



ORF ISSUE BRIEF

JANUARY 2014

ISSUE BRIEF # 66

Geneva II: Breakthrough or Stalemate?

Kanchi Gupta

Introduction

The deadlock between the Assad regime in Syria and the opposition groups has plunged the country into a civil war—already in its third year. The involvement of radical Islamic groups, along with the military and financial support being provided by foreign powers to the warring sides, has resulted in no group achieving a clear military victory. Thus, the Western-initiated Geneva II dialogue for a political resolution to the crisis is critical for breaking this stalemate. UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon's last minute invitation to Iran put the conference in jeopardy as the Syrian opposition groups withheld their participation. The conference is now scheduled to go ahead as the invitation to Teheran has been withdrawn.

The tacit cooperation between US and Russia over Syria's chemical weapons has opened up the possibility of a political solution to the crisis. The Geneva II dialogue seeks to realise the objective of a political transition as outlined in the Geneva I Declaration. However, the document's ambiguity on the survival of the Assad regime remains the prime point of contention between all stakeholders. Infighting within the opposition coalition and the Assad regime's refusal to relinquish power are also impediments to the outcome of the dialogue. This Issue Brief outlines the trajectory of diplomatic dialogues leading up to Geneva II and the domestic realities that overshadow these initiatives.

The Geneva II conference on Syria is scheduled to be held at the Palais de Nations in Geneva on January 22. The objective of the conference is to bring the warring Syrian parties to the negotiation table and arrive at a consensus on the proposals of the Geneva I communiqué issued in June 2012. At Geneva I, the Action Group members identified measures necessary to implement a six-point plan put forth by UN-Arab League Joint Special Envoy, Kofi Annan. The plan would facilitate a political

Observer Research Foundation is a public policy think-tank that aims to influence formulation of policies for building a strong and prosperous India. ORF pursues these goals by providing informed and productive inputs, in-depth research and stimulating discussions. The Foundation is supported in its mission by a cross-section of India's leading public figures, academics and business leaders.

transition that meets the aspirations of the Syrian people through a Syrian-led political process. It was decided that the “transitional government body” could include members of the Syrian regime and opposition groups based on “mutual consent”.¹

The Geneva I dialogue was attended by the UN Secretary-General, The Secretary-General of the Arab League, the Ministers for Foreign Affairs of Russia, the United States, France, China, the United Kingdom, Turkey, Iraq, Kuwait, Qatar and the High Representative of the European Union.

Geneva I: The Onset of US-Russia Cooperation

Although the Geneva I deliberations marked the beginning of cooperation between world powers, particularly Russia and US, differences remain over Syria. Russia has been a staunch supporter of President Assad's regime and has vetoed UNSC resolutions that called for military action against the Syrian state aimed at regime change. The US on the other hand, has steadfastly held the Assad regime responsible for the brutalities of the war and retained the use of force as an option to resolve the crisis. The United States, which actively backed the opposition, also initiated the 'Friends of Syria' collective in 2012 to gather support for implementing a plan of regime change in the war-torn country.² Analysts and news commentators have contended that the Geneva I document is ambiguous on President Assad's role in the transitional body in order to take into consideration both the US and Russian positions.³

Lakhdar Brahimi, UN and Arab League envoy to Syria, said that “it is largely understood that 'governing body with full executive powers' clearly meant that the President would have no role in the transition”.⁴ US Secretary of State John Kerry agreed with this stance when he declared: “I don't think there is a difference of opinion that his leaving may either be inevitable or necessary to be able to have a solution”.⁵ The Russians, on the other hand, have refrained from commenting on this. Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said that “the document does not seek to dictate to the Syrian sides how the transition should happen politically”.⁶ They maintain that President Assad's exit must not be a precondition for the talks, even though it could be a possible outcome.⁷

In August 2013, the possibility of military strikes seemed imminent as the use of chemical weapons in Syria crossed the Obama administration's “red line”. However, President Obama acknowledged his reluctance to undertake military action and deferred the decision to a congressional vote.⁸ He then delayed the vote to consider a Russian proposal that called for Syria to surrender its arsenal of chemical weapons. Thus, Russian and American interests in the conflict overlapped and culminated into a tacit cooperation over resolving the Syrian impasse.

Regional Balance of Power: Implications for Syria

The US-Russian entente is a setback to the Sunni-Arab world that is opposed to President Assad's Shia-Alawite regime. The Arab world's policies towards Syria are largely driven by regional balance of

power concerns. The Sunni countries have always been concerned about the emergence of the 'Shia Crescent' and are, thus, keen on replacing Assad's pro-Iranian government with a Sunni-backed administration in Damascus. Countries like Qatar, Saudi Arabia and Turkey have provided considerable military and financial assistance to Sunni rebel groups in Syria and have called for military action against Damascus. They were convinced of Assad's ouster after the chemical weapons attack but the US-Russia chemical weapons deal is a strong indicator of the Obama Administration's disinclination towards unilateral action against the Assad regime. Moreover, Assad's cooperation with the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons accords him a certain degree of reprieve and international recognition. However, Prince Mohammed bin Nawaf, Riyadh's ambassador to the UK, is on record saying that “chemical weapons are but a small cog in Mr. Assad's killing machine”.⁹

Moreover, the Syrian opposition camp is deeply divided and fractious, and differences have also appeared within the Sunni-dominated members of the Arab League over the conflict. Thus, countries pressing for regime change have few options. The Arab league suspended Syrian membership after 18 of the Sunni-led member countries voted in favour of the suspension, Yemen and Lebanon opposed it and Iraq abstained.¹⁰ However, divisions appeared within member countries as Egypt, Iraq, Lebanon, Tunisia and Algeria expressed opposition to military intervention at the League's meeting in Cairo, shortly after the chemical weapons attack. The League has also been divided over support for the opposition coalition. While the League called the National Coalition of the Syrian Powers of Revolution and Opposition (NCSPRO) the “main interlocutor”,¹¹ Iraq, Lebanon and Algeria opposed the League's decision to accord the opposition coalition a seat. The GCC however, instantly recognised it as the “legitimate representative” of the Syrian people.¹²

The Syrian opposition has been weakened by Saudi Arabia and Qatar's battle for pre-eminence in the region. The United States and Saudi Arabia were concerned that Qatar was directly supplying weapons to the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood. However, Riyadh and Doha joined forces to fund the then main opposition group, the Syrian National Council (the SNC later became a prominent part of the National Coalition).¹³ Qatar-backed Ghassan Hitto's appointment as the shadow opposition government's Prime Minister was criticised by the US and Saudi Arabia due to his proximity to the Muslim Brotherhood and opposition to negotiations with the Assad regime. Hitto eventually resigned and was succeeded by Saudi-backed candidate, Ahmed Jarba (recently re-elected as leader of the national coalition).

Apart from funding the National Coalition allied Free Syrian Army (FSA), Saudi Arabia and Qatar have also supported different Islamist factions. This support, coupled with the rise of the extremist groups like the Islamic State of Iraq and Greater Syria (ISIS) and other Al-Qaeda affiliates, has complicated the Syrian war. These groups have undermined the cohesion of the Free Syrian Army and diverted its resources towards combating the radicals. Moreover, the United States has shied away from supporting the opposition coalition for fear of arms supplies being diverted to extremist groups.¹⁴

On one hand, Qatar has allegedly funded groups like the Ahfad al-Rasoul and the Farouq Brigade which have often clashed with the ISIS.¹⁵ On the other hand, Qatar-backed Al-Tawhid brigade has made attempts to negotiate between the ISIS and other splinter groups. On September 24, the Tawhid Brigade, the largest unit of the FSA, formed a new alliance with 10-12 other powerful factions including the Al-Qaeda affiliate, Jabhat al-Nusra. This 'Islamist Alliance' denounced the National Coalition and called for the creation of an Islamic State.¹⁶ Saudi Arabia too is allegedly funding a merger of rebel groups called the 'Army of Islam'. This group, comprising of 43 rebel factions, was formed a week after the 'Islamist Alliance' with the same mandate.¹⁷

The National Coalition's military wing, the Supreme Military Council, holds the West responsible for this disintegration. Their spokesman Louay al-Mokdad claims that the West's failure to deliver on its promises to provide assistance caused the groups to break away and look elsewhere for military support.¹⁸ The United States responded by saying that “a divided opposition benefits the Assad regime and opportunists who are using the conflict to further their own extreme agenda”. US aid will, however, take into account that alliances and associations often change on the ground.¹⁹

According to Prince Nawaf, the West is using “the threat of Al-Qaeda's terrorist operations in Syria as an excuse for hesitation and inaction. Al-Qaeda's activities are a symptom of the international community's failure to intervene”.²⁰ Newspaper reports quote Gulf officials as claiming that Saudi Arabia has expanded training facilities and arms supplies to the rebel groups. This expansion is a “parallel operation independent of US”²¹ in the aftermath of the chemical weapons deal.

The Opposition and Geneva II

These evolving dynamics have implications for the Geneva II Dialogue. Many of the rebel groups have rejected the peace conference. Zahran Alloush, the head of the 'Army of Islam' has said that “the coalition will be treated as our enemy, just the same as Bashar Assad's regime, if it decides to go to the Geneva II peace conference”.²² He added that the group would blacklist all the Geneva II participants, from the opposition and the regime. It has been contended that over 40 members of the coalition withdrew because of the NC's initial decision (now suspended) to participate in the conference.²³ These groups stated that the Coalition “abandoned the principles of the homeland and the revolution”.²⁴ The National Coalition had first refused and then consented to participate in the conference.

The Syrian National Council (SNC), the main group of the opposition coalition has also pulled out of the Geneva II talks, threatening a split in the National Coalition. George Sabra, the head of the SNC, has said that the Council will withdraw from the Coalition umbrella if it attends the peace conference. He added that “the international community has focused on the murder weapon, which is the chemical weapons, and left the murderer unpunished”. The Syrian National Coalition had suspended its decision to participate in the talks until a meeting on January 17. Michel Kilo, a member of the

Coalition, has said that SNC's decision reflects the general political mood of the Syrian opposition regarding the international stance towards the Syrian crisis. He added that the Geneva talks lack “any mechanism or vision for the negotiations”.²⁵ These developments point to the increasing ruptures within the western-backed opposition and are important considerations in the NC's decision on the Geneva talks. Now that the impasse over Iran's participation has been resolved, the National Coalition has agreed to attend the conference.

Iran and the Syrian Regime

The Geneva II deliberations are further complicated due to divergences over who should be invited. Iran's participation in the talks has been a big point of contention between stakeholders of the Syrian conflict. While the US, Saudi Arabia and Qatar are against Tehran's participation, Russia and the UN have pressed for Tehran's inclusion in the talks. Ban Ki-moon reiterated that “Iran can play a very important role. It is a very important regional power. Therefore, logically speaking, and practically and realistically, they should be part of this meeting”.²⁶

Iran has been the largest backer of the Assad government. Tehran has provided significant financial and military assistance to its long time ally and Iranian-backed Hezbollah forces are also openly engaged in defending the Assad regime. Saudi Arabia's opposition to Tehran's inclusion in the dialogue stems from its own geopolitical considerations. Riyadh fears that Iranian participation will be at the expense of its influence in the region—particularly if Tehran succeeds in facilitating a deal on the Syrian impasse. These concerns have been multiplied following the US-Iran nuclear deal and the possibility of the resurgence of Iranian clout in the region. Saudi Arabia faces a restive Shia-population in its oil-rich eastern provinces and fears the strengthening of the 'Shia Crescent' if the Assad regime survives.

The United States is also against Iranian participation because Tehran did not endorse the Geneva I framework. White House officials have said that for Iran to be able to participate in Geneva II, it must agree to the terms of Geneva I and “demonstrate that they would do things that would be less destructive in Syria”.²⁷ US Secretary of State John Kerry had earlier said that “Iran could play a constructive role”²⁸ in the talks and had also put forth the possibility of Tehran attending as an unofficial participant. However, Iranian Foreign Minister, Javad Zarif stressed that Iran will not accept any precondition for its presence at the conference.²⁹ Foreign Ministry Spokeswoman Marziyeh Afham added, “[Iran] would only accept proposals respecting its dignity.”³⁰ Iran has reiterated that it supports a political resolution to the stalemate in Syria.

Iran was extended an invitation after Ban Ki-Moon stated that he had been assured by Iran's Foreign Minister, Javad Zarif, of Tehran's support for a transitional government. He said that Zarif and I “agree that the goal of the negotiations is to establish, by mutual consent, a transitional governing body with full executive powers”. The US State Department maintained that Iran has never “publicly” stated its support for the communiqué.³¹

The Syrian regime has confirmed that it will participate in the talks and is likely to be represented by Foreign Minister Walid Muallem, according to Russian officials. The Syrian government has been firm on its stance towards the Geneva II negotiations. Syria's Deputy Foreign Minister, Faisal Al-Mokdad, has reiterated that no agreement can be reached without President Assad's approval. Refuting the opposition's demands that Assad must relinquish power for a transition to take effect, Al-Mokdad said that the Syrian government will not transfer power to the opposition.³²

Syrian Information Minister, Omran Al-Zoubi, further elucidated the position of the Syrian regime. According to him, the Geneva II dialogue should focus on reaching an agreement to end terrorism - backed by Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Turkey—the way to political authority must be through election ballots and not military means. President Assad too has said that he might run for re-election in 2014.³³ Al-Zoubi claims that the “[Geneva I] declaration indicates that both sides of the conflict can agree on forming a government. The government can make radical reforms and this in no way tarnishes the President of Syria”.³⁴ This points towards the lack of clarity in the Geneva I declaration on Assad's role in the transitional body.

Obstacles to Geneva II

The Geneva talks were originally scheduled to take place in November 2012. They were delayed because of a deadlock between the opposition and the Syrian regime as well as differences between the great powers. The warring parties, owing to their contradictory stances towards the negotiations, refused to commit their participation. The opposition had refused to take part as long as there was a possibility of Assad retaining power. President Assad, at his end, insisted that foreign support towards arming rebels must end and he would not negotiate with an armed opposition.³⁵

The US and Russia were also divided over the opposition representation. The US announced that a single delegation of the opposition, the NC, should be the legitimate representative. Russia on the other hand favoured the participation of several delegations of opposition factions. Lakhdar Brahimi, UN envoy, also appealed for broader participation from the opposition forces beyond the National Coalition.³⁶ The Arab League too, endorsed the participation of an opposition delegation under the NC banner led by Ahmed Jarba.³⁷

On January 12, 2014 Secretary Kerry participated in a meeting with the Friends for Syria³⁸ group with the prime objective of urging the opposition to attend Geneva II. The humanitarian situation, prisoners' exchange and the possibility of a ceasefire were also some of the issues discussed.³⁹ News reports quoted Kerry as calling for the Syrian regime to “enact local ceasefires”⁴⁰; he indicated that the opposition was prepared to consider prisoner exchanges.

The United States however, slammed the Assad government's proposals for a ceasefire and opening humanitarian corridors. Senator Kerry insisted that these proposals were a ploy to divert attention away from a political resolution by emphasising on the importance of combating terrorism and

“trying to make himself the protector of Syria against extremists”.⁴¹ He accused Assad of funding some hardline groups in order to challenge the rebels. In his remarks to the press, Kerry said that “we too are deeply concerned about the rise of extremism” but “it defies logic to imagine that those whose brutality created this magnet (for jihadists and extremists), how they could ever lead Syria away from extremism and towards a better future”.⁴²

President Assad has rejected the distinction between jihadists and rebel factions. He said that regardless of western labels, “we are now fighting one extremist terrorist group comprising various factions”. He insisted that the Geneva II talks should focus on “war against terrorism” and ruled out sharing power with the opposition. Opposition groups are backed by foreign states and their representation in the government would mean “participation of each of those states in the Syrian government”⁴³, he asserted.

Even though most European countries have maintained their position on the Assad government, Syria’s deputy foreign minister, Faisal Mokdad, claims that there is a “schism” between security officials and political leaders over this matter in several western countries.⁴⁴ He corroborated this by claiming that western intelligence agencies are seeking cooperation with the Assad regime on counterterrorism. These comments come in light of increasing concern over ‘westerners’ joining the war in Syria. According to news reports, American and European intelligence agencies estimate that at least 1200 westerners have joined rebel groups in Syria, including those affiliated to Al Qaeda.⁴⁵

French Foreign Minister, Laurent Fabius said “there will be no political solution for Syria unless Geneva II meets”. This is symptomatic of the efforts amongst great powers to bring all sides of the Syrian conflict to the negotiating table and facilitate a political resolution. Cooperation between United States and Russia has opened up space for negotiations between the opposing sides. However, the domestic realities of the Syrian conflict undermine the prospect of a political solution. Deep divisions within the moderate and extremist elements of opposition groups are an obstacle to the political process. The opposition coalition fears the possibility of losing its credibility amongst the rebel groupings if it negotiates with government representatives. The ambiguity surrounding President Assad's role in the transitional administration exacerbates this fear. Secondly, the Syrian government has out-rightly rejected any solution that involves surrendering power. Thirdly, regional powers like Saudi Arabia and Iran are polarised in their positions towards the conflict. They continue to provide financial and military support to the warring parties and, hence, complicate the process of resolution.

India at Geneva II

India's policy towards Syria has been defined by a number of competing imperatives. While India has always maintained good relations with the Assad regime in Damascus, New Delhi also has strong relations with the GCC and other Arab states that are currently hostile to Syria. India has chosen to remain unbiased towards the conflict, condemning violence irrespective of the perpetrator. New

Delhi has also maintained that it is against military action intended towards regime change without UN authorisation. India's involvement in the crisis includes supplementing international efforts to destroy Syria's stockpile of chemical weapons. One million dollars have been pledged towards this mission.

During Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's visit to Russia in October, Moscow announced its intention of nominating India to participate in the Geneva II conference scheduled for January 22. India has been included in the final list of attendees and MEA officials recently visited Syria to prepare for their participation. They met with government representatives as well as the head of the opposition's umbrella group, the National Coordination Committee for Democratic Change (NCC).⁴⁶ It is important to note that some opposition coalitions are against the NCC's approach to the conflict. The NCC has called for economic sanctions as a means of putting pressure on the regime, but simultaneously advocated a dialogue with President Assad.⁴⁷

India and Syria's bilateral relationship goes back over 50 years, strengthened by Prime Ministers Jawahar Lal Nehru and Atal Bihari Vajpayee and then President Pratibha Patil having visited the country during their tenures, and Assad's visit to India in 2008. India's relationship with Syria is also defined by traditional empathy for Arab Ba'athists and the secularism they represent. President Assad has time and again reiterated his commitment to secularism in Syria and deemed religious extremism as the greatest threat to the security of his country. India's own battle with religious radicalism has added to concerns about the involvement of extremist groups like Al-Qaeda as part of the rebel factions.

India has condemned the violence and human rights violations in the Syrian civil war and emphasised an inclusive peace process that involves all warring parties. New Delhi has, therefore, refrained from taking sides in the conflict but instead held both, the regime and the rebels, responsible for the violence. This was exemplified as it abstained from the UNSC resolution in October 2011 that condemned Assad's violent crackdown on pro-democracy protesters. Hardeep Puri, India's permanent representative to the UN clarified that India abstained because the resolution “does not condemn the violence perpetrated by the Syrian opposition”.⁴⁸ India also abstained from voting at the UN General Assembly resolution that called for President Assad to step down and all UN states to sever relations with Syria.

However, India voted in favour of the Security Council's draft resolution that would implement elements of the peace plan set out by the Arab League in February 2013. Indian officials said that the resolution was supported only after concerns of regime change, sanctions and military intervention were addressed. They insisted that nothing in the draft resolution called for regime change and certain details of the Arab League peace proposal were deleted before India (and some other Council members) decided to support it.

India has therefore, maintained that any armed action aimed at regime change, without UN authorisation, would be a violation of international law. As the news of the use of chemical weapons in Syria broke out, India immediately insisted that it opposes unilateral action by the United States. As a signatory of the Organisation for the Prevention of Chemical Weapons, New Delhi could not remain silent on the matter but Foreign Minister Salman Khurshid said that “I don't think we can support any action that is not endorsed by the UN”.⁴⁹

India's emphasis on a peaceful transition was reiterated through the IBSA initiative wherein India, Brazil and South Africa sent a joint delegation to Damascus to engage with the Syrian government. The IBSA Joint Communiqué declared, in September 2013, commitment to a Syrian-led political process that respects Syrian independence, territorial integrity and sovereignty. At the Non Aligned Movement (NAM) summit hosted by Iran in 2012, Prime Minister Singh affirmed his opposition to foreign intervention. “India supports popular aspirations for a democratic and pluralistic order” but “such transformations cannot be prompted by external intervention”.⁵⁰

India's energy interests in the Gulf States also dictate its policies towards the region. India currently imports more than 83 per cent of its crude oil and 70 per cent of its natural gas requirements. Saudi Arabia is India's largest oil supplier (followed by Iran, Iraq and the UAE), Qatar is the largest supplier of gas and over 5 million Indian expatriates are employed in the Gulf region. India has also increased engagement with the region through investments, infrastructure and defence cooperation.

India also has good relations with Iran, the Assad regime's strongest backer. In response to sanctions on Iran, India had reduced crude imports from Iran by 26 per cent but with the rupee's fall, New Delhi has been compelled to review its policy. India now proposes to import 11 million tonnes of crude from Iran in order to save \$8.5 billion in foreign exchange as Tehran has agreed to accept payment in rupees. Iran also provides India access to Afghanistan.

India has, therefore, balanced competing imperatives by displaying neutrality towards the conflict at international conventions and undertaking diplomatic initiatives like the IBSA forum. New Delhi's position on the Syrian conflict has largely emanated from a non-aligned perspective. Russian authorities also added that India's nomination to Geneva II was not an attempt to get a partner at the negotiation table, but to invite an influential power that has remained unbiased through the conflict. Therefore, India is in a position to use the Geneva II platform to push for an inclusive political dialogue and address its growing concerns over the conflict.

Endnotes:

1. Action Group for Syria Final Communique, July 30, 2012 ([http://www.un.org/News/dh/infocus/Syria/Final Communique Action Group for Syria.pdf](http://www.un.org/News/dh/infocus/Syria/Final%20Communique%20Action%20Group%20for%20Syria.pdf))
2. Irish, John 'France, partners planning Syria crisis group: Sarkozy', Reuters, February 4, 2012 (<http://www.reuters.com/article/2012/02/04/us-syria-france-idUSTRE8130QV20120204>)
3. Borger, Juilan 'Russia and US in Geneva talks over future of Syria', The Guardian, December 9, 2012 (<http://www.theguardian.com/world/2012/dec/09/russia-us-geneva-talks-syria>)
4. Black, Ian 'Can a new Syria peace conference in Geneva stop the worsening crisis?' The Guardian, October 22, 2013 (<http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2013/oct/22/can-syria-peace-conference-geneva-stop-crisis>)
5. Aronson, Geoffrey 'Geneva document key to end Syria stalemate', Al-Monitor, April 28, 2013 (<http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2013/04/geneva-agreement-syria-solution.html>)
6. 'Annan: Russia, West agree on transition government for Syria, Russia Today, June 30, 2012 (<http://rt.com/news/syria-summit-geneva-annan-115/>)
7. 'How about diplomacy: Russia and America try a bit of jaw-jaw', The Economist, May 25, 2013, (<http://www.economist.com/news/middle-east-and-africa/21578443-russia-and-america-try-bit-jaw-jaw-how-about-diplomacy>)
8. 'Remarks by the President in address to the Nation on Syria', The White House, September 10, 2013 (<http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2013/09/10/remarks-president-address-nation-syria>)
9. Al Saud, Mohammed bin Nawaf, 'Saudi Arabia will go it alone', The New York Times, December 17, 2013 (<http://www.nytimes.com/2013/12/18/opinion/saudi-arabia-will-go-it-alone.html>)
10. MacFarquhar, Neil 'Arab League votes to suspend Syria over crackdown', New York Times, November 12, 2011 (<http://www.nytimes.com/2011/11/13/world/middleeast/arab-league-votes-to-suspend-syria-over-its-crackdown-on-protesters.html?pagewanted=all>)
11. 'Arab League divided over support of nascent Syrian coalition', Russia Today, November 13, 2012 (<http://rt.com/op-edge/arab-opposition-coalition-syria-558/>)
12. 'Syrian crisis: guide to armed and political opposition', BBC News, October 17, 2013 (<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-15798218>)
13. For more details on the Syrian opposition see 'Syrian crisis: guide to armed and political opposition', BBC News, October 17, 2013 (<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-15798218>)
Entous, Adam, Malas, Nour and Coker, Margaret 'Veteran Saudi power play works to build support to topple Assad', The Wall Street Journal, April 25, 2013 (<http://online.wsj.com/news/articles/SB10001424127887323423804579024452583045962>)
14. Afanasieva, Dasha and Pamuk, Humeyra 'US, Britain suspend aid to north Syria after Islmaists seize weapons store', Reuters, December 11, 2013 (<http://www.reuters.com/article/2013/12/11/us-syria-crisis-usa-idUSBRE9BA08820131211>)
15. Weinberg, David Andrew 'Saudi Arabia, Qatar may be playing dangerous game over Syria rebels', CNN World, October 25, 2013 (<http://globalpublicsquare.blogs.cnn.com/2013/10/25/saudi-arabia-qatar-may-be-playing-dangerous-game-over-syria-rebels/>)
16. Deyoung, Karen and Sly, Liz 'Largest Syrian rebel groups form Islamic Alliance in possible blow to US influence', The Washington Post, September 25, 2013 (http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle_east/largest-syrian-rebel-groups-embrace-islamic-alliance-in-possible-blow-to-us-influence/2013/09/25/f669629e-25f8-11e3-9372-92606241ae9c_story.html)
17. Weinberg, David Andrew 'Saudi Arabia, Qatar may be playing dangerous game over Syria rebels', CNN World, October 25, 2013

(<http://globalpublicsquare.blogs.cnn.com/2013/10/25/saudi-arabia-qatar-may-be-playing-dangerous-game-over-syria-rebels/>),

Hassan, Hassan 'The Army of Islam is winning in Syria' Foreign Policy, October 1, 2013 (http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2013/10/01/the_army_of_islam_is_winning_in_syria#sthash.NvHucR65.dpbs)

Sayigh, Yezid 'Unifying Syria's rebels: Saudi Arabia joins the fray', Carnegie Middle East Center, October 28, 2013

18. Deyoung, Karen and Sly, Liz 'Largest Syrian rebel groups form Islamic Alliance in possible blow to US influence', The Washington Post, September 25, 2013 (http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle_east/largest-syrian-rebel-groups-embrace-islamic-alliance-in-possible-blow-to-us-influence/2013/09/25/f669629e-25f8-11e3-9372-92606241ae9c_story.html)
19. Ibid
20. Al Saud, Mohammed bin Nawaf, 'Saudi Arabia will go it alone', The New York Times, December 17, 2013 (<http://www.nytimes.com/2013/12/18/opinion/saudi-arabia-will-go-it-alone.html>)
21. Deyoung, Karen and Woodward, Bob 'Syrian Conflict: Persian Gulf officials tired of waiting for US move to boost aid to rebels', The Washington Post, November 3, 2013 (http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/syrian-conflict-persian-gulf-officials-tired-of-waiting-for-us-move-to-boost-aid-to-rebels/2013/11/02/af0c8554-4324-11e3-8b74-d89d714ca4dd_story.html)
22. Sayigh, Yezid 'Unifying Syria's rebels: Saudi Arabia joins the fray', Carnegie Middle East Center, October 28, 2013
23. 'Islamic Front to blacklist Geneva II participants', Zaman Alwsl, January 7, 2014 (<http://zamanalwsl.net/en/news/3175.html>)
24. Sayigh, Yezid 'Unifying Syria's rebels: Saudi Arabia joins the fray', Carnegie Middle East Center, October 28, 2013
25. Rahal, Loyal Abu 'Syrian opposition faces split over Geneva peace talks', Asharq Al-Awsat October 14, 2013 (<http://www.aawsat.net/2013/10/article55319193>)
26. 'Iran's participation in Geneva II conference logically important', Kuwait News Agency December 23, 2013 (<http://www.kuna.net.kw/ArticleDetails.aspx?id=2352024&Language=en>)
27. 'Iran rejects sideline involvement in Geneva II talks', Russia Today, January 6, 2013 (<http://rt.com/news/iran-syria-geneva-peace-250/>)
28. 'Kerry: Iran could help secure peace in Syria', The Times of Israel, January 5, 2014-01-15(<http://www.timesofisrael.com/kerry-iran-could-help-secure-peace-in-syria/>)
29. 'Zarif: Iran will not accept any precondition for presence in Syria confab', Islamic Republic of Iran Ministry of Foreign Affairs, January 7, 2014 (<http://www.mfa.gov.ir/?siteid=3&siteid=3&pageid=1997&newsview=273539>)
30. 'Afkham: Iran only accepts proposals respecting its dignity', Islamic Republic of Iran Ministry of Foreign Affairs, January 6, 2014 (<http://en.mfa.ir/index.aspx?siteid=3&pageid=2021&newsview=273339&pro=nobak>)
31. Iran receives UN's Geneva II invitation: Official, Press TV, January 20, 2014 <http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2014/01/20/346656/iran-confirms-uns-geneva-ii-invitation/>
32. 'Syrian government remains defiant on Geneva II', Asharq Al-Awsat December 2, 2013 (<http://www.aawsat.net/2013/12/article55324234>)
33. Assad inherited power from his father in 2000 and was confirmed in an election in which he ran unopposed. He was re-elected in 2007. The Assad family has ruled Syria for more than 40 years
34. Dara, Dilbikhin and Bahlawi, Dilxaz 'Syrian Minister: We are not going to Geneva to hand over power', Rudaw, December 17, 2013 (<http://rudaw.net/english/interview/17122013>)
35. 'No Geneva II Syria peace summit this month, Russian media reports, CBS News, November 5, 2013 (<http://www.cbsnews.com/news/no-geneva-ii-syria-peace-summit-this-month-russian-media-reports/>)

36. 'Brahimi demands opposition for wide participation in Geneva II, not only Coalition, Zaman Alwsl, November 26, 2013 (<http://zamanalwsl.net/en/news/2648.html>)
37. 'Arab League urges Assad, opposition to meet in Geneva for peace talks', The Jerusalem Post, November 4, 2013 (<http://www.jpost.com/Middle-East/Arab-League-urges-Assad-opposition-to-meet-in-Geneva-for-peace-talks-330563>)
38. The Friends of Syria nations - US, Britain, France, Germany, Italy, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Egypt and Jordan – group of countries who support the Syrian opposition
39. 'Background briefing of Secretary Kerry's trip to Paris and Kuwait City', US Department of State, January 10, 2014 (<http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2014/01/219563.htm>)
40. 'The new pulse – Geneva II', Al-Monitor, January 12, 2014 (<http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/ar/contents/articles/originals/2014/01/week-in-reviewgeneva-ii.html>)
41. 'Kerry slams Syria ceasefire offer', Al Jazeera, January 18, 2014 <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2014/01/kerry-slams-syria-regime-ceasefire-offer-2014117152551217128.html>
42. Remarks to Press by John Kerry, January 16, 2014 <http://www.state.gov/secretary/remarks/2014/01/219915.htm>
43. Moussaoui, Rana and Ketz, Sammy 'Syria's Assad expects to run again, rejects power deal', AFP January 20, 2014 http://www.google.com/hostednews/afp/article/ALeqM5i8dCOYdukO6x1B9DEE07mFAWg9_A?docId=204db838-90ac-4881-903f-bca04f68b71f
44. 'Syria donors conference raises more than \$2.4 b', The Nation, January 16, 2014 [http://www.nation.com.pk/international/16-Jan-2014/syria-donors-conference-raises-more-than-\\$2.4b](http://www.nation.com.pk/international/16-Jan-2014/syria-donors-conference-raises-more-than-$2.4b)
45. Smale, Alison 'Flow of westerners to Syria prompts security concerns', The New York Times, January 15, 2014 <http://www.nytimes.com/2014/01/16/world/middleeast/syria-western-intelligence-cooperation.htm>
46. See footnote 40
47. Aneja, Atul, 'Iran for bigger Indian role in Syria', The Hindu, May 6, 2013 (<http://www.thehindu.com/news/international/world/iran-for-bigger-indian-role-in-syria/article4689493.ece>)
48. Slim, Randa, 'Meet Syria's opposition', Foreign Policy, November 2, 2011 (http://mideastafrica.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2011/11/02/meet_syrias_opposition)
49. Sharma, Rajeev 'Behind India's Syria Diplomacy', The Diplomat, October 5, 2011
50. Bhaumik, Subir, 'South Asian Nations oppose US strike in Syria', Al Jazeera, September 3, 2013
51. Amrutha, Gayathri, 'NAM sharply divided on Syria: Egypt supports rebels while India opposes intervention', International Business Times, August 31, 2012 (<http://www.ibtimes.com/nam-sharply-divided-syria-egypt-supports-rebels-while-india-opposes-intervention-760417>)

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Kanchi Gupta is a Junior Fellow at Observer Research Foundation, New Delhi. She is pursuing research on the on-going political developments in West Asia.



Observer Research Foundation,
20, Rouse Avenue, New Delhi-110 002
Phone: +91-11-43520020 Fax: +91-11-43520003
www.orfonline.org email: orf@orfonline.org