Why Libya, but not Syria? The Authorization of Military Intervention by the United Nations Security Council

Andrea Caruso[*], York University

Abstract

In both Libya and Syria, an uprising of civilians against their rulers resulted in intra-state conflicts. Despite comparable circumstances, the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) has approached these situations in different ways. The existing literature tends to consider both conflicts in the context of the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) doctrine. Rather than compare and contrast the two conflicts in terms of assessing the effectiveness of R2P, the purpose of this paper is to examine why the UNSC authorized a military intervention in Libya, but not in Syria. This question arises out of the notion that similar conditions should elicit the same response. This research will present three main arguments to explain why the UNSC did not authorize the use of force in Syria as they did in Libya. The first is that the variety of actors fighting in Syria makes it difficult for intervention. The second is that the individual interactions between the permanent Security Council members and Syria further complicate intervention. The final argument is that the Security Council is upholding the foundation of the UN in preventing World War III.

Keywords: Libya, Syria, United Nations Security Council, Intervention

Résumé

En Libye et en Syrie, un soulèvement des civils contre leurs dirigeants a entraîné des conflits intra-étatiques. En dépit de circonstances similaires, le Conseil de sécurité des Nations unies (CS) a abordé ces situations de manière différente. La littérature existante tend à considérer les deux conflits dans le contexte de la doctrine de la responsabilité de protéger (R2P). Plutôt que de comparer et d'opposer les deux conflits en termes d'évaluation de l'efficacité de la R2P, l'objectif de ce document est d'examiner pourquoi le CS a autorisé une intervention militaire en Libye, mais pas en Syrie. Cette question découle de l'idée que des conditions similaires devraient susciter la même réponse. Cette recherche présentera trois arguments principaux pour expliquer pourquoi le CS n'a pas autorisé l'usage de la force en Syrie comme il l'a fait en Libye. Le premier est que la diversité des acteurs qui combattent en Syrie rend l'intervention difficile. Le deuxième est que les interactions individuelles entre les membres permanents du Conseil de sécurité et la Syrie compliquent davantage l'intervention. Le dernier argument est que le Conseil de sécurité respecte la raison d'être des Nations unies dans la prévention de la troisième guerre mondiale.

Mots-clés : Libye, Syrie, Conseil de sécurité des Nations Unies, Intervention

[*]Biography :
Andrea Caruso is a recent graduate from the Glendon School of Public and International Affairs at York University in Toronto. She has successfully completed all program requirements for a bilingual Master's in Public and International Affairs. During her graduate studies, Andrea had the opportunity to spend a semester studying in Strasbourg, France. She also worked as a research assistant at Glendon and completed an internship at the International Development Research Centre in Ottawa. In 2018, she received her BA in French Studies with a minor in Political Science from Brock University in St. Catharines in Ontario.

Biographie :
Andrea Caruso est récemment diplômée de l'École d'Affaires publiques et internationales de Glendon de l'Université York à Toronto. Elle a complété avec succès toutes les exigences du programme pour obtenir une maîtrise en affaires publiques et internationales. Pendant ses études graduées, Andrea a eu l'occasion de partir étudier un semestre à Strasbourg en France. Elle a également travaillé comme assistante de recherche à Glendon et effectué un stage au Centre de recherches pour le développement international à Ottawa. En 2018, elle a obtenu un baccalauréat en études françaises avec une mineure en sciences politiques à l'Université Brock à Saint Catharines en Ontario.

Introduction

The principle of non-intervention lies at the heart of the United Nations and the use of force is prohibited under the UN Charter. However, there are exceptions to this ban, which include the authorization of the use of force under circumstances of self-defence or by the UN Security Council (UNSC) in order to protect international peace and security. This latter exception was used in 2011, when the UNSC authorized a military intervention in Libya. Conversely, the UNSC has not done so over the course of the nearly eight-year-long conflict in Syria. Despite the similar intra-state nature of both conflicts, the uprising of civilians over an oppressive government, and the need to establish peace and security in both situations, the UNSC has taken a different approach to each situation.

The intervention in Libya was the first time that the UNSC authorized a third party (NATO forces) to conduct a military intervention with the intention of protecting civilians under the guise of the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) doctrine (Brockmeier et al., 2016). This triggered mixed reactions from UNSC member states with some suggesting the need to invoke the doctrine in Syria and others advising that states should refrain from using R2P in Syria due to the outcome in Libya. Rather than compare and contrast the two conflicts in terms of assessing the effectiveness of R2P, this paper aims to answer the question: Why did the UNSC authorize a military intervention in Libya, but not Syria? To answer this question, this paper will present three plausible reasons as to why the UNSC has not authorized the use of force in Syria as they did in Libya. These main arguments for non-intervention are that the variety of actors fighting in Syria makes it difficult for intervention, that the individual interactions between the permanent UNSC members and Syria further complicates intervention, and that the UNSC is upholding the foundation of the UN in preventing World War III.

Literature Review

The state of knowledge on this topic has a seemingly narrow focus on the role of R2P in Libya and Syria. The existing scholarship has a tendency to assess the effectiveness of R2P in Libya, evaluate the transferability of R2P post-Libya to Syria, or critique the UNSC for their inability to collaborate on creating a successful solution in Syria. The key debate in the literature considers whether the intervention in Libya marked the end or the victory of R2P. The existing scholarship tends to pass judgment on the paralysis at the UNSC for falling short in effectively responding to the conflict in Syria and discusses the operational challenges of R2P. The main arguments across the literature are described below in detail.

Impact and Legacy of the Libyan Precedent

On the one hand, a majority of the existing literature contends that the outcome in Libya symbolized the failure of R2P, which is demonstrated by the deadlock at the UNSC inhibiting action in Syria (Nuruzzaman, 2013). These arguments point to the dangers of intervention and its likelihood to generate more harm than good for Syria (Morris, 2013). Some authors contend that NATO's intervention in Libya worsened matters and some states want to avoid making the same mistakes in Syria (Pelletier & Massie, 2017). Others note that the UNSC must draw on the lessons learned from Libya to guide its decisions surrounding Syria (Rashid, 2013). Many articles propose that Libya proved to be a textbook case for justifying the principles of R2P, yet its implementation yielded results which have hindered the use of R2P in Syria (Thakur, 2013).

On the other hand, the literature also considers, to a lesser degree, the legacy of Libya in more positive terms. For instance, some authors highlight that the initial objective in Libya, of ensuring that the civilians in Benghazi were no longer under imminent threat by the regime, was achieved within days of intervention (Brockmeier et al., 2016). Some evidence reveals that the UNSC has become increasingly accepting of R2P post-Libya and in fact, there has been an increase in references to the doctrine in UNSC draft resolutions since then (Bellamy, 2014).

Inconsistency at the UNSC

The existing literature also highlights discrepancies among the use of the veto power of the five permanent members of the UNSC, made up of Russia, China, the United States, the United Kingdom, and France. These states have the final decision-making power when voting on resolutions whereby the veto of one state can obstruct an international response. For instance, it has been argued that the ongoing intra-state conflict in Syria has revealed the power, fragility, and inconsistency of the UNSC (Mohamed, 2012). The literature alludes to this inconsistency while discussing China and Russia's veto use, resulting in the lack of intervention in Syria, as opposed to their abstentions which ultimately permitted intervention in Libya (Mathias, 2012).

Many of the main arguments presented within the existing scholarship tend to evaluate the effectiveness of R2P in Libya, scrutinize the UNSC for their inability to agree on a solution in Syria, and conflate the precedent of R2P in Libya with disparities at the UNSC on Syria. It is especially noteworthy that both the UNSC and the UN General Assembly (UNGA) have demonstrated increased comfort with R2P post-Libya than they had prior to it (Bellamy, 2014). For example, in the 24 months following intervention in Libya, the UNSC used R2P more frequently than in the five years leading up to Resolution 1973 on Libya (Bellamy, 2014). Thus, the use of R2P in Libya did not completely destroy future use of R2P, given that the UNSC is in fact more willing to invoke the R2P doctrine post-Libya. Therefore, rather than framing the debate in terms of assessing the effectiveness of R2P, there is a greater need to acknowledge that above all, the UNSC has the power to authorize the use of force.

Overall, the existing research which compares the two conflicts, lacks a deeper analysis of the differentiating circumstances on the ground and the actors involved in each conflict. In addition, it lacks a detailed examination of the individual relationships of the five permanent UNSC members with Libya and Syria. There is also a need to take into consideration the founding purpose of the UN and the nuclear capabilities of the five permanent UNSC members. Thus, these aforementioned factors will be examined below in order to help answer why the UNSC authorized military intervention in one intra-state conflict, but not the other. This paper aims to bridge these gaps in the literature by exploring how the varying circumstances on the ground and actors involved in each conflict provoked different responses from the UNSC, how the dynamics of the five permanent UNSC members interact with Libya and Syria, and how the founding purpose of the UN interacts with the core of both UNSC decisions.

Methodology

Given that the existing literature lacks an in-depth discussion of certain aforementioned aspects of both conflicts, the initial stages of developing this paper identified the differentiating circumstances of each conflict and examined the relationships of the permanent five UNSC members with Libya and Syria. Identifying the nuances of these factors allowed for the development of a better understanding of both conflicts.

This paper aims to bridge the analytical gaps in the existing literature. In order to do so, research articles discussing the actors in Syria were compared with those describing the actors involved in Libya. Several articles on the array of actors in Syria were available, however, minimal scholarly information was presented on the scope of actors in Libya leading up to the 2011 intervention. Rather than considering this as an obstacle to answering the research question, it pointed to the fact that the conflict in Libya was clearer cut in terms of the actors involved on each side. This ultimately emphasized that unlike Syria, the conflict in Libya was not multi-sided, and was instead, two-sided.

In order to answer the research question: Why did the UNSC authorize a military intervention in Libya, but not Syria?, this paper takes a comparative approach. This approach examines both intra-state wars connected to the Arab Spring protests, but with an emphasis on the divergent outcomes

concerning the authorization of military intervention under international law. This approach ultimately aims to identify the determinants of this divergent outcome, which will help to fill the identified gaps in the existing literature.

First, an examination of the context leading up to the authorization of the use of force in Libya under international law was considered. Next, the contextual circumstances in Syria were considered. After understanding the context of each conflict, the nuances of both situations were compared and contrasted. Then, an assessment of whether Libya set a precedent for the use of R2P in Syria was considered. Furthermore, the contentions held by UNSC members were investigated as well as to what extent their individual assertions created divergent responses to each conflict. Finally, the divergent UNSC responses were then considered vis-à-vis the founding objectives of the UN in order to determine whether the decisions made by the UNSC fit within the larger purpose of the UN.

Overall, this comparative approach seeks to determine precisely why the UN authorized the use of force in Libya, but not in Syria, despite the similar intra-state nature of these conflicts and a need to establish peace and security in both situations. It is important to note that this approach does not intend to argue whether a UN authorized military intervention is the most effective or ineffective solution to an intra-state conflict of this nature. Instead, it aims to determine the reasoning behind the authorization of the use of force in the name of international peace and security in one intra-state conflict, but not the other.

Differentiating Circumstances on the Ground and Actors Involved in Syria versus Libya

The UNSC's authorization of military intervention in Syria would result in difficulties in determining who exactly the UNSC would support. In essence, the Syrian conflict is multi-sided whereby four main groups consisting of Kurdish forces, the Islamic State, the regime of President Bashar al-Assad, and various civilian opposition groups, are fighting within Syria, with the involvement of external actors. However, a detailed account of the multitude of actors includes the civilians, the Kurds, Syrian rebel fighters, foreign fighters (for instance, from Europe), defected officers and soldiers, soldiers and officers of the Assad-regime, combatants from affiliates such as the Syrian Social Nationalist Party and National Defence Forces, the Islamic State, and Hezbollah fighters (Gupta, 2016). The multitude of actors is further illustrated by a report from NATO stating that it is believed that there are as many as 1,200 armed opposition groups in Syria with over 100,000 fighters and various external funding sources (Gupta, 2016). Thus, the actualities on the ground in Syria are not straightforward.

In comparison to other dictatorships in the Arab world, Syria has a diverse society whereby the regime earns its support from the religious groups of the Alawites, Christians, and Druze who respectively make up thirteen, nine, and three percent of the total population, in addition to support from the upper and middle-class of the Sunni Arabs who account for sixty-five percent of the population (Gupta, 2016). The lower-class Sunni Arabs, defectors from the Syrian Army, and foreign Islamist fighters are among those against the Assad regime, while the Kurds remain unaligned in the conflict (Gupta, 2016). Despite abuses made by the Assad regime, the Syrian opposition has also exercised forms of brutality (Gupta, 2016). This side of the conflict lacks proper communication and coordination and the acceleration of violence has led to an increase in the radicalisation of rebels, the infiltration of foreign fighters, and support from external actors (Wimmen & Asseburg, 2012).

The root of the uprising in Syria was an unarmed, rural lower-class of civilians who formed the Syrian Army. However, when states in the region such as Saudi Arabia and Turkey started providing arms and fighters, military defections from the Syrian Army began (Gupta, 2016). This provision of arms from other states in the region, as well as from the US and its Western allies, is a main reason why there is so much devastation in Syria (Gupta, 2016). Meanwhile, Iraq and Lebanon, the unstable neighbours of Syria, offer rhetorical, financial, and military support to both sides in the conflict

(Wimmen & Asseburg, 2012). For instance, the government of Iraq and the Lebanese Hezbollah back the Assad regime, while Sunni groups in both states support the Syrian rebels (Wimmen & Asseburg, 2012). In addition, Iran's financial, military, and oil contributions aim to assist the Assad regime (Wimmen & Asseburg, 2012). It has been suggested that if the Assad regime continues to receive arms from Iran and Russia, and assistance from Hezbollah, the opponents of Assad will be disadvantaged militarily (Hughes, 2014). This external support further perpetuates factionalism within the rebel movement and divisions between rival commanders (Hughes, 2014). Furthermore, the provision of financial support and weaponry to non-state actors is especially problematic when they do not act in accordance to the political intentions of the state that supplied them (Hughes, 2014).

Furthermore, some of the territory in Syria is under control of the Assad regime, some is under control of the Islamic State, some is under control of the Kurds, and the rest is controlled by various Islamist groups (Gupta, 2016). Within each of these areas that the territory has been divided into, terrorist networks are establishing havens (Tabler, 2013). The Assad regime has also further entrenched sectarian tensions by attributing many of its mass killings of civilians to its 'terrorist opponents' and denying the involvement of their forces (Hughes, 2014). The fighters from Hezbollah, which is a Shiite Islamist group with Iran's support, frequently cross the Lebanese border to join the forces of the Assad regime (Tabler, 2014). Meanwhile, the north-central region is controlled by various armed opposition groups such as the al-Qaeda affiliate Jabhat al-Nusra, which makes up the Islamic State (Tabler, 2014). In addition, the north is operated by the Kurdish population who are working to establish self-administration structures (Tabler, 2014). There has also been a spillover of fighting along the borders of Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan, and Iraq and there are concerns that the autonomous Kurdish region will rise and amplify divisions within Syria (Wimmen & Asseburg, 2012). Syria serves as the most important transit route for the supply of arms to the Lebanese Hezbollah and also has a strong influence over Lebanese actors, which explains the presence of Hezbollah in Syria (Wimmen & Asseburg, 2012). The presence of this array of state, non-state, and foreign actors render effective negotiations towards a cohesive solution virtually impossible.

Conversely, the conflict in Libya was much clearer cut in terms of the actors involved. Unlike Syria, the conflict in Libya was not multi-sided. There were two sides fighting against each other, the Libyan people who revolted against the dictatorship of Muammar Gaddafi, who publicly announced an imminent massacre in Benghazi (Brockmeier et al., 2016). The threat of mass atrocities was evident as Gaddafi declared that any Libyan who chose to take up arms against the state would be executed, and this resulted in the hesitant UNSC members, to realize that inaction was not the solution (Bellamy, 2011). The violence in Syria does not resemble the conflict in Libya and there are many concerns pertaining to both the character and the coherence of the Syrian opposition (Ralph et al., 2017). Therefore, declaring that the conflicts in Libya and Syria are similar, is misleading due to the fact that Gaddafi's armed forces were much less sophisticated than Assad's forces who possess armoured vehicles and airspace control (Hughes, 2014). In addition, the Transitional National Council in Libya provided unified leadership and control over the rebel forces much more effectively in comparison to the lack of a cohesive control force over the Syrian opposition groups (Hughes, 2014). The UNSC response to the conflict in Syria has been greatly shaped by factors within Syria itself rather than through R2P concerns stemming from the conflict in Libya (Bellamy, 2014). For instance, given the complex assortment of political, religious, and strategic factors impacting Syria and surrounding states, the divide over the best solution to end the violence is much more convoluted in comparison to Libya (Morris, 2013). This suggests that an intervention is much more difficult to coordinate and there is uncertainty in terms of who to side with when the conflict is multi-sided.

Ultimately, the differences between all sides of the conflict in Syria make it incredibly difficult to coordinate a UN authorized intervention (Gupta, 2016). These differences suggest that a UN intervention is not the way to resolve this conflict (Gupta, 2016). For example, it is difficult to determine a feasible form of conflict resolution when various autonomous paramilitary units with ethnic and

religious distinctions are simultaneously fighting for land control and influence (Wimmen & Asseburg, 2012). Furthermore, there are a variety of conflicts presently unfolding in Syria, for instance, the fight for state leadership, rivalry between the US and China/Russia, the presence of non-state extremist networks, and the quest for Kurdish autonomy (Wimmen & Asseburg, 2012). The assumption can be made that the battle against the terrorist networks affiliated with the Islamic State must be the priority for all parties involved (Hlavsová et al., 2018). However, cooperation between states has been impossible to coordinate as they each pursue their own specific interests and individually align themselves with the diverse actors in Syria. Thus, as a result of the various alliances and the hostilities between all implicated actors, a UNSC authorized military intervention would only add fuel to the fire in Syria. Overall, it would be extremely difficult to determine exactly which actors the UN would support by way of intervention. The ambiguity of actors on the ground combined with the multi-sided character of the conflict, does not allow for the UN to intervene in a clear way.

Interactions Between the Permanent Five UNSC Members With Syria Versus Libya

This leads to the argument that the individual interactions between the permanent five UNSC member states with Syria has influenced the lack of authorization of intervention. In the international realm, the competing security and economic interests of states combined with self-interested foreign policy agendas, often undermine the prioritization of human rights strategies (Silander, 2013). This argument will be presented by outlining the relationships of the Eastern representatives at the UNSC (Russia and China) and the Western representatives (the US, the UK, and France) with Libya and Syria.

In Libya, the Gaddafi regime had few allies, which was further exacerbated by the oppressive behaviour of his regime (Bellamy, 2011). The demand for a no-fly zone made by regional organizations such as the Gulf Cooperation Council, the Organization of the Islamic Conference, and the League of Arab States, influenced Russia and China's decision to abstain from, rather than veto Resolution 1973 (Bellamy, 2011). Therefore, Gaddafi's unpopularity among China and Russia surpassed any feeling of humanitarian solidarity (Bellamy, 2011). Furthermore, Russia and China were not drawn to human security preoccupations, instead, they saw that the events taking place within Libya would lead to the destabilization of other sovereign states in the area (Silander, 2013). Nevertheless, the abstentions, rather than vetoes by Russia and China revealed their uncertainties towards Resolution 1973 as they were unconvinced that all other measures had been exercised and uncertain that the use of force was necessary (Brockmeier et al., 2016). However, the fear that inaction would result in a massacre in Benghazi was looming and the primary objective of Resolution 1973 was accomplished within days of intervention in Libya (Brockmeier et al., 2016). Overall, Russia and China made it very clear that they themselves did not want to intervene in Libya, and they allowed the West to intervene by way of their abstention (Chapnick, 2018). Therefore, there was little risk that the Permanent Five UNSC Members, representing the largest nuclear powers from both the East and the West, would be simultaneously present on Libyan soil.

In regards to the Syrian conflict, Russian and Chinese explanations of the use of their veto for draft resolutions on Syria have lacked an emphasis on the precedent of intervention in Libya (Bellamy, 2014). For instance, in formal remarks to the UNSC, China has never publicly expressed concerns over past intervention in Libya as reasoning behind its decision to veto resolutions on Syria (Bellamy, 2014). In fact, China stated that they vetoed the draft resolution because it may further complicate the situation (Bellamy, 2014). Although it was not stated at the UNSC, it is noteworthy from Beijing's point of view that their abstention on Resolution 1973 in Libya, resulted in great financial losses. This can be illustrated through Beijing's economic ties to Gaddafi, which led to a loss of more than $20 billion to Chinese companies following the power transition in Libya (Sun, 2012). It can be noted that perhaps this outcome was not far from the surface when China decided to veto draft resolutions on Syria.

Nonetheless, China's joint veto with Russia on Syria, saved Moscow from being internationally isolated and demonstrates the diplomatic coordination between the two states (Sun, 2012). In addition, Russia only initially expressed veto concerns that NATO's operation in Libya, resulting in a Western-led regime change, could happen in Syria, and this only formed one part of a much broader argument (Bellamy, 2014). It is important to underline that Russia advanced several other key arguments in defence of its position such as; that the tragedy in Syria was not only a result of the brutal actions of authorities, but also by the opposition, that confrontation would only exacerbate the conflict, and that many Syrians would prefer gradual changes rather than a quick regime change (Bellamy, 2014). Furthermore, Russian officials declared that the Syrian conflict did not resemble that of Libya due to the fact that Syrian opposition groups were violent from the onset of the conflict (Allison, 2013). Therefore, the experience in Libya is much less significant in terms of its impact on the voting behaviour of UNSC members and additionally, none of the public statements put forward by Russia or China articulated concerns over the inclusion of R2P language in the resolutions (Bellamy, 2014). This ultimately demonstrates that neither the inclusion of R2P, nor the precedent in Libya had a strong impact on Russia and China's decision to use their veto on draft resolutions to address the conflict in Syria.

In addition, there are undeniable economic and strategic priorities behind Russia's decision to use their veto (Thakur, 2013). It has been argued that the principal driver of Russia's veto is the affinity between Moscow and Damascus which is bound by identity, long-standing cooperation, kinship, trade relations, investment, and a military alliance whereby Russia has a naval resupply base in Syria (Bellamy, 2014). Russian strategic interests and Moscow's connections to the Assad regime have been linked to their UNSC decisions (Morris, 2013). For example, nearly 100,000 Russians were living in Syria leading up to the conflict and there are many intermarriages between Russians and Syrians (Bellamy, 2014). In addition, from 2007-2010, Russian arms trade with Syria made up seventy-eight percent of their trade relations which amounted to $4.8 billion and since 2009, Russian companies have invested $20 billion in Syria (Bellamy, 2014). Russia's naval base in Syria is the only one that Moscow possesses outside of the former USSR and since the onset of the uprising in Syria in 2011, Russia has supported the Assad regime through their actions and public statements (Katz, 2013). Furthermore, Russia has expressed their concerns that the Arab Spring movement encourages the spread of radical Islamism in the Middle East which may permeate closer to Russia's borders (Bellamy, 2014). Russian criticisms directed towards previous Western-led military interventions, under the language of legality, is insufficient to explain its policy towards Syria (Allison, 2013). This is due to the fact that Moscow and Damascus share historical affinities, that Russia has material and geopolitical interests in maintaining its bilateral relations with Syria, and that the crisis in Syria has the potential to spill into Russia.

On a global scale, Russia is the state which has most prominently served as a diplomatic shield for Syria and bolstered the state through the provision of arms (Allison, 2013). Moscow has not dissociated itself from Assad's regime nor has it challenged the legitimacy of his rule (Allison, 2013). This diplomatic shield that Russia provides for Assad defies most of the Arab states and the UN and appears to be an alignment of convenience (Allison, 2013). For instance, since the 1970s, Russia has been the primary source of arms for the Assad family of rulers (Hughes, 2014). During the Cold War, Syria took sides with the Soviet Union and Russia was granted the naval base in Syria in 1971 (Gupta, 2016). The numerous Russian advisers stationed in Syria reveals the high value that Damascus attaches to Russian arms and technicians (Allison, 2013). The Syrian military has historically had extensive interactions with Russia and this ongoing connection to Russian military advisers deepens the military-intelligence linkages between the two states whereby Russia provides intelligence support to the Syrian regime (Allison, 2013). For instance, Russia maintains a sizeable electronic eavesdropping post on the Syrian coast and their ongoing access to the naval port represents geopolitical ties (Allison, 2013). Russia is unwilling to break ties with their only remaining base and ally in the Middle East, which is preserved through their connections with the elite members of Assad's

security (Allison, 2013). Russia continues to leverage its access to Syria in order to maintain their role as an actor in the Middle East because Russia cannot expect relations between Damascus and Moscow to continue as they are if the Assad regime is overthrown (Allison, 2013). The relationship between Russia and Syria is a connection that Russia is unwilling to relinquish and this illustrates that the strategic, military, and geopolitical interests of Russia have ultimately influenced their decision to use their veto.

Furthermore, some of Syria's foreign policy positions have earned Russia's approval. For example, Syria publicly supported Russia during its 2008 military intervention in Georgia by means of Assad's visit to Moscow after the conflict began whereby he offered to place Russian missile systems on Syrian territory for the coordination of a strategic response, which underlines the current need for reciprocal support by Russia (Allison, 2013). In addition, Russia is devoted to construction work in Syria on the Arab Gas Pipeline linking Egypt to Turkey and it views Syria as a strategically important actor in the transit of energy (Allison, 2013).

Chinese and Russian statements over Syria diverge from other UNSC members by demanding that the criticism directed at the behaviour of the Assad regime become more balanced with criticism of anti-Assad forces (Morris, 2013). Both Russia and China have practiced coordinating their behaviour at the UNSC since the end of the Cold War due to the fact that these states do not want to be viewed as having singlehandedly blocked actions made by the UNSC (Morris, 2013). China's robust support towards the Syrian regime has pleased Russia as they follow their lead (Värk, 2013). The decisions made by the UNSC members on the authorization of the use of force are linked to politics all the way down and these decisions will always be dependent on underlying strategic circumstances (Morris, 2013).

In Libya, the concept of R2P did not actually play a significant role in determining policy, even in pro-R2P states such as the UK (Morris, 2013). In the US, President Barack Obama publicly justified the actions of the US in UNSC debates over Libya by carefully articulating terms of case-specific circumstances, which suggested that their decision was driven by national interests, rather than a sense of responsibility (Morris, 2013). Historically speaking, the economic and trade relations between France and Libya have been significant and US companies have also acquired oil contracts in Libya (Yahia, 2009). This highlights that factors aside from those linked to the notion of R2P are important to consider when examining Western decisions on Libya.

In Syria, the US reluctance to directly engage militarily is due in part to historical animosities and a lack of public support (Hlavsová, 2018). The US, UK, and France have stated that Assad needs to relinquish his presidential role in order for any political processes to occur (Wimmen & Asseburg, 2012). Despite their support for the removal of Assad, states such as the UK have expressed difficulties, an unwillingness, and inability to coordinate military intervention, however, they have also indicated that it would be difficult for the UK not to follow the lead of the US (Ralph et al., 2017). The presence of the US in Turkey facilitates the transfer of weapons to the Syrian opposition (Hughes, 2014). In order to facilitate the provision of arms to the Syrian rebels, France and the UK have lifted the European Union's arms embargo on Syria (Hughes, 2014). The popular opposition in the UK to their direct involvement in any conflict overseas, combined with the desire of the UK government to place coercive pressures on the Assad regime, results in proxy warfare as the alternate solution to inaction (Hughes, 2014). However, Russia has criticized the provision of arms to the Syrian opposition as extremely dangerous due to the fact that these sophisticated systems have found their way into the hands of those that they were unintended for, such as terrorist organizations (Allison, 2013). Furthermore, Washington has been unable to unify the various opposition groups in Syria in order to create a military force capable of fighting against the Assad regime (Ziser, 2013). The US has spoken out against the use of chemical weapons by Assad, however, minimal action has been taken on their part largely as a result of Russia and China's veto (Ziser, 2013). Washington has provided medicine

and nearly expired ready-to-eat meals to the Syrian opposition, however, this type of assistance will not coordinate the downfall of the Assad regime, which the permanent UNSC member states of the West argue is a necessary step towards improving the situation in Syria (Tabler, 2013).

Furthermore, it can be argued that the desire to suppress the acts of terrorist groups in Syria is possibly the one decision that the five permanent members of the UNSC can all agree on. The majority of the American and European public opposed intervention in Syria until 2014, when the Islamic State began to claim large portions of Syria and coordinate numerous international terrorist attacks (Hlavsová, 2018). The National Security Strategy of the US in 2015 highlights that the US has been working to equip and train the Syrian opposition in order to counterbalance the terrorists and the Assad regime (Hlavsová, 2018). Following the terrorist attacks in France, a resolution put forward by France in the UNSC was unanimously adopted as it called for the need to combat against ISIS, a threat to international peace and security (Gupta, 2016). Ultimately, the unanimous adoption of this resolution represents an area that all five permanent UNSC members can agree on, likely due to the fact that these groups are non-state actors who threaten both Western and Eastern states.

Nonetheless, this section highlights the need to be mindful of the interactions of the five permanent member states of the UNSC with Libya and Syria. This allows for a much more comprehensive understanding of the carefully calculated reasoning behind a state's decision to pass, veto, or abstain from resolutions. Thus, there is a need to view these conflicts and responses to them on a case-by-case basis because the assertions made by the five permanent UNSC member states, do not demonstrate a clear link between the impact of Libya on Syria. For instance, Russia's opposition to resolutions on Syria would have happened regardless of intervention in Libya, as a result of Russia's desire to preserve their relations with Syria (Brockmeier et al., 2016). The UNGA has criticized the UNSC for its inability to take action in Syria in a timely manner, which suggests that the UNSC's position on Syria does not align with the majority of states in the UNGA who have endorsed resolutions on Syria (Bellamy, 2014). Overall, this reveals that the UNSC's paralysis on Syria owes more to the state to state relations pertaining to the situation in Syria itself than to R2P concerns from the NATO-led intervention in Libya.

Prevention of World War III

A reconsideration of the founding purpose of the UN, leads to the contention that the UNSC did not authorize intervention in Syria in order to uphold the origins of the UN in preventing World War III. For instance, unlike the League of Nations which was unsuccessful in preventing WWII, the UN has been successful for nearly seventy-five years in preventing WWIII (Chapnick, 2018). Russia and China made it very clear that they themselves did not want to intervene in Libya and they allowed the West to intervene by means of their abstention, therefore, there was little risk of WWIII erupting (Chapnick, 2018). Conversely, given Russia and China's affinities to the Assad regime, in a scenario where a coalition of Western states intervenes in Syria, Russia and China would back the Assad regime. Therefore, the most powerful states in the world would all be present on the ground in the same war zone, in an extremely unstable area in the Middle East, teeming with non-state actors and terrorist groups. The nuclear capabilities of the five permanent UNSC members, combined with their simultaneous presence on the same territory, would ultimately become cause for concern insofar that this would increase any potential threat of WWIII. Since the dawn of nuclear weapons, the mission of the UN has been to diminish any possibility of a third World War.

The UN's fundamental objective to avoid an armed confrontation between the nuclear powers is reinforced by the concept of mutually assured destruction (MAD). The principle behind MAD is that neither the US nor Russia would be capable of surviving nuclear warfare with one another, which provides both states with the incentive to thwart any possibility of simultaneously engaging in a conflict threatening their physical existence (Early & Asal, 2014). For this reason, scholar Kenneth Waltz contends that the world is actually a much safer place as a result of the proliferation of nuclear weapons, due to the fact that they are so dangerous (Early & Asal, 2014). It is important to note that

the five permanent members of the UNSC pose the greatest nuclear threat as a result of their large arsenals and thus, they are deterred from directly engaging in conflicts with one another because the risk of MAD is far too high (Early & Asal, 2014). In fact, the nuclear capacity of the US poses the greatest existential threat to all other nuclear-armed states while Russia and China represent the greatest existential threat to the US (Early & Asal, 2014). This possibility of MAD influences the behaviour of nuclear-armed states during conflicts and underlines the impact that nuclear weapons have on the central security interests of states (Early & Asal, 2014). These findings ultimately explain why the permanent members of the UNSC/nuclear-armed states have refrained from intervening militarily on the same territory. The risk that military intervention would transform into a war between the East and the West, where MAD is on the line, is too high. This would not uphold the founding principles of the UN Charter, which promote and protect international peace and security between states. The occurrence of an inter-state war would trigger the downfall of the UN for failing to accomplish its founding purpose in preventing WWIII. Overall, this scenario would resemble that of the UN's predecessor, the League of Nations, who failed to prevent WWII.

It has been suggested that the conflict in Syria resembles a proxy war whereby the actors involved rely on support from external powers and various regional, subnational, and international conflicts are fought on Syrian territory (Wimmen & Asseburg, 2012). The current rivalry support offered by the US and Russia illustrates similar patterns of the Cold War (Wimmen & Asseburg, 2012). The proxy wars during the Cold War represent a time when the threat of MAD was constantly looming. Thus, the situation in Syria portrays a battleground in a proxy war between several powerful states, most notably, the US, Russia, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and Iran (Hlavsová, 2018). This suggests that if both Russia and the US intervened militarily in Syria, this would transition the current situation from a proxy war into a war between states. In 2011, Russia stated that the conflict in Syria is not a threat to international peace and security and for this reason, an external military intervention in Syria would trigger serious consequences in the Middle East (Allison, 2013). In addition, an intervention by Western states would likely result in a deeper conflict with Russia as a result of the presence of their sophisticated air defence systems alongside the provision of Western arms to the Syrian opposition (Allison, 2013).

Despite the fact that opposition groups have indicated their resentment at the sparse Western assistance which fails to adequately counterbalance the regime support from Iran and Russia, an intervention by Western states presents the risk of intensifying the various sectarian tensions in Syria and surrounding states (Hughes, 2014). On the one hand, Russia uses airstrikes against those fighting against the Assad regime, which has helped to boost the Assad regime's diminishing morale (Gupta, 2016). On the other hand, US airstrikes against the Islamic State also have the effect of assisting the Assad regime (Pelletier & Massie, 2017). Therefore, it would be extremely difficult for Western states to support a UNSC mission that would reinforce the tenure of Assad's power. This argument highlights that ultimately, UNSC authorization of military intervention would likely propel Syria's pre-existing descent into a catastrophe (Juneau, 2015). This type of intervention may trigger a widespread conflict throughout various states within the region, with an added religious dimension (Morris, 2013). Moreover, the nuclear capabilities of the implicated actors would result in the potential threat of MAD. Thus, it can be argued that UNSC's decision to refrain from military intervention has been the right policy decision in order to avoid the possibility of MAD by way of an armed confrontation between the East and the West.

Conclusion

Overall, this research paper emphasizes the need to examine intra-state conflicts on a case-by-case basis in order to understand UNSC reasoning behind intervention versus non-intervention, rather than regard conflicts such as Libya and Syria as identical situations. The main arguments presented in this research paper are that unlike in Libya, the UNSC has not authorized intervention

in Syria because of the overwhelming number of actors involved, the individual interactions between the five permanent members with Syria, and the prevention of World War III.

The conflict in Syria presents a challenge to the UNSC in considering its role and responses which range from intervening militarily to doing absolutely nothing. It is important to consider that at the end of the day, the permanent members of the UNSC have the final decision-making power when it comes to the authorization of military intervention. This research paper raises a series of questions for further research which include: What is the purpose of the UN laws on the use of force in a world where intra-state conflicts are the new norm? Does any possibility of nuclear war ultimately make the world a safer place? What use does the R2P doctrine have in a structure where five nuclear-armed states have the final decision-making power when it comes to intervention? The examination of these questions can further this area of research and contribute to the ongoing debates in the literature.

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