

**UNIVERSITY OF NAIROBI, INSTITUTE OF DIPLOMACY AND INTERNATIONAL
STUDIES.**

**POWER AND INTERNATIONALIZED CONFLICT IN THE 21ST CENTURY: AN
EXAMINATION OF BALANCE OF POWER DYNAMICS IN THE MIDDLE EAST**

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STUDENT'S DECLARATION

I, the undersigned, declare that this research project is my original work and has not been submitted to any other college, institution or university other than University of Nairobi.

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This project report has been presented for examination with my approval as the appointed supervisor.

Signed _____

Date: _____

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DEDICATION

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this research project is to provide an in depth understanding of the role of power transitions and power politics in the emergence and persistence of conflict in the Middle East region. The study used two current endearing conflicts in the Middle East; the Syria and Yemen conflicts.

To achieve this, the study was guided by 4 research objectives; to determine the place of global power transitions in accounting for the phenomenon of international conflict in the 21st century, to demonstrate the role of power politics in the emergence and persistence of conflict in Syria and Yemen, to examine why conflict management processes have been unsuccessful in securing lasting peace in Syria and Yemen, and ultimately to suggest possible strategies for better management of the conflicts in Syria and Yemen to ensure lasting peace.

To address these objectives, the study has provided a detailed explanation of power transitions in the 21st Century, analysis of power relations between various states, and their impact on conflict emergence and protraction, as well as an analysis of the peace processes in a bid to understand reasons behind their dismal performance in bringing lasting peace in Syria and Yemen. Therefore, this study provides a descriptive analysis of the changing power dynamics characterized by intensified power contestation between state actors and emerging non state groups and their role in exacerbating conflicts in the Middle East region.

This study is grounded on the Power transition theory proposed by Organski and Kugler, which best brings out the relationship between power transitions and international conflicts in the 21st Century. Other theories such as the theory of multipolar stability, realism and theory of conflict transformation have also been used to explain the relationship between power and conflict and to support the arguments put forth by Organski and Kugler, that hegemonic power contestation, results in a less stable world.

The study confirms the hypothesis that changing power dynamics in the 21st Century are at the core of violent conflicts in the Middle East, particularly in Syria and Yemen.

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CHAPTER ONE

1.0 Introduction

Historically, state power was all about military power, such that the state with the largest military capabilities was automatically perceived as more powerful. Nevertheless, immediate post-cold war international system, political hostilities in form of inter-state wars declined and; the level of insecurity in the global arrangement reduced.¹ Owing to the fact that states were more concerned with reconstruction of their post-war economies as opposed to military security matters. To this regard, the situation provoked a need for urgent involvement in economic matters in an effort to amass economic power.

In support of this proposition, liberalists argued that growing interdependence on economics, trade and business in the 21st century would make military wars obsolete.² This has evidently shifted the global agenda from military power to accommodate state's economic interests, which are of paramount importance to states to ensure their survival, as well as a fundamental strategy in attaining dominance particularly in the 21st century.³

Scholars of world politics have argued, in the current global political structure, a dominant economic power is equally able to become a military power.⁴ This is due to the fact that amassing

¹ Gaddis, (1991). "Toward the Post- Cold War world". Vol 70(2), pp. 102-122. Published by Foreign Affairs

² Joseph, Nye (2011). "Has Economic Power replaced Military might?" Accessed Via: [https://www. Belfercenter.org/ publication](https://www.Belfercenter.org/publication)

³ Joseph Nye. (2004). "Power in the Global Information Age journal". Pp 60-77

⁴ Griffiths , M. & O'callaghan, T. (2013). "Key Concepts in International, Routledge" Retrieved from the Hong Kong Economic Journal

military power requires a thriving economy that can finance the acquisition of military power and capabilities. Globally, economic power has become paramount and key to attaining success in world politics before the cold war phase.⁵ This is as a result of numerous upsurge of countries with increasing economic might in the international system, including; Russia, China the U.K among other fast growing economies.

According to Brooks,⁶ the contemporary globalized world has become more interconnected than it was originally projected to be. Increased interdependence in the international system brought with it a relative shift / power transition from the state hegemon, characterized by emergence of “new powers” and rapid proliferation of non-state actors in international politics.

Although no consensus has been arrived on the typology of the current global structure, i.e., whether it is multipolar or unipolar, it is certain that due to variability in the international system, power is currently multi-dimensional and extra highly disseminated, and therefore, the international political system has indeed greatly transformed in the 21st Century.

1.1 Background of the Study

Violent conflicts have been noted as one of the key attributable causes of global poverty and underdevelopment today. This is due to the heavy human and socio-economic cost of conflict.⁷ Although most conflicts in the 21st century are internal, external forces have been argued to have considerable effects on the sprouting and persistence of internal conflicts. Particularly in the Middle East, old conflicts are expected to persist and new ones are predicted to flare up in the background of the Arab uprisings in the twenty first century.⁸

In the years following the cold war, the international system in the 21st century has seen ground moving changes in the balance of power arising from the sprouting of fresh economic powers. To this regard, the Post-cold war era has noted far reaching transformation in international politics with a looming trend towards multi-polarity as opposed to uni-polarity.⁹

The decline of the USSR after Cold War indicated a drastic change in the balance of power, leaving an imminent power vacuum. For a while after the end of the cold war, the US maintained

⁵ Joseph Nye. (2004). “Power in the Global Information Age journal”. Pp 60-77

⁶ Brooks Barri Atwan (2012) – Article, The Arab League has misjudged its actions on Syria. Accessed Via: <https://www.theguardian.com/arab-league-syria>

⁷ Frances Stewart, University of Oxford- “Root causes of violent conflicts in developing countries- Accessed Via: <https://www.researchgate.net>

⁸ Marwan Kaban 2019. “What the Middle East looks like in 2019”- Arab Centre of Research and Policy Studies.

⁹ Harrison. R Wagner (2004) - Research Article – “Bargaining, War and Alliances”

hegemonic power as the only super power. Some scholars argue that after Cold war, poise of power had become a rather obsolete phenomenon.¹⁰ The system was rather imbalanced and therefore need for other nations to come up occupy the power vacuum left after the disintegration of the USSR.

According to Ernst, balance of power denotes distribution of political power. Other scholars propose that a balance of power in international politics creates an equilibrium state in the international system where powerful state actors constantly check and balance each other to counter the rise of the threat of hegemony. However, owing to the dynamic nature of the post-cold war international system sustained by counteraction by other actors, an equilibrium state is not tenable.

Henceforth, in the 21st century use of the term “balancing of power” instead of “balance of power” has been widely used. The term “balancing of power” embodies a continuous process of power tradeoffs characterized by contention and defiance.¹¹ In the auspices of the revolutionary transformation in the international political system in the 21st Century, study of balance of power is of even more critical importance than it has ever been in the past due to the shift towards multi polarity and its resultant effects in the international political system.¹²

This research therefore seeks to examine how shifts in global balance of power characterised by emergence of “new powers” and new actors in the international political system influences the emergence and persistence of international conflicts in the Middle East region. This research will study the region’s power dynamics, including power contestation between hegemonic power (U.S) and emerging powers including China and Russia as well as their Middle East regional allied powers and their role in the emergence and protraction of conflicts in the region, with a focus on the Syria and Yemen conflicts.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Historically, the Middle East region has experienced highly destructive and often bloody protracted conflicts which have indeed caused great suffering to humanity. Aside from conflict intractability, another striking similarity of conflicts in the region, especially in the twenty first century, is the character of “contagion” of conflicts in the region, which has been argued to result from geographical proximity of the warring states and warring parties, as well as a multitude of other geopolitical and socio-cultural factors.

¹⁰ Ibid:9

¹¹ Ernst H., (1935). “prescription, concept , to Balance of power”, World Politics(5) Pg 6

¹² Aharon K. 2015. “‘ Great Powers’ & Geopolitics: The Balance and Balancing of Power” pp. 11-28

Conflicts in the Middle East have mutated over the years, raising debate on whether they are indeed wars, or organized crimes or have crossed the line and evolved to large-scale human right violations. Due to the internationalized character of internal conflicts and increasing complexity of modern day conflicts, conflict management processes have often been watered down. A series of peace initiatives have been initiated to quell the crisis in the region, which have been inconclusive and unfruitful to date.

21st Century conflicts in the post-cold war period have generally become increasingly more complex than those of the past.¹³ This is inherently due to the interconnectedness of actors involved in conflict driven by forces of globalization, whose involvement in conflict systems in a complex mesh brings about new dimensions to conflict, often causing conflict management of these conflicts to be even more difficult. In addition, the Middle East region has attracted a multitude of powerful external actors whose intervention in the conflicts has been noted as a major contributor to conflict protraction due to their effect in watering down peace processes.

This research seeks to deliberate the role of power dynamics in conflict and analyze conflict management in the background of the intervening power dynamics influencing the process. “Does power rivalry and power contestation between powerful state actors translate to spill over conflicts in smaller states?”

1.3 Research Questions

- 1 To what extent do 21st century global power transitions influence the outcomes of conflicts?
- 2 To what extent is power politics a cause of conflict intractability in Syria and Yemen?
- 3 Why have the conflict management processes used in management of conflicts in Syria and Yemen fail?
- 4 What are the possible solutions to bring lasting peace in Syria and Yemen?

1.4 Research Objectives

General Objective

This study seeks to examine the role of power dynamics in the emergence and intractability of conflict in Syria and Yemen.

Specific Objectives

¹³ Candace Rondeaux & David Sterman, (2018)- A briefing document “Twenty First Century Proxy warfare”

Specifically, the study aims to;

1. Determine the place of global power transitions in accounting for the phenomenon of international conflict in the twenty first century.
2. Demonstrate the role of power politics in the emergence and persistence of conflict in Syria and Yemen.
3. Examine why conflict management processes have been unsuccessful in securing lasting peace in Syria and Yemen.
4. Suggest possible strategies for management of the conflicts in Syria and Yemen to ensure lasting peace.

1.5 Literature Review

This section provides a thematic analysis of literature, guided by the research questions and objectives of this study. The resonating theme in the below literature is the role of 21st century power transitions and power politics on conflicts. Further, review of literature on conflict management processes for internationalized conflicts and why management processes fail has been done to provide insight to inform the gaps which will be addressed by this study.

1.5.1 Why is the Middle East region plagued with so much conflict?

According to Waltz in his book, “Man, State and War”, conflict is part of human nature.¹⁴ 21st century conflicts generally arise due to a multitude of root causes ranging from political, economic, environmental and socio-cultural factors, which are mostly internal.¹⁵ The Middle East region has been an enduring area of conflict engagement characterized by frequent relapse of old conflicts and emergence of new ones. The Middle East is a highly conflict prone region owing to the stakes and interests of various states in the region.

There are many underlying causes of conflict that vary from one conflict to another. As noted by Anthony Cordesman,¹⁶ the current patterns portray dominance of economic, political, social, ethnic, tribal and religious sectarianism as some of the prime factors causing disgruntlement and sparking conflict in the region. It is therefore evident that there are a number of variables involved which differ from one conflict to another. Although there is no reliable way to conduct an assessment of structural factors such as demographics and economics on conflict, some scholars attribute the

¹⁴ Kenneth Waltz (1959) – Book: “Man, the State and War” pp 17-37

¹⁵ Frances Stewart, 2011 “Root causes of violent conflicts in developing countries” Oxford University Press

¹⁶ Antony Cordesman, and Chloe Coughlin, Schulte.2013. “Causes of crisis in Middle East” Published by the CSIS

tribulations of the M.E region particularly in the 21st Century to structural factors such as economics, population growth, unemployment and inflation.

Nonetheless, the key challenge with this approach is that there are few reliable qualitative and quantitative arguments to make inferences to their linkage with conflict. Other scholars attribute the conflicts in the region to internal threats, resulting from violent extremism resulting from the increase in number of violent non-state actor groups such as Hamas, Hezbollah, ISI, Houthi, Mujahedeen together with Zionist movement. These groups have widely been known to use terror and intimidation to achieve their ends, and fuel existing conflicts in the region.¹⁷

Genesis of violent none state actors with considerable affiliations with Islam has in turn had far-reaching political and religious inferences. There is widespread association of terrorism to Islam, which has morphed conflict in the region to a scale of religious conflict, often referred to as “Jihad.” Existence of violent extremist groups in the region has attracted the attention of other states that have since established footing in the region in a collective war against terror spearheaded by the United States.

In addition, within Islam, there exist further divisions between the Shi’a and Sunni identities. Some scholars such as Aaron Reese, point to religious sectarianism as the most dominant and long-lasting challenges to peace and stability in the region.¹⁸ For example, Shi’a militias from outside the territory, Hezbollah have launched attacks in Syria, a Sunni majority. A number of power rivalries in the region are founded on sectarian antagonism including the enduring Iran and Saudi rivalry.

At the commencement of Arab Spring wave, the “contagion” of conflict of region had been argued to be backed by cultural / sectarian altruism.¹⁹ Other Middle East scholars such as Claude Salhani, have linked the multitude of conflicts in the region, particularly in Iraq to her abundant oil reserves and the desire for control the resource generates both from governments and other non-state actors.²⁰ According to Michael Klare, oil fields have been seized by rebels and the revenues used to sustain their activities which have destabilized the region. Oil has also plays a crucial part in attracting global powers to the region, who have established presence in the region for decades now. Oil therefore remains a critical issue of the conflict in the region.

¹⁷ Duaa Binzafran (2016) “The Effect on Non-state Actors on Middle East Politics” . California State University

¹⁸ Aron Reese (2013) – Middle East Security Report- “Sectarian and Regional Conflict in the Middle East

¹⁹ Jacob Slobodien. R. (2016). “A Middle East Case study of the Contagiousness of Regional Conflict journal”.

²⁰ Claude Salhani (2014). “Oil- A blessing and A curse in the Middle East journal”

1.5.2 Linkage between power transition and conflict in the 21st century

Possible relations and conceivable links between global shift in power and the probability of warfare have been contended extensively in international politics literary works.

Wagner explores an argument anchored on assertions that occurrence of war is most improbable if power is equally distributed and more probable if power is distributed unequally.²¹ From a historical perspective, Wagner maintains that the alteration of sharing power as a result of the fall of the USSR rejuvenated the correlation between war and internal sharing of power.²² Mearsheimer, in his book, “*Conventional deterrence*”, argues that war is improbable during instance where power is shared equally.²³ This is because the cost of conflict engagement is much higher when power is distributed equitably. Warring parties are more likely to get hurt when the degree of power exerted against each other is equal and proportionate. Therefore, states who have equal power capabilities refrain from conflict to avert the detrimental costs from actual combat.

Wagner, on the other hand, asserts his assumption that alliances and wars are the only factors that lead to a change the distribution of power.²⁴ However, in some instances, change in balance of power occurs without an alliance or war. This is true for example in the shift in balance of power from the United States to the East (China) in the 21st Century. In his recent work, Wagner now notes that his earlier assumption is inaccurate and argues that since the French revolution, the distribution of power has been subject to other exogenous changes such as shift in economic strength like in the case of the rise of China to the status of second greatest economy as well as the upsurge of the Russia Federation as a global power.

Wagner continued to argue that exogenous changes that strengthen one country can motivate other nations to exercise preventive war due to the fact that even half chance of securing a win from a more dominant one they become stronger. In this context, Wagner supports the idea that there is a higher possibility of conflict due to the shift in power balance. Bringing his theory to focus, the United States which is currently the dominant power would wage preventive war against upcoming powers like China so as to maintain her hegemonic ranking.

²¹ Wagner, R. (1994). “Peace, War, and the Balance of Power”. *The American Political Science Review*, 88(3), 593-607

²² *Ibid* 25

²³ Mearsheimer, J. 1985. ‘*Conventional Deterrence*’. Published by Cornell University Press. Pp 170

²⁴ Call, C (2015). “Addressing Two problems with Peace building.” Retrieved from United Nations University Centre for Policy Research

Van der Putten & Meijnders , in their article, “*Great Powers and global instability*” presents a sequel conclusion that international diffusion of power is at the center of the rise of BRICS countries, as well as increased numbers of powerful non state actors. However, the process is yet to crystallize into an unequivocal configuration of power to replace the Cold War bipolar system and realignment of global supremacies.²⁵The diffusion of power is likely to tamper with the global multilateral system. According to Meijnders, it could lead to a situation whereby worldwide collaboration is accustomed by associations between global powers, such that the system is more unstable in the instance global powers do not cooperate.²⁶

Van der Putten & Meijnders believe that the relation between China and US is developing into a main axis within the sphere of influence²⁷. But, the axes between Russia and the EU/US are also influential. The political realignment and cooperation between world powers as well as a battle for supremacy through proxy wars such as witnessed in Ukraine and Syria is evidence of conflict arising from the global shift in power. Consequently, Van der Putten & Meijnders support the notion that global shift in the equilibrium of power will lead to emergence of conflict.

History suggests that periods of power diffusion are always characterized by high risks of conflict between existing and emerging powers. The conflict between EU/US and Russia over Ukraine is a good example. Shift in the balance of power leads to tension considered by differences in opinion and divergence of interests where great powers are involved. The case of Syria, Iraq, the Islamic State, and Yemen are other ideal examples of how differences in opinion can lead to tensions and supremacy battles between global powers. Based, on the examples given by Van der Putten & Meijnders , the shift in the balance of power has led to notable conflicts, like in the case of Yemen, as will be further discussed in this research. This is therefore a phenomenon to keep an eye on due to possibility of an escalation considering the narrowing gap, characterized by the rise in emerging powers.

In an article on foreign affairs, Glaser²⁸grapples with the question if or not the rise of China will lead to war. Critics argue that the ascent of China will likely increase the probability of great-power war. Glaser believes that unlike the Soviet Union, China is a serious economic competitor and this would make the rise in tension between China and U.S more dangerous.

²⁵ Vander P, & M. Meijnders (2016), “Great Powers:International Instability.” Published by the Netherlands Institute of International Relations. Pp 77-103

²⁶ Lemke, D. (2008). “Power politics and wars without states.” American Journal of Political science, 52(4), pp 774-786

²⁷ Ibid:34

²⁸ Call, C (2015). “Addressing Two problems with Peace building.” Retrieved from United Nations University Centre for Policy Research

According to Glaser,²⁹ liberals argue that the current international order can accommodate China's rise since it is defined by political and economic openness. On the other hand, realists predict intense competition which leads to a more assertive pursuit of national interest, which is ultimately anticipated to degenerate into war.

1.5.3 Role of Power politics in conflict

Based on the assertions of Lemke,³⁰ theorists of power politics and international relations are unified by the central argument that power distribution and national interests or changes to power distributions are the fundamental causes of war. Generally, power politics are characterized by conflicting interests, power contestation, competition and disruption of the existing hegemonic order. These dynamics are majorly aggravated by cognitive imbalance, status difference, differences in power capabilities and state power resources. According to Lemke, these aggravating forces inevitably lead to conflicts³¹.

A number of empirical studies also link power transitions to interstate conflicts. In his study, Fogg cited Tammen's study which used GDP as a measure of national power to portray the relationship between power transitions and occurrence of World War 1, World War 2, the Iraq-Iran war and the Franco- Prussian war.³²

The dynamics of power politics and their role in conflict in the world today, according to Goddard & Nexon is a complex one.³³ The re-emergence of realpolitik as characterized by Russian Federation's annexation Crimea and China's aggressive claims on its coastal waters are just a few examples of how power politics holds potential for conflict. Although in the 21st century nations rely mainly on international law and institutions to adjudicate their disputes and pursue their interests, this does not in effect mean that conflicting interests do not degenerate into real wars. According to Brown,³⁴ power politics, as characterized by changes in the distribution of interests and power, can lead to heated power competition which increases the likelihood for the emergence of proxy wars.

²⁹Ibid: 36 , pp 85-87

³⁰ Lemke, D. (2008). "Power politics and wars without states." *American Journal of Political science*, 52(4), pp 774-786

³¹ Call, C (2015). "Addressing Two problems with Peace building." Retrieved from United Nations University Centre for Policy Research

³² Godard, S.E., & Nexon, D.H . (2015)., "The structure of international politics" *Security Studies Journal*. Vol 1 pp 48-50

³³ Ibid 33

³⁴ Brown, 2016, 'Reasons and Challenges of proxy wars' an analysis of Smallwars. Pp234

Power politics trigger conflicts and have historically led to proxy wars particularly in Africa and the Middle East. Byman,³⁵ in his analysis of power politics, illustrates examples of proxy wars triggered by power politics. For example, Iran is working with Houthi rebels in Yemen to fight the Saudis. Iran provides weapons as well as funding to the rebel group in a bid to undermine Saudi Arabia's regional hegemonic ambitions and impede her influence as a key American ally.

The Syrian war is another ideal example of a conflict emanating from power politics. According to Ali,³⁶ the Turkey-Syria border conflict is a 'proxy' war between Russia and the United States. Arising from the U.S's affinity for hegemonic dominance, United States sidelined its allies, Turkey and engaged in a war at the Turkish border. The results are what critics' term as a shift in interest as Turkey henceforth drew closer to Russia to balance out the U.S. The Syrian war has sucked in many other self-interested countries³⁷. Due to the shift in power balance and the nature of power politics, the Syrian war has not only become more deadly, but more complicated over time. As Ali posits, the role of power politics in the Syrian conflict cannot be undermined.

Power politics has also played a massive role in African conflicts; Michael Ray³⁸ highlights the Sudan-South Sudan conflict which resulted to the cessation of the Southern part of Sudan as a conflict driven by power politics. Although there were other intervening factors, power politics is in fact a common denominator in almost all protracted conflicts in the 21st Century. The Second Congo War (1998–2003) is another ideal example, where diamonds, viewed as a source of financial power, have landed the country in political turmoil.

Casier³⁹ argues that hegemonic contestation is at the epicenter of power politics. United States led hegemonic structure is slowly changing as it is challenged by Russia and China. China and Russia are currently operating from a position of increasing influence and power, which means that power politics are expected to intensify over time, and hegemonic contestation will likely influence political realignments, which could trigger global conflicts.

³⁵ Byman, D., 2018. "Genesis of Proxy Wars: Nations Outlook."

³⁶ Ibid:45

³⁷ Ali, Candace Rondeaux & David Sterman, (2018)- A briefing document "Twenty First Century Proxy warfare"

³⁸ Ray, M.(2015). "Deadliest Wars of the 21st century." Retrieved <https://www.britannica.com>

³⁹ Casier, T. (2018). Hegemony and contestation: "Why changing power relations do not mean a change of international order. Retrieved <https://doc-research.org>

1.5.4 Management of Internationalized Conflicts

Conflict management is conceptualized as the techniques aimed at reducing the negative effects of conflict and enhance the positive ones.⁴⁰ According to Blake and Mouton, there are five main conflict management strategies which are applied depending on the nature of conflict, including; accommodation, domination, avoidance, compromise and integration. Conflict management focused majorly on the limitation, mitigation and containment of conflict, without necessarily resolving it.⁴¹

Internationalization of conflict has been a hot topic in the 21st century with increasing intervention of foreign actors in internal conflict, resulting in prolonged civil wars, particularly in the developing countries of the Middle East region .Sylvain Vite⁴² defines internationalization as intervention of a third state in an internal conflict in support of state forces or non-government rebels. There are however other viewpoints of conflict internationalization from the perspective of refugee influx to neighboring states, hence Albrecht Schnabel's ⁴³definition as “conflict spill-overs”.

There are different motivations for internal actors to seek external interventions majorly pegged on the need for material resources to fight and legitimacy, which is usually connected to support from abroad.⁴⁴ On the flipside, the motivations for external actors to intervene in internal conflicts mainly gravitate around acquisition of natural resources and projection of influence. However way the term is conceptualized, the evident factor is the increased complexity of internationalized conflict arising from a complex web of external actors. Internationalized wars have been argued to be far more deadly and protracted than non- internationalized conflicts.⁴⁵

Consequently, internationalization of conflict has indeed brought with it new dimensions to conflict management processes. This is because in an internationalized conflict, there are many more players with multiple interests which are difficult to satisfy all at once. The wars in Syria, Yemen and Palestine are indeed good examples of internationalized conflicts, with scholars referring to them as “many wars in one”.⁴⁶ According to Deng & Zartman internationalization of conflict broadens the conflict by bringing in external perspectives with only peripheral remnants of the

⁴⁰ Qi Wang. (2015). “Conflict Management”. Retrieved <https://centerforinterculturaldialogue>.

⁴¹ Fred. T. (2000) – “Conflict prevention & resolution: Limits of Multilateralism”

⁴² De Silva, K.M & May, R. J (1991).”Internationalization of Ethnic Conflict, Continuum International Publishing

⁴³ Schnabel., 2002. “The South East European Security”

⁴⁴ Borda., Candace & David Sterman, (2018)- A briefing document “Twenty First Century Proxy warfare”

⁴⁵ Erink, Harrison. R Wagner (2004). “Bargaining War and Alliances”

⁴⁶ Fawcellett (2013). “ Global relations of the Middle East Region- “Puzzle of political reform of UAE.”

internal perspectives of the conflict, thus calling for more sophisticated approaches to conflict management.

In addition, a powerful actor whose interests are unmet in a peace deal is more likely to sabotage the outcomes of the deal. Powerful actors are therefore not likely to quit until their needs are satisfied.⁴⁷ Therefore, conflicts in the Middle East are more inclined to end in the way that the external actors and especially the powerful actors want them to end. For this reason, management of internationalized conflict is arguably more difficult than management of purely internal conflicts.⁴⁸

Key to note however, is the centrality of power politics in the management of conflicts in the Middle East, particularly the stalemate conflict in Syria, with the shift from the Western- led Geneva talks to the Russian-led Astana talks, where the U.S has participated only as an observer.⁴⁹ Similarly, managing the Israeli-Palestine conflict has proven futile due to power contestation between Iran and Israel and their allies. In Yemen, the conflict management processes have also stalled owing to competing Saudi and Iranian interests.

Although the Arab league has made efforts to manage conflicts in the region, the record of success in management of the conflicts is indeed bleak.⁵⁰ Empirical studies conducted by the Crisis States Research Centre on reasons for the low success rates of the league in managing conflicts alluded to the organization's reluctance to intervene in conflicts in cases where major regional powers were involved, to safeguard their individual self-interests.⁵¹

With involvement of the world powers and regional actors in conflict management processes in pursuit of their self-interest and absence of negotiated inclusivity, the conflict management and resolution efforts are predicted to be unsuccessful. This phenomenon therefore leaves conflict managers in a dilemma on how exactly power politics and national interest of the participating states will play out in favor of peace and stability in the region and vice versa. For this reason, this study aims to enhance the understanding of the role of power in conflict management processes of internationalized conflicts and propose remedial solutions.

⁴⁷ Deng and Zartman, (1991) - "Conflict Resolution in Africa" (Washington) pp 1-14

⁴⁸ Christopher Phillips, (2016). "The Battle of Syria: International Rivalries in the Middle East."

⁴⁹ Lakshmi Priya (2017). "Preamble to Astana Peace Talks." Retrieved <https://idsa.in/backgrounder>

⁵⁰ Harrison. R Wagner (2004). "Bargaining War and Alliances"

⁵¹ Ibid: 60

1.5.5 Why do Conflict Management Processes for Protracted Internationalized Conflict Fail?

Stein argues that in global politics, the understanding of international conflicts has burst through the constraints of sovereignty and so have the conflict management processes.⁵² Autesserre⁵³ highlights three ideas which seek to explain factors / flaws which are hurting international conflict management and peacebuilding processes. According to Autesserre, these flaws are based on assumptions as they are not supported by empirical studies.

The first assumption is the conventional idea that good things enhance peace, and bad things subvert peace. In many instances, peacebuilding initiatives often view democracy and education as a moral force that enhances peace. Scholars argue that contrary to the popular beliefs, education and democratization may, in fact, fuel those conflicts.⁵⁴ For example in the case of the Arab spring, democratization processes in the Middle East have resulted in antagonism and discrimination, and has worked against peacebuilding and overall stability of the Middle East region. The same phenomenon has been witnessed in Congo and Angola. Autesserre further claims that contrary to conventional thinking, illicit activities can create short term stability, which in the long run could culminate to a durable peace⁵⁵.

The second assumption is that adoption of formal peace efforts to control violence with disregard to local dynamics results in more speedy outcomes. In this vein, it has been argued that conflict management processes put more emphasis on international organizations and institutions such as U.N and A.U which concentrate more on enforcement of international law without much consideration to engage local civil-society organizations in the process.

This assumption has been criticized overtime, evidenced by the various institution led peace processes that have not been successful in the past. Some scholars have argued for and against peace processes spearheaded by international organizations. For example, according to Ogego,⁵⁶ the Sudan's peace process had to take the intervention of the U.N to push the process forward. Conversely, according to Rolandsen,⁵⁷ the resultant agreement between the Sudan government and

⁵² Stein., J. 2000., 'Bottlenecks to conflict resolution: Humanitarian Non-governmental Institutions' emergencies Journal Vol 1

⁵³ Ibid 53

⁵⁴ Ray, Rondeaux & David Sterman, (2018)- A briefing document "Twenty First Century Proxy warfare"

⁵⁵ Marwan Kabalan 2019. "What the Middle East looks like in 2019"- Arab Centre of Research and Policy Studies.

⁵⁶ Peter Ogego (2014). Research thesis- "Sudan's Persistent conflict and Elusive Peace" Retrieved from the IDIS- UoN

⁵⁷ O.H. Rolandsen 2014. " A Quick Fix?" pp, 561-562

the SPLM was a result of the push by external influences, which was not entirely inclusive and therefore unsustainable.

The third assumption, according to Autesserre⁵⁸, which is closely interrelated with the second assumption, is the assumption that local inhabitants of conflict zones are not capable of resolving their predicament. Conventional conflict management processes seem to allude that local leaders are incompetent, uninterested, corrupt, and autocratic and have no goodwill to be able to nurture peacebuilding. Although this assumption has not been tested empirically, it has been noted that although most locals are willing and committed to negotiations and peacebuilding, there is usually no goodwill from the leadership. In the Syria peace process for example, despite there being a ceasefire agreement, the Assad regime has been alleged to dishonor the agreement by launching attacks in opposition-strongholds, culminating to withdrawal of the opposition from the peace process.⁵⁹

Charles Call analyzes some of the failures of peacebuilding in Iraq and Afghanistan⁶⁰. In his research, Call argues that the dismal performance of conflict management and peacebuilding initiatives in Iraq and Afghan can be attributed to several interconnected problems associated with financing. In the UN systems, for example, there is an imbalance between conflict response and conflict prevention. This is because these interventions have been argued to be largely reactive as opposed to preventive. Secondly, peacebuilding operations in Iraq and Afghanistan have not found ways to adapt and respond to the local context of the war in a more cost-effective and sustainable manner.

According to Bercovitch & Langley,⁶¹ mediation and negotiation are extensively considered as the most widely used forms of third-party interventions in international conflicts and disputes. However, despite this, there is still much about their effectiveness in delivering lasting peace, which is questionable. Failed negotiations in Yemen, Syria and Palestine are examples of how flawed international mediation and negotiation processes have been in the past.⁶² According to a Project on Middle East Democracy by Pomed,⁶³ UN-led negotiation in the Yemen crisis failed because it

⁵⁸ Ibid:65

⁵⁹ Kazinform (2017).Journal- “Memorandum on Syria de-escalation zones signed in Astana”.

⁶⁰ Call, C (2015). “Addressing Two problems with Peace building.” Retrieved from United Nations University Centre for Policy Research

⁶¹ Bercovitch. J & Langley. J (1993).”The nature of dispute and the effectiveness of International Mediation.” Journal of Conflict Resolution, 37(4).pp 669- 690

⁶² Pomed, P. (2017). Policy Brief “Breaking the Cycle of Failed Negotiations in Yemen.”

⁶³ Ibid: 72

was dominated by external elites and did not have considerations for representatives from the aggrieved areas. Pomed believes that failure to directly involve locally aggrieved regions and parties is the main reason for the failed negotiations.

The Israel and Palestinian dispute is yet another long term power conflict which is also characterized by a series of failed negotiations and mediation. Shaban ⁶⁴argues that Israel believes that negotiations cannot succeed as long as Palestine remains divided. The conflict between Hamas and Fatah led to a geographical and political rift, which has largely compromised peace efforts. In this light, lack of unity of purpose among the negotiating/ warring parties is one of the fundamental reasons for failed negotiations. According to Shaban, Israel uses this disunity to justify Palestine's absence on peace negotiation table.

Failed peace negotiations between the Syrian government and the opposition are another example of unfruitful negotiations. Habets⁶⁵ claims that the failed negotiations, in this case, were attributable to the interference by external interests. The involvement of superpowers such as Russia, U.S, and EU supporting one or another faction made peaceful resolution impossible. According to Habets, the involvement of regional and international powers in the Syrian conflict, complicated the conflict and made even more difficult to have conclusive negotiations.

1.5.6 Concept of Proxy Wars and Internationalization of conflicts in the 21st Century

Proxy wars have wrecked developing countries notably in Africa and the Middle East region, emanating from the heated confrontation between external state actors motivated by scramble for resources and quest to exert influence⁶⁶. To this regard, proxy wars have become a viable strategy of the great powers aimed at advancing and defending their national interests in a bipolar/multipolar international system.

Arising from the changing characteristics of wars in the 21st Century, “new wars” is a term that was coined by a British scholar, Mary Kaldor, to describe conflicts that have occurred in the post-cold war period. The phrase “new war” does not necessarily mean that the wars have not been in existence before; it is simply used to denote the shift from conventional wars to contemporary modern wars⁶⁷. New wars are characterized by; attempts to attain political control over populations,

⁶⁴ Ray, N. Claude Salhani (2014). “Oil- A blessing and A curse in the Middle East journal”

⁶⁵ Call, C (2015). “Addressing two problems with Peace building.” Retrieved from United Nations University Centre for Policy Research

⁶⁶ Marwan Kabalan 2019. “What the Middle East looks like in 2019”- Arab Centre of Research and Policy Studies.

⁶⁷ Baczko, Dorronsoro, & A Quesnay (2018) Civil war in Syria:” Mobilization and competing social orders”. Published by Cambridge University Press

conflicts between different combinations of national and non-state networks, and violence financed either through state or other predatory means.⁶⁸

According to Karl Deustch, proxy wars are conflicts between two states in a third country outside their territory.⁶⁹ Proxy wars were basically the hottest part of the cold war where the protagonists indirectly faced each other. This is a common great power strategy which U.S. has adopted to advance its interests in Middle East, South Asia and Africa by establishing local partners without committing to direct military intervention.

Closely linked to the concept of proxy wars is the concept of conflict internationalization. Internationalized conflicts are internal conflicts which have interference by external actors in any phase of conflict, ranging from involvement in hostilities, negotiation and reconstruction processes of a domestic conflict.⁷⁰ External actors can either be involved directly in form of military combat or indirectly in form of aid and military assistance. Internationalization of internal conflicts occurs majorly in developing countries that rely on assistance and international support to address domestic political and economic problems.⁷¹

It has been argued that great power wars in the 21st Century are highly unlikely. Although the United States is keen on asserting her role as the superpower by dealing with the destabilizing efforts of the “emerging powers”, scholars have argued that the cost associated with morphing the antagonism into actual war far outweighs the U.S need to maintain the status –quo hegemonic title. All states would like to assert influence and dominance without having direct involvement in fighting. This is because direct involvement is way too costly, and certainly not in the best interests of Washington and any of the emerging powers, hence the use of proxies.

Rather than engaging in direct wars, the great powers save on costs and capitalize on lower risks of engagement through proxy wars⁷². The locals fight and die so that the great powers do not have to, but at the same time the great powers get the chance to maintain influence and power. Proxies also help in preventing the nationalistic backlash that often arise due to foreign interventions in conflicts, by using the weaker states as proxies to avert the cost of war from themselves.

⁶⁸ Mary Kaldor (2013). “Identity and War journal”

⁶⁹ Andrew Mumford (2013). “Proxy warfare. Polity press”. Cambridge.pp13

⁷⁰ De Silva, K. & May, R. (1991). “Internationalization of Ethnic Conflict”. Continuum International Publishing

⁷¹ Barnet. M. Levy. (1991). “Domestic Sources of Alliances and Alignments: The Case of Egypt, 1962- 1973”. Vol 45 pp 370-394

⁷² Griffiths , M. & O’callaghan, T. (2013). “Key Concepts in International, Routledge” Retrieved from the Hong Kong Economic Journal

The power contestation between the global and Middle East regional powers has propagated the adoption of proxy war strategies to achieve their foreign policy objectives. The conflicts in Middle East are classic examples of proxy wars among great powers and regional powers, which have caused people immense suffering in the hands of powerful decision makers outside their territory. Owing to the fact that the great powers use proxies as pawns to defend their strategic interests, conflict analysts have argued that the outcomes of proxy conflicts are arguably even more brutal than direct wars.⁷³

Super powers' involvement in proxy wars often results in long periods of instability in developing countries. In addition, their involvement in proxy wars tends to lengthen the time-span of the conflict since the effects are not felt directly and none of the powers are ready to accept defeat. The concept of proxy wars has been elaborated in this study to demonstrate the linkage between power and conflict.

The major conflicts of this nature in the Middle East in the 21st century are the Syria civil war, and the Yemen civil war, which will be analyzed in chapter 3 of this study.

1.6 Justification of the Study

This study aims to fill a gap in literature in providing a systematic and detailed analysis of conflicts and the factors behind intractability of the conflicts in the Middle East region. There are few comprehensive studies conducted focussed on how power is manifested in the intractability and most importantly, the seemingly contagious endemic nature conflicts in the region.

Peace is an indispensable condition for prosperity and for protecting the dignity of human life.⁷⁴ According to the World Development Report, violence is the most pertinent factor contributing to underdevelopment in the world in the twenty first century.⁷⁵ For this reason and the high costs associated with civil wars, it is therefore important to study the key factors causing conflict protraction in order to find ways of resolving these conflicts as sustainably as possible.

The use of the Power transition theory as the basis of this research will enable policy makers to better predict the outcomes of conflicts in the 21st Century and device tools to respond to power conflicts in the future. The policy recommendations in this research paper aim to supplement and complement the already existing policy framework in conflict management of internationalized

⁷³ Brecher, M. (2008). "International political earthquakes journal." University of Michigan Press

⁷⁴ Westendorf J.K. (2015). "Why Peace processes fail ". Published by Boulder, Lyne Reinner Press

⁷⁵ World Bank report Vol. 23 2015

conflicts. This will ensure that conflict management of internationalized conflicts do not always end in futility.

This research will be important to scholars undertaking research in this subject area to understand the role of power and its dynamics in the outcomes of conflicts. In addition, with the increasing complexity of conflicts in the 21st Century, further research will be required to understand and offer solutions to the anticipated proxy wars in the coming years. This study will provide a valuable addition to the body of knowledge that will serve as a reference point to other scholars in their research in conflict and peace studies.

The study will also play the role in enlightening the public and state actors by proposing how power can be used effectively to help them work together with non-state actors in ways that are mutually beneficial to both parties.

With the rise of violent intra-state conflicts as a global concern, particularly with the growing recognition of the effect of foreign intervention coupled with emergence of powerful non-state actors in conflicts, this study is indeed distinctive.

1.7 Theoretical Framework

This section will outline a number of relevant theories that explain the nexus between war /conflict and the balance of power phenomenon in the 21st Century. However, the most relevant theory that will form the basis for the arguments in this research is the power transition theory.

1.7.1 Theory of Power transition

The concept of power transition emerged from the power transition theory which has been used to explain great power wars. The concept has been discussed by scholars in the context of the U.S and a rising China and Russia in what is referred to as power transition from the West to East.⁷⁶Power transition is focused on the changing power distribution in the international political system.

The theory of Power transition as advanced by Organski and Kugler is based on a hierarchical world system, which is based on ranking of states in world politics. The theory argues that power transitions in the international system increase the probability of wars. This arises because the dominant power is unwilling to grant the new powers access to the benefits they derive from the status quo. Emerging powers who are dissatisfied with the status quo are likely to provoke war in

⁷⁶ Dr. Joseph Nye. (2011). Article- "The Future of Power"

order to challenge the hegemonic power of the status quo dominant state, particularly when the challenger grows in approximate power parity.

In relation to the 21st century, the U.S has been at the apex of the hierarchy as the superpower since the disintegration of the USSR. Until recently, China, Russia, the U.K were lower in ranking as “great powers”, because they could not match the United States’ power at the time, both economically and militarily.

The theory argues that international stability is dependent on the dominant power and great powers beneath the dominant power, who are content with the status quo in the system. Contrary to which, dissatisfaction coupled with power parity ensues in conflict.⁷⁷ Therefore, war ensues when the great powers are dissatisfied with the status quo and rise to challenge the dominant power.⁷⁸

The effect of such wars is to re-order the system. Peace and Stability therefore ensues when one power dominates the system.⁷⁹ According to J. Nye, the other type of power transition is power diffusion, which is the shift of power from the state to non-state actors.⁸⁰ Power diffusion has characterized the Middle East power dynamics with the emergence of various non-state actors in conflict including ISIS, Hamas, Hezbollah, Mujahedeen, Al-Qaeda, Muslim brotherhood and other Zionist movements who continue to shape Middle East conflict outcomes in many ways.

Power transition in the contemporary 21st century is argued to be as a result of differential rates of economic growth. Power transition theory predicts emergence of war resulting from the uneven growth of power between states. As one country grows, it achieves power parity which will likely elicit aggressive resistance from the dominant state, which provides pre-conditions of conflict.

The risk of confrontation increases with the narrowing of the power gap between the hegemonic power and aspiring hegemon. According to Organski and Kugler, states with more vibrant economies can effectively equip their armies, increasing their chances, likelihood and potential to rise up to oppose a more powerful state.

According to Luisa& Kai the likelihood of conflict increases if there is a power imbalance in the system. Although the rise of China and Russia has not culminated to actual war with the U.S, the power contestation and resultant rivalry remains a matter of concern in the future of global

⁷⁷ Scofield Yoni. (2016). “Power transition as a Cause of conflict.” Oxford Press

⁷⁸ Claude Salhani (2014). “Oil- A blessing and A curse in the Middle East journal”

⁷⁹ Jose’ Pedro. (2012). “Applying power transition theory and liberal institutionalist theory to U.S China relations thesis.” Retrieved from University of Oslo

⁸⁰ Joseph Nye. (2004). “Power in the Global Information Age journal”. Pp 60-77

international politics in the long run. Many scholars use the theory of power transition to explain occurrence and persistence of conflicts in the last decade, and clearly define the relationship between power transitions and conflict, hence why this theory is of utmost relevance and importance to support the arguments put forth in this study.

1.7.2 Theory of Multi-polar Stability

The theory of multi-polarity has attracted different views from scholars on its impacts on international stability. This theory was advanced by Karl Deutch and David Singer⁸¹. They argued that as the international system moves towards multipolarity, the frequency and intensity of war will be expected to diminish.

Midlarsky & Hopf argue that multi-polarity prevents conflicts by triggering a balance of power.⁸² Stability can be attained through a multi-polar system where different states and alliances have the military and economic power and their survival does not depend a preponderant hegemon⁸³. According to Brecher,⁸⁴ multi-polarity prevents instability due to the presence or recognition of other controlling systems in the international system, which keeps all players in check. The lesser nations have little or no opportunity to play major powers against each other due to the rigidity of a system with fewer great powers. The above arguments are based on the pluralism model which stipulates that multipolarity is more stable due to increase in interactions between the actors because alliances as in a bipolar system inhibit interaction opportunities.⁸⁵

Conversely, opponents of multi-polarity have brought forth strong arguments against the theory. Brecher argues that in the 21st Century, a single power cannot succeed in positive control of the whole world. Other states will definitely want to pursue policy preferences to balance the hegemon's control, which inevitably leads to conflicts.

According to Maoz et al⁸⁶, international stability reduces as the system moves from bipolar or unipolar towards multi-polarity. The frequency of war in such a system increases due to the presence of staunch alliances that diminish the possibility of national interactions, hence increasing

⁸¹ Brecher, M. (2008). "International political earthquakes journal." University of Michigan Press

⁸² Hopf, T. & Midlarsky, M. (1993). "Polarity and international stability." *The American Political Science Review*, 87 (1) pp173

⁸³ Maoz, Z., Terris, L. G., Kuperman, R.D., & Tlud, I. (2007). "What is the enemy of my enemy? Causes and consequences of imbalanced international relations, 1816-2001". Retrieved from the *Journal of Politics*, 69(1), pp 100-115

⁸⁴ Ibid: 94

⁸⁵ Dr. Patrick Maluki- Lecture notes.

⁸⁶ Maoz, Z. (1984). "Peace by empire? Conflict outcomes and international stability, 1816-1976 journal". *Peace of Research*, 21(3), pp 227-241

conflicts by punishing defectors. In addition, the number of conflict combinations is more in a multi-polar system, compared to a unipolar system which due to increased possibilities of war.

In a multipolar system, there are high chances of miscalculations of opponents' resolve and relative power makes it harder to control conflicts in a multi-polar system. From an analytical viewpoint, the bipolar system in history prevented large scale wars, ensuring that the international system enjoyed long periods of global peace after World War II.⁸⁷

In conclusion, for this study, multipolarity brings forth more instability than unipolarity and bipolarity owing to increased power contestation⁸⁸. In fact, there is an arguably high likelihood of stopping the conflicts in the Middle East if the U.S. would succeed in capping the capability of emerging nuclear states such as China and Russia and their allies in the region.

For the above reasons, the concept of multipolar stability is ideal in the understanding of the nexus between the changes in power distribution in the system and stability.

1.7.3 Theory of Balance of Power

The theory of balance of power suggests that international security is attained when power is evenly distributed in a manner that there is no one nation has the ability to dominate over others. Some scholars have consistently argued that international stability can be achieved in the presence of a balance of power. Therefore, if one country becomes stronger than others, the theory of balance of power envisages that it will exploit and launch aggression towards the weaker states. By so doing, this creates an incentive for the weak nations to unite in defensive coalitions.⁸⁹

The argument about whether balance of power causes stability or instability was advanced further by studies of polarity. Morgenthau, Singer and Deustch argued that a multipolar system is more stable, whereas Waltz argued that a bipolar system is more stable. Power transition theorists such as Organski, on the other hand argue that power preponderance (unipolarity) does in fact result in more stable structural conditions compared to bipolarity, to this effect, he argued that multipolar systems increase the likelihood of conflict. The results are however inconclusive from an empirical perspective.

⁸⁷ Phillips, C. (2016) . "The battle for Syria : international rivalry in the Middle East". Yale University Press

⁸⁸ Wohlfot, W. 2007 Unipollar stability article review Haverd.

⁸⁹ Ibid:90

According to Morgenthau and Waltz,⁹⁰ balance of power creates peaceful structural conditions. Considering the evidence of how balance of power prevented escalation of conflicts into actual combat during the Cold war, it is apparent that allowing distribution of power in the international system is pivotal to international stability, due to restraint exercised towards other actors. To this regard, balance of power has been termed as a condition for peace and stability.

Conversely, from a contrary viewpoint, some researchers have expressed claims of the theory of balance of power being a source of conflict and international instability. Organski was the pioneer scholar to put forth ideas to challenge the balance of power paradigm through the power transition theory⁹¹. He argued that likelihood of war increases when there are power shifts from a dominant status quo power to an emerging challenger.

According to Wagner,⁹² the balance of power in 1914 was one of the main factors that caused World War I in 1914. In addition, the balance of power in the late twentieth century characterized by emerging nuclear powers such as Russia and China is arguably one of the predominant causes of the current instability in the Middle East. This is on the basis that states will inherently be more predisposed to use force to protect their interests when challenged.⁹³ This viewpoint was iterated by the power transition theorists⁹⁴.

The current conflicts in the region such as Syria and Iraq are a demonstration of resistance by “emerging powers” towards the advances of the U.S, a condition that stems from the balance of power.⁹⁵ In addition to the above argument against balance of power, other scholars such as John Herz, contends that the pursuit of balance of power results in “security dilemma”, where states’ efforts to make themselves more secure, i.e. by increasing their military strength, causes others to retaliate in equal measure, thus ends up making the system more insecure by producing tensions that may result in conflict. This was particularly evident in the arms race during the Cold War.

With regards to whether or not a unipolar system with the U.S leadership was more stable, scholars have advanced various arguments. Some scholars have criticized the U.S power on grounds of arrogance resulting from her indispensability, while others have acknowledged the role of the U.S

⁹⁰ Hans Morgenthau. (1948). “Politics among nations” and Kenneth Waltz. (1979). “Theory of International Politics

⁹¹ Spykman, N.J. (2017). “America’s strategy in world politics: the United States and the balance of power. Routledge”

⁹² Wagner, R. H. (1994). Peace, War and the balance of power”. Retrieved American Political Science Review, 88(3), pp 593- 607

⁹³ Harry Booty. (2010). The balance of power journal-“A cause of War, a Condition of Peace or Both?”. Retrieved from <http://www.e.li.info/2011>

⁹⁴ Sheehan, M. (2004). “The Balance of Power: History & Theory”. Routledge

⁹⁵ Spykman, N.J. (2017). “America’s strategy in world politics: the United States and the balance of power. Routledge”

as a stabilizing force resulting from her ability to face the threats and challenges of the post-cold war international system.

For this study, the understanding of the balance of power as a theory is ideal in establishing a relationship between persistence of conflicts in the background of changes and shifts in the balance of power as determined by the world powers and regional powers in the Middle East.

1.7.4 Realism

Realism is one of the key theories that dominate the practice of international relations and international politics.

Neo-realists such as Kenneth Waltz argue that the international system is anarchical grouping of self-interested states, where there is no supreme authority that governs the behavior of state actors.⁹⁶ The theory is grounded on the doctrine of “self-help” to ensure state security and therefore views conflicts as inevitable. In an anarchical system, the key motive for the behavior of states is survival which is achieved through power. According to Kenneth Waltz,⁹⁷ wars occur because there is no deterrence, owing to the anarchic nature of the system. Realists have therefore used this theory to explain why states go to war.

Realism is a state-centric theory which portrays the “state” as the principal actor in international politics. It argues that state behavior is governed by national interests and that the ultimately leads to competition. Central to the above assumption is the proposition that human beings are selfish and desire power, and would choose power over morality in the pursuit of their self-interest. According to Machiavelli and Hans Morgenthau,⁹⁸ the desire for more power is the key driver of international politics and is deeply rooted in the flawed nature of humanity.

In essence, the above viewpoints serve to explain violence and conflicts in the world today. The theory accurately explains the reality of international politics in the 21st Century as a perpetual struggle for power and influence at whatever cost.

1.7.5 Theory of Conflict Transformation

This theory was built on the idea of conflict formation advanced by Johan Galtung. Conflict transformation theorists argue that the character of contemporary conflicts has transformed

⁹⁶ Helen Milner. (1991). “The assumptions of anarchy in international relations theory”.

⁹⁷ Ibid: 103

⁹⁸ Kenneth Waltz (1959) – Book: “Man, the State and War” pp 17-37 Published by the Columbia Uni press

exhibiting patterns of conflict relationships that extend beyond the geographical confines of an internal conflict. Conflict transformation is a process of transforming the issues, interests, actors, and discourse of conflict, in a manner that supports the protraction of conflicts. Vayreyren⁹⁹ argues that conflicts can also undergo structural transformations which alter the relationships and power distribution of actors involved in the conflict.

The theory draws heavily on ideas of conflict dynamics which describe patterns that may result in widening of conflict (new actors) and broadening of conflict (new issues). Therefore, with emergence of new actors and new issues parties shift positions and change their goals, bringing forth new relationships and new structures, as well as changes in motive and perceptions.

Galtung¹⁰⁰ argued that conflicts undergo a variety of transformational processes that enlarge the scope of conflicts to larger conflicts, as well as their complexity through associations and dissociations of various actors in the conflict. This theory further argues that conflicts undergo transformation resulting from the changing needs of the parties involved as well as the contextual background which is centered on the underlying issues of a conflict. Changing needs, interests and perspectives are human nature. Glasl¹⁰¹ argues that conflicts evolve in stages, and similarly conflict management strategies should be based on the particular stage of a conflict. Consequently, transformation theorists view post conflict peace building as an enduring continuous reshaping of a war system into a peace system driven by transformation in the value system of a society in the long term.¹⁰²

This theory will be fundamental in explaining the changing dynamics of conflict, the intervening factors and transformation of internal conflicts to internationalized conflicts, as a defining characteristic of Middle Eastern conflicts and the resulting effects of such transformation.

1.8 Hypotheses

A hypothesis is a predictive outcome of a research study that can be tested.

This research is anchored on the following hypotheses;

⁹⁹ Vayreyren, (1991). "Conflict Resolution and Conflict Transformation journal" pp 1-39

¹⁰⁰ Johan Galtung. (1969). "Conflict as a way of life". Published by New Society pp 589-592

¹⁰¹ Glasl. F (1982). "The process of Conflict Escalation and Roles of Third Parties journal"

¹⁰² Marwan Kabalan 2019. "What the Middle East looks like in 2019"- Arab Centre of Research and Policy Studies.

1. Changing power dynamics in the 21st Century create structural pre-conditions that trigger international conflict and are at the core of violent conflicts in the Middle East.
2. Power politics have greatly contributed to conflict protraction in the Middle East.
3. Involvement of powerful external actors in internal conflicts has stifled peace processes in the Middle East region.

1.9 Examination of Key Concepts in this study

The following are the key concepts which have been used in this study.

1.9.1 Concept of Power

Power is a central subject of interest and the center piece in driving international relations. Different scholars have defined power differently; however, one of the most dominant definitions of power is according to Max Weber, who defined power as a relationship, which impacts the ability of one actor to carry out his will over others despite resistance.¹⁰³ This implies an aspect of “control” and a readiness to use force against any resistance driven by the urge to propagate one’s will using any means possible. Payne defines power as the ability to cause others to behave in ways and do things they would ordinarily not do. Dahl,¹⁰⁴ defines power as, the ability of a state to cause another to do something they would typically not have done under the circumstances.

Political power is deployed through use of what is referred to as “power capabilities” and “power resources”. Kauppi and Viotti define capabilities as the tangible and intangible power resources that can be transformed into actual power. Power capabilities may either be economic, military, demographic, geographical and political. However, according to Carr, military power is the most important form of power, as it serves both as a means and an end in itself.¹⁰⁵

Conversely, contemporary international politics scholars, argue that the role of non-military power has been underestimated by the historical exaggeration of the importance of military power.¹⁰⁶ Other scholars have often argued that possession of power resources only, does not translate to actual power, without the strategic purpose and skill to put such power resources into use.

103 Candace Rondeaux & David Sterman, (2018)- A briefing document “Twenty First Century Proxy warfare”

104 Dahl Robert, (1957). “The concept of power”. Published by the System Research and Behavioural Science Institute, pp 22

105 Carr , H. E., (1946). The 20 Years’ Crisis of 1919-1939: “An introduction to the Study of International Relations” Oxford Press

106 Baldwin, D.A (2012). “Power and International Relations”. Retrieved from International Relations handbook. Pp 15-19

There are two key forms of political power; hard power and soft power. Hard power, also known as coercive power, manifests through use of threat and force, whereas soft power manifests through attraction and seduction.¹⁰⁷ Power remains the ultimate, immediate aim in international politics.¹⁰⁸ According to Hans Morgenthau, international politics is all about struggle for power and power remains at the heart of all politics. Power is the ultimate reason why states go to war.¹⁰⁹

The purpose of reviewing the concept of power in this paper is to set good groundwork to better understand the power dynamics in the 21st century, including the rising value and recognition of soft power in recent times and to better understand the meaning and importance of power in international politics.

1.9.2 Concept of Balance of Power

The concept of balance of power is one of the most important ideas in international politics. According to Healy and Stein, the concept of balance of power is of utmost importance in the 21st century more than it has been in previous years due to the dynamic evolution of the international system in the post-cold war period.

The concept of balance of power has been defined differently by different scholars.¹¹⁰ Although the concept is laden with a number of definitions, there are certain key features that define balance of power. Zinnes,¹¹¹ argues that balance of power refers to power distribution in the international system such that no single state has preponderant power over others. To this regard, the security and existence of other state actors is not threatened.

Therefore, the power held by a powerful state is continuously checked and balanced by others. As a consequence, when state power increases to the point it threatens other less powerful states, a counter balancing coalition (sometimes individual action), emerges to prevent it in a bid to protect the autonomy and self-preservation of others in the system. This counterbalancing act results in an “equilibrium” state.

¹⁰⁷ Shaomin, X. & Zuxing, Z. (2011). “ A Reappraisal of Soft Power Theory by Joseph S. Nye”. International Forum Vol 5

¹⁰⁸ Dr. Patrick Maluki. 2018. “Lecturer notes”

¹⁰⁹ Morgenthau, H. J. (1978). “Politics Among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace fifth Edition”. New York Press pp 87- 141

¹¹⁰ Inis. L. Claude. (1962). “Power and International Relations “ Vol 78, No. 4 pp 609- 613

¹¹¹ Zinnes, D. A. (1967). An analytical study of the balance of power theories”. Retrieved from Journal of Peace Research, 4(3), pp 270-287

According to Haas,¹¹² equilibrium can be defined as a situation where the elements in the system are able to co-exist in a balanced state without pressurizing one another. Other scholars argue against the idea of “equilibrium” on grounds that equilibrium is not a destination, but a continuous, dynamic process that is difficult to attain.¹¹³ This is because as a state tries to attain more power, its efforts are frustrated by the counteraction of others, which disturbs the state of equilibrium and an adjustment needs to be done.

According to Zinnes, balance of power systems vary based on the number of states in the system. Therefore, the power distribution in a two-power system is different from a multiple power system, and so are the methods and approaches to balance power. In a two-power system, only equality of power can prevent preponderance. However, in a multiple power system, divide and rule, alliances, compensation, intervention, armaments among other methods can be used.

With reference to this study, according to Joseph Nye, the United States is certainly a great power but is not the only power in the 21st Century. Particularly in economic and political issues, there are other power centers including China, Russia and U.K. The emergence of other states after the cold war as economic power centers greatly diluted the hegemonic power of the United States and has resulted in ground shifting transformative changes in the balance of power in the 21st Century.

Some scholars argue that the EU, Russia, China, U.K and Japan would balance the US power which is envisaged to give birth to multi-polarity. Multi-polarity is characterized by the dispersal of power rather than a concentration in hegemony. Balance of power is the reason why states form alliances, build their military capability and align with others.

This research will be based on Haas’ definition of balance of power to mean “power politics”. The key question arising analysis of the concept of balance of power in connection to this study is, “Is balance of power is a condition for peace and stability or a source of conflict in the 21st century?”

1.9.3 The Concept of Shift in Balance of Power

Although shift in balance of power is often referred to as a 21st Century phenomenon, it is certainly not the first time the world is experiencing such a shift. The rise of the West during the 15th Century and the decline of China was an early instance of global shift in power. However, although the classic state power is still important, in the 21st Century, power and influence are increasingly

¹¹² Haas, E.B. (1953). “The balance of power: concept, prescription, or propaganda”? Retrieved from World Politics 5(4), pp 442-477

¹¹³ Lasswell, H.D. (1935). “World politics and personal insecurity”

centered outside the traditional state-centric models. Since the disintegration of the USSR after the Cold war, unipolarity was arguably the most popular description of the international system. The U.S has been the central player in international relations.

However, in recent times, the rise of China and other “new powers” has since transformed the international system. In fact, some scholars argue that the U.S has been “toppled” from its dominant position, characterized by a shift away from unipolarity towards multipolarity.¹¹⁴ According to Keohane,¹¹⁵ with the spring up of the new powers and increase in violent non-state actors, (such as ISIS), the system is experiencing power transitions and power diffusions, driven by the forces of globalization. Power concentration in hegemony is now transitioning and diffusing to other actors, iterating the balance of power definition as “power distribution.”

Adam Roberts explained the emergence of new powers as a product of rise in use of soft power, in contrast with hard power, which, the U.S used in its hegemonic power pedestal. He argued that the use of hard power in form of threats and force would be ineffective to gain influence in the 21st century.¹¹⁶ According to Nye, soft power is the ability to get what you want through attraction, persuasion and consent, rather than through coercion.¹¹⁷ The rise of the “new powers” particularly China, has been through use of soft power.

Some scholars have argued whether or not a shift in balance of power does in fact result in more or less stability. According to Organski,¹¹⁸ the likelihood of war does in fact increase when there are power shifts in the international system. He argued that a state of unipolarity, where only one power maintains hegemonic preponderant power is a more peaceful structural condition. Therefore, the rise of a challenger in the eye of a dominant status quo power, often results in systemic instability. However, other scholars have different views. According to Claude,¹¹⁹ war is improbable if power in the international system is distributed.

Shift in balance of power is evidently a real phenomenon following the conclusion of the cold war and has been accelerating in the 21st century, characterized by the rise in new powers and increased competition for influence with the U.S. The resultant effects of how the balance of power affects

114 Stephen G. Brooks & William C. Wohlforth. “The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers in the Twenty first Century”. Retrieved from *Global Security*, Vol 40, No. 3, pp 7-53

115 Joseph Nye. (2004). “Power in the Global Information Age journal”. Pp 60-77

116 Griffiths, M. & O’callaghan, T. (2013). “Key Concepts in International, Routledge” Retrieved from the Hong Kong Economic Journal

117 Joseph Nye. (2004). “Power in the Global Information Age journal”. Pp 60-77

118 Kazinform (2017).Journal- “Memorandum on Syria de-escalation zones signed in Astana”.

119 Claude, I. L. (1989). “ The balance of power revisited”. Retrieved from *International Studies*, 15(2) 77-85

outcomes of conflicts will be explored in detail in this research. This research analyzes shift in both global and regional balance of power and their role in conflict protraction in the Middle East region.

1.10 Research Methodology

This section outlines the research design, methods of data collection, data collection instruments target population, sampling and methods of data analysis.

1.10.1 Research Design

For this research project, a mixed method research design was adopted. This involves use of both qualitative and quantitative data.

For qualitative data, a descriptive and explorative research design was adopted. A descriptive research design is a systematic and empirical investigation of a phenomenon which the data is readily available and the variables are devoid of manipulation. An exploratory design is conducted about a research problem when there are few earlier studies to rely upon to predict an outcome. An explorative design was therefore appropriate for this study because few studies have been conducted on the relationship between changes in balance of power and conflict.

A combination of the descriptive and exploratory design will ensure a thorough and detailed analysis and generation of extensive literature on the phenomenon of internationalized conflict and the role of Middle East power dynamics in the protracted conflicts in the region. This data will be conducted through key informant interviews and FGD's conducted using loosely structured questionnaires.

For quantitative data, numerical data was obtained based on the respondent's responses to the questionnaire. The numerical data was presented using descriptive statistics.

A mixed approach is relevant for this research because it provides an avenue for triangulation to provide a complete and comprehensive understanding of the study.

1.10.2 Methods of Data Collection

The study utilizes both primary and secondary data. Primary data was obtained through key informant interviews based on a Key Informant Interview (KII) Guide in form of a loosely structured questionnaire. The primary data from the key informants was obtained through telephone interviews and face to face interview in some cases.

Key informant interviews have been selected as the most appropriate mode of data collection due to the need to obtain first hand responses from key informants who are well versed in the area of international political systems and conflicts in the Middle East region. In addition to this, telephone interviews were ideal due to the convenience in the event that meeting some of the interviewees was impossible hence more cost-effective.

In addition, Focus Group Discussions were also used to engage other key professionals pursuing their doctorate studies in the conflict resolution or International Relations field to provide more in depth analysis of the emerging issues in the conflicts and brainstorm to expound on the effectiveness of various methods of conflict management and get recommendations on the most appropriate ways to manage complex conflicts as those discussed in this study.

The secondary data was sourced from a collection of journals, articles, published and unpublished materials, previous academic dissertations and periodicals using the desk review technique with the help of a desk review guide to ensure completeness of information sourced for the study.

1.10.3 Target Population and Sampling

The preferred key informants for this study were officials from various embassies of the Middle East in Nairobi including; The Embassy of the Republic of Yemen, Consular Section of the Embassy of Israel and the Syrian Embassy as well as academicians from University of Nairobi and the United States International University.

For the Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), the respondents include doctorate students currently pursuing their doctorate degrees with a specialization in International Conflict management, international politics, political science and international relations of the Middle East region. Similarly the participants of the FGDs were selected using the snowballing sampling technique. Each FGD had a maximum of 10 participants for active participation as well as to ensure the period for the FGD was not too long.

The key informants for this study were selected through snowball sampling. This is owing to the fact that it was difficult to access the required respondents hence one respondent was used to reach out to another until there was information saturation. Sampling of key informant interviewees was halted when the ability of obtaining new information had been attained, all themes thoroughly discussed and no further coding was feasible, with due considerations for the time frame to

undertake this study. In addition, this chain referral method was instrumental in obtaining a variety of responses.

The study interviewed a total of 11 Key Informants as well as held 2 FGDs one with 10 participants and the other with 9 participants. These interviews and discussions raised critical information that has been incorporated in the study as appropriate. Each KII and FGD had a moderator and a note taker. The note taker ensured that comprehensive notes were taken of the whole sessions which were later used in the analysis process.

Below is a summary of the target population for this study;

Target Group	Category	Number of respondents
Embassy Official * Relations officer Syrian/Yemen Embassy in Nairobi	Key Informant	2
Academicians and Scholars of political science and International politics. (includes: lecturers, professionals and political analysts)	Key Informants	9
Political Science and International relations Doctorate students (in their final year)	FGD (Split into 2 separate groups of 9 members and 10 members)	19
Total Target Population		30

1.10.4 Data Analysis

Although this study largely analyzes data qualitatively, quantitative data analysis will also be used in form of descriptive statistics. The number of responses were entered in Microsoft excel and presented in form of tabulated graphs indicating the percentage response rates, which are explained in detail in the chapters.

Quantitative data analysis utilizes descriptive statistics to summarize the responses obtained from the sample. Additionally, graphs were constructed based on the respondents' views on various

questions on the KII and FGD Guides. The graphs were generated from frequencies or percentages as answered by the respondents for clearer presentation of findings.

Qualitative data analysis entails content analysis of the transcribed data taken during the interviews, focus group discussions and secondary data sources. Using the thematic approach, the study's themes were coded. The notes from the various sessions were then marked with their respective codes for future reference. This technique ensured that the qualitative data was analyzed comprehensively for accurate conclusion of the study. The study also utilized deductive reasoning. The research questions were used to guide development of different themes that were analyzed to make inferences and arrive at a conclusion.

The thematic approach enables a systematic in-depth examination of qualitative data to examine patterns in written and audio text. The content was analyzed thematically under various sub-headings, which explored the phenomenon of shift in balance of power in the Middle East and resultant conflicts in detail to gain an in-depth understanding of the same.

Each theme is analyzed and discussed in detail under a sub-topic to gain an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon in order to derive an explanation for the outcomes of conflict in the Middle East. An in depth analysis of data facilitated drawing inferences through the observed patterns and themes in the data. The responses from the key informants and FGD's are synthesized within the chapters of this research.

The key respondents for this study requested to remain anonymous. For this reason, in the data analysis, we have attached a code to each key respondent in order to maintain their anonymity and transcribe their responses in a systematic manner.

1.11 Scope and Limitations of the Study

The study examines two recent conflicts in the Middle East region in the 21st Century that have persisted for years and have not been resolved to date. These are; the Syria conflict and Yemen conflicts. The study analyses the changing power dynamics, characterised by power contestation between hegemonic power (U.S) and other emerging powers (including China, Russia, and their Middle East allies), in addition to the emerging non-state actors and their role in exacerbating conflicts in the region.

This study largely uses qualitative data which tends to be highly subjective based on the individual opinions of the Key informants and members of the FGD's and the nature of the subject matter of

this study which restricts measurements and observations. However, the study has incorporated some statistics and published secondary data to back up the responses obtained from the respondents.

1.12 Chapter Summary

This research will be divided into 5 Chapters as follows;

Chapter 1 is the proposal for this thesis. It introduces the topic of the research study, by detailing a background for the study, the research problem, research hypothesis, research objectives, research justification, summary of key concepts, theoretical framework, literature review as well as the proposed research methodology.

Chapter 2 will explore the concept of power transitions in international politics. The chapter outlines the different power transitions witnessed in the 21st century and their linkage with international conflicts. This knowledge sets the ground for understanding of the role of the changes in balance of power in some of the most fluid conflicts particularly the Syria and Yemeni conflicts.

Chapter 3 explores in detail the role of power politics in the emergence and persistence of conflict in the Middle East region. The chapter goes further to explore the role of both great power rivalry and regional power rivalry in the exacerbation of conflicts in the Middle East, predominantly in Syria and Yemen.

Chapter 4 explores reasons why the Syria and Yemeni peace processes have failed to lead to lasting peace amidst protracted civil warfare. The chapter will analyze the Syria and Yemen peace processes and uncover their flaws that have led to their imminent failure to secure peace.

Chapter 5 provides conclusions of the study, recommendations, in terms of relevant strategies to address the shortcomings in the Syria and Yemeni peace processes to increase the chances of attaining peace and stability in Syria and Yemen and suggestions for areas of future research.

The responses from the key informants and focus group discussions have been transcribed and integrated as part of the chapters. The key informants and members of the focus group discussions

were coded during transcription in order to track the responses for each key informant and member of the FGD. Hence forth, the codes will be included in the transcribed response quotations. The codes are indicated as (KII) to indicate key informant interview and (FGD) for the focus group discussion. A number was assigned to each respondent for ease of tracking and to safeguard the respondents' anonymity. The key informants are coded KII 01-11 for the 11 key informants and the focus group discussion members are coded FGD 01, 1-10 for the 10 members of the first focus group and FDG 02, 1-9 for the 9 members of the second focus group.

CHAPTER TWO: Power Transitions and Conflicts in the 21st Century

2.0 Introduction

Power transitions are, and will continue to be one of the key defining features of the 21st Century international political system. Power transitions are changes in great power relations characterized by power redistribution (from the U.S hegemon to other emerging state actors) and power diffusion (from the state to emerging non-state actors).

Power transitions in the 21st century arise majorly from the rapid economic advancement of emerging state actors and increase in non-state actors in numbers and scope of influence. The significance of this exponentially growing power on the international system, and particularly on the character and stature of the state has been the major subject of focus. According to Ronald & Kugler, power transitions either create conditions of confrontation or augmentation of the status quo. The two outcomes are dependent on the satisfaction or dissatisfaction of the actors with the transition.¹²⁰

Historically, power transitions often degenerated into war. Changes in balance of power alter the power balance, which inevitably sets the stage for great power conflict. Power transition theorists argue that peace and stability prevails only as far as the dominant hegemon can maintain the prevailing state of the international order. This is because in a hierarchical system where it is clear who the dominant power is, they need not show their might, because the potential contenders would dare not try to challenge the status quo power. According to Gilpin, hegemonic wars arise when an

¹²⁰ J. Kugler, Ronald. I. Tammen, and Siddharth Swaminathan (2011). The Asian Perspective- "Power Transitions and Alliances in the 21st Century journal". Vol 5 pp 5-25

expanding potential challenger becomes dissatisfied by the system and rises to challenge the dominant power. Conflict occurs because the two are unable to settle their differences through peaceful means.¹²¹

Although the dominant power maintains supremacy in absolute terms, in relative terms, the dominant power is losing ground to the expanding power. Therefore conflict begins to take shape when the gap between the two becomes narrower.¹²² However, according to Organski, power transition is a long process, which has been in progress for the last 30 years, gradually setting the stage for a new order to be established.

Power contestation for systemic dominance driven by power transitions in the 21st Century is therefore a real phenomenon, which if not properly managed, takes a toll on the relations between states.

This chapter will explore different power transitions witnessed in the 21st century and their linkage with international conflicts. This knowledge sets the ground for understanding of the role of the changes in balance of power in some of the most fluid conflicts such as the Syria and Yemeni conflicts. It will also contain transcribed responses from the FGD's and Key Informants.

2.1 Transition from Hard Power to Soft Power

The concept of power has its origins in the realist school of thought. Power is generally understood as the capacity of states to influence other states' behavior to get the outcomes they want.¹²³ The international political system in the 21st Century has undergone critical transformation in how power is perceived and exercised by states.

Historically, state behavior was governed by hard power, which is achieved through use of threat, coercive diplomacy and military force. To these ends, power is dependent on ownership and accessibility to military power resources, which determine the ranking of states in the international political system. To this regard, states continuously compete to increase their military capabilities in order to gain an upper hand and pose deterrence to others. This explains why powerful states continue to invest heavily in military and nuclear stockpiles to pose deterrence to each other.

According to the 6th Key informant, power is anchored on military power. It is on this basis that emerging economic powers seek to acquire and amass military power through massive investments

¹²¹ Robert Gilpin 2010. World politics

¹²² Steve Chan 2010. China Russia World power politics. Global perspective

¹²³ Jackman. R. W. (1993). "The Political capacity of Nation States". Published by University of Michigan Press

in militarization. A case in point according to the informant is China which continues to increase military spending and investment.

“.....Historically, states or leaders of states were regarded powerful and self-sufficient if they had a strong military that could fight any battle and win...” (KII06).

The above assertion is built upon by Neo-realist approaches to hard power which lay emphasis not only on the military capabilities but on economic strength of states as well.¹²⁴ The use of hard military power in the 21st Century is more difficult to employ than it was in the 90's when large scale military inter-state wars were more prevalent. This is because use of soft power in the 21st Century is less costly than hard power (military) and is more easily acceptable in the post-cold war era of democratization and regard for human rights.¹²⁵

The concept of soft power was developed by Joseph Nye in 1990. He defined soft-power as the use of persuasion to influence others to do what one wants.¹²⁶ Soft power employs non-coercive strategies such as economic cooperation, provision of aid and assistance and other intangible resources such as culture, to shift the perceptions and attitudes of one state in favor of the other. These strategies are used to attract less powerful states to support or to yield to the cause and wants of the more powerful state.

China for example has perfected her soft power tactics in an effort to exert influence in her aspirations of being a dominant power through use of increased overseas presence through her alleged “debt diplomacy” strategies, the one belt one road initiative and funding of Confucius institutes in developing countries.¹²⁷ The United States also uses various soft power strategies including humanitarian aid, a powerful media that portray attractive western liberalist values, conflict resolution assistance to fragile states and even the “enchanted” Hollywood culture and flourishing music industry. All these are part and parcel of the U.S soft power strategies to remain magnetic in order to maintain dominance and leadership.¹²⁸

Based on the arguments of the 1st Focus Group Discussion, 9th Member (FGD01/09), China has particularly perfected the art of soft power and employ soft power strategies across the globe

¹²⁴ Kenneth Waltz (1979). “Theory of International Politics” pp 191- 192

¹²⁵ Colin Gray, (2011). “Hard and Soft Power: The Utility of Military Force as an instrument of policy in the 21st century” Published by the Strategic Studies Institute

¹²⁶ Nye, J. S., 1990. Soft Power. *Foreign Policy*, Issue 80, pp. 153-171

¹²⁷ Lo, J.T & Pan, S. (2016). “Confucius Institutes and China’s soft power: practices and paradoxes: Vol 46(4), pp 510-530

¹²⁸ Kroenig, M., Mc Adam, M & Weber, S. (2010). “Taking soft power seriously” Vol 29 (5) pp 412- 4311

through initiatives such as loans, grants and aid. The aim is to shape other's preferences through attraction and appeal.

“... Soft power has dominated the 21st century due to the power of seduction; a more effective approach than coercion, in which many values like democracy, human rights, among others are a magnet that influences people to achieve desired outcomes.”
(FGD01/09)

Based on the above claim, it can be argued that soft power is a common phenomenon in the twenty first century. However, although the use of military hard power has greatly diminished in the 21st century, it is not to mean that hard power has completely become obsolete. In fact, more-so the 21st century hard military power is still relevant and essential particularly with the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and the need for states to pose deterrence to others. Soft power cannot therefore be deemed as a substitute to hard military power as an instrument of a state's foreign policy. However, to a great extent, soft power strategies appear to be more effective in the 21st Century than hard power strategies.

The FGD 02/05 and the 10th Key Informant alluded to the fact that a thin line exist between the use of hard power and soft power. For example, the U.S in most occasions harnesses both soft and hard power when dealing with adversaries, in order to leverage on the strengths and weaknesses of both approaches. However, when pushed to a tipping point, states would take advantage of the decline of their counterparts and employ hard power in fighting and toppling them.

“...States take advantage of their counterparts' decline, in asserting their interests which lead to inclusion of hard power in various states...” (FGD02/05)

“.....most states experience uncertainties on the techniques of wilding soft power and the measurement of its effectiveness thereby leaders end up winding back to hard power which they understand better, be it through economic sanctions and airstrikes among others.”
(KII10)

It is evident from the Key Informant's perspective that soft and hard power are used complementarily as the situation might dictate.

According to Colin,¹²⁹ hard and soft power should be used complementarily to achieve the desired foreign policy objectives. This is in response to the increased competition arising from shift in balance of power that necessitate states to change their strategies to adopt to the revolutionary changes in the system with the goal of ensuring their survival . The combination of hard and soft power was adopted by Nossal and Nye, in what they referred to as “smart power.” According to Wilson, smart power is the capacity of states to combine hard and soft power in a way they complement each other, in order to maximize the gains from the resultant synergies to achieve the desired objectives.¹³⁰

The decline of hard power and rise of soft power strategies in the 21st Century has transformed the nature and character of conflicts between state actors.

Analysts of international politics have also argued that in the 21st Century, military force is losing its relative value due to the rapid evolution of contemporary conflicts. Modern conflicts of the 21st Century have been argued to possess irregular character, and therefore, use of regular means, i.e. military force would be ineffective in the circumstances.¹³¹ The irregular character of conflicts in the 21st Century, referred to by Hoffman as “hybrid wars,” whose complexity require a change in tact.¹³² The change of tact implies a change from the conventional wars that involved direct combat to more passive and indirect means such as proxy wars and trade wars.

Some scholars argue that one of the passive intentions for America’s projection of her liberal democratic values is to maintain attraction to herself away from China’s domestic authoritarianism as a counter effect to China’s endearing soft power strategies in developing countries. The culmination of these events inevitably leads to a competition for attractiveness and power dominance which is evidenced by US-China strained trade relations. The Arab Spring as a phenomenon for example, has been argued to be as a result of resistance of the Arab world to the U.S soft power, characterized by proliferation of western liberal democratic ideas in the Middle East.¹³³

¹²⁹ Colin Gray, (2011). “From Hard to Soft Power: The Utility of Military Force as an instrument of policy in the 21st century”. Published by the Strategic Studies Institute

¹³⁰ Wilson, E. J., (2008) “ Hard Power, Soft Power, Smart Power”. Retrieved from ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social sciences, Issue 616, pp 115

¹³¹ Frank Hoffman. (2007). “Conflict in the 21st Century: The Rise of Hybrid Wars”. Published by the Potomac Institute for Policy Studies

¹³² Ibid: 366

¹³³ Ivancheko & Margojev. (2017). Power in International Politics: Does the World Go Hard??. Retrieved from The University Consortium Annual Conference, Washington DC

Foreign aid to the Middle East is one of the key soft power strategies the U.S has used over the years to assert her influence in the region. To date, Israel is the largest cumulative recipient of foreign assistance from the U.S since WW2, with a significant portion of it being military assistance.¹³⁴

Not only is the U.S support to the region in terms of military assistance, the U.S provides her support in terms of training and advice, logistical support and intelligence support.¹³⁵ Military assistance, coupled with training and intelligence support to the Middle East has increased exponentially over the years. Evidently so, instability in the region has equally become more intense and persistent. Although the U.S has assumed “by-stander” role in the conflicts in Syria and Yemen, reports have intricately linked the U.S with these conflicts, allegedly offered support, (both financial and military) to opposition forces in Libya, Syria and Yemen to reinforce their support for democratization, to defeat terrorism and most importantly, to check Iranian regional hegemonic ambitions.¹³⁶

2.2 Power diffusion (State to Non- State Actors)

The concept of diffusion of power was advanced by J. Nye in his book “The future of power”. He defined power diffusion as the movement or spread of power from the state to non-state actors. The idea of diffusion of power was built upon the concept of power transition, which is the shift of power among states. In his book, Joseph Nye argues that in the 21st Century, power diffusion is an even greater threat to states than power transition. Diffusion of power from state to violent non-state groups has transformed the character and nature of conflict from conventional wars to unconventional wars, characterized by irregular tactics, lethal skills and catastrophic outcomes.¹³⁷

More than ever before, power is of paramount importance to states in the 21st Century. The desire and need for states to amass power is in fact more intense and dire than it has been in the past. This is especially significant due to the increasing awareness of the presence of non-state actors and tensions arising from diffusion of power from state to non-state groups, which has heightened the vulnerability of the state.

¹³⁴ J.Sharp & C. Hummud. (2015). “U.S Foreign Assistance to the Middle East: Historical background, recent trends and the FY 2016 Request” Published by the Congressional Research Service

¹³⁵ Ibid: 171

¹³⁶ Charles Dunne. (2019). “Deteriorating circumstances in Syria and Yemen overshadow journal”. US Tactical success

¹³⁷ Bruce Hoffman (2006). “Unconventional Threats and Capabilities”. Presented to the subcommittee on Terrorism, Oxford University

Historically, during and immediately after the Cold war, the state was the primary and dominant actor in International politics. However, in the contemporary international political system, the position of the state as the primary actor in the system has been challenged by the growing prominence of non-state actors and their indispensable influence in international politics.

According to Thomas Weiss,¹³⁸ the weakening role of the state in international politics can be attributed to the growing force of globalization, which has greatly facilitated the proliferation of non-state actors. This is because the contemporary world has become more interconnected than it was originally projected to be. State actors henceforth have to exist alongside the non-state actors and share their power. This section shall however focus on the violent non state groups due to their evident linkage to conflict in the region.

The sectarian groups in the region have brought new perspectives to conflicts in the Middle East and to the world, due to the active role they play in catalyzing conflict situations.¹³⁹ Their existence has been termed as a global security concern owing to the acts of terror orchestrated to gain political objectives. Power transition from the state to non-state actors in this case is evident particularly in the alarming adaptation of state characteristics by these groups. These range from control of territory, active engagement in politics and diplomacy and significant following by local populations.¹⁴⁰

According to 1st Focus Group Discussion, 3rd Member (FGD01/03), diffusion of power from the state to non- state actors is a key characteristic of power transition in the twenty first Century. The Middle East region is a case in point where sectarian violence and terrorism has hugely affected peace and stability in the region. Sectarian groups are often used as pawns by powerful external actors to push for their agenda.

“.....Several external states are involved in the Middle East military and economic affairs and in particular sectarian conflicts. Russia, U.S and China are the key powers involved and they are aligned to faction groups within the region enhancing power diffusion even further.” (FGD01/03)

These groups frustrate peace efforts in regions such as Yemen and Syria, making some of these regions impossible to govern.

¹³⁸ Thomas Weiss. (2013). “Rise of Non- State actors in Global governance journal”. Cambridge University

¹³⁹ Ibid.,91

¹⁴⁰ Haim Malka. (2015). “The Challenge of Non- State Actors”. Published by the Global Forecast pg 57

The most pertinent characteristic of the sectarian rebel groups of the Middle East is their financial muscle and organizational capacity that has proven an uphill task for Middle East governments in their efforts to contain them. In addition to this, the proliferation of small and light weapons (SALW) and control of oil fields in the Middle East region has further reinforced their standing in the region.¹⁴¹ The biggest challenge for states is that things continue to happen outside their control, owing to the uncontrollable forces of globalization in the 21st century.

Scholars have argued that the emergence of thriving violent non-state actors in the Middle East is a culmination of a series of global events including, heightened discontent with governments, rivalry between the U.S and other competing powers, U.S fight against terror in the region and most importantly as a response to the creation of the Israeli state by the United Nations, backed by the U.S in 1948.¹⁴² The general feeling however, is that the sectarian groups, including; Hamas, Al-Qaeda, Taliban, Muslim brotherhood, Hezbollah and most recently, the ISIS are in fact “terrorist groups”

Other scholars have argued that the West’s foreign policy in the region and increasing support for Israel in the Arab world accounts for the major motivation for the emergence and resilience of these groups. The Islamic State for example emerged after the U.S invasion of Iraq and removal of Saddam Hussein. Al-Qaeda has existed since 1988 to promote radical Islam in the name of “jihad” and to perpetrate terror against Western ideologies which contradict the Islam principles.¹⁴³ The Hezbollah and the Muslim brotherhood were formed to fight against Israelis in the name of promoting emancipation of Islam.¹⁴⁴

Although religion and a disillusioned youth appears to be some of the dominant factors resulting in emergence of these groups in the Middle East region, the involvement of the U.S in a bid to declare and assert influence in the region is arguably one of the dominant underlying factors setting the process in motion. The Arab states have therefore often blamed Washington for causing instability in the region.¹⁴⁵ The Soviet Union too, as part of hegemonic contestation with the U.S through her expansionist strategies to spread communism in the Cold war period, resulted in off shoot of other groups such as the Afghan Mujahedeen.

¹⁴¹ Compton, J. (2008). “Violent Non- State Actors”. Published by the Small Wars Journal

¹⁴² Ibid:141

¹⁴³ Ibid:144

¹⁴⁴ Amina Akbar. (2014). “National Security’s Broken Windows”. Retrieved from UCLA Law Review 62 no.4

¹⁴⁵ Haim Malka. (2015). “ The Challenge of Non- State Actors”. Published by Global Forecast pg 56

However, in the current ongoing conflicts in the region, various state actors use the non-state groups as pawns to achieve their ends. This explains the immense support (both financial and military support) from individuals and states in support of the non-state militants to push for their agenda in Middle East power politics. The linkage between power transition in form of power diffusion towards non state actors and conflict in the Middle East is evident. The region would indeed be more peaceful in the absence of these heavily funded and well organized violent non state groups and certainly, the state would have more leverage in influencing the outcomes of conflicts in the region.

2.3 The Decline of the United States

The current discourses about power transition in international relations entails two different claims about the position of the United States in the international system. While some scholars suggest that U.S supremacy is unrivalled and will continue to persist, others allude to a decline of the U.S in international politics. An understanding of the impact of the decline of the United States is ideal in the analysis of the ensuing change in the balance of power.

Fareed Zakaria posits that the largest global and political trend of the 21st Century is the “alleged” decline of the United States. However, this decline is in the context of sphere of influence and not militarily or economically.¹⁴⁶ The United States remains a global superpower with massive military and economic capacity. However, the relative decline is with regard to America’s inability to translate her power resources into outcomes, in comparison to the overwhelming recent successes of the challenging powers in international politics.

According to (FGD01/07), the decline in United States’ position as a global power is in spite of its military and economic capacity is due to the complex nature of global power dynamics in the 21st Century.

“.....US has the greatest soft power: leading worldwide in high technology; finance and business; movies; higher education as well as receiving approximately 1 million immigrants yearly...” (FGD01/07)

However, according to another participant of the focus group, FGD 02/07, owing to the migrant issue and heavy military involvement of the U.S in other countries, the U.S has lost goodwill with a huge part of the world making the downward spiral more pronounced.

¹⁴⁶ Zakaria, F. (2008). “The future of American power: how America can survive the rise of the rest”. Retrieved from Foreign Affairs pp 18-43

.....*The U.S popularity as the savior for all is a notion that has been on the decline in recent times.* (FGD02/07)

According to Robert Kagan,¹⁴⁷ the perception of the decline of the United States in the 21st Century is indeed understandable. Kagan postulates that this decline has been characterized by the dismal economic situation during the 2007-2008 financial crisis, the enormous fiscal deficits and the continued growth of China, India and European economies¹⁴⁸. Critics believe that the United States has lost favor and goodwill with a large part of the world considering their endless wars and political interference in other countries, especially in the Middle East. These dynamics portend a threat of irreversible shift of global power.

The broad perception of the American decline has been characterized by the failure of the US to always get its way in world politics. In fact, scholars such as Joseph Nye attribute the decline of the United States to her incapacity to tactfully balance the application of soft power strategies with hard power strategies to exert influence, relative to other emerging powers in the international political system.

Kagan maintains that Israelis and Arabs' failure to make peace despite America's interventions, North Korea and Iran defying American demands on nuclear war weapons, rise in terrorist non-state actors, China's refusal to let its currency rise are some of the instances which characterize the decline of the United States¹⁴⁹. Most recently, inability to defeat the Russia- China backed Syrian regime and participation in Syria Astana talks as a mere observer, has indeed dealt a heavy blow on U.S supremacy in the Middle East.

According to Ikenberry, the decline of the United States will undoubtedly lead to a greater rise in China. China's extraordinary economic growth and active diplomacy has to a significant degree enhanced China's position as a global power. These dynamics will lead to political transformation in the World and in East Asia¹⁵⁰.

The relative decline of the U.S will lead to "a reorientation of the world" eastwards towards Asia. Ikenberry believes that the results of these transitions will be distrust, conflict, tension as typical

¹⁴⁷ Kagan, R. (2012). Not fade away: Against the myth of American decline" Retrieved from The New Republic Vol (1) pp 243

¹⁴⁸ Lynch M. (2019). ' Does the Decline of U.S. Power Matter For the Middle East?' Retrieved from <http://carnegieendowment.org/does-decline-of-u.s.-power-matter-for-middle-east-pub>

¹⁴⁹ Kagan R. (2012). Article – "Against the Myth of American Decline." Retrieved from <https://www.brookings.edu/opinions/not-fade-away-against-the-myth-of-america-decline>

¹⁵⁰ Ikenberry G.J. & Moon C. I. (Eds). (2007). The United States and Northeast Asia: debates, issues and new order. Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.

features of power transition. However, critics argue that the rise of China does not have to trigger a wrenching hegemonic transition. The fundamental justification for this argument is the fact that the nuclear revolution and increasing economic interdependence has made war among the great powers unlikely.

The debate on American decline in the Middle East has been a dominant theme in the political space in the 21st Century.¹⁵¹ According to Christian,¹⁵² the perceived decline of American primacy is not easily observed in terms of material power; it is a policy issue. However, the decline is likely to lead to a paradigm shift in the politics of the Middle East.

Russia is viewed as opportunistic as witnessed by its intervention in Syria. In the event of a power shift, Russia and China will be huge players in the global politics.¹⁵³ The decline of the United States will witness countries such as Iran asserting their influence in the region. These countries will seek to extend their influence without restraint. The decline of the United States will lead to the death of the regional order in favor of Iran.¹⁵⁴

According to the response of (FGD02/06), China and Russia are currently the leading diplomatic pragmatist as evidenced by Russia's successful intervention in Syria and US' failure to match this diplomatic shrewdness. This reinforces the position of Iran as the U.S arch enemy in the Middle East.

“.....China and Russia are leading in the implementation of pragmatic strategies that major on their interests while at the same time maximizing on making a statement of their economic power to undermine the United States...” (FGD02/06)

The case of Russia's successful intervention in Syria and the role of Iran and China who are all aligned against the U.S is clear evidence of the imminent decline of the United States.

The rising powers such as Iran and Russia will be at the center of the new world order in the event of a complete collapse of the United States. Iran, in particular, would increase their extension of military and political power across the region. However, the struggle for power amidst these dynamics will lead to military conflicts which could instigate political instability as already

¹⁵¹ Lynch, M. (2019). Does the Decline of U.S. Power Matter For the Middle East?. Retrieved from <https://carnegieendowment.org/2019/03/19/does-decline-of-u.s.-power-matter-for-middle-east-pub-78645>

¹⁵² Christian, F. (2017). The Political Economy of Privacy on Facebook. Uppsala University, Department Of Informatics and Media Studies.

¹⁵³ Ibid:183

¹⁵⁴ Hudson M.C. (1996). 'To play the hegemon: Fifty years of U.S policy toward the Middle East.' The Middle East Journal, 50(3), 329

demonstrated by Ikenberry, who argues that power transition must be characterized by tension and conflict.¹⁵⁵

Hierarchical systems exhibit a series of construction and deconstruction of power. However, the nature of power and the cause of its rise and fall evolve over time. According to Lynch, the decline of the United States as a global leader could lead to a power vacuum which could result into global conflicts, as the emerging powers compete to fill the void.¹⁵⁶ The emerging powers such as Turkey in the Middle East and Iran are likely to assume dominance, and this could degenerate into military war with other regional powers, including Israel and Saudi.

The decline of U.S as the external leader in Middle East could result in failure of the nuclear deal with Iran. The phenomenon would also have a huge impact on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. According to Zakaria,¹⁵⁷ the United States has been a key player in peace negotiations between Israel and Palestine and a decline U.S footprint in the region would be a huge blow to the peace process. The explosive increase in uncontrollable sectarian terror groups and the decline in reliable allies in the region have further diminished America's might.¹⁵⁸ The same has also been witnessed by its evident defeat in Syria.

The 11th Key Informant believes that the Trump administration's foreign policy is devoid of pragmatism and in most cases is unclear, and this makes United States' position as a global power more unstable.

“.....Trump's mixed messaging pertaining middle east issues has certainly brought confusion which could result in a corrosive effect the Israeli-Palestinian peace plan” (KII011)....

“.....The United States failure to make straightforward and decisive moves has largely shifted some alliances in favor of the Sino-Russian duo, which is perceived as a more stable ally”

These changes are likely to influence power balance and transform the goals, options, alliances and interests of the involved parties with a likelihood of escalated conflict, especially in the Middle

¹⁵⁵ Ikenberry G.J. & Moon C. I. (Eds). (2007). 'The United States and Northeast Asia: debates, issues and new order.' Rowman & Littlefield Publishers

¹⁵⁶ Chris C. Dunn, Kirk L. and Hiroko I. (2011) – International Review of Modern Sociology vol 37, No. 1, pp.1-29

¹⁵⁷ Zakaria F. (2011). 'Are America's best days behind us. Time magazine.'

¹⁵⁸ Berti B. and Paris J. (2014). Article, "Beyond sectarianism: Geopolitics, fragmentation, & the Syria civil war" Strategic Assessment, Vol 16(4)

East. Therefore, trade wars, proxy wars and arms races will continue to dominate the international politics as passive strategies in the continued hegemonic contestation for power.

Generally, it was noted that states' dominance in the Middle East in the 21st century had Russia ranked first by 45% of the respondents followed by United States (31% of the respondents) and finally China at 24% as illustrated in Figure 1 below.

It is crucial to note that most of the respondents commented that a continuous decline in the United States' power would inevitably create a power vacuum which would need to be filled, hence result in the rise of Russia and China in the region.

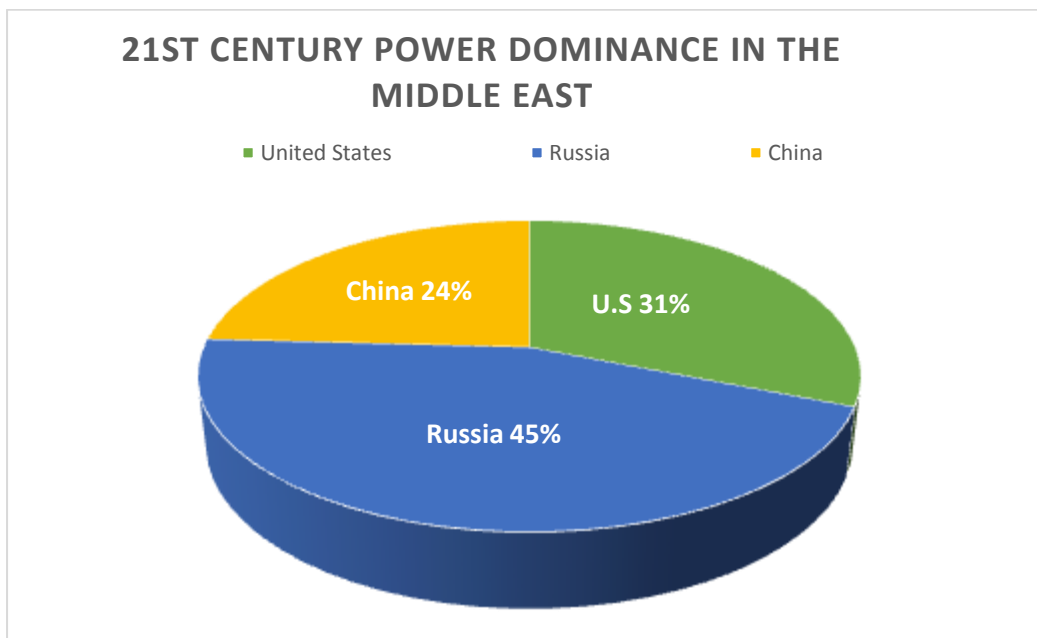
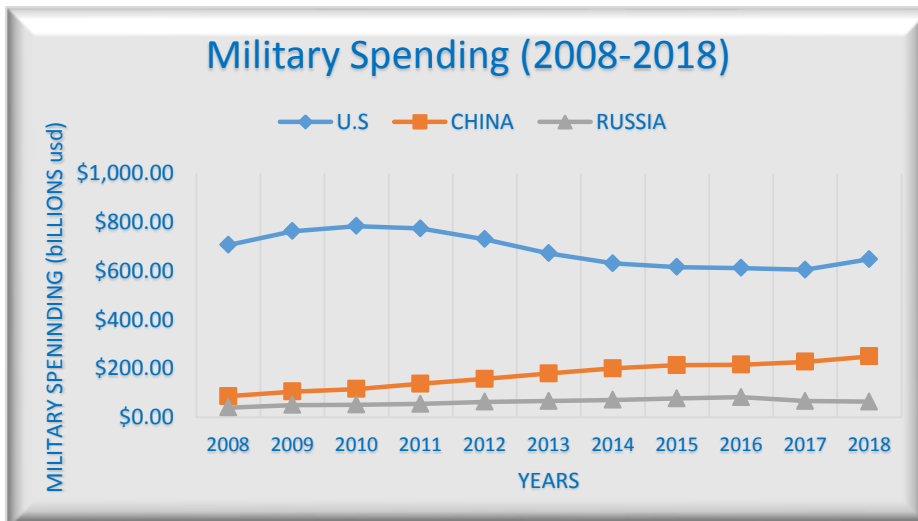


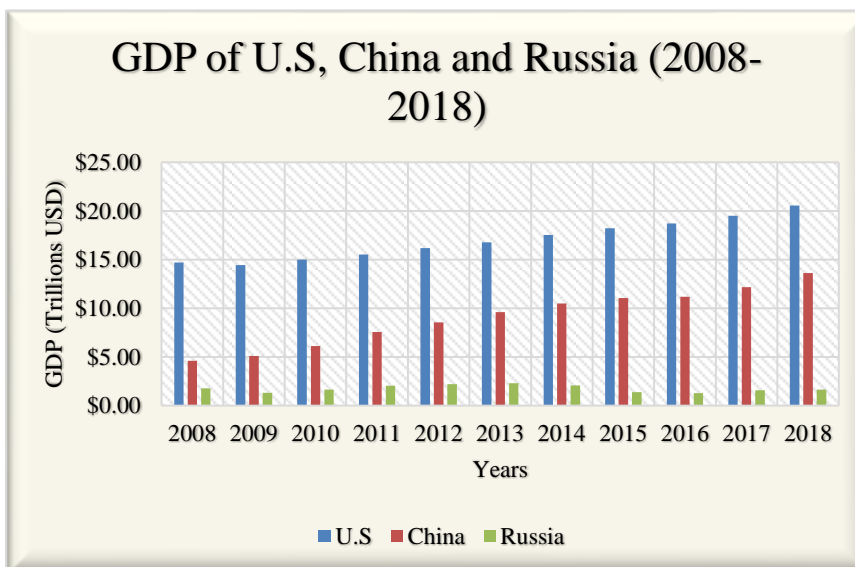
Fig.1. Respondents' Perception on Power Dominance in the Middle East in the 21st Century.

However, it is imperative to note that the issue of decline in U.S power and influence, and the respondent's opinion tabulated above is exclusively based on perception. However, power is multi-dimensional, other key elements that form part of the power equation are military and economic, which U.S dominance remains unrivalled at a global level. *See: Fig 2 and Fig 3 below*

The U.S decline referred to in this study is "relative decline" in comparison with the other global powers whose relative gains subsequently result in the U.S relative decline.



*Fig: 2 Source: (Statista.com, 2019; Worldpopulationreview.com 2019; Sipri.org, 2019)



*Fig: 3 Source: (Statista.com, 2019; The Balance, 2019; Ceicdata.com)

2.4 Power Transition towards Asia (Focus on China)

Historically, the United States was the leading power in the Asia- Pacific region.¹⁵⁹ However, according to Pant & Joshi, the relative decline of the United States and the expanding popularity of China has led to an apparent power transition¹⁶⁰. China is at the center of this transition, and Beijing’s altercation to the U.S led hegemonic order characterized by China’s linear projection of

¹⁵⁹ John Ikenberry (2014) – From Hegemony to the Balance of Power: “The Rise of China and the American Grant Strategy in East Asia Pgs. 41-60

¹⁶⁰ Pant H.V, Joshi Y. (2016) Power Transition in Asia and Indian Foreign Policy. In: The U.S Pivot and Indian Foreign and Policy: Asia’s Evolving Balance of Power. Palgrave Pivot, London.

growth in GDP, active diplomacy, military build-up and endearing influence of China are among the main manifestations of power transition towards Asia. (Fig 2 and Fig 3 above)

In the face of changing political dynamics, the impact of the rise of China on international politics and the possible emergence of hegemonic confrontation is palpable. Power transition towards Asia is anticipated to have a momentous impact on international politics. It will re-shape Beijing's place in the international world order¹⁶¹.

In the 21st Century, Beijing has risen to challenge the United States' economic and military primacy in the region. Scholars argue that Beijing's assertive tendencies endanger international peace and security by challenging U.S primacy, and thereby upsetting the balance of power. Physical manifestations of America's response to defend her hegemonic title remain incoherent with the U.S retaliating in passively in form of trade wars and proxy wars.

Second Focus Group Discussion, 9th member (FGD02/09) argued that United States does not seem to be able to counter the rise of People's Republic of China. Desperate attempts such trade wars are meant to fail especially in a globalized world.

".....China has grown into a stable player in the global affairs. The US has little influence on these dynamics" (FGD02/09).

These assertions are supported by Pant & Joshi, who maintain that China is deploying its economic wealth to support foreign policy in a bid to assert its diplomatic relations and support its political ambitions and there is little United States can do to counter that.¹⁶² The initiative is through China's One Belt One Road Initiative (OBOR), which aims to enhance connectivity to support China's widening trading network.¹⁶³ In addition, China's connectivity to different countries reinforces her growing relevance, particularly in Africa and the Middle East.

Power transition towards Asia with China at the center of this transition has reinforced China's desire to dominate the Middle East.¹⁶⁴ Ziegler¹⁶⁵ argues that security and economic relationships (linked to trade and oil), are some of the critical facets of China's diplomatic engagement with Iran

¹⁶¹ Zhou J. (2019). Power Transition and Paradigm Shift in Diplomacy: Why China and the US March towards Strategic Competition? Published by The Chinese Journal of International Politics. Vol 12(1),

¹⁶² Ibid: 198

¹⁶³ Sanam Vakil (2018) – China and Middle East regional rebalancing. Accessed via: <https://www.hoover.org/research/china-middle-east-regional-balancing>

¹⁶⁴ Daniels O. (2017). Article "Saudi Arabia Pivots to Asia". Retrieved from <https://www.thediplomat.com/Saudi-arabia-pivots-to-asia-for-now>

¹⁶⁵ Ziegler C.E. (2006). The energy factor in China's foreign policy. Journal of Chinese Political Science. 11(1), 1-23

and Saudi Arabia. In the political arena, the power transition towards Asia gives China the impetus to increase its naval patrols near the Gulf of Oman as well as Aden.

The 3rd Key Informant argued that China's sphere of influence is enhanced by power dynamics in Middle East and Asia, these dynamics have fueled the nations' desire to dominate the region and to a greater extent challenge the U.S hegemonic status.

“.....Beijing's strategy of building infrastructure in a number of countries that are unable to pay the mounting debts will see it take over natural resources in these countries. For example,, Israel will eventually deal with the fact that its border with Syria will be manned under Chinese jurisdiction.....” (KII03)

However, in the wake of this shift in the balance of power, the role of Russia in the Middle East must also be examined¹⁶⁶. The role of Russia vis-à-vis China in the Middle East will define the politics of the Middle East and global politics at large, especially with the relative decline of U.S influence in the region. Scholars argue that in the Middle East, the relationship between Russia and China will be more of cooperation rather than competition. This has been recently evidenced by Russia and China's collaboration to veto U.S sponsored resolutions to impose sanctions on the Assad regime in what has been referred to as the “Sino-Russian” duo. This emerged as an alliance to counter the U.S in Syria.

Power Transition towards Asia raises a broad range of questions on whether it will lead to a great-power war. Will the era of Chinese –US tension be as dangerous as the Cold War? But, China, unlike the Soviet Union, is a severe economic competitor with massive geopolitical influence. Glaser foresees that in the auspices of the heated contestation, international conflict is a possibility. Glaser,¹⁶⁷ also argues that the current international order is defined by political and economic openness, and this can accommodate the rise of China and the transition of power towards Asia¹⁶⁸. This is a liberal view; however, if China decides to undertake a dangerous military struggle to overturn the system and establish a new order, war will be imminent.

The 7th Key Informant (KII07) argued that China could decide to engage in military undertaking with a bid to overturn the system and this could be one of the greatest military struggles of the 21st Century.

¹⁶⁶ Daniels O. (2018). How China Is Trying to Dominate the Middle East. Retrieved from <https://nationalinterest.org/feature/how-china-trying-dominate-middle-east>

¹⁶⁷ Glaser C. (2011). Will China's rise lead to war? Why realism does not mean pessimism. Foreign Affairs. 80-91

¹⁶⁸ Ibid: 205

“...China’s rise is a clear instance of power transition which could eventually lead to emergence of conflict in the recent future in the event of a military struggle...” However, this is not likely to occur considering the fact that China is more concerned with economic development rather than military interventions and struggles”.... (KII07)

Although Beijing and Washington have expressed goodwill in line with common goals of peaceful and mutually beneficial development, analysts allude that the numerous unsettled issues between the two states that are increasingly becoming more complicated by the occurring power transition process could slump into conflict in the long run if not properly managed.¹⁶⁹

Emerging conflicts and the proxy wars in countries such as Yemen and Venezuela are indicative that the peaceful transition during changes in the balance of power is unlikely. According to Zhou,¹⁷⁰ there is brewing conflict in many parts of the world due to power struggle; the world is unstable. The interconnection of global conflict, like the complex war in Syria and the proxy war between Saudi Arabia and Iran in Yemen and Lebanon only shows how vulnerable the world is in the face of shifting the balance of power.

The new possibilities for miscalculations arising from power distribution bring fears that as Asia continues to grow, great power politics is returning and compromise may not be feasible. The system runs the risk of a security dilemma. As the U.S continues to increase their military arsenal, other states who feel less secure (Russia, China) engage in counter measures, which increase the overall risk of conflict.¹⁷¹

2.5 The Rise of Russia

According to Götz and Merlen,¹⁷² there exists broad agreement among analysts and critics that Russia intends to undermine liberal international order led by the U.S which has dominated the international arena since the Soviet Union’s collapse after the Cold War. According to Stronski and Sokolsky,¹⁷³ Russia’s aim is to create a multipolar world in which it plays a more prominent role.

Over the past few decades, Russia appears as a 'defensive power' whose primary motive is to institute changes within the world order and reclaim her position in the international system. Under

¹⁶⁹ David Lai (2011). “U.S and China in Power transition.” Page 4 published by the Strategic Studies Institute.

¹⁷⁰ Zhou J. (2019). Power Transition and Paradigm Shift in Diplomacy: Why China and the US March towards Strategic Competition? Published by The Chinese Journal of International Politics. Vol 12(1), Pg 1-34

¹⁷¹ John Herz. “Idealist Internationalism and the Security Dilemma.” World politics pp.157

¹⁷² Gotz E. & Merlen C.R. (2019). Russian and the question of world order. European Politics and Society. 20(2), 133-153.

¹⁷³ Stronski P. & Sokolsky R. (2017). The Return of Global Russia: An Analytical Framework.

the leadership of Putin, Russia has created a new phenomenon of 'aggressive isolationist' by playing a spoiler role in regards to international affairs to boost domestic legitimacy and expand its global influence at the expense of the West.¹⁷⁴

Richard Sokolsky and Paul Stronski argue that Russia continues to conduct well-resourced, sophisticated and successful campaigns aimed at expanding their influence to the detriment of the U.S and Western countries since 2012¹⁷⁵. According to Götz and Merlen,¹⁷⁶ the rise of Russia has resulted in Moscow pursuing ambitions such as undermining the U.S.-led liberal international order and undermining democracy that has resulted in dividing Western security and political institutions.

Consequently, events leading to Russia's rise have earned it a place among the global superpowers, a move that bolsters Putin legitimacy; and promotes Russia's energy, military and commercial interests¹⁷⁷. Russia has continued to challenge the norms and rules prevailing in the post-Soviet space that touches on the international border, as evident in Crimea's takeover. Over the past decade, Russia has involved itself with the politics of neighboring countries causing a rift in international politics. According to Zaur Gasimov,¹⁷⁸ the Middle East region has become an important arena for Russia to make a comeback to international politics and articulate her military strength.

The key informant (KII07) maintains that the rise of Russia is at the center of power transition in the 21st Century. The idea is that the rejuvenation of Russia presents a threat to U.S dominance.

“...Russia has re-imperialized the former Soviet States by consistently implementing a seven-stage trajectory that began with strong soft power, trickled down to humanitarian and compatriot policies and finally the information war...” (KII07)

“.....Russia's imminent success in Syria through the victory of the Assad regime has largely undermined the position of the U.S in the Middle East, which has traditionally been a U.S sphere of influence.” Her efforts to mediate the Syria conflict have established Russia as a driving force in international diplomacy in the region”. (KII04)

¹⁷⁴ Pain E. 18 May 2005. “will Russia Transform Into a Nationalist Empire?”

¹⁷⁵ Stronski P. & Sokolsky R. (2017). The Return of Global Russia: An Analytical Framework. Accessed via: <https://carnegieendowment.org/return-of-global-russia-analytical-framework-pub>

¹⁷⁶ Ibid: 215

¹⁷⁷ Gotz, Elias and Camille R. Merlen. (2018). “Russia and the Question of World Order.” European Politics and Society: Vol 20(2): pp133-153

¹⁷⁸ Zaur Gasimov is a Senior Research Fellow at the University of Bonn's Russian Studies Department – <https://thearabweekly.com/Russia-widens-footprint-middle-east>.

The above argument is supported by Clément Therme's¹⁷⁹ assertion that perceives Russia as a permanent threat, which has maintained a sophisticated reputation in the Middle East. Furthermore, since the fall of the Soviet Union, Russia's foreign policy did not change and the same has triggered its return to the Middle East as a key player. Russia's political strategy in the Middle East takes a pragmatic approach instead of an ideological one¹⁸⁰.

“.....Moscow's strategy in the Middle East is in fact very witty and opportunistic. Russia has managed to maintain friendly relations with Iran, Syria, Turkey, Israel, Qatar, UAE and host of other Arab nations which have had hostile relations among themselves for decades now, giving Russia an upper hand, compared to U.S whose policy in the region is clear on who is an ally and who is a foe.....” (FGD02/03)

In contradiction to their anti-west ideologies, Russia takes sides with Western nations on a multilateral approach in resolving conflict in the region primarily due to the fear of nuclear proliferation.¹⁸¹ The approach Russia takes in the region appears as a strategy that varies in form and shape that oscillates between hindrance and helpful political resolutions dependent on Russia's nationalistic ideologies and self-interest.

The First Focus Group Discussion 5th Member (FGD01/05) argued that Russia's strategy in Middle East is amorphous and dynamic and is not anchored on any one particular diplomatic framework. But, is a more pragmatic approach compared to that of United States.

*“...Putin's return to the middle East is a pragmatic opportunistic pursuit of its interests...which are more than ever endearing on her quest to usher in a new world order.”
Putin's efforts to reclaim Russia's position are relentless. (FGD01/05)*

Götz and Merlen¹⁸² argue that Russia continues to mount a significant amount of economic pressure on nations such as Lithuania, Moldova and Ukraine and has expanded its military base in Post-Soviet regions. These actions along with Russia's increased military investments are triggers of conflict in the region and the same can escalate to other parts of Middle East. In addition, Putin's rejection of the liberal global order is a source of conflict with the Western nations and U.S.

¹⁷⁹ Al Makahleh S. (2018). The Arab view of Russia's role in the MENA: Changing Arab Perceptions of Russia and implications for US Policy. Pp.61

¹⁸⁰ Therme C. (2018). Iran and Russia in the Middle East: Toward a Regional Alliance? The Middle East Journal. 72(4), 549-562.

¹⁸¹ Therme Clement (2019) “Russia's influence in the Middle East: on the rise or inevitable decline?”

¹⁸² Gotz, Elias and Camille R. Merlen. (2018). “Russia and the Question of World Order.” European Politics and Society: Vol 20(2): pp133-153

These are actions that can easily trigger conflict not just at the regional level but also at the global level. Russia seeks to exploit vulnerabilities and openness of Western nations' socio-economic faults and information system pluralism aimed at creating divisions within the Euro-Atlantic community¹⁸³. An ideal example is Russia's alleged interference with the U.S elections. These are provocative actions which could trigger serious global conflict. Besides, Russia has forged alliances with other authoritarian regimes such as China and Iran to represent anti-democracies that challenge the post-Cold War status quo, which is a possible cause of conflicts.

2.6 Transition from Military Power to Economic Power

Historically, the test of power was military might because war was the ultimate end game.¹⁸⁴ However, in the 21st Century, in the age of proliferation of nuclear weapons, great power wars are unlikely and therefore the sources of power have shifted towards economic power. Graham defines economic power as the capacity of a state to influence another through economic means.

According to (KII01), the proliferation of nuclear weaponry has limited chances in great power confrontations in the 21st Century, the damage is too much a cost for the great powers to bear. This has brought about transition to economic power as evidenced by the strained trade relations between China and U.S and economic sanctions imposed on antagonists such as Iran and North Korea.

“...no great military power has ever remained as such with poor economic power...money / economic might is power” (KII01)

The proponents of this power transition argue that economic power has replaced military valor. According to Joseph Nye, economic muscle, rather than military force, will shape the balance of power and would become a critical factor to success in international politics in the 21st Century.¹⁸⁵ Although military power is important, formation of a formidable military force requires economic prosperity. ¹⁸⁶In fact, the discourse about the rise of China has majorly been with reference to her growing economy with very little consideration of her military power.

¹⁸³ Gotz, Elias and Camille R. Merlen. (2018). “Russia and the Question of World Order.” European Politics and Society: Vol 20(2): pp133-153

¹⁸⁴ Joseph Nye (2002). Article – “Why Military Power is no longer enough.”

¹⁸⁵ Joseph Nye (2011) – Article published by Aljazeera – “Has Economic Might replace Military Might.”

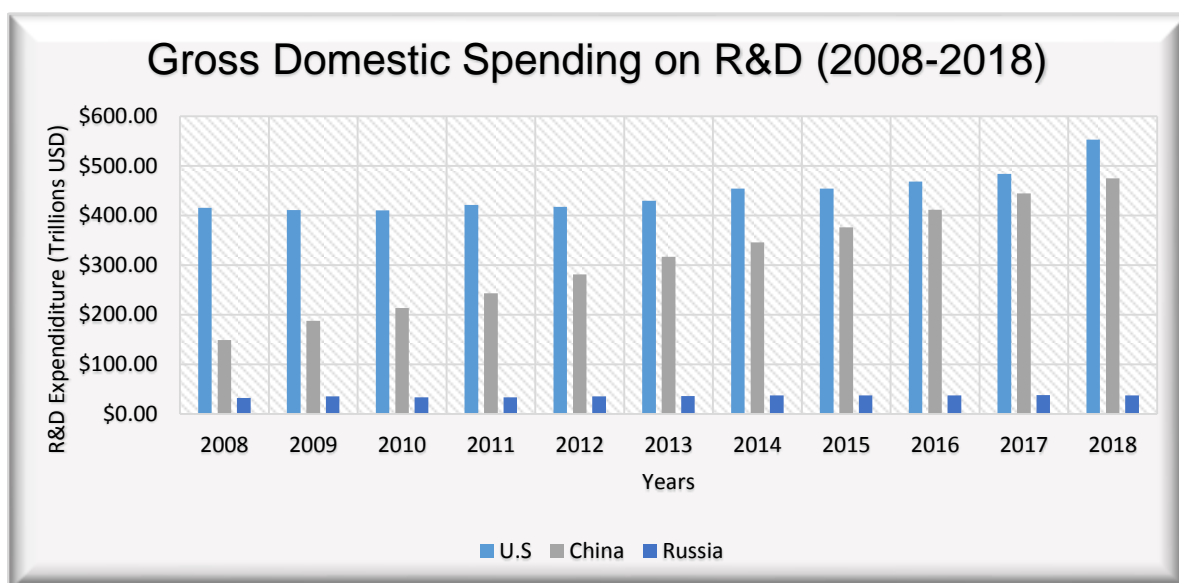
¹⁸⁶ James Graham (2013) – Military power verses economic power in history.

A response by the 8th Key Informant alludes to the idea that currently, economic power is taking precedence over military power and the same is what characterizes the rise of China to global power status.

“...the American military power would be eroded in the absence of robust economic revival...” (KII08)

The growing importance of economic power arose from the need of states to reconstruct their economic after the turmoil of the Cold war. States had invested heavily and therefore needed to replenish their resource reserves. Increased interdependence between states in the 21st Century means that use of military might sabotage their economic objectives.¹⁸⁷ This is because use of coercive force destroys mutually beneficial relationships and is far too costly. This is however not to undermine the importance of military power.

James Graham¹⁸⁸ argues that although the motivations for interstate wars have declined in the 21st Century, the motivation for states to pursue economic power is ultimately to pose deterrence to others by advancing their military forces. For many years, China’s military power was relatively small, however, with her growing economy; China has modernized and expanded her military forces. Without a strong economy, there would have been no chance to afford a strong military. A strong economy and a strong military would not be feasible without corresponding improvement in technology and increase in investment in research and development. *See Fig: 4 below*



¹⁸⁷ Joseph Nye. 2011

¹⁸⁸ Graham J. (2013). Military power vs economic power in history.

*Fig: 4 Source: (OECD, 2019; UNESCO.org, 2019)

The transition from military power to economic power has also further heightened rivalry between the U.S and China, characterized by the recent trade wars and proxy wars in the developed world dubbed “the new scramble for African resources.” The new scramble for African resources denoted by the vicious competition between the east (China) and the west (U.S) over natural resources, particularly, oil. According to Southall and Melber,¹⁸⁹ the phenomenon of the “new scramble for African resources” is driven by the desire for increased economic power. A response by the 5th Key Informant affirms Southall and Melber’s proposition;

....As a matter of fact, the U.S has since been intimidated of China’s entry into Africa, publicly accusing China of exploiting Africa. Everyone wants to secure a piece of the cake to remain economically relevant.” (KII05)

The struggle to gain access and control of oil is a means to maintain relevance to the global economy by the contending states owing to its utmost value for states’ interests in industrialization.¹⁹⁰ This argument holds true in relation to contestation for oil in the Middle East which has been one of the underlying causes of conflict in the region for decades. Countries are willing to go to war to secure supply of oil to drive their economic growth. A good example is the U.S invasion of Afghan.

A response by the 7th Key Informant backs up this proposition

.....In the 21st Century, the end justifies the means. If a country has to go to war or invade another to safeguard her economic interests, then indeed conflict is unavoidable.....”(KII07)

Historically, nations were formed and others obliterated owing to the power transition process.

Conclusion

The accelerated pace of transformation of relative power status of states in the International system in this century is not likely to slow down in the coming years. This therefore means that the effect of power transitions is likely to be felt even more strongly. The competitive spirit between states in response to the “void” left by the US “relative decline” is likely to intensify as states contest for a

¹⁸⁹ Southall R. & Melber H. (Eds). (2009). A new scramble for Africa? Imperialism, investment and development. Scottsville: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press.

¹⁹⁰ Susan Strange (1998) – Article “Mad Money” Published by Manchester University Press pp.115-116

spot in the hierarchical international order, and as the US fights back to maintain its hegemonic status.

Power transitions therefore bring forth the power parity problem, which creates an illusion of a rapidly narrowing window of opportunity for ambitious states to act, leading to a higher probability for interstate conflict. A rising state often provokes conflict, rather than initiate or declare it against a super power hegemon. In most instances, powerful states do engage in preventative wars to defend their hegemonic interests.

CHAPTER THREE: Power politics as a major cause of emergence and persistence of conflict in the Middle East

3.0 Introduction: Hegemonic Order and hegemonic contestation in the twenty first century.

The concept of hegemonic order in international relations can be understood as the ranking of political units i.e. “countries” order of political, military coupled with economic power in the international system.¹⁹¹ According to Stanislaw,¹⁹² hegemony implies a form of domination of the weaker represented by a phenomenon of superiority of one over others.

The importance of this concept for this study is to demonstrate the place of power in determination of “rank” units in the international political system. The hegemonic order thereby inevitably brings about hierarchy whereby the survival of the weakest one is to a greater proportion in line to the stronger one. States therefore endeavor to reach or maintain a higher ranking by all means necessary to guarantee their continuity in the global system.

Hegemonic contestation in the 21st century has resulted in confrontation between the U.S and the aspiring powers unleashed through competition and rivalry manifested in proxy conflicts in other parts of the world.¹⁹³ In recent years the great power rivalry has manifested in trade wars and acquisition of nuclear weapons.

It was believed that post-cold war era the world would generally be more peaceful. The emerging trends of unconventional and even more brutal wars that have occurred in the world today was unprecedented. However much each conflict portrays unique characteristics, the 21st century protracted conflicts in the Middle East region are noted to exhibit some seemingly similar characteristics, which will be examined in this chapter.

After the end of the cold war, U.S maintained hegemonic power as the only super power. Since then, the US has exercised all forms of domination over other states in the international system through her military reach, unrivalled political infrastructure, economic prowess and capability to utilize her power resources to exert influence.

The 21st century post-cold war system witnessed rapid growth arising from stability and emergence of new powerful economies which has evidently shifted the global balance of power in disfavor of

¹⁹¹ Wilkinson D. Hegemonia: Hegemony, Classical and Modern. Journal of Word-Systems Research, 2008, Vol XIV, No.2, pg119.

¹⁹² S. Bielen S. (2017). The hegemonic order in the 21st century.

¹⁹³ Michale Moodie (2009). “Conflict trends in the 21st Century” Published by ND University, Washington DC

the United States. Russia, Europe, Japan and China's rapid economic growth has in a way reduced their inferiority to US dominance. The U.S dominance has further been undermined by the diminishing support of the U.S resulting from the use of domineering force and inward looking policies that has alienated her traditional allies.¹⁹⁴

Emergence of new powers rivals has indeed intensified the geopolitical competition between the US and the new powers that are rapidly rising into global power status.¹⁹⁵ Russia and China exhibit more aggressive and assertive behavior in their aspiring leadership roles in the Middle East and Africa respectively which has arguably led to America's decline in her global leadership role arising from the new distribution of power in the twenty first century.

The most persistent conflicts in the world today have largely afflicted Africa and the Middle East. Protracted conflicts in Africa and Middle Eastern region remain a matter of concern as they pose a multitude of challenges in achievement of development goals. An analysis of protracted conflicts in developing countries, particularly in Africa reveals major linkages of the involvement of the great powers in conflict to resources, in what is referred to as the "new scramble for African resources", which denotes an aspect of the need to amass power. This paper shall focus on the Syria and Yemen conflicts as part of a larger conflict system in the Middle East region.

Does power contestation between two or more external state actors transform internal conflicts in any way? To what extent has the intensity of conflicts changed in the 21st century in light of shifts in global power balance? This chapter explores the role of various power rivalries, and their impact to the outcomes of conflicts in Syria and Yemen.

3.1 Historical background of the Middle East

The current power dynamics in the Middle East can be traced down to the Cold war period. One of the key reasons why the cold war had a profound impact on the region was because most of Arab countries in the Middle East gained their sovereignty from European colonialism during the cold war period. Therefore, during the cold war some of the Arab states were still struggling to transition to independence, and were therefore in need of assistance from external powers. Their vulnerability attracted the US and the Soviet Union who competed for Arab allies in an effort to gain influence in the region.

¹⁹⁴ Skarzyński, R. 2006- Anarchy and polycentrism, p.50

¹⁹⁵ The Peace Research Institute Frankfurt, 2014. "Promoting of great power multilateralism"

Monarchies such as Saudi Arabia and Jordan aligned to the US to ensure regime security while Syria,¹⁹⁶ Libya, Iraq, Yemen and Egypt aligned with the USSR. Other non-Arab states were also pulled in with Turkey, Iran and Israel aligned with the U.S. The Middle East region was thereby divided into two rival camps which mirrored and mimicked the bipolar international system.

According to Shwadran,¹⁹⁷ the Middle East is one of the key hotly contested regions since WW2 owing to the region's strategic geographical location and large reserves of oil and gas. In fact, the US and USSR were already militarily invested in the Middle East where they positioned their submarines in the 60's and 70's in Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Iran and Egypt during the Cold war.

The end of the Cold War, characterized by the collapse of the Soviet Union and the ensuing era of US hegemony necessitated the USSR allies to reconfigure their foreign policy arising from the loss of USSR aid that caught her allies flat-footed. In fact, scholars have argued that it is no coincidence that USSR allies are to this day heavily afflicted by conflicts arising from the Arab Spring which stem from economic crisis.¹⁹⁸ US allies on the other hand continued to enjoy benefits from their affiliation with the only super power.

The 3rd member of the First Focus Group Discussion maintained that the fall of USSR after the Cold War bolstered America's position as a global superpower.

“.....The fall of USSR rendered US the sole superpower and the sole beneficiaries of the USSR's demise. The US continued to thrive economically, military-wise among various other aspects while USSR was left a step behind...” (FGD01/03)

Due to the fall of USSR it then meant that countries had to realign their foreign policies with the global shift of power. The respondent argued that countries such as Libya changed their international relations policies in response to this shift in balance of power. Many other countries followed suit.

Reconfiguration of foreign policies of USSR's allies occurred in different forms; some such as Libya quickly remedied her relations with the U.S while others such as Syria and Iran formed resistance alliances along with other non-state groups including Hezbollah and Hamas who also resisted the U.S dominance in the Middle East. Since then, some of the resisting countries

¹⁹⁶ Raymond Hinnebusch (2012). “Authoritarian Upgrading to Revolution in Syria” International Affairs 23

¹⁹⁷ Shwadran B. (1985). ‘The Middle East oil: Great powers’

¹⁹⁸ Hinnebusch, 2009. “Syria.” P.97

witnessed military invasions by the U.S such as in Afghanistan and Iraq.¹⁹⁹ This situation set up new rival power structures in the region defined by competing US Arab allies and Iran-led resistance front; and Sunni vs. Shia Muslims which still play out in the civil wars of the Middle East to date.

Re-emergence of Russia in the late 21st Century has since attempted to close up the power vacuum, which has again shifted power balance in the region. Henceforth, competition between both US and Russia and regional powers in the Middle East has transformed the region into hotly contested proxy battles. Since then, the Middle East has presented a battle field where great power rivalry has manifested to date, which has greatly shaped Middle East geopolitics.

The Second Focus Group Discussion 7th Member maintained that proxy wars especially in the Middle East has been triggered by resurgence of Russia and the intriguing competition with U.S.

“.....The presence of Russia and China in the Middle East has posed power competition to the U.S as well as her allies in the region. Russia has attempted to perfect the art of diplomacy- Soft Power that has seen it dominate the United States in the 21st Century”
(FGD02/07)

The dynamics of the re-emergence of Russia according to (FGD02/07) has transformed Middle East geopolitics making it the center of great power conflict in the 21st Century.

3.2 Middle East Geopolitics and Balance of Power in the 21st Century

To understand the role of power in exacerbating the conflicts in Syria, Yemen and Palestine it is paramount to understand the Middle East geopolitics and resultant power dynamics in the region. The Middle East region has clearly been an object of struggle for influence and interests by many state actors, and recently non-state actors in equal measure.²⁰⁰

The international relations of the Middle Eastern states have been strained arising from historical political, national and religious rivalries. Scholars of Middle Eastern politics have argued that in the 21st Century, the region has experienced the most crucial transformation throughout history.²⁰¹

¹⁹⁹ Douglas J. Feith (2009). War and Decision – For a discussion of how the Bush Administration made decisions in the wake of 9/11 New York, Haper Collins pp.106.

²⁰⁰ Hughes G., 2014. “Syria and the perils of proxy warfare.” EAJ, 25:3, pages 523-530.

²⁰¹ March Lynch. 2007. ‘Uprisings and Anarchy in the Middle East’. New York Press

Of importance in understanding protraction of conflicts in the Middle East including the Yemeni, Iraq and Syrian conflicts is the power contest between Iran, Israel, Turkey and the Arab Middle East (Saudi Arabia in particular). The involvement of Iran, Israel, Turkey and Saudi Arabia in the Middle East conflicts manifests as proxy warfare where they support government and opposition militia groups as a means to fight over influence in the region. The power contestation between the regional powers has since intensified in the 21st Century with the emergence of China which has in away shifted the U.S attention to Asia, leaving its allies, Israel and Saudi Arabia in a power rival status with Iran to safeguard her interests in the region.²⁰²

The Middle East region is the region that best exhibits the “balancing of power” phenomenon as a continuous and sustained struggle for dominance and counteractions from other regional powers. To this regard, the debate on which is the most powerful state in the Middle East has been a rather heated subject of analysis, giving forth different results, dependent on the criteria used for such analysis from military power, religious dominance, to the growing importance of socio-economic factors in influencing foreign policy.²⁰³

Spillover effects of the conflict in Syria including the refugee crisis and threats to the security interests of the regional powers arising from such conflict have been argued to justify their involvement. However, scholars such as Marc, 2017 ²⁰⁴ have argued that aside from protection of the immediate interests from impending threats, the regional civil wars in the Middle East are more about asserting dominance and establishing the balance of power.

According to Morgenthau 1948, balancing of power occurs either by diminishing the power of the powerful state or increasing the power of the lesser state. Iraq was no longer a power after U.S invasion in 2003. However, the US withdrawal of troops in Iraq shifted the balance of power in favor of Iran. Syria, Libya and Egypt declined in their power status with the onset of the Arab Spring. These destabilizing events left an imminent power vacuum that prompted Iran, Israel, Turkey and Saudi Arabia to pursue their ambitions of a regional hegemony.

3.2 The Syria and Yemeni Civil Wars

An analysis of the development of the Syria and Yemen civil wars and involvement of various actors is important with regards to developing an understanding of the war to build an

²⁰² Muhareem ,. (2017) .“Regional Hegemony Quests in the Middle East from the Balance of Power System to the Balance: Proxy wars. Article

²⁰³ Military Strength Ranking 2019. ‘Global Fire Power List of Countries.’ Accessed via: <https://www.globalfirepower.com>

²⁰⁴ Ibid: 240

understanding of the role of the key external state actors, their motivations for involvement in the conflict and the impact of their involvement on the outcomes of the conflict.

The Arab Spring, also known as the “Arab awakening” began as a series of violent and non-violent anti-government protests in the Middle Eastern countries motivated by the outcomes of the same in successful overthrowing of repressive governments who had ruled tyrannically for decades. The Arab Spring has been described by scholars as a “revolution” due to the striking similar patterns involving anti-government strikes, riots, protests as well as use of the media by citizens to express dissatisfaction with the government, in the hope of achieving the much desired regime changes.²⁰⁵

Scholars argue that the protests are believed to have been sparked majorly by income inequality, unemployment, economic crisis, autocratic authoritarianism, inflation, corruption, violation of citizen rights and political mismanagement “instigated” by local governments on their citizens.²⁰⁶ These factors cumulatively resulted in disgruntled citizens rising up against the dictatorial oppressive rule.

Anti-government protests erupted in Syria in March 2011, motivated by similar protests resulting from the Arab spring “wave effect”. The Assad regime further aggravated the situation in the country by responding brutally by use of live fire, killings, capture and forced arrests on peaceful protesters, which quickly culminated to civil war. Therefore, by the end of 2011, the situation had climaxed into a full blown conflict between government forces and the opposition rebels.

Similarly, the Yemeni conflict between the Saudi backed Yemeni government (with U.S support) and the Iran backed Houthi movement (with Russian support) is arguably perceived as an extension of the Saudi- Iranian proxy conflict to tame Iran.

The key issue to note from the turn of events for the Syria and Yemeni conflicts is the increasing complexity of the war in the recent years resulting from external interference by the global powers, evidenced by a complex web of alliances. According to Marshall,²⁰⁷ the global powers, US, China, UK and Russia are pursuing a proxy war fueled by their self-interests tied to power contestation and

²⁰⁵ Elfatih Abdel Salam (2015) – “The Arab Spring: Its Origin, evolution an consequences...four years on”

²⁰⁶ Ibid: 245

²⁰⁷ Marshall,. A. 2016. “From civil war to proxy war: past history; Small Wars & Insurgencies.”pp 195

battle for influence. Scholars have often described the Syria and Yemeni Crisis as the new chessboards for great power politics in the 21st Century.²⁰⁸

Initially, the wars were internationalized regional conflicts with influence from the regional powers including Iran, Turkey, Saudi- Arabia and Qatar among others. Regional state actors are involved by virtue of refugee influx from Syria and Yemen, self-interest, as well as other reasons including belief in the Westphalia system and alignment with great powers present in the conflicts.

However, the conflicts quickly gained a global dimension with inclusion of the great powers, who acted in close collaboration with the regional powers. Russia and China aligned themselves with the Assad regime by acting in collaboration with Iran (Hezbollah), in what is referred to as the “Sino-Russian” bilateral duo. In Yemen, Russia provided support to the Houthi rebels as the U.S reinforced Saudi’s standing through her support to the Saudi-led coalition.

Conversely, the US, Germany, France and England supported the opposition. The global rivalry between the US and Russia, dating way back to the Cold war, as well as US and China economic power rivalry was imported to the conflicts in the region.²⁰⁹ Due to the changing dynamics of the conflict, it began to get increasingly complex, and has as a result largely affected Middle Eastern geopolitics.

The great powers began to support the Assad and Hadi regime and the opposition forces with both economic and military aid to propagate their interests in form of proxy warfare. Although the great powers deny direct involvement in Syria and Yemen, scholars argue that the economic and military aid to Syria and Yemen and to the regional powers involved in the conflict has exacerbated the conflicts to unimaginable levels, particularly with the introduction of use of chemical and biological weapons in Syria.

The battle for influence on Syria between the great powers has been iterated in the UNSC through the use of sanctions, where Russia and China have repeatedly vetoed draft resolutions against the Assad regime sponsored by the West to stop the ongoing widespread attacks by the Assad regime on Syrian civilians.²¹⁰

²⁰⁸ Bir, V. Politikararinin,. Realizme,. D. (2017). “THE SYRIAN CRISIS AS A PROXY WAR” Accessed via: <https://dergipa.rk.gov.tr/download/article-01>

²⁰⁹ Alexandra S. 2016. “USA and Russia could start Third World War over Syria conflict, says Turkey.” The Independent, 17 October 2016,publication

²¹⁰ Human Rights Council, 2018 – “Report of the Special Rapporteur on the negative impact of unilateral coercive measures on the enjoyment of human rights on his mission to the Syrian Arab Republic” pg.4

3.3 MIDDLE EAST REGIONAL POWER RIVALRIES AND OUTCOMES ON CONFLICTS

Responses from the key informants and FGD's strongly felt that Iran, Saudi Arabia, Israel, Russia and the U.S play a fundamental role in the instability in the Middle East. The respondents perceived China's role as "peacemaker and strategic partner". This is owing to China's strategic hands-off and passive approach governed by her doctrine of non-interference. Below is a thematic analysis of the key issues that came out from the KII and FGD's.

3.3.1 The Iran Factor

Iran has been one of the key supporters of the Assad regime since the conflict broke out in Syria in 2011. This is owing to Iran's long standing allied relationship with Syria. The relationship between Syria and Iran began after the Iran- Iraq war (1980-1988), where Syria stood with Iran as the only Arab country. Scholars argue that Iran's involvement in Syria has been a test of its political utility, and most importantly, a test of her abilities and capabilities.²¹¹

To this regard, as the situation in Syria deteriorated, Tehran provided training, intelligence and logistical support to the Syrian Army. Iran also stepped in to the help of the Assad regime particularly when the regime had insufficient forces to fight rebel groups. Iran facilitated rapid recruitment of Shia fighters from Afghanistan and Pakistan, as well as her closest allied group, Hezbollah. Tehran also facilitated deployment of Iraqi Shia fighters and Special Forces to aid the Assad regime²¹²

Although Iran's interests tied to support of the Assad regime in Syria is to fight against Daesh, scholars argue that the overarching reason for her continued support to Syria is in alignment with Russia, aimed at undermining the U.S and her regional allies, Israel and Saudi Arabia.

3.3.2 Iran- Saudi rivalry

The Iran- Saudi rivalry is predominantly a sectarian conflict between the Shi'a and Sunni. The rivalry over the years has been denoted by a struggle for political, military supremacy, religious legitimacy and a never ending quest for regional dominance.²¹³

²¹¹ Gareth Smyth, 2013. The Guardian, "Iran: Rafsanjani Signals Wavering in Long-standing Support for Syria"

²¹² Omar Al-Jaffal, 2013. "Iraqi Shiites Join Syria War"

²¹³ Patrick van der Heiden and Alex Krijger, 2018 – The Saudi-Iranian rivalry – "An ominous zero-sum game for supremacy"

According to the 10th Key Informant, rivalries between Middle East regional powers and the proxy wars in Middle East are to a large degree based on Sectarianism;

“.....Iran possess a longer history of nationhood with a larger population (predominantly Shiii’a) while Saudi Arabia , which is predominantly Sunni, holds custody of Islamic holy Sites hence the enmity between the two states over religious dominance in the region.....”
(KII10)

The respondent emphasized that the rivalry between Saudi and Iran is a classic example of how religious sectarianism fuels conflict in the region.

The Iran- Saudi Arabia rivalry reflects a classical manifestation of the balance of power theory. The historical religious rivalry between Saudi Arabia and Iran, is mirrored in the Syria and Yemeni conflicts with Saudi Arabia supporting the opposition rebels and Iran supporting the Assad forces alongside Hezbollah in Syria. Iran’s support to the Houthi rebels in Yemen including military assistance and training became apparent evidenced by a number of Iranian ships seized carrying arm shipments to Yemen.²¹⁴

The First Focus Group Discussion, 7th Member believe that power struggle between Saudi Arabia and Iran has worsened Yemen war, making it severe and endless.

“...Yemen, the poorest country in the Arab region, has experienced dire humanitarian crisis due to Saudi’s involvement in its war.” (FGD01/07)

The First Focus Group Discussion, 7th Member’s arguments aligns well with that of (KII10) who argues that;

“.....the Iran-Saudi Arabia rivalry is a key deterrent to peace in the Middle East region.”(FGD01/07)

Saudi’s direct participation in Yemen was to indirectly undermine Iranian influence, based on fears that success of the Houthi rebels would give Iran strong standing in Yemen, giving Iran a considerable influence in Saudi’s southern border. According to Irem Karakir,²¹⁵ the Yemeni conflict would largely be explained as a religious struggle between Shi’a Iran and Sunni Saudi Arabia to reinforce their control in the region. Regardless of whether the conflict is seen through a

²¹⁴ James Shinnie April 2017 – Iran in Yemen: Ending the Houthi War Vol. 37 No.2

²¹⁵ Karakir I. A. Ongoing conflict in Yemen: A proxy war? Tesam akademi, 5(2), 121-149.

religious lenses or not, the endearing factor is that it still associated with the need to project power and influence.

The regional Iran-Saudi rivalry brings forth an interesting twist to Middle East balance of power with the role of Turkey and Israel as balancing powers to balance out Iranian power in the region. Recent engagement of Israel in the conflict is to outperform Iran with a sole aim of diminishing Iran's control in Syria and thereby reinforcing her authority in Syria. The need to balance Iranian power in Syria has been further achieved by a "convenience" alliance between Saudi Arabia and Israel to achieve the common objective to defeat Iran.

Neither Iran nor Saudi Arabia has managed to outdo the other to date.²¹⁶ However, particularly in Syria, the balance of power has recently shifted in favor of Iran with the defeat of the Saudi backed rebel groups. In many ways, the Saudi- Iranian rivalry has consequently repeatedly pitted the US and Russia against each other.

3.3.3 Iran- Israeli Rivalry

Iran and Israel is yet another formidable power rivalry in the Middle East region. Israel and Iran have historically been allies, but their relationship deteriorated with the onset of the Arab spring which sparked Israel's concern over the potential of the Arab revolutions to reinforce Iran's foothold in the region and tip the balance of power in Iran's favor²¹⁷.

The (FGD02/07) reiterated the convolutedness of Middle East conflicts, reflecting on the fall of Saddam Hussein and the role it played in strengthening Iran which again emerged as a new threat to the United States, and her long term ally, Israel.

"...Iraq was defeated with the help of Israel, Iran was left stronger! This however had a negative effect on Israel since it was left with a quite devalued role to the United States that sparked the rivalry between Iran and Israel. So Israel formed an Alliance with Saudi Arabia against Iran..." (FGD02/07)

According to (FGD02/07), Saudi Arabia and Israel had no option but to settle into an alliance. The same triggered involvement of the United States due to threats of nuclear weapons posed by a rising Iran.

²¹⁶ Muhareem Eksi 2017 – Article "Regional Hegemony Quests in the Middle East from the Balance of power Systems to the Balance of Proxy Wars: Turkey as Balancing Power for the Iran – Saudi Rivalry"

²¹⁷ Solomon Jay, (2011) – Article "U.S. Reacts to Fear of Iran's Rising Clout" Published by Wallstreet Journal

In addition to this, their rivalry has also been over their relative capabilities in light of a possibility of a nuclear armed Iran in the near future. Iran's nuclear advances in the recent past has heightened Israel's threat perception of Iran.²¹⁸ Israel also fears for her territorial security with Iran's encroachment near her borders in form of support to Hezbollah and Hamas in Syria and Lebanon. To date, Iran and Israel view each other as direct rivals for power and influence in the Middle East region.

Although Israel's initial response to the Arab spring revolutions was in support of the resultant democracy, Israel quickly took note of the emerging security threats emanating from instability in her Arab neighbors. Israel's intervention in Syria was therefore to weaken the Assad regime, and ultimately bring down Iran's influence in the region.²¹⁹

To these ends, Israel offered her support to the rebel fighters of the Free Syrian Army in form of humanitarian aid and alleged military support. Israel's support therefore strengthened the Syrian opposition, thus fueling the conflict. Ultimately, the overarching objective of Israel's intervention in Syria is to dilute Iran's influence and assert her role as the cheerleader of democracy in the Middle East.

3.3.4 Turkey- Saudi Rivalry

Turkey's involvement in the Iran-Saudi rivalry was historically to balance Iranian power, which has been for a long time be seen by the US and her allies as a destabilizing force in the region.²²⁰ Turkey's involvement recently went beyond the need to contain Iran to tackle Saudi to establish herself as the leader of the Muslim world. Turkey- Saudi relations have since been strained.

Historically, Turkey and Saudi Arabia enjoyed warm diplomatic ties with each other, which were even further strengthened by their common objective to contain Iran's influence in the region, particularly in Syria. Their relations however took a downward turn in 2011 with the onset of the Arab Spring. Turkey welcomed the revolutions and the resultant new governments while Saudi Arabia viewed the uprisings as destabilizing.²²¹ Turkey's support to the Muslim brotherhood who also supported reformist movements during the Arab spring which potentially threatened the Saudi

²¹⁸ Dalia D. Kaye, Alireza N. & Parisa R, (2011) – Israel and Iran – A dangerous rivalry. Published by RAND National Defense Research Institute.

²¹⁹ Ibid: 258

²²⁰ Fahim Tastekin, "Are Turkey and Saudi Arabia Working Together Against Iran?" In the Al Monitor, March 2015.

²²¹ Fuller, Graham, Turkey and the Arab Spring (Bozorg Press, 2014) p.267

monarch. A culmination of these events led to Saudi Arabia openly undermining Turkey's bid to become a non-permanent member of the UNSC.

Turkey and Saudi Arabia's power contestation has subsequently played out in Syria with Turkey and Saudi's differences in sentiments over the Arab uprising to remove the Assad regime and Turkish support to the Muslim brotherhood as part of the Syrian opposition.²²² Turkey's support for the Syrian opposition was to affirm her support for democratization in the region, and thereby undermine Saudi Arabia in this respect.

3.4 GREAT POWERS INVOLVEMENT IN MIDDLE EAST

3.4.1 U.S Factor

Although the U.S has been a dominant power in the Middle East, the rise of China and renewed interests of the Russia Federation in the region has certainly upset the existing balance of power in the world and in the Middle East region.

Historically, the major interests of the U.S in the region have been energy security (access to oil). Given the U.S interests in economic growth and industrialization, access to oil will for a long time remain a crucial interest. Therefore, an anticipated aggression from Iran, Russia or China against the oil-rich states would certainly provoke U.S response. China's hegemonic ambitions and fresh interests in the Middle East for her oil resources has certainly elicited heightened concern from the U.S and her allies.

The 8th Key Informant argued that the region's massive oil reserves initially attracted the global powers, especially U.S. However, in the twenty first century there is more to fight for in the Middle East more than just oil. The U.S aims to cap Russia and China's hegemonic ambitions in the region.

"...The USSR as well as U.S. were initially the dominant external powers in the Middle East. After the disintegration of USSR. United States became the sole power in the Middle East. In the 21st Century, Russia and China have as well expressed their interests in the Middle East due to resources such as oil reserves as well as markets for goods. The rise of China and the influence of Russia led to decline in US dominance in the Middle East."
(KII08)

²²² Sener Akturk – "Turkey's Role In The Arab Spring; The Syrian Conflict"

The involvement of China, Russia and United States in Syria is stated by (KII08) as a critical example of the dynamics of power struggles in the Middle East. For example, while United States are interested in asserting authority and influence, China is interested in potential markets that would come from an alliance with Syria and other powers in the region. Russia on the other hand is interested in overturning the hegemonic hierarchy and reassert herself as an equally significant player.

Involvement of great powers in Syria in what has been referred to by Ericka Folsberg²²³ as a “vertical contagion” by the US, Russia and China has culminated to a vicious competition for dominance in the Middle East. The U.S’s strategy in Syria is to use her allies to prevent Iran together with her allies (particularly Russia) from establishing hegemony in the region. As much as the U.S’s openly declared intentions for involvement in Syria as part of her war against terror stands true, experts in Middle East geopolitics argue that the U.S involvement in Syria is to stifle Iran’s hegemonic ambitions and as a result ensure the survival of her ally, Israel.²²⁴ It is also key to note that as part of U.S agenda to suppress Iran’s power ambitions is to keep an eye on Iran with regards to Iran’s controversial nuclear program.

The U.S and Russia’s power rivalry dates back to the Cold war period. The rivalry has been further vindicated by Russia’s renewed interest in the Middle East which has expanded over the last decade. Russia’s cooperation with Iran in Syria in salvaging the Assad regime from an imminent collapse and her involvement in spearheading the Astana talks has reinforced Russia’s stand, thereby reducing America’s attractiveness in the region and inevitably shifting the balance of power away from the U.S towards Russia and China.

First Focus Group Discussion, 7th Member posits that the minimal role that United States played during the Astana talks and Yemen talks is a clear sign that the balance of power is shifting away from the U.S towards the East.

“.....Russia, Turkey and Iran held the Astana peace talks for Syria in support of Assad thereby salvaging U.S. Russia’s involvement in Syria’s peace resolutions, further accelerated the decline in US dominance in the Middle East” (FGD01/07)

²²³ Erika Forsberg “Transnational Dimensions of Civil Wars: Clustering, Contagion, and Connectedness” in T. David Mason and Sara McLaughlin Mitchell (eds), *What Do We Know About Civil Wars?* (Rowman & Littlefield: New York: 2016)

²²⁴ National committee of American Foreign Policy (2008) *American Foreign Policy Interests, Toward a New Balance of Power in the Middle East.*

According to (FGD01/07) American's enduring presence in the Middle East has influenced the power balance for decades. However, this is seen to be changing in the 21st Century with the emergence of Russia and China.

3.4.2 America's Role in Middle East Conflicts

The U.S has been involved in the Middle East for a long time since the Cold war era. In the 90's U.S expanded its presence in the region to contain Saddam Hussein in Iraq. However, following the September 2011 terror attack, the U.S further expanded its presence. According to Byman & Moller, U.S interests in the Middle East include; fighting terrorism, maintaining security of her ally Israel, ensuring continual flow of oil and gas, preventing nuclear proliferation (Iran) and promoting democratization.²²⁵The U.S approaches towards securing these interests include deterrence of foes and reassurance of allies. To this regard, all these interests converge towards her military policy in the region.

Scholars of Middle East politics represent a majority pessimistic view of the effect of the U.S factor on peace and stability in the region. The U.S has often been referred to as a "complicating factor" in Middle East geopolitics, owing to the US military policy towards the region.²²⁶The Middle East region is currently the most militarized region in the world today owing to arms transfers, counter terrorism operations, security cooperation programs, military training programs and long term troop deployments to the region.

The 4th Key Informant recognized the huge role that United States has played in Middle East both in terms of economics as well as security;

"....The U.S majorly plays the role of deterring the wrong leadership that would use oil in the Middle East with the wrong intentions such as weaponry. So far, the U.S has offered billions of dollars in humanitarian aid as well as engaged in the military aspects Weapons sales and military aid." (KII04)

According to key informant (KII04), security issues and urge to curb proliferation of nuclear weapons has been at the core of US's interests and enduring presence in the region.

²²⁵ Daniel Byman & Sara Moller (2016) – "The United States and the Middle East: Interests, Risks and Costs" Published by the Oxford University Press pp.1

²²⁶ Micah Zenko 2018 – Research Paper "US Military Policy in the Middle East" published by the Royal Institute of International Affairs

Arms sales and arms transfers remain an important tool used by states to exert their power and influence in the international system. According to Clayton Thomas,²²⁷ the United States is the single largest arms supplier to the Middle East region, in comparison to other arms exporters including Russia, France, Germany and China. In 2017, the U.S announced US\$ 75.9 billion worth of armed sales, US\$ 52 billion were to the Middle East.²²⁸ Evidently so, this is one of U.S tools aimed towards achievement of her foreign policy objectives to counter Iran’s influence in the region and safeguard her allies ‘military edge over their rogue neighbors, and has to a large extent triggered a regional arms race.²²⁹

Other scholars have noted that arms transfers from the U.S have in some instances served to emancipate undemocratic regimes, laying the ground for preconditions of instability. A report published by the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute on global arms sales revealed that arms sales to the Middle East have increased by 87% between 2014- 2018 bringing the Middle East arms imports to almost double in the last 5 years. The report also reiterated the U.S position as the world’s largest arms exporter, at 36% followed by Russia at 21% from 2014-2018 and China at a distant 5.2%.²³⁰ *See below statistics conducted by SIPRI;*

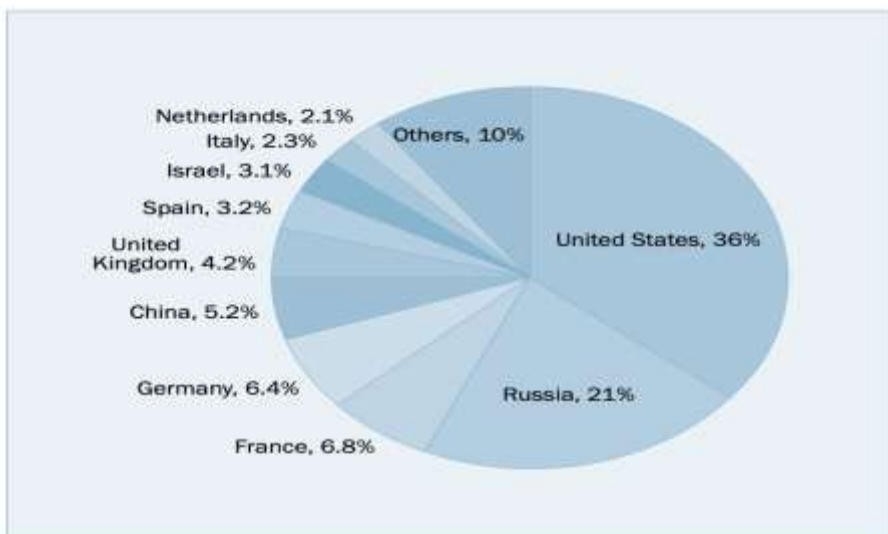


Figure 2. Global share of major arms exports by the 10 largest exporters, 2014–18

Source: SIPRI Arms Transfers Database, Mar. 2019.

²²⁷ Clayton Thomas, 2017- Arms Sales in the Middle East: Trends and Analytical Perspectives for U.S Policy.

²²⁸ Aaron Mehta (2017) – Defense News, “US clears record total for arms sales in FY 17” FOR U.S Policy

²²⁹ Anna Ahronheim (2017) – Article, “Israel’s next security concern: a Middle East arms race.”Published by the Jerusalem Post

²³⁰ Report on Global Arms Sales, Published by the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute. Accessed Via: <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/5-charts-that-reveal-the-state-of-the-global-arms-trade>

According to 6th Key Informant, the drive for the United States' for profits in form of arms sales is the largest enabler for conflict throughout the world.

“.....The U.S arms sales and military aid to the region and other parts of the world such as Africa has worsened conflicts in the Middle East. Ease of accessibility to weapons have prolonged conflicts that would otherwise have been short-lived.” (K1106)

One of the reasons for America's military policy towards the Middle East as explained by Deutch,²³¹ is to ensure “offshore balancing”. This ensures that the U.S enjoys dominance in the region. However, Deutch saw the U.S military policy in Middle East as a major cause of conflict intractability. This is because heavy U.S military presence endangers retaliation against the U.S and her allies and also lead to a rise in terrorism and Islamic militancy on account of the widespread anti-western sentiments against the U.S.²³² In addition, U.S military policy characterized by the decade long fight against terrorism has given a perception that the U.S has been “in war” in the Middle East. To this regard, Deutch's sentiment was that U.S pull out would therefore bring more stability to the region.

According to 7th Key Informant, United States' supply of weapons to nations such as Saudi Arabia and rebels in Syria complicates and waters down attempts at ceasefire in the region.

“....The United States' involvement in the Middle East military aspects through supply of weapons in partnership with the natives has complicated the conflict resolution processes. Peace is hard to come by in such conditions where weapons are second nature...” (K1107)

However, despite these concerns, some scholars argue that U.S military presence in the region is fundamental to provide stability. According to Brooks & Wohlforth,²³³ the U.S needs a heavy military presence in the Middle East to be able to secure her influence and achieve her vital interests, which majorly revolve around assuring supply of oil and gas and fight against terrorism. Although on the surface, America's arms transfers to the Middle East are majorly targeted towards counter terrorism efforts, as one of the Key informant notes, *“America's arms transfers and arms sales to the Middle East are targeted to fight proxy wars and contain Iran's growing influence.”(K1106)*

²³¹ Deutch J. (2005). Time to Pull Out, and Not Just From Iraq. The New York Times.

²³² Layne C. 2016 – “The Case for Offshore Balancing, A Superior U.S. Grand Strategy” Foreign Affairs, Accessed via: <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/united-states/case-offshore-balancing>

²³³ Brooks S. and Wohlforth W. (2016), American Abroad: Why the Sole Superior Should Not Pull Back From the World, Oxford, UK

With Saudi listed as the world's largest arms importers 2014-2018,²³⁴ and the biggest exporter being the United States, the Saudi-Led coalition war in Yemen has been enabled and reinforced by U.S arms sales and arms transfers to aid Saudi Arabia aimed at defeating the Iranian backed Houthi militia. Similarly in Syria, US and Russia arms transfers to aid the rebel forces and the Assad regime has gone a long way in empowering the warring parties and thereby prolonging and worsening the conflict.

According to the First Focus Group Discussion, 9th Member, US's indirect involvement in Yemen war through arms sales to Saudi Arabia raises questions on whether the nation is committed to peace in Middle East.

"...Over time, Russia has supported Assad to ensure he remains in power by rejecting all the sanctions against him raised by the US. Russia has supported the Houthi rebels in ensuring that Assad remains in power. This implies that the US and Russia play a key role in the conflicts and have the solutions for peace in their hands..." (FGD01/09)

United States' foreign policies have come under scrutiny under different circumstances leading to questions on their legitimate commitment to peace in the region. This has bolstered Russia's and Beijing's influence and footprint in the region.

3.4.3 Moscow's regional footprint and role in Syria and Yemen conflicts

Russia is definitely not a stranger in the Middle East region. Russia has had decade long presence in the region since the Cold war era. However, Russia's presence declined following the collapse of the USSR after the Cold war. However, after a few years, Russia began to become increasingly disappointed with the West's policies and disregard for Russia. Russia's presence in the Middle East was however re-ignited and became more consolidated under Putin's leadership in the 21st Century.

According to Robert Freedman,²³⁵ Putin's major objective when he attained presidency was to restore Russia's prestige in the international arena and rebuild Russia's economy in order to balance the dominating hegemonic power of the U.S. Since then Russia has built her economic and diplomatic relations with countries in the Middle East as part and parcel of her renewed growth

²³⁴ Global arms trade report 2015 pp. 34

²³⁵ Brooks S. and Wohlforth W. (2016), American Abroad: Why the Sole Superior Should Not Pull Back From the World, Oxford, UK

agenda. Some scholars have argued that as it currently stands, Russia has seemingly outsmarted the U.S in the region, particularly in Yemen and Syria.²³⁶

Russia's interests range from quest to limit US's superpower status, support her allies, secure supply of oil, fight ISIS and protect her economic interests emanating from the region.²³⁷ The striking similarities of Russia's key interests in the region to America's interests has been argued to be the key driving force for power rivalry between the two global powers. Majority of the key respondents selected for this study concurred that Russia's key motivator for involvement in Syria is to strengthen her global power status by effectively undermining and weakening U.S's domination in international relations. Similarly, her efforts to initiate the Astana peace talks in Syria after the failure of the U.S sponsored Geneva talks was in the same vein, to portray herself as a peace loving ally , whilst presenting the U.S as the guilty party for destabilizing Syria.

Yemen's civil war has also extended beyond the region, drawing global and regional powers in the conflict. According to scholars, Russia did not openly declare/express her support for any one side of the warring parties in Yemen.²³⁸ However, according to statements issues by Moscow on the Yemeni crisis, her stance in Yemen became more apparent to be in support of the Houthis against the Saudi-led coalition who intervened to re-instate President Hadi's regime. Although Russia's support for the Houthis in the conflict has been a more subtle approach than their open support to the Assad regime in Syria, the effects of her intervention in the Yemeni conflict have still been felt in equal measure.

Other scholars have argued that Russia's role in the Middle East and particularly in Yemen and Syria has majorly been in form of support for Iranian expansionist policies. The Russian - Iranian cooperation has been one of the long lasting alliances of the Middle East, and has continued to strengthen in the background of sharing a common foe, the U.S. Expansion of Iran in its regional power aspirations would in turn boost Russia's standing. To this end, Russia has repeatedly protected Iran against unfavorable UNSC sanctions.

Russia's intervention in Syria is to a large extent in response to her concerns of pro- American regime changes and push for democratization, which Russia views as destabilizing. In addition to this, Assad's regime was one of the few Russian assets in the region and therefore, involvement in

²³⁶ Fuad Shahbazov 2019 – “ Russia's growing role in Yemen” pp.2

²³⁷ Agata Bagan, 2017 – Syria in Russia's Foreign Policy in the 21st Century – Published by the Institute of International Politics and Security, Jan Kochanowski University

²³⁸ Diana Alghoul, (2016) – Article “Russian's role in the Yemen conflict, Published by the Middle East Monitor

Syria was of strategic importance to Russia. According to Itamar,²³⁹ the possibility of Syria falling under the U.S's sphere of influence was therefore appalling for Moscow. Therefore, in 2015, Russia intervened militarily in the Syria conflict by sending fighter jets which conducted airstrikes and indiscriminate bombing against rebel held areas.²⁴⁰

According to the 1st Key Informant, the relations between the U.S and Russia have been at their lowest, particularly in the 21st Century and this raises questions for the future of global peace.

“.....Putin’s strategies have to date succeeded in the Middle East and reinforced their dominance over U.S. A number of occurrences in which Russia has won and portrayed U.S as an enemy to the Middle East; for instance the initiation of Astana Peace talks which restored calm in Syria while Geneva talks organized by the U.S failed. Russia has also supported Iran in ensuring Assad remains in power and the sanctions from the US do not succeed. This has seen Russia rise as the most powerful state within the Middle East and deterioration of the US influence” (KII01)

Key informant (KII01) argued that despite the questioning of US's legitimacy when it comes to peace initiatives in the region,

..... “Russia continues to play a dominant role in Middle East’s peace process making it possible for them to regain their initial status as a global power.” (KII01)

3.4.4 Role of China: Peace loving Ally or Opportunist?

Ceccarelli, Board & Labate argues that the United States and Russia are not the only “complicating factors” in the Syrian crisis. China has played a prominent role in the conflict. China for more than three times, has used the veto power in the UN Security Council to block U.S sanctions that were aimed at punishing Bashar al-Assad government²⁴¹. Furthermore, China has emerged as a strong proponent of dialogue as a means to end the stalemate between the opposition and government forces. China has been vocal in calls for talks and has openly criticized western airstrikes in Syria.

Even though China is not as directly involved in the conflict, as the U.S and Russia, Zhou maintains that Beijing has always voiced its concern over the escalating situation and complication of the

²³⁹ Rabinovich, I, (2016) – Russia – U.S Relationship in Middle East region: A Five-Year Projection. Carnegie Task Force on US Policy.

²⁴⁰ Patrick J. McDonnell (2015) – Article “Russia launches airstrikes in Syria amid U.S concern against targets” Published by Los Angeles Times

²⁴¹ Board, Ceccarelli, & Labate, D. (2014). Role of China in Syria crisis – Mediterranean Affairs. Retrieved 23 July 2019, from <http://mediterraneanaffairs.com/the-role-of-china-in-syria-crisis>

conflict by European airstrikes. China took part in the drafting of the 2012 Geneva paper which outlined contours of a political solution²⁴².

In 2016, China appointed a special envoy to Syria. The envoy was charged with the responsibility of encouraging parties to reach a political solution through dialogue. In January 2019, a Chinese special envoy to Syria participated in the Sochi Conference, which came to be as a result of the Astana talks. China also has a security stake in Syria with thousands of Uyghur fighters from China fighting in Syria under the banner of the Turkistan Islamic Party²⁴³.

In Yemen, China delivered its first tranche of humanitarian aid in July 2017. According to Ramani,²⁴⁴ China delivered assistance package, which consisted of relief supplies worth \$22.5 to Yemen. However, unlike in Syria, China has been reluctant to intervene diplomatically in Yemen. However, China is forging pro-Saudi factions in Yemen with the aim of supporting the Yemenis government.

China has also tried to bridge the trust deficit between the UN and the Houthi-Saleh bloc, and in 2017 Beijing worked to restart talks between the Houthis and Ismail Cheikh Ahmed, who was UN special envoy. However, the mediation failed as Houthis accused Ahmed of bias²⁴⁵. China remains supportive of peace in Yemen and maintains close diplomatic ties with the government of Yemen.

The 7th Key Informant believes that the passive approach adopted by China in Yemen war is strategic as it tries to leave its options open. China's main interest is on economic matters and not on gaining political mileage.

“.....The passive approach China has taken in the Middle East seems to be working well for it. It is important to note that China has adhered to its diplomacy policies in the Middle East for effective implementation of its roles and possibly successful mediation of the Yemeni war” (KII07)

Based on the above position and from analytical viewpoint, China's positioning in conflicts in the Middle East, it is evident that China's interest in Yemen is to ensure political stability from her positioning as peace maker, because peace is good for business. To this ends, scholars have argued that China's foreign policy strategy in the region is that of mediation diplomacy.

²⁴² Zhou L. (2018). China opposes Western air strikes on Syria, calls for talks.

²⁴³ Esber F. (2018). China's low-key but significant role in Syria. Retrieved 23 July 2019, from <http://www.arabnews.com/node>

²⁴⁴ Ramani S. China's role in the Yemen crisis. The Diplomat, (11 August 2017)

²⁴⁵ Ramani S. (2017). China's Role in the Yemen Crisis. Retrieved 23 July 2019, from <https://thediplomat.com/chinas-role-in-the-yemen-crisis>

According to Mordechai, 2018, economic diplomacy is a “legitimate” channel for China to be involved, with due consideration of the non- interference policy.²⁴⁶ Although China’s non-interference policy has been criticized to only be applied in situations that suit China’s interests, mediation diplomacy has worked to China’s advantage as a subtle tactic to stay relevant, obtain power and influence while at the same time advancing her strategic interests. Beijing’s role as “neutral observer” is indeed a very effective approach for China to maximize its national interests, whilst avoiding direct confrontation compared to U.S’s and Russia’s approach in the region, which have often been viewed as destabilizing.

However, various scholars have cast doubt on the success of China’s mediation efforts to resolve the Syria and Yemeni conflicts. Rudolf,²⁴⁷ argues that China does not have experience in Middle East conflicts. This is because China is a relatively new actor in the region and has little historical understanding of the conflicts in the region.²⁴⁸ According to Andrew Scobell and Alireaza Nader,²⁴⁹ owing to China’s policy of non-interference, China may be reluctant to put both feet in as it fears getting entangled in the conflicts. This could jeopardize China’s reputation as a neutral mediator, and therefore discredit China as the go to peace loving ally. Conversely, other scholars believe that China has the best shot at mediation in Middle East conflicts compared to other external powers such as U.S and Russia owing to China’s neutral position, as the only mediator who could bring warring parties to the negotiation table, as it did in Afghanistan.²⁵⁰

As the Middle East region becomes more unstable, China has been keen to accelerate her engagement in the region. This is because China sees the region as a land of opportunity for China’s infrastructural projects in the aftermath of the highly destructive conflicts that have troubled the region for decades.²⁵¹ In addition to this, Beijing has spotted a lucrative market for her low cost weapons, which have been argued to be part and parcel of the crisis, as provision of weapons at low costs further exacerbates conflicts in the region.

246 Mordechai Chaziza, (2018) “China Mediation Efforts in the Middle East and North Africa: Constructive Conflict Management,” Strategic Analysis

²⁴⁷ Rudolf M. (2016). China’s New Era of Diplomacy: Engaging in Syria. The diplomat. pp.25

²⁴⁸ Moritz Rudolf, (2016) – Article “China’s New Era of Diplomacy: Engaging Syria” Published by The Diplomat Accessed via <https://thediplomat.com/chinas-new-era-of-diplomacy-engaging-in-syria>

²⁴⁹ Scobell A. & Nader A. (2016). “China in Middle East” – the wary dragon. Rand Corporation.

²⁵⁰ Catherine Putz (2017) – Article “China help mediate between Afghanistan and Pakistan” Published by The Diplomat

²⁵¹ Daniel Kliman and Abigail Grace, (2018) – Article, “China smells opportunity in the Middle East’s Crisis” – Beijing is using the region’s ongoing woes to solidify its own geopolitical agenda – Published by Foreign Policy

Regardless of the fact that stability in the region would be to China's best interest for her business prospects, China's positioning in its engagement in the region and most critical interest remains economic, and to this regard, even arms sales means business for China.²⁵²

3.5 ROLE OF GREAT POWER RIVALRIES IN MIDDLE-EAST CONFLICTS

3.5.1 US- Russia Rivalry: Syria and Yemen as a playground for US- Russia Rivalry

The U.S and Russia have had a long history of tension. The rivalry between US and Russia dates way back to the cold war period where the two powers competed for dominance and influence characterized by differences in ideologies following the collapse of the grand alliance between the USSR, Britain and the US after World War 2. The Cold war ended with the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 due to heavy military spending which proved to be unsustainable.²⁵³

The U.S had emerged victorious, after communism came to an end in Europe in 1990. This marked the end of bipolarity, as the US emerged as the only hegemonic power in the world. However, in the wake of the 21st century, accompanied by economic growth, military resuscitation and tenable alliances, Russia began to re-emerge to assert her hegemonic ambitions once again. Putin began to aggressively pursue a new foreign policy in the Middle East, which set Russia up as competition for the United States.²⁵⁴

Alamailes & Yurtsever²⁵⁵ describes the attitude of Russia and U.S in Syria as disagreeable and contradictory. It can therefore be argued that the current situation in Syria is a representation of sharp competition between Russia and the United States. Dekel & Magen²⁵⁶ posit that Russia and the United States' involvement in the Syrian war constitutes a new paradigm shift in the balance of power considering the role that Russia has played in stabilizing the Assad regime.

According to Dekel & Magen, as competition intensifies between great powers, conflict is likely to continue or metamorphose into more complex forms. The implication of the rivalry between the US and Russia on balance of power is that the resultant power contestation is likely to lead to more political instability in the Middle East as nations realign to a possible new world order.

²⁵² Ibid: 291

²⁵³ Kent J. (2005). United States reactions to empire, and cold war in Black Africa, 1949-57. *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 33(2), 195-220

²⁵⁴ Itamar Rabinovich, (2016) – The Russia – US relationship in the Middle East: A 5 year Projection. Accessed via: https://carnegieendowment.org/files/Rabinovich_Five_Year_Projection

²⁵⁵ YURTSEVER S. & ALAMAILES . 'Syrian crisis in scope of U.S. ;Russian competition in Middle East.' *International Journal of Entrepreneurship & Management Inquiries (EMI)*, 2(3). 33-48.

²⁵⁶ Dekel U. & Magen Z (2015). "Russian involvement in Syria" What has changed, and significance for Israel.

The 5th Key Informant argued that Power contestation in the Middle East is a recipe for violence and a major threat in an already unstable environment.

“.....It is natural that states would want to out-do one another to gain dominance over the other. However, this situation has been the fuel to the un-ending conflicts in the Middle East despite a number of interventions for peace in the region. Beijing and Washington are two mighty players working towards similar interests- oil and economic benefit, which makes their relationship antagonistic from time to time. Despite the fact that these two governments renounce any involvement in the wars, they often supply their parties with weapons, intelligence and/ or security. This has a direct impact in the war status...”
(KII05).

This assertion is mirrored by the fact that U.S view Russia’s move to defend Assad's regime as an intention to advance its hegemonic aspirations. These political maneuvers are likely to prolong the conflict in Syria.

Ozalp, supports Dekel & Magen's idea that the Syrian war is not likely to end soon due to the competition between Russia and the United States. Ozalp argues that due to the competition, Syria remains a tangle of power plays.²⁵⁷ To date, the two super powers see the Middle East as the space in which the U.S and Russia use to prove their worth.

In Yemen, the war between the Yemeni government and the Houthi armed movement has yet again pitted Russia and the United States on a collision course. The United States supports the Saudi-backed government against the Russia-backed Houthi rebels. On the other hand, Russia is expressing a desire to act as a mediator in the war, and thereby positioning herself as a peace loving ally²⁵⁸.

Ramani believes that such a pronouncement by Russia to mediate the Yemeni conflict is of strategic interest and carries with it heavy regional status aspirations. These aspirations propagate power competition between Russia and U.S, which is likely to prolong the war.²⁵⁹ Hence, critics doubt the

²⁵⁷ Ozalp M. (2018). Reason the Syrian war won't end. Retrieved 20 July 2019, from <https://www.news.com.au/world/middle-east/hell-on-earth-jihadist-rebel-groups-see-fighting-as-the-only-option/news-story>

²⁵⁸ McLaughlin E. & Martinez L. (2016). What You Need to Know About US Involved in Yemen. Retrieved 20 July 2019, from <https://abcnews.go.com/international/us-role-yemen/story>

²⁵⁹ Ramani S. (2018). How Serious Is Russia’s Offer to Mediate in Yemen? Retrieved 20 July 2019, from <https://www.worldpoliticsreview.com/article/how-serious-is-russias-offer-to-mediate-in-yemen>

intentions of Russia as mediator for the Yemen crisis. Why would a war contributor, offer genuine assistance to mediate the same conflict they have fueled without self-interest?

Key informant (KII06) believes that Russia and United States are not sincere in the quest for peace in Yemen as evidenced by their involvement.

“.....Russia is a cunning state supporting the Houthi rebels in the Saud-Houthi war yet acting peaceful by offering to mediate between the two antagonists. The mediation offer just sounds as an opportunistic one to paint a picture of a peace-loving state.....” (KII06)

In the same vein, were it not for the rivalry between the two powers, the two warring factions would probably not have the military support they have utilized to date to continue with the war. Otherwise, U.S and Russia would rationalize their support and aid to the warring parties, such that in the event no direct benefit accrues from their investment, then it would not make economic sense to stay on. This has been witnessed by the U.S withdrawal from Syria, in the onset of her dismal gains in the war.

3.5.2 Role of U.S - China Rivalry in Middle East conflicts

The rivalry between the U.S and the rising challenger, China is a slowly evolving 21st century rivalry which has not only caused a decline of US- China relations but caused great uncertainty amid intensified power contestation and tensions in the global arena. According to Hitoshi,²⁶⁰ tensions between the US and China in the 21st century are rooted in competition for global power supremacy. The US- China strategic rivalry has played out in their bilateral trade relations in form of trade wars and even spilled over to proxy conflicts in Africa and the Middle East.

Yui Li maintains that rivalry between China and the United States in Syria is at the center of power plays in the Syrian crisis. The escalation of the Syrian Civil war into a global issue, according to Yui Li is due to involvement by great powers, such as China, United States and Russia.²⁶¹. The “era of great power competition” in Syria is evidenced by the opposing sides taken by China and the

²⁶⁰ Hitoshi Tanaka, (2018) – “Managing the U.S China strategic rivalry” – Published by East Asia Insights.

²⁶¹ Yui Li T. (2016). The Role of Power Plays in the Syrian Crisis. Hong Kong Baptist University, Retrieved from <https://repository.hkbu.edu.hk/lawfareblog.com/us-withdrawal-syria-opportunity-china>

United States.²⁶² In Syria, the United States supported the opposition rebels, while China and Russia supported the Assad regime.

The (KII02) demonstrated clearly that the events of Syria exposed the deep seated rivalry between USA and China.

“...China and Russia are allies and the same is portrayed in the Middle East where both Russia and China support Assad’s regime and do whatever it takes to ensure he remains in power, probably to just upset the U.S...” (KII02)

According to Hemenway,²⁶³ the incentive for China’s involvement in Syria in support of the Assad regime is directly linked to incorporating Syria as part of its Belt and Road initiative. To this regard, it is in China’s best interests to forge a formidable relationship with a stable government in Syria in the hopes that China would be given first priority in reconstruction of the country’s infrastructure when the war ceases. This is in line with China’s policy to counter America’s influence in the region. China has evidently demonstrated an interest in taking advantage of economic opportunities in post-conflict Syria, and this presents a huge economic challenge to the United States who is China’s immediate economic rival.²⁶⁴ But, while China uses direct aid and reconstruction assistance to Syria to advance her hegemonic power interest, the United States has intervened directly to oust the Assad regime, partly to assert her power and partly to undermine China’s potential lucrative interests in Syria’s reconstruction.

According to Engle,²⁶⁵ in the Syrian crisis, power act as a divide in the ongoing state of affairs in Syria. It then means that the rivalry between the United States and China will only destabilize the situation and prolong the conflict. Furthermore, the power struggle emanating from competition between the two countries will not promote democracy, which the West is advocating for in Syria and other parts of Middle East. The rift between the U.S and China on the Syria crisis has been

²⁶² Saltskog M. & Clarke C. (2019) – U.S Withdrawal from Syria is an opportunity for China. Retrieved from <https://www.lawfareblog.com/us-withdrawal-syria-opportunity-china>

²⁶³ Dan Hemenway (2018) – Article “China Strategic engaging with Assad in Syria” Published by the Atlantic Council

²⁶⁴ Saltskog M. & Clarke C. (2019) “U.S Withdrawal from Syria is an opportunity for China.” Retrieved from <https://www.lawfareblog.com/us-withdrawal-syria-opportunity-china>

²⁶⁵ Engle E. (2014). The International Criminal Court, the United States, and the Domestic Armed Conflict in Syria. *Chi-Kent J. Int’l & Comp. L*, 14, 146.

further reinforced by vetoing US sponsored resolutions to impose sanctions on the Assad regime alongside Russia.²⁶⁶

Similarly, China's positioning in offering support to Iran, U.S key rival in the region has further aggravated their relationship. China has played a major role to shield Iran from the effects of economic sanctions through increasing crude oil imports from Iran, which has largely kept the isolated Iranian economy afloat, while at the same time servicing China's energy needs.²⁶⁷ China and Russia have openly shown support to Iran encompassing the nuclear deal and joined hands in support of Iran against the U.S sanctions.

In Yemen, the United States supports the Saudi led campaign against the Houthi rebels while China is playing a supportive but low-key role in an international effort to propel peace²⁶⁸. However, unlike in Syria, Chinese intervention is meek and subtle with minimal contestation between the two powers except their opposing views on what direction the war should take and the controversial United States' arms support to Saudi Arabia.²⁶⁹ Despite U.S leadership in arms exports to the region, China has equally endeavored to secure a niche in supply of military drones to the Middle East, which is indicative of the US China global rivalry playing out in the region.²⁷⁰ It is evident that the power play or the balance of power due to the rivalry between the two powers will play a decisive role in the outcomes of the current ongoing conflicts in the region.

China's use of subtle soft power strategies in form of aid and reconstruction assistance arising from her principle of non-interference does in fact portray a good picture of China, compared to the other intervening global powers such as the U.S and Russia who have used hard power by intervening militarily in these conflicts. The difference in the mode of intervention of the U.S and China has resulted in strategic rivalry between the two powers.

The Trump administration has in fact termed the Chinese as "predatory lenders" who are using debt as traps to hold indebted states captive to Beijing's demands. As a result, the Trump administration has taken measures aimed at countering Chinese influence, including increasing aid to countries that have been swayed by Chinese attractive aid, in a bid to reassert her influence. Although direct

²⁶⁶ BBC News (2014). Syria War: Russia and China veto sanctions

²⁶⁷ Kenneth Katzman, (2019) "Iranian sanctions". Published by CRS Report for congress:
<https://fas.org/sgpr/Mideast.pdf>

²⁶⁸ Dorlian, S. (2011). "The Sa'da war in Yemen; between politics and Sectarianism". *The Muslim World*, 101(2), pages 182-201

²⁶⁹ Ibid: 308

²⁷⁰ Latifa A. Al Saud (2018), "China's Arms sales; Philosophy in the Middle East. " *Journal of international Affairs*

combat between the two powers has not occurred so far, scholars project more proxy conflicts in the future, more-so over contested regions, such as the Middle East.

The Second Focus Group Discussion, 3rd Member alluded to the fact that with the growing rivalry between the two sides of the divide, proxy wars are likely to increase in Middle East in the future.

“.....China has played the role of a peace loving lender in the Middle East in partnership with Russia. China has taken interest in Iran, U.S’ primary enemy in the Middle East, facilitating Iran in every way possible to keep the economy amidst the sanctions bombarded on Iran by the U.S. This role of China in the Middle East seems to be one that threatens future of the already antagonistic relationship between Beijing and U.S which portrays a bleak future for peace in the world as a whole” (FGD02/03)

Based on the position of FGD02/03) above, China’s sphere of influence in Middle East is likely to grow with increased success in proxy wars.

3.5.3 Russia vs. China: Cooperation or Competition?

The Sino- Russian relationship is indeed a unique relationship. Susanne & Weismann²⁷¹ maintains that although the Sino-Russian relationship is both cooperation and competition, the two powers opt to describe their relationship as a strategic partnership.

However, as Chen²⁷² contends, this strategic partnership has been noted to possess elements of competition and distrust based on interest. Russia and China relation is a pragmatic approach towards a bilateral relationship based on shared interest. According to Susanne & Weismann, Russia and China share a common geopolitical world view. The two nations both have an ambition to boost their position on international platforms as a global leader. To these ends, Chen maintains that both Russia and China wants to limit the influence of United States on the global level. Both Russia and China share a preference for a multipolar system, and their positioning in driving multi polarity provides an opportunity to collaborate to counteract the hegemonic power of the U.S.²⁷³

According to Susanne & Weismann, cooperation between Russia and China is also characterized by the 2001 Treaty of Good Neighborliness, Cooperation and Friendship which constituted the basis

²⁷¹ Oxensterina, Susanne & Weismann, Mikael & Carlson, M. (2015). China and Russia Study on Cooperation; Competition; Distrust.” FOI Research report series.

²⁷² Chen, X. (2012) “Central Asian factors of energy relationship between China and Russia.” Asian Social science, Vol 8(7)

²⁷³ Marta, C, Susanne, O. & Mikael, W. (2015). “China & Russia, A study on Co-operation, Competition & Distrust”

for a strategic partnership. The treaty stipulated terms of non-aggression and absence of territorial claims. Chen argues that Sino-Russia cooperation is based on armaments, energy, and common border, and to this regard, the two powers support each other's security interests against terrorism.

Yu and Sui ²⁷⁴ maintain that the evolving Sino-Russian cooperation is evident in the Syria and Yemen war as much as it is evident in other spheres. The Sino-Russian alignment in support of Syrian government against United States and the rebels is an ideal case of cooperation. Russia and China have been supporters of Bashar al-Assad regime and have seen to it that Assad remains in power. They have both cast strings of vetoes in the UN Security Council and rejected U.S sponsored sanctions against the Assad regime.

According to the Second Key Informant (KII02), China and Russia's cooperation presents a huge threat to the United States.

"....Despite Russia and China being active and passive actors in the Middle East respectively, the two states seem to be working together in the Middle East apart from them being state allies. Their cooperation in ensuring that Assad is in power by deterring the U.S sanctions against the Iran is a good instance of the two states working together.." (KII02)

Key informant (KII02) added that the cooperation between China and Russia is driven by a shared opposition to a possible US-led regime change in Syria.

In Yemen, although the two nations are not actively involved, Almasmari in San'a and Fitch²⁷⁵ claim that the Houthi rebels in Yemen have links with China and Russia. This has inevitably pitted China and Russia against the Saudi Arabia-led coalition which is supported by the United States. The result could be an intensification of proxy war between United States against Russia and China.

Conversely, Russia and China's views diverge as a consequence of the fact that China is a larger economy as well as more integrated, with more allied relationships than Russia. This is attributable to the fact that Russia is focused on geopolitics and great power status while China is focused on economic power and cooperation.²⁷⁶ China, unlike Russia has developed ties with important countries in Europe, Asia and Africa hence it has other options than Russia which has limited attractiveness as a partner and this makes the relationship unstable. For this reason, Yu and Sui

²⁷⁴ Yu, L. and Sui, S. (2019). China-Russia military cooperation in the context of Sino-Russian strategic partnership." Published by Asian Europe Journals.

²⁷⁵ Almasamarin San'a, H. and Fitch, A. (2015). "Yemen's Houthis Seek Iran, Russia and China ties" Available at <https://www.wsj.com/articles/yemens-houthis-seek-iran-russia-and-china-ties> accessed 2 Aug 2019.

²⁷⁶ Ibid:277

argue that the relationship between Russia and China is more important to Russia than it is to China.

According to Yu and Sui, while China seeks to continue its global ascent, Russia aims to consolidate its newly restored status as a great power but on a smaller scale compared to the Soviet Imperial periods²⁷⁷. Russia wants to maintain its security and geopolitical sovereignty vis-à-vis both China and United States and this might trigger a ground for political contestation between Russia and China. Finally, there is an increasing geopolitical competition between China and Russia in central Asia. The two powers aim to consolidate their sphere of influence especially in energy, economic military and political arena and this could lead to future confrontations despite the Treaty for Good Neighborliness, Cooperation and Friendship of 2001.

Based on the analysis of the Sino-Russia relationship, it can be argued that the relationship between China and Russia is “a marriage of convenience”. Just as Raymond & Lubina²⁷⁸ argues, the relationship between contemporary China and Russia is a partnership in crime. It is a relationship between powers bent on undermining liberal norms and a rule-based global order. The underlying basis of this argument is that relationship between Russia and China is based on shared opposition to the United States and the West in general rather than mutual respect and shared values. The relationship between the two nations is neither more of competition nor cooperation, but a fragile relationship based on convenience.

Although China and Russia has endeavored to broker peace in Yemen and Syria, their strategic partnership against the west in the Middle East is likely to enhance antagonism between the warring factions in Syria and Yemen leading to prolonged conflicts.²⁷⁹ For example, the Houthi rebels in Yemen affiliation with Russia and China then means that in such a scenario, the opposition (Houthi) will be strengthened and the United States might be forced join the opponents and the result could be an endless war in Yemen.²⁸⁰ The same scenario could be replicated in Syria²⁸¹. Furthermore, what scholars describe as a “convenience relationship” could change faces,

²⁷⁷ Yu, L. and Sui, S. (2019). “China-Russia military cooperation in the context of Sino –Russian strategic partnership.” *Asian Europe Journals*.

²⁷⁸ Lubina, M. (2016). “Between Reality and Dreams; Russia’s Pivot to Asia. Building the diverse community; Beyond Regionalism in East Asia.” *Contemporary Asian studies series*.

²⁷⁹ Yixan Xu (2017). “Evolving Sino- Russian Cooperation in Syria.” Published by the United States Institute of Peace. Accessed via; [https:// www.usip.org/sites](https://www.usip.org/sites)

²⁸⁰ Ibid:317

²⁸¹ Raymond, G. & Lubina, M. (2018). “Security challenges.” 14 (1), retrieved from <https://www.jstor.org/stable/264494>

fragment and flare up at any moment when their interests clash. Either way, the Sino-Russian relationship is in fact a critical factor to the peace and stability of the Middle East region.

3.6 Conclusion

From my analysis, I have noted that the key role of U.S, China and Russia in influencing Middle East power politics has been to augment the alignments into a semblance of regional blocks through the military partnerships formed to secure national interests. It is also very evident that the regional and external powers exploit the chaos in the region to expand their influence. The involvement of regional and external third parties has further complicated the conflicts, due to self-interest, which are rarely similar to the interests of warring parties, making the applied conflict management strategies convoluted.

So far, it appears that Russia has outplayed the U.S in Syria and is anticipated to do the same in Yemen. Russia's emerging role as mediator in the Middle East is indeed working to her advantage to expand her geopolitical influence and establish a leading diplomatic role for Russia in the region. The gains made by Russia, China and Iran's in the Syria and Yemeni conflict portrays a trend towards shift in balance of power from the U.S to other powers, particularly Russia. However, this does not by any means mean that the U.S has been beaten to the ground. Having maintained hegemonic dominance in the region for decades, some scholars envision a vengeful U.S in the future.

The likelihood of resolving the rivalries between the Saudi- Iran, Israel- Iran and US- Iran is indeed very low, this is because these rivalries have been endearing for decades now, and at this point, tolerance would be improbable in light of the heightened stakes in the background of shift in power balance.

CHAPTER FOUR: Analysis of the Syria and Yemeni peace processes: Major Issues and Outcomes.

This Chapter therefore seeks to investigate the reasons why peace processes often fail to lead to lasting peace amidst protracted civil warfare. The findings of this chapter will be of utmost importance to unveil the flaws in peace processes in the Middle East region.

This chapter will separately analyze the Syria and Yemen peace processes and uncover their flaws that have led to their imminent failure to secure peace.

4.0 Introduction: Perspectives on Negotiation and Mediation of International Conflicts

The interventions so far in Syria and Yemen all gravitate towards mediation and negotiation. Different scholars have put forth arguments about why negotiation and mediation efforts fail and conflicts continue to persist. Scholarly opinions differ on why some conflicts persist for prolonged periods of time despite various interventions to end them. Some scholars argue that conflicts persist in society because it is innate and inevitable among social animals, and therefore a natural occurrence common in human societies, causing bottlenecks in conflict management processes.²⁸²

However, other scholars argue in favor of other factors that touch on the substance of the conflict management processes. The most dominant argument emphasize on the timing and substance of the negotiation/mediation. According to William Zartman, untimely negotiation and mediation processes are highly likely to hit a dead end. William argued that the timing of initiating peace processes matter to a great extent in determining the success of the process. He advanced the

²⁸² Paul Wehr, (1979). "Conflict resolution" .Published by West View Press pages 1-8

concept of “ripeness” or “the hurting stalemate” of a conflict as a pre requisite to potentially successful mediation outcomes.²⁸³

The theory of the hurting stalemate argues that mediation and negotiation efforts are fruitless until the moment is ripe.²⁸⁴ However, the big questions remain, how do warring parties and third parties recognize the ripe moment? Is “ripeness” a sufficient condition for initiation of negotiation/mediation? How much does a hurting stalemate have to hurt for it to trigger successful negotiations?

The ripeness theory as advanced by William Zartman²⁸⁵ is anchored on the perception of a mutually hurting stalemate. The rationale is that in the event warring parties find themselves in a deadlock, where escalation would be mutually destructive and more costly, then they are compelled to seek recourse. Therefore, according to Zartman and Hampson,²⁸⁶ the role of a mediator is to exploit the conditions of the hurting stalemate, if they exist, or even more interestingly, create an illusion of the existence of such conditions.

The challenge with the view of hurting stalemates as a precondition for successful negotiation is that the hurting stalemate often hurts civilians more than those in power who ultimately make the decision for the civilian population. In most instances, the leader will make a decision in their own interest as opposed to the interests of the population. However, the biggest question is, “how much should a hurting stalemate hurt for it to trigger successful negotiations?”

Other scholars argue in favor of other factors such as the mediator’s skill and need for a guarantor to oversee fulfillment of the terms of the agreement. The presence of a guarantor in mediation makes cheating or abandoning of the terms of the peace agreement difficult and costly, thereby increasing prospects of cooperation between the warring parties.²⁸⁷ However, even external mediator, it must have a self-interest in the outcomes of the conflict and ought to have the ability to exercise power if necessary to achieve these ends. Zartman also emphasizes on the importance of a deadline / timeline for the negotiation or mediation process.

²⁸³ William Zartman (2008). “Global conflict resolution.” *The Hurting stale mate and Beyond*.

²⁸⁴ Ibid 315

²⁸⁵ Zartman W. I. (2000). “Ripeness : Hurting Stalemate and beyond; International conflict”. *Resolution after the cold war*, chapter 2, page 225-250

²⁸⁶ Hampson, F.O ., & Zartman , I. W. (2015). “Global Power of Talk: negotiating America’s interest”. Routledge.

²⁸⁷ Barbara walter (2009). “Bargaining failures and civil war”. Page 121

On negotiation and mediation of international conflicts, key informant (KII05) identified that one of the major factors that affects negotiation between warring parties is the complexity of the conflict.

“...Studies have noted various factors affecting negotiation and mediation between warring states as follows: rank/ power parity of the mediator/negotiator and timing of the negotiation/mediation. The complexity of the conflict as well as the intensity of the conflict also emerge as significant factors...” (KII05)

In the same vein, it emerged that there is no clear position or consensus about the degree to which each of the independent variables fundamentally affect mediation and negotiation processes.

However, the commonly agreed viewpoint is that preconditions for these processes such as recognition, for example, recognition of the opposition by a government as a legitimate negotiating partner is required before commencement of any dialogue. Recognition requires one party to cede some of its power to the other, which has always been a difficult thing, particularly in conflicts between government and rebel factions such as the ones discussed in this study.

4.1 Detailed analysis of the Syria and Yemen peace processes.

4.1.1 The Syrian Peace Process (2011 to date)

The Syrian peace process consists of a series of initiatives aimed at ending the Syria conflict commenced around 2011. To date, there have been several mediation initiatives and international peace conferences spearheaded by UN and Arab League. All these have been third party interventions by the United Nations, the Arab League and recently the regional powers as in the Astana peace talks. Despite all these efforts, the Syria and Yemen conflict is still not resolved to date. This chapter seeks to investigate why the Syria peace processes have been unfruitful to date. Is it time for new peace processes for Syria and Yemen?

A year after violence broke out in Syria, talks commenced in Geneva under the leadership of the UN in 2012. The conference culminated in production of a document that detailed measures to resolve the Syria conflict. However, the document was lacking in identifying the parties to form part of the transitional government as proposed by the document. This was owing to the multiplicity of actors forming the opposition, who had different interests and motivations.²⁸⁸

²⁸⁸ Ermer Groake 2012. “Exploration of power showering as a conflict tool in Syria” UAE Journal

In 2014, the UN brokered a second round of talks in Geneva. This round sought to resolve the crisis through division of power between the government forces and the opposition forces. The outcomes of this round were without effect because the Assad regime was unwilling to share power with the opposition forces and as a result, ignored the recommendations.²⁸⁹

In October 2015, another round of talks was convened by the US and Russia at Vienna. Key participants in this round of talks were; USA, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Iran and Russia. Other participants include; U.K, Germany, France, Italy, China, Qatar, Jordan, Iraq, Oman, UAE, and representatives of the UN and EU were also present. This was the first round of talks that saw Iranian and Saudi Arabia states convene on the same table and also the first round without Syrian representation. As expected, the Vienna talks did not bear fruit.²⁹⁰ From the key informant interviews conducted, exclusion of the Syrian counterparts rendered these talks null and void from inception. Resolution of the Syrian crisis could not be unilaterally decided by external powers only.

In November another round of talks was convened in Vienna by the same participants in the first Vienna talks, but this time with representation of the Arab League. This round of talks emphasized on establishment of a ceasefire and support of a political transition. Owing to the absence of Syrian representation, no agreement was formally arrived at in this round.

In February 2016, the Geneva talks on Syria resumed. This was the third round of Geneva talks, hence, Geneva III. The key object of these talks was to discuss establishment of a transition government, after parliamentary elections in Syria. However, there were concerns that some of the groups in the opposition coalition were in fact terrorist groups, and to this regard, negotiation with terrorists was not an intended objective. In addition to this, other participants felt that some opposition groups such as the Kurds and Islamic state were not represented.

Another round of talks started in March 14th, these talks focused on establishment of a peaceful transition in Syria and condemnation of terrorism. The outcomes of this round of talks were not tenable because there were no specifications on how the transition would occur and the roles for each of the two warring sides towards the outcome of peaceful transition. The talks resumed on 13 April, where the necessary conditions for peaceful transition would be defined.²⁹¹ Parliamentary

²⁸⁹ Ibid; 327

²⁹⁰ Reuters Press 2015

²⁹¹ Abdel Barri Atwan (2012) – Article, The Arab League has misjudged its actions on Syria. Accessed Via: <https://www.theguardian.com/arab-league-syria>

elections in Syria on the transition government took place, which was rejected by the opposition as illegitimate on grounds of bias in the vote in favor of Assad.

On 18 April 2016, the opposition forces suspended talks citing violation of provisions to ceasefire agreement by the government forces and denial by Syria to let in humanitarian intervention into rebel held territories.²⁹² The Syrian government and Russian forces persisted with military advances against rebel groups, particularly in Aleppo and other rebel-held areas. The suspension of opposition from the UN talks stipulated a situation to deadlock, thus halting the UN talks indefinitely.

The (KII10) argued that the failure of the UN Syria peace talks was due to tactical challenges rather than lack of commitment by the involved parties.

“.....I believe the UN Syria talks were not successful majorly due to self-interests and clashing viewpoints of the 5 members of UN SC that came before the interest of Syrian people”. In addition to this exclusion of key parties to the negotiations such as ISIS, because the UN talks were U.S led and “the US does not negotiate with terrorists”.” (KII10)

4.1.2 The Astana Peace Process

The Astana peace process was introduced in 2017 by Russia, Turkey and Iran (guarantor states) after failure of the UN led Geneva peace talks and a myriad of other peace initiatives and talks initiated by Powers of the west the League of Arab. Astana talks adopted a guarantor states' mechanism aimed at maximizing the guarantor states' leverage over Syria in order to ensure compliance from the warring parties. The objective of the Astana process was to complement the UN led process to push for a ceasefire in Syria.

Although the Astana process was initiated when the U.S led Geneva talks stalled and failed to achieve the desired outcomes, some scholars have argued that the Astana peace talks were initiated by Russia to compete against the US led Geneva talks. The U.S participated in the talks as an observer. The first round of talks commenced in January 2017 where the Syrian rebel faction and government delegation converged in Astana, Kazakhstan for ceasefire talks.

While the Syrian government appreciated the outcomes of the talks, the opposition declined to accept the outcomes. The Syrian opposition rejected the outcomes of the talks on grounds that some

²⁹²Frances Stewart, University of Oxford- “Root causes of violent conflicts in developing countries- Accessed Via: <https://www.researchgate.net>

participants in the talks, including the guarantor states were pursuing their self-interest.²⁹³ In addition, some participants felt that the talks were not inclusive of all religions in Syria, as well as the Arab League.²⁹⁴

The second round of talks also bore no fruits due to the heightened mistrust between the warring parties. The opposition complained of violation of the ceasefire accord by the Assad regime. The element of the discussions in this round revolved around consolidation of the ceasefire accord. Although no final agreement was signed, the guarantor state formed a joint monitoring group to ensure adherence of the terms of armistice pact proposed in the first round of discussions.

March 2017, the third round of talks was held. However, the opposition rebel group boycotted the talks by virtue of non-adherence of the government forces to the ceasefire accord, following airstrikes in Syria. The talks therefore wrapped up inconclusively. The next round was planned for May 2017.²⁹⁵

The 4th round took place in May 2017. The key agenda was to delimit de-escalation zones in Syria. The rebel faction was however not in support of the de-escalation zones as they viewed it as an attempt to divide the people of Syria. The talks therefore failed to establish the safe zones owing to the withdrawal of the opposition forces due to continued bombing of rebel-held areas by the Assad regime.²⁹⁶

The fifth round of talks in July 2017 reiterated the question of the de-escalation zones and confidence building measures. A series of meetings were held to discuss several regimes on the de-escalation zones. Although no document was signed in this round, there was some progress, because for the first time since the commencement of the Astana talks the Al-sham militant group participated in the talks.

In the sixth round held in September, some documents regulating de-escalation of zones and humanitarian aid concerns were signed. A joint coordination center was established by the guarantor states to spearhead the fight against ISIS and facilitate confidence building measures.

The seventh round of talks emphasized on self-confidence edifice actions; exchange of detainees, free of hostages, demining coupled with facilitation of humanitarian aid. Another congress was

²⁹³ Ibid: 331

²⁹⁴ Kazinform, (2017). "Arabic countries should be involved in Syria talks, de Mistura".

²⁹⁵ Abdel Barri Atwan (2012) – Article, The Arab League has misjudged its actions on Syria. Accessed Via: <https://www.theguardian.com/arab-league-syria>

²⁹⁶ Ibid 327

planned in Sochi, Russia with members of the Syrian civil society which was boycotted by the opposition. The main agenda of the Sochi congress was the unexpected U.S withdrawal of troops from Syria and control of Idlib province.

The eighth round of Astana talks focused on cementing a ceasefire deal brokered by Russian, Iranian and Turkey governments. Talks were also meant to address the leftover issues of round seven of the meetings in October. Some of the leftover issues addressed include release of hostages and captives as well as clearing of landmines.

In the 9th round of talks, the United States did not take part in the talks and the session was attended by rebels and the representatives of the Syrian President. The talk was to address the latest development in the de-escalation zones as well as humanitarian issue²⁹⁷. The peace talk was attended by three guarantor countries that is, Iran, Russia and Turkey. The representatives of the Syrian government also attended the talks.

The 10th phase of discussions looked into the current issue of in the scaling down regions in Idlib, repatriation of refugees, rewrite of Syrian Constitution and release of refugees. De-escalation zones in Idlib were the top issue in the talks. Delegation from Turkey was expected to stress on the importance of maintaining ceasefire in the region and bring up the issue of return of displaced people and refugees.

The 11th round of the Astana talks concluded with the decision to improve a joint effort to prevent violations of ceasefire in Idlib. The peace meeting began with a meeting between representatives of Syrian state. The peace process condemned the use of chemical weapons and it also urged investigations of their alleged usage in the war. There was a decision by Turkey and Iran to step up joint efforts to prevent violations of the Idlib ceasefire. The guarantor countries also agreed unanimously to support Syrian parties in establishing Constitutional committee in Geneva.

The 12th round of Astana peace talk process anchored on the need to launch Constitutional Committee that would bring peace to Syria. Guarantors such as Turkey, Russia and Iran reaffirmed their commitment and determination to maintain previous agreements. Remedies set up to ensure that Idlib armistice is not violated. The meeting also called on the international committee to continue supporting Syrians through humanitarian aid. A joint statement was then made by the

²⁹⁷ Cordall, S (2019). “Astana talks achieve mixed results although crucial issues”retrieved from <https://broached.thereabweekly.com>

guarantor nations and it reiterated the need to increase the number of observers of the Astana peace framework. They also agreed to invite Lebanon and Iraq to a joint Astana format.

The 13th round, and most recent round of Astana talks concluded on August 2nd 2017. The involved parties held trilateral and bilateral talks to agree on the final declaration. The declaration highlighted the commitment of the parties to Syria's territorial integrity, sovereignty²⁹⁸. They also declared that the fight will continue against all terrorist groups. They also maintained that all international agreements should be respected and especially the UN Security Council Resolution 497. Humanitarian aid was to be delivered without conditions and there was a call for UN to increase its humanitarian aid. Finally and in declarations, the parties expressed grief over civilian casualties and the worsening humanitarian situation and decided to take concrete measures to protect the civilian population.

The Astana peace process has indeed been a long process with several rounds of talks. Analysts have expressed concern that the only positive consequence of the Astana progression is establishment of scaling down zones in Syria; otherwise, Astana peace process has not resolved the crisis. Although the Assad regime appears to have won against the opposition rebels, scholars have described the current situation in Syria as a “frozen conflict.”²⁹⁹ The possibilities of relapse remain imminent, a one sided victory has often at times proven unsustainable.

The First Key Informant (KII01) believes that Astana peace talk is hugely volatile and is not the ultimate solution to Syrian conflict. The talks did not resolve all issues and only pacified the involved parties. It then means that more needs to be done to delve into the deeper intrigues of the conflict.

“...Astana Peace talks were successful to calm the conflict despite the perception that Russia initiated these talks in an effort to outdo US and write off the U.S led Geneva talks. However, the U.S's withdrawal of her troops from Syria at a point when the prospects of the talks were looking up has in fact fractured the Astana talks. In addition to this, the Astana talks do not delve into the human issues affecting the Syrian people relating to marginalization, inflation and undemocratic governance that triggered the Arab Spring revolution ...” (KII01)

²⁹⁸ Jarber, R & Abdulrazek, S. (2019).” Moscow plans to Advance in Idlib on Eve of Astana Talks” retrieved <https://awaasat.com/English/home/article>

²⁹⁹ Arond Lund. (2018) “Root causes of violent conflicts in developing countries- Accessed Via: <https://www.researchgate.net>

4.1.2.1 What is the effect of U.S withdrawal from Syria on the balance of power and peace process?

Scholars of Middle East politics infer that U.S withdrawal from Syria has worked against the U.S and in favour of Russia and Iran. It has been argued that this action is a sign of eroding of U.S power and influence and portrays Russia as the leader in the Middle East politics. Critics such as Specia argue that the effect of U.S withdrawal of troops from Syria in some way leaves the U.S allies exposed and weakened. To this regard, the move strengthens rivals supported by Russia and Iran.³⁰⁰

The decision means that the balance of power in this particular conflict will shift from the United States in favor of Russia. According to Blanchard,³⁰¹ America's pullout will indeed weaken their influence over negotiations or settlement meant to end the war, which will greatly undermine the Syria peace process. Evidently so, the U.S taking out of her troops from Syria has in fact dealt a blow on the milestones achieved by the Astana process. This is because the U.S's sphere of influence has greatly reduced and would therefore have little or no influence on the pertinent issues. The shift in the balance of power to the East (Iran and Russia) means that the U.S will no longer have the leverage that it has always enjoyed in the Middle East. This phenomenon has the consequence of reducing goodwill of the U.S.A to push for peace in Syria, which has greatly watered down efforts to bring back peace in Syria, hence lengthening the period of war in Syria.

First Focus Group Discussion 7th Member posits that United States' withdrawal from Syria gives Russia a huge leverage in Middle East as the dominant power.

“...Withdrawal of US from Syria has played a crucial role in the power shift in favor of Russia as the ‘dominant’ power in the Middle East. It is feared that the vacuum due to the withdrawal of US could lead to the rise of conflicts in a bid to replace the US...”
(FGD01/07)

It is evident that US's withdrawal from Syria is likely to play a huge role in the reconfiguration of the balance of power in the Middle East.

Some scholars argue that U.S withdrawal of troops from Syria may derail negotiation and mediation processes, other scholars have argued that U.S withdrawal from Syria provides new

³⁰⁰ Marwan Kabalan 2019. “What the Middle East looks like in 2019”- Arab Centre of Research and Policy Studies.

³⁰¹ Griffiths , M. & O’callaghan, T. (2013). “Key Concepts in International, Routledge” Retrieved from the Hong Kong Economic Journal

opportunities for peace due to reduced great power rivalries interfering with the process. Either way, the U.S withdrawal has certainly upset the status quo.

According to the American Journal, President Bashar al-Assad , Russia, and Iran are the main beneficiaries by the move³⁰². The decision will consolidate the Eastern powers and tighten Assad's grip on power. Iran however stands to benefit more as it asserts its dominance in the Middle East. Alaaldin debates that the effect of U.S withdrawal from Syria on the outcome of the war is that it could lengthen the war as there is a likelihood of resurgence of ISIS and other terror groups the U.S presence had helped to quell. Although the ISIS may have lost, but that does not mean that they are vanquished. United States' withdrawal means that the ISIS could continue to present menacing threats and thereby undermine peace and stability in the region. U.S retreat will allow terrorists (ISIS) to revitalize, and this can only increase insecurity and prolong the war, and even possibly cause emergence of new conflicts.

Just as Alaaldin maintains, U.S withdrawal from Syria has left a void which must be filled, and it is only through war that such a vacuum can be filled³⁰³. Could the U.S imminent absence in such a crucial balance of power playground such as Syria be an opportunity for China and Russia to thrive?

4.1.3 The Arab League Intervention in Syria

This is one of the oldest regional blocks of the Middle East. This Organization was formed in 1945 by the Arab states to strengthen ties and promote their common interests. The league has tried to intermediate the Syria crisis without much success. According to Maddy-Weitzman, the league's mediation process for Syria has been argued to be short-lived, with only two attempts to quell the crisis.³⁰⁴

The first trial was in 2011 November, where the government of Syria accepted a peace plan and mediation from the league. The result of the mediation entailed an agreement that Bashar al-Assad's government would halt forceful and violet arrests against peaceful demonstrations. Tanks were to be removed from towns, and all political prisoners were to be released. Consequently, discussions commenced with the opposition a fortnight of the agreement.³⁰⁵ In response to Assad's breach of

³⁰² Steve Chan 2010. China Russia World power politics. Global perspective

³⁰³ Steve Chan 2010. China Russia World power politics. Global perspective

³⁰⁴ Frances Stewart, 2011 "Root causes of violent conflicts in developing countries" Oxford University Press

³⁰⁵ Claude Salhani (2014). "Oil- A blessing and A curse in the Middle East journal"

the ceasefire agreement, the Arab League threatened to suspend Syrians membership of the League if it would not execute the peace plan by 16th November. This League indeed stopped Syrians membership with it due to Bashar al-Assad's non-compliance on terms of the peace plan.

³⁰⁶Consequently, the Syrian government asserted her unwillingness to adopt "Arab solutions" for the crisis.

The second attempt was on 19th December when Syria signed another peace plan spearheaded by the League. According to Kucukkeles,³⁰⁷ the plan demanded withdrawal of both the opposition forces and government army from the streets, admittance of League's observers to Syria and the beginning of talks between the dissidents and the government. The Assad regime again failed to keep its promises and mass killing of civilians by the government continued.

Critics argued that the League's presence amidst the violation imparted legitimacy to the violent actions of the Syrian government.³⁰⁸ Despite these failures, Arab League decided to extend the task which ended on 19th January 2012 for one more month, and this decision caused Saudi Arabia to pullout monitors from the mission and called on Russia, China, U.S, and EU to intervene³⁰⁹. Gulf States, that is, Kuwait, Bahrain, Oman, and Qatar concluded that the Arab League observer mission was ineffective and that marked the end of its involvement in the peace plans.

The Arab League monitoring operations were suspended after its unsuccessful attempts to restore order in Syria.³¹⁰ Salt (2012), suggests that the mission is constantly accused of understaffing and lack of common political will, which are the main reasons why it failed to stop the bloodshed. Its failure is also attributed to the cynicism of the leaders who demonstrate repeated impotence amidst major crisis. For instance, the appointment of General Al-Dabi, a strong backer of Sudanese President Al-Bashir who was involved in crisis and violence in South Sudan, to lead the League did not promote confidence. The League should have approached the peace plan with more concern for human rights, staffed with competitive leaders who uphold integrity, employed conflict management mechanisms in the early stages of conflicts, and promoted direct economic and cultural cooperation for better results³¹¹.

³⁰⁶ <http://www.interfacejournal.net/2012/05/interface-volume-4-issue-1-the-season-of-revolution-the-arab-spring-and-european-mobilizations>

³⁰⁷ Ibid:350

³⁰⁸ Kucukkeles M. (2012). Claude Salhani (2014). "Oil- A blessing and A curse in the Middle East journal"

³⁰⁹ Kucukkeles 2011 Washington Dc: The AL Syrian Policy

³¹⁰ Garwood-Gowers, A. (2013). The responsibility to protect and the Arab Spring: Libya as the exception, Syria as the norm.

³¹¹ Emile Hoyakem (2012). Journal- "Memorandum on Syria de-escalation zones signed in Astana".

According to (KII03), the Arab league did not have the impetus to initiate peace in Syria and hence its massive failure.

“.....President Bashar-al-Assad’s defiance and non-compliance to the ceasefire call from the Arab league was the main setback in achieving peace. The Arab League did not have the girth to influence the behavior of the Assad regime and the rebel factions.....” (KII03)

The lack of impetus from the league’s perspective made the Syrian government ignore various orders and peace initiatives. It is on this basis that critics argue that Arab league’s intervention in Syria has been termed as “brief”, almost hands-off and lacking zeal.

From the above analysis of the intervention of the league in Syria, it is evident that the league has not done enough for Syria. However, the most pertinent issue that comes out is the league’s inability to oversee compliance of the peace plan in the background of outright defiance of the Assad regime in this process. According to Sean,³¹² the Assad regime’s sentiments were that the Arab league turned against Syria by suspending Syria’s membership in the League, and supporting the opposition rebels and further proposing a plan for power transfer from the Assad regime to a caretaker government.

In addition, the league’s support for human rights and democratic governance has been argued to be biased and inconsistent, dependent on the member states geopolitical interests.³¹³ This is an indication of the self-interest of the member states at play. This has largely affected the league’s legitimacy, and as a result, the league has been unable to ensure compliance of the warring parties to the agreements.

4.2 The Yemen Peace Process

The Yemeni conflict is an internationalised conflict involving internal and external components and therefore not a clear cut fight between two factions hence making the peace process complicated. Juneau³¹⁴ describes the Yemeni battle as a proxy war that pits Saudi-backed and Iran-backed adversaries. Yemen has historically suffered immense economic, social, security, and structural changes. The war that commenced in 2015 only intensified the situation.³¹⁵

³¹² Mann S., 2011. “Root causes of violent conflicts in developing countries” Oxford University Press

³¹³ Ibid:350

³¹⁴ Candace Rondeaux & David Sterman, (2018)- A briefing document “Twenty First Century Proxy warfare”

³¹⁵ Griffiths , M. & O’callaghan, T. (2013). “Key Concepts in International, Routledge” Retrieved from the Hong Kong Economic Journal

The United Nations, United Kingdom and Arab League have been the main players in Yemen's peace process³¹⁶. According to Sharp an analysis of the Yemen civil war and peace interventions by both regional and global powers, highlights a chronology of events in the back drop of an ever changing conflict environment as follows;

4.2.1 Arab League formation of joint force in Yemen - March 2015

The Arab league announced the creation a multifaceted military force of the Arab that would resolve bottlenecks from Yemen to Maghreb. The organization supported the military operations of the Joint Arab military force against the Houthis. However, critics argued that such an arrangement would only increase tensions in the region and spark sectarianism, and therefore result in more instability in the region.³¹⁷The military force was questioned on the basis of the authority from which such a force would operate. Eventually, the joint force did not succeed in the quest to restore peace due to lack of capacity, political goodwill and the question of the legitimacy of the force.

4.2.2 United Nations Peace Interventions in Yemen

U.N. negotiates a temporary cease-fire, as UN-mediated peace talks begin in Switzerland (December 2015)

United Nations initial peace talks began in December 2015 in Switzerland, and that talk was aimed at finding a durable settlement to the crisis.³¹⁸The talks aimed at establishing a permanent ceasefire and improving the humanitarian situation. The talks' agenda included the need to have a peaceful and orderly transition of power³¹⁹. U.N. special envoy facilitated the peace and attended by 24 Yemeni representatives and advisors. However, the peace talk achieved none of the objectives except the ceasefire which lasted two weeks, ending in early January 2016.

Stephen Day³²⁰ attributes the lack lustre outcomes of the talks to the unwillingness of the involved parties to negotiate.

April –August: U.N.-brokered peace negotiations begin in Kuwait, but end in August with no agreement (2016)

³¹⁶ Kenneth Waltz (1959) – Book: “Man, the State ad War” pp 17-37

³¹⁷ Ibid;357

³¹⁸ Ibid: 355

³¹⁹ Ibid: 357

³²⁰ Griffiths , M. & O'callaghan, T. (2013). “Key Concepts in International, Routledge” Retrieved from the Hong Kong Economic Journal

In 2016, United Nations sponsored peace talks in Kuwait aimed at establishing peace in Yemen but it ended without an agreement. The Houthi fighters rejected the peace propositions. The peace plan by United Nations involved appointment of ten member governing body to run Yemen. The plan was accepted by Yemen's internationally recognized government but rejected by the rebels (Houthi fighters). The rebels claimed that the plan did not meet key demands required of a unity government. The rebels demanded for immediate removal of President Rabbu Mansour Hadi.

October 19: A 72-hour new cessation of hostilities goes into effect. Violations occur and the ceasefire lasts until October 23 without renewal (2016)

In 2016 the fighting parties in Yemen agreed on the terms of a ceasefire as well as Cessation of hostilities. The ceasefire agreement was in effect up to 10th of April 2016, but a violation occurred on the same date. The United Nations then stepped in to urge the warring parties to agree on an extension for at least another 72 hours to allow humanitarian supplies into the affected areas.

U.N Mediated talks in Geneva September (2018)

In September of 2018, the United Nations-led mediation talks in Geneva, and the mediation process lasted for three days. However, the Houthi delegation did not show up for the talk claiming that they were halted from traveling by the coalition. On the other hand, the coalition claimed that the Houthis sabotaged the arrangements that would have facilitated their travel with new late demands³²¹. The Houthis demanded three guarantees from the UN before they would attend the talks that had been postponed twice³²². Technically, nothing came out of the negotiations due to the absence of the rebels.

December 13: UN-Mediated talks and the Stockholm Agreement (2018)

The Stockholm Agreement was reached in Sweden after UN-mediated talks, which took ten days. The two factions (Saudi led group and Iran-led group) announced the Agreement as a sign of commitment.³²³The critical components of the Agreement included mutual withdrawal of forces from the port of Hodeidah, release and exchange of prisoners. In the Agreement, the parties committed to implementing the Agreement and working towards the removal of impediments and obstructions from its implementation. The parties also promised to refrain from activities that would

³²¹ Ibid:362

³²² Shar.p J.,2019. "Regional intervention in the Yemen Civil war". UAE Journal

³²³ A. Hishami, 2019. Route to peace in Yemen Now" guardian publication

escalate or undermine prospects of peace. Finally, there was also a commitment to continue consultations in January 2019 in a location that was to be agreed upon by the parties.

United Kingdom-led Peace talks on 'next steps' for Yemen peace process

In April 2019, UK organized a meeting to discuss the 'next step' for Yemen peace process. UK brought together representatives of the UAE, US, UN, and Saudi Arabia.³²⁴ The meeting was organized amidst fear that the peace process in Yemen had faltered. In the meeting, the United States expressed a grave concern that the Stockholm Agreement of 2018 was not being implemented. According to Juneau, The meeting proposed stronger measures that would ensure that peace deal requirements are met. Despite these measures, lethal fighting continues in Yemen and analyst casts doubts on the success of the process³²⁵. To date, a political settlement to end the war is yet to be reached.

An analysis of the peace process in Yemen clearly shows that the United Nations and other involved players have not done enough to secure peace. Al-Omeisy argues that the United Nations need to understand Yemen better and stop being too simplistic.³²⁶ United Nations has been accused of opting for short-term solutions instead of working on long term viable solutions. From the analysis of the peace process from 2015, it is evident that it has made minimal tangible solutions to lasting peace.

4.3 Why Conflicts management processes have failed in Syria and Yemen

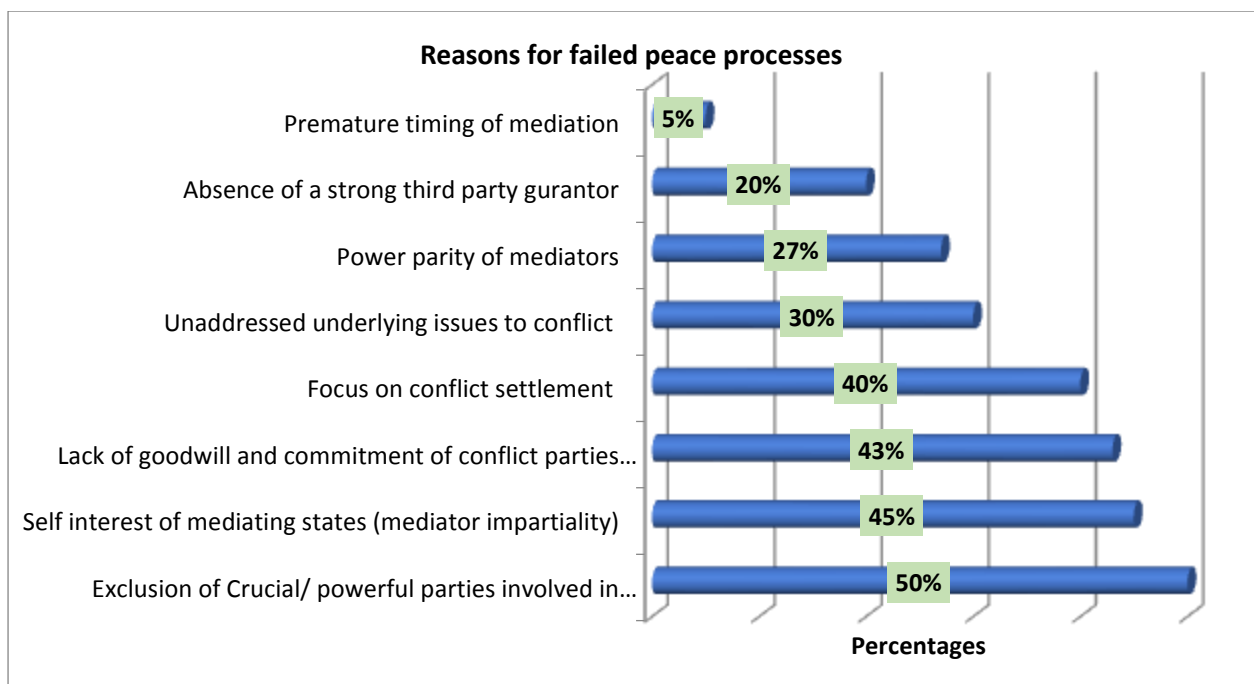
Power politics has been, and will continue to determine the outcomes of conflict management processes. The above detailed examination of the peace interventions as well as discussions with the Key Informants and FGD's noted some pertinent issues in the approaches of the Syria and Yemen peace interventions that culminated to their failure in ensuring lasting peace.

The following table shows the responses obtained from the KII and FDG's on why the Syria and Yemen conflict management processes have been unsuccessful to date.

³²⁴ Dr. Joseph Nye. (2011). Article- "The Future of Power"

³²⁵ Ibid: 366 (134-152)

³²⁶ Ibid:365



**Source: Fig.5 Respondents responses to why peace processes in Syria and Yemen have failed.*

The respondents gave multiple responses to why the Syria and Yemen peace processes have been unsuccessful, as the questionnaire used was open ended and allowed up to 3 answers to this question. To this regard, 50% of the respondents were of the opinion that exclusion of powerful parties involved in the conflict in the peace processes was bound to make it fail. This is because exclusion of some crucial parties automatically discredits the impartiality of the process. In addition, the excluded parties are highly likely to sabotage the process. 45% felt that self-interests of mediating parties also undermined the impartiality of the mediation process. 43% felt that there is lack of goodwill, 40% felt that the peace processes were focused on conflict settlement as opposed to conflict resolution, 30% were of the opinion that generally, there are a number of unaddressed historical divisions in the middle east which fuel the conflicts, 27% highlighted the importance of power parity between the two sides in mediation, 20% cited that the processes did not have a strong third party guarantor and 5% that the mediation interventions in Syria and Yemen were premature, as the hurting stalemate had not been reached to trigger willingness to negotiate.

The above noted emerging issues have been further discussed in detail below;

4.3.1 Exclusion of Crucial parties to the conflicts

The most pertinent issue noted about the UN-led talks on Syria was exclusion of PYD affiliated Kurdish militia and jihadist rebels from the negotiations. This intentional omission greatly

undermined the chances of ceasefire in Syria and ultimately, the success of the UN sponsored talks. This is due to their scope of influence in the northern part of Syria. Continuation of talks in the absence of these groups in fact resulted in breakdown of the talks.³²⁷

The U.S participated in the Astana talks as “observer “Inclusion of all parties and factions to the conflict including non-state groups is essential to lasting peace. In a number of instances, the Syrian opposition rebels boycotted the talks and refused to hold direct talks with the Assad regime.

The 3rd and 5th key informants as well as 5 members of the FGD’s were in agreement that;

.....”Deliberate exclusion of crucial parties to a conflict undermines the impartiality of mediation and creates bias. The mediation outcomes are therefore unacceptable to the excluded party. This inevitably waters down the process.

The 2nd Focus Group Discussion 6th Member alluded the fact that failure to understand the complexity of a particular conflict contributes to collapse of peace process in reference to the Yemen war.

“...it is crucial that all warring parties are recognized in the negotiation or mediation process. Although it is usually a hard thing for the dominating party to acknowledge the presence of its counterparts, recognition is usually the first step towards peaceful resolutions...” (FGD02/06)

It is evidently critical to understand the dynamics of war and how complex the relationship among the involved parties. Exclusion of crucial parties to the conflict has often reflected in flaring up of conflict, which is fueled by the party who feels excluded and not recognized. Inclusion of all parties and factions to the conflict including non-state groups, whether they are thought to be terrorist groups or not is essential to lasting peace.

4.3.2 Motive to mediate: Self-interest of involved parties

Another factor worth noting is the impact of self-interest of the participants in the outcomes of the UN led talks for Syria. Iraq was present as part of her agenda to fight against ISIS, Jordan and Lebanon were present to avert the spillover effects of the Syrian conflict in form of refugees,

³²⁷ Max Fisher, (2006) Article, The Arab League has misjudged its actions on Syria. Accessed Via: <https://www.theguardian.com/arab-league-syria>

Turkey due to the Kurdish and refugee issue. Iran, Saudi Arabia, U.S, Russia, E.U and China engaged in the conflict directly to influence balance of power in the region.

According to Ege Seckin, IHS Markit Principal Analyst, each of the three parties who initiated the Astana talks had its own interests in the process.³²⁸ For Turkey, the Astana talks served the purpose of restraining the Assad's regime advances into Idlib, near its borders, to avert further refugee influx into Turkish territory. Therefore membership in the tripartite peace process provided Turkey legitimate military presence in northern Syria. For Russia and Iran, the intention is to control the end game on Syria, thereby undermining U.S influence in the region.

Similarly, in Yemen, the entire conflict is attributable to rivalry between US- backed Saudi led coalition and Iran backed Houthis, over their power interests for hegemonic dominance in the region. To this regard, no other country, apart from the US and Iran has sufficient leverage over Saudi Arabia and the Houthi rebels to influence their behavior in Yemen. However, owing to their self-interest for power dominance, the Yemen conflict persists.

The 8th Key Informant (KII08) in response to complexities of peace negotiations alluded to the fact that although it is important to involve all parties in the negotiation process and not just to concentrate on parties who are directly involved, consideration of their motive can salvage the peace process.

“...mediation significantly relies on the parties’ motive. Both warring parties as well as the mediators should fully aim at achieving peace for the mediation process to work. In this process, any conflict of interest and open self-interest ambitions could sabotage the process because a self-interested mediator cannot be trusted...” (KII08)

The Arab league isolation of Syria by suspending her membership in the league was a decision based on the interests of member states. According to Abdel Barri, isolation of Syria from the Arab League risks polarizing sectarian loyalties which may increase the potential for escalation of further conflicts in the region.³²⁹ In addition, the Arab league intervention in the Syria and Yemeni conflict has been described as “half-hearted” stifled by a myriad of self-interests of the members of the League.

³²⁸ Ege Seckin, (2018) - Article. “Turkish Intervention”

³²⁹ Abdel Barri Atwan (2012) – Article, The Arab League has misjudged its actions on Syria. Accessed Via: <https://www.theguardian.com/arab-league-syria>

The United Nations interventions have also been largely unsuccessful owing to lack of consensus of the UNSC P5 hence Syrian crisis is evidently one of their biggest failures in the 21st century. The Council looked on as Assad regime carried out atrocities against the Syrian people, reinforced by China and Russia's actions to shield the Assad regime from sanctions.³³⁰

Self-interests of the involved third party mediator bring in the issue of “mediator impartiality”. According to Miall, mediator impartiality is a one of the most critical aspects for successful mediation outcomes.³³¹ Mediator impartiality is key in building confidence in the mediator. When disputants have confidence in the mediator, they are more likely to accept the outcomes of the mediation. The reverse is true when there is mistrust.³³² For example, the opposition rebels have displayed no faith in the Astana process, and have often times boycotted the talks, terming the talks as “bias”. This is because the Iran, Turkey and Russia appear to be in support of the Assad regime. Similarly, the UN talks and Arab league interventions failed in compelling the Assad regime to comply with the agreements because the Assad regime saw the UN talks as a U.S intervention which was bias in favor of opposition rebels and the Arab league as a traitor, after suspending her membership from the league.

4.3.3 Unaddressed religious divisions

Conflict settlement processes have been criticized on grounds that they are centered on cutting deals over power alignment and do not address the underlying issues of the conflict. What are these “underlying issues”? There are a number of underlying issues surrounding the conflicts in the Middle East which relate to historical divisions. All the key informants selected for this research mentioned religious sectarianism as an issue, which has often been “swept under the carpet” with regard to how conflicts have been addressed in the Middle East.

Religious Sectarianism, is at the epicenter of political conflicts of Middle East.³³³ According to Byman, sectarianism is arguably one of the biggest threats to peace in Middle East and should be addressed. The phenomenon has centuries' old theological and religious roots and runs deep in the region, and hence it has become impossible to quell. To this regard, an examination of history of Sunni-Shi's sectarianism is invaluable in the understanding of conflict in the region.

³³⁰ Andreas Bummel, (2018) – “UNSC has failed Syria” Democracy without borders publication

³³¹ Miall. H. (1992) – “Since 1945 peace makers.” Published by Mac. London

³³² Wehrn. P.N and Lederach., Mediation processes in Central American states (199, pp.85 – 97. Published by the Journal of Peace Research.

³³³ Kabalan, M. & Kabalan, M. (2019). Article published on Aljazeera “resolving the middle east crisis.” 5 August 2019,

According to Kartaloglu,³³⁴ sectarianism in Middle East between the Shia's and the Sunnis is an ancient marvel however, has hugely changed in the modern times. Sectarianism emanates from continuous history of primordial and ancient struggle over religious doctrines misunderstandings amongst themselves, Sunni and Shia. This divide was based on two branches of Islam religion. The two sects share common beliefs and have common practices but have different religious and theological understanding of the doctrine of Islam.³³⁵

According to the 6th Key Informant (KII06) Sectarianism between the Shia's and the Sunnis has shaped the conflicts in Middle East region in more ways than one can imagine.

“.....Religious sectarianism in the Middle East is probably the only factor in the conflicts which has had very little influence from external powers. Religious sectarianism is a historical issue that goes deep into the fabric of the Middle Eastern societies since time immemorial. It is almost impossible to address sectarian divisions. The historical underpinnings of the Sunnis and Shia's will continue to affect the dynamics of conflict in the region for years to come.” (KII06)

According to Byman,³³⁶ religious sectarianism is an impetus to a number of rivalries that dominate the Middle East region. Saudi Arabia is predominantly Sunni at 75% to 85%; on the other hand, Iran is Shia at 90%³³⁷. The two powers have instrumentalized sectarianism to pursue political dominance in countries such as Yemen, Syria, Pakistan, Somalia, and Iraq which have suffered as a result of religious rivalry with the factions engaging in endless wars.

Currently, Iran and Saudi are leading in the projection of religion in the region. This is reflected in their decade long rivalry as the two regional powers compete over dominance in the region. However, critics argue that the Sunnis and the Shiites are not genetically predisposed to conflict with each other and that war between them results from political and nationalistic interest.

According to Fabrice Balanche,³³⁸ the Syrian War is not a clear-cut sectarian conflict, as some would imagine. However, based on analysis of the sectarian trends and dynamics, there are some

³³⁴ KARTALOGLU H. (2019). Religious conflict in the middle east and US intervention. e-Makalat Mezhep Arastirmalari Dergisi, 12(1), 197-2014

³³⁵ Gonzalez N. (2013). “Sunni Vs Shi'a Crisis” Published by the North Media Co. Ltd.

³³⁶ Byman., D. 2018. “How religious groups divide assist end war in the middle East.” SEA Journal

³³⁷ Ivanov, s. (2016) The Middle East and Sunni-Shia Contradictions. International, Affairs.

³³⁸ Balanche, Kazinform (2017).Journal- “Memorandum on Syria de-escalation zones signed in Astana”.

overlooked aspects of the war, which are associated with sectarianism.³³⁹ The Syrian War, to a considerable degree is a sectarian conflict between the majority Sunnis against the minority Shiite who are the ruling elites. Sectarianism, in this case, is projected and driven by social-economic grievances based on the politics of exclusion. Sectarianism is also largely embedded in Syria's political structure through administrative appointments and distribution of resources.

Sherwood argues that the governance system in Syria has elements of religious exclusion, and this sparks sectarianism. This is inherently because the distribution of administrative districts often favors certain sects. Military appointments and promotions have been noted to favor Alawite officers over the Sunnis, which has also sparked rivalry between the two sects. Lack of cohesion between the Sunnis and the Shias is evident in social aspects where inter-sectarian marriages are uncommon, especially among the low-class people. The War is reinforced by sectarian identity, and this is evidenced by the proliferation of sectarian militia across the nation.³⁴⁰

From a broad perspective, in Yemen, the manner in which foreign forces are aligning and intervening in the conflict shows a sectarian divide. The same applies to non-state groups such as Hezbollah in Syria who are in support Houthi rebels in Yemen³⁴¹.

Thus, while it is recognized that religious sectarianism is one of the key causes of conflict intractability in the region, critics argue that violence in Yemen is not sectarian but Colgan³⁴² believes that this assertion is only true when one looks just within Yemen. The Houthi rebels are Shiite but they have fought alongside the Sunnis against the government. It then means that in this light, in Yemen the sectarianism arguments do not hold water. Locally, the conflict is more of a political contest rather than sectarianism.

The 9th Key Informant noted that despite the historical significance of Sectarianism, it plays a minor role in the ensuing conflict in the Middle East. The problems in the region are more political rather than religious.

“.....Religious sectarianism has been regarded as insignificant in the wars due to the fact that most mediators find it complex to analyze. However, it is important to note that religion sectarianism could have an impact especially when two religions back opposing antagonists

³³⁹ Ibold, Harrison. R Wagner (2004) - Research Article – “Bargaining, War and Alliances”

³⁴⁰ Candace Rondeaux & David Serman, (2018)- A briefing document “Twenty First Century Proxy warfare”

³⁴¹ Kartaloglu, 2012 Article, The Arab League has misjudged its actions on Syria. Accessed Via: <https://www.theguardian.com/arab-league-syria>

³⁴² Colgan. 2012. “Root causes of violent conflicts in developing countries- Accessed Via: <https://www.researchgate.net>

in a war. Therefore it is crucial that mediators focus on addressing this issue as well rather than sweep it under the carpet as it cooks another conflict...” (KII09)

Furthermore, religious sectarianism amidst other historical divisions in the region have largely been ignored, hence why the conflict management processes have been termed as “cosmetic” and therefore unsuccessful. This is because the interventions only seem to mitigate short term effects, as the conflict continues brewing under the surface. These divisions run deep and are too complex for external parties to address. Therefore, as a result it is much easier to ignore them than face them head on.

Generally, the religious and ethnic diversities in the region have been politicized, resulting in feelings of exclusion and marginalization among some populations whose retaliation has manifested in the 21st Century as the Arab Spring revolutions.

4.3.4 Negotiation/Mediation efforts focused on conflict settlement rather than Conflict resolution

Conflict settlement aims at bringing a conflict to an end without necessarily uncovering and dealing with the fundamental underlying causes of the conflict. Conflict settlement is a zero-sum game, which is centered on power, and to this regard, the dominant power often has their way. Therefore, the outcomes of conflict settlement are often, achieved through the use of coercive power.³⁴³ On the other hand, conflict resolution is a problem-solving approach that emphasizes that in any conflict there exist non-negotiable needs and values which have to be comprehensively addressed.³⁴⁴ Therefore, conflict resolution is a strategy which focusses on mutual satisfaction of needs and not the power relationships of the involved parties.

The strategies utilized in the management of the Syria and Yemeni conflicts largely gravitate towards conflict settlement as opposed to conflict resolution. The conflict mediation efforts by the UN, the Arab league and some regional powers have not accorded the needs and values of the warring parties the attention they deserve. These processes have even been noted to be driven entirely by external powers with little or no consideration of the needs and values of the warring parties. Therefore, in this case, the confluence of power interests reign supreme, as the underlying causes of the conflict are disregarded. Similarly, the outcomes of such processes, including peace agreements are more likely to be ignored by the warring parties whose interests and needs are

³⁴³ C. Mitchel and Webbs (1988) – “ The motives for mediation” pp.30-35

³⁴⁴ Burton etal.1991.– “Conflict & Human needs’ theory.” Published by Mac Press

brushed off. The outcomes of settlement processes mainly result in power sharing agreements, which are dependent on the power interests of the more powerful parties, particularly the sponsors and patrons of the process who are mainly external.³⁴⁵

Key informant (KII05) believes that conflict management processes should take cognizance of and address the underlying issues which exist in every conflict;

“.....Conflict resolution entails the warring parties coming to a consensus on the contentious issues that lead to the conflict in the first place, with due consideration of the needs of both parties. However, when a mediator like the Arab League calls for ceasefire, without considering the needs and primary causes of the conflict then the aim shifts to conflict settlement which tends to flop as well.” (KII05)

In a scenario where the real issues and other historical grievances are not brought on table, all efforts towards reconciliation become futile.

US sponsored resolutions to halt Assad’s human right violations against the people of Syria were vetoed by Russia and China, a move that was driven by their self-interests, as opposed to the interests of the Syrian people. In the event Russia and China would support the U.S in this cause, the Assad regime would have been significantly weakened and be more open to talks with the opposition rebels. From the analysis of the Syria and Yemen peace processes, it is evident that non-compliance to the agreements and boycotting talks by various parties to the conflict often result from a feeling that their end of the bargain or their needs are ignored/unmet. In addition to this, powerful external actors intervene in a conflict with power sharing frameworks which are imposed on the warring parties as opposed to letting the warring parties spearhead the process and drive the outcomes based on their needs.³⁴⁶

Conflict settlement is therefore a temporary, short term solution to conflict and often, conflicts relapses, rendering the conflict intractable. Focus on short term truces is therefore unsustainable.

³⁴⁵ Ogego Thesis, “Sudan’s Persistent Conflicts and Elusive Peace Confluence of Interests –Submitted to IDIS and Diplomacy, UoN

³⁴⁶ John. W. Burton (1990) – Conflict: Resolution and Prevention Beyond Intractability Published by New York: St. Martin’s Press.

4.3.5 Power Parity- “U.S as Third party guarantor”

Power parity and distribution of power is a crucial factor for successful mediation and negotiation outcomes. The outcomes of a negotiation or mediation intervention are shaped exclusively by polarity and national interests of the dominant external powers who have an interest in the conflict.

Power disparity between the warring parties reinforces the stronger party reluctance to make concessions and compromises which is key to achieving successful mediation.³⁴⁷ This research has noted a peculiar turn of events characterized by a decline in U.S involvement and scope of influence in the conflict management processes for Syria and Yemen. In Syria, the U.S participated in the Astana process as an observer after the imminent failure of the U.S sponsored Geneva peace talks. In Yemen, China is taking the mediator role .This begs the question, “what is the effect of decline in U.S scope of influence on the conflict management processes for the Syria and Yemen conflict?” Is the declining position of the U.S in the Syria peace process altering the balance of power required to enhance the Assad regime’s willingness to accept mediation outcomes and respect the provisions of the ceasefire agreements?

According to Kressel, power inequality between the disputants is often a major hindrance to of successful mediation and negotiation. Balance of power and power parity influences the degree of leverage of the mediators to a conflict is able to have on the disputants. According to Marieke Kleiboer,³⁴⁸ leverage is the ability of a mediator to put pressure on conflicting parties to give credence to the outcomes of a proposed settlement and ceasefire. The aspect of putting pressure is highly dependent on power parity, such that only a powerful mediator can achieve these ends. The U.S has maintained hegemonic dominance in the Middle East for decades now, and scholars question how absence of leverage / pressure from the U.S in this context has affected the outcomes of the mediations.

In fact, it has been argued that only the U.S has the leverage over the Saudi led coalition in Yemen and the Houthi rebels. Therefore, if it was in the U.S’s interest, the U.S would easily influence Saudi Arabia to withdraw from Yemen and thereby quell the crisis. According to Marwan, minimal engagement in the Syria peace interventions and exit of the U.S from Syria in a way leaves the

³⁴⁷ Roseneau , Modelski., 1964. ‘Global studies on resolving internal wars’ Princeton Journal

³⁴⁸ Kleiboer M. (1996). “Analysing success and failure of global mediation.” Journal Management of conflict 360-389

processes “half orphaned” and fractured, because the U.S has all along been a key player in the conflict since it began.³⁴⁹

Although the 21st century has brought with it power distribution attributable to the rising powers, this does not by any means mean that the U.S has ceded its hegemonic dominance. The U.S cannot be sidelined from the peace processes for a number of reasons; first, support of the west for regime change as part of their peace approaches for the Middle East is likely to ignite even more problems and stir up more bad blood and therefore reverse the goodwill gains that would have steered the negotiation processes. Second, Trump’s decision to abandon ship by withdrawing troops from Syria without advance consultation even from her allies has prompted a shift in alliances and interests which may heighten the chances of miscalculation and worsen conflict, thirdly and most importantly, without American support in the fight against terror, the Islamic State and other jihadist groups could capitalize on that weakness and further destabilize the region.

The 8th Key Informant (KII08) argued that imbalance in power distribution in conflict management processes distorts the balance affects the propensity to negotiate.

“.....Withdrawal of the US from Syria and the Middle East in which it has dominated for over two decades poses a myriad of negative outcomes that could come out of it due to the power vacuum left behind. Further conflict could arise when the rebel groups take advantage of US’ exit from the Middle East.” (KII08)

.....”In fact, the U.S active presence as part and parcel of the Syrian and Yemen peace process would balance off the weight of the Russian counterparts and see to it that cheating after a ceasefire is reached becomes more difficult and the conflicting parties would have no option but to cooperate.”(KII02)

“.....Power disparity between the warring parties reinforces the stronger party’s reluctance to make concessions and compromises. (FGD2/10)

The key informants noted that there is need for a powerful guarantor state in any mediation process to ensure the parties respect the outcomes of mediation. The 2nd key informant , KII02 alluded to the fact that Assad continuously dishonored the ceasefire agreements because the U.S’s presence to chaperon compliance and to enforce consequences of non-compliance was very dismal.

³⁴⁹ Marwan Kabalan (2019) – Article “ Analysis of Syria post US withdrwal” Article by Aljezera

The above arguments can be supported by the fact that sustainability of the outcomes of the peace processes for Syria and Yemen is doubtful being that a critical player in the conflict (U.S) is suddenly side-tracked when the parties want to make amends.

4.4 Conclusion

The first step towards commencement of any negotiation or mediation process for any violent conflict is to end the conflict and have a mutually agreed ceasefire. Although the parties have had mutually agreed ceasefire agreements, compliance to the mutually agreed ceasefire is often the challenge. This demonstrates a lack of willingness to ceasefire. Open defiance and unwillingness of warring parties to comply with a ceasefire agreement that was mutually agreed is often due to inadequate external pressure from mediating states who have leverage over the warring parties. Although warring parties can be made to accept to negotiate by a third party, successful peace negotiations can only arise if the parties are genuinely willing to resolve the conflicts. Therefore, external pressure and willingness to negotiate and respect the provisions of mutually agreed agreements are complementary.

Managing the conflicts in Middle East (Case in point: Syria and Yemen) is particularly challenging due to the complex shifting of issues, such as changing interests, power realignments, evolving relations and new actors which overall cause these conflicts to be very fluid. Changes in the balance of power therefore play a key role in determining the outcomes of conflict as well as success rate of the mediation or negotiation interventions. Great power interests have been noted as a critical determinant of the outcomes of conflict management efforts, particularly for conflicts in Middle East.

Although some scholars argue that mediation in Syria and Yemen was initiated at such a time that was not “ripe”, this study has found that although ripeness of conflict is a crucial factor in the success of mediation or negotiation, for the two conflicts discussed in this paper, other factors such exclusion of key parties to conflict, unaddressed historical rivalries , power parity, self-interest of external mediating parties and tendency to focus on conflict settlement as opposed to conflict resolution as the more endearing factors to the lackluster outcomes of the mediation interventions in Syria and Yemen.

For Syria, the Astana process has drawn optimism to itself vis-à-vis the pessimism surrounding the UN led mediation interventions. The major reason surrounding optimism of this process to deliver peace to Syria is its character of use of a third party guarantor states to spearhead the process and to

ensure compliance. The only missing piece to this process is equal involvement of the United States to oversee compliance from Assad. According to Medzihorsky and Jenne,³⁵⁰ there is need for the United Nations to adopt a new approach to the conflict management processes for Middle East conflicts. The current approaches have been criticized to be short-term, simplistic and lacking goodwill, hence why they keep failing.

As much as lack of focus on the underlying causes of conflict is bound to cause conflict settlement processes to fail, the power aspect in this approach, characterized by intervention by powerful external actors has been fundamental in creating power asymmetry which is a critical factor in the negotiation process.

³⁵⁰ Medzihorsky. J., 2017. "UNSC deliberations on the Syrian civil Unrest; Conflict management". Research & Politics.

CHAPTER FIVE: Summary of findings, recommendations and Conclusion

The proposed strategies for addressing the Syrian and Yemeni Civil Wars described in this chapter are based on addressing problems or shortcomings of the peace process as highlighted in Chapter 4 above. Although there were other flaws noted from the responses from the key informants used for this study, this chapter shall highlight the relevant strategies to address the shortcomings noted including; exclusion of crucial parties, self-interest, lack of mediator impartiality, lack of goodwill and commitment and the power parity problem.

The current ceasefires in Syria and Yemen have been argued to be more of conflict settlement rather than resolution strategies, and hence proving unsustainable. Conflict settlement is a zero-sum game, where the dominant party has its way and the weaker party accepts the outcomes merely because they do not have enough power to match the dominant party and contest the outcome. To this regard, conflict settlement strategies cannot endure, because they are only sustainable in the short term as far as the power balance / power parity persists, otherwise, relapse is imminent.

The recommendations proposed in this chapter take cognizance of the fact that normalization may not be feasible for Syria and Yemen in the short term. Therefore the proposed recommendations provide avenues for political settlement. Although reaching a political settlement is a conflict settlement strategy, it has been argued to be closer in substance and form to conflict resolution due to its character of “power sharing”.

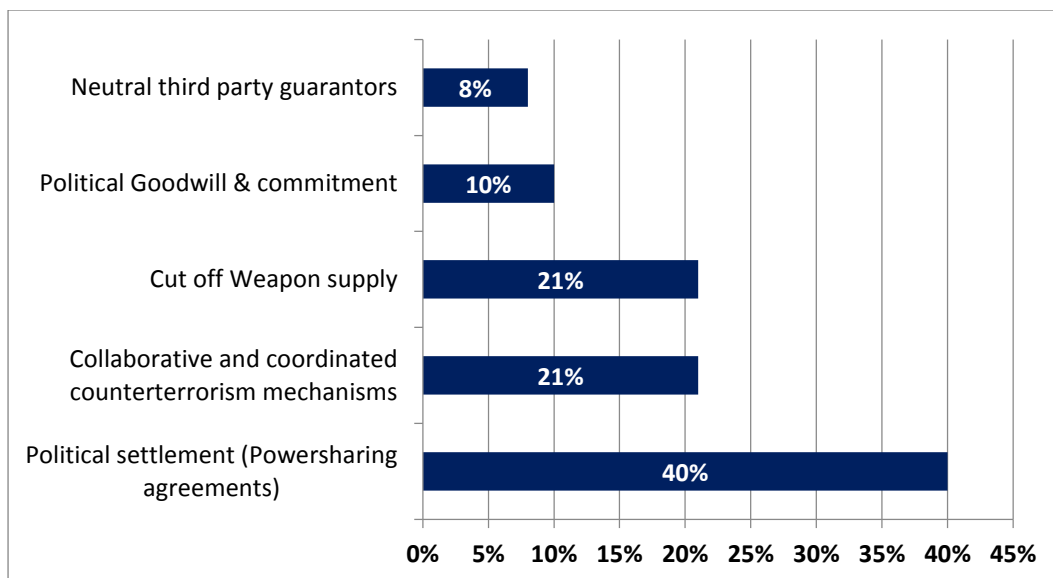


Fig.6. Respondents' Recommendations on Conflict Strategies to Quell the Syria and Yemeni conflicts

40% of the respondents were of the opinion that a well negotiated political settlement would bring peace, 21% attributed the conflicts to abundant supply of weapons and felt that sanctions to temporarily cut off weapon supply would help, 21% felt that there was need for collaborative efforts and goodwill by the super powers to fight the scourge of terrorism, 10% cited absence of political goodwill and commitment and 10% highlighted the need for a neutral third party guarantor to oversee the peace processes with pressure by the UNSC on the warring parties to comply with the provisions of the ceasefire agreements.

5.1 Recommendations to Quell the Syria Crisis

Political Settlement - Explore constitutional Reforms to Divide Syria into autonomous confederation zones and inclusion of Key players in the Conflict

A pertinent flaw in the Syria peace process is the failure to uncover and discuss some critical issues emanating from allegations of lack of recognition and exclusion of key parties to the conflict on the negotiation table as equal parties. For example, exclusion of the PYD affiliated Kurdish militia and jihadist rebel groups such as the Jabhat-al-Nusra from the negotiations negatively affected peace process in Syria. For the success of any peaceful process, all stakeholders must be brought on board. It is only through this means that political settlement can be achieved. Political settlement through constitutional reforms must involve all stakeholders.

The governance problem and how to combat the Islamic State and Assad and accommodate opposition groups is an issue that has rarely been exhaustively discussed on the negotiation table. For that reason, there is need for Syria to be divided into autonomous confederation zones with strong and effective governance structures. The strategy is not just a political resolution but is also an ideal road map on how the international community can work closely with the opposition. Dividing Syria into autonomous confederation zones will also help address the problem of the exclusion of crucial parties and long term divide in the country between the regime supporters and the opposition groups.

Previous negotiation and mediation initiatives such as the Astana process have been blamed for exclusion of key stakeholders and regional partners, who share the same conflict system with Syria and Yemen. Reaching out to Israel and other Gulf partners and having them on board can make a huge difference towards conflict resolution. The move will provide options to address intra-regional rivalries and concerns about Iran that would possibly secure their buy-in to help de-escalate and support the proposed framework. It may not be possible to push Iran out of Syria in the short-term,

but the U.S and other partners can work together to reduce the influence that Iran has in the war, by bringing other Middle East states onboard. The Arab league would have been the perfect solution for providing the needed inclusivity of other Gulf States, but first, there is need for the members of the league to put their rivalries and self-interests aside in the interest of peace in the region. For now, the process would have to do with only inviting states who have goodwill for peace in the region. Forcing inclusivity would work to the detriment of the process, due to spoilers who would work under cover to sabotage the process.

Consequently, there should be an agreement that any form of negotiation must include minorities' participation. The failure of previous peace processes have been criticized by the tendency to ignore minority stakeholders who in most cases, are in the thick of the conflict and have interests in the outcomes of the conflict. Inclusion, as opposed to exclusion, should be the ideal framework of a peaceful conflict resolution in Syria.

The 7th Key informant reiterated the need to have an inclusive conflict resolution process that will ensure that all affected groups are heard.

“.....it is crucial that all groups involved in the Syrian war are included in the negotiation process including all opposition rebel groups for effective conflict resolution. For the longest time, exclusion of some groups which are at times the key stakeholders of the war on grounds of association with terrorism has taken a toll on peace processes.” If this is not feasible, dividing the region into autonomous confederation zones may be an alternative to explore.”(KII07)

Political settlement based on inclusion of all parties should, however be backed with reinforced counter terrorism mechanisms in order to assert clarity with regards the unacceptable actions of “terrorist” groups mushrooming in the region under the veil of opposition forces.

There is a need for United Nations to initiate post-war constitutional reforms and this is in line with dividing Syria into autonomous confederation zones. Constitutional reforms will encourage peace and stability. The U.N should put more pressure on stakeholders including United States and Russia to initiate Constitutional Reforms as a means to peaceful political settlement.

Establishment of collaborative and coordinated counter-terrorism mechanisms by the US and Russia

Conflict resolution in Syria has been marred by self-interest of the mediating states including Russia, China and United States as well as Iran have vested political and economic interest in the

country. This has led to bias and lack of goodwill to drive positive outcomes in peace negotiation processes.

This research recognizes the importance of collaborative anti-terrorism mechanisms by the US and Russia, as two of the great powers involved in the conflict. This is in cognizance of the role of violent jihadist groups mushrooming in every conflict situation in 21st century conflicts to lead a coordinated mechanism in support of counter terrorism.

Previously, the two powers have been divided on the issue, with Russia's support to her allies, Iran and Syria and related groups such as Hamas and Hezbollah, who have been alleged to engage in terrorism. Syria and Iran are two of the four countries listed in the list of state sponsors of terror as published by the US Secretary of state.³⁵¹ In recent times, the America's annual terrorism report reiterated this by describing Iran as the "leading state sponsor of terrorism". Although these allegations carry with them a semblance of the rivalry between the US and Iran, the divide between the US and Russia about the terrorism issue in the Middle East has been a major enabler to the persistent problem. For that reason, there should be a solid framework for a collaborative and coordinated counterterrorism framework.

Peace in the region would be a possibility, if only the two powers could agree to work together to restrain Iranian-backed groups and other emerging "terrorist" non-state groups that have fueled conflict in the region, rendering the conflicts intractable. Furthermore, the process should involve securing support from main allies such as China in the case of Russia and Israel in the case of United States. Russian support of the process will be imperative in clearing al Qaeda-held territories in Idlib.

According to (KII09), the global powers have an important mandate of working together and pulling resources with an aim of achieving peace in Syria, Yemen and the Middle East as a whole.

".....The key for peace in Syria and in a number of other Middle East conflicts requires goodwill from the global powers...this would require the global powers to put aside some of their interests in the region, which is highly unlikely in the current highly competitive political environment in the region" (KII09)

To this end, the U.S requires to change tact with regards to her approach with Iran. Previously, U.S's approach with Iran with regard to the Syrian issue has diminished any chances of negotiations between the two states. Bargaining with Iran is possible; however, the key for such a negotiation

³⁵¹ US department of State Website- <https://www.state.gov/state-sponsors-of-terrorism>.

should be influenced and spearheaded by Russia. The U.S should at least be willing to relax her sanctions for the Iranian counterparts to accept to sit on the table. The United Nations should provide the platform for the negotiation, in order to obtain support from other member states and oversight to ensure compliance to the outcomes of the negotiation.

The 9th Key Informant maintained that Iran plays a huge role in the Syrian conflict and hence the need to bring the Iran leaders on board through negotiation for a lasting peace.

“....Iran should be convinced to engage in a peaceful negotiation and compromise if peace is to be achieved in Syria....”

“....Bringing Iran on board can prove vital in collaborative and coordinated counter-terrorism efforts.” (KII09)

Promotion of political goodwill through Russia and United States Collaboration by Making Russia and the U.S the Center of Peaceful Negotiations

Political goodwill remains a major hindrance to peace in the Middle East. Critics argue that lack of political goodwill between the stakeholders has made peaceful resolution impossible.

Merely negotiating with Assad is not likely to help achieve political solution, and neither will it help defeat ISIL. The United Nations should provide a platform for Russia, Iran and the U.S to negotiate their differences as they are alleged to be the key sponsors of the Syria conflict.

The 2nd and 5th key informants believe that the U.S, Russia and Iran hold the key to peace in Syria;

“...Russia and Iran have consistently supported Assad to over the years. It is therefore crucial that the negotiation starts with the sponsors of Assad in this war- Russia and Iran to ensure that the supply of weapons is stopped and the resources are directed at stopping the war rather than fuelling it.” (KII05)

“.....The U.S support to rebel forces in the form of military aid, intelligence and troops, has been the major enabling factor. If there was no support for the Assad regime and the rebel factions, particularly militarily, a political settlement would have been a reality and Syria would be a step closer to ending the conflict.”(KII02)

Based on the above assertion, it can be argued that for a peaceful resolution of the Syrian conflict, power rivalry between the United States, Russia and Iran must be quelled. The power struggle between the superpowers has jeopardized peace not just in Syria but also in Yemen and many other

parts of the Middle East region. Through political goodwill, stakeholders can develop an effective strategy to deal with the urgent threat which is posed by jihadi groups, especially the ISIS.

Implementation of the above strategies based on political goodwill can prove invaluable in realization of peace in Syria.

5.2 Recommendations to Quell the Yemeni Crisis

The Yemen conflict has become a mutually hurting stalemate, and a prospect of peace would be ideal. However, the question is, “is peace possible in Yemen”? First, Yemen is still facing a severe humanitarian catastrophe that will continue to haunt the region for decades. Secondly, it will be impossible to advance a peace agreement in Yemen without an innovative form of inclusive power-sharing that addresses the needs of all the involved parties. In addition, it is easier for Saudi Arabia and Iran to keep fighting rather than negotiate for peace.

However, with correct strategies and commitment by involved parties, peace remains possible in Yemen³⁵². Nonetheless, with this optimism, we should be mindful of the fact that immediate future looks bleak and possible peace in the short term may only be a mirage. But, with the highlighted recommendations, peace may be feasible in the foreseeable future if well implemented.

Neutral Third Party Guarantor

One of the key challenges highlighted as key reasons for failure of peace process in Yemen is the lack of a neutral third party guarantor to bring impartiality to peace interventions.

United States, Iran and Saudi are engaged in actions of war and this makes it impossible to have neutral arbitrators to the conflict owing to associated self-interests. Therefore, this research acknowledges the need for a neutral third party guarantor to initiate consultations between Houthis, Saudi Arabia and the Yemen government.

The need for a guarantor state to oversee the Yemen peace process is majorly to provide oversight and “force” the government of Yemen to participate without unfair preconditions and compliance to the outcomes of such negotiations. To this regard, other members of the united security council, particularly non-permanent of the U.N should be the neutral third party force that can be trusted to act unilaterally to help solve the problem. This is because the permanent members have been argued to be “tainted” and as a result will not be impartial.

³⁵² Salisbury, P. (2018). “Peace-building and conflict management in Yemen,”. Foreign Affairs Article

A member of the Second Focus Group Discussion alluded to the fact that, in Yemen, the peace process should not be preceded with pre-conditions. Moreover, the peace process should be as inclusive as possible with the United Nations at the helm of the talks, spearheaded through Security Council of United Nations non permanent members on humanitarian grounds. Otherwise, reforms to the security council would be a major win in the long-term..

“.....It is crucial that all warring parties engage in the peace negotiations for inclusivity and sustainability of peace in the region.” (FGD02/01)

From an analytical viewpoint, this is a measure that would ensure that the conflict does not escalate due to sabotage by interested parties to the conflict.

United Nations should stop United States’ Supply of Weapons to Saudi Arabia

Conflict of interest has been a huge issue of concern in the Yemen peace process. United States is viewed as a critical player maintaining the process of peace in addition continues to supply armaments to Saudi thus reinforcing its coalition in fighting fight Houthi rebels.

The UN Security Council should back UN envoy’s call for immediate ceasefire by putting pressure on Saudi Arabia to withdraw from Yemen and engage in considerations to halt supply of weapons to Saudi Arabia to facilitate immediate disarmament of all warring parties. Sanctions on members of the Saudi –led coalition to “force” their withdrawal could yield positive outcomes.

Arms sales constitute a major genesis of income to USA as well as further arms exporting nations such as Russia and China alike. Being that these are the members of the UNSC, it may be a task in futility for them to cut arms transactions in Middle East region, which is the biggest market for arms. This action may call for pressure from other non-permanent members of the UNSC on humanitarian grounds.

Political settlement through inclusion of all Stakeholders

Exclusion of important players in conflict resolution process has been cited as one of the impediments to peace process in Yemen. Peace negotiation process in Yemen has failed to include all players and stakeholders, and this has come at a cost.

The negotiation process has always excluded minor stakeholders such as Sunni Islamist Party, Salafi group and the Southern Resistance. There is a need to draft a political settlement framework that ensures complete inclusion of all participants and stakeholders. The negotiation process should

be expanded to involve all stakeholders in Yemen. Failure to include all stakeholders in the war has failed to yield a durable ceasefire, let alone peaceful resolutions.

To achieve a durable political framework, an integrated approach for regional security and economic considerations should be prioritized as a means to political settlement. The negotiation process should be primarily intra-Yemeni, and that is between the factions in Yemen, with support and goodwill from the U.N to push for complete withdrawal of the Saudi-led coalition from Yemen.

5.1 GENERAL CONCLUSION

This study has revealed that power dynamics are at the core of violent conflicts in the Middle East. The current hegemonic power contestation particularly between the US, Russia, China and their regional allies has worked to the detriment of peace and stability and in fact fueled and sustained the Syria and Yemeni conflicts. From the findings of this study, it is evident that power rivalry result in a less stable world.

However, the study further reveals that power transitions are more of triggers than first hand causes of the Syria and Yemen conflicts. Power transition and power parity largely trigger and fuel already ongoing conflicts, whose real causes are in most cases internal.

The study has confirmed the three hypotheses. First, although not all power transitions result in conflict, the research confirms that power distribution among state actors and power diffusion from state to non-state actors largely create pre-conditions for conflict. This is because shift towards power parity upsets the balance in a system dominated by a hegemonic power. In addition, mushrooming of violent non-state actors, who are used by interested parties as pawns to fuel conflicts, generates governance problems and encourages lawlessness, which are a perfect recipe for instability.

Secondly, this research confirms that power politics greatly contributed to conflict protraction in the Middle East. Just as demonstrated in the research, power struggles among Iran and Saudi is the major cause escalation of conflict in Yemen. Presence and power play among and together with Saudi allied world powers, the USA and Russia is a key reason why conflicts in the region are often prolonged with no end in sight. Responses from the key informants selected for this study noted that proliferation of western ideologies in the Middle East as one of the key drivers of instability, owing to numerous violent extremist groups whose emergence is triggered by anti-western

sentiments arising from the U.S foreign policy objective of fight against terrorism and quest for dominance.

Finally, this research has confirmed the hypothesis that involvement of powerful external actors in internal conflicts has stifled peace processes in the Middle East region. With China as the exception, involvement; Russia, Turkey and United States in Syria results in conflict of interest which in the end derails and waters down peace processes. In addition, the results of the study emphasize that involvement and exclusion of these actors in peace processes often waters down peace processes. Either way, both involvement and exclusion of powerful external actors in internal conflicts has yielded more negative outcomes. Positive outcomes can only be achieved when the involvement is coupled with goodwill and genuine commitment. Therefore, even for power sharing agreements to have a chance of success they should be spearheaded by internal parties so that the process is void of external power interests.

Unlike previous research which only emphasized the role of main actors in the wars, this paper has contributed to the body of knowledge by determining that minority non state actors; the Sunni Islamist party, Salafi group in Yemen as well as violent non-state opposition groups associated with terrorism such ISIL, Al-Qaeda, Houthi and Hezbollah are key determinants of sustainable peace. The research has demonstrated that previous peace negotiation processes ignored such minority players, and hence making sustainable peace unattainable. Therefore, the implementation of any of the highlighted recommendations will require political goodwill from all the stakeholders in order to guarantee acceptance of the mediation outcomes by all parties.

Based on the findings noted from this research, future research should seek to determine the role of minority stakeholders and violent extremist groups in peace negotiations and conflict resolution in Middle East. These groups have been noted to be highly influential and could therefore hold the keys to sustainable peace in the region, and hence an important area for future research.

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ANNEXURES

Annex1: KII/ FGD Guide

Introduction

Power and Internationalized Conflict in the 21st Century: An examination of balance of power dynamics in the Middle East is a research project submitted to the Institute of Diplomacy and International Studies in fulfilment of the award of Master of Arts Degree in International Studies. The main objective of this study is to examine the role of power dynamics in the emergence and intractability of conflict in the Middle East, particularly in Syria and Yemen, as part of a larger conflict system, with an aim of reinventing the key strategies that would ensure successful conflict resolution processes in the Middle East.

Recognizing your position in this Institution and or faculty of Diplomacy and International Relations, I am sure you will be able to share critical information that would be useful to this study and for the purpose for which it is being conducted. Results of this interview will be compiled and shared with stakeholders in the Diplomacy and International Relations filed for possible uptake of the recommendations derived for successful conflict resolution in the Middle East.

This interview will take approximately 45 minutes. Whatever information you provide will be kept strictly confidential. Participation in this interview discussion is voluntary and you can choose not to any of the questions. You are free to leave interview discussion at any time. However, I hope that you will participate in this interview discussion since your views are important.

Questionnaire:

A. POWER TRANSITIONS IN THE 21ST CENTURY

- 1.) What are the major power transitions that have affected power dynamics in the 21st Century international political system?
- 2.) In your opinion, do you think that changes in power alignment from the unipolar post-cold war system to alleged multi polar system witnessed in the 21st century have any linkages to conflict? (Briefly explain your answer)

B. POWER POLITICS AS A MAJOR CAUSE OF EMERGENCE AND PERSISTENCE OF CONFLICT IN THE MIDDLE EAST

- 1.) What role did the regional powers, Iran, Turkey, Saudi and Israel play in the conflicts in Syria and Yemen?
- 2.) What role did the global powers, i.e. U.S, Russia, China and play in Syria and Yemen conflicts?
- 3.) What is the role of regional powers and great power rivalry on the outcomes of the Syria and Yemen conflict?
- 4.) In your opinion, do you think the U.S would have been involved in the Middle East, were it not for the fight against terrorism influenced by the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks? (If Yes, give your reason why)

C. WHY HAVE CONFLICT MANAGEMENT PROCESSES BEEN UNSUCCESSFUL IN SECURING LASTING PEACE IN SYRIA AND YEMEN?

- 1.) Despite a number of Interventions by the U.N, Arab league and interventions by the regional powers in Syria and Yemen, why do you think these processes have been unfruitful?
- 2.) What factors do you consider to have motivated Russia initiate the Astana Peace talks in Syria and the Yemen peace project?
- 3.) What factors do you consider made the warring parties in Syria and Yemen begin negotiations?
 - Because of regional and external power pressure
 - Because the warring parties voluntarily want to end the conflict
 - Because the warring parties had reached a mutually hurting stalemate
 - Any other? (Explain)
- 4.) In your review how efficient has the Arab League been in bringing the warring parties to negotiate? Explain
 - Efficient
 - Neutral
 - Inefficient
- 5.) What do you think is China's motivation for involvement in Syria and Yemen?
- 6.) In your view, can peace agreements for Syria and Yemen be signed without external major powers participation? (Explain your answer)
- 7.) In your view, would a unipolar / multipolar situation facilitate the negotiation processes in Yemen and Syria? Explain why
 - Unipolar
 - Multipolar
- 8.) In your opinion, what are the major flaws in the Syria and Yemen peace interventions?
- 9.) Finally, propose recommendations that would be helpful to manage the Syria and Yemen crisis

Annex 2: Desk Review Guide

	Description	Deliverable	Findings
1.	Power transitions in the 21st century	➤ Power dynamics in the Middle East	
		➤ Establish any linkages between the global power transition, power diffusion and the conflicts in the Middle East	
2.	Power politics as a major cause of emergence and persistence of conflict in the Middle East	➤ Role of regional powers in the Syria and Yemen conflicts	
		➤ Role of Global powers in the Syria and Yemen Conflicts	
3.	Why have conflict management processes been unsuccessful in securing lasting peace in Syria and Yemen?	➤ Root causes of the unsuccessful peace interventions in the Syria and Yemen Conflicts	
		➤ Roles of the Arab league, UN and the external powers in the Middle East in the Conflict resolution process	
4.	Recommendations on Conflict Strategies to Quell the Syria and Yemeni conflicts	➤ Viable strategies to quell the Syria and Yemen crisis	