

# The Syrian war: The “hidden hands” and the challenge to peace processes

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**Abstract** Syria’s civil war, which began in 2011, has been dubbed one of the bloodiest conflicts of the twenty-first century. A multitude of institutional, regional, and global efforts and activities in the shape of peace proposals, negotiations, diplomatic peace initiatives, and mediations have been put in place in an attempt to end the war. The goal of this research is to look at these peace mechanisms and the elements that function as undercurrents and/or obstacles to their implementation. It claims that a variety of actors, interests, and goals obstruct diverse peace processes. Furthermore, the complex intertwining of internal and external influences is critical to the success of many conflict management programs. The problems faced by many peace processes include the sordid backstories and operations of hidden hands such as the United States and Russia using the war as a pawn to conduct proxy fights including Iran, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and other entities. The conclusion is that, while a political solution is an appropriate vehicle for resolving the quagmire, the effect of foreign interests and complicated internal elements that have a negative impact on political diplomacy may persist for some time. As a result, if a political approach is to be effective, it must take into account and synergize the numerous domestic and exogenous interests.

## Introduction

As a result of inadequate conflict management, the ostensibly peaceful demonstration against Assad's administration in March 2011 grew into a full-fledged war. Furthermore, the conflict devolved into a full-fledged war as a result of the numerous conflict actors fighting for their own unique goals, as well as the myriad individual, organizational, and state interests that existed both within and outside (Akinrinde, 2018). Due to its severe effects and repercussions on the Syrian populace, the Middle East area, neighbouring nations, and beyond, the war has not only grown intractable, but has also devolved into a regional crisis; it has become a regional and worldwide concern and problem. This is because, aside from the fact that the war resulted in massive casualties, displaced thousands of people, and destroyed vast amounts of property, it reopened old scars of hatred and brought the US – Russian race for the Middle East to the fore. It also reveals the regional hegemonic battle, which is reflected in the battle for regional hegemony between Iran, Saudi Arabia, and Turkey, as well as Israel (a common foe to the Arab people). In the face of unspeakable bloodshed and destruction, regional and world leaders did not fold their arms, but reacted to find a solution to the problem. The United Nations and civil society actors took the lead in initiating conflict management operations and peace processes with the goal of ending the war and restoring peace to the Arab country (Adeyeye, 2017; Akinrinde, 2020). However, because the battle refused to end, little success could be claimed. The authors of this study believe that the apparent failure of many peace processes and conflict management systems can be attributed to the war's sordid backstories, and that the underlying obstacle to peace processes stems from internal and external forces – “hidden hands” led by the United States and Russia. The war is being used as a pawn by the two powers to fight proxy wars with Iran, Turkey, and Saudi Arabia, as well as other groups such as Islamist groups acting as fronts for the two antagonists. Specifically, this paper argues that the Middle East political intrigues involving the United States and Russia's socio-economic, political, and strategic interests in Syria have made the war intractable and responsible for the challenges to peace. The strategic importance of Syria in the region, for example, is a key component in Russia and United States' Middle-East interests and operations. Syria's strategic position in the area exposes the war to strategic power play including regional states seeking regional hegemonic objectives, as well as global actors such as United States and Russia (Chance, 2016). Syria's strategic position is explained by its geographical proximity to Turkey and Israel (a significant United States' ally), as well as Syria's status as an ally of Iran and Russia (a global competitor with the United States). As a result, the conflict became a crucial tool in the power struggle between the United States and Russia.

Syria is also vulnerable to external actors and hidden hands since it acts as a vital conduit between Iran and Islamist groups such as Hezbollah Lebanon, a Lebanese Shiite organization (Manfreda, 2017; Tudoroiu, 2015, p. 147; Chance, 2016). To be sure, other internal and foreign elements such as Iran (a firm backer of Al-Assad), Saudi Arabia and its Gulf allies' involvement, Turkey (supporting the Syrian government's opposition), terrorist groups, and religious and ethnic groupings all have a role in determining the result of the various peace processes. Tudoroiu (2015, p. 147) and Manfreda (2017) maintain that the failures of various negotiation and mediation

processes are due to the fluidity and shifting dynamics of the war, as well as the unwillingness and/or lack of willingness of conflict actors and parties in conflict to negotiate; their lack of will to settle and lack of independence of conflict players.

As a result of the foregoing, this study argues that a political solution is acceptable for resolving the quagmire, but the influence of external interests has had and will continue to have a detrimental impact on political diplomacy that could help to stop the conflict and war completely. To that degree, if there is no consideration and synergy among the many domestic and exogenous interests, the various peace processes and conflict management measures may not be able to completely solve the situation in Syria. The United States, Russia, and the United Nations must take the lead and assume responsibility, and the Syrian people must be brought along and made to own the peace processes and mechanisms in order to convince regional and domestic parties to accept peaceful resolution of problems in a fashion that leads to peacebuilding.

## Situating peace and peace processes

### Peace

It has not been a simple task to define peace. However, in order to properly position the point of this work, it is necessary to describe what constitutes peace and the varieties of peace pertinent to this debate. As previously said, conceptualizing peace is a difficult endeavour because peace has been employed in various contexts to convey a wide range of meanings and may continue to be so for a long time. For example, the term “peace” has been used to describe: (1) freedom from disturbance, tranquillity – when someone wants to do something in peace; (2) mental or emotional quiet, as in “peace of mind”; (3) a treaty agreeing peace between warring governments and factions – situation of a supported/negotiated peace, and (4) a state or period in which there is no war or a conflict has ended. It has also been interpreted as a state of total peace, tranquillity, or quietude, as opposed to any type of antagonistic or non-aggressive conflict (Albert, Oloyede, 2010, p. 2; Galtung, 1969, p. 167–191; Stoessinger, 2011). Peace has also been defined as people being able to resolve disagreements without resorting to violence and working together to enhance their quality of life. Peace interpretations can be classified as either negative or positive in terms of categorization. Positive peace depicts the absence of both structural and psychological violence, whereas negative peace depicts the absence of physical violence. Negative peace is frequently forced; it rarely occurs as a result of an open conflict resolution. Positive peace, on the other hand, represents conflict resolution and repair through creative conflict transformation (Adeyeye, 2018a, 2017b; Albert, Oloyede, 2010, p. 2; Regehr, 2009). Negative peace is imposed as a result of conflict parties’ failure to negotiate, as in peacekeeping operations during conflicts and wars. Peace is achieved in this manner by the use of adversarial conflict management measures, such as military and paramilitary forces, as well as the legal system.

Non-adversarial conflict resolution requires parties in conflict to work together to find long-term solutions to their differences and conflicts. This is accomplished through negotiation, mediation, and, in some cases, arbitration. These approaches are referred to as peace processes

in this article. That is, political techniques for resolving problems by nonviolent means. For the purpose of this paper, peace emphasises situations when: everyone lives in safety, without fear or threat of violence, and no form of violence is tolerated in law or in practice; everyone is equal before the law, the systems for justice are trusted, and fair and effective laws protect people's rights; everyone is able to participate in shaping political decisions and the government is accountable to the people; everyone has fair and equal access to the basic needs for their wellbeing—such as food, clean water, shelter, education, healthcare and a decent living environment; everyone has an equal opportunity to work and make a living regardless of gender, ethnicity or any other aspect of identity. To be clear, the aforementioned vision, conditions, and aspects of peace are at odds with the situation in Syria since 2011, hence the country cannot be described as peaceful. Syria's citizens were unable to resolve their disagreements and conflicts without resorting to bloodshed. Because there were so many warring parties, effective negotiation was difficult, and peace enforcement was equally difficult due to the war's complexity. As a result, Syria's two peace alternatives have remained elusive since 2011.

### Peace process

For the purpose of this study, peace processes are defined as a combination of official and unofficial diplomatic efforts to affect and transform relationships, dialogue, negotiation, and mediation. It encompasses all forms of conflict resolution and transformation, as well as general peace-making, peacekeeping, and peacebuilding initiatives. As a result of this context, a peace process is defined as a collection of plans, ideas, ideas, negotiations, diplomatic peace initiatives, and mediations aimed at resolving a conflict or war. Peace processes in Syria are based on agreement and negotiation between domestic warring groups and the Syrian state, as well as external players to the conflict such as the United States, Russia, Iran, Turkey, and Saudi Arabia. In this context, negotiation is defined as a communication approach in which disputing parties attempt to reach mutually acceptable solutions to their differences and conflict concerns. This method focuses on long-term goals rather than the narrow short-term gains that conflict participants sometimes seek. Negotiation's essence and objective is to reach an agreement rather than to win. This entails bringing conflicting parties to the table for conversation, with the goal of ending hostilities and wars. As a result, peace processes are considered as political tactics for resolving conflicts through peaceful methods. These include a mix of official and unofficial political diplomacy aimed at affecting and changing relationships, dialogue, negotiation, and mediation. It also refers to efforts at general peace-making, peacekeeping, and peacebuilding, as well as conflict resolution and transformation. Peace proposals, negotiations, diplomatic peace initiatives, and mediations in Syria appear to have failed to end conflict and war because it was difficult to get conflict actors/parties together to meaningfully express themselves in mediation, which is a fundamental requirement for the success of peace processes, posing challenges to peace that can only be achieved by the use of force. Resources, time, and patience are all necessary components in peace processes. It necessitates compromise both inside the local environment and at the conflict's exterior level (Albert, 2012; Albert and Oloyede, 2010). All of which were conspicuously

absent in Syria. Peace processes have been a challenging landscape to navigate in practice, particularly because of their obscurity. This is because it is sometimes difficult to adequately mediate and negotiate in complicated conflict contexts like Syria to arrive at a win-win outcome. To be sure, Syria’s web of interests and forces makes coordination and, ultimately, peace in such a fight difficult (Sitcher et al., 2015).

Negotiation is a significant non-adversarial conflict management technique that is pertinent to our issue. Because it has been recognized that adversarial conflict management approaches and military options do not always succeed in resolving conflicts, and because the diversity of parties and interests in Syria makes adversarial approaches (military peace enforcement) challenging, negotiation is essential. Negotiation is a communication approach in which disputing parties attempt to reach a mutually acceptable solution to their differences and difficulties (Albert and Oloyede, 2010; Adeyeye, 2017b). In contrast to the narrow/parochial short-term benefits that conflict parties frequently desire, the negotiation approach has been recognized as aiding in the achievement of long-term objectives, and the purpose of negotiation is based on establishing agreement rather than striving for ultimate victory-achieving a win-win-non-zero sum situation. Essentially, negotiation has long been recognized to have long-term benefits in that it aids in the formulation of opinions and the delineation of areas of agreement and disagreement, as well as allowing each conflicting party to acquire something in exchange for something (Galtung, 1969, p. 167; Regehr, 2009). Negotiation success, on the other hand, is contingent on a number of factors. These are the following factors: (1) Identifying parties willing to participate, that is, the peace process must first identify conflict parties who are willing to engage in negotiations. (2) In order to have a fruitful negotiation, parties must be reliant on one another, i.e., actors must be interdependent. This is because participants require one another in order for their respective interests to be realized; in particular, one party cannot meet his or her wants without the cooperation of the other. (3) Participants must be willing to negotiate; else, dialogue will not take place. (4) Consensus on a given subject. Participants and people must agree on specific issues and interests for any meaningful progress and productive negotiation to occur. The Syrian war discourse would reveal an apparent lack of these conditions, making negotiation difficult. On this point, one would be inclined to suggest military, paramilitary, or judicial solutions, because force is utilized in difficult situations when parties in conflict refuse to cooperate in negotiations, as in Syria. Apart from the complexities of the individuals and interests involved, discussions in Syria, as in other complicated battles, are frequently beset by two fundamental challenges: time and financial resources.

## **Power, international and reciprocal socialisation**

### **Realism (power) theory**

The analyses presented in this study are framed by theories of power and international socialization. Realism describes the international system in terms of power. Without doubts, power is one of the most important (if not the most important) factors to consider while studying domestic

and international relations and political discourses. Varma (1975, p. 176) maintains that politics is concerned with men's relationships in affiliation and competition, submission and control, and that power is what men desire in their political bargaining and interactions. The power theory is based on a number of ideas. The power thesis, for example, claims that military forces are a key component of the ability to influence or force compliance and that negotiation outcome is also dependent on raw power and strategic attack, and that hegemony (the dominance) of one state in the international system can aid in maintaining stability and peace (Morgenthau, 2012, p. 4). In the sense that the Syrian war is about the interests (hegemonic, resource, and prestige) of internal and external players backed by the use of power, the above stance simply summarizes the discourse on the Syrian war. Because the war reflects domestic and international politics and power struggles, particularly on the roles of foreign forces, the power theory is suitable. The centrality of the issues in the Syrian war; context, causes, and actors, no doubts, revolves around states' and groups' ambition for power and power relations both within and beyond Syria.

Although there are several definitions of power, Hans Morgenthau's basic explanation of power, in which he argued that power is essentially about man's control over other people's beliefs and behaviours, perfectly captures the essence of the Syrian war discussion (Morgenthau, 2012; 1978 and 1970). Furthermore, Wolfer's assertion that power is the ability to move others or force them to do what one desires, rather than what one does not require, situates the roles of the powerful hidden hands in the Syrian war, such as the United States and Russia (Wolfer, 1962, p. 103). Since Morgenthau and Arnold's descriptions, several others have contributed to the discussion of power, a number of which capture the crisis in Syria. For example, Frankel (1973, p. 64) defined power as the ability to have one's wish fulfilled, the ability to influence others' behaviour and actions to fulfil one's wish, and a state's capability to employ real and intangible resources to influence the behaviour of other nations and their overall capabilities. The war in Syria is seen as a tool to impact economic, political, and socio-cultural factors. The characters and their division, both inside and externally, are motivated by the economic and political rewards in Syria, and they eventually want to influence and dominate the Arab people. Whilst the United States and its allies Saudi Arabia and Turkey are supporting the Sunni party, Russia continues using Iran (a recognized United States' adversary) as a front to back the Shia Alawite party and Assad regime. This explains why the Syrian Kurds led by the Islamic State (ISIS), and Shia Islamist group (Hezbollah) among others are involved in power politics for real and intangible gains (Manfreda, 2017).

### International and reciprocal socialisation

According to the constructivist school, actors in international relations are continually socializing and learning. This viewpoint is at the heart of the international socialisation theory, which claims that constant social learning between states affects their behaviour, interests, and identities, which in turn affects the state's global environment and, in many cases, the dynamics of global anarchy (Wendt, 1999, p. 224; Checkel, 2005, p. 804; Tudoroiu, 2015, p. 144; Terhalle, 2011, p. 342). Tudoroiu (2015, p. 143) uses this perspective to argue that the relationship between

Moscow and Syria is a unique sort of reciprocal socialization. For example, in the last fifty years, the Russian-Syrian relationship has evolved dramatically and has taken on reciprocal constitutive relationships. Syria has been impacted by and forced to adapt to Russian ideas and philosophies; Russia’s values, attitudes, political behaviour, and overall dynamics have been influenced by Syria, but to a lesser extent than Russian impact. As a result, it is plausible to say that Moscow and Damascus have reciprocal socialization and that this has influenced the two countries’ objectives, behaviours, and identities. For example, Assad’s forceful conflict resolution method might be said to be characteristic of, and a reflection of, Russian influence. This viewpoint is well expressed by Tudoroiu (2015), who claims that Moscow’s heavy military, economic, diplomatic, and political backing enabled Syria’s emergence as a regional power and the establishment of an authoritarian regime, and that these factors are part of the socialization of Syria into Moscow’s political culture, identity, and global interests. Without a question, Moscow has a greater influence in Syria, which has been bolstered in part by Washington’s hard power actions in the Arab states. For example, Iran and Iraq (two major United States’ adversaries and key players in the Syrian conflict) have added a dimension to the conflict that resembles the Cold War, with Russia-Syria on one side, and the United States-Israel on the other (Israel also a known antagonist of the Arab nations). If seen in this light, the Syrian conflict is more of a proxy war between the United States and Russia, with the real goal of both powers being to exert influence and respect in the region. Russia’s backing for Syria is primarily intended to demonstrate Moscow’s worldwide influence in competition with Washington in the Middle East, where Israel serves as Washington’s “eye and arm”. As a result of the discussion of power, socialization, and the Syrian war, one may begin to visualize the causes of the war, which will be the subject of the following debate.

### **Why the war? A thematic and contextual analysis of the remote and immediate Causes of the Syrian war**

A number of interconnected elements (domestic and external) can also be presented as a cause of conflict and war, in the context of historical, socio-economic, political, and religious considerations. Institutional bottlenecks, structural violence, ethnic politics, accountability concerns, and inadequate or utter disdain for the administration of public funds have all been blamed for the turmoil and war in Syria. Low government regulatory power and ineffectiveness in the management of dissension and grievances, as well as Assad’s authoritarian posture, poor quality of rule of law, and complication in the country’s court system, are all factors worth mentioning.

The war is dominated by the contest of Washington and Moscow for the life of the region, the regional hegemony battle, and religious activity. As a starting point, a narrative of the war in Syria can be placed in the Arab Nation’s history of dictatorship and authoritarian administration. The authoritarian arrangements in country governance have created underlying disagreements between governance and government. With regard to the history of authoritarianism, Syria has a lasting history of dictatorship and harsh regimes. For example, on 8 March 1963 Ba’th coup d’état led by Hafiz Al-Assad and Sah Jadid was pointed out by Karsh (1991, p. 5) and Tudoroiu (2015, p. 144). Hafiz Al-Assad managed to deceive Jadid before 1970, and Hafiz Al-Assad

created a dictatorial regime in Syria, and so it was. Factors like the long-standing ethnic and religious division, systemic violence, and nepotism are also worth considering. They have all contributed to the negative peace of the country. This reflects the Alawite's favour with Hafiz Al-Assad, with fewer than 12% of the country's population (Tudoroiu, 2015). There is little question that 60% of the Sunni Muslim majority would always disapprove with Assad's government. In this circumstance, Assad uses a dictatorship and oppressive tactics to vigorously halt disagreement rather than seek political answers to the dilemma as in history (Tudoroiu, 2015). Indeed, Tudoroiu (2015) further adds that president Al-Assad built more than 15 security organizations with 50,000 employees that carried out repression and hard power techniques that led to disorder and extreme forces, as they were claimed to be using chemicals. These repressive and dictatorial activities in 2011 have changed the dynamic of the conflict into a full-scale war, and the latent sectarian undercurrent has been further inflamed by the history of split and structural violence in Syria. Ethnic and religious groups' mixture of mostly Sunni Muslims, Alawites, Shi'a, Kurds, Christians and the Druze minority, for instance, provided the incentive for the evolution of war into a full-fledged war. The acceptance and application of hard power in the form of oppression and intimidation is no question, the key to the festering of the conflict, the continuation of war and the failure to achieve the intended outcomes of not only the war but peace in the nation. Starr (2012) states that Hafiz Al-Assad has inserted a Mafia component to the crisis by equipping the Shabih (fantastic) paramilitary group in his despair to curb the opposition, says this assertion (many of the members of the group are criminals released from prison). Starr (2012) further believes that the Group's "ghosts" are utilized as a means of ethnic cleansing and existentialism. This theory is founded on Syrians ethnic, clannish and religious accounts, especially the sectarian composition of Syrian politicians. The sensation of "killing or being exterminated" among shabias often overwhelms this sectarian concern. Sectoral rhetoric is further exacerbated by Assad's feeling that Alawites are being imposed by the state in many parts of Syria (Engel, 2012; Chulov, 2012, p. 20).

Regional policy and United States interests and Russia, Iran, Turkey and other nations in the area are complicating the Syrian war. For example, Yousef Gamal El-Din (2013), in the context of Russia's involvement in Syria, says that Russia-Syria has a long history of significant cultural, economic and political ties. Contrary to his previous viewpoint, Hafiz Al-Assad was made aware of the necessity for foreign backing in order to maintain the nation after Egypt deprived of its merger with Syria. The relationship between Moscow and Damascus was strengthened. Moscow has been its staunch supporter in the area since then. Indeed, in the initial years after the collapse of Egypt and Syria, Damascus received enormous armaments and military aid from Moscow, assessed at \$825 million, \$1 billion in 1977, by Rubin (2007, p. 55 and Tudoroiu, 2015, p. 145). Overall, the entire sum of exports from Moscow to Syria for the military and personnel training was an average of \$25 trillion and Russia taught more than 10 thousand military officers, and as a world leader exporter of guns, conflict in Syria might be an economic gift rather than a catastrophe for Russia. Also, in the educational sector, Syrian citizen enjoy educational and study support from Russia. Moscow has always been helping Syria in the economic sector on various occasions. Moscow, for example, invested almost \$19.4 billion in Syrian projects in 2009. In 2011,



when the Syrian crisis began, Syria is also an export destination of 1.93 billion dollars for Russia. It should also be noted that it is of major geo-strategic relevance for Syria to take use of Tartus, the Mediterranean port, as opposed to its long cruise through the Black Sea (Yousef, 2013). The war has been festered by external impact on issues linked to human development and government weakness, structural violent and social marginalization, internally fragmented influences and Assad's own ambitions to keep power by force, as well as by lack of unified crisis response policies (Kodmani, 2015, pp. 1–7; Kodmani, Legrand, 2013). Technological globalization is one of the processes of the millennium, which in turn resulted in a variety of the pan-Arab public influenced by information technology.

The new identity symbolizes a generational transformation consisting of youth who are disillusioned by social and government failure, power abuse, corrupt leadership, and socio-economic decline. Arab spring came about because the communications were easy and information accessible, as the already angry and troubled young people had access to avenues to arouse their wrath and generate prospects for a new phase of resistance to governments in the area. The communication facility also allowed for the mobilization of an anarchical, un-headed and disordered organization in the unsatisfied young people to proceed on their work. The roles played by Al-Jazeera in Syria, for instance, cannot be overemphasized, because of the willing nature of Sheik Yusuf Qardawi to depose the Alawite dictatorship. Sadly, the immediate response of Assad to the rising disagreement was timid (Kodmani, 2015).

While the Human Development Index and the Gross Domestic Product in Syria have increased gradually, with the Gross Domestic Product standing at (4.45%), between 2001 and 2010, the Syrians' government has failed to focus on inclusive or pro-people growth and there has been little account of expanding Gross Domestic Product for the citizen consumption of the local populace. Notwithstanding, the Gross Domestic Product of Syria has been gradually increasing.

In the life of the Syrian population, especially young people, growth was not reflected. Poverty and inequality have been increased (two factors that have been variously advanced for frustration and aggression and violence). There is also a great deal of distrust in social interactions; personal and social damage, intolerance and rampant extremism exist all across Syria (Kodmani, 2015, pp. 1–7). The bad socio-economic and political circumstances have led to discontent, which contributed to the crisis of 2011. And, when the revolt began, Hafiz Al-Assad embraced a policy of hard power instead of being responsive and proactive to the core causes of the developing disagreement. As for the foreign forces, Hafiz Al-Assad blamed their agitation and resistance to his regime and failed to provide appropriate political concessions. Since 2012, Hafiz Al-Assad has been thought to privatize the country's security and utilize it for the suppression of the opposition through Shabiha, a notable paramilitary group throughout the war. Not only did this result in anarchy, but also opened the way for the development of irregular troops. It also led to Syria becoming disorganized and unorganized (International Crisis Group 2012, p. 4). Hafiz Al-Assad also tampered with the discourse of anti-external power. In 2013, for example, Assad accused foreign players for the crisis in his nation and its hard-line attitude to security, such as the case of the mass murder and devastation in Houla between May 2012 and December 2013, in which over 130,000 people were slaughtered (*The Guardian*, 2012). Instead of reducing the approach,

the opposition and violence have been reduced by little. Non-state actors in the region, just as the states, rely on propaganda strategies that present themselves as victims of power struggle. Political marginalization, weakness, and the absence of ideological home groups to promote a conflict in Syria are some aspects to be considered. The war-willing groups are faint and do not have an ideological objective. This goes against powerful players that do not want to stop the battle, such as the Islamic State, the jihadi movements, militias, and warlords.

### Why has the war persisted? The “hidden hands” and the challenge to peace process in Syria

There might be historical, domestic, and external elements as to why the March 2011 non-violent demonstration in Damascus turned into a widespread conflict and how it persists for nearly a decade. In order to end the war and restore the nation’s peace, regional and global organizations have implemented several actions, initiatives and instruments since the commencement of the Syrian crisis in 2011. Despite all the efforts, it was impossible to find a solution to the conflict, as the process was confronted by countless problems resulting from domestic and external forces, leading to the end of the conflict. There was also a lack of clarity in criticizing the hard power attitude of Hafiz Al-Assad’s administration and of the countless crimes perpetrated against people. Historically, complicated conflicts and wars, such as in the case of Syria, make it often difficult to negotiate peace, to mediate, and to establish peace, particularly in circumstances where the dynamics change fast in terms of their contents and surroundings, like in Syria. The manipulation and subordination of information to politics lead to the misrepresentation of conflict issues and, consequently, causes participants to decide quickly and without proper preparation in peace processes. In addition, the sense of the Sunni Muslims’ perceived political isolation is a key problem in the fight. The Sunni Muslims must unify and embrace Daeshism, a group that was part of the bad in the fight. The sectarian tension and contradiction between Shia and Sunni Muslims exacerbate the problem (Ankomah, 2013). Sticher et al. (2015) argue in particular that war has endured because the diverse groups of Sunni Muslim, Alawite, Shia, Kurdish, Christian, and Druze minority of Syria have acquired a vital philosophy and struggle, thereby establishing a self-help dimension of the segment of the population that has been marginalized. The self-help effort for these organizations is centered on the use of violence against what they see as a violent Syrian state, and the continuation of institutional brutality led by Hafiz Al-Assad.

There cannot be excessive focus on the roles of other parties, notably the United States and Russia, when it comes to drawing out the conflict. There is no question that the United States and world’s major democracies have been financing or stimulating conflicts for a long time. The roles played by the DR Congo, Algeria, Rwanda, Uganda, and Mali by Washington in the context of African wars, for example, include some of the effects of hands disguised in battles (Keenan, 2013, pp. 10–11; King, 2015, pp. 7 and 2013). Russia, for instance, has been helping to boost the capacity of Assad’s government troops and to increase the virulence and duration of the conflict through deliveries of munitions and armaments in the first year (Grove, Solomon, 2012). The inability to find effective solutions to the conflict by the two major observer missions, the Arab

League and the United Nations, leads to the intensification of the war. The failure of the United Nations to deal with the conflict in its early stages and the encouragement of external help in the forms of financial and weaponry supplies have led to a dramatic and fundamental growth in opposition activities. In addition, it is necessary to mention the growth and radicalization of the Salafi brigade and the demise of previously powerful secular democracy movements. The problems originating from the difficulties in describing or conceptualizing the primary actors of the conflict are also addressed in various peace processes. In the early years, and for a very long time, the subject of recognizing the primary players was a peace concern. Identifying significant players in conflicts is an important element in conflict management, negotiation, and mediation. In the Syrian conflict the absence of identification of actors effectively opposes mediation and settlement procedures, and eventually has led to the continuation of the war. This is because the warring parties involved in the Syrian war are so divided in numbers and interests that it becomes incredibly difficult to define the procedure that would address the many conflicting interests. For example, it was difficult for the terrorist groups such as the IS, Jabhat al-Nusra, for the government and opposition factions, and for the other external players to establish a common ground of discussion and mediation. This difficulty arises from the different groupings, notably the opposition, being severely split by rivalry between parties and policies, ideological disagreements, and small internal scuffles. The foreign financing and military backing the war players get from outside Syria make this situation even more complex. The United States and Russia are essential participants in the Syrian war as key players in international politics, because Russia and the United States possess the capacity and political power necessary for leadership and response to the crisis in order to guide Assad and his allies.

At the beginning, however, Washington was primarily concerned in containment, something which did little to support the search for peace, as noted during the last debate. Perhaps also, because of their experiences in Iraq and Afghanistan and out of fear that arm assistance for the rebels would support the terrorist jihadists, who may use the weapons against the United States, the United States was wary in intervening directly in Syria (Jenkins, 2014, p. 2). Similarly, the policy to establish strategic alliances to control the spread of the war, Barack Obama's hostile powers and apparent strong negotiating were little more than imagination. This was because Hafiz Al-Assad was unable to resolve the regionalization of the problem. The United States policy has, instead, promoted extremism, fostered chaos and disarray from which benefited the terrorist groups like ISIS. The Syrian President Hafiz Al-Assad was able to utilize this unstable scenario to exert excessive force on the rebels. That is why, despite its use of chemical weapons, Kodmani (2015, p. 1) labelled the United States a greater evil than Hafiz Al-Assad. No doubt, a fundamental role in the absence of a policy solution and in the development of Syria's war is the competition of hegemonic goals, firstly between the United States and Russia, and secondly inside the Arab country, acting for the two great opponents. The United States is a key factor in Syria and Washington's involvement in Middle East politics is not farreaching. The activity of America in the area cannot be separated from the unfriendly relations with Iran and the United States. There is no question that Israel's relations with Syria are essential to the United States interest in Syria and in the whole Middle East setting. Strategically speaking, Syria's contiguity

to Israel, the traditional ally of the United States, and her close link with Iran (United States' antagonist) and other Islamist groups, such as the Hezbollah group, makes the Syrian issue imperative and interesting, especially because Syria has been the longstanding opponent of the United States and Israel. Iran, in particular, during the seeming "cold war" between Russia and the United States, played an essential role in the balance of their warpower. Iran is a major player in the Middle East's power relations. While not being a particularly apparent backer of Hafiz Al-Assad until now, Iran has played an important role in the fight. Iran's disposition to Syria and Putin's Russia – against the United States – is considered a means of balance of power in the "cold war" between the United States and Russia (Hiltermann, 2017, pp. 1–6).

Russia's drastically expanded relations with Syria have made Russia a prominent figure since the 1970s. Russia's influence in Hafiz Al-Assad's Syria was growing, but the power dispute between Russia and United States has made the two countries to work in Syria to burn out more. No doubt, Russia's relationship with Syria has been mutually constitutive and the reciprocal socialization has influenced both Russia and Syria, which largely reflects the cold war era between the United States' and Russia's interests, actions, and identities. The rationale for Russia's significant backing of Syria is therefore to express the global authority of Russia in its ideological dispute with the United States, especially in the Middle East, with a view to advancing Russia's economic interests and enhance her military and political prestige (Tudoroiu, 2015, p. 143). In addition, Russia utilized the Syrian war to boost further its standing in Middle Eastern affairs as a "game changer". Accordingly, Russia chose in 2012 to trade the S-300 missile system to Hafiz Al-Assad in order to improve Russia's ties with Israel via the use of the strategic armaments industry, and by 2016 to sell the same S-300s to Iran to help stimulate dialogue between Russia and Iran. Essentially, Russia has been a prominent hand in the war with Syria, desirous of expanding its status in the arm industry in contention with United States. Asia is Russia's main arms market, constituting over 70% (70% in the last decade) of the Russian arms export sector, closely following the Middle East and North Africa, the key destinations for Syria. Kodmani (2015, p. 1) points out that "Russia represents a diplomatic blockade of Syrian settlement processes in an attempt to identify Russia's participation in promoting the Syrian war". It is possibly because Russia opposes virtually all of the resolutions tabled in order to censure the Al-Assad's government, perhaps for the different interests of Russia in Syria.

### **What has been done? The phases of the peace processes in Syria**

The question of how the tides of violence can be stopped and peace restored to Syria and the whole area has been seen via several peace attempts, processes and methods, in particular by the United Nations. For instance, the peace plan, which was presented to the United Nations Security Council; the first Geneva Communiqué, 30 June 2012; the second Vienna Process Conference and the Vienna Proceedings and Intra-Syrian Talk; and the 2015 Vienna Peace Talks and the Geneva III-Geneva Peace Conference in 2016 were a few of the peace processes that had been initiated on the Syrian war (Jung, 2015; Karthick, 2016). In essence, the goals of the peace processes in Syria are to fight the terrorist forces, establish transitional governments, and put an end to the

conflict. However, each attempt has experienced different problems and disadvantages that make it difficult to achieve its particular goals. The difficulties linked by the seeming failures cannot be detached from external actors’ effects and household incompatibilities caused by age-old animosities. The issues include the smoothness and fast changing dynamics that influence process coordination. In the first Geneva Conference on Syria, the parties which should participate in the planned transitional government were neither established nor identified. Parties have to be identified in the light of the fact that there are numerous opposing actors and they have different objectives and opinions. Al-Assad’s rejection of the opposition also rejects the advice of the peace effort. The method of negotiating with the opposition has also been affected by the lack of interests of the international parties, save from Iran and Russia (Groarke, 2016). Information politics, a pre-established principal compromise not only influenced the setting and substance of peace efforts but also showed the lack of ownership and domestic inclusivity of the proceedings. In this context the goal of the Kofi Annan peace initiative was not achieved and the conflict could not stop, due to the continuing influences of the international, global, and regional support of two key conflict actors, the Al-Assad government and the main protagonist of the opposition. The goal of the Geneva peace initiative was to create the flames and the buffers for the political solution of crisis. Brahimi Lakhdar has been named the United Nations and the Arab League envoy to Syria sent there as a result of the collapse of the Kofi Annan initiative and its frustrated withdrawal (Sticher et al., 2015, p. 6). In summary, the numerous peace initiatives suffered from political rivalry, diverging ideological foundations, limited opposition disputes, inexperience in undertaking collective actions, the social inefficiency of operational strategy or seeming absolute absence of leadership.

### Ending the war? The way forward

The political solution is offered through diplomacy in search of a solution to the war and establishing peace in Syria. This procedure will include all parties ready and willing to participate in the negotiation process. And therefore both parties must rely on each other to ensure that any negotiations will be fruitful and will meet their goals. Furthermore, all conflict players must agree on some shared concerns and interests and have the determination to resolve them. Warlike issues should be negotiated, and agreement should be reasonable and feasible, while the external conditions should be favourable to resolution (Omodunbi, Adeyeye, Ige, 2019, pp. 12–14; Goarke, 2016, pp. 2–3). In particular, the United States and Russia must show a genuine determination at an international level to put an end to Syria’s plague of war. At home people, including the Syrian president Hafiz Al-Assad, must be prepared to take the nation out of a war catastrophe. The reason is that even if a political solution can be found to end the war in Syria, that war will be continued unless the United States and Russia, together with the United Nations, have drawn up strategies to make the United States and Russia acknowledge the overarching right of Syrians to live peaceful life in their country. It is important for the government and the people to effectively address the core causes of conflict inside Syria’s domain. This can be done by opening a United Nationsbacked constitutional convention to address perceived or real structural violence via

ethnic and religious differences and concerns of powers-sharing, in order to solve socioeconomic inequities that have produced splits, distrust, and disagreement in Syria for some time. Conflict resolution and peace process needs all conflict participants to be included. It is based on the ideal of inclusive peace in an international paradigm of conflict resolution that occupies historic positions. While the subject of inclusion was not completely accepted from the outset of peace attempts in Syria, it is crucial that negotiations are inclusive at this level to address all concerns in the conflict correctly. Civil society groups should include Islamist, insurgent/terrorist, women, ethnic and tribal organizations. In addition, it sets up and draws a realistic peace map, deepens global and regional diplomacy and promotes responsibility for all the parties involved in the armed conflict. The final purpose is to ensure a suitable security space that ultimately abhors human rights abuses, assaults, devastation, and indiscriminate slaughter which are antagonistic to peace processes.

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## Cytowanie

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