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Local Councils in Syria During the Civil War

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İç Savaş Sırasında Suriye'de Yerel Konseyler

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to analyse the formation process of the local councils established by the opposition groups during the Syrian civil war and how domestic dynamics as well as regional and international actors limited the operational capacity of these local councils. This study will primarily discuss basic characteristics of the local councils and their relations with civil society and non-governmental organizations. Then it will highlight the regional and international factors which have been decisive in shaping the fragmented structure of Syrian opposition. This study aims to demonstrate that the local councils in Syria have been negatively influenced by lack of coordination and harmony among the opposition groups and foreign interference. Because of these limitations, the local councils cannot overcome the security concerns and provide peace and stability.

Key words: Syria, Civil War, Local councils, Opposition Groups, Fragmentation, Foreign Interference, Syrian humanitarian crisis, Human rights violation, Syria opposition.

Özet

Bu çalışmanın amacı, Suriye iç savaşı sırasında muhalefet gruplarının kurduğu yerel konseylerin oluşum sürecini ve yerel dinamikler ile bölgesel ve uluslararası aktörlerin bu yerel konseylerin operasyonel kapasitesini nasıl sınırladığını incelemektir. Bu çalışmada öncelikle yerel konseylerin temel özellikleri ve sivil toplum ve sivil toplum kuruluşları ile ilişkileri tartışılacaktır. Ardından, Suriye muhalefetinin parçalı yapısını şekillendirmede belirleyici olan bölgesel ve uluslararası faktörleri vurgulayacaktır. Bu çalışma, Suriye'deki yerel meclislerin muhalefet grupları arasındaki koordinasyon ve uyum eksikliğinden ve dış müdahaleden olumsuz etkilendiğini göstermeyi amaçlamaktadır. Bu sınırlamalar nedeniyle yerel konseyler güvenlik kaygılarının üstesinden gelemiyor, barış ve istikrar sağlayamıyor.

Anahtar kelimeler: Suriye, İç Savaş, Yerel meclisler, Muhalefet Grupları, Parçalanma, Dış Müdahale, Suriye insani krizi, İnsan hakları ihlali, Suriye muhalefeti.

SECTION ONE

INTRODUCTION

Since the beginning of the civil war in Syria in 2011, the local regions in control of the opposition are bereft of the control from the center and any governance system. The central government of Damascus can no longer exercise their control in the regions that are in the hands of the opposition and the rebellions. The concept of developing the local council as a force responsible for organizing the citizens and their influence was introduced in the year 2011 by Omar Aziz. The circulation and acceptance of his ideas was observed among the Syrian activists and the newly established Syrian National Council. The resultant breakthrough of this acceptance took place in January 2012 with popular tourist suburb in Damascus, Al Zabadani establishing a local council comprising of about 30,000 citizens. With the evolution of wars and the escape of various towns from the hands of the regime, numerous cities across Syria started following the example set by Al Zabadani. The absence of a governance structure resulted in the formation of local councils that were established either by the local citizens or by the rebellious groups. These were formed by getting the support of the regional population or from some international assistance. The support received from the international bodies and the countries was helpful in ensuring stability in these regions and providing the required support and legitimacy to the local councils. This thesis aims to discuss the reasons for why the local councils in Syria failed to establish order and stability and how international interference, including those of pro-opposition actors, hampered the efforts the local councils. This study puts forward two local council examples of Aleppo and Idlib to analyze the primary reasons for failure of the local councils in general.

The importance of this topic lies in explaining the roles of the local government and its benefits established and activated by the oppositions in Syrian areas. Moreover, this study highlights the role of the international intervention, the important factor of the failure of the local council which was shy mentioned in many previous studies of their impacts on the effectiveness of the local councils. Clarifying the role of international interventions in the two case studies of Idlib and Aleppo with its complexities contributes to understanding the local political dynamics in Syria in the areas controlled by oppositions during the civil war.

In order to understand the definition of local councils we need to understand the concept of local government. Local government indicate to particularly institutions created by state constitution like US and Australia, or by national constitutions like France and Brazil or by

the legislation of a higher level of central government like the UK and New Zealand and most of the countries, or by provincial or state legislation like Pakistan and Canada or executive order like China to provide a range of specific services to a relatively small area. Local government is a broader concept, and it is defined as the formulation and execution of collective action at the local level. Local government has direct and indirect roles of formal institutions of local government and government hierarchies as well as the roles of informal norms, community organizations, networks, and neighborhood associations in pursuing collective action by defining the framework of citizen-citizen and citizen-state interactions, collective decision making and delivery of public services. Local government concept is not new, but it is as old as the history of humanity, recently scholars give their attention to local government broad discourses at the academic level. The focus of the local government came to re-examine the relationship between the stat the citizen (Anwar Shah 2006).

Local government of any region is a system formulated with the elected members that are the representative of their communities. These local government officials are responsible for the decision making on the behalf of the larger community. There is no single globally accepted and precise definition of the administrative law but it is rationally used to define and determine the responsibilities, functions, duties and composition of the authorities who carry out the administration and maintain the relationship between the local representatives, the non-government bodies and the citizens. There are numerous factors that are taken into consideration when defining the local government and their decision making (Ndreu, 2016).

In order to effectively answer the research question, it is important to understand the definition and the role played by the local government. Dele Olowu states that local government formulation is a result of the devolution and it facilitates decentralization of the control. There are two distinct approaches identified by him. The first approach is generally followed for carrying out comparative studies. It regards the local government as national structures that fall below the central government. The second approach highlighted by him identifies the local government as an institution having its own legal personality and the defined powers for its officials. These local governments are responsible for carrying out numerous functions and have a substantial budget and complete autonomy for taking staffing decisions. Therefore, as an institution, local government are perceived to be independent and have limited central control. The local nature of the authority and citizen partnership distinguishes it from the other local institutions and ensures that it is continuously operating in an effective manner (Olowu, 1988).

However, the essential features that have highlighted in the definition can be misleading because not every local government facilitates effective partnership by the citizens. The lack of clarity in defining citizen participation also adds to the misleading nature of this definition. Citizen partnership and its perception vary from one region to the other. While some areas may determine the electoral participation of the citizens as effective participation, others may require inputs from the citizens in the decision-making process. The definition by William A. Robson grants a legal perspective to local government (Robson, 1937). According to this definition, the formation of local government is the construction of a non-sovereign territorial community that possesses the legal right, authority and the organization to carry out the regulation of its day to day affairs. Therefore, the existence of local government is in the form of a local authority that has the power to independently act and exercise external control for the administration of the affairs carried out on its own.

G. L. Gomme delivered lectures about the principles of local government in the year 1987. In these lectures, he defines the local government as a part of the national government administered by the central authorities. According to his definition, the local government is subordinate to the national authorities. However, this body is elected independently by the people belonging to the community who are qualified residents. The communities found for the local government are constituted by the people having either a common history or some common interests (Haque, 2012).

The definitions by Gomme and Robson highlight the independence of the local government. However, the local government is not always an independent body functioning without any authority or control from the central government. There only provided with relative autonomy as the responsibilities are distributed among the different bodies. The link between the state government and local government is defined by their dependency and their relationship. Heymans & Totemeyer have presented the pre-conditions that determine the success of the interdependence between the local and the state government (Freysen, 2008). These include a strong system developed for the local government in an environment that is democratic. These conditions also state that the local government should be given permission to significantly fulfill its role as a contributor to the regional and national growth and development. The distribution of the financial resources between the local, regional and central governing bodies should be carried out fairly. Same holds true for the distribution of the human resources across the different levels of government. There should be a balance between the local and the central government and a formal approach for assessing their responsibilities and tasks. The relationship between the various levels of government can also

be evaluated by assessing the flow of information and its accuracy. Both the local and the central government hold a responsibility to provide adequate consultation to each other whenever required. The citizens should be provided equal opportunities for participation without any discrimination and irrespective of their gender and race. This helps in extending the power of democracy to all levels of governance. Politically and socially harmonious relationship should be maintained and the link between the different levels of government should be based on the values of honesty and mutual trust. The legal relations between the central government, regional government and local government should be clearly defined and the local government should have the necessary resources to guide and influence the decision making by the central government.

The definition of local government given by Marshall is relatively more dynamic and identifies the distinctive features of local government. As a cornerstone of the democratic political system, local government is the vehicle that makes citizenship more responsible and intelligent (Bolatito & Ibrahim, 2014). The distinctive characteristics of the local government about their selection for election for the restricted geographical area and the level of autonomy granted to it are discussed in this definition. He states that the local government as the democratic units' exercise in governments across the democratic system. 20 units are subordinate to the central government but are vested with the governmental powers in a controlled and prescribed environment. The local government has a prescribed source of revenue and is responsible for rendering local services to the community. It is also the responsibility of the local government towards controlling, regulating and developing the economic and social well-being of the community belonging to the designated geographical area. The political and economic bodies have defended and propagated the development of local government as it plays a crucial role in intensifying the mass participation of the citizens and promotes political democracy. The most significant reason for developing a local government system is to increase the accountability of the government bodies, provide the citizens with the training ground for future political leadership and to encourage political education among the masses (Pretoria University, 2018). The local government plays the role of steering the population and the respective communities on the path of growth and development. It is responsible for the accurate determination of the measures that can contribute to ensuring the well-being of the larger community. The local authorities in the form of government and councils have to carry out systematic and methodical prioritization of service provisioning across their designated territories. The common service provisioning oversight provided by the local government is associated with improving the overall living

and working conditions of the neighborhoods or the municipality. They need to extend support to the local economic activities and encourage the members for improving the economic and social performance. It is the responsibility of the local government to promote the development of a healthy cultural and social life for its people and raise the awareness associated with the community among its citizens. Additional responsibilities fulfilled by the local government include the maintenance of the public property and working to protect and improve the physical surrounding by ensuring regular garbage collection, cleaning and maintenance (Gecom, 2019).

Each country has its own system and structure to represent the local government and its divisions, which in some cases, local government represented by a municipality, and local authorities mean local councils. A municipality located in the provinces subdivided into local councils located in the small cities, towns, districts, and villages. In other cases, the local government exists as an administrative body in big cities and local councils in the districts, towns, and villages. However, the local council or local authority has the same role as the local government in providing services in their areas, while the local governments and municipality are responsible for the provision of an extensive range of public services and administrate the local councils or any subdivision of local government. The local governments with local councils change the role of the local government to administrate, organize, and monitor the local councils. And in some cases, local authorities are the highest, which they are divided into country councils. All dependent on the structure and name are giving by the central governments and the constitution. Giving examples to countries division and style of local governments will clarify that each county has its own way to name these institutions.

There are various concrete examples about how local councils operate in different countries. Whereas some of these councils are work quite effectively with the central governments the others have very limited role in regulating the regional politics. For instance, local councils in Colombia contributed to prevention of armed conflict by transferring political power to regional militia groups. Those groups have found the opportunity to represent and express themselves in local councils which are actually official regional institutions. In this way, by means of their political power they have the chance to deter militia groups who reject joining to political process from initiating certain types of violence (Hector Galindo-Silva 2019).

It is also possible to discuss the local administrations in Egypt to clarify difference between local governments and local administrations which are under the control of the central government. Al-Efindi suggests that local administrations assist the central government to

provide peace and stability (Al-Efindi 1995). Also, local administrations have a key role in preventing regional unrest and separatist movements (Abdel-Salam 1990). Moreover, the local administrations help the central government to implement the plans needed in faster way. This way the state will be always interact with the local people by the local administrations in each locality. Mayfield shows the link between the success of reducing poverty with the performance of the local administration by analyzing the relationship between local participation, poverty reduction, and local administration. Assessing local institutions' performance at the local level by examining the local institution participants with poverty reductions will lead to articulating local needs and implementing projects that respond to local people's needs besides the link between the people and the government (Mayfield 1996).

Another example of local councils can be found in André Sorensen's work in which he explained the weakness of local government in Japan because of the lack of autonomy due to the powerful central government, which has all the authority over the local government. In the nineteenth century, Japan adopted democratic political system, nevertheless it did not change the fact of the weakness of the local government due to the destruction in the infrastructure because of the WW2 which it did not help in improving or achieving the main goals of local governments in the urban areas, the main reason which he explained is the war, which it led to the financial problem to japan (André Sorensen 2002).

Local governments in South Africa are subjected to service delivery conditions in terms of detailed legislation set out in the Municipal Systems Act (No. 32 of 2000), The municipality has a top-down, hierarchical organizational structure according to the constitution and the Organized Local Government Act 1997. The Department of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs aims to build and strengthen the capability and accountability of provinces and municipalities. South Africa's local government structure contains 278 municipalities, divided into three categories to 8 metropolitan municipalities, 226 local municipalities, and 44 district municipalities (South Africa Government. 2018).

Israel has three kinds of local authorities with different municipal statuses: Municipal council – a local authority that has the status of a city; local council – a local authority that is not large enough to have the status of a city; regional council – a local authority of several settlements, usually rural. According to the Union of Local Authorities in Israel, in May 2007 Israel had 255 local authorities – 72 municipal councils, 128 local councils and 5 regional councils (Knesset, local authorities). While Malta has 68 Local Councils distributed all around Malta lands without having municipalities which is known as the higher authority in

many other examples of other counties (Eurybase 2006.2007). Mainland Portugal is divided into 18 districts with 308 municipalities which are named after their biggest cities. The municipalities subdivided into 3091 civil parishes (Statoids 2001). Egypt is divided into 26 governorates, each governorate is divided into two main structures, executive boards governed by the governor appointed by the central government and popular local councils distributed in the cities districts villages and other (Solava Ibrahim 2000).

Syrian local government structure is similar to Egypt. Syria is divided into 14 governorates, each one governed by a governor appointed directly from the president, each city in Syria has municipality which it subdivided into local councils distributed in districts villages and other. The Ministry of Local Administration and Environment in Syria one of the Syrian government ministries was created in 2016 by Republican Decree, as a result of merging both the Ministry of Local Administration and the Ministry of State for Environmental Affairs which is responsible for the local councils working aside with governors (statoids 2003).

Taking into consideration that the previous structure is the official constitutional one by the Syrian regime, which differs from the local councils controlled by the opposition groups. They provided an alternative to the absence of civil governance and encouraged citizens' participation since the local people ran them. Therefore, they considerably differ from aforementioned examples of local governments and administrations. Starting from this part, the concept of local council will be used for local administrations in Syria which had been freed from the control of the central authority.

By 2016, the total number of local councils, operating across the area which had been controlled by the opposition groups, had increased to 105. These local councils have entirely full autonomy from any link to local governments or municipality, and they are working for local people in small specific areas ruled by local people. This study focusses on two particular local councils' examples in Idlib and Aleppo, primary due to the complicity of these two governorates that have many kinds of interventions by organizations, counties, and the lack of securities, which are targeted by Syrian regime and its allies forces, oppositions groups and jihadist groups, moreover these two cities gave this study many examples to make this study explains broad and relevant reasons affected the local councils directly. And local councils in Idlib form 27% of the total councils, Aleppo councils form 23%, Hama form 12%, Homs form 11%, Daraa councils form 6%, Hasakaa form 5%. In comparison, it does not exceed 3% in the remaining provinces, all formed during the Syrian revolution.

This study excludes other cases of local councils located in north and east of Syria established by Kurdish forces and ISIS. Because both of them are quite unique cases that can

only be discussed comprehensively in another academic study. In order to avoid any distraction, this thesis only focuses on the local councils in which the Syrian opposition was largely influential.

Moreover, most local councils in areas controlled by Kurdish forces and ISIS remained the same before the Syrian crisis started by being supported by the central government. These supports are coming in many ways; for example, many local councils were still supported financially by giving salaries to the workers in local council's institutions and funding projects like watering, maintaining public infrastructure, fixing electricity, agricultural services, experts and other. However, this support is not given to the Kurdish militias or ISIS directly or indirectly, but to local councils only which are under the control of the armed forces that control these areas, the regime acquiring several benefits, for example, mutual trade, joint relations, and negotiations. Besides, these areas are a lifeline that the regime must maintain ties to keep the oil flowing and many agricultural crops. On the other hand, the non-governmental forces on the ground, whether it is ISIS or the Kurdish forces, they are the beneficiaries of the support coming from the Syrian regime due to the lack of experience to establish local councils utterly independent from the Syrian regime, moreover to obtaining a relative guarantee from the Syrian regime not to bomb the areas Residential these local councils serve. While in the other areas out of the central government's control like Idlib and Aleppo did not get any support but ignored and attacks (Azmi Bishara 2018. Rana Khalaf 2016).

This study will contribute to the studies about the efficiency of local governments during the civil war taking the Syrian crisis as a case study of the local councils established in the areas controlled by the opposition groups. Many studies explained the role of the local governments and how it eases the provisions of services, and how it developed the areas where it operates, also the participation of local people increase the democratization of the counties. However, neither of them analyzed the impact of the external interventions on the efforts of the local councils, particularly in Syria. This study aims to fill this gap by demonstrating the interrelation between international actors and local councils.

There are also many studies focusing on the local councils in Syria during the civil war have been operating. These studies particularly discuss how the Syrian regime deals with the local councils established in the areas controlled by the regime, the mechanism of work of some local councils, funding methods, representation methods, the method of administration and election, the reasons for establishing local councils, and finally obstacles and general reasons

for the inability of local councils to conduct their work in a adequately and achieve their goals.

Layla Saleh, in her study Civic Resilience During Conflict: Syria's Local Councils focused on the military facts on the ground, and attendant diplomatic failures of a loosely conceived opposition, which led the regime to move his army towered the opposition areas resulting in mass distraction then the collapse of the local councils. Her study highlighted the role of the political opposition effects on the local councils' performances and their independence. Saleh also mentioned in her research about the efficiency of the way of the establishment of the local councils as a unique experience of bottom-up governance structure, which is more institutionalized. Therefore, some councils took on an arguably civic-democratic trajectory referred to civic resilience in front of the regime's brutal war machine to suppress dissent in all its forms (Layla 2018).

Omran research center has many studies about local councils, many of these researches gave this thesis statistic number related to the local councils because of the close relations between the Omran research center and the local councils in the opposition areas. One of these studies called Crises Facing Local Councils and Mechanisms for Dealing with them focused on the local councils' crises, which are categorized into seven crises: Administrative crisis, financial crisis, climate crisis, security crisis, human resources crisis, humanitarian crisis, and sectoral crisis. This study did not ignore the international interventions, but it was shyly mentioned by indicating the need for sustainable financial support with more focus on the surveying of the local councils about the crises facing, with more focusing on the interior crises of the local councils. The development of crises in areas managed by local councils is linked to two main factors: 1) the general development of the conflict, which represents the general environment in which the local councils move; 2) The effectiveness of the response of local councils and other bodies in dealing with crises (Omran 2015).

Rana Khalaf in her study Governance without Government in Syria: Civil Society and State Building during Conflict focused on the international players that they formed "Hybrid Governance" by reconstructing local councils to implement its plan in Syria because of the structural weakness of the Syrian civil society by Institutionalization from top to bottom through creation and promotion of the National Coalition of the Syrian Revolution and Opposition Forces and the increased support for the creation and development of Local Councils in Syria, which exacerbated the fragility and fragmentation of civil society groups on the ground. This study did not focus on the role of the local councils as independent

institutions. Still, it was tending to judge local councils controlled by international players because of direct or indirect support (Khalaf 2017).

Overall, this study attempts to cover all the international interventions aspects and its influences on local councils' performances. International interventions in this study is not limited to financial support for local councils in opposition areas, rather, external interference includes military, material, financial and political support for the Syrian regime and the Syrian opposition. External interference also includes worn out political and military alliances with the Syrian regime, primarily political alliances with the opposition at the beginning of the Syrian crisis and then dispersal and division. International interventions resulted in the state of division in the Security Council that mainly affected the Syrian situation. Because of the international interventions, Jihadists get supported, the opposition divided to blocks on each other; all of the above influenced the work of local councils. This study is distinguished from other studies by analyzing how international interventions and performance of local councils are interrelated.

METHODOLOGY

The data for this study is collected from secondary sources of information. These include the information sources that are not directly related to the research study but have the data compiled for some other purpose at a different time in the past. The secondary data in the written, type and electronic forms were utilised for this research for gaining insights about the research problem and for conducting the analysis. Secondary data was used to provide unique perspectives for the research and because of the easy access ability of the data sources. The information for this research was collected from books, journals, scholarly articles, news articles, researches, industry reports, organisational reports, government publications, interviews, websites and other electronic and non-electronic sources. The specific research question that this study aims to answer is:

- How did the intervention of the countries in Syria contribute to exacerbating the civil war in general as well as instability and conflict in local councils that have been controlled by the opposition groups?
- Did local governments establishment in Syria contribute in achieving its goals between 2012 and 2018?

SECTION TWO

SYRIAN CIVIL WAR

2.1. Uprisings in Syria

Syria got complete independence in the year 1946. Since then, the nation had failed to establish a government system that was centrally controlled and lasted for more than a year. This was until the year 1970 when Hafez al-Assad decided to capture the power. This was followed by relative political stability in the country and good relations with the international neighbors like Iran and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR). His policies were against the western bloc and these were also reflected in the general population despising the support extended by the west to Israel. After the death of President Hafez al-Assad in the year 2000, his son Bashar al-Assad was elected as the President. Bashar had relatively liberal thinking because of his Western education and he also tried to contribute towards the progress of Syria by embracing liberalization. Why the people of Syria hoped for a democratic government, Bashar al-Assad also adopted the policies of his father by imprisoning the protectors and anybody speaking in dissent. The poor human rights record of Syria was a reflection of his activities. However, the anti-government protests were further fueled by the Arab Spring resulting in violent clashes all over the country.

Hafez al-Assad formed the coherent state structure of the security forces, the army, and the judiciary, appointing those close to him to the highest positions, and most of the other sensitive positions were allocated to minorities, especially the Alawite community, and the Arab Socialist Ba'ath Party played an important role in shaping the state's structure, as it restricted social and political actions by imposing rules and behavioral standards for the Syrian people in all civil institutions such as schools, universities, sports, media, etc., in addition to suppressing and abolishing any kind of opposition, thus the Baath Party has

become the only political actor in Syria. That is why all forms of freedoms and expression of opinion have been eliminated since Hafez al-Assad took power, until the Syrian revolution erupted in 2011 (Raymond & Omar, 2018). Syria that was popularly known as The Cradle of Civilizations has been ravaged and stayed in a state of distress for a very long time now.

The beginning of the civil war can be traced to the year 2011 when Mohamed Bouazizi, a poor and hopeless street vendor decided to light himself on fire in front of the Parliament in Tunisia. This event sparked numerous anti-government protests throughout the Middle East completely overthrowing the despotic rulers of the era who had exercised their powers for decades together. This was known as the 'Arab Spring' resulting in a wave of unrest across Tunisia and various other Middle Eastern countries. As these protests expanded and reached Syria, many attempts started to plan an Egypt-style protest in Syria. Beginning in January 2011, social-networking youths, similar to those who participated in the Egyptian protests, organized weak demonstrations that failed. A group calling itself "Syrian Revolution 2011 against Bashar al-Assad" organized one such demonstration in Damascus on March 15. Protesters demanded, among other things, that the government rescind the emergency law and release political prisoners. It attracted only an estimated 200 to 350 protesters and was quickly broken up by security forces. Then, four days later, demonstrations broke loose after many events of suppression then it spread almost all-around Syria. With the beginning of the Syrian uprising for absorb street anger and fearing the spread of demonstrations, the Syrian government in 2011 cancelled the controversial emergency law which is a circumvention of the provisions of the Syrian constitution that authorizes security forces to arrest and accuse anyone at any time. After that law had come into force in 1963, all opponents in Syria were arrested and all kinds of protests were suppressed, and this led to the execution of any person who is a member of the Muslim Brotherhood in Syria. Removal of this law was one of the most important demands of the protesters in Syria. In return, Bashar Al-Assad attempted to make some superficial reforms to the Syrian constitution in 2012 to end the monopoly of the authority of the Baath Party, but the powers of Syrian President Bashar Al-Assad remained the same, as he is the supreme commander of the armed forces and the head of the judiciary and as he can dissolve parliament in any at some point, his powers include appointing ministers and the prime minister in addition to the governors of the governorates, in addition to many other powers (James L. Gelvin 2015).

With the start of the Syrian revolution and after the civilian incident in Daraa, which killed many civilians, all supporters and opponents waited for Bashar al-Assad's speech, wishing to hear many fundamental reforms in many parts of the state, and in particular, the security

institutions that exhausted the Syrians with their sects, his first speech regarding the uprising in 2011 was disappointing for the Syrians. He contended himself as accusing the protestors as terrorists who were conspiring with the external forces including the United States, the European Union, Israel and Gulf Countries. In this speech, Bashar Al-Assad announced some reforms aimed specifically at state officials to ensure that they did not participate in the uprising, but in return, the demonstrations were facing fire and iron. Bearing in mind that the demands of the Syrian people at the beginning of the protests were limited to political and economic reforms, and the demand to expand democracy and freedoms and safeguard the dignity of the Syrian citizen. This prompted the protests to expand later, as the Syrian regime increased its oppression of the demonstrators, with many victims causing many individuals to arm to protect the demonstrators, but as the balance of power approached between the protected demonstrators by armed demonstrations and the security forces of the Syrian regime. The Syrian army began to use of its military strength against the demonstrators, which led to many defections of soldiers and their joining of the demonstrators and the revolutionaries. Then they began to form military battalions, which facilitated the intervention of regional states to support the rebels to topple the regime of each country according to their interests. Since the beginning of the armed opposition's formation, there has been a lot of discussion about the armament of the Syrian revolution, but the regime is no longer able to defend itself and therefore, by using excessive force, the Syrian regime forced the opponents to arm themselves, which resulted in militarization of the revolution and intervention of the regional and international actors. Consequently, opposition forces took control of some areas. Loss of territories to opposition weakened the Syrian regime to a large extent which also resulted in power vacuum that was filled by not only by international and regional actors but also by the jihadist groups. As a result, it is safe to say that militarization of the Syrian uprising attracted allies of the Baath regime like Iran and Russia to infiltrate to Syria (Raymond & Omar, 2018).

Syrian regime blamed the problems on salafis, al-Qaedists, ex-convicts, smugglers, armed gangs, and an international conspiracy involving everyone from the United States to Israel to Saudi Arabia and all their allies (James L. Gelvin 2015). Accordingly, Bashar al-Assad decided to use brute force against opposition which opened the door for unending violence. These conflicts pushed the entire country towards a civil war. The key players in this civil war are the government of Syria, the anti-government protestors, Islamic State militants and the international players holding a stake and influencing this conflict (Khan, 2018). Conflict between the Assad regime and opposition groups turned into a civil war after the

involvement of various national and international actors. By 2013, the Syrian Civil War turned into a sectarian warfare; between the Alawite dominated government forces, backed by Iran and Hezbollah and rebel groups supported by some Sunni countries. Finally, the conflict became a proxy war going on with Iran and Russia collectively fighting against the United States of America and all its allies. About half of the total population of Syria has been displaced resulting from this civil war. The migration is also triggered by the increased tension among the different global powers and the jihadist organizations like the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS). All these conflicts have not only resulted in long term damage today economic and the general well-being of the population but also transformed into a matter of international security because of the involvement of these notorious groups (Karim, 2017).

There are three basic reasons for eruption of the Syrian crisis. First reason is fragility of Syrian population which stems from its complex and fragmented make-up. The various Arab elites who have governed Syria over time have never succeeded in establishing true national cohesion. Many were even opposed to the principle of a nation-state, considered a western concept, and based their management of public life on infra-national identities (clans, religious communities, ethnic groups). In Syria, the Sunni Arabs represent the majority with 74%, but there are also numerous minorities. On the other hand, Alawites, a religious sect linked to Shiism, who represent approximately 15% of inhabitants, Christians approximately 8%, Druze approximately 4% and Seveners close to 1% (a branch of Ismaiil Shiism. They became known as "Seveners" because they believed that Ismail ibn Jafar was the seventh and the last Imam). In addition to these ethnic-religious fragmentations one must also take into account the Kurdish ethnolinguistic community, at 15% (Platforma, 2015). Hafez Al-Assad who assumed power in 1970 belonged to the Alawite sect. Although he wanted to cloth the identity differences with Arab nationalism, his successor son Bashar Al-Assad instigated hostility between Alawites and Sunnis by providing special privileges for Alawites.

This kind of a biased political approach inevitably deepened the divergence between different sects. Domestic groups and regional powers, in turn, took sides based on their sectarian affiliations. Their intervention encouraged both sides of the conflict, destroying on a scale unprecedented in Syria’s history. Understanding religious identity is essential in understanding the Syrian conflict. In the multi-ethnic, multi-religious, or multi-sectarian settings of Syria, wherein religious or sectarian affiliation is the predominant source for social values, individuals prioritize their religious and sectarian identities. As a result, Syrian inhabitants primarily reserve loyalty and trust for members of their extended family. When kinship is not a factor, shared religious affiliations take preference. Thus, when the Alawi

have come into power, they cannot exercise their authority anonymously and objectively. Instead, power has been distributed with kinship and sectarianism in mind, such that the laws of the state become secondary to the blood ties and religious identities of the power brokers to ensure the viability of their dominance, the power brokers have formed alliances with a broad spectrum of people of various religious backgrounds who were willing to pledge their allegiance in exchange for entrance to government and other government positions that would allow them to gain privileges or prestige. The most devastating result of religious identification supremacy has been a failure to solve nonreligious, secular conflicts without provoking a violent religious fight and sectarian massacres, as we have repeatedly seen in Lebanon, Iraq, and recently in Syria. Because of the supremacy of sectarian identification, violent revolutions, even when responding against state-violence, are destined to take a sectarian course, as people resort to their trusted informal sectarian networks for protection. Therefore, Western demands for democratization cannot be achieved without an intellectual revolution (Mark Tomass, 2016).

With the beginning of the Syrian revolution, the Syrian regime used sectarianism mainly to disperse protests and surround the regime with supporters from minorities, by intimidating and terrorizing minorities and showing that the success of these protests by bringing down the regime is a matter of existence for these minorities. By this, the regime was able to mobilize its supporters from these sects and arm them to disperse the protesters, in addition to establishing organizations to protect the areas supporting the regime. The regime's reliance on sectarianism to maintain power, and its use of minorities, especially the Alawite sect, in addition to sectarian sensitivity to the societal structure of Syria, it became clear that these protests would go into a sectarian direction and a civil war (James L. Gelvin 2015).

Second basic reason for the eruption of the Syrian crisis is the water crisis faced by the people in Syria also triggered numerous instances of violence since the year 2011. It is stated that a majority of the rural population of Syria was forced to move to the urban areas because of the ongoing water crisis. The devastating drought faced by the country in the year 2006 resulted in the killing of 85% of livestock in certain regions of Syria and impacting more than 1.3 million people across the country. Prolonged drought faced by the country combined with the ongoing migration, widespread unemployment and the instability in the socio-economic environment are the key contributors to the ongoing conflict and civil war in Syria. These situations have triggered the population to carry out violent protests against the government

and the weak response of the government to work towards the issues faced by the population has further strengthened these challenges (Tan & Perudin, 2019).

The third reason is the weakness of civil society, as social and political life in Syria lacked freedom and independence. The work of civil society was limited to the Syrian regime's thinking exclusively. On the other hand, the Syrian regime prevented the development of a free and alternative civil society. It only allowed some civil society activities to act within a framework of delicate tasks, like charities and religious organizations. These associations operate away from politics or any opening that will affect the system. The Baath Arab Socialist Party in Syria has been controlling all forms of civil society that could have a negative impact on the system. Thus, civil society in Syria has become ineffective under the shadow of the Baath regime as well as sectarian and tribal affiliations. The weakness of civil society is one of the reasons that the Syrian people took to the streets and demanded their rights. (Raymond & Omar, 2018).

2.2. International Interference

International interference is another primary reason for deepening of the crisis in Syria. The peaceful protest against the Syrian government that once represented hope for the citizens of the country has now turned into a brutal war with the dictator holding onto his position and the people suffering all over the country. With the migration of millions of people within Syria and even internationally, there are thousands of cases regularly registered of murder and torture of the Syrian citizens. The infrastructure of Syria can barely provide any support and the country has lost an entire generation because of this conflict. However, these conflicts are no longer a civil war and an internal matter. It has impacted the international territories, continents and regions all over the world. There is a regular flow of millions of refugees in the neighboring countries of Europe. Most of these nations are working towards providing a safe environment to the refugees but there are reports of refugees facing hostilities (Makdisi, Hazbun, Gündoğar, & Dark, 2017).

International interference began actually in 2012 when the "Friends of Syria" group was established. The most prominent decisions of the successive meetings that took place are the recognition of the Syrian National Council as a representative of the Syrian people, and it is a Syrian political group announced in 2011 in Istanbul in a unified framework of the Syrian opposition. It includes all the political spectrums of liberals and the Muslim Brotherhood and coordination committees and Kurds and Assyrians in addition to its membership in the Syrian coalition formed in Doha, and perhaps its most controversial decision refused to arm the

"Free Army", which was in the process of forming at the time. Saudi Arabia withdrew from the group during its first meeting, considering that humanitarian aid is insufficient in Syria. Here, the Saudi waving began to use military force to remove Assad, when the Foreign Minister, Saud Al-Faisal, stressed that he must "transfer power in Syria, voluntarily or by force." Saudi military support for the Syrian revolution began after this point, but with many reservations. Saudi Arabia was one of the countries that supported the Syrian national formations revolting against the regime, especially the "National Coalition of Revolutionary and Opposition Forces", but the matter was not without intense competition between regional countries over the Syrian forces. The Syrian opposition was divided among the supporters. Ahmed al-Jarba was a Syrian opponent close to Saudi Arabia. He headed the Syrian coalition, before Khaled Khojah succeeded him with a Saudi-Turkish-Qatari agreement, especially after the regional positions of these countries converged until 2015. This is evident in the accreditation of Saudi Arabia, the "Coalition," and the National Coordination Authority, as the only two political blocs present in Syrian opposition meetings until 2015 in Saudi Arabia.

Following regional consensus, Saudi Arabia began to provide more comprehensive, less selective, military support, in what is considered a serious implementation of the pressure toward Assad's military departure. Initially, support was directed at factions close to Ahmed al-Jarba, former head of the National Coalition. Saudi support was also provided to the Chief of the Staff of the Free Army, Major General Salim Idris. In addition to providing support to Lt. Col. Ahmed Al-Nimah in Daraa and other factions, to a limited extent. Saudi support was limited to the factions in southern Syria, and those that are not close to the Islamists of the Muslim Brotherhood in particular. This policy has changed, as Saudi Arabia no longer places a "veto" on support for Islamic factions. Saudi has begun to support factions capable of achieving military achievements, even if they are Islamic or close to the "Brotherhood". The support extended to include factions in northern Syria, and this Saudi support also came through Qatari-Turkish coordination (Al-Rashed, 2015).

With the arrival of King Salman bin Abdulaziz to power in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in 2015, many things changed drastically, which was evident in the boycott of the State of Qatar, the tension of the relationship with Turkey and America, and the preoccupation with the Yemen war, its formation of the Syrian negotiating committee, and thus the further division The political opposition to the Syrian. Also, Jaish al-Islam was formed in the eastern suburbs of Damascus under the leadership of Zahran Alloush, leader of Liwa al-Islam, to strengthen the jihadist Salafi thorn loyal to Riyadh in a confrontation. It rejected the opposition authority abroad, represented by the Syrian coalition, which is backed by Turkey,

Qatar, and some Western countries and Saudi Arabia. The Army of Islam criticized the Syrian National Coalition in that the Syrian revolution should be run by fighters inside Syria and not by leaders abroad. The fragmentation in the Syrian opposition started from the military factions, their number, and loyalty, through the change of international understandings and the difference in goals, ending in the absence of a real intention to maintain peace in Syria, placing the local councils in several existential challenges and security threats from the opposition (Awais, 2013).

The conflicts and fragmented opposition have provided the ISIS with an opportunity to control certain regions and work towards its motives of spreading terrorism and fear not just within Syria but also internationally. The old conflicts of Syria with Turkey before the rapprochement in 2002. After Syria's independence from the French in 1946, the two countries entered, more than once, a state of conflict, which nearly led to a devastating war between them, and was embodied on the ground by strengthening the military presence on the borders and planting more mines on the Turkish side, so that no object could cross them . The conflict extended to include water, especially during the 1990s, when Turkey constructed a series of large dams on the Euphrates River reserving the greater part of water.

Also, the conflicts between Saudi Arabia and Iran because of their religious differences are also adding fuel to the Syrian situation. The countries like Russia, the United States of America and the European Union are extending support to one or the other conflicting parties in this civil war increasing the complications and making it more difficult to bring it to an end. The international involvement has made it extremely difficult for Syria to find a peaceful solution of its ongoing conflicts (Habets, 2016). The international community has mostly been ambivalent to the Syrian humanitarian crisis. The inflow of refugees from Syria to the neighboring countries of Turkey, Jordan and Lebanon along with some countries of Europe is resulting in a lot of turmoil and also negatively impacting their concept of having open borders and providing the freedom of movement to all the people.

When the Assad regime was losing out its territory to ISIS in 2015, the president invited Russia to join and contribute to the fight. Russian forces destroyed the territories that were controlled by the opposition and the civil infrastructure including the hospitals and residential areas. Russia continued to save Assad for a long time and after taking a lead in the conflict, it decided to hand over the control back to the regime. In the year 2016, Russian President Vladimir Putin made an announcement to pull away the military support provided to the Syrian government (Habets, 2016).

Whereas Russia and Iran were backing Damascus; Saudi Arabia, Libya, Turkey and Qatar are urging to end the Assad regime and are providing open support to the insurgence of arms and cash in Syria. Mohammed Mursi government of Egypt was the only political actor that struggled for finding a resolution for this conflict at the regional level but could not overcome the strong opposition of Saudi Arabia. All the Arab Gulf States supported armed groups which hampered the efforts of the civil society initiatives. (Center for Security Studies, 2012).

Another tangent to the international involvement in the Syrian conflict is the ongoing competition between the United States and Russia. The foreign policy designed by the US has always targeted the Arab countries by manipulating their domestic politics, or directly launching military operations. In addition to that, America is always striving to establish military bases in Arab countries, to ensure its control over the region, to protect its interests in the region, and to drive Russia and Iran away. The US is always trying to develop a position of international strategic advantage through its interventions in Syria. It has been trying to incorporate Syria into the liberal international system. That is why the Syrian opposition was getting support from the US military that is trying to prevent the expansion and influence of the Russian forces.

The White House declaration of the "illegitimacy" of the Syrian government and its subsequent effort to overthrow it through violent means was bound to yield catastrophic results for the region and the United States. The United States simply aimed at carving out a pure Sunni state that would contain both Shīa Iran and Hezbollah in Lebanon. However, failed US military interventions in Lebanon and Iraq in the past highlight the adverse outcomes resulting from misunderstanding the regional dynamics and miscalculated assumptions about the social structure of the Middle Eastern countries. (Mark Tomass, 2016). The political elite in the US insisted on relying on the same miscalculation by disregarding the sectarian hostility which is the primary reason for the failure of efforts of the US in establishing order in the Middle East.

On the other hand, Syria has always been a significant area of influence for Russia among the Middle Eastern countries. Even before the Assad regime, the relationship between Damascus and the USSR was the building block to their international strategy. Russia is trying to maintain this strategic permanent partnership with the Middle Eastern region and also focused on restoring its position as a global superpower since very long. The actions taken by Russia against the United States of America are intended to counterweight the latter and take advantage of Middle Eastern connect (Joffé, 2012). It wants to prevent any US military

interventions within Syria and it also wants to prevent the American foothold to become stronger within the country. The overthrow of the Assad regime would have negative consequences for Russia and even result in disrupting all the Middle Eastern initiatives of the country.

The political, strategic and economic interests of the numerous international players have resulted in complicating the conflicts in Syria even further. All the countries are trying to create Syria as a battlefield for a proxy war. The Western military intervention has made the situation more complex and the chances of a peaceful negotiation that end the ongoing civil war and conflicts in Syria are diminishing with every passing day (Leonard & Krastev, 2007). All the domestic actors involved in the Syrian crisis are involved in the vicious activities of resorting to violence. It is only possible to free them from this by intervention from the international powers and any external mediation. However, because of the respective strategic interests vested in the Syrian crisis, most of the international actors are only trying to escalate the conflict and push for an extremist solution that can only be achieved through violence. The Assad regime is receiving support from Russia and China from the economic means and by the military of Russia. These countries also make use of their veto in the Security Council to control the global sanctions provided to Syria.

On the other hand, the United States, the European countries including France and the United Kingdom, and Turkey had supported the Syrian opposition since the beginning of the uprisings. The opposition groups also received support from the Gulf countries like Saudi Arabia and Qatar. The Syrian crisis was an opportunity for the Middle Eastern countries like Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates and Israel to strengthen their own position in Iraq against Iran, which became one of the most influential actors in this country after the Second Gulf War in 2003 thanks to deep fragmentation between Shiites and Sunnis. Since the majority of Iraq has been composed of Shiites Iran found the opportunity to establish considerable political influence over Iraq. Iran's traditional enemies like Israel, Saudi Arabia and United Arab Emirates had been concerned about the growing influence of Iran in the Middle East. Arab Spring in 2011 was an opportunity for these countries to contain Iran by eliminating Syria, its most important ally in the region. They provided enormous armed and financial support to the opposition groups including jihadist organization. On the other hand, Iran wants to expand its influence on Syria, like in Yemen and Iraq to control not only Basra Gulf but also the Eastern Mediterranean. Lebanese Hezbollah is a close ally of Iran in the region has been playing a crucial role in Syrian conflict in favour of the Assad regime. (Asseburg & Wimmen, 2018).

Western countries including the United States, France, Britain, and Israel are also members of anti-Iranian front, which aims to prevent a possible rise of a Shīia Crescent. That is the primary reason for why they supported the opposition groups which were targeting Assad regime, a close ally of Iran. In short, anti-Iranian bloc saw the initial Syrian uprising and following armed rebellion as a chance to break the Iran–Syria–Hezbollah alliance through a transfer of power to a Sunni-dominated regime. Additionally, Turkey and Qatar sponsored the Muslim Brothers and the foreign Turkic fighters to gain a place in the future government in Syria. However, on the other hand, Saudi, wary of a future challenge from the Muslim Brothers to its rule, sponsored the Salafi groups like the Army of Islam and al-Qaida affiliates, such as al-Nusra Front and the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant instead (Mark Tomass, 2016).

Russia is actively participating in the Syrian debate and the process of finding a resolution for the conflict because of the key interests of the country invested in Syria. Syria was the key market for the Russian arms suppliers. About 10% of the total arms sale of Russia was accounted for by Syria. The United Nations imposed an embargo on arms sales in Libya which has resulted in significant monetary losses for Russia. It could not afford to lose another market and account for more losses. Russia also holds a significant strategic interest in the Syrian conflict. Tartus is a Russian naval base located in Syria. This is the only remaining military base of the country that is located outside the formerly demarcated USSR. Therefore, Tartus is of symbolic and political significance to Russia in addition to holding the military significance for the country (Gifkins, 2019).

The member states of the United Nations voted against Russia making it lose its seat at the human rights council of UN in the year 2016 because of the support extended by the country to the Bashar al-Assad regime in Syria despite this, the Russian government kept sending aids to Syrian regime. (Orozobekova, 2016). The resistance of the proposal of the western bloc to support military interventions is indirectly a strategy adopted by Vladimir Putin to increase the domestic support for his government in the country, because the Russian government is struggling with numerous anti-government protests going on in the country.

Numerous national governments and key international organizations are calling for ending the ongoing violence in Syria. However, the biggest ship in the diplomatic terrain associated with the Syrian civil war and the ongoing conflict took place in August 2011 when the UK, Germany and France issued a joint statement that was also supported by the leaders from Canada and the US. In this statement, the countries supported the anti-government protesters and also the president of Syria, al-Assad to step down from power. In the eyes of these

countries, the government of Syria had lost all its legitimacy because of the violence against the civilians and the peaceful protestors sponsored by the state. The subsequent international debates on the Syrian conflict have been considerably influenced by this statement. Following this, a statement issued by the Russian Ambassador stated that the collective call of these nations undermined the possibility of having a political settlement in the region.

The United Kingdom had prepared a proposal for resolving the conflict that was presented to the United Nations. In this proposal, the UK suggested freezing the assets of the Syrian government and implementing an arms embargo in the region. It was vetoed by the two members China and Russia and could not pass. The proposal from the UK would have resulted in the establishment of a new political process and a reduction in the violence taking place against the civilians in the country (Press Dossier, 2013).

It is evident that the international interference in Syria has only deepened the conflict. The countries are trying to fulfil their long-term political goals by fueling tension in Syria and instigating the conflicts. It is highly likely that these countries will continue with their efforts to ensure that there is no outcome of the civil war as any result could be disadvantages for the involved parties. The influx of weapons and cash from the countries is expected to continue in Syria. Any significant success in the military front for one party will inevitably result in the other parties intensifying their operations and activities in the country. Therefore, military interventions are not expected to provide a solution to this situation. On the contrary, it is expected that increasing the scope and the intensity of the arms war will only result in increasing the number of refugees moving out of Syria and victims of these conflicts (Alamailes & Yurtsever, 2018).

As will discussed below, intervention of democratic Western countries did not contribute to democratization of Syria. On the contrary, insistence of supporting militia groups rather than assisting civil society initiatives resulted in weakening the legitimate ground of the opposition groups who were started to be associated with the jihadist organizations and terror groups. Accordingly, local councils which were under the control of the opposition groups, surrounded by foreign fighters.

2.3. Civil Society and Conflict Resolution

Local councils are basically and formally affiliated with local government, which is a product of the constitution in all countries of the world, regardless of the freedom and democracy practiced by local councils granted by the government. The association of civil society and local councils in Syria is evident in several points, the most important of which is that civil

society originates from the heart of the local population and is non-governmental. As the local councils that have been established in northern Syria are a result of the absence of the government. Therefore, the definition of local councils according to a study entitled “Syrian civil society organizations, reality and challenges,” local councils in Syria are a preliminary form, and it is not clear that they have an independent structure and an independent board of directors or supervision and funding that are not affiliated with the central government. While the term civil society and its affiliated organizations, according to the World Bank's definition, refers to a wide range of non-governmental and non-profit organizations that have a presence in public life and that bear the burden of expressing the interests and values of their members or others, based on ethical or cultural, or political considerations or scientific or religious or charitable. However, the definition of the Syrian civil society organization according to the previous study, is that each non-profit, non-partisan, non-governmental, and non-violent organization has a clear Syrian character, where most of its management members, whether in its boards of directors or its executive management, are Syrians. Its main activity is directed towards the Syrian issue with support or rallying or providing Syrians in Syria and neighboring countries or with an ethnic or social group of Syrians or their NGOs. In the Syrian context, the definition of civil society organizations and civil actors, in general, appears to be extremely important for the modernity of this civil society on the one hand and the conceptual mixing around it on the other hand, since in the absence of central government authority, the majority of institutions operating in areas outside the government's authority operate according to mechanisms very similar, this is because many local councils and civil society organizations adopt structures similar to those of civil society organizations. For example, and not limited to, the Idlib Health Directorate (with governmental functions) elects a board of trustees by doctors in Idlib governorate to appoint a director of health, this directorate is not affiliated with any other government agency and collects its funds through donors and is not linked to any political body or this is a non-profit, non-governmental, non-partisan, non-violent organization which makes it a civil society organization, according to the definition of the World Bank (Zaidoun Al-Zoubi 2017).

At the beginning of the uprising, a civil society focused on promoting civil and human rights in areas controlled by the opposition and replacing the absent Syrian state to ensure the provision of the necessary services. While Syria was fragmenting into government-controlled lands and others under opposition domination, the civil society launched initiatives to promote human rights and social justice, ranging from documenting violations of these rights to running workshops to spread the ideals of peace and transitional justice. Moreover, civil

society organizations have worked with local councils and other quasi-governmental bodies to provide health, education, and other services. Local councils and civil society organizations have played a complementary role and often competitive role in Syria through mutual relations and common goals to achieve some peace, security, and service provision (Asaad Al-Ashi 2020).

The social actors throughout the world acknowledge the significance of civic engagement. The policy for the growth and development of any region includes assessing the human rights and ensuring their protection, providing humanitarian aid and also analysing the environmental policies and practices. Similarly, the policies for the growth and development of any region that has faced conflict are also based on these principles. The civil society in these areas is expected to contribute to the process of creating a democracy and transforming from the current situation of conflict. The civil society plays an essential role in developing disclosures associated with peacebuilding and their importance has further increased after the failure of the international interventions in the regions like Rwanda and Somalia (Fischer, 2006).

The civil society is an essential element that helps in strengthening the capacity of the societies and also facilitates peaceful conflict resolution. This is even more true when the reason for the conflict is the existence of different groups having the respective concerns in line with the different political values, communal identities or vocational interests. It is expected that the actors of civil society can contribute towards building the social capital that acts as a network responsible for integrating the members and minimising the ongoing polarization among the people belonging to the different groups. The creation of an independent civil society is a solution offered for numerous political, social and economic problems faced by the states not just by the subject experts but also by the international organisations. However, it becomes important to understand the associated complexities of the expectations and needs of the regions that are transitioning from war and conflict towards peace. In these regions, relying solely on the civil society for maintaining order can result in overestimation of its scope and potential (Fischer, 2006).

The civil society is defined as a sum of all the voices that are not controlled by the central government. These voices help in representing the individual interest of the people in a collective manner. Peacebuilding is the process followed for the removal of any obstacles in the path of building long-lasting peace in a region. It also involves reducing any opportunities for structural or physical violence in the areas for varied reasons. The concept of civil society and ending all kinds of regional conflicts are strongly interrelated. This is because any form

of violence and conflict within a state and even among the different states can be better regulated, controlled and minimised when the citizens of the state are granted with the capacity of decision-making and balancing the coercive powers possessed by their respective governments. Numerous social movements and the organisation of civil societies have helped in the creation and advancement of democracy in a peaceful manner while defending the civil rights of the people (Bolatito & Ibrahim, 2014).

The government is the mechanism that holds the responsibility of steering the state in the desired direction. In order to balance the powers of the government with those possessed by the civil society, it is important to establish a public place that is safe and that provides a platform for political disclosures. The creation of this environment is also dependent on ensuring free speech for the people of the society. The human rights and the constitution freedom granted to the people allow them to communicate on political issues. However, this communication is also dependent on the infrastructure like the media houses, telephones, telecommunication framework and internet. The control of the government on this infrastructure limits the capacity of the citizens to carry out free political communication. The inability of the people to exercise their freedom and rights results in undermining the civil society (Fischer, 2006).

Political communication needs to be encouraged outside the government and among the people forming the civil society for successful transformation from a conflict. This is because free political communication increases the awareness of the available alternators with the people and interests of the society not just among the government but also among the people at large. These conversations also help in aggregating individual actions and mobilizing them to achieve the desired change. Open political communication also allows the Civil Society to look for an alternative to the coercive force of the government by providing an opportunity to carry out reasonable debates at public forums and identifying the right course of action for resolving the differences and conflicts. An effective conflict resolution requires addressing the structural reasons for violence in a society. Structural violence can result in the marginalization of certain groups of society because of the systematic disadvantage faced by them. In this situation, any attempts of protests by the disadvantaged groups might be refreshed because of the question power of the government. The efforts directed at encouraging the transformation of the state from the conflicting stage towards peace results in the improved organisation of the community by providing the people with the necessary support and education while ensuring increased accountability of the force is like the police

and the military. This makes it clear that conflict resolution encompasses the components of both the state government and the civil society (Peinado, 2005).

Figure 1: Civil society types Source: (Kaldor, 2003)

	Social movements[2]	NGOs[3]	Social organizations[4]	Nationalist and religious groups
Mission	Emancipation of the poor and excluded	Development and humanitarian relief	Protection and promotion of members interests	Empowerment of national and religious groups
Activities	Protests, demonstrations, mediatique events	Service provision and advocacy	Service provision, lobbying	Mobilization through media, religious organizations, and sometimes violence
Social composition	Activists, committed individuals, students	Professional staff	Workers, farmers, employers, local communities, displaced persons	Newly urbanized groups, peasants
Forms of organization	Loose horizontal coalitions, network	Ranges from bureaucratic and corporate to small-scale and informal	Ranges from vertical and hierarchical to informal networks	Vertical and hierarchical although can involve networks of tightly organized cells, charismatic leadership

Kaldor developed a model of four ideal civil societies and their associated factors. The research acknowledges that they are not distinct types of societies and can overlap with each other in reality (Kaldor, 2003). However, the distinguishing characteristics of each of them can help in identifying the social composition of civil societies and the activities that are carried out by them. The first category of civil society is that of social movements. The purpose of this society is to work towards the welfare of the poor and the excluded population so that they are not emancipated. The social movements irregularly organised in the form of demonstrations, protests and related events. These societies are made up of the students, committed individuals and activists working towards the decided cause. The cell society for

social movement is built through the informal network and has loose horizontal coalitions between the members. The non-government organisations work towards the mission of providing humanitarian relief and development of the people. They provide services and also offer advice while advocating their cause. The NGOs are made up of the professional staff and the organisation of its members can range from extremely bureaucratic composition with a defined structure to an informal structure designed at a small scale. The social organisations work towards protecting the interests of its members and the promotion of these interest. They carry out lobbying and are dedicated to providing services to the members constituting this civil society. The social composition of these civil societies includes the displaced people, people belonging to a specific local community, employers, farmers and workers. Similar to the non-government organisations, the structure of a social organisation can also vary between being highly informal to a hierarchical and well-defined horizontal organisational structure.

Among these, the most significant category of the civil society classification presented by Kaldor includes the members forming the religious and nationalist groups. The purpose of these societies is to work towards empowering the specific members of the group and these members are defined by their religion or culture. The practice mobilization of the people by conducting religious organisations, with the help of the media and these can easily turn violent (Sivrikaya, 2020).

The fact that civil society confers its power from the factors outside the control of the government is its biggest drawback and strength at the same time. The power granted to civil society comes from the power of legitimacy, the power from the organisation and the power drawn from the informal networks of communication that it has established throughout society. All these powers culminate to provide it with the necessary support and also allow it to extend the support to the movements or political beliefs that are different from those of the existing state government. Therefore, civil society is essential for maintaining a healthy democracy but it can also result in undermining the governing capability of the state and make the social environment more prone to violence (Last, 2008).

For addressing the ongoing structural violence in the state, the famous political scientist Jack Snyder has presented an argument to build a very strong institutional framework before the society is ready for running a democratic act like hosting elections (Snyder, 2000). When the government and non-governmental organisations are mutually enforcing institutions, they can help in forming a healthy democracy. Any of these institutions in their nascent stage can be easily hijacked by the people having special interests and be used for the perpetration of

physical or structural violence. An example of this is the development of a constitution that allows the majority to rule the state without putting in place proper safeguards for the representation of the minorities. This results in erosion of the security and the life prospects for the minority population and puts them at risk. The analysis conducted by Arendt Lijphart on political accommodation and power sharing lists nine fundamental conditions that can help in the successful distribution of power in the states having multi-ethnic population (Bogaards, 2002). These include single majority, no economic disparity, a balance of power, relatively small populations, overarching loyalties to the state, an external threat, a tradition of compromise, geographic concentration, and a small number of ethnic groups. Ensuring the fulfilment of all these conditions can help in balancing the differences of the people belonging to different ethnic groups and believes and also ensure effective political compromise and disclosure on an ongoing basis. The formation of civil society helps in building a network of relations between the central government and the people that facilitates effective political disclosure. It also provides an incentive to the people for compromise.

Contrary to the views of Lijphart, Donald Horowitz has proposed the creation of political institutions that do not address the inter-ethnic conflicts from a political perspective but encourage cooperation across the groups with the creation of federal systems with different ethnic boundaries (Horowitz, 1998). The formula presented by Lijphart focuses more on building the civil society while the ideas of Horowitz assigned the responsibility of transitioning from conflict on the shoulders of the government. Assigning this power to the government can result in structural violence but both these propose ideas make it important to strike a balance between the power possessed by the government and the civil society.

The transformation from the state of conflict also requires addressing the ongoing physical violence. The insights by Lijphart and Horowitz indicate that civil society plays an essential role in the identification and reduction of physical violence. This transition is dependent on the condition that the majority of the people belonging to the society are working towards uniting it instead of dividing the groups on the basis of their ideologies. Another condition for the successful contribution of the civil society in reducing physical violence is that it is difficult for the people to make use of violence against others then they know them and are close to them. Therefore, the most significant contribution of the civil society in reducing physical violence would be to facilitate connections between the individuals and groups. This results in social cohesion of the people reducing the onset of violence and also helping the states recover quickly from any violence taking place at the community level itself (JepchumbaKidombo, 2013).

Civil society and its organised governance structures built by it can help in conflict transformation when used effectively. On the contrary, the clubs and associations formed as a part of the civil society can also become the vehicles for the promotion of violent action between the groups of people belonging to them. Effective conflict transformation with the help of civic society can only be achieved when there is an absence of physical and structural violence. Occasional rumblings about the potential for violence by the politically marginalized or under-represented groups in society can even be part of the regulatory mechanism that keeps a political system responsive. But the very mechanisms that permit civil society to be a useful tool for balancing the coercive power of the state can also contribute to physical and structural violence. Hate-mongering extremists, sects that repress women and corporations that violate labour codes or trammel the environment can all thrive on the uncivil side of a civil society (Iglesias, 2017).

2.4. Syria's division of spheres of influence

There are several spheres of influence in the Syrian Civil War including the regional, national and international players playing a critical role in defining the course of the war and its ultimate result. The international interests in the Syrian conflict are not contributing to ending the war but instead in claiming it even further. The Assad regime and its Russian and Iranian supporters have no respect for the democratic values of the human rights of the Syrians. Challenging done are the people in the opposition of the regime that was once standing for the humanitarian rights of the serials but has long abandoned its mission (Bolatito & Ibrahim, 2014).

The rift between the Gulf countries after the siege of Qatar in the year 2017 has resulted in further fragmentation of the opposition allies of Syria. The ongoing war in Yemen had contributed to the lack of support at the regional level and it is been translated has another Arab cold war. The military rule that has slowed down the development and growth of the Arab countries in comparison with their western counterparts is now inhibiting the growth of Syria as well. (Ziadeh, 2019).

The internal differences within the country and the ongoing external interference have created havoc for Syria. The division of the Syrian state in the impending future is something that cannot be denied (Ziadeh, 2019). The societal borders of the country and its geographic borders have significantly diverged from their original state and the focus on the ethnic and sectarian differences of the people might make the civil war dormant for some time but it will

erupt again and cause disruption unless the nations come together to find a solution for political and economic negotiation.

2.5. Impact of crises and interference

Hafez al-Assad instrumentalized ideological convictions to derive consent, but his main ruling strategy applied was “divide and rule”. The people belonging to the Alawite sect, who were being despised and marginalized till Assad’s assumption of power, acquired a new social level and comfort in the state. Hafez al-Assad showed that their clan was not provided complete control over the resources available in Syria and its wealth to prevent any Sunni uprisings from happening. He worked towards maintaining stability and order in the state by dividing the Sunni majority and by practising social fragmentation of their sect. At the local level, the Sunnis were marginalised and divided by manipulation (Narbone, Favier, & Collombier, 2016). At the time, the Sunnis were responsible for a majority of the tasks assigned by the government and in the Syrian administration while all the key positions in the government and the security forces were reserved for the people belonging to the Alawite sect. This made sure that the Assad regime controlled the power and all of it was concentrated within their clan. However, this strategy was not entirely successful and there was consistent historical tension between the majority in Syria and the Alawite minority.

There were numerous other trends that lead to an increase in tension in Syria. Bashar Al-Assad assumed the responsibility of the president in the year 2000. His strategy for managing the politics and economy of Syria was quite different from his father. In economic terms, the economy of Syria has significantly modernized and there were numerous reforms introduced by the Regime that was underway beginning from the 1990s. All these reforms accelerated after the year 2000 headed by the new president. The new generation of Syria and the business class started pressurizing the government as they were ignored by the previous leaders who focused on the labour market and their needs. Bashar Al-Assad also adopted the principles of privatization and liberalization and these measures were intended to modernize the Syrian economy and particularly the financial services sector. It enabled Syria to obtain direct foreign investment from the organisations located all over the world. However, despite a lot of support and numerous reforms directed towards modernising the economy, it has been impossible for Syria to welcome all these new arrivals in the country and most of the

labour market has been dissatisfied by its (Slim & Trombetta, 2014). This increasing this content is attributed to the uneven distribution of wealth among the upper classes who are considered to be close to the people in power and belonging to their sect. The new political vision of the president made the Syrian government for the neglect the needs of the rural inhabitants of the nation and pull away from the peripheral territories that required most attention, growth and development. The agrarian outlook of the previous president and the reforms directed towards benefiting the rural population work completely replaced by the economic liberalisation and modernization philosophies of the new President. Bashar Al-Assad also decided to implement strict measures on agriculture and the agrarian sector. This significantly reduced the contribution and the revenues from agriculture and further contributed to the increase in the wealth and revenues of the largest cities and the already rich population (Slim & Trombetta, 2014).

The North Western part of Syria that was previously known for expanses of farmable land used for agriculture was now reserved in a measure to preserve the resources. Only the people having special privileges and the ones that were close to power were allowed to make use of these preserved resources. The for the duration of the rural life in Syria resulted in a massive migration of the people towards largest cities making certain neighbourhoods of these cities having a concentrated population of people living in extreme poverty. This was while the rich flourished and enjoyed the special privileges because of the regime. The significant increase in wealth inequality throughout the country created numerous differences between the inner and outer cities across Syria. In the year 2010, despite the deployment of numerous economic reforms, over 30% of the population of Syria was living in extreme poverty (Lefigaro, 2013).

The ongoing internal strife of the country was not the only reason for the instabilities. International interference and the conflicts taking place in the neighbouring countries were also impacting the serial population. The Kurdish uprising that took place in the year 2004 was a mass protest against the state because their ethnic identity was being neglected and they were suffering from underdevelopment. The Kurds demanded complete autonomy and the response of the uprising was severe repression of the Kurds by the regime. This increased the resentment against the government among the people of Syria and the Iraq crisis that started in the year 2003 also lead to large-scale influx of refugees from Iraq increasing the complexities in the already challenging demographics of the country.

As a result, all these elements together contributed to a revolt of unprecedented magnitude. In the year 2011, Syria was counted among the nations having a widespread protest against the government that had already led to the overthrow of the government in Egypt and Tunisia.

What started in city of Deraa, soon expanded to the south of Damascus and in the agricultural regions of the country because of the oppression of the agrarian societies and their suffering because of the mindset of the government which led to internal migration from the countryside to the cities because of giving concessions to those close to the authority to use agricultural resources. This dissent soon spread out to various other regions of Syria and marginally so in the poorer quarters. The government tried to severely repress the protest movements that were earlier peaceful. There were numerous promises made by the regime to reform the policies and address the concerns and demands of the protesters. However, all these promises proved to be smoke screens that resulted in feeling the opposition movement and turning it into an armed uprising that got transformed into a full-blown civil war. Despite the protestors making significant progress at the initial stage of the crisis, the regime was able to hold strong control over the strategic functioning of the territory with the help of friends like Russia and Iran. In all these years, neither the protesters nor the government has been able to take complete decisive control of the main cities and the strategic zones of Syria. The violence is still continuing throughout the country and there is very little scope of reaching an outcome of this crisis (Lefigaro, 2013).

The distinguishing features of the principles adopted for the protests by the anti-government groups and government of Syria were the violent principles where the targeted the vulnerable groups like women and children, made use of heavy weapons throughout the civil areas and carried out massacres on a large scale. People are tortured and deprived of the basic necessities subjecting them to extreme conditions resulting in large scale violation of human rights of the people and activities with arbitrary detention of people, killing of the small children and torturing them while also making use of them as human shields. The president encouraged sectarian cleavages by dividing the different sects of the Muslims and pitting them against each other. The additional privileges granted to the people belonging to the Alawite sect and excessive immunity enrages the Sunni majority in Syria. The Sunni Muslims despite being in majority do not hold any such privileges or access to the top positions in the president's rule. The Assad regime has characterized the anti-government protests as an international conspiracy against the government to impact the political structure of the country and make it vulnerable. The people who are in support of the government and the regime are incomplete support of this characterization and also believe that is justified for the regime to make use of violence and force against these protestors who are the foreign elements contributing to disturbing the regime and its control and taking it away. This is similar to the condition of Iran and Hizbollah where the use of extreme violence by the

government received widespread support. The Syrian government and the regime also make use of the involvement of the groups like the Islamic state to classify all the protests against the government as terrorist activities organisation conducted by the anti-national elements (Hinnebusch, 1997).

The inability of the regime to manage these protests and the international interference in this matter to contribute to the peacemaking in Syria has resulted in the complexity of the situation remaining the same. The involvement of the people belonging to different ethnic sects fighting against each other and considering the others responsible for this instability is resulting in making the situation even more complex and finding a solution extremely challenging

The current situation of Syria indicates that the civil war will continue and there is also a significant risk of extreme segmentation taking place in the country. There were numerous territorial divides already existing in the country, but the ongoing crisis has proved to be a major threat to the territorial integrity of Syria. There is a possibility of a geographical division in Syria resulting in the creation of Syrian Kurdistan. Furthermore, the ongoing conflict in Syria has given rise to the formation of terrorist groups in the country supporting both the sides of the protests and has also led to the emergence of armed radical beliefs. The reduction in state cohesion resulting from this crisis has increased the fear of the Alawite community that is in minority in the country.

CHAPTER THREE

3.1 Syrian Local Councils

In this chapter, the main reasons for the failure of the local councils will be analysed. These reasons can be summarized as lack of coordination among the groups composing the local councils, international interference and clash of interest between the regional actors who are providing financial and military aid to local council, settlements imposed by the Assad regime and military intervention of Russia in September 2015. After discussing the dynamics that are limiting the operational capacity of the local councils in general, two specific cases, local councils in Aleppo and Idlib, will be elaborated in order to provide detailed insight about the mutual interaction between the aforementioned reasons for failure.

3.2 Syrian local councils' challenges

The different bodies that together constitute the local council responsible for the management of the areas in control of the opposition and their security have resulted in the creation of a system that provides an excellent alternative to the otherwise authoritarian control system developed by the regime (Haid, 2019). The rebels of Syria acknowledged the fact that it was impossible for the country to return to the pre-revolution era. Even though the Assad regime was withdrawn from various areas of Syria, there was a lack of basic public services and the citizens faced numerous civic problems that had to be immediately addressed to ensure the habitability of these regions. The formation of local councils brings hope to the Syrians indicating towards possible stability and humanitarian relief in future. However, the process of emergence of these local councils cannot be considered spontaneous. Numerous revolutionary leaders of Syria have constantly worked to fight against the Assad regime and overthrow it (Leenders & Mansour, 2018). It was believed that simply overthrowing the dictatorship was not enough and they had to completely give up on the authoritarian leadership structure followed by it. By assessing the needs of the people and all the aspects of their lives, the local councils were established for ensuring better governance. Syria has never had democratically elected representatives. With all the powers residing in the hands of the Syrian president, they are also given the freedom to choose the way to deal with any domestic opposition. The initial experience of setting up of the local council was extremely challenging for the opposition lead territories because of the excessive pressure arising from the three

most important factors (IIED, 2018). Firstly, the areas controlled by the opposition groups no longer receiving financial support from the government. The local council has to fulfil the entire responsibility of securing the necessary resources for service provisioning for the people, developing the required expertise of administration and management and taking the measures to ensure complete security to the local population. The absence of any prominent leaders who provide the right strategic vision to the local councils led to their failure. Secondly, the revolutionary movement exposed the general population to a very high level of militarization. There were new competitors emerging to provide local security because of the multiple functions of national resistance including the revolutionary police of Syria, the free army and jihadist groups supported by pro-opposition countries. Finally, the feeding of the initial local councils set up in the opposition-controlled territories was because of the regular military incursions organised by the regime and its allies. The excessive use of force and the regular targeting of the administrative bodies and the civilian areas led to the collapse of the existing local governance structures and also limited the scope of setting up the local councils by themselves (Imady & Hinnebusch, 2018).

However, by conducting regular meetings in Qatar and Turkey, the Syrian National Council managed to develop and implement local councils in the areas that are not controlled by the opposition in Syria. Different local councils have different political affiliations and level of independence. Most of these local councils are influenced very strongly by the military groups. These groups not only control the operations of the council but also choose the candidates by picking the people who do not interfere with their activities. The members of the local council have to regularly report to the military groups and while it is very difficult to verify these claims, there are numerous reports presented by the local councils that have confirmed the influence of military groups on their working and decision making (IIED, 2018). This is evident in this study on the city of Idlib, which faced the interference of the military in the city of Idlib significantly, and the control of each faction on a local council, with the attempts of the Syrian coalition to establish one institution that gather all local councils. This, which never happened because of dependency of the factions to donors other than the Syrian coalition, which is supported by Turkey and Qatar,

Besides, Idlib clarifies the militarization of the local councils due to the actions and violations of the HTS, which formed a government and local councils and its control of existed local councils by force. Also, the lack of trust between international donors and Islamic militant groups resulted in shrinking the aid which was supposed to support the elected Local Civil Council. For this reason, these funds were transferred to civil society organizations.

The local councils of Syria have struggled and faced numerous challenges since they were formed. The clear lack of expertise among the representatives of these councils and poorly organised structure of defining the authority and responsibility in the council are the biggest weaknesses (Gutman, 2016). The local councils were developed as a result of the desire activists to contribute to the betterment of the Syrians. While most of the people decided to flee the country in the wake of the power overthrow and ongoing violent conflicts, the activists decided to stay for providing the freedom to their cities from the authority of the Assad regime. Most of these activists are now a part of the local councils. The Syrian community is now lacking the trained technocrats like the doctors and engineers who decided to seek refuge in other countries because of the intensifying conflicts. These people are still not willing to assume responsibility among the local councils which makes then weak governing bodies with no real experience or understanding (IIED, 2018).

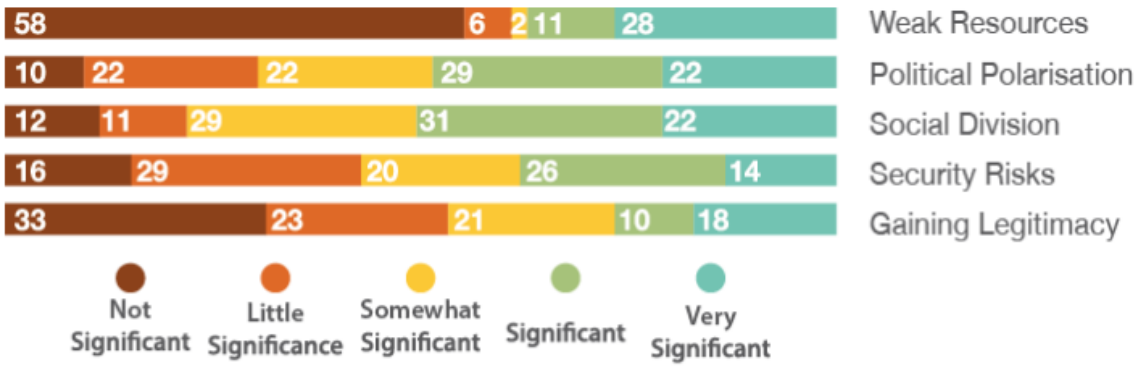
The local councils in Syria have to play numerous rules by managing the judicial, educational, civic and health needs of the people in their communities. In some of the regions, the local councils are also responsible for ensuring the security of the people and their protection (Khalaf, 2017). They take care of the regular supply of electricity, fuel, water and telecommunication services. The reconstruction activities, civil protection and the delivery and distribution of the aid among the regions are also decided by the local councils. Previously, all these functions were carried out by the designated bodies and agencies having specialised experts. This lack of expertise among the people belonging to the local councils is a major challenge faced by them all over Syria. The local council members are not elected and therefore they are not represented of the communities that they are handling. Some local council in Syria have members that are self-appointed or simply selected among the group of activists within the province (Fischer, 2006). The term of office for the Syrian local council is only six months which is not enough for them to understand the operations; take any significant decisions and ensure their effective implementation. This poor continuity of the local council system results in ineffective leadership and the inability of the local council members to develop the required expertise in their regions for providing services with quality and consistency.

There is no regular flow of financial resources for the local councils which results in a significant challenge for exercising their powers. The areas that are held by the opposition are dependent on the aid provided by the individuals, organisations, international bodies, countries or a combination of all these. This funding is not consistent making it difficult for the local council to function effectively. The local council that was earlier established to

provide the essential services to the communities have also been influenced by the Muslim Brotherhood (Humanitarian Practice Network, 2013). This transnational organisation has its members included in the councils who make use of their influence and their resources for controlling the elections and the decision making of the local council (Ginty, 2011). There are numerous instances of local councils getting hijacked by the violent-prone groups stripping them from their power and gaining control of the communities. The people protest against the imposed division of these groups that regularly derange the functioning of the local council and their decision making.

The figure below represents the responses received for a survey conducted in the year 2016 highlighting the most significant obstacles that are faced by the local councils as the governing and administrative institutions in Syria (Javed & Mahmood, 2017). The most significant challenge reported in the server is the lack of the available resources among these local councils.

Figure 2: Challenges of Syrian local councils Source: (Omari & Fakir, 2016)



The financial deficit faced by the local councils is growing by every passing day. The cost of service provisioning by these councils is very high and the logistical and security expenses of the councils combined with instability in the flow of financial revenues make it very challenging for them to operate uninterrupted (Haid, 2019). These local councils are dependent on external aid. Since they do not possess any self-supporting sources of revenue, the lack of availability of resources for the local councils continues to be the biggest challenge faced by them. The local councils in Syria are quite important for providing services to the population. Despite this significance, the state and the donors are not contributing towards extending support to these councils in the form of resources and providing them legal legitimacy. These councils are sometimes considered as local agents that can be replaced with parallel entities decreasing their ability to work for the welfare of

the people. The external forces and the donors are also unsure of the future contribution of the councils if they are transformed into central actors with all the power. Going by the history of the regime, there is a possibility of these councils turning into the central actors that again start operating without any control of the people. Because of this, the resources received by the local councils are limited and the idea of legitimising the local council is rejected by the regime, the opposition and all their allies (Desouky, 2016). Another challenge faced by the councils includes political polarization where these councils need to bridge the social divisions between the various factors influencing their operations and ensure collaboration between their varied interests (Azzam, 2016). The working environment of the local councils is highly unstable. Best travel with the humanitarian, financial and sectoral challenges because of the intertwined crisis between the state and the opposition, the religious sects and international players involved in the proxy war. The central councils can only have a limited impact on the local service provisioning and as the conflict increase in the severity, the local councils proved to be more resourceful as they exercise a participatory management approach. The local councils can carry out the distribution of tasks and mobilization of resources provided by the primary donors more effectively for the organisations and the governmental and non-governmental bodies (Meininghaus & Kühn, 2018). However, they need to constantly balance the interests of the militant groups, central government, local citizens and the local and international bodies and individuals providing financial assistance.

The local councils operating in Syria face significant security risks. They are soft targets for the jihadist groups, central government and the other opposition forces. However, the regime continues to be the biggest threat faced by the local councils facing delivery targeting contributed to the destruction of the infrastructure and the interruption of the administrative services being provided by them. The local councils are open on the receiving end of attacks that result in the destruction of buildings and transportation vehicles like the ambulance, cars and other means of transport. Even though these councils have set up an armistice agreement government, the instances of violation of these agreements are fairly common. The war crimes like targeting the civilian headquarters that are responsible for service provisioning to the citizens of the territories and targeting of the local council headquarters are also frequently reported in the areas that are under the control of the opposition (Gutman, 2016). The ISIS and other Islamic organisations are some prominent entities that constantly threaten the security function of the local councils in Syria. Providing security to civilians is one of the top priorities of the local councils. However, the jihadist groups prove to be an obstacle to the smooth functioning of the local councils and its service provisioning in these regions.

They carry out regular activities to destabilize the security of the territories which suicide operations and massacre of the civilians that are often targeted towards the leaders in the field of military and civic bodies. This is to spread security chaos and provide an opportunity for these organisations to reimburse as the controlling bodies (Meininghaus & Kühn, 2018).

The frequent military inclusions by the regime in the form of the campaigns conducted in the areas outside its control have resulted in worsening the security situation of these territories. The organised resistance movements and protests resulted in the central government losing control over a lot of territories across Syria. Although the regime was able to gain back control of most of these territories with the help of Russia and other allies, there are certain regions that have set up their own administrative procedures with the help of the local councils. The other contributing factors to the worsening security situation creating a challenge for the local council in Syria include the numerous open confrontations with the army in the difficult geographical terrains. All these attacks from the central government are targeted to the structure established for the provisioning of public facilities so that the organizational skills of the local councils can become weaker. The regime is also trying to reduce the support of these local government structures that are still in the emerging state decreasing their legitimacy and acceptance by the general public. The internal displacement of the people and the significant increase in the number of the dead and wounded population often contributes to the existing humanitarian crisis in Syria. This displacement increases the security challenges for the local councils and the activities of the Islamic jihadist elements also prove to be a security threat for the general population.

All these incursions against the organized resistance movements that led to the establishment of the local councils, increase the security threats faced by it (Bolatito & Ibrahim, 2014). The local councils and their operations are extremely prone to the pressures and challenges of all the individuals in organizations involved in this conflict. Even though they are trying to create a new management approach by promoting participative decision making, they are constantly facing numerous challenges as discussed in this section (El-Desouky, 2017). The increasing chaos in the areas in control of the opposition is because of the numerous activities that are carried out by the security cells appointed by the regime for gathering the information about the resistance factions. These elements not only cause physical damage by targeting the administrative buildings, schools, hospitals and other infrastructure established for the service of the public but also carry out regular bombings and assassinations to create instability in these regions (Khalaf, 2017). The members of the regime spread rumors to instigate the opposition and protestors trying to create a rift between different groups and trying to break

down the established administrative services by the opposition in the form of the local councils. There is very little military coordination among different resistance factions including the jihadist groups, international territories supporting the opposition, the protectors and their allies. The multiplicity of these factors and the absence of a uniting force makes the security function weak for these powers (Bolatito & Ibrahim, 2014). Being an area that has faced conflict for about a decade now, Syria is also experiencing the emergence of warlords who are only focused at promoting their own interest sometimes even at the expense of the public interest. The jihadists and the other Islamic groups are also expanding their strength and propagating their own principles that sometimes conflict with the other national resistance factions. This results in the internal conflict in the opposition and makes it challenging for the local councils to manage the interest of these bodies (Sivrikaya, 2020). The regime is receiving the support of the Shiite militias who are assigned some positions of power in exchange for their services. This has contributed to polarization in the Syrian societies and mostly in the regions that are managed by the opposition. The intervention of Shiite militias in Syria, supported by Iran and Hezbollah in Lebanon, in the war against the Syrian opposition gained them several cities, such as the city of Qusayr in Homs, which was controlled by Hezbollah militias after entering with the Syrian regime army in 2013, which remained under the control of the Hezbollah militias Lebanese. The city remained empty for several years because its people were not allowed to return after it had evacuated its inhabitants, the opposition forces, and the local council, which was running it with the opposition forces.

Direct regional and international intervention in Syria, with the assistance of their military, contributes to increased chaos and instability in areas administered by local councils. This study also mentioned extensively in the second section on foreign interference from countries and militias and the places it distributes in Syria and its goals. Military alliances with the Syrian regime operating on the ground militarily are less complicated than their enemy the Syrian opposition by affecting the local councils. Iran and Russia, the most prominent allies of the Syrian regime, their influence on local councils were limited to the item of security and stability, as the Syrian regime's allies continued the Syrian regime approach by bombing and destroying vital installations and administrative buildings of local councils, in addition to displacing and excluding local councils from international negotiations, which will be highlighted in these two cases separately because of their importance in clarifying the importance of international intervention in the marginalization and failure of local councils.

The most complicated management related problem for the local councils is the opposition itself. The formation of hundreds of military brigades opposed to the Syrian regime at the beginning of the Syrian revolution's transformation into a civil war, which made the military leaders by order of their financiers to prepare to manage the affairs of the areas they control. All countries supporting the Syrian revolution supported the Syrian opposition by arming them and creating political bodies to achieve their goals. The protection of the local councils in the areas controlled by the Syrian opposition linked to the strength of the armed opposition, which they were fighting each other a lot. That allowed researchers to carry out a whole new study to discuss the causes of these conflicts and the importance of international intervention in Syria to fuel these conflicts.

Also the lack of stability in the local councils arising from the constant restructuring and absence of any leadership and governance experience of its constituent members results in the creation of political arrangements that are confusing and difficult to communicate to the people (Ziadeh, 2019). One such example is of Manbij where the local council of the province was an autonomous body then one decision resulted in transforming it into an appendage of the sharia court. Followed by this, the sharia court started playing an essential role of arbitrator in all the disputes taking place between the members of the local council. The sharia court had the backing of powerful Islamist armed groups. The attainment of sufficient power by the group resulted in the sharia court overpowering the functions of the local council and leaving it with no option other than becoming a part of the sharia committee. This committee consisted of eight seats, seven of which belonged to armed factions with the local council being the only civilian entity in this new arrangement. The presidency of the sharia committee was by monthly rotation, with each entity nominating a cleric for the role. As a result, the local council of Manbij was simply reduced to operating as an executive arm of the sharia court and all the people working in the local council regularly scrutinized by the clerics that are nominated by the opposition groups for ensuring the delivery of justice in the city (Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue, 2014).

The issue of establishing legitimacy is one of the biggest challenges that is faced by the local council in Syria. The problems associated with the interruption in the resource flow for the council and their competency can be solved by providing training to its members and getting funding for making the councils self-sustainable. However, the lack of legitimacy assigned to these institutions is a profound challenge that has a direct impact on all aspects of the performance of these councils. The local councils cannot utilize the time-consuming process of getting legitimacy through normative procedures. The territory is managed by the local

councils are predominantly involved in the agricultural business and do not have any prior experience of creating leadership and designing the strategy on their own accord. So far, the results of the endeavors of forming the local councils in these states have mostly been fragile and these councils need to host elections after every 3 to 6 months. While the reason given for this frequency is the opportunity to remove any officials who are not efficient in their roles and responsibilities but the lack of confidence of the people responsible for the creation of the system of the local council and the general public is considered to be the driving force behind this decision. There is a frequent restructuring of the roles and responsibilities to strike a good balance between the needs of the community and the power assigned to the members. The absence of any arbiter for settling the disputes taking place within the local councils and for anchoring the entire process of the local councils down is also contributing to a constitutional crisis and numerous deadlocks in the operations of these administrative structures.

As in regime-held areas, for instance, opposition forces and NGOs are engaged in infrastructure projects and providing electricity or emergency care, such as delivering primary health care, electricity, and water, or even running local bakeries and delivering cheap bread. However, this has also created a situation in which armed groups, local councils, and a myriad of NGOs have competed for legitimacy and ultimately for their survival by providing identical or overlapping services. Instead of focusing primarily on these governmental tasks, local councils may often be preoccupied with the day-to-day coordination and sometimes implementation of humanitarian assistance (Malmvig & Helle, 2018).

Another factor that limits the capacity of the local councils is the settlements imposed by the Assad regime. The relationship between the state regime and the local council is inorganic despite the fact that the local councils provide recognition to the authority of the regime. The Assad regime imposed numerous settlements on the local communities across several territories of Syria especially in the areas of the conflict contributed to the forcible displacement of thousands of people from these regions to the province of Idlib and the Aleppo governorate. The Qaboun Damascus neighborhood to the Eastern Ghouta is the region where people were displaced and the policy adopted by the regime is to encourage the displacement of the actors that contributed to the formation of the local councils, civil organizations and other local administrative bodies along with the ones that extended support to the military factions for dissolving the governance structures formed by the people and pressurizing the territories to agree with the conditions offered by them (Akbarzada, 2018).

All these settlements have a different context and reason, but they were supported because they made the end of the prolonged ongoing military conflict with the regime and all its allies on one side and the forces of national resistance fighting from the other side. It was impossible for the regime to make use of military decisiveness for turning the situation in favour and therefore it made use of methods like indiscriminate felling of the civilian areas, sieges and starvation that served as a precious actor for all the administrative structures in the form of local councils designed by the locals and the military forces. The regime also made use of the multiple humanitarian files for blackmailing the territories. In the Daraya and eastern Aleppo region, the regime established its case by making use of the military and continuously escalating the attacks. The administrative bodies were compelled to give up on their resistance by either declaring truce or through the implicit actions during early 2014. The regime videos of similar strategies for the regions Moazamiyat Al-Sham, Khan Al-Sheeh, Zakia, Qudsaya, Al-Hama, Wadi Barada, Serghaya, Derakhba, Al-Tayybah, Al-Waar, Al-Tal, Damar, Kafar Souseh, Barzeh and Al-Qaboun developing comprehensive and having separate agreements that fall outside the context of reconciliation of the state in exchange of peace in the provinces (El-Faqir, 2017). The implementation of these strategies by the regime resulted in either partial displacement or comprehensive displacement of the population of the people residing in these areas. All these regions are believed to be of geopolitical importance since they are located in the Northern region of Syria. The allies of the regime including Russia and Iran have their interests vested in these territories and these countries were also responsible for determining the size of displacement and the segment of people that were displaced. The displaced population mostly included the local leaders and the military heads along with their families and supporters. As in the case of Al-Adhamiyah, Al-Hama, Qudsaya, and East Aleppo it was found out that the displacement of the population was decided by the Russian actors of military and control providing them with directions decided according to the demographic divide and the localised dispersal of forces for suiting the Russian strategy and for the creation of zones that help in the de-escalation of the conflict by providing more control in the hands of the central government of Syria. Similarly, the Iranian allies of Syria carried out the orientation of the displacement for levelling the demographic divide and for ensuring that the human components that were earlier fortifying the influence of the anti-government elements were not replaced by any new ones. The displacement was directed towards preventing the reproduction of the revolution by distributing the factors contributing to the uprising (Couldrey & Peebles, 2018).

The aforementioned regions word imposed with comprehensive agreements for reconciliation by the regime that primarily focused on the displacement of the local leaders who contributed to the formation of the civil bodies and local councils for the complete dissolving of the local council themselves using this situation for blackmailing the locals and resulting in their subservience to the central government. This consistent approach of the regime by carrying out the segmental rejection of any form of administration or local governance left them with no option but to give up and go for the alternate option of legitimate control provided by the regime. Before the displacement, the local councils in the regions that were in control of the opposition in Syria played the role of the political and administrative support for the civilians. These local councils have to continuously redefine themselves in the changing environment and most of the local councils performed in the areas that were subject to settlements and subjected to partial or total forced displacement were characterized by fragility and poor management of services. These local councils were also known for their modest capacities to institutionalize and limited their representation of the population.

The setting up of local councils among the displaced communities allowed the elements in opposition of the central regime to reactivate their resistance even though they were outside their geographical borders. The local councils were a result of the urgent need of the communities to find a representative body that could carry out the coordination of the roles and responsibilities in the areas that were still revolting and develop and institutions that could garner legitimacy from the locals. The roles for development, administration and service were later assigned to the local councils after the complete decline of the regime from their respective provinces in order to respond to the needs of the local communities for specific institutions and roles. The leaders that were displaced by the regime sometimes decided to form a new and redefined local council were interested with new roles at the legal, political and administrative level.

The Daraya Council is one such example of the destruction and this location triggered by the negotiations with the regime. By the end of the year 2015, there was a significant military escalation that is becoming dangerous for the people residing in the city of Daraya. The central regime had already made significant progress in the territory with the help of the military and the support of its allies Russia and Iran. The ceasefire agreement between Russia and the United States of America for resolving the military escalation between the two countries resulted in taking the control away from the national resistance factions from Daraya. The continuous military interventions by both these nations had led to the loss of the fertile agricultural land in Daraya and also destroyed the civil infrastructure including

hospitals and schools (Amnesty International, 2017). Daraya was placed in a state of complete disability because of the bombing, shelling and explosive battles between because of these military interventions. All the civil and military factions of the region along with the local council of Daraya participated actively in the negotiations. The committee formed by the council included the martyrs of Islam and al-Miqdad bin Amr who were representing the city and negotiating with the representatives of the central regime. The agreement between the two parties was finalized on 27th August 2016. Followed by this, the regime ordered the evacuation and displacement of all the fighters and resistance elements of Daraya along with 793 families towards the Idlib governorate. The responsibilities of the displaced members of the local council of Daraya were only restricted to supervising the operations of the emergency room housing the people from Daraya in Idlib and even outside Syria by helping the civilian bodies and the relief organizations that were ready to offer assistance (Proukaki, 2018). The emergency committee of the Daraya local council continued following up and extending support to the displaced people of the city for 4 months after the agreement. After that, a permanent relief committee for the management of the displacement affairs of Daraya residents was formed. The local council of Daraya continued to hold the meetings in Idlib where the members of the Council present the reports of the work done by them in the office in the year 2016 when the decision of dissolving the local council was approved by all the members.

The assessment of reasons behind dissolving the local councils after the control has been transferred to the central regime are dominated by the factors like the absence of the geographical scope, the reduced administrator scope and the absence of any legitimacy. Before the central regime regained power in the regions which were previously controlled by the opposition groups, the local councils were responsible for representing the people and all the activities were associated with the administrative boundaries of the city. However, the displacement of the members of the council and the agreements providing control back to the regime resulted in complete reference of the geographical scope of work administered by these local councils and the complete absence of the administrative boundaries in which their activities were carried out. The control of the city by the Syrian government also threatened the independence of the work carried out by the council. Another major reason for the decision to dissolve the councils stems from the fact that the service officers of the council were no longer fulfilling the designated responsibilities as all these tasks were now outside the administrative scope. The local councils were not accepted as legitimate administrative bodies in the city and this decline in legitimacy contributed to the tough decisions taken by

the council members to dissolve them. When the territories were started to be controlled by the opposition groups, the local councils develop their responsibilities and duties that were steadfast with the requirements of the citizens of the respective regions. The council had an excellent understanding of the needs of the people and they were also familiar with the conditions of war and blockade going on in their territory (Couldrey & Peebles, 2018).

Once the councils were moved to the neighboring places, they were no longer able to obtain this information and could not stay updated with the latest happenings in their cities and provinces. The lack of representation of the residents living in the territory and the increasing representation from the people who were displaced and in diaspora transformed the purpose for which the local councils were formed and increased their border significantly despite the lack of legitimacy, abilities and resources. The people that decided to continue residing in the city could no longer relate to the objectives and activities of the local council and the people who were displaced were also not very supportive of the idea of reconstituting the local council in the new territory. Added to this, these local councils have to complete with the local councils of the host locations during the distribution of service roles and fight for the resources and aid received by them. This decision of dissolving the local councils of the displaced provinces and territories can be studied from the following perspective. It was the decision that allowed the council members to make a decision without compromising and resuming the control to the ministry of local administration. However, this decision resulted in the absence of a political body representing the needs of the people who were forcibly displaced from their cities find a code no longer take help from the established administrative bodies to demand their rights (El-Faqir, 2017).

The joining of the City Council with the Aleppo Governorate Council provided both the bodies with wider diversity and scope that helped in a significant reduction of the functional inconsistencies of the Council. The supervisory role of the leaders of both the councils working in collaboration increased the scope and effectiveness of their activities and administrative units in the governorate able to serve the needs of the displaced population as well as the people residing within the territory of the Aleppo Governorate Council. The rampant migration of the people in support of the opposition followed by the recapturing of the territories by the regime and its allies impacted how the local councils that were formed in these regions operated. However, it was also noted that the roles of some councils did not undergo any significant change even after the migration and the abandonment of the area where they were formed. The councils that were forced to move away from the areas that were now under the control of the regime had their roles previously restricted to representing

the local community but were now carrying out revolutionary coordination and relief work for the dislocated people while organising the statistics and carrying out needs assessment for them. The Damar and Kafr Soussa Councils are such local councils that continued with their clandestine work within their territories and the administrative borders and contributed to reshaping the anti-government movement outside it (Amnesty International, 2017).

Even after their arrival in the Idlib province, these councils adopted the responsibility of restructuring their own accord and all the members of these councils returned to the higher administrative levels. The two councils worked on counting the displaced and securing their needs through communication with supporters and humanitarian organizations. The councils are also continuing to carry out their roles that they were performing in the occupied areas and the areas from which they were displaced. However, they continue to face the challenge of an almost complete lack of resources which lead to temporary destruction of their activities immediately after the migration but they decided to continue functioning by focusing on playing the relief role at the expense of the other roles and responsibilities (IDMC, 2018).

The case of the Madaya and Zabadani Councils add another perspective to the impact of the dislocation of the council members followed by the centre regarding control of the territories. The negotiations for the Four Cities Agreement started in September 2015 and the agreement was finalized towards the end of the year 2016 between the Al-Fateh Army and the Iranian side and with Qatari effort. This resulted in the dislocation and evacuation of more than 3500 civilians residing in the city of Zabadani because of the power intensifying siege and the military escalation against the Zabadani region in general. The role of the Zabadani councils was completely marginalized followed by this because of the complete encroachment in the area by the military forces that were dominant even before the displacement started. The activities of the council were replaced by the relief organisation that operated independently and was controlled by the Ahrar al-Sham movement (Human Rights Council, 2011). This organisation carried out the management of the convoys containing the displaced individuals by maintaining the record of their numbers and decided the distribution of these migrants to the different shelter centres located in the north. The local council of the town of Madaya discontinued its operations as the local council and instead formed the Syrian Center for the Rights for the people who were forcibly displaced from their respective cities and territories while basing its operations in Idlib itself. The tasks that are carried out by this centre include maintaining the documentation of the names of the people who were forcibly displaced because of the armistice, hostilities, security prosecution and forced agreements. This centre also carries out regular communication with the United Nations and Security Council by

running numerous advocacy campaigns highlighting the issues of forced displacement of the refugees. They work towards claiming the rights of the people to return to their cities and highlight the humanitarian and the legal perspective of this issue. The ongoing issue of the return of these people who are forcibly migrated is raised among the host communities and in the host environment while encouraging the development of independent groups for increasing the representation in the governorates (Roth, 2017).

3.3 Local councils and the Russian truce agreements

The regime and its allies including Russia and Iran have realised that some people opposing the regime do not associate themselves with the terrorist organisations and actually taking a moderate stance. Therefore, identify the distinct value in the local councils formed across the areas in control of the opposition in Syria and have adopted the approach to empower these local administrative bodies for coming up with the resolution for this ongoing conflict. The long-lasting civil war and conflict in Syria have resulted in weakening the position of the central government and has also contributed to territorial fragmentation throughout the country. Russia has been a strong supporter of the Al-Assad regime this conflict and has demonstrated its commitment to the probability of Syria. It has promoted territorial integrity in the country and is also extending support for the creation of a unified nation. However, the establishment of the self-government civic bodies in the territories that are controlled by the opposition, in the form of the local councils have resulted in stability and effective administration in these regions. The rebel-controlled districts are efficiently managed by the local Council for a very long time and it gives hope to the opposition that the Syrian activist Omar Aziz at the onset of the uprising in 2011 has materialized to some extent (Mardasov, 2017).

Until recently, Russia was refusing to accept and acknowledge the presence of civil war in Syria and projecting the conflict as the fight between the central government in Damascus and terrorists. Because of this policy, the Russian officials did not carry out an objective assessment of the local councils and their performance. The Defence Ministry of Russia supported the evacuation of the besieged fighters and all their family members to the territories in control of the opposition like Idlib and Aleppo. At the same time, it has been clear in the communication that any notorious jihadist groups should be detained and screened once the centre regains the control in these territories. However, the response of Moscow after successfully recaptured eastern Aleppo and the statement by the defence Ministry of Russia indicated the subsequent recognition of the country to the people

belonging to the moderate opposition. In the end, Article 15 regarding the separation of power between local councils and the central government was incorporated into Syria's much-talked-about draft constitution produced by Russian experts and presented to the armed opposition at negotiations in Astana, Kazakhstan. This step indicates the building this of the country to make some concessions and give consent to the division of Syria into different zones that have distributed control within the existing national boundaries of the nation. The nation has stated that the draft constitution formed by including numerous controversial subjects like the seven-year presidential term for the regime and the discussion associated with the cord is autonomy is for promoting discussion between all the parties involved in the conflict. However, it indicates the focus of the Russian forces to legalise the local councils and their integration into the conflict settlement process as the political and administrative representative of the people. Russia has acknowledged that supporting the local governance system is a pragmatic approach that can prove to be effective for restoring peace across Syria. Providing legitimacy to the local councils can also help in improved addressing of the social needs of the people and job creation (Imady & Hinnebusch, 2018).

Resulting from this, Russia is focusing on pushing the truce agreements towards the local councils especially after the setback that it received in Aleppo. There are also visible signs of the shift in the regional and international position taken by Russia towards the Syrian conflict. The initial truce agreements prepared by Russia did not include any mention of the local councils and were only focus on the prevalence of security considerations for fighting against terrorism and for ceasing the military operations in the areas. This was despite the significant role played by the local councils in the Amman and Cairo agreements promoting the humanitarian considerations of the civilians and also focusing on restoring stability. The inclusion of local councils in the truce agreements presented by Russia is conducive for these governance structures. This is a political opportunity that can help in advancing the intended objectives of forming the local councils. However, the local councils are also trying to identify any threats in this agreement that can result in targeting the presents of these administrative structures in the long run and their adoption of any exclusionary approaches by Russia that maybe later imposed through these truce agreements (Araabi & Hilal, 2016).

Therefore, the local councils are trying to develop structures that help in making them immune to the dangers and challenges that may arise because of breach of truce agreements with Russia and working on establishing the integrated trilogy of ensuring security, service provisioning and legitimacy so that they continue to operate successfully in the future as well. Russia is well aware of the complexities in the Syrian crisis that have increased because of

the involvement of the international players and the regional differences. The conflicting interests of the regional powers and the international bodies and the intertwining of the economic, humanitarian, political, security and social crisis has made it mandatory that the approach adopted for the settlement of the crisis results in coming it down and dismantling the individual challenges into different tracks for making it a little simpler to manage. This will provide Syria with the ability to avoid the conflict of interest between the different active forces and move towards a position that helps in achieving a balance between these interests.

Russia has acknowledged the importance of the involvement of the hardest groups and the factions of military opposition when coming up with the arrangements for military intervention and for ensuring security in Syria. Similarly, it is also acknowledging the significance of the involvement of local councils in the arrangements that are targeted towards ensuring effective administrative arrangements and service provisioning with the help of the truce agreements. It is only doing this after analysing the role played by each of these elements and ensuring that it is consistent with the vision of the solution to the Syrian conflict that Russia has developed.

The Russian-American appeasement agreements were mostly focused on establishing arrangements for military intervention to avoid the collision of both the parties when designing the considerations for defining the security and military in the region. This agreement was also directed towards managing the security associated with the counter-terrorist operations taking place in the Syrian geography. Because of this, there was no mention of the local councils and the role fulfilled by them in the areas under the control of the opposition. The limited role of the local administration in this arrangement is because of the focus of the agreements on the military factions. Followed by this, the Ankara agreement that was offered on 23rd January 2017 establishing the launch of the Astana route also failed to mention any role played by the local councils because it was promoting the stipulation of a ceasefire and the negotiations between the allegations that were representing the military factions of the parties that were finding the agreement. However, this agreement indicates a shift in the position of Russia and its strict refusal to deal with the local councils in any way. Russia had previously used these government structures of fuelling violence among the people. However, the relapse of Aleppo has led to the realisation of the significance of local councils as Russia begins considering the fragmentation of the authority of the central government across different spheres of influence (Adleh & Favier, 2017).

The Memorandum of Understanding of the South between Russia, America and Jordan, the Egyptian mediation and the agreement to reduce tension in Eastern Ghouta indicates towards

remarkable development made by Russia by including local councils and discussing their role in the agreements and also reforming their position in the implementation of the emerging arrangements suggested by the country. Russia has acknowledged the role of the local councils and the strengths possessed by these administrative and governance structures designed by the people. The Russian approach seeks to employ councils within its vision based on strengthening the existing system and restoring the Syrian state in accordance with some form of decentralization, and their tools in this are truce agreements and military pressure on council areas.

The truce agreements designed while acknowledging the role of the local councils can be beneficial for them. This is because the local companies will be able to address the challenges associated with the displacement of the people and in addressing their social, humanitarian and economic demands ensuring stress relief for the Syrian refugees. The agreements can empower the local council and allow them to corporate with autonomy when dealing with the service entitlement and the management of large-scale financial resources. It will also help in opening the doors for the legislators with the exposure of the donor conditions. The increasing need for establishing the legitimacy of the local councils can be addressed with the help of these agreements and the councils will be successfully able to represent all the segments of the new society including the displaced people, the women and children, the loyalists and protestors. The truce agreements are advantageous for the local councils because they help in strengthening the good governance practices and can also allow these councils to attract and maintain the staff having specialised competencies. This will significantly improve the effectiveness of the local councils and enable them to immediately respond to the requirements of the people not just in the initial phase of conflict resolution but even in the long term (Al-Rawashdeh, 2018).

The councils understand that the international powers and regional players involved in the conflict need their support as a mechanism for the implementation of the truce agreements. The experience that distances have accumulated then managing the conflict and serving the people during the humanitarian crisis makes them valuable. The local councils have obtained some degree of legitimacy among the local population because of the fair representation of the people, consistent management of all their affairs and working towards meeting their needs (Narbone, Favier, & Collombier, 2016). The role and future of the local councils are determined by their ability to accomplish service and humanitarian benefits arising from the truce agreements. The local councils need to achieve institutional stability by building their capacities. The truce agreement can provide the necessary logistical and technical support to

these councils along with the provisioning of the required machinery and equipment enhancing their ability to provide service to the civilians. The working of the councils can become more professional and they will be in a position to successfully carry out service provisioning for all the citizens without any partiality or discrimination. This will help in promoting the values of professionalism and transparency and also encourage people to participate in the decision-making and service provisioning of these bodies (Ziadeh, 2019).

On the contrary, the central government of Syria is strongly opposing the establishment of the local Council that are not affiliated with the regime. It is trying to restore the administrative structures that were previously established by the regime and are loyal to the government. This is because of the fear that the local councils can contribute to the creation of a democratic public division that has been consistently aborted by the centre. The policy of liquidation of the local councils followed by the regime is based on showing acceptance to them by following the virtue of necessity in principle and later creating a pressure of security and service on the administrator systems designed by the local companies for exhausting them. This will ultimately lead to weakening the councils and their obsolescence (Humud, 2020).

3.4 Case Analysis I: Local Councils in Idlib

It is essential to look closer at specific local council cases in Syria in order to understand the basic reasons for their insufficiency and lack of capacity in providing basic services for their residents. Idlib and Aleppo are chosen as the prominent cases to explain the basic dynamics which are limiting the operating capacity of the local councils, as they are representing the most critical and complicated instances of the Syrian civil war.

The governorate of Idlib that has been long held by the opposition has become the centre of numerous airstrikes and ground operations carried out by the Syrian government. More than a million civilians from Idlib have been driven away from their home which is proclaimed to be the largest single displacement taking place in Syria since the war started. The United Nations has acknowledged that a full-scale battle between the opposition and the government can result in a blood bath. Idlib is considered to be of prime importance to the Assad regime as it has a significant stronghold of the jihadist groups and the rebels were constantly working and protesting to overthrow the government since the year 2011.

The opposition and anti-government protesters had taken control of large parts of Syria during this conflict, but the army has again captured most of the territory in the last five years with the help of the assistance received from Russia and Iran. The army has now moved its

focus to Idlib and is working to recapture it. The Assad regime and its alliance including Russia, Iran and the Lebanese Hizbollah have viewed Idlib as a hotbed of terrorism. Over the last few years, the government of Syria and all its allies have carried out numerous sieges in the areas held by the opposition resulting in the breach of the international humanitarian laws. The enforced surrender by the Syrian Army is projected as a deal for reconciliation and the creation of a humanitarian corridor for safe passage has led to the forced migration of thousands of Syrian fighters and civilians. Idlib has been the place of migration of tens of thousands of these people resulting from the continents warfare that has breached all the rules of the war since it started in the year 2011. The influx of the people in Idlib displaced by the areas that were once under the control of the opposition and are now under the Syrian government has resulted in doubling the population of the province. The region now hosts about three million people of which one million consists of children.

The strategic importance of Idlib also makes it a significant target for Damascus and the government. There are numerous different rival factions that are extending their control in Idlib since the opposition gained power in the region in the year 2015. The most dominant force in Idlib is the al-Qaeda-linked jihadist alliance, Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS). Established in the year 2017, HTS is a group that was once a part of the Al-Qaeda but has now formally broken off all its ties. Designated as a terrorist organisation by international bodies like the UN, HTS is estimated to have about 12,000 to 15,000 fighters in Idlib and the areas surrounding the province. HTS carried out numerous violent activities resulting in its takeover of numerous large areas of Idlib province. It is also raising consistent battles against the government and gets the support from the other Islamist groups, the Chinese Uighur militants and the new affiliates of the Al-Qaeda.

Since the year 2017, Idlib had been a part of agreements between Turkey, Iran and Russia for the de-escalation of the issues and the cessation of the ongoing hostilities in the region. The four opposition strongholds in the region including Turkish backed Syrian rebels, the Kurdish forces, and the Al-Qaida affiliated jihadists have become a part of this agreement to ensure uninterrupted delivery of the aid in the area. In October 2017, there were numerous troops deployed by Turkey across its observation posts located on the front line in the Idlib province for constant monitoring of this agreement. The Russian troops follow their lead by placing army man on the side of the government. However, the presence of these troops did not prevent the Syrian government and the army to recapture large parts of the province on the eastern countryside in the following four months. The government and the army move its attention to the other locations like the Eastern Ghouta and the Homs province that were also

successfully recaptured by July 2018. This led to mass destruction in the civilian areas devastating the infrastructure, costing the lives of hundreds of Syrians and resulting in the displacement of thousands of people. The Syrian government termed it as a negotiated surrender where the people supporting the opposition were allowed to evacuate and move to Idlib. The Syrian Army troops started preparing for an assault at an even larger scale in Idlib but this was soon averted after an agreement between Russia and Turkey in September 2018 (Meininghaus & Kühn, 2018). Also known as the Sochi accord, this agreement was for the creation of a demilitarized buffer zone on the front line asking the jihadists to completely withdraw from the region and prevent the mainstream rebels from using heavy weapons. However, the region was unable to completely implement the agreement and while it led to the withdrawal of heavy weaponry of the rebels, the jihadists continued to stay in the area and Idlib was soon taken over by Hayat Tahrir al-Sham. This was followed by a renewal of the conflict in the region and the Government of Syria combined with the Russian military expertise carried out numerous strikes in the areas that were held by the opposition. The jihadist groups carried out shelling in the territories held by the government during this time.

The Idlib province is one of the last remaining zones that is still controlled by the opposition. The radical Islamist group Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) has taken over control of about half the territory from the Free Syrian Army since 2017, while another 50% remains controlled by "moderate forces According to UN-special Envoy de Mistura (who declared resigning from office "for personal reasons" by the end of November), HTS counts an estimated 10,000 fighters (Meininghaus & Kühn, 2018).

The Idlib province is playing a very significant role in the ongoing conflict in Syria. The distinguished geographical location of Idlib transforms it into a link between the northern, central and coastal regions of Syria. The huge number of local councils operating in the Idlib region has attracted a lot of negative attention from the opposition control areas. The stronghold of the ISIS was let loose across the area by the year 2019. The airstrikes carried out by the United States air forces in October 2019 led to the killing of the ISIS leader Abu Bakr al Baghdadi in the Idlib province (Atrache, 2019). A stronghold of opposition against the centre is because of the capturing of this province by the opposition groups in the year 2015. At present, about half of the Idlib provinces under the control of the opposition. With a population of about 3 million people, Idlib is popularly known as the place residing numerous fighters linked with Al-Qaeda (Humud, 2020). The government of Syria significantly escalated the military operations in this province but most of these operations have been bolstered by the local Hezbollah forces and international interference from Iran and Russia.

Described as a humanitarian catastrophe by the United Nations officials, Idlib province has registered the migration of more than half a million people since December 2019. This is because of the ongoing hostilities in the region and 80% off the displaced population comprises of women and children. Idlib was called a safe haven for Al-Qaeda by the United States of America officials and it is still a significant terrorist concern for Syria and for the international governments as well. The US halted the violent extremism to counter this in the year 2018 after the broader withdrawal of the assistance provided by the country to the northwest region of Syria (El-Desouky A. , 2017).

The case of Idlib has a central role in this thesis in terms of demonstrating why local councils failed to operate successfully in Syria. The scarce resources, ongoing opposition from the local bodies and citizens, the contradictory policies of the national and international forces influencing the operations of the council and the entire conflict is having a detrimental impact on the working of the local councils in this province (alSham, 2020). The central geographical divisions of the governorate with six regions comprising 26 districts, while the governorate is divided into 157 administrative units distributed over 15 cities, 47 towns and 95 municipalities that enjoy legal personality, in addition to dozens of villages, farms, and communities that do not have legal personality and are not included in the divisions of administrative council, the actual number of the existing councils are 307 local councils, including the Governorate Council and the town councils that fell to the regime's hand after it seized the east rail regions in February 2016 (Al-Faqir, 2018).

Since its liberation from the Syrian regime, the local government has appeared throughout Idlib governorate, enabling civil society practices and institutions to develop while providing essential services as well. Idlib's local councils serve as an experiment in the type of participatory policy that was not available before the war. Candidates to run local councils are chosen in different ways by larger or smaller councils or through the consensus of families and local organizations through indirect elections, sometimes winning seats through wealth and influence rather than merit. Unfortunately, many of these councils are unable to collect revenue outside international assistance, which means that councilors often work voluntarily and unsustainable public services. Moreover, international actors are reluctant to provide funding for some of these local organizations that may be linked to militant groups. For example, the Services Management Committee was established by a member of Ahrar al-Sham (now part of the National Liberation Front) to coordinate local councils and public services. Likewise, the Public Service Department established by Fatah Al-Sham (now part of the HTS) manages service provision or cooperates with local councils to enhance the group's

position on influence and relationship with the population. Such bodies are more significant and broader in scope than local governments, and some local councils are often unable or unwilling to reject and protect combatant resources (Timep, 2019).

There are numerous instances of armed groups influencing the local councils in Idlib and most of the candidates forming these councils are also determined by the armed groups. While these groups do not interfere in the day to day working and decision making of the local councils, they ask the members to regularly report to them and wish to control all their operations (Dassouky, 2017).

The councils located across Idlib vary in the degree of effectiveness and authority depending upon the factors like the ongoing military operations, the capacity of the council, it's legitimacy and the size of the administrative unit. Along with this, the relationship of the council and its members with Hayat Tahrir al-Sham also has a significant impact on its operations and effectiveness. The local councils are designed to ensure the provisioning of essential services to the members of the community (IWPR, 2014).

The complications that faced the local councils started from the external opposition interventions supported by countries that want to topple the Syrian regime to serve their interests, such as the Arab Gulf states, Turkey, and the United States. These interventions crystallized by creating a single body that brings together all the local councils under one administration. Only in Idlib province, there are three bodies the "Provincial Council" affiliated to the Syrian Coalition, "Board of Directors" affiliated to Army of Conquest, and "City Council" is elected.

The first of these began in 2013 by establishing the "Idlib Governorate Council" to supervise all the local councils' work in the cities and villages of Idlib Governorate. The "provincial council" is based in Taftanaz, east of Idlib, because it was prevented from carrying out its activities or providing its services within the areas of control of the "Army of Conquest." The "Provincial Council" tried to provide support to its bakeries. However, its representative was expelled from the building of the "Idlib City Administration" due to the dependency of the "Provincial Council" to the "Syrian coalition" with "infidel secular regime," Therefore, the Governorate Council did not contribute to providing any services to the city of Idlib. Its activity was limited to supporting the local councils in the villages and cities of the province.

Poor public relations and the restrictions imposed by the "Board of Directors" on the sources of support caused the decline of ties with service organizations and, consequently, the decline of their work, which led to these organizations not dealing with the "Board of Directors." As a result, services are limited in the city of Idlib. The region is in urgent need of a civil

administration independent of the military forces that can deal and benefit from civil organizations' services. Therefore, in 2017, the formation of the Idlib city council, locally recognized as the "Local Council in Idlib City," was elected and formed after signing a memorandum of understanding with the "Board of Directors" stipulating the handing over of all official civil departments in Idlib to the elected council, within a maximum period of three months under coming conditions which the main one in that the Local Council in Idlib City should not be affiliated to the Syrian Coalition.

The "City Council or Local Council in Idlib City" tried to organize the affairs of the city, advance the service reality in it, and establish the "Directorate of Transport." Actually, the council only received the "Service Directorate" and the "Ovens Department" and the Electricity and Water Corporation, i.e., the exhausted sectors due to the high costs of bread, poor water and lack of electricity, and the region's reliance on special generators that operate daily for limited hours. It is difficult to meet civilians' needs through these institutions and departments because most of their facilities are suspended and destroyed. Which led to the weakness of the popular incubator of the council. This seems to have been the intention of the "Army of the Conquest of Fatah", which intentionally managed the rest of the public departments in the city of Idlib, without fulfilling the memorandum of understanding previously signed the "Idlib Local Council". Despite all the previous restrictions, it became clear within a few months that the city of Idlib has changed through several projects completed by the council, including cleaning projects, and "cash-for-work" projects that have maintained all the major roundabouts, the majority of sidewalks, pavements, and public parks, in addition to the project for paving the city's streets, supporting small projects, digging wells to feed the water network, and organizing operating hours for private generators to suit everyone. The council was about to start distinguished projects such as lighting the roads with alternative energy and installing huge generators that would feed the entire city of Idlib with additional electricity hours and contribute to the continuous operation of water pumps. The Headquarters for the Liberation of Al-Sham did not end the "Board of Directors" after the dissolution of the "Army of Conquest", but rather controlled it, and replaced its directors with others affiliated with it, and tried to expand its activities to cover all of Idlib Governorate. However, it almost completely ended the "Provincial Council affiliated with the Syrian Coalition." It contributed to freezing his work after he introduced the "Civil Administration for Services", which issued a statement in which it considered that the bodies and directorates operating in the areas which are controlled by the opposition groups are not only independent legal persons. The "elected city council" is the most affected

by the HTS's dominance of civil affairs. It has been completely terminated by force of arms, despite its commitment to contracts and projects with multiple entities and support organizations (Almodon, 2017).

Idlib Governorate contains two active opposition governments on the ground. The first one is the Syrian Interim Government formed by the Syrian opposition group and the National Coalition for the Syrian Revolution, which had been in Turkey's exile. Then returned to Syria to the areas, controlled by the opposition, specifically the city of Idlib. It contains eight ministries, including the Ministry of Local Administration, which suffers from political and field conditions. The opposition as a whole is experiencing a change in the mood of international supporters in general. There are no longer opportunities for different opposition institutions to obtain generous support. The area of opposition control on the ground has also shrunk gradually, especially in 2018, after the Russian help to the Syrian government and the HTS attacked many opposition areas seeking full control (Jusoor, 2018).

The second government in Idlib is the Syrian Salvation Government, which has extended its control over large parts of the city of Idlib through direct confrontations between the Headquarters for the HTS (formerly the Al-Nusra Front) and the opposition forces. Because of the bloodshed, opposition forces often withdraw from the areas attacked by the Headquarters for the HTS, which in turn controls the area. Then the Syrian Salvation Government comes to extend its administrative control directly. The Syrian Salvation Government consists of ten ministries, including the Ministry of Local Administration and Services (Enabbaladi, 2018).

The main reason for the failure of the local councils is disharmony and ongoing rivalry between the Syrian Salvation Government and the interim government. The following statistics illustrate the divergence between the local councils.

- 33% of councils identify themselves as local units acting independently from the interim government and the Salvation Government.
- 30% of the councils classify themselves as local units acting independently from Salvation Government. On the other hand, they are administratively affiliated with the interim government. while 13% of the councils describe their relationship with the Salvation Government as a forced cooperation relationship.
- 14% of the councils classify themselves as local units acting independently from the interim government, rather they are administratively affiliated with the Salvation

Government, while 8% of the councils describe their relationship with the temporary as cooperation and coordination relationship;

- 2% of the local councils that administer the temporary administration are related to the Salvation Government as a relationship of cooperation and coordination (7 councils);
- Three councils reported having a rivalry with the Salvation government.
- 27% of the local councils consider their areas under the military control of the HTS ;
- 10% of the local councils consider their areas under the military control of the HTS and other military factions;
- 28% of the local councils consider their areas to be under the military control of various factions (other than the HTS);
- 29% of the local councils consider their regions neutral (not under the authority of any military faction);
- The local councils that have administrative affiliation with the interim government and are located in the military control areas of the HTS account for 9% of the sub-governorate councils;
- Local councils that have administrative affiliation with the interim government and are located in the military control areas of the rest of the factions (except for the HTS) constitute 14% of the sub-governorate councils;
- Two local councils in the governorate have an administrative affiliation to the Salvation Government and are located in the military control areas of the rest of the factions (except for the HTS);
- There are eight councils with coercive affiliation with the Salvation Government and located in the military control areas of the rest of the factions (except for the HTS);
- Local councils that have administrative affiliation with the interim government and do not fall into the areas of military control for the rest of the factions, including the HTS, constitute 9% of the sub-governorate councils;
- There are four councils with administrative affiliation to the Salvation Government and located in neutral areas.

Most of the local councils in Idlib governorate complain about the provincial council's weakness, and most councils expressed their willingness to cooperate with the Salvation Government of the HTS after they provided them with gas, in the absence of the provincial

council and the interim government. Military factions also take advantage of inter-family differences over local councils' formation and try to interfere in the formation.

In administrative units in which there are different factions, many of these factions are trying to have a presence in the existing local council through the sons of the region belonging to this or that faction, which led to the reluctance of aid from several support organizations. Therefore, the people in many areas went to ask the factions not to interfere with the work of councils. There are several councils, some resources were brought in, but the Salvation government took control of these resources and did not leave the councils anything like the Rusafa and Ras al-Ain councils, as the HTS took over agricultural land owned by the local council in Kafr Yahmoul. Many local councils play relief roles only and have no permanent headquarters, no service activity. The vast majority of councils do not have an internal system, budget, or integrated work plan (Al Faqir, 2018).

The external factors impacted in a significant way on the performance of the local councils in the city of Idlib, and we conclude many of them through the above, the bombing of the Syrian regime and his allies under the eyes of the international community and the United Nations made many obstacles for the local councils. In addition to the local councils relying on external financing in a large percentage, stopping or rationing in this funding weakened and limited the influence of local councils in the Idlib governorate, which has a private affair different from all areas in Syria outside the control of the local government because of its geographical importance and opposition components whom they are based in the city of Idlib. Another external factor that affected local councils is the lack of coordination from the supportive countries that support a certain number of local councils at the expense of other weaknesses and the support of civil society organizations at the expense of local councils. The external support directed directly to the armed groups, regardless of their belief, whether jihadist or moderate groups mainly affected the democratic and political track of the work of the local councils, as the external interventions through their agents on the ground have limited and weakened the work of the local councils. Thus, the influence and administrative authority have been strengthened for different military factions in the city of Idlib.

To sum up there are two basic factors which have been decisive in failure of the local councils in Idlib. These are lack of coordination and harmony among the local councils and international interference which limited the capacity of the local councils considerably. Obviously these two factors are closely interrelated. Lack of coordination among the pro-opposition countries results in disharmony in local councils in Idlib. Even fierce rivalry

between some councils are rooted in competition between regional powers who actually share the same goal of overthrowing the Assad regime.

3.5 Case Analysis II: Local Councils in Aleppo

Aleppo is Syria's second-largest city and it plays a significant role in the geopolitical and economic performance of Syria. Located very close to Turkey, Aleppo along with Damascus is one of the oldest cities that have been continuously inhabited throughout the world. It is a metropolitan city that hosts a population of people belonging to various different ethnicities, religious and beliefs. Economically, Aleppo can be broadly classified into the populations belonging to the lower middle class, a mix of rich and poor class and the rich upper class. Western Aleppo was captured by the opposition groups by November 2012. The rest of the region was demarcated as the dangerous area divided by a pathway. There were numerous people crossing to the other side for reaching their places of work for some time but soon enough, this pathway was blocked completely separating the two sides (Khalaf, 2017).

Followed by the take-over of Western Aleppo by the opposition forces, the city experienced complete state failure. This gave rise to humanitarian crisis in the region increasing the insecurity of the citizens and the formation of numerous parasitic gangs carrying out crimes like loot and burglary. A local initiative in the form of the security police tried to extend its control over the region but it was dismantled shortly after its formation. While this ongoing humanitarian crisis, Aleppo is also witnessing the development of a civil society that was better managed and structured as compared to any other civil societies operating in Syria. This was because Aleppo attracted numerous revolting activists from all over the country who were trying to move away from the areas controlled by the regime. Another challenge faced by the city was the ongoing polarization between the Islamic and the secular activist groups. This made numerous activists detach themselves from the political activities and they contended themselves with fulfilling the basic humanitarian needs of the people of Aleppo.

The ISIS also tries to take advantage of this ongoing divergence in the beliefs of the activists extending its authority in the western region of Aleppo. However, the ongoing brutality by the group and extreme hostility towards the civil society resulted in the triggering of extreme resistance by the common population among against the ISIS. Jaish Al-Mujahideen guided the armed resistance against it and the locals of Aleppo were soon able to free themselves by expelling the ISIS. This was followed by the random attacks and bombing of the institutions, houses and other civilian areas across the western part of Aleppo. This random shelling combined with the availability of limited resources in the region contributed to the migration

of the people out of Aleppo in large numbers. By now, the city was only housing a few people who did not have the resources to move to a new place. Aleppo developed its own solution in the form of hybrid governance structure to address the ongoing conflict. There are three distinct layers of bodies operating in the city. These include:

- Aleppo Governorate Council
- Sharia Court and
- Conflict society

The longtime opposition carried out by the activists in the Aleppo countryside resulted in the first attempt of the local powers to create the local council. The members of the opposition including the activists from the Tansiqiyat (local protest coordination committees) convinced of the possibility of getting assistance from the European governments if it decides to create an independent local administrative body in the areas controlled by the opposition groups. The local councils were established as the local governance bodies in various provinces in Syria organically. These were found in the absence of any government system extending control from the top. Similarly, the local councils in Aleppo were established in 2013 to fill the gap created by the lack of central control. These local councils have managed to maintain effective delivery of the basic services with the necessary support from the external forces. It is evident that providing the necessary support and building the capacity of the local councils as the government bodies can facilitate the recovery efforts in these regions and can also help in building resilience across the populations belonging to the provinces. Aleppo local councils have maintained adequate transparency in the decision making and with the right support; these councils have also enhanced the accountability of the governing bodies (IIED, 2018). The organizations carrying out humanitarian and development operations in Syria are trying to create conditions that stabilize the population and the economy. The local councils can play a major role in doing this with their support as evident in Aleppo.

The local population of Syria has become increasingly dependent on the national and international aid and the protraction of the ongoing conflict has further intensified this situation. The physical capital stock of the provinces across Syria has decimated and the economic activities throughout the country have decreased exponentially. The siege that took place in Aleppo province in the year 2016 resulted in increased shortages of electricity and clean water throughout the region because they were cut from the government and because of the destruction of the infrastructure. While before the siege people could move between the area controlled by the opposition and area controlled by the government. The residents of the

province were only surviving on the supply coming from the water tankers and the meals supplied by the organizations providing them with the aid and assistance. However, this has changed since the onset of the crisis and Aleppo has managed to set up numerous local councils despite the complex demographic dynamic of the province. Fostering these local councils has provided the province with a lot of assistance during the crisis and they have managed to help the vulnerable groups to recover and build more resilience for any conflicts that may arise in future (IWPR, 2014). The local councils in Aleppo are reaching out to the national and international agencies that are offering aid to ensure the equitable distribution of resources across all fragments. The sub-national governance institutions in the form of the local councils in Aleppo are not only providing assistance but also carrying out the fundamental operations of add distribution and service delivery. They are maintaining the infrastructure and this local framework can help in laying the foundation for centrally controlled national framework that can expedite the process of recovery for the entire nation.

In addition to the international powers, the local actors are contributing equally to ensure the success of the local councils in Aleppo province. One such example is a project Tamkeen carried out by the Conflict, Security and Safety Fund's (CSSF) in the region. As a part of this initiative, the local forces are assigned the task of developing a response to the ongoing crisis. Tamkeen was an initiative designed to expand the capacities of governance of these local councils by increasing the participation in the regions of Syria that are controlled by the opposition. As a part of this initiative, the local councils receive grants and are given the freedom to carry out the planning, budgeting, procurement and implementation of the basic services for their communities. These include the project associated with ensuring livelihood, health and safety, education and food security for all their citizens (IIED, 2018). While being a project for local government development, Tamkeen is also serving as a tool for fulfilling the humanitarian needs of the people in the Aleppo province and increasing the sustainability of these regions (Khalaf, 2017).

In 2013, 71 local councils were approved, all of which are preparing to elect the first local council for the city, which will consist of a 344-member general assembly, electing 25 representatives to the city council, 29 members of the provincial council, including eight from the city and the rest from the Aleppo countryside. The local council of Aleppo is carrying out cleanliness and environment works, registering health and educational institutions, and repairing roads with available capabilities, in partnership with the two most essential service arms in the city of Aleppo, namely the Islamic Department of Services affiliate of ISIS and the Sharia Board consisting of several factions, most notably the Al-

Nusra Front (later became HTS) - Ahrar al-Sham - the Tawhid Brigade. Because of this cooperation before the expulsion of ISIS form the Aleppo city, Aleppo's local council was able to obtain many equipment and mechanisms from the Free Syrian Army factions and service organizations, which enabled it to proceed with its services according to what is available was able to rehabilitate electricity transmission stations (Aljazeera 2013).

Later, in a unilateral move, Jabhat Al-Nusra announced the formation of the General Administration of Services in Aleppo, one of three service groups that serve non-military facilities and matters in the city of Aleppo. Furthermore, these formations are the General Administration of Services - the Islamic Administration for Services (affiliated with ISIS) - the Sharia Commission in Aleppo (consisting of several factions, most notably the Al-Nusra Front - Ahrar al-Sham - the Tawhid Brigade). After expelling ISIS from Aleppo, the Al-Nusra Front took control of the administration Islamic Services and Sharia Board in Aleppo. Subsequently, the General Administration of Services faced many challenges, most notably the acute shortage of mechanisms required for all directorates due to the Islamic State and the Syrian regime targeting of management vehicles and equipment and its headquarters. Among these obstacles is a lack of human resources due to the displacement of most of Aleppo residents to other areas, for fear of bombing and ongoing clashes (Aljazeera, 2014).

There has been no struggle over control of the local councils from the Free Army, Jabhat al-Nusra, and ISIS for a long time except for the expulsion of ISIS from the city of Aleppo. This harmony in managing the areas in Aleppo is due to Turkey and Qatar's external interference in the work of the local councils in Aleppo. Consequently, this external intervention positively affected the local councils' work, which performed their role excellently and established a state of cooperation between the local councils, the various opposition forces, and the local population. Therefore, the democratic situation in the city of Aleppo was at its best, and this is what the regime and its allies feared until Russia announced the cessation of direct support from Qatar to the local councils and considered it an essential achievement in the course of the battle to retake the city of Aleppo. (lebanon24, 2016).

We can divide the events in Aleppo into two parts. Before and after the fall of Aleppo, after the Russian intervention and the overthrow of Aleppo, the Kurdish militias went and completed their control over the northern countryside of Aleppo with direct American support. Russian interference in the Syrian war was the main reason for Aleppo's re-control and the tightening of the siege on the opposition-held areas in the city of Aleppo. At the same time, the Aleppo countryside remained under the control of the Syrian regime, the Kurdish forces, ISIS, and the Free Syrian Army.

The Kurdish forces have brought full control of the Syrian-Turkish border because of the American support; thus, the Kurdish forces linked all the areas they have captured, especially after the victory over ISIS, with the help of the international coalition forces that played a crucial role in the air. Turkey's became very concerned about the approaching of the Kurdish forces' control of the northern countryside of Aleppo, and this is why the Turkish forces launched a war against ISIS and the Kurdish forces and achieved a decisive victory, thus Turkey had severed the Kurdish areas with an operation called the "Euphrates Shield in 2017". Another operation followed in 2018 to end the presence of the Kurdish forces in Aleppo countryside, and Afrin was controlled in operation called "Olive Branch."

With the completion of the Battle of the Euphrates Shield, Turkey took the initiative to thoughtfully manage the northern and eastern countryside of Aleppo by strengthening its military and administrative presence in the region, providing educational and medical health services, as well as providing electricity and water to the residents of the region, establishing communication centers and towers for the Turkish air network and activating its work in the region.

The Turkish government succeeded in including the armed opposition factions in forming most of the brigades and battalions operating in the Euphrates Shield region. The agreement came against the backdrop of a meeting between Turkish officials and leaders of the armed opposition factions that control the region. After uniting the ranks of the opposition, the Turkish forces united the work of the border crossings with Turkey. They handed them over to a civil administration to coordinate the crossings' work in the region after the opposition factions abandoned them. Namely, the Bab Al-Salama crossing, the Shepherd crossing, and the Jarabulus crossing, while the Turkish government recently opened a new border gate linking the Battle of the "Olive Branch" area to Turkish territory.

At a time when the region is facing a significant security breach, Turkey has formed the police and public security forces in the Euphrates Shield area to effectively control the security of the region, after many incidents in the region, from the spread of theft, kidnappings. Turkey considers the local councils the sole and legitimate representative of each region or city in the Euphrates Shield regions. Turkey has supported the local councils by providing educational and medical services that are the basis for institutional work to reach later to implement service projects that secure a relatively good life for the residents of the region (Al Khatib, 2018).

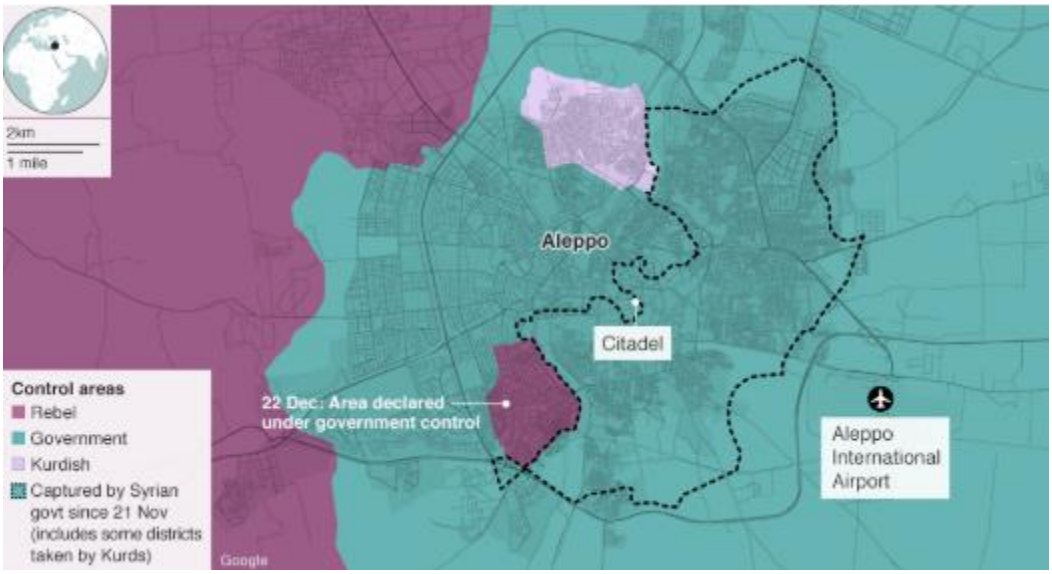
Turkey did not interfere in the formation of these councils except in security cases. That is, when a member or employee is not wanted locally, or when there is suspected of any ties to

organizations that Turkey considers terrorists. Turkey's domination of the local councils was achieved in its current form after the "Turkish Emergencies and Disasters Administration / AFAD" assumed the responsibility of adequately supervising the humanitarian and relief work in the region. No foreign or domestic organization can operate without supervision.

The northeastern part of the countryside of Aleppo monitored by governorate of Gaziantep while the northern Aleppo countryside is administratively attached to Kilis. The Turkish side has assigned a representative for each council bearing the official capacity: "Assistant to the governor"," for the city to which the villages and farms belong in Syria. In practice, the local councils in the region, supported by the Turkish side, outperformed the military councils that dominated the main "Euphrates Shield" centers, during the past years, when the role of the local councils was secondary. Mostly, the local councils were under the umbrella of the military councils. It can be said that the local councils achieved independence, at present, from the armed factions in the region by 80 percent. The Turkish side seeks to dismantle these links completely during the coming period, so there will be no influence of armed factions on the formation of local councils. The local councils monitored by the governorate of Gaziantep received more attention in terms of the volume of services provided, their quality and intensity. Al-Bab, the largest city of the "Euphrates Shield," obtained a large share of support, the Al-Bab Sports Club was rehabilitated, and it established directorates affiliated to the council, including the Transportation Directorate. The central garage was renovated in the city, and several unions were formed, like the Medical Association, and pharmacists. The Livestock Office was established. The Chambers of Industry and Commerce is considered one of the most effective chambers in the region. Jarablus comes second in terms of service activity and the support the council receives from governorate Gaziantep. In addition to the support, Jarablus receives from the state center, which is the support provided by Turkish national societies, many Syrian Turkmen live in the city and the villages near it. In contrast, the opportunities for support, and the level of miscellaneous services provided by local councils managed by officials from Kilis State; in Azaz, Maree, Suran, Akhtaren, and Al-Raai, it is less than the eastern part of the "Euphrates Shield". Perhaps the reason for this is the weak capabilities between the two governates, the presence of Turkish officials in Gaziantep who have a real desire to build a partnership between the state and local councils in the "Euphrates Shield", and the provision of various services, offset by the formation of responsive councils, as in the council that was formed after the "Islamic State" was expelled from the region (Al Khatib, 2018).

Nine years have passed since Syria has been involved in this ongoing conflict that has affected every single aspect of the lives of the Syrians. The humanitarian catastrophe in the form of the Syrian civil war has taken thousands of life, resulted in the displacement of people and has also resulted in numerous costly damages to the entire infrastructure of the country (Fangi, 2019). Over a third of the total population of Syria has suffered from the devastating impact of the conflict and among these, Aleppo and Homs are the worst hit. Aleppo and Homs are the second and the third largest cities in the country and the old city of Aleppo was done for numerous historical monuments. However, most of these are either partially damaged or completely destroyed along with the entire infrastructure of the city. Aleppo was previously divided with the eastern part of the city under the control of the rebels and the western part of Aleppo under the control of the Assad regime. This was until the end of the year 2016. December 2016 witnessed the takeover of the entire city by the Syrian government forces and Aleppo was reunited followed by an evacuation agreement with the rebels in the eastern Aleppo were allowed to migrate and leave the region. At present, about 90% of the total surface area of the old city of Aleppo is completely damaged where 60% of the area is severely damaged and 30% of it completely destroyed (Munawar, 2018). The map below represents the control areas of the different forces at the end of December 2016 when the northern Syrian city of Aleppo was caught in a brutal four-year deadlock.

Figure 3: Aleppo at the end of the battle Source: (BBC News, 2020)



The heritage of the city is considered to be the most significant weapon during any conflict. The ongoing conflict in Aleppo has combined the cultural heritage of Syria with the identity of its people destroying the chance of allowing the people to appreciate the history of the

place and also carry out the plans for continuous development and future nation-building. The representatives of the opposition in Aleppo combined with the regional and international forces entered an agreement that allowed the people belonging to the eastern region of Aleppo to evacuate and move to the areas that were no longer under the control of the regime. This is applicable to all the people who are not ready to settle for the conditions that were offered by the regime after it regained control of the eastern parts of the second largest city of Syria. The military escalation in the city lasted for more than a year and the regime continued to tighten the siege on the protestors residing in the city the last batch left in December 2016. People belonging to Aleppo displaced during this time were estimated to be about 150,000. Most of the people were distributed across the governorate of Idlib or the governorate of Aleppo in addition to some members that decided to move towards the northern countryside of Aleppo. This migration and mass dislocation of people from the eastern Aleppo was taking place while the fourth electoral cycle of the Aleppo City Council was going on. The city council decided that there were two options available with them to make the decisions associated with the distribution of power and the allocation of responsibilities among the members. The first option was to completely dissolve the Aleppo City Council and establish a new committee for the management of the displaced affairs of the people belonging to Eastern Aleppo. The other option was to activate the Council based on the elections and the existing members.

The General Assembly of Aleppo, consisting of 140 people, what is called for discussion on this subject and the members of the assembly unanimously agreed that they would carry out a relation for the City Council for its fifth session and it would operate in coordination with the Aleppo Governorate Council. The Aleppo City Council was taking advantage if it presents even within the geographical area of the governorate of Aleppo while the administrative borders of the city continued in the hands of the opposing forces. The Counselor actively to care of the interest of the residents of the city of Aleppo by opening two different offices where one was responsible for specifically monitoring the affairs of the displaced population and the other operating in the western countryside responsible for the management of the administrative tasks (El-Faqir, 2017).

Just like the other regions operating the local councils in Syria, the local councils in Aleppo are in support of the armed opposition. This is because the Islamic State actors have a need for maintaining the popular support that the received during the uprising. They encouraged the development of the local councils in numerous areas because of their vested interest in these structures and especially the welfare function carried out by the local councils.

However, this has resulted in the creation of an extremely complex relationship between the two actors where they exchange favors in the form of the aid and arms dubiously.

The changes in the social structure, power distribution and the urban structuring of the population are stimulated by the conflict in the region. It has also changed the face of Aleppo that was once the main place in Syria for the industrial and financial activities holding a key significance for the economy to the city known for constant battle between the two forces. After the control was taken over by the Syrian government, the people residing in the areas under the control of the opposition started to evacuate. The Syrian government received support from Russia and together they supported the relocation of the rebels and their supporters to the Idlib province. However, this evacuation was soon halted by the Syrian government following the reports that the Rebels were not following the rules of evacuation. Even when the evacuation resumed later, there were numerous reports of consistent conflicts and attacks on them. The migration was marked on 22nd December 2017 but this conflict and the consistent fights between the rebels and the Syrian government had a devastating impact on the civilians residing in Aleppo. The people living in the city faced food shortages and the bombing of the critical infrastructure of the city including schools and hospitals made their life very difficult. People started fleeing from the government-controlled territories of Aleppo as well and while this month the end of the conflict in Aleppo, the situation has never been stable for the civilians with their family members losing their lives and the people who left in the city still deprived of numerous necessary services (BBC, 2017).

International support to the local councils in the city of Aleppo and its countryside, saved many of the region's residents from famine and thirst, in addition to repairing the infrastructure of the city of Aleppo, which was damaged by the constant shelling and then tightening the siege by the Syrian regime forces and its allies who played a role in the evacuation of civilians from the city with the local councils, to the countryside of Aleppo or Idlib governorate. Turkey entered Syria with a military operation against Kurdish and ISIS militias. Stability returned to northern Aleppo thanks to support coming from Turkey to the local councils turn organize and provide ways of life for the Syrians.

However, as we discussed in Idlib case, short term foreign support will not provide peace and comfort, without establishing cohesion between all the local parties composing the local councils. After all, the main reason for the insufficiency that all local councils are suffering from is deep fragmentation among the opposition groups and foreign interference coming both from regional and global actors.

CONCLUSION

The local councils in Syria have demonstrated a genuine concern for the increasing security chaos and are working towards minimising it to bring about stability in the areas that are no longer under the control of the regime. They are a hope for the local population belonging to these territories providing them with a stable alternative to the authoritative political structure followed by the Assad regime. However, these councils are facing numerous challenges because of the constant conflict of the concerns of various national and international individuals and organisations. Additionally, the local councils also have to overcome the security considerations that come with the local jihadist groups and central forces trying to create instability and chaos. This dissertation is compiled to inform the readers about the challenges that are faced by the local councils as the administrative operating in the territories that are in control of the opposition in Syria. The study begins with discussing the history of the formation of local councils and the rules that are fulfilled by them in the present day globally. The local councils play the role of steering the population and the respective communities on the path of growth and development. They hold the responsibility for the accurate determination of the measures that can contribute to ensuring the well-being of the larger community. The local authorities in the form of government and councils have to carry out systematic and methodical prioritisation of service provisioning across their designated territories. The common service provisioning oversight provided by the local councils and other administrative structures is associated with improving the overall living and working conditions of the region they preside over. Discussing the role of the local councils in Syria, it is highlighted that the local councils in Syria are not very well established and they often suffer from financial insufficiency and fragmentation among the opposition groups controlling the local councils. Different local councils are at different stages of development and there are numerous factors including the security situation of the region, duration since the establishment of the council, spoilers and access to the border routes that impact their working on a day to day basis. Despite all these challenges, the Syrian local councils have managed to establish some level of governance and provide social services to their respective areas. The authority and autonomy combined with the revolutionary history of the local councils throughout the uprising have made numerous people embrace this system and the local communities are expected to soon enjoy the same degree of legitimacy as a result of these councils.

The study discusses the basic dynamics and regional outcome of the Syrian conflict starting from the beginning. It also provides an insight about the ongoing international interference in the Syrian conflict and discusses the interest and points of contention for each of the international players involved directly or indirectly in the Syrian civil war. The research indicates that the international interests and interference in the Syrian conflict is only complicating the position of the country and strengthening the strategic positions of the international players. The countries are trying to fulfil their long-term political goals by fuelling tension in Syria and instigating the conflicts. The understanding of the interventions by the United Nations and its involvement as a neutral international body has also failed because of the distributed opinion of its members and the members of the Security Council. This is because of the inability of any member or organisation to effectively interpret the situation and frame the conflict is resulting in a lot of disagreement between the member states. The western members of the United Nation Security Council describe the conflict as the violation of the human rights of the Syrian population to justify the anti-government movement. The UN Security Council is also unable to decide the measures that can be taken to address the ongoing crisis. The options available with the council like a change in the regime; military intervention and issuing of sanctions are all extremely controversial. Among the reasons that are identified to contribute to the challenges that are faced by the local councils formed across the opposition-controlled areas in Syria include the weak and irregular flow of finance and other resources for the councils, the political polarization of the territories and the social divisions among the existing members of the society, the ever-increasing security risks from the jihadist groups, international allies of the centre and the regime and the difficulties faced by these local councils to gain the legitimacy as a governance structure responsible for managing the local administration.

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