

FOREIGN INVOLVEMENT IN THE SYRIAN CRISIS: AN ANALYSIS

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Abstract: *This research paper examines foreign involvement in the Syrian Crisis, in terms of foreign interventions, driven by national interests, strategic dynamics, and geopolitical ambitions, which resultantly enfeebled the State institutions of Syria thus providing space for the emergence of non-state actor like the Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham (HTS). The latter then became a driving force behind toppling the Assad's longstanding government. By using qualitative approach and secondary sources couples with interpretivist ontological and subjectivist epistemological position, this study investigates the impact of the external players like Russia, and the United States, on the course of political crisis in Syria, intensifying sectarian cleavages, and dividing the nation into competing areas of influence. It also analyzes how foreign supported proxy wars have hindered the establishment of a unified post-Assad governance framework, rather promoting alternative configurations of local governance by militias. The research provides a wide-range examination of the relationship between foreign intervention and state failure, highlighting wider implications for sovereignty, regional stability, and future peacebuilding in the Middle East.*

Keywords: Syrian Crisis, Foreign involvement, Power struggle, U.S Involvement, Russian Involvement, Post Assad Syria.

Introduction

The Syrian civil war, which erupted in 2011 following a wave of Arab Spring protests, rapidly transformed from a domestic uprising into one of the most complex and devastating proxy wars of the 21st century. Though internal frustrations like autocratic rule of Assad, unstable socio-economic conditions and sectarian conflicts became the initial causes of the uprising, the intensity of the Syrian political crisis could not be thoroughly understanding without the role of interventionist tendencies (Abboud, 2016). Global and regional actors played a crucial role in shaping the war in Syria, which lead to severe discontent resulted in disintegration of Syria.

Foreign intervention in Syria was manifold in nature varying from direct military action to economic assistance, provision of arms supplies, and support of the different rebel groups. US and other Western nations primarily supported moderate opposition groups in the name of supporting democracy and combating terrorism, whereas Russia and Iran supported the Assad regime in the name of regional stability and protection of state sovereignty (Phillips, 2016; Lister, 2015). While regional powers like Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and Qatar followed their own geopolitical interests, supporting Islamist forces to contain Kurdish independence or exert influence over competitors (Stein, 2020; Pierret, 2018). These

interventionist tendencies made Syria as a battle ground for gaining their geopolitical interests by surpassing the interests and ambitions of the Syrian people.

Due to external interference, Syria was transformed into a disintegrated state from a centralized state. This disintegration resultant in the changing dynamics of alliances, authority disintegration, and rival influence on various areas. The emergence of military non-state actors made the situation worse than earlier while most of these military non-state actors were supported by foreign assistance which hampered the ways for national unity, strengthen national institutions and, chance of single post crisis settlement. In addition, the presence of proxy militias and foreign military basis obstruct the ways of peace process and increase the Syrian dependency on foreign powers (Byman, 2013; Joas, Kaldor, & Selchow, 2015).

This research study aims to explain that how foreign intervention either motivated by ideological alliances, geo-strategic interests, or regional conflicts contributes to the disintegrated Syria. This research study examines the role of the major foreign actors in terms of their conflict interest, and discuss the implications of proxies for state sovereignty and regional order. Through a research study of direct and indirect involvement, this research study aims to analyze the complex web of foreign involvement that deteriorated Syria from a regional power of displeasure into a global battle field.

Literature Review

The scholarly debate over the Syrian war emphasizes the pivotal nature of foreign interventions in deepening the war, hastening state disintegration, and solidifying a complicated geopolitical chessboard. The focal point of this crisis is the heightened US-Russian competition, which has turned Syria into a strategic battle field for great power competition. Elbassoussy & Khaled (2024) and, Чепхов et al. (2024) contend that both powers have extended the crisis via military, economic, and diplomatic tactics, thus foiling peace efforts and reinforcing instability. Trujillo (2025) provides a historical twist, arguing that Russia's contemporary involvement is an extension of Cold War strategic thinking, intended to counterbalance the influence of NATO and preserve access to essential sea lanes.

This tremendous great power competition has had spillover consequences throughout the Middle East. Zafar, Akhtar, and Shaukat (2025) position Syria as a focal point within a larger security dilemma, wherein the US-Russian rivalry has provoked regional militarization and exacerbated sectarian cleavages. Saeed (2025) presents a sophisticated examination of Russia's motives running from restoring international prestige and defending economic interests to fighting extremism together with a recognition of the severe humanitarian and normative costs of its engagement. In addition to world powers, other regional players like Iran, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and Qatar have had central roles in the transformation of Syria's internal dynamic.

Phillips (2016) offers a vivid examination of the ways in which Russian and Iranian backing sustained Assad's regime, shifting the equilibrium and disempowering peace potential. Stein (2020) outlines Iran's strategic deployment of Shiite militias and advisers, which was pivotal in Assad's ability to survive. At the same time, Khatib (2017) and Lister (2017) examine how the support of Gulf states in financial and logistical terms to opposition groups specifically Islamist movements such as Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) helped to radicalize and fragment Syria's opposition environment. Lister provides specific insight into how HTS developed militarily and administratively, in effect constructing dual governance systems underwritten by external assistance.

The U.S. intervention is commonly cast in terms of counterterrorism. Byman (2013) and Cronin (2015) builds on this by examining Washington's singular preoccupation with defeating ISIS, claiming that this agenda inadvertently drew the U.S. into a wider geopolitical crisis with Russia and Iran. Gause (2019) is broader in perspective, linking the Syrian crisis to the wider Saudi-Iranian cold war, illustrating how their proxy competition fueled sectarian polarization and emboldened extremist actors. Not only has foreign intervention shaped the military and political course of the crisis but it has also consolidated

Syria's internal fragmentation and collapse of institutions. Zelin (2020) and Wood (2008) depicts how Russia's unshakeable support of Assad stands in contrast to Turkish military action against Kurdish forces, creating zones of overlapping influence. Turkey's actions, especially against northern Syria, added to the complicated relationship with the U.S., particularly with regard to backing the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF).

The collapse of state control during war has facilitated the ability of non-state actors to fill the vacuum. Arjona et al. (2015) introduce a theoretical construct of how collapse of central powers permits local and transnational communities to assert territorial authority. Baczko, Dorronsoro, & Quesnay (2018) examine ISIS's administrative incursions, displaying how initial bureaucratic efficacy was succumbed to domestic contradictions and pressure from the external world, to eventually collapse. Analogously, HTS's governance aspirations have continued to be contentious and uneven even as it strived for institutionalization. Zelin (2020) boldly posits that this emergence of non-state governance could mark a more profound transformation in Middle Eastern political order than a transitory wartime expedience. In spite of the ravaging role of foreign interventions, a few analysts identify possible entry points into a negotiated settlement. Joas et al. (2015) suggest that external powers, while fueling crisis, might ultimately shape a political solution aligned with their interests. However, such a solution risks being externally imposed, lacking legitimacy among Syrians. Meanwhile, the human cost of the crisis has been devastating. The United Nations (2020) estimates over 400,000 deaths and millions displaced, with continued intervention worsening the humanitarian crisis. Abboud (2016) highlights the collapse of Syria's civilian infrastructure, observing that even attempts by non-state actors to deliver essential services have failed to keep pace with the unprecedented needs of the population.

Research Gap

Though prior research has dealt with various themes of foreign involvement in the Syrian crisis, it has largely disengaged the impact of individual powers or the military conduct of non-state actors. Little work has comprehensively analyzed how proxy warfare overlaps with the increasing disintegration of Syria's state institutions. In addition, few studies discuss how the foreign intervention impact the political destiny of the nation, especially in post-Assad times. This specialized study addresses that void by presenting a comprehensive analysis of how strategic interventions by foreign powers and the rival interests involved have not only sharpened domestic cleavages but also influenced the formation of new political and governance systems fragmentary or transitional within Syria.

2.3 Methodology

This study uses qualitative approach for analyzing foreign involvement in the Syrian crisis. The study addresses the question what are the implications of foreign involvement in the Syrian Crisis with an objective to analyze the implications of foreign involvement in the Crisis for Syria in general and Middle East in common. The reason and rationale for using qualitative approach is that it provides comprehensive perspective of the situation, phenomena and events. The research uses interpretivist philosophical underpinnings in terms of relativist ontological and subjectivist epistemological positions. The research study uses secondary data i.e. information or data already available in books, journals, newspapers, personal diaries, letters, documentaries, research articles, and magazines is referred to as secondary data. Some valuable scholarly books were also studied for this research article, e.g., "Russia's War in Syria: Assessing Russian Military Capabilities and Lessons Learned" by Dmitry Adamsky, "The Battle for Syria: International Rivalry in the New Middle East" by Christopher Phillips and "America's Wars on Democracy in the Muslim World" by Deepa Kumar. Descriptive analysis technique will be used in this research study.

Theoretical Framework

According to Waltz (1979) self-help is the primary objective of the state for its survival, and power is the main way of acquiring power. But in the case of Syria, both the U.S. and Russia viewed the crisis

not only as a humanitarian calamity or a proxy war but also as an opportunity to expand their geopolitical influence through strategic opportunity (Mearsheimer, 2001). Russia's support for the Assad regime was driven by its desire to maintain access to its naval base in Tartus, declare itself a global power, and counterbalance against US-led intervention in the region (Trenin, 2016; Galeotti, 2017). On the other side, the U.S. contends to weaken Iran's influence, prevent the revival of terrorist groups like ISIS, and back allies, i.e., the Kurdish-led Syria Democratic Forces and Israel (Lesch, 2025; Gerges, 2025). Both major powers are involved in support of proxy actors and, through military support, turning Syria into a battlefield for power struggles (Phillips, 2020). This indicates the neorealist view that international politics is conquered by power struggle and competition and the pursuit of relative gains of power. The great powers use the regional crisis as a platform for their strategic interests (Mearsheimer, 2001). Thus, the Syrian political crisis presents a vivid illustration of how state behavior is designed by the anarchic international order and strategic imperatives, which align with the core tenet of structural realism.

Background of the Study

Syria's crisis since 2011 became part of the larger tidal wave of uprisings by the Arabs as a way to counter authoritarian rules throughout the Middle East. Brought about as initial protests with masses calling for democratic reforms as well as for political prisoners' freedom, Syrian rule's fierce crackdown on protests escalated rapidly to full-blown civil war (Lesch, 2012). Demonstrators, drawing inspiration from the revolutions in Tunisia and Egypt, first asked for more political liberties, but repression by the regime made things worse, and armed oppositional forces soon materialized, calling for the regime to topple President Bashar al-Assad (Hinnebusch, 2015). The use of force by the Assad regime, such as the deployment of the military and the shelling of civilian neighborhoods, resulted in the increasing militarization of the opposition and the eventual breakdown of the conflict into a complex war with many domestic and foreign players.

As the war continued, foreign interventions by regional and international actors only added to the complexity of the situation. Assad regime was supported by Russia and Iran logistical and military aid, while Kurdish fighters and other opposition groups were supported by United States and its various allies (Phillips, 2016). Beside this, the scenario of the conflict has changed with the emergence of non-state actors like Hayat Tahrir AL- Sham and ISIS, while these non-state actors trying to gain the territorial control with destabilizing Assad regime and rest of the rebel groups (Lister, 2017). The war became more globalized by alliances and support of regional and extra regional powers. The regional powers like Turkey, Saudi Arabia and Qatar supported opposition groups while Iranian militias and Russia sided Assad regime (Gause, 2019). This opposing involvement resulting in power shifts of and forces, which led to the deterioration of Syrian political crisis, following thousands of killings, and millions of refugees (United Nations, 2020).

In 2013 the rise of ISIS has changed the aspects of war, involved in significant territorial control in Iraq and Syria. This growth changed the international focus, specifically that of the United States and its allies, who made defeating ISIS their top strategic priority (Byman, 2013). Russia, initially having diplomatically supported the Assad regime, began a full-scale military intervention in 2015, with aerial support, troops, and sophisticated arms (Zelin, 2020). Russian air campaign and Iranian militia attacked opposition forces as well as terrorist organizations, making the pre-existing humanitarian crisis even worse. The conflict turned into a battleground not just for Assad's survival but also for greater geopolitical rivalry, with external powers competing to have influence over Syria's future.

The war also increased regional fragmentation, as regional actors, most notably Kurdish forces, attempted to create autonomous areas, particularly in the northeast. The Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), which was mainly made up of Kurdish militias, rose to fame with the help of the U.S. against ISIS, but it created friction with Turkey, which saw the autonomy of the Kurds as an immediate threat to its national security (Wood, 2008). This created Turkey's military interventions in Syrian north,

further destabilizing the conflict and opening new frontlines. Moreover, the Gulf states of Saudi Arabia and Qatar funded various rebel groups, superimposing sectarian and ideological fault lines over the war (Khatib, 2017). America's intervention, presented initially as a counterterrorism campaign to target ISIS, got caught up in this multifaceted web of coalitions, as Washington attempted to contain Iranian power while trying to balance backing Kurdish autonomy without offending Turkey. At the same time, the Assad government remained embroiled in internal strife, with opposition forces, even though they were fractured, waging continued resistance. Against this backdrop, the conflict's humanitarian costs accelerated exponentially as millions were displaced internally and across borders, producing one of the most massive refugee crises in recent history (UNHCR, 2020).

The Syrian war also illustrated the weaknesses of global diplomacy, with many failed peace efforts aimed at halting the violence. Though periodic peace negotiations, like those organized by the United Nations in Geneva, took place, they usually collapsed because of the fixed positions of the parties and the lack of a feasible political solution (Burgat, 2016). The presence of non-state actors, like groups of HTS, also made negotiations more difficult, as these actors did not always represent the larger opposition or international agendas. The growing militarization of the crisis, combined with the confused multiplicity of foreign interventions, highlighted the challenges of attaining peace since external actors tended to have rival visions for Syria's future. The continued fragmentation of Syria poses fundamental questions on its future as a single state and implications for regional security and the governance of the Middle East.

Foreign Involvement

United States Involvement

The United States' engagement in the Syrian crisis has undergone a remarkable transformation since the crisis started in 2011, influenced by the changing dynamics on the ground and its larger geopolitical and strategic interests. U.S. policy in Syria was initially aimed at assisting the pro-democracy protests that broke out in 2011 as part of the Arab Spring. U.S. officials, joining the general regional demand for democratic change, were supportive of the opposition and critical of the Assad regime's violent crackdown (Lesch, 2012). The United States also pressured Assad to resign, calling for a political transition that would put an end to his authoritarian rule. But the war soon escalated from a civil uprising to a determined crisis, which made it difficult for the U.S. to pursue. As violence mounted, the U.S. started rethinking its strategy, mainly spurred by the emergence of extremist organizations such as ISIS, which directly threatened regional stability and U.S. interests in the Middle East.

The U.S. approach changed following the sudden expansion of ISIS in 2013, when the group took over vast sections of Syria and Iraq, announcing the formation of a caliphate. The U.S. and its coalition allies redirected their main efforts against defeating ISIS while continuing to be opposed to Assad. In 2014, the U.S. launched airstrikes against ISIS objectives in Syria, and in the next year it started supporting the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), a militia led by the Kurds, as the main land force combating ISIS (Byman, 2013). This action was just a part of the larger coalition to undermine ISIS's territorial footprint. But U.S. involvement in Syria was not merely driven by counterterrorism aims. America was also interested in checking the expansion of regional antagonist Iran and its proxies, like Hezbollah, that were backing up Assad's government. American support for Kurdish fighters, in the first place, was driven by countering Iranian and Russian influence (Gerges, 2014). The U.S., meanwhile, found itself in a diplomatic predicament in that its advocacy of Kurdish autonomy in northern Syria put a strain on its relations with Turkey, which perceived the Kurds as a threat to its territorial integrity.

As the Assad regime's position solidified with the assistance of Russian and Iranian assistance, the U.S. shifted to a more targeted policy of constraining Assad's military and economic power, particularly through sanctions. The objective was to undermine the regime without directly intervening in attempts to overthrow him. This policy also included attempts to keep the regime from reasserting control over

the country, especially regions that had been freed from ISIS and other opposition forces (Gause, 2019). With Russia's military intervention in 2015, which greatly supported Assad's military situation, the U.S. was now faced with a direct crisis with Russian interests in Syria. The U.S. attempted to reconcile its anti-Assad stance with its counterterrorism agenda, but the two goals frequently conflicted, resulting in a convoluted and dynamic strategy that involved both military and diplomatic actions (Zelin, 2020).

After Assad, the U.S. would have serious problems with Syria's future leadership. While the departure of Assad had appeared a realistic prospect at the beginning of the war, the entrenched involvement of Iran and Russia has set the stage so that Assad's survival and consolidation of authority became more and more probable. By 2017, as Assad retook important territories with Russian air and Iranian ground assistance, the U.S. started shifting its policy towards a more defensive stance, concentrating on stabilizing territories freed from ISIS and preventing Iran's expansion in Syria (Said, 2025). The U.S. sought to constrain Iran's power projection capability through its militias in Syria and its influence in northeastern Syria, especially through the SDF, which emerged as a principal ally in the fight against ISIS. But following U.S. President Donald Trump's withdrawal of American troops from northern Syria in 2019, Turkey invaded the Kurdish forces in the area, marking a shocking policy reversal and prompting fears of abandoning its Kurdish allies (Wood, 2008).

The post-Assad period in Syria is a challenging array of issues for U.S. policy. The U.S. has been a long proponent of a political resolution involving a post-Assad transition, but this scenario is now less likely as Assad consolidated his rule with Russian and Iranian support. While Syria's territorial integrity continues to be shared, with considerable influence held by foreign powers, America has to walk a fine line between containing Iranian influence, juggling relations with its Kurdish allies, and avoiding a return to power for extremist movements like ISIS. In addition, U.S. engagement after Assad will be geared towards humanitarian aid and reconstruction, but this will be complicated by the necessity of working with global partners while enduring ongoing sanctions against the Assad regime (Burgat, 2016). The U.S. will also have to answer questions about the legitimacy of a political resolution that includes the Assad regime, as Syria's future political structure remains in doubt and highly contested.

In summary, U.S. engagement in Syria has evolved over time, following shifting strategic imperatives. From initial backing of regime change and democratic transition to emphasis on counterterrorism and restraint of Iranian power, U.S. policy has been influenced by the changing nature of the crisis. The post-Assad era brings new challenges since the U.S. is going to have to contend with the consequences of a highly divided Syria and the conflicting interests of international and regional powers. Though American engagement is bound to persist, its capacity for shaping Syria's future political destiny remains constrained since the crisis has transformed from a regime change issue into a more multifaceted geopolitical and humanitarian emergency.

Russian Involvement

Russia's involvement in the Syrian crisis has evolved from diplomatic support for the Assad regime to full-scale military intervention, and this shift has had profound implications for the war's trajectory, regional security dynamics, and Russia's broader geopolitical strategy. In the initial stages of the war in 2011, Russia gave diplomatic support to the Assad government, employing its veto at the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) to stall any resolutions that might have opened the door for international intervention against the Syrian state (Lesch, 2012). It was Russia's direct military intervention, which commenced in September 2015, that was the major turning point in the war in Syria. Initially, the Russian intervention was considered a source to fight against jihadist groups like ISIS and to fight against forces that bolster Assad regime, but with the passage of time it became evident that all the moves of Russian intervention was purely based on geo-strategic interest.

Russia military and strategic presence in the Middle East and to maintain its regional influence were the main aims of Russian intervention in Syrian political crisis. The Tartus Russian naval base and the

Khmeimim airbase were key Russian assets for projecting power in the Mediterranean, enabling it to have a presence in the region and balance U.S. and NATO influence (Trujillo, 2025). Russia's military strategy was airpower-dependent, with Russian fighter aircraft offering key support to Assad's forces. This enabled Assad's forces to recapture vast amounts of territory, particularly in Aleppo, where Russian and Syrian air raids wiped out opposition-held territory, inflicting heavy civilian losses and devastation (Zelin, 2020). Although Russia's intervention was presented as attempts to fight terrorism, this also helped project Moscow's hegemony in Syria and the wider Middle East.

Russia's intervention also greatly influenced the balance of the crisis and regional power dynamics. By aligning itself with Iran and Hezbollah, Russia assisted in creating a strong axis in favor of the Assad regime, which had long-term implications for sectarian tensions in Syria and the region (Gause, 2019). This axis of Shia-dominated powers, such as Russia, Iran, and Hezbollah, directly opposed the Sunni-majority coalition backing various opposition groups. The rise of Iran's military presence in Syria, especially the establishment of militias and its financial and logistical backing of Assad, increased the regional competition with Sunni nations such as Saudi Arabia and Turkey. Russia's alliance with Iran also made its relations with Turkey complicated, particularly regarding the Kurdish autonomy question. The Kurdish fighters, specifically the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), were a prime focus of crisis when they sought to establish an autonomous state in northern Syria. While the U.S. supported the SDF against ISIS, Turkey perceived Kurdish independence as being a direct danger to its own national security and responded with crisis with the U.S. as well as Turkey and Russia (Zelin, 2020). In spite of all these tensions, Russia was able to keep its pragmatic relationship going with Turkey, especially in ceasefire deals and regional security issues cooperation.

At the battlefield level, the Russian patronage for Assad proved instrumental in turning the tide of war. Russian air attacks, coordinated with Iranian-sponsored ground forces, not only struck against opposition forces but also against jihadist groups like ISIS and HTS, more solidifying the control of Assad and further weakening the opposition. But these military attacks frequently resulted in high numbers of civilian deaths and have been widely condemned as indiscriminate, especially in densely populated cities like Aleppo and Eastern Ghouta (Said, 2025). These actions played a huge role in the continued humanitarian crisis in Syria, with millions of individuals displaced both within the country and across borders, adding to one of the biggest refugee crises in recent history (United Nations, 2020).

Apart from the military, Russia's intervention has also had deep diplomatic consequences. Moscow was instrumental in the Astana process, an alternate track of peace talks that involved Iran and Turkey, unlike the Geneva negotiations by the United Nations (Elbassoussy & Khaled, 2024). The Astana discussions aimed to establish de-escalation zones and a political solution to the war. Russia's capacity to negotiate with many regional players above all, Turkey and Iran enabled it to secure a major diplomatic role in determining Syria's future. Through the Astana process, Russia aimed to preserve Assad's hold on power while preventing the total disintegration of the Syrian state. The result of this process was, however, unclear since it became evident by then that the foreign powers were not merely interested in deciding the political future of Syria but also in defending their own regional strategic interests.

Russia's endorsement of the Assad regime further contributed to shaping international norms as well as international institutions like the United Nations to its advantage. Russia's exercise of its veto power in the UNSC to veto resolutions intended to condemn Assad's actions or enable outside intervention undermined international efforts to solve the crisis. Moscow's approach represented a larger challenge to the post-Cold War international order, where Russia was determined to defend its allies and strategic interests even at the cost of international norms (Said, 2025). Russia's willingness to use force to secure its interests in Syria also signaled to other powers, including the U.S. and EU, that the Russian Federation was prepared to confront the West directly in order to assert its influence over regional crisis.

4.0 Conclusion

The involvement of both the United States and Russia into the Syrian crisis has had significant and lasting impacts, not only on Syria but also on regional and international politics. Both powers have sought their own strategic interests, and though these interests at times coincided, they frequently resulted in conflicting interests that have made it difficult to settle the crisis and determine Syria's post-crisis future.

Initially, the U.S. motive behind involvement in Syrian political crisis was to counterterrorist groups like ISIS and to establish democracy. However, when the war manifolds the U.S. has reconsidered its policies of intervention in Syria, like to toppled down the Assad regime and stem the Iranian proxies and Iran in Syria, and to support Kurdish troops in north Syria had become the focus of its strategic interest. This Kurdish troops support makes the U.S.-Turkey relations strained and highlighted how complicated it would be to align strategic interests during a war characterized by temporary alliances. The failure efforts to ouster Assad and the increasing Russian and Iranian involvement in Syria make the strategic position of U.S. limited. After the fall of Assad's regime, the U.S. is provoked with the issue of aiding reconstruction, to handle a broad humanitarian crisis, and to contain the re-emergence of rebel extremist groups, while dealing with the harsh reality of strong foreign involvement of Iran and Russia in fractured Syria.

Contrary, the Russian intervention strongly supports the Assad regime for maintains its influence in the middle east. Russia military involvement, along with Iranian support played avital role in withdrawing the war in Assad's favor. Russin military and naval basis of Tartus and its access to Mediterranean Sea has guided Russia geo-strategic involvement in Syria. Beside this, one of the core causes of regional sectarian conflict is the Russia alignment with Hezbollah and Iran, in the context of Saudi-Iranian reginal competition.

The intervention of both foreign powers i.e., Russia and U.S. have been the reason of increasing the Syrian political crisis, adding to the huge humanitarian crisis. The U.S. and their allies support of Kurdish forces in north of Syria increased the tensions with Turkey, made the geo-strategical situation worse. While Russian support to the Assad regime including airstrikes and use of chemical weapons caused huge mass displacement, destroyed the infrastructure, and abused the basic human rights. The competing and rival interest of both the foreign powers have always hindered the collective international efforts for peace in Syria and exaggerated the Syrian political crisis. In post - Assad Syria, the Russian and U.S. control will continue to redesign the political trajectory of the state. Russian strong hold, especially in military affairs and in the field of diplomacy, predicts a political resolution. While U.S. will not be able to regain the regional control and Syrian politics due to the Iranian and Russian military presence.

To sum up, the U.S. and Russian interest have made the crisis multi layered at the cost of Syrian instability. The post- Assad Syria will certainly find the state as fragmented state with foreign actors' involvement and dictation of its political fat. Syria's future is contingent on whether these powers can reconcile their differing goals and move toward a path of peace and reconstruction, which to date has been an unattainable objective.

Findings

- To reassert its global power status and secure its military assets (Tartus naval base), Russia sought to preserve the Assad regime as a bulwark against Western influence.
- While supporting moderate opposition forces, the U.N. pursued a policy of regime change early in the crisis, later shifting toward counterterrorism goals.

- While using airpower and strategic bombing indiscriminately, Russian military intervention from 2015 onwards significantly changed the balance of power in favor of the Assad regime.
- U.S. involvement made the relations complicated with its NATO ally Turkey, while through support for Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) and airstrikes to defeat ISIS.
- Massive civilian casualties and displacement contributed by both U.S. and Russian operations.
- Undermining international conflict resolution, Russia's use of veto power in the UN Security Council blocked humanitarian access and sanctions.
- The rivalry has deepened the conflicts and multilateral diplomacy in the Middle East.

Recommendations

- **Strengthen Diplomatic Relations:** Under UN auspices, both Russian and U.S. diplomats should revitalize the Astana and Geneva peace processes. An essential negotiation process could be restarted through a balanced transitional framework that includes regime representatives and opposition voices.
- **Reduce the Proxy Interventions:** In areas like northeast Syria, both the U.S. and Russia should work to de-escalate tensions between their respective allies. To reduce the risk of conflict escalation, confidence-building measures, e.g., joint humanitarian corridors and demilitarized zones, should be taken.
- **Ensure Civilian Safety:** Principles of International Humanitarian Law (IHL) regarding sieges and indiscriminate bombing should be committed by both the U.S. and Russia. Ceasefires and compliance with humanitarian norms should be conditional for constructional support.
- **Design Harmonized Counterterrorism Strategies:** Joint counterterrorism operations could focus on isolating transnational jihadist groups by both Russia and the U.S., while avoiding collective punishment of populations. Deconfliction processes and intelligence sharing should be expanded.
- **Support and invest in local governance initiatives:** In areas liberated from ISIS and post-conflict zones, both states should invest in civil society initiatives and local governance. Regime consolidation and proxy entrenchment should not be the basis of economic aid and reconstruction.
- **Limit the militarization moves:** Commit to **gradual demilitarization** of Syria through mutual reduction of military presence and preventing further entrenchment of foreign bases. To prevent further entrenchment of foreign bases, a gradual demilitarization process of Syria through mutual reduction of military presences should be committed by both states.
- **Develop channels for regional dialogues:** To promote a comprehensive regional security dialogue on Syria's future, regional platforms can be facilitated by both Russia and the U.S. involving Gulf states, Turkey, and Iran

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