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Research Article

Costs and Collateral Damage of a Failure to Protect in Syria

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Abstract

This article reviews humanitarian intervention and Responsibility to Protect (R2P) in Syria arguing that inaction has had greater repercussions than action would have had. It begins by engaging a wide range of policy literature on humanitarian law and broader international relations theory to locate R2P and Syria's case. Using the Kosovo precedent, it shows an intervention was justifiable and then explains why one did not occur. The consequences of failing to act (when it was possible) is said to have undermined respect for human rights and R2P. The article concludes that the failure to protect in Syria has had international reverberations, which are intensified by concurrent global trends. The damage Syria has done to the human rights regime has bearing on the post-WWII (especially post-Cold War) liberal and normative world order because central values were left undefended. Regionally, inaction destabilized the Middle East and created problems in Europe – and beyond. Inside Syria, the costs of the war will last generations. Unintended collateral damage created by the failure to protect in Syria includes less future respect for human rights, R2P, US global leadership and the liberal world order as well as challenges to Middle Eastern stability, European refugee policy and counterterrorism policy.

Keywords: Syria, human rights, humanitarian intervention, R2P, liberalism, realism

1. Introduction

Syria, the 21st century's deadliest conflict, created a complex humanitarian crisis (International Committee of the Red Cross, 2016). The death toll in Syria between March 2011 and April 2016 is in the order of 400,000 people (Al Jazeera, 2016a), plus two million wounded and a further 70,000 indirect fatalities due to a lack of health care, poor sanitation, starvation and malnutrition (McCormack, 2016, 513). Nearly half of Syria's entire population is outside Syria and the ICRC estimates nearly eight million Syrians are internally displaced (McCormack, 2016, 514). The sum effect of the Syrian crisis on regional and international security has not yet been fully reconciled. When the repercussions for inaction (up until late 2013 when it was possible) are scored, the wide-ranging implications for the future of the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) concept will be brought to bear as well as the very position of human rights in state level political discourse. Conclusions will also be drawn about the dilution of the US-led liberal normative global governance in place since the end of World War Two in ideological terms, which has implications for the primacy of respect for human rights, but also US leadership in the Middle East in general. This is on top of the very practical matters of extremism, refugees, massive post-conflict reconstruction projects and a new geopolitical arrangement in the Middle East that almost certainly will perpetuate conflict. Without having calculated the total cost, already it is known the costs of inaction on R2P in Syria are immense.

Indeed, a R2P backed with force between mid-2011 and late 2013 in Syria would have

created less regional and international insecurity than what is visible today. Inaction was a great error. At a minimum, aside from gross human suffering, inaction shifted power toward Iran, which led to a war in Yemen, threatened reconstruction efforts in Iraq and Libya, weakened states with low resilience, like Lebanon and Jordan, created a record number of foreign fighters in the region, spread extremist ideology and breathed life into political Islam, sectarianism and division. This is aside from the political repercussions caused by an influx of refugees for Syria's neighbouring states and those in Europe in particular. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees' reports 4.8 million Syrians refugees are overwhelming Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq (International Committee of the Red Cross, 2016) and Europe receiving a great number. This exacerbates the existing problem of already large numbers of asylum seekers to Europe as a result of regional political and economic crises in the wider MENA region. Syria's economy has collapsed completely ensuring future poverty, deprivation and insecurity. Syria Policy Research (SPR) estimates that 70 percent of the population is dependent upon humanitarian aid just to survive placing a massive economic burden on donor states (McCormack, 2016, 513). Schools are not running leading to a generation of academic disruption and incredible social disturbance. In short, the global community is witness to the comprehensive disintegration of Syria as a nation-state.

This paper will begin by reviewing the concept of humanitarian intervention in international law in general terms and then view Syria in the context of NATO's Kosovo intervention explaining why it was possible to intervene. A critical assessment of the reasons why there was a failure to intervene will be provided, which requires an analytic shift from the liberal institutionalist world view that houses humanitarian intervention (and Responsibility to Protect (R2P) later) to a realist perspective that views humanitarian intervention as a political practice often less than wholly humanitarian in aim. It is affirmed that despite the politicized and securitized aspects of the practice – at times – its inherent value is to uphold respect for human rights. It is argued that the consequences of inaction in Syria are greater than those that would have existed had one occurred by concluding with a levels of analysis approach on the costs of inaction. Ramifications at the international level include damage to the relevance of the post-Cold War liberal world order in particular and the continuation of the US' sphere of influence in the Middle East. At the regional level, refugees, extremism, failed states, sectarianism and state rivalry are highlighted while domestically, the state collapsed creating a complex humanitarian emergency, development gaps, human insecurity, poverty and indignity.

Humanitarian intervention as a practice overlaps liberal and realist worldviews. Liberal values lay at the heart of the US' world order and underscore its global governance framework (Shiraev and Zubokv, 2015, 86). For liberals "world politics [*is not*] a 'jungle,' ... [*but a*] cultivable 'garden,' combining a state of war with the possibility of a state of peace" (Doyle, 1997, 19). Thus, states are viewed as "conglomerate of coalitions and interests" with membership in the international institutions (Doyle, 1997, 19). Realists argue power-seeking, self-interested states compete for limited resources in a 'lawless' world (Morgenthau, 1946, 12-23) that liberalism sits on top of, but never supplanted. Within humanitarian intervention – a liberal idea – the ideological incongruence erupts as contradiction and inconsistency in practice because it embodies the dyadic parallels of liberalism and realism. The inconsistency of humanitarian interventions since 1991 illustrates the ideological polarity at play. Why were there interventions in Somalia, Haiti, Kosovo and Libya and not in Rwanda, Chechnya or Syria?

In 2000, R2P was established as an outgrowth of prior practice. It shifted the paradigm from the 'right' to intervene to a responsibility (Evans and Sahnoun, 2002, 101). The first criteria for a R2P mission is a "just cause" threshold, a large-scale loss of life or ethnic cleansing. Violations to human rights do not meet this criteria. The second is the "precautionary principle" about the right intention, last resort, proportional means and reasonable prospects. As such the primary purpose of the intervention must be to lessen or prevent human suffering and military intervention should only be used when all peaceful means have been exhausted. Proportionate refers to the intervention in ratio to the problem. Lastly, an intervention should have a reasonable prospect of success and doing it causes less harm than not. The UNSC authority for an intervention was unchanged, if require and the above criteria are met, action can occur outside it (Evans and Sahnoun, 2002, 101-107). This is why Kosovo was acceptable. Yet, the two interventions after it – Iraq and Afghanistan – proves what many human rights critics claim to be threat – that human rights can be political

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(Swatek-Evenstein, 2012, 241-244).

Humanitarian intervention without UNSC authorization is formally illegal, but justifiable on purely moral grounds. NATO's campaign in Kosovo is particularly significant because it offers a case of states intervening for humanitarian purposes without the authorization of the UNSC because it was 'blocked,' but acting anyway for moral reasons (O'Connell, 2000, 71). Despite Russia's and China's veto of humanitarian intervention in Syria, the option to act outside the law with a moral justification existed due to a powerful Balkan precedent. Kosovo, despite its unsettling challenge to the supremacy of state sovereignty and the UN system, serves as an example of morality guiding international security decisions. So why did an intervention not occur in Syria when it offered the gold standard for a moral 'just cause' like Kosovo did? To interrogate the non-intervention, the legal basis for Kosovo must be reviewed as Syria's case is quite similar regarding a blocked UNSC.

2. NATO's Kosovo Intervention and the Unauthorized Use of Force

Following NATO's unauthorized humanitarian intervention in Kosovo intervention, many legal scholars challenged its right to do it. Legal scholars maintain that NATO's intervention was formally "illegal" because UNSC authorization was not obtained before or after their campaign. A close assessment suggests that a purely legal analysis is insufficient to assess the legitimacy of the NATO intervention (Guicherd, 1999, 19) because the question of legitimacy is primarily determined based on moral or political grounds (Danish Institute of International Affairs 1999, 24). In an assessment of a humanitarian intervention, the legal analysis is only one part. Thus, regarding NATO's intervention in Kosovo, Richard Falk observes: "The Charter system cannot be legally bypassed in the manner attempted by NATO. Yet it is equally true that to regard textual barriers to humanitarian intervention as decisive in the face of genocidal behavior is politically and morally unacceptable" (Falk, 1999, 853).

The absence of a legal right to intervene forcefully without UNSC authorization may provide a moral right and perhaps even a moral obligation to do so. Similarly, the legality of a humanitarian intervention has to be weighed against a state's compliance with international law in every other aspect during the humanitarian campaign. Bruno Simma states: Humanitarian interventions without UNSC authorization are illegal as a matter of principle, yet the crime of illegality must be weighed against the others occurring – legal judgments cannot be the final word in every case (Simma, 1999, 6). Kosovo represents a compromise between legal, political and moral concerns, which leave open the option for illegal humanitarian interventions in cases of extreme human suffering. An unauthorized humanitarian intervention is Syria would have been justifiable as a plethora of resolutions reveal all avenues for a peaceful settlement were exhausted, which international law requires before a use of force.[1] This means an interception early in the conflict would have been acceptable and also why no intervention is possible in Syria today: more harm would likely result.

Yet, the tension between liberals and realists is visible even in this case. NATO made an effort to remain 'close to the law' during its intervention in Kosovo by linking its efforts to the resolutions of the UNSC and stating their action was required to prevent a larger humanitarian crisis (Gordon, 1996, 22). Yet, the historical record of humanitarian interventions is that "in very few, if any, instances, has the right *[to humanitarian intervention]* been asserted under circumstances that appear more humanitarian than self-seeking and power seeking" (Lobel and Ratner, 2000, 11). NATO's intervention in Kosovo advanced Washington's geopolitical designs. The outcome of the Kosovo air campaign was less about a stable and secure network of Balkan states, but NATO expansion to fill a security vacuum in Eastern Europe and institutionalize US leadership in the post-Soviet Europe (Bello, 2006, 2). That goal was less than wholly humanitarian in nature and nor would it have been in Syria, but it should have happened anyway.

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[1] *Articles 2(3) and 33, 36, 37, 39, and 42 of the UN Charter.*

3. Realpolitik and Syria

There is no need to review the nature and extent of the terrorism against civilians in Syria as it is altogether too well-recognized both in its existence and as some of the gravest indiscriminate violence carried against civilians. It is also unnecessary to catalogue the global attempts by different actors at action, whether embargos, sanctions, peace talks, Presidential Statements, UN Secretary General Reports, General Assembly Resolutions, UN Human Rights Council Resolutions cease-fires and diplomacy to arming of rebels or humanitarian corridors and emergency aid delivery. Despite Secretary of State John Kerry reference to the "moral obscenity" of Al Assad's blatant chemical weapons use in 2013 and notwithstanding President Obama's reference to "global norms" prohibiting use of WMD in war, (Gottlieb, 2013) inferring military action would be fully justified, none occurred. How can a failure to launch a meaningful humanitarian intervention (when one was still possible) be explained when inaction risked (and did) create more political problems for the western Atlantic alliance and its partners than action would have? The inaction hard to understand even in realist terms.

To explain the inaction in Syria one must look to Libya (2011) for political context. Libya's humanitarian intervention saw Col. Muammar Qaddafi's 40 dictatorship crushed after he announced his intent to launch a mass homicide campaign. On 22 February 2011, he said he would "purge Libya inch by inch, house by house, household by household, alley by alley, and individual by individual until I purify this land" (Bassiouni, 2013, 160). The credibility of the threat led to a humanitarian intervention under S/RES/1973 on the basis of "grave concern at the deteriorating situation, the escalation of violence, and the heavy civilian casualties," (UN, 2011b), which at that time had only just surpassed 2,000 people, UN figures stated (Türkmen, 2014). S/RES/1973 said: "...Acting under Chapter VII of the Charter... (the UNSC) authorizes Member States...to take all necessary measures...to protect civilians" (UN, 2011b). R2P – as a concept – was implemented for the first time by the UN acting with the primary objective of protecting civilians. One commentator said the decision "may well go down in UN history as one of the more momentous occasions, not only for the UN but also the contemporary development of international law" (Rothwell and Nasu, 2011).

What were factors that led to Syria? One of the factors is the "rebound effect," a politico-economic factor. To understand it one must review the pattern of post-Cold War interventions. In 1992, the UNSC authorized an intervention to protect Iraqi Kurds from Saddam Hussein with S/RES/ 688 (UN, 1991). Iraq was a success (US Department of State, 1992) and led to another Charter 7 humanitarian intervention in 1992 in Somalia after the state collapsed under S/RES 794 (UN, 1992). Unfortunately, Somalia was a failure (Clarke and Herbst, 1996) and 18 US soldiers died (US State Department, 2001). The Somalia debacle had a negative "rebound effect" on Rwanda's 1994 genocide. The shame caused then-President Clinton to advocate for a NATO intervention ending genocide in Bosnia, despite it being technically illegal, which shows the principle is political. That intervention had another "rebound effect," which enabled action rather than prohibiting it. Libya had a "rebound effect" in Syria.

Obama suggested that at the time, in Libya, there was an ability to stop violence through an international mandate, a broad coalition including Arab countries and a plea for help from the Libyans (Obama, 2011). This is a strikingly pragmatic valuation, which if extended illuminates the rationale for non- humanitarian intervention in Syria (Türkmen, 2014, 27). The intervention was also supported because Libya had a very poor record on human rights, giving a clear 'just cause' coupled with 'redemption politics' (Wallace-Wells, 2011). US inaction in Egypt and Tunisia after the 'Arab Spring' created impetus to demonstrate that it was still engaged in the region and saw an opportunity for some 'goodwill' to the Muslim world, especially useful after Afghanistan and Iraq (Türkmen, 2014, 13). Although oil was not a motivator, it was Africa's largest oil exporter and the world's 10th thus capable of inducing significant price volatility (World Atlas, 2016). Lastly, as Cordesman notes Libya's military forces was a "farce" (Cordesman, 2004, 96). It weakness translated into high prospects for success. It was also not densely populated making an intervention feasible. These factors matched the R2P giving a humanitarian intervention political cover. However, the intervention led to regime change, a security vacuum and state failure.

Libya left US-Russia relations strained as the mandate grew almost immediately after its concession for a no-fly zone that led to aerial bombardment and Col. Gadhafi's removal. President Putin called the humanitarian intervention a pretence (Türkmen, 2014, 16) when NATO-supported rebels killed Col. Gaddafi, he said "Who gave them the right to do this?" (Shuster, 2012). The fallout affected Syria. Russia had no intention of seeing a re-play and became more skeptical and resistant on Syria. Indeed when Russia vetoed the first UNSC resolution condemning violence in Syria on October 4, 2011, Russia's then-president Dmitry Medvedev said he simply did not trust his "partners in the U.N. Security Council to rule out the replay of the Libya scenario" (Times, 2011). However, overthrowing Col. Gadhafi was justifiable according to the former Chief Prosecutor of the International Criminal Tribunals for Yugoslavia and Rwanda, Louise Arbour, who rhetorically asked if regime change was not the end state of any decision to invoke R2P. She said "How can the international community be expected to protect civilians without going to the further and necessary lengths of ousting the leaders responsible for the human rights violations?"(Arbour, 2012). Regime change was precisely the challenge in Syria (Pape, 2012, 70). This is a practical problem: if regime change is part of the plan then the fact that there never has been a credible post-war alternative to Al Assad is indeed a big problem.

There is no denying the fact that the atrocities in Syria have generated threats to international peace and security. Nor is it possible to claim that a 'just cause' is lacking. However, the issues of reducing overall harm and a chance of success exist. Considering these issues, beyond the two mentioned above, a R2P style intervention would ratchet up already high tensions between the US-Russia after Moscow's annexation of Crimea in March 2014. Another factor is that Syria has a strong, capable military that has proven to be resilient (Khaddour, 2016). Its capability is the result of an unforeseen paradox: the same factors that gutted it during peacetime became its main strength during the war (Khaddour, 2016). It is also backed by Russian air force and Iranian militias on the ground. Furthermore, the fatigue caused by Libya – as it descended into a failed state – accentuated by state-building failures in Iraq and Afghanistan translates into another "rebound" effect. Beyond this is the reality of blurry lines. Indeed, the Byzantine regional politics of the Middle East are playing out at the ground level, which not only means that various groups are committing atrocities, and R2P action risks the coalition being pulled into the war – worsening matters. Moreover, Syria is densely populated with a multifaceted ethnic and religious composition making any common ground hard to find, even if the impact of external influences were mitigated.

To unpack some of these key factors requires an acceptance that the post-WWII liberal normative framework reinforced after the Cold War has lost traction, especially in the foreign policy of the various states interacting in the Middle East over Syria. Some unresponsiveness is tied to Crimea events and a resuscitation of Cold War politics, some linked to the European reliance on Russian gas and also related to President's Obama's weak leadership in the region. Also the aftermath of the Iranian nuclear deal and the fallout from Iraq that shifted power to the so-called 'Shia crescent.' Russia's continuous material and political support to the regime and blocking of all UNSC action on the "grave and systematic human rights violations and use of force against civilians by the Syrian authorities" is defended by arguing it will not solve the crisis, nor take into account the violence committed by 'extremists' against Syria's government but would "send an unbalanced signal to the Syrian parties" (UN News Service Section, 2011). Russia appears to be correct now.

4. The Implications

The outcome of Syria compels several conclusions to be drawn at different levels of analysis. At the international level with respect to US-Russia relations, inaction gave Russia and opportunity to take advantage of the power vacuum and make major inroads at the expense of US power there. This is a notable shift as for centuries the Middle East has principally been in the western sphere of influence through British, French and Ottoman rule shifting to the US more recently. Indeed, history reveals that what happens the Middle East is linked to what happens elsewhere on the globe; events there are a barometer of global power configurations. Thus, current events in the Middle East correspond to global realignments linked to the so-called post-world order and this has bearing

on respect for human rights. Indisputably, the emerging global multipolarity is shifting power from the US and decentralizing it across global capitals uprooting old geo-economic power configurations, (Grether and Mathys, 2017) a pattern referred to the new 'world economic center of gravity' (WECG).[2] This has implications for the post-WWII global liberal governance framework, which embodies political and normative assumptions that appear to be increasingly far from universal.

Indeed, Syria dealt a huge blow to the gravity given to human rights ideals in security discourse, but to be fair challenges to the liberal world order stem from other places than Syria and it seems to just have been another nail in the liberal coffin. Easy examples of the symbolic departure from US liberal hegemonic leadership include Venezuela, Bolivia and Ecuador (Weitzman, 2007) wanting to pull out of the IMF and World Bank, and three African states (Sengupta, 2916) plus Russia leaving the International Court of Justice, which President Putin called "ineffective and one-sided" emblematically tarnishing a western symbol (Nechpurenko and Cumming-Bruce, 2016). These are the institutions of global governance and China setting up the Asia Development Investment Bank may indicate a new one is emerging, perhaps one that is amoral or differently principled. The painful conclusion is that realism and pragmatism are increasingly likely to trump values ideals like those embedded in R2P. The National Interest frankly says: "There is no sugar-coating the damage done to the cause of humanitarian intervention by the global wavering over Syria…particularly stark…on the heels of the 2011 Libya intervention, [*the*] model for future application of so-called "responsibility to protect" (R2P)"(Gottlieb, 2013).

At the regional level, inaction led to a great exodus of Syrians now principally living in squalid refugee camps in Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey. Empirical research indicates that these complex humanitarian environments provide fertile ground for disguised charities and aid workers to recruit and radicalize refugees in camps. In Middle Eastern camps, the alchemy of being marginalized, disenfranchised, excluded, angry and desperate collapses identities and inspires faith, which all create opportunity for extremist recruiters (Koser, 2015). Aside from the Middle East there is Europe and many extremists are thought to have entered Europe as refugees to join sophisticated sleeper cell networks (Faiola and Mekhennet, 2016). This is on top of the legitimate refugees who arrived on boats and inundated a financially strapped Europe with heavy demands on its welfare systems at a time of high unemployment and tensions within the EU about labour migration. These factors all combined with a growing discontent with the outcome of economic globalization seen to be generating more inequality, environmental destruction and eroding worker's rights. These sentiments have been visible over the last decade in frequent petitions, protests and acts of civil disobedience in Europe and elsewhere globally. The arrival of millions of newcomers was the proverbial straw that broke the camel's back. Forces mixed and refugees became the 'scapegoat' for mass mobilization toward populist demagogues preaching about a return to traditional values. Thus is leading to considerable anti-Muslim sentiment, a development that alienates Muslims – the very last thing needed when trying to counter tides of violent extremism (Allan et al., 2015). Acceptance, tolerance and inclusion are remedies and the reverse is worsening the terrorist threat in Europe and in the west in general.

Returning to the Middle East, the full extent of the cost of not intervening is yet to be determined. Indeed, Syria is brimming with war hardened fighters that have nowhere to go. Disarmament, demobilization, rehabilitation and reintegration (DDRR) processes are unlikely to find success in the Syrian context given the additional complicating factors of the Caliphate, religion, socio-economic well-being, war crimes and combatant's rights to return as well as reversing 'brainwashed' extremist ideology from thousands of people. There is also nearly a generation of children kidnapped, recruited or born into extremist networks that need to be de-programmed.

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[2] *One recent extrapolation of economic growth from 700 locations across the world indicates that the WECG shifted 4800 kms eastward between 1980, when it was located roughly midway in the Atlantic Ocean, and 2010, when it reached a longitude equivalent to Izmir in Turkey or Minsk in Belarus. It further suggests that by 2050 the WECG will have moved another 4500 kms to the east to lie at a point between India and China (Quah, 2011, 3).*

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Capacity in this area is in short supply (South Korea's expertise in this may be worth reviewing) and the environment on the ground does not lend itself well to it either. Where will these people go? In particular where will the Sunni Muslims from Syria go as they are unlikely to be welcomes backed warmly to Syria and Iraq is becoming increasingly hostile toward them. This is an issue of massive displacement. Furthermore, beyond sectarian residue, how can refugees return to a 'regular' life in Syria at all? There is no life in Syria. The economy has crumbled, the majority of the state's infrastructure has been blown up. Hospitals and schools face brutal austerity. Many doctors and teachers will have been killed, many will have left and many not willing to come back to Assad's government and to the rubble – traumatized and disassociated with the new Syria.

Then there is the geopolitical dimension to regional security that the Syria crisis upended. Power is conspicuously becoming more about outcomes than resources in the region. Iran has made big strategic gains in Iraq and Syria that impacts the Sunni-Shia balance. Iran's deployed Shia militia, including Lebanon's Hezbollah, in Syria and elsewhere coupled with weak and failing states around it is a situation easily exploited. Iran has tipped the balance of power between Sunnis and Shia in place since the 1979 Iranian Revolution towards Shias. The future of the region will see Iran's sphere of influence grow at the expense of Saudi Arabia and western influence. Egypt is weak, Turkey is undergoing considerable change, Libya has collapsed, Yemen is in state failure and Iraq is powerless – all to Iran's benefit. As Aleppo returns to Al Assad, Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) General Hossein Salami said: "It is now time for the Islamic conquests. After the liberation of Aleppo, Bahrain's hopes will be realised and Yemen will be happy with the defeat of the enemies of Islam" (UNMID, 2016). The extent of the security threats, unease, unpredictability and fragility within the Middle East's regional security complex is hard to overstate. Weapons are pouring into the region. Jane's HIS report said the global defence trade in 2015 was worth record-breaking $65 billion principally driven by Middle East conflict (Solomon, 2016), which is drawing in great powers bringing dangers reminiscent of the Cold War. This is not the picture of an improving situation. Again, Syria alone did not cause this, but again, it appears to be the final brick that brought the international normative *status quo* wall down tumbling down. The consequences of the 'in between' place that the international community appears to have entered are unknown. Historically, multipolar environments are unstable. Recall the period preceding WWI.

At the domestic level of analysis, there is less security due to inaction on R2P. Less people would have died, fewer families broken up and more social fabric sustained. The state economy, the vast majority of its infrastructure, its ethnic and religious composition and the national identity of Syria would be better intact than today had a forceful R2P intervention occurred before late 2013. The reality today is that the social, politico-ethnic fragmentation, trauma, resentment and anger will interact with other constructs including lack of health care, sanitation, clean water and education to undermine Syria's long term security. Insecurity in Syria over a decade coupled with insecurity in Iraq and elsewhere decrease the chance of a sustainable peace. Conflict environments, threatened borders, repressive, authoritarian governments and weak economies are not the conditions for peace-building and post-conflict recovery.

Failure to act in Syria without UNSC authorization, which was justifiable, likely means the concept has perished. Syria may be remembered as a litmus test for the continued relevance of global western-centric normative ideals. It shows there is in fact a move toward an increasingly dispersed, multi-polar power structure with different normative perspectives or the lack of them all together (Ulrichsen, 2013, 2). The future is unwritten, but to be sure it will be less multilateral, and less normative with the state at the centre despite non-state actors and non-traditional forms of security likely being more prominent threats. In fact, a paradoxical 'the return of the state' may be happening at the same time as non-state actors are increasingly capable of exercising power challenging it. Under this 'return to Westphalia,' which Stephen Walt said a "live and let live" approach (Walt, 2016) will reign means there would be no R2P, no more efforts to spread democracy, change regimes or enforce respect for human rights. The liberal *End of History* is effectively ending. A new one is starting even if it is more of a return to an old one far less normative, but no less realistic. Looking back, Syria sure had sparks and the decision not to intervene caused a lot of collateral damage. Arguably, we should have put the fire out lest we risk almighty upsets to established global systems, norms and values – and simultaneously cause the

spread regional insecurity, state failures, balance of power shifts, refugees and extremism. Bloody hindsight – literally.

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