6

Foreign Policy Vision

Abstract: It is possible to argue that there are many stakeholders involved in the ongoing Syrian civil war. The developments in the region concern a number of regional and global actors. Turkey is facing the repercussions of the spillover effect of the ongoing conflict whereas Lebanon is fearful of sectarian clashes in the country. The US, while holding that an intervention is necessary, avoids strong and decisive action. The EU, on the other hand, seems to be paying attention to the prospective state rather than the ongoing conflict itself. Despite this complex situation in the foreign policy realm, opposition groups do not have a clarified framework of foreign relations that will serve as guidance and a roadmap in their endeavors.

DOI: 10.1057/9781137538857.0011.
Regional and global powers in the Syrian crisis

For some inevitable factors such as security issues and humanitarian concerns, the domestic war in Syria has affected its neighboring countries and regional actors. The border clashes and intrusions, violations of the Turkish–Syrian border, the expansion of the sphere of influence of the PKK due to the instability in Syria, as well as the 1.5 million Syrian refugees in Turkey constitute the main source of concerns for Turkish foreign policy makers. Lebanon is particularly concerned about the spillover effect of the conflict, whereas Iran is fearful of losing its chief ally in the Arab world; Gulf countries, however, express concerns over the growing role and influence of Iran in the region in connection with the Syrian crisis.

Iranian–Syrian relations have improved tremendously since Hafeez Assad came to power in Syria; the Damascus administration that supported the 1979 revolution also sided with Iran in the Iran–Iraq War. The countries executed a strategic partnership agreement in 2004 and a defense treaty in 2006. Iran has paid great attention to Syria, which is controlled by a Nusayri minority, because it seeks to expand its sphere of influence under what is known as the Shia Crescent theory; for this reason, the fall of the Assad regime poses great uncertainties for Iran; in addition, Hezbollah in Lebanon favors the Assad regime for its own interests.

Turkey and the Gulf countries stress that the civil war in the country should end immediately because it has destabilized the region, and side with the opposition forces. In addition, all the countries in the region are interested in the preservation of the territorial integrity of Syria as well as its unitary state structure. The EU and other countries in the region have adopted a more active role and taken responsibility in the process of transformation in the Middle East, particularly because President Obama avoided military engagement and has paid more attention to the Asia-Pacific region. Although acknowledging that the grave situation in Syria calls for the taking of strong measures, Obama is reluctant to start a military offensive in the country. With respect to Libya, Obama said they secured action by the international community and had the consent of the Security Council; in addition, he also stressed that they started the military operation after it became evident that such an operation would be conclusive; Obama has also indicated that the situation in Syria is far more complicated. This statement offers insights into the probable