

Regional Developments in the Battle for Syria

In an unfolding tragic tale of twists and turns, the Syrian conflict has transmuted from that of a solidarity show of support for the Arab Spring in 2011 to that of a continuous conflagrative self destruction perpetrated by a cesspool of several armed opposition factions majorly under the umbrella of the Free Syrian Army (FSA), several Jihadi groups notable among which are the Al Nusra Front and the Islamic State (IS); all of which though disunited on the battle front, are fighting a common cause of overthrowing the government of Bashar al-Assad.

Since 2011, when the conflict started, it was insinuated that the Syrian regime will fall, like that of Tunisia and Egypt within a couple of months. As protests against the government simmered, it was met with brute response from the security forces and that gave birth to the armed opposition mostly made up of disaffected government soldiers under the umbrella of the Free Syrian Army (FSA). With a resolute government not ready to stand down, the scenario turned from that of protest scenes to a full scale conflict.

As world powers (US, UK, France, China and Russia) bickered on resolutions and counter resolutions to resolve the ensuing conflict, their actions and inactions buoyed by an unstable neighbouring Iraq facing a Jihadi insurgency turned the tide of the conflict to that of an unfolding grotesque. Jihadi fighters under the platform of the Islamic State or ISIS and the Al-Nusra front with a vision of creating an Islamic Caliphate in the entire Middle East launched cross border incursions into Syria. For the Jihadists they had two enemies; the Syrian government and the armed opposition forces. On the long run, the Islamic State (IS) gained much ground and declared a caliphate on conquered territories covering Iraq and Syria.

Haunted by the ripples of past military campaigns in the Middle East notably Iraq, the US and the Western powers though yearning for the overthrow of Bashar al-Assad dithered in active military support for the Syrian Opposition

and with the Syrian regime finding active support from Russia, there was no blithe to the aggression of the opposition. As such, the Syrian conflict was left to run its brutal self destructive cause with the hope that the struggle would be resolved on the battle field.

The rise of the Islamic State kitted with sophisticated weaponry captured from the US kitted Iraqi army has changed the face of the conflict. With the capture of large swathes of territory across Iraq and Syria by this group, they seem poised to give a knockout blow to what is left of the regimes in Iraq and Syria and then expanding their conquest beyond. Faced with this threat and brutal executions of hostages by the Islamic state, the US together with a coalition of Western and Arab Countries have begun to take military action, launching airstrikes against IS targets. However, airstrikes alone will not wipe of the capabilities of the Islamic State and whilst the US do have a working relationship with the Iraqi government, the same cannot be said with the Syrian government.

Peace moves have seemed elusive and those arranged in Geneva (Geneva 1 and Geneva 2) between the Syrian opposition and the government ended inconclusively, voiding the wisdom of top diplomats in Koffi Annan and Lakhdar Brahimi.

Lessons learnt from the intrigues of the Arab Spring especially in Libya and the Iraqi story after the US invasion of 2003 have proved that overthrowing strong regimes to the mercies of an uncoordinated opposition don't favour the stability of the State either on the short or long run; therefore, it might be tragic to note that at this stage of the conflict, the US is still trying to identify 'the moderate armed opposition' to kit with arms in the fight against the Islamic State.

The Syrian conflict at this stage will be best resolved by the use of force against the Islamic State and other extremist groups and political negotiation between the opposition and government. Seeing that the Syrian Opposition does not have control over the activities of the armed opposition (Free Syrian army) and that the armed Opposition in itself do have a concrete

command structure, the sustenance of the regime of Bashar al-Assad becomes expedient for the survival and continuity of the Syrian state.

The Syrian people have suffered untold casualties destruction of their homeland and this has had a spiral effect on neighbouring countries. As such, the conflict should be resolved by pragmatic means at this stage forgiving past misdeeds.