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## THE SYRIAN CIVIL WAR IN THE YEARS 2011-2013

### AN ANALYSIS OF THE CONFLICT AND ITS IMPACT ON THE GLOBAL SECURITY SYSTEM

**ABSTRACT** The ongoing Syrian Civil War is one of the most arresting issues in the international area in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. This article examines it on Kenneth Waltz's levels of analysis: the individual, the state and the international level. The author argues that the case of this Middle Eastern state symbolizes the struggle for influence in the contemporary international relations, during which the decline of US hegemony and the rise of the multipolar world are observable. The case of the Syrian Civil War also proves that the global security system, established after World War II and the Cold War, is no longer adequate.

**KEYWORDS** *international security system, civil war, Syria, Russia, USA, multipolarity*

## INTRODUCTION

The aim of this article is to analyse the causes, course, and consequences of the Syrian Civil War, while indicating how they may influence global security. Furthermore, the author examines the Russian Federation's growing influence in the Middle East. The author argues that the Syrian case may be considered a significant element in the process of deepening of the world's multipolarity. The article is grounded in the neorealist perspective of international politics, introduced by Kenneth Waltz in *Theory of International Politics* (1979).

This paper is organized as follows: Section 1 gives basic information about Syria; Section 2 provides a brief history of the Syrian Arab Republic; Section 3 introduces

Waltz's levels (*images*) of analysis: the level of the individual, the state and the international system, as presented in *Man, the State, and War: A Theoretical Analysis*; Section 4 deals with the influence of the Syrian Civil War on the international security system.

## 1. GENERAL INFORMATION ABOUT SYRIA

Syria is situated in Western Asia and borders Turkey to the north, Iraq to the east, Jordan to the south, Lebanon and the Mediterranean Sea to the west and Israel to the southwest. This geographical location causes Syria to be in the limelight of world powers. It is a unitary, semi-presidential republic under an authoritarian regime with the capital in Damascus and Arabic as the official language. According to the Constitution of the Syrian Arab Republic from 1973 (modified in 2000), the head of state is the president who has to profess Islam, and this religion in combination with civil law forms the legal system of Syria. The Arab Socialist Ba'ath Party – Syria Region (the Baath Party) *shall be the leader party in society*<sup>1</sup>. The country has about 22 thousand inhabitants and the dominant ethnic group are Arabs (90,3%). A significant role is played by Kurds, Armenians and other minorities (9,7%)<sup>2</sup>. Religious diversification has played a major role in the Syrian civil war. Three greater groups of believers may be singled out: Sunni Muslims (74%), other Muslims: Alawite and Druze (16%), and various denominations of Christians (10%). Furthermore, in cities like Damascus, Al-Qamishli, and Aleppo tiny communities of Jews settled down<sup>3</sup>.

In addition, as regards the current economic situation, Syria is continuing to suffer the effects of the ongoing conflict which began in 2011. The government has to struggle against economic decline and has even begun liberalizing policies by opening private banks. Nevertheless, the economy remains highly regulated. The most significant problems seem to be: declining oil production, foreign trade barriers, rising budget deficits and increasing exploitation of water supplies caused by heavy use of agriculture, rapid population growth and water pollution<sup>4</sup>.

## 2. HISTORY OF SYRIA

In 64 BC Pompey the Great of the Roman Republic captured Antioch, converting Syria into a Roman province; and subsequently, by 640 AD it was conquered by Arabs. As a result of the First Crusade the majority of Syria's territory was controlled by Crusaders,

<sup>1</sup> *Constitution of the Syrian Arab Republic*, [online] [http://web.archive.org/web/20041014033534/http://www.moi-syria.com/\\_politic.asp?FileName=20021118201233](http://web.archive.org/web/20041014033534/http://www.moi-syria.com/_politic.asp?FileName=20021118201233), 18 XI 2013.

<sup>2</sup> *Middle East: Syria*, The World Factbook, [online] [https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/print/country/countrypdf\\_sy.pdf](https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/print/country/countrypdf_sy.pdf), 10 XI 2014.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

who formed the Principality of Antioch. Then, in 1516, Syria became a part of the Ottoman Empire, but after the death of Ahmed al-Jazzar, pasha of central and southern Syria, this region was left completely uncontrolled and, as a result, in 1831 Ibrahim Pasha's forces captured Damascus. However, Egypt was forced by the European powers to return it after ten years. In the latter part of 19<sup>th</sup> century, a national movement was born, which struggled for the independence of Greater Syria. But two European powers, France and Great Britain, had other plans. In the midst of World War I, François Georges-Picot and Mark Sykes agreed on the post-war division of the Ottoman Empire and, according to this division, Syria was to become a zone of French influence.

In March 1920, the Kingdom of Syria was proclaimed independent with Faisal I as its ruler, but in a month's time France and the United Kingdom enforced the aforementioned division. As a consequence, six states were created: Greater Lebanon, the Alawite State, the State of Damascus, the Jabal al-Druze State, the State of Aleppo and the Sanjak of Alexandretta, which were a reflection of religious and ethnic differences. In 1925 the State of Damascus and the State of Aleppo were consolidated into one country, named the Syrian Republic. After the liberation in 1941, Free French Forces declared the independence of Syria, which was announced officially in 1943. For the next twenty seven years, the most important issue was the instability of the country's public system<sup>5</sup>. As proposed by Raymond Hinnebusch, the next half a century can be divided into three periods: *the instability of early independence (1950s-1960s); the phase of consolidation of an authoritarian state (1970s-1980s); and, most recently, the phase of liberalization and adaptation of this regime to growing internal and external pressures (1990s-2000s)*<sup>6</sup>.

In 1970, Hafez al-Assad seized power and was president for nearly thirty years. He was born in a poor Alawite family<sup>7</sup>. During his studies, he joined the Baath Party. Since assuming his position as President of Syria, he struggled against the Muslim Brotherhood, which protested against the secular Baath Party and the ruling Alawites. These tensions led to the Hama massacre of 1982, when between 10,000 and 25,000 people were killed by the Syrian Army (the number depends on the source)<sup>8</sup>. Hafez al-Assad died in June 2000 and then his son, Bashar al-Assad, the current president of Syria, was elected<sup>9</sup>. Initially he had been perceived as a reformer, but eventually it was his policy that caused the anti-government revolt<sup>10</sup>.

<sup>5</sup> Syria, Encyclopaedia Britannica, [online] <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/578856/Syria/29913/The-Ayyubids-and-Mamluks#toc29914>, 18 I 2015.

<sup>6</sup> R. Hinnebusch, "Modern Syrian Politics", *History Compass*, vol. 6, no. 1 (2008), p. 263, [online] <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1478-0542.2007.00487.x>.

<sup>7</sup> P. Seale, *Assad of Syria – the Struggle for the Middle East*, Berkeley 1995, pp. 5-8.

<sup>8</sup> K.N. Wield, *The Hama Massacre – Reasons, Supporters of the Rebellion, Consequences*, Beer Sheva 2006, p. 8-10, [online] [https://wikileaks.org/gifiles/attach/124/124348\\_v63819\\_pdf.pdf](https://wikileaks.org/gifiles/attach/124/124348_v63819_pdf.pdf), 18 XI 2013.

<sup>9</sup> S. Bar, "Bashar's Syria: The Regime and its Strategic Worldview", *Comparative Strategy*, vol. 25, issue 5 (2006), p. 367, [online] DOI: 10.1080/01495930601105412.

<sup>10</sup> "Revolt and repression in Syria: Could the Assad Regime Fall apart?", *The Economist*, 28 IV 2013, [online] [www.economist.com/node/18621246?zid=309&ah=80dcf288b8561b012f603b9fd9577f0e](http://www.economist.com/node/18621246?zid=309&ah=80dcf288b8561b012f603b9fd9577f0e), 18 XI 2013.

Inspired by the Arab Spring, the civil war broke out when on the 15<sup>th</sup> of March 2011, Hasan Ali Akleh immolated himself in a city called Al-Hasaka. After bloody pacifications of Damascus, Dara, Hims and other cities, in July 2011 army defectors formed the Free Syrian Army, which is dominated by Sunni Muslims. For two years, this armed conflict continued, but in August 2013 it became even more dangerous and widely publicized due to the use of chemical weapons against civilians. The ruling regime had allegedly used chemical weapons in the past, but the government officials denied these allegations<sup>11</sup>. The research carried out by the inspectors of the United Nations Organization confirmed that sarin gas had indeed been used<sup>12</sup>. Their task was not to point out who it was used by, but the report includes information which could be used to blame the regime; for instance, the type of rockets used, which, according to the experts, are only in the possession of the Syrian army<sup>13</sup>. But the above findings are still perceived as a subjective opinion and these conclusions allow Damascus to maintain that it was the rebels who took over the weapons during the fighting and used them in order to put the blame on the regime.

### 3. THE CAUSES OF THE WAR

To cope with the complexity of the issue, the author will use Waltz's levels (*images*) of analysis which form the framework for categorizing factors leading to war.

#### 3.1. The individual

Syria has been a dictatorship since the coup d'état of 1963. A couple of the leaders of the coup, including Hafez Al-Assad, were members of the Alawite religious sect, an offshoot of the Shiite branch of Islam. Hafez Al-Assad filled the most important public and military positions with Alawites. On the other hand, when he strived for the support of Christians, he presented himself as a secular leader who defends the rights of minorities. Sometimes, he was also an impeccable Sunni, who was promoting the reading of the Koran. He abandoned his beliefs and adopted new ones, which were shared by the group of people whose sympathy he wanted to win<sup>14</sup>. After his death, the Parliament

<sup>11</sup> SIPRI Yearbook 2013: *Armament, Disarmament and International Security*, Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), Stockholm 2013, p. 17, [online] <http://www.sipri.org/yearbook/2013/files/SIPRIYB13Summary.pdf>, 10 XI 2014.

<sup>12</sup> United Nations Mission to Investigate Allegations of the Use of Chemical Weapons in the Syrian Arab Republic, *Report on the Alleged Use of Chemical Weapons in the Ghouta Area of Damascus on 21 August 2013*, The United Nations Organization, [online] [http://www.un.org/disarmament/content/slide-show/Secretary\\_General\\_Report\\_of\\_CW\\_Investigation.pdf](http://www.un.org/disarmament/content/slide-show/Secretary_General_Report_of_CW_Investigation.pdf), 18 XI 2013.

<sup>13</sup> T. Bielecki, M. Wybieralski, *ONZ: Są dowody na użycie sarinu w Syrii. Brytyjczycy: Aż połowa sił walczących z Al-Asadem to radykałowie*, Gazeta.pl, 16 IX 2013, [online] [<sup>14</sup> A.F. Jakubowski, \*Asadowie – z kim walczą syryjscy rebelianci\*, 15 VI 2013, \[online\] <http://pl.delfi.lt/aktualia/swiat/asadowie-z-kim-walcza-syryjscy-rebelianci.d?id=61630635>, 10 XI 2014.](http://wyborcza.pl/1,76842,14615804,ONZ__Sa_dowody_na_uzycie_sarinu_w_Syrii__Brytyjczycy_.html#ixzz, 10 XI 2014.</a></p>
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changed the article in the constitution regulating the age of candidacy so that his son, Bashar Al-Assad, could be elected<sup>15</sup>. The young dictator, an ophthalmologist by profession, had never been considered for any political role in his country and, as experts are convinced, had no aspirations to become one. Since the death of his brother in a road accident, Bashar started to learn how to replace his father in the most important position in Syria<sup>16</sup>. He continued his father's policy of manipulating religious resentments<sup>17</sup>. Al-Assad has put a lot of effort into reinforcing the Alawites' loyalty towards the authorities and ensuring that they have only one basis for their identity, that is *the minority which rules Syria*. Whilst many Alawites oppose the regime, many identify with it. *Al-Assad has succeeded in convincing the great majority that their physical survival is tied to his political survival*<sup>18</sup>. Some even replaced traditional religion with a cult of personality built around Bashar al-Assad and the Baath Party. The strongest sign of this conduct is the changed profession of faith, which was traditionally expressed as *There is no God but Allah*, but now sometimes becomes *There is no God but Bashar*<sup>19</sup>.

The dictator and his closest assistants manipulate not only religious groups, but also the heads of other states, accusing the rival parties in Syria of being Islamic fundamentalists and calling rebels *members of Al-Qaeda* and *terrorists*. It is known that neither the USA nor the West European states support this extreme branch of religion. They would not want to cope with a state in the Middle East led by Islamic fundamentalists. Assad tried to convince the Western world that his dictatorship would be the lesser of two evils. The truth is that among the Syrian revolutionists there are representatives of various religious denominations as well as atheists.

### 3.2. The state

The second image, the state level of the analysis, consists of manifold aspects. Firstly, it is necessary to say that Syria had a single-party system, so every election was fictitious. The first elections in which people could choose between seven parties was held on 7<sup>th</sup> of May 2012. The Popular Front for Change and Liberation held the most significance on the side of the opposition. Currently, there are two alternative centres of power: the government, which consists mostly of Alawites, and the Syrian Interim Government, which was recognised by some states, including the United States and the United Kingdom, as the *sole representative of Syrian people*<sup>20</sup>.

<sup>15</sup> *Constitution of the Syrian Arab Republic*.

<sup>16</sup> E. Zisser, *Assad's Legacy – Syria in Transition*, London 2001, pp. 174-175.

<sup>17</sup> F. Leverett, *Inheriting Syria: Bashar's Trial by Fire*, Washington 2005, pp. 18-21.

<sup>18</sup> The Project on Middle East Political Science, *Arab Uprising: The Syria Crisis*, Washington 2012, [online] [http://pomeps.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/02/POMEPS\\_BriefBooklet9\\_Syria\\_Web.pdf](http://pomeps.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/02/POMEPS_BriefBooklet9_Syria_Web.pdf), 10 XI 2014.

<sup>19</sup> J. Reynolds, *Syria torture accounts reinforce human rights concerns*, BBC, 3 VII 2012, [online] [www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-18687422](http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-18687422), 10 XI 2014.

<sup>20</sup> H. Schofield, *Syria: France backs anti-Assad coalition*, BBC, 13 XI 2012, [online] [www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-20319787](http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-20319787), 10 XI 2014.

From 1963 to 2011 Syria was under Emergency Law, which allowed for oppositionists' arrests and repressions. When the revolt flourished, the administration mobilized security and intelligence agencies to stifle it. The number of detentions increased – human right groups estimated them at least 25,000, but some of the organizations mentioned that the real number is likely much higher. Additionally, as it was described by Ben Hubbard, *Most [people] said they had been detained for marching in anti-government protests and some said that they had been beaten and electrocuted*<sup>21</sup>. According to the Human Rights Watch, the situation in Syria has become better than in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, but all independent publications are still banned<sup>22</sup>. In the ranking of the ten worst countries for bloggers, it came in third<sup>23</sup>. In addition, under the influence of the Arab Spring the regime intensified its policy and banned access to popular social media.

The ethnic and religious mixture in Syria is a consequence of the changing fortune of this territory. As it was mentioned, the government tried to agitate the religious groups, but inefficiently. The largest non-Arabic ethnic minority are Kurds – the group numbers approximately 1.7 million people (around 10% of the entire population). Since the 1950s, the government has adopted anti-Kurdish policies, maintaining that this ethnic group is a threat to the unity of the Arab Syria. Their political and cultural rights were taken away and teaching Kurdish in schools was prohibited. The same happened with the celebration of Kurdish festivals, for example Nowruz (the Persian New Year). Since 2001, Bashar al-Assad has made a lot of promises about changes in the law, but unfortunately there were none. The problem escalated in March 2004, when the Kurds brought their flag onto a stadium. *Syrian authorities reacted to the protests with lethal force, killing at least 36 people, injuring over 160 and detaining more than 2,000* – as the Human Rights Watch announced<sup>24</sup>.

### 3.3. The international

The last, and – in the author's opinion – the most significant image, is the international level, composed of states, alliances, organizations and multinational corporations. Before considering the first group, it is worth noticing that there is a dispute among scholars over whether or not the United States is still the most influential actor on the world stage, in both the political and economic sense. Some scholars argue that China may overtake the United States in a couple of decades. The results of a study on the citizens of 21 countries in the world, conducted in 2012 by the Pew Research Center,

<sup>21</sup> B. Hubbard, "Rights group says it finds proof of torture in Syria", *The New York Times*, 17 V 2013, [online] [www.nytimes.com/2013/05/18/world/middleeast/rights-group-says-it-finds-proof-of-torture-in-syria.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2013/05/18/world/middleeast/rights-group-says-it-finds-proof-of-torture-in-syria.html?_r=0), 10 XI 2014.

<sup>22</sup> Human Rights Watch, *A Wasted Decade: Human Rights in Syria during Bashar al-Assad's First Ten Years in Power*, New York 2010, [online] <http://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/reports/syria0710webwcover.pdf>, 10 XI 2014.

<sup>23</sup> Committee to Protect Journalists, *10 Worst Countries to be a Blogger*, IV 2009, [online] <http://cpj.org/reports/2009/04/10-worst-countries-to-be-a-blogger.php>, 10 XI 2014.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.



an American *think tank*, indicated that China is already considered to be more powerful than the USA<sup>25</sup>. Some studies show that China will overtake the USA even in 5-10 years<sup>26</sup>. Not to forget about other emerging states with fast-blooming economies such as Brazil, Russia, India, and South Africa. The contemporary world is being frequently described using the model of the multipolar system of major actors. The position of the world's powers is usually signalized by participating in ongoing conflicts around the globe, but not every case is worth their attention. States meddle in those conflicts which they could use to extend or to defend their influences or from which they can draw some benefits. This process can be observed in the case of the Syrian Civil War where the interests of the USA, the European Union states (mostly UK and France), Russia, China and others clashed with one another. So the question is: what are the motives of these states?

In the beginning the author would like to present the division of international actors that stood for the rebels (1): the United States of America, the European Union, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Qatar<sup>27</sup>. They were opposed by (2): China, Russia and Iran, which sided with al-Assad<sup>28</sup>.

### 3.3.1. Allies of the rebels

During his presidency, the administration of Barack Obama has changed the international policy and decided to pay more attention to the Asia-Pacific Region (the *strategic pivot*). The new doctrine consists of the reinforcement of ongoing alliances and building economic cooperation with such multilateral institutions as the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). The assumption is that thanks to these actions, the USA should become a counterweight for the Central Plain, thus reducing its expansive policy; therefore, partnerships with India, Indonesia and Vietnam were the set goals. The USA wanted to prevent China from increasing its influence in the Middle East. In 2012, the new guidelines concerning strategy of defence acknowledged this region as crucial, with Iran and China presented as main opponents<sup>29</sup>. Syria became the point of collision between powers.

<sup>25</sup> J. Bolanowski, *Chiny mają większą gospodarkę od USA – tak uważają ludzie na świecie*, Forsal.pl, 20 VI 2012, [online] [http://forsal.pl/artykuly/626168,chini\\_maja\\_wieksza\\_gospodarke\\_od\\_usa\\_tak\\_uwazaja\\_ludzie\\_na\\_swiecie.htm](http://forsal.pl/artykuly/626168,chini_maja_wieksza_gospodarke_od_usa_tak_uwazaja_ludzie_na_swiecie.htm), 10 XI 2014.

<sup>26</sup> M. Pettis, "China will overtake America within a decade. Want to bet?", *The Economist*, 30 III 2012, [online] [www.economist.com/blogs/freeexchange/2012/03/china-will-overtake-america-within-decade-want-bet](http://www.economist.com/blogs/freeexchange/2012/03/china-will-overtake-america-within-decade-want-bet), 10 XI 2014.

<sup>27</sup> R. Hinnebusch, "Syria: from 'Authoritarian Upgrading' to Revolution?", *International Affairs*, vol. 88, issue 1, pp. 95-113 (2012), [online] DOI: 10.1111/j.1468-2346.2012.01059.x.

<sup>28</sup> S. Nakhoul, *Insight: Syria's Assad is Fortunate in his Enemies*, Reuters, 24 IX 2013, [online] [www.reuters.com/article/2013/09/24/us-syria-assad-future-insight-idUSBRE98N0JB20130924](http://www.reuters.com/article/2013/09/24/us-syria-assad-future-insight-idUSBRE98N0JB20130924), 10 XI 2014.

<sup>29</sup> K. Dobosz, "Syria przedmurzem Chin", *Stosunki Międzynarodowe*, 28 XII 2012, [online] <http://www.stosunki.pl/?q=content/syria-przedmurzem-chin>, 10 XI 2014.

The reasons that have caused the People's Republic of China to join the Syrian conflict are more complex than retention or extension of Chinese influence. Since the 90s, most of the global oil and gas resources were under American control. However, since then, the Chinese economy has developed significantly, allowing the country to obtain trade agreements and win over more and more states which are rich in natural resources. Consequently, America's hegemony became weaker.

On the other hand, the Middle East is still under US military dominance. The United States Central Command (CENTCOM), established in 1983, was supposed to guard the *regional security, stability and prosperity*, which is a convenient pretext to allocate an army in this part of the world<sup>30</sup>. At the moment, NATO controls all the regions around the Mediterranean Sea, excluding the Tartus port in Syria, which is controlled by the Russian Navy, due to the leasing agreement of 1971<sup>31</sup>.

American intervention in Syria's case was not so obvious. Obama's administration emphasizes many problems. First of all, it could help topple the Assad regime and, as a result, the Islamists would take the leadership in the new Syrian government. Additionally, recent history has taught the Americans that any interventions in the midst of a civil war can be long, risky and costly. Furthermore, since the intervention in Afghanistan, many experts had pointed out the increasing anti-Americanism in the Middle East<sup>32</sup>.

On the same side stands the European Union. Among many policies introduced by this organization, there is a special European Neighbourhood Policy established in 2003 and adopted in the case of Syria. The objective of this policy is to sustain stability, security and prosperity in the Middle East region. The benefits obtainable by the neighbours include trade preferences, equity in the EU internal market, increased cooperation in areas such as transport, communication and energy production, the opportunity to take part in some programs, as well as greater financial and technical support<sup>33</sup>. However, should Syria remain a non-democratic state, the benefits are limited for both sides. In Syria, the economy is highly regulated by the government and nationalized, which does not support competitiveness of prices. Moreover, companies from other countries cannot be set up there easily. On the other hand, it would be a great opportunity for the EU to have better relations with a country so rich in natural resources such as oil and gas, because it would allow for a higher degree of independence from Russia's supplies.

The European Union tries to provide assistance to its Syrian allies. In the report about the Syria crisis, the European Commission mentioned that *The European Union*

<sup>30</sup> *US Central Command Facilities*, GlobalSecurity.org, [online] [www.globalsecurity.org/military/facility/centcom.htm](http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/facility/centcom.htm), 10 XI 2014.

<sup>31</sup> *Syria – walka o wpływy*, independenttrader.pl, 2 IX 2013, [online] [http://independenttrader.pl/141-syria\\_-\\_walka\\_o\\_wplywy.html](http://independenttrader.pl/141-syria_-_walka_o_wplywy.html), 10 XI 2014.

<sup>32</sup> B. Rubin, "The real roots of Arab Anti-Americanism", *Foreign Affairs*, XI-XII 2012, [online] <http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/58434/barry-rubin/the-real-roots-of-arab-anti-americanism>, 10 XI 2014.

<sup>33</sup> *Europejska Polityka Sąsiedztwa*, 14 VI 2011, [online] [http://ec.europa.eu/economy\\_finance/international/neighbourhood\\_policy/index\\_pl.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/economy_finance/international/neighbourhood_policy/index_pl.htm), 10 XI 2014.



is a leading donor in the response to the Syria crisis with around €3.1 billion of total budget mobilised by the Commission and Member States collectively in humanitarian, development, economic and stabilisation assistance. Total humanitarian contribution amounted to €665 million since the beginning of the conflict<sup>34</sup>. But this form of help is not enough if the country is in the process of break-up and total ineffectiveness.

One of the states ready to participate in the anti-Syria coalition was Turkey. Since 2002, Ankara had adopted the conception of *Strategic Depth* and the *zero problem policy with neighbours* was one of its four pillars<sup>35</sup>. Turkey and Syria became close partners on the economic and political levels. Both countries abolished visas, carried out common military exercises. Many meetings on the highest level have been organised. An outbreak of anti-government protests put Ankara in a difficult situation. The relations between the two countries were deteriorating and in November 2012, they reached a critical point when Syrian missiles targeted the Turkish territory. Turkey responded with bombardment of the positions on the other side of the border. Earlier, in June 2012, Assad's forces shot down a Turkish F-4 Phantom jet. Although the dictator maintained that it was a dreadful mistake, nobody believed him. The Turkish territory became the place where refugees and some rebel leaders found sanctuary. In a report issued by Amnesty International, *Left out in the cold: Syrian refugees abandoned by the international community*, the number of refugees is estimated to be at least 1,6 million. Officially, Turkey maintains an open-border policy for Syrians. However, official border crossings have become easier only for small groups of Syrian refugees with a valid visa. But it can be hard even for refugees with passports, since border crossings have been practically closed during the escalation of the conflict. In spite of occasional difficulties, there are positive cases, such as the Yumurtalık crossing gate<sup>36</sup>. Finally, weapon supplies and other equipment, which are financed mainly by Saudi Arabia and Qatar, are transported through the Turkish area<sup>37</sup>.

The abovementioned Arabic states also have some business-oriented goals in Syria, among them supplying weapons, which is beneficial for their military industry. The State of Qatar, a small country with the greatest GDP per capita in the world, has long been interested in gaining international recognition. It is rich in natural resources, especially gas, which greatly influences its economic position. In Syria, there is a clash of two gas potentates: Russian Gazprom – a monopolist on the European market, and

<sup>34</sup> European Commission, Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection, *The Syria crisis. Echo Factsheet*, XII 2014, ECHO Factsheet, [online] [http://ec.europa.eu/echo/files/aid/countries/factsheets/syria\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/echo/files/aid/countries/factsheets/syria_en.pdf), 12 XII 2014.

<sup>35</sup> M.K. Kaya, H.M. Karaveli, "Vision or Illusion? Ahmet Davutoglu's State of Harmony in Regional Relations", *Turkey Analyst*, vol. 2, no. 11, 5 VI 2009, [online] <http://www.turkeyanalyst.org/publications/turkey-analyst-articles/item/169-vision-or-illusion?-ahmet-davutoglus-state-of-harmony-in-regional-relations.html>, 10 XI 2014.

<sup>36</sup> Amnesty International, *Left Out in the Cold: Syrian refugees abandoned by the international community*, 2014, [online] <http://amnesty.org.pl/uploads/media/LeftOutintheCold.pdf>, pp. 18-19, 11 XII 2014.

<sup>37</sup> *Wojna domowa w Syrii*, TVN 24, [online] <http://www.tvn24.pl/raporty/wojna-domowa-w-syrii,722,21 XI 2013>.

Qatar, which wants to take it over. Australia plans to boost its extraction in 2014-2020, expecting that these supplies will replenish Asian needs. At the same time its export to North America decreases systematically. Due to this situation, Europe is going to be a crucial client for Qatar. As it is a small state, it has to ally with the United States and NATO to strengthen its position on the international arena. Qatari involvement in the Syrian crisis is intensive and unambiguous, which is a great change in its foreign policy, mostly based on mediations. Furthermore, leaving behind its traditional role in the Middle East shows a determination to overthrow the regime in Damascus.

### 3.3.2. Allies of the dictator

As mentioned before, the People's Republic of China, the state with the fastest growing economy in the world, has broad connections with Syria – in 2011, it was ranked as its top trading partner. The Middle East, with its booming petroleum industry, is the main supply source for the energy-intensive Chinese economy. The exports in 2011 amounted to more than \$2.4 billion, including communications and electronic equipment, heavy machinery and other important goods. In 2004, Assad was on an inaugural visit in Beijing, during which the Syrian-Chinese Business Council was created. Most importantly: the state-owned China National Petroleum Corporation holds shares in two of Syria's largest oil companies and signed multibillion-dollar deals to assist in the exploration and development activities. Furthermore, as written by Joel Wuthnow: *the PRC firm, Sinochem, owns a 50 percent stake in one of Syria's largest oil fields*<sup>38</sup>.

What is striking is the change in Chinese foreign policy during the Libyan Civil War. Since 1954 the base had been an independent China's foreign policy of peace, first introduced in 1954, what meant that the Asian power do did not intermeddle meddle in the interior issues of other states. Despite this old assumption, Chinese diplomacy in the case of Libya resolution voted for 'yes' (Resolutions 1970) and abstained from voting (Resolution 1973), allowing sanctions on Gaddafi's regime and the no-fly zone to be authorised. These documents were a green light for the Western states, allowing for NATO's military intervention (Operation Unified Protector). The undertaken actions caused instability in Libya and, in consequence, a downfall of the regime, which reflected negatively on the Chinese businesses. For that reason, among others, China voted against four resolutions concerning Syria (October 2011, February 2012, July 2012, and May 2014) – they were guided by fear of intervention, which would be concealed beneath lofty rhetoric about opposition to tyranny and adherence to human rights.

The second great supporter of al-Assad's regime is the Russian Federation. Close relations between these two states have been continuing since 1956, when they signed a military pact after the Suez Crisis. The cooperation flourished after Assad's clan took power in Damascus in 1970. After a year, they established a military base in Tartus<sup>39</sup>.

<sup>38</sup> J. Wuthnow, "Why China Would Intervene in Syria", *The National Interest*, 16 VII 2012, [online] <http://nationalinterest.org/commentary/why-china-would-intervene-syria-7197>, 10 XI 2014.

<sup>39</sup> *Wojna domowa w Syrii...*

Because of this, other actors on the international area could see that Russia possesses some influence and allies in the Middle East. A supply of weapons and needs which are handed over to the dictator's army prove to be yet another indicator of cooperation between Russia and Syria. As a result, the ongoing civil war accelerates Russia's economy, especially military industries. It is also an opportunity for this state to sell oil and gas at higher prices. Many newspaper headlines in January 2012 informed about a \$550 million deal for combat training jets between Russia and Syria. Moreover, during the war, Russia assisted in training Syrian officers and air defence personnel<sup>40</sup>.

The authoritarian and anti-west regime of al-Assad, being the most abiding, foreseeable state in the region, has been an ideal strategic ally. Therefore, it is crucial in Putin's key policy objective: to block the American effort in achieving a significant influence on the region. At the same time, Putin is trying to guarantee Russian interests and maintain his influence in Syria after a possible collapse of the regime. However, Moscow does notice some disadvantages – Russian interventions have been criticised by the Middle Eastern countries and societies. Russian politicians also started saying publicly that preventing the collapse of the country and its destabilization is more important than keeping Assad in power.

The last ally discussed in this section is Iran – a state with significant connections with China. China is Iran's largest trading partner, and Iran is one of China's largest oil suppliers. As a result of the embargo imposed by the USA, Iran is cut off from the international system of settlements – SWIFT. It is very clear that Iran has reasons to oppose the USA and, what is more, has a long history of cooperation with Syria. Firstly, during the Iran-Iraq War (1980-1982) Syria was the only Arab country to ally with Iran. In 2003, relations between Tehran and Damascus intensified because of the support of Palestinian Hamas and their dislike towards Israel. Furthermore, those two states cooperate in military technology research<sup>41</sup>. Due to the strategic significance of Syria for the regional interests and aspirations of Iran, the government of the latter country decided to send advisers and instructors as well as 23 million dollars for the purpose of building a military base in Latakia<sup>42</sup>. It will enable direct transport of weapons by sea from Iran to Syria. The familiarity between the Shiites (the largest religious group in Iran) and the Alawites is also meaningful. Iran has always supported this Syrian minority, even after the collapse of the regime<sup>43</sup>. They want to prevent the creation of a pro-American regime in Syria.

<sup>40</sup> T. Grove, *Insight: Russia's Syria Diplomacy, a Game of Smoke and Mirrors*, Reuters, 6 VI 2013, [online] <http://www.reuters.com/article/2013/06/06/us-syria-crisis-russia-insight-idUSBRE95505W20130606>, 10 XI 2014.

<sup>41</sup> W. Fulton, R. Frasco, A. Farrar-Wellman, *Syria-Iran Foreign Relations*, irantracker.org, 15 VIII 2011, [online] <http://www.irantracker.org/foreign-relations/syria-iran-foreign-relations>, 10 XI 2014.

<sup>42</sup> C. Coughlin, "Iran Agrees to Fund Syrian Military Base", *The Telegraph*, 12 VIII 2011, [online] [www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/middleeast/iran/8699077/Iran-agrees-to-fund-Syrian-military-base.html](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/middleeast/iran/8699077/Iran-agrees-to-fund-Syrian-military-base.html), 10 XI 2014.

<sup>43</sup> W. Fulton, J. Holliday, S. Wyer, *Iranian Strategy in Syria. A Joint Report by AEI's Critical Threats Project & Institute for the Study of War*, Washington 2013, [online] [www.irantracker.org/sites/default/files/imce-images/Iranian\\_Strategy\\_in\\_Syria.pdf](http://www.irantracker.org/sites/default/files/imce-images/Iranian_Strategy_in_Syria.pdf), 10 XI 2014.

#### 4. THE INTERNATIONAL SECURITY SYSTEM AND SYRIA'S REPERCUSSIONS

##### 4.1. The UN Security Council

The United Nations is an organization which promotes world peace, economic and social development and every form of international cooperation. To achieve these goals, six principal organs were established, including the United Nations Security Council, the duty of which is to maintain international peace and security. Its powers are outlined in the United Nations Charter and include the establishment of peacekeeping operations, the establishment of international sanctions and the authorization of military action. The UN Security Council consists of 15 members. The first ten representatives of states are non-permanent members with five elected each year to serve two-year terms. The five remaining members – China, France, Russia, the United Kingdom and the United States – are permanent (as great powers and winners of the Second World War). None of the resolutions can be accepted when there is an objection of permanent members.

Currently some states, such as China, India, Brazil or Russia, have a greater significance in global affairs. The recently revived Group of Twenty (G20) may better reflect the current distribution of powers. Consequently, we can no longer speak about hegemony of the United States of America, which was so obvious after the Cold War<sup>44</sup>. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the multipolar world is becoming reality. Even the most powerful states must cooperate and compromise with others in order to address shared security problems. The contemporary world is dynamic and transnational, which is proven by the flow of information, people, capital and goods. As a result, the security system cannot cope with and face up to the phenomena which destabilize international theatre<sup>45</sup> and spread conflict<sup>46</sup>.

##### 4.2. The four rejected resolution

Since 2008, the United States and its allies in Europe have been struggling with an economic crisis which impacted the ability to uphold international security. The US hegemony was becoming weaker and weaker, but, in the author's opinion, the most crucial and significant point is the conflict in Syria. The unremitting battle, which was carried

<sup>44</sup> B. Gill, *The Global Security Governance System – Meeting Tomorrow's Challenges with Yesterday's Tools*, Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), 11 V 2013, [online] [www.sipri.org/media/newsletter/essay/may11](http://www.sipri.org/media/newsletter/essay/may11), 10 XI 2014.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> P. Grzebyk, "Narody Zjednoczone stale spóźnione walczą o efektywność – Rada Bezpieczeństwa w akcji", *Rocznik Strategiczny*, issue 19 (2013/2014), pp. 106-109. The author of the article pays attention to the dramatic situation in Lebanon. It is the only state which accepted Syrian immigrants without restriction. As a result of this politics, one million of Syrian citizens found a shelter in Lebanon.

out in the UN Security Council between the Occident and the coalition of Russia and China, did not bring anything pleasant to the US.

The discussion mentioned above was devoted to resolution projects, which could not be accepted, because two of the members, Russia and China, objected to them. Learning from events in Libya, the Asian powers did not want to agree on any document which would result in a military operation. The first resolution, rejected on 4<sup>th</sup> October 2011, was to be an official document condemning the bloody repressions against anti-government protests<sup>47</sup>. During the 2012 Homs offensive, on 4<sup>th</sup> February 2012, the pro-Syrian government coalition blocked the second project of resolution, which would have called for al-Assad to step down from office. The third one, which was supposed to impose sanctions on Syria's regime, was rejected on 19<sup>th</sup> July 2012. The last one – a referral to the International Criminal Court – was rejected on 22<sup>th</sup> May 2014. Russia and China were blamed for ignoring human rights while pursuing their selfish interests. On the other hand, they supported projects that established negotiations, not military operations, which, in their opinion, would be an intervention in Syria's internal problems<sup>48</sup>. This assumption fits in with the Chinese foreign policy, but not exactly with that of the Russian Federation. Nevertheless, this situation disturbed the Western world and led to disagreements between the members of the UN Security Council.

#### 4.3. The consequences of the Ghouta chemical attack

The issue that stirred the international community the most was the use of chemical weapons against civilians in a few cities in Ghouta on 21<sup>st</sup> August 2013. The number of victims varies from source to source, but surely lies between 300 and 1300. Before that, many states, such as Israel, Jordan, Turkey, the United Kingdom, and the USA, supposedly obligated themselves to monitor and secure the places in which they could be hidden<sup>49</sup>.

The chemical attack crossed “the red line” appointed by Obama a year before<sup>50</sup>. Since it was unclear who was to blame for it, the president could not make any deci-

<sup>47</sup> Polska Agencja Prasowa, *Rada Bezpieczeństwa ONZ nie potępiła syryjskiego reżimu*, wp.pl, 5 X 2011, [online] <http://konflikty.wp.pl/kat,127354,title,Rada-Bezpieczenstwa-ONZ-nie-potepila-syryjskiego-rezimu,wid,13862836,wiadomosc.html>, 10 XI 2014.

<sup>48</sup> Polska Agencja Prasowa, *Rosja i Chiny zawetowały rezolucję w sprawie Syrii*, wp.pl, 19 VII 2012, [online] <http://konflikty.wp.pl/kat,127354,title,Rosja-i-Chiny-zawetowaly-rezolucje-w-sprawie-Syrii,wid,14775577,wiadomosc.html>, 10 XI 2014; *Security Council – Veto List (in reverse chronological order)*, United Nations, [online] [research.un.org/en/docs/sc/quick/veto](http://research.un.org/en/docs/sc/quick/veto), 10 XI 2014.

<sup>49</sup> *SIPRI Yearbook...* Syria was not one of signatories of Chemical Weapons Convention from 29<sup>th</sup> April 1997. This convention also binds Syria since 14<sup>th</sup> November 2013. Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, *OPCW Member States*, [online] [www.opcw.org/about-opcw/member-states](http://www.opcw.org/about-opcw/member-states), 10 XI 2014.

<sup>50</sup> G. Kessler, “President Obama and ‘red line’ on Syria's chemical weapons”, *The Washington Post*, 6 IX 2013, [online] [www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/fact-checker/wp/2013/09/06/president-obama-and-the-red-line-on-syrias-chemical-weapons](http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/fact-checker/wp/2013/09/06/president-obama-and-the-red-line-on-syrias-chemical-weapons), 10 XI 2014.

sion, but it did not stop people from jokingly calling him "Pinocchio". He and David Cameron, the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, expressed their will to begin military actions should the UN Security Council once again find itself at an impasse. But the British House of Commons rejected the government's motion, arguing that there was no explanation of any military action. Though the government stressed that the objective would be deterrence, they gave no details on how they plan to deter the future use of chemical weapons. Moreover, the government did not provide any consequences of military action in the motion<sup>51</sup>.

Despite that, according to United States constitutional law, the president can take military action without permission of the Congress. However, this time Obama decided to ask the representatives. While in the beginning he was quite sure about the Congress's support in the operation, he was greatly disappointed when it turned out that according to the research, 230 out of 433 members of the United States House of Representatives would vote "against" and only 42 were "for" a military intervention. For several days, Obama's administration worked hard to change the minds of the representatives, convincing them that if this situation was left without an intervention, it would be a sign for Iran, Hezbollah or North Korea that they can use weapons of mass destruction with impunity<sup>52</sup>. Eventually, Russia aided Obama by negotiating with Syria's president on the topic of disarmament. This situation showed that the American public is tired of spending money on wars, especially during the continuing crisis.

It is also worth to mention the European Union's position after the chemical attack. Since this organization is an old ally of the United States, particularly in the case of the United Kingdom, and has always supported American decisions. Catherine Ashton, the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, gave a speech in the European Parliament at the beginning of September 2013, in which she ensured that the European Union would support Syria's citizens in every possible way with humanitarian aid, *in the political transformation, which will bring them peace*. Ashton mentioned the importance of disposing of chemical weapons and exhorted the UN Security Council to take action<sup>53</sup>. The solution proposed by the UN Security Council was: disarming Syria and depositing chemical weapons under international control. It was a plan created by the Polish Minister of Foreign Affairs, Radosław Sikorski. The negotiations were conducted by Russian representatives. From 12<sup>th</sup> to 14<sup>th</sup> September 2013 in Geneva, John Kerry, Sergey Lavrov and Lakhdar Brahimi discussed the takeover of Syrian chemical weapons and placing them under international con-

<sup>51</sup> I. Anthony, *The Syria Vote in the British Parliament*, Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), 30 VIII 2013, [online] [http://www.sipri.org/media/expert-comments/august\\_syria](http://www.sipri.org/media/expert-comments/august_syria), 10 XI 2014.

<sup>52</sup> Polska Agencja Prasowa, *Kongres ósmieszy Obamę? Coraz mniej zwolenników interwencji w Syrii*, TVN24, 9 IX 2013, [online] <http://www.tvn24.pl/wiadomosci-ze-swiate,2/kongres-osmieszy-obame-coraz-mniej-zwolennikow-interwencji-w-syrii,353357.html>, 10 XI 2014.

<sup>53</sup> C. Ashton, *Speech by HRVP Catherine Ashton on Syria*, European Union, 11 IX 2013, [online] [http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release\\_SPEECH-13-688\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_SPEECH-13-688_en.htm), 10 XI 2014.



trol. As a result, the six points agreement was created and, according to this document, OPWC inspectors would be sent to Syria before the end of November 2013, with unlimited access to places where the chemical weapons were stored. These places were pointed out by the Syrian regime, as it was established in the plan. One of the assumptions was that in the case of not abiding by this pact, Damascus would be threatened with the United Nations' sanctions and military intervention (although the procedure is rather vague). On 27<sup>th</sup> September 2013 the resolution was adopted unanimously by the Security Council.

Owing to this situation, Russia had another opportunity to strengthen its position on the international arena and demonstrate global leadership due to the favourable conditions and take a lead in the implementation of the disarmament project. This state has already had some experience in this area (not in a time of conflict, however) and possesses the technical expertise required to manage the transfer of chemical weapons. Additionally, it has a good relationship with the current Syrian government<sup>54</sup>.

In this war, the United Kingdom and France were the first states willing to support the United States Armed Forces. After the decision about disarmament, which was made in Geneva, Francois Holland, president of France, John Kerry, the United States Secretary of State, and William Hague, the UK Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, called for a strong and robust United Nations resolution that would set precise and binding deadlines<sup>55</sup>. The United States and its allies agreed on the solution presented by Russia. According to various studies, war is always more expensive than it is assumed; so in the current situation, when the West is still experiencing the detrimental effects of the financial crisis, it seems more sensible not to take part in any military intervention<sup>56</sup>. However, the ones most unwilling to take military actions are not the politicians, but the general public, reluctant to becoming involved in other countries' issues. The Syrian case revealed a deep scepticism about the utility of military instruments to achieve positive outcomes.

Despite the resolution of 27<sup>th</sup> September 2013, the Security Council, the most important for international security organ, can be considered a failure. During the two years of conflict – two years of incontrovertible violations of human rights – it did not make a decision. The international cooperation and solidarity, which seemed to be developing after the Second World War and the Cold War, turned out to be weaker than the states' interests<sup>57</sup>. This signifies a great need to change the governance security sys-

<sup>54</sup> I. Anthony, *Disarming Syria: An Opportunity for Russian Leadership*, Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), 11 VIII 2013, [online] [http://www.sipri.org/media/expert-comments/september\\_anthony](http://www.sipri.org/media/expert-comments/september_anthony), 10 XI 2014.

<sup>55</sup> *Syria crisis: France, US and UK eye 'strong' UN resolution*, BBC, 16 VIII 2013, [online] [www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-24105381](http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-24105381), 10 XI 2014.

<sup>56</sup> T. Brück, *Calculating the Costs of the Continuing Conflict in Syria*, Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), 13 VIII 2013, [online], [www.sipri.org/media/newsletter/essay/Brueck\\_Sept13](http://www.sipri.org/media/newsletter/essay/Brueck_Sept13), 10 XI 2014.

<sup>57</sup> I. Anthony, *The Syria...*

tem, which has to reflect the new distribution of global and regional powers and accelerate their integration. The principles of membership in the UN Security Council can be modified, the G20 and the regional organizations as the African Union and the Arab League could have a more active role in the security system. A higher degree of coordination between the governments, industries and civil society may be the best solution to disentangle conflict risk and natural resources.

## CONCLUSIONS

The geostrategic location of Syria is complicated. Its natural resources make it a significant actor in international relations. The hybrid of ethnicities and religions that is conditioned by the history of this region makes the state more disunited, which Assad's regime utilizes to manipulate society. Even though the Syrian government emphasizes the Islamic character of revolution, none of the radical, Islamic organizations play the leading role<sup>58</sup>.

It is possible to see the parallel between the Syrian civil war and the Autumn of Nations. However, this revolution is incomparably bloodier; the authority of the regime is stronger, and there are great powers interested in maintaining the *status quo*. Perhaps even more important is the example of another state of the Arab Spring, Egypt.

It is interesting to recall Zbigniew Brzezinski's words about the Arab Spring: *The Arab spring can end as an Arab Winter. For example, in Egypt, under the populists, the slogans will be military dictatorship or fundamentalism*. These words were uttered before the Egyptian parliamentary election. The findings presented suggest that even if the dictatorship in Syria is to be overthrown, the next president will bring no true change. Or, like it is described in *Global Trends 2030*, Syria will simply revert back to the situation from before the dictatorship<sup>59</sup>.

The situation revealed the decrease of the West's significance on the international area. Specialists argue about the loss of hegemony by the USA during Obama's presidency, which supports Russian revival in the world of multipolarity. Most importantly, the Syrian Civil War has shown to the international community the need to establish new principles for cooperative security. Previous solutions proved to be insufficient and outdated. The contemporary security environment requires greater participation of the states in the cooperative security dialogue.

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<sup>58</sup> In this context, it is important to mention the ISIS (Islamic State of Iraq and Syria) rebel group, which proclaimed the creation of the Islamic State based on the sharia law in June 2014. During the Syrian Civil War, the group grew significantly. The ongoing situation is favourable for formations like these and clearly shows destabilization in the country as well as in the entire Middle East. To emphasize the activity of ISIS: this group was not the cause of the revolution, but was established thanks to the Syrian Civil War.

<sup>59</sup> National Intelligence Council, *Global Trends 2030: Alternative Worlds*, Washington 2012, [online] <http://globaltrends2030.files.wordpress.com/2012/11/global-trends-2030-november2012.pdf>, 10 XI 2014.

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