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## From the Red Line to R2P: Why neither Force nor Negotiations Worked on Stopping Chemical Attacks in Syria

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### Introduction

The enduring Syrian civil war is a perfect representation of how unprecedentedly complex a conflict can be in a multipolar world. As states, terrorist organizations, and ethnic minority groups struggle to eliminate each other's existence, indiscriminate airstrikes and chemical attacks on civilians in Syria have flagrantly violated the most basic principles of international law while posing threats to the global progress on weapon of mass destruction (WMD) control and non-proliferation. Despite the preexisting and provisional measures against the usage of chemical weapons, why did military and diplomatic tactics in Syria fail? This study identifies three key problems that have plagued the global community's responses to the recurring WMD crisis in Syria — the inconsistency of the US military strategy, the underestimation of the difficulty of chemical weapon removal and a lack of priority and understanding of motives at the Geneva talks.

### Historical Overview

Reports of the Syrian government's use of chemical weapons appeared as early as 2011.<sup>1</sup> In the following two years, President Obama announced that the use of chemical weapons constituted a "red line"<sup>2</sup> while Syria joined the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) in 2013.<sup>3</sup> According to Article IV of the CWC, the regime was supposed to have the weapons transported out of the country and destroyed, yet blatant chemical attacks like the ones that occurred in Ghouta in 2013 continued.

In the UN Security Council, long-standing divides among the permanent members made it unlikely for any meaningful resolution to be passed to address the issue on a united front. Despite the existence of the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) principle that allows states to use force for humanitarian purposes,<sup>4</sup> the use of force in Libya and Côte d'Ivoire also undermined the credibility of the UN's action in Syria.<sup>5</sup> In fact, part of the Chinese and Russian rationales in

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<sup>1</sup> Sarah Almukhtar, "Most Chemical Attacks in Syria Get Little Attention. Here Are 34 Confirmed Cases," *The New York Times*, April 13, 2018.

<sup>2</sup> Margaret Talev and Nayla Razzouk, "Obama Says Chemical Weapons Use by Syria 'Red Line' for U.S.," *Bloomberg*, Aug. 21, 2012.

<sup>3</sup> Almukhtar, "Most Chemical Attacks in Syria Get Little Attention."

<sup>4</sup> "Responsibility to Protect – Office of The Special Adviser on The Prevention of Genocide," United Nations, [www.un.org](http://www.un.org).

<sup>5</sup> Simon Adams, "Libya and the Responsibility to Protect," Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect Occasional Paper Series, No.3/2012.

refusing to authorize the use of force in Syria was based on the abuse of Security Council authorization in the previous R2P crises.<sup>6</sup>

Suffering from a lack of consistent domestic strategy and cohesive international support, the US and its allies quickly adopted the deconfliction proposal made by the Russian foreign minister Sergey V. Lavrov, which was supposed to provide “a diplomatic alternative” to military intervention.<sup>7</sup> However, later development in Syria proved that the proposal was likely a delaying tactic, and thus the possibility of fostering further diplomatic progress was greatly diminished.

Meanwhile, after the UN’s multiple failed attempts to bring the warring sides to the negotiation table at the Geneva Talks,<sup>8</sup> the alternative Sochi peace conference sponsored by Russia, though heavily tilted towards the Assad's regime and its chosen participants, did not yield much result either.<sup>9</sup> The absence of necessary pressure or consistent strategy on the regime and opposition groups aroused criticism in the global society, who have been calling for a more focused policy instead of the empty rhetoric like “redline” or “breakthrough” that encouraged renewed usage of chemical weapons by the Assad’s regime.

## Theoretical Overview

According to Peter Coleman, protracted conflicts are rife with systemic complexities that are resistant to change<sup>10</sup>. The age-old struggle in the Middle East is a perfect example of how difficult it is for a complex system to overcome its reinforced status quo of prolonged conflict even with a collection of stimuli, such as the 2011-2014 Arabs Revolution that toppled multiple authoritarian regimes and affected the lives of hundreds of millions of people. As ‘waves of democratization’ swept through the whole region, the deep sectarian, ethno-national and class-based divisions stoked rapid escalation of domestic turmoil and extreme fragmentation<sup>11</sup> in Syria. The results were violent counter-revolution by the government and even counter-counter revolution in the form of jihadist Islam. The ensuing consequences have been unprecedented and devastating, with more than half of the Syrian population fleeing the country and tens of

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<sup>6</sup> Muditha Halliyadde, “Syria - Another Drawback for R2P?: An Analysis of R2P's Failure to Change International Law on Humanitarian Intervention,” *Indiana Journal of Law and Social Equity* 4, no. 2 (2016): 215; Gareth Evans, “R2P and RWP after Libya and Syria,” Keynote Address at GCR2P/FGV.

<sup>7</sup> Michael R. Gordon and Steven Lee Myers, “Obama Calls Russia Offer on Syria Possible ‘Breakthrough,’” *The New York Times*, September 9, 2013.

<sup>8</sup> Nick Cumming-Bruce and Somini Sengupta, “Syria Talks Are Suspended,” *The New York Times*, February 3, 2016.

Nick Cumming-Bruce, “Agreement Elusive on Syria Peace Talks in Geneva,” *The New York Times*, February 3, 2016, June 5, 2013.

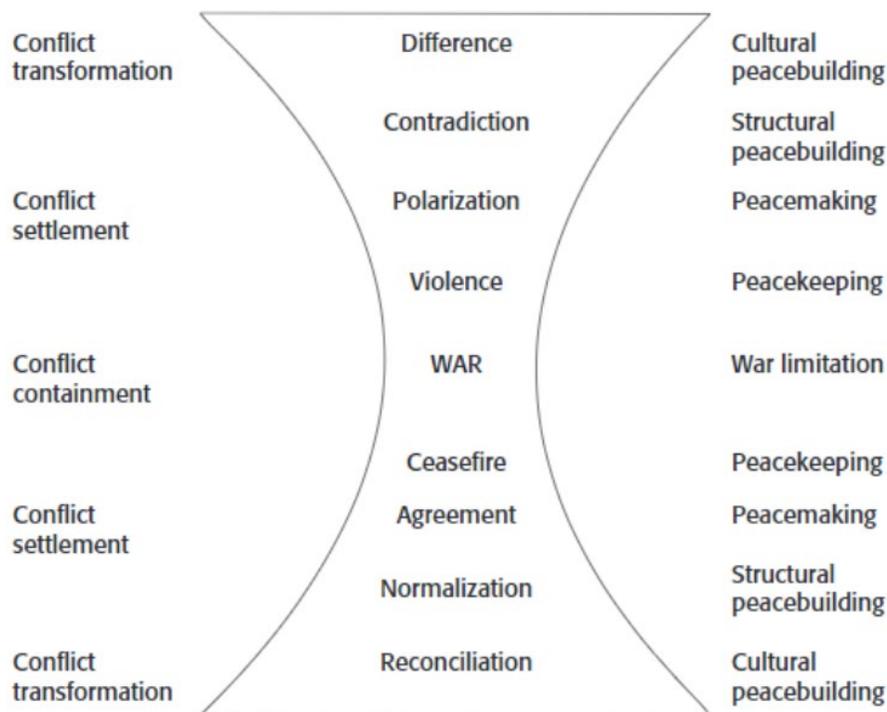
<sup>9</sup> Anne Barnard, “Syrian Peace Talks in Russia: 1,500 Delegates, Mostly Pro-Assad,” *The New York Times*, Jan 30, 2018.

<sup>10</sup> Peter Coleman, “Characteristics of Protracted, Intractable Conflict: Toward the Development of a Metaframework-I,” *Peace and Conflict: Journal of Peace Psychology* 9 (2003): 1–37.

<sup>11</sup> As many as 1,200 armed opposition groups exist or existed as a result of post-Arab Spring militia proliferation, According to Themnér, Lotta & Peter Wallenstein (2014) ‘Armed conflict, 1946-2013.’ *Journal of Peace Research* 51(4).

thousands of international neo-jihadists joining the fight.<sup>12</sup> The world has also been witnessing a surge of populism and nationalism, as well as the renewed usage of chemical weapons against civilians.

In terms of containing the sprawling conflicts in the Syrian civil war, the US-led allied force and the UN have played the most important roles as, respectively, the guardian of the liberal international order and the biggest international peacekeeping institution. The regional power dynamics are also further complicated by Russia’s interests as the sponsor of the autocratic Syrian government. Before delving into the deep underlying reasons of the prolonged conflicts among the combatting groups, it is important that we refer to the Hourglass model of Ramsbotham and Woodhouse for a systematic overview of the situation (see the figure below).<sup>13</sup>



Note: in de-escalation phases conflict resolution tasks must be initiated at the same time and are nested. They cannot be undertaken sequentially as may be possible in escalation phases – see chapters 5 and 8. We suggest that what is sometimes called deep peacemaking (which includes reconciliation) is best seen as part of cultural peacebuilding.

Figure 1.3 The hourglass model: conflict containment, conflict settlement and conflict transformation

The model suggests that all conflicts begin with difference and contradiction within a community, which then gradually evolve into a polarized situation. Without early conflict transformation or cultural/structural peacebuilding efforts, intragroup dissents could escalate into violence and full-blown war. The hourglass shape represents the narrowing of available political space as tension magnifies. Yet unlike real hourglasses where sand comes down the funnel

<sup>12</sup> “How many IS foreign fighters are left in Iraq and Syria?” *BBC*. Feb 20, 2019.

<sup>13</sup> Oliver Ramsbotham, Tom Woodhouse, and Hugh Miall, *Contemporary Conflict Resolution* (New York: Polity Press, 2016), 208–9.

automatically, opposing parties mired in violent conflicts are often stuck in the middle of the ‘hourglass’ until the damage becomes too much to bear. According to the *ripeness theory*<sup>14</sup>, this is also the best time for the warring sides to come to the negotiation table as no party would be able to gain any benefit from prolonging the conflict.<sup>15</sup> From then on, continuous and simultaneous peacebuilding and conflict transformation efforts would be able to foster an agreement between the opposing sides, thus successfully resolving the conflict.

In the Syrian case, the foundation for the domestic unrest, or the ‘difference’, is the fundamental rift between the Sunni majority - represented by the opposition Free Syria Army - and the Alawite Shia minority that has been dominating the army and administration since the advent of Hafez al-Assad in the 1970s.<sup>16</sup> As there was hardly any effective cultural peacebuilding approach implemented in the region before the emergence of mass terrorism attacks, the ethno-sectarian confrontation within the nation was left to simmer in entrenched frustration and animosity, only to be escalated into an all-out war in the wake of the Arab Spring.

The Assad’s regime’s violent crackdown on the opposition force resulted in serious sanctions from the global society. Nevertheless, with the support from Russia<sup>17</sup> and the US unwillingness to intervene decisively in the Post-Iraq era, the Syrian government was emboldened to launch attacks and even utilize chemical weapons without suffering too much blow either economically or militarily. Meanwhile, the extreme fragmentation within the state means that there was no consensus within the opposing parties, thus making the UN-led Geneva talks unlikely to yield any result at the first place. As a matter of fact, the first few rounds of the Geneva talks and the Russia-led Astana talks all resulted in fruitless situations where no meaningful agreement was reached between the warring parties. The very core condition of the proposed agreements - a democratic transition in Syria - was never an acceptable option for the Assad regime, whereas in some cases the opposition even refused to come to the negotiation table without Assad stepping down.<sup>18</sup> As a result, the negotiation never found its way out of the stalemate; despite the number of civilian casualties kept creeping up, the situation in Syria seemed never ‘ripe’ enough for an effective negotiation to take place. In the following sections, this study looks at the various failed attempts made by the Obama administration and the UN community to explain the underlying factors that have sustained the deadly impasse.

## **Inconsistency of US Military Strategy and Questionable Cooperation with Russia**

Within the US government, the executive branch was supposed to be the dominant force in setting strategies on Syria. Yet in face of congressional opposition, unfavorable public sentiment toward military interventionism and lack of support from allies, the Obama

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<sup>14</sup> I.W. Zartman and S. Touval, “International Mediation: Conflict Resolution and Power Politics,” *Journal of Social Issues* 41 (1985): 27–45.

<sup>15</sup> Ramsbotham, Woodhouse, and Miall, *Contemporary Conflict Resolution*, 208–9.

<sup>16</sup> Martin Chulov, “The fear-filled minority sect that keeps Syria's struggling dictatorship alive,” *The Guardian*, June 16, 2012.

<sup>17</sup> “Why is Russia engaged in Aleppo?” *BBC*, Nov 16, 2016.

<sup>18</sup> “What is the Geneva II conference on Syria?” *BBC*, Jan 22, 2014.

Administration found itself cornered and with no one with which to work except Russia. Moreover, since Secretary of State Kerry was playing a crucial role in setting the U.S.' Syria strategy,<sup>19</sup> diplomatic solutions became a more likely choice than strictly military ones.

As pointed out by Phil Carter, the director of the Military, Veterans, and Society Program for the Center for a New American Security, “there’s no agreement on the fundamentals” of the US strategy in Syria.<sup>20</sup> Asking the Congress to pass the Authorization for Use of Military Force (AUMF) would certainly invite a time-consuming debate about “expiration dates, boots on the ground, drones, the legacy of the Iraq War”<sup>21</sup>, all of which would depend on highly-convincing and well-rounded arguments offered by the White House. Yet instead of emphasizing the urgency and significance of bringing US forces to Syrian ground, Secretary of State John Kerry chose to focus on the size of intervention as his main argument; in his remarks, Kerry told reporters that any US military attack on Syria would be “unbelievably small”, which would allow the US “to hold Bashar Assad accountable without engaging in troops on the ground.”<sup>22</sup>

His claims, immediately blasted by members of Congress who were at least supportive of the retaliatory air strikes, were later reversed by President Obama, who said any attack would not be felt like a “pinprick” in Syria. Nevertheless, according to a Washington insider, “the idea of asking for a congressional vote had never been discussed at length” in most of the White House meetings about Syria, making it unusual in the sense that such an important decision would be made “without first being thoroughly pored over in the interagency process”.<sup>23</sup>

As of April 2017, the U.S. has bombed both of the “two main players” in the Syrian war — the government military and the Islamic State<sup>24</sup>, arousing concerns about the U.S. fundamental objectives in the war — Should the U.S. focus only on defeating the Islamic State? What is the attitude of the U.S. toward Assad? Should the U.S. rely on cooperation or on itself? For years, President Obama refrained from getting the U.S. involved in Syria and insisted that Syria “isn’t of great strategic importance” to the U.S. until Syria started reusing chemical weapons.<sup>25</sup> On multiple occasions, He stressed that his main concern was to take out Assad or to wait for Assad’s ultimate loss of power.<sup>26</sup> It is understandable, or even advisable, that he changed course and drew the “red line” given the seriousness of the nature and impact of chemical attacks. However, such a forceful warning was only to be followed by a surprising seeking-of-approval directed at a Republican-controlled Congress.<sup>27</sup> Even with the following

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<sup>19</sup> “Kerry to meet Putin to push peace in Syria, Ukraine” *Gulf Times*’ March 22, 2016; D. McAdams, “White House schizophrenia—Kerry: ‘Assad can stay’; Obama: ‘Assad must go,’” *Global Research*, December 20, 2015.

<sup>20</sup> Amber Phillips, “President Obama’s push for military authorization to fight ISIS won’t go anywhere in Congress. Here’s why,” *The Washington Post*, December 7, 2015.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>22</sup> David K. Li and Kate Sheehy, “Kerry: US strike on Syria would be ‘unbelievably small,’” *New York Post* September 9, 2013.

<sup>23</sup> Derek Chollet, “Obama’s Red Line, Revisited,” *Politico*, July 19, 2016.

<sup>24</sup> Greg Myre, “What Is the U.S. Goal in Syria?” *NPR*, April 8, 2017.

<sup>25</sup> David Greenberg, “Syria Will Stain Obama’s Legacy Forever,” *Foreign Policy*, December 29, 2016.

<sup>26</sup> McAdams, “White House schizophrenia.”

<sup>27</sup> “Obama Seeks Approval by Congress for Strike in Syria,” *The New York Times*, Aug 31, 2013.

counterattacks, the Obama administration's inconsistent claims about "a brief strike" that will teach the Syrians a lesson would mostly likely be interpreted as a "symbolic use of power."<sup>28</sup>

Traditionally, post-war presidents tended to rely more on their national security advisers for policy formulation in lieu of the secretaries of state. Both of President Obama's secretaries of state, Clinton and Kerry, however, assumed a larger than usual role than their predecessors. In the negotiations with Russia, Secretary Kerry occupied a key position as he was found frequently engaged in conversations with his Russian counterpart. As his interaction with Russia was much followed and reported, great expectation was also put on his role as the bridge between the two stakeholder countries and as a crucial factor that can determine the flow of the situation in Syria.

Interestingly, Secretary Kerry initially favored the use of military force in Syria and was surprised when President Obama announced that he would seek congressional support. In some earlier occasions, Kerry expressed several times that he would prefer "not to bar the use of ground troops in Syria"<sup>29</sup> in order to preserve the options available to the President, and that diplomacy and the deal with Russia were his second choice once the use of force was ruled out. Yet in the end, his repeated backtracking and ultimate reversal of stance indicated that the President still dominated in the policy-making process, which leaves the mystery of why the latter made the "red line" announcement but then decided to seek approval from Congress that he was very unlikely to obtain. Besides the congressional dissent, a public that was generally anti-war and ill-informed about the foreign policy might also have pressured the President and the Secretary to adopt a cooperative strategy in haste.

### **Underestimating the Difficulty of Chemical Weapon Removal and Institutional Challenge**

To further complicate the situation, the pacifism demonstrated by the American head-of-state was also coupled with the negligence of the time-consuming nature of the chemical weapon removal, which does not guarantee complete elimination of threat either.<sup>30</sup> When asked whether there was anything the Syrian President could do to avert a U.S. attack, Secretary Kerry said that the former "could turn over every single bit of his chemical weapons to the international community in the next week — turn it over, all of it, without delay and allow the full and total accounting." While there has been a lot of speculation that those seemingly offhand commitments were actually intentional and calculated to open the door to deal with Russia,<sup>31</sup> they also indicated the necessity and urgency of U.S. military action in the area and pulled the administration into a situation where hasty decisions were made in an effort to live up to its word.

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<sup>28</sup> David E. Sanger, "British Vote, Unusual Isolation for U.S. on Syria," *The New York Times*, August 30, 2013.

<sup>29</sup> Susan Cornwell and Patricia Zengerle, "Kerry opens door to 'boots on ground' in Syria, then slams it shut," Reuters, Sept 3, 2013.

<sup>30</sup> "Why the Syrian Chemical Weapons Problem Is So Hard to Solve," *The New York Times*, April 13, 2017,

<sup>31</sup> Michael R. Gordon and Steven Lee Myers, "Obama Calls Russia Offer on Syria Possible 'Breakthrough,'" *The New York Times*, September 9, 2013.

Considering the severe nature of using chemical weapons against civilians — which constitutes a severe violation of the basic principles of CPC and deserves the harshest sanctions and punishment by the global community — the U.S. first sought for multilateral action from other nations. After several unsuccessful attempts to persuade Russia and China to agree to a UN resolution authorizing military action against the Syrian regime, in October 2016, the U.S. tried to gather support for a resolution condemning Syria’s use of chemical weapons at OPCW and to “strip Damascus of its voting rights at the agency” if it refused greater international inspection.<sup>32</sup> Despite the efforts and hopes of the U.S. and European countries, the latest measure was again thwarted by Russia and some developing countries.

The unfavorable situation may have left the U.S. with few options to choose from. However, by settling for a Russian proposal that would merely dismantle Syria of its weapons stockpiles, the U.S. essentially allowed Syria to escape retribution for its war crimes. In Europe, countries like France felt “exposed”<sup>33</sup> as they had already declared their willingness to strike in Syria and subsequently suffered from Islamic State-related terrorism attacks. The credibility issue is likely to be prolonged as many allies wonder whether they could trust the U.S. to honor its commitments in the future - even after the chemical weapon matter was hopefully eradicated.

### **Lack of Priority and Understanding of Motives at the Geneva Talks**

Peacebuilding efforts in Syria started as early as November 2011 when the Arab League proposed a peace plan that demanded no violent crackdown against peaceful demonstrators. Despite the presence of over 50 peace monitors and the threat of having its Arab League membership suspended, the Syrian government continuously breached the promise by killing demonstrators and dissidents in what was essentially a ‘genocide’, as pointed out by an AL monitor.<sup>34</sup> Since then, numerous formal and informal talks backed by the UN and Russia were held among different parties, yet most of them ended up in the same fruitless situation as the previous ones.

Among the various peace plans and initiatives proposed during this period, the Geneva talks stood out as the most prominent and promising platform for conflict resolution in the region. In June 2012, the Geneva I Conference initiated by the then UN peace envoy to Syria Kofi Annan issued a communiqué that focused on the need for a “transitional government body” with full executive powers and participation of both the members of the Syrian government and the opposition.<sup>35</sup> All five permanent members of the UN Security Council initially supported Annan's efforts. Yet the US and Russia disagreed on whether Assad should remain in power. Similarly, after Lakhdar Brahimi replaced Kofi Annan as the UN special envoy to Syria, the Geneva II Conference aimed at bringing Syrian government and opposition together also failed in the same manner as the US and Russia could not reach any consensus. The impasse continued

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<sup>32</sup> Colum Lynch, “U.S. Scraps Plan to Punish Syria for Using Chemical Weapons,” *Foreign Policy*, Nov 11, 2016.

<sup>33</sup> Derek Chollet, “Obama’s Red Line, Revisited,” *Politico*, July 19, 2016.

<sup>34</sup> “Arab League Observer: Assad Committing Genocide in Syria,” *Haaretz*, December 26, 2011.

<sup>35</sup> Raymond Hinnebusch, I. William Zartman, et al., “UN Mediation in the Syrian Crisis: From Kofi Annan to Lakhdar Brahimi,” New York: International Peace Institute, March 2016.

as the Syrian government and opposition refused to be in the same room together during the Geneva III Conference in January 2016.<sup>36</sup> As pointed out by the Russian foreign minister Lavrov, the opposition was not interested in a constructive negotiation but rather ‘tried to put forward preconditions’. Rebel commanders were also cited as saying that they hoped the collapse of the peace talks would encourage their foreign backers to send them more powerful weapons<sup>37</sup>.

With rampant terrorist activities and atrocious human rights violations left out of the picture, the first three Geneva talks were inevitably oriented toward a superficial peace agreement that did not address the core motives of the different parties. While Damascus has long pursued to develop its WMD arsenals and was sanctioned economically by the US as early as 2004, the focus was never put on addressing the underlying motives of Syria’s pursuit of WMD, which, according to Jouejati, was ‘neither for status nor for aggrandizement’, but rather stemmed from the country’s need for national defense as it is surrounded by American power and allies. Therefore, without recognizing Syria’s motives of pursuing WMD and facilitating the peaceful settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict in the first place, a one-sided approach towards Damascus may be counterproductive as it would only further inflame anti-American sentiment in the region.

On the other hand, the determination of both sides to continue fighting also indicated that the conflict was never ripe enough for reaching a compromise – as the UN special envoy and the UNSC members struggled to bring the delegations to the negotiation table, the efficiency of the talks were greatly impaired by the developments on the ground. Intriguingly, most of the ceasefire plans were brokered by the Russia-led Astana talks, albeit their much-criticized tilt toward the Assad regime. Despite the rebel representatives’ rejection of the de-escalation zones as leaving too many loopholes for the Syrian government’s future bombing and the Democratic Union Party’ claim that the ceasefire zones were ‘dividing Syria up on a sectarian basis’<sup>38</sup>, the Astana talks were believed to have made "clear progress"<sup>39</sup> to reduce violence in Syria according to the UN’s special envoy Staffan de Mistura. Meanwhile, during the Geneva IV peace talks that began in February 2017, a deeper split emerged as the Syrian government delegation sought to focus on counterterrorism while the opposition sought to focus on political transition. Considering the numerous failed lessons of previous peacebuilding efforts, the struggling negotiations repeatedly staged by the UN raised the fundamental question of whether ‘traditional’ peacebuilding approaches are still applicable to the deeply intertwined modern conflicts.

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<sup>36</sup> “Syria conflict: Sides trade blame over talks’ suspension.” *BBC*, February 4, 2016.

<sup>37</sup> Daniel Byman and Jeremy Shapiro, “Be Afraid. Be A Little Afraid: The Threat of Terrorism from Western Foreign Fighters in Syria and Iraq.” Policy Paper, Brookings Institution, November 2014; Edwin Bakker, Christophe Paulussen, and Eva Entenmann, “Dealing with European Foreign Fighters in Syria: Governance Challenges and Legal Implications,” *The International Centre for Counter-Terrorism – The Hague* 4, no. 8 (2013).

<sup>38</sup> “Syrian Kurdish PYD denounces Syria deal for ‘de-escalation zones,’” *Reuters*, May 5, 2017.

<sup>39</sup> “Note to Correspondents: Transcript of the press conference by the UN Special Envoy for Syria, Staffan de Mistura.” United Nations, July 5, 2017.

## Lessons from the Syrian Civil War

For contemporary conflict studies, the Syrian civil war shows how important it is to develop a new generation of peacekeeping methods to cope with the increasingly complex ethno-national and regional conflicts. The proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) is among the direst global security concerns that every nation should be a stakeholder. Within the U.S. government, the President and the Secretary of State were supposed to be the dominant force in setting strategies in Syria and were in an enabling situation to do so, as demonstrated by the uniqueness and exclusiveness of national security problems. Nevertheless, in face of congressional opposition, unfavorable public sentiment toward military interventionism and lack of support by allies, the executive branch rushed to make decisions that were fraught with inconsistencies and never clearly explained the objectives of U.S. participation in the war.

By agreeing to work with Russia to ship chemical weapons out of Syria and destroy them, the U.S. shifted its focus from punishing the regime to eliminating the chemical weapons. The latter was unsuccessful either as the list provided by Syria did not include chlorine gas.<sup>40</sup> The result, demonstrated by the later flagrant attacks ordered by the Syrian government, ultimately forced the US to re-order air strikes and give up the idea of cooperating with Russia, whom the current administration has accused of making false narratives.

In addition, the UN-backed institutional efforts also suffered huge setbacks as the organizers failed to set up priorities or bottom lines for the meetings. The P5 aimed at reaching an agreement without addressing the core concerns of the warring parties or even trying to de-escalate domestic violence first. Moreover, along with numerous other human rights violations, the usage of chemical weapons was hardly mentioned during the mostly indirect talks,<sup>41</sup> making the US' previous threatening speech on the usage of chemical weapons even less credible.

Overall, the complexity of the continuous chemical weapon attacks in Syria is demonstrated not only by the unreliability of the regime's commitment, but also by a series of political and institutional loopholes. Despite the existence of the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) mechanism that commits all governments to protect civilians from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity, the abuse of R2P in Libya had ignited widespread criticism. The strategic standoff among the permanent members of the UN Security Council and the general lack of enforceability of the UN resolutions further emboldened Assad to violate the CWC. When taken together, these partisan and institutional problems have hindered the global community from developing effective strategies against usage of chemical weapons.

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<sup>40</sup> Krishnadev Calamur, "How Is Syria Still Using Chemical Weapons?" *The Atlantic*, April 4, 2017.

<sup>41</sup> Sam Heller, "Geneva Peace Talks Won't Solve Syria—So Why Have Them?" The Century Foundation. June 30, 2017.