

# **Syria Studies**

---

VOL 8, NO 2 (2016)  
November 2016

# **Syrian Mutations**

The Random & the Purposeful

---

Eduardo W. Aboultaif  
Ola Rifai  
Tamara al-Om

# **Syria Studies**

An open-access, peer reviewed, & indexed  
journal published online by:  
The Centre for Syrian Studies (CSS)  
University of St Andrews

Raymond Hinnebusch  
(Editor-In-Chief)  
&  
Omar Imady  
(Managing Editor)

---

---



## Contents

|   |  |       |
|---|--|-------|
|   | Preface – <i>Omar Imady</i>  | v-vii |
| 1 | Regional and International factors that Prolong the Syrian Crisis – <i>Eduardo Aboultaif</i>   | 1-11  |
| 2 | The Kurdish identity; from Banishment to Empowerment – <i>Ola Rifai</i>  | 12-24 |
| 3 | The Emergence of The Political Voice of Syria’s Civil Society from within the Non-violent Movements of the Syrian Uprising - <i>Tamara Al-Om</i> | 25-48 |

## Preface

*Omar Imady*

In this issue of *Syria Studies*, we are pleased to share three new studies that shed additional light on some of the complex layers of the Syrian Uprising.

In *Regional and International factors that Prolong the Syrian Crisis*, Eduardo W. Aboultaif provides an analytical survey of the various regional and international players who are directly or indirectly involved in the Syrian crisis. Aboultaif elucidates the subtle differences between political and economic concerns and explains, for example, how states often are willing to ignore their immediate economic interest when faced with political factors that are seen as national security threats. Aboultaif further describes the inter-consecutiveness of events in Syria and events in Russia, China and Iran, thereby revealing the logic underlying support to the Asad regime. Perhaps most important, and up to the time in which Aboultaif completed this article, the unwillingness of Arab states, and to a lesser extent Turkey, to act directly in the region without American support has served to define the nature of the regional conflict and, explains, to a large extent, the continuity of the crisis.

In *The Kurdish identity; from Banishment to Empowerment*, Ola Rifai explores one of the important manifestations of the Syrian Uprising, namely, how it has directly and indirectly influenced the manufacturing and perception of identity in Syria. Rifai focuses on the proliferation of Kurdish identities after 2011, and shows how, to a large extent, these identities were imposed from above by actors with very specific political agendas. Rifai further sheds light on how the Syrian regime interacted with these identities on the basis of security concerns, rather than on Baathist ideological principles. Various

dynamics, as Rifai narrates, explain why the PYD's vision of an exclusive Kurdish identity was far more empowered than visions of Kurdish identity that were more conciliatory or more willing to remain under some type of Syrian national framework. Though all of this can be traced back to the event of the Syrian Uprising, as with other similar outcomes, the foundations for all of this are far older than the Syrian Uprising and are seemingly the result of the failure of Syrian politicians from independence onwards to address minorities, both ethnic and religious, in a manner that is genuinely inclusive.

In *The Emergence of The Political Voice of Syria's Civil Society from within the Non-violent Movements of the Syrian Uprising*, Tamara Al-Om address one of the most important aspects and ironically least addressed, of the Syrian Uprising. As Al-Om points out in her article, we are far more tempted to focus on the sensational, i.e. war, than we are on the far less dramatic, i.e. a non-violent civil society movement. Further complicating the attempt to focus on Syria's civil society within the context of recent events, is the fact that this entails a far more in depth knowledge of Syria than the attempt to understand a military conflict. Many scholars are tempted to dismiss that Syria, or other countries in the region, even have what might be called a civil society. Al-Om emphasises the need for the international community to refocus its attention on opposition groups within Syria, that are not only not armed but also not political in the strict definition of the term. In the absence of such an approach, not only do we risk holding on to an approach to events in Syria that is significantly not in touch with the majority of Syria's population, but, even more important, risk being alienated from the very civil society institutions that

will play the critical role in the rebuilding of Syria once a resolution is reached.