

REPORT DOCUMENTATION PAGE

Form Approved
OMB No. 0704-0188

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1. REPORT DATE (DD-MM-YYYY) 04/14/2016	2. REPORT TYPE Master's of Military Studies	3. DATES COVERED (From - To) SEP 2015 - APR 2016
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4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE A Struggle to Commit to a Noble Cause: Why the Syrian Civil War Challenges the Relevancy of the United Nations	5a. CONTRACT NUMBER N/A
	5b. GRANT NUMBER N/A
	5c. PROGRAM ELEMENT NUMBER N/A

6. AUTHOR(S) Vasilev, Nikola, Major, Army of the Republic of Macedonia	5d. PROJECT NUMBER N/A
	5e. TASK NUMBER N/A
	5f. WORK UNIT NUMBER N/A

7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) USMC Command and Staff College Marine Corps University 2076 South Street Quantico, VA 22134-5068	8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER N/A
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9. SPONSORING/MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)	10. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S ACRONYM(S) N/A
	11. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S REPORT NUMBER(S) N/A

12. DISTRIBUTION/AVAILABILITY STATEMENT
Approved for public release, distribution unlimited.

13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES

14. ABSTRACT
The United Nations (UN) by being prevented from mandate to restore peace in Syria by its Security Council permanent members, makes the organization to look ineffective and outdated. This polarized conflict by the United States and Russia, makes the UN handicapped to achieve its mission, and as such, its prosperity becomes questionable. The implied question is, does the UN has the capability and flexibility to respond to this internal challenge, and achieve its mission.

15. SUBJECT TERMS
United Nations, United Nations Security Council, Syria, United States mission in the UN, Russian mission in the UN, United Nations Resolution

16. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF:			17. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT	18. NUMBER OF PAGES	19a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE PERSON	
a. REPORT	b. ABSTRACT	c. THIS PAGE			USMC Command and Staff College	
Unclass	Unclass	Unclass	UU	39	19b. TELEPHONE NUMBER (Include area code) (703) 784-3330 (Admin Office)	

United States Marine Corps
Command and Staff College
Marine Corps University
2076 South Street
Marine Corps Combat Development Command
Quantico, Virginia 22134-5068

MASTER OF MILITARY STUDIES

TITLE:

**A STRUGGLE TO COMMIT TO A NOBLE CAUSE:
WHY THE SYRIAN CIVIL WAR CHALLENGES THE RELEVANCY OF THE
UNITED NATIONS**


SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF MILITARY STUDIES

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Executive Summary

Title: A Struggle to Commit to a Noble Cause: Why the Syrian Civil War Challenges the Relevancy of the United Nations?

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Thesis: The United Nations (UN) in a polarized conflict such as the one in Syria can achieve its mission by: engaging conflicted sides into a mediation process focused on providing partial resolutions on the agreed elements, by engaging countries and international organizations that have no interest of choosing sides but have an interest to restore peace, and with providing resolute humanitarian contribution to minimize the consequences of the conflict.

Discussion: The UN, responsible to protect the world's peace, is currently facing the most complex security challenge since its establishment. The organization acknowledged that in the conflict in Syria it is challenged by its most dominant members, the United States (US) and Russia, both with opposing views on how to resolve it. The inability to bring the conflict to an end, while it became the largest in the UN's history, makes the organization appear ineffective and outdated. However, with the effort that the UN is making, and the opportunities that it is providing, this noble organization brings hope by proving that persistence, in any form, can resolve even the most complex confrontations.

Although the US and Russia are positioned on opposite sides in this conflict, the UN recognizes and constantly promotes opportunities for dialog and mediation between the opposing parties in the civil war in Syria. Additionally, the UN encouraged them to negotiate ceases in violence, and to restore communication. All of the meetings mediated by the UN were able to stimulate effective verbal interaction between the conflicted sides, and the results from them are agreements on partial elements of the conflict. Those partial agreements provided operational authorization for the UN to act with regards on the provided mandate, which is significant for the people of Syria, and the region. Overall, every provided opportunity by the UN for dialog and negotiation, is narrowing the disagreements, and presents a step further in the pursuit for peace in Syria.

The international community, especially those countries and organizations that have no interest to choose a side in this conflict, but have an interest to end it, are supporting the UN's efforts with political commitment and supporting actions. The political commitment from these countries and organizations is one of the most important elements because it provides leverage for the UN's influence over the conflicted parties to reach a compromise. At the same time, the

supporting actions are providing an ability for the organization to monitor and assess the conflict, which is important for neutral and transparent mediation, as well as proper allocation of resources.

While the UN is in pursuit for permanent solution to end the conflict, the humanitarian relief is a continuous process that is occurring in a parallel effort. The proper allocation of the UN's capabilities and resources, in order to achieve the maximum relief from the conflicted areas is making the organization relevant, and necessary to mitigate the negative effects from the conflict. Most of the UN's sub-organizations and departments are involved in different supporting programs and projects. They are exploiting every opportunity for humanitarian relief, which makes the organization effective in both commitment and results.

Conclusion: The UN's involvement presents a resolute commitment to end the conflict in Syria. Restoring peace and security in the country is the only permanent solution for this crisis, as well as a requirement to begin the restoration of normalcy for the Syrian population. All of the presented elements of the effort that the UN is making with regard to this crisis, are providing positive results, and are bringing the organization close to achieving its mission. At the same time, the actions that this organization is taking, are making it very relevant, and necessary for other present or future crisis throughout the world.

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Table of Contents

	Page
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	ii
DISCLAIMER	iv
PREFACE	vi
INTRODUCTION	1
UN’s background	3
Syrian Arab Republic	5
The UN involvement in Syria	7
THE BENEFIT OF PARTIAL AGREEMENTS	8
The US and Russia Positions	8
The War Inside the UN	11
Agreements Over Disagreements	13
UN’S LEVERAGE BY NEUTRAL PARTIES	13
The European Union	13
The Fight Against ISIS	15
UN’s Support by Neutral Countries	16
HUMANITARIAN RELIEF	17
Removal of Chemical Weapons	17
UN’s Engagement with Displaced Persons	18
Project for Restoration and Stabilization	18
CONCLUSION	20
Endnotes	24
Bibliography	28

Preface

The people throughout the world are continuously benefiting from having the United Nations (UN) that is tasked to preserve the world's peace. This organization since its establishment has been involved in peace restoration of numerous conflict. Although full success in peace restoration is a utopian expectation, the UN' commitment is what is expected. UN' commitment is providing humanitarian relief through the whole spectrum of peace restoration process. The most significant of all UN' departments and agencies, the UN Security Council (UNSC) is responsible for providing a mandate for the organization to act. However, there are situations when its five permanent member states (P-5) have opposing positions. This is currently happening in Syria, and makes the organization appear handicapped.

This research provides an assessment of how and why the civil war in Syria became the center of gravity for the world's geopolitics. It provides an outline of the current interaction within the United Nations' bodies, and logical expectation for results of this crisis. The analysis method is mostly used in order to provide understanding for the complexity of the conflict, and to provide an insight to all of its segments. The paper addresses several challenges, such as historical and political implications that constitute the civil war in Syria, internal and external players that are involved, and UN' actions towards peace restoration. The conflict is observed from the UN' perspective, which presents how all of the involved parties interact with or through the organization towards their version of the desired peace. By addressing all of the challenges from the civil war in Syria, there is one question that unifies all of them. Is the organization of the United Nations, with subordinate bodies, tasked to maintain and preserve the world's peace

and security, capable and adaptable enough to provide a positive contribution in resolving a complex polarized conflict such the one in Syria?

I would like to begin by thanking my mentor Dr. Eric S. Shibuya for the sincere advice that guided me through the project. In addition, special thanks to LtCol Jarrod Stoutenborough and Professor Michael Lewis, for the incredible amount of mentorship and feedback they have provided for me. An enormous amount of gratitude goes to the senior leadership of the Army of the Republic of Macedonia and the Ministry of Defence, for the trust that was given upon me to represent my country in the United States' academic and military environment. Finally thank you to my wife, Biljana, and my daughter Marija, for the patience and understanding while I was going through this project, and the hurdles inherent to military life. None of this would be possible without their support.

REPORT DOCUMENTATION PAGE		FORM APPROVED - - - OMB NO. 0704-0188	
<small>PUBLIC REPORTING BURDEN FOR THIS COLLECTION OF INFORMATION IS ESTIMATED TO AVERAGE 1 HOUR PER RESPONSE, INCLUDING THE TIME FOR REVIEWING INSTRUCTIONS, SEARCHING EXISTING DATA SOURCES, GATHERING AND MAINTAINING THE DATA NEEDED, AND COMPLETING AND REVIEWING THE COLLECTION OF INFORMATION. SEND COMMENTS REGARDING THIS BURDEN ESTIMATE OR ANY OTHER ASPECT OF THIS COLLECTION OF INFORMATION, INCLUDING SUGGESTIONS FOR REDUCING THIS BURDEN, TO WASHINGTON HEADQUARTERS SERVICES, DIRECTORATE FOR INFORMATION OPERATIONS AND REPORTS, 1215 JEFFERSON DAVIS HIGHWAY, SUITE 1204, ARLINGTON, VA 22202-4302, AND TO THE OFFICE OF MANAGEMENT AND BUDGET, PAPERWORK REDUCTION PROJECT (0704-0188) WASHINGTON, DC 20503</small>			
1. AGENCY USE ONLY (<i>LEAVE BLANK</i>)	2. REPORT DATE	3. REPORT TYPE AND DATES COVERED <i>STUDENT RESEARCH PAPER</i>	
4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE <i>A STRUGGLE TO COMMIT TO A NOBLE CAUSE: WHY THE SYRIAN CIVIL WAR CHALLENGES THE RELEVANCY OF THE UNITED NATIONS?</i>		5. FUNDING NUMBERS <i>N/A</i>	
6. AUTHOR(S) Major Nikola Vasilev			
7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) <i>USMC COMMAND AND STAFF COLLEGE 2076 SOUTH STREET, MCCDC, QUANTICO, VA 22134-5068</i>		8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER <i>NONE</i>	
9. SPONSORING/MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) <i>SAME AS #7.</i>		10. SPONSORING/MONITORING AGENCY REPORT NUMBER: <i>NONE</i>	
11. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES <i>NONE</i>			
12A. DISTRIBUTION/AVAILABILITY STATEMENT <i>NO RESTRICTIONS</i>		12B. DISTRIBUTION CODE <i>N/A</i>	
ABSTRACT (<i>MAXIMUM 200 WORDS</i>) <i>The United Nations (UN) by being prevented from mandate to restore peace in Syria by its Security Council permanent members, makes the organization to look ineffective and outdated. This polarized conflict by the United States and Russia, makes the UN handicapped to achieve its mission, and as such, its prosperity becomes questionable. The implied question is, does the UN have the capability and flexibility to respond to this internal challenge, and achieve its mission.</i>			
14. SUBJECT TERMS (KEY WORDS ON WHICH TO PERFORM SEARCH) <i>United Nations, United Nations Security Council, Syria, United States mission in the UN, Russian mission in the UN, United Nations Resolution</i>		15. NUMBER OF PAGES: <i>39</i>	
		16. PRICE CODE: <i>N/A</i>	
17. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF REPORT <i>UNCLASSIFIED</i>	18. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF THIS PAGE: <i>UNCLASSIFIED</i>	19. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF ABSTRACT <i>UNCLASSIFIED</i>	20. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT

The Purpose of the United Nations:

“To maintain international peace and security, and to that end:

to take effective collective measures for the prevention and removal of threats to the peace,

and for suppression of act of aggression or other breaches of the peace,

and to bring about by peaceful means, and in conformity

with the principles of justice and international law,

adjustment or settlement of international dispute or

situation that might lead to a breach of the peace.”

Chapter I, Article 1,

Charter of the United Nations

INTRODUCTION

The Syrian civil war is becoming the biggest humanitarian challenge since World War II. Every day this conflict is increasing. The world is facing the most important question: Is there anything that can be done? News is filled with the suffering of civilians. The number of refugees is estimated at several millions¹ with additional millions of Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) within Syrian borders. There is unimaginable destruction of the world’s protected heritage². This is probably the biggest shame on the human population, regarding the lack of interest within the capable nations to get involved and help end this crisis. Although the international relations among the countries are complex, and national interests many times are prioritized over international benefits, this crisis is challenging the entire human population, regardless of religion, culture, or nationality. At the same time, it challenges the relationship among involved countries regarding what they think the outcome of the war should be.

The worst part of the peace providing effort is that there is no united strategy for stabilization or reducing the violence in Syria. Actually, the opposite is the case. All of the involved parties in the war are getting stronger by making alliances, and receiving foreign support,³ hoping to prevail over the other. This situation polarizes the conflict, and the impression is that there is no sincere effort to resolve it. All of the involved parties have their own agenda, and lack of will to make any compromise in the name of humanity. Most of the attempts⁴ to resolve this conflict were not able to be implemented, and over time became outdated. All of these attempts were made under the United Nations' (UN) umbrella, as an organization tasked to protect and preserve the world's peace and security. Although the organization is taking every opportunity to promote human values, it can only provide verbal determination, due to the lack of commitment among the participant countries to compromise their interests.

This research provides an analysis and recommendations of how the UN can be effective in a complex conflict such the civil war in Syria. It provides an outline of the current interaction of the UN bodies inside the organization and with external collaborators, and what logical expectations exist for results of this crisis. By addressing the most significant challenges from the civil war in Syria, there is one question that unifies all of them. How can the UN achieve its mission, when the countries that carry the burden to maintain the peace cannot come to agreement?

The UN in a polarized conflict such as the one in Syria can achieve its mission by engaging conflicted sides into a mediation process with emphasis on providing partial resolutions on the agreed elements of the peace restoration process, by engaging countries and international organizations that have no interest of choosing sides but have an interest to restore peace, and

with providing resolute humanitarian contribution to minimize the consequences of the conflict. All of these actions, one by one should eliminate every portion of the disagreement, and ultimately should end the conflict.

The UN's Background

The origin of the UN begins with the idea of a peace loving organization to maintain the world's peace and security, that was brought to light after World War I by establishing the "League of Nations". Although the League failed to sustain the world's peace, a similar idea was developed during World War II. On January 1, 1942, US President Franklin D. Roosevelt used the term "United Nations", when twenty-six countries decided to oppose the Axis⁵. The following event was unification of fifty countries in 1945, to establish an organization that will be responsible to protect the world's peace. This organization's methods of contribution are diverse, which requires a solid understanding of the UN sub-organs,⁶ and capabilities as well. The source of power for the UN is its Charter, which is the UN's constitutional document that regulates the rights and obligations amongst the member countries. When the members are united and have a shared vision the UN is very strong. But, as very often happens, when the member states have conflicted visions the organization is trapped within its own regulations⁷.

The UN Security Council (UNSC) is the organization's body where the resolutions with regards to peace disturbance, and actions in peace support are voted. It consists of fifteen member states out of who China, France, Russia, United Kingdom (UK) and US are permanent members (P-5) with 10 other countries having rotational two-year status. This is where the decisions regarding taking action are made, with agreement of P-5 member states, and approved by 2/3 of total UNSC member states. The P-5 countries within the SC have the right of veto on

any decision. Statistically, the Soviet Union with its successor Russia, and the US have the most exercises of the veto.⁸ The Cold War influenced many of these vetoes⁹.

This tendency continues even after the Cold War. On February 18, 2011, US vetoed draft resolution S/2011/24, meeting 5565 condemning Israel's settling in the West Bank.¹⁰ On July 8, 2015, Russia vetoed a draft resolution regarding the Bosnia and Herzegovina conflict S/2015/508, meeting 7481. Later that month, on July 29, 2015, Russia vetoed draft resolution S/2015/562 meeting 7498 for an international criminal tribunal regarding the MH-17 Air disaster in Ukraine.¹¹ Use of veto prevents the UN from providing unified effort for protection of the peace throughout the world. However, if the intention of resolution is not sincere, the veto can be an organizational asset which prevents abuse of the UN's capabilities. Most of the time, the permanent members of the SC will agree on the partial segments of the dispute, such as humanitarian aid to the displaced population or protection of historic heritage, but not to enforce peace within the conflicted country. Syria is the most recent example for SC member states possessing a will to help, but not to enforce peace.

Such P-5 behavior makes Chapter VII of the UN Charter, which includes "Actions with respect to threats to the peace, breaches of the peace and act of aggression"¹² to be the most difficult to negotiate, if there is a national interest from their side, with or against the conflicted country. This is also an effective protection for the countries who are able to maintain strong relations with one or more of the P-5. Israel's close relations with the US, and Syria's relations with Russia are two examples for this situation. The UN is effective in protecting the peace as long as these permanent members are willing to act, or prevent action. The past has shown that these states can act united, but sometimes too late. The genocide in Rwanda in 1994 is one

example, where the mandate adopted in 1993 did not provide sufficient troop capacity for its implementation.¹³ Today, the biggest humanitarian and peace concern is the civil war in Syria.

Syrian Arab Republic - Syria

Syria, by being positioned at the edge of the Mediterranean Sea, was attractive for most of the dominant civilizations throughout the centuries. It was always a dynasty or empire that set rule over the people living there, until Emir Feisal supported by the British proclaimed independence in 1918 from Ottoman occupation. Two years later Syria was included in the agreement from San Remo and became part of the French protected “State of Great Lebanon”.¹⁴ French presence in Syria was predominant until World War II, although the uprisings from 1925-1926, 1928 and 1936 forecasted future Syrian independence. On October 24, 1945, Syria became a member of the UN¹⁵ together with forty-nine other countries when the UN Charter was ratified. In 1946 French troops completely withdrew from Syria, setting conditions for national self-determination, but also for political rivalry.

In 1947 the Baath party was formed and led the country for two years. Then began an era of military coups, which ended in 1955 when Shukri Al-Quwatli was elected president. After unsuccessful unification with Egypt, the trend of military coups continued. In 1970 Hafez Al-Assad from his position of defense minister overthrew the government and appointed himself as president, a position he retained for the following thirty years.¹⁶ During his rule, Syria had several conflicts with Israel. Assad was pragmatic and aligned with the Soviet Union as a response to Israel’s and Iran’s relations with western countries. After the Islamic revolution in Iran, Assad improved the relations with Tehran and supported Iran during the Iraq-Iran War in 1980. This alignment was the product of the traditional rivalry between the Baath parties from

Iraq and Syria.¹⁷ Ten years later, in 1990, Syria participated in Gulf War I and aligned with the US led coalition against Iraq, which improved relations between Damascus and the western countries.

In 2000, Assad was succeeded by his son Bashir Al-Assad, who became a thorn in the side of the West because of his attempts to develop Weapons for Mass Destruction (WMD)¹⁸. The Syrian government was criticized for maintaining large stock piles of WMD, most of which were sarin and VX (nerve agent) gas. Although Syria didn't possess the capacity for developing an advanced and large chemical warfare program, the country maintained large amounts, mostly imported during the previous years. The trigger for the international community was the official report from the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) in the UN in 2011¹⁹ for developing an undeclared nuclear reactor for the second time, after Israeli Security Forces destroyed an alleged nuclear reactor under construction in 2007.²⁰ The report addressing the Syrian nuclear program brought concern within the international community regarding Syrian commitment to the Non-Proliferation Treaty Agreement signed in 1969, although according to the late reports of Syrian nuclear program, Syria signed the agreement just to prevent Israel from another attack after the "Six Days War" in 1967, and showed no commitment to its implementation.²¹ Although in all of these years the Syrian economy was not able to support maintaining nuclear capabilities, the government saw this capability as a deterrent, and was committed to develop it.

In December 2010 the Tunisian revolution started the Arab Spring which spread both in North Africa and the Middle East. Syria was affected by this movement in March 2011 with mass demonstrations initially demanding a liberal society and western orientation of the country.²² The opposition party who stood behind the protests declared themselves The Free Syrian Opposition, and set the foundation for establishing the Free Syrian Army (FSA), mostly

consisting of defected Syrian Army Officers and soldiers. The FSA gained immediate support from western countries who proclaimed changes and democracy in the Arabic world, and from the neighbor countries with Sunni majorities such as Turkey and Saudi Arabia. On the other side, Assad's regime had direct support from Lebanese Hezbollah and the Kurdish National Council, and as well as from Iran and Russia as geopolitically aligned countries. The protests in Syria immediately became violent and made a fast transition into civil war.

The UN involvement in Syria

The UN's involvement in Syria is from the beginning of the crisis mostly through the Arab League. Mr. Kofi Annan was appointed as first special envoy for Syria, and the international community became significantly engaged. The first attempt for conflict resolution came in 2011, when the Syrian government was called to cease fire, and withdraw the Syrian Army from all populated areas involved in the conflict.²³ A draft UN Resolution was prompted within the SC, and came under veto from Russia and China, both stating that proposed interventions were for regime change and not for stabilization of the country.²⁴ This became a motive for the UN to facilitate the dialog and mediation among the involved state and international actors. The UNSC unanimously adopted resolution 2042²⁵ on request of the Syrian government expressing concerns for their sovereignty, and resolution 2043²⁶ for deployment of ceasefire monitoring unarmed military observers. Meanwhile, the conflict was increasing. The established UN Supervision Mission in Syria (UNSMIS) from April 2012 did not meet the conditions stated in UN resolution 2043, and was unable to accomplish its mission. In June 2012, the Geneva working group²⁷ met again, and this time included all involved parties in the conflict. This meeting stressed the importance of the success of UNSMIS mission. Regardless of the international effort, the increased violence in Syria did not provide conditions for the UNSMIS

mission to succeed, and through UN resolution 2059 it was aborted.²⁸ The security vacuum that existed in Iraq and Syria provided conditions for the rise of another terrorist organization that made the conflict a lot more intense and complex.

Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) was born while the peace was disturbed in Iraq in the past decade. The Al Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) succeeded expanding to Syria, due to the civil war, and established the so-called Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS).²⁹ ISIS' leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi made an effort to unite all regional Sunni terrorist organizations, with limited success. ISIS became known for their cruelty over the other religions. By marking the non-Sunni population as non-believers, ISIS is leaving three options for them: extortion, conversion to their version of Islam, or death. However, ISIS had their own goal, which confronts both the Syrian government and the Syrian opposition forces. They operate independently and are increasing the destruction in this country. In less than a year, ISIS made the conflict in Syria to be even worse, by casualties and displaced people, since the end of WW II when the UN was formed.³⁰ This, as well as the civil war itself, ignited large migration from Syria and Iraq. UN High Commission on Refugees (UNHCR) made, and still makes an effort to manage this crisis, however without treating the source of the refugee crisis, the UN can only reduce the negative effects of it.

THE BENEFIT OF PARTIAL AGREEMENTS

The US and Russia Positions

Both countries recognizing the opportunity to extend their national influence, began distant involvement in this conflict. At the beginning it was just rhetorical support for their supported side, but as the civil war was increasing, the support became more material. In

December 2012 US President Barack Obama recognized Syrian opposition as the only legitimate government, and brought them to the negotiation table. The following step that the US government made was to provide military support for them.³¹ The US argued that Syrian president Bashar Al-Assad was repressing the Syrian population, and enflaming the civil war. According to the US Department of Defense, in August 2014 the US-led coalition initiated “Operation Inherent Resolve-OIR”³² consisting of air strikes against ISIS, in support to Iraqi government ground troops, and to the Syrian opposition as well. This new strategy aimed to maintain attrition towards the Syrian regime by supporting the free opposition, and occasional involvement by traditional regional allies such Turkey and Saudi Arabia.

Turkey, a strategic ally to the US, got involved in OIR both directly and indirectly.³³ Directly, they are attacking ISIS targets in Iraq, but not in Syria. There are allegations that the Turkish government was actually focused on targeting the Workers Party of Kurdistan (PKK).³⁴ The response from Ankara was that they consider both as terrorist organizations.³⁵ More important is that Turkey indirectly is supporting the operation by providing airfields for air operations, and logistic support as well. However, regarding the effects of an anti-ISIS coalition, it looks more like this coalition is backing up the Syrian opposition instead of fighting against ISIS.

Saudi Arabia is another key player in the fight against ISIS and the Syrian regime. They are concerned about ISIS’s success, as it might spill over to the Saudi Kingdom. However, Saudis are also concerned of Shia influence that Iran projects in Syria via the Syrian government and Hezbollah, so they are providing support for the Syrian opposition³⁶ to fight both Assad and ISIS. Clearly, all of the countries involved in anti-ISIS coalition are also maintaining their national interests. Saudi Arabia is making an effort to maintain Islamic dignity, by making a

coalition of Arabic countries to defeat ISIS, however with no specific actions. All of these countries, led by US efforts are seeking legitimacy of their actions against the Syrian regime. US, supported by UK, has submitted several proposed resolutions in the UN that are reflecting on the security and human rights in Syria, but all of them were vetoed by Russia and China. The Turkish prime minister in 2012 [today president of the country] referring to the UNSC interaction over Syria, stated that this international organization is becoming ineffective, and needs restructuring.³⁷

Russia and China vetoed most of the UNSC draft resolutions regarding international involvement in Syria with Peace Enforcement mandate. These countries, supported by others who don't share the Western vision regarding Syria, are preventing an international coalition with mandate from the UNSC to intervene in Syria. Iran is constantly providing logistics for Syrian pro-government military, and Lebanon, as a traditional Syrian ally, is supporting Assad with its Hezbollah fighters. Russian involvement in Syria has been a fact since the conflict started. Besides traditional friendship, Russia has strategic interest to sustain Bashar Al-Assad's regime in Syria. Syrian ports on the Mediterranean Sea, Latakia and Tartus, are the only ports that Russian Black Sea Fleet can operate from this area, which makes the Assad regime essential for Russian power projection in the Middle East. With ISIS's growth, which weakened Assad's position, Russia was forced to get involved in Syria, targeting ISIS positions. However, according to witnesses they targeted position of the Free Syrian Army too.³⁸

Iran is one more of the major figures in the Syrian civil war, since this country decided to back up Assad's regime together with Russia. Although Iran for the last 30 years has been a traditional customer of Russian military technology, their alignment became even stronger after

US positioned themselves in Afghanistan and Iraq. In the conflict in Syria, Iran is providing large amounts of supplies, and additional support as well.³⁹

Lebanon, another Assad ally, which does not have a unified national strategy due its lack of will to elect a legitimate government, still represents an efficient ally of the Syrian government due to historical support that Syria has provided to Lebanon. Lebanese Hezbollah fighters are present in Syria, in support of Assad.⁴⁰

This block of countries that support Assad, including China with its own interest to support Russia, have interest in preserving him and his government as legitimate leadership in Syria, in order to be capable to project their own power and interest in the Middle East. They constantly support Syrian government in the UN, which prevents the opposite block to provide legitimacy for international military intervention against the current regime.⁴¹ Although Bashar Al-Assad's future remained as the only significant disagreement between the two blocks, both sides encouraged by the UN are publicly expressing will for providing a unified resolution in order to end the conflict, and to restore the peace in Syria.

The War Inside the UN

While the death toll from the civil war in Syria is increasing daily, perhaps the biggest proxy war is going on between the two confronting sides within the international institutions. Within the UN General Assembly, both US and Russia blamed each other for lack of will to end this crisis. In September 2015 President Obama during the session in the UN stated that the US is willing to cooperate with any other country who share the same vision, including Russia and Iran, however with no compromise on Assad remaining to govern the Syrian Arab Republic.⁴² Acknowledging that this is a point of disagreement between Russia and the US, this invitation

for cooperation presumably had no future. However, the UN elevated this US' position as a point for discussion, and restored the peace talks amongst the involved parties.

In the same event, on the same stage, Russian President Putin argued that the US was responsible for increasing the conflict. However, he officially did not support Bashar Al-Assad. He stated that many ex-military personnel from the dissolved Iraqi Army are fighting on the ISIS' side, and that is expected to happen if Syria became a country with a lack of governance, such as Iraq.⁴³ With this evident disagreement for Syrian future, the agreement for a unified approach towards this global security challenge remains distant, although both sides presented will for possible cooperation and coordination of the effort.

Although the will between both sides to restore the peace in Syria exist, the will to compromise on the desired outcome is still hard to negotiate. Both US and Russia are fighting separate wars against ISIS, and they both make separate efforts to provide a solution for the conflict. Although without UN consensus, Russian foreign minister Sergei Lavrov together with UN special envoy for Syria Steffan de Mistura were working on a proposed government transition in Syria that would end with general elections monitored by the UN.⁴⁴ According to US Secretary of State, John Kerry, they are working closely with the Syrian opposition towards the transition of the government in Syria.⁴⁵

Russian ambassador to the UN Vitaly Churkin is projecting the Russian position by continuously declaring that his government has the will to cooperate on this issue, however with no sign of concession regarding their position.⁴⁶ The same words are used by Samantha Power, US ambassador to the UN, condemning the Russian involvement in Syria, referring to its direct support for Bashar Al-Assad, as well as justifying US involvement as a protection of human

values. With all this rhetoric, the UN is facilitating every opportunity for dialog in the pursuit of a reasonable solution to this conflict.

Agreements Over Disagreements

Until this point in the Syrian civil war, the UN has been constrained from providing a solution for this security challenge due to the opposing positions of the US and Russia. However, they have more agreed on points than disagreed. Actually, the only disagreement that they have regarding the Syrian future is Assad's future. Should Assad remain in power in Syria?

UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon acknowledged this situation, and has many times called upon agreement within UNSC in order to regain UN capability to provide legitimacy for conflict resolution.⁴⁷ He stated that at the end, it depends on the Syrian people to decide what Syria's future should be. The only way to come to this is by providing conditions for free, UN monitored elections, and later supporting the elected government to regain order and legitimacy over the country. Within the Syrian situation, as much as the UN seems to be ineffective, this organization is constantly providing a common ground for talks, and recommends solutions with regards on its charter. During the discussions amongst all of the involved countries, the UN was always viewed as the likely administrator of the expected outcome for Syria, regardless of what it might be.

UN'S LEVERAGE BY NEUTRAL PARTIES

The European Union (EU)

The EU⁴⁸ was unable to respond in an appropriate manner due to a lack of a synchronized approach. Although the EU presents a single political institution, each member country is

different by constitution, national policy and strategy, and financial capacity. Because of that, Europe shifted the Middle East instability, as a global challenge, to the UN. The EU supported UN efforts for conflict resolution, however provided no additional input towards a solution.

With increased violence, and the UN's inability to provide a unified response, Europe became more affected by this conflict. High numbers of refugees began to seek safety in Europe. The number of registered refugees from the Middle East, most of them from Syria, raised to over one million in 2015.⁴⁹ The EU acknowledged that a permanent solution can only be the restore the peace in Syria. This is the reason why Europe is focusing its contribution towards UN capabilities, to bring everyone into talks, and later into agreement on existing disputes. The European Union supported all resolutions provided by the UN with regards to the civil war in Syria. However, it became actively engaged since Russia got involved with military force in Syria, in order to balance the disagreements, and coordinate the effort between US and Russia, with focus towards the desired goal.

The reason for this late European involvement is the EU's principle of positive relations with both sides. Most of the European countries are NATO member countries (Ireland and Finland are exceptions), which by default makes the European Union more inclined to US vision for how this conflict should be resolved. However, most European countries have strong economic relations with Russia, especially with regards to energy distribution, which is their national interest. All of these countries are aware that every disagreement will endanger the relations between them and Russia, especially after the embargo imposed over Russia for Crimea annexation. With regards to Russian energy export, it is strongly engaging the Asian market, targeting China, India, and Iran, which means Europe need's Russia more than Russia needs Europe. The EU member countries recognized that in order to balance between the US and

Russia, it required a decisive involvement in the conflict in Syria, and coordinating both sides' efforts. However, Europe's leadership was not prepared to make this effort until the effects of the conflict spilled on Europe's soil.

The Fight Against ISIS

The fight against ISIS remains related with the process of providing peace in Syria. ISIS' terrorist activities elevated the disagreement amongst the countries dealing with Syria. With their brutal actions both in Syria and Iraq, ISIS increased the suffering to an unimaginable level, and stimulated the refugee flow, especially towards Europe. According to UNHCR statistics, from all refugees 25% are children, 17% are women, and 58% are men. The refugee demographics raises questions about possible infiltration of ISIS fighters on European soil. This concern increased after the execution of a complex terrorist attack in Paris on November 13, 2015, with death of 130 people, when a refugee passport was found at one of the attack sites⁵⁰. ISIS claimed responsibility for this attack.⁵¹ ISIS claimed responsibility for several other terrorist attacks, including attack on Russian jet airliner with 224 death casualties,⁵² attack in the Turkish border city of Suruc with 31 murdered, and more than a hundred wounded people,⁵³ and ISIS inspired attack in San Bernardino, California, with 14 murdered and 17 wounded.⁵⁴

These actions that originated from Syria and Iraq, unified the US, Russia, and EU into fight towards mutual objective. Considering that ISIS presents relevant threat to world's peace and security, France proposed within UNSC a resolution that condemns ISIS actions, addresses unified fight against this terrorist organization. The resolution was unanimously adopted within the UNSC.⁵⁵ The most important point is that this resolution provided legitimacy to the fight against ISIS, with regards to the conduct of combat operations in another country. France,

supported by UK, Germany, and the most European countries, begin to coordinate their effort with Russia and the US. Although the fight against ISIS is one segment of providing the desired peace in Syria, at this point ISIS presents a credible threat towards the international security. Perhaps the biggest benefit in this situation is that all influential countries began to act as unified force, putting disagreement aside and supporting each other. The EU remains a constructive partner both to the US and Russia, seeking legitimacy in every use of force within the UN, while maintaining a resolute determination in the multinational effort to defeat ISIS as a world threat.

UN's Support by Neutral Countries

The same support is coming from other countries and organizations that are not satisfied with the opposing positions of US and Russia within the UNSC. Recognizing ineffectiveness in the UN, many of them have called upon unifications in the approach of resolving this conflict. New Zealand's Prime Minister, John Key argued that exercising the veto power in the UNSC is paralyzing the UN's effectiveness while the death tolls rise. "We cannot afford to let the [UN Security] Council go from institution with failings to failed institution",⁵⁶ calling for administrative changes on how the veto power is exercised, and under which circumstances. These and similar statements provide leverage to the UN to ask for P-5 to uphold the UN's values and principles.

The UN can maintain constructive dynamics in the process of mediation by providing recommendations for solution of this crisis. This position leverages the credibility and influence that the UN projects, and makes the opposing P-5 countries obliged to be constructive. It forces them to compromise on the desired outcome, in order to retain good relations with the neutral international community. Although it seems that a lot of national interests are prevailing over

such a noble purpose, in polarized and complex conflict such the civil war in Syria, it is necessity to bring these interests into a reasonable conclusion, in order to avoid future escalations. One word, the end-state is to end the civil war, and then to begin with nation-rebuilding process, on which many of the neutral countries have agreed.

HUMANITARIAN RELIEF

Removal of Chemical Weapons

While the UN is in pursuit of a long term solution to the Syrian civil war, the organization remains active and focus in minimizing the consequences by providing partial resolutions for agreed segments of the conflict. UNSC member states do not agree how the outcome of the conflict should look, however, they agree that some actions are unacceptable, and are willing to let the UN get involved. One of these agreed segments was the use of chemical weapons, that began to be used in Syria by the end of 2012. The UN Secretary General in accordance with his authorization, extended the UN General Assembly A/RES/42/37/C, endorsed UNSC S/RES/620(1988), and affirmed the UN Mission to investigate the alleged use of chemical weapons. Professor Ake Sellstrom (Sweden) was appointed head of mission, and the mission consisted of representatives from the Organization for Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) and World Health Organization (WHO).⁵⁷ The investigation teams and the official report from the investigation were not able to identify the originator of the chemical attacks. The UN investigation teams were able to provide feedback on the alleged use of chemical weapons due to the respect of the ceasefire provided from all of the involved parties in the armed conflict, which affirms once again the legitimacy and the respect that this organization built through the past and possesses today.

The subsequent action from the international community was adoption of the UN resolution 2118 in the UNSC on September 27, 2013. On October 16, 2013, a new OPCW-UN Joint Mission was established and tasked to eliminate the chemical weapons program of the Arab Republic of Syria. Ms. Sigrid Kaag was appointed as a Special Coordinator for the Joint Mission⁵⁸ and within twelve months all of the Syrian stockpile of chemical weapons were successfully destroyed and this mission was concluded. This OPCW-UNJM was another example of the UN and partner organizations contribution towards the world's peace and security.

UN's Engagement with Displaced Persons

Refugee migration from affected areas presents a significant challenge for Europe, due to the large number of refugees, and the capacity to integrate them in the society in a safe manner. This process is constantly coordinated with UNHCR. The better life conditions and human rights were the predominant reason for these people to ask for asylum in some of the European countries. Europe has a long tradition of welcoming asylum seekers from all over the world. The significant numbers of refugees who migrated to Europe in such a short amount of time meant Europe was unable to respond in an appropriate manner. However, some temporary solutions such shelter, food, water, clothing and medicine are provided in coordination and assistance with UNHCR, in order to minimize the negative effects of this crisis. While this is reducing the negative effects of the conflict, the UN is working with partner organizations to provide a long term solution for preventing the refugee flow.

Project for Restoration and Stabilization

One of the permanent solutions to reduce migration from Syria, besides providing peace and security, remains providing a solid livelihood for the population. The UN via its Development Program (UNDP) recognized the possible negative effects with regards to rapid migration from Syria into Europe. The EU was decisive in support of this, and in coordination with UNDP started a “Project for restoration and stabilization of the livelihoods in affected Syrian communities” in 2013.⁵⁹ Europe decided to implement this project in partnership with the UN because of the high recognition that UNDP has throughout the world, and because of the legitimacy that this organization projects.

The expected outcome from this cooperation is to sustain a quality living condition within the conflicted areas in Syria, which ultimately will mitigate the refugee flow to Europe. UNDP focuses on improvement of the living condition in Syria.⁶⁰ However, due to the risk from the civil war, the organization is unable to implement many of its projects. Their estimations are that more than 60% of the country’s population, which is more than 12 million is either a refugee or internally displaced person status.⁶¹ This situation will require a significant effort to normalize the living condition in Syria, as soon as peace and security are restored. However, by maintaining good estimations of requirements to achieve this goal, it will reduce the time to initiate a variety of projects towards the desired objective.

The presented form of partial resolutions, and partial involvement of the UN, in order to reduce the negative effects of the conflict is highly encouraged and supported by UNSC and other UN’s member states. The recognition of the uncertainty for the outcome of this conflict, forces the international community, represented by the UN, to be persistent in seeking permanent solution, and at the same time to be actively engaged in finding an agreed settlement to the conflict itself. The UN’s approach of emphasizing the agreed segments of the conflict, and

reducing them by providing partial resolutions, will focus the international effort on the remaining disagreements hoping that eventually the conflicted sides will be able to compromise, and provide conditions for peace restoration.

CONCLUSION

The initial point of every agreement is the desire to come to an agreement, and with that the opportunity for communication between the opposing parties in the civil war in Syria has to be provided. The UN has to continue to facilitate the dialog between the opposing sides, and with resolute engagement of the special envoys, to assist in the process of overcoming the disagreements. Meetings organized by the UN are able to stimulate the communication between the conflicted sides. Overall, by providing an opportunity for dialog and negotiation to overcome the disagreements the UN can provide the most significant contribution in this context.

Although the civil war in Syria is not over, this UN approach is bringing positive results. The disagreements between the opposing sides are significantly reduced, increasing the will to find a permanent solution to end the conflict. All of the meetings mediated by the UN revealed that the only significant remaining disagreement between US and Russia is Assad's future. The pressure from the international community, that Assad's future is not more important than the lives of twelve million affected people, is forcing both countries to behave in a constructive manner. Restoring the peace in Syria is also a precondition for decisive annihilation of ISIS. The world became united in this fight by providing UN resolution to defeat ISIS, however due to the complexity of the civil war in Syria, both challenges have to be treated simultaneously. A

positive indicator is that the communication facilitated by the UN is reducing the disagreements, which is a significant progress towards the desired peace.

The UN has to continue to exploit every opportunity to condemn stimulation of violence, and to elevate the influence from supporting countries and organizations that prioritize human values over the geo-political interests. These countries and organizations with their presence in the mediation process are increasing the constructive attitude within it. The ability to act united towards the desired goal is a fundamental principle of the organization since its establishment. Achieving this goal requires time and effort, however with the last statements from both US and Russia, with UN mediation there finally is a common interest and will to end this conflict. After the Paris attacks, France proposed a resolution in the UNSC for an international effort in the fight against ISIS, and was immediately verified by all member states. In addition, the refugee crisis is challenging the countries' demographics, economies and neighbor relations, which is an international challenge. The UN has to emphasize every positive contribution towards resolving these issues, and to continue to cooperate with all constructive international partners towards the desired end-state.

At the same time, the organization has to maintain strong commitment in reducing the violence. Although both of the conflicted parties in the civil war are supported by UNSC permanent members, the UN is taking every opportunity to minimize these effects. The restoration of security is a necessity because it is essential for the UN sub-organizations, and other humanitarian agencies, to get involved in restoring peace and stability. The UN was committed prohibiting the use of WMD. After the successful investigation removed more than 90% of the WMD from Syria, and destroyed it. The UNHCR is constantly monitoring the migration,⁶² and providing assistance where and when needed. The UN Educational, Scientific,

and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), provided a resolution that condemns the destruction of the world's heritage in Syria and Iraq, by ISIS or any other terrorist organization. The UN with this resolution is delegitimizing ISIS' beliefs and ideology, both within Islamic countries and worldwide, which makes the terrorist organizations unable to politically effect the governments of the affected countries. The maintenance or restoration of the damaged institutions is one of the priorities for the UN, during or after the civil war is terminated. UNDP has a major role in this process, by maintaining commitment, providing resources, and coordinating actions with other agencies towards the mutual goal. The UN, via its sub-organizations, despite some of the setbacks it has experienced since the beginning of the civil war, is the best organization to manage crisis and restore peace and security, and as such has the burden to perform this duty.

All of these UN sub-organizations, and others as well, are reducing the negative effects from the conflict, which is a parallel contribution while the mediation towards desired peace is ongoing. This involvement is essential in the process of support to the affected population, as a humanitarian segment of the UN's mission, to maintain world's peace and security, and dignity as well. Humanitarian relief, from the perspective of the affected population, perhaps is the most important assistance.

The overall security situation in Syria is far from normalized, and the desired peace is still not restored. The civil war has lasted more than four years, has damaged lives of several million Syrians. However, their hope of normalizing the life in their home country still exist. With this regard, UN's task to restore peace must be priority for the international community from humanitarian point of view, and as such appropriate support is needed. Although, the UN cannot enforce peace restoration without UNSC' approval, it makes a significant effort in every segment it can contribute towards.

In order to achieve this goal, it requires time and effort, however with the last statements from both sides, seems that finally there is a common interest and will to end this conflict. This is the desired outcome for the UN, to provide unified commitment from its UNSC members in peace restoration. The ceases in fire that was established on February 27, this year, is a positive sign that perhaps the conflict can come soon to an end. The UN Special Envoy for Syria, Mr. De Mistura stated that peace restoration via mediation is productive, and there is no other option.⁶³ After five years of violence, the humanitarian aid for Syria is able to reach the affected population.

The UN in this conflict presents a high level of readiness for minimizing the negative effects, which is an integral part of the peace restoration process. The support and facilitation of dialog between the conflicted parties is an essential element for the UN, with partial agreements to reduce the differences in the expected outcome from opposing P-5 members. The interaction and support from neutral countries and organizations is elevating the humanitarian aspect of the conflict resolution over the geo-strategic interest of the some of the P-5. In the end, the humanitarian relief has always been a priority for the UN and its sub-organizations, as a parallel process that needs to be done in order to reduce the negative effects from a conflict such the civil war in Syria. Although the UN does not have the power to terminate a conflict at once, by contributing in these segments it is moving towards the desired peace, by relieving the pain from the affected civilians at the same time. With the UN effort and actions regarding the civil war in Syria, the world is definitely benefiting from UN efforts in Syria, or wherever it is needed.

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