

THE SYRIAN CIVIL WAR: A CONSTRUCTIVIST DECONSTRUCTION OF CONFLICT

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Abstract

The Syrian Civil War, a seemingly intractable conflict with devastating global consequences, demands a nuanced understanding that transcends a simplistic narrative of power struggle. The constructivist lens offers a valuable framework for deconstructing the war's complexities. Constructivism posits that identities, interests, and even the international order itself are not preordained realities, but rather socially constructed through shared meanings and interpretations. This study contends that adopting a constructivist perspective provides a beneficial framework for evaluating the Syrian crisis. Examining the crisis through this lens reveals how these constructed elements shaped state behavior and the dynamics of the war. Constructivist interplay moves beyond a simplistic power struggle narrative, highlighting the role of ideas, identities, and evolving international norms in driving the conflict and shaping international responses.

1. Introduction

Understanding the essence of the Syrian Civil War, began in 2011 (President Assad is ousted, fled in Moscow and rebels are now in power under Ahmed al-Sharaa) has proven to be extremely difficult because to its complexity and persistence. The civil war still continues in parts of Syria. The complex interplay between identity, norms, and ideas that contribute to violence is difficult for conventional theories of international politics to understand, as they frequently place a higher priority on material power and state objectives (Spyer 2012). Experts argue that a combination of regional and internal factors led to the Syrian crisis. Official persecution and internal political and economic grievances and interests within Syria are the main domestic determinants (Kaufulu 2017). These components have been present throughout the nation's history of independence, especially as a result of political arrangements made to accommodate its varied populace. Constructivism, as opposed to realism and liberalism, highlights the socially constructed aspect of international politics. According to Wendt (1999), constructivism suggests that the identities and interests of states are not predetermined but are instead influenced by historical narratives, shared understandings, and international norms. This viewpoint enables us to analyze how conflicting accounts of Syrian national identity, the significance of religion in society, and the legitimacy of the former President Assad's administration before 08 December 2024 have contributed to the escalation of the conflict. Moreover, constructivists emphasize the importance of international institutions and norms in influencing the actions of states (Finnemore & Sikkink 1998). The Syrian crisis occurred in the context of the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) principle, which highlights the global community's duty to prevent genocide and other large-scale atrocities. The discussion on the suitability of the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) principle in Syria and the challenge to established human rights standards by different parties provides a valuable understanding of the conflict's dynamics.

The Syrian Civil War will be explored in this research using a constructivist perspective. By examining the effects of conflicting identity narratives, the significance of international

standards, and the actions taken by key global actors, the study aims to improve understanding of the complex and protracted situation.

2. Aims, Research Gap and Research Questions

2.1 Aims and Research Gap

This study assesses the influence of conflicting narratives and identity formations on the ongoing Syrian Civil War. It also aims to investigate the role of international norms, specifically the Responsibility to Protect (R2P), in shaping the global reaction to the conflict. Again, the national identity is also an important domestic factor that fuels the war and external powers may take advantage of this. The objective of this research is to investigate the influence of non-state actors, such as ISIS, in both challenging and altering existing norms, as well as forming new identities. The paper examines the interpretations of the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) principle in Syria and its influence on global responses and seeks to comprehend the complex interplay of ideas, identities, and norms in the ongoing Syrian Civil War, while the majority of research concentrates on internal narratives.

While existing research explores the Syrian Civil War from various perspectives (realist, liberal etc.), a constructivist analysis can offer a deeper understanding of the underlying narratives, identity struggles, and evolving interpretations of security that have fueled the conflict. Most studies focus on state-level actors. This research explores how non-state actors (rebel groups, civil society) construct their identities and interests, and how they interact with the dominant state narrative.

2.2 Research Questions

- What role have competing national identity concepts (Arab, Alawite, and Sunni) played in the ongoing Syrian Civil War?
- How have narratives (like democracy vs. counterterrorism) and the creation and contestation of these norms influenced international norms on human rights, intervention, and the duty to protect?
- How have the application of international norms and the emergence of distinct identities shaped the trajectory of the Syrian Civil War and the response from across the world?

3. Methodology

This study will investigate the Syrian Civil War from a constructivist standpoint using a qualitative research methodology. Qualitative methods look closely at the complex relationships between identities, conceptions, and norms (Yin 1984). This work only uses secondary data as its foundation. Document analysis and discourse analysis had been used to get the data. One way to understand how different actors shape narratives and construct identities that impact the conflict is to examine speeches, official remarks, media reports, and propaganda materials produced by foreign entities like the US, Russia, and Iran, as well as non-governmental organisations like ISIS and the Syrian government (Weingart 2007). Analyzing reports and papers published by international organizations including the United Nations and human rights groups offered valuable perspectives on how the international community perceives the conflict and implements standards like the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) (Yin 1984). The gathered data will be subjected to thematic analysis, whereby reoccurring motifs and storylines within the speech of the different actors will be identified. This task will include coding the data according to predetermined themes such as narratives of danger, identity creation, and interpretations of R2P, as well as any new topics that emerge throughout the study (Braun and Clarke 2006).

4. Literature Review

The purpose of these literary analyses is to spark fresh thinking about the Syrian Civil War. The main point of interest is how constructivism looks at the Syrian Civil War. These studies of the literature seek to improve our comprehension of the intricate and protracted war by looking at the impact of competing identity narratives, the importance of international

standards, and the behaviours of significant international actors. These literary works provide evidence for the research's validity and demonstrate how it offers fresh insights on the Syrian Civil War. The literature review first examines the scholarly literature on identity formation and conflict occurrence within this framework. Numerous investigations have been carried out regarding the impact of stories on the Syrian civil war. The literature also explores the involvement of the superpower in the conflict. At last, there is literature pertaining to constructivism. Additionally, there exists a body of literature that explores other theoretical frameworks, including realism and liberalism.

4.1 Identity Construction and Conflict

Bohman (2016) posits domestic and regional factors as the driving forces behind the Syrian crisis. The Assad regime's brutal suppression led to protestors resorting to armed resistance, leading to the regime intensifying its aggressive tactics. This was fueled by weak Syrian patriotism, sectarian affiliations, and extremist Islamism. Former President Assad used violent methods and intimidation strategies to incite conflict between the Sunni majority and its alliance of minority groups, fearing the Sunni majority would turn against them (Bohman 2016). This escalation increased support for the regime's brutality and fueled radicalization among the opposition (Bohman 2016). Consequently, numerous militia factions emerged, including opposition organizations, Kurds declaring self-governing land, extremist Islamist factions, and indigenous military leaders. The rise of these organizations may be attributed to the fragility of Syrian nationalism, the influence of radical Islamist doctrine, the growth of Kurdish nationalism, and the lack of governmental strength (Bohman 2016). Extremist groups like Daesh and Jabhat al Nusra (later transformed into Hayat Tahrir al Sham and in power now) exploited sectarian divisions and violence to present themselves as protectors of the Sunni majority.

Phillips (2022) advocates the correlation between regional and global multipolarity and the probability of involvement in civil conflicts, with a specific emphasis on the Syrian crisis from 2011 to the 2022. His analysis explores the role of foreign players in intensifying domestic disagreement, transforming it into an internationalized civil war, and shaping specific aspects of the conflict (Phillips 2022). In addition, foreign actors actively motivated the opposition to engage in armed conflict. Turkey, Qatar, and Saudi Arabia played significant roles by hosting rebel organizations starting from July 2011 (Phillips 2022). They also provided financial resources, weapons, and assistance to the rebel soldiers.

4.2 The Power of Narratives

Kaufulu (2017) has analyzed the determinants of civil war with theoretical framework. It was argued that whether this war can be called a civil war or not. International relations theories on civil war have often focused on the involvement of foreign nations that meet certain criteria, as well as the interventions of global institutions in resolving disputes in afflicted states. International relations theories, which often combine realist and liberalist perspectives, might be seen as resembling foreign interventionist theories since they struggle to analyze the state as a collection of separate actors (Kaufulu 2017). Sub-national possibilities in international relations theories of civil war often focus on models of regional and global economic and political integration. For instance, if economic integration is emphasized in conjunction with realist or liberalist assumptions, the theories can be categorized as neorealist and neoliberalist perspectives on civil wars, attributing the causal role to economic factors (Kaufulu 2017). The main focus of structuralist approaches is to identify the functional aspects of a system at a particular level of social or political analysis. This is done by identifying and comprehending the significance of various components within a chosen entity, whose boundaries are determined by the level of analysis being conducted (Kaufulu 2017). These components play a crucial role in maintaining the entity's overall coherence and longevity.

4.3 The Intervention of Super Powers

According to Pettersson (2020), the Middle East has become a significant region for foreign interest, with the conflict in Syria attracting global and regional powers. The US has approved over 150 air strikes against ISIS targets since 2014, aiming to protect minorities. However, the legality of these strikes and changes in international law due to the war on terror in Syria remains questionable (Ashraf 2022). Neorealism posits that governments ensure their place within the international system by assisting their friends since Russia has substantial economic and geopolitical stakes in Syria (Afridi and Jibrán 2018). Since the Cold War, Syria has consistently relied on Russian armaments, acquiring 78% of its weaponry from Russia. Furthermore, Russian oil and gas corporations own substantial financial stakes in Syria. In 2010, Assad rejected the Qatar gas pipeline proposal to transport Qatar's gas to Europe, citing concerns about possible economic hazards (Afridi and Jibrán 2018).

4.4 Theoretical Approaches: Contestation of Norms and Role of International Institutions

Constructivism asserts that governments and other entities pick their interests by taking into account how they view themselves, emphasising the social process of identity creation. According to Alexander Wendt (Wendt 1999), governments create dangers through the process of "securitization," in which an issue is presented as a serious threat to their identity. Karacan (2019) emphasises how powerful countries can push for norms that benefit them. The contradiction between the principle of national sovereignty and the responsibility to protect (R2P) is best shown by the situation in Syria. A coordinated international reaction was hampered by Russia and China's backing for Syrian sovereignty, while western nations encouraged involvement based on the R2P.

Realist theory, emphasises power, anarchy, and order, is a normative perspective in international relations, according to Pettersson (2020). It implies that sensible governments put their own security before the security of others. Security is the ultimate goal under anarchic order, and states are required to provide security in order to foster well-being and provide comfort from potential threats (Morgenthau 1948). Political realism recognises that a country's morals can influence its foreign policy, but it also holds that politicians shouldn't let other domains take precedence over politics. Realists hold that power is shared and cooperation is necessary for the interests of nations, which are in a state of anarchy, in order to maximise profits (Waltz 1959). They question the effectiveness of international institutions in preventing war, arguing that they only reflect a state's interest in relative power (Waltz 1959).

International liberalism emphasizes society, interdependence, and progressive change. It highlights the importance of domestic and international security and global organizations. The UN system is a crucial factor in liberalist theory, as it serves as a multilevel linkage, norms, and institutions. The role of the UN has evolved since the US failed as a peacekeeper in Lebanon (Pettersson 2020). International law is essential to shift attention from constitutional law to international law, as it ensures respect and cooperative infrastructure. Moreover, international governments often have interdependent relationships with other countries, but there are issues with applying international law, such as states viewing them as insignificant or disregarding them. Trade is an essential aspect of liberal economic theory, as it argues that free trade and social exchange facilitate modernization and unite differences, undercutting tyranny and geopolitical revisionism (Pettersson 2020).

5. Theoretical Framework of the Discussion: Constructivism

Constructivism offers alternative perspectives on key international relations concepts, such as anarchy, balance of power, state identity and interest, and power dynamics. It can be understood in two forms: conventional and critical (Hopf 1998). Constructivism aims to provide an alternative to mainstream theory, incorporating reinterpretations of balance-of-threat, security problems, neoliberal cooperation, and democratic peace. It focuses on identity-related global politics and domestic politics and culture (Hopf 1998). International institutions such as the United Nations (UN) serve as platforms where participants discuss and establish

the interpretation of security risks. The efficacy of institutions is contingent upon the existing power dynamics (Lantis and Wunderlich 2022). The UN Security Council's efforts to facilitate a peaceful settlement in the Syrian situation have been impeded by the use of vetoes by Russia and China, rendering it unable to take effective action.

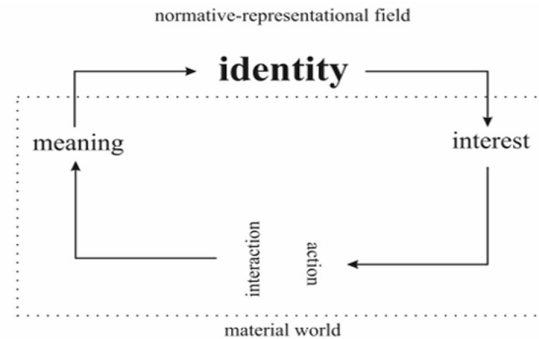


Figure 1: The Constructivist Perspective on Political Reality (Ghica 2013)

In order to examine the ongoing Syrian Civil War, this research study uses constructivism, a theoretical framework that highlights the influence of ideas, identities, and norms on global politics (Karacan 2019). Constructivism presents a challenge to conventional methods, like as realism, which prioritizes material capabilities and power structures. The violence has been intensified by the divergent national identity ideas of Arab, Alawite, and Sunni groups (Abosedra, Fakih, and Haimoun 2021). These identities are not static, but instead shaped by society via historical accounts and interactions among different communities. The war has given rise to conflicting accounts, with the ousted President Assad's administration was asserting its legitimacy while the rebels strive for democracy and at last the rebels become successful to overthrow the regime. These narratives have been influenced by players both inside and outside of the country (Corstange 2020) and have a significant impact on the conduct of states and the reactions of the international community. The war has challenged and modified international standards on human rights, intervention, and the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) (Coen 2015). The international community's approach to the issue is determined by how these standards are applicable and interpreted. In this respect, this research seeks to enhance comprehension of the Syrian Civil War and its intricate international aspects by examining the interplay of ideational forces.

6. Nature of the Syrian Civil War

Syria witnesses the most protracted and violent war of the Arab Spring. The war in Syria originated with demonstrations that started on January 26, 2011, and then escalated into a widespread revolt on March 15, 2011 (Žuber and Moussa 2018). The Arab Spring has resulted in the deadliest war in the Middle East. The initial situation of the battle resembled that of other nations. The pro-democracy rallies against the Syrian dictatorship began in Deraa, a city in southern Syria, after the detention and torture of several adolescents who had painted revolutionary slogans on a wall on March 6, 2011 (Žuber and Moussa 2018). The violence escalated in response to the security forces' use of lethal force against protesters, resulting in many fatalities. Demonstrators called for the resignation of President Assad. The Assad government's use of force to scatter the protests intensified the demonstrators' resolve. At last, in 08 December 2024 Assad was overthrown by rebels under the leadership of Ahmed al-Sharaa and fled to Moscow.

This conflict originated from a collision of identities within Syria. The Assad dictatorship, which is predominantly controlled by the Alawite minority, established a national identity centered around secularism and Ba'athism, an ideology that prioritizes Arab unity and socialist reform. Nevertheless, the Sunni Muslim majority experienced a growing sense of marginalization and exclusion from positions of authority (Asseburg, Wimmen, and

Wissenschaft 2012). Moreover, the desire of the Kurdish people for self-governance added another layer of complexity to the issue of national identity.

Iran and Saudi Arabia, as regional powers, exerted considerable influence in forming the identities of the Syrian population. Iran backed the Assad administration, perceiving it as a vital partner in the Middle East. Saudi Arabia, in contrast, supported the Sunni opposition to counter Iranian influence (Nower 2017). These external entities exacerbated the sectarian differences within Syria, hence fueling the expansion of the conflict.

Both the Assad regime and opposition groups crafted narratives depicting each other as a fundamental and imminent danger. The Assad regime depicted the revolt as a terrorist conspiracy supported by foreign entities and consequently rationalized its harsh suppression (Corstange and York 2018). The opposition, on the other hand, portrayed the regime as an oppressive power that required removal. The presence of conflicting threat narratives intensified the violence and hindered the potential for a peaceful conclusion.

The Syrian Civil War led to the gradual decline of established global standards for human rights and the principle of responsibility to protect (R2P). The utilization of chemical weapons and the indiscriminate assaults on civilians by the Assad regime posed a direct challenge to the established standard against acts of war crimes. Moreover, the international community's lack of effective measures to safeguard civilians has weakened the R2P concept (Coen 2015).

By examining above mentioned issues, a constructivist perspective offers us the complex nature of the Syrian Civil War, which goes beyond a mere contest for control. The struggle was fundamentally based on conflicting identities, external manipulation, and the creation of perceived threats. This viewpoint offers valuable observations on the difficulties of peacebuilding and the significance of tackling fundamental identity issues in future initiatives.

7. Big Powers Interest, Involvement and Competition in Syria

The Syrian civil war has undergone major shifts and transforming into a proxy war involving the United States, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Turkey and Iran. Terrorist organizations, including ISIS, al-Qaeda, and Hezbollah, have also joined the battle, adding a religious aspect (Ashraf 2022). The primary contention is between the Assad government and the rebels, with Bashar al-Assad being an associate of Russia and a constituent of the Alawite minority. The United States and its allies, such as Saudi Arabia and Turkey, assist insurgent groups engaged in combat against the regime of Bashar al-Assad (Ashraf 2022). The Syrian National Army, a rebel group is backed by Turkey. Turkey's role is further complicated by its engagement in combat with the Kurdish forces in Northern Syria, while the Kurds have been collaborating with the United States in their war against ISIS. **Figure-2** shows the different parties engaged in the Syrian civil war.

Conflict in Syria has created a complex web of alliances

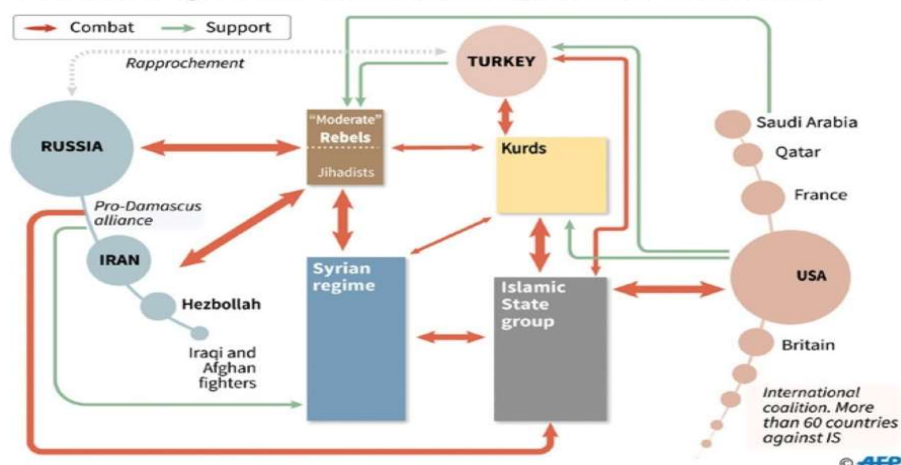


Figure 2: Conflicting parties in the Syrian War (<https://www.dawn.com/news/1280157>)**7.1 The United States (US)**

The Middle East has become a significant region for foreign interest, with the conflict in Syria attracting both global and regional powers. The uprising in Syria has not led to any regime change but rather has evolved into a conflict where regional and global superpowers pursue their interests (Pettersson 2020). The Obama administration announced in 2013 that the US would conduct air strikes against ISIS targets, including Syria, to cut finances and avoid foreign *Jihadists* entering the region. Since August 2014, the US has approved over 150 air strikes against ISIS targets, aiming to protect religious and ethnic minorities. However, the legality of these airstrikes is often questioned. In 2015, Russia launched its largest interference in the Middle East, causing the US to recognize that it is not the only power broker in the region. According to Pettersson (2020), the legality of foreign intervention in Syria and the changes in international law due to the war on terror in Syria is also a questionable issue.

The United States first established a clear boundary for Syria, issuing a warning that it would take action to penalize the government if it used chemical weapons on its citizens (Bohman 2016). Nevertheless, in 2013, the Syrian government persisted in deploying chemical weapons, prompting Russia to propose an agreement with Assad to eliminate these weapons while being monitored by the United Nations. The deal was approved, and the United States conducted no military attacks against the Assad government (Bohman 2016). The withdrawal resulted in a surge in the number of individuals joining radical Islamist groups in Syria and the surrounding area. The United States' reluctance to provide weapons to opposition forces has resulted in armed factions seeking assistance from extremist financiers in Kuwait, Libya, Qatar, and Saudi Arabia, sometimes professing allegiance to extremist ideologies (Bohman 2016).

Ashraf (2022) claimed that diplomatic and security concerns motivated the US engagement in the Syrian crisis. He further claimed that humanitarian aims, such as the removal of the Assad government and the reconstruction of the state, as well as political and diplomatic goals, such as eliminating al-Qaeda and ISIS. Furthermore, the operation sought to reduce the influence of Russia and Iran. The United States' strategic intimacy with Israel, and Turkey itself further motivated its desire to control the war (Ashraf 2022). Key concerns include the reduction of the refugee problem, the tackling of terrorist threats, the violation of human rights, the strengthening of Russia's position in Syria, and the addressing of Iran's growth towards the Western side (Ashraf 2022).

7.2 Russia

The first Russian head of state to visit Damascus was Dmitry Medvedev in 2010, which strengthened ties between Russia and Syria to a new level since the ending of the Cold War. Nevertheless, Russia faced constraints in its involvement in Syria due to pressure from the US and Israel, who exerted influence on the Russian government to prevent the delivery of sophisticated missile systems. These countries cautioned that such shipments would disrupt the existing balance of power and strengthen Iran's position. Russia's engagement with Syria primarily revolves on security and intelligence collaboration, naval entry, and the exchange of weaponry (Lund 2019). The Syrian economy was characterized by underdevelopment, corruption, and an unwelcoming environment for investors. Additionally, trade mainly favored the European Union, Turkey, China, and the Middle East. Although efforts were made to promote Russian-Syrian commerce, the relationship between Russia and Syria was characterized by a significant imbalance, with Syria's significance increasing as Russia became further distant from the Western countries (Lund 2019).

Despite resistance from Western, Turkish, and Gulf Arab governments, the Kremlin provided backing to the loyalist faction in Syria's civil war. The decision was driven by concerns about material and political interests, as there was a worry that Western interventionism may threaten Russia's national security and perhaps alter the international order to the detriment of

Moscow. Russia’s first strategy in Syria prioritized securing weapons deliveries, fostering intelligence collaboration, and securing the Tartous facility (Lund 2019). Decades of Russian investment was wiped out by the 2003 Iraq war, leading Moscow to anticipate a hostile attitude towards Russia in post-Assad Syria. The action conducted by NATO in Libya significantly contributed to preparing the Kremlin for resistance in Syria. Russia rejected draft resolutions critical of Assad when they were presented by Western countries in 2011, citing the principle of non-interference. Moscow declined to halt the provision of military supplies to Syria, asserting the need to deliver both ‘defensive’ weaponry and undisclosed quantities of small arms and ammunition (Lund 2019). Latest, Moscow provided Assad asylum on humanitarian ground there. It seems that Russia was not providing help to Damascus without expecting anything in return, and previous agreements for sophisticated weapons before the conflict subsequently expired.

7.3 Iran and Turkey

Iran had been the main ally of Assad in the Syrian war, supplying the majority of the personnel required for his ongoing battle. In 2013, the Lebanese militant organization Hezbollah, which Iran supports, became involved in Homs Province(Ford 2019). Then, between 2014 and 2018, Iran’s al-Quds Force organized members from Iraqi Shi’a terrorist groups, as well as individuals from Afghanistan and Pakistan, to form the Afghan Fatemiyoun and Pakistani Zainebiyoun brigades (Ford 2019). These militias contributed significantly to the Syrian governments victories in several battles from 2015 to 2023. The main objective of Iran is to guarantee the continuity of the Assad regime, which in turn offers a significant advantage to Lebanese Hezbollah and the Iranian-supported “resistance front” against Israel (Ford 2019). The Iranian leadership has consistently said that its soldiers would continue to stay in Syria, condemning the presence of American forces in eastern Syria as well as American backing for the People’s Protection Units (YPG) militia and local Arab fighters. While the physical damage has been relatively small, Iran’s economic situation, particularly the reduction in funding from oil exports, is starting to impede its operations in Syria.

On the other hand, Turkey’s intervention in Syria is influenced by its own regional aspirations and security concerns. Turkey sees the Syrian conflict through the lens of its Kurdish insurgency and the threat posed by Kurdish militant groups operating along its southern border. Ankara’s intervention in Syria aims to contain Kurdish expansionism and prevent the emergence of an autonomous Kurdish region along its border, reflecting Turkey’s regional power aspirations and its commitment to territorial integrity and national security.Together with Saudi Arabia and Qatar, Turkey has also provided the rebels with arms and other military equipment.The following **Table-1** shows in short the big powers involvement in Syria.

Table-1

Superpower	Interests	Involvement
United States	Weaken Assad regime, support rebels, combat ISIS	Training and support for rebels, airstrikes against ISIS
Russia	Maintain influence in the region, support Assad regime	Military intervention, air strikes in support of Assad
Iran	Counteract US influence, support Assad regime and Hezbollah	Military advisors, financial and logistical support for Assad

Source: Devised by the author

8. Analysis of the Discussion through Constructivism Theory

From the above discussion, we gained a deeper understanding of the complex interplay between identities, ideas, and international norms that contribute to Syrian civil war. This analysis section attempts to find answers of the three research questions as mentioned earlier.

8.1 A Fragmented Nation: Identity, Sectsand Conflict

Constructivism, as applied to International Relations (IR), focuses on the influence of shared

ideas, norms, and identities on the conduct of states and the occurrence of international (Abosedra, Fakhri, and Haimoun 2021). The Syrian Civil War has been profoundly affected by various national identity notions, namely Arab, Alawite, and Sunni, which have played a crucial role in shaping the course of the war.

Before the conflict, the Assad administration, controlled by the Alawite minority (about 12% of the population), fostered a pan-Arab national identity (Phillips 2015). This concealed the deep-seated sectarian divisions, including the exclusion of the Sunni majority (64%) (Anouti 2020). The 2011 uprising initially expressed a yearning for change that cut across different religious and ethnic groups, but the regime's use of violence further intensified narratives based on religious divisions. Sunnis progressively saw themselves as a marginalized majority, while Alawites had concerns about being subjected to mistreatment under a government dominated by Sunnis (Corstange 2020). Foreign entities also took advantage of these divisions based on identity, as regional Sunni nations supported the opposition while Iran strengthened the administration headed by the Alawites (Nower 2017). This outsider interference exacerbated sectarian identities and drove bloodshed. This exemplifies the role of constructed national identities, especially when exploited by political leaders and external forces, in intensifying pre-existing divisions and fueling destructive internal conflicts.

8.2 Contrasting Perspectives and Role of International Actors

The Syrian Civil War still has become a battleground where various viewpoints, heavily influenced by global powers, are deeply split. The Assad administration, with the backing of Russia and Iran, presented the war as a battle against terrorism, depicting the opposition as Islamist extremists that pose a danger to regional security. Meanwhile, the western powers and regional actors such as Saudi Arabia and Turkey propagate an image of a tyrannical ruler suppressing a democratic revolt. Can (2017) emphasizes the Assad regime's human rights violations and portrays the opposition as genuine representatives of the Syrian people who are striving for liberation. These arguments aim to undermine the legitimacy of the former Assad administration and gather worldwide support for the opposition. Social media plays a vital role in spreading these narratives, often obscuring the distinction between factual information and propaganda (Dekker et al. 2018). The constructed images further solidify the opposing factions by influencing how the conflict is seen internationally and how different players behave inside it.

8.3 Syrian Crisis and International Order: Redefining Norms

The Syrian crisis has had an immense impact on the establishment and debate around global standards of human rights, intervention, and the responsibility to protect (R2P). The Assad regime's ruthless suppression of civilian uprisings defied the conventional expectation of a state's duty to safeguard its inhabitants (Russo 2020). Nevertheless, the R2P norm was undermined due to the international community's inability to take effective action, which was influenced by geopolitical rivalry and concerns about the war intensifying (Evans 2009). The extensive human rights violations revealed the deficiencies of the current system of norms and the difficulties in ensuring compliance (Russo 2020). There is a growing need to revise the R2P concept by including more explicit criteria for intervention and more robust procedures for compliance (Russo 2020). Nevertheless, the absence of cooperation among influential nations makes implementing these changes improbable in the foreseeable future. In essence, the Syrian crisis has brought attention to the continuous dispute over these established global standards, resulting in an uncertain international reaction to widespread acts of violence.

The Syrian Civil War clearly illustrates how constructivist theory can provide light on the intricate interaction between ideas, identities, and intervention. The divergent narratives surrounding the revolt in Syria, with the former Assad administration characterizing it as a terrorist insurgency and the rebels presenting it as a struggle for democracy, influenced how the international community perceived and formed alliances (Russo 2020). The creation of

separate identities was driven by these conflicting narratives, with Sunnis identifying with the rebels and Alawites aligning themselves with the regime (Kaufulu 2017). The international community, guided by the principle of ‘responsibility to protect’ (R2P), must respond. However, there is ongoing debate and disagreement on the validity of this principle (Evans 2009, Reinold 2012). The outcome was a fragmented reaction, with western nations endorsing rebels they saw as democratic, while Russia and Iran supported Assad, whom they regarded as a safeguard against sectarian violence. The interaction between different narratives, the process of shaping one’s identity, and the deliberate choice to follow certain global norms considerably influenced the course of the conflict and the level of worldwide participation.

9. Conclusion

From the discussion above, it is clear that the conflict went beyond a simple sectarian divide between the Alawite minority, in power with Assad, and the Sunni majority. Ethnic identities, particularly the Arab-Kurdish divide, further fueled the flames. The former Assad regime constructed itself as the sole guarantor of stability in a diverse Syria, stoking fears of chaos if they lost power. This clashed with the opposition’s vision of an inclusive Syria that respected all ethnicities and sects. External actors, with their own self-perceptions, further complicated the identity landscape. Russia identified with the Assad regime as a fellow authoritarian state, while regional powers like Saudi Arabia supported Sunni rebels. These external interventions, driven by constructed identities of allies and enemies, exacerbated the internal conflict.

State interests, traditionally viewed as objective calculations of power and security, are another key element to unpack through a constructivist lens. The Syrian government, under Assad faced an uprising, framed it as a terrorist threat, justifying a brutal crackdown. This framing served to delegitimize the opposition and consolidate their own power. The rebels, on the other hand, constructed their fight as a struggle for self-determination and democratic values. This contestation of interests, rooted in social interpretations of the situation, fueled the cycle of violence and lastly helped them to occupy the power.

The international system’s lack of a central authority (anarchy) creates space for contesting norms, offering another crucial element for constructivist analysis. The evolving international understanding of human rights and the legitimacy of intervention influenced the international community’s response to the Syrian crisis. Initially, norms of non-intervention held sway, allowing the Assad regime to unleash its violence with impunity. However, as the humanitarian crisis escalated and images of brutality reached the global audience, the international community began debating the responsibility to intervene. This shift in norms, driven by social construction of human rights violations and the Syrian crisis itself, ultimately led to limited interventions from various actors, further complicating the conflict.

So, by deconstructing these socially constructed elements – identity, interest, and the international order – the constructivist approach offers a richer understanding of the Syrian Civil War. It moves beyond a simplistic power struggle narrative, highlighting the role of ideas, identities, and evolving international norms in driving the conflict and shaping international responses. This deeper understanding is crucial for crafting solutions that address the root causes of the conflict and pave the way for a lasting peace in Syria.

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