

The Syrian Civil War: A Comparative Analysis Through the Lenses of Realism, Liberalism and Constructivism

Meherub Al Hassan¹

Iffat Anjum²

Abstract

How should one weigh the nature of the altercated Syrian civil war in contemporary international politics? This paper investigates the key actors of this war and the relevance of the mainstream International Relations theories in explaining their major roles highlighting the Syrian war to be a 'nascent game changer' in contemporary political security equation. The realist school explains the role of the multiple actors- Syrian government, Russia, Iran and sporadic opponents of rebel forces, ISIL Saudi Arabia and US-led western coalition concentrating on their individual 'national interest' and 'balance of power' projection. Contrarily, the liberal lens has examined the war as a struggle for establishing democratic rights, incorporating institutional involvement and enduring international co-operation. On the other hand, constructivism examines the same war based on the rudimentary issues of ethnic conflict, religious drift, radical ideas, US temptation for 'global guardianship' and Russian urge for 'emerging power' identity. This paper has adapted a qualitative research methodology to assess the significance of international relations theories in explaining Syrian civil war. However, this paper eventually compares these theoretical insights unveiling a) each theory has their own explanation to interpret comprehend the same war b) these theories are neither self-sufficient nor mutually exclusive and c) the relevance of realism seems more plausible in explaining the nature of the multifaceted war.

Keywords: International Relations, Realism, Liberalism, Social Constructivism, actors and international power.

1. Introduction

“Theory will have fulfilled its main task when it is used to analyze the constituent elements of war... to explain in full the properties of the means employed and to show their probable effects...and to illuminate all phases of warfare in a thorough critical inquiry. Theory then becomes a guide to anyone who wants to learn about war from book...”

- (Clausewitz 141)

On 15th March 2011, the proliferation of the Arab Spring into Syria stimulated one of the most crucial 'political security contravention interaction volition' in the Middle Eastern Region inducing significant spillover effects for the rest of the world. As an intrinsic part of the democratic movements of the Arab Spring, peaceful protests became initial instruments of revolt urging for transparency and accountability which

¹Lieutenant Colonel, Head of the department, Department of International Relations, Faculty of Business and Social Science, Bangladesh Military Academy, e-mail :meherub4821@gmail.com

²Lecturer, Department of International Relations, Bangladesh University of Professionals, e-mail: iffatdu@yahoo.com

were ‘allegedly being violated’ by the long-sustained Assad regime. But the initial violent and overhyped aggressive response from the ruling regime substantially shifted the nature of the movement and ultimately the pioneers began to call for the overthrow of the regime. Since then, tensions heightened dramatically from both the contended parties but unfortunately the nascent escalation of violence could not be reversed even after seven years of its inception. The situation was precipitated further by the subsequent intervention of multiple state and non-state actors with their individual perspectives. The civil war originated initially between the ruling regime and its opposition but gradually like a cobweb it snowballed with the involvement of other national, regional and international actors either through projecting direct military boots or inflicting indirect political support. The government was being backed by regional and international actors like Iran, Russia and Hezbollah, whereas the opposition group incorporated multiday fractions like the radical Islamic State of Syria and Levant (ISIL), Al Nusra Front, Syrian National Coalition, Kurdish parties and including Saudi Arabia, Turkey, USA and the EU (Johnson 2016). Thus, the nature of the civil war had been gradually reshaped by its complex international dimensions embroiling the entire world with its cascading consequences. While entering into its seventh year, the war is evident as one of the worst case of humanitarian catastrophe stimulating more than 475,000 deaths and above 5 million refugees worldwide (Black). Again, Russian military forces on Syria on 30th September, 2015 by deploying combat aircraft and up to 2,000 support personnel vis-à-vis US ‘portrayed mislead’ Deir ez-Zor air strike killing around 106 Syrian army on 17th September, 2017 threatened the contemporary ‘political-security equation unfolding significant possibilities for further international ramification (Hume etal).

Now, primarily this paper argues that the ‘Syrian Crisis’ has emerged as a ‘critical tool’ to predict the future political scenario of Middle East and beyond. Thereby, political instabilities of the puzzled war have not only generated immense pressure among the concerned state leaders and policy-makers but also have occupied theoreticians and academia with intrinsic research and study to apprehend the nature and to forecast the future of the war. As theory provide a framework or lens to analyze any particular event and different theories can analyze the same event differently, it is undoubted that the contended issue of Syrian civil war has provided the political theoreticians ample scope to explore how to best analyze the events in Syria and how the lesson learnt can be applied hereafter. In this regard, the mainstream schools of thoughts of International Relations (IR): realism, liberalism and social constructivism have inaugurated a juvenile debate about logically tracing the root causes, comprehending key roles played by the dominant actors and enumerating the future context of the war.

2. Objective

This research paper gradually endeavors along with its core objective to weigh the theoretical insights of realism, liberalism and constructivism in comparing their plausible explanations regarding the nature of the Syrian Civil War.

3. Research Question

Thereby, aligning with the primary attempt of rationally explaining the exhaustive nature of Syrian civil war through the contending lenses of IR theories, this paper endeavors to establish its central research query as:

- To what extent can the dominant International Relations theories: realism, liberal institutionalism and constructivism rationally explain the nature of the contentions Syrian civil war?

4. Rationale of the Paper

In explaining with artless words, theory can be compared with recipes or formula to inflict any general idea about any particular event or issue. Similar to different recipes of the same dish, different theories can analyze and assume a single event differently. It is not necessary that these theories will to be mutually exclusive, but every single theory has individual variables to analyze and explain. Now, international relations as a distinct discipline to analyze the multiple relations among various entities (states and non-state actors) in the international system (Ola 89) strives to decipher the nature of any particular event in the system primarily based on its dominant theoretical insights of realism, liberalism and social Constructivism And the significance of these IR theories do not only stay confined in the pages of meticulous research works but also paves away for the policy-makers, stakeholders and common people of a particular nation-state to understand and to examine the causes, intensity and future of any crisis. Thereby, the security threats and concerns related to the Middle Eastern political instabilities are seriously relying on the theoretical arguments from IR theories to initiate further steps by the policymakers to ensure global peace and security indeed. However, it has been stated before that these theories differ in explaining any particular event and similarly, regarding the civil war escalation in Syria realist school, liberal institutionalism and social constructivism fundamentally altercate to provide their analysis and assumption about the war. Consequently, in the seventh year of the prolonged civil war, it has become obligatory to compare the theoretical insights of the war as well as to weigh the better plausible explanations in order to incorporate substantive initiatives to pacify the extent and to ensure stability in the region and also in the world.

5. Methodology

In complying with the objectives of the paper, while developing arguments regarding the comparative theoretical analysis of Syrian civil war, a qualitative research methodology has been adopted primarily owing to secondary data, peer reviewed journals, case study reports, and review of scholarly books, international magazines and newspapers, official websites and credible media reports etc. This paper has attempted to weigh and predict the plausibility of the theoretical debates and thereby has adopted a case study structure through its gradual developments. Eventually, based on prevailing arguments and explanations, it will examine each of the theoretical insights of realism, liberalism and constructivism differently along with their consistent

argument regarding the prolonging civil war. And finally, this paper will incorporate the authors' explanation or arguments along with evidences and examples regarding the plausibility of the theoretical insights for their further incorporations in political debates.

6. Literature Review

While venturing onto the terrain of current Syrian civil war literatures, the most common trend is to address the a symmetric assumptions regarding the explanations in shaping the nature of the long-sustained war. As the incident is still being on its prolonging epoch, only a few insightful theoretical and scholarly arguments could be reviewed. This paper finds a knowledge vacuum in effectively explaining the responsible reasons as well as strategic shifts of Russia regarding its recent military intervention in Syria. Among a surge of reviewed literatures a few key compositions would be briefly presented here. Again, while reviewing relevant literatures, several substantial gaps can be explored in order to investigate the necessary arguments in advancing towards the research queries.

- Significant amount of literatures are diversely uneven or illiberal.
- To some extent a division mark can be placed between the scholarly literatures of academia and their policy level practical sagacity.
- Policymakers in favor of rationalizing their practices, to some extent have ignored the inherent challenges and dilemmas which can be well –investigated with the theoretical insights of International Relations.

In general, the most dominant school of thought in International Relations tends to be 'realism'. Realism basically assumes the world system to be anarchic and the nation-states to be unitary actors of world politics. Here, anarchy indicates towards the absence of any supreme governing authority and within such system, states are predominantly concentrating on the issues of their national interest, sovereignty and power politics which ultimately lead towards a situation where conflicts will be inevitable. Contrarily, liberal intuitionism indicates towards a system which is anarchic but along with state-actors, non-state actors or international institutions are also playing key roles within the system. Here, with the process of institution building, rules, regulations, regimes and norms based 'complex interdependence' among the state and non-state actors, co-operation can be achieved and peace can be established within the international system. Finally, constructivism indicates that the nature of international system cannot be objectified as to be either peaceful or conflictual rather it is socially constructed. Socially constructed ideas and inter-subjective identity creation among state and non-state actors ultimately define the nature of international system.

Now, following the legacy of the pioneering advocates of Hans J. Morgenthau, Kenneth Waltz and E.H. Carr, the most ancient and most dominant theoretical school of International Relations 'realism' has been frequently cited by contemporary prudent scholars to analyze the nature of the today's multifaceted Syrian civil war and the involvement of multiple actors in the stage of theatre

- Realism primarily investigates the international system to be anarchic where nation- states are the key actors in the international system and statism, sovereignty and self-help are the key components of maintaining international relations among the system. Here the frequent quest for power among the states can create 'security dilemma' ensuring conflicts to be 'amenable' (Morgenthau 179). Meticulous conflict analyst (Cordesman and Narguzian 7) and judicious writer (Scheltema 5) has analyzed the roots, escalation and consolidation of the Syrian conflict from a lens that focuses on the power struggle of the different actors involved in the war. The external actors Russia, USA, Iran are either craving for their regional sphere of influence or trying to enhance the extent of the conflict with either direct militarily engagement or political intervention. Again, in light of the (An analysis of the Syrian Conflict) scrutinized write-up the non-effectiveness of regional and international institutions like Arab League, UN and EU also inflames the realist debate of power-politics.
- In contrast, embracing the ideas of Immanuel Kant, Robert Keohane and Joseph Nye, liberal institutional lens analyses the same international system with a deviated focus. According to its key pioneers the international system is also anarchic, but along with states also the non-state actors are the key stakeholders in the international system. The level of co-operation among these states and non-state actors and their inter-dependence through normative and institutional arrangements would be the key components of maintaining international relations among the system and these mutual co-operation, legal norms, rule of law and democratic ideas will gradually drive towards 'absolute gain' and 'peace process' (Keohane and Nye 45). Thus, the liberal institutional lens would analyze the context of the Syrian civil war on the basis of a struggle for democratic rights, rule of law, normative insights, freedom of expression in the prevailing ruling regime and also the foreign involvements by western coalition is being viewed to establish democratic rights in the Middle East (An analysis of the Syrian Conflict). Then again, the role of institutions UN, EU, Arab league can be analyzed as exerting continuous initiatives to ensure normative rule and attempts for inter-governmental co-operation in order to pacify the escalation of violence and to ensure political stability (Syrian Civil War : Realism V. Liberalism).
- Social constructivism in contrast challenges the permanency of the international system and rather argues that international system would be defined by the 'identity creation' and 'ideational power' of the state as well as non-state actors (Rheus-Smit and Snidal 299-305) Thereby, the mutual interaction among nation-states and their creation of 'identity' would construct the 'regimes' and 'institutions' in result, defining the nature of the system highlighting the subjectivity of the debated issue. Thereby, constructivists advocate that the international system is not permanent or fixed in an anarchical manner where states are continuously wresting to absorb power,

rather, the persisting structure gets infused with ideational factors and shared identities to incorporate regimes, norms and law (Viotti and Kaupi 278) and thereby, anarchy is what states make of it (Wendt 395- 405).

Now, in tracing the roots and predicting about the Future of Syrian civil war constructivism focuses on the creation of ideas about different ethnic groups and religious drifts or portrayed image and 'identity creation' based on the concerned ideas. The multifarious issues of Syrian-Alawites nationalism, Shia-Sunni divergence, Radicalization of Sharia-Law, US-global guardianship and Russian emerging power statues actually define the roles of different concerned state and non-state actors and the basis of their specific 'ideational creation' and 'socially constructed identities' (Johnson 5-9).

There was a noticeable gap in existing literatures regarding mapping an analytical comparison among the dominant theories of IR in explaining the nature of the Syrian civil war.

7. Background of the Syrian War

a) The role of various regular and irregular forces fighting the war

In analyzing the role of multiple belligerents involving in the contested war, two core combatants are evident- Assad regime's 'Syrian Armed Forces', 'National Defense Forces' and 'Ba'ath Brigades' occupying 38.39% of Syria and 70.8% of the population till early 2018 (Syrian Civil War Map) and opposition 'Free Syrian Army' who were backed by or allied with multiple forces from home and abroad. All these forces were not necessarily being involved from the inception period, rather regional powers like Turkey provided solely arms support to the opposition 'Free Syrian Army' since 2011 and only after 2016 did the Turkish substantial move of military intervention consolidate the opposition force to be 'Turkish backed Free Syrian Army' or 'Syrian National Army'. Again, both the two combatants and their affiliated belligerents do not pursue similar interests or ideologies. Rather, diverse group of combatants are forming diverse alliances as well as coalition seeking their diverse interests into the war. Then again, there prevails the existence of intrinsically different combatant groups like radical / extremist groups who do not follow democratic ideology of the core opposition but substantially tale part into the war as separate belligerents (Syria : The Story). Thus, along with the core opposition a number of diverse (mostly Sunni) Arab rebel groups: commonly abbreviated as Syrian Democratic Force (SDF) or QSD- a multi-ethno-religious alliance of Kurdish Arab, Assyrian, Armenian and Turkmen militia mostly led by Kurdish People's Protection Unit-YPG who have occupied 22.51% of Syria and 14.30% of the population till 2017 (Syrian Civil War Map) are being involved (Belfer Center). Again, another faction of Salafi jihadist groups, who are deviating from the democratic motives of Free Syrian Army, rather, urge to pursue a Sharia-law based/ Islamic vision for Syria namely, the Al Nusra Front along with the contested Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) has occupied 22.4 % of Syria and 5.70% of the population till 2017 (Syrian Civil War Map). These groups are

substantially opposing the government forces since 2015, seizing control of the Aleppo and parts of Southern Syria International involvement from USA and EU (mostly UK, France, Germany) are 'portraying to counter radical Islamist groups like ISIL.

Syria: Who controls what?

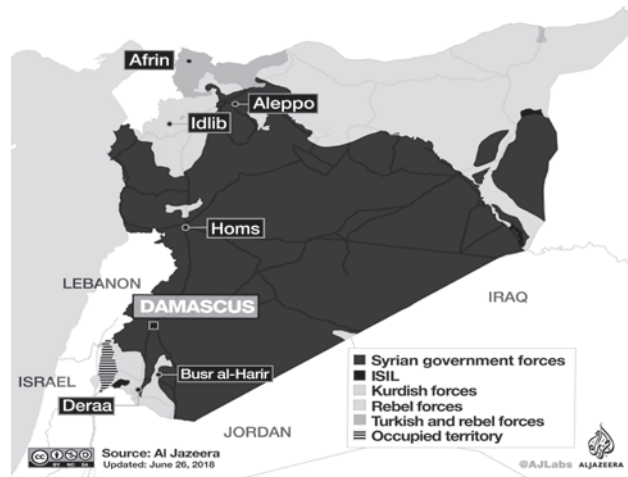


Figure-1 : Multiple belligerents into the war and their controlled area after seven years of fighting (Chughtai)

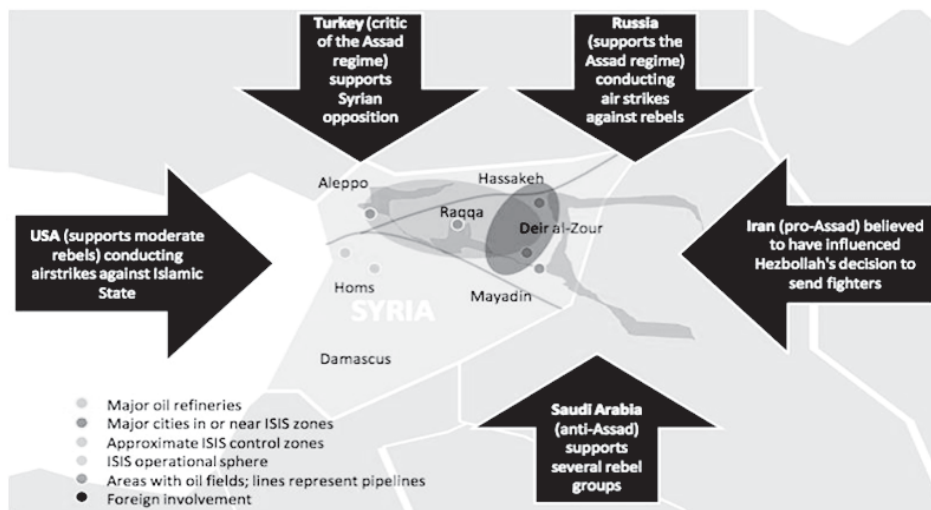
But in practice, their involvement is altercated because mostly they were rendering military support to another opposition force the ‘Free Syrian Army’, to combat government forces till 2016. Similarly, Turkish military involvement is claimed to fight against multi-ethnic SDF and radical ISIL rather than the Assad regime. But the September 2017’s US ‘claimed unintentional military base attack’ on Syrian Armed Forces killing around 100 Syrian troops stimulated the debate of Western military involvement with a pursuit of toppling the ruling regime (Aboufadel). In contrast , Assad regime’s ‘Syrian Armed Forces’ and ‘Ba’ath Brigades’ were being militarily backed by its historical allies Russia, Iran and Lebanon based Shia militia, Hezbollah. Thereby, multi-cellular events like the Russian event as well as western military intervention are ultimately threatening the international politics by the spill over effects which may convert the civil nature of the war into otherwise (Syria: The Story).

b) The role of various state and non-state actors in resolving the Syrian War

The key stakeholders of the war are the internal Gulf players (Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Israel and Iran) and external global power USA, emerging power (Russia and China) and significant non-state actors and inter-governmental organizations such as: UN, EU, NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization), ISIL, Arab League, UNHCR (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees), SCPR (Syrian Center for Policy Research). As an alliance partner, every key actor has their own rationale to join or oppose the

ruling regime deeply influencing the prevailing political dynamics (BelferCenter). USA as a global actor seeks to continue its Middle Eastern preponderance through deepening ties with Israel and Saudi Arabia, combating radical threats and mostly expanding regional influence through intervention and thereby passively demanding the toppling down of Assad regime.

Saudi-Arabia opposes Assad regime with an aspiration of backing regional antagonistic power, Iran and also to continue the regional sphere of influence. Russian growing economic development, increasing arms trade, nuclear missiles, and repeated veto power projection in UNSC regarding humanitarian intervention within the mandate of Syrian Responsibility to Protect/R2P (due to fear of regional destabilization similar to ‘Libya’) has provided incentives to hit the final nail through military boots on Syria. Iran also derives its own position of band wagoning with its Sunni ally and backing regional opponent Saudi Arabia in order to bolster the Assad regime. ISIL portrayed to establish their Sharia-law based radical Islamist ideology using the means of coercion and immense violence stimulating ‘islam ophobia’. The US-Israel-Turkey-EU alliance is debated to take advantage of this phobia with an inherent intention of toppling the ruling government through overt and covert opposition (Belfer Center).



Source: BBC, World Energy Outlook, IEA, Petroleum Economists, Institute for the Study of War, RBC Capital Markets

Figure-2: Involvement of multiple state and non state actors in Syrian Civil War (Institute for the Study of War)

Thereby, as a cascading consequence, non-state and inter-governmental institutions like UNHCR, UNOCHA, Amnesty International, Syrian Center for Policy Research and Syrian Observatory for Human Rights are frequently trying to be involved there in weighing the current scenario with immense obligations from the ruling regime.

8. Realist, Liberal and Constructivist Schools in Weighing the Nature of the War

In analyzing the complete nature of the ongoing Syrian War, different theoretical schools of IR provide their diverse interpretations to analyze, assume and predict the prevailing context and future possibilities of the war. Now, in answering the key query of the paper regarding the plausible viability of the theoretical interpretations, this paper prepares a comparative analysis among realist power politics orientation, liberal institutional legacy and socially constructed idea based 'constructivist' theory being applied in the theatre of Syrian civil war.

a) Realist School:

In explaining both the internal (ethno-religious) as well as external (involvement of global powers) dimensions of the Syrian war the three core focuses of realism would be inevitable: state centrism, prioritizing self interest and the anarchic nature of the international system.

- The realist lens would test the military intervention of Russia as a classic example of prioritizing 'sphere of influence; and 'balancing power approach' in the region. Abatement of Chechen movement, Georgian War of 2008, the annexation of Crimea in 2014, and Russia's ongoing involvement in Ukraine would be expressions of Russian contemporary 'sphere of influence policy' projection where the continuation is being evident in Assad's Syria – a traditional Russian ally to gain direct access to the Mediterranean (Sage and Davis). Russia's intervention objective was followed by maintaining the existing regime which was threatened by US led war coalition to secure Moscow's foothold across several geo-strategic attainments (Barzegar), Such as:
 - i) Infrastructure on the coast: modernized naval base in Tartus providing refueling, repair,
 - ii) Russian navy in the Mediterranean and
 - iii) An eventual airbase in Latakia, Syria (Guerisoli).

Russia due to its geographical proximity, strategic access and long tradition of being regional ally since the independence of Syria got threatened with the fear of regional destabilization of Syria as a 'failed state' similar to recent Libya through unilateral western intervention. Thereby, Sino-Iranian-Russian proximity in the Syrian crisis is more of a national security concern based on balancing power through its sphere of influences.

- The major driver of Teheran's intervention through Iranian Revolution Guard is indeed the necessity to counter-balance the influence exercised in the region by the Sunni Gulf States and their American ally. The reason is, Teheran would find itself dangerously isolated and extremely weakened in its capacity of balancing power if its regional stability would be disrupted with the toppling down of the ruling allied Assad regime (An analysis of the Syrian Conflict).

- The United States initially intervened because backing anti-Assad forces aim to exploit the room for action and the power vacuum created by the war in Syria in order to expand the American 'global guardian influence' and to strengthen the position of America's regional allies. Washington aims to widen the scope of maneuver, influence and power projection for itself and its regional partners, while at the same time minimizing the possible influence of traditional rivals such as Moscow, Teheran and radical Islamists (An analysis of the Syrian Conflict).
- From the Saudis' perspective, overthrowing Assad would mean upsetting the existent balance of power and creating a new one, based on the primacy of the Saudi monarchy vis-à-vis Iran because it would render its long-time rival not only isolated but also ever weaker and marginal and it remains as one of the primary sources of concern for Saudi Arabia (An analysis of the Syrian Conflict).
- Again, Turkish interests are not only connected with the counter-balancing of long-time rivals such as Iran and Russia. The threat to the national security against which Erdogan's Turkey is intervening, in fact, is mostly represented by the Syrian Kurds of the Rojava movement and, more specifically, of the YPG, that affiliates itself with Turkey's own Kurds movement and is consequently capable of posing a direct threat to the country's security, stability and power projection.
- Along with external actors, the internal ethno-religious issues can also be explained through the realist lens of historical domination, unequal power projection and lack of transparency induced grievances towards the autocratic government and also unequal power projection among ethnic minorities likes Kurds which which have ultimately resulted into sectarian movements.

b) Liberal Institutionalism:

The second most influential theory of International relations the liberal institutional school analyzes the multiplicity of the contended war with its basic arguments of democratic values, normative rules, institutional engagements and also hold its basic expectation that the future of the complexities can be pacified with mutual negotiation, diplomacy, mediation and ensurance of absolute peace unlike the 'relative peace'/'relative leverage gaining' mechanism of realism.

- The liberal lens explains the uprising of the civil war as a response against long sustained violations of democratic rules by the government or ruling regime in Syria. The root causes and further expansion of the rebel groups thus can be described as advancement towards establishing democratic values, freedom of expression and rule of law which is 'allegedly being severely violated since more than four decades in the region by the ruling Ba'ath party' (Babajanian1-5).

- The involvement of external global and regional actors can be explained by the pioneering initiative adapted by USA proclaiming to be the 'rescuer of democracy' along with its regional and global partners within their mandated umbrella of 'support for democratic reform' and 'rule of law'. Thereby, United States along with regional actors Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Jordan and globally incorporating UK, France or EU constitutes 'partner nation forces' in order to aid the embryonic democratic movement both financially and technically extending sometimes up to military support too.
- The most significant explanation has been generated by the liberals with their exclusive focus on international institutions and their involvement in pacifying the ongoing war. Liberals in general pioneer regarding the roles of institutional regimes and laws in pacifying the extent of violence and war. Similar to the theoretical ideas, multifarious regional and international institutions have intended to get involved into the theatre of the war with their diverse mechanisms, but unfortunately, in spite of their simultaneous engagement initiatives, these institutions are still struggling in bringing any plausible solution for conflict pacification. For Example: UNSC being the most prudent and most capable organ of UN has initiated multiple mechanisms since the inception of the conflict but even in the seventh year of the civil war, it could not provoke the mandate of 'humanitarian intervention' or 'responsibility to protect' in cases of the gross violation of human rights of the unarmed civilians perpetrated by their own state leader. Rather since 2011, UNSC has embraced almost a paralyzed status through failed initiatives of passing resolution or even through the dramatic failures of Syrian peace talks or the dramatic wrapping up of United Nations Support Mission in Syria (UNSMIS). Regarding, each of the cases UNSC had to almost retreat with immediate stagnancy producing substantial threat for global and regional security (Frumin).
- Although, the viability of the institutional involvement can substantially be criticized regarding the Syrian civil war but it should also be acknowledged that the interference of institutions had been frequently evident here. The incident that unveils the frequent initiatives adopted by regional and international institutions to cope up with the nascent pace of the conflict is when the Arab League, as the most concerned regional institution, established Arab League Monitoring Mission in December 2011 which had to wrap up with immense failure in 2012. Again, Arab League along with Organization for Islamic Cooperation suspended their Syrian membership which could not be reflected in UNSC due to intra-institutional continuation from Russia and China.
- Along with US and western coalition, the UN, EU, GCC, OIC and Arab League dismissed the 2014 presidential election of Syria indicating towards the non-compliance with transparency and accountability of the election thereby, creating moral pressure for the ruling regime. (Larison)

- International Syrian Support Group (ISSG) has been established and UNSC has continuously adopted initiatives to pass resolution either to halt the perpetrator or to minimize the extent of the radical rebel groups. A ceasefire and de-escalation through mediation has been recommended through Syrian peace talks since 2015 but since then the global community is still way behind in producing any plausible mechanisms to practically execute these initiatives (Erdem 5-10).
- Finally, in spite of the evidenced limitations of the institutional involvements, liberal institutionalism meticulously highlights the extend and pace of institutional initiatives as well as rooms and expectations for the pacification of the war through the application of international law and exerting the mechanisms of mediation, diplomacy and negotiation in the long run (Babajanian1-5).

c) Constructivist School of Thoughts:

The theoretical school of constructivism tends to explain state behavior not only based upon material interests rather focuses on 'ideational power' and 'identity creation' where the international system is not 'given' but 'socially constructed'. Thus, constructivism introduces ideational and normative elements into the equation of conflict analysis. The interactions between agents (individuals, non-state actors, states) influence the structure and the structure in turn redefines identities and interests of the agents. As Alexander Wendt advocated- 'anarchy is what stats make of it' indicating that the anarchic nature of the international system does not necessarily lead to conflict unlike realists but when socially inter-acting with them ,each actor constructs a 'self' and an 'other', that can be perceived as a friend, a rival, or an enemy. That means, realist and liberal school advocate the significance of relative or absolute gains respectively in international co-operation where anarchy/structure is fixed but in contrast constructivism explains how ideas and idea-based identities shape the system .Now, depending on these social identities, the agents will project their behavior in testing the nature of the war.

- The initial ideas of democracy, freedom, and political participation among Syrian people as a result of the social interaction (largely favored by the media) contributed to shaping a new 'identity' of being marginalized and subordinated citizens vis-à-vis ruling regime being 'perceived as authoritarian and oppressive'. Thus, 'collective identities' of 'self' and 'other' brought about a substantial change inaction. So, initially the governance system of the ruling regime constructed the identity of being 'authoritarian and oppressive' in mutual interaction with the citizens' which has gradually intensified in the past decades and as a result the grievances consolidated into the embryonic ideas of revolt and protest against the ruling regime.
- Now, the idea of identity creation of 'self' and 'other' has similarly influenced the policy behavior of the ruling regime. Thus, in accordance with a

hierarchical legacy of governing a particular geographic area and being confronted with a changing structure moved by new ideas, Assad regime in return responded with a new 'self-identity'. He perceived himself as a legitimate ruler determined to stay in power against the threat posed by the 'other' terrorists and state enemies. Again, the involvement of external actors like USA and Saudi Arabia had also been perceived as an 'external intrusion against the 'legitimate ruling regime of a sovereign state'. This new identity inevitably drove Assad's behavior towards reactionary strategies and further response of immense violence and brutality.

- These new identities and ideas induced multiple 'sub national identities 'increasing the fragmentation of the Syrian opposition. The anti-Assad faction was no longer constituted by an uniform and united group of people, rather created a growing number of diverse rival factions perceiving themselves as either 'Sunni', 'Islamists', or 'Kurds', and regarded the 'others' respectively as 'Alawiite', 'Kafir' or 'Arab' enemy to overthrow the political regime resulting into new inter-subjective relationships that contributed to the collapse of the structure into a civil war ever more sectarian, based on the Sunni-Shia, secular-Islamist, and Arab-Kurd cleavages (An analysis of the Syrian Conflict). Thus, on the basis of the subjective issue areas of gradual grievances, multiple factions and sub-factions of rivals had emerged who are not being mutually inclusive to each other except one singular objective of toppling down the 'authoritarian' government.
- This new structure, on its side, reinforced Assad's construction and promotion of a self-identity and self-image of legitimately elected President, regional champion of the Arab and Shia identity resisting the fight taken up against him by 'terrorists', 'extremist Islamists' and 'Sunni radical groups' with the support of Western and Gulf enemies.
- The contraposition between Saudi Arabia and Turkey on one side and Iran, Hezbollah and Assad on the other can be perceived as a Sunni-Shia confrontation induced from the historical drifts of Islam's religious sub-identities. Thus, the ideas of historical dichotomy of religious and ethnic sub-factions has reinvigorated with their concerned ideologies in designing a complex situation of civil conflict. Again, The Washington and Moscow contraposition can be examined by the US perceived 'defender of democracy and liberalism' vis-à-vis the 'illiberal' status embodied by Assad and its allies'. That means, to uphold the notion of 'savior of democracy and freedom of speech', external actors have justified their intrusion into a sovereign 'illiberal and non-democratic governing regime' perpetrated by the ruling regime and pampered by its allies.
- Russian self-constructed identity of 'emerging world power' that has been evident by its bare foot prints on Syrian ground as well frequent veto power projection in United Nations Security Council can be perceived as strategic

moves towards its continuous bargaining for the status of a 'rising power' identity creation. In continuation with its moves in Crimea and Ukraine, bargaining with Washington and straight involvement with Damascus and allies has consolidated the arguments for its 'emerging power temptation' since the end of the cold war.

So, social constructivism is basically weighing the foreign policy behavior of the multi-dimensional actors in a way where rather than concrete realities and interests, subjective identity based strategic and tactical moves are more rationally designing the nature of the Syrian civil war.

9. Comparative Analysis of the Theoretical Insights

The multifaceted nature of Syrian Civil War has emerged as a 'critical tool' in the contemporary political security equation because multiple state as well as non-state actors are invading the zone converging around individual bargaining levers. The behavior of the government regime and its allies vis-a vis internal-external oppositions can be explained with the theoretical tool of realism justifying power hunt and balancing. Whereas, ethnic ties and religious identity based group behavior cannot be explained bluntly through this school. Then again, these issues of ethnic and cultural drifts have been explained by realists as expression of domination of powerful factions or groups in the system. In contrast, liberal institutionalism tries to portray the significance of institutions, norms, laws and regimes in defining the diverse roles of stakeholders here. But liberals are being potentially attacked these days in regards to the substantial non-compliance of the key institutions and their instigated norms-resolution relating to Syrian crisis and global security. Interestingly, the constructivist school can well explain the linkage between ancient ties, identity creation, changing of identity through social interaction, grievances and sub-national identity creation etc. Thereby, the internal essence of the war can be defined by the theory but still power politics among sub-national groups can no way be avoidable or negligible.

Again, 'global emerging power' or 'supremacy' may remain as one of the core considerations to the external actors but these can be just one single dimension of their 'power and interest' based foreign policy projection. Moreover, many of the regional and external powers from EU do not have any identity based or ideational linkage with the war but urea still being allied in order to prioritize their self-interests indeed. Finally, this paper would conclude with its final contemplation that the insights of realist theoretical school of International Relations prioritizing 'national interest' and 'balance of power' are more rational and better plausible instruments in explaining the diverse behaviors of the multiple key actors involved in into the contested Syrian Civil War.

10. Conclusion

In weighing the tripartite insights of the mainstream theoretical schools of International Relations regarding the plausibility of explaining the nature of Syrian civil war, this paper denominates the realist theoretical essence prioritizing 'national interest' and

'balance of power' to be a more rational instrument in explaining the divergent behaviors of the multiple key stakeholders involved in the theatre of war. This paper unveils the limitation of liberal institutionalism in explaining the efficacy of international norm and rule of law instigated by several regional and international institutions in the concerned civil war, Similarly, constructivist 'shared identity' and 'ideational power' may induce incentives from national-level but the involvement of diverse external actors and their fragmented as well as fluctuated behaviors in the contested area cannot be explained viably by this theory. However, this paper has unraveled that the debated behavior of the existing regime and its concerned allies, the involvement of multiple states and non-state opponents and significantly, their fluctuation of roles can be logically explained with the predominant issues of either national interest or power craving temptations among the stakeholders. Then again, the issues of ethnic and cultural clashes and religious drifts within the theatre of war have been explained by realists as expression of domination of powerful factions over the less powerful groups in the system. Overall, in order to sketch a plausible explanation in analyzing the present context of the Syrian civil war, realism holds its exclusive tenure which can be insightful in predicting the future political behavior of the concerned stakeholders. Thereby, this paper endeavors to conclude highlighting the insights of realist theoretical school to be more rational and better plausible in explaining the nature of the complicated war.

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