External Influence and Conflict Resolution in Global Politics: Example from Syria

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Abstract

Conflicts and their resolution in the international system require concerted efforts to achieve results. This however, becomes fruitless when vested, external and extended interests are involved in seemingly simple issues. This appears to be situation in the Syrian crisis that began in 2012 which has significantly demonstrated how third-party involvement shapes the course of wars in the global system. The study adopted the descriptive qualitative method that relied on secondary data from academic journals, books, and newspaper. Anchoring on the realist perspective, the study undertook an appraisal of the Syrian civil war. It argued that the motive and mode of external involvement is a major factor in the trajectory of wars and conflict resolution. Findings revealed that the escalation and prolongation of the war is significantly linked to external involvement in what is termed aggressive unilateralism. Propelled by pre-determined interests, rival powers engaged Syria unilaterally thereby counteracting the United Nations multilateral peace effort, and making conflict resolution a difficult challenge. The study recommends the United Nations multilateralism, especially revisiting the Geneva Communiqué (Security Council Resolution 2254 (2015) which affirms commitment to the sovereignty, independence, and territorial integrity of Syria, in providing a roadmap for a truly Syrian-led peace process.

Key Words: External Involvement, Unilateral Intervention, Multilateralism, Conflict Resolution, and National Interest

Introduction

Driven by national interest and the burden of domestic demands, states are compelled to seek engagements outside their territorial borders to guarantee development and internal stability. This imperative presents a state of affairs in which states are spurred by their neo-liberal impulse to seek areas of corporation for security and economic prosperity (Goldstein 2001:8). In other instance, national interest and the imperative of safeguarding domestic aspirations generates conditions where nations are continually enmeshed in conflicts of interest over which they clash in a zero sum game (Morgenthau, 1978). In this dynamic interface of corporation and rivalry, smaller powers with valuable statecraft are poised to benefit from rational choices, alliances and diplomatic maneuvers. However, in a situation of wrong choices or erratic state behavior, such state viewed as reckless, surrenders its territorial space for destructive power struggle among imperialistic forces, whose ultimate quest is to satisfy the domestic aspiration of their respective states (Mearsheimer, (2009). This later possibility suffices for Al- Bashir Assad and the Syrian state, whose inability to manage its internal crisis arising from the Arab Spring uprising, degenerated into arms conflict. As the situation worsened by terrorist invasion, external intervention becomes a moral imperative. Syria got entangled in the marsh of a superpower rivalry, determined by the strength of their economies, destructiveness of their weapon system, and stiffness of their imperialist intents (Friedman 2018).

Syria was an economically fast-growing lower-middle-income country, where oil, agriculture, industry, and tourism were the economic mainstays (Novik & Starr: 1981). The modern Syrian state was part of the Ottoman Empire until its dissolution by the League of Nations in 1920, with France as its colonial power. In 1946, Syria attained independence but was confronted by lingering political crises resulting in several military coups, one of which brought in the rule of General Hafez al-Assad in 1970 (Waxman, 2017). Syria is a conglomeration of diverse ethno-religious and linguistic groups like the Sunni Muslims majority occupying about 74% of the population, 10% are Christians and 13% Shi'a Muslims including the Alawi community, while 3% are Druze. Also, 90% of the populations are

Arabs, 9% are Kurds, and 1% is Armenians, Circassians, and Turkmen. The President, Bashar al-Assad belongs to the Alawite Shia minority, the dominant ruling community since 1966 after the Ba'ath Party coup (Calabrese 2012). The Alawite Shia minority of the Assad regime is backed by the Shia state of Iran and other regional militia groups. On the other hand, the main rebel force called the Free Syrian Army is 90 percent Sunni and is heavily supported by Sunni state of Saudi Arabia (Bock 2015; CIA World Factbook, 2017). The Syrian state shares borders with Turkey to the North, Iraq to the East, Lebanon and the Mediterranean to the West and Israel and Jordan to the South; its prime location makes it the geostrategic masterpiece of the Middle East (Novik & Starr: 1981).

The Syrian war originated from the *'Arab Spring'* uprising which began as a civil protest in the Tunisia town of Sid Bouzid in January 2011. The Tunisian President, Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali fled the country as the protest intensified and spread to other parts of the Arab states, marking the beginning of the Arab Spring protest. The Arab spring protest was an anti-government uprising seeking reforms in countries across the Middle East and beyond (Phillips, 2016). The Syrian state led by President Al-Bashir Assad was not spared from the 'Arab Spring' due to high unemployment rate, corruption, lack of political freedom, and social exclusion that characterized the state. Influenced by the Arab Spring, Syrians took to the street to protest poor governance and unfavorable conditions of living. What was considered a peaceful protest degenerated into armed conflict at the instance of President Assad's use of force, which included arrests and mass detentions, maiming, raping, shooting and killing of protesters. This situation triggered a survival dilemma as civilians resorted to arms ownership to defend themselves and their communities (Bellal, 2017). As armed violence exacerbated, defectors from the Syrian army joined forces with civilian armed groups to form a militia front called the Free Syrian Army (FSA), bringing Syria to a state of war (Phillips, 2016).

As humanitarian situation worsened, pro-western coalition force led by the United States intervened against terrorist strongholds, while maintaining a policy stance of regime change. In the same manner, Russia siding with the Assad regime intervened to dislodge terrorist and rebel groups occupying Syria (Mazhar and Goraya, 2018). Notably, Iran was the foremost state to establish its unilateral

presence in support of the Assad regime, assisting with training, military and economic aid (Phillips, 2016). The United Nations intervened at the onset of the war through the Department of Political and Peace building Affairs (DPPA), engaged in close monitoring of the Syrian situation (DPPA, 2012). The United Nations Human Right Council (UNHRC) created a commission of inquiry on Syria in August 2011, to monitor gross violation of human rights. And as the war intensified, the UNHRC along with the General Assembly consistently put forth resolutions condemning human right abuses on civilians (Faisal and Javad, 2017). The Anan peace plan was jointly launched by the United Nations and the Arab league in March 2012, followed by the adoption of the Geneva Communiqué for effective implementation of the six-point peace plan in Syria. In this regards, the UN Supervision Mission in Syria (UNSMIS), a UN peacekeeping mission, was set up in April 2012 by UNSC resolution 2043 (https://en.m.wikipedia.org, 2012). The mission lasted until Oct. 2012. But with intensification of violence across Syria, the UNSC was unable to renew the UNSMIS mandate beyond August 2012, pro nb mpting Kofi Anan to resign his position. Lakhdar Brahimi was appointed as the new peace envoy to Syria and as the joint Special Representative of the UN-Arab League peace Mission. His effort remarkably saw reduction in hostilities (Faisal and Javad, 2017).

By April 2013, violence has temporarily decreased as both government forces and rebels forces agreed to a ceasefire, which enabled the SC to adopt resolution authorizing the deployment of a small observer team. The SC further established a larger 90-day UN Supervision Mission (UNSMIS) to monitor the ceasefire and implementation of the Anan Plan, marking a highpoint in attempt to resolve the conflict (http://www.un.org 2012). Brahimi convened negotiations in Geneva in January and February 2014, which aimed to provide break for the Syrian sides to agree on full implementation of the Geneva Communiqué. But while all parties agreed on four point agenda namely; constituting a transitional governing body; tackling violence and terrorism; strengthening national institutions; and reconciliation, they could not agree on the sequence for negotiating these issues. This stalemate was perceived by the fighting groups as a signal to resume hostilities. And as hostilities resumed, Brahimi suspended further negotiations and did not extend his assignment beyond May 2014 (Faisal and Javad, 2017). By 2015, a total of 30,000 foreign fighters had flown into Syria to fight for either side

of the conflict. Disturbed by the massive influx into Syria in view of its national security, Israel laid a formal complaint at the United Nations, in which it indicated that Iran has more than 80,000 fighters in Syria (Giacomini, 2016).

The humanitarian consequences of the war is vividly captured in the CIA World Factbook (2017); as of December 2016, most public utilities and infrastructures were either damaged or reduced to rubble making the Syrian situation the largest humanitarian crisis worldwide. Approximately 13.5 million people were either dead or in need of humanitarian assistance; 6.3 million are displaced internally, and 4.8 million Syrian are refugees outside Syria. According to United States Institute for Peace (2020), as Syria marked its 11th year of conflict, 500,000 deaths have been recorded, 13million displaced, 6.2 million internally displaced and, 5.6 are refugees mainly in Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey. Between July 2018 and June 2020, more than 2700 children were killed by airstrikes and explosive remnants over indiscriminate ground shelling of civilian populated area. Attacks affecting 37 water facilities were verified in a period of 6months in 2019 affecting water supply for 600 thousand people. According to the UN 2021 report, Jordan hosts 500.000 refugees making up almost the 1/6 of the country's population. Lebanon hosts 450.000, while Turkey shelters over 3.6million Syrians. Twenty-two million people, more than half of Syrian prewar population is displaced by the violence; with more than six million internally displaced, and six million fleeing abroad (UNHCR, 2021). In 2021, more than 6.8 million refugees were from Syria, more than any other country in the world. While an estimated 5.8 million children need humanitarian aid to meet their basic needs in Syria and neighboring countries (https://www.worldvision.org/refugees-news).

The contradiction regarding external intervention and escalation of the war creates the need to interrogate the motives and mode of engagement by the external forces. It is argued that the Syrian conflict took an upward trajectory at the instance of unilateral use of armed forces in combat positions by these forces. As hostilities intensified with influx of opposing foreign fighters, the war became internationalized; becoming a proxy war of the superpowers. Also, regardless of the prevailing domestic realities which represent a potent catalyst for the war such as, poor governance, extreme sectarian divide and highhandedness of Al Bashir Assad in handling the Arab Spring protest, key factor in the escalation of the

conflict is majorly the quest by foreign powers to pursue their predetermined goals in Syria. The unilateral mode of engagement becomes a viable means of accomplishing deliberate objectives among competing forces regardless of the binding principles of international law. Hence, the claim of humanitarian intervention cannot suffice amidst actions that are largely driven by realpolitik calculation (Igwe and Abdullah, 2017). Thus the aim of this study is to investigate the issues surrounding the dynamics of the Syrian war as it affects third-party intervention and the challenge of conflict resolution, and proffer a possible way forward.

Statement of the Problem

Inability to resolve the Syrian war over a lengthy period of catastrophic loss of human and material resources generates a serious concern. Earlier speculations suggest that Syria would have been on the path to recovery, yet more than 12years since the war began, the situation remains critical. Since the start of the war, more than 12million people were food insecure, an increase of 51% since 2019; 6.9 million people were displaced within Syria. Nearly 13, 000 children have died or been injured, while about 1400 children were recruited or used by at least 25 parties to the conflict. The situation has also become subject to increased radicalization among its main actors, empowering radical Islamist elements among the armed opposition. Despite the humanitarian consequences of the war, the Geneva Communiqué representing a consensus roadmap to peace is jettisoned. Effort of sub-multilateral groups such as: the Arab league, the Astana Triangle comprising Russia, Turkey and Iranian joint effort; as well as mediation of the Gulf States has failed. Therefore, considering what appears to be an irresolvable dynamics of the Syrian war, this research work intends unravel core issues that constitutes encumbrances to conflict resolution, peace and to political stability in Syria.

Conceptual Discourse

Power, Interest, Conflict and External Intervention

Power is the ability to produce intended effects on other people. Political power is the ability to affect the policies of others with the help of actual or threatened severe deprivations for non-conformity with policies intended. Emphasis here is the coercive force of a state in the exercise power. In international politics, power

is the key to understanding major state behavior, political events, phenomena and processes. In order to survive, states are determined to build their power base to prevent vulnerability to ruthless adversaries, and to advance their interests (Laswell and Kaplan, 1950; Morgenthau, 1948). Thus, the underlying imperative for state in international politics is maximization of its accessibility to power for survival and the pursuit of its vital interest ((Akinbobola, 1996). However, the way and manner in which a state responds to its national interest depends on the importance attached to such interest, and the coercive force available at its disposal. Morgenthau (1943) narrowed down the concept of national interest to security, that "The meaning of national interest is survival or self-preservation; the protection of physical, political and cultural identity against encroachments by other nation-states" According to Brookings Institution (2017), a state interest is what a nation feels to be necessary to its security and wellbeing. It reflects the general and continuing ends for which a nation acts, and it is seen as something vital to states' survival which a state is prepared to take steps to protect. Northedge (1968) in a concentric circle of strategic importance stated that, vital interest is that which a state is unwilling to make any concessions but to safeguard, and be willing to engage in open confrontation or war immediately or ultimately.

In the pursuit of vital interest, states involve in power struggles either to preserve the status quo, to achieve an expansionist interest or to gain honor or prestige (Morganthau (1967). In this pursuit, conflict is an inescapable dilemma which can turn violent when 'there are inadequate channels for dialogue and disagreement'; or when 'dissenting voices and deeply held grievances cannot be heard and addressed'; and in environments of 'instability, injustice and fear'. Hence a third-party or external intervention becomes a vital imperative as a conflict management mechanism, either within or between states (Fisher, 2000). External intervention can be defined as a third-party involvement in a conflict, which can either be forcible or non-forcible, direct or by proxy, not necessarily lawful or unlawful, and which can be provided for either or by both sides of the divide. It can also be defined as "convention-breaking military, economic or political activities in the internal affairs of a state, targeted at the authority structure, with the aim of affecting the balance of power between parties in a conflict" (**Pedrosa de** Sousa, 2014).

External intervention can take the forms of military, humanitarian, economic or diplomatic interventions (Gleditsch, Wallensteen, Sollenberg, 2002). In specific terms, military intervention can be used to explain involvement of external armed force in a war by deploying military personnel, provision of military equipment, technical support or intelligence information or even withholding same (Sibii, 2012). On the other hand, humanitarian intervention can be used to express actions taken by external bodies to provide services, aids, partnership with international organizations and/or the conflicting parties, to influence a war (El Taraboulsi-McCarthy, 2016, Kabia, 2016). Economic intervention involves the provision of economic incentives in the forms of accessibility to loans, grants, aid, as well as economic sanctions that can impact on the capacity of one or both the parties in a conflict. Regarding conflict intensity, de-escalation is effective where military interventions and economic support is effectively channeled to oversee a ceasefire or secure a buffer zone (Regan 2002a).

Irrespective of the forms of intervention, the mode of engagement can either be unilateral or multilateral in nature. Unilateral military intervention is the engagement of armed force as a third-party in a war outside a common or general consensus. In this case, such intervention does not have the backing of extant international laws regarding external intervention, and can therefore not lay claim to acting under the imperative of humanitarian intervention (Kabia, 2016). In unilateral intervention, if negotiations pursued are unfavorable to its interest, the intervener may add extra conditions to make it more difficult to reach an agreement (Regan, 1996, 2010). However, unilateral intervention enjoys considerable backing by law in self-defense or as a countermeasure in line with article 51 of the UN charter (https://legal.un.org/repertory/art51.shtml).

A multilateral approach to intervention is a collective, consensus building mode of engagement in achieving a common goal. There are three conditions that make it a more success driven approach to conflict resolution namely; the attribute of mutual consent of the parties involved; impartiality on the part of the interveners; and the existence of a coherent intervention strategy (Phillips, 2016). The United Nations is such multilateral organization by which sovereign states find expression in addressing issues of security beyond their national security architecture. It is a structural setup designed to accommodate various levels of

representation and consensus building regarding issues of security and peace. The United Nations intervention processes and procedures adhere with enshrined rules of engagement. Resolutions on security involve both the General Assembly and Security Council (SC) that reserves the power of veto. The mode of engagement involves dialogue and consensus among stakeholders in accordance with article 33 of the United Nations on conflict resolution (USIP 2020; Regan, 2002).

A purely humanitarian intervention, will not subscribe to air bombardment as seen with the pattern of the intervention in Syria, mainly with Russia. The attack of one fighting group by the other through the use of air power has serious humanitarian consequences on the civilian population. Thus, it is safe to describe the interventionists in Syria as a weak coalition of the willing, lending little legitimacy to rightful claims to intervene for humanitarian reasons (https://www.birmingham.ac.uk). At early stages of the Syrian war, the United Nations Human Right Council along with the General Assembly consistently put forth resolutions condemning human right abuses by calling upon the Syrian regime to put an end to the attack on civilians. However, the UN resolutions in Oct 2011 holding the Assad regime accountable for its human rights abuse and accompanied sanctions was unsuccessful as Russia and China vetoed the resolutions.

Also, the United Nations met in Feb 2012 where the Western-Arab resolution on Syria was discussed, demanding an immediate ceasefire, and as well reaffirm the Jan 2012 Arab League Peace Plan that called on Assad to cede power, once more Russia and China vetoed the resolution (UN News 2012). It can therefore be argued that the counteracting influence of unilateralism by foreign powers significantly hindered the United Nations effort in mitigating the war in Syria (https://www.birmingham.ac.uk). Thus, signaling a failure of the multilateral effort by the United Nations to safeguard human rights in Syria (The Guardian 2011; Faisal and Javad, 2017).

Theoretical Framework: The Realist Perspective

The most widely accepted approaches to understanding power, interest, and conflict in international politics is the realist perspective. The realist perspective

prioritizes national interest and security, rather than ideals, social reconstructions, or ethics. Realists believe that nations act only out of self-interest and that their major goal is to advance their own positions of power. Hence state behavior is seen as a consequence of bounded rationality often undertaken in the midst of limited resources, information and time, and quantifies cost and benefits in different policy alternatives to achieve desired goals (Keohane, 1989; Simon, 1955).

Realism mirrors the international system as an arena characterized by anarchy and the struggle for power, in which the "shadow of war" is ever-present, and a realm in which conflict is inevitable (Aron, 1970: 36). Hence self-preservation is the core national objective above other considerations among states (Mearsheimer 2001; Hoffmann 1965; Morgenthau, 1978).

The lack of centralized authority and the quest for self preservation creates uncertainties among states' future intentions, which gives rise to security dilemma. Surrounded by uncertainties, states try to amend their security by improving military capability and by making others feel in secure. This way of thinking and behavior leads to an endless circle between security and insecurity (Herz, 1954). The more powerful military a state has the more secure the situation is for it, but simultaneously the more threatening the situation becomes for other states (Baldwin, 1997). Therefore, states rely on the means they can generate and the arrangements they can make for themselves. As Waltz (1979) puts it, states seek their interests according the logic of self-help and power maximization thereby causing imbalance of power. Walt (1987) postulates in his external threat hypothesis, that states can create balance against stronger states and guarantee security either by relying on their own capabilities or by aligning with other states. The arguments arising from the realist perspective is suitable in explaining Syria internal security and the war. A typical realist self-help approach for state survival in Syria is evident in the regime of Hafez al-Assad, who formed a strategic alliance with Russia against Western imperialistic threats dating back to the 70s (Tucker, 2013, Global Security.Org 2016). Also, the self-help approach is evident in the Assad's ruling family's political survival quest. Aware of the disadvantaged size of the Shia ruling minority in the country's religious equation against Sunni's population dominance, Assad family created an effective security guarantee with an Iran Shia state for its political survival. Furthermore, in

September 2015 when Assad regime was losing the war with less than a fifth of the territory in the hands of the Free Syrian Army, Assad regime requested the help of Russia its foremost ally; Russia's onslaught turned the tide for Assad (Charap, 2019).

It can be argued that the quest for power and interest prompted foreign fighters to engage in the fight for dominance in Syria. According to Alamailes and Yurtsever (2018), instituting a pro-Western government to replace Assad's regime will secure America interest and that of its allies, and weaken the influence of Russia and Iran. It is also expected that Iran and Hezbollah nexus would be weakened by installing a democratic regime that could reconsider using Syria's territorial space as a transit route for arms supplies between foreign bodies (Truman Centre, 2011; Ogunnowo & Chidozie, 2020). Russia's relentless bombardment of rebel stronghold regardless of mass civilian casualty is instructive (Szénási, 2019; Welna, 2019).

Interest and Unilateral Use of Force in Syria

Taraboulsi-McCarthy (2016) explains that there are ties between a country's national interest and its decision to engage in humanitarian interventions. Corroborating this view, Ngwa (2017) stated that humanitarian intervention largely serve the interest of the intervening powers rather than the country of intervention. As observed, it can be argued that the motive behind external intervention in Syria cannot be detached from the self-interest of the interveners. It is the factor of interest that influenced the unilateral mode of engagement, which accommodated the perpetuation of the predetermine goals of the imperialistic forces at play in Syria. United States exploit against terrorist stronghold in Syria cannot be detached from its national security interest in the post-September 11 attack. Putting an end to ISIS occupation in Syria is considered a proactive measure aimed at preventing a reoccurrence of the infamous Al Qaida attack on its soil (cfr.org). Another factor is the imperative of democratizing the Syrian political system, as it is envisioned that a democratic Syrian state moderated by popular participation and accountability, will engender a pro-western egalitarian society.

The United States interest in Syria is not limited to confronting the Assad government to establish a constitutional government; it can also be argued that the United States motive is propelled by the geostrategic relevance of Syria in the Middle East, especially securing the country's large deposits of natural resources (Ogunnowo & Chidozie, 2020). For instance, ISIS occupied oil fields were attack and taken over by Russia, America and the Kurds (Almohamad, 2016). This is a clear realistic decision since the competitive takeover of these oils sites is a move aimed at consolidating their power base in Syria (Keith, 2004). Amongst its past exploits was targeting control of the Persian Gulf area, and pushing for partitioning that will allow a safe transit routes for oil and gas. The United States quest is evident in the 1957 Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) sponsored coup against President Zaim, after a previous overthrow of President Shukri al-Quwatli for blocking the passage of the Trans-Arabian Pipe Line (TAPLINE) from Saudi Arabia to the Mediterranean through Syria. It is remarkable to note that not long before the Syrian war, United States had sought Assad's consent to allow the construction of a South-to-North gas pipeline from the Gulf to Turkey, and onwards Europe, but Assad declined, favoring Russia-backed proposal that would take natural gas originating from Iran. Europe's oil interests in Syria northeast began to grow since the 1940s, making the enclave a target for Western exploitation (New York Times, 2013; Novik & Starr 1981).

United States unilateral intervention in Syria is evident in the unsolicited terrorist engagement, while unequivocally demanding the resignation of the sovereign regime of President Bashar al-Assad. Other forms of involvement included training of rebel personnel, sanctions of the Syrian government, and humanitarian aid (Sharp & Blanchard, 2013). Since September 2014, the United States have approved more than 150 air strikes against Isis targets, with the aim of backing a counter-offensive by Kurdish Regional Government (KRG) forces to protect religious and ethnic minorities risking slaughter at the hands of the jihadist fighters. Subsequent engagement involved supply of lethal and nonlethal assistance to opposition forces by the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) in a bid to achieve a favorable change in the status quo. More significant is President Trump, in conjunction with France and Britain ordering of cruise missile strikes against the regime's al-Shayrat air base, at the instance of Syria chemical weapons attack against civilians on April 4 2018 (Solomon and Malas, 2012).

The unilateral strikes by the United States and its allies in Syria at the instance of Assad's use of chemical weapon, is considered a breach of international law on territorial aggression, and as such a factor in the conflict escalation. Among notable critics to this countermeasure is Marc Weller, Professor of international law who questioned the legal nature of the airstrikes in view of the provisions of international law on such action (Weller, 2018). The argument is that, it is a case of unilateral adventurism as it did not receive the backing of the United Nation Security Council (UNSC). The likelihood that such action if brought before the United Nations Security Council could be vetoed, prompted a unilateral attack and falling short of the law (United Nations Charter, 39-41). Furthermore, taking into cognizance that the form and magnitude of response was determined solely by the United States and its partners makes it a unilateral engagement, questionable by law. And ironically, what the Syrian regime lost by airstrikes from the allied forces as a countermeasure, generated greater hostility with accompanied humanitarian consequences e.g food blockade etc (Westbrook, 2019). In addition to breach of rules of international relations, the massive arming of rebel forces amounting to US$1 billion dollars is argued to have significantly impacted on the intensity of the war (Sharp & Blanchard, 2013). It is therefore safe to state that inability to defeat the rebel fighters in Syria over a lengthy period result from external backing it received from the United States and its allies (Goldberg, 2016; Nikolaos 2017).

Russia's foreign policy is strategically propelled by the imperative of maintaining a deterrence foreign policy against the United States and the West. Losing out in Syria would mark a serious setback for it in the Middle East, as it would undermine its balance-of-power strategy and deterrence policy against the United States and the West. Thus Russia strives to maintain its military relations with Syria, since the 1970 (Webb, 2018). Syria provides Russia's naval ships and nuclear submarines an exclusive access to the eastern Mediterranean without transiting the Turkey-controlled Bosporus. The Eastern Mediterranean is also a major in-route for Russia's Intra European trade for its gas and source of oil inflow from the Middle East (Global Security.Org, 2016).

It is estimated that Russian arms exports to Syria from 2008 to 2012 totaled about $1.1 billion (at 1990 prices) out of a worldwide total of $35.2 billion, which further expanded remarkably during the war, amounting to 48 percent of Syria's arms imports. At the start of the Syrian crisis in 2011, the Assad government had an estimated $4 billion in active contracts with Russian arms dealers, making Syria one of the top five importers of Russian weaponry. And as the crackdown on protests turned deadly and the country edged towards civil war during 2011, an estimated $960 million worth of Russian arms flowed into the country (Grove and Erika, 2012; Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, 2016).

Russia's aggressive adventurism into Syria, aimed at standing up against the United States and the West, cannot be insulated from the imperative of safeguarding its strategic interest, and thus cannot be classified as humanitarian intervention (Mazzetti, 2017). It can be argued that Russia aerial bombardment across rebel lines resulting in mass civilian deaths and displacements, while applying its veto power to hinder efforts at mitigating humanitarian crisis in Syria is a questionable misuse of power (Spaulding, 2015). The arbitrary use of veto by Russia in conjunction with China constrained also efforts at conflict resolution as most draft-resolutions towards managing the war was crushed by Russia-China's vetoes in areas such as Use of Chemical Weapons, Call for Truce, Declaration of War crime, Condemning Syria, Invocation of sanctions, etc. (RTE News, 2018). Russia stand accused of colluding with Assad's government on food blockade to rebel held areas, using starvation as a weapon of war against civilian population, including conspiring with the Syrian regime in the use of chemical weapons on civilians as strategy of war. Its claim of noninvolvement is viewed with doubt by its unwillingness to condemn a case of war crime that cost the lives of about 1,429 civilians and, more than 400 children (Global Security.Org, 2016). It can also be stated that Russia's covert support further emboldened Assad to repeat a similar act of chemical weapon use, prompting a counter-measure by US and the allied forces (Forsythe, 2011).

On the part of Iran, its primary goal is to continue to influence affairs in the Middle East, and pursuit of strategic advantage against its competitors by safeguarding the Al-Bashir Assad regime. Specifically, Syria under Assad regime guarantees strategic access to Iran in the nexus with Hezbollah militia against the

state of Israel. Thus the UN and Western nations' insistence on the installation of a democratic regime is resisted majorly by both Russia and the state of Iran (Spaulding, 2015). On the other hand, Iran sees the Syrian enclave as being strategically beneficial to its hostility against Israel via the Hezbollah militia group. Thus Iran cannot afford losing Syria its foremost ally, as it could result in complete isolation and weakened its capacity to act. This view corroborates Mazhar & Goraya (2018), that "Syria is the only Arab country allied with the Shiite Iran in the Sunni populated region. A shift in regime will broadly manipulate the balance of power in the region".

Israel's meddling in the Syrian war is to serve its security goal of preventing threats from hostile groups like "ISIL-linked Salafi-Jihadi in Egypt's Sinai, instability tied to Hezbollah along UN Blue Line with Lebanon and threats on the Golan Heights from both Hezbollah and Iran's Quds Force on one hand and, Al-Qaeda affiliated groups on the other". Israel embarks on targeting installations in Syria considered as threat to its national security, via intermittently conducting Ariel bombardments on Iranian military bases to forestall threats to its internal security. Israel also prioritizes the surveillance of the Golan Highs being a strategic hot-post that could be used to undermine national security.

Turkey's preemptive engagement is to check security threats on its territory that may arise from Al Bashir Assad's highhandedness, and escalatory roles of Russia and Iran in the war, especially, the social security threats that may arise from unmanageable refugee crisis on its territory. Also of concern is the threat pose by the widening sphere of influence of Kurdish Syrian rebel group of the Rojava movement called the YPG, an affiliate of the banned PKK which Turkey have proscribed as a terrorist group. The YPG growing influence in Syria's Northeastern territory is seen as a threat to Turkey's security as it will further catalyze the Kurdish PKK secessionist group in Turkey against the state. (Hiro, 2018). With the operation Euphrates Shield in 2016, the Turkish armed forces began a direct military intervention into Syria, mainly targeting ISIL, while also supporting the rebel groups with economic and military provisions. It is remarkable to note that, it was in Istanbul that the Free Syrian Army first organized to form a united opposition front against Assad regime in July 2011. Turkey also engaged in aerial bombardment with determination of dislodging the

Kurdish YPG resistant movement in Northern Syria, which it sees as threat to its internal security, further stretching the scale of the war, with records of civilian casualties. Its determined to extend its chase to the YPG in Northern Syria, is to create what it terms a safe zone across its border (Bar'el Z, 2018).

The Challenge of Conflict Resolution and Political Stability

Third-party intervention is an organic human response driven mainly by moral and altruistic considerations. Likewise in international relations among states, external intervention is a deliberate mechanism crafted and guided by legal rules to assuage or resolve a conflict situation. However as observed in this study, external intervention in Syria as argued is largely propelled by realpolitik calculation, and less of altruistic humanitarian considerations (Igwe and Abdullah, 2017). Hence the question is put: 'has the war ended in Syria? And has the Assad's regime won the battle to remain in power to the extent that security and political stability has returned to Syria? Andrew Tabler an expert on Syria at the Washington Institute replied in the contrary, "Syrians see the outcome of the war very differently; they see Iranian activities there, they see the Russians, and they see Kurdish activities." They see potential conflicts playing out in Syrian territory; that which pit Turkey against the Syrian Kurds, Israel against Iran, the U.S. against Russia and Iran, Syrian Democratic Front (SDF) insurrection and terrorists threats from ISIS and Al-Qaida etc (Krishnadev, 2018). As Philips (2016) posited, "until the various external actors in the conflict either have their goals or interest sufficiently satisfied or cut their losses and leave the stage, then war is likely to continue in some form." Ki-moon (2014) argues the greatest obstacle to resolving the Syria war is the notion that the war was won. That, 'conquering territory through aerial bombardments into densely populated civilian neighborhoods is not a victory. Starving besieged communities into surrender is not a victory, and even if one side were to prevail in the short-term, the devastating toll would have sown the seeds of future conflict'.

As argued by Laub, (2021), President Assad and his allies cannot claim to have won the war as they do not have solution to the country's numerous challenges ranging from; capacity to create an effective structure of governance to tackle the hybrid of complex security problems, guarantee political and economic stability or deal with the refugee and IDP problems. More than a decade after the uprising

that sparked the war, Syria is marred in low-level conflict, political instability and economic turmoil. Dispersed terrorist groups have gradually regrouped along Syrian borders and quietly sneaking into Syria. Of note is car bomb explosion in one of the main streets in Idlib in 2018, killing at least four people and wounded several others, in a suicide attack by ISIS (The Associated Press 2018). Another attack killed 13 people and injured more than 30 people in a marketplace in Tal Abyad district, an area in northeastern Syria with YPG taking responsibility (The Newyork Times, 2019).

As stated by Krishnadev (2018), while recovering lost territories from rebels, Assad backed forces stand accused of large amount of civilian casualties, massive infrastructural damages, and misery for the Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs). Thus, with so much uncertainties and civilian discontent, the regime can at best repress, but cannot bring lasting stability and unity to Syria. Anger and disenchantment among the populace will continue to have destabilizing effect on the state that can only boast of weak and depleted military force that rely heavily on pro-Assad militia members and foreign fighters. In the absence of foreign support, the regime will find it difficult to withstand sudden or sustained attacks from rebel groups. **Nikolaos (2017) argued,** "The post war divide in Syria is so ingrained that it hardly sees any possibility for reconciliation, particularly not under the present dictatorship. Stating further he asked; who could lead the reconciliation? There is no Nelson Mandela in Syria. After all this death and destruction, it may take generations before you can talk about any kind of normalization"

The war has reignited the intensity of regional power struggle between rivals Saudi Arabia and Iran; heightened Sunni-Shia sectarianism, paved way for terrorist groups, energized Kurdish separatism and returned the Middle East region to a precarious security situation. Israel has sustained bombing of targets in Syria said to be Iran's military infrastructures and Iran linked militia, including Hezbollah. Also there are resistance movements in the forms of guerrilla warfare, covert activities like snipers engagement, assassinations and coup attempts assisted by outside powers, including spontaneous terrorist attacks (Bar'el, 2018). Getting the destabilizing forces out of Syria, including getting Assad allies and the West out to allow for an independent Syrian state, for reconciliation and

development is a challenge. For instance, the Iranian government once responded through its prime minister, that his country's presence in Syria is by invitation and would remain until Assad's government requests otherwise. A forced withdrawal of Iran from Syria is an unlikely possibility as Iran, Hezbollah, and Assad are locked in alliance from which none of them is likely to defect (Tamara and Bruce, 2016). Russia also insists that its operation is based on formal invitation by the Syrian state, while criticizing the West for an "unauthorized" use of force on Syrian soil (Allison, 2013).

The United States still occupies nearly a third of Syrian territory which is about 30 percent of Northeastern Syria, rich in natural resources, particularly fossil fuels in the form of natural gas and oil. This area contains 95 percent of all Syrian oil and gas potential, including al-Omar, the country's largest oil field. More significantly, nearly all the existing Syrian oil reserves estimated at around 2.5 billion barrels are located in the area. Furthermore, the U.S. and its proxies in northeast Syria has taken effective control of the Conoco gas plant, the country's largest plant, which can produce nearly 50 million cubic feet of gas per day. The occupied area also hosts the country's three largest freshwater reservoirs, dam and supplier of electricity and irrigation to other regions. Syria needs immediate sales of its oil for rebuilding, but United States occupation of its major oil fields and massive sanctions will not allow that. With this huge resource under its control, the United States still has significant leverage to influence affairs in Syria (Webb, 2018). President Joe Biden's military airstrikes immediately after his inauguration, against Iraq-based militia targeting US military in the Syrian North indicates US firm resolve to maintain its firm presence in the state (Laub, 2021). Another airstrike was conducted in Syria on March 25, 2023 on what the US said was against Iranian-affiliated facilities. This airstrike was in response to suspected Iranian drone attack on a facility housing US personnel in the country, which killed an American contractor and wounded five US service members (Carvajal, Alvarez, Treene, 2023). Also according to Kube (2023), armed Russian jets have flown over a U.S military garrison in Syria nearly every day in March, violating a 4-year old agreement between US and Russia and risking escalation.

The price tag for rebuilding Syria is estimated at $200 billion and above, and neither Assad, nor Russia and Iran has the resources as they are currently

overweighed by sanctions, wars, and internal unrest. The United States has continued to pursue sanctions against Syria and the Assad regime, rendering it economically and financially incapacitated for state reconstruction. The Syrian deputy prime minister, in 2019 United Nations Assembly meeting lamented that sanctions on Syria have restricted it access to medicine, oil products needed for electricity, household gas and heating (Lynch, 2018).The United States has maintained it will not contribute to reconstruction in Assad-held areas unless a political solution is reached. Also, rich European states wouldn't want to be involved in rebuilding Syria in view of United States stations on Syria. Besides, the Gulf States with the financial capacity to fund large scale reconstruction are aligned to the United States and the Western position on Syria. China is already heavily committed to the Middle East aid project, and can only contribute its beat, leaving the most to Syria's allies. Turkey is conscious of Iran's growing influence in the Middle East and wouldn't commit to rebuilding a Syrian state where Assad remains the leader whose core ally is Iran at its strategic expense (Krishnadev, 2018; Lynch, 2018).

Finally, there is also no indication that suggests to the United Nations now possesses the institutional strength to bring political stability to Syria. The United Nations have not been effective in resolving the Syrian conflict since its commencement in 2011 mainly from the encumbrances of the power of veto on five permanent Security Council members. Since the commencement of the war, almost all draft-resolutions directed towards the Syrian conflict were crushed by vetoes in areas such as Use of chemical weapons, Call for Truce, Declaration of War crime, Condemning Syria, Invocation of sanctions, etc. Russia has vetoed twelve draft-resolutions coming from the United States since the war in alignment with China, irrespective of human right concerns. While on the other hand, United States aligning with France and Britain has also vetoed resolution coming from Russia (RTE News, 2018). In 2020, Syria ally Russia used its veto at the Security Council to allow UN aid deliveries to the rebel-held north through only one border crossing, down from four the previous year (cfr.org).

Conclusion:

The basic goal of humanitarian intervention in a war is de-escalation to allow for diplomatic interface and consensus building towards conflict resolution (Regan,

2002), this notion presupposes that interveners' motives is primarily "peace promoting". However, findings from study on the Syrian war reveals that the motive of intervention is influenced not primarily by altruistic pursuit of peace, but predetermined self-interest of the interveners e.g protection of the intervener's diplomatic, economic or military interests, and safeguarding of ideological, cultural and religious affinities of people in the target countries.

From the above, the protracted nature of the Syrian war results from the struggle by foreign powers for sphere of influence in Syria which they are determined to accomplish. Hence Philips (2016) has argued that "until the various external actors in the conflict either have their goals or interest sufficiently satisfied or cut their losses and leaves the stage, war is likely to continue in some form."

The study shows that resulting from the motive of foreign involvement in Syria which is primarily propelled by self-interest, even if the interventionist objective may not aim to exacerbate the fighting, it may still have unintended consequences that would heighten and prolong the war (Regan, 2002).

Findings also revealed that the counteracting factor of unilateral intervention by foreign powers significantly hindered the effectiveness of the United Nations in managing the war. Also are the structural challenges preventing it from effectively mediating in the conflict, especially the arbitrary use of veto power.

It is therefore safe to state at this point that conflict resolution and political stability in Syria will remain elusive, except there is a collective approach of consensus building which only a multilateral engagement approach can provide. This aligns with studies which suggest that a comprehensive peace agreement implemented through a peace operation has a better success rate in securing peace than a military victory (Doyle & Sambanis, 2006).

Thus to resolve the war and restore peace, stakeholders must recognize the imperative of political solution through the UNO multilateral engagement channel. Specifically, there is need to return to the Geneva communiqué of 2012. The viability of the Geneva peace roadmap is the fact that it is the means by which Syrians and no one else should determine their future (United Nations

Organization, 2012). Its viability lies in the fact that; it is a consensus document championed by the United Nations, affirming commitment to the sovereignty, unity, independence, and territorial integrity of Syria. Secondly, it provides a clear roadmap for a truly Syrian owned and led political process. Thirdly is its inclusiveness in the fact that it entails a meaningful participation of Syrian women, as it addresses the issues of governance and constitutional process leading to a UN supervised election. Suffice to say that for Syria to return to a peaceful and stable state, legitimacy and trust should drive the process by relying on the lead of the United Nations.

In a broader sense, the effectiveness of the United Nations in addressing global security challenges should be revisited. Drawing experiences from the Syrian war, politics of self-interest should not be allowed to erode the security imperatives of the United Nations. In view of this, the role of the United Nations with cognizance to its structure and power configuration should be revisited. It should be understood that the rational of veto by a group of five superpower states whose national interest must prevail, has proved counterproductive to the quest for global peace and security. And can no longer be allowed to subsist in a globalized and dynamic 21st century as a workable apparatus for achieving the United Nations security objective, especially under urgent humanitarian situations. Retaining the status quo would amount to living the fate of the common humanity in the hands of few 'Spartacus' of the global arena, whose national interest must be protected at all times. A more viable approach to critical resolutions can be achieved within a broadened space, where superior presentations triumphs and majority decision is made to stand and binding on all.

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