

THE SYRIAN WAR: HIDDEN HANDS AND THE CHALLENGES TO PEACE PROCESSES AND CONFLICT MANAGEMENT

Adebowale Idowu Adeyeye¹

¹Osun State University, Nigeria

*corresponding author: adebowale.adeyeye@uniosun.edu.ng

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ABSTRACT

Perhaps, the war in Syria which began in 2011 can be described as one of the deadliest conflicts in the 21st century. In attempting to end the war, a number of institutional, regional and global efforts and initiatives in forms of peace proposals, negotiations, diplomatic peace initiatives and mediations were put in place. The purpose of this paper is to examine these peace mechanisms and the factors that act as undercurrents and/or impediments. It argues that various actors, interests and agendas act as impediments to the numerous peace processes. And, that the complex intertwines of internal and external factors are fundamental to the outcome of the various peace processes and conflict management initiatives. The sordid back stories and activities of hidden hands such as the United States (US) and Russia using the war as pawn to fight a proxy battles including the roles of Iran, Turkey, Saudi Arabia and other groups are the challenges faced by the various peace processes. It is concluded that though political solution is appropriate mechanism for solving the quagmire but the influence of exogenous interests and the complex internal factors which impacts negatively on political diplomacy may continue for a long time. Therefore, if political approach must work effectively, there must be consideration for, and synergy among the various domestic and exogenous interests.

Keywords: Peace Process, Conflict Management, Power, Hidden Hands, International and Reciprocal Socialisation

INTRODUCTION

The seeming peaceful protest which took place in March 2011 against Assad's government was made to fester into full scale war as a result of poor conflict management. Also, the conflict degenerated into full scale war due to the complex conflict actors fighting for peculiar interests coupled with the many individual, groups and state interests both internally at externally. To that extent, the war did not only become intractable but degenerated into regional crisis; assumed a regional and

become global concern and challenge due to its negative impacts and implications on the Syrian population; the Middle East region, neighbouring countries and beyond. This is because, apart from the fact that the war caused deaths of tremendous proportion, displacement of several people and destruction of enormous properties, it opened old wounds of animosity and bring to the fore the scramble for the Middle East by the United State (US) and Russia. It also further expose the regional hegemonic war reflecting in Iran, Saudi Arabia and Turkey contestation for regional hegemony and Israel (common foe to the Arab nation). In the face of the carnage and the destruction of unimaginable proportions arising from the war, regional and global leaders did not fold their arms but reacted to finding solution to the crisis. In the lead was the United Nations (UN) and civil society actors that initiated conflict management efforts and peace processes with a view to ending the war and restoring peace to the Arab country. However, little success can be said to have been achieved as the war refused to abate. The view of this paper is that the seeming failure of the various peace processes and conflict management mechanisms can be blamed on the sordid back stories behind the war and that the fundamental challenge to peace processes results from the internal and external forces-‘hidden hands’ led by the United States (US) and Russia. The two powers use the war as pawn to fight proxy battles with Iran, Turkey and Saudi Arabia and other groups such as Islamist groups acting as fronts for the two antagonists. Specifically, this paper argues that the Middle-East political intrigues involving the US and Russia’s socio-economic, political and strategic interests Syria made the war intractable and responsible for the challenges of peace processes. For example, the centrality of Syria in the region is a fundamental factor to Russia and Washington’s strategic interest and activities in the Middle-East. It is this strategic position of Syria in the region that further exposes the war to strategic power play involving regional actors in the quest for regional hegemonic interests and the global actors involving Washington and Moscow. This Syrian strategic position is explained by geographical location of bordering Turkey and Israel (a key ally to Washington), and Syria being an ally to Iran and Russia (a global competitor with the US). This therefore made the war an important instrument of power politics between Washington and Moscow. Also, because Syria serves as an important link between Iran and Islamist groups such as the Lebanese Shiite organisation-Hezbollah Lebanon made the war susceptible to the activities of external actors and hidden hands (Manfreda, 2017; Tudoroiu, 2015:147; Chance, 2016). To be sure, the complex intertwines of other internal and external factors such as the roles played by Iran (a staunch supporter of al-Assad), Saudi Arabia and its Gulf allies, Turkey-(supporting opposition to the Syrian government), terrorist groups and religious and ethnic groups are important factor in the determination of the outcome

of the various peace processes. In situating these challenges, Tudoroiu, (2015:147) and Manfreda, (2017) conclude that the fluidity and changing dynamics of the war coupled with the refusal and/or lack of willingness of conflict actors and parties in conflict to negotiate; their lack of will to settle and lack of independence of conflict actors are responsible for failures of the various negotiations and mediation mechanisms.

Arising from the above, this paper concludes that political solution is appropriate in solving the quagmire but the influence of exogenous interests' have and would continue to impact negatively on political diplomacy that may help to totally end the conflict and war. To that extent, the various peace processes and conflict management initiatives may not totally solve the problem in Syria if there is no consideration and synergy among the various domestic and exogenous interests. The United States, Russia and the UN must take lead and responsibilities and the Syrian people must be carried along and made to own the processes and mechanism of peace to be able to influence the regional and domestic actors in accepting peaceful resolution of the conflicts in a way that will end in a win-win situation that will lead to peace building.

Situating Peace and Peace Processes

Peace: Defining peace has not been an easy endeavour. However, describing what makes up for peace and the types of peace relevant to this discourse is important so as to appropriately situate the thrust of this paper. As stated, conceptualising peace remains a complex task because peace has been used in different perspectives to depict numerous interpretations and may remain so for a long time. For example, the word peace has been used to mean: (1) freedom from disturbance; tranquillity-when someone wants to do something in peace; (2) mental or emotional calm, as in peace of mind; (3) a treaty agreeing peace between warring states and factions-situation of a supported/negotiated peace; and, (4) a state or period in which there is no war or a war has ended. It has also been seen as condition of absolute harmony, serenity, or quietude; that is, as opposed to any kind of conflict, antagonistic or otherwise (Albert and Oloyede, 2010: 2; Galtung, 1969: 167-191; Stoessinger, 2011). Peace has also been conceived as when people are able to resolve their conflicts without violence and are able to work together to improve the quality of their lives. In terms of categorisation, the interpretations of peace can be viewed from the negative and positive perspectives. While negative peace is used to describe absence of physical violence, positive peace depicts absence of both structural and psychological violence. Negative peace is usually imposed; it hardly results from an open resolution of conflict. In contrast, positive peace depicts reconciliation and restoration through

creative transformation of conflict (Adeyeye, 2018a and 2017b; Albert and Oloyede, 2010: 2; Regehr, 2009). The derivative is that negative peace is forced due to the refusal of conflict parties to negotiate, such as in peace enforcement during conflicts and wars. In this regard, peace is attained through the instrumentality of adversarial conflict management strategies, that is, military and paramilitary forces and through the law court.

Non-adversarial conflict management technique requires that parties in conflict work together to find lasting solutions to the issues of conflict and differences. This process is undertaken through negotiation, mediation and sometimes through arbitration. It is these approaches that are described here as peace processes. That is, political strategies through which conflicts are resolved by peaceful means. For the purpose of this paper, peace emphasises situations when: everyone lives in safety, without fear or threat of violence, and no form of violence is tolerated in law or in practice; everyone is equal before the law, the systems for justice are trusted, and fair and effective laws protect people's rights; everyone is able to participate in shaping political decisions and the government is accountable to the people; everyone has fair and equal access to the basic needs for their wellbeing-such as food, clean water, shelter, education, healthcare and a decent living environment; everyone has an equal opportunity to work and make a living regardless of gender, ethnicity or any other aspect of identity. To be sure, the above conception, conditions and elements of peace can be said to be at variance with the situation in Syria since 2011 as such the country cannot be said to be peaceful. The people of Syria were not able to resolve their differences and conflict issues without the use of violence. And, because warring parties were numerous, effective negotiation was difficult and peace enforcement was also difficult because of the complex nature of the war. Therefore, the two variants of peace remained elusive in Syria since 2011.

Peace Process: For the purpose of this discourse, peace processes is conceived as involving mixtures of political diplomacy to effect and change relationship, dialogue, negotiation and mediation both at the official and unofficial arena. It includes the general peace-making, peacekeeping, peace building efforts in forms of conflict resolution and transformation. Arising from this backdrop, peace process is viewed as the ensemble of plans, initiatives, proposals, negotiations, diplomatic peace initiatives and mediations that have been initiated towards ending a conflict or war. In the case of Syria, peace processes is premised on the agreement and negotiating peace amongst domestic warring groups and the state of Syria including the external parties in the war such as the US, Russia, Iran, Turkey and Saudi Arabia. In this context, negotiation is described as a communication strategy in which parties in conflict try to find mutually agreeable solutions to their differences and conflict

issues. This strategy helps secure long-range objectives instead of the narrow short-term advantages that conflict parties sometimes seek. The essence and goal of negotiation is to achieve agreement and not to attain victory. This involves bringing parties in conflict to table for discussion which ultimately leads to ending conflicts and war. Therefore, peace processes is viewed as the political strategies through which conflicts are resolved by peaceful means. These involve mixtures of political diplomacy aimed at effecting and change relationship, dialogue, negotiation and mediation both at the official and unofficial arena. It is also about general peace-making, peacekeeping, peace building efforts which are in forms of conflict resolution and transformation. In the case of Syria, the peace proposals, negotiations, diplomatic peace initiatives and mediations seem not to succeed in ending conflict and war because it was difficult bringing conflict actors/parties together to significantly express themselves in mediation which is a fundamental requirement for the success of peace processes, thereby posing challenges to peace which can only be achieved through inclusiveness, that is, when primary actors-combatants and all other interests are considered. The requisites for peace processes are resources, time and the investment of patience. It requires compromise both within the local environment and at the external level of the conflict (Albert, 2012; Albert and Oloyede, 2010). All of which were absent in Syria Practically, peace processes has been a very difficult terrain and particularly it has been a condition of abstruseness. This is because in complex conflict environments as in Syria, it is often difficult to appropriately mediate and negotiate to arrive at win-win situation. To be sure, the twine of web of interests and forces in Syria is a challenge to coordination and ultimately peace in such conflict (Sitcher, et'al, 2015).

One significant non-adversarial conflict management relevant in this discussion is negotiation. Negotiation is fundamental because it has been observed that adversarial conflict management techniques-military options do not always succeed in resolving conflicts and in the case of Syria, the complexity of actors and interests makes adversarial techniques (military peace enforcement) difficult. Negotiation is a communication strategy in which parties in conflict try to find mutually agreeable solutions to their differences and problems (Albert and Oloyede, 2010; Adeyeye, 2017b). As against narrow/parochial short term benefits which conflict parties often pursue negotiation method has been recognised as helping to secure long-range objectives and the purpose of negotiation is premised on achieving agreement instead of struggling to attain total victory-achieving a win-win-non-zero sum situation. Essentially, negotiation has been recognised to providing long time benefits in that it assists in formulating viewpoints and delineating areas of agreement and contention, and also enables each of the conflict parties gain something in exchange

for something (Galtung, 1969:167; Regehr, 2009). However, successful negotiation is dependent on some factors. These factors are: (1) Identifying parties who willing to participate, that is, peace process must in the first instance identify conflict parties that are ready to take part in negotiation. (2) In order to have a productive negotiation, parties must be dependent on one another, that is, there must be interdependence of actors. This is because participants need themselves for their individual interests to be met; especially that one party cannot get his or her needs met without the other cooperating. (3) There must be readiness of participants to negotiate without which dialogue takes cannot place. (4) Agreement on specific issues and interest Albert and Oloyede, 2010. Inferring that for any meaningful progress and productive negotiation to occur, participants and people must agree on specific issues and interests. The discourse on the Syrian war would reveal a seemingly absence of these conditions thereby making negotiation difficult. It is on this mention that one might be tempted to offer military or paramilitary and legal approaches because force is used in difficult situations especially when parties in conflict are not cooperating in negotiation as in the case of Syria. However, apart from the complexity of actors and interests, negotiations in Syria like in other complex wars are often faced with two fundamental challenges of time and financial resources.

PEACE, INTERNATIONAL AND RECIPROCAL SOCIALISATION

Realism (Power) theory

Issues raised in this paper are situated within the context of the power and international socialisation theories. Realism explains international system in terms of power. No doubt, power is one fundamental (if not the most pertinent) in the analysis of domestic and international relations and political discourses. This is why Lasswell cit. Varma, (1975:176) argue that politics is concerned with the relations of men, in association and competition, submission and control and that what men seek in their political negotiation is power. At the base of the power theory are a number of principles. For example, the power theory argue that military forces in an important ingredient of capability to influence or force compliance, bargaining outcomes depend on raw power and strategic attack and hegemony-the predominance of one state in the national system can help provide stability and peace (Morgenthau, 2012: 4). The war in Syria no doubt is about interests (hegemonic, resource and prestige) of domestic and external actors backed by the use of power. Situating the Syrian war within the power theory is appropriate because the war reflects domestic and international politics and power struggle particularly on the roles of external forces. The centrality of the issues in the war; background, causes and the actors, revolves around desire for power and power relations among states and groups both within and outside Syria.

Although the description of power is numerous, the simplistic description offered at different times by Hans Morgenthau (2012; 1978 and 1970) in which described power as fundamentally about man's control over the minds and actions of others succinctly capture the essence of the discussion on the Syrian war. Also, Wolfer's (1962: 103) contention that power is the ability to move others or make them do as one desires, and not to do what one does not requires that they do, situates the roles of the powerful hidden hands such as the United States (US) and Russia in the war in Syria. Since Morgenthau and Arnold's descriptions, several others have contributed to the discussion of power, a number of which capture the crisis in Syria. For example, Frankel (1973:64) talked about power as being the ability to get one's wish carried out, ability to influence the behaviour and actions of others in accordance with one's wish, capacity of a state to use tangible and intangible resources in a way to affect the behaviour of other nations and the overall capabilities of others. The above perspectives view the war in Syria as a means to economic resources and political and socio-cultural influence. The actors and their fragmentation both in the internal and external environments are based on the economic and political benefits in Syria and ultimately they are interested in influencing and controlling the Arab nation. The United States and its allies-Saudi Arabia and Turkey supporting the Sunni party, Russia using Iran (a known antagonist of the US) as front to, support the Shia Alawite party and Assad government, the Syrian Kurd led by the Islamic State (ISIS) and the Shia Islamist group-Hezbollah (Manfreda, 2017) among others are engaged in power politics for the purpose of tangible and intangible gains.

International and reciprocal socialisation theory

The constructivist school argues that actors in international relations are constantly in socialisation and learning process. This opinion is at the core of the position of the international socialisation theory which argues that the constant social learning between states often influences their behaviour interests and identities which subsequently influence the state's global environment and in many instances the dynamics of global culture of anarchy (Wendt, 1999:224; Checkel, 2005:804; Tudoroiu, 2015: 144; Terhalle, 2011: 342). Using this perspective and in attempting to analyse the war in Syria Tudoroiu, (2015:143) argues that the relation between Moscow and Syria can be pointed as a unique form of reciprocal socialisation. For example, the Russian-Syrian relationship has grown drastically in the past fifty years and has assumed reciprocal constitutive relations. In the course of their relationship, Syria has been influenced by and made to conform to the ideas and philosophies; the values, attitudes, political behaviour and the overall dynamics of Russia and Moscow influenced by Syria, albeit in a minimal degree than the Russian influence. Therefore, it is possible to argue that there is reciprocal socialisation between Moscow and Damascus and has been the influential factor for interests, actions and identities of the two countries. For instance, the coercive conflict management strategy adopted

by Assad can be said to be typical of, and a reflection of the Russian influence. This opinion is aptly situated by Tudoroiu (2015) when he argues that 'Syria's development as regional power and the construction of authoritarian regime are made possible by Moscow's heavy military, economic, diplomatic and political supports and are parts of the socialisation of Syria into Moscow's political culture and identity; values and global interest'. No doubt, the degree of influence of Moscow on Syria is higher and this has by providence have largely been enhanced by Washington's hard power activities in the Arab states. For example in Iran and Iraq (two prominent antagonists of the US and prominent players in the Syrian war) thereby throwing into the mix a dimension that mirrors the Cold-War with Russia-Syria on one side and the United State-Israel on the other (Israel also a known antagonist of the Arab nations). If viewed this way, the war in Syria is more of proxy battle between the US and Russia and the real intention of the two powers is assertion of power and respect in the region. Particularly, Russia's support for Syria is to assert Moscow's global power in contention with Washington in the Middle East region which have Israel as the 'eye and arm' of Washington. Arising from the discussion of power, socialisation and the war in Syria, one can begin to visualise the reasons for the war which is the focus of next discussion.

WHY WAR IN SYRIA? REMOTE AND IMMEDIATE CAUSES

A number of intertwine remote and immediate factors located in historical, socio-economic, political, religious issues both at the domestic and external domains can be advanced as the cause of conflict and war in Syria. Issues and factors such as institutional bottleneck, structural violence, ethnic politics, issues of accountability and poor or total disregard for the management of public fund have been pointed as responsible for conflicts and war in Syria. Other factors that can equally be mentioned are: low government regulatory and ineffectiveness in the management of dissention and grievances and Assad's authoritarian posture, poor quality of rule of law, and complication in the country's judicial system. The contest for the life of the region by Washington and Moscow, regional contest for hegemony and the activities of religious groups are fundamental factors in the war.

As a point of take-off, it is possible to situate the narrative of the war in Syria in the history of dictatorship and repressive governance in the Arab nation. The authoritarian dispositions located in the governance of the country have created latent dissension to governance and government. As for the history of authoritarianism, Syria has had an enduring legacy of dictatorship and repressive governments. For instance, Karsh, (1991:5); Tudoroiu, (2015:144) point that the

March 8 1963 Ba'th coup d'état led by two highly competitively power ambitious Hafiz al-Assad and Sah Jadid. By 1970, Hafiz al-Assad succeeded in outwitting Jadid, Hafiz instituted a dictatorial government and that has been the case in Syria. Also worth mentioning are factors such as the age-long ethnic and religious dichotomy; structural violence and nepotism. All of which have contributed to the country's negative peace. This is reflective in Assad's favour for the Alawites with less than 12% of the population of the country. No doubt, it is expected that the majority Sunni Muslim population of 60% will always disagree with the Assad government. Under this situation, rather than finding political solutions to the crisis, Assad like in the history of the country adopts dictatorship and repressive strategy to forcefully stop dissension. In fact, Rubin (2007:52) reports that Assad created more than 15 security agencies with employee totalling 50,000 with which he carry out repression and hard power tactics which led to the encouragement of chaos and the adoption of extreme force as in the alleged use of chemical weapon. As expected, these repressive and dictatorial activities changed the dynamics of the conflict in 2011 morphing into full scale war with the latent sectarian undercurrent that has a history of division and structural violence in Syria further fuelling the flame. For example, the ethnic and sectarian mixed with religious divisions involving the majority Sunni Muslims, the Alawite, Shi'a, Kurd, Christian and the minority Druze served as an instigating factor for the degeneration of the conflict into full-blown war. No doubt, the adoption and use of hard power in forms of intimidation and repression of opposition is a fundamental factor in the festering of the conflict; the persistence of the war and why the peace processes has failed to achieve the desired results of not only ending the war but bringing peace to the country. The above statement is affirmed by Starr (2012) where he reports that Assad in his desperation to curtail the oppositions introduced mafia dimension to the crisis by arming the Shabiha (the ghosts) militia group (many of the members of the group are criminals released from prison). Starr (2012) also argues that it is possible to conclude that the group-'the ghosts' are used for ethnic cleansing and existentialist ideology and activity. This argument is based on the ethnic, clannish and religious narratives of Syria, particularly the sectarian makeup of Syrian leaders. This sectarian issue is often swelled by the feeling of 'kill or be eliminated' amongst the Shabiha. The sectarian rhetoric is further worsened by the feeling that Assad has been carrying out of state-imposed insulation of the Alawites in many parts of Syria (Engel, 2012; Chulov, 2012:20).

The Syrian conflict is complicated by regional politics and the interests of United States and Russia, Iran, Turkey and other countries in the region. For example, in situating Russia's interest in Syria, Yousef Gamal El-Din (2013) states that

Russia-Syria's strong cultural, economic and political relationships has a long history. The tie between Moscow and Damascus became strong when Assad contrary to his earlier position realised the need for external support for the purpose of having a grip of the country after Egypt defected from its merger with Syria. Since then, Moscow became its strong ally in the region. In fact, within the first few years after the Egypt-Syria break-up, Damascus enjoyed huge arms and military supports from Moscow which Rubin, (2007:55 and Tudoroiu, 2015:145) put at \$825 million in 1977, \$1 billion in 1978. In all, the total amounts of Moscow's exports in military and personnel training to Syria was in the average of \$25 billion and more than 10,000 military officers were trained by Russia and as a global leading exporter of arms the war in Syria could be a blessing than curse to Russia when viewed from the economic perspective. Also, in the educational sector, Syrian citizen enjoy educational and study support from Russia. Still within the economic sector, Moscow has at different times helped Syria. For example, as at 2009, Moscow's investments in Syria stood at roughly \$19.4 billion. Also, Syria is an export destination for Russia amounting to \$1.93 billion when the Syrian conflict began in 2011. It is also worth mentioning that Moscow Navy's need to make use of the Mediterranean Port of Tartus as against the long voyage across the Black Sea serves as an important geo-strategic interest in Syria (Yousef, 2013). On the issues relating to human development and government weakness, structural violence and social exclusion, external influence made possible by internal fragmentation and Assad's personal ambition to hold on to power by force and lack of coordinated crisis response strategy have contributed to the festering of the conflict (Kodmani, 2015: 1-7; Kodmani, B. and F. Legrand, 2013).

One of the dynamics of the millennium is technological globalisation which in turn resulted in the development of a variant of pan-Arab public influenced by Information and Communication Technology (ICT). This new identity reflects a generational change consisting of young people who are frustrated by societal and governmental failure, abusive of power, corrupt leadership and socio-economic decay. The ease of communication and readily available and access to information provided for the already frustrated and aggrieved youth an avenue to air their anger and created opportunities for a new phase of opposition to regimes in the region led to the Arab spring. The ease of communication also made possible mobilization by old opposition, including anarchical, headless and disorganised organisation to find refuge in the frustrated youths to carry out their activities. For example, in Syria, the roles played by Al-Jazeera influenced by Sheikh Yusuf Qardawi's desire to remove the Alawite regime cannot be overemphasised. Unfortunately, Assad's initial response to the growing dissension was tepid. (Rabinovich, 2011:374).

Although it is possible to argue that Human Development Index (HDI) and the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of Syria grew steadily between 2001 and 2010 with GDP standing at (4.45%), Syrian government did not focus on the inclusive or pro-poor growth and there was no reflection of the growing GDP in the citizen's consumption of the local population. The growth was not reflective in the lives of the Syrian population especially the youth. This resulted in poverty and increasing inequality (two factors that has been variously advanced for frustration and aggression and violence). Also, social relationships are highly distrusted; extreme human and social loss, intolerance and widespread extremism are located everywhere in Syria (Kodmani, 2015: 1-7). These poor socio-economic and political conditions resulted in discontentment leading to the 2011 demonstration that led to the crisis. And, when the uprising began, Assad adopted hard power strategy rather than been receptive and proactive to the root causes of the growing dissension. Assad blamed external forces for the agitation and opposition to his government and refused to offer adequate political concession, instead adopted hard-line security strategies and propaganda. It is believed that since 2012, through the use of Shabiha-a prominent militia group in the war, Assad has privatised the country's security and used it as instrument of repression of the opposition. The consequence of this action not only resulted in lawlessness but opened the door for the growth of irregular forces. It also led to chaotic and disorganised Syria (International Crisis Group 2012: 4). Also, Assad manipulated the anti-external force rhetoric. For example, in 2013, while making a speech, Assad blamed external actors for the crises in his country and his hard-line security approach, such as the case of the May 2012 to December 2013 wholesale killing and carnage in Houla in which more than 130,000 people were massacred was mainly to repel the hidden hands in the conflicts (The Guardian, 1st June 2012). Rather than abate, the approach did little to reduce the opposition and the violence. In the region, non-state actors just like the states rely on the strategy of propaganda portraying themselves as victims in their struggle for power. Other factors that can be mentioned are political exclusion, weak and lack of ideological domestic groups that can foster an end to the war in Syria. The groups wanting the war to end are weak and lack ideological agenda to do so. This is against very strong actors not interested in ending the war such as the Islamic State, Jihadi movements, militias, warlords and conflict entrepreneurs.

Why has the war persisted? Hidden Hands and Challenges to peace processes and inclusive approaches to ending the war in Syria

The question on why the March 2011 non-violent protest in Damascus morphed into full scale war and why it has persisted for over a decade can be located in historical,

domestic and external factors. Since the outbreak of the conflict in Syria in 2011, a number of efforts, initiatives and instruments have been put in place by regional and global institutions to put an end the war and restore peace to the country. All the efforts notwithstanding, finding solution to the war has been difficult because the processes have been faced with myriads of challenges arising from domestic and exogenous factors thereby leading to the festering and persistence of the war. The lack of clear-cut statement condemning the government of Assad's hard power approach and the various atrocities against the citizens has equally been mentioned. Historically, complex conflicts and wars such as in the case of Syria usually pose problem for peace processes-negotiation and mediation, and peace making especially in situations where the dynamics are changing quickly in term of the contents and contexts such as the case in Syria. The manipulation of, and subjection of information to politics leads to the distortion of conflict issues are distorted thereby pushing actors in peace processes to take decisions in a hurry without adequate preparation. Also, the feeling of perceived political exclusion of the Sunni Muslims has been a major issue in the war. The Sunni Muslims is forced to align and give support to Daeshism (ISIS ideology), a group that has been parts of the negatives in the war. This is further made worse by the sectarian tension and dichotomy between the Shia and the Sunni Muslims (Ankomah, 2013). Put specifically, Sticher, et'al, (2015) argue that the war has persisted because it has assumed existential philosophy and conflict amongst the various groups-Sunni Muslim, Alawite, Shia, Kurd, Christian and the Druze minorities in Syria thereby introducing self-help dimension from a section of the local population who felt marginalised. To these groups of people the self-help struggle is based on the use of violence against what they perceive as the violent Syrian state and the persistence of structural violence under the leadership of Assad.

The roles of external actors acting as hidden hands, especially the United States (US) and Russia in dragging the war cannot be overemphasised. No doubt, the US and the world's leading democracies have long been pointed in either sponsoring or fuelling wars. For example, Washington's roles in African wars exemplified in the DR Congo, Algeria, Rwanda, Uganda and Mali, to mention a few are cases of the influence of hidden hands in wars (Ankomah, 2013: 10-11; Keenan, 2013 Sticher, et'al, 2015:7). As for Russia, the sales of arms and weapons totalling about \$1 billion in the first year of the war (Grove and Solomon, 2012) helped to enhance the capability of the Assad government forces and by implication the festering and persistence of the war. The failure of the two main observer missions-the Arab League and the UN, to meaningfully find solution to the conflict contributes to the festering of the conflict. The inability of the UN to handle the conflict at the early stage and encouraged by

external supports in forms of funding and supply of arms, the activities of opposition grew drastically and fundamentally sustained the war. To add, the emergence and radicalisation of the Salafi brigade coupled with failure of the hitherto influential secular democratic groups can equally be mentioned.

Also, the various peace processes is confronted by the problem arising from the difficulty in the description or conceptualising the main actors of the war. The question of identifying the main actors in the early periods of the and for a very long time has been a problem to peace. Identifying key conflict actors is a fundamental ingredient of negotiation and mediation in conflict management. This lack of identification of actors in the case of Syrian conflict essentially militates against mediation and negotiation processes and ultimately contributed to the persistence of the war. This is so because conflict parties in the war in Syria are so fragmented both in number and interests to the extent that designing process that will take care of the numerous interests in the conflict becomes extremely difficult. For instance, getting a common ground for negotiation and mediation has been a major challenge from terror groups such as IS, Jabhat al-Nusra, government and opposition groups (SNC and NCCDC), and the various external actors. This is made difficult because the various groups especially the opposition is highly divided by party and political rivalries, differences in ideology and narrow minded internal scuffles. This situation is further compounded by the external funding and military supports these conflict actors receive from outside of Syria.

As a fundamental player in global politics, the United States and Russia are important actors in the Syrian war because Moscow and Washington, possesses the required capabilities and political influence to give direction and intervene in the crisis with a view to given direction to Assad and his allies. However, at the initial stage, Washington was only interested in containment approach, which as stated in the earlier discussion did little to help the search for peace. Also, Perhaps, Washington has been cautious in direct intervention in Syria because of their experiences in Iraq and Afghanistan on the one hand and fearing that arm support to the rebels could end up in the hands of the terrorist Jihadist who could turn to use such weapons against the US (Jenkins, 2014:2). Equally, the policy of creating strategic alliances to check the expansion of the conflict; the hostile powers and a seeming forceful negotiation adopted by Barack Obama was nothing but fantasy. This is because the approach could not find solution to the regionalisation of the crisis by Assad. Instead, the US strategy further promoted radicalism, encouraged confusion and disorder which were manipulated by terror groups such as ISIS. It is this chaotic situation that Assad was able to manipulate to using extreme force

against the rebels. This is why, Kodmani (2015:1) labelled the US as a higher evil than Assad albeit his use of chemical weapons.

No doubt, the competing hegemonic intentions first between the US and Russia and within countries in the Arab nation acting for the two powerful antagonists is a major factor in the failure of political solution and the degeneration of the Syrian conflict. The United State is an important actor in the Syria and the interest of Washington is not far-fetched in the Middle East politics. America's activities in the region cannot be detached from Washington's hostile relations with Tehran. No doubt, the relation between Israel and Syria within the context of the Middle East is important in the US's interest in Syria. Strategically, Syria's contiguity with Israel-traditional ally of the US, and Damascus close relation with Iran (an antagonist of Washington) and other Islamist groups such as the Hezbollah group makes it imperative to be interested in the Syrian issues, especially that Damascus has been a long antagonists of US and Israel, therefore, Washington's desire is not only to decimate Assad's government but to remove the Shiite leadership in the country backed by Iran and Russia. Iran has been an instrument of balance of power in the war in Syria, especially with the seeming 'cold war' between Moscow and Washington. Iran is a main actor in the power relations in the region. Although, Iran may not have hitherto been a very visible friend of Assad but Tehran has played prominent roles in the dynamics of the war. Iran is an instrument of balance of power in the 'cold war' between Washington and Moscow by Tehran's disposition to Putin against the US (Hiltermann, 2017:1-6).

The Russian-Syrian relationship which has grown drastically since the 1970s make Russia an important figure and ordinarily serve as a factor for Moscow's influence on Assad but the power contest between Moscow and Washington makes the two countries work at cross purpose in Syria thereby further flaming the war. No doubt, the relation between Russia and Damascus has assumed reciprocal constitutive relation and the reciprocal socialisation has been the influential factor for interests, actions and identities of Moscow and Damascus which largely mirrors the Cold War era between the US and Russia. To that extent, the basis for Russia's strong support for Syria is to assert Moscow's global power in contention with Washington and particularly in the Middle-East region (Tudoroiu, 2015:143), advancing Moscow's economic interests and strengthening military and political status. Also, Moscow has used the Syrian war to further promote its status as a 'game changer' in the Middle-East politics. Explaining this argument, Kozhanov (2016) argues that in using strategic arms industry, Moscow decided to trade S-300s to Assad in 2012 with a view to improving Moscow's relations with Israel and by 2016, Russia's sale of the

same S-300s to Tehran helped to instigate Moscow-Tehran dialogue. Essentially, Moscow has been a prominent hand in the war in Syria desirous of expanding its status in the arm industry in contention with Washington. In Russia's arms export economy, Asia represent significant export market for Moscow arms with over seventy percent (70%) in the last ten years, closely followed by Middle East and North Africa, of which Syria is a fundamental destination (Connolly and Sendstad, 2017:1). Flowing from the above, and in attempting to situate Russia's role in promoting the war in Syria, Kodmani (2015:1) argues that: 'Moscow has been a diplomatic clog in the peace processes in Syria. This is because Moscow always vetoes virtually all resolutions that are brought up to criticise the government of Assad', perhaps because of the many interests of Moscow in the Syria.

What has been done? Phases of Peace Processes in Syria

The question on what was been done to stem the tides of the negative tales of the war and to bring peace to Syria and by extension the region is viewed from the various peace efforts, mechanisms and strategies especially by the United Nations. These are the Kofi Annan (UN Special Envoy) 6 (six) point peace plan that was submitted to the United Nations Security Council (UNSC); the 30th June 2012 (the First Geneva Communiqué); the second Geneva Conference 2014 on Syria and the Vienna Process and Intra-Syrian Talk, and the 2015 peace talks in Vienna and the Geneva III-Geneva Peace Conference of 2016 (Jung, 2015; Karthick, 2016). Essentially, the objectives of the peace processes in Syria revolve around battling the jihadist movements, forming transitional government and bringing the war to end. However, each of these efforts suffered various challenges and drawbacks which make it difficult to realising their respective objectives and goals. The problems associated with the seeming failures cannot be removed from the influences of external actors and domestic incompatibilities arising from age-long animosities. The challenges include the fluidity and quick changing dynamics affect the coordinating of the processes. The first Geneva Conference on Syria did not establish the identity or identify the parties that should be involved in the proposed transitional government. Identifying the parties was necessary considering that the opposing conflict actors are many and they bear varying motivations and beliefs. In the same vein, Assad's refusal to include the opposition also negates the recommendation of the peace initiative. The process was equally distorted by the lack of interests from the international actors aside from Iran and Russia, to engage in negotiation with the opposition (Groarke, 2016).

The politicisation of information, exogenous compromise of established principle not

only affected the context and contents of the peace initiatives but also reflected in the lack of ownership and domestic inclusiveness in the processes. For example, the objective of the Kofi Annan led First Geneva peace initiative which was to create buffer/ceasefire to create room for political solution to the crises failed to achieve its goal and could not stop the conflict from festering due to the continued influences of external-global and regional support for the two main conflict actors-the government of Assad and the protagonist opposition especially in form of supply of funds and arm. Consequent on the failure of the Annan initiative and his frustrating departure, Brahimi Lakhdar was appointed as the UN and Arab League Envoy to Syria (Sticher. Et al, 2015:6). Summarily, the various peace processes suffered from political rivalry, differential ideological underpinning, narrow minded conflicts amongst the opposition, and inexperience in how to engage in collective action, social ineffectiveness of operational strategy or seeming total lack of it leading to directionless and lack of feasible leadership.

What can be done to end the war?

In finding solution to the war and bringing peace to the Syria, political solution through negotiation is suggested. This process will include all parties ready and willing to participate in the negotiation process. And knowing that for any negotiation to be productive, all parties must depend on one another in order to have their interests satisfied. Also, all conflict actors must agree on some common issues and interests and must have the will to settle. Issues in the war should be negotiable with a view to having a win-win situation and agreement must be reasonable and implementable and external factors should be favourable to settlement (Omodunbi, Adeyeye, and Ige, 2019: 12-14; Goarke, 2016:2-3). Specifically, at the international level, UN, US and Russia must show sincere desire in ending the scourge of war in Syria. At the domestic level, groups and interests including Assad must also be ready to remove the country from the apocalypse of war. This is because as much as political solution is appropriate in ending the war in Syria; the war will be prolonged if the US and Russia including the UN did not draw up strategies that will see Washington and Moscow realising that the interest of the Syrian population is paramount within their right to live in peace in their country, particularly Moscow must back out from its aversion to mediation and intervention. Importantly, within the internal domain of Syria, the root causes of conflicts must be properly addressed by the government and the people. This can be done through the initiation of the UN backed constitutional conference which will take care of perceived or real structural violence along ethnic and religious divides and power sharing issues with a view to addressing social injustices that has long caused

divisions, distrusts and dissension in Syria. Resolving conflicts and peace process requires inclusion of all conflict actors. This is premised on the notion of inclusive peace that has occupied vintage position in international conflict resolution paradigm. Although at the beginning of the peace initiatives in Syria, the issue of inclusion was not fully adopted, it is important at this stage that negotiation must be inclusive to properly address all conflict issues. This should include civil society groups Islamist and insurgent/terror groups, women, ethnic and tribal associations. Also, the collation and drawing of realistic peace map, deepening of international and regional diplomacy, advocating accountability by all armed conflict actors. This is with a view to guaranteeing adequate security space that ultimately leading to abuse of human rights; attacks, wanting destruction, and indiscriminate killing that are antithetical to peace processes.

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