External University Feature

The Syrian Crisis: Failed Mediation and Implications for Conflict Resolution

Meagan Eisner
Towson University

This paper uses well known civil war theories to analyze the most significant mediation attempts that have occurred in the Syrian Civil War and explain why they have been unsuccessful. After reviewing the failed attempts from the Arab League and the United Nations to negotiate an end to conflict in Syria, this paper concludes that the reasons attempt have failed are the large number of parties involved in the conflict, hostilities among the parties involved, and international disunity. Ultimately, scholars have found that the number of parties in a conflict, the level of hostility among the parties, and the ability for the international community to unite around a common approach for resolution correlates with the likelihood for successful mediation. These findings offer insight and guidance for future policymakers that are involved in conflict mediation in a multi-polar world. Since previous mediation attempts have failed, this paper seeks to offer a way to restructure the post-war state so that peace and stability is achieved, and war recurrence is unlikely. Power-sharing is the most effective means to restructure the post-war state in deeply divided societies such as Syria. The conflict in Syria has real implications for the future of conflict mediation. Based on the failures of previous mediation attempts, this paper offers insight into how the United Nations can capitalize on the tools at its disposal in order to enhance its effectiveness in conflict resolution.

Introduction

The conflict in Syria has been a puzzling one to say the least, leaving many at a crossroads as to what can be done to resolve it. Mediation has plagued international actors working to implement some form of effective conflict resolution in the region. While negotiated settlements have been a popular method used to resolve and shorten civil wars since the end of the Cold War, agreeing on a settlement and signing on that settlement is no easy feat. Syria's case is a model of just how demanding the

negotiation process can be. Policymakers have had difficulty devising a plan that can be agreed upon by both the Syrian government and opposition that would end conflict. The large number of parties in the Syrian conflict has not only led to an indefinite war but has also challenged sustained resolution efforts. The complex nature of the conflict is reflective of the course of modern civil wars: they tend to become multilateral and involve foreign actors, increasing the number of stakeholders and the outcomes desired from the conflict.

Furthermore, learning from Syria's experience will help guide the course of future conflict management practices aimed at the negotiation, mediation, and prevention of civil wars.

An analysis of the Syrian crisis is of great importance to the academic community because the conflict can guide research on policies that will shorten wars and lead to enduring peace agreements. The Syrian conflict is best examined using civil conflict theories to explain what has transpired over the years and gauge what the future of the state holds. Attempts to negotiate the Syrian War have been made since it became evident that the deep-seated conflict had no real end in sight and would continue to degrade the state, cost hundreds of thousands of lives, and displace a significant portion of Syria's population. Beginning in 2011, the war is poised to continue into its eighth year during 2019. Due to the duration of the war, it is crucial to focus on the key features of conflict management: ways to reform institutions, rebuild the state, and implement the necessary power-sharing arrangements that would bring about an enduring peace. The United Nations has played an important role in conflict management, from facilitating negotiations meant to foster cooperation to administering peacekeeping operations. This paper investigates the limits of mediation in Syria, between March 2011 and the spring of 2016. In this paper, scholarly literature will be used to analyze the factors that contributed to the failed negotiation attempts, and eventually will conclude by discussing the implications of United Nations initiatives as mediation continues to be a method to resolve conflicts. Research for this paper began in September 2018 and ended in December 2018. As there is still conflict in Syria, the course of action is likely to evolve beyond the scope of this paper.

Background

The Syrian Civil War began in March 2011 amid peaceful protests against the Assad Regime that turned deadly. The protests occurred in the wake of the Arab Spring uprisings, fueled by protesters' desire for the government to adopt more democratic practices and response to long-standing authoritarianism of the Assad regime. The government responded to the protests by firing at protesters, killing the first civilians of the war (Specia, 2018). Reports estimate that at least 38 civilians were killed in the initial protests, with that number growing as the protests continued (Slackman, 2011). It has been hard for officials to obtain exact death toll numbers as the Syrian government has blocked reporters and foreign media from entering the state (Slackman, 2011). Even within the country, different authorities issue death certificates and struggle to maintain accurate records that reflect true death tolls (Specia, 2018). The government's violent response to the protests instigated a civil war that as of spring of 2019, will have stretched on for 8 years. It is estimated that more than 400,000 casualties have occurred during the war and millions of citizens have been displaced (Akpinar, 2016). The staggering death toll and number of displaced citizens is partly explained by the protracted nature of the war, but both are also due to the involvement of numerous countries and their overlapping conflicts. Gilsinan described the Syrian War best, as a war of parts: "partly a civil war of government against people; partly a religious war pitting Assad's minority Alawite sect, aligned with Shiite fighters from Iran and Hezbollah in Lebanon, against Sunni rebel groups; and increasingly a proxy war featuring Russia and Iran against the United States and its allies" (Gilsinan, 2015).

This paper focuses mainly on the Assad Regime and its opposition, as well as the role of international actors in the negotiations. The major parties involved at the domestic level are the Assad Regime and loyalists to the regime; the rebel forces that oppose the government, which are the Syrian Democratic Forces, or SDF, and the Free Syrian Army; and the Kurds, fighting to retain autonomy in the Northern region (Gilsinan, 2015). Key parties at the international level are Russia and Iran, backing the Assad Regime; and the US, Turkey, and the Gulf States supporting the rebels (Gilsinan, 2015). The Syrian War has also evolved into a

conflict between foreign powers and the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria, also known as ISIS. The Islamic State believes in a literal interpretation of the Quran, rejects Western political concepts of democracy that place man above God, and supports the strict imposition of Islamic law, which collectively have fueled fears in the West (Jenkins, 2016, p. 9). Foreign powers are divided in their approaches to combat ISIS, despite the fact that they all agree to oppose it. Russia and Iran have maintained that the best way to combat ISIS is to keep the Assad Regime intact; while the United States and its allies maintain the best way to do this is via Assad's ouster (Jenkins, 2016, p. 9).

The involvement of ISIS and the inability of foreign powers to reconcile their differences in combating ISIS has created even more stumbling blocks during the negotiation process. External support from Russia and Iran, for example, has slowed the UN mediation process by decreasing the likelihood of opposing parties to agree to terms of a settlement (Jenkins, 2014). Iran is a long-time ally to the regime, reinforcing skeptics' view that mediations have lacked neutrality (Akpinar, 2016; Jenkins, 2014). In addition, mediators have had trouble achieving proper representation of the rebel groups during negotiations (Akpinar, 2016; Greig, 2013; Lundgren, 2016). The opposition, the SDF and the Free Syrian Army, have tried to unite their efforts under the Syrian National Council, a coalition formed to create solutions for the Syrian people in the wake of the brutal civilian attacks at the hands of Assad ("Syrian National Council Information," n.d.). However, the Council has proven to be distrustful of any promises made by the Assad regime throughout negotiations (Akpinar, 2016; Greig, 2013).

As of December 2018, the Assad regime had gained control of most of the region, in addition to holding the two most populous cities - Aleppo and Damascus.The regime has been unable to penetrate the last few rebel-held regions, but the rebels also lack the cohesion, manpower, and clear leadership to retake government-controlled territory and topple the regime (Hubbard & Patel, 2018). As of December 2018, the regime and the rebels remained at a stalemate (Hubbard & Patel, 2018). Although the central government maintains majority control, forces have become depleted over time, leaving the regime unable to completely oust rebel strongholds (Hubbard & Patel, 2018). While the Syrian War appears unlikely to end, there is still hope that a settlement can be reached. Examining the course of failed negotiation attempts and their shortcomings will inform future mediation strategies to bring peaceful resolve to Syria.

Negotiation Attempts

The Syrian Civil War has been a case of perpetual mediation. In a most basic sense, mediation is diplomatic intervention, providing the threat of military or economic intervention if diplomatic efforts are disregarded (DeRouen, 2015). Mediation has been routinely used by the international community to address issues for all parties. Due to the fact that one-sided victories can lead to a resurgence in conflict, where violence is no longer a viable choice, mediation requires that third-party countries work with combatants to change both behaviors and perceptions (DeRouen, 2015, p. 231). By ensuring that promises are kept, timetables respected, and matching commitments fulfilled, an agreement is easier to reach (DeRouen, 2015, p. 231). Peacefully ending civil wars, DeRouen argues (2015), requires third-party peacekeepers intervene in order to build trust among the combatants and make sure that commitments to peace are kept. Third-party countries are often reluctant to put their soldiers and resources in harm's way, which makes it easy for combatants to rescind on promises made in the negotiation process, thus spurring continued violence (DeRouen, 2015, p. 231).

The likelihood that all parties involved in a conflict will agree is contingent on "ripeness theory," also known as mutually-hurting stalemate, referring to the readiness to commit to peace (DeRouen, 2015). According to this theory, parties must recognize that fighting is no longer an option. A main form of mediation is diplomatic intervention, which provides the threat of military or economic intervention if

diplomatic efforts are disregarded; by this logic, the conflict may have been resolved if military intervention were threatened (DeRouen, 2015). Parties resolve their conflict only when they are ready to do so, and when each side recognizes that they are in a costly predicament where alternative measures have reached no avail; therefore, at the ripe moment that they will accept resolution measures that have been present for some time (DeRouen, 2015).

Despite high hopes for Syrian negotiations between 2012 and 2016, progress has not been made. Russia, the United Nations, and the Arab League have been crucial actors throughout negotiation attempts, yet their efforts have not produced an end to the conflict. The continued failure to initiate a peace process in Syria begs the question: why have attempts failed? Some would argue that the combatants have not been ready to stop fighting, and that both sides have never reached a point of mutually-hurting stalemate (Hinnebusch & Zartman, 2016). Mutually-hurting stalemate refers to the point where both sides recognize the high costs incurred due to fighting and agree to negotiations and eventually peace because there is little to gain from further combat (DeRouen, 2015, p. 84). Another school of thought maintains that the large number of parties in a conflict increases the number of interests at stake, making conflicts harder to resolve (Cunningham, 2011). There are upwards of 1,000 interest groups fighting in the Syrian War and 9 countries interested in fighting ISIS, which greatly increases the complexity of the war (Gilsinan, 2015). The multi-party, or multilateral, nature of the Syrian conflict has made it hard for negotiators to develop plans upon which all parties can agree (Greig, 2013).

Still others would argue that the divisions among the fighting factions are so profoundly embedded that the only way for violence to subside is for a clear military victory from one side. This school of thought, also known as the 'Give War a Chance' theory argues that letting wars run their natural course to a military victory is more conducive to long-lasting peace and democratization (Toft, 2010). Opposing this view are those who maintain that wars

resolved through established settlements with power-sharing provisions, like those being attempted with the Syrian War, are the most stable in the long term, even though civil wars make it difficult to reach an agreement (Hartzell & Hoddie, 2003).

Several countries, such as Afghanistan, Bosnia, the Philippines, and Northern Ireland have employed power-sharing measures as part of negotiated settlements to conflict (Hartzell & Hoddie, 2003, p. 318). Power-sharing arrangements are a central feature of negotiated settlements and ensure that each party in a conflict can participate in some dimension of governance. Research has also shown that the path to democratization is not limited to certain kinds of states, and those that achieve democracy are less prone to future conflicts (Fortna & Huang, 2012). Regardless, the correlation between lasting peace and negotiated settlements should guide policymakers and encourage members of the international community to commit to third-party peace enforcement to bring peace to deadly conflicts.

To understand why attempts at mediating the conflict in Syria have failed thus far, it is important to highlight the most significant negotiation attempts and their key components. In the context of this paper, the most telling negotiation attempts are the Arab League efforts and the UN-backed peace talks. The inability to reach a settlement has real implications for the future of the state, and while the war may be at a stalemate as of 2018, the instability in the region makes it ripe for continuing resurgence. Literature surrounding war termination provides insight into the course of Syrian mediations. Hultman et. al. (2013) explores the different kinds of UN peacekeeping missions, the importance of multilateral approaches, and the effectiveness delivered by military and police troops. Doyle and Sambanis (2000) champion the peace triangle, or the ability to build peace, which is contingent on three aspects: the level of hostilities, international capacity, and local capacity. According to this logic, if one of these aspects is lacking, it can be made up for by an abundance of the other aspects, so that peace

can still be achieved (Doyle & Sambanis, 2000). Mehler (2009) maintains that including the people conflict directly affects in the negotiation process is necessary for peace to be successful. According to DeRouen, the costs suffered during war have an impact on conflict management, especially regarding civil war recurrence (DeRouen, 2015). Each of these theories can be applied to the conflict in Syria. It is imperative for peacekeeping missions to be tailored specifically to the conflict and be designed to rebuild the state if peace is to be successful.

Arab League Mediation Attempts

The first negotiation efforts of the Syrian Civil War were initiated by the Arab League, a loose confederation representing the Middle East whose goal is to elicit coordination on matters of common interest (Masters & Sergie, 2014). An important guideline among members of the Arab League is their commitment to non-aggressive decisions, which is strengthened by a pact stating that the council will determine the necessary measures to repel aggression against any party involved (Pact of the League of Arab States, March 22, 1945, Article 6). Like most international actors involved with Syria, the Arab League originally left conflict resolution in the hands of other domestic parties involved (Lundgren, 2016). As the war continued, however, the Arab League shifted their stance and tried to engage in mediation. Mediation began early in the conflict, not even a year after fighting began (Lundgren, 2016). Dispatching its Secretary General on a mediation mission from fall of 2011 to early 2012, the Arab League embarked on an "Arab Action Plan" that pushed for a cease-fire and national dialogue in Syria (Lundgren, 2016). While the plan seemed achievable, the Syrian Government never agreed to terms because of their mistrust of Qatar and Saudi Arabia, neighbors who openly wanted to undermine and dismantle the Assad regime (Lundgren, 2016).

As conflict continued, the Syrian government took steps to vehemently suppress the uprising and make mediation unnecessary (Lundgren, 2016). The Arab League resorted to coercive measures to get the government to cooperate (Akpinar, 2016). Economic sanctions were imposed due to the regime's reluctance to agree to a cessation of violence and were accepted on October 30, 2011 as part of the Arab Action Plan. The Action Plan also removed Syria from the Arab League. The sanctions were intended to deliver a major blow, severing trade and investment from the Arab world, when Syria was already experiencing sanctions from the European Union and the United States (MacFarquhar & Bakrinov, 2011). The sanctions were also designed to affect Syrian government officials by instituting "a travel ban against scores of senior officials, a freeze on Syrian government assets in Arab countries, a ban on transactions with Syria's central bank, and an end to all commercial exchanges with the Syrian government" (MacFarquhar & Bakrinov, 2011).

Following these measures, the Assad regime eventually consented to the stipulations of the Arab Action Plan in December 2011 (Lundgren, 2016). As DeRouen discusses (2013), mediation often implies that ignoring diplomatic efforts will result in violence; this conflict may have been resolved if military intervention were threatened. Even though the regime consented, mediation attempts were immediately met with opposition from the Syrian National Council. The leading opposition group at the time, the Council was skeptical of the regime's compliance and thought they would not sincerely accept the mediation (Lundgren, 2016). High levels of mistrust between the government and opposition contributed to the inability to reach an agreement. Literature points to this as a roadblock to achieving a peaceful resolution to conflict through negotiated settlement because ethnic identities are fixed and relatively non-negotiable (Gurses & Mason, 2008). Attempting to amplify trust between the factions and determine the regime's commitment to the Arab Action Plan, the Arab League deployed 166 civilian and military observers that would carry out basic monitoring activities of the conflict (Lundgren, 2016). The mission lacked the

staffing, training, and equipment to make any significant impact, and as conflict worsened it led to disunity among the Arab League members.

Peacekeeping missions, as defined by Doyle and Sambanis (2000), encompass four different levels: monitor/observer missions, enforcement missions, traditional peacekeeping, and multilateral missions. Monitor/observer missions are the most basic: personnel are deployed to take note of what is happening on the ground and report back to the international organization. Monitor missions have no ability to protect civilians or ensure that violence stops because they only report what is happening on the ground. Enforcement missions, on the other hand, involve sending military or police personnel to the host country to impose order and protect civilians. The military threat incentivizes the fighting groups to commit to peace. In this regard, an enforcement mission would have fared better at encouraging the parties to commit to peace in Syria than the Arab League's observer mission. This indicates how imperative it is for international actors to account for the depth of hostility, the number of factions, and the level of economic development when determining how much assistance is necessary for peace (Doyle & Sambanis, 2000). On January 22, 2012, Qatar and Saudi Arabia withdrew their support, pushing for the Arab League to adopt a tougher position on the Syrian government to force cooperation and, eventually, a regime change (Lundgren, 2016). The observer mission suspended its activities on January 28, 2012 marking the failure of the first negotiation attempt (Lundgren, 2016). It is important to note that the Arab League negotiations were relatively un-inclusive of other groups, further contributing to their failure. This was also a factor that would contribute to the failure of the United Nations-led negotiations to follow. As the observer mission unraveled, the next phase of negotiations was assumed by the United Nations.

United Nations Negotiations: First Round

In February 2012, amidst escalating tensions and violence in Syria, an international initiative arose that would combine international and regional efforts through the appointment of former United Nations Secretary-General and veteran mediator, Kofi Annan, as the joint special envoy of the UN and Arab League for Syria (Akpinar, 2016). The special envoy is a high-level representative of the United Nations and the Arab League for Syria, whose mission is to bring an end to violence and promote a peaceful solution through diplomatic relations (United Nations Press Release, 2012). Prior to becoming the special envoy, Annan helped bring peace to a difficult conflict in Kenya in 2008. In late March 2012, Annan proposed a six-point plan that would end violence and make room for diplomacy. The six-point plan outlined a framework for a UN-supervised truce that would lead to a wider transformation of Syria's government (Lundgren, 2016, p. 4). On April 12, 2012, a ceasefire, a key part of the plan, was established and the UN deployed 300 observer personnel to supervise Syria in observation patrols across the country (Lundgren, 2016, p. 4). At first the ceasefire, with the help of the UN observer personnel, reduced the intensity of hostilities for about six to eight weeks. However, in early June 2012, violence reignited, and the UN observers ended operations, paving the way for the Geneva Peace Talks (Lundgren, 2016). Ceasefires alone rarely result in conflict termination and Doyle and Sambanis (2000) argue the need to adapt UN missions to each conflict. In addition, the number of deployed personnel is imperative for peace operations to be sustained, with military and police troops being the most effective in protecting civilians and signaling resolve (Hultman et. al., 2003). Military and police personnel were key components missing from the UN supervision mission in Syria.

In response to UN supervisors pulling out, Annan convened an action group for Syria, consisting of states with common interests and influence in the conflict. Meeting in Geneva in June 2012, the action group laid out a set of guidelines for a peace process in Syria, including

the establishment of a transitional government (Lundgren, 2016). The action group consisted of representatives from the UN and the Arab League, China, France, Russia, the United Kingdom, the United States, Turkey, Iraq, Kuwait, Qatar, and the European Union. (United Nations, 2012, para. 1). The outcome of the Geneva Conference was outlined in the Geneva Communique, which marked an acceleration of demands for regime change that would take place through national dialogue (Hinnebusch & Zartman, 2016). The communique particularly emphasized constitutional reform, the institution of a multi-party system, and a transitional government of which membership would be mutually agreed upon by the government and the opposition (Hinnebush & Zartman, 2016). The disunity that had marked the Arab League's initiatives carried over to UN negotiations and infiltrated the mediation process. While the intent of the first round of Geneva negotiations was to bring the great powers together to discuss an end to conflict, the parties failed to agree on the fate of Assad (Akpinar, 2016).

In addition, the key parties of the conflict were not represented at the bargaining table. The Syrian government and the Syrian opposition were not present during the meeting—peace talks can rarely move forward without the presence of the parties to the conflict, especially because instating reform requires consent from the government and the opposition. Who is represented at the bargaining table creates problems for the peace process, and while including too many groups can convolute the mediation, it is necessary for at a minimum the fighting factions to be represented for anything to be executed (Mehler, 2009). Not only were key players unrepresented, but two major powers staunchly opposed each other on whether the regime should remain in power. The US insisted that Assad should step down, while Russia vehemently opposed a regime change (Akpinar, 2016). Russia's position was about protecting national security interests, as the fall of Assad would mean the spread of terrorism into its borders and further radicalization of the Middle East (Kozhanov, 2016). For the US, opinions centered on correcting humanitarian atrocities committed by Assad, sustaining regional stability, and promoting democratization determined their position (Sorenson, 2013). Geneva highlighted the vastly different views the great powers held on the future of Syria and its role in international politics. Ultimately, Annan could not resolve the differences in the international community that would weaken Russia's support for the regime (Lundgren, 2016).

United Nations Negotiations: Second Round

Stemming from the failure of the first round of negotiations and the inability of Russia and the US to reconcile their differences, in the summer of 2012 Annan stepped down. Annan was replaced by new envoy, Lakhdar Brahimi, an Algerian diplomat whose career prior to Syria included peacemaking efforts in Lebanon, Haiti, Afghanistan, and Iraq ("Lakhdar Brahimi," 2019). In his resignation, Annan criticized the international and regional powers for failing to rally behind his efforts and provide the leverage necessary to execute the plan (Lundgren, 2016). Disunity among the international community was further exemplified by those who celebrated the attempts as offering the only viable solution since third-parties were reluctant to intervene, and those arguing the attempts legitimized Assad and allowed the continued militarization on the ground (Akpinar, 2016). According to some scholars, the perceived failure can be attributed to the early phase of mediation, that the parties need to reach a point of "mutually hurting stalemate" before negotiation is appealing (DeRouen, 2015). Early on, Assad had no incentives to enter negotiations given that the opposition was weaker and the international community was at a crossroads on how to deal with the conflict and whether to intervene (Akpinar, 2016).

When Brahimi assumed the role of special envoy in September 2012, he adopted a more cautious approach, stressing the futility of continued violence and the humanitarian costs it imposed on the Syrian population (Lundgren, 2016). Brahimi faced the challenges of a conflict

that had intensified, expanding to include even more parties than before. Between September 2012 and January 2014, "the conflict began spreading into neighboring countries; chemical weapons were introduced; and the Islamic State and the Kurds became more influential" (Akpinar, 2016). Moreover, mediation efforts were further complicated as the need to offer attractive bargains to satisfy the conflicting interests of multiple parties became apparent. In January 2014 the second round of Geneva talks ensued, bringing together representatives from the United Nations, the Arab League, the European Union, and 30 other states; however, this time the talks also brought the Syrian government and the opposition, represented by the Syrian National Coalition, face-to-face (Akpinar, 2016). While the US and Russia set aside their differences to leverage their power over the parties, the meeting again failed to bring an end to conflict and ushered in new envoy Staffan de Mistura (Akpinar, 2016).

The new envoy, Staffan de Mistura, was met with some of the same challenges as his predecessor. Some accused the envoy of being too sympathetic to Assad and criticized him for trying to exert Western influence. A key point of contention was that de Mistura failed to propose a plan with international guarantees of an agreement and one that accounted for the rejection of the peace process (Akpinar, 2016). International peacekeeping intends to create a climate where fighting is no longer a reality and where peace is durable (DeRouen, 2015). Because greater international capacity is linked to greater success rates of peacebuilding, it is crucial for the UN to find ways to enforce or guarantee its initiatives (Doyle & Sambanis, 2000).

United Nations Negotiations: Third Round

On October 30, 2015, members from the United Nation Security Council, along with 20 other countries, met in Vienna to establish the International Syria Support Group (ISSG) (Akpinar, 2016). On December 18, 2015, Security Council Resolution 2254 was adopted, "which reiterated the support for a ceasefire, humanitarian access to besieged areas, and called for elections to be held under UN supervision within the following 18 months" (Akpinar, 2016, p. 2296). Though promising, the future of Assad was never outlined in the Vienna meetings, and adequate representation from the rebels was missing. Again, the problem of which parties are present at the negotiating table became an issue in this round of negotiations (Mehler, 2009).

Illegitimate representation of the fighting factions was a recurring theme throughout the peace talks. The lack of representation was due in large part to the high levels of distrust among the groups and their hesitancy to be in the same room as the regime amid hostilities and continued violence on the ground. Still, Geneva III talks opened in February 2016 and were again halted for a several reasons: first, the opposition withdrew in response to the government's attack on Aleppo; second, the presence of Russian-backed groups threatened the legitimacy of the peace talks in the eyes of the opposition; and third, key parties, such as the Islamic State and the Kurds were unrepresented (Akpinar, 2016).

Throughout the process, the opposition maintained that the only way a cease-fire could take place is if a transitional government was instituted that would force Assad to step down. Despite the setbacks, a ceasefire was agreed to in February 2016. This ceasefire was the most positive turning point in the war, with the longest period of peace stretching between February 2016 and March 2016 (Lundgren, 2016). However, in Aleppo and surrounding areas, "groups not covered by the ceasefire operated alongside groups that were, the ceasefire proved vulnerable, as the intermixing of groups made it difficult to contain hostilities" (Lundgren, 2016, p. 6). While the UN-backed peace talks were a step in the direction of peace, they never fully took off due to continuing conflicting interests between the US and Russia. In addition, the government and the opposition had not yet exhausted their military capabilities and did not see negotiation as an option to end conflict.

The Role of Foreign Powers

The diverging interests of the US and Russia have been evident throughout the conflict and all mediation attempts in Syria. The relative inability for the two superpowers to reconcile their own political and strategic agendas contributed to the unfortunate course of the peace talks. The logic of Doyle and Sambanis (2000) can extend to the gridlock between Russia and the US: peace-building plans are unlikely to be effective unless international actors cease to support war in favor of supporting peace. Russia's military involvement reinforces this logic. From the beginning, the top priority for Russia was to reestablish the military and political capacities of the Assad regime to cement their position both regionally and internationally (Kozhanov, 2016). The situation, for Russia, has primarily been about protecting its own national security interests. The downfall of the Assad regime would mean the further radicalization of the Middle East and the possible spread of terrorism into Russia's borders (Kozhanov, 2016). Furthermore, Russia has worked very hard to put their stamp on conflict resolution through the presence of military forces and providing military support to the regime. Unlike Russia, the US has been reluctant to engage militarily. For the West, Assad is linked to the source of the problem rather than the solution (Kozhanov, 2016).

At the same time, both superpowers have keen interest in combating terrorism with the involvement of ISIS, which is indicative of the internationalized component of the war. In addition, the US was hesitant to take any actions that would undermine the nuclear deal struck with Iran that was signed on November 24, 2013. All these interests combined have clouded the main goal of mediation efforts, which is to bring peace to Syria, as the two superpowers seek to leverage their power to force an agreement. According to Hinnebusch and Zartman (2016), leverage is one of the five major challenges that negotiators face and one that explains faltered UN mediations: "without the means to follow through on threats or promises, the mediators were reduced to making warnings and predictions" (Hinnebusch & Zartman 2016, p. 1).

The evidence of power leveraging was seen at all levels of the UN-backed negotiations where the mediators disagreed on the fate of Assad. Thus, no concrete plan was ever conceptualized (Lundgren, 2016). Realizing the inability to agree on those terms and the implication it would have for the opposition, any peace plan avoided the question of Assad and used vague terminology like "cessation of violence" to appeal to both sides—in effect not making any guarantees. The consolidation of the Islamic State between 2014-2015 changed the landscape, shifting international attention in the war toward prioritizing counter-terrorism efforts over conflict resolution in Syria (Lundgren, 2016). These mutual interests led to Russia beginning to pull some of its military out of Syria and push to regenerate negotiations (Kozhanov, 2016). Despite the good intentions of the October 2015 Vienna talks, the most contentious issues could not be agreed upon, highlighting the shortcomings in changing the course of the war.

Stumbling Blocks to Mediation

Some striking similarities exist across every negotiation attempt, demonstrating the most predominant explanations for what went wrong. The number of parties, groups, and states involved disturbed the mediation process. The immense hostilities and distrust among the factions thwarted any proposals, and disunity on the United Nations Security Council, UNSC, between the United States and Russia, and among key actors made it unlikely for a concrete plan to be implemented. Despite institutional constraints to UN effectiveness, this last stumbling block is especially important for driving the future of diplomacy in a multi-polar world. The emergence of a multi-polar age requires a multilateral approach agreed upon by the actors, otherwise there will be real consequences for any peace process in the future (Hill, 2015). This new era requires "development of new and effective mediation strategies, as original and dynamic ideas are

developed to overcome new obstacles" (Hill, 2015, p. 472).

Number of Parties Involved

The first major problem with the conflict itself that carried over to the mediation process was the number of parties involved. As the number of parties in a conflict grows, the chances for successful mediation decreases (Greig, 2013). There were too many conflicting interests from all of the parties, which made it almost impossible to adopt a plan that satisfied all. According to Cunningham (2011) and Greig (2013), navigating an end to conflict is harder when there are too many parties involved. These conflicts endure "because more veto players make bargaining harder, leaving combatants less able or willing to negotiate an end to warfare" (Cunningham, 2011, p. 183). There are three reasons why the number of parties decreases the likelihood for negotiation settlements. First, a mediator faces a difficult task coordinating communications among parties while also limiting the chances for miscommunication simultaneously (Greig, 2013, p. 50). Second, the more parties involved means more spoilers to the peace process (Greig, 2013; Cunningham, 2011). Spoilers undermine the peace process when the warring parties feel their power and interests are threatened by a peace agreement. When spoilers are successful, war is renewed and casualties increase, as was the case in the failed peace accords of Angola in 1992 and Rwanda in 1994 (Stedman, 2000). In both cases, the casualties resulting from failed peace were much greater than those that resulted from fighting before the signing of a peace agreement (Stedman, 2000). Lastly, a lack of enforcement decreases the confidence that each side will stick to the agreement (Greig, 2013, p. 50).

Cunningham and Greig put forth a compelling argument that offers an explanation to why agreements have failed to halt violence for an extended period. Multi-party agreements often produce partial agreements, where peace is implemented among some of the parties, but other players are excluded. These partial agreements often are a contributing factor to continued violence and unstable situations (Cunningham, 2011, p. 185). The fragility of multiparty ceasefires and their likelihood to crumble explains why any leeway made on a truce in Syria was short-lived. For a complete negotiated settlement to be reached, every party must engage in a cost-benefit analysis of resolution. Cost-benefit analysis requires the parties to believe they will do better from negotiating than continued violence, that the benefit of peace outweighs the cost of violence (Cunningham, 2911, p. 185). Since the opposition didn't trust the regime to stay true to any agreements and there were no incentives for the regime to cooperate, violence seemed like the better alternative for both the central government and the opposition.

The multi-party nature of the conflict has also played out in the misrepresentation of key parties. Arguably, there have been so many factions involved that effective representation at the negotiation table was unachievable. Misrepresentation has occurred because of the multi-party nature of the conflict. It has made it difficult to pinpoint exactly which groups are fighting, and who should be involved at negotiations to bring peace to Syria. At numerous stages throughout the negotiations, the opposition was largely unaccounted for, whether it was due to the inability to identify leadership or the refusal to be in the same room as the government, this presented a real problem for getting any agreement signed. By giving the ability to choose who was present at the meetings to the regime, there were negative ramifications for the opposition. Because of the many sub-divisions within the opposition, it has been nearly impossible to identify all the actors necessary to participate in a peace process (Greig, 2013, p. 51). Misrepresentation of key parties at negotiations can send the message that the interests they seek or their motives for fighting are not of concern, thus there is little incentive for them to end combat. If key parties are excluded from mediation or interests are ignored, implementing peace accords becomes even harder. Angola has been a prime example of failed peace implementation. The 1991 Angola agreement implemented 'winner-take-

all' elections, but when one of the major factions lost the election in 1992, war reignited (O'Toole, 1997). Those involved with brokering peace must be mindful of what the warring factions seek in order to ensure the parties do not return to violence.

Hostilities

The second major problem facing negotiators is the characteristics of the conflict itself. The warring factions have such deep-seated hostilities toward each other that generating enough trust between them for an agreement was highly unlikely. This was exemplified in every instance where parties came close to an agreement and then quickly reverted to violence.

Fear and mistrust have been rampant throughout the course of this conflict. "The authoritarian nature of the regime, demonstrated by its harsh treatment of political challengers in the past, burdened its ability to convince the opposition that conceding to negotiations was a real option" (Lundgren, 2016, p. 9). On one hand, the regime did not want to relinquish their power in fear of what would happen; on the other end, the opposition had suffered immensely at the hands of the regime, reinforcing their refusal to back down unless Assad conceded. Escalating violence further contributed to the opposition's uniform belief that Assad must go, illustrating the inflexible nature of both sides' refusal to budge on demands. Since the regime had no incentive to be flexible on this demand either, "disputes over this issue have recurred throughout the war and remained one of the central barriers to a negotiated settlement" (Lundgren, 2016, p. 10). Furthermore, as violence has escalated, the level of hostility increased with it and has encouraged, and will continue to encourage, more violence (Greig, 2013).

International Disunity

As was evident in the examination of the role of Russia and the different stages of UN peace talks, disunity among international actors has hindered the negotiation process. The international community has been unable to unite under a common approach to end the Syrian Civil War, because their attention has been on self-seeking interests tied to questions of Assad's leadership, which ultimately led to the downfall of negotiation attempts. Treating the removal of the Assad regime as a precondition rather than a result of a settlement hampered negotiations from the beginning (Hinnebusch & Zartman, 2016). Put clearly, "one should not demand as a precondition what one hopes to gain in negotiation, since this removes an item of exchange for the other party" (Hinnebusch & Zartman 2016, p. 18).

Throughout each level of the UN negotiations, the US and Russia failed to agree on a common approach for Syria dismantled mediation efforts, despite their collaborations in the Geneva Communique and the ceasefire of 2016 (Lundgren, 2016). Ultimately, these fundamental conceptual differences within the members of the UN about conflict resolution diminished the Security Council's ability to demonstrate an unwavering and united front (Jafarova, 2014, p. 44). Academics argue that institutional constraints of the UN also resulted in faltered negotiations (Jafarova, 2014). However, if the international community, such as the United States and Russia, were able to set aside their differences and focus on a multilateral strategy that appealed to both the regime and the rebels, added constraints would not have been necessary.

Structuring the Post-War State

It is apparent that mediation has been unable to resolve tensions in Syria. One possible way to bring stability to Syria would be through partition: dividing up the state into sovereign territories. Different groups, such as Sunni rebels, the Kurds, and any other ethnic group seeking autonomy, would have control over their own sovereign territory. This option may appeal to several of the opposition factions. However, the process of dividing up sovereign entities is difficult, exacerbates disagreements, and does not ensure that fighting will cease (Paris, 1997).

Perhaps one of the reasons a settlement was never reached was that ceasefires were

negotiated and instated, as opposed to a fully developed negotiated peace settlement. Agreements and ceasefires without multi-dimensional power-sharing are likely to be short-lived, while those that incorporate multilevel power-sharing arrangements are likely to endure (DeRouen, 2015; Hartzell & Hoddie, 2003). Power-sharing is most commonly seen in political, territorial, economic, and military sectors (Hartzell & Hoddie, 2003). Political power-sharing ensures equal representation at the political center; military power-sharing integrates government and rebel armies into one coherent force; territorial power-sharing gives regionally concentrated groups the opportunity to self-govern; and economic power-sharing redistributes government resources to those who experienced economic discrimination prior to the conflict. These arrangements typically create a sustaining peace because of their capacity to foster security among former combatants, while also minimizing the danger of one party becoming dominant (Hartzell & Hoddie 2003).

Power-sharing, dividing, and balancing power among rival groups would be especially conducive to peace in Syria because it would address the grievances of the deeply divided society, where many have suffered under the Assad regime. Some researchers, such as Mehler (2009) argue that power-sharing is not inclusive enough and is undemocratic due to the absence of elections. Democracy and peace go hand-in-hand, Mehler asserts; therefore, power-sharing will only benefit upper classes and will not give most citizens a voice in the political process (2009). In Syria's case, power-sharing would address the root of the conflict and disincentivize a resurgence of the violence that has plagued this conflict. It would ensure that competing groups have a voice in government, so that no single group has a monopoly of power. Even if power-sharing isn't always associated with democracy, it is associated with enduring peace, which is essential after Syria's intense and prolonged struggle (Hartzell & Hoddie, 2003).

There are many reasons why democracy may not be the best choice when resolving the Syrian Civil War. While democratic states are less likely to experience conflict, peace is ultimately the ideal goal before democracy. The potentially destabilizing effects that market democracy can impart on war-shattered states requires the international community to tailor peacebuilding operations to the needs of the state, rather than on the premises on which it should operate (Paris, 1997). Tailoring peace operations to the state means international and private agencies responsible for implementing peace accords must consider that Western ideals may not be effective in war-torn states. Bringing peace and stability to a state is far more essential than implementing democratic practices directly following a war.

Now that the war is at a stalemate, it is important to note the current conditions that make the state vulnerable. According to DeRouen (2015), violence can persist once a war ends due to the lack of state capacity to deter it and be exacerbated by a depleted economy. Effective peace-building requires acknowledgement of the three elements of the peace-building triangle, which include: level of hostility, international commitment and local capacity (Doyle & Sambanis, 2000). Following this logic, the bigger the space is in the triangle, the increased likelihood there is for peacebuilding success. Moreover, a peacekeeping mission that would assume the role of peace enforcement by deploying military and police personnel to the region would create an even more durable peace. This type of peacekeeping mission would be beneficial to post-war Syria because UN operations are responsible for disarming thousands of combatants and it is low cost in comparison to other efforts (DeRouen, 2015). Finally, this would allow attention to be focused on rebuilding state institutions and the economy.

When considering reconciliation, an effective and comprehensive UN peacekeeping mission coupled with a system of federalization would enable groups that are currently at war with each other to live in society harmoniously. For the political sector of power-sharing, Lijphart's consociational model for deeply divided states would best apply to Syria

(Hartzell & Hoddie, 2003). The consociational model hinges on the establishment of a grand coalition; the mutual veto; a proportional electoral system and proportionality in the distribution of administrative appointments; and either territorial or corporate autonomy (Hartzell & Hoddie, 2003). Ideally, giving the fighting factions in Syria their own regional autonomy would disincentivize conflict and reduce hostilities among the warring factions. Burundi, for example, is a state that has been successful in achieving peace and stability due to proportionality, group autonomy, and the minority veto (LeMarchand, 2006). Even though the work of LeMarchand (2006) focuses on the consequences associated with this particular model, the existence of grand, coalition-like conditions allows for the socio-political factors to be addressed by giving competing groups a voice in central government. Politics are not the only area of importance. As stated earlier, societies that implement all four dimensions of power-sharing are more likely to enjoy lasting peace and stability. If political, economic, territorial, and military power-sharing provisions are implemented, the failure of one provision can be made up for by the existence of others, strengthening the chances for stability. Furthermore, power-sharing arrangements supplemented by third-party enforcement create the conditions necessary for lasting peace by providing security and ensuring that stipulations are adhered to (Hartzell & Hoddie, 2003). Using the UN to maintain peace through military and police would provide adequate third-party enforcement.

Future of United Nations Initiatives

The UN will continue to play a crucial role in the mediation of civil wars across the globe and will be called upon to develop social, economic, and political institutions that prevent conflicts from turning violent (Doyle & Sambanis, 2000). Yet, if the UN is to increase its effectiveness in the modern world, drastic steps to rethink its methods must take place. International intervention has been a major focal point of the protracted Syrian conflict and has implications for future conflict management all over the world. While intervention often occurs in the most intractable conflicts, it can increase the duration of the war. DeRouen argued that intervention can extend war if the party with external support believes that intervening will result in military victory (DeRouen, 2015, p. 250). The external support to the Assad regime and the lack of neutrality in mediation has decreased the likelihood for parties to agree to terms of a settlement. Conflict mediation that enhances trust among parties should guide the future endeavors of the international community, meaning it is imperative that members of the UN operate under a united front to lessen the potential for stumbling blocks (DeRouen, 2015, p. 252). If the UN can consolidate its interests, peacekeeping and humanitarian law can better aid in the reconciliation process and deter a recurrence of violence (DeRouen, 2015, p. 251).

The future of Syrian conflict mitigation will depend on the ability of Russia and the US to make credible commitments. If the Security Council is to be effective in mitigating future conflicts, the members must facilitate national dialogue while coercing spoilers to resolution with consequences (Jafarova, 2014). Furthermore, policymakers can learn a great deal from mediation failures. It is evident that plans contingent on strict parameters will gain little momentum, hence the need for flexibility and an emphasis on facilitating international security. Since institutional challenges make it hard for the Council to act in a unified manner, future success will rely on the ability of members to look past their own interests and deliver significant results. The Security Council has some of "the most potent policy instruments that allow it to adopt swift and effective actions in response to the most pressing challenges to international peace and security" (Jafarova, 2014, p. 50). Capitalizing on the policy tools of the Security Council, such as the ability to use force to make commitments binding, will reinforce the actions necessary for navigating conflicts in the multi-polar world. It may even be necessary to adopt a mandate that

would bind members to peace enforcement in the future.

Conclusion

The Syrian Civil War has been fraught with negative impacts both domestically and internationally. It has seen repeated attempts at mediation characterized by recurring roadblocks. From the Arab League negotiations to the UN-backed mediation attempts, the most apparent obstructions to peace was the multi-party nature of the conflict, disunity at the international level, and sustained hostility. Following the Cold War, negotiated settlements have been the most prevalent means of terminating wars. However, the war in Syria proves that the peace process is challenging, especially if there are many interests at stake.

The Syrian conflict is a product of many institutional failures at the international level (Jafarova, 2014). If policymakers are to take anything away from this conflict, it is that Syria is the beginning of a new era of civil wars; wars that will require a multilateral approach to resolve. Understanding what went wrong in negotiations is essential. If these problems are not addressed, the future of diplomacy will be threatened. Even though negotiations failed, "multilateral power can be constructed and exerted with effectiveness by mediators in civil wars, even in the most fraught and polarizing crises of the new multipolar international system" (Hill, 2015, p. 472). Furthermore, while institutional constraints severely limit the efforts of the UN, if parties had reconciled their differences in support of a plan that addressed the root causes, then a settlement could have been achieved.

In the aftermath of war, it is crucial to focus on peacebuilding to bring stability to the state. While democratization is routinely sought, adopting a strategic approach will preserve the goal of democratization while recognizing the vulnerability of war-torn states. By making gradual changes, designing a central government that rewards moderation, promoting equitable growth policies, creating effective coordinating bodies, and extending the duration of peace operations, the UN can ensure the state achieves stability (Paris, 1997). The UN Security Council must examine internal dynamics and adopt a more interventionist approach to make credible commitments and assist in peacebuilding.

References

Akpinar, P. (2016). The limits of mediation in the Arab Spring: the case of Syria. *Third World Quarterly 37*(12), 2288–2303. https://doi:10.1080/01436597.2016.1218273

Cunningham, D. E. (2011). *Barriers to peace in civil war*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. doi: 10.1017/CBO9780511993374

DeRouen, K. (2015). *An introduction to civil wars*. Thousand Oaks, CA: CQ Press.

Doyle, M., & Sambanis, N. (2000). International peacebuilding: a theoretical and quantitative analysis. *American Political Science Review 94*(4), 779-801.

Fortna, V. P., & Huang, R. (2012). Democratization after civil war: a brush clearing exercise. *International Studies Quarterly 56*(4), 801–808.

Gilsinan, K. (2015, October 29). The confused person's guide to the Syrian Civil War. *The Atlantic.* Retrieved from https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2015/10/syrian-civil-war-guide-isis/410746/

Greig, M. J. (2013). Intractable Syria? Insights from the scholarly literature on the failure of mediation. *Penn State Journal of Law and International Affairs 2*(1), 48-56. Retrieved from https://elibrary.law.psu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1029&context=jlia.

Gurses, M., & Mason T. D. (2008). Democracy out of anarchy: the prospects for post-civil war democracy. *Social Science Quarterly 89*(2), 315–36.

Hartzell, C. A., & Hoddie, M. (2003). Institutionalizing peace: power sharing and post-civil war conflict management. *American Journal of Political Science 47*(2), 318-332.

Hill, T. H. J.(2015). Kofi Annan's multilateral strategy of mediation and the Syrian Crisis: the future of peacemaking in a multipolar world? *International Negotiation 20*(3), 444-478. https://doi:10.1163/15718069-12341322.

Hinnebusch, R. I., & Zartman, W., et al. (2016). *UN mediation in the Syrian Crisis: from Kofi Annan to Lakhdar Brahimi*. New York: International Peace

Institute. Retrieved from http://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep09643.

Hoddie, M., & Smith, J. M. (2009). Forms of civil war violence and their consequences for future public health." *International Studies Quarterly 53*(1), 175-202.

Hubbard, B., & Patel, J. K. (2018, February 8). Why is the Syrian War still raging? *The New York Times*. Retrieved from https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2018/02/08/world/middleeast/war-in-syria-maps.html

Hultman, L., Kathman, J., & Shannon, M. (2013). United Nations peacekeeping and civilian protection in civil war. *American Journal of Political Science 57*(4), 875-891.

Jafarova, E. (2014). Solving the Syria knot: dynamics within the UN Security Council and challenges to its effectiveness. *Connections 13*(2), 25-50. Retrieved from https://www.jstor.org/stable/26326356.

Jenkins, B. M. (2014). *The dynamics of Syria's Civil War* [PDF file]. Santa Monica, CA: Rand Corporation. Retrieved from https://www.rand.org/pubs/perspectives/PE115.html

Kozhanov, N. (2016). Russian military involvement in the Syrian Conflict: what happens next? In *Russia and the Syrian Conflict: Moscow's Domestic, Regional and Strategic Interests* (pp. 59-74). Berlin, Germany: Gerlach Press. doi:10.2307/j.ctt1hj9wjf.8.

Lakhdar Brahimi (2019). In *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. Retrieved from https://www.britannica.com/biography/Lakhdar-Brahimi.

Lemarchand, R. (2006). Consociationalism and power sharing in Africa: Rwanda, Burundi, and The Democratic Republic of Congo. *African Affairs 106*(422), 1-20. https://doi:10.1093/afraf/adl041.

Lundgren, M. (2016). Mediation in Syria: initiatives, strategies, and obstacles, 2011–2016. *Contemporary Security Policy 37*(2), 273-288. https://doi.org/10.1080/13523260.2016.1192377.

MacFarquhar, N., & Bakri, N. (2017, November 27). Isolating Syria, Arab League imposes broad sanctions. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from https://www.nytimes.com/2011/11/28/world/middleeast/arab-league-prepares-to-vote-on-syrian-sanctions.html

Masters, J., & Sergie, M. A. 2014. The Arab League. *Council on Foreign Relations*. Retrieved from

https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/185164/The%20Arab%20League%20-%20Council%20on%20Foreign%20Relations.pdf

Mehler, A. (2009). Peace and power sharing in Africa: a not so obvious relationship. *African Affairs 108*(432), 453-473.

O'Toole, K. (1997, November 19). *Why peace agreements often fail to end civil wars* [news release]. Retrieved from https://news.stanford.edu/pr/97/971119civilwar.html

Pact of the League of Arab States, March 22, 1945 (1). *The Avalon Project*. Retrieved from http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/arableag.asp

Paris, R. (1997). Peacebuilding and the limits of liberal internationalism." *International Security 22*(2), 54-89.

Slackman, M. (2011, March 25). Syrian troops open fire on protestors in several cities. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from https://www.nytimes.com/2011/03/26/world/middleeast/26syria.html

Sorenson, D. S. (2013). US options in Syria. *Parameters 43*(3), 5-16.

Specia, M. (2018, April 13). How Syria's death toll is lost in the fog of war. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from https://www.nytimes.com/2018/04/13/world/middleeast/syria-death-toll.html

Stedman, S. J. (2000). Spoiler problems in peace processes. In P.C. Stern & D. Druckman (Eds.) *International conflict resolution after the Cold War* (pp. 178-224). Washington, DC: National Academy Press.

Syrian National Council, n. d. Information on the SNC. Retrieved from http://syriancouncil.org/

Toft, M. D. (2010). Ending civil wars: a case for rebel victories? *International Security 34*(4), 7-36.

United Nations. (2012, February 23). *Kofi Annan appointed Joint Special Envoy of United Nations, League of Arab States on Syrian Crisis* [Press Release]. Retrieved from https://www.un.org/press/en/2012/sgsm14124.doc.htm.

United Nations. (2012, June 30). *Action Group for Syria final communique* [Press Release]. Retrieved from http://www.un.org/News/dh/infocus/Syria/FinalCommuniqueActionGroupforSyria.pdf