in Syria following the civil war, demanded a new state therefore separating from Syria. Many Kurdish Turks reside in Turkey as well, therefore Ankara feared this fight for a separate entity would spread to within Turkish borders hence it required support from Moscow to prevent this (Schmidt 2019: 7; Ifantis & Galariotis 2017: 33). Main agenda for Turkey throughout conflict inflicted Syria has been the prevention of a new Kurdish state being born. The PKK (Partiya Karkerên Kurdistanê), a political militant organisation that had been endorsing the separation of Kurds in Turkey into a new state; has also been supportive of Syrian Kurds. Kurdish Turks make

up for 18% of the total population, they reside in the east near the borders of the Kurdish population in Syria. Naturally, Turkey wants to avoid the spillover of such an empowering stance for Turkish Kurds (Gunes & Lowe 2015: 4; Okyay 2017: 832).

Assad's forces regaining control on ISIS claimed parts of Syria has also hampered the influence of Turkey in the Syrian Civil War (Schmidt 2019: 7). The events that have ensued in the wake of Arab Spring in Syria that involve Turkey, have uncovered a series of miscalculations and blunders. Ankara, has often miscalculated the power of the Assad forces and the lengths to which Russia would go to keep Assad in power (Ifantis & Galariotis 2017: 35). In doing so, Turkey also assumed that other regional players would not have vested interests in Syria and its strategic location. The 'zero problems' policy is therefore a failure considering the clashes Ankara had to face in Syrian Civil war (Ifantis & Galariotis 2017: 33).

As we can see the interests of Turkey in Syria have often altered. Turkey has on several occasions called for or even pursued United Nations and USA to intervene through military combat in order to overthrow Assad. Turkey has based its persuasions on advocating democracy in Syria and calling out the Assad regime for their human rights violations (Okyay 2017: 834).

As seen Turkey has advocated the removal of Assad. In addition to this, Ankara's policy has been to spread its wings of influence in the Middle East now that the power structure in the region has shaken up. Even yet, Ankara has on several occasions experienced failure. Failure of Assad not heeding Ankara's advice on political reforms, the victory of Assad's forces in recapturing the areas that were controlled by rebel groups and Islamic state and overestimating its own position as the 'order setter' after introducing the 'zero problems' strategy (Hiltermann 2018).

Ankara's aspirations to spread its influence in Middle East was hampered when the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood was exiled from the state. Muslim Brotherhood is a political organisation that advocates democracy based on Islamic laws. On an international platform, it is considered an extremist organisation. The name is synonymous to Syrian Muslim Brotherhood. Syrian Muslim Brotherhood has been Turkey's main surrogate in Syria. Muslim Brotherhood is spread over Middle East under different names, one of whom is the popular Hamas in Palestine region (Schmidt 2019: 7; Tastekin 2019). Turkey's relationship with Muslim Brotherhood dates back to

Cold War. It was during this time that the two entities along with Israel had made attempts to uproot the Baathist regime in Syria. In Syria when revolutions turned into a full blown civil war, around 5000 members of the organisation sought shelter in Turkey (Tastekin 2019). Support to an organisation whose President was ousted in Egypt has not portrayed Turkey in a good light. In addition to sheltering Islamist militia, Turkey has also provided cover to FSA in south eastern part. Here they were provided support and ability to organize their opposition against Assad regime (Yilmaz 2013: 68). Ankara continued to echo 'zero problems policy', even as it continued to support and actively arm opposition that wanted to overthrow Assad, because Ankara believed that 'no stability will come to Syria as long as Assad is in power' (Yilmaz 2013: 69).

While Turkey fears a separate Kurdish state, as PKK continues to dominate Kurdish states inside Syrian borders, thus becoming involved in a sectarian war, Ankara is also backing the SNC which is made of Sunni majority from Syria (Yilmaz 2013: 69). This calls to question the intentions of Ankara, if it is to stop the war or aggravate it?

ISRAEL

Israel, a pro-West state in the region of Middle East is entangled in two main conflicts with other states. Namely the Iran-Israel conflict and Israel-Saudi Arabia conflict, however Israel is strongly supported by the Trump government who follow a pro-Israel policy (Lund 2018: 32). When Arab Springs reached Syria, Israel was quick to support a regime change that was pro-west and anti-Iran. In 2011, the rebel forces in Syria and opposition groups also seem to not be bothered by Israel's brutal crackdown on the Gaza strip in 2008. At this time Israeli officials also were sure that the Assad regime would be dethroned in a matter of months. Much to their dismay the resilient regime is surviving today after 9 years.

In order to analyse Israel's role in Syrian Civil war, the issue of *Golan Heights* is important to understand. Golan Heights is a conflicted area that lies between northeastern border of Israel and Syria. However, the Sea of Galilee falls on the Southern border of Golan Heights. The dispute over this territory dates back to 1967 when Israel took over Golan Heights after being in a war with Syria that lasted for six days. Immediately after, there were Israeli settlements in the area. In

1973, Syrian army made attempts to reconquer the area, however this time UN intervened and both states signed a ceasefire. This must not be mistaken for a peace deal over Golan Heights (BBC 2019; Schmidt, 2019: 8). Nevertheless, Israel and Syria have been on the war path since. The war continues to be over Golan Heights and the water resources from the Sea of Galilee, the two states have agreed to a UN negotiated cease fire, but Golan Heights are part of neither of the states. The anti-Assad sentiment is also caused by Syria, Iran and Hezbollah's support to Hamas. Hamas is a Palestinian militant organization much like Hezbollah (Reider 2013: 43). At the onset of the Syrian Conflict Israel was fighting both Syrian military and Hezbollah soldiers on the Golan Heights front (Trenin 2017)

Below is a map of the disputed territory (Aljazeera 2016).



Israel's involvement in the Syrian civil war, comes in the form of a proxy war with Iran. Assad's decision to seek help from Hezbollah commanders has gone a long way in forestalling Israel (Schmidt 2019: 8). As will be seen in chapter 4.2.1, Hezbollah is backed and receives excessive support from Iran. This can be seen as a way of Iran keeping Israel in check or preventing the state from directly attacking Iran. Israel is a pro-Western state in the anti-West part of Middle East, hence it is also considered an outlaw state in the security complex (Schmidt 2019: 8). Religion in Middle East politics plays an important role. As we have seen the civil war in Syria has taken the form of a sectarian war that involves all the important states who are fighting an internal as well as external sectarian war. Israel is not an exception to this as well. Syria along with its allies Iran and Hezbollah are inherently anti-West in their policies as opposed to Israel

(IGC 2018: 5-6). A regime that is a part of the Sunni-muslim majority which is also pro-West is more suitable to Israel than the current Assad regime. However, such regime would lead to surge in the operations of extremist groups in the region which will directly affect Israel as most of such Islamist groups are inherently *Anti-Zionist* and Israel is surrounded by radical Islamist regimes. (Schmidt 2019: 8). While Israel's main rival continues to be Iran, taking an anti-Assad stance is the only way how Israel might be successful in crippling the strength and Iranian influence in the region (Reider 2013: 41).

While the world, media and international leaders are more interested in the Syrian Civil War, its spillover and the humanitarian crisis the conflict it has led to, they seem to be brushing and moving away from the Palestine issue and the human rights violations of IDF in the Palestine region. This is seemingly working in the favour of Netanyahu's regime (Reider 2013: 46). Thus the Israeli regime is free to manage its internal conflicts the way it sees fit even if it is by the use of military force.

SAUDI ARABIA

Saudi Arabia, a state in the Persian sub-complex has long-standing reputation of sheltering the Muslim Brotherhood (MB). MB is parents organization of Syrian Muslim Brotherhood. Both the organizations are largely supported by Saudi Arabia and Turkey. Thus making all three actors Anti-Assad (Quilliam 2017: 20 ;Hassan 2013).

Saudi Arabia provides support to the Muslim Brotherhood, who have penetrated the Syrian Conflict via the Syrian National Council. In addition to supporting the main opposition actor to the Assad regime, Saudi Arabia also provides intelligence and logistical support to the Free Syrian Army. Saudi Arabia is also responsible for arming the FSA. Intelligence and political backing is also provided to the National Coalition for Syria Revolutionary and Opposition Forces (SOC). The SOC, FSA and SNB are important because these actors all share the same goal, overthrowing the Assad regime (Quilliam 2017: 20; Hassan 2013).

Saudi Arabia has shifted its support for the current regime much like Turkey.

Originally, Saudi Arabia pressed Assad regime for political reforms and to develop a more "accommodating policy" (Quilliam 2017:20; Hassan 2013). This state in the Arabian Peninsula

encouraged Assad to break off the revolution by introducing reforms which was basically the only demand of the opposition (Quilliam 2017: 20; Hassan 2013). Saudi regime called on Assad to engage in political reforms negotiations was from the fear of the spillover of the Arab Spring reaching the Persian sub-complex (Quilliam 2017: 21). Thus when their demand went unheeded their support was shifted to the opposition.

Saudi Arabia's policy and role in the Syrian Civil War arises from the regional competition they are engaged in with Iran. Iran and Saudi Arabia, are playing to establish each self as greater influencers in the region of Middle East. Both the states are also operating to secure a position as a regional hegemonic leader in the region because of their vast oil reserves (Quilliam 2017: 20; Schmidt 2019). Saudi's policy towards Syria and their support to the Syrian Opposition comes from attempts at "pushing back" the Iranian influence in the Middle East region. Like Israel, Saudi is greatly worried of Iran's rise to power as Iran is also backed by Russia (Khouri 2018: 7). Since Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman has assumed power he has persuaded the Lebanese regime to denounce both Hezbollah and Iran, who are the major actors in the Pro-Assad team. This call for denunciation was however refused. Another example of Saudi's failed attempts was the pressure on Qatar to sever ties with Iran in 2017 (Khouri 2018: 8). Rami Khouri has called these attempts by Saudi to dethrone Assad in a proxy war with Iran as "half hearted attempts". Half hearted attempts at supporting the Syrian opposition and at blacklisting Iran in the Middle East regional order (Khouri 2018).

In another important note at the 'rollbacks on Iran' and 'overthrowing Assad', Saudi Arabia has aligned itself with some powerful regional Anti-Assad squad namely the Israelis and Emirati's who are backed by the fluctuating support of USA (Khouri 2017: 8). This alignment has not aided such attempts, especially since the American troops were withdrawn from Syria and Iraq. Prior to break out of the Syrian Conflict, Saudi Arabia faced humiliation in 2005 in the American war against Iraq, when Iran managed to gain a dominating position in Iraq post war. Saudi Arabia had ardently supported the American regime then in this war. Thus proving the ineffective policy making of Saudi regime (Quilliam 2017: 21-22).

Saudi Arabia does not lag behind in the underlying sectarian war in the Syrian Conflict. According to Aaron Lund, Saudi regime's attempts to push back Iran is also to keep a check on

the growing pro-Shia popularity in an inherently pro-sunni Saudi Arabia (Lund 2018: 32). The Saudi family in rule is of the Sunni sect therefore involving them in a “sectarian hatred” between Sunni and Shias of the Middle East (Schmidt 2019: 9). The role of this Gulf state in the Syrian war can be seen more in the form of a proxy war than any substantial contempt directed at the Assad regime except condemning the Syrian Civil war and calling off its ambassadors to Syria (Lund 2018).

As seen from above, both Turkey and Saudi Arabia support opposition forces in their attempts to bring down the Assad regime. However, they differ on their support to Muslim Brotherhood. While Turkey actively supports them and shelters the members, Saudi Arabia chooses to maintain some distance (Yilmaz 2013: 69-70)

4.2 Axis Of Resistance

The rise of the so called *Axis of Resistance* dates back to 2006. It is a regional power block which includes Hezbollah, Iran, Iraq and Syria in addition to Hamas from time to time. Hezbollah is continuously backed by Iran when it comes to war (Mohseni & Kalout 2017). Hezbollah backed by Iran’s influence led to changes in the regional order in the Middle East, in which previously Turkey was the only powerhouse backed by USA. Uprisings across Arab states for a new democratic regimes, provided the Axis of Resistance to build a new political structure which was muscular and effective as it included the militant organizations Hezbollah and Hamas (Mohseni & Kalout 2017: 2)

According to the author, an important notable feature the anti-American, anti- Israeli alliance is the hints of a sectarian Shia alliance (Gelbart 2010). The Syrian Conflict, is as we know also engulfed in a sectarian war between minority Shia, Alawites and the majority Sunni Muslims in Syria. The alliance is led by Iran, therefore the centre for the Axis is Tehran which is also strongly backed by Russia (Mohseni and Kalout 2017).

Although it is a predominantly Shiite Axis, new multiethnic members from the Middle East region were trained by Hezbollah to fight as militias against a common Sunni militant

organization ISIS. New members although not permanent were SND, Houthis in Yemen and Pakistani Zaynabiyoun all operating in the war torn state of Syria (Mohseni & Kalout 2017). The fall of Mosul at the hands of ISIS, aggravated the rise of militants trained by Hezbollah to fight ISIS namely the Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF). A fatwa issued by a spiritual leader in Iraq to fight ISIS also supported the mobilization of new militant groups who fought under the umbrella of Axis of Resistance (Mohseni & Kalout 2017). According to Schmidt, the training of militant groups by Hezbollah and Hezbollah themselves fighting in the Syrian War to win back territories is why Assad is still in power (Schmidt 2019). Axis of Resistance is an alliance that supports the Assad regime along with Russia, who is a pro-Assad thus making the alliance even more powerful. Moscow on several occasions has shared intelligence with Iran and Syria in order to keep Assad in power. Russia has also supported Iran with an air missile defence system (Mohseni & Kalout 2017: 7). The Iran-Hezbollah-Syria alliance benefits the Assad regime in containing the threat from the rebel groups. It has also provided Hezbollah with a route to Lebanon to carry arms and weapons for emergency purposes via Syria (Hokayem 2013: 125). Originally the Axis of Resistance was a two member alliance between Iran and Syria. The two allied on their shared anti-western and anti-Zionism ideology (Gelbart 2010). With the addition of the powerful Hezbollah, the three have been working towards keeping Assad in power. A regime change in Syria will hamper the progress the alliance has made in changing the geopolitical structure in the Levant sub-complex. Aligning over a common enemy Israel where Syria is engaged in a political and military conflict over Golan Heights and preventing the rise of Sunni regimes in the sub-complex this alliance has proven to be more effective throughout the Syrian Conflict. All three partners are inherently anti-Israel in their policies and military operations (Gelbart 2010). The Axis of Resistance is responsible for a power shift in the region of Middle East, because the growing regional power of Iran and its influence was enhanced by its alignment with the militarily powerful Hezbollah (Hokayem 2013: 123). The alliance was first tested in 2009, when elections and anti-government demonstrations in Iran threatened to oust President Ahmadinejad. At this time, of all the states in the Middle East, Syria was the only stood in support to Ahmadinejad regimes (Gelbart 2010). Now that the Syrian regime of Assad is threatened, Iran is returning the favour.

The only threat the alliance faces is from Turkey. However, due to close economic ties between Iran and Turkey, the threat is non-military (Schmidt 2019). The relations between Turkey and Russia also reduce the threat as Russia's back the current Syrian regime and Axis itself. As the Syrian Conflict enters its 9th year of bloodshed, the survival of the alliance is one to look out for. Nevertheless, this formidable alliance has set the tone for the regional order and security dilemma in the Middle East.

4.2.1 Pro-Assad states

IRAN

Iran has till date possibly been the biggest supporter of the Assad regime, since the Arab Spring reached Syria. Also known as the Islamic Republic of Iran, this regime is encircled by states whose policies are not in unison with Iran's, therefore making such states a threat to the current regime of Ayatollah Ali Khamenei (Schmidt 2019). In the wake of Arab Spring in Tunisia, Iran supported the opposition to the regime in the hope that this would lead to a new Islamist and anti West wave in Middle East. In 2015, Israeli prime minister pointed out that Islamic State and Iran are engaged in a war to prove who is more militant Islamist in their ways (Farhi 2017: 2). As we have seen Israel and Iran are in a proxy war themselves. Iran is engaged in two major conflicts in the Middle East, with Israel and Saudi Arabia.

The motto behind its strong support to Syria, is to avoid a regime in Syria that does not tend to all the needs of Tehran (Goodarzi 2013: 25). Iran's support to Syria is also driven by their own interests. Primary motive of Iran is to refrain the reinstating of a Sunni regime in place of Assad. Furthermore, Iran's conflict is with two pro-western states in the Middle East, whose military capabilities are seen as an offensive move by Iran. Namely the Iran-Israel conflict and Iran-Saudi Arabia conflict. Both of the pro-western states are also Anti-Assad as seen from chapter 4.2.

Hence in a subsequent reaction to this, Iran has developed relations with the militant Hezbollah which is a non-state actor in order for Iran to defend itself (Price 2013: 3). The unwavering

support of Iran to Assad's Syria is surprising because there is no unison to the national values between the two states nor are there any common strategic interests. Iran and Syria have neither common culture nor language (Gelbart 2010). However, like the minority Alawite community in Syria there exists a minority Shia community in Islam. Therefore, the Sunni Islamist organisation ISIS is a threat to Iran's regime as well (Schmidt 2019: 5; Price 2013).

It is also in Iran's national interest to support the Arab Spring in Egypt and Tunisia as the opposition called for a regime change. These regimes were pro-West which threatened the regime in Iran. Iran's regime is founded on Islamist values (Sadjadpour 2013: 11). This is in complete contrast to the support provided to the current Syrian regime. It is because the states in the Middle East align themselves with support that bolsters their own national interests. Syria is "golden ring of resistance against Israel", as claimed by Iran's former foreign minister. This is because Israel is pro-west and is engaged in a conflict with Syria over the Golan Heights as we have seen (Sadjadpour 2013: 11).

To quote Sadjadpour, "Without Iranian military aide and financial largesse, al-Assad's regime may have fallen long ago" (2013: 11). This is particularly true in Iran's successful efforts in recruiting Hezbollah's soldiers to fight Assad's war. Iran has also provided its own military to engage in war and aide Syrian regime in regaining its most important parts back from rebels. Iran has been successful in expanding its resources to Iraq, Afghanistan and Pakistan. Tehran has managed to convince local, non-professional soldiers from these regions to fight in the Syrian war most of whom are Shia muslims. This has been fruitful to Syria, as the financial funds were provided by the Islamic Revolutionary guard. It makes one question very apparent, why has Iran gone to such far lengths in ensuring Assad remains in power?

Iran and Syria's share a mutually beneficial relationship that is three decades old. In this time, although they have been divided on views they have always strategically stuck together and backed one another. The resilience that Assad's regime shows today comes from the support of Iran, both financially and militarily (Sadjadpour 2013).

Iran along with Hezbollah need an assurance of Syria continuing to be a part of the Axis of Resistance against Israel. One way to ensure this is fighting Assad's war for him. Assad also needs the support of his trusted allies i.e Iran and Hezbollah to maintain his level of influence in

Syria or even bolster it. Iran and Syria share a common enmity to Israel. The regional influence and global interference shifted when Trump pulled out troops from Syria, compelling Assad to depend on Iran and Hezbollah. The three parties now see it as a victory for their Axis of Resistance (Slim 2019).

The animosity between Iran and Israel is because of the Zionist population in Israel. It pertains to Iran's national interests to hold such a hatred for Israel. Another reason is Israel's illegal occupation of Golan Heights and the West Bank in addition to Palestine territories. This threatens the Islamist population living in the parts (Schmidt 2019: 5-6). This sub-security complex in the Middle East regional security complex is interesting because, Iran-Hezbollah-Syria all share one common interest and enemy i.e Israel. Iran's interest in Syrian conflict is deepened by the fact that Iran supplied Hezbollah with ammunition via Syria and Iraq. An anti-Iran regime in Syria will definitely jeopardize this (Schmidt 2019: 5-6). Syria has also been able to successfully prohibit Israel from attacking Iran.

An interesting pattern of this give and take amity between Iran and Syria is noticed. In the past, Assad has given free access to Iran in order to move people, weapons, and finances for its intermediaries in Middle East (Fulton et al. 2019: 9). Syria and Iran share a special relationship, wherein one is always the others backer or promoter (Hokayem 2013: 108).

While Iran has very high stakes in the outcome of the Syrian war, in the course of years leading up to the war Iranian regime has increasingly shown bias to Shiite Muslims in the region where Sunni's make up the majority. Iran's steady support to the Syrian regime for over three decades and firm backing to the Hezbollah does not bode well for this Islamist republic. It is increasingly becoming the enemy of the Sunni states in the region, specifically the Gulf states (Sadjadpour 2013: 13). Iranian leader Khameni, has been very vocal about supporting those in the region who are anti-Zionist. Thus a Sunni regime in Damascus also does not bode well for Iran, as there might be a change in the ideological view towards Israel if a Sunni leader takes place of Assad. A regime change will also mean fall of the 'Axis of Resistance', which has been the backbone of the current regime and of Iranian influence in the Middle East region (Sadjadpour 2013: 13). It is also important to note that among the durable role of Iranian policy in the Syrian Civil War, the Iranian regime has also faced financial losses and lost some political credibility while trying to

keep the Assad regime afloat (Goodrazi 2013: 6). The pro-Iran sentiment continues to grow even though it is still bleeding on the battleground to keep the Assad regime in charge (Reider 2013: 43-44).

HEZBOLLAH

Hezbollah or 'Party of God', is a political military organisation in Lebanon that represents the Shia Muslims in the state. In May 2013, when the Assad regime had incurred significant losses in Syria, Hezbollah officially intervened in the civil war. The death of Assad's brother-in-law is said to be a turning point which compelled Hezbollah to enter the war as a key player. Shia Muslims of Lebanon have a close affinity to the Alawite Muslims in Syria therefore Hezbollah is involved partially because of their sectarian rivalry against Sunni Muslims (Schmidt 2019: 10; Calculli 2017: 36)

Hezbollah, Iran and Syria are connected through 'Axis of Resistance' against a common conflict with Israel. Presence of Shiite Muslims among all three is also a common denominator that binds them together, even though Hezbollah is a non-state actor (Schmidt 2019: 10). Hezbollah's military intervention in Syrian war is largely due to its close relations with Iran, therefore consequently due to their support for the Assad regime. The military intervention enabled Hezbollah to create influence not only militarily but also ideologically in a weak state like Syria (31; Mohanad 2019: 8)

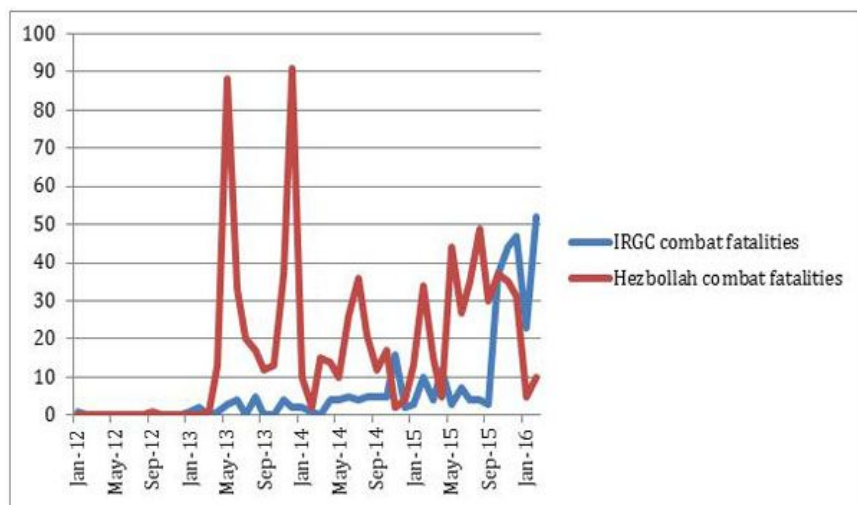
The forces were successful in acquiring the strategic areas that bordered Lebanon and Syria called the Qalamoun mountains. This has also been dubbed as a way of Hezbollah ensuring Syria's place in Axis of Resistance (Mohanad 2019; Schmidt 2019). Hezbollah's role is aiding Syria acquire its most important parts including Northern Syria has been very extensive. They have trained militias in Syria that are supportive of Assad's regime (Mohanad 2019: 9-10). It has gone to the lengths of recruiting foreign militias and members from Shia community in Syria and losing thousands of their own soldiers (Mohanad 2019; Schmidt 2019).

The involvement of Hezbollah is an Iranian decision, it is an attempt by the two major actors to refrain from letting an anti-Iran regime get hold of Syria in place of Assad's pro-Iran government. It is also a careful yet calculated move by the Iranian officials to carve a niche in

the Middle Eastern regional order, so as to increase and extend their influence in the region (Mohanad 2019; Schmidt 2019). Assad has been able to reconquer parts of Syria with assistance from Hezbollah. The non-state actor has been supplied by weapons and arms by Iran, even before the Syrian conflict. They have also received financial funding from Iran in addition to arms (Calculli 2019: 39).

Hezbollah's support to Assad is out of fear, as also claimed by the secretary general of Hezbollah Nasarallah, he says "if we do not go to fight them, they will come here." He refers to fighting "them" as a sectarian war against Sunni Muslims (Dacey 2013: 62). Hezbollah prefers current Syrian regime of Assad in order to avoid a regime that would oppose their existence in the region (Dacey 2013: 62). Hezbollah is an inherently Shiite Muslim militant organization.

The figure below shows the soldiers who died in the Syrian Conflict. IRGC is Iran's Revolutionary Guards Corps (Source: Ali Alfoneh 2016). From the image it is evident that there have been more Hezbollah casualties than Iranian soldiers, even though the decision to involve Hezbollah is Tehran's. The spike in deaths in May 2013, is due to the joint operation in city of Al-Qusayr by Syrian army and Hezbollah (ibid).



The matter of conflict with Israel is of key importance to both actors. In May 2013, Israel attempted to destroy the supply of weapons to Hezbollah as a way of reducing their military foothold in Syria. A pro Sunni regime would be harmful to the inherent existence of Hezbollah (Dacey 2013: 62-63). The attacks by Israel on Hezbollah, rivalry between Iran and Israel and the existence of the Axis of Resistance all are a proxy war being fought between Iran and Israel by

way of involving the militarily powerful Hezbollah and using the weak state of Syria to sort out their age old differences.

According to Schmidt, Hezbollah would much rather favor a regime in Syria that is not only legitimate but also provides stability to the region instead of Assad. If such a regime could also support Hezbollah's existence, their activities and fulfill its strategic interests in the state, Hezbollah is likely to shift its support (2019: 10). 'Party of God', has extended the stationing of its soldiers to the area of Golan Heights (Jonas & Markusen 2018: 5). Golan Heights is a complicated issue for both Syria and Israel as discussed in sub chapter 4.1. Hezbollah's intervention in Syrian war is of concern because of the way it has expanded. In the sense that they have trained local Shia citizens in arms use and combat, this will prove helpful to Hezbollah if the conflict between Iran and Israel becomes an armed war (Jonas & Markusen 2018: 5-6). The role of Hezbollah is therefore clear from the above information. Hezbollah is involved to secure the position of Syria in 'Axis of Resistance', to secure their route through which they receive weapons in Lebanon supplied by Iran, some are manufactured in Syria, to increase their establishment in the region of Middle East and contribute their bit to the sectarian war of Sunni-Shia Muslims. Hezbollah has also basically not paid heed to the 'non intervention' policy of the Lebanese government (Price 2013: p.3). Since the uprising broke out in Syria in 2011, Hezbollah has had its men on-ground to prevent the fall of Assad. At this time, Hezbollah concealed and denied its interference in the uprising under the guise of 'protecting ethnic Lebanese in Syria'. However, at the time Hezbollah was trying to prevent the spillover of Syrian rebel groups into the Lebanese border (Levitt and Zelin 2013: 14).

The role of Hezbollah in the Syrian uprising carries a significant *historical* aspect. The shrine of Sayyida Zaynab in southern part of the capital city of Damascus is a vital pilgrimage place for Shi'a Muslims in the region of Middle East. Shia's from all over the region visit the holy shrine. An FBI investigation of 1996, proved that this shrine serves the main purpose of recruiting Shia Muslims to Shia militant organizations like Hezbollah. Shia's living in Sunni majority states like Saudi Arabia, are recruited and trained to become militants for Hezbollah. Hence the excessive involvement of Hezbollah in the Syrian conflict can be explained (Levitt and Zelin 2013).

Hezbollah's power has proven to be very

instrumental in not only silencing the rebel forces in Syria but also the opposition and retaliation coming from Israel (Hokayem 2013: 125). At the break of the Syrian Conflict, Hezbollah denied involvement, however in the mid of 2012, there was a public burial for soldiers of Hezbollah who died fighting (Naharnet in Hokayem 2013: 38). Their presence also became evident when Hezbollah soldiers were seen guarding the warehouses that stored chemical weapons used in later by the Syrian regime and seen training in the southern part of Damascus (Hokayem 2013: 138). With Hezbollah's help, Syria has been able to engage in Lebanese politics by asserting any little influence it holds via its proxies in the Lebanese regime (Hokayem 2013: 132)

4.3 Analysis

The security complex referred to is the Middle Eastern RSC in which the Syrian Conflict is unfolding. The Syrian Conflict has called on the members of the security complex in the region of Middle East to come together to fight an external force. These external forces are in the form of ISIS, Assad regime, opposition forces and rebel groups. As we know from the theory chapter the process to fight an external force is called *securitization*. Hence the *states in the security complex* Turkey, Israel, Iran, Iraq, Saudi Arabia are all engaged in the process of securitization. An important aspect as seen from chapter 3 is *that the matters of national security of one state are also intertwined with other state as well* (Buzan & Wæver 2003). Hence when the external force threatened the actor Syria, it also threatened the other actors thus starting the process of securitization. Schmidt in 2019, has already characterized the region of Middle East as one that has anarchic structures. Thus the spill over of Arab Springs in Tunisia and Egypt had its effects on the weak and anarchic structure of Syria thus leading to the current Civil War.

From the above empirical data, the break of the Syrian Conflict started with calls for political reforms and later a full blown Civil War gave rise to another threat. The threat originated from the rebel groups and opposition forces to the Assad regime. Since the matters of national security cannot be separated, the threat here that is SNC, SoC, FSA and SNB as opposition and rebel groups also threatened the security in the allied areas of Syria, mainly Iran and Hezbollah.

As also seen from chapter 3.2, allied forces or actors sharing a pattern of amity tend to form a *security constellation* to start the process of securitization. Hence the allied forces in the Axis of Resistance is a *Security Community*. Iran, Hezbollah and Syria share a heavy pattern of amity. As seen from the empirical data, these allied forces always back one another, support and promote each others interests, therefore they are a security community.

The *pattern of amity and enmity* are largely visible throughout the empirical data. Firstly, Turkey functions on patterns of enmity in the Syrian Conflict. The role of Turkey to overthrow the Assad regime has its roots in Assad taking no note of Turkey's pressure to engage in political reforms to avoid the current situation. Also seen from chapter 3, is that *global powers penetrate the regional security dynamics via patterns of amity and enmity*. Here, the global power USA has penetrated the Syrian Conflict via their amicable relations with Turkey thus also calling for Assad to step down. Ankara's support to the Arab Springs is also a way of balancing power in the region of Middle East by way of their Anti-Assad role. According to the theory, *balance of power in the RSC is likely to happen through the process of securitization*. This balance of power can be seen as Turkey tried to exert influence by supporting the fall of Assad as part of the Arab Springs. Turkey's shift from supporting Assad in 2010 and 2011 to becoming anti-Assad is a form of an *internal change* that the regional security complex has witnessed. According to Buzan and Wævers prediction of change of an RSC, an *internal transformation* is likely via these patterns of amity and enmity.

Primarily as seen from Chapter 4, section 4.1 the role of Turkey is that of an insulator state. Therefore Turkey need not directly intervene when two states in RSC clash, that is the job of the buffer state. Turkey as an insulator state between MERSC and Europe, is actively engaged in the Syrian Conflict, which is unusual according to the designated role of insulator state.

Regional security complex theory, has stated Turkey to be an insulator state. The active involvement of Turkey in the Syrian civil war has however not prevented rivalries between the states in security complexes, instead aggravated them. The direct involvement of Turkey in Syrian conflict is in contradiction to the power of an insulator state. However, as seen from the theory section, the security complex in Middle east is anarchic hence it explains why Turkey would intervene. An attempt at establishing dominance, by supporting Arab Spring revolution

and involvement in the Syrian war, is a questionable role of an insulator state, given the non-interference role such a state needs to play according to RSCT. This also directly challenges the RSCT (Litsas et al. 2016).

Secondly, from the empirical data Israel's role in the Syrian Conflict is purely on *pattern of enmity* with Iran, Syria and Hezbollah. The isolation of Zionist Israel in an Islamist regional security complex has left Israel with *no pattern of amity*. Turkey and Israel's shared anti-Assad stand is not seen a pattern of amity but as a neutral relationship that will come together to fight only one common threat, thus it is not a part of any security constellation. However, the penetration of global power USA is also possible through patterns of amity shared between USA and Israel. The anti-Assad stand of the Israeli government can also be linked to the *enmity being historical*. As seen from the empirical data, the issue of the Golan Heights is a long standing war between Syria. This complex territorial dispute has its roots in a six day war in 1967. Thus proving Buzan and Wævers notion that patterns of enmity has historical aspects. Like Israel, Saudi Arabia's role is also understood as carrying a *historical enmity* with Iran because of growth of Iranian influence in the region. That said the shift in Saudi's attitude towards the Assad regime is again an *internal transformation* that changed from pattern of amity to enmity. However, the proxy war between Saudi Arabia and Iran over power of influence and regional hegemonic aspirations is a *historical pattern of enmity*.

From the three anti-Assad states, Turkey, Israel and Saudi- Arabia, we can use the merging of Buzan and Wendt's theory to explain security constellation. The three states are not amicable with one another however they all *negatively identify with the Assad regime* thus starting another *process of securitization* to fight the *threat i.e Assad regime* in a *conflict formation* type of constellation. As we also know that *power relations* is an important characteristic of the RSCT. Here, the power relations between all three anti-Assad states and Iran are linked by the author to their role in the Syrian Conflict. In order, to avoid a unipolar or bipolar balance of power in the hands of Iran and Syria, the three states choose to stand against Syrian regime, who share amicable relations with Iran. The role of Saudi Arabia can also be explained by their differentiating between *us* and *them* as seen from the theory. Saudis use 'us' as Sunni's to oppose

the 'them' in the Syrian Conflict that is Shia Muslims. The differentiating between 'us' and 'them' also true in Sunni rebel forces and Shia regime in Assad.

Similarly because of the *geographical proximity* of Turkey and Syria wherein, they share a border can be understood is to why Ankara is anti-Assad. As the adjacency is less between the two, Turkey wants to prevent a spill-over of Arab Springs within their boundaries thus, playing an Anti-Assad role to support democratic reforms.

The pro-Assad squad in brief is fighting to maintain their influence and keep Assad in power. During the course, both Iran and Hezbollah have faced financial and political loss and substantial loss of human life by sending soldiers to fight in the Syrian Conflict. Their role is tracked through their mutual dependence along the *strongest pattern of amity* that had emerged from the Conflict. The aims of all three members of the Axis of Resistance are interdependent. The author of the paper proposes to refer to *Axis of Resistance as a sub-complex* with the RSC of the Middle East. It is because the three allied forces are engaged in the process of securitization namely two in the case of Syrian Conflict. The first one is to fight rebel groups and opposition forces and the second process of securitization is against the Israeli. Thus both threats serving similar interests of the actors in this sub-complex i.e it to keep Assad in power.

Thus the characteristic of *maintenance of status quo* is visible in this sub-complex. Although this characteristic extends to entire security complex, the national security interests of Iran, Hezbollah and Syria are more intertwined than other members. The sub-complex has been consistent in backing one another whether it is their Pro-Assad stand or Syrian support to Iran during the questionable elections of 2009. The *geographical proximity* of Hezbollah to the Syri can be linked to their Pro-Assad stand and overall role in the Conflict. One of the aims is to prevent the Sunni islamist jihad spillover in the Lebanese boundary which is *adjacent to Syria*. As we also know that *pattern of amity is also likely to be interdependent in nature*, this can be linked to Iran's support to the Assad regime. Fall of the Assad regime, would mean spill over of a complete democratic transition and political reformation within the Iranian boundary.

Throughout the empirical data, there are *no signs of any external transformation*. That is nearby RSC's do not wish to merge with the Middle Eastern RSC. As we also know that the security

interaction is highest in standard RSC (Buzan & Wæver 2003: 67), the intense interaction of both Pro-Assad and Anti-Assad group is seen from the empirical data.

Each group intensifies their Syrian policy to reach one's aim. The empirical data shows that the *security dynamics in the Syrian Conflict are multipolar in nature*. Multipolar because power concentration is visible with Iran, Turkey and Israel where Iran is aligned with Assad thus also including Syria. According to the theory, *deseccuritization* is when a threat seems to be eliminated. Hence the process of *deseccuritization* was started by the united members when the threat from ISIS was eased but at the same time securitizing to eliminate the threat of the Assad regime (Anti-Assad) and threat of rebel and opposition groups (Pro-Assad).

Inter- regional securitization process as put forth by Buzan and Wæver (2003: 71-76) is seen in the inter regional conflicts of Israel- Iran and Iran-Saudi Arabia. These are also the *two most important patterns of emity seen* throughout the Syrian Conflict. The role of Israel and Saudi Arabia in Syrian Conflict is therefore along the lines of this pattern of enmity with Iran, who is allied with Syria.

The *security dilemma* along these patterns of enmity can be viewed by the way of military build up of Israel to protect Golan Heights while Hezbollah members are also stationed at the disputed territory. Saudi Arabia aiding the rebel forces and Turkey sheltering Muslim brother is also *security dilemma* to fight the Assad regime. It is a defensive measure on the part of Turkey, Saudi Arabia and Israel in Golan Heights to the offensive engagement of Assad's forces.

Intra- state security dilemma is visible in the sectarian war as FSA, SNC and Assad's forces engage in war to prevent the fall of the regime. Russia, a global power has also penetrated the Syrian Conflict via the pattern of amity it shares with Iran, thus also becoming pro-Assad. Iran and Hezbollah's policy in the Syrian Conflict can also be seen through the prism of historical amity like mentioned in the RSCT. Hezbollah's *historical amity* can also be linked to the protection they provided to The Shrine of Sayyida Zaynab.

Hence, throughout the analysis patterns of enmity and amity are very prominent.

5. CONCLUSION

The empirical data, its analysis and method of research has tried to answer *why is it important to map the role of Pro-Assad and Anti-Assad states to understand the difficulties in resolving the Syrian Conflict?* Based on the empirical data and its analysis the author concludes the following: From the research, it is deduced that the chosen regional actors hold high stakes in the outcome of the Syrian Civil War thus making them major actors. According to the author, the resolution of the Syrian Conflict would have come sooner rather the prolong delayed and bloodshed if the involved actors had indirect intervention rather an excessive direct one.

Turkey and Iran have the highest stakes in if the Syrian Conflict is resolved. It is the opportunity to become an ‘order-setter’ and exert more influence than the other actors.

By exploring the role of the divided states, it is also concluded that the national interests of each of the states under the two categories, *Pro-Assad and Anti-Assad* overtake the need to resolve the Syrian Conflict. That said, a war that has now lasted for eight years while collaterally leading to the largest humanitarian crisis is a sign of the Assad regime not willing to leave the position of power.

The theory of Regional Security Complex has been fulfilling in exploring the role of the Pro-Assad and Anti-Assad states. The theory successfully accounts for changes that have taken place and will take place anarchical system. However, the role of insulator and buffer states has considerably changed since 2006 formulation of the theory. These changes were noticed in the analysis of the active role of Turkey as an influencer. Nevertheless, the theory has been helpful in concluding the patterns of enmity and amity are the most visible in the Syrian Conflict. The author of this paper proposes to include ISIS, in the Levant sub-complex as well. As a non state actor it holds substantial influence in the Levant sub-complex.

The author also concludes that the Pro-Assad and Anti-Assad states have affected the security dynamics in the Syrian Conflict while also influencing the regional order. The resolution of the Conflict will have certainly effects on the regional order of Middle East, which is scope for research once the resolution is reached. On the basis of the analysis it is also concluded that

while exploring the role of the divided states, each is using the backdrop of the Syrian Conflict to exercise influence in the considerably weak parts of the region, like Syria. The Pro-Assad and Anti-Assad states have also taken this opportunity to battle out their historical differences thus delaying and challenging the resolution of the Syrian Civil War.

The inherent sectarian differences in the Middle East are most visible throughout research. The author concludes that the Syrian Conflict is largely a sectarian war being fought between Shia Muslims and Sunni Muslims to achieve a successor who will tend to their interests. Moreover, it is also one of the biggest difficulties to resolving the Syrian War, as the Pro-Assad group is Shia and the Anti-Assad group is Sunnis and Jews. The author also concludes that, fighting Islamist jihadist movements like ISIS united the states in the Middle East but it caused yet another divide between Turkey and Saudi Arabia on supporting Muslim Brotherhood and SNC both of which are opposed to Assad. Therefore, there will be difficulty in resolving the Syrian Conflict as along states like Turkey and Saudi Arabia will continue arm, fund and shelter extreme organisations like Muslim Brotherhood and Syrian Brotherhood.

The challenges to resolving the Syrian Conflict stem from the two groups not being able to agree on a resolution basically because losing Assad will affect and break the Axis of Resistance, while keeping Assad in power jeopardizes the national interests and security in Israel and harms the reputation, influential position of Turkey and Saudi Arabia. The complexity involved in resolving the Syrian Conflict lies in the hands of Syria but also with the Pro-Assad and anti-Assad states.

The pursuit for balance of power is inherent in the historical enmities that are being fought in the Syrian Conflict by the interference of the two groups. On the basis of the empirical analysis it may also be possible that the challenges to conflict resolution on the Syrian Civil War will be enhanced by the inclusion of the excluded Arab and Levant states. Their role is mostly secondary in comparison to Iran, Turkey, Israel, Saudi Arabia and Hezbollah. However unlikely that maybe, the author acknowledges that there may be some degree of change by analysing the role of such secondary states.

The author concludes from the analysis that the resolution of the Conflict will either favour the Shia Muslims or Sunni Muslims. This is also set the tone of future regional order of the Middle

East. Understanding the complexity and the role of the states in the Syrian Civil War also explains why the civil war is about to enter its 9th year in 2020. The author is also bold to conclude that the Assad regime is nowhere close to finding a resolution to end the long suffrage as there is little or no evidence of peace talks or negotiations.

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