

**Full Length Research**

# The Politics of Responsibility to Protect In the Syrian Context: Challenges of Application

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The study examined the challenges of operationalization of 'Responsibility to Protect' in the context of Syria. Methodologically, the study employed qualitative research methodological approach. Accordingly, the study used secondary source of data; collected from books, published journal articles, theses and dissertations, governmental and Inter-governmental organization reports, and official website sources. Given the data gathered are qualitative; the study employed qualitative data analysis techniques. The findings of the study shows that though in its very essence responsibility to protect are assured to be a preventive tool of mass atrocities committed elsewhere, it faces operational problem. Responsibility to protect itself is highly politicised. Selectivity, inconsistency and politicization all are the hallmark features of responsibility to protect which remains big challenge. Moreover, the (in) applicability of responsibility to protect is largely determined by national interest, geo-politics and the power politics of members of UNSC. Thus, the importance of 'Responsibility to Protect' is not its legal and humanitarian value rather its rhetoric values as used by the intervening State in order to legitimate and justify their intervention. It is due to this reason that critics of responsibility to protect tended to describe responsibility to protect as a R.I.P. Thus, the applicability of responsibility to protect is inconsistent, too flexible and highly politicised.

**Key Words:** Responsibility to Protect, Syria, Intervention, National interest

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## INTRODUCTION

In the contemporary world, intervention in a sovereign State as a response to stop mass atrocities remains one of a contentious and inescapable dilemma (Ayoob, 2002). Moreover, the single-most ever challenges of humanitarian groups are how to react to prevent gross violation of human rights. Adding to this, the 1990's is the decade of mass atrocity crimes committed by States on their own civilian (Small, 2014). In this horrible decade, the world witnessed genocide, ethnic cleansing, and displacement of citizens and mass refugees, and humanitarian disasters. The outbreak of such atrocities

led to the *real politik* with two contradictory camps: *pro-interventionist to protect civilians led by the U.S. and the West, and anti-interventionist advocating the principal principle of State sovereignty and non-interference led by Russia, China and the South*. Consequently, as a response to the mass atrocities committed on the eve of twenty first century, the international community responded different responses: military intervention in Somalia and Sierra Leone, NATO intervention in Kosovo, and non-response to the Rwanda genocide (Jones and Borjana, 2013; Evoe, 2008; Joyner, 2002). This shows

that international responses are inconsistent and largely determined by power politics.

Such grave violation of human rights led to the development of 'Responsibility to Protect' in order to prevent, react and rebuild (Jones and Borjana, 2013; Small, 2014). 'Responsibility to Protect' is first reported by International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty (ICISS) for the failures of the international community in Rwanda, Bosnia, and Kosovo (Mohamed, 2012; Stahn, 2007). However, it has become the subject of controversy. It is in between rhetoric preaching and practice. In this regard, one of the playing areas for such controversies is Syria. The United Nations Security Council (UNSC) is deadlock over authorizing action in response to mass atrocities in Syria (Lombardo, 2015).

However, major powers unilaterally intervened in Syria, without UNSC authorization, on different grounds: United States (U.S.) and its allies on the basis of humanitarian ground<sup>1</sup> and while Russia by invoking the so-called 'intervention by invitation'. The intervening powers in Syria have a conflictual interest behind their officially provoked grounds. Thus, for them issues of human rights is a means to an end. Likewise, 'Responsibility to Protect' is the subject of power politics. This is particularly true in the Case of Syria. The intention of this paper is, therefore, to examine the challenges of operationalization of 'Responsibility to Protect' in the context of Syria. Accordingly, the paper argues that in its application, the so-called 'Responsibility to Protect' is too flexible, politicised, selective and inconsistent, and largely depends on the strategic position and geopolitics of the State which violates human rights. Thus, the importance of 'Responsibility to Protect' is not its legal and humanitarian value rather its rhetoric values as used by the intervening State in order to legitimate and justify their intervention. Thus, the inconsistency of the application of 'Responsibility to Protect' is largely due to national interests of major powers particularly the five Veto powers.

Methodologically, the study employed qualitative research methodology. Accordingly, the study used secondary source of data; collected from books,

<sup>1</sup> Though America refrained from confirming its involvement-but also intervention, it launch's U.S.-led coalition targeting Islamic State militants in Syria. In a Statement on Air strikes in Syria, President Obama confirmed that U.S. military has launched its first air strikes against ISIL targets in Syria. His statement implies that U.S. would continue to train, equip and provide all the necessary resources to the Syrian opposition in order to defeat ISIL and hastened the removal of Assad regime. For more See President Barack Obama (2014, September 14). Statement By The President On Airstrikes In Syria. The White House, Office of The Press Secretary. Retrieved May 30, 2016 from y 30, 2016 from <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2014/09/23/statement-president-airstrikes-syria>

published journal articles, thesis and dissertations, governmental and Inter-governmental organization reports, and some internet sources. Given the data gathered are qualitative; the study employ qualitative data analysis techniques.

To this end, the paper has four sections. The first section depicts the historical context of responsibility to protect and the challenge of its application. The second section describes the Syrian civil war in light of responsibility to protect. The third section deals with the politicization of responsibility to protect in the Syrian context. Finally, the paper has some concluding remarks.

### **The Genesis of the Responsibility to Protect and Challenges of Application**

'Responsibility to Protect' has become a contentious issue since the report of ICISS<sup>2</sup> in 2001. The reason for the birth of 'Responsibility to protect' is the failure of international community to stop mass atrocities in Bangladesh in 1971, East Timor and Cambodia in 1970s, Rwanda in 1994, Kosovo and Serbia (Jones and Borjana, 2013; Lombardo, 2015). This is first addressed by the former United Nation Secretary-General Kofi Annan in 1999 and 2000. In 1999 UN General Assembly session (UNGA), he remained the assembly about the failure of UNSC to respond to Rwanda and Kosovo mass atrocities and recommended to search a viable means of collective action in the face of human rights violations (Lombardo, 2015; Small, 2014). In 2002 in his millennium report, he underlines the challenge of preventing mass atrocities and forwards the possible strategies. Kofi Annan, as cited in Lombardo (2015:1190), stated that: "...if humanitarian intervention is, indeed, an unacceptable assault on sovereignty, how should we respond to a Rwanda, to a Srebrenica – to gross and systematic violations of human rights that offend every precept of our common humanity"

Based up on Kofi Annan report, in 2002 ICISS developed the concept of 'The Responsibility to Protect'. The central theme of 'Responsibility to Protect', according to the report, is that a sovereign State has an inherent responsibility to protect its own citizens from all evils-soil servitude and natural disasters, and whenever the said State is unwilling or unable to protect its citizens, the international community has the responsibility to act accordingly (ICISS, 2001; Stahn, 2007). According to the ICISS report, the 'Responsibility to Protect' contains three

<sup>2</sup> International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty of States was established by Canada in the aftermath of the millennium report of UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan. It introduces the concept of Responsibility to protect. The report stated that the international community has the responsibility to protect civilians from atrocities if the State is unable or unwilling to do so.

pillars: the responsibility to prevent mass atrocity, the responsibility to react when atrocities are committed, and the responsibility to rebuild in the wake of intervention. It also stated that intervention for human protection is justified when there is genocide, ethnic cleansing, and large scale loss of life (ICISS, 2001).

In 2004, the UN Secretary-General's High Level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change released a report to the General Assembly entitled *A More Secure World: Our Shared Responsibility*. The panel recommended acceptance of the responsibility to protect as an 'emerging norm' to be exercised in time of genocide, ethnic cleansing and grave violations of human rights<sup>3</sup> (UN, 2004).

In 2005, the concept of 'Responsibility to Protect' was incorporated in the UN Secretary-General Report entitled *'In Larger Freedom: towards development, security and human rights for all'*. The report reaffirmed the necessity of endorsement of responsibility to protect as an emerging norm for the international community to embrace when necessary (UN, 2005a). The General Assembly adopted the 2005 Outcome Document of the World Summit. Paragraph 138 affirms that "each individual State has the responsibility to protect its populations from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity" (UN, 2005:31b). Similarly paragraph 139 stated that the international community, through the UN, has the responsibility to use appropriate means to protect civilians from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity (UN, 2005b).

At the UN level, different resolutions by different organ and sub-organ of the organization have been passed. Both the UNGA and UNSC continuously call for the immediate implementation of the 'Responsibility to Protect'. The 2011 Report of the Secretary-General, *The role of regional and sub-regional arrangements in implementing the responsibility to protect*, goes beyond the State notion of responsibility to protect (UN, 2011). The 2013 Secretary-General Report, *Responsibility to protect: State responsibility and prevention*, also addresses responsibility to protect (UN, 2013). The 2014 Secretary-General Report, *Fulfilling our collective responsibility: international assistance and the responsibility to protect*, calls for national, regional and international cooperation in fulfilling their responsibility to protect populations from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity (UN, 2014).

Besides this, the UNSC passed two resolutions confirming a commitment to the principles of the 'Responsibility to Protect': the UNSC Resolution 1674

and UNSC Resolution 1706 (UN, 2006a; UN, 2006b). In both resolutions, they recalled paragraphs 138 and 139 of the World Outcome Document. Despite such provisions, the application of 'Responsibility to Protect' is very contentious and it has become inescapable dilemma.

The UNSC, by citing the doctrine of 'Responsibility to Protect', approved an intervention in Libya in response to the Gaddafi regime's brutal suppression of political protests (Jones and Borjana, 2013; Kassim, 2014; Small, 2014). Some referred this—the 'first chapter' of 'Responsibility to Protect' (Mckay and Robert, 2014). Others also labelled NATO led intervention in Libya as 'game changer' because of its first implementation of the doctrine of 'Responsibility to Protect'. According to Gareth Evans, as cited in McKay and Robert (2014), the goal of military intervention in Libya was not to bomb democracy or the regime but it has a single-most justification that is protecting civilians. Thus, it is due to its first implementation that peoples tend to call it as a 'textbook' case of the 'Responsibility to Protect' norm. Likewise, the UN commission also used 'Responsibility to Protect' on the report of Darfur crisis to evaluate the failures of the Sudanese government and the ensuing obligations on the international community.

Despite the legality, morality and feasibility of the intervention in Libya, in the aftermath of the intervention in Libya 'Responsibility to Protect' is not utilized in the Syrian civil war. Syria foreshadows the inconsistency, geopolitics and power politics of 'Responsibility to Protect' (Small, 2014). The uprising but nightly changed civil war in Syria engendered huge amounts of human suffering: death, torture, forced displacement, kidnapping, unlawful detention, and execution of civilians. Moreover, the very evil thing in Syria since the first day of the revolt is the use of chemical weapons which is strictly forbidden under international law. All in all the Syrian case is horrible in terms of violation of human rights. No doubt that all such inhumane act of the government security force automatically met standard of Mass Atrocity Crimes (Ibid).

However, neither the UN nor the international community adopts a viable solution to stop the violation of human rights committed by the involved actors in the civil war. Because of the Russia and China Veto, the UNSC become paralysed in adopting a resolution. For instance, Russia and China rejected drafted resolution of UNSC which intended to intervene by citing the emerging norm 'Responsibility to Protect' (Small, 2014). Beside this, the international community particularly the West who officially declared themselves to be human right defenders delayed its intervention. Rather they intervened after all things become worse and too difficult. This depicts the selectivity, politicization and inconsistency of 'Responsibility to Protect'. Thus, the failure of 'Responsibility to Protect' in the most-inhumanly

<sup>3</sup> See paragraph 201 and 203 of the report: UN (2004). Report of the High-level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change; A more secure world: Our shared responsibility. New York: United Nations.

committed atrocities is largely due to the geographical strategic position of Syria and power politics.

### **Syrian: From Arab Spring to Violence**

In the first decade of the twenty first century, the Arab world in particular the Middle East and North Africa witnessed uprisings. The revolt are popularly known as 'Arab Spring', also called Arab Uprisings erupt in December 2010 and led to either the fall (in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya and Yemen) or reform (among others, in Jordan, Morocco, Algeria and Bahrain) of age-old autocratic in several Arab states (Kassim, 2014). One of the Middle Eastern States which experience the 'Spring' was Syria (Hasler, 2012; Blythe, 2014). Sadly enough, however, the Syrian version of the Arab Spring was quickly turned into an 'Autumn', an all-out Civil War in March 2011. The protest began in March 18, 2011 in the dusty agricultural town of Dar'a. Though the Syrian uprising originated in rural periphery it was spread to cities within short time. As a response, the Assad's regime preferred a security solution to abort the revolt. According to Droz-Vincent (2014), repression is the single-most response of the Assad regime to the 2011 uprising. Thus, securitization, brutalization, mass killing, summary-style executions of disloyal soldiers and officers, and intimidation tactics all led to the outbreak of the Civil War (Peters, 2015).

Consequently, the pattern of the violence changed and much more atrocities committed. The very evil thing is the use of chemical weapons by Assad regime against civilians on August 2013. McKay and Robert (2014) described this as "world's most lethal chemical weapons attack since the 1980s". UN Secretary-General, as cited in Stahn (2013: 956), also explains it as 'the most significant confirmed use of chemical weapons' since Saddam Hussein's attack on the Halabja region of Iraq'. The used chemical weapon had killed mass civilians in the outskirts of Damascus. This has two repercussions: first use of chemical weapon is strictly forbidden in international law and thus the Syrian regime violated international law (Schmitt, 2013). Second, the use of chemical weapon mean acting against humanity and calling extinction of particular group. Thus, it is war crime or crime against humanity. This calls the response of international community through collective action. Sadly enough, collective action remains deadlock due to power politics of the five permanent members of UNSC (Webb, 2014).

Despite the grave violation of human rights in Syria, the international community remains salient with the exception of the delayed unilateral intervention of Russia and U.S. Syrian case has become also a playing field of regional and international power politics. Regionally, the war in Syria become a prelude to a contest between

regional powers, particularly the pro-Assad Iran, Algeria and Iraq and the anti-Assad Saudi Arabia, Turkey and Qatar.

Internationally, Syria has become the playing field of two conflictual world powers; the U.S and its west allies, and the Russia and China. Initially all contested powers proved not to intervene in Syria. This proved the subjectivity of 'Responsibility to Protect'. However, the power politics of the region and the rise of the Islamic State in Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS)<sup>4</sup> led the non-intervention of major powers to be questioned. First, the contest between regional powers and the human cost of the war paved the way for possible intervention by major powers. Both powers, U.S and Russia, intended to intervene for the sake of their Middle East friends. Iran and Turkey are the two powers of the region having conflictual interest in Syria. Iran and Russia want to save Assad while U.S. and Turkey want to remove Assad. Secondly, no one has expected that the Syrian Civil War would be an impetus for the rise of a deadliest terrorist group, (ISIS) in 2013. This is another tragedy which led the West's non-intervention in Syria to be seriously questioned (Weiss and Hassan, 2015).

Consequently, the two powers intervened in Syria on different grounds. With the unprecedented rise of ISIS, the world, especially the West, regain an opportunity to intervene in Syria. The American-led anti-ISIS coalition began to hit targets within Syria in 2014. The U.S. has also been supporting 'moderate' rebel groups. The West's intervention in Syria was severely criticized and denounced immediately by Russia. A year later, however, Russia itself changed its mind, and intervened in Syrian Civil War to prop up the Assad regime in 2015 (Hossain, 2015). However, the intervention of both powers is far from being 'Responsibility to Protect'. Rather it is aimed at securing national interests.

### **Repugnance of Responsibility to protect Over Syria**

In a response to Libyan case, the UNSC specifically referenced 'Responsibility to Protect' and imposed coercive military measures against the regime which failed to save civilians. Kassim (2014: 16) by citing the speech of UN General-Secretary describe this as follows:

*When Ban Ki Moon announced Security Council Resolution 1973, he indirectly invoked R2P as*

<sup>4</sup> Initially, Islamic State of Iraq (ISI) is al-Qaeda affiliated group. Later, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, announced the unification of Jabhat al-Nursa and ISI to form the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria/the Levant (ISIS or ISIL). It is abbreviated as ISIL, ISIS, or in Arabic Daesh. The group has referred to itself as the Islamic State. The group expanded into Syria since 2013 and controlled some areas of the region. By the time, this group is considered as a global threat.

*the enabling norm. In a statement soon after the resolution was adopted, he said: 'The Security Council today has taken an historic decision. Resolution 1973 affirms, clearly and unequivocally, the international community's determination to fulfil its responsibility to protect civilians from violence perpetrated upon them by their own government.'*

Despite the physiography and geopolitical difference of Syria and Libya, the Syrian uprising erupted on the same year of the launch of NATO-led intervention in Libya. Since the 2011, the situation in Syria has become worse and grave violation of human rights also continued. Altruistically, Syria deserves urgent response from international community since the State fails to protect civilians. However, power politics of Veto power blocked any fruitful responses to Syria. Russia and China successfully vetoed three UNSC resolutions over Syria. Thus, members of UNSC seem disagreed on the nature and very purpose of R2P. Russia and China suspected that this new norm was designed to advance western interest by toppling anti-western regimes (Kassim, 2014). While other members of UNSC strongly advocate that this norm would protect civilians during mass atrocities. However, the reality is in between the two extremes. Thus, 'Responsibility to Protect' is the subject of the national interest discourse of the five members of the UNSC. Consequently, divergence of interest in Syria led to the failure of 'Responsibility to Protect'. In Syria, each regional and international actor involved has conflictual interest.

#### **A. U.S. Interest in Syria**

U.S. and its west allies, the makers and violators of international law, claimed that its intervention in Syria is based on humanitarian concerns and the so-called 'war on terror'. However, humanitarian intervention in Syria was dead and buried as the international community became reluctant to intervene in Syria in the early days of the conflict (which they have done in Libya in 2011) or following the use of chemical weapons in 2013. If U.S. and its Western allies are a true altruistic defender and promoter of humanitarian, then it would be possible to them to intervene in Syria following the use of chemical weapons. However, they failed to do so. This arise question that whether or not the U.S. intervention is humanitarian. Again the overarching driving force that led to U.S. intervention in Syria is also in question. What, then, are the true reasons for U.S. intervention in Syria? The overall goal of U.S, its western allies and regional friends such as Turkey and Saudi Arabia is to remove Assad and establish pro-western government.

First, the principal and leading interest of U.S. in Syria

is security. In a Statement on ISIL, the U.S. President stated that U.S intention is to 'degrade and ultimately destroy terrorist Groups' the so-called ISIL. He further indicates the source of the threat; he said that "at this moment, the greatest threats come from the Middle East and North Africa" (President Barack Obama, 2014, September 10). This is considered as a menace of American peoples and their friends. One reason for this is that foreigners from all over the world including America and its west allies have joined ISIS. In this regard, the Americans suspected that they may return back to their home country, U.S., and may cause attack (Byman, 2016). Thus, fighting ISIS found to be mandatory task of Americans, at least, for two reasons. One is to save itself from the evil consequence of terrorist attack. In the second place, to ensure the security of its friends: Western Europe, Saudi Arabia, Turkey and Israel. Thus, it is too difficult to conclude that the recently U.S. led air attack in Syria arises out of responsibility to protect. Rather is falls on strategic interest. Thus, the U.S. led air strikes is both unlawful and far from the discourse of responsibility to protect.

Second, for U.S., enforcing the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) is a critical national interest. In a speech on August 2012, the United States (U.S.) President Barack Obama declares the use by the Bashar al-Assad regime of chemical weapons would be a 'red line' to militarily intervene in Syria. Chemical weapons were used in the Syrian Civil War in August 2013, which crossed the "red line" portrayed by Obama. Though the U.S. delays its intervention, policy makers and senators strongly believe that undermining this norm may encourage other regimes to acquire even to use chemical weapons. U.S. officials repeatedly stated that U.S would act so as to ensure accountability of Syria's unlawful use of chemical weapons. Secretary of State John Kerry in his remark in 2013, for instance, strongly stated that "all peoples and all nations who believe in the cause of our common humanity must stand up to assure that there is accountability for the use of chemical weapons so that it never happens again" (Schmitt, 2013: 7). Thus, for its own sake U.S. wants to be the enforcer of CWC by using its 'carrot and stick' policy. Not surprisingly, U.S. interest in enforcing this norm is to prevent others from accessing it. Thus, U.S intervention is far from humanitarian ground rather it has other orientations.

Third, stability of Turkey is also a major concern of U.S. Since the first day of the uprising, the Syria conflict is destabilizing to the region, even beyond the region (Byman, 2016). Instability is major causes of refugees. In the contemporary world, one of a contentious issue is refugees. Refugees alone are not a problem but there is suspicion of terrorists attack in the context of refugees. This worried the U.S. Due to the civil war in Syria, the number of refugees to neighbouring countries of Turkey and Jordan has been increased. Empirical data shows

that “over four million refugees fled Syria as of September 2015, and over seven million more are internally displaced” (Byman, 2016:173). No doubt, those refugees are vulnerable for terrorist attack and communicable disease. Moreover, they also recruited by terrorists. This has a spill-over effect not only to neighbouring countries but also to Europe and U.S.

Fourth, safeguarding the stability of Europe is another vital interest of U.S. Europe has become the destination of many Syrian refugees. For instance, many Germany's opposed the policy of Angela Merkel's on displaced peoples. Some countries also closed their border. Moreover, at continental level there is a wider suspicion that the refugee crisis would threaten the cohesion of the entire European Union (Cassidy, 2015). Beside this, they suspected terrorist attack. In New York Times, ‘*Could Paris Happen Here?*’, Benjaminov and Simon (2015) argued that “complicating matters is the ease with which a terrorist might slip out of Syria, cross through Turkey and enter Greece and the European Union”. Without question, the recent Paris attack exemplifies the danger of ISIS to the world in particular the Western world. Byman (2016:174) describes the danger of terrorism to the U.S. and its West allies as “.....terrorist threat remains real to the U.S. homeland and the West, ranging from Islamic State-inspired “lone wolves” to the possibility that Paris is but the first of many Islamic State attempts to prioritize mass slaughter in the West”.

Finally, protecting Israel and fighting ISIS is the interest of U.S. The U.S. considers that it is in its national interest to protect its key Middle East ally, Israel. Maintaining the security of Israel is among the three priority area of U.S. in the Middle East<sup>5</sup>. Geo-strategically, Syria's political ties with Hezbollah in Lebanon and Hamas in Palestine (both of which regarded as terrorists by the U.S.), U.S.-Israeli relations, the role of Iran, relations to the resurgent Russia, and the risk of a long-lasting Civil War in a highly unstable region with its economic effects—all shape the special interests of the U.S. Thus, the U.S. intervention in Syria is shaped by geo-political and not humanitarian considerations.

## B. Russian interest in Syria

Russia and China successfully vetoed a number of UNSC resolutions over Syria. From the beginning Russia never wants regime change in Syria, its strategic ally in the region. Russia's position is totally contradictory with that of U.S. and its west allies. Charbonneau (2012), as cited in Kassim (2014), argued that the draft resolution which Russia vetoed was an attempt of ‘regime change’

in Syria which is against the very interest of the government at Moscow. Moreover, Russian foreign minister, Sergei Lavrov, calls the Western attempted regime change in Syria as an “element of a larger regional geopolitical game” (Lavrov, 2012). He further argued that the U.S. and its west allies plan of regime change in Syria are undoubtedly targeting Iran, because a group of anti-Iran and Syria such as the USA and NATO countries, Israel, Turkey appear to be interested in weakening regional powers (*Ibid*). Due to clash of interest, Russia and China vetoed a draft resolution of UNSC. In expressing the reason why Russia opposed the October 2011 particular Resolution of UNSC, the Russian representative argues that: “today's rejected draft was based on... the philosophy of confrontation”(Harris, 2012:3). Thus, saving Assad is main interest of Russia. This is confirmed by Russian higher official, deputy foreign minister Mikhail Bogdanov as he said that “if the value of ousting the president seems acceptable to you [he mean the west], then what can we do? We consider it unacceptable”(BBC, 2012, 13 December). If President Assad is removed, then the Russians may struggle to retain influence in the region (*Ibid*). Thus, geopolitics of the region is the detrimental factor.

Despite Russia's Vetoed against UNSC resolution which would condemns grave violation of human rights and allow military intervention, Russia itself intervened in Syria in 2015. Russia claimed it intervene with the alleged request of the beleaguered Syrian President, Bashar al-Assad. But, the real reasons for Russia's support for Assad are not still expressed directly. Russia has some solid interests, however.

First, Russia has economic interest. Economically, Russia exports arms to Syria, and its access to a naval facility at the Mediterranean port of Tartus is strategically important (Peters, 2015). Zifcak, as cited in Small (2014), analysed this as follows:

*Syria is a major purchaser of exports of Russian arms and defence equipment. The Syrian market is worth six per cent of the overall arms export industry. Syria hosts a strategically positioned Russian naval base at Tartus on the west coast, its only one outside the former Soviet Union. . . . Russia has major economic investments in Syria, principally in the business of natural gas extraction. It is unsurprising given these important connections that the Russians do not wish to see them disturbed by the replacement of the al-Assad regime. Its veto at the Security Council provides it with political power it needs to forestall any such possibility.*

Thus, Russia found Syria as important country in the Middle East as a buyer of Russian arms and the strategic value of Tartus port to the Russian Navy. Moreover,

<sup>5</sup> U.S. three core interests in the Middle East are: oil price stability, halting nuclear proliferation, and ensuring the security of Israel.

Russia has also weapons and investment contracts with the ruling Syrian government. Since the uprising in 2011, Russia has been benefited from the arms industry by exporting weapons to Syria. Syria also imports petroleum products and other goods from Russia. Thus, when we see the reason why Russia vetoed UNSC resolutions is beyond the officially proclaimed fact. Officially Russia stated that Russia's objection of 'Responsibility to Protect' is due to the fact that the intervention in Libya resulted dire consequence. In contrast, U.S. argues that this is not the case. For instance, Ambassador Susan Rice said that "the United States retorted that the proposed military intervention and Libyan response were not at issue, but rather Russia's desire to sell arms to the Syrian regime trumped Russia's desire to stand up for the Syrian people" (Susan Rice statement as cited in Small, 2014:191)

Thus, Russian intervention is to secure its economic interest by saving its ally, Assad. This is not something new rather such military and economic relation goes back to the soviet period.

Second, politically, 'Mistaking Syria for Chechnya' is still the most solid reason for Russian intervention in Syria (Hill, 2013). Chechnya, a small, Muslim-dominated area in Russia in the Caucasus Mountains, is prone to Islamic uprisings against the Russian regime. By fighting Islamic extremism abroad, Putin wants to weaken the Islamic sentiment in Russia.

Finally, both Russia and China suspicion that the new norm of the so-called 'Responsibility to Protect' paradoxically may serve as an instrument of the west to topple anti-west regimes. Regarding 'Responsibility to Protect' members of Security Council can be divided in to two contradictory groups: pro-'Responsibility to Protect' and Anti-'Responsibility to Protect'. Pro-'Responsibility to Protect' are known as G3 (U.S., Britain and France) and while anti-'Responsibility to Protect' are commonly referred as G2 (China and Russia). The G2 suspected that the three countries are intending and attempting to impose their power on the non-west by provoking 'Responsibility to Protect' which allow them to intervene in non-west countries (Small, 2014). The human right practice of both countries is also not without question. Thus, their stance in blocking UNSC resolution is also a self-interested (Menon, 2012). Thus, Russia and China used their veto power as a counter strategy of such suspicion.

Thus, Russian intervention aimed at military power, prestige, economic profit and counter strategy. Therefore, it is possible to conclude that the driving force of Russian intervention in Syria is not invitation but national interest which can be explained as Wax and Gold (the Wax is intervention by invitation while the Gold is securing national interest in terms of economic, political, military and also prestige).

Despite the interests of both intervening powers, they

have a common interest which is fighting ISIS. However, they failed to cooperate and continued to execute their contradictory plan regarding the future fate of Syria. Thus, intervention remains a tool to achieve strategic interest.

In general, though 'Responsibility to Protect' was implemented in Libya, it has become a reverse doctrine in Syria. Even in Libya the intervening powers used it as a means to an end. They go beyond their mandate-to regime change. This is officially provoked by Russia and China whenever there is a proposed resolution of military intervention in Syria. Thus, China and Russia continue to veto UNSC Resolutions containing intervention because of the fear that it will serve as a pretext for another Western military intervention. Thus, 'Responsibility to Protect' is a geopolitical tool used by the West to destabilize and establish pro-Western government in the aftermath of the intervention.

### **Clash of Interest and false promise of Responsibility to Protect**

The single-most challenge for the operationalization of 'Responsibility to Protect' is the political interests of the five permanent members of the UNSC. This successfully reinsured the inconsistency and selective application of 'Responsibility to Protect'. For instance, Russia abstained from voting a resolution allowing military intervention in Libya. However, when Syria comes to the scene of the Security Council, Russia vetoed three resolutions. On the other side, three members of Security Council (United States, Britain and France) paradoxically use 'Responsibility to Protect' as to bring regime change. Not surprisingly, Russia used the notion of 'Responsibility to Protect' in its 2008 operation in Georgia. Thus, 'Responsibility to Protect' is highly politicised concept. It would not be applicable unless the interest of the five members of UNSC came together or less sensitive. Thus, it would be fair to conclude that 'Responsibility to Protect' is a false promise of saving civilians.

### **CONCLUSION**

Though in its very essence responsibility to protect is assured to be a preventive tool of mass atrocities committed elsewhere, it faces operational problem. Responsibility to protect itself is highly politicised. Selectivity, inconsistency and politicization all are the hallmark features of responsibility to protect which remains big challenge. Moreover, the (in) applicability of responsibility to protect is largely determined by national interest, geo-politics and the power politics of members of UNSC. This is true in Syria which deserves Responsibility to protect. Since 2011, civilians in Syria continue to face

mass atrocity crimes committed by three actors: State security forces, armed opposition groups, and ISIS. All the three are committing war crimes and crimes against humanity. The Syrian civil war can be labelled as the longest civil war of the second decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Likewise, it is also the 21<sup>st</sup> century second decade recorded gross violation of human rights: from murder to extermination, rape, torture, imprisonment, enforced disappearance and other inhuman acts.

Despite such crimes against humanity committed by the three actors, the international community failed from stopping it. Rather major powers further exacerbate the situation by providing arms to their closest parties. No doubt that, major powers violated international humanitarian law by providing arms to rebel groups even to terrorists. Though various human rights instruments prohibit contracting States to refrain from supporting violators of human rights and rebel groups, major powers continued to support violators of humanitarian law. The major powers such as U.S. and its west allies, and Russia and China failed to save civilians. Rather they continued to find a cost-effective mechanism to achieve their strategic interest. It is due to this reason that critics of responsibility to protect tended to describe responsibility to protect as a R.I.P.

Thus, the applicability of responsibility to protect is inconsistent, too flexible and highly politicised. As the farmers of responsibility to protect are the Western, other such as Russia and China suspected that it would be used as a tool of Western powers to remove anti-western regimes by invoking responsibility to protect. Thus, responsibility to protect is the subject of two contradictory extremes. Some considered it as a best mechanism of protecting human rights while other holds that it is a means to achieve some planned goals of the West.

In general, the nascent ideal of responsibility to protect is misused and abused by major powers. Ironically they tend to use responsibility to protect as a justification to achieve their own objectives.

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