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Intentions and Interests:
Human Rights, Sovereignty, and The Syrian Civil War
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Syria has of late become one of the greatest humanitarian crises of our times. Beginning as civil unrest and spiraling out of control into a full-scale Civil War, somewhere around 2.5 million Syrians have fled from their homes, nearly 600,000 of them fleeing to Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan and Iraq.¹ In the three years of war roughly 88,000 people have been killed, the conflict peaking in August of 2012 with nearly 6,000 killed in one month. 73% of the casualties have been civilians.² While the war raged on, much of the world failed to pay attention. Only within the last year or so of the war have Western leaders acknowledged the crisis in Syria. But as substantive talks about Syria in the Security Council have unfolded, so too has the question of Sovereignty unfolded. As in other crises of humanitarian significance, the ideal of national Sovereignty has raised its head. In the face of the massacre of civilians and the use of chemical weapons, the question is again raised, which has primacy: Sovereignty or Human Rights? Both arguments have been invoked in debates amongst World Leaders, and both arguments have utilized the precedents of International Law.

On March 15, 2011 protestors took to the streets in Damascus and Aleppo. Inspired by the recent downfall of Hosni Mubarrak in Egypt, a number of Anti-Assad Facebook Groups began calling for widespread street protests. One such Facebook group, “The Syrian Revolution Against Bashar al-Assad 2011” is credited with organizing the March 15 protests.³ During the protests the security forces arrested six people but otherwise the demonstration was peaceful overall. But what the regime had failed to

¹ “Syrian Refugees: A Snapshot of the Crisis—in the Middle East and Europe.” *Migration Policy Centre*. <http://syrianrefugees.eu/> Accessed Nov. 30, 2013.

² *Violations Documentation Center in Syria*. “Statistics for the Number of Martyrs.” <https://www.vdc-sy.info/index.php/en/home> Accessed 5/6/13.

³ “Mid-East Unrest: Syrian Protests in Damascus and Aleppo.” *BBC News*. (March 15, 2011.) <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-12749674> Accessed Nov. 28, 2013.

realize was that this was just the beginning of a long and bloody struggle. Following the unrest in Tunisia, that is widely regarded to have sparked the Arab Spring, President Bashar al-Assad spoke to the *Wall Street Journal*. In his interview he stated in essence that, “Syria was more stable than Tunisia and Egypt. He said that there was no chance of political upheaval, and pledged to press on with a package of reforms.”⁴

Within two months Assad was ordering tanks and riot police to clash against protestors. By June for the first time the Opposition took up arms against the regime.⁵ Within eight months of Assad’s statement the Syrian Arab Republic was in the midst of a full-scale war. In the two and a half years of warfare, somewhere around 89,000 people have been killed. Of that number nearly 64% of the deaths were civilians caught in the middle between the Rebel Forces and the Regime.⁶ The war has proceeded with a “‘gradual escalation and desensitization’ of the public in Syria and abroad” as Emile Hokayem with the International Institute for Strategic Studies has put it.⁷ As the war has become prolonged the war has likewise become more brutal. The Regime has indiscriminately fired artillery shells into populated suburbs, government snipers have targeted unarmed civilians, as well government soldiers have been reported dropping improvised barrel bombs from helicopters into populated areas.⁸ On top of these tactics, it is highly likely that the Regime has deployed chemical weapons against civilian and rebel

⁴ “Mid-East Unrest: Syrian Protests in Damascus and Aleppo.”

⁵ Karouny, Mariam. “Syria To Send in Army after 120 Troops Killed.” *Reuters Canada*. (Jun 6, 2011). <http://ca.reuters.com/article/topNews/idCATRE7553AI20110606> Accessed Nov. 28, 2013.

⁶ *Violations Documentation Center in Syria*. “Statistics for the Number of Martyrs.” <https://www.vdc-sy.info/index.php/en/home> Accessed 5/6/13.

⁷ Barnard, Anne. “Accusations of Chemical Attack Spur Speculation on Motive.” *The New York Times*. (Aug. 28, 2013) http://www.nytimes.com/2013/08/28/world/middleeast/reports-of-syria-chemical-attack-spur-question-why.html?_r=0 Accessed Aug. 28, 2013.

⁸ Barnard, Anne. “Accusations of Chemical Attack Spur Speculation on Motive.”

targets as early as April of 2013.⁹ The Rebels likewise have become progressively radicalized and brutal. Reports of Rebels directly targeting Christians and Alawites in Sectarian Inspired attacks are all too common.¹⁰ There is one infamous video of a rebel soldier eating the heart of a government soldier.¹¹ Such actions have gone further, the Rebels imposing Sharia based law in some areas they control.¹² Both sides of the conflict have grossly violated human rights laws.

The Radicalization of the Opposition in Syria is both interesting and shocking particularly in its speed. The Opposition initially began solely as a reformist movement, wishing to work with the Regime to expand rights within Syria. Very quickly the tone of the Opposition's rhetoric changed. "Crowds took to the streets after Friday prayers," Barry Neild writes, observing scenes in Latakia and Qusair in August of 2011, "The chants calling for Assad's death are seen as a sign of how much the protest movement has changed since its initial demands for minor reform, but not for regime change."¹³ The Opposition early on attempted to show itself as non-religious or at the very least non-fundamentalist, this was done in an attempt to garner the support of the Western powers, particularly the United States. Reporter Graham Usher observed as late as May of 2012 that, "At a recent anti-government rally in Idlib protesters raised the chant: 'When are

⁹ Lynch, Colum and Karen DeYoung. "Britain, France Claim Syria Used Chemical Weapons." *Washington Post*. (April 18, 2013). http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/britain-france-claim-syria-used-chemical-weapons/2013/04/18/f17a2e7c-a82f-11e2-a8e2-5b98cb59187f_story.html Accessed Nov 29, 2013.

¹⁰ Fakhri, Lama. "The Fading of Syrian Humanity." *Human Rights Watch*. (Nov. 5, 2013). <http://www.hrw.org/news/2013/11/05/fading-syrian-humanity> Accessed Nov. 30, 2013.

¹¹ <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RFfnxK-YGGQ>

¹² "The Boy Killed For An Off-Hand Remark About Prophet Muhammad—Sharia Spreads in Syria." *BBC News*. (July 2, 2013). <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-23139784> Accessed Nov 29, 2013.

¹³ Neild, Barry. "Assad Orders Tanks Into Rebel Towns as Syria's Brutal Crackdown Intensifies." *The Guardian* (8/13/2011). Accessed August 15, 2011. <http://gu.com/p/3x7nd/tw>

you going to understand? There is no Al-Qaeda here.’”¹⁴ The Opposition knew that any links with radical Islamist groups would serve to dissuade their prospective supporters.

However, the United States did very little to convey support in the early months of the war. In August 2011, “U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton said sanctions against Syria's vital oil and gas industry were needed to put pressure on Assad.” Clinton called upon China and Russia in particular to halt this economic support with Syria. But as Khaled Oweis notes, such talk of sanctions ring hollow as “there is little prospect of Western states putting teeth into the sanctions on Assad by targeting Syria's oil because of vested commercial interests against doing so.”¹⁵ In evidence of this statement, it must be noted that the Government of Venezuela gave no regard to these sanctions. In February of 2012 *Petróleos de Venezuela*, the state-run oil company of Venezuela, sent 600,000 barrels of oil to Syria. The Energy Minister Rafael Ramirez stated, "Syria is a blockaded country, if it needs diesel and we can provide it, there's no reason not to do it."¹⁶ In this instance, as in many others, alliances between anti-Western Regimes as well as the ideals of national sovereignty trump human rights in the logic of State actors.

The EU has likewise been lax in its acknowledgement of the crisis. While it is true that the EU has contributed nearly 53% of the humanitarian aid to Syria, around \$486 million, it has done very little else that would be of service to the Opposition.¹⁷ In May of 2011 the EU set up an arms embargo against Syria for two years, as a way of

¹⁴ Usher, Graham. “The Syrian Cockpit.” *Al-Ahram Weekly Online*. (17-23 May 2012). <http://weekly.ahram.org.eg/2012/1098/re8.htm> Accessed April 12, 2013.

¹⁵ Oweis, Khaled Yacoub. “Syrian Forces Kill 10 Protesters after Friday Prayers.” *Reuters*. (August 12, 2011). <http://reut.rs/nYk92Y> Accessed August 15, 2011.

¹⁶ “Venezuela Aids Syria Regime With Fuel Shipments.” *Fox News Latino*. (Feb. 29, 2012). <http://latino.foxnews.com/latino/news/2012/02/29/venezuela-aids-syria-regime-with-fuel-shipments/#ixzz1nmxcb0Gt> Accessed Feb. 29, 2012.

¹⁷ “Syrian Refugees: A Snapshot of the Crisis—in the Middle East and Europe.”

punishing the Assad Regime.¹⁸ But such an embargo was applied to both sides of the conflict, which in essence served only to disarm the Opposition. The Regime continues to get its weapons and logistical support from its allies, Russia and Iran.¹⁹ With the Western nations unable or unwilling to give military support to the Opposition, and with the Regime receiving support from Russia, Iran, and Hezbollah; many groups within the Opposition began to turn towards alternative options to receive weapons and aid. Specifically, they began to turn towards radical Islamist elements in the region. “The leader of a militant group fighting on the side of Syria's rebels has for the first time pledged allegiance to al-Qaeda...Al-Golani said that the Iraqi group was providing half of its budget to the conflict in Syria.”²⁰ While civilians were being gunned down in the streets and mosques were laid siege to by Regime forces, the moderates within the Opposition became marginalized. While “whole neighborhood[s] echo...with the sound of bullets,” the Opposition felt abandoned by the West, they turned to the only groups that seemed willing to help them.²¹ In Hama thousands took to the streets chanting, “We will kneel only to God.”²²

The Regime and al-Assad have also changed significantly in their approach to the situation as the war has dragged on. Bashar al-Assad became president of Syria in 2000 after his father died. While al-Assad maintained the authoritarian rule of the Ba’th Party

¹⁸ Traynor, Ian. “EU Slaps Arms Embargo on Syria but Spares President Bashar al-Assad.” *The Guardian*. (May 9, 2011). <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2011/may/09/eu-syria-arms-embargo-assad> Accessed Nov. 25, 2013.

¹⁹ Spencer, Richard. “Syrian Plane ‘carried military equipment from Russia.’” *The Telegraph*. (Oct. 11, 2012). <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/middleeast/syria/9602752/Syrian-plane-carried-military-equipment-from-Russia.html> Accessed Oct. 11, 2012.

²⁰ The Associated Press. “Militant Rebels in Syria Announce Merger with al-Qaeda.” *CBS News*. (April 10, 2013). <http://www.cbc.ca/news/world/story/2013/04/10/syria-rebels-alqaeda.html> Accessed April 10, 2013.

²¹ Owels, Khaled Yacoub. “Syrian Forces Kill 10 Protesters after Friday Prayers.”

²² Owels, Khaled Yacoub. “Syrian Forces Kill 10 Protesters after Friday Prayers.”

and the domination of the Alawis, al-Assad hoped to be less repressive than his father, and began implementing liberalizing efforts. Al-Assad declared Amnesty for the Muslim Brothers in 2001, he released 800 Brothers from prison between 2001 and 2004, and in 2006 he lifted the ban on prayer in military barracks; the younger al-Assad seemed to represent a “willingness on the part of the Syrian state to open a new chapter in its relations with the country’s religious groups.”²³ Even at the beginning of the Arab Spring al-Assad seemed to be positioning his Regime towards being more open towards reform.²⁴ Al-Assad has been adamant in denying the legitimacy of the Opposition, denying their grassroots genesis. He has gone so far as to imply that the Rebels themselves are foreign agents, seeking destabilize the Regime, and that the will of the Syrian people is still in support of him.²⁵ Labeling the Opposition as “Terrorist Criminal Gangs,” al-Assad has declared that Syria “will not relent in pursuing the terrorist groups in order to protect the stability of the country and the security of the citizens,”²⁶ By August of 2011, the Regime had positioned its forces in such a way that in many of the major cities “tanks occupy every main square and roundabout,” strategically positioned near key mosques to counter Opposition organization.²⁷ Al-Assad has also done his best

²³ Khatib, Line. *Islamic Revivalism in Syria: The Rise and Fall of Ba’thist Secularism*. London: Routledge. 2011. p. 2.

²⁴ “Mid-East Unrest: Syrian Protests in Damascus and Aleppo.”

²⁵ “Assad Says Foreign Enemy Agents Undermining Stability.” *Channel 4 News*. (Aug. 1, 2012). <http://www.channel4.com/news/assad-says-foreign-enemy-agents-undermining-stability> Accessed Dec 2, 2013.

²⁶ Oweis, Khaled Yacoub. “Assad: Syria Won’t Stop Fight Against Terrorists.” *Reuters*. (August 10, 2011). <http://in.reuters.com/article/2011/08/09/idINIndia-58697320110809> Accessed November 24, 2013.

²⁷ Oweis, Khaled Yacoub. “Syrian Forces Kill 10 Protesters after Friday Prayers.”

in silencing the Opposition's attempts to get support from the outside world, expelling most independent journalists within the first five months of the uprising.²⁸

The ways in which the international community has reacted to this crisis is very telling, and to be honest speaks more to the priority of geopolitical alliances placed above ideals of human rights. For over a year the government of the United States was largely silent about the massacres in Syria. Senator John McCain of Arizona was one of the first to break ranks in Washington to speak about what role the US ought to play in Syria. He spoke quite openly about his own personal frustrations with the International System and made an argument from morality and human rights for intervention. In April of 2012 he stated bluntly that:

For the United States to sit by and watch this wanton massacre is a betrayal of everything we stand for and believe in...Over there, they [the Syrian rebels] are waiting for American leadership...We have announced that we are now providing them with non-lethal equipment. That does not do very well against tanks and artillery. We need to get a sanctuary for the Free Syrian Army; we need to get them supplies; we need to get them weapons. And there are many ways to get weapons to them. We showed that in Libya, we showed that in Afghanistan [in the 1980s]...Again, Russia and China continue to veto any significant effort that comes from the United Nations. How many times are we going to push that reset button? It's time for the United States to lead.²⁹

A few months after McCain's statements, the Obama Administration itself began to address the crisis in Syria more succinctly, though without the interventionist air that McCain leant such sentiments. Obama's statements about Syria were much more measured, suggesting that the Administration itself, while acknowledging the crisis, did not wish to intervene directly. Obama stated in a press conference that:

²⁸ *Reuters*. "Syrian Forces Kill 17, U.S. Threatens More Sanctions." (August 12, 2011). <http://in.reuters.com/article/2011/08/11/idINIndia-58741920110811> Accessed November 24, 2013.

²⁹ Bowman, Michael. "McCain: U.S. Must Lead in Syria." *CBS News*. (April 15, 2012). <http://www.cbsnews.com/news/mccain-us-must-lead-in-syria/> Accessed April 26, 2012.

We have been very clear to the Assad regime, but also to other players on the ground, that a red line for us is we start seeing a whole bunch of chemical weapons moving around or being utilized. That would change my calculus. That would change my equation. But the point that [was] made about chemical and biological weapons is critical. That's an issue that doesn't just concern Syria; it concerns our close allies in the region, including Israel. It concerns us. We cannot have a situation where chemical or biological weapons are falling into the hands of the wrong people.³⁰

The argument made by the Western, primarily NATO, powers was that there were limits upon the ideal of national sovereignty. A decade earlier Prime Minister Tony Blair, when discussing the Balkans Crises put the case quite succinctly when he stated that, "The principle of non-interference must be qualified in important respects. Acts of genocide can never be a purely internal affair."³¹ Many politicians from many nations also leant moral arguments towards the enforcement of human rights over national sovereignty, if not to the same end that McCain was suggesting. French President Francois Hollande declared to the United Nations in September that, "These are not just numbers, they are people, who need food, water, shelter, sanitation, electricity, health care, and more."³² President Obama clinched the international argument for interventionism in the face of human rights violations in a statement on September 4, 2013. In the weeks following the chemical attacks in Damascus that left over 1,000 dead, the United States began to discuss openly the option of direct military intervention against the Regime. In defense of this position, Obama declared clearly: "I didn't set a red line. The world set a red line."³³ Such internationalist arguments of morality and interventionism have been used many

³⁰ Kessler, Glenn. "President Obama and the 'red line' on Syria's chemical weapons." *Washington Post*. (Sept. 6, 2013). <http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/fact-checker/wp/2013/09/06/president-obama-and-the-red-line-on-syrias-chemical-weapons/> Accessed Nov. 25, 2013.

³¹ Lauren, Paul Gordon. *The Evolution of International Human Rights: Visions Seen*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press. 3rd ed. 2011. p. 273.

³² "France Urges Action on Syria, Says 120,000 Dead." *Alliance News*. (Sep. 25, 2013). [http://www.lse.co.uk/AllNews.asp?code=loegkpggo&headline=France urges action on Syria says 1 20000 dead](http://www.lse.co.uk/AllNews.asp?code=loegkpggo&headline=France%20urges%20action%20on%20Syria%20says%20120000%20dead) Accessed Nov. 28, 2013.

³³ Kessler, Glenn. "President Obama and the 'red line' on Syria's chemical weapons."

times before, particularly in the examples of Kosovo and of the 2011 bombings of Libya. However, while the arguments made by the Obama administration speak of a moral horror at these violations of human rights, what is clear in Obama's statements in the summer of 2012 is that the potential regional destabilization is of more importance to the calculus of decision makers than necessarily the human rights violations themselves. The fear of chemical weapons being utilized against Israel and US interests in the region obviously trumps the horror of tens of thousands being murdered by "conventional" weapons.

But the argument for international order and international law is not solely held by NATO and the Western powers. The powers that have been actively supporting the al-Assad Regime, particularly Russia, have likewise appealed to international law to justify non-intervention or at most continued support for the Regime. Russia has been a long-time ally of Syria, for the Russians, Syria is a key doorway to influencing the Middle East as a whole. Likewise Iran is a close ally to Syria, particularly for Syria's hostility towards Iraq as well as a mutual hostility towards Israel. Both Russia and Iran have a direct geopolitical interest in maintaining the power of the al-Assad Regime and as such are willing to glance over the human rights violations of the Regime. Whether as a willing blindness towards these violations, for instance Putin's stated skepticism of the Regime's involvement in the chemical attacks of August 2013,³⁴ or blaming the Rebels themselves for the chemical weapons attacks; the crimes of the Regime are largely ignored. In this regard Russia has been using arguments of international law to great effect. President Vladimir Putin states clearly in a September interview with Russia Today that:

³⁴ "Putin: Russia Doesn't Defend Assad, We Defend International Law." *Russia Today*. (Sept. 4, 2013). <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ntkkJw18TNY> Accessed Nov. 20, 2013.

Under international law, the only body that can authorize using weapons against a sovereign state is the UN Security Council. Any other reasons and methods to justify the use of force against an independent and sovereign state are unacceptable and can be seen as nothing but aggression.³⁵

But of course, Russia having a seat upon the Security Council can negate any legal international attempt at intervention against Syria, due solely to the fact that Syria is a client of Russia. Such political posturing and couching geopolitical interests in the rhetoric of international law has been recognized by many people. In the same September 4 interview with Putin, the interviewer attempts to flush this out, asking a moral question of Putin. The interviewer asks directly, “Are you afraid that you may be seen today as standing by a Regime that is committing crimes, are you afraid that you will be seen today as a protector of this government?” Putin, without a moment’s hesitation responds to the question by reiterating the rhetoric of sovereignty and international law. Putin replies:

We are not defending the current government, we are defending other things entirely. We’re defending the principles and norms of international law, we are defending the current world order, we’re defending the rule that even a possibility of using force must be discussed within the framework of existing world order and international law. This is what we’re defending. This is the absolute value. When decisions regarding the use of force are made outside the UN and the Security Council it raises a concern that such illegal actions could be taken against any country under any pretext.³⁶

This is not the first time that Russia has placed priority upon sovereignty over human rights, nor is this the first time that Russia has directly criticized Western foreign policy in this regard. In the Spring of 2011 (at the same time protests in Syria first began) the Libyan Civil War had escalated in a similar fashion to the Syrian Civil War. The war going in favor of Colonel Ghaddafi and with threats to massacre entire cities that supported the Rebels; NATO, lead by the United States, engaged in a bombing campaign

³⁵ “Putin: Russia Doesn’t Defend Assad, We Defend International Law.”

³⁶ “Putin: Russia Doesn’t Defend Assad, We Defend International Law.”

specifically targeting Ghaddafi and his regime. Putin once more showed skepticism towards the allegations made upon the Regime's forces, and likewise was skeptical of the motivations for the intervention itself. He alleged that humanitarian aid was merely a pretext for the European Union to seize control of Libya's oil reserves. Putin further did not accept NATO's legitimacy in intervening in the internal affairs of an independent nation. At a press conference in April of 2011 Putin stated:

Now some officials have claimed that eliminating [Gaddafi] was their goal, who gave them that right...? The bombings are destroying the country's entire infrastructure. When the so-called 'civilized' world uses all of its military might against a small country, destroying what's been created by generations, I don't know if that's good.³⁷

It is very clear that Russia has consistently utilized the arguments of international law and placed such arguments over and above the arguments for the enforcement of human rights.

Over the last few months, the war has dragged into a stalemate, strategic positions trading hands again and again. It is for this reason that it was speculated that al-Assad deployed chemical weapons against the rebels. With the stalemate persisting for such an extended amount of time, it has motivated both sides to consider negotiations for peace. Peace talks were scheduled to convene between the two sides in Geneva in January 2014. It was the first time that representatives from the Regime and the Free Syrian Army have come to the table.³⁸ Both sides came to the conference skeptical of any possible reconciliation, particularly given how brutal the conflict has been. The International Community is well aware of this, Secretary of State John Kerry stated in a press

³⁷ "Putin: Who Gave NATO Right to Kill Gaddafi." *Russia Today*. (April 26, 2011). http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Iw5lj_RFJ1Q Accessed Nov. 25, 2013.

³⁸ Morris, Loveday. "Long-Delayed Syrian Peace Talks Set for January." *The Washington Post*. (Nov. 25, 2013). http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/long-delayed-syrian-peace-talks-set-for-january/2013/11/25/865bb1d8-55db-11e3-bdbf-097ab2a3dc2b_story.html Accessed Nov. 25, 2013.

conference on November 25 that, “We are well aware that the obstacles on the road to a political solution are many, and we will enter the Geneva conference on Syria with our eyes wide open.”³⁹ Despite this very rational wariness, international leaders are hopeful overall. And it is telling to note that both NATO as well as Russia have expressed support towards the furthering of peace talks.⁴⁰ In this case, a compromise between the two factions, the interventionists and the non-interventionists, is hoped to result in some peace settlement.

However, after two rounds of negotiations, this hope has proved to be in vain. Over the course of January and early February of 2014 the two sides came to the table and no agreement was met. Rather, “each side has seemed to express contempt for the other.”⁴¹ Neither side was at all willing to take the first step towards reconciliation. But while they were both unwilling to properly negotiate, they likewise blamed each other for sole responsibility of the impasse. The Regime’s chief negotiator, Bashar Jaafari, told the press that “those people are not really committed toward guaranteeing the success of the Geneva conference, on the contrary, there was no goodwill at all.”⁴² The Opposition’s spokesman, Louay Safi, likewise told the press that “the regime wants to stall. There is nothing positive we can take from these rounds.”⁴³ The failure of these negotiations was devastating, both for the Syrian People as well as the global community. The UN

³⁹ Morris, Loveday. “Long-Delayed Syrian Peace Talks Set for January.”

⁴⁰ “NATO, Russian Foreign Ministers Support Syrian Peace Talks.” *Voice of America*. (Dec. 4, 2013). <http://www.voanews.com/content/nato-russian-foreign-ministers-support-syria-peace-talks/1803197.html> Accessed Dec. 4, 2013.

⁴¹ McDonnell, Patrick J. “Syria Peace Talks End With No Progress; Mediator Hints at 3rd Session.” *The Los Angeles Times*. (Feb. 15, 2014). <http://www.latimes.com/world/worldnow/la-fg-wn-syria-peace-talks-end-with-no-progress-20140215.0.2091097.story#axzz2tOrVqLYX> Accessed Feb. 15, 2014.

⁴² McDonnell, Patrick J. “Syria Peace Talks End With No Progress; Mediator Hints at 3rd Session.”

⁴³ McDonnell, Patrick J. “Syria Peace Talks End With No Progress; Mediator Hints at 3rd Session.”

mediator of the negotiations, Lakdhar Brahimi, seemed to take the failure personally. He told reporters, “I am very, very sorry. I apologize [to] the Syrian People.”⁴⁴

The Civil War in Syria, with its myriad of factions, of complexities; with the brutality and disregard for civilian life; with the desensitization of Syrian society towards the horrors of war. This war is the greatest modern example of how the violations of human rights affect societies as well as the machinations of international politics. For while both the United States and Russia utilize high-minded rhetoric of humanitarianism and international order; nevertheless the actions they directly take ultimately are only taken in the furthering of their own self-interests. The United States was largely quiet about Syrian human rights violations, until the war began to spill into Turkey and Lebanon, and threatened to destabilize the region to the detriment of Israel. Russia speaks highly of defending the international order and law; but in reality they are defending their long-term ally, their access to influencing the region as a whole. Russia has refused to cease its support of Syria for this reason. It is apparent that there is a disconnect between intentions and rhetoric. There is a disconnect between such abstract ideals as sovereignty or human rights and with the true interests of the powers that be.

For these reasons the conflict in Syria continues to escalate, because the international community at large cares more for their own interests in power and politics. Syria is truly a tragic example of the failure of human rights within the international community.

⁴⁴ McDonnell, Patrick J. “Syria Peace Talks End With No Progress; Mediator Hints at 3rd Session.”

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