

Abstract

On May 13, 2014, Ladhkar Brahimi, UN Syria envoy, announced his resignation from his role accepting his inability to negotiate an agreement amongst the Syrian President Assad Bashar and the opposition group Syrian National Coalition. The opposition group desires a transitional government without Assad, while the Syrian President insists that the actual war is a result of terrorist actions undertaken by the Syrian opponents backed by international powers. Two rounds of negotiations already took place in order to provide a solution to this violent war. A third negotiations round is supposed to take place, but so far there is no consensus that will bring an end to the conflict. Therefore, there comes the question why it is so difficult to reach a political solution in this case? Why these types of negotiations fail? What are the causes that hinder a peaceful resolution of this conflict?

This is what this thesis is aimed to discover. The arguments developed in this project lay on the theories produced by Barbara Walter, Zartman and Cuningham. Analyzing the conflict by employing 3 different theoretical approaches and through a full examination over the internal and external development of the Syrian armed conflict I was be able to identify the factors that inhibit a successful conflict resolution. With the help of documentary research data and secondary data as books, academic articles or journalistic sources a versatile analysis of this contemporary issue was realized.

The Syrian imbroglio is complex and difficult to explain being much more entangled than it looks like at a first sight. In the end I argue that the Syrian war has a bad configuration of seriously commitment issues, veto-players, lack of mutually hurting stalemate along with highly fragmented opposition and international discord being far from a negotiated settlement.

Key words: Syrian Civil War, Commitment, Mutually hurting stalemate, Veto-players, Negotiated Settlement

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List of abbreviations

BBS- Building the Syrian State

E.U. - European Union

FSA-Free Syrian Army

ISIS- Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant

JN - Abhat al-Nusra

M.H.S.-Mutually Hurting Stalemate

SNC-Syrian National Coalition

U.N.-United Nations

U.S.-United States

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“Mankind must put an end to war or war will put an end to mankind”

(John F. Kennedy, 1961)

Introduction

For centuries the people have been slaying each other, with violence and persistence in their assay to conquer, influence and dominate. As Clausewitz argued, war is nothing else but “an act of violence intended to compel our opponent to fulfill our will”¹. By nature the wars are rampant and fundamentally political. Clausewitz sees war as a rational instrument that ensures benefits and once at war, the parts involved should concentrate all their energy towards the final aim: victory. A dangerous reality of our age, wars have been subjected to study by experts of international relations. The interest in war studies has grown significantly, evoking substantial concerns in other fields as well. Wars bring to light the best and the worst in human nature, having a profound impact on societies. The burden of war produces severe consequences having massive effects at both national and international level: people are being killed, significant mass migration is being generated, economy is being destabilized and human rights violated.

But lately the nature of war has altered. Wars become smaller, but even so, they seem to be more intense and vicious. The external conflicts turned into internal conflicts. The rules, players and targets have changed. Countries do not fight against each other anymore, as the murderous violence is happening within the boundary of the state. A politically established, large sized, on-going, rampantly conflict that occurs between significant large groups of citizens within the same country is qualified as a civil war. The local actors revolt in order to achieve their diverse goals. Usually, civil wars rise in states where the governance holds monopoly over the society, generating inequalities or denying human

¹ Von Clausewitz ,Carl, “ On war”, *al.* Howard, Michael,; Paret, Peter, Princeton University Press, United States of America 1989, p. 25

rights to such a level that people decide to challenge the power of the state in order to produce a change².

Change-this is what countries from Middle East also wished for when starting the wave of rebellion against the regimen three years ago. The anti-government movement, known as Arab Spring, quickly spread all over the area, the first bloom of democracy, freedom and dignity not being late in coming among the states in question. The outbreak of Arab Spring is regarded as having a global historical significance, producing a fundamental transformation of the region. But the success of their protests is still an issue to reflect on, as so many years of authoritarian regimes will have long-term effects, representing critical barriers to installing a new democratic system.

The revolutionary waves of demonstrations that occurred in the Middle East and the massive mobilization by the opposition in order to produce leadership-change encouraged people to fight for their rights. In a time of great political transition and unrest throughout the whole Middle East, Syria seems not to be an exception either, with thousands of people protesting against the regime. Syrians wish change as well. However, nowadays Syria heads to disaster. The controversial situation within the country is currently in the limelight of the international community being portrayed as one of the most significant matter on the international agenda. In the last 4 years the international actors have directed their attention towards the tangled situation from Syria. This increasingly complicated armed conflict has long term implications for both the country's internal situation as for the Middle East as a whole or the international system. The Syrian imbroglio is complex and difficult to explain being much more entangled than it looks like at a first sight.

"The people want to topple the regime."-the line that set the start for what was to become one of the most bloody civil wars of all times. In March 2011, young people seeking economic and political freedoms as well as "dignity" stand up against their government echoing for a new democratic Syria.³ This seemed to be the turning point of the Syrian revolution. However many chapters followed afterwards as the regime's brutality rapidly

² Sambanis, Nicholas, "What is Civil war? Conceptual and Empirical Complexities of an operational Definition," *The Journal of Conflict Resolution*, vol 48, No.6, Dec. 2004, p. 814-858

³ BBC News , "Muslim Brotherhood rejects Egypt's draft constitution", 2 December 2013, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-25183139>

provoked wide-spread protests around the country.⁴ In retrospect to temper the protests, the Syrian government started a series of military attacks, sending tanks to the stirring areas while armed forces fired on the manifestants causing several deaths and serious human rights violations. In short time the protests escalated, several reports presenting the dead of more than 200 people just in the beginning of April. As the crackdowns intensified, and thousands of soldiers decided to change sides, an opposition government was formed in order to fight the Syrian army. However, the opposition constituted by defected fighters, fragmented political groups, grass roots activists and armed belligerents divided by ethnic or religious ideologies seized the dimension of the conflict, further complicating it. Terrified by the on-ground development of events in Syria, international powers along with human rights organizations called for cease-fire. As the armed forces of the Syrian government continued the crackdown against the demonstrators, president Bashar al-Assad lifted the emergency law that permitted the government to suspend constitutional rights. The death toll increased rapidly as the government increased its efforts to silence the protesters.

The internal bloodshed caught even more the attention of international players when the Syrian armed forces backed by tanks killed several hundred people in August 2011. Along the time, international actors as European Union, United States or Turkey tried to stop the bloody events first by entailing economic sanctions on the regime and later by asking Assad to back down from power and allow the formation of a transitional political government, without success though. European Union imposed sanctions mainly on the oil-sector, United States deciding to freeze Syrian assets under U.S. jurisdiction.⁵ The G.D.P. that was 3.24% before the uprising, dropped dramatically within only one year period of time reaching a negative 2.3%, according to World Bank's evaluation.⁶ The economic sanctions, which are still being enforced in Syria even after four years since the escalation of the conflict, have not discouraged the Syrian elite to back down in front of a determined opposition. Neither the economic sanctions nor the high cost of war convinced the two fighting groups to step away from the conflict. All this did not proved to be a

⁴ Associated Press, Politico, Syrian uprising time of key events'', 9 April 2013 , <http://www.politico.com/story/2013/09/syria-timeline-96270.html>

⁵ Krauss, Clifford, MacFarquahar, '' Europe's oil Embargo leaves Syria urgently seeking new customers'', New York Times, 27 September, 2011, http://www.nytimes.com/2011/09/28/world/middleeast/europes-oil-embargo-forces-syria-to-urgently-look-for-new-customers.html?_r=0

⁶ Baker, Aryn ''The cost of war: Syria-three years on'', Time, 14 March, 2014, <http://time.com/24741/the-cost-of-war-syria-three-years-on/>

sufficient reason for the parts involved in the conflict to properly negotiate an end to the war. On the contrary, as the crisis rapidly escalated, the Syrian government enhanced its attacks being considered responsible for possible crimes against humanity. On the other hand, the rebels continued their fighting against the elite, the increased clashing between the two parts producing thousands of deaths.

As the conflict magnified, the global players divided themselves according to the on -the -ground development of events, supporting one of the fighting parts, increasing hereby the risk of a regional war. With Russia, Iran and Hezbollah constantly supplying military weaponry to the Syrian government and Turkey, Saudi Arabia and Qatar equipping the rebels, the implication of the regional players just inflamed the war. However, the West's decision to adopt a coherent stance was strongly related to the opposition's status. The rivalry among the armored rebel groups and the increasing role of Islamist insurgency rose uncertainty in the West's foreign policy. The fractionalized opposition determined U.S. to halt its military supplies towards the rebels. Meanwhile, Russia and China vetoed all proposals that aimed the Syrian elite and the Alawites in large. August 2013 the war reached its highest intensity when a sarin chemical attack killed hundreds of people. None of the opponents admitted its implication in the strike. In search for responses towards the chemical attacks, U.S., France and U.K. advocated for a potential military intervention in Syria, U.S. trying to convince United Nations Security Council that a retaliatory coup would be justified. However Iran, Russia and China made their stand against any military action, President Assad claiming that "will fight this western aggression".⁷ As Western's call for military action did not have the expected result, the international actors decided to use diplomacy approach as a way of providing a solution to the Syrian civil war.

Taking into consideration the development of events inside Syria, United Nations took the mediator role in order to bring an end to the bloodshed. However, it seems to have serious issues reaching its aim. Not even U.N.'s intervention managed to appease the spirits. The mediation process undertaken by Kofi Annan in 2012 did not bring any change to the Syria's crisis. As his 6-points proposal calls failed, Annan was replaced by Lakhdar Brahimi as the joint special representative for Syria. In order to end the violence, both E.U. and U.S.A. called for U.N.'s sanctions and asked Assad to allow political transition within

⁷ BBC News "Syria's Bashar al-Assad will fight Western "aggression"", 29 August, 2013
<http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-23884313>

Syria. In spite of Brahimi's efforts to reconcile both U.S. and Russia on the international stage and to further its plan of political transition in Syria within the Geneva Communiqué, little progress has been achieved. In time, the cycle of tensions and brutality amplified. The opposition group became larger and better equipped, forcing the Syrian army to improve its military capabilities as well in order to cope with the rebel's military.

The Syrian turmoil displays not only a conflict among the government and the rebels but also created the perfect environment for the rebels to fight against each other, raising conflict's complexity. The war has multi-faceted dimensions. The increasingly violent conflict has also been defined by a multi-sectarian division, ethnic groups having the same identity with groups from neighboring states. United Nations argued that, in time, the war developed into a sectarian and ethnic conflict. The Syrian war is not just a discord between the elite Alawite- a Shiite Muslim, and the overall majority of the country-Sunni Muslim, but also a crusade of 13 moderate groups against the Syrian administration.⁸ The lack of coordination and support among each other created chaos on the ground contributing to conflict's intensity. Over and above, the large variety of ethnic (Kurdish, Armenian, Palestinian) and religious groups (Muslims, Christians), some supporting the elite more than the others, created mutual mistrust and religious intolerance within the Syrian territory that also inflicted casualties. Some war termination analysts argue that one of the issues that deter a negotiated settlement and endanger peace building process is represented by identity problems. Should this also be one of the reasons for which Syrian war is still carrying on? Clear studies prove though that identity does not represent a serious impediment in convincing the fighting groups within a civil war to put aside the hatchet.⁹ And, as a-fore mentioned, the economic issues are not a viable motif either.

Meanwhile, the chaos in Syria spanned the national borders. The spillover of refugees is currently affecting all neighboring countries, creating the biggest refugee crisis since the Rwanda genocide. Data shows that almost 9 million Syrians were forced to flee their

⁸ Walter, Barbara, "The four things we know about how civil wars end (and what this tells us about Syria)", 18 October, 2013, <http://politicalviolenceataglance.org/2013/10/18/the-four-things-we-know-about-how-civil-wars-end-and-what-this-tells-us-about-syria/>

⁹ Walter, Barbara, "The critical Barrier to Civil War settlement", International organization, Volume 51, Issue 03, 1997, P.336

places while 2.5 million persons have been received by neighboring countries as: Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan¹⁰. This is proof of the civil war's gravity taking place in Syria now.

Both Geneva Conferences aimed at ending the civil war failed in providing a viable political solution to Syria's situation. Bringing the sides on the table, the Syrian government and the opposition, represented attempts towards confidence-building among the two, even if they could not make terms with each other. The two sides just spend their time incriminating each other. While the Syrian elite accused the rebels of being the main agents for destabilizing the state, the opposition's representatives accused the elite of barely cooperating both over a transitional political change or humanitarian issue. Forming a transitional governing body represented the basis of the second Geneva talk. As the government does not seem ready to drop the power, the two opponents seem to be at an impasse over the issue.

A third negotiations round is supposed to take place, but so far there is no consensus that will bring an end to the conflict. Studies show that when a 3rd party intervenes in a civil conflict, the chances of a negotiated agreement among the opponents increase. In Syria's case, in spite of U.N. several attempts to cease the fire, the conflict is still going on. Ensuring peace and cooperation under an anarchic system is extremely difficult. Furthermore, the international community is still divided regarding their stance towards the conflict. While the West and Arab's league constantly pose incentives towards the government, Iran Russia and China strongly supports Assad. Entering in its 4th year of crusade, the end of the war does not seem to be a tangible reality, Assad steadily making progress, destabilizing the Syrian opposition within the war.

¹⁰Migration policy Center, updated february 2014, <http://syrianrefugees.eu/>

1.1. Problem Statement

For decades now, the international actors tried to bring an end to civil wars through negotiated settlements rather than military approach. According to Barbara Walter, there are extremely rare the situations in which a civil war ends in a negotiated settlement.¹¹ Most civil conflicts end with a victory of one of the two sides, the fighting groups deciding to fight till the end unless an outside intervention steps in to assure a good development of peace process negotiations. Bringing an end to the Syrian imbroglio seems extremely difficult. As studies show that economic, political or ethnical problems are not viable impediments to a successful negotiated agreement and a mediation process has already been initiated within Syria's case what are then the causes that hinder a peaceful resolution of this conflict?

Problem formulation:

What can explain why a negotiated settlement has not yet been found in the Syrian Civil War case?

1.2. Motivation of topic:

The complex reality of the Syrian Civil War determined me to find a scientific interest in the topic and try to determine the challenges that hinder a successful negotiation among Bashar al-Assad and the opposition. The fact that no solution has yet been provided raised a huge amount of criticism at international level, the powers involved in the conflict running slow in providing a resolution. This civil war cannot be portrayed in black and white only, approaching the Syrian conflict topic representing a serious challenge. Based on the above background, the project is aimed to provide an insight into the civil war's development, while identifying the factors that inhibit a successful conflict resolution. The answer to the core question will be discovered through a full examination over the internal development of the armed conflict but a specific attention will be brought to the external dimension as well as well.

¹¹ Op. Cit. Walter, "The critical Barrier to Civil War settlement", p.335

2. Methodology and Research Design

2.1 Project design

The project is divided into 7 main chapters, some of these chapters containing sub-chapters. First chapter provides an introduction to the conflict, offering a short historical background that is vital for the further analysis, as it lays down the basis for the “why” question. The second chapter displays the scientific approach employed in the project, data and the limitations of the project. 3rd chapter presents the theoretical framework. Several theories will be used in order to provide a comprehensive understanding of the reasons that deter a negotiated settlement among Assad’s government and the Syrian opposition. Veto-player theory, commitment theory or ripeness theory will act as a foundation for the analysis proving the real obstacles that lay at the heart of conflict and will most clearly explain why the actors act the way they do at domestic level as on the international stage as well. This chapter will provide a better understating of how the reciprocal problems of enforcement and vulnerability make impossible the cooperation process among the opponents, how none of them is eager to risk its own security during a transition period and how fighting actors will use their power to influence the outcome of the war. Furthermore, the ripeness theory will create the perfect framework to show how the moment of negotiations is not the most favorable one for a successful agreement. Through the combination of these theories a versatile analysis of a contemporary issue will be realized, providing a framework for relations at international level and a framework for domestic actors as well.

The main part of the project is represented by the analytical part that will bring answers to the core problem. Next chapter “Veto-Players and the Syrian Imbroglio” demonstrates how some actors can influence the development of the conflict making use of their status on the national and international stage. The importance of cooperation will be approached in chapter 5, giving a better understanding of the conflict. This part seeks to uncover additional reasons that make a peace treaty hard to achieve by portraying the challenges that Assad and the government face before signing a negotiation agreement or might face during a transition period. Chapter 6 presents the conflict from a different perspective

disclosing additional reasons that contribute to the failure of the negotiation process. Finally, last chapter will conclude the findings of the analysis.

2.2. Data and Research Strategy

2.2.1 Qualitative research

In search for answers, this project will make use of a qualitative research strategy. This type of research has a focus on meanings, perspectives and understandings. It is aimed to offer a comprehensive understanding of the social world, in contrast with the quantitative strategy that employs quantitative determination and measurement.¹² This research strategy will offer an insight into the reason for which it is so difficult to achieve a negotiated settlement in the Syrian civil war case and will better help me to provide an answer to the core question. Also, on the basis of the much entangled nature of the conflict under examination, the project will be addressed from different perspectives bearing in mind the different standpoints that surround the topic in discussion. Quantitative data will not be used in the project. Only a qualitative approach can provide detailed insights into the thoughts and ideas collected by the empirical data. As the data is the result of human being thoughts it is impossible therefore to acquire objective measurable data. Furthermore, focus groups or interviews will also not be employed as it will not present any macro-tendency or insight into the Syrian civil war approached case.

2.2.2. Document analysis

The application of a document analysis as a qualitative research method will be employed in the project. The detailed examination of documents is an import research tool, being the most employed method for leading sociologists, the data having a strong validity. A very rough selection of the materials has been realized in order to assure a good quality of the essay. Scholarly literature as books, academic articles or journalistic sources, reports, government policies, speeches and electronic materials will constitute the base of the analysis. The reason behind this choice subsists in the fact that these types of data lay the basis for a proper assay of the topic, description, assessment and interpretation of the facts

¹² Kothari.C.H, ‘Research Methodology. Research and Techniques’, 2nd edition, New Age International(P)Ltd. Publishers, 2006, p.3

offering a thorough understanding of varied opinions while allowing the possibility for independent observations and conclusions. Internet sources will also be used as they reveal the actual status of the conflict that may not have been covered yet by books or high academic-journals.

2.2.3. Interpretative technique

Establishing a good research design is extremely important as it incorporates all the aspects of the study in a logical and coherent manner ensuring that the research question will be properly addressed. The epistemological position of this project is interpretivism. Interpretivism is commonly employed with a qualitative research as it offers a comprehensive understanding of social world and it's aimed to figure out the social phenomenon. I have to mention that a certain amount of criticism will be employed through the development of the analysis. Examining and observing all the materials chosen for the analysis will lead me to entail the attitudes and approaches of both domestic and international actors towards Syrian Civil War. A drawback of this type of technique is that the events are changing constantly, changing also the conclusions of the analysis on the way. But the interpretative techniques are aimed to offer a better understanding of the reality, taking the events as they come and not as they are planned.¹³ The analysis and interpretation of the qualitative data will create the perfect framework to reveal the findings and to draw versatile conclusions for the research question

2.3 Limitations of the project:

In the analysis of the core question a series of limitations must also be taken into consideration. The reliability of some sources or language barriers will hurdle the process of analysis. Moreover, due to the size limitation of the project, choices had to be made regarding the theoretical approaches. Hence, only the most representative and imperative methodological theories will be employed in the study-case. Secondly it must be acknowledged that my research object is very broad and therefore it is unlikely to offer extremely detailed information throughout the analysis. Only the most important facts and data will be presented to provide a clear response to the "why" question.

¹³ McNabb, David, "Research methods for Political science , Second Edition, Quantitative and Qualitative Approaches", M.E. Sharpe Inc., 2010, p. 225
<http://books.google.dk/books?id=8PJYznDXQIcC&pg=PA227&lpg=PA227&dq=explanatory+research&source=bl&ots=6p5DNrZbh3&sig=3abeuXY7hYpfF4u0VhgbLE1IWQo&hl=es&sa=X&ei=e5U4U7qhKqeo4gSOj4Aw&ved=0CF0Q6AEwBzgU#v=onepage&q=explanatory%20research&f=false>

3. *Theories*

The following section displays the theoretical framework employed in the project. The theories presented are not intended to be fully comprehensive as this would not be possible within the spatial limitation of the project. Only the core elements, critics and issues of the theories will be outlined as these theoretical approaches are meant to serve as guidance and reference for the further discussion.

3.1. **Veto-Player Theory**

The veto- player theory is an influential approach that currently attracts extensive attention in the International Relations fields becoming a more common area of study. The Veto-player theory had a strong impact in the comparative politics area, explaining the consequences of a veto-power in policy-making and suggesting that the plurality of veto-powers implies a diversification of veto-power policies that will alter the policy, impacting thence its bringing into effect. As it aims to justify outcomes, it is important that the preferences and the position of the players over the status -quo to be well known. The less information is being known about these aspects, the more demanding will be to explain the change. Moreover, a raised number of veto players that have various predilections or differences over the outcome of the policy creates stability in the political system. However, high policy stability can though produce regime instability as it becomes difficult to adjust the policy to mitigating circumstances.

This theoretical approach has been developed by George Tsebelis in an attempt to contrast political systems according to their competences to produce policy change. In his book “Veto-players and Institutional analysis” he defined veto-players as “individual or collective actors whose agreement is necessary for a change in the status quo”.¹⁴ Veto-players hold veto- powers that can influence any modification in a new policy by limiting the set of possible alternative policies. This kind of power has a “silent and unperceived”

¹⁴ Tsebelis, George, “Veto Players and Institutional Analysis.” Los Angeles, University of California, Governance: An International Journal of Policy and Administration, Vol. 13, No. 4, October 2000, p. 442

operational impact as it rejects change and does not accept it, having a real effect on the policy.¹⁵

The veto –player theory can be employed to analyze in a coherent way all types of political systems irrespective of their regime.¹⁶ Veto-theory aims to provide justifications to policy outcomes. In his work, Tsebelis shows how easy it is to influence the policy’s status –quo in a political system. However, the political system has to adjust to new conditions and therefore allow changes to happen or to abide to the rules of the game and not intervene in other’s players agreements. He also demonstrates how the ability of the political system over the outcome of the policy has a considerable impact on other divisions of the system as well, as bureaucracy or government stability. Yet, stability is either desirable or necessary according to the status quo. As long as one player agrees with the status quo and enjoys stability, it will be against change. He distinguishes among two types of veto-players within a democratic system: institutional and partisan veto-players. The institutional veto-players are represented by those actors who have the power to approve the pass of a law, whereas partisan veto-players are the actors that hold the veto right based on their political status. He acknowledges that in spite of the fact that the actors of parliamentary democracies don’t hold formal veto-powers, there are several political groups who actually have that veto- power. The most important veto-players are the ones belonging to a coalition party. Furthermore, the number of parties also represents a critical factor in assuring policy stability. For instance, the political parties that form the cabinet and that have a majority in the senate need to offer their consent in order to issue a law. Some other times, other players, as interest-groups, make use of their veto- power albeit the fact that the constitution did not specifically stipulated their rights to do so in the law making process.¹⁷

3.1.1 Critics of theory:

¹⁵ Hamilton Alexander; ‘‘The work of Alexander Hamilton’’, Ney York, Williams and Whiting, 1810, p.201 http://books.google.dk/books?id=zX4UAAAAYAAJ&pg=PA201&lpg=PA201&dq=%E2%80%98silent+and+unperceived+hamilton&source=bl&ots=ahZzJJ8gHk&sig=les1N0YcdDpoNAunxxWeAJ38HR8&hl=es&sa=X&ei=QhtyU6roFoG6ygP_iYDwAg&ved=0CDEQ6AEwAQ#v=onepage&q=%E2%80%98silent%20and%20unperceived%20hamilton&f=false

¹⁶ Op.Cit., Tsebelis, ‘‘Veto Players and Institutional Analysis.’’, p.1

¹⁷ Ibid., Tsebelis, p. 443-446

In his book ‘‘ Promises and Pitfalls of Veto- players’ analysis’’, Steffen Ganghof identifies several problems that veto-player studies encounter, offering specific critique to Tsebelis’s theory. One problem identified by Ganghof relates to the identification process of the veto-players. The definition provided by Tsebelis seems to be quite broad. Scholars have to make a distinction between the real veto-players and potential actors that can just hinder the policy without influencing it in a definite way. He emphasizes as a weakness the extent to which players can be classified as collective and if certain influential players can be considered veto-players. In order to identify the veto-players we need to understand where the power lies in the political system. In addition, the number of veto-players can vary across time or can be influenced by the policy filed. The actors that hold the veto will make use of their power to influence the policies that are not favorable to the status quo. Per se, several veto-actors on the same side of the status quo, within one dimensional policy space, will fail to concur with a new policy that could bring benefits to both sides , affecting therefore policy stability. This theoretical approach has been many times employed to provide explanations to various phenomena from civil war duration.¹⁸

Measuring the preferences of some political actors over the outcome of the policy is a second problem disclosed by Ganghof. Once determined the veto-players, the actors’ predilection over the policy change has to be detected as well , as future predictions depend mostly on this attributions. However, how this is going to be done is still uncertain. In addition, he talks about the problem of equivalence and whether there must be made a distinction among several types of veto-player or they are similar in all respects excepting their predilections for the policy’s outcome.¹⁹All these pitfalls must be taken into consideration in a veto-players analysis, but the way they stand out depends on the methodological framework adopted. In a qualitative research approach the above-mentioned problems are strongly inter-connected and the key issue is to explain the solutions provided. A qualitative veto-players study highlights the importance of a clear analysis of the veto-players, as off-hand decisions over the preferences of the political players can provide unsubstantial explanations. In a veto-players analysis the focus must be set on confirming certain advanced explanations than elaborate them. Moreover, the

¹⁸ Cunningham, E. David, ‘‘Veto players and civil war duration.’’, *American Journal of Political Science*, 50(4), 2006, p. 875-892

¹⁹ Ganghof , Steffen, ‘‘ Promises and Pitfalls of Veto-players Analysis’’, *Swiss Political Science Review* 9(2) 2003, p. 3-5-<http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/j.1662-6370.2003.tb00411.x/pdf>

analysts must explain the preferences they confer to the veto-actors, which can raise issues as these predilections cannot be measured, but they have to be extracted from the players' behavior. On the other hand a quantitative approach has to distinguish among those that refer to the theoretical assumption about players' predilections and those that attempt to measure them.

3.1.2. Veto-player theory and Civil Wars.

Cunningham decides to apply this theoretical framework to explain variations in civil war duration and to show how the presence of several actors that hold a veto-power extends the war's time. This theory further focuses on the amount of actors that can influence an agreement. In contrast with Tsebelis main argument, which claims that a raised number of players can produce stability, as no change will be made over the policy's status and applies these concepts to an institutional system, this theory can be successfully employed in civil wars as well, Cunningham describing civil wars "*... as violent conflict over policy*".²⁰ He argues that a high number of veto-actors involved in the conflict hinder a negotiated treaty, postponing the end of the war. Within civil wars, the veto-players have the ability to pose obstacles to war termination and even continue the war on their own if they have different bargaining dynamics.²¹ The plurality of parties involved in the conflict, each having different predilections over the status-quo and military capacity, will therefore influence the outcome of the conflict.²² With each added actor the bargaining process will become heavy as it will not provide acceptable agreements to gratify all the players. According to Ganghof "*the shape of policies is influenced by veto players; and therefore, if many players have substantially different interests, they will likely find it difficult to agree on a change of the status quo policy*".²³ Therefore, each actor will just delay intentionally an agreement hoping to get the best deal as a last signatory part. This strategy has been widely employed along the time as it is believed that signing last will ensure greater incentives than the rest.

²⁰ Op.Cit.,Cunningham, "Veto players and civil war duration, p. 875-895

²¹ Cunninham, E.,David," Who Should be at the table?: Veto-Players and Peace Processes in Civil War", University of Maryland & Centre for the Study of Civil War at the Peace Research Institute in Oslo, April, 2013, p.39

²² Cunninham, E.,David, "Barriers to peace in Civil Wars", University of Maryland Department of Government and Politics, United Kingdom at the University Press, Cambridge, 2011, p.63

²³ Op. Cit., Ganghof, Promises and Pitfalls, p.3

Cunningham presents another mechanism to support its point of view regarding war termination. He emphasizes the shifting alliances process, as a main deterrent of a bargaining treaty. Shifting alliances come into existence when the groups belong to several coalitions. These shifting alliances have a strong negative impact on the negotiation process as the parties that agree with each other on some matters might also comply with some other groups on some other issues. As the parties will compound for one topic, there is a significant chance that they will disagree on other issues, breaking the alliances as different issues raise.²⁴

The veto-player theory can be further employed to explain terrorism acts in different political systems. Joseph Young and Laura Dugan display in their book "Veto players and terror" the link between terrorism and the presence of veto-players. They claim that an increased number of veto-players within a political system intensify the risk of war's stalemate. When the players encounter difficulties to reach their aims in a non-violent way, terrorist activities become more recurrent. The main argument displayed by the authors is that when the groups opposing the regimen fail to produce a change in the status-quo of the policy, terrorist attacks are prone to take place.²⁵ In civil war cases, peace agreements are considered to be the most appropriate solutions to end the casualties. However, the outcomes of civil wars can vary significantly as both the regimen and the rebels take decisions having particular expectations in mind. The interplay among the two determines the development of the war.²⁶ However, in order to provide a strategy to the end of the war, all parties must be taken into consideration.

In his article "Who should be at the table?: Veto-players and Peace Processes in Civil War" Cunningham proves the importance of involving all actors that hold a veto-power to the negotiations table. As veto-players have the ability to continue to war on their own, a peace treaty among the other political actors won't stop the conflict. However, in this case, bringing all veto-players to the table represents a serious challenge, as parties will refuse to cooperate expecting better deal afterwards, as already a-fore mentioned. Yet, the opponents can apply this strategy if they have enough capabilities to carry on the combat. When the

²⁴ Op.Cit., Cunningham, "Barriers to peace in Civil Wars", p. 56-57

²⁵ Young, J.K., & Dugan, L. "Veto players and terror." *Journal of Peace Research*, 2001, 48(1),p. 19-33.

²⁶ De Rouen, Karl; Sobek, David, "The Dynamics of Civil War Duration And Outcome", *Journal of Peace Research* 2004, 41:303, p. 317

actors can't cover the costs of the war they are prone to accept a negotiated treaty. Therefore, the strongest parties are the one inclined to spoil an agreement and not the ones with more interest or references over the outcome.²⁷ In addition, he suggests that peace processes that exclude all non- veto-players just complicate the negotiations. Involving non-veto players in the negotiation process may further create extra veto- actors that could deter the end of the conflict.²⁸

The war will carry on until one of the sides will lose the field or until an agreement will be settled. During each stage of the conflict the players will have the alternative to choose amongst a continuation of the war or its cessation. Only in the moment a negotiated agreement will seem more favorable than a continuation of violence, a settlement will be agreed upon. The civil wars rise when one of the parties decides to choose violence as a way of reaching its aim, but once the war started, other fighting groups can also come forth and join the conflict to make themselves heard. In an initial phase the civil war is a combat between the government and the opposition. De Rouen and Sobek argue in their work that the interplay amongst regimen and opposition will influence the course of events within the civil war.²⁹ However, as the violence enhances, the opposition splits in several additional groups. The reason the split occurs is due to several reasons as discontent with the course the main opposition has taken or dissatisfaction regarding the leadership method. An additional group that can create issues is represented by the external interveners that can adopt diverse positions influencing war's duration. By supporting one of the fighting parties, while having their own agenda and preferences over the outcome of the conflict, they determine the course of events and postpone the end of the war.³⁰ It has been found that the more veto-players are involved in the conflict, the longer the war will last. However there remains the question if the plurality of veto-players will influence in a certain way the outcome of the war.³¹

3.2. Conflict resolution and credible commitment theory

²⁷ Op.Cit., Cunningham, "Veto players and civil war duration" p.875-892.

²⁸ Cunningham, D.E., SkredeGleditsch, K., & Salehyan, I. "It takes two: A dyadic analysis of civil war duration and outcome". *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 2009, 53(4), p. 570-597

²⁹ Op.Cit. DeRouen, K.R.&Sobek, "The dynamics of civil war duration and outcome." p. 303-320.

³⁰ Op.Cit., Cunningham, "Veto players and civil war duration" p.875-892.

³¹ Ibid. Cunningham

As a defined field of study, conflict resolution has come of age in the 1950 as a result of the world's power nexus deterioration and the emergence of nuclear weapons that seemed to endanger human survival. Specialists from several fields acknowledged the importance of exploring conflict as a general phenomenon, having congenerous attributes regardless of the fact that the conflict takes place in international relations, domestic nexus or between individuals . In short time their ideas attracted interest and the domain started to develop, making a real difference in real conflicts. In consequence, the number of peace agreements increased significantly, some of them putting an end to violence while others failing to transform the conflicts into cooperative relations. In the early 1990s internal conflicts and power struggle took the place of international conflicts that used to characterize the world system before. There was a need for a better understanding of conflict resolutions' conditions and negotiation processes, as conflict resolutions take different dimension when the protagonists are in bad terms. A conflict resolution process encounters unique obstacles as it has to observe standards of justice while providing security to the actors. Civil wars, in particular, are even more difficult to handle. During the conflict human rights have been broken and the trust among the opponents has been shaken, living therefore the complicated task to rebuild a new relationship.³² Civil wars are conflicts in which one of the sides decides to take control over the government. As the opponents are members of the same state, the initial conflict is built on internal greed, inflicting conflicting behavior. In addition, the bridges created among the parties will be ideological, social or financial, being difficult to solve.

Conflict resolutions play a vital role in war zones. Implementing peace and understanding among divided societies, along with mediation strategies, help to address the violent conflict and rebuild the intra-party nexus. Johan Galtung, one of the founders of the field, approached the violence-conflict- peace relation in his attempt to offer an insight into the structural and cultural roots of the conflict. He developed a triangle model that encompasses 3 main features that influence the development of a conflict: contradiction, attitude and behavior. The contradiction element is defined by the incompatibility of interests between the protagonists in several types of conflict. In his study, Galtung distinguishes among symmetric an asymmetric conflicts, in the first case the contradiction lying in the interests and the conflict of interest between the parties, whereas in an

³² Ramsbotham Oliver, Woodhouse Tom, Miall Hugh, "Contemporary Conflict Resolution" 2nd Edition, Polity Press, USA, 2005, p.3-10

asymmetric conflict, the contradiction is defined by their relationship and the clash of interest inherited in the nexus. The incompatibility among the parties is a specific feature of civil wars. Hereinafter, attitude refers to the way the opponents perceive each other and how their attitudes are being influenced by feelings as fear, fury or enmity. However, once the conflict has started the adversaries tend to unfold stereotypes about the other side, setting their minds towards specific goals, being therefore difficult to change their behavior further on. The last element, behavior, can incorporate cooperation or constraint, which can lead, or not, to a conflict resolution. Galtung claims that all 3 features are important, defining conflict as a dynamic process in which their interface influences the conflict, the clashes of interests amongst the parties generating conflictual attitudes which lead to a conflict outbreak. In addition, as the conflict deepens, other actors are being drawn into the collision as well, creating secondary conflicts that complicate the task of providing a solution to the core conflict. Lastly, settling the war requires a set of dynamic changes that implies a de-escalation of conflict behavior and a transformation in attitudes and relations that generate the conflict.³³

Other specialists have developed numerous models too in order to explain a conflict resolution that will allow the opponents to put down their weapons. Some studies show though that the real motive that hinders a concept resolution is the parties' problem to credible commit to enforceable treaties by third parties. In the absence of credible commitments, opponents' are less likely to agree to any solution aimed to cease the conflict.

In his work, 'War as commitment problem' Powel describes several issues that contribute to conflict continuation. Firstly, actors are more likely to fight if they face uncertainty regarding the other side's moves. As long as one of party does not know if the opponent will carry on fighting or will accommodate, the war will continue. This uncertainty is being produced by the absence of communication. If the actors would hold complete information about each other, there would be no fighting. However, this approach encounters some critics, as some actors might decide to fight even if there is no incertitude. In this case, war seems more probable than a settlement.³⁴ In addition bargaining indivisibilities do not

³³ Ibid. Ramsbotham, Woodhouse, Miall, "Contemporary Conflict Resolution" p.3-10

³⁴ Power, Robert, "War as a Commitment Problem", Cambridge University Press, International Organization, Vol. 60, No. 1, 2006, p.176

solve the inefficiency puzzle either, as the real reason of war continuation is represented by the commitment issues. The commitment issue is considered being the main drawback in a civil war termination.³⁵

Next to Powel, Barbara Walter as well endorses commitment issues as reason for conflict resolutions failure. In her work she demonstrates how the factors identified by the civil war resolution theories (as cost of war, ethnic identities or the balance of power among the opponents) fail to demonstrate why some conflicts cannot be brought to an end. She develops “the credible commitment theory” arguing that in time of domestic anarchy the conflicting parties are asked to put down their weapons and entrust each other to enforce the agreement. However, as the actors know this means being unprotected in front of the adversary in a state that lacks legitimate government or appropriate military service, they will avoid cooperation, What actually stops the adversary to settle an agreement is the fear of exploitation from the other side and the fact that the other side will fail to truly abide to the treaty. A serious aftermath is that the protagonists might be stuck in a costly conflict that they would rather avoid. A conflict resolution implies more than a cessation of armed conflict and a negotiated bargain, but requires a treaty that offer security guarantees to the opponents. A successful treaty must incorporate all fighting actors into a single state, bring into existence a government that will solve actors’ security concerns and create a national, non-partisan army. As long as the protagonists will fail to get such guarantees the war will continue. When the groups have obtained credible third party guarantees and power sharing assurances they will agree with the settlement.³⁶

3.3. Ripeness Theory

Along the time, the question of which is the right moment for a start of a peace process, or in which stage of the conflict a resolution treaty is more likely to influence the course of events within a war has prevailed the work of political scientists. While most war studies analyzing peace agreements consider the content of the proposal as the key to a successful negotiation process, some specialists rivet their attention to the right timing of a mediation

³⁵ Fearon, James D., “Commitment Problems and the Spread of Ethnic Conflict”, in David A. Lake & Donald Rothchild, *al., The International Spread of Ethnic Conflict*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press ,1998, p.107–126.

³⁶ Walter, Barbara, “Committing to Peace”. *The Successful Settlement of Civil Wars*, United Kingdom, Princeton University Press 2001, p. 1-17

process as solution for the conflict. This importance of timing in diplomacy produced the concept of “ripeness”. The core elements of this theoretical framework were elaborated by I. William Zartman in his attempt to provide an explanation to how some domestic and international conflicts transform into peace processes. John Campbell describes the notion of ripeness “as the absolute essences of diplomacy”, “You have to do the right thing at the right time.”³⁷ “The success of negotiations is attributable not to a particular procedure chosen, but to the readiness of the parties to exploit opportunities, confronts hard choices, and makes fair and mutual concessions”³⁸

The parties involved in the conflict will put their weapons down and engage in the peace process only if they feel ready to do so, as the opponents confront with an uncomfortable and costly situation. Studies show that a negotiated treaty is more likely to take place only when an appropriate set of circumstances allows it. Understanding the circumstances that permit a mediation process is vital, from both a theoretical and political point of view, in order to determine the favorable moments that could lead to a peace process. Identifying the conditions for negotiations will help the international mediators to meliorate the nexus among disputing actors. Additionally, a better comprehension of the ripe moment may prevent a deterioration of their interplay.³⁹ However the ripeness is just a condition for mediation, as the right moment must be acknowledged directly by both sides, or through mediator’s aid. In contrast, not all ripe moments can be properly recognized. As confusion may arise it is important to present clear evidence of ripeness, proving the right moment for the combatants to start negotiations.

The idea of ripeness focuses on the opponents’ perception of a reciprocal hurting deadlock. The Mutual Hurting Stalemate (MHS) is a condition that makes the parties receptive to the possibility of a peace process. The MHS can occur at any stage of the conflict, early or late. Can be felt either in the incipient phases of the conflict when it’s easy to propose an agreement or, in extraordinary cases at a rather high level of war, which requires, in fact, an increased perception of MHS in order to determine the parts to proceed negotiations.

³⁷ Campbell, J., “Successful Negotiation”, Trieste, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1976

³⁸ Zartman, I, William, “Ripeness: The Hurting Stalemate and Beyond,” in “International Conflict Resolution after the Cold War.” al. Druckman D., Stern P. Washington: National Academy Press 2000, p. 226

³⁹ Sage Library of International Relations, , “Conflict Resolution”, al. Druckman D., Diehl P., Vol. III, London, Sage Publications Ltd., p. 263

The concept is based on the cost- benefit analysis, supposing that the opponents will seek a peace process only when no successful outcome can be foreseen by either party, seeking thence a more beneficial alternative. The failure of the current strategies aimed to gain ground or the high cost of war by both sides will create no later right opportunities for a decisive victory. As they cannot either win or lose, they find themselves locked in the conflict which feels sore for all parts. In this context, parties' interests will not be reached, not even approximated, which will determine them to look for a way out. When the adversaries believe that there is a possibility of a way out, that's the moment when they are more prone to negotiate, making the conflict ripe for a settlement. When the parties become eager to adopt less conflicting behaviors to reach mutually satisfactory results, ripeness happens. Yet the opponents don't have to identify a particular solution, but to create the feeling that a mediation process is an attribute that both sides wish to comply with. However, there remains the question whether is the high cost of war or the lack of winnings that determines the leaders to carry on the fight or cease the war.⁴⁰

Studies show that in internal conflicts only some of the combatants must feel the hurting stalemate, that only the main players rather than secondary actors have to seize the ripe moment and that the way out through negotiations must be seen as a solution to the conflict by all parties. Another condition that could help the adversary to escape the MHS is the presence of a valid speaker for each party along with rulers' willingness to abide by a peace process. However Fred Ilke emphasizes the importance of the appropriate conditions for all sides as decisive factor for a conflict resolution⁴¹. Some other specialists focused their attention on the so-called "intra-party ripeness" suggesting that the domestic dimension of the conflict influences the outcome of the war. Internal divisions at the leadership level or among domestic fighters pose barriers to any conflict resolution.⁴² Stedman further lays stress on the domestic political changes that could uncover strategies and exit situations that might have been left out by previous rulers.⁴³

⁴⁰ Mitchell, Christopher, Zartman, I, William, "The right Moment: Notes on Four Models of Ripeness" / "Ripeness: The Hurting Stalemate and Beyond" in Conflict Resolutions, Sage Library of International Relations, Vol. II, *al.* Druckman D., Diehl, P., London, Sage publications Ltd., P 85-110

⁴¹ Ilke Fred C., "Every war must end", 2nd edition, New York, Columbia University Press, 1991.

⁴² Op.cit., Mitchell, p. 96

⁴³ Stedman, Stephen J. 1991. Peacemaking in Civil War: International Mediation in Zimbabwe, 1974-1980. Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner

3.3.1. Impediments

The ripeness theory raises several challenging problems. In his work, Zartman points out that under some conditions, the hurting stalemate moment can have an opposite effect of increasing resistance to a peace process instead of enabling it. In his article "Ripeness: the hurting Stalemate and Beyond", he identifies several contexts in which increased pain is less likely to produce negotiations. In first instance a normal reaction is the opposition's desire to not abandon war without a fight. This theory emphasizes that parties are caught into a deadlock from which they cannot escape, implying efforts to carry on the combat before surrender. However, as ripeness is linked to perception, it is very difficult to determine the moment and the way in which the desire to continue the war switches to surrender. Even though the theory is not predictive, failing to determine the exact moment in which the negotiations should start, it can though identify the factors that suggest a productive onset of the negotiations.⁴⁴

Secondly, pressured applied to one sides of the combat may result in worsening the image of the adversary. This perception of the adversary tends to diminish communication, raising a feeling of mistrust and lowering the chances of peace-making. Consequently the factors that are supposed to create the ripe moment produce an opposite reaction. Third, an increase level of conflict involves increased pain, both parties enhancing their resistance in reaction to the other side's determination of winning. In this case, only an acceptance of pain or a relaxation of pain can allow a conflict resolution. Resistant reaction is a natural tendency that leads to pressure on both sides.

Another complication of this theory refers to the dependency on war. The rulers may become committed to battles that prove to be difficult to win at fair costs or risks. Their

⁴⁴ Zartman, I. William, "The Timming of Peace Initiatives: Hurting Stalemate and Ripe Moments", School of Advanced International Studies, Johns Hopkins University, *The Global Review of Ethnopolitics* Vol. 1, no. 1, September 2001, p.11

dedication to the war may be emotional or may imply public guarantees that are embarrassing to draw back, determining them to carry on the fight.⁴⁵

4. *Empirical analysis*

The above presented introduction lays the foundation for a suitable platform whereon an analysis shall be created. The following chapters will identify several key issues that lay the basis of the Syrian Civil War hindering a productive initiation of a negotiated agreement. The conflict will be analysed from different perspectives that have been organized on three main analytical chapters as follows.

4.1 **Veto-Players and the Syrian Imbrolio**

According to David Cunningham there is a strong correlation among the number of actors involved in a conflict and the duration of the conflict. Civil wars are thought to be extremely difficult conflicts to solve. The difficulty rises even more if the conflict involves multiple-players who have the ability to stall the settlement and carry on the combat unilaterally. These types of actors, usually defined as “veto-players” and having their own predilection on the outcome of the combat, may change the status quo of the conflict. As every civil war includes at least 2 veto- players, the government and the opposition group, either of them is able to block the settlement at any time. Taken the Syrian case, the situation is further complicated, as this is not just a conflict between the Alawite elite and the military opposition, but a combat among the fragmented opposition as well, all of them having the possibility to veto a negotiated agreement. Therefore, the existence of multiple Syrian rebel groups fighting against each other and against the government in the same time further hinders a comprehensive resolution. The situation is subsequently inflicted by the presence of international actors that also play an important role bringing an end to the

⁴⁵ Op.cit, Ilke, 1991

Syrian civil war and that also have a veto-ability. And the more veto-players are being involved in the conflict, the lower the chances for a settlement.⁴⁶

4.1.1. Internal dimension

Identifying the veto-players is a necessary condition to bring an end to a civil war. The factors that determine the sides to act as veto players include a strong political back-up, have a better military capability or have access to founding sources. Like this, the parts can easily resist being defeated and can behave as veto-players.⁴⁷ However, the plurality of rebel groups within the Syrian civil war makes it difficult to determine who the veto-players are as the militant groups are constantly coalescing, redefining their position as the conflict evolves. The presence of several umbrella organizations as: ISIS, Hezbollah or FSA that impacts the on-the ground development of events and coordinates the insurgency poses obstacles to a comprehensive agreement, each of them wrestling for different scenarios. As radical groups aim to create an Islamic state and not to oppose the Syrian president, the main Syrian opposition has to carry on additional fights in order to stop them taking a more outstanding role in leading the insurgency. The official representative opposition seems to have little sway over the rebel groups that are fighting on the scene, the fractioned Islamist groups carrying the same Al-Qaida believes inflaming even more the moderate groups.⁴⁸ The general organizational mismanagement of the opposition, especially between the non-Islamic groups, the inefficient assaults, the lack of a proper defense system and the weak international support affects the rebel's progress in their fight against Assad. The rebel groups are so dysfunctional and fragmented that many parties are reluctant to cooperate.

Furthermore, as it has its own agenda, part of the Syrian opposition does not seem interested in accepting any compromises. The Islamic Front strongly rejected any negotiations within

⁴⁶ Cunningham, E. David, "Veto-Players and Civil Wars in Syria", *The Political Science of Syria's war*. Middle East Political Science, 18 December 2013, p.26

⁴⁷ Op. Cit., Cunningham, "Who Should be at the table?", p. 41

⁴⁸ Mohammed, Arshad, "Syria's Peace Talks failure spurs U.S. -Russia recrimination", Reuters, 17 February 2014, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/02/17/us-syria-crisis-idUSBREA1G0R420140217>

Geneva Conference in spite of the Syrian National Coalition decision to attend the talks. Its veto-position implies that even in the remote event of a comprehensive agreement among the Syrian elite and the opposition representatives, the chances to bring the resolution into effect are low. According to one of the Islamic Front representatives the country's future will be *“formulated here on the ground of heroism, and signed with blood on the front lines, not in hollow conferences attended by those who don't even represent themselves”*.⁴⁹ Furthermore the extremists groups even threatened the SNC members who partook at the Geneva II conference. The chances for a successful meeting were yet dim from the beginning, as the SNC almost boycotted the peace talks entirely, failing to decide from the first meeting if to attend the summit or not.⁵⁰

As it can be seen, the presence of so many internal veto-players having the ability to deter any change that could lead to a step forward in the Syrian conflict just poses more barriers to the settlement. Yet, the large number of veto-players is not the only challenge for an agreement. Taking into consideration that the rebels' group' incentives are at stake, none of them will be eager to acknowledge a negotiated settlement. Moreover, as the balance of power among the rebel parties shifts constantly it can be difficult to determine the supposed veto players that should be engaged in the negotiations process. Following August 2013, after Barack Obama's failure to military intervene in Syrian war accepting instead a dismantlement of Syria's illicit weapons program, a notably change in power among the rebels raised further concerns regarding the future of civilians and about the Geneva II development. As the Syrian Coalition and the Free Syrian Army slowly lost its authority in front of the other activists and rebel groups, extremist groups as ISIS or the Islamic Alliance gain more power. This shift in power represented a real blow to holding the Geneva II talks as the Islamists Groups stated that the sole representatives of the opposition should be the ones that sacrificed for the combat.⁵¹ However, so far many representatives of rebel groups refused participating at the Geneva II conference as part of a single opposition commission represented by the National Coalition, rejecting SNC as envoy. According to Zartman, the recognition of a valid spokesperson is a necessary condition in order to assure the successful

⁴⁹ RT, “Syrian split: Islamist Rebels reject Geneva 2 talks”, 19 January 2014, <http://rt.com/news/syrian-rebels-reject-talks-861/>

⁵⁰The voice of Russia, “Syrian opposition group agrees to attend Geneva 2 talks”, 19 January 2014, http://voiceofrussia.com/news/2014_01_19/Syrian-opposition-group-agrees-to-attend-Geneva-2-peace-talks-7336/

⁵¹ Perlov, Orit, Dekel Udi, “A change in the Balance of Power in Syria: the Bag against the Bad, Canada Free Press, 15 October 2013, <http://canadafreepress.com/index.php/article/58573>

start of a negotiated settlement.⁵² Therefore, taking into consideration the misunderstandings within the Syrian opposition is difficult to reach a negotiated treaty.

Another condition for a negotiated settlement to be achieved is represented by the desire of the parties directly involved in the conflict to set an agreement. Taking into consideration the on -the -ground development of events, the Syrian government seems skeptical in accepting any communication with the opposition, President Assad not being sure to whom to address in order to have his message heard. However, even if dialogue is a precondition of a comprehensive agreement,⁵³ Assad emphasized he will not negotiate, neither with the radical groups that encourage terrorism within the country or with the groups that are being backed by the Western powers aiming for regime change.⁵⁴ In these conditions, Assad as well can be considered a veto-player, proving to be reluctant to any settlement.

As the opposition rejected The Syrian Coalition as the representative group aimed to promote their interests within Geneva Conference and Assad clearly rejected cooperation with the adverse side, the chaos on the ground concerns the international community. Along the time, the plurality of forces with different interests led to several combats among the extremist opposition over how to proceed: whether to overthrow first the Alawite regime and establish later on an Islamic state or vice-versa. Studies show that including all veto players in the negotiation process increases the chances of an agreement to actual happen.⁵⁵ But the actual situation within the Syrian war poses challenges in determining who the next veto-player that could hinder the negotiations could be.

4.1.2. External Dimension

Not only domestic players can behave as veto-players but external actors as well, having their own strategic interest and their own military capacity to engage in the conflict beyond supporting one of the combatant parts. Albeit civil wars are domestic conflicts amongst combatants within the same country, they frequently involve a high degree of international

⁵² Op.Cit., Ramsbotham, Woodhouse, Miall, "Contemporary Conflict Resolution.", p.166

⁵³ Ibid. Ramsbotham, Woodhouse, Miall, "Contemporary Conflict Resolution.", p. 166

⁵⁴ The Syrian Observer, "Assad delivers a defiant speech, ignoring the people, the opposition and the international forces", 7 January 2013

<http://www.syrianobserver.com/News/News/Assad+delivers+a+defiant+speech+ignoring+the+people+the+opposition+and+the+international+forces>

⁵⁵ Op cit., Cunningham, "Who Should be at the table?", P. 39

leverage.⁵⁶ Within the Syrian Civil War the involvement of so many international powers further complicates the dynamics of the war. The Syrian conflict is an imbroglio where the powers dispute over supremacy. Political interest is at stake when the international actors have to decide a solution for the civil war. The decision making process seems to be driven by their national interests influencing differently the negotiations. In order to protect their status the external actors will use their veto-right, posing barriers to bargaining.

While Russia's and China's stance towards the conflict is clear-cut, backing the Syrian elite, the West strongly offers its aid to the opposition. Along the time, the two Chinese and Russian super-powers vetoed any decisions affecting Assad's government fearing that the West would back a military intervention on the side of the opposition. China followed closely Russia, firmly opposing any resolutions against the Syrian government, contributing to a continuous stalemate of U.N. to take measures against Syria. Both Russia and China have strong economic and military connections with Syria. Beijing invested considerably in the Syrian Republic, considering the Arabic state a significant trading hub. Its stance towards the Syrian conflict though is nuanced, supporting a political resolution and not encouraging a military intervention. However, officially, it does not support either the government or the opposition, having a more defensive strategy, "betting on both".⁵⁷

Officially, the Russian government is impartial in the Syrian conflict. However it has maintained its historical stance as military supplier for the Syrian regime. Moreover, the Tartus naval-base that Russia holds on the Syrian waters represents a symbol of the Soviet Union in the Middle East, counterweighting U.S. influence in the area. Therefore, Moscow has strong reasons to maintain its alliance with Bashar al- Assad. The fall of the elite government would have a negative impact on the Russian influence within Middle East area. However experts claim that Russia's interests rests in maintaining its friendly nexus with Syria regardless of its ruler, Moscow wishing to leave the Syrian people to decide their own future.

⁵⁶Op. Cit, Cunningham, "Veto-Players and Civil Wars in Syria", p. 27

⁵⁷ Yan, Holly, "Syria's allies: Why Russia, Iran and China are standing by the regime", CNN, 30 August 2013, <http://edition.cnn.com/2013/08/29/world/meast/syria-iran-china-russia-supporters/>

“We have never said or insisted that Assad necessarily had to remain in power at the end of the political process....This issue has to be settled by the Syrians themselves.”⁵⁸

Along the time, the soviet power seemed to play an active role in providing a viable solution to the conflict by either supporting Assad’s plan for a transitional government in 2012 or by convincing the Syrian government to commit to the deployment of weapons chemical program in 2013. However in spite of this apparently cooperative approach towards the conflict, Russia never agreed with U.S. sanctions activities or intervention, using its veto- power to deter any action against Assad, rejecting no more than 4 western-backed U.N. resolutions since the onset of the war . ⁵⁹

On the other hand, U.S. strongly criticized Russia’s military support for the government. U.S.-Russia’s tensions just inflamed the development of the war. As Moscow distrusts U.S. intentions in the area, Putin believes that any proposal coming from its U.N. body partner it’s just a manner of advancing its influence in the Middle East area. Russia’s policy purpose is obstructing American effort to take over the region. Nevertheless their alliance holds one key to the Syrian puzzle, the conflict magnifying as none of the two big powers wishes to undermine its standing in the area. The nexus among the two topped out in the framework of the chemical weapons assault within Syria.

As an aftermath of the alleged chemical attack of the Syrian government on its own people in august 2013, U.S. decided to military intervene in the region, decision that was strongly rejected by both the Russian government and U.N.as well, posing serious challenges to the policy makers on how to respond to the supposedly chemical attack⁶⁰. Researches later proved that the employment of the chemical weapons has been actually employed by the rebels, government’s involvement in the gas attack being rejected.⁶¹ However, at that time, U.S. decision to intervene in the conflict turned the actor into a possible veto-player as well, postponing a peaceful agreement of the conflict. The hypothesis of an U.S. intervention within civil war would drastically reduce the changes for a comprehensive

⁵⁸ Ballout, Mohammad, ‘Russia Talks to Syrian Dissident, Looks Beyond Assad,’ AlMonitor.com, 30 April 2012 <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/politics/2012/04/syrian-dissident-nothing-is-sacr.html>

⁵⁹ Gutterman, Steve, ‘Russia says will veto Syria aid Resolution in current form’, Reuters, 12 February 2014, <http://in.reuters.com/article/2014/02/12/syria-crisis-russia-aid-idINDEEA1B04S20140212>

⁶⁰Op. Cit., Cunningham, ‘Barriers to peace in Civil Wars’, p. 41

⁶¹ The Guardian, ‘Doubts about Syrian Chemical Weapons attacks’, 14 April 2014, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/apr/14/doubts-syria-chemical-weapons-attacks>

agreement. The existence of a potential external veto-actor can drastically influence the status-quo of the war. Both U.S. and Russia have an enhanced leverage power over the policy and the dynamics of the internal conflict affecting considerably the decision-making ability of the opponents to determine their own military and bargaining strategy. However, Russia never acknowledged U.S.'s evidence of the chemical weapons employment by the Syrian government, deliberately dismissing any facts.⁶²

Additionally, at a more insight look over the conflict, Iran itself can also be considered a veto-player. Taking into consideration its implication in the conflict, its support for the Syrian government has an increased leverage on the development of the war. Syria is vital for Iran, as the country represents the main supply routes for its Hezbollah paramilitary wing in Lebanon- which is mainly used as a deterrent for an Israel's attack against Iran. The establishment of this umbrella organization allowed Iran to strengthen its relation with Assad government and increases its status in the area. Starting 1979, Syria represented a key element for Iran in order to consolidate and preserve its regional leverage while maintaining a serious stand domestically. Without Assad's cabinet to govern, Iran's regional geopolitical influence will be diminished. Furthermore, a change within the Syrian regime does not guarantee the same cordial relation among Syrian and Iranian government as it does not guarantee that Iran's nexus with the proxy groups in the Levant won't be altered, risking a shift in the regional balance of power within Middle East area while isolating even more the Iranian state.⁶³ Therefore it is in Iran's interest that no governmental changes to be done within Syria.

Furthermore, as Syria's main ally, Tehran's presence within the Geneva II has been highly disputed. In spite of the fact that the international community acknowledged Iran's importance in providing a solution for the Syrian war⁶⁴, U.S. rejected its involvement within the conference, as Tehran refused to publicly commit to the aim of peace talks to support a transitional government. The misunderstanding among United States and United Nations troublesome Geneva II, creating big frustration in the international community.

⁶² Herszenhorn, David, "Russia rejects U.S. evidence on Syrian chemical attack", The New York Times, 2 September 2013, <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/09/03/world/middleeast/russia-syria.html>

⁶³ Georgetown Journal of International affairs, "Iran Looms Large in Russia's and China's Positions on Syria", <http://journal.georgetown.edu/2012/07/18/the-four-axes-of-the-east-russia-china-syria-and-iran/>

⁶⁴ Pearson Michael, Labot Elise, Abedine Saad, "Syria Defiant at conference; Kerry rules out al-Assad", CNN, 22 January 2014, <http://edition.cnn.com/2014/01/22/world/europe/syria-geneva-talks/>

In the same time, the Syrian National Coalition also opposed Iran's presence at the conference, menacing to boycott the summit if the Islamic state would join, making the meeting to seem almost impossible to hold. However, this time Iran did not react negatively and did not create an international confrontation, in spite of the fact that its invitation to Geneva meeting was withdrew. Yet, by stating clearly its position towards the Syrian civil war, Iran has shown beyond doubt that will not be reluctant in intervening to support Assad's government and protect its regional influence. Iran's foreign policy is similar to Syria's, showing resistance to U.S. -Israel- Saudi influence and their desire to reorganize the region according to their interest. Therefore, Iran will back the Syrian government at any cost, making the probability of a negotiated treaty in the Syrian war lower.

4.2. Conclusions of the chapter

To conclude this chapter, it can be stated that the implications of so many actors, some of them with a veto-power, makes a negotiated settlement to remain elusive in the Syrian case. The multi-party wars are fundamentally different from the dyadic ones, especially when part of the combatants has the ability to block the settlement. The plurality of all the veto-players involved in the conflict, both internal and external, their various interest over the outcome of the war and the domestic shifting dimension of the Syrian conflict makes the bargaining process more difficult. Additionally, enforcing a peace process on reluctant opponents implies not only high costs but also deployment of resources that the internal combatants don't hold. Internationally, even if the bargaining strategy would represent the most viable method to end the war, the geo-political interest of the external actors makes it prone to failure. As U.S. -Iran's relations have been problematic for decades already, Iran suffering nowadays international pressure from U.S. and the E.U., cooperation among these parts seems to be at a large order. The sides will have to cooperate at close quarters in order to reach the aim of Geneva II, target that Iran does not seem willing to support, as it has already stated. Iran's diplomatic position is vital in order to reach a negotiated agreement aimed to end the Syrian Civil War. However, its stance towards the conflict has always been clear and irrefutable supporting the Syrian government and its position towards Syrian state won't changes easily taking into consideration their historical ties⁶⁵. They will support each other in hard times, relationship proven by the mutual defense

⁶⁵Pan Esther, "Syria, Iran and the Mideast Conflict", Council on Foreign Relations, 18 July 2006
<http://www.cfr.org/iran/syria-iran-mideast-conflict/p11122>

treaty signed in 2004. Therefore, Iran can be considered a veto-player within the Syrian civil war, the chances to agree with U.N. proposals being dim.

Additionally, Russia's decisions towards the conflict also complicate the development of events, as Moscow sees any proposal as a trigger for U.S. to military intervene in the war looking for more regional leverage, consequently rejecting any U.N. proposal backed by the west community, making use of their veto-powers. Moreover, the constant escalating tensions among the two world's super- powers, Russia and U.S., their disagreements and approaches towards the war just pose further barriers to a proper negotiations' process.

The 3 states- Russia, China and Iran- carry the same view over global dominance and over U.S.'s stance in the international system in particular. Yet, even if the international community is constantly claiming its desire to put an end to the Syrian Civil War, none of them seems keen to make a commitment to facilitate a comprehensive agreement among the Syrian opponent.

Syrian war is an international affair that divided the global powers. The regional and extra-regional powers have taken sides- some supporting the Syrian government while others backing the rebels, while using their veto powers in order to protect their geopolitical interests. Therefore due to their preferences over a given outcome, it can be difficult for the opponents involved in the conflict to reach an agreement. This division among world powers supporting both sides of the civil war led to a diplomatic stalemate which increased the massacre. Since the uprising, Russia has provided heavy arms to the Syrian government as defense systems, stocks of armory or missiles, while the U.S and E.U. enforced arms embargo in Syria, diminishing its support for the opposition. However, the regional actors as Saudi Arabia or Qatar supplied the gap by offering their own military backup to the rebels. This international misunderstandings and the actors 'veto ability creates a dead-lock and hinders the restoration of stability and prevention of further slaughtering.

Even if the Geneva Communiqué laid the basis for the international community to start the talks, a divided United Nations Security Council just makes the prospect for a negotiated solution seems far away. A united international community will increase the chances for an agreement.

Addressing separately each dimension of the conflict, the internal dynamic also deserves special attention when considering laying the basis for a negotiation process, the plurality of rebel groups representing a real challenge to a comprehensive agreement. Taking into consideration that the opposition is highly fragmented, and some of the rebels play in different teams, having their own agenda, their activity impacts the possibility of a successful agreement that could stop the conflict. As some of the groups involved in the turmoil share an Islamic ideology, their main goal is overthrowing the regime and further establish an Islamic State or getting regional autonomy and not reaching a peaceful resolution that could bring an end to the civil war. As their intentions are distrustful, even the United States was reluctant in dealing with these Islamist groups, not wanting to further inflame the war and create a terrorist haven in Syria. However, they will have to be included in a diplomatic settlement as well, as some of them already proved their veto-status of blocking any agreement by publicly acknowledging that even in the unlikely event of progress, the probability of actually enforcing the solution on the ground is small.

4.3. Application of Veto-player Theory

Studies show that most civil wars are more likely to end in military victories than in negotiated settlements, these conflicts proving to be even more resistant to comprehensive settlements when they involve actors that can inhibit the agreement.⁶⁶ Additionally, the conflict is less likely to terminate in a time scale that comprises more than two veto-players, complicating the war and contributing to its extension. The Syrian Civil War is extremely resistant to a peace treaty *inter alia* due to the large number of actors that intentionally pose obstacles to a resolution. The veto-player theory argues that any civil war has at least two veto-players: the government and the opposition. However, in the Syrian case, the conflict contains additional internal or external actors that would rather carry on the conflict on their own as an agreement would not provide them the expected benefits. As unanimous agreement amongst all parties is needed to terminate the conflict, the last signers hold the ability to force the other players to agree with their conditions.

⁶⁶ Op. Cit., Cunningham, "Veto-players and Civil War in Syria", p. 27

Therefore, the actors will hold back accepting a treaty believing that signing last will bring them better gainings. In addition, the veto player theory demonstrates how a negotiated agreement in the Syrian war is seriously affected by the presence of so many actors, each having its own preference over the outcome of the war and how the military capacity to carry on the combat unilaterally reduces the chances for peace. As long as both Assad regime and the opposition are receiving external financial and military aid they won't consider bargaining a viable solution for the conflict.

The plurality of rebel groups inside the Syrian territory offers an additional complicated dimension to the war. Due to its multitudinous, the identification of all possible Syrian veto-players represents an extra barrier to war termination. The constant shift in power of the rebel groups, some of them coordinated by terrorist organizations as Al-Qaeda makes it difficult for the international community that aim to end the war to detect the actors that can block the settlement.

At international level is really difficult for the players to establish the balance power, vetoing therefore any action that will threaten their influence in the Syrian region. Yet, as external actors as Russia or China don't feel directly the cost of war they don't feel the pressure of advancing a peace treaty either. Furthermore, as each power has its own agenda on the world stage, actors will have to collaborate, putting aside any grievances, as in U.S.-Iran nexus, thing that seems hardly achievable. Through the veto players' perspective, including all veto-players in the negotiations is the fundamental condition that assures a successful resolution. As the actors can carry on the war unilaterally, if one or several players are not involved in the bargaining process the conflict will continue although some of the actors agreed to make peace. As the veto-player theory claims that the strongest parties are the one inclined to hinder the agreement and not the ones with more interest or references over the outcome, rejecting Iran's presence at the negotiations table increases the chances to failure of a treaty.

Determining all actors to come to the negotiations table is a real challenge. At domestic level, the international community had to offer either "carrots" or "sticks" to the Syrian opponents to convince them to cooperate. However, even if Assad and the opposition representatives met for the first time at Geneva 2014 to set the basis of a treaty, the two

sides failed to cooperate. As each side is following its own interest, their discord turns both of them into veto-players, accepting cooperation only under specific conditions. However, there are some other domestic players that must be considered, as the Islamic groups that do not want to settle an agreement, advancing their own beliefs within the Syrian society being actually their real goal.

Therefore, the large number of veto-players represents a serious obstacle to end this violent war, as the parties have greater difficulties to come to terms over the termination of the conflict, each parties' interest in the conflict determining them to become veto-players.

5. Commitment and cooperation

While it is true that actor's indivisible interests and disagreements represent a serious obstacle to a comprehensive agreement, negotiations do not fail only because the parts involved in the conflict cannot compromise. Studies show that during war the opponents are actually able to compromise on the main issues of the conflict and find reasonable solutions that benefit both sides. They are capable to solve the so called "game of deadlock" and lay to rest their adverse competing interests and various preferences in favor of war stalemate⁶⁷. The external powers offered their help and proposed different solutions in order to put an end to the atrocities from Syria. United States considered a military intervention being the appropriate solution for resolving the conflict. Both Lakhdar Brahimi and Kofi Annan tried to use their exceptional mediation skills to ease the process of negotiation. However, according to Barbara Walter, neither a military intervention nor good mediation abilities does not represent sufficient conditions to convince the opponents to cooperate.⁶⁸

In spite of all the international attempts to end the conflict and to bring the parts on the table, the adversaries don't seem to settle their differences. Yet, why is the Syrian war so difficult to stop? Why the domestic sides' just don't want to accept a proper negotiation process that could lead to a settlement agreement? Negotiated agreements are a

⁶⁷ Op.Cit., Walter, "The Critical Barrier to Civil War Settlement", p. 335-360

⁶⁸ Op.Cit., Walter, "The Critical Barrier to Civil War Settlement", p. 335

fundamental part of the peace processes and of the conflict resolution further on. Without a type of agreement among the conflicting parts it is difficult to consider an end to the conflict and establish a conflict resolution later on. Each civil war is unique and has its own particularities. The uniqueness of the Syrian civil war lies in the multitude of players, with unrevealed goals and abilities and different options and outcomes. Nevertheless, the Syrian case is much more complicated. The war proved, along the time, to be extremely violent and destructive with more than 140000 deaths since the uprising, the number of casualties proving to be vital for the peace-making process as it can severely impact the establishment of a post-war relationship later on.⁶⁹

Nowadays, the Syrian adversaries face a choice amid continuing the war or start a peace process. Barbara Walter argues that one reason for which the peace agreements fail rests in the inability of the opponents to repose confidence in each other, given the fact that at time of general turmoil there is no legitimate forces to provide security and enforce peace. As previously mentioned the roots of the conflict dwell from the repressive governance, the aftermath being a mix of expatriates, activists or secular dissidents deprived of political supporters.

The military dynamic of the conflict influenced along the time the domestic actors in their decision-making process. The regime's military choice to provide a solution to the uprising in the incipient phase just provoked more opposition's violence. Times out of the number have the Syrian security forces been accused for repeatedly conducting attacks against peaceful protestants or violent rebel groups. Security's services malpractice using violence and illicit behavior seeking to crush opponents into submission created armed resistance and raised the criminal activity. In the same time, Assad's reaction to the events spurred even more the rebellion, the Syrian president claiming that the opposition is just a group of terrorists, Islamic supporters or foreign conspirators⁷⁰. Assad's response to the emergence of mass of politics falls in front of the spectrum of reactions of the opposition forces. The more the adversary side armed to secure itself, the more the regime enhanced its attacks to the level of large –scale counter-offensive employing armored units and military ad versus several cities.

⁶⁹ Wallensteen, Peter, "Understanding conflict resolution- War, Peace and the Global System", London, Sage Publications Ltd.,2002, p. 34

⁷⁰ Crisis Group, "The Syrian regime's Slow motion suicide", Middle East Report N.109, 13 July 2011

Alternatively, this also produced new challenges: enhancing the number of casualties along with the rise of territorial enclaves and their loss of control in rebel's favor. The Syrian government's resort of using tanks and fighter jets in their combats increased the human casualties of the discord. Slowly, the civilians desponded of the security services in Syria. Even the president Assad acknowledged in 2011 the excesses made by the Syrian security services while handling the uprising, attributing these abuses on their inexperience.⁷¹ However, these shortcomings represented a step to fostering distrust among the government and opposition while threatening individual security. As one actor is responding to the other actor's actions, in time the dynamic of the war lives no other alternative but to continue retroact with a higher level of violence.

Assad further contributed to fostering mistrust against his opponents by cutting off communication with the rebels, taking advantage of the state's control over the telecommunication system. He exploited its coalition with Hezbollah paramilitary wing to procure military services and training, producing tangible improvements in the security and military forces efficiency. Iran is thought to have sent additional military forces to Syria as well. The involvement of external powers in the conflict raised tensions among the Syrian opponents generating a further rupture in their nexus. Furthermore, under the burden of the conflict all state institutions have collapsed, determining Assad to reform the state at all levels in response to the insurgency. As an aftermath of reorganizing its military and security forces and reforming the economy, the president's decision has been highly criticized even by government officials that consider the limited economic reforms the reason which determined civilians to join the rebel movement, intensifying the conflict. The course the rival side took it is mainly a result of Assad's violent and disproportionate attacks within the country, and not a sequel of its own design.⁷² The Syrian government itself had a clear impact on the course of events, by producing fear among the population and creating disorder which determines the other side of the conflict to see Assad's regime with disbelief.

⁷¹ BBC News, "Syrian president says security services made mistakes", 18 May 2011, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-13444174>

⁷² Heydemann, Steven, "Syria's adaptive authoritarianism" *Unites States Institute of Peace, The Political Science of Syria's War, Middle East Political Science*, 18 December 2013, p. 59

In response to Assad's reaction to the uprising, the opposition slowly started to organize creating several opposition organizations or umbrella organizations whose clear aim has been from the beginning of the crisis replacing Assad from power. The opposition resorted many times to violent attacks towards the government inflicting the war. The constant external military supply for the moderate opposition militia played an important role as it boosted their capability to fight against the regime and Alawite groups. In time though, this type of attacks became sectarian in nature, targeting not only Assad's army but civilians as well causing serious human rights violations. Fearing revenge from the Syrian militia, the rebel groups made their survival a priority in combats, employing more counter-attacks against Assad's security forces. The fighting and abuses among the 2 adversary sides contributed to fostering mistrust lowering the chances of a treaty. In recent times, the employment of chemical weapons assault on August 21, 2013, culminating with the death of over 1000 people, or the new allegation of the poison gas attack in April 2014 sparked again tensions among the sides, both of them refusing to take the responsibility of the attacks. The commitment issue among the Syrian opponents lies therefore in the lack of trust the opponents fail to repose in each other as an aftermath of continuous infight.

Furthermore, the decisions taken by the Syrian parties along the conflict just destroyed bridges that could create communication among the opponents, diminishing the necessary confidence to create today a golden mean. The domestic cooperation is hard to achieve in such anarchic conditions. Syria's political situation displays contradiction, discord and irreconcilable geopolitical interests which lay at the basis of the conflict. The strategic dilemma in the Syrian case is proven by the fact that the parts will either have to credibly commit to peaceful settlement and reckon upon the promises they have made, leaving out of consideration the ever present risk of the other side breaking its promise, or carry on the civil war, the prospect for win and loss making the parts more sensible. When their security is at risk, the actors will just have to put their arms down and engage in the peace process. A solution to this dilemma is for both Assad and the opposition to trust each other to put their arms down and engage in the peace-building process. However, the idea of ceasing the combat, renouncing at any political ground and disengage from their position will be therefore strongly rejected by both sides.⁷³

⁷³ Op.Cit., Ramsbotham, Woodhouse, Miall, "Contemporary Conflict Resolution.", P. 173

In contrast with inter-state wars where the opponents can still keep their armed forces and assure their own protection, during civil wars it's impossible for actors to cooperate and credible commit to disarmament.⁷⁴ Even if both the Syrian government and the resistance know that cooperation will bring them only profits, laying down their weapons means giving up their only way of protection. If the Syrian opponents decide in the end to make peace they will not be able to preserve their independent military anymore forcing themselves to engage in a transition period. Once engaged in an agreement and with no military forces, the Syrian opponents will still have to share the same state, without any possibility to hide behind buffer zones or counter attack supposing the adversary will turn malign eftsoon. Furthermore, the decision of ceasing the war would further make both Assad and the opposition vulnerable, as they would have to give up their territorial reductions on which they fought so hard and on their bargaining terms that might assure a possibility of winning. Yet, the Syrian parties are aware of the risk that a negotiated settlement implies. A comprehensive agreement is a two edged sword. The vincibility position in which they will find themselves will make the Syrian government and the adversary side to doubt that the conditions of the agreement will be truly honored by the other side, enhancing also the concern for their security. Therefore, making credible commitments proves to be extremely difficult. As Fred Ikl'e stated:

*“Whatever the obstacles..., the use of violence itself engenders new obstacles to the reestablishment of peace. Fighting sharpens feelings of hostility. It creates fears that an opponent might again resort to violence, and thus adds to the skepticism about a compromise peace.”*⁷⁵

Given the stakes involved, own survival and the latter history of enmity, needless to say that both Assad and its opponents stand against a negotiated settlement. From a military point of view, the commitment issue is represented by the disarmament condition which eliminates any possibility for the opponents to defend themselves in the future. For some rulers demilitarization may beseem close to defeat, therefore political gaining must be substantial to persuade the armed side to accept such a deal. Nevertheless, demobilization of one adversary would represent a clear sign of its commitment to negotiations.

⁷⁴ Op.Cit, Walter, *The Critical Barrier to Civil War' Settlement'*, p.337

⁷⁵ Op.Cit., Ikle Fred C., *“Every War Must End”*, p. 107.

A second issue the demilitarization process poses concerns to the state on how to further incorporate the militants' 'armed forces in case of a peace agreement. A base power sharing might represents a solution for this issue, this practice being considered the perfect tool to temperate an internal conflict. Normally, this type of political arrangement is aimed to solve the grievances that lay at the base of the conflict. As the trust level among the Syrian government and the opposition is extremely low due to the constant fight, unfair access to power or serious human violations, the power sharing prospect offers them the possibility to a new beginning.

5.1. Power sharing as commitment issue: military dimension

A power sharing solution will ensure a balance among the representatives of the two adversary armies. However, power sharing in the military arena is a critical phase. Convincing both sides to create a united army will prove to be a real challenge, as the negotiated settlement will have to offer acceptable guarantees to the military opponents. The creation of a single military will prevent any political disagreement that can lead to war resumption. Once the combat begun, the opponents' attitudes and thoughts about the other adversary are set, making difficult to change their ideas later. After fighting against each other for almost four years, the military forces would be asked to do something that they consider hard to achieve: ceasing the fire and working together.

During war, actors have to take decisions, use their judgment and seek strategic thinking to assure their victories. This approach towards the conflict has to be employed as well when the actors decide if to agree with a negotiated settlement or not. Taken the Syrian case, both parties acknowledge not only the benefits that they will get from the peace treaty but the profit the other side will acquire as well if the war stops. As long as one side will obtain greater benefits than the other, the prospect of continuing the fight will seem much more appealing than an actual commitment to peace.⁷⁶ However, the Syrian sides are aware of the fact that if they agree with a peace treaty and engage in a transition period, they might

⁷⁶ Op.Cit, Walter, 'The Critical Barrier to Civil War Settlement', p. 338-341

risk their own survival. For some time, the Syrian war has been perceived as a zero sum game, both the regimen and the Syrian opposition seeing themselves engaged in combat for survival that does not offer any possibility to compromise.

5.2. Political dimension of power-sharing prospect

From a political point of view, the commitment problem lays within the incertitude of the opponents concerning the functioning of future institutions within which they will have to share power if the conflict ceases. However, the prospect of power-sharing as credible commitment seems to be fraught with difficulties. Dealing with the requirements of all the armed groups involved in the conflict is a real challenge. One factor that lies at the base of the power sharing process is the need to create institutions that help develop alliances that involve representatives of the main domestic actors involved in the conflict. These institutions are aimed to oust the “security dilemma” that the parties confront with, concerning disarming and contribute to starting the peace negotiations. Through the power sharing process the parties will ensure non-discriminatory and accurate policies that benefit to everybody. Yet, transition periods are more difficult to overcome as they are insecure and unstable periods. This phase is paved with fears and unpredictable situations that might restart the combat again. The sides involved in the conflict needs to negotiate however, negotiations that could lead to confidence-building measures.⁷⁷ However, in the power sharing process, all sides must drop out their desire of achieving the power.

One condition of the Geneva Convention regarding the Syrian civil war is the establishment of a transitional governing body that could include representatives of both the governing elite and the opposition along with members of other faction groups as well. The power sharing prospect implies protection for the Syrian rulers, as they will become members of the new state’s institutions, being hence protected by them. In appearance, the proposal brings benefits for all sides. Nevertheless, parties do not seem eager to engage in peace talks. In case of a negotiated agreement, representatives of both Syrian opponents will have to cooperate in order to restore the state’s capability. However, as both parties might have doubts about how the new political cooperation might work, the feeling of distrust will prevail their decisions. Studies show that in power sharing arrangements, both

⁷⁷ Sriram, Chandra Lekha, ‘Peace as governance. Power Sharing, Armed Groups and Contemporary Peace Negotiations’ Palgrave Macmillan, Great Britain, 2008, p.18

sides are distrustful of each other, fearing that the former opponent will attempt to take over the state, remove them from power and make use of the instruments of state to repress them. The risk that the government apparatus might be assumed by one of the adversary side and that a change in the structure of the new government might bring security issues for some domestic players could represent a serious obstacle to enforcing a peace agreement.⁷⁸ Taking into consideration the actual situation from Syria, neither the opposition or the government desire to form a common leadership, both parts highly disliking each other. Therefore, after using their destructive forces to diminish influence of its opponent for so long, the possibility of a negotiated commitment seems low again. Cooperation with previous enemies will further create more discontent, as the skepticism will make each representative to wish to provide more future benefits for its group, affecting like this the agreement⁷⁹. Uncertainty regarding the future aims of the opponent just increases the security dilemma and encourages sides to choose war over peace.

Power sharing as a commitment problem, in the Syrian case, is further emphasized by the lack of a demonstrated interest and implementation of a settlement from the multiple sides involved in the conflict. An act that ensures that none of the negotiating parts is taking greater risks than the other one might offer the possibility to identify any cheating and provide sanctions while guaranteeing the Syrian groups contribution to the peace process.

5.3. Opposition fragmentation

Making credible commitments is a problematic affair for all the players but it's particularly difficult for a divided opposition. Taken the Syrian case, the rebel factions reckon challenges to abide by a comprehensive agreement as the behavior and plans of the other side of the opposition are in the balance. The divided groups cannot make credible promises regarding the other's opponent intentions or about its plan to dominate the adversary with more demands as a divided opposition is taking individual decisions and acts separately.

⁷⁸ Op.Cit., Wallenstein, "Understanding Conflict Resolution", p. 152

⁷⁹ Downes, Alexander, "Problem with negotiated settlements in Ethnic Civil Wars", University of California, Publisher Routledge, Informa Ltd Registered, London, 7 October 2010, P.51

The on the ground development of events among the rebel groups called into question their relevance for the Syrian political affair. The militant dissention among the rebels sometimes cooperating, and some other times competing proved weak ties of trust, faction unification being impossible. According to Cunningham, the division among the opposition creates for the state- actor low possibilities to pursue an agreement that could solve the underlying issues of the dispute. Furthermore, the credible commitment issues that the opposition factions face and their ability to unravel their discord have a decisive impact on the dynamics of the conflict. The combination of this two factors means that the attempt of the state to settle an agreement with a divided opposition has less chances to be successful than the deals made among the state and a unified opposition.⁸⁰

Referring to the latter factor, in time, the lack of unification among the Syrian opposition worsened endangering now the prospect for democracy and posing obstacles to the agreement. Activating as an insurrection and holding different degrees of military preparation or resources, the Syrian rebel groups are linked through their final goals. These types of variables create interdependence amidst the Syrian parties that share a common post-Assad vision in spite of their competing ideologies. As the conflict escalated, these disparities came forth generating tensions amidst the cooperative groups and inflicted an enhanced distrust amongst opponents.

The sole recognized main opposition political body, SNC, highly supported by on-the-ground activists and friendly regimes, rapidly lost its credibility in front of its sympathizers as the leader was thought to have connection with Muslim Brotherhood influencing hereby group's beliefs. In time, the coalition member's became strongly disorganized⁸¹, the group losing in the end its status as representative of the opposition. The lack of political skills of SNC has been many times subjected to criticisms, former members complaining about the lack of experience of the intellectuals ruling the group. Moreover, the main representative opposition has been characterize by the Syrian press as carrying more about their interest

⁸⁰ Cunningham, Kathleen, "Actor Fragmentation and Conflict Processes", University of Maryland, *The Political Science of Syria's War, Middle East Political Science, 18 December 2013*, p. 35

⁸¹ Crisis Group, "Anything But Politics: The State of Syria's Political Opposition", Middle East Report N°146, 17 October 2013, p.3

<http://www.crisisgroup.org/~media/Files/Middle%20East%20North%20Africa/Iraq%20Syria%20Lebanon/Syria/146-anything-but-politics-the-state-of-syrias-political-opposition.pdf>

and control over power than representing the Syrian people.⁸² In addition, SNC experienced a rapid turnover of leaders while it failed to influence and unite the fragmented opposition. The constant change of leadership within the main opposition representative means that faction groups don't have the necessary continuity to abide to long term promise about their future intentions. The discord among the opposition at large and the rebels is easily perceptible. However, the Syrian National Coalition encounters problems in maintaining track of all the political groups under its umbrella, as trying to gain support from the population by creating different government structures to offer fundamental aid and services. Nevertheless, a central authority is hard to create, and even when it succeeds it is difficult to implement its decision on the scene. The lack of a credible leadership means that no credible guarantees about the future intentions of the factions can be made hindering a negotiation process.

Yet, the biggest jeopardy for SNC is represented by the large number of independent rebel groups, some of them under the command of Al- Qaeda. Consequently, the misunderstandings amongst the rebel groups and their contrasted attitudes not only complicates the conflict, making it difficult to follow, but also act in the detriment of the opposition's assay to progress in its fight against Assad's government. In contrast with BBS that has a pacifist approach towards the conflict- encouraging dialogue as a form of ending the war while promoting the establishment of a democratic Syria⁸³, the other extremists groups as ISIS or Jabhat al-Nusra possess different religious ideologies and employ guerilla attacks, executions or abductions in order to create instability and seize territorial control. The fact that these rebel groups do not adhere to a unitary command structure shapes the development of the conflict, postponing an end to the war. In spite of the fact that their only main aim is overthrowing Assad from power, they have different perspectives of how a post-Assad should look like.

In January 2014 new clashes took place among the Islamists rebels, the main responsible being ISIS, creating serious human casualties. The extremist group also got engaged in military combats with Al -nusra Front or Muhajideen army, proving one more time the

⁸²Hegghammer, Thomas, "Syria's Foreign fighters", Norwegian Defense establishment in *The Political Science of Syria's War*, *Middle East Political Science*, 18 December 2013, p. 47

⁸³ Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, "Building the Syrian State", 2014
<http://carnegieendowment.org/syriaincrisis/?fa=49517&reloadFlag=1>

intricacy within the rebels. Even if the Levant group and Al-nusra have been at cross purposes, executing each other's supporters, when ISIS attempted to bring Al-nusra under its influence, the Islamist group did not military counter-attack. Although their relationship is defined by enmity and competition, Al-nusra offered to play the mediator's role in ISIS's combat against the Kurds, clash that killed almost 250 people in just a couple of days, as the reports show.⁸⁴ Many times the Levant has been hold responsible for infights and demonstrations with both the rebel groups and security forces. Competition among divided opposition can lead to a particular group reigning over other factions in different moments of the conflict. This domination is possible by collaboration with some other faction groups. ISIS is cooperating with several Jihadist groups around Syria, sharing the same religious beliefs and virulent animosity against the regimen.⁸⁵

The blend of cooperation and competition among the rebel groups, Al-nusra offer to mediate the fights, the permanent armed struggle of ISIS, and Al-nusra and Islamic fighters contra Syrian regimen confers a plus of complicacy to the war. The rise of sectarianism and radicalization along with the regime crackdown contributed to the emergence of mistrust and skepticisms among the parties engaged in the conflict. Furthermore, another reason for which some rebel groups might be reluctant to a particular settlement is their fear that they might be losing some political and military, making hence their stand against the agreement.

The presence of multiple groups, challenging the government, poses obstacles to a future democratic Syria. Their complicated nexus, at some times cooperating while some other times competing, makes them unpredictable actors that easily endanger a progress in the war against Assad's regimen and complicates the process of a settlement. As the Syrian opposition is highly fragmented, cooperation is a sensitive issue both on the ground and politically. This commitment issues lower the chances of a negotiated agreement to take place, as the faction opposition shows signs that amelioration in their nexus won't happen any time soon. The fact that the Syrian rebel groups cannot cooperate properly raises credibility concerns as it is uncertain whether one rebel group can abide to the terms of the negotiated agreement set with the state. The fragmentation among the opposition is further

⁸⁴ Roggio Bill, Lundquist Lisa, "Analysis: Shifting Dynamics of Rebel Infighting in Syria", *The Long War Journal*, 17 January 2014, http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2014/01/analysis_shifting_dy.php

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, Roggio, Lundquist, "Analysis: Shifting Dynamics of Rebel Infighting in Syria"

encouraged by the involvement of external actors, as U.S. choose to provide political or military support to some Syrian rebel groups. In exchange, these actors use material assistance in order to gain leverage over some of the rebel groups. In the first two years since the insurgency, U.S. and other E.U. countries offered a minimal support to the rebels. Only in early 2013, did U.S. decide to directly backup the Syrian opposition. Albeit the West had offered financial aid to the Syrian National Coalition before 2013 hoping to strengthen its ability to govern the rebel groups, U.S. started to provide non-lethal aid to the opposition itself. Furthermore, E.U. changed its policy allowing European states to supply military and technical aid to the rebels. This changes made by the West represented a strategy to organize and unify the opposition, while assuring a well-equipped military to fight against the regimen. However, later on, U.S. stopped its military supply fearing that it would end up in the hands of extremist. External backing can offer to the rebel groups the necessary resources to operate independently of an official ruling, impairing authority and control while supplementing the goals, identities and interests of those groups already creating insurgency.

Obsolete violent conflict amid armed groups that belong to the same side of the war creates cooperation and trust issues among the rebels, determining them to assure their own survival, breaking down the chances of peace. The competition for survival will determine the groups to fight even its own allies, wherewith seriously concur for political backing, in order to enhance their political power when the war will cease. The external military support for the opposition only enhances the conflict and encourages the rise of extremist groups. This dynamic is often encountered in the Syrian war. The military support offered to the Syrian rebels assured their survival against Assad, even though they lacked the ability to win in crucial fights. However, as the backup is being offered only to some of the fragmented opposition, this usually exacerbates the combat among allied groups, leading to an escalation of extremists. Military combats among the rebels occurred in many regions that had been seized from the regime's governance. In March 2013, groups' opposition gained control over Raqqa town. As Assad military proved unable to re-conquer the city, the rebel groups turned against each other. Another combat that further proves the discord among the opposition groups is represented by the attack of ISIS and the radical group Great Syria on the moderate Islamic groups Ahfad al-Rasul, murdering its ruler and taking over its territory on August 15. The constant clash of fighting and increased violence

among the Syrian rebels contributes to foster mistrust among them, increasing the commitment issue. Furthermore, as long as the fragmented Syrian opposition will carry on creating safe havens without organizing themselves to fight against the regimen, the more the extremism will intensify. This dynamic of the conflict is a direct aftermath of the current course established by the international actors that are backing the rebel groups half way. Their involvement in the Syrian civil war by financing different parties in an unequal manner raises the feeling of grievances among the domestic opponents, determining a counter attack effect and lack of trust among the fighters

5.4. Conclusions of the chapter

In this chapter I point out how the commitment issue and lack of cooperation among the Syrian government and the rebel opposition makes difficult the achievement of a peace treaty. I examine here how the parties fear for their own security affecting the confidence building process. Both Assad and the rebel forces face a security dilemma that hinders the negotiation process, as a peace treaty oblige the opponents to lay down their only tools of protection. In order to allow the end of the war, they will have to overcome challenges of mistrust and cheating and cooperate in spite of the long term fights they drove among each other. Each fears the betrayal of the other side and the risk of a surprise attack, lowering the chances of cooperation. Furthermore, both Assad and rebel groups will want to be sure that their interests are safeguarded and that the other side will not make use of the resources of the state to gain even more power. Such a situation implies strong promises to commit and disarm, promises that none of the Syrian parties seems willing to make.

From an analytical point of view, disarming is a vital step for stopping the war. A reduction in military power will lower the insecurity concerns among the Syrian parties.

Yet, for both Assad and the rebels, this is a step hard to undertake as the internal security dilemma still prevails their relationship. Building confidence among the Syrian opponents is a necessary step that must be taken in order to stop the war and create a stable state. Yet, the actors do not only concern about their own survival and security but they also distrust their foe, feeling fostered by the violent period of combat that the actors have been engaged in and by the long term grievances suffered during the conflict. The rebel groups are aware of the fact that if they agree to disarm, the Syrian government would disown any political concessions once the opposition group puts its weapons down. They cannot trust that the government will not commit them to prison or execute. This is the credible commitment issue that deters the rebels to reach an agreement. This also explains why the rebel groups aim for political power rather than a negotiated agreement. On the other hand, the government does not trust the rebel either to abide the treaty.

As a consequence, the long -term fighting inflicted the dynamics of the conflict, removing any chance of cooperation, and giving no chance to the opponents but to keep responding to the enhanced level of assaults, reducing the chances of cooperation. A negotiation treaty and peace agreement should address not only the causes that initially started the conflict and the grievances generated during the war but the security problems as well. These security issues represent a critical factor in starting a negotiated process as the two parties that are not in speaking terms are expected not only to risk disarming and put them in danger, but also to cooperate in a post conflict state. Both the opposition and the government would have to put aside their grievances and work together to create a stable state. Therefore, the dynamic approach of the analysis demonstrates the importance of dialogue and confidence building measures among the Syrian adversaries as significant factors that alter the prospect of a negotiated agreement.

In addition, these security concerns determine the actors to make use of any kind of resources, military or financially to ensure their survival. As the actors involved in the conflict aim to win the war or at least to prevent the other part from winning, external assistance helps them to advance their position in the field. Therefore, the international connections are important as they offer incentives, back-up and further help the war, prolonging hence the conflict and enhancing destruction. Their military and financial support creates serious barrier to the consensus. Major powers got involved in the Syrian

conflict supporting one side or another, contributing to the rupture among Assad's government and opposition. However, the Syrian government is much more strongly supported by Russia, Iran or Hezbollah than the rebel side, helping Assad to steadily gain ground. The aspect of power and dominance encourages the international powers to support the sides that will offer them the best advantages at the end of the conflict. Furthermore the rivalry between external actors on the international stage paralyses the effectiveness of the Geneva meetings aimed to bring an end to the atrocities caused by war and reconcile the Syrian opponents. Progress towards peace is though possible through the power sharing prospect. However, this solution is even more problematic and hard to achieve as long as the two sides are expected to annihilate each other. Strengthening the adversary side with an agreement that can be used against them in the future is a major risk, implying the commitment issue again.

At national level, both actors should demonstrate their will to stop the cycle of violence and engage in a negotiated treaty. However, once the war has started, stereotypes about the adversary side are being set, enhancing a conflicting relationship. As the dynamic of the conflict evolves, the parties become more interested in pursuing their interest and so, complicate the conflict through their hostile attitudes. This leads to secondary discords within the main parties. Taken the Syrian case, the constant struggle among the rebel groups over ideological goals creates disorder within the opposition preventing them from focusing on achieving their final aim, removing Assad from power. The extreme factionalism and divided opposition diminishes the military threat that the rebels pose to the Syrian government, offering to Assad opportunities to advance its power.

All in all, given the considerable risks this chapter has identified it makes sense why each of the domestic actors displays a reluctant attitude to a negotiated settlement.

5.5. Application of commitment theory

Taking into consideration the raised number of actors involved in the conflict, the commitment theory successfully demonstrates how the Syrian opponents fail to abide to a negotiated treaty as they cannot solve their grievances fearing that the other side will take advantage of them if they agree with the settlement. Similarly the rebels cannot trust that

Assad will respect the agreement. As the opposition gave up its arms, Assad can annihilate them while re-consolidating its power.

Developing confidence between Assad and the opposition seems a hard task to achieve. Through the commitment theory perspective, the negotiating parties fear for their own security, fear they will be at disadvantage or even destroyed. They will find it difficult to agree over sensitive issues as disarmament or power-sharing. For the Syrian government a negotiated process would mean putting down its weapons and offer part of its authority to the rebels while the rebels may use this benefit to obtain more opportunities. The commitment issue is considered one of the major impediments to a negotiated agreement in a civil war. Furthermore, taking into consideration the long-term grievances among the Syrian combatants over access to power or due to abuses they will find it difficult to start cooperation and trust each other. Taking into consideration the on the ground development of events, each actor's actions against the other one just fostered distrust, reduced cooperation among them and contributed to inflicting the war. Not only that, in case of accepting a negotiated treaty, both Assad and the Syrian rebels will look at each other with increased mistrust but they will also find it difficult to agree with a settlement.

As the adversaries are not able to design an agreement that ensures their security concern, a 3rd party intervention will address their concerns and offering guarantees. In the Syrian case though, the lack of trust among the opponents is extreme and nothing just promises will not convince them to cooperate. Instead, as the theory argues, before putting aside their weapons the opponents will wish to get a function in the new power structure to safeguard their interests and secure them from a possible attack. This implies a decline in power for the government, therefore needless to say that Assad won't accept losing its power in favor of opposition that may betray the agreement at any time. In order to ensure their interest in the treaty and convince each other of their commitment to peace, the Syrian opponents would have had to pursue some steps to demonstrate they are trustworthy and indeed wish peace. The theory argues that these are acts that the adversaries would undertake only if they were truly committed to the agreement, which does not seem to be Syria's case. None of the opponents undertook clear steps to ensure the other side of its desire to put down its weapons and engage in the negotiation process.

6. *Seizing the ripe moment*

The conflict in Syria continues to burn unabated, an antagonism that became more brutal, entrenched and sanguinary. Studies show that civil wars are more likely to end in military victories than in negotiated settlements and cease-fire.⁸⁶ For a negotiation process to achieve a successful result an outside intervention is necessary, an arbiter, as United Nations, to initiate the agreement and work out the commitment issues and fears that hold back the opponents to engage in a peace process. Without a significant 3rd party intervention the combatants will find it extremely difficult to put their weapons down and abide to negotiations. However, as the outside arbiter has a very important mission to settle the war, choosing the right moment to initiate a peace process is vital. Therefore, the triumph of a peace process lies in the timing of efforts for resolution.⁸⁷

Over the last decade, the experts started to reckon the importance of when the peace process is likely to start and when a negotiated process is likely to produce a positive change on the course of the protracted war. In these expert circles, the specialists stress the importance of a proper moment in which the opponent sides are more likely to agree to a peace process. In his work, Zartman named this phase of the conflict “the ripe moment”, cataloging it as a necessary condition for a negotiated settlement. The warring parties will agree to negotiate only when they feel ready to do it. Without ripeness, the wars can be controlled, suppressed but not settled.⁸⁸

According to Zartman, only a certain set of circumstances determine the adversaries to consider a settlement. And what can determine the combatants to start a negotiation treaty is the mutually hurting stalemate feeling. In Syria’s case, in spite of the terrible fights deployed among Assad government and the opposition, the civil war has not reached yet the “mutually hurting stalemate”- a stance within the adversaries acknowledge that their cause cannot be advanced anymore by carrying on the fight and that a continuation of the war will only hurt them more. In a complicated war like this, all actors with the power to

⁸⁶ Kreutz, Joakim. 2010. “How and When Armed Conflicts End: Introducing the UCDP Conflict Termination Dataset,” *Journal of Peace Research*, p. 243-250.

⁸⁷ Op. Cit., Druckman, Diehl, “Conflict Resolution”, Vol. 2, p. 99

⁸⁸ Ibid. Druckman, Diehl, “Conflict Resolution”, Vol. II, p. 101

spoil the resolution must perceive a stalemate and deadlines and the necessity to exchange the certainty of military standstill with the insecurity of a peace process that will include the punishment of all responsible for war crimes. So far, the actors have not felt the pain so much so as to trigger negotiations. The international financial and military support for the fighting parts has been creating the perfect environment for them to continue the war from the very first beginning. In spite of all the diplomatic trial, the military aid sent by external powers to the fighting actors before the Geneva meeting in 2014 just contributed to another diplomatic failure, further prolonging the war, determining both Assad and the opposition to carry on the fight military and politically. The international discord also affects the internal development of events, Russia and China vetoing any resolution against Assad. As Assad feels protected by two strong super-powers he won't feel any need for accepting the conditions of Geneva protocol. On the other hand, the opposition might accept negotiation as long as Assad won't be part of a future leadership group.

The concept of ripeness describes only the moment in which the fighting sides are prepared for negotiations and does not assure a successful conflict negotiation. None of the Syrian parties gives signs of wishing to de-escalate the conflict. On the contrary, the probability for a negotiated agreement in the foreseeable future is nominal in the Syrian case. However, foreign governments insist that only a diplomatic solution will bring a ceasefire to the conflict. Though, the meetings aimed to end the Syrian Civil War, known in the diplomatic circles as Geneva meetings, failed to provide the appropriate results expected by both Syrian people and international community. The peace rounds failed to create a bridge to communication among the warring parties and to make them more opened to peace, as the brutal combat destroyed any mean of cooperation and any mean of establishing trust among the opponents. In spite of all these issues, the fighting parties agreed with the negotiations. Yet, their decision to get engaged in the Geneva peace talks is explained not by their desire to put an end to the armed struggle but by the presence of the external pressure of their international supporters. As both the Syrian regimen and the opposition have been drawn into a forced negotiation by the U.N., the last Geneva meeting in February 2014 made a very modest progress, the parties barely initiating dialogue with each other. In a MHS moment the opponents see negotiations as a way of recompense, process that will bring benefits to both sides. Therefore, it is needless to say that the parties which consider negotiations unnecessary or poorly aligned with their expectations are

unlikely to ground a fair peace process. The Geneva Communique does not seem to satisfy combatants' expectations, as Assad does not wish a transitional government and the opposition rejects a government that includes Assad as well.

Furthermore, if a negotiation process does start, it will not provide a successful resolution as long as one side will have the feeling of winning the war. In this manner, the winning side will be reluctant to compromise and agree with any conditions that will not bring more advantages than the ones already provided by the winning status. As it believes it has a chance of winning the war, the winning side will not be interested anymore to create the necessary conditions for negotiation. On the other hand, the losing side will be reserved to abide to negotiations as long as it believes it can change its negotiations status through a military counter-attack. In the Syrian case, none of the parties registered progress for a long period of time, the opponents finding themselves in a zero-sum game. However, lately the Syrian government is slowly making progress against the opposition, regaining territory and confidently organizing presidential elections. Its army seems to be better equipped, trained and superiorly organized to the opposition. Furthermore, the fact that Assad's regimen received the necessary external support in key moments of the war speeded in the end its advancement in the combat. In contrast with the regimen, the rebels' lack of unification and their division in several coalitions weakened their position on the battlefield. An enhanced division of the rebels can only encourage Assad's army to carry on the war, giving him weak reasons to feel the need for a peace treaty. Feeling that he is winning ground, he does not perceive the hurting stalemate and this does not motivate him to find a solution to the crisis. Therefore the international powers' efforts to provide a solution will fail as long as some of the parties won't have an increased sense of urgency and danger. However, the existence of pain does not guarantee a negotiation process or a search for alternative solutions; on the contrary, it can create an adversary reaction, increased pain leading to the intensification of resistance. Even if ripeness is considered a necessary condition for a negotiations process to start, not all ripeness moments result in negotiations.⁸⁹ The imposition of pain in the Syrian case failed to determine the opponents to bargain, each party responding with an enhanced military attack to its adversary counter attack, reducing the chances of reconciliation, pain being a justification for war intensification. Additionally, both parties hope they will prevail militarily, not being

⁸⁹ Ibid., Druckman, Diehl, "Conflict Resolution", Vol.II, p 111

therefore willing to accept any compromise. On the other hand, pressure on one of side of the conflict determines the actor to increase its resistance even more, generating an opposed reaction to the long-expected ripe moment. Both U.S. and E.U. imposed freeze assets and oil and business ban on Syria, trying to determine Assad to cease the fire. Yet, Assad did not back down, carrying on its attacks against the rebels. Even though the external powers were functioning after MHS principle, trying to induce pain feeling, the Syrian regimen was operating under the logic of justifying the pain, responding with more violence.

However, ripeness is not a sudden factor, but a difficult process of modifications in the development of events, changes in public attitudes and new visions amid decision makers.⁹⁰ The ripeness idea emphasis that the willingness of the fighting parties to settle a negotiation is primordial, as their willingness can lead to a de-escalation of the war. But this willingness is driven only by a perception of a way out for the opponents. Without a sense of way out the outside intervention aimed to facilitate the peace process is useless. Ripeness is a perceptual event, is a perception of the conditions that create the MHS and not the condition itself.⁹¹ The Syrian opponents have to perceive themselves in a hurting stalemate which will determine them to choose the settlement over war. Only when they will find themselves in a highly painful situation they will be willing to search for alternative solutions that will offer them benefits. In the Syrian case, parties' willingness to bargain seems extremely low as the opposition refuses to negotiate with Assad, while the regimen's ruler is willing to negotiate only on his own terms of remaining the legitimate ruler, condition that the opposition will never accept.⁹² Employing peace on actors that don't want it guarantees a failure of the negotiated process. Furthermore, different agendas from both sides along with the struggle for survival barely leave room for compromise. The 2014 Geneva meeting has been considered by the Syrian ruler, Assad, and by the opposition representatives an opportunity to reinforce their stance and delegitimize the adversary, being supported, again, by their allies. Yet, rulers' willingness to negotiate is highly dependable on the appropriate conditions within the parties as between them.⁹³

⁹⁰ Op.Cit., Rambotham, Woodhoue, Mial, "Contemporary Conflict Resolution", p.167

⁹¹ Op. Cit., Druckman, Diehl, "Conflict Resolution", Vol. II, p. 103

⁹² Manfreda Primož, "Why no solution to Syrian Conflict. Obstacles to Peaceful Resolution in Syria", Middle East Issues, <http://middleeast.about.com/od/syria/tp/Why-No-Solution-To-Syrian-Conflict.htm>

⁹³ Op. Cit., Druckman, Diehl, "Conflict Resolution", Vol. II, p 96

Stedman argues that “ripeness comes in part from processes internal to groups in conflict”,⁹⁴ considering the domestic division among leadership a serious obstacle to a successful negotiation treaty. The high discord among the rebels deters the “appropriate moment” for resolution, each having a different view over the outcome of the conflict and fighting for different final objectives. Another important factor that affects the development of a right moment is represented by the intra-party support enjoyed by the leaders and the possibility of a new leadership that may change the course of events. These two aspects tend to enhance a deadlock situation. In the situation in which the Syrian opposition is not considered entirely legitimate by the rebel groups to represent their interest at Geneva meetings, and even the two main negotiators, Assad and SNC, have issues accepting each other’s as bargaining partners, a ripe moment for peace seems far away, the misunderstanding adding fluidity to the conflict. Assad represents a single voice in the Geneva talks, while the opposition encounters difficulties to show up at the talks as a representative of a united group. Therefore is really difficult for them to come out with a serious counterforce to Assad’s position.

In conclusion, managing the conflict in Syria will become possible only when the increased feeling of pain will force both Assad and the rebels to change their perception over the outcome of the war. The Syrian conflict has not yet reached a sufficiently hurtful level for the Syrian adversaries to alter the status quo and determine them to cooperate. They have not reached the mutual hurting stalemate where unilateral actions would offer them fewer benefits than joint actions. As they don’t feel the costs and the pain they are not interested in seeking for a way out either. Therefore the ripe moment for negotiations seems far away. Additionally, receiving international support from the world powers, the Syrian opponents’ don’t feel an increased level of threat. The external pressure is not sufficient to determine them to agree with the negotiated treaty. The international support only encourages them to carry on the fight, postponing the MHS and the ripe moment.

6.1 Application of “the ripe moment” theory

Analyzing the Syrian conflict by applying Zartman’s “ripe moment theory” proves that the situation is not yet right for conflict resolution. Zartman’s theory focuses on the

⁹⁴ Stedman, Stephen John, ‘Peacemaking in Civil War’, 1991, Boulder, Colo.: Lynne Rienner’, Spoiler problems in peace processes.’, 1997, , International Security, p.283

importance of the ripe moment for negotiations in a conflict. From his point of view identifying the appropriate moment that leads to a conflict resolution is vital as this is the only moment when the 3rd part has the best chances to start a peace process. The Syrian opponents will make peace only when they will be prepared for it, only when unilaterally actions fail to produce the expected results and the adversaries will find themselves in costly situation. In that moment they will turn their attention to other available solutions, as a negotiated treaty. However, as long as at least one side is not feeling the hurting stalemate the war is far from finish. Assad is slowly making progress, winning battles and regaining parts of the lost territories. He makes appreciable gains which discourages him to change its strategy towards the Syrian rebels. When conditions are ripe for negotiations, the 3rd party intervention and their mediation attempts will provide a successful resolution. Within the scholarly literature, ripeness represents the best moment under which conflict management has the best chance to be successful. While MHS represents a necessary condition to start negotiations it is not though a sufficient one, as during the bargaining process the fighting parties must receive more attractive prospects from negotiators to determine them to cooperate. Therefore, the push factor represented by the high cost of war and pain feeling is replaced by a pull factor. In the Syrian case, besides an increased pain the opponents must also accept the incentives U.N. is offering to negotiate. As a transitional government and power sharing does not attract Assad, he is strongly rejecting any pact.

7. Final conclusions

The aim of this thesis is to discover *why a negotiated settlement has not yet been found in the Syrian Civil War case*. Conclusively, this study has revealed several issues that lay at the basis of a delayed negation process within Syrian War. Studies show that almost 70% of civil wars finish through a military victory and not through a negotiated settlement.⁹⁵ If

⁹⁵ Walter, Barbara, "The four things we know about how civil wars end", Political violence at a glance, 18 October 2013. <http://politicalviolenceataglance.org/2013/10/18/the-four-things-we-know-about-how-civil-wars-end-and-what-this-tells-us-about-syria/>

it were to follow the statistics, this may also be the case of the Syrian War, the conflict having slight chances to a negotiated peace.

In the first instance, the project identified that the commitment issue is one of the main reason that discourage opponents to get seriously involved in a negotiation process and to accept the conditions of Geneva II. The fighting parties fear for their own security, fear that the other side will cheat the treaty and will caught them unprepared for a surprise attack. As one condition of Geneva II involves the formation of a transitional government that comprise members from both side this mean that the opponents will have to agree to power sharing, matter they are not prepared to do.

A key problem is that ideal conditions for starting negotiations and deliver power sharing agreements seldom exists, exactly because of a low level of trust among the opponents. Even though history proves that power sharing arrangements represent a proper strategy for stabilizing the country and mitigate the security dilemma, advancing and implementing such tools in a state with a protracted war is much more difficult. As a transitional period will follow, power sharing arrangements at political or military level will not be clearly determined and betrayal may be easily committed by both Assad and the Syrian opposition. Therefore power sharing arrangements may give rise to tensions even if the Syrian opponents will seek or not to advance their power.

However, commitment and power sharing issues resulted from the constant struggle for survival will occur in any circumstances, even in the absence of veto-players. Yet, this is not the Syrian case as the plurality of veto-players at both domestic and international level represents a serious obstacle to a negotiated agreement. The myriad rebel groups and the constant shift in power makes it difficult for the international powers to determine who the next veto-players that it might thenceforth hinder the treaty will be. Additionally, not including all significant actors in the negotiation process increases the risk of peace failure. U.S. strongly rejected Iran's presence at Geneva meetings. Even if Iran publicly stated its support towards Assad's regimen, refusing to agree with the pre-conditions of the talks he is highly involved in the conflict. Therefore, its importance in the peace treaty should not be neglected. The international players involved in the conflict must also be convinced to settle an agreement. With Russia and China vetoing any resolution against Assad and the

deteriorating relation among U.S. and Russia, a peace agreement seems difficult to be achieved. The necessary international commitment required for peace is missing. In the absence of an international united leadership to prioritize the effect the crisis is having over the Syrian people and not one that divides its support according to their own political interests, the aim of Geneva talks will not be fulfilled.

To complicate the situation even more, the Syrian opposition is highly fractured, the rebel groups fighting against each other instead of focusing its entire strength on the actual aim of the revolution. The aim of each fighting group is defeating the other one. However, reaching their aim seems difficult as they do not have the necessary capability to do so. Only lately Assad started to gain ground, giving the impression that it is slowly regaining its status. And even if the fractioned opposition could unify, they don't have serious reasons to believe that the Syrian president will respect the terms of the agreement once they put down their weapons. Additionally, the negotiations are not grounded on reality as the fighting parts have been forced to partake at the negotiations; Obama administration forcing the opposition to attend the Geneva talks under threats of reducing their financial support while Assad has been offered incentives to cooperate.

The last part of the project identified that the absence of a mutually hurting stalemate determines some fighting parts to carry on the combat instead of accepting negotiations. As Assad is convinced he will win the war, making serious preparations for elections and winning the last battles, he does not seem to perceive the pain feeling. None of the opponents feels a raised sense of urgency to abide to the treaty. The ripe moment for negotiated is thenceforth influenced by the willingness to give up. None of the Syrian adversaries seems to be willing to negotiate, willingness being an important factor for war termination. Additionally the resistance to the mutually hurting stalemate in the Syrian case is complicated by the fact that both Assad and the rebels decided to respond to increased pain with more pain, prolonging the war and delaying the bargaining. And as there are not any international attractive prospects to convince them to cooperate, the war will continue.

In conclusion, analyzing the conflict by employing 3 different theoretical approaches I was able to uncover why it is so difficult to settle a negotiated agreement in the Syrian Civil

War. The conflict is too complicated to be explained only from one single point of view, as it proves to be remarkably difficult in all its dimensions. The most political scientists are skeptics regarding Syrian war termination in the foreseeable future and are highly pessimistic that the conflict will end in a negotiated treaty. The Syrian war has a bad configuration of seriously commitment issues, veto-players, lack of mutually hurting stalemate along with highly fragmented opposition and international discord.

Therefore, for the above mentioned reasons, and for many others, “the likelihood of a successful negotiated settlement in Syria is close to zero.”⁹⁶

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