



Making Sense of Russian Vetoes Concerning the Syrian Civil War:

A Case Study on the National Interests that Shape Russia's
Justifications

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Abstract

This thesis asks how Russia's justifications for vetoing resolutions on Syria were shaped by Russia's national interests. Employing a qualitative holistic case study method, the study intends to analyse different aspects of the problem. These aspects are the economic interests and the interest in maximising power that Russia has in Syria, in connection to the justifications that Russia gives in the Security Council. It includes an analysis of the interests of Russia, which are defined by economic interests and the advancement of power in the international system in this study. These aspects are analysed from a realist theoretical perspective. The findings are that certain justifications of Russia in the Security Council for vetoing resolutions on Syria can be connected to specific interests of Russia in Syria. The arms trade with the Syrian authorities and the maximisation of power and influence for Russia are argued to be the main national interests driving the key arguments the Russian justifications of vetoes in the Security Council regarding the Syrian civil war.

Keywords: Russia, Syrian civil war, Security Council, Veto, National interests

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1. Introduction

1.1. Research Problem

The Syrian civil war has left its mark in history as an enormous humanitarian crisis, to this day (United Nations, 2025). The United Nations Security Council (hereafter the Security Council) plays a central role in conflicts such as these, where internal conflicts threaten to destabilise entire regions. Since the start of the civil war in 2011, there have been multiple attempts to pass resolutions about the Syrian civil war in the United Nations Security Council, but few have actually been approved. As a result, the opportunity for intervention mechanisms, such as the Responsibility to Protect or the United Nations missions have been impacted. This is mostly due to the five permanent members of the Security Council, which have veto power to block resolutions from passing.

The concept of veto power has been the subject of many discussions about the legitimacy and the democratic values of the Security Council. As one of the permanent members of the Security Council, the Russian Federation (hereafter Russia) had vetoed 17 resolutions as of 2022 relating to the Syrian civil war (US embassy in Syria, 2022). The lack of consensus on the Syrian civil war likely contributed to this inaction of the Security Council.

In the Security Council meetings where its members voted upon these resolutions, the Russian delegation gave arguments on why they vetoed the concerned resolution. The problem that is addressed in this thesis is the connection between these justifications of Russia concerning vetoes on Syria and the national interests that Russia has in Syria.

While reading about Russia's role in the Syrian civil war, there has been research on what national interests might have motivated the vetoes in the Security Council. This will be further addressed in the contextual background and previous research chapters. However, this thesis specifically looks at the speeches that were given by Russia in the Security Council meetings concerning resolutions on Syria, and how certain arguments are shaped by the underlying interests by Russia in the Syrian civil war.

The timeframe for the analysis is from 2011 to 2016. The reasoning for starting in 2011 is that the Syrian conflict started in that year, and it is useful to analyse the justifications and national interests from the first vetoed resolution concerning the Syrian civil war. The reason for cutting the timeframe in 2016 is because Russia started actively intervening in the Syrian civil

war from about 2014, and it is valuable to learn if the main points of the arguments given by Russia continue throughout the interventions that followed from 2014 to 2016. The reason for this is because Russia also invaded Crimea in 2014, which could have played a role in the justifications for vetoing certain resolutions.

1.2 Aim of the study and research questions

The aim of the study is to investigate how Russia's interests in Syria shape the arguments given by Russia for vetoing Security Council Resolutions regarding the Syrian civil war. This is done by exploring the resolutions themselves, the speeches in which Russia justifies its vetoes, and academic articles that uncover the political and economic interests of Russia in Syria. This thesis will focus on four key vetoed resolutions and Russia's justifications of in timespan between 2011 and 2016. The objective is to have a comprehensive analysis and conclusion that connects Russia's national interests to its justifications in the Security Council on resolutions regarding Syria.

The thesis aims to answer the following research question:

"How did Russia's national interests shape Russia's main justifications for vetoing UN Security Council resolutions on Syria between 2011 and 2016?"

To answer the research question, these are the following operational questions that guide the process:

- What were Russia's interests in Syria between 2011 and 2016?
- What were the principal provisions in the key Security Council resolutions vetoed by Russia between 2011 and 2016?
- What were Russia's main arguments for vetoing Security Council resolutions on Syria between 2011 and 2016?
- How can the interests of Russia in Syria be connected to the main arguments for vetoing Security Council resolutions on Syria?

1.3 Significance of the study and relation to Peace and Conflict studies

This study contributes to the field of Peace and Conflict studies by exploring how power politics within international institutions can delay or obstruct international response to grave humanitarian situations and violent conflict. In addition, it analyses how international law in the context of veto is used to the advantage of economic and political interests. By challenging the more idealistic view of international law and international institutions it examines how these can also be used by states like Russia in their pursuit of power. As this thesis employs a realist perspective, it is concerned with the reflection of power by international institutions and the self-interests of states. Russia has been at the centre of many conflicts itself, but this study tries to highlight the power the permanent members of the Security Council still have when they are not directly involved and underscores the power and interests of Russian foreign policy. In studying the relation between the justifications given by Russia in the Security Council for vetoing resolutions on the Syrian civil war and Russia's interests in Syria, this thesis attempts to uncover how Russia justifies using its veto power to protect its national interests. This thesis can contribute to the existing field of Peace and Conflict studies by underscoring Russia's interest to be considered as a powerful nation, which might have implications for Russia's future behaviour in the Security Council and the overall behaviour of states in the wider international system when it comes to conflicts.

1.4 Outline

Chapter one of the thesis defines the research problem, the research questions that will be answered and the significance of the study. Chapter two outlines the contextual background that focusses on explaining key issues, such as veto power, sovereignty, and the role of Russia in the Syrian civil war. These concepts are important to understand for the analysis. Chapter four explains the method of choice, which is a case study. The choice for this particular method is explained. In chapter five, the theoretical framework for the analysis is defined, and the choice for the theory of realism is explained. In chapter six, the analysis of the material is presented. The analysis starts by outlining the four draft resolutions that were chosen for the study. Then, four of the most continuous arguments that Russia uses to justify its vetoes throughout 2011 and 2016 are explored, which are then connected to the national interests that

Russia has in Syria. The main justifications that Russia gives are arguments for sovereignty, against regime change, the argument of Libya as an example and diplomacy and P5 unity. The analysis is structured based on these four different justifications which are then connected to the national interests from a realist perspective. In chapter seven, the conclusion of this analysis is presented together with suggestions for further research.

2. Contextual background

In this chapter a background to the Syrian civil war, the UN Security Council, Russian involvement, and the Responsibility to Protect principle are presented. This contextual background is important to understand some of the concepts in the analysis.

2.1 The Syrian conflict

The Syrian conflict started in 2011, in the so-called Arab Spring. Protests erupted all over the Syrian Arab Republic. It was mostly civilian groups that requested reform from the Syrian government. However, the government of Bashar al-Assad reacted with considerable force to these protests. There have been multiple reports of violent repression by the Syrian government, with International Humanitarian Law violations prevalent (Ene, 2021, 17). These human rights abuses are governed by International Humanitarian Law, the set of rules that apply when a conflict is ongoing. One of the most important principles in International Humanitarian Law is the principle of distinction. This means one should differentiate between combatants and civilians when using force (Geneva Conventions Additional Protocol I, 1977, art. 48). The Additional Protocol of the Geneva conventions is signed and ratified by Syria, which means it must adhere to this principle, along with any other principle in the Geneva Conventions and Additional Protocol I.

The protests turned into rebel groups and militias when they were met with force from their own government. It quickly became an intrastate conflict, with these rebel groups fighting against Assad's government (Sarkin & Capazorio, 2022, 481).

The conflict had become internationalized soon after, with major foreign powers supporting certain sides of the conflict. For example, the Syrian government of Bashar al-Assad was largely supported by Russia, Iran and the Lebanese political party and militia Hezbollah (Sarkin & Capazorio, 2022, 482). However, the US and France supported rebel groups. Russia and the US were also among the foreign powers that used force on the territory of Syria, which will be illustrated in the chapter 2.3. While there were other states that were active in Syria, the contextual background mostly focusses on the permanent members of the Security Council's involvement.

Since the start of the Syrian conflict, it has become the largest humanitarian and refugee crisis in the twenty-first century, and has prompted a global rise in terrorist groups (Sarkin, Capazorio, 2022, 512). There were about 5.6 million Syrian refugees in Türkiye and Europe alone, notwithstanding the 6.6 million internally displaced people in Syria, calculated according to the United Nations Refugee Agency (Ene, 2021, 167). According to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, from 2011 to 2019 371,222 Syrian people lost their lives in the violent war that is still ongoing (Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, 2019). Of this very high number of casualties, more than $\frac{1}{3}$ were civilians, including a significant amount of children's deaths (Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, 2019). This also includes civilians killed by Russian, Turkish and US airstrikes (ibid).

2.2 The United Nations Security Council

The Security Council is an organ of the United Nations. It has the primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security (United Nations Security Council). They have several powers, as it is allowed to take diplomatic measures as well as enforcement measures. These can include relatively peaceful measures such as dispatching United Nations missions, mediation, appointing special envoys or requesting the Secretary-General of the United Nations to achieve a pacific settlement of disputes. More enforcing measures include sanctions, blockades, collective military action and the severance of diplomatic relations.

In addition, the Security Council may also issue directives for a ceasefire or dispatch peacekeepers to reduce tension. If a member of the Security Council wants to take such measures, it proposes a resolution to the Security Council, upon which can then be voted by the remaining members.

The Security Council has fifteen members, which each have one vote. The Security Council is made up of five permanent members and ten members that rotate every two years between the remaining United Nations member states. The five permanent members are the United States of America, the United Kingdom, the French Republic, the Russian Federation and the People's Republic of China. These permanent members have the power to block a resolution, also called a veto. This means that if all of the members of the Security Council vote in favour of a resolution but, for example, China votes against, the resolution will not pass.

2.3 Russian involvement and international intervention

While there have been attempts at collaborative humanitarian intervention in Syria through international institutions such as the United Nations, these have continuously failed. When resolutions were proposed in the UNSC regarding Syria, they were often vetoed by Russia and/or China. In the timespan from 2011 to 2018, a total of 12 resolutions were vetoed by Russia and China. In draft resolution S/2011/612, for example, it called for a condemnation of the Syrian authorities' violation of human rights and called upon states to remain vigilant about the supply of arms (2011). When chemical weapons got entangled in the now civil war by the Syrian government, the US was quick to participate and wanted to take action against Assad's government. One resolution that did pass in the UNSC, was a resolution that condemns the attacks involving such chemical weapons. It endorses the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons' (OCPW) decision to destroy Syrian chemical weapons by means of special procedures (S/RES/2118, 2013). In 2018, chemical weapons were once again used by the Syrian government.

Despite the failed attempts at resolutions condemning the human rights violations in Syria, the UN did send a mission to Syria, the United Nations Supervision Mission in Syria (UNSMIS). This mission was established when the UNSC adopted resolution 2043, where up to 300 unarmed military observers would go to Syria to "monitor the cessation of armed violence in its all forms by all parties" (2012). Along with this mission, the USA and Russia conducted airstrikes on Syrian soil in 2016 and 2017 (Ackerman et al., 2017 & Stent, 2016). The US has been confirmed to conduct airstrikes mainly against the government of Assad, but the strikes also affected civilians, and some even resulted in deaths (Ackerman et al. 2017). The US has supported rebels more covertly before their intervention in 2014, by supporting more "moderate" rebels to destabilize Iran (Nuruzzaman, 2016, 541). Russia, on the other hand, appears to target opposition groups, and the President of Russia, Vladimir Putin, has said Russia prefers the Assad regime at the time to stay in power (Stent, 2016).

However, despite Russian and US involvement in the conflict, and UNSMIS, the idea of collective legal intervention never gained traction. Despite the involvement of these states and UNSMIS, a substantial number of scholars are of the opinion that humanitarian intervention, in particular, failed in Syria (Nuruzzaman, 2014 & Açıkyıldız 2018). The main reasoning for this claim is that the Responsibility to Protect principle was never used by the UN security

council to intervene. The next paragraph will explain what exactly this principle is, and how it has been implemented in past conflicts.

2.4 The Responsibility to Protect

The Responsibility to Protect principle is important to understand as it is used consistently by Russia in its arguments for the vetoes in the Security Council regarding the Syrian civil war. This is further illustrated in the analysis, but Russia draws parallels to the Responsibility to Protect Principle used in Libya to justify its vetoes regarding the Syrian civil war. This principle is explained in this subchapter.

The Responsibility to Protect principle finds its origin in 2005, where the principle was adopted at the World Summit by the General Assembly body of the United Nations (A/RES/60/1, 2005). Firstly, the principle as explained by the World Summit Outcome Document affirms that each individual state has the responsibility to protect its citizens from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity (ibid). Furthermore, it states that the international community has the responsibility to help protect populations from these crimes, firstly through diplomatic and peaceful means, but on a case-by-case basis, collective action can also be taken (ibid). In a letter addressed to the Security Council in 2007, Secretary-General of the United Nations Ban Ki-moon expressed the wish to operationalize the principle (S/2007/721). Thus, states should be primarily responsible for the protection of civilians, and the international community must assist them, but if they fail to do so, stronger measures can be taken (Frowe, 2023).

The first time this principle was included in a Security Council resolution, these stronger measures were evident. The principle was first used in a Security Council resolution in 2011, concerning the conflict in Libya (S/RES/1973, 2011). In this resolution, the Security Council "authorizes member states that have notified the Secretary-General to take *all necessary measures* to protect civilians and civilian populated areas, while excluding a foreign occupation force on Libyan territory" (ibid). All necessary measures can in this case mean the use of force, along with diplomatic measures and sanctions, for example. The use of force can be authorised by the Security Council, according to the UN charter, which did make it legal, in the scope of international law for foreign states to use force in Libya (United Nations Charter, 1945).

Russia has been a vocal opponent of the Responsibility to Protect principle, especially after Libya. Russia did use the Responsibility to Protect principle to justify its intervention in Georgia, for example (Evans, 2009, 25). This was however before the official use of the Responsibility to Protect principle in a Security Council resolution. After the use of Responsibility to Protect in Libya, Russia has stated that they were ‘alarmed by statements that compliance with Security Council resolutions on Libya in the NATO interpretation is a model for the future actions of NATO in implementing the Responsibility to Protect’ (Gifkins, 2016, 158).

3. Previous research

In this chapter, the previous research that is done on the topic of the Syrian civil war and Russian vetoes is reviewed. In particular, the literature on Russian involvement in the Syrian civil war and the topic of foreign involvement as a whole, the protection of civilians in the Syrian civil war and the existing research on the motivations behind Russia's vetoes in the security council regarding Syria are explored. The positioning of this thesis within the existing research is also explained.

3.1 Russian involvement in the Syrian civil war

Foreign involvement is a contentious issue, especially when it is for humanitarian purposes. The pro-side usually maintains that foreign (humanitarian) intervention can improve human rights situations in countries plagued by war and attempts to mediate and advocate for human rights at the different parties in such a conflict (Nuruzzaman, 2016). The anti-intervention side, though, hold the opinion that these interventions usually do more harm than good for any peace processes in the concerned countries, and sovereignty is a concern as well (ibid). It is thus no surprise that foreign intervention in Syria is a much-disputed topic among scholars, and often the discussion is about why certain states intervene and in what capacity.

For example, in Hughes' (2014) article on proxy wars, he states that Russia condemns foreign intervention, while being the main arms provider of Assad's regime which creates discussions about motivations for and against intervention. Because of the multitude of international actors involved in the conflict, the Syrian civil war is usually described as a proxy war. A proxy war is characterised by sponsors or states that are involved by aiding (or abetting) proxies in a conflict, and many scholars, like Hughes, are of the opinion that that is exactly what was happening in Syria at the time (Hughes, 2014, 22).

There has been much research on why the Russian government was involved in Syria at all. In a research report by Charap, Treyger and Geist (2019, 1), the findings were that Russia found a collapse of the Assad government an "adverse outcome", and that this would have serious security implications. This report also explored why intervention was then necessary. Charap, Treyger and Geist (2019, 1) argue that other means, like diplomacy, failed in Russia's view to prevent these threats to security. These authors also claim that Syria seems to be a unique case; the kind of intervention we have seen Russia play a role in in Syria is not likely to happen

again in the region, as the necessary circumstances for that are not manifested (Charap, Treyger & Geist, 2019, 22). Kasım (2024, 17). echoes this view but adds that Russia has a significant interest in diplomacy as well, as it is important for Russia to have influence over the diplomatic sphere.

According to Crossdon (2014, 95)., Russia's unique involvement in Syria has everything to do with Russia's need for diplomatic significance. He argues that while material interests did play a role, they were not important enough to Russia to involve itself in such a way, and the discussion about the material interests do not consider the foreign policy point behind the Russian involvement in Syria (Crossdon, 2014, 96). This notion of the ultimate objective of Russia being mostly strategic in nature, is shared by Bagdonas (2016, 72), who also is of the opinion that the strategic aims should be considered more important than the material interests when it comes to Russia in the Security council. He states that the "chief aim" of Russia in the Security Council meetings concerning Syria was to prevent the legitimisation of a regime change, as well as to protect Russia's foothold in the Middle East region (Bagdonas, 2016, 72).

3.2 The protection of civilians and the Security Council

The Responsibility to Protect principle, first officially used in Libya in 2011, states that the international community must assist states in protecting their civilians (Frowe, 2016, 90). However, the use of force always has to be authorised by the Security Council (ibid). It was never proposed in a resolution concerning Syria and was thus never implemented. The reason for discussing the previous research on the topic is because Russia continuously argues against the Responsibility to Protect principle to be implemented in Syria and mentions Libya as an example of the misuse of the principle, even though it was never proposed in an actual resolution.

The neglect of Responsibility to Protect in Syria by the Security Council has been deemed the "death" of the Responsibility to Protect principle and "fail to protect", because of the failed attempt at it in this conflict (Nurruzman, 2014, Açıkyıldız, 2018). Those that argue that R2P has died with this conflict say that the failure lies with the international community, who could not agree on a consensus regarding Syria (Bellamy, 2012).

However, there are also those, like Bellamy, who argue that the Responsibility to Protect is more alive than ever, especially when looking at UN debates and documents (2012). He argues that it is in fact increasingly used to justify UN interventions, such as in Yemen and South-Sudan (2012). Bellamy also states that generally individual states in the United Nations do not have problem with R2P itself, that is, preventing mass atrocities and genocide, but their concerns are more about the way it is used. This is especially considering the use of force and the change of regimes after such an intervention (Bellamy, 2012).

According to Cronogue, the Responsibility to Protect is only likely to be implemented when it is affirmative to both strategy and pragmatics and will otherwise not be used even when there is widespread violence (2012). His paper strongly suggests that it is states' national interests that have promoted inaction in Syria. This study also claims that there is a strong basis for implementing R2P in Syria, as Assad's government, as Cronogue puts it, breached the duty of protecting civilians from serious harm by killing civilians while cracking down on protestors (2012).

International law has certain provisions on human rights violations, but, according to Sarkin and Capazorio, it is "ill-equipped" in dealing with and preventing ongoing human rights violations (2022, 478). And international law can play a role, it often goes unused (ibid). According to these same authors, the biggest difficulty in the international law surrounding Syria, were the vetoed resolutions in the United Nations Security Council (Sarkin & Capazorio, 2022, 512). Their article concludes with stating that the problem in Syria was a lack of political will. Sarkin's and Capazorio recommend that the United Nations and international law as a whole need to be reformed, in order for it to better deal with such issues as the Syrian civil war (2022, 513).

The notion of international law being unable to cope with a response to violations of human rights, displayed in Syria, is echoed by Stahn (2013). His thesis argues that a case-by-case basis is a better way forward in relation to international law (ibid). Halliyade argues that the Responsibility to Protect principle did not change international law as it intended to, which, as aforementioned, is in line with the notion that Responsibility to Protect and the appliance of international law in relation to protection of civilians in Syria have largely failed.

3.3 Russia's vetoes in the Security council

The existing research on Russia's vetoes mostly focusses on strategic, political and economic interests in the region of Syria. Chaziza (2014, 254) concludes that Russia's vetoes concerning Syria should not be seen as a threat to the current international order, but rather as a call for the international community to consider the position and interests of Russia in world politics. This study was done with the theory of soft-balancing strategy, which refers to 'efforts of short military action made by nations to frustrate the foreign policy objective of other nations' (Chaziza, 2014, 245).

This notion of Russia's vetoes regarding Syria as a demand for Russia to be recognized for its role by the Western states is concluded in Pieper's (2019) study of Russia's Syria Policies as well. Pieper suggests that Russia's veto power was used to undermine the normative standing of the Responsibility to Protect principle, and to contest western foreign policy more widely.

That the interests in Syria and global position of Russia play a role in its Security Council vetoes is echoed by Eminue and Dickson (2013), who came to a similar conclusion on the motivations of Russia for the vetoes for the resolutions. Eminue and Dickson (2013, 11) name several motivations that could have played a role in the determination of the Russian motivations. First off, they name the strategic relevance of Syria for Russia as a key point, especially considering Russia's Tartus military base (Eminue & Dickson, 2013, 11). With that, Eminue and Dickson (ibid) name the arms trade as a strategically relevant motivation for the veto. They also consider the anti-western rhetoric of the Russian president Putin as a reason for blocking US-led resolutions in the Security Council. This study argues that the 300.000 Russians that live in Syria also play a role, and the protection of Christians in Syria is lobbied for by the Russian Orthodox church (Eminue & Dickson, 2013, 11). Further conclusions in this article for Russia's behaviour in the Security Council regarding Syria include the prevention of radical Islam forces in power and Eminue and Dickson (2013, 11) argue that Russia shows genuine concern over the law and order within Syria, which according to this study, is an explanation for the Russian support of al-Assad.

3.4 Positioning this thesis

It is clear that there has been a lot of comprehensive research on Russia's role in the Syrian conflict. While Russia's motivations for vetoing Security Council resolutions are considered

in this thesis, and important to the analysis, this study focusses more on the connection between the justifications given by Russia and the national interests that Russia has in Syria. It does build upon the findings of, especially, the motivations of the Russian vetoes to explore how these could have shaped the justifications given by Russia. This thesis does have a somewhat unique analysis of the justifications, as they are often just mentioned in passing in the previous research done on the topic.

4. Methodology

This thesis adopts a qualitative case study research design, in an attempt to reach a rich and credible conclusion on the clash between international law and power politics. This chapter outlines how this method works, and why they were chosen. The ethical considerations and delimitations of this study will also be explored.

4.1 Research design

A qualitative single-case study method is used in this thesis to analyse the legal justifications of Russia's vetoes in the United Nations Security Council. The case study method will be largely based on a Yinian (2002) perspective on this particular method. Yin defines a case as "a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between a phenomenon and context are not clear and the researcher has little control over the phenomenon and context" (Yin, 2002, 13). In the context of this research, that explanation of the method fits this analysis of Russia's legal justifications for the veto well. The researcher has no control over the vetoes or the justifications, as it cannot influence the voting procedures. The phenomenon analysed would be the legal norms in the justifications given by Russia in the Security council. In addition, the boundaries between the phenomenon and the context, which are Russia's economic and political interests in Syria, are not clear, which is what this study aims to investigate. According to Yin, a case study is well-suited to answer "how" or "why" research questions, which is also the kind of research questions asked in this thesis (in Yazan, 2015, 138).

The method of choice, as aforementioned, will be a single-case study, as the period from 2011 to 2016 is treated as a single case. The analysis will be focused on studying strategic behaviour of Russia; its veto use across a case bounded by time (2011-2016). The emphasis is on Russia's overarching foreign policy in Syria, not so much the single resolutions. This thesis will employ a holistic case study design, as demonstrated by Yin, as it will analyse the phenomenon of legal norms in Russian justifications for the vetoes in relation to Syria as a single case (Yazan, 2015, 140). This means that the analysis is not broken up into single resolutions. The goal is to look at the case as a whole, taking into account the legal and geopolitical aspects to get as complete an answer as possible to the research questions. What is very important in case study research, according to Yin, is to maximize four conditions of

research: construct validity, internal validity, external validity and reliability (Yin, 2002, 19). These will be reflected upon in the conclusion.

The choice for a case study method was made to have a holistic analysis of the research problem. The case study allows the study to not only focus on the language, but to explore the relation between two factors, the legal justifications and the strategic implications of Russia. A case study also allows for a combination of textual sources, like United Nations documents, but also secondary sources or economic data. The aim of the thesis is not to explore the construction of the meaning of legal language in the text, but more so the relation of legal language to other factors. That said, discourse and language do play a significant role in this study.

4.2 Material

The material that is used in this thesis is made up of public documents. It will focus on four key draft resolutions and four meeting documents between 2011 and 2016. First of all, there's United Nations draft resolution 612 that will be used in the analysis. This draft resolution was voted upon in the 6627th meeting, in which Russia also gives its justification for vetoing this resolution. The 6627th Security Council meeting document will thus be used to source Russia's justifications from. This draft resolution was the first resolution to be proposed concerning the Syrian civil war, which is why this is one of the resolutions chosen for the analysis. It is important to analyse the

The second draft resolution is resolution 77 from 2012, and the 6711th meeting document. This resolution was chosen because of the significance of the Arab League's peace plan that was prevalent in the resolution, and the fear from Russia for the threat of a breach of sovereignty is illustrated in their justification for the veto.

Then, the 2014 draft resolution 348 and the 7189th meeting document was selected, because of its obvious relation to international law and legal norms (S/2014/348, S/PV.7189, 2014). In this proposed resolution, the Security Council was proposed to refer the Syrian situation to the International Criminal Court. The reason why this is important to the analysis, is because the legal language that is used in the justifications for the veto in the 7189th meeting document are prevalent. The last draft resolution that is used is the 2016 vetoed resolution 847 and the meeting document of the 7758th meeting of the Security Council. This draft resolution was

specifically selected for its significance in the conflict, with the call for an immediate ceasefire and the cessation of aerial bombings over Aleppo.

In addition, the Rome statute of the International Criminal court and the United Nations Charter are used to establish the international law that is used in both the draft resolutions and the justifications of the veto by Russia.

To ensure the validity of the draft resolutions, meeting documents where Russia's arguments are taken from and the United Nations Charter are sourced directly from the United Nations digital website. The Rome statute is sourced from the International Criminal Court website itself.

4.3 Ethical considerations

This particular study does not have ethical considerations concerning human subjects, as it does not contain interviews or experiments concerning people. However, it is still important to consider internal ethics. Especially researcher bias should be minimised and reflected upon. To avoid researcher bias as much as possible, sources, especially secondary data, will be triangulated. This thesis aims for credibility by following the methodological and theoretical framework.

4.4 Delimitations

The delimitations in regard to the analysis itself, are of time and place. This thesis will only investigate the Syrian case from 2011 to 2016. As Russia's justifications do compare the Syrian civil war to the Libyan conflict in relation to Responsibility to Protect, Libya will be mentioned in the analysis in that context. The analysis will however not be focused on comparison as it is a single-case study. It is important to make it clear that the analysis will take four resolutions and the accompanying justifications in Security Council speeches into account, for which the choices are outlined in the above section. This is however a delimitation as there were more resolutions that Russia vetoed in this timeframe, but due to space and time constraints it is not possible to analyse all of these. In addition, the four most continuous and relevant arguments from Russia's justifications for the vetoes on the Syrian

civil war will be outlined and analysed in relation to Russia's national interests. This means that not all of Russia's arguments are analysed.

5. Theoretical Framework

In this chapter present the theory of Realism is presented, as this is the theory that provides the framework for this thesis. The choice for is further explained in this chapter.

5.1 Realism

In realist theory, the primary and central actors in an international system are individual states (Nye & Welch, 2011). The assumption here is that the international community is anarchic, and not hierarchic, as it does not have a governing system and states are, in the end, sovereign (Nye & Welch, 2011 & Lobell, 2010). Realists thus argue that states seek to maximize their power, or in line with Waltz's realism, self-preservation at the minimum (ibid). Some realists believe that morals do not have a place in international politics, as it is solely driven by national interests, but ethics *do* play a role (Nye & Welch, 2011).

According to Waltz (2000, 39), the in the natural, anarchic condition of states, they act on calculations of its immediate interests. Additionally, he suggests that in 2000, the international system was unipolar, shaped by the United States (Waltz, 2000,39). Waltz argues that this makes the power unbalanced within the international system, and that this unbalanced power is dangerous (Waltz, 2000, 30). This will come to an end, Waltz states, and new powers will emerge (2000, 30). I will argue in the analysis that the Russian vetoes are also based on their interest in becoming such an emerging power in the global sphere.

The reasoning for choosing realism as a theory for this study is because of its strong basis on state sovereignty, which is also what Russian foreign policy has argued many times in justifications for vetoes in relation to the Syrian conflict. This will become clearer in the analysis chapter. Additionally, the unique stance of realism on morality is very much in line with what Russia argues in relation to the Syrian conflict.

5.2 Realism and international law

As legal norms are present in the justifications given by Russia for vetoing Security Council resolutions on Syria, the relationship between international law and realism must be reflected upon. International law in realism is seen as mostly a moral and ethical issue in realism, especially related to justice (Nye & Welch, 2011). This particular aspect of realism is well-

demonstrated in Syria and is crucial to the analysis later on in this study. Morality, to those realists that do take it seriously, is at least equally as important in international politics as order. That is, because justice (morality) cannot be achieved without having order first according to this theory (ibid). According to realists, ethics do not have as big of a role in international politics as national politics, which is mainly because there is no consensus on shared values in the international community (ibid).

According to realists, international law will only be respected by states if it is in their interest to do so and will disrespect international law when it is not useful in furthering state interests (Klabbers, 2017, 16). This notion is important to this study, as legal norms such as sovereignty and territorial integrity, as well as the Responsibility to Protect in the Libyan context are some of the main justifications Russia gives for its veto.

6. Analysis

In this chapter, the analysis of the material is presented. First, there will be an overview of the four chosen draft resolutions that were vetoed by Russia between 2011 and 2016 where the key provisions will be discussed. The outline for the further analysis will be based on the four most used arguments by Russia: sovereignty and territorial integrity, the escalation of the conflict and regime change by the West, the use of Libya as an example and diplomacy and p5 unity. These arguments will then be connected to Russia's national interests.

6.1 Overview of the Russian-vetoed draft resolutions

A short overview of each of the four chosen draft resolutions concerning the Syrian civil war is presented in this subchapter, as the key clauses of these draft resolutions are important to understand in order to analyse the justifications for these draft resolutions.

6.1.1 Overview of draft resolution 612

The first Security Council draft resolution that Russia vetoed in 2011, was an attempt to respond to the growing unrest in Syria. It was also the first Security Council resolution to be proposed in general regarding the Syrian civil war (Security Council Report, 2018). The proposed document was draft resolution 612, sponsored by France, Germany and the United Kingdom (2011). The most significant points of this draft resolution were the condemnation of the Syrian government's violations of human rights while cracking down on protestors, and the call upon the Arab league to continue peace efforts to attempt to cease the violence (S/2011/612, 2011). The Arab League is a regional association which comprises of 22 Middle Eastern and North African states where Arabic is an official language (BBC, 2017). It played an important role in the Syrian civil war, as it worked closely together with the United Nations during the discussions about Syria. In addition, this draft resolution includes a call to member states to exercise restraint and vigilance over arms exports to Syria. This last statement can be interpreted as a call for an arms embargo. Russia was not the only country to vote against this resolution. China, another permanent member of the Security Council, voted against the resolution as well, and it was thus vetoed by two permanent members and did not pass. Additionally, Brazil, Lebanon, South Africa and India abstained (Security Council, 2011, 2).

6.1.2 Overview of draft resolution 77

United Nations Security Council Draft Resolution 77 was first proposed by the majority of the Arab League states, France, the UK and the US in February 2012. It was a United Nations resolution based on the Arab League support plan. At this point, in 2012, the Syrian conflict had become a full-scale conflict, with multiple actors, most notably the Syrian government, Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) and the Free Syrian Army (FSA). This is manifested in draft resolution 77.

The peace plan included the cessation of violence against civilians, the release of prisoners and the withdrawal of state armed forces from cities. It also included the allowance for an observer mission from the Arab League and the full freedom to protest of civilians (S/2012/77, 2012). Draft resolution 77 demanded the Syrian government to comply with these conditions of the peace plan. Furthermore, the resolution was focussed on the assistance of the Arab League in their peace efforts and, again, the condemnation of the Syrian authorities of human rights violations and the demand to stop those violations immediately. Again, this resolution was vetoed by China and Russia. This time, however, the rest of the security council members all voted in favour, with no abstentions. It is important to note that in a different resolution from April of 2012, the condemnation of the human rights violations by the Syrian authorities *and* armed groups, in addition to the call for *all* groups in Syria, including the opposition, was voted through with Russia in favour (S/RES/2042, 2012). This suggests that the international community did consider that a resolution on Syria would not pass without including the opposition groups in the resolutions. This is a good example of the influence that Russia has in the international community which is made possible by the Syrian conflict.

This draft resolution in 2012 is very similar to the first resolution in 2011, especially related to the condemnation of the Syrian government for its human rights violations and the demand for the cease of the use of force against civilians. The right to protest is, however, explicitly mentioned in draft resolution 77, as well as the release of prisoners. However, the main point of this draft resolution is the implementation of the Arab League peace plan.

6.1.3 Overview of draft resolution 348

The proposal for a Security Council resolution in May 2014 was proposed by a staggering number of states to the Security Council. Forty-seven states put their signature on this proposal. This included three permanent members of the Security Council: The United States of America, the United Kingdom and France. In addition, most European countries, as well as Middle Eastern and African countries were well-represented in the sponsoring of this proposed resolution (S/2012/348, 2012).

This draft resolution has a different goal than the previously mentioned resolutions: a referral to the prosecutor of the International Criminal Court. Syria is not party to the Rome Statute, which is the treaty the International Criminal Court is based upon (International Criminal Court). In order for Syrian nationals to still be prosecuted for crimes committed on Syrian territory, the Security Council does have the power to refer a case to the prosecutor (Rome Statute, art. 13 & United Nations Charter, art 5). This would essentially mean that the prosecutor would then take the case and investigate if criminal acts and intentions were indeed conducted.

However, Russia and, again, China voted against this resolution, and it was thus vetoed (Security Council, 2014, 4). It is important to note that three of the five permanent members are not a member state of the International Criminal Court, which are Russia, China and the United States. It can be seen as an infringement of sovereignty for the Security Council to refer a case of nationals of a state that is not a state party to the International Criminal court. Treaties like the Rome statute are based upon consent of the state. This means that if a state is not party to a treaty, they did not give consent for the rules of the treaty to be bestowed upon their country or their nationals (Klabbers, 2017, 24). By the Security Council referring a case to the International Court, it essentially goes around this base of state consent. However, from the other side, the power of the Security Council is grounded in the United Nations Charter, which Syria is naturally a party to. In Chapter VII of the United Nations charter, it does give the power to the security council to make decisions to maintain or restore international peace and security (United Nations Charter, 1945).

6.1.4 Overview of draft resolution 846

The last resolution that will be taken into account in this analysis was proposed in October 2016. This resolution was once again supported by France, the United Kingdom and the United States along with mostly MENA and European states. This resolution was proposed after the non-compliance of Syrian parties to the conflict of the previous Security Council resolutions (S/2016/846, 2016). The proposal also came after an attack on a Red Crescent operation which the United Nations opened an investigation on. This draft resolution calls upon the concerned parties in Syria to cooperate fully with the investigation (S/2016/846, 2016).

The main point of the draft resolution was the call for a ceasefire in Aleppo and reaffirming the commitment of all parties to International Humanitarian Law. It urges for a cessation of all armed hostilities and the safe passage for humanitarian convoys. The draft resolution encourages United Nations member states to assist in the investigation, especially calling for information about these attacks. It calls for a stop to aerial bombings over the city of Aleppo as well.

In regard to sovereignty and in relation to the Responsibility to Protect, I argue that while a demand of a state can be seen as a breach of sovereignty, it is in the power of the Security Council to make these demands. However, this draft resolution includes an operational clause that in the case of non-compliance, the intent is to take further measures under the United Nations Charter. This can be interpreted as a threat of a breach of sovereignty or the intent to use the Responsibility to Protect in the case of non-compliance.

6.2. Sovereignty and territorial integrity

Sovereignty and territorial integrity are integral to the realist theory, and it is clear that Russia is concerned by possible breaches of the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Syria. The arguments of the breach of sovereignty and territorial integrity in Russia's justifications will be outlined, as well as the connection to the interests of Russia.

6.2.1 Sovereignty and territorial integrity in Russia's justifications

The argument of sovereignty and territorial integrity is most explicitly mentioned in the justification for the veto of draft resolution 612 in 2011. The explanation that Russia gives for vetoing Security Council draft resolution 612 in 2011, submitted by France, Germany, Portugal and the United Kingdom, is in a speech in the 6627th Security Council meeting. It is important to note that Russia was also working on a draft resolution together with China, which Russia mentioned in their speech at the same meeting (Security Council, 2011, 3). Russia argues that the principles of sovereignty and territorial integrity of Syria were not respected in the resolution proposed by France, Germany, Portugal and the United Kingdom (Security Council, 2011, 3). Russia argues that the proposed resolution was of a confrontational and accusatory nature against the Syrian regime. (Security Council, 2011, 3). It is likely that Russia sees the condemnation of human rights violations by the Syrian authorities as an example of an accusatory remark toward the Syrian regime.

The principles of sovereignty and territorial integrity are solidified in the United Nations Charter, particularly Article 2. In Article 2, the United Nations outline the principles any member state must behave accordingly with, and in Article 2., it states that member states shall "refrain from the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity and political independence of any state" (United Nations Charter, 1945). It is clear that Russia does not believe these principles are respected in the 2011 draft resolution. It is possible that Russia feels that the political independence of Syria is threatened by a Security Council condemnation of the government for their human rights violations and would thus be a threat to the sovereignty of Syria.

In the later justifications for the vetoes on the resolutions concerning Syria, Russia does not explicitly mention the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Syria to be threatened. I argue this is possibly because the 2012 draft resolution was relatively shortly after the 2011

resolution, and most of the speech Russia gave in that meeting was reserved for a unity argument against the resolution. From 2014 onwards I suggest that the use of the principle of sovereignty by Russia as an argument for vetoing the 2014 and 2016 draft resolution would be ill-timed because of Russia's invasion of Crimea, on the territory of Ukraine. This will be further explained in the connection of Russian interests to the argument of sovereignty and territorial integrity.

6.2.2 The national interests shaping the argument of sovereignty and territorial integrity.

The realist perspective assumes that great powers, like Russia, value sovereignty and takes it as a given (Ziegler, 2012, 402). This is clear in the justification that Russia gives for vetoing the 2011 resolution about the condemnation of human rights violations by the Syrian authorities, as Russia possibly views the condemnation of human rights violations of the Syrian authorities as a threat to the sovereignty of Syria. This suggests that Russia values the sovereignty greatly and sees sovereignty as absolute, in which the United Nations cannot interfere in any way. The interest of Russia, I argue, is the interest in maintaining the importance of sovereignty in the world, as its foreign policy is decidedly anti-Western. The use of sovereignty in its justification suggests that sovereignty can constrain actions proposed by powerful Western states. This relates to the interest of Russia in maintaining their power within international systems. I would argue that it is possible that Russia is showing its veto power in matters of sovereignty to maintain or maximise their influence in the Security Council, because Russia needs to re-establish itself as a global superpower.

As for the reasoning why Russia did not explicitly mention sovereignty and territorial integrity in its justifications for the 2014 and 2016 draft resolutions, I suggest this had to do with the Russian invasion of Crimea. In February and March of 2014, Russia annexed Crimea from Ukraine. From a realist theoretical perspective, it might not be in Russia's self-interest to refer any case to the International Criminal Court when Russia was already under scrutiny of international law under the United Nations Charter for the breach of sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine. The legal norm of the Responsibility to Protect used in the justification for the 2014 veto is significantly more focussed on the past failure of the Responsibility to Protect instead of sovereignty and territorial integrity. This is in line with the realist view of the use of international law as a tool for furthering power and not respecting it when it comes it is not in the interest of the state (Klabbers, 2017, 16).

The opportunity for Russia to argue on the basis of the principle of sovereignty was presented the 2014 draft resolution about the referral to the International Criminal Court, however, since Syria is not a party to the Rome Statute. As aforementioned, state consent for international law is important especially considering the realist view of international law. It would have been a perfect podium for Russia to solidify the argument for sovereignty of Syria, which means there must be a reason Russia did not mention it once in its speech at the 7180th Security Council meeting.

Russia's main interests in relation to sovereignty and territorial integrity are thus the upholding of sovereignty in the international institutions, which is prevalent in the 2011 justification where Russia states that sovereignty and territorial integrity are not respected in the proposed resolution. In the later justifications for Russia's vetoes, they do not explicitly mention sovereignty and territorial integrity, which I suggest is shaped by the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

6.3 The West's escalation of the conflict and the regime change argument

Realism is concerned with the protection of national interests and the expansion of power. In this line, regime change would not be beneficial for Russia, as will be outlined in the following section. The use of the argument against regime change will be outlined and the strategic, especially considering Russian influence in the world will be considered in the following analysis.

6.3.1 The West's escalation of the conflict and regime change in Russia's justifications

In the justification of Russia in Security Council meeting 6711 in 2012, Russia's main argument for vetoing draft resolution 77 about the Arab League peace plan was that the majority of Western states in the United Nations did not wish a "political settlement", but rather a regime change (2012, 9). It was a short justification, a little more than half a page long, contrasting that of 2011 about the condemnation of human rights violations by the Syrian authorities where it was almost one and a half pages. Russia argues that the demand for opposition groups to distance themselves from extremist groups, possibly hinting at groups like ISIS and Al-Qaeda, was not adequately included in the draft resolution of 2012 (Security Council, 2012, 9).

In the 7180th meeting of the Security Council about draft resolution 348 about the referral to the International Criminal Court, the Russian emphasis is, once again, on a political process or settlement, with the inclusion of the Syrian authorities. In the subtext of this is a concern about a regime change, which Russia is convinced the Western states want to achieve with this resolution. According to Russia, the proposed resolution is an attempt to pursue regime change at all costs (Security Council, 2014, 13). According to Russia, this resolution is an attempt at escalating the conflict to push regime change (Security Council, 2014, 13). Russia stresses that a regime change would only prolong the conflict, and would not be beneficial to the people of Syria. It calls the judgement of France that the political process is dead, a "treachery to the Syrian people" (Security Council, 2014, 13).

In 2011, the Russian justification for the veto of draft resolution 612 in the 6627th Security Council, states that while Russia is not a supporter of the Assad regime, the blame for these human rights violations cannot be put on the government alone (Security Council, 2011, 5). While this is not an explicit wording of regime change, it does suggest that Russia does not

want the Assad government to be condemned for their human rights violations alone. Russia continuously stresses that rebel groups also commit human rights violation. Russia calls the opposition to the government radical and mentions the ties with terrorism of these opposition groups (Security Council, 2011,4). The call for the opposition to be included in the condemnation of human rights is prevalent, as they call the wording about the Syrian opposition groups "weak" (Security Council, 2011, 4). In later resolutions that did pass in the Security Council, for example Security council resolutions 2043 (2012), 2139 (2014) and 2165 (2014), the condemnation of human rights violations was directed towards both the Syrian authorities and armed groups.

The push from Russia for the opposition groups to be included in these condemnations of human rights violations continues through the years. It is also argued for in the justification of draft resolution 77 in 2012 about the Arab League peace plan and 846 in 2016 about the Aleppo ceasefire. Again, while it is not an explicit mention of regime change, I still suggest that it is because of the same reasons as the argument against regime change in Syria. By including the opposition groups in the condemnation of human rights violations, the Syrian opposition does lose some of its credibility as a fit leader.

The red thread of the justification is a solution that Russia continues to propose: a political settlement including the Syrian regime. It is also clear that Russia is convinced that the west is pushing a regime change in Syria, and wants to escalate the conflict to be able to do that.

6.3.2 The national interests shaping the argument of regime change

If we look at Russian strategic interests behind the reluctance of Russia for a regime change in Syria, the arms trade with the Syrian government has to be considered. Russia was Syria's first arms provider in the timespan between 2011 and 2016 (Azizi, 2019, 95). Between 2007 and 2011, the arms sales from Russia to Syria increased by 600 percent (Azizi, 2019, 90), which was before the Syrian civil war even started. Considering the realist perspective of protecting the national interests, Russia would not vote in favour of a constraint, or even vigilance of the supply of arms to Syria in 2011. The distinction between the actual sale of arms to Syrian authorities and the arms that the Russian military present in Syria bore is difficult to distinguish in the numbers of the arms trade (Azizi, 2019, 90). It is however established that the arms deals between Syria and Russia were significant, even in 2011. As government contracts make up the most substantial part of the trade agreements Russia makes

in Syria, a change of regime would not be beneficial to Russian economic interests, as the chance is then low of these deals to be re-established (Bagdonas, 2016, 64).

Russia bore a serious economic loss with the fall of Gaddafi in Libya, as a four-billion-dollar arms trade did not go through with the Libyan government (Azizi, 2019, 97). A change of the regime in Syria then does not bode well for the major arms trade of Russia with Syria. Russia does state that it is not an advocate for Syrian authorities in the 6627th Security Council meeting, but Russia does put the attention on the opposition instead of the Assad regime, with whom Russia has little to no arms sales with.

As for the foreign policy strategy of Russia concerning Syria in 2011, there is much speculation on how far the alignment between Russia and al-Assad's regime actually goes. However, it is true that in the 1970s, Syria was the Soviet Union's (Russia's predecessor) only major ally in the MENA region (Allison, 2013, 801). This was a long time ago, but the international alignment continued. In 2011, Syria was still one of Russia's only footholds in the Middle East region. As established, it is economically beneficial to Russia to align with Syria considering arms trade. Additionally, al-Assad offered Russia to put missile systems in Syria as a response to US missiles in Europe (Allison, 2013, 803), which constitutes a military strategic interest.

Russia's alignment with the Assad regime is further strengthened by their shared ideas about territorial integrity and the disdain for regime change supported by the west. This is prevalent in Russia's justifications for the 2011 veto, as it explicitly mentions the statements made by western politicians on the legitimacy of Assad, which according to Russia, could destabilize the region (Security Council, 2011, 4). The call for the "extremist" opposition to be included in Security Council resolutions and Russia's statement that the blame for human rights violations cannot be solely attributed to the Syrian authorities, may suggest Russia's interest in protecting an alignment.

In 2014, we can see that Russia seems to be increasingly worried by an escalation of the conflict. I would argue this is because of the strategic interests in Syria, as the major foothold of Russia in the middle east and the global influence Russia wants to keep more so than the economic interests. If the case were to be referred to the International Criminal Court, there is a significant chance the Syrian authorities would be accused of war crimes. This is not beneficial to Russia, as a regime change could mean that Russia would be ousted in the peace process, and could have a poor effect on the wish of Russia to be seen as an influential

political power globally. Russia would lose a somewhat stable alignment with Syria and the diplomatic power of Russia in the Syrian civil war, and with that globally, would decrease significantly.

Coming back to the realist theoretical perspective of national interests and power, there are two main national interests that play a role in Russian argument against regime change. First of all, there is the economic interest in the arms trade with Syrian authorities. The other interest that has to be considered is Russia's global power, which is augmented by its role in the Syrian civil war and the foothold it has in the Syrian government.

6.4 The use of Libya as an example

Russia uses Libya as an example of how the conflict should not play out in all the analysed Russian justifications for vetoing resolutions on Syria. Most of their arguments are about the responsibility to protect. In this subchapter, the uses of Libya as an example in the Russian justification as well as the interests that shaped the arguments regarding Libya will be outlined.

6.4.1 The use of Libya as an example in the Russian justifications

The Russian Federation mentions that the Syrian situation cannot be seen separate from the Libyan experience in the 6627th Security Council meeting (Security Council, 2011, 4). Russia explicitly mentions the Responsibility to Protect principle that was used in Libya a few months prior (Security Council, 2011, 4). Russia invoked an argument about the Responsibility to Protect, stating that it is alarmed by the NATO interpretation of this principle and is worried it will be used that way in the Syria (Security Council, 2011, 5). Additionally, Russia is weary of a call for a ceasefire in Syria (ibid). In the 6627th Security Council meeting speech, Russia states that the demand for a ceasefire turned into a civil war in Libya (Security Council, 2011, 4). At this point, the Syrian war was still in its first year, and was transitioning from protests to a fully-fledged civil war. Even though the implementation of the Responsibility to Protect principle was not invoked in the 2011 draft resolution, it seems that Russia wanted to get ahead of this by making clear that they would not vote for the principle to be implemented from the very beginning.

In that same speech given by Russia in the 6627th Security Council meeting about draft resolution 612 in 2011, Russia stated that the draft resolution included an "ultimatum and threat of sanctions against the Syrian authorities" (Security Council, 2011, 3). The statement by Russia about the "threat of sanctions" suggests disdain over the part of the Security Council draft resolution 612 where it says that member states need to remain vigilant over the supply of arms to Syria. Russia draws a parallel to Libya, where in their words the arms embargo had turned into a naval blockade (Security Council, 2011, 4). According to Russia, this would be unacceptable.

In 2014, with the draft resolution calling for a referral to the International Criminal Court of the situation in Syria, Russia argues that such a referral would be an attempt to use the Court

to further inflame the political intensity, and a base for further military intervention in Syria (Security Council, 2014, 13). Russia once again draws a comparison to Libya, which was the last time an International Criminal Court referral passed in the Security Council. In the justification, Russia asserts that the referral only added fuel to the conflict, instead of an attempt to resolve it (ibid). Russia argues that the NATO bombardments in Libya where civilians died, were left out of the scope of the International Criminal Court case concerning Libya (Security Council, 2014, 13). Russia goes further on to state that the United States is eager to refer cases to the International Criminal Court from other countries but never referred the Iraqi case to the Court (Security Council, 2014, 13). According to Russia, the United States asked for their own citizens to be left out from the Syrian case if it were to be referred. The United Kingdom was also criticised by Russia for being a party to the Rome statute but lacking enthusiasm for the International Criminal Court to explore crimes committed by the British military in Iraq. Russia points out that if the United Kingdom and the United States were really against impunity, the Iraqi case would be referred to the Court as well.

The Russian delegation in the 7785th Security Council meeting concerning the draft resolution from 2016 once again draws a parallel to the interventions in the Libyan conflict. Russia states that the implementation of the Responsibility to Protect principle left the country destroyed but was called a great success by the Western states. (Security Council, 2016, 5).

6.4.2 The national interests shaping the argument of Libya as an example

The national interests that shape the arguments of Libya are somewhat similar to the regime change arguments. This is mostly due to the fact that in Libya, a regime change did happen after implementing the responsibility to protect.

The arms trade has a role in shaping the Libyan argument, as the regime change in Libya meant a loss of a major arms deal with the Libyan regime. As aforementioned, the Syrian authorities do have a significant part in the arms trade between Syria and Russia. The use of Libya as an example thus suggests that Russia does not want a repeat of the regime change in Libya in another country where their arms trade is significant.

Furthermore, the disdain of the ‘‘NATO interpretation’’ of the Responsibility to Protect might suggest that Russia has an interest in blocking resolutions that would legitimise the Western meaning of the Responsibility to Protect. In addition, the support of the Assad regime, as

outlined in the above subchapter, is important to the Russian influence in the region. Implementing the Responsibility to Protect might constitute a threat to this government, which is decidedly not in Russia's national interests.

The referral of the Syrian situation to the International Criminal Court could have an effect on the Syrian regime as well, as it would be likely that al-Assad would be prosecuted for war crimes or crimes against humanity. I would argue that this does constitute a threat to the Syrian government and thus Russia's power. A referral to the International Criminal Court would thus not be in Russia's national interests either.

The invasion of Ukraine in 2014, I argue, also plays a role in this argument against legitimising the Responsibility to Protect principle. This is because accepting the Responsibility to Protect as a legitimate norm in the Security Council might set a precedent to authorise a similar kind of intervention concerning Russia's actions in Ukraine.

Thus, the main national interests that shape Russia's comparison of Syria to Libya as a justification for vetoing Security Council resolutions on Syria are the arms trade with the Syrian authorities, the interest in maintaining power in the region, the protection of the Syrian government and the interest in delegitimising the Responsibility to Protect principle.

6.5 Diplomacy and P5 unity

The arguments on the procedure of diplomacy and the five permanent members of the security council's (P5) unity played a significant role in the justifications that Russia puts forward for vetoing security council resolutions regarding Syria.

6.5.1 Diplomacy and P5 Unity in Russia's justifications

In the 6627th Security council meeting, Russia states that a proposed amendment about the intermediary capabilities of the Arab League was not taken into account (Security Council, 2012, 9). Instead of the Arab League peace plan, Russia would have agreed to a political process with an inclusion of Syria, without an immediate regime change (ibid). Russia explains that a more diplomatic approach, instead of a demand for the cessation of hostilities, would lead to an "inclusive Syrian political process" (Security Council, 2012, 9). While this can be seen in conjunction with the regime change argument, I suggest it also has to do with the want of Russia to be seen as a powerful diplomatic state. This can be achieved by playing a role in solving the Syrian conflict through a political process instead of a cessation of hostilities.

In May 2014, in the 7180th Security Council meeting Russia mainly criticises France as a sponsor of the draft resolution calling for a referral of the situation in Syria to the International Criminal Court. Russia says that the efforts to have a unified P5, consisting of the five permanent members of the Security Council, have been undermined by this draft resolution. Additionally, the Russian Federation states that France already knew that it would be vetoed by Russia. Russia does admit that there were complaints about the unity of policy regarding Syria was not there in the past, but mentions resolution 2118 in 2013, on the destruction of chemical weapons possessed by Syrian nationals and resolution 2139 in 2014 on humanitarian aid as successes, which this resolution undermines (Security Council, 2014, 12). The Russian Federation calls it a "blow" to the unity of the P5 (ibid).

The lack of P5 unity and constructive discussion regarding Syria were also at the forefront of the justification for vetoing the 2016 resolution in the 7785th meeting of the Security Council. Russia goes into more procedural arguments in the justification, pointing out that this draft was not adequately discussed before the meeting, and that it undermines the collaborative nature of the Security Council (Security Council, 2016, 4&5). The Russian Federation argues

that the plan in this resolution was completely pulled out of thin air (Security Council, 2016, 4).

In the same meeting a resolution drafted by Russia was also proposed, considering the situation that unfolded in Aleppo. It was voted upon as well, and it did not pass as there were only four votes in favour. The votes in favour were from China, Russia, Egypt and Venezuela (Security Council, 2016, 12). Venezuela also voted against the draft resolution written by France. The Russian draft resolution is important to mention as it is about the same situation in Aleppo, but instead written by Russia. The draft resolution proposed by Russia did include a call for a ceasefire in Aleppo but also the call for ensuring that, once again, *all* sides to the conflict would adhere to that ceasefire. (Security Council, 2016, 5). Russia did predict that their draft would not get enough votes, stating that this would be because of "anti-Russian sentiments", "false notions of prestige" or simply a lack of courage (Security Council, 2016, 5).

The arguments of the West wanting a regime change and the lack of constructive discussion about this draft were the main points Russia made in the 7785th meeting. This is in line with the previous justifications that Russia gave for the aforementioned draft resolutions, but it does seem like the frustration with the way France, the United States and the United Kingdom are approaching Syria is only growing. Half of the speech Russia gave in October 2016 at the 7785th meeting of the Security Council was about the lack of discourse on Syria and the unconstructive manner in which meetings about Syria were conducted.

6.5.2 The national interests shaping the argument of diplomacy and P5 unity

The want of Russia to balance out the power in the Security Council is evident. Russia wants to be involved in discourse and discussions about the Syrian situation. I suggest that this because of the influence that Russia can exercise over the discourse in Syria, but is not included in this so far. The evolution of the growing frustration of the Western permanent members is possibly because of the exclusion of Russian interests and the stumping of its growth concerning power. The Russian interests and amendments are, according to Russia, constantly left out of the discussion which is why the P5 cannot come to a consensus on the topic of Syria.

It is however important to mention that Russia did get actively involved in Syria in mainly 2015. The Security Council 7785th meeting document from 2016 included an argument against the aerial bombings ban on Aleppo. Russia argues that on the question whether this military flight ban also included drones, or why it also applied to the western part of Aleppo, which the government controls, the answers were unsatisfactory (Security Council, 2016, 5). The ban of military flights encompassed the entire city of Aleppo, but Russia is not in agreement of the government-controlled area of Aleppo to be included in that military flight ban. This is because, in Russia's words, that part has been continuously under fire by fighters from the eastern side (ibid). The eastern part of Aleppo was at the time held by coalitions of differing rebel groups, most notably the Fatah Halab operations room and the Ansar-al-Sharia (MacDonald, 2016). The Fatah Halab operations room is made up of rebel groups that do not want Assad or IS in power, which are groups such as the Free Syrian Army, Ahrar al-Sham and the Suqur al-Jabar Brigade (ibid). The latter was approved by the CIA (ibid). The Ansar-al-Sharia was made up of exclusively Islamic groups such as the al-Nusra front, famously tied with al-Qaeda (MacDonald, 2016).

Considering this, the Russian interest in a political process and productive discussions on Syria might also constitute a desire for the Syrian regime to be included in a peace process. It can also involve a protection of Russian military interests, because of the military presence in Russia at the time.

Thus, I argue that the arguments that Russia gives in its justifications for vetoing resolutions concerning Syria are shaped Russia's interest in having diplomatic influence, especially in institutions such as the United Nations. In addition, the military interests of Russia and the protection of its interests in Syria, as outlined in the regime change argument are of importance when analysing the diplomatic and P5 unity arguments of Russia.

7. Conclusion

To conclude, the analysis shows that the justifications given by Russia are shaped by the interests that Russia has in different ways. I argue that for the argument of sovereignty and territorial integrity, the main interests that played a role were the upholding of the principle of sovereignty, but also that Russia's invasion of Crimea had a significant part in the lack of these principles in later justifications. For the argument of the West's escalation of the conflict and wanting regime change, I suggest that the underlying national interests driving these justifications are the arms trade, the protection of Syria as a foothold for Russia in the region and Russia's interest in maximising its power. Similar national interests drive Russia's parallels to Libya in the justifications for vetoing resolutions on Syria. However, the delegitimization of the Responsibility to Protect would also serve in Russia's interests, which Russia does by pointing out the weaknesses in Libya. As for the last argument for diplomacy and P5 unity, I suggest that Russia's main interest is to maintain its influence over the diplomatic sphere along with the protection of Russia's foothold in Syria and the military interests.

In line with the previous research done on the Russian vetoes regarding Syria, the thesis also determines that the expansion of (diplomatic) power is a motivation for not only vetoing Security Council resolutions on Syria, but also for the choice of arguments in the justifications for the vetoes. However, there were other aspects that were considered in this thesis other than the influence of Russia on the international system, such as the arms trade with the Syrian authorities and the invasion of Crimea.

As this study was constrained by time and space delimitations, I suggest that further research can be done on the evolution of the Russian justifications in the security council up to present times, and the influence of the interest of other states on the vetoes of certain resolutions, as this analysis was only focussed on Russia and Syria. It would be interesting to see if other permanent members behave in a similar way to Russia in terms of veto power and self-interest. Analysing this can help understand why international response can be obstructed or delayed based on national interests and how these national interests have an effect on the justifications for doing so.

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