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**BOMBING SYRIA: LEGALITY AND COSTS OF MILITARY  
INTERVENTION**

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**ABSTRACT**

*The Syrian conflict which erupted following a government crackdown against peaceful protest escalated into a full-fledged civil war taking the shape of sectarian division in 2012. The involvement of regional and international actors in the conflict with irreconcilable interests has radicalized and latter transformed it into armed resistance. Above all, the use of deadly chemical weapons by the Assad's regime on 21<sup>st</sup> of August 2013 compelled the USA and its Western allies to consider a Kosovo style of military intervention. This paper, therefore, attempts to reveal the legality and costs of military intervention in Syria. Moreover, it argues that military intervention of any kind, whether legal or illegal, will not address the Syrian crisis, rather it destroys the peace and security networks of the entire Middle East.*

*Key words: Kosovo, Syria, civil war, international law, chemical weapons, military intervention.*

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**THE GENESIS OF THE SYRIAN CIVIL WAR**

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The Arab uprising which first erupted in Tunisia reached into the territory of Syria on 15 March 2011 following a government crackdown against peaceful protest (International Crisis Group, 2012). Since President Bashar Al-Assad took political power from his father, this regime has been criticized for discriminating the majority of the population from socio-economic opportunities favoring the minority Alawite Islamic sect (Frederic, 2013). Consequently, the people of Syria expressed their dissatisfaction about the weak performance and incompetence of Assad's authoritarian regime and thus demanded its immediate downfall. Yet, the regime reacted brutally to the demands of peaceful demonstrators which lead to the unprecedented vertical (the destruction level of the conflict) and horizontal (the number of actors involved in and its geographical scope) escalation of the conflict. In fact, the regime initially tried to take a few popular measures in order to meet the legitimate demands of the people.

However, as the conflict escalated across the country, the Assad government failed to introduce satisfactory democratic reforms which would address the demands of the public. Instead the Syrian security forces responded by murdering unarmed civilians and protestors with military-grade weapons (Human Rights Watch, 2013). Unlike Tunisia and Egypt, the Syrian military has not stood on the sidelines. Almost without exception, the security forces have remained obedient to the regime though some top military generals have defected opposing the brutal responses of the government. The peaceful demonstrators, thus, choose to take up arms in order to fight the Assad brutal regime. Indeed, the spread of violence has accelerated radicalization among the rebels and the proportion of fighters with Salafi-jihadists has increased significantly (Muriel and Heiko, 2012). As a result, the peaceful protest shifted towards armed resistance and entirely militarized on the later days. The conflict also absorbed both regional and international actors and turned into a full-fledged civil war taking the shape of sectarian division (Fehmi, 2013: 95-117).

There was a wide range of expectation among the Syrian population when Bashar Al-Assad came to the presidency in 2000 that he would take the country into a new era of economic prosperity and political freedom. Yet, he failed to democratize the state and promote economic development; instead his reforms resulted in the escalation of violence. As far as the policy of

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the Assad regime was concerned, there were three interconnected economic and political factors that could explain why his reforms breed cycle of conflict and intensification of the civil war.

First, although the regime prevented sectarianism, in reality it followed *Machiavellian* policy of ‘Divide and Rule’. This latter resulted in the development of mistrust and fear among the society which eroded social cohesion and national unity. Second, Al-Assad’s reform to promote economic growth and strengthen the capacity of the private sectors produced unprecedented number of unemployment and income concentration. In 2010 alone, the number of unemployment was estimated around 24.4 per cent (Berzins, 2013). Although the investment sector increased from 17 per cent of the GDP in 2000 to 23 per cent in 2007, private investment was concentrated in short term, real estate and trade (Ibid, 2013). Therefore, the economy was not able to shoulder the demand of the young Syrian population. This economic downturn finally translated in to political crisis. The last factor was grave violation of human rights and political atrocities committed by the regime. Syria was under emergency rule from 1963 to 2011, effectively granting the military and security forces sweeping power of arrest and detention (Amnesty International, 2013). The young generation who were seeking political and economic opportunities were harshly arrested, tortured and killed. As a result of the regime’s brutality and increasing suppression of waves of unrest, majority of the people joined the conflict seeking to take personal revenge for the losing family members or damaged property.

Bashar Al-Assad inherited from his father a ‘stable’ suppressive political system connected in a largely Alawite security establishment featuring elite, regime-military units, a multifaceted intelligence apparatus (Frederic, 2013). The Alawite is a minority sect of Islam whose member includes President Bashar Al-Assad and represents only 12 percent of the Syrian population (Ibid, 2013). It is the most politically powerful segment of the Syria’s minority. One of the factors that could explain their supremacy in the political scene of Syria is French colonialism (Robinson, 2012, 331-336). The Syrian national army was created by the French. This provided the poor Alawite minorities with the opportunity to join the military and to share the benefits of socio-economic development. When Syria got its independence from the French; the Alawites joined the army in droves and continued dominating the inner circle of military apparatus of the state. Above all, their prevalence in the office of corps explains why they were in a decisive position to dominate the Syrian politics since 1960s (Ibid, 2012: 336).

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The majority Alawite narrative today is ‘kill or to be killed’. Memories of discrimination in the recent past history by the Sunnis are still fresh in their mind. Most Alawites appear to believe that, in a situation where the regime is to be vanished and the opposition and the jihadist<sup>1</sup> come to power, some version of ethnic cleansing would be undertaken against the Alawite community as a whole. Therefore, the Alawites community remained loyal to the Assad’s regime fearing that they will be slaughtered in Sunni revenge killings if the regime totally loses control of political power. As a result, Assad able to maintain his political power by means of repressive system built by his predecessor.

Since the outbreak of the civil war, it is estimated that more than 100,000 people have been killed and a total of 6.5 million of others were displaced, according to the UNHCR Report in 2014. The civil war also created a great humanitarian tragedy in the Middle East (Tim and Johan Eldebo, 2013:8) and nearly 2.8 million refugees fled to the neighboring countries such as Turkey, Iraq, Lebanon, Jordan and Egypt seeking shelter and humanitarian assistance.

The Syrian tragedy has been calling unilateral or multilateral intervention of the international community. This study, therefore, explains the legality and costs of military intervention in Syria by comparing with the NATO’s intervention in Kosovo in 1999 which had a common characteristics and dimensions with the Syrian situation. It concludes by arguing that any kind of military intervention, instead of addressing the roots causes of the civil war, it will destabilize the peace and security of the entire Middle East.

### **KOSOVO: A MODEL FOR MILITARY INTERVENTION IN SYRIA**

The humanitarian tragedy which took place in Kosovo in the late 1990s was a culmination of a long history of Serbian oppression on the one hand and Albanian resistance on the other. For Serbs, Kosovo was viewed as the holy place of the Serb nation, the place where the Serbian Army was defeated by the Turks in the famous battle of Fushe Kosovo in 1389 and the site of many of Serbian’s historical churches (Independent International Commission on Kosovo, 2006).

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<sup>1</sup> Over the past years Salafi jihadist groups have gained recognition from some observers as the most combat of anti-Assad forces. They have been reportedly obtained significant private funding from the Gulf and many of their members have accrued battlefield experience abroad, unlike the large inexperience ranks of the Free Syrian Army. They also controlled very strategically important places which enable to train their fighters and presented themselves as less corrupt and more selfless than other opposition factions. It is also arguable that Western nations have, by declining to arm and finance Syria’s more moderate opposition groups, inadvertently empowered the jihadists to accrue relative advantages over the mainstream armed movements.

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Under Tito's rule, Kosovo had substantial autonomy, but Serbian president Milosevic exercised extreme control in the province and experienced harsh marginalization and persecution.

In the mid-1990s, the situation began to deteriorate and transformed into a full-fledged humanitarian disaster which led to the death of dozens of civilians. Among other things, the crisis escalated dramatically on 24 March 1999 with the launch by NATO of a campaign of intensive air strikes against the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (ICG, 1999). NATO's intervention was triggered by Serbian rejection to accept the terms of the internationally brokered Rambouillet Peace Agreement<sup>2</sup> and an ominous build-up of Serbian forces in and along the borders of Kosovo (Ibid, 1999).

Following the explosion of humanitarian crisis, mass killings and grave human rights violation by Milosevic regime, the 'international community' decided to respond militarily to the government's brutality under the doctrine of 'humanitarian intervention' (Joyner, 2002: 597-619). In fact, international law has a clear stance on the issue of humanitarian intervention. States shall not interfere in the domestic matters of a state or in affairs that are mainly fall within the domestic jurisdiction of a state. In this regard, Article 2 of the UN Charter vividly states that "All members shall refrain in their international relations from the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any state, or in any other manner inconsistent with the Purpose of the United Nations."

Nonetheless, there are certain exceptions where the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) is mandated to intervene in the domestic affairs of a state. The Security Council may intervene when it determine that there is a threat to international peace and security which authorizes it to take coercive measures under Chapter VII of the Charter.<sup>3</sup> Besides, UNSC has been employing

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<sup>2</sup> The Rambouillet Agreement is the name of a proposed peace agreement between then-Yugoslavia and a delegation representing the ethnic-Albanian majority population of Kosovo. It was drafted by the Northern Treaty Organization (NATO) and name Chateau Rambouillet, where it was initially proposed. The significance of the agreement lies in the fact that Yugoslavia refused to accept it, which NATO used as justification to start the Kosovo War. Belgrade's rejection was based on the argument that the agreement contained provisions for Kosovo's autonomy that went further than the Serbian/Yugoslav government saw as reasonable. The most controversial provision was the status envisioned for Kosovo, by which Kosovo would remain a *de jure* province of Serbia, but would become a *de facto* third republic. This provision spelled out a greater degree of autonomy vis-à-vis the federal government for Kosovo than Serbia or Montenegro. Serbia viewed this as a secession of Kosovo from Serbia. Even more controversial was that while Serbia would retain no influence over its then-southern province of Kosovo, Kosovo would have been granted substantial influence over Serbia. For example, Kosovars would take part in Serbian elections by electing representatives (MPs) to the Serbian parliament, which would have no jurisdiction over Kosovo. Kosovars would have guaranteed seats in the Serbian Government and the Serbian Supreme Court, which would deal exclusively with the territory of Serbia without Kosovo. Kosovo would also have an independent judicial system including its own autonomous Constitutional Court, but it would also have guaranteed representatives in the Yugoslavian judiciary, which would have no jurisdiction over Kosovo. Furthermore, NATO would have free and unrestricted military access to the country.

<sup>3</sup> UN Charter Chapter VII, Article 41 states that 'In order to prevent an aggravation of the situation, the Security Council may, before making the recommendations or deciding upon the measures provided for in Article 39, call upon the parties concerned to comply with such provisional measures as it deems necessary or desirable. Such provisional measures shall be without prejudice to the rights, claims, or positions of the parties concerned. The Security Council shall duly take account of failure to comply with such provisional measures.'

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three international customary practices and moral judgments of intervention: the right to intervene in humanitarian disaster; international criminal courts; and supervision of free elections or intervention designed to promote social, economic and political reconstruction (Legult, 2000). Humanitarian intervention takes place when there is serious human rights abuses on deemed a threat to international peace and security; in particular when there is a risk of conflict spreading to the surrounding areas or an exodus of refugees that threaten political and economic stability in the region (Khalid, 2001: 73-79). However, the legality of intervention on these circumstances has remained contentious leaving the venue for debate and discussion.

The so-called “international community” led by USA and its NATO allies had been a major political player in the political panorama in Kosovo-Yugoslavia following the crisis. Indeed, at the beginning of the conflict, the “international community” viewed the Kosovo crisis as an essentially domestic matter for Serbia to settle it through a negotiated political and diplomatic means. Likewise, many of the international political players considered the Syrian conflict as an internal matter at the beginning and part of the spreading of Arab awakening. In Kosovo, the US was more effective in leading the effort to stop the increasing humanitarian disaster and bringing the conflicting parties into the negotiation table so as to achieve durable peace. But in Syria, the US has been advancing a policy of double standard and playing a passive role in ending the civil war.

Armend R.Bekaji in his article *“The KLA and the Kosovo War: From Intra-State to Independent Country”* mentioned that the then USA President George Bush had written to Milosevic in the early 1992 drawing a red line on Kosovo: “In the event of conflict in Kosovo caused by Serbian action, the United States would be prepared to employ military force against the Serbs in Kosovo and Serbian proper” (Armend, 2010). Similarly, the Obama administration had set a red line for Damascus where the USA would be forced to engage military into the conflict. This red line was the “use of deadly chemical weapons by the Assad’s regime against civilian population.”

The UN General Assembly issued a number of resolutions from 1992 to 1999 in order to galvanize the efforts of the international community to stop grave violation of human freedoms and mass killings in Kosovo (Christopher, 2002). During 1998 and 1999 the UNSC also passed numerous resolutions referring to Chapter VII of the UN Charter, where by “impending humanitarian catastrophe” in Kosovo was viewed as a threat to international peace and security.

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However, none of these resolutions stopped the slaughter of millions of people and the brutality of the government (Ibid, 2002).

The breakdown of the UNSC to achieve a consensus among its five permanent members and to develop a comprehensive working framework for military intervention in Kosovo created a fertile ground for NATO to intervene in the situation militarily. The US intervention with its NATO allies in Kosovo was without the backing of the UNSC resolution. It was on 24 March 1999 that the NATO Alliance launched military airstrikes over Serbian-Yugoslavia military and other installations (Kishan, 2000: 342-361). NATO's bombing campaign over rump Yugoslavia went on for 78 days, until Milosevic's regime surrendered (Daniel, 2002: 597-619). NATO believed that a relatively short bombing campaign would persuade Milosevic to sign the Rambouillet agreement. On the contrary, the Milosevic's regime intensified its persecution of the Albanian civilian population. The project of ethnic cleansing was unraveling with terrifying pace. By the time the war was over, around 12,000 Albanians had been killed, most of them were civilians; more than 3,500 were unaccounted for; 120,000 homes had been pillaged and destroyed (Joyner, 2002).

The legality of NATO's intervention in Kosovo had been the subject of debate among international lawyers and intellectuals. On the one hand, the Operation of Allied Forces in Kosovo was controversial because of the fact that NATO was intervening in the internal affairs of Kosovo without the authorization of the UNSC. On the other hand, NATO leaders argued that their military intervention was legal and as per to the norms and customary practices of international law which allowed intervention in cases of humanitarian catastrophe.

Some international law commentators argued that NATO's intervention was illegal and against the principles of international law because of the fact that NATO did not have the full approval of the UNSC and its military action was rejected by the permanent members of the Security Council, particularly Russia and China. In this respect, the International Independent Commission for Kosovo emphasized in its report that "the NATO military intervention was illegal but legitimate humanitarian intervention" (International Crisis Group, 1999). The Commission considered that the intervention was justified on the ground that all diplomatic avenues had been exhausted and the intervention had the effect of liberating the majority of population of Kosovo from a long period of oppression under Serbian rule (Independent

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International Commission on Kosovo, 2006). Nevertheless, there was a strong criticism of NATO military campaign and bombing of the civilian population.

In Syria, according to US intelligence information, deadly chemical attacks in and around Damascus killed more than 1,400 people, including more than 400 children. The anticipated US military operation in Syria would have been unique as compared to Kosovo in that the intervention had not fully backed by global coalition, NATO's members and EU allies like Britain and Germany. For instance, last September 2013, the House of Commons of the British Parliament voted against any military involvement in Syria. They argued that the evidences were not scientific and substantive. Needless to say, Labor Party opposition leader, Ed Miliband, rejected the motion presented by David Cameron arguing that the "Evidence should precede decisions, not decisions precede evidence." It was highly probable that US would go alone to take surgical airstrikes on Syria because of the UNSC incapacity to convince Russia and China. In fact, France, Turkey, Israel, Saudi Arabia and UAE expressed their willingness to assist the US led surgical operation in Syria.

The Prime Minister of Turkish, Recep Tyyip Edrojan, has been insisting a Kosovo style of military operation in Syria to change the regime in order to restore peace and stability in the region (Dogan, 2012). He has been openly calling for the change of regime in Syria since the eruption of the violent conflict in the country. Turkey's policy towards Damascus is clear. It needs the immediate downfall of the Assad regime. To this end, it has been supporting and arming the rebels fighting the regime operating in the neighboring countries.

### **HOW MILITARY INTERVENTION BE LEGALLY JUSTIFIED?**

The nature and applicability of international law is always a subject of debate among international lawyers and politicians. This debate largely stems from the nature of international law. Its applicability has been contested given the fact that there is no world government in the international system which regulates the behavior of states. However, international law strictly prohibits intervention and use of force of in the domestic affairs of other states.

On the other hand, Article 2 (4) of the United Nations Charter takes the legal right to use force away from the state and gives it to the Security Council. According to Article 24 of the UN Charter, the Council has the "prime responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security" and it can take all necessary measures, including military action against states or other

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threats. In other words, the UNSC has the right to intervene in the domestic affairs of states as it sees that there is a threat to international peace and security. Therefore, intervention authorized by the Security Council is unambiguously legal, as far as it approves the Council's authority over threat to international peace and security. This has been used as a legal justification for intervention and use of force in cases of humanitarian atrocities and war crimes against humanity (Ian, 2011).

The use of Mass Destructive Weapons (MDCs) or Atomic, Biological and Chemical (ABCs) weapons is strongly prohibited under customary international practices and moral judgments. Violation of high standard of international norms such as the use of chemical weapons against civilian population has immediate consequences. Some states were the victims of chemical weapons during WWI and WWII. To mention, Ethiopian was the target of chemical weapons when the Fascist led Italian government invaded the country in 1935. Yet, the international community failed to respond immediately and to punish Italy knowing that it was a serious violation of international law and customary practices; other than condemning and releasing strong statement against its use. In September 2013 British parliamentary debate, one of the members of the House of Common mentioned the devastating consequences of the use of chemical weapons against Ethiopian people in 1935 to convince the parliamentarians to support a legislation that allow British military to intervene into the Syrian situation for humanitarian assistance.

The Geneva Protocol of 1925 also prohibits the use of chemical and biological weapons in war times. The Protocol was signed at a conference which was convened in Geneva under the framework of the League of Nations in 1925 and entered into force in 1928. Later, the international community agreed to set up a mechanism to deter the use of MDWs and signed the Biological Weapons Convention (BWC) and Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) in 1972 and 1993 respectively. More importantly, the CWC, in which Syria is one of the signatory states, has banned the development, production, stockpiling and use of chemical weapons and on their destruction. For example, Article 1(1) of the CWC states that "Each State Party to this Convention undertakes never under any circumstances: (a) To develop, produce, otherwise acquire, stockpile or retain chemical weapons, or transfer, directly or indirectly, chemical weapons to anyone; (b) To use chemical weapons; (c) To engage in any military preparations to use chemical weapons; (d) To assist, encourage or induce, in any way, anyone to engage in any

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activity prohibited to a State Party under this Convention.” The CWC is unique among multilateral arms control agreement in the complexity and scope of its implementation provisions. It contains a large number of affirmative obligations that are keys to its effective implementation where as some arms control treaties simply prohibit the possession or use of certain weapons (B. Tucker, 2011). Furthermore, parallel sets of obligations must be implemented at the international and national level.

At the international level, the CWC is the only treaty that mandates the creation of its own implementing independent body, the OPCW, which is responsible for monitoring the implementation of every article. In contrast, the Biological Weapons Convention lacks an implementing body, whereas the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty adopted an existing organization, the International Atomic Energy, (IAEA), whose authority covers only some obligations of NPT States Parties. At the national level, states parties to the CWC must engage in multipurpose activities such as setting up a national authority to communicate with the OPCW, enacting implementing legislation and chemical export controls, preparing and submitting declarations and national reports.

According to the US government, the legality of their military intervention in Syria relied on the Geneva Protocol of 1925 and Chemical Weapons Convention of 1993 in which Damascus was accused of violating the terms of the agreement. Its usage of chemical weapons on the civilian population was a crime against humanity. The Assad regime has frequently breached its promises to stop the killing of civilians and abide by a peace agreement mediated by the United Nations and the Arab League. Although the international community has taken several measures, including Syria’s suspension from the Arab League, extensive economic sanctions, and the threats of more drastic action, have failed to stop the Assad regime from using mass killing chemical weapons against civilians and opposition political movements (Public International Law and Policy Group, 2012; Benjamin, 2011). Under international law, atrocity crimes, such as crimes against humanity, genocide, and war crimes are considered as crimes against international peace and order.

On the basis of intelligence information that the US government presented to the international community, President Assad developed, produced and made all the necessary military preparation to use chemical weapons against his own people by violating long standing international norms. As a result, the legal justification of US intended unilateral military action

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on Syria's regime was enforcing the terms of the Geneva Convention and other international legal instruments related to the use of Mass Destructive Weapons. In addition, it was also aimed at minimizing the proliferation of Atomic, Biological and Chemical/Mass Destructive Weapons and to deter its future use by punishing the Assad regime. The argument of the Obama administration was, if we failed to punish the Assad regime, it would encourage other rogue states such as North Korea and Iran; and terrorist organizations to use it in any circumstances. Thus, military strike would discourage these actors from using it in the future.

The US and its allies were trying to make their intended military strikes legal and legitimate under the banner of "humanitarian intervention". As Washington clearly stated, the objective of its intervention was not to topple the Bashar Al-Assad's regime or to support the coalition of opposition political movements by directly involving into the civil war; rather it was focused on destroying a number of command posts and regimes' chemical weapons delivery facilities. It is apparent that the legality of US military intervention in Kosovo (1999), Afghanistan (2001)<sup>4</sup>, Iraq (2003)<sup>5</sup> and Libya (2011) was without the backing UN Security Council and was always controversial. Yet, the US governments had attempted to justify the legality of its intervention by citing international protocols.

According to Daniel H. Joyner, in his article "*The Kosovo Intervention: Legal Analysis and a More Persuasive Paradigm*", the legal justifications officially employed to legitimize the Kosovo intervention centered on two main arguments (Daniel, 2002: 597-619). First, previous UN Security Council resolutions could be constructed to lend some authority to NATO's military operation. Secondly, the principles of general and customary international law provided for a right of intervention on the ground of overwhelming humanitarian necessity. Likewise, the US government was building the same reason to convince the international community to its intended intervention in the Syrian situation. Some commentators in the region argued that the

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<sup>4</sup> According to Iram Khalid after September 9/11, the global politics has been changed dramatically and the worlds become more insecure than ever before. On this date there were terrorist attacks on United States of America after that United States adopted the policy of pre-emption. They start invasion into the parts f the globe particularly the Muslim area like Afghanistan were the target. The US and its NATO coalition's forces intervened in Afghanistan under the assumption that the terrorist organization, al-Qaeda, based in Afghanistan is the threat of international peace and security. They legality of their intervention has never achieved consensus among international law commentators.

<sup>5</sup> The US invaded Iraq in March 2003 among the allied states were British, Australia, Denmark, Poland and Spain. The invasion led by US under the United Nations Security Council resolution 1441 which recalled all the previous resolutions against Iraq. The United States supplied the vast majority of the invading forces, but also received support from Kurdish troops in Iraqi Kurdish. The basic purpose of this action was to secure the international peace and security, to disarm Iraq of weapons of mass destruction and to overthrow the Saddam government. President Bush had introduced a new category of self-defense- pre-emptive self-defense- which he claimed was legally justifiable in the new post-Sep.11 world.

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US unilateral intended intervention and military strike on Syria could not be legal and justifiable unless it got an approval from the UNSC.

In 2011, for instance, USA went to attack Afghanistan referring Article 51 of the UN Charter to use its inherent right of “pre-emptive self-defense” against terrorist training camps in Afghanistan. It also invaded Iraq in 2003 under the pretext that Iraq had the possession of MDWs which could threaten international peace and security. Most people believed that the legitimacy of NATO’s intervention in Libya which led to the downfall Qaddafi’s four decades of dictatorship and his eventual death was not controversial. This was because of the fact that its intervention had received the blessing of the Arab League though the Security Council was blocked and paralyzed by Qadhafi’s long standing allies, China and Russia. Generally, intervention of any kind under the umbrella of UN Resolution and international laws is becoming a political business than a legal issue. Thus, the nature and applicability of international law in cases of humanitarian catastrophe and crimes against humanity is inevitably problematic.

### **COSTS OF U.S. UNILATERAL MILITARY INTERVENTION IN SYRIA**

It seemed that the White House was committed to take a unilateral “limited” and “proportional” military action against the Assad regime. In 2011 President Barak Obama drew a red line to the Syrian regime saying “the use of a bunch of chemical weapons would change my calculus.” In other words, the use of mass killing weapons was the only reason that the US would be obliged to intervene in Syrian for humanitarian assistance. It is widely believed that the Assad regime used chemical weapons on civilian population crossing the red line and murdered thousands of unarmed civilians.

Following Assad’s use of chemical weapons, the Obama administration decided to take ‘limited’ military action on Syria not only to degrade Assad’s regime capability to use chemical weapons but also to deter those states such as Iran, North Korea who are interested to test well established international norms. Most certainly, he made clear that the mission of the military action was also to protect friends in the region like Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Turkey and Iraq. But his decision was not yet authorized by the Congress although a Senate Panel voted in favor of giving him the authority to use force against Syria. Likewise, the international community was also remained deeply divided on the kind of action that should be taken on the Syria.

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Iran, Russian and China were reluctant to any US military intervention in Syria particularly and in the Middle East generally in order to preserve the oil rich region under their sphere of influence. Accordingly, Russian and China voted three UN Security Council resolutions against military intervention that could significantly paralyzed the international community from ending Syrian civil war. It is apparent that Russia and China are the main supplier of weapons to Syria's military apparatus to pursue their national interests (Radha, etal, 2013).

The primary interest of Russia in maintaining the Assad regime is geo-political and strategic (Ekaterina, 2012: 1-6). It wanted to protect the oil rich region part of the world from becoming under the US sphere of influence. Secondly, it wanted to protect its economic interests. Currently, there are a large number of companies investing in and working on oil and natural gas exploitation in Syria (Center for Security Studies, 2012; Dogan, 2012). The Syrian civil war has presented Moscow with immense opportunity with a late honeymoon with the government in Syria, one of its most important allies during the Cold War years. Moscow rejected military intervention in Syria saying that there were no crystal clear and scientific evidences which would compelled the international community to use force against Assad regime.

Another strong regional ally to the Assad regime is Iran. According to Radha Iyengar and Brian Fishman, Iran has three distinct strategic interests for supporting the Assad's regime financially and diplomatically (Radha, etal., 2013). The first reason is that Iran views as a bulwark against the United States and Israel. To this end, it has been supporting various anti-US and Israeli terrorist groups operating in Syria such as Hezbollah. US estimated that Hezbollah receives \$100m in supplies and weapons per year from Tehran transported through Syria (Rabinovich, 2012; M. Sharp, 2013). Undeniably, the civil war in Syria has benefited Tehran in the sense that it diverted the attention of the international community from its controversial nuclear program.

Secondly, the regime in Tehran opposes setting a precedent for the right to protect; which argues that international community should intervene when a government deliberately attacks its own people. For Tehran, the alleged use of chemical weapons by Assad against civilians was not convincing to call the intervention of the international community although it blamed the regime for using these weapons. And finally, sympathetic Alawite control over a majority Sunni population constrained the influence of rival Saudi Arabia and borders Sunni-Arab parties in the Middle East (Fehmi, 2013). Therefore, Iran has a clear strategic interest, both for domestic stability and regional influence, to maintain the Alawite leadership in Syria. Above all, the

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leadership in Iran wanted the continuation of the civil war in order to redirect the attention of the international community for its contentious unclear enrichment program.

Political analysts suggested that US unilateral “surgical/ targeted”, “limited” and “proportional” strikes could produce an explosive chain of reactions from Syria, Iran and Hezbollah. In this regard, Syria might retaliate by launching long range missiles against Israel, long time US ally in the Middle East. Damascus was repeatedly criticizing Tel Aviv for its invisible involvement in the civil war. According to the White House, Israel supplied “reliable” intelligence information to Western powers especially to US that justify when and how the Assad’s regime used the chemical weapons and thus could be the target of Syria’s military attack. However, it was unlikely for Damascus to launch a large-scale military operation and use chemical weapons against Israel, given the fragility of the Assad’s military capability, unless he was determined to commit a suicide and surrender to Western powers.

There was also an anticipation that Hezbollah might respond to the intended US military operation by launching missiles from Lebanon to Israel. US military action on Syria might also increase humanitarian crisis; create opportunities for the expansion of Islamic extremist inside Syrian. It was beyond reasonable doubt that any kind of military intervention in Syria would drastically change the conflict map in Syria and the region at large. In general, it would destroy the security network of the entire Middle East.

## CONCLUSION

The Syrian conflict which erupted following a government crackdown against peaceful protest has escalated into a full-fledged civil war taking the shape of sectarian division in 2012. The involvement of regional and international actors in the conflict with irreconcilable national interests has radicalized and latter transformed it into armed resistance. Above all, the use of deadly chemical weapons by the Assad’s regime on 21<sup>st</sup> of August 2013 compelled the USA in particular and its Western allies in general to consider a Kosovo style of military intervention in Syria to destroy the regime’s military capability and to deter the future use of chemical weapons. However, the legality of the intended military intervention in the domestic affairs of sovereign state under the banner of humanitarian assistance never received a universal consensus, thus remained to be a controversial issue; and in most cases, military intervention worsen human sufferings than resolving the root causes of the conflict.

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At this particular juncture, it is hardly possible to predict the kind of political scenarios that would prevail in Syria given the complexity of the civil war and the number of regional and international actors operating in the region. If Bashar Al-Assad had continued his fighting with those actors and took a devastating retaliatory strike against US allies in the region particularly Israel, with the diplomatic support of Iran, Russia and Hezbollah, the entire security networks of the region and the world at large would have been deteriorated. However, it was unlikely for Assad to strike back against the intended US military action and to attack its allies unless he was determined to make a political suicide as Saddam Hussein and Qadhafi did. Perhaps, Washington–Paris Coalition Vs Moscow–Tehran–Beijing diplomatic confrontation might contribute for the escalation of sectarian conflict and jihadist violence across the Middle East. Moreover, the security situation of the region would have been worsening if Assad had reacted by intensifying persecution of his own people as Milosevic did in Kosovo.

Generally, military intervention of any kind, whether legal or illegal, in Syria will not address the central issues of the crisis, rather it will destroy the peace and security networks of the entire Middle East. President Bashar Al-Assad in an exclusive interview with the RT said that ‘The price of foreign invasion is going to be too big more than the world can afford. It will have a domino effect from the Atlantic to the Pacific. If the West invades Syria, nobody can tell what is next.’ The only solution to the Syrian crisis is a negotiated political arrangement which would lead to a peaceful political transition. All opposition groups should be constructively involved in any kind of political dialogue to shape the future political road of Syria. In fact, lack of unity among the various opposition political groups, ranging from liberals to extremist, has remained to the biggest challenge to the Geneva II peace talks.

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