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PROLIFERATION OF ARMED GROUPS AND THE SYRIAN CIVIL WAR

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A B S T R A C T

The armed conflict in Syria that began in 2011 in the wave of popular protests and uprising seeking political and economic change from the authoritarian government of President Bashar Al-Assad. However, Syria degenerated into full scale civil war in 2012. These developments made Syria to appear as a theatre of two significant challenges: the influx of foreign fighters seeking to join various parties in the war and global involvement in multiple power struggles between both regional and international influences. The Syrian civil war has protracted resulting in wanton destruction of lives and property as well as heavy shipments, transfers and exchange of weapons and ammunition among rebel fighters. All of these have culminated into the attendant insecurity that pervades the entire Middle East. Anchored on the Regional Security Complex Theory (RSCT), the researcher adopted the documentary method as well as time series research design in carrying out the study. Findings in the study revealed that the Syrian civil war is implicated in the multiplicity of terrorists and armed groups in the Middle East. The international actors violated series of Syrian peace agreements (including LIN Security Council Resolution 2254; Geneva I-VII, Astana 1-VI; Russia –Turkey ceasefire; Four de-escalation zone pact, etc). Increased hostilities resulted to death toll of over 465,000, one million injured and over twelve million Syrians internally displaced. Syrian refuges scattered in the Middle East countries rose significantly from 21,533 in 2010 to 4,857,617 in 2016. The study, therefore, recommended resolution for ceasefire at the level of UN Security Council, disbandment of various rebel groups fighting in Syria, prosecution of war criminals as well as entrenchment of democratic culture in Syria. The study further contributed to the existing body of knowledge by establishing the empirical linkages between the Syrian war and the rising insecurity in the Middle East which has become a source for concern to the global community.

1. INTRODUCTION

The civilian populations in Syria have been the worst hit in the ensuing conflict which has raised one of the highest forms of human displacement in the world. According to IDMC (2018) there have not been any respect for civilians, who continued to bear the brunt of extreme violence committed by all parties and fled their homes across the country, especially in a situation where many of them have experienced multiple displacements at different times to steadily diminishing areas of safety. The hostilities were relentless and included deliberate targeting of civilians and civilian infrastructure, such as schools and healthcare facilities. During military actions such as the one in Eastern Ghouta, many people continued to be deliberately deprived of aid and access to basic services such as food, water and medical care resulting to sever challenges in internal displacement. Offensives, such as the Government of Syria's offensive to retake eastern Aleppo that ended with government victory in December 2016, have had staggering consequences for the civilian population. Following intense fighting in the Aleppo city, many innocent, nearly 160,000 persons have been forced to flee from their homes and this has caused widespread damage to housing and infrastructure (Van Dam, 2017). Syria has therefore become a major scene of violent conflicts with different shades of civilian endangerment and protection risks. There has been a pool of new fighting wings recruited into the conflict day after day by Syrian conflict mongers. The proliferation of dangerous chemical weapons, small arms and light weapons (SALW) as well as armed groups has resulted in wanton destruction of lives and property as well as intensification of complex humanitarian issues. A labyrinth of external interventions and strategic involvement of regional and global powers has also dangerously played out inside and across Syrian borders spreading into the entire Middle East. This has not only deepened dissentions and intensified the war among the conflicting parties, but has further polarized the fighting rebel groups along religious, ethnic and political lines, causing political instability inside Syria and even generally in the Middle East.

Generally, the conflict in Syria is estimated to have cost the little country about $7.5 billion and doubled unemployment to 20 percent. Syria has used up more than 90 percent of its ballistic missiles against rebels during a more

than four-year-old civil war but a few were transferred to Hezbollah guerrillas in neighbouring Lebanon, while Syria's Scud-type missiles as well as Iran's long-range Shehabs remain potential threats (Phillips, 2018).

The loss of lives and property in the Syrian conflict has been quite tremendous and irredeemable. According to the World Bank, more than 400,000 people have been killed in Syria since the start of the war. The UN reports that more than 5.6 million people have fled the country, and 6.5 million have been internally displaced. Many refugees have fled to Jordan and Lebanon, straining already weak infrastructure and limited resources. More than 3.4 million Syrians have fled to Turkey, and many have attempted to seek refuge in Europe (Council on Foreign Relations, 2018). About 1 million Lebanese were already judged by the World Bank as "poor," and an additional 170,000 have been pushed into poverty. The Syrian refugee population in the country has reached at least 1 million, making Syrians now almost a third of the total Lebanese population (Polak, 2013). In Jordan, half a million refugees are camped out there. One refugee encampment in the country houses over 100,000 people and has become Jordan's fifth largest city. Almost as many as this number have also fled to Turkey. Tens of thousands more, mainly Kurds have fled the genocidal attacks of the Syrian rebels and gone to Iraq (Polak, 2013). Farmer and Sherlock (2013) reveal that opposition forces fighting to overthrow Bashar al-Assad's regime in Syria now number around 100,000 fighters, but that after more than two years of battle they have been fragmented into as many as 1,000 bands. There are around 10,000 jihadists including foreign fighters who have been fighting for powerful factions linked to al-Qaeda. Another 30,000 to 35,000 are hardline Islamists who share much of the outlook of the jihadists, but are focused purely on the Syrian war rather than a wider international struggle. This is in addition of at least 30,000 moderates belonging to groups that have an Islamic character. This therefore means that only a small minority of the rebels are linked to secular or purely nationalist groups.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study is anchored on the Regional security complex theory (RSCT). Regional security complex theory is a theory of regional security developed by Barry Buzan and Ole Waever in the 1980s. The theory was further advanced by Barry Buzan and Ole Waever in their 2003 masterpiece Regions and Powers: The Structure of International Security, thus making the theory to gain wider global attention. Other scholars that popularized this theory include Bill McSweeny (1993), Mohammed Ayoob (1999), Charles Hemmer and Peter Katzenstein (2002), Michael C. Williams (2003), Tula Kahrs (2004), Rajesh M. Basrur (2006) among others. According to Buzan (2003, P.4);

> *The central idea in RSCT is that, since most threats travel more easily over short distances than long ones, security interdependence is normally into regionally based clusters: security complexes. Process of securitization and thus the degree of security interdependence are more intense between actors inside such complexes than they are between actors inside the complex and outside of it.*

Fundamentally, regional security complex theory explains how security concerns tie together in a regional formation, where geographical adjacency is the factor of paramount importance (Buzan and Weaver, 1998). A regional security complex can be defined "as a set of units whose major processes of securitization, de-securitization or both are so interlinked that their problems cannot reasonably be analyzed or resolved apart from one another. This means that a security problem in one country will affect the security of all other countries in that region. Hence, security problem in a particular country within a given region becomes the security concern of all members of that region. The basic concept underpinning Regional security complexes is that "most political and military threats travel more easily over short distances than over long ones, insecurity is often associated with proximity" (Buzan and Weaver, 1998:11). State actors therefore view the world as regional clusters, whereby security complexes are magnified within these clusters (Buzan, 2003: 45).

The formation of regional security complex is driven by the assumption that after the Cold War, international relations would take on a more regionalized character. It is also hinged on interaction of anarchy with social and geographical factors. These factors could be manifested in the form of terror, violent conflict, crime, violence, uprisings, war etc. In this case, many different types of threats projectors and actors are clustered in the web of regional security complex studies as a means of providing a broader view and state-centric focus in global security analysis. In other words, regional and global patterns of response to regional security issues may differ but would be distinctively intertwined and tied together in a complex system (Buzan and Weaver, 1998). The main features of a RSC are the differentiation of units, the number of units, the patterns of amity and enmity and the distribution of power. In sum, the structure of a security complex is generated by the states within that complex by their security perceptions of, and interactions with, each other. Basically, RSCs can be "standard" or "centered," in terms of formation, and alliances. It is standard when it involves at least two powers with a primarily military security agenda; while it is centered when it involves a major or great power with a number of significantly less powerful states. Again, in the case of standard RSCs anarchy dominates; while in centered formations the main power dominates security interaction (Buzan & Weaver, 1998).

It is further argued that the security complexes of states depend primarily on the pressures deriving from geographic proximity, and the interplay between the anarchic structure and how balances of power play out in the system. State actors therefore view the world as regional clusters, whereby security complexes are magnified within these clusters (Buzan, 2003). Often, the primary factor in complex definition is "a high level of security threat/fear which is mutually felt among two or more states of the region. States however may have various shared and convergent interests as interdependency need not be a priori conflictual (Buzan, 1983; Buzan & Weaver, 2005). It is also crucial to pay attention to criteria of regional security, especially considered from the perspective of the region's position in the world system (Kusztal , 2017). Regions should be regarded as mini systems where all other International Relations theories can be applied, such as balance of power, polarity, interdependence, alliance systems, etc.

What is paramount in this exposition which underscores the basic assumption of RSC is that the security interdependence is more intense among the states inside such complexes than with states outside them. In this context, security complexes are focused on relative intensity of interstate security relations. These relations lead to regional patterns shaped by the differentiation among the units or actors of the complex, depicting patterns of enmity and amity among these units and as a result, the distribution of power. In sum, the structure of a security complex is generated by the states within that complex by their security perceptions of, and interactions with, each other. As Ayoob (1999) pointed out, a security community requires a conscious recognition on the part of regional states that they have certain common interests they need to preserve despite the existence of differences, even disputes among them. This recognition leads to regional integration while changing the power structure of the complex (Ayoob, 1999). Thus, the Regional Security Complex Theory uses a blend of materialistic and constructivist approaches. It is materialistic when it uses ideas of bounded territoriality and distribution of power that are close to neo-realist analyses and it is constructivist when it refers to the process of securitization as a product of inter-subjective interaction, essentially open and subject to influence by a host of factors including state and non-state actors, violent conflicts, crime, hostage-taking, internal displacement, uprisings, terrorism etc (Williams, 2003).

In connection to this study, regional security complex theory (RSCT) offers scientific spectrum with which to understand and appreciate that the Syrian civil war has a wider impact or effect on the security of the Middle East. This underscores Buzan (1998) argument that a security problem in one country will affect the security of all other countries in that region. Hence, the ongoing security problem in Syria has had a spiral effect on the entire Middle East region. In essence, the Syrian crisis has fully attracted the attention and interventions of other countries in the Middle East including Iran, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, in the Middle East, Israel, Turkey, United Arab Emirates, Jordan, Kuwait etc. (see, Khalaf & Smith, 2013). This is primarily because "most threats travel more easily over short distances than long ones, security interdependence is normally into regionally based clusters: security complexes. Process of securitization and thus the degree of security interdependence are more intense between actors inside such complexe." Buzan (2003, p.4). Therefore, we hinge on the RSCT to make key arguments as follows: first, that the Syrian civil war has been externalized or regionalized to the wider Middle East region, to the point that key drivers of the conflict, including the state and non-state actors, arms and weapons shipments, human displacement, coalition forces, trans-border crimes, violent attacks, peace agreements, military interventions etc are now regionalized, or regionally implicated. Secondly, that the conflict in the Middle East has remained protracted as a result of the regionalization of the conflict, i.e. the militaristic posture of the external parties to the conflict, including state and non-state actors within the Middle East region and beyond –(the U.S. and Riussian Federation). In other words, the negative effects that Syrian conflict projects: militarization of the conflict – arming of rebels, weapons shipments, proliferation of small arms and light and light weapons (SALW), use of chemical weapons, human displacements, sprouting activities of terrorist groups and armed groups, etc, are all as a result of the overriding influences, political interests, and orchestrated interventions of regional powers, and by extension global powers. These constitute the key parties to the conflict, and not just the Syrian government of Bashar al-Assad and his perceived opposition groups or 'rebel fighters'.

3. METHODOLOGY

This study adopts the time series design which involves a series of repeated pre-measurement and post-measurement or before and after observation. This paper equally adopted the documentary method of data collection. This is in tune with the documentary method. Since 2011 when the first shots were fired in the Syrian Civil war, there have been quite a number of recorded and documented accounts about it. Therefore, this study made attempts to dissect some of these sources as it concerns the Syrian Civil war. Hence, through logical interpretation of the data and information embedded in the numerous materials generated for the study which is based on the Syrian civil war and insecurity in the Middle East, it was possible to carefully evaluate facts and draw up relevant conclusions.

4. MULTIPLICITY OF TERRORISM AND ARMED GROUP IN SYRIA

Farmer and Sherlock (2013) reveal that opposition forces fighting to overthrow Bashar al-Assad's regime in Syria now number around 100,000 fighters, but that after more than two years of battle they have been fragmented into as many as 1,000 bands. There are around 10,000 jihadists including foreign fighters who have been fighting for powerful

factions linked to al-Qaeda. Another 30,000 to 35,000 are hardline Islamists who share much of the outlook of the jihadists, but are focused purely on the Syrian war rather than a wider international struggle. This is in addition of at least 30,000 moderates belonging to groups that have an Islamic character. This therefore means that only a small minority of the rebels are linked to secular or purely nationalist groups. An important factor that should be noted in the Syrian conflict and the rebels fighting in the ongoing conflict is the influx of foreign fighters who are mainly extraction from the Middle East. Jenkins (2014) revealed that most of the 6,000 to 8,000 foreign fighters among Syria's rebels are drawn from Middle East and Arab countries such as —Iraq, Libya, Tunisia, a large number of Chechens, and volunteers from Pakistan and some from the Gulf kingdoms. Euronews (12 May 2013) also showed that between 1,500 and 2,000 volunteer fighters have gone from Europe to Syria and more are joining in the ongoing Syrian civil war.

Turkey has been the major entrance route through which many foreign rebel fighters are transported into Syria. Al Nusra is a rebel group that continues to be attractive to most foreign recruits. These foreign fighters who have been well known for their international status especially in view of their consistent role in fighting in foreign wars as combatants which does not show any accommodation for peaceful settlements of dispute. These foreign fighters count on their experience in Syrian war and had already established wide structures and networks in Syria that will enable them engage in similar rebellions in their own countries. Many countries in Europe and Middle East worry so much about the future of their own internal security should these rebel fighters return home with military skills and combat experience and now indulge in terrorist activities. In view of their proximity and volume, Syria's foreign fighters are viewed as a much larger problem compared to the experience of the security risks posed by past generation of veterans who returned from Afghanistan (Jenkins, 2014). Jones (2013) remarks that some Americans have joined the Syrian rebels since November 2013. Some discussions among prospective members were seen in the social media platform which indicated aspirations. This was backed by a notion of safe jihadi in which rebels pretend that to participate is attractive, even when there is concern that once there, individuals may be further radicalized and redirected to participate in acts of terrorism at home.

Report of the Small Arms Survey (2014) shows that some foreign rebels who are termed 'volunteers' have joined in the Syrian war even without first establishing links with rebel groups or organizations in Syria. The common network of their engagement are through contacts inside Syria by others: friends already in Syria, casual acquaintances from home (from the mosque or the workplace, for example), or people contacted via online social networks (mainly Facebook, and usually after a process of referral by 'friends of friends'). This method of recruitment of foreign rebel fighters in Syria represents a bottom-up ideological process in which informal process is adopted. While recruiting 'networks' functionally exist, they may not actually have a formal structure. The report shows that at the Turkish border cities, rebel groups who are positioned in the front lines maintain certain coordinated method in which they facilitate have border-crossing schemes to assist foreign fighters who wish to cross into Syria. Syrian-based 'transfer coordinators' maintain a network in which they hand over new recruits to their own sister groups who are already in Syria and there they would arrange for logistics to carter for those foreign fighters being recruited. Coordinators take charge of specific border region, and they move the incoming foreign fighters across the border and into the ranks of the particular unit. When foreign fighters arrive Syria, they establish contact with the coordinators on ground who prepare for their settlement and other logistics needed for them to fit in with their conflict environment.

Table 1. Key Syrian Regime Fighters and Opposition Rebels

S/N	Name	Commander/ Origin	Ideology	Goal	Supporting States/ Funder	Component Groups	Fighting Strength
1	Syrian Armed Forces	Fahd Jassem al-Freij	Baathist, Secularist, Arab Nationalist	Preserving Assad regime	Assad's Regime/ Russia, Iran etc.	Infantry, Artillery, Tanks, Air Force	Force: 220-280,000 fighters. Artillery, Air Power (Russian MiGs) Tactics: : Dropping barrel-bombs on civilian areas
2	Al-Quds Force And Basij Militia (IRAN)	Qasem Soleimani (founded 1979)	Shi'ite Islamist, Iranian Nationalist	Iranian regional hegemony	Assad's Regime	Al-Quds Force, Basij Militias	Quds Force 15,000 total, Basij militias unknown. Tactics: Elite infantry force, superior training and military intel
3	National Defense Forces (NDF) & Allied Paramilitary Groups	NDF unknown, Others: Mihrac Ural	Shiites, Alawites, Baathists, Sunnis, Communists, Christians	Maintaining Assad's regime	Assad's Regime	NDF, Ba'ath Brigades (BB),TSR, Other militia units that support Assad	100,000 for the NDF, BB 10,000. Tactics: Brutal, guerrilla tactics
4	Hezbolla	Hassan Nasrallah	Shiite Islamism/	Supporting	N/A	None	Force: 20,000-30,000 (25% full-time active).

S/N	Name	Commander/ Origin	Ideology	Goal	Supporting States/ Funder	Component Groups	Fighting Strength
			Lebanese Shi'ite terrorist group formed to fight Israel	Iran/Assad strategic alliance			Tactics: Well-trained, disciplined fighting force which turned the tide for the Regime at Qusayr and Yabroud battles
5	Islamic Front	Ahmed Issa al-Sheik (from Suqour al-Sham)	Sunni Islamism	The removal of Assad and later creation of an Islamic State, Jihad		Ahrar as-Sham, Suquor al-Sham Brigades, The Tawhid Brigade, The Haq Brigade, The Ansar al-Sham Battalions, The Islam Army. Rebels, Islamists. Cooperates with Jabhat Al-Nusra	Fighters: 40,000 to 70,000 (March 5th). Tactics: Syria's most powerful insurgent bloc, slightly more moderate Salafi Islamism than Nusra or ISIS
6	Jabhat Al-Nusra	Abu Mohammed al-Joulani	Sunni Islamism	Global Islamic caliphate, Jihad		Al Qaeda's official affiliate in the Syrian conflict. ISIS and Nusra split in mid-2013.	15,000-20,000. Tactics: Suicide bombings
7	The Islamic State (AKA: ISIS, ISIL, DAASH)	Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi	Sunni Islamism	An Islamic state in parts of Iraq and Syria, Global Islamic caliphate	Rebels, Islamists	None	N/A Tactics: Brutality, implementation of sharia
8	Free Syrian Army (FSA)	Various, officially Abdul-Ilah alBashir. Syrian Revolutionary Front (SRF)-Jamal Ma'aruf. Founded 2011	Broadly secularist, some Islamist elements/ sympathies	End of the Assad regime, democratic state	N/A	Supreme Military Council, Syrian Revolutionary Front (SRF), Euphrates Islamic Liberation Front, others	N/A Tactics: Western backed official opposition, comparatively poor funding (under National Coalition of Syria)
9.	Kurdish Popular Protection Units (YPG) And Allies	Sipan Hemo	Kurdish Nationalist, Christian Syriac Military Council (SMC)	Kurdish autonomy. Against Islamists, aim for autonomy from Assad regime		YPG, Syriac Military Council.	40,000-50,000. Tactics: Re-opening schools, driving out ISIS and Nusra
10	The Southern Front	Amman Military Operations Center. Established 2014	N/A	The struggle against IS.	N/A	N/A	23,000 fighters dominated by five "secularist" groups.

S/N	Name	Commander/ Origin	Ideology	Goal	Supporting States/ Funder	Component Groups	Fighting Strength
11	The Khorasan Group	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
12	Ahrar al-Sham	Founded by former Islamist prisoners	Salafist rebel group	a bridge between the secular rebels and the extremists.		Previous al-Qaeda militants, such as its senior leader Abu Khalid al-Suri, who was then al-Qaeda's Syria representative	Between 10,000 and 20,000 fighters, making it the most powerful unit fighting al-Assad under the umbrella of the Islamic Front

Source: Adapted by Author from: Friedland, Elliot (2014) "Fact Sheet: Who's Who In The Syrian Civil War.

The implications of this development on peace and security of Middle East remains a serious concern. Jenkins (2014) noted that the Syrian civil war may prompt a regional war between Sunnis and Shi'as, with Assad forces, Syria's Alawites, Hezbollah fighters, Iraq's Shi'a militias, and Iran on one side, and Syria's rebels; jihadists; and al Qaeda fronts in Lebanon, Iraq, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and the Gulf kingdoms on the other. Such may not attract an open warfare between the forces of the major regional powers—Iran, Saudi Arabia, and Turkey. However, there could be possibility of a war of many fronts, which may not transform to a sectarian conflict, but a war that is limited military incursions, continuing guerrilla warfare, and multiple terrorist campaigns. As Jenkins (2014) contends, President Al-Bashir Assad's forces are complemented by Hezbollah and "volunteers" sent from Iran arrayed against secular, salafist, and jihadist Syrian rebels, who are already being reinforced by fighters from Pakistan's Taliban and other radical Sunni groups. Lebanon's Sunnis, including al Qaeda's new recruits in traditional Sunni bases such as it is in Tripoli and in Palestinian refugee camps where al Qaeda-inspired jihadists are supplanting the old Palestinian terrorist organizations, may fight back on Hezbollah in a reprise of that country's civil war of the 1980s. Saudi Arabia and the Gulf kingdoms could become the targets of Iranian-instigated subversion, sabotage, and terrorism. Friedland (2017) observes that the Syrian conflict has taken an international dimension than being merely a local issue. This is because of the influx of large numbers of Syrian refugees into neighboring countries such as Jordan to the south, Lebanon to the west and into Turkey to the north. The conflict has also been polarized and transformed into a sectarian violence between Sunni and Shiite Muslim communities which has spilled over into Lebanon. This means that the conflict is exacerbating the cycle of violence in Iraq, coupled with the new sporadic incidents of mortar and artillery fire landing in Israel. It is important to note that Assad's regime has maintained peace on Israel's border with Syria for forty years. However, the Israelis regard the Assad regime as thugs, and had serious concerns that an Assad victory will add to Hezbollah's influence and strength, but his fall could bring a host of al Qaeda fanatics to Israel's frontier, all competing to cause trouble (Jenkins, 2014).

4.1 Fragmentation of Terrorist and Armed Groups across Middle East

The opposition rebel forces fighting in the Syrian civil war represent an emergent force. These rebel forces have wide spread and have continued to evolve over the course of the Syrian war. The early stages of the Syrian conflict reflected an isolated bands of poorly armed defectors and amateurs, among which included the butchers, the bakers, the candlestick makers etc, but as the Syrian war continued to expand and attract international interests and supports, the armed rebels have become a force capable of seizing and holding territory across a substantial portion of Syria, challenging the very existence of President Bashar al-Assad's regime. Rebel forces have had control of some major disputed areas close to Damascus and other parts in Northern Syria such as Idlib, Aleppo, and Raqqa provinces as well as some parts in Eastern Syruia such as Deir Ezzor and portions of Homs province. Jeffery (2013) maintains that the rebels are basically drawn from the diverse strata of Syrian society, including the wealthy and poor, urban and rural, secular and religious, tribal and urbanized, educated and uneducated, former military and civilian. Many units are local in origin, raised by local people for the defense of a town or village. Some of the rebels are defectors and many among them are religious in orientation but not extremists or radicals. Some of them are described as Kurdish elements who fight in Aleppo and some Kurds and perhaps Christians are in rebel formations, the rebels are predominantly a Sunni Arab army.

It should be noted that most of the armed opposition rebel groups in Syria are increasingly fragmented. However, the Islamic State (IS) and the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) remain the key factions. Those with the Sunni identity are also remarkably considerable. Apart from foreign jihadists, most of the rebels are of the Sunni Arabs, complemented by a few thousand Sunni Turkmens, which makes it proper to categorize them as a "Sunni rebellion." Although such religious homogeneity is not a strong bond to provide the armed opposition the military the much needed cohesion and unified political identity. Balanche (2016) notes that it is very difficult to identify the dynamic structure and

command lines of the rebel groups, as the number of groups continues to grow with alliances and coalitions bringing steady change in composition and nomenclature. A closer look at the geography of this fragmentation will be useful in providing better understanding of the nature and structure of the rebellion and assess their militant activities. Although there are between 100,000 and 150,000 rebel fighters in Syria about 23 of Syria's hundreds of rebel groups are significant as the main "powerbrokers" and "potential powerbrokers" in the opposition. In total, these groups command an estimated 90,000 fighters. Figure 1 below describes the distribution of main rebel forces in Syria according to their areas of influence, while figure 2 describes them according to their number and ideology.
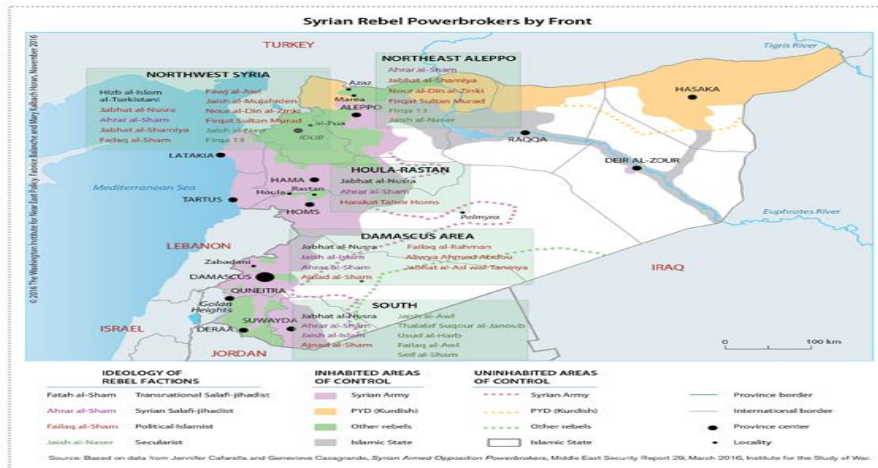
Figure 1. Main Rebel Forces in Syria According to Their Areas of Influence
Source: Balanche (2016) "Status of the Syrian Rebellion: Numbers, Ideologies, and Prospects." Washington Institute.
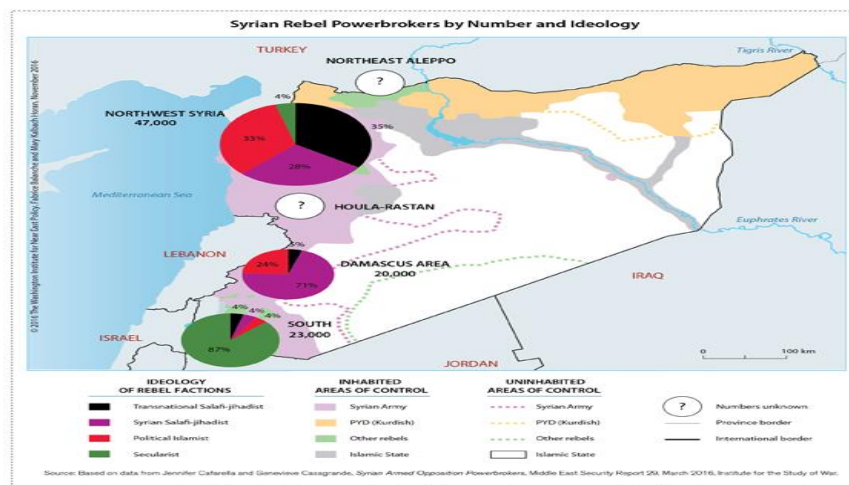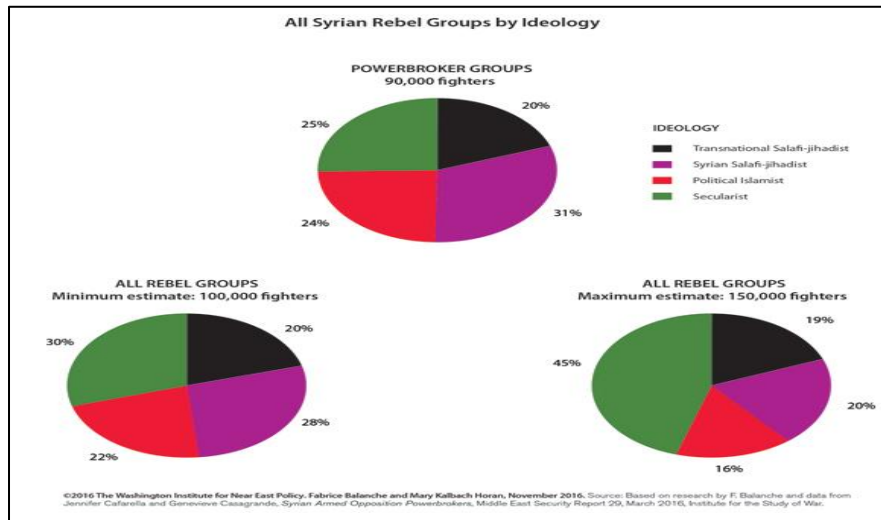

Figure 2. Main rebel forces in Syria according to their Number and Ideology
Source: Balanche (2016) "Status of the Syrian Rebellion: Numbers, Ideologies, and Prospects." Washington Institute.

While the fighting rebel groups range between 100,000 to 150,000 fighters, the Syrian regime forces has more in comparison, with about 125,000 regular army troops and 150,000 pro-government militia members, including around 50,000 Shiite foreign fighters (i.e., Hezbollah personnel and Iranian-trained Iraqis, Pakistanis, and Afghan Hazaras). In addition, the SDF and its main component, the Syrian Kurdish Democratic Union Party (PYD), have about 30,000 fighters. The CIA affirms that IS may have as many as 30,000 total fighters in Syria and Iraq. The IS recruited thousands of local fighters after seizing large tracts of territory in 2014. In specifics, the group's forces could number as many as 200,000, with one-quarter of them in Syria (though the capabilities and loyalties of these additional fighters, whatever their numbers, would likely not be on par with those of the IS core) (Balance, 2016). Among the hundreds of rebel groups fighting in Syria which comprised over 150,000 fighting, about 23 rebel groups have been identified as powerbrokers. These 23 groups comprised of about 90,000 fighters. Among these "powerbroker" rebels, some 20 percent can be classified as transnational jihadists, 31 percent as national jihadists, 24 percent as political Islamists, and 25 percent as "secularists." When the thousands of rebels in the non-powerbroker categories are added, the "secularists" become the largest grouping,

but they are also the most fragmented and therefore the least effective (Balanche, 2016:1). Figure 5.3 shows the ideological bent of the rebel powerbrokers.

Figure 3. Main rebel forces in Syria according to their Number and Ideology
Source: Balanche (2016) "Status of the Syrian Rebellion: Numbers, Ideologies, and Prospects." Washington Institute

It is however believed that the foreign-controlled and foreign-constituted insurgent groups are the most coherent, organized, and effective despite that they share no common language and come from a wide variety of cultures. It is common to find a number of cooperating insurgent groups in one operation, made up of Chechens, Turks, Tajiks, Pakistanis, French, Egyptians, Libyans, Tunisians, Saudi Arabians, and Moroccans. These groups function with the underlying support of the conservative Arab states, particularly Qatar and Saudi Arabia; Turkey, the EU member states; and the U.S (Polk, 2013). The fighting rebels adopt specific coherent military strategy and command structures in their operations. The table below shows operations of rebel groups fighting in Syria and the level of success or failure recorded in the operations.

Table 2: Examples of Rebel Operations

S/N	Name	Timeframe	Area	Outcome
1.	ALEPPO PROVINCE OFFENSIVE	JULY–AUG 2012	ALEPPO PROVINCE	PARTIAL SUCCESS
2.	TAFTANAZ AIRFIELD	JAN 2013	IDLIB	SUCCESS
3.	AL BUNYAN AL MARSOOS	WINTER 2013	IDLIB	FAILURE
4.	OPERATION RETRIBUTION	MAY 2013	IDLIB	SUCCESS
5.	DEFENSE OF KHERBET GHAZALAH	MAY 2013	DERAA	FAILURE
6.	DEFENSE OF ATAIBAH	APRIL 2013	RIF DAMASCUS	FAILURE
7.	ONE BODY BATTLE	MAY–JUNE 2013	EASTERN HAMA	PARTIAL SUCCESS
8.	DEFENSE OF AL-QUSAYR	APRIL–JUNE 2013	SOUTH.HOMS PROVINCE	FAILURE
9.	FURQAN "CRITERION" BATTLE	MAY 2013	RIF DAMASCUS	ONGOING
10.	LIBERATION OF THE COAST	AUGUST 2013	LATAKIA	ONGOING

Source: White, Tabler, and Zelin (2013) "Syria's Military Opposition: How Effective, United, Or extremist." Policy Focus 128, September.

4.2 Training and Funding of Rebel and Armed Groups across Middle East

The United States, developed a programme to train pro-Western opposition fighters, which was launched in 2014. The programme was a central component of the Obama administration's policy in Syria, which sought the overthrow of Assad (CIA, 2017).Mr. Obama first announced the $500m programme for the training of the opposition fighters. Athough the US State Department claims that the sole aim of this initiative was to prevent the spread of ISIS and not per se to fight the Syrian regime. The original $500 million training program began in the spring of 2015 with talk of fielding a force of about 5,000 rebels by the end 2017. So far, more than 400 recruits have been cleared by the Americans to receive light arms training in the current programme. About 90 of these recruits who have training camps in Turkey, Jordan and Saudi Arabia would be expected to be combat ready after several months and the military officers in Pentagon estimates that it will take three years before a full force of 15,000 can be deployed. American-backed rebels may have killed and wounded as many as 10,000 Syrian or allied soldiers (Lung, 2019).

Some U.S. special operations forces have continued to work with individual Syrian Arab commanders, who have succeeded in bringing them to Turkey for training before infiltrating them into Syria with American-provided equipment. There are also about 50 American commandos on the ground inside Syria, who control and coordinate the assaults and fight against the Islamic State (McLeary, 2016). By July 2017, more than 8,500 members of the SDF (Syrian Democratic forces (SDF) have been trained by the U.S.-led coalition and in the first half of 2017, more than 400 vehicles and other equipment have been delivered to over 40,000 SDF troops (Wilgenburg, 2017). Marzouk and Angelovski (2017a) describes the channels through which the United States carry out its major arms deals and funding of multiple opposition rebel groups in Syria. This is usually done in line with the claims of the fight against ISIS in Syria. It is revealed that the U.S. has relied on a range of contractors and sub-contractors – from blue-chip military giants to companies linked to organized crime – to supply up to US$ 2.2 billion worth of Soviet-style arms and ammunition to Syrian rebels. Two key sources of arms deal has been linked to U.S. purchases: the Special Operations Command (SOCOM), which is in charge of specific operations across all services of the US military, and the Picatinny Arsenal, a little-known US Army weapons facility in New Jersey. Both sea (i.e. black sea route) and air routes are utilized to transport weapons and munitions from Europe to Turkey, Jordan and Kuwait. The weapons consignments are then distributed to U.S allies in northern and southern Syria through the use of plane and truck.

The U.S. military's Special Operations Command (SOCOM) commissioned a commercial cargo ship to haul 1,600 tons of ammunition to Syria's neighbors Turkey and Jordan, and from there almost certainly on to US-backed rebels fighting in Syria. According to procurement documents, ship tracking data, and two cargo lists obtained by the Balkan Investigative Reporting Network (BIRN) and the Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project (OCCRP), there were about four shipments in less than 12 months in 2017 in which altogether about 6,300 tons of Eastern Bloc weapons and ammunition were shipped from ports in Constanta in Romania and Burgas in Bulgaria to the military ports of Aqaba, Jordan, and Agalar, Turkey (Marzouk and Angelovski, 2017a). The Black Sea Route which serves as the shipping point of transportation for Syrian bound weapons and ammunition consignments is illustrated in the figure 5.4 below:
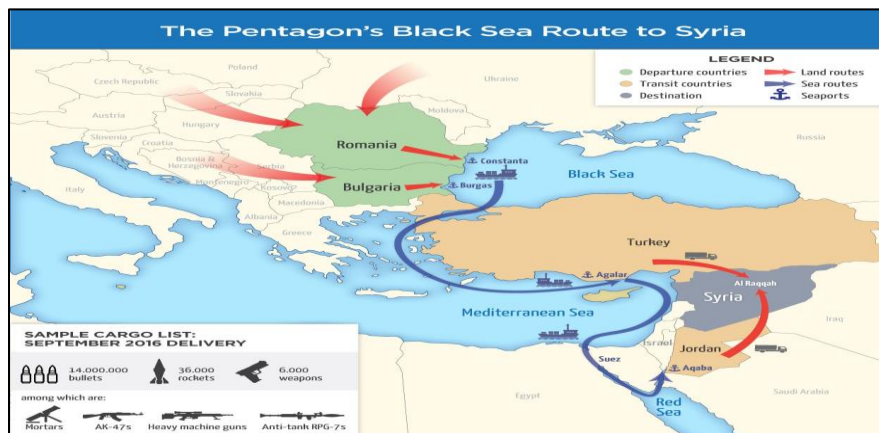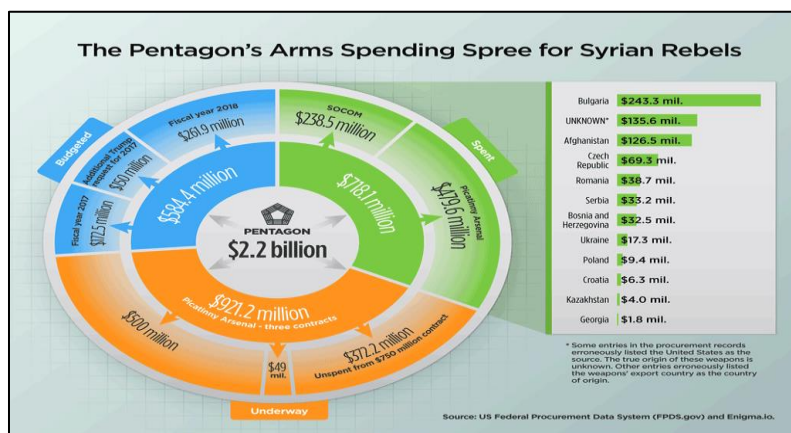

Figure 4. United States Arms Spending Spree for Syria Rebels
Source: Balanche (2016) "Status of the Syrian Rebellion: Numbers, Ideologies, and Prospects." Washington Institute

In March 2016 a ship carried 13 million bullets, 35,000 rockets and 6,000 weapons. The weapons consignments were delivered to the ports from across Central and Eastern Europe, especially by the use of truck. SOCOM mainly supplies Syrian rebels in the north (through Turkey) and in the south (through Jordan) with large volumes of Soviet-style weapons. The U.S. military confirmed to BIRN and OCCRP that in 2016 it delivered equipment to "vetted Syrian Opposition" groups in 20 airdrops, 100 cargo flights, and 500 truckloads and that the pace had increased as efforts to retake Raqqa (Marzouk and Angelovski, 2017a). Also, SOCOM made budgets for the purchase of weapons and ammunition from Bulgaria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Czech Republic, Kazakhstan, Poland, Romania, Serbia and Ukraine Worth $238.5 million in May 2017. Marzouk and Angelovski (2017b) further observe that the United States struck the major buy-up in September 2015 under President Obama. As at 2017, the U.S. had already spent more than $700 million on AK-47s, rocket-propelled grenade (RPG) launchers, mortars, and other weapons and ammunition. Over $900 million has been contracted to be spent by 2022, whereas the present Trump administration has further budgeted or requested nearly $600 million more. This makes U.S. intended budgetary allocations on its Syrian opposition groups to a tune of $2.2 billion. Figure 5.5 below depicts the trend and trajectory of United States arms spending and rebel funding in Syria, while Figure 5.6 illustrates the U.S. backed rebel forces in Syria.

On the other hand, Khalaf and Smith (2013) report that Qatar, a gas-rich state in the Middle East has spent as much as $3bn since the beginning of the conflict supporting the rebellion in Syria, far exceeding any other government. This

made the country to become a prime source of arms to the rebels. Its contributions to the conflict appears to overshadow the western backings for the opposition. Even though Qatar is a small state, it remained the biggest donor to the political opposition, providing generous refugee packages to defectors (estimated at $50,000 a year for a defector and his family) and has provided vast amounts of humanitarian support. In particular cases, many rebels in Syria's Aleppo province received a one-off payment of $150 supplied from Qatar. It is further reported that Qatar total spending has reached as much as $3bn, while rebel and diplomatic sources put the figure at $1bn at most. It is believed that Qatar's intervention in Syria conflict is part of an aggressive quest for global recognition and primarily an attempt to establish itself as a major player in the Middle East region, especially following its backing of Libya's rebels who overthrew Muammer Gaddafi in 2011. An institute that tracks arms transfers, the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (2013) remarks that Qatar has sent the most weapons deliveries to Syria, with more than 70 military cargo flights into neighbouring Turkey between April 2012 and March 2013. This further deepened Qatar's influence and entangled it in the polarized politics of the region.Qatar has been supporting Islamist groups in the Arab world, and this puts it in a bad light among its peers in the Gulf States. Such covert support has fuelled rivalry with Saudi Arabia. Based on this development, Saudi Arabia, which until now has been a more deliberate supporter of Syria's rebels, has stepped up its involvement in the conflict. Generally, backers of al-Assad's opponents and Syria's rebels include Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, the United Arab Emirates and Jordan (Khalaf & Smith, 2013).

Figure 5.   United States Arms Spending Spree for Syria Rebels
Source: Marzouk, Lawrence and Angelovski, Ivan (2017b) "Revealed: The Pentagon is Spending Up To $2.2 Billion on Soviet-Style Arms for Syrian Rebels."
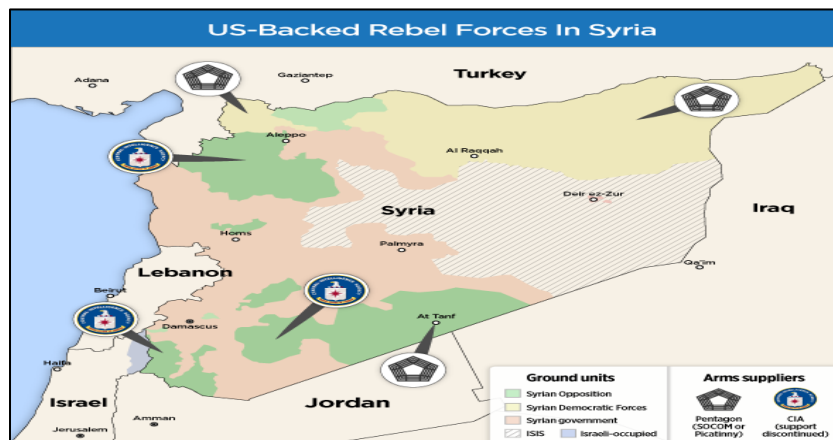
Figure 6.   United States Backed Rebel Forces in Syria
Source: Marzouk, Lawrence and Angelovski, Ivan (2017b) "Revealed: The Pentagon Is Spending Up To $2.2 Billion on Soviet-Style Arms for Syrian Rebels."

Zargar (2017) listed the weapons the U.S. is shipping into Syria through the Black Sea Route to include heavy firearms, mortars, AK-47 assault rifles, machine guns, Rocket Propeller Grenades and various other types of ammunition. The US military in Pentagon has continued to purchase assorted arms from countries such as Poland, Czech Republic, Ukraine, Kazakhstan, Serbia and Bosnia. Some of the arms are then sent to ports and airports in Bulgaria and Romania. The purchased arms are then routed to countries like Turkey, Jordan and Kuwait before being finally distributed to opposition rebel groups in Syria.

Rebel fighters in Syria claim that after Western-sponsored groups lost ground to al-Nusra in 2014, the U.S began to cut off funding for most of the supposedly moderate groups. Harakat al-Hazm, originally the most favoured of these, had its cash funding halved; the rebel Farouq Brigade had all funds cut off. According to Abdulatif al-Sabbagh, an officer with Ahrar al-Sham, alerted that the U.S. backed some people claiming to be revolutionaries, but corrupt and incompetent. He further claims that Jaish al-Fatah is successful because they all fight together. But that they are all against Daesh [ISIS] the same way they are against Bashar al-Assad. He further testified that the Americans are bombing Daesh but doing nothing against the regime, and they have been united to fight them. Jaish al-Fatah has made recent inroads into regime held territory, capturing Idlib and other towns and villages. Al-Nusra provided over 3,000 fighters for the operation which has put the rebels in a position to launch an offensive against Latakia on the coastal strip (Sengupta, 2015, p.1).

4.3 Conclusion and Recommendations

The findings show that the military and diplomatic interventions of regional and global powers in the Syrian conflict undermined peace and security in the Middle East. International organizations like the UN, Arab League, the EU, the Organization of Islamic Countries (OIC), state actors in Middle East and other international actors imposed sanctions on Syria failed to achieve effective implementation of the sanctions. The UN Security Council Resolution 2254 failed. The EU sanctions were selectively implemented. Russia and China had consistently vetoed UN resolutions against Syria, despite China's claim and pretentious sanctions and condemnation against the Syrian government. Following the investigations carried out in this study and the consequent findings established in the study, the following recommendations in which we may hang our intellectual beliefs and prospect for further studies on the subject matter have been proposed:

- Since most global powers claim they are sponsoring rebels who fight against ISIS in Syria, the UN Security Council should make a resolution to disband the thousands of rebel groups fighting in Syria and be replaced by United Nations special force in Syria. This will stamp out the political factors/interests that fuel the conflict, forestall multiplicity of armed groups and contain proliferation of small arms and light weapons in Syria and across the Middle East.
- The United Nations Security Council should make a resolution for ceasefire in conflict areas and back it up with severe sanctions to defaulting global and regional state and non-state actors either directly or indirectly involved in the ongoing Syrian civil war. This will ensure comprehensive implementation of specific peace agreements reached by stakeholders.

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