

Bachelor project : Political Leaders in International Conflicts and Issues
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How belief systems and the Responsibility to Protect influenced Obama`s policy in Syria

The United States has supported rebels and done interventions in other nations multiple times in history (Carpenter, 1986). These actions have been happening for many years with different motivations for every one. Examples of this are the support for the contras in Nicaragua (Tuathail & Agnew, 1992). The objective was to defend the interests of US Corporations (Thompson, 1992). During the Cold War these actions were practically a phenomenon as they were part of this Truman doctrine and international relations theories such as realism tried explain this behaviour in terms of national interest (Heywood, 2014). After the Cold War the US also did other various interventions such as Iraq, Somalia, Bosnia and Kosovo (DiPrizio, 2002; ÓTuathail, 2002). These were also guided by US interests and also can be explained to some extent by theories such as realism (DiPrizio, 2002). However, the US decided that taking action by supporting the rebels in the Syrian War was also necessary. This action that can be seen as part of a broader US based phenomenon could usually be explained via the realist theme of national interest. In this case however, realism cannot give a complete and logical explanation. Syria is a nation far away and with no significant strategic interest to the US when looking on the basis of realist theory.

This inability to explain raises the question, why did president Obama decide that supporting rebels in Syria was a necessary step?

This research will use two theories as possibilities to explain this decision by the US. The first theory is the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) theory and would explain this decision as the need for Obama to support the Syrian people on the basis of protecting them from human rights abuses and that this would force him to act to support the rebels in Syria as they are fighting to stop a ruthless dictator. The second theory is the belief system theory and it would explain this decision as the high influence of Obama's own belief system that led him to take this unusual action. A discourse analysis will be used to test if either of these theories was of influence on Obama during the policy making process.

The structure of this thesis will be as follows: First a short literature review will discuss the main theories, then a theoretical framework will explain the R2P and belief system theories in detail as well as provide the assumptions regarding these theories. Third the research design will explain how the research will be conducted. The results and analysis will discuss the establishment of Obama's belief system and the results of the main discourse analysis. The discussion and conclusion will summarize the findings and provide suggestions for further research regarding this topic.

Literature review

The United States (US) has a long and interesting history in relation to interventions in other nations or support for rebels groups. There were various objectives for the US when supporting rebels or executing interventions (Carpenter, 1986). Today the US has supported rebels in Syria with nonlethal and lethal aid (Blanchard, Humud, & Nikitin, 2014). The decision to first train and then arm certain rebels groups in Syria has not been without controversy (Gordon & Landler, 2013). This controversial action has been discussed around the world and several nations including Russia have also intervened in Syria (Allison, 2013). This crisis is happening in the international dimension and one would think that the grand international relations (IR) theories, such as realism, would give a possible explanation for the decisions taken by nations as it has done in the past with for example the Iraq war. Realism is a political theory that has been very influential and has had a long history of explaining former actions taken by nations (Donnelly, 2000; Heywood, 2014).

If realism is able to explain the behaviour of the US in Syria then the actions of the US or the situation in Syria should be in line with the main realist themes or beliefs (Rose, 1998). There are several main themes that are present in realism. These are: states are egoistic and will always act in national interest; power and survival are the most important objectives for a state to achieve; moral principles do not guide state behaviour; there are no universal moral principles as they are state specific; nations will always be in a self-help state as the international system is anarchic and thus cooperation is not possible; states are inherently rational actors and lastly, nations look at actions in terms of relative gains as they wish to have more benefit from an action than another state (Heywood, 2014).

Previous US interventions or rebel aid policies do satisfy several of the realist themes and thus realism can explain the behaviour of the US in those situations. One example is the US planned coup d'état in Iran in 1953 (Simonsen, 2016). The most plausible reason for committing this act was that the US feared that if Iran nationalized their oil industry it would encourage other nations in the Middle East to also do so and that could threaten the supply of cheap oil the US needed for its own industry (Simonsen, 2016). This follows the realist idea of protecting national interests and securing state survival. A second example is the multiple different proxy wars that the US started to try and drive out communist power during the cold war via the Truman Doctrine (Cox, 1990). Here the US feared that it would have relatively less power than the USSR and thus tried to contain it by starting proxy wars or support rebels such as the Mujahedeen in Afghanistan (Mitchell, 2002). Here the realist theme of relative power and state survival are satisfied.

When looking at the decision to support rebels in Syria there are several problems that arise when trying to use realism to explain this decision. Supporting rebels in Syria to overthrow the government does not meet any major realist themes. Economically Syria is not a threat to the US as its economic power is very low, militarily the US has the most powerful army in the world with Syria coming in at number 43 (2017 Index of Economic Freedom, 2017; Global Firepower, 2017). The US will not receive any relative gains from supporting the Syrian rebels as it currently costs the US around 500 million to support the rebels yet they receive nothing in return (Blanchard et al., 2014). Syria also is geographically very far from the mainland US and does not have the capability to project its power onto the US mainland. This makes the direct threat of Syria for the US low and shows that the action in Syria by the US is not properly explainable from a realist perspective.

The realist theory bases itself on the international level or structure level, yet there is another dimension that could provide and answers as to why the US decided to act in Syria. When looking at the actions that states take there is a leader at the head of the nation that makes these decisions. It is important to look at the individual leaders of nations as they are the ones that interpret a crisis situation, its constraints and are responsible for making important decisions (M. Hermann & Hagan, 1998). It is a leader of a nation that can make unusual or historical decisions (Post, 2004). This individual level of analysis can provide an explanation for the unusual behaviour of the US as a leader is an individual that gets influenced by various factors. It is this influence of factors on a leader that can lead to the leader making unusual decisions and this creates enough academic incentive to research individual leaders as possible causes for actions. During the time of the decision to support the rebels in Syria the US president was Barack Hussein Obama. If the explanation is going to be researched at the individual level the research should focus on factors that could have influenced him.

The situation in Syria is an international and humanitarian crisis. When looking at possible factors and theories that could influence leaders during crises there are various ones available. There is one contested concept that stands out in relation to the US and could possibly provide an explanation for its unusual behaviour, the concept of Responsibility to Protect (R2P). The reason that this theory stands out with regards to US behaviour is that R2P was one of the main reasons for the intervention in Libya (Bellamy & Williams, 2011). Obama was one of the advocates for R2P in Libya (Hehir, 2013). It would be possible for this theory to influence Obama's policy on Syria and be the reason for its actions due to the similar circumstances in both nations during their crises. These are: leaders attacking their own citizens and protests across the nations that could and have led to civil war (Bellamy & Williams, 2011).

R2P is a concept that emerged between 2001 and 2005 in the United Nations (UN) (Zyber & Mason, 2013). The concept came to existence after the UN International Commission on Intervention and State sovereignty supported the In Larger Freedom report from the UN Secretary-General in 2005 (Amnéus, 2013). This report was drafted after the previous attempts by the UN to stop mass atrocities failed. R2P entails the responsibility of a nation to protect its citizens and take care for their wellbeing (Thakur & Weiss, 2009). If a nation cannot guarantee the wellbeing of its citizens or commits atrocities against them then the international community or UN is allowed to dismiss the nations right of sovereignty and as a result the rule of non-intervention (Badescu & Weiss, 2010). This concept has been heavily contested by various nations as they state that sovereignty is unchallengeable and that R2P

has not been backed up by international law (Junk, 2014). How would this concept make the US support rebels in Syria? First one has to look at history. The US has used R2P as a premise for acting in the internal affairs of sovereign foreign nations before with examples such as the war in Iraq, especially after no Weapons of Mass Destruction were found (Ramesh Thakur, 2006). Another more recent example of the US using R2P as a justification for action is the conflict in Libya (Vaughn & Dunne, 2015). In the case of Libya the US used R2P in the UN Security Council (USNC) as a justification for its actions. According to scholars R2P was used as a justification as there were several other events happening at the same time that would allow the US to invoke R2P more easily than before (Vaughn & Dunne, 2015). These were the fact that the Arab Spring was happening that made Gaddafi lose significant allies in the region, the relation between the West and Gaddafi were at a low point especially after threats and actions against his own population and finally Libya was militarily weak (Vaughn & Dunne, 2015). All these factors allowed Obama to intervene militarily in Libya with the support of other nations under the premise of R2P. These historical and recent examples show that the US is not hesitant to invoke R2P as a reason for its actions and thus that it could also do this in the case of Syria.

If we look at the circumstances that enabled R2P to be used by Obama in Libya and at the work scholars have done into the use of R2P in relation to the case of Syria there are several elements that could create the notion that the US saw R2P as one of its main reasons to support rebels in Syria. When comparing to the case of Libya, the Syrian president Assad also committed atrocities against his people via gas attacks (Khadder et al., 2017). Militarily Syria was also weak at the time the US decided to start supporting the rebels as the Syrian army could not claim significant victories over the rebels (Blanchard et al., 2014).

The situation in Syria also met the criteria of the three pillars of invoking R2P. The three main pillars that are the basis for R2P are: 1. A state has to protect its population from mass atrocities; 2. The international community has to help nations achieve the responsibility to protect their citizens; 3. If a state is failing to achieve pillar 1 the international community must be prepared to take appropriate collective action (Kolb, 2012; Morris, 2013). Assad has committed atrocities against his population and the international community has to respond in the appropriate manner. The US has explicitly mentioned during the UNSC deliberations that the human rights abuses and gas attacks must be stopped (Anna, 2014). This gives a reason to believe that R2P would explain why the US decided to act.

The decision to support rebels instead of a bombing campaign can possibly be explained by the fact that Russia and China blocked resolutions concerning Syria effectively stopping the ability to intervene (Saxon & Pratt, 2015). The next possible option for the US could be supporting rebels if they wish to aid the population on the basis of R2P. This is not confirmed however and it thus remains questionable why the US would even bother acting in Syria as it is not in its own interest to do so in addition to the obstructions in the UNSC. Another factor that makes the role of R2P as a factor for action in Syria questionable is the fact that research has stated that the people overestimated the role and influence of R2P during early times of the Syria conflict (Morris, 2013). The R2P theory possibly gives a better explanation as to why Obama did act in Syria however it still has several issues.

R2P is not the only factor that could have influenced Obama. There is a possibility that Obama's belief system could have played a role in the creation of foreign policy. The belief system of a political leader is the collection of beliefs a leader has concerning the political world (Larson, 1994). A leader's belief system creates interpretations of other leaders, what a leader perceives as good or bad and what is morally acceptable or not (Larson, 1994). The relation between a belief system and decision making is that the values and thoughts in a leader's belief system directly affect the type of decisions the leader will make (Brodin, 1972).

During the time of the decision to support the rebels in Syria the US president was Barack Hussein Obama. Obama has openly been a defender of human rights and democracy (Clinton, 2011). If his belief system encouraged him to aid people in achieving democracy and respect for human rights then there is a possibility that his belief system somehow influenced the decision to support the rebels in Syria even if it was not of US national interest (Brodin, 1972). There is evidence that suggests that a leader's belief system can significantly influence the policy making of a leader (Holsti, 1962). If Obama's belief system was of influence then this could explain why the US supported Syrian rebels and why a grand political theory such as realism does not have the capability to fully explain this action. However, there is no guarantee that this is correct and this will need to be researched. On the other hand if Obama was influenced by R2P then this would also explain why R2P can only partly explain why the US decided to act.

Realist theory does not give a complete explanation as to why Obama decided to support rebels in Syria as it is not in their national interest to do this. R2P theory and belief system theory provide possible reasons as to why the decision to support rebels was made yet are still

inconclusive. On the basis of the unanswered question why the US would take such an illogical step compared to the past the following research question is posed:

Why did president Obama decide to support the Syrian rebels?

Theoretical framework

In answering the research question the focus will be on two main theories. The first theory is R2P. The second theory is the belief system theory. There are two reasons that these two theories were chosen over other theories in this research. R2P theory has been chosen as it has recently been used by the Obama administration for action in Libya. This creates the possibility that R2P can also be used in Syria due to the situation being similar on some points as explained above. The belief system theory has been chosen for its ability to give a different possible answer to the research question as it is based on the beliefs of a leader and therefore is can give a possible explanation for Obama`s actions that lies within Obama himself rather than a factor that influences Obama externally.

R2P is a contested concept and needs to be properly defined before it can be used. R2P states that all nations have a responsibility to protect and guarantee the wellbeing of their citizens (Amnéus, 2013). If a nations does not fulfil this obligation the international community has to help that nation to achieve this. When this fails the sovereignty of that nation is waived and allows other nations to intervene militarily if needed to protect the population of that nation (Amnéus, 2013). This collection of elements together is called R2P.

The influence of R2P on a leader`s decision making process could be seen as the intensity of the need of a leader to help a population in a situation where their state is not possible to (Amnéus, 2013). The amount influence R2P has on a leader`s decision making process depends on several elements and could be the driving force to make a leader decide that some form of action is needed. Whether or not a leader has to intervene would depend on the position of his or her nation in regards to the following elements : respect for the dignity and basic rights of all people, a belief that human rights are universal and should be enforced, the belief that external nations have an obligation to prevent crimes such as genocide, the belief that nations have to cooperate to end serious breaches of human rights and a belief that there is an individual and collective state responsibility to uphold R2P (Amnéus, 2013; Arbour, 2008; Thakur & Weiss, 2009).

Whether or not a leader decides to intervene will be dependent on their nation's position on these elements. If their nation has an accepting stance on these elements and as a result supports collective action against nations that violate human rights the leader might feel pressured to take action (Acharya, 2014). If the leader does not take action to support the values that his or her nation supports then this will raise serious questions about the capabilities of the leader. This effect is strengthened in countries where the leader is chosen democratically. Needing to support allies with the same values also adds additional pressure on a leader to act (McKeown, 2009). R2P is a concept that has been promoted by a large part of the world at the 2005 World Summit and if the leader of a nation that accepts the concept of R2P does not act then this would stand out and this can have negative consequences for the position of the leader in future international relations (Arbour, 2008; Carlson, 2012).

In contrast to this example, a nation that has rejected one or more of the elements of R2P does not have to respond to a violation of human rights in the same way as the nation that supports human rights (Maiguashca, Farrell, & Armstrong, 2005). One such example is a nation such as Russia that opposes R2P and states that it undermines the Charter of the UN (Responsibilitytoprotect.org, 2017). In this nation the concept of R2P will have much less impact on foreign policy decision making.

The acceptance of R2P values is complemented by another factor, namely the historical position of that nation in regards to human rights (Oueslati, 2014). A nation that has a long history of promoting human rights will not be able to sit still when these values are under attack. Policy makers and leaders will look at the past to see how to similar situations were dealt with and if needed resort to the same measures (Gavin, 2007). If we take the US as an example the US has had a focus on human rights, freedom and democracy for a long time (Paust, 1989). During and after the Cold War the US acted to promote these values and they still persist today (Carlson, 2012; Reinold, 2011). This means that the leader of the US, a nation that promotes these values, will have a strong incentive to act in a situation where these values are under threat and will explain these actions as being done in the defence of these values. Not acting would be an unusual act to do as it would go against the history and policy that the nation has been committed to for a long time. Using values to justify the actions is something leaders will often do as they try to avoid blame for unpopular actions (Weaver, 2008). Having popular values as a justification of actions is a low risk option for leaders and in the case of R2P will also be supported by a large part of the international community.

The previous history of the US with defending these important values, the national support for R2P and a history of calling on R2P to be used gives the expectation that R2P will play at least some role in Obama`s decision to support the Syrian rebels. The situation has similarities with Libya in the sense that there are also human rights violations and a leader that is attacking his own population. Obama did call on R2P to be used in Libya and it would make sense given this and the history of the US in this dimension that R2P could be a reason for Obama to decide that supporting the Syrian rebels was a necessary step.

If the influence of the R2P was of importance when making the decision to support the Syrian rebels then certain elements of the concept of R2P could reveal themselves in Obama`s speeches or interviews concerning the matter. The most typical elements of R2P would have the highest chance to be mentioned by Obama.

The following elements are the most characteristic and important for the concept of R2P according to literature on the matter (Amnéus, 2013; Saxon & Pratt, 2015; Weiss, 2004) :

Table 1: Most characteristics elements of the Responsibility to Protect concept

Responsibility to Protect (R2P)	Crimes against humanity
Humanitarian	Collective action
Human rights/ human dignity	International norms
Acts of violence	Accountability/accountable
Protect	United Nations

If these characteristic elements are present in speeches then it should give an indication whether or not R2P was of influence in Obama`s decision to support the Syrian rebels.

The belief system theory gives another perspective on the justification of foreign policy by leaders. The theory of a belief system is based on the idea that every person has a belief system and that a belief system consists of the empirical and normative ideas about reality a person has (Brodin, 1972). The individual will act according to a reality that is based on their belief system and their actions will reflect their belief system (Holsti, 1962). In international relations a belief system will also have an effect as it has been shown that there is a significant link between a leader`s belief system and foreign policy choices (Holsti, 1962).

A leader has a belief system that is relevant for politics and this is referred to as an operational code. When looking at international relations the influence of a leader's belief system can be quite significant. A leader acting according to his or her belief system can explain unusual behaviour by states. Taking the example of the US during the cold war, the Truman Doctrine can explain why the US was so committed to stopping communism and went to war in several countries to stop its spread (Watts, 2010). This action was based on the belief of president Truman that communism was aiming to envelop the world regardless if this was true or not and is a prime example of a leader's belief system influencing foreign policy.

How influential a belief system is for a leader depends on several factors such as how many different actors can influence a situation. If the leader has a dominant position in the policy making process or other factors allow the leader to make the majority of decisions then their belief system can decide foreign policy (Brodin, 1972). During an international crisis a leader has only a small group of advisors around him or her and influence of other groups is low unless it is on the international dimension (Post, 2004). This situation increases the influence of a leader's belief system. The influence of a leader's belief system can increase if a situation is very polarized and requires urgent action (Holsti, 1962). In this situation a leader can fall back on their belief system as a reasoning for action as their belief system confirms a situation to be as they see it and they can move away from logical behaviour as expected from decision makers (Brodin, 1972). If a policy is made this way the leader does not always have to explain their actions by claiming that they thought it was the right decision as the leader can think of another justification for the action. However, if the values of the nation and their own personal values overlap even to a degree then they can still state that it was their own belief that it was a correct policy to implement and they will not face major issues when explaining the decision to their citizens (Weaver, 2008). Basing on the fact that the situation in Syria is a crisis and following from that Obama probably was making the decision in a small group where his influence was larger than usual it seems plausible that his belief system would have an impact on foreign policy decisions.

To test this theory in regards to Obama's belief system, his belief system needs to be known. Obama's belief system will be established via the use of Profiler Plus v 7.3.2.. From the results of Profiler Plus, literature will be used to establish the most characteristic elements that fit Obama's belief system in the same way they were made for the R2P theory. These characteristics will then be used in the discourse analysis.

Research design

For this research a qualitative analysis via a case study has been chosen. The reason for a qualitative approach comes from the fact that the inherent nature of my research question prefers a more qualitative approach over a quantitative approach. The specific design is a discourse analysis (Becker, Bryman, & Ferguson, 2012). The reason for a discourse analysis is that interviewing a leader is not possible and data or exact documents about the decision making processes are also not available.

The closest that this research can get to a leader is a proximity analysis via a discourse analysis (Schafer & Walker, 2006). A proximity analysis has both benefits and downsides. The benefit is that it allows for analysis of subject that otherwise would not be accessible. The downside is that the analysis is not the most precise as it relies on interpretations of statements. In regards to discourse analysis the benefit is that it fits the research question very well as it allows for the interpretation and reveal of the hidden motivation behind a text (Bryman, 2012). This fits the research question. There is a downside to discourse analysis, namely that it still is an interpretation of a text and thus is not an extremely accurate scientific method. The pros and cons of a case study are also of importance. The downside of picking a case study is that the external validity is low as a single case can hardly be representative of other cases (Becker et al., 2012). The positive argument however is that a case study allows for more testing of several variables on one case and thus be quite detailed in the analysis which will allow for further discussion.

When looking at case selection there are several important factors to keep in mind. First is access to data that is reliable as this is needed for a good discourse analysis. In relation to other regions of the globe Western nations are more transparent and reliable (TransparencyInternational, 2016). The aim of this research was to explain unusual behaviour in a pattern of international behaviour and thus due to the increased reliability of data a Western nation was chosen. The US interventions and support during and after the Cold War have basically been a pattern as they occurred regularly as part of a government policy on the basis of national interests (Johnson & Piehler, 2013). The choice for the US action in Syria was made on the basis of it being an anomaly in the pattern of US behaviour in foreign policy. The US support to rebels in Syria is unusual in the fact that it does not satisfy the criteria of self-interest according to the realist theory in international relations (Heywood, 2014). It is unusual behaviour, when looking at history and realist theory, for the US to intervene in a nation if it does not have national benefit. The leader of a nation guides its foreign policy and

factors that influence foreign policy making will reflect themselves via a nations leader (M. G. Hermann, Preston, Korany, & Shaw, 2001). On the basis of this knowledge Barack Hussein Obama will be researched as the leader of the US during the time the policy of supporting the Syrian rebels was made.

Primary data will be used in this research. As the research question is interested in the motivation of Obama for supporting the Syrian rebels the research will be conducted on the basis of a discourse analysis of speeches and interviews of Obama concerning the option of supporting the Syrian rebels. The research will be looking at the years 2012, 2013 and 2014 as this was the primary time the policy of supporting the Syrian rebels was made (CNN, 2013). There will be 15 documents used in the discourse analysis as after extensive searching on the internet it was found that there are very little speeches and interviews where Obama himself has spoken about the decision to support the Syrian rebels. Other sources concerning this decision could have been used as they are more common however this research is concerned with Obama himself and not anyone else who speaks on his behalf. Using sources other than speeches or interviews with Obama himself can lower the internal validity of this research as it would not be measuring Obama but possibly the interpretation that the spokesperson has given to what Obama wants to say (Bryman, 2012).

In regards to operationalisation there will be two stages. The first is the establishing of Obama`s belief system via the use of Profiler Plus v7.3.2 with the Verbs In Context (VIC) system for Operational code coding scheme. To ensure that the analysis of Obama`s belief system is not skewed by certain events such as winning the elections a total of 27 speeches will be analysed across the 8 years of his presidency from 2008 to 2016 with three speeches taken from every year (See Appendix A). The speeches for the establishment of Obama`s belief system will be taken from a database of all the speeches that Obama has given (<http://www.americanrhetoric.com/barackobamaspeeches.htm>).

The use of this programme will give a representation of Obama`s belief system on the basis that even though speechwriters are involved in writing leaders` speeches, leaders` characteristics still permeate in the text as they are often involved in the writing of the speech (Nhandara, Karlsson, & Johansson, 2015). The results and specific dimensions of Profiler Plus will be analysed on the basis of their strength (See Appendix B). These dimensions will be interpreted via literature in relation to belief systems and the specific dimension in the results to establish the 10 most characteristic elements for Obama`s belief system. The reasoning for 10 characteristic elements is to avoid the issue of having more elements than the

R2P theory, which also has 10 elements, and thus accidentally skewing the results as more elements means the chance at them being found is higher.

The second stage of the analysis will consist of searching for speeches and interviews concerning the policy to support rebels in Syria between 2012, 2013 and 2014 for the most characteristic elements of both the R2P theory and belief system theory. The meaning of the presence of these elements will then be explained with the help of the theory and literature used in the theoretical framework.

Results and analysis

The Profiler Plus analysis of the 27 speeches has given various results and was interpreted with the interpretation table. (Appendix B and Appendix C). Of the 16 dimensions tested only 6 have a distinctive result for Obama. The first dimension is P-1 and Obama has a value of +0.26 and this represents that he believes that the nature of the political universe is somewhat friendly. This can indicate that he believes that different nations can work together and create a peaceful solution to problems (M. Hermann & Hagan, 1998). The second dimension that stood out in terms of its value is P-5, the role of chance. This has a value of +0.91 and is extremely positive. This indicates that Obama most certainly believes that chance plays a large role in international politics. This dimension is important as it works closely together with another dimension of Obama's belief system, namely I-3, risk orientation. According to literature the chances a leader is willing to take are determined by how risk averse or accepting a leader is (Brodin, 1972). Obama has a score of -0.50 for the dimension of risk orientation and this indicates that he is very opposed to taking risks. Opposition to risks and a belief in chance can indicate that Obama takes his time when making decisions and that he is not inclined to randomly make a policy that can result in a negative backlash. His possible cautiousness is also reflected in his score of +0.32 on the dimension of I-1, direction of strategy. A score of +0.32 indicates that his strategies are more likely to be based on cooperation instead of starting conflicts however this score is only moderately strong and thus can allow for shifting to a more conflict oriented approach if needed.

The fourth and fifth strong dimensions based on the Profiler Plus data are dimensions I-4a and I-4b with scores of +0.68 and +0.61 respectively. These scores indicate that Obama is flexible in switching between cooperation and starting a conflict and bringing his words into deeds. The influence this has for Obama's policy is that even though his belief system is orientated on the belief that cooperation with other nations and peaceful solutions are possible, he avoids

risks and chance as much as possible and is not afraid to turn his words into actions by switching from peaceful cooperation to for example a military strike (Walker, Schafer, & Young, 1998). The final and possibly most important dimension in Obama`s belief system is I-5c the utility of appealing or supporting other people. Obama scores a +0.43 and this indicates that he is very convinced that supporting or appealing to other people or nations is of large influence and utility (Walker et al., 1998). The results of the other dimensions in the Profiler Plus analysis are not very strong and lie approximately in the middle of their dimensional value spectrum. One example is dimension P-2, the realization of political values. Obama has a value of +0.09 and that is neither optimistic nor pessimistic. As a result of this establishing most characteristic elements for these dimensions is difficult and their weakness on the spectrum makes it unlikely that they will be explicitly mentioned and detectable in Obama`s speeches or interviews concerning the policy making process. This is based on the theory that only the strongest elements of a leader`s belief system will influence policymaking (Brodin, 1972).

All of these strong dimensions combined create the following belief system for Obama: He believes that the world of international politics is somewhat friendly and can allow for cooperation between nations; chance and risks are to be avoided as much as possible when creating foreign policy; supporting other nations or people should be a priority when creating foreign policy and peaceful cooperation can be exchanged for military action if needed (Brodin, 1972; M. Hermann & Hagan, 1998; Walker et al., 1998).

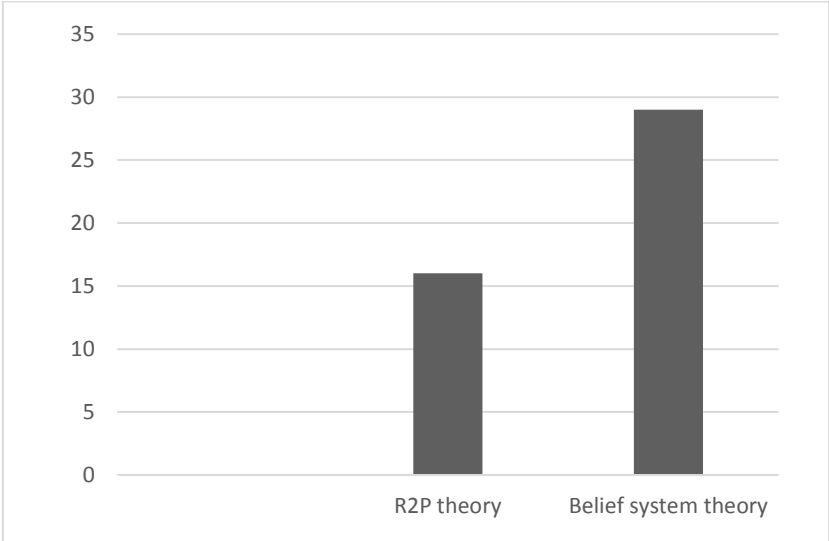
Based on the established belief system and the previously used theory the following ten elements have been found to be the most representative of Obama`s belief system (Brodin, 1972; Holsti, 1962; Walker et al., 1998) :

Table 4: Most characteristic elements of the belief system of Barack Hussein Obama

Cooperation	International cooperation
Peaceful solution	Avoid
Risk	Political solution
Chance	Take action
Help/support	negotiate

A total of 15 articles and speeches by Obama or where Obama was interviewed were analysed (See appendix D). With regards to the theories the characteristics of the R2P theory were found 16 times and the characteristics of the belief system theory were found almost twice as much with 29 times (table 5).

Table 5: the number of characteristics found per theory



In regards to the R2P theory the analysis of the articles provided several findings. In 2012 Obama explicitly mentioned the Responsibility to Protect in his official statement on Syria. This is the first and only time out of all articles used across the years that R2P was mentioned explicitly in those words. In all following articles and statements R2P was not mentioned explicitly and this can indicate that Obama initially did see R2P as a justification to act in Syria. This is in line with the theoretical expectations that R2P would play at least some role in the policy making process. The theory also provides an explanation as to why Obama never mentioned R2P explicitly after this initial statement. R2P is inherently contested and many nations oppose its use as they see it to be a breach of a nation’s sovereignty. A leader will not repeat unpopular actions as this lower the confidence of their citizens in them (Weaver, 2008). R2P played a role in Obama`s decision to act in Libya and at first was supported even by nations such as Russia and China in the UN (Morris, 2013). R2P in Libya resulted in regime change and turned nations against Obama and R2P. This could have led to Obama deciding that using R2P explicitly would not be a wise decision in international politics as it could turn various nations against the US actions in Syria. The data reflected would support this as R2P would never be mentioned again directly. However, the notion of R2P as a concept still had

an impact on Obama's decision to support the Syrian rebels as in various other statements R2P was indirectly mentioned. One example of this is visible in the following quote: "(...)" which brings me to the fourth and final element of American leadership: our willingness to act on behalf of human dignity" (Obama's Commencement Address at West Point, 2014).

This quote shows the element of human dignity that is part of the R2P theory. Other elements of R2P were also consistently found across the articles. This would be supported by the theory that a leader has to act on the behalf of his nations support for R2P and thus that R2P did play a role in the creation of the policy on supporting Syrian rebels (Acharya, 2014). The US and its population support R2P to stop violations of human rights (Eichenberg, 2005). Obama has as a leader the responsibility to reflect his nations support for R2P. In the UNSC Russia and China blocked many resolutions from the US and allies regarding action in Syria by citing the regime change that happened in Libya (Sun, 2012). Obama needed a way to represent the interest of his nation and R2P but in a more indirect matter as to avoid international issues. The policy on supporting rebels in Syria would be a way to achieve this as it would not be happening via the collective action of the international community or any mentioning of R2P. This was visible in several articles where he described the events in Syria as crimes against humanity and that the US would support the rebels in Syria as they are fighting for democracy and freedom. This shows that as described in the expectations and theory, R2P did play a role in his decision to support the rebels in Syria.

When compared to R2P the elements of Obama's belief system were found in almost double the quantity. The presence of the elements of Obama's belief system was found to be more stable. Across all articles in only 2 cases were elements of Obama's belief system not found. For R2P this was 5 times. This indicates a more stable influence of Obama's belief system across time. When looking at the theory the more stable influence of Obama's belief system could be explained via the small amount of influencing actors that were present around him during the policy making process. If the amount of actors around a leader during the policy making process is low then the belief system of a leader will have a stronger and more stable influence (Post, 2004). The conflict in Syria was not a short crisis nor was it a simple or easy one to solve as is proven by the fact that the war is still going on to this day. A crisis that does not lower in intensity or severity will continue to have the leader in an environment where there are little actors as they are making policy. The findings in the articles support the notion that the belief system of Obama was a constant influence, as the specific words found were also very consistent and did not change a lot. The elements of support, political solution and

help were found in 12 of the 15 analysed articles indicating a stable presence of Obama`s belief system.

The influence of his belief system was even explicitly mentioned by Obama himself in his address to the Nation on US military action in Syria as seen in the following quote: “I agree, and I have a deeply held preference for peaceful solutions.” (Address to the Nation on U.S. Military Action in Syria, 2013). This indicates that Obama`s belief system was of influence for the policy of supporting Syrian rebels as the element of peaceful solutions is one characteristic to Obama`s belief system.

The theoretical explanation for the strong presence of Obama`s belief system in creating the policy of supporting the Syrian rebels can also be explained by the belief system theory. The strength of the influence of a leader`s belief system can increase if a situation requires urgent action (Holsti, 1962). The urgency of the situation is visible via the following quote from Obama: “The United States has been inspired by the Syrian peoples` pursuit of a peaceful transition to democracy. They have braved ferocious brutality at the hands of their government.” (President Obama: "The future of Syria must be determined by its people, but President Bashar al-Assad is standing in their way, 2012). Obama explicitly mentioned a peaceful transition and that it was brutally stopped by the Syrian government. Finding a peaceful solution is a characteristic element of Obamas belief system and it would be logical that his belief system given its large influence due to the low actor count as described above would lead him to urgently create a policy that assisted the people in Syria in achieving their goal of transition. The choice for supporting rebels and not an open intervention can also be explained via his belief system. Obama is risk avoiding and having an open intervention or military action gives a high risk of international backlash especially after the regime change in Libya that the US was partially responsible for. All these factors combined show that in addition to R2P Obama`s belief system most certainly also was of influence in creating the policy of supporting the Syrian rebels.

Discussion

The research had two stages and results First, Obama`s belief system was established with the help of Profiler Plus and indicated that Obama avoids risk and chance and believes in peaceful resolution and cooperation. He is also capable of switching between words and deeds quite flexibly. The second stage was the analysis of articles with regards to characteristic elements and had two findings. The first was that R2P was of influence in Obama`s policy making

process regarding the supporting of rebels. This is based on the finding that R2P was explicitly mentioned at the very beginning of the conflict and later on persisted in an inexplicit manner. Theoretically this can be explained by the R2P theory as Obama having to represent his nation's view on R2P and human rights and this having to be considered to some extent in the policy making process. The indirectness of the presence of R2P after the initial statement can be explained as the result of the failed Libya intervention and Obama not wishing to anger the international community by explicitly mentioning R2P.

Obama's belief system was also found to have had influence on the policy making process. The data from the article analysis showed that elements of Obama's belief system were present quite stable across nearly all articles. In turn this indicates that Obama's belief system was of influence in the policy making process. The data shows that Obama's belief system was of strong influence seeing as the characteristic elements were found twice as much as R2P elements. The strong influence of Obama's belief system was explained by the belief system theory. It can be the result of a high pressure and crisis environment. A leader's belief system has more influence in policy making when the pressure is high and the situation is a crisis. The crisis in Syria was one where Obama most certainly felt a high pressure to act and the low number of actors around him seem to have led to an increase in the influence of his belief system on the policy making process. The higher number of elements found for the belief system theory gives an indication that it was of higher influence than R2P during the creation of this policy.

Both R2P and Obama's belief system played a role in creating the foreign policy of supporting the Syrian rebels. The analysis data also provides another possible insight, namely that Obama's belief system and the concept R2P overlap and thus reinforce one another. Obama's belief system allows for an emphasis on a peaceful solution for conflict. However, if needed his belief system will allow him to switch quite flexibly to taking action. R2P theory and its three pillars have a similar design. The second pillar of R2P states that the international community should assist nations in achieving the responsibility to protect their citizens (Kolb, 2012). This pillar can be considered a soft pillar as it is focused on preventing and peaceful resolution (Morris, 2013). The third pillar is actual action by the international community and is a pillar that can be seen as hard action and less peaceful resolution (Kolb, 2012; Morris, 2013). This difference between pillar two and three in R2P has similarities with Obama's belief system and as a result could cause both theories to be present in his actions. Obama first wishes for a peaceful resolution but if this does not work then he can switch to

taking action. In this case supporting rebels was a policy option that would be supported by his belief system and R2P as a peaceful resolution failed due to Assad not willing to step down. This leads to Obama wishing to take action yet having the constraints of the UNSC where Russia and China were blocking action (Sun, 2012). Creating the policy of supporting the Syrian rebels would be a way around this problem.

Conclusion

Why did president Obama decide to support the Syrian rebels? Both the concept of R2P and Obama's belief system have played a role in the decision of Obama to support the Syrian rebels. His belief system was of higher influence most likely due to the low actor count around him and the inherently urgent nature of the crisis. The presence of both theories as a reason for Obama's action and the discussed overlap between the R2P theory and Obama's belief system creates an interesting situation for further research. Obama is a leader that focuses on peaceful resolution and also is a proponent of R2P. Within international relations the R2P concept has leaders that support and oppose it. Based on this research it can be asked if there is a specific type of leader that is more inclined to support R2P due to their personal beliefs. In this case realism did not explain Obama's action while his personal belief system that is similar to R2P could give an explanation for this action. Further research could see if this similarity is also visible in other leaders or is the opposite in leaders with beliefs contrasting to R2P elements. Further the question can be asked if this possible link between beliefs and R2P can then be applied to international relations. Should this be the case then previous actions by nations that were difficult for traditional structure level theories to explain could be explained on this individual level.

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Appendix A

List of speeches used for Profiler Plus analysis

2008

President-Elect Victory Speech. Retrieved from: <http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/convention2008/barackobamavictoryspeech.htm>

Nomination of Key Members of Management and Budget Office Leadership. Retrieved from: <http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/barackobama/barackobamamanagementandbudgetoffice.htm>

Campaign Policy Speech on Iraq at the Wilson Center. Retrieved from: <http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/barackobama/barackobamairaqwarreaganbuilding.htm>

2009

First Presidential Inaugural Address. Retrieved from: <http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/barackobama/barackobamainauguraladdress.htm>

Address to the New Economic School Graduating Class. Retrieved from: <http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/barackobama/barackobamaneweconomicschool.htm>

Nobel Prize for Peace Acceptance Speech and Lecture. Retrieved from: <http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/barackobama/barackobamanobelprizespeech.htm>

2010

Address on UN Security Council Sanctions Against Iran. Retrieved from: <http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/barackobama/barackobamairansanctions.htm>

Speech Proposing Financial Crisis Responsibility Fee. Retrieved from: <http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/barackobama/barackobamafinancialcrisisresponsibilityfee.htm>

Address to the Nation on the End of Operation Iraqi Freedom. Retrieved from: <http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/wariniraq/barackobamairaqendofcombatops.htm>

2011

Second Presidential State of the Union Address. Retrieved from: <http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/stateoftheunion2011.htm>

Address to the Nation on the Dangers of Default. Retrieved from: <http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/barackobama/barackobamadeficitreductionplan.htm>

Appendix A (continuation)

66th Session of the United Nations General Assembly Address. Retrieved from:

[http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/
barackobama/barackobamaunitednations66.htm](http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/barackobama/barackobamaunitednations66.htm)

2012

Address to AIPAC. Retrieved from: [http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/
barackobama/barackobamaaipac2012.htm](http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/barackobama/barackobamaaipac2012.htm)

67th Session of the United Nations General Assembly Address. Retrieved from:

[http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/
barackobama/barackobamaunitednations67.htm](http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/barackobama/barackobamaunitednations67.htm)

Address to the 113th Convention of the Veterans of Foreign Wars . Retrieved from:

[http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/
barackobama/barackobama113vfw.htm](http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/barackobama/barackobama113vfw.htm)

2013

Address at the Jerusalem International Convention Center. Retrieved from:

[http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/
barackobama/barackobamajerusalemconventioncenter.htm](http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/barackobama/barackobamajerusalemconventioncenter.htm)

White House Correspondents' Dinner Address 2013. Retrieved from:

[http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/
barackobama/barackobamawhitehousecorrespondentsdinner2013.htm](http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/barackobama/barackobamawhitehousecorrespondentsdinner2013.htm)

Address to the Nation on U.S. Military Action in Syria. Retrieved from:

[http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/
barackobama/barackobamasyrianation.htm](http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/barackobama/barackobamasyrianation.htm)

2014

White House Correspondents' Dinner Address 2014. Retrieved from:

[http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/
barackobama/barackobama2014prayerbreakfast.htm](http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/barackobama/barackobama2014prayerbreakfast.htm)

On Authorizing Targeted Air Strikes and Humanitarian Aid in Iraq. Retrieved from:

[http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/
barackobama/barackobamairaqairstrikehumanitarianeffort.htm](http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/barackobama/barackobamairaqairstrikehumanitarianeffort.htm)

United Nations Security Council Address. Retrieved from:

[http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/
barackobama/barackobamaunitednationssecuritycouncil2014.htm](http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/barackobama/barackobamaunitednationssecuritycouncil2014.htm)

Appendix A (continuation)

2015

On Force Authorization Request Against ISIL. Retrieved from:

[http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/
barackobama/barackobamaISILforceauthorization.htm](http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/barackobama/barackobamaISILforceauthorization.htm)

Address on Iran at American University. Retrieved from:

[http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/
barackobama/barackobamairanamericanuniversity.htm](http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/barackobama/barackobamairanamericanuniversity.htm)

Address to the Nation on Foreign and Domestic Counter-Terrorism Strategies. Retrieved

from: [http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/
/barackobama/barackobamaforeigndomesticterrorismresponseovaloffice.htm](http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/barackobama/barackobamaforeigndomesticterrorismresponseovaloffice.htm)

2016

On Smart Diplomacy with Iran and Release of U.S. Detainees. Retrieved from:

[http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/
barackobama/barackobamairansanctionslifted.htm](http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/barackobama/barackobamairansanctionslifted.htm)

Address at the Hiroshima Peace Memorial. Retrieved from:

[http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/
barackobama/barackobamahiroshimaspeech.htm](http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/barackobama/barackobamahiroshimaspeech.htm)

Address to the People of Greece. Retrieved from:

[http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/
barackobama/barackobamagreecepeople.htm](http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/barackobama/barackobamagreecepeople.htm)

Appendix B

Table 2: Interpretation table of the Verbs in Context System for Operational Code

P-1: Nature of the Political Universe									
Hostile								Friendly	
Extremely	Very	Definitely	Somewhat	Mixed	Somewhat	Definitely	Very	Extremely	
-1.0	-.75	-.50	-.25	0.0	+.25	+.50	+.75	+1.0	
P-2: Realization of Political Values									
Pessimistic								Optimistic	
Extremely	Very	Definitely	Somewhat	Mixed	Somewhat	Definitely	Very	Extremely	
-1.0	-.75	-.50	-.25	0.0	+.25	+.50	+.75	+1.0	
P-3: Predictability of Political Future									
Very Low		Low		Medium		High		Very High	
0.0		.25		.50		.75		1.0	
P-4: Control Over Historical Development									
Very Low		Low		Medium		High		Very High	
0.0		.25		.50		.75		1.0	
P-5: Role of Chance									
Very Low		Low		Medium		High		Very High	
0.0		.25		.50		.75		1.0	
I-1: Direction of Strategy									
Conflict								Cooperation	
Extremely	Very	Definitely	Somewhat	Mixed	Somewhat	Definitely	Very	Extremely	
-1.0	-.75	-.50	-.25	0.0	+.25	+.50	+.75	+1.0	
I-2: Intensity of Tactics									
Conflict								Cooperation	
Extremely	Very	Definitely	Somewhat	Mixed	Somewhat	Definitely	Very	Extremely	
-1.0	-.75	-.50	-.25	0.0	+.25	+.50	+.75	+1.0	
I-3: Risk Orientation									
Risk Averse								Risk Acceptant	
Very Low		Low		Medium		High		Very High	
0.0		.25		.50		.75		1.0	
I-4a: Flexibility of Tactics (between Cooperation and Conflict)									
Very Low		Low		Medium		High		Very High	
0.0		.25		.50		.75		1.0	
I-4b: Flexibility of Tactics (between Words and Deeds)									
Very Low		Low		Medium		High		Very High	
0.0		.25		.50		.75		1.0	
I-5 Utility of Means (Appeal/Support, Promise, Reward, Oppose/Resist, Threaten, Punish)									
Very Low		Low		Medium		High		Very High	
0.0		.08		.16		.24		.32	

Source: Renshon, J., 2008

Appendix C

Table 3: The belief system of Barrack Hussein Obama

Dimension	Meaning	Value
P-1	Nature of the political universe	+0.26
P-2	Realization of political values	+0.09
P-3	Predictability of political future	+0.30
P-4	Control over historical development	+0.29
P-5	Role of chance	+0.91
I-1	Strategic approach to goals	+0.32
I-2	Tactical pursuit of goals	+0.14
I-3	Risk Orientation	-0.50
I-4	Flexibility of tactics between:	
I-4a	Cooperation/conflict	+0.68
I-4b	Words/deeds	+0.61
I-5	Utility of means	
I-5a	Reward	+0.17
I-5b	Promise	+0.06
I-5c	Appeal/support	+0.43
I-5d	Oppose/resist	+0.16
I-5e	Threaten	+0.05
I-5f	Punish	+0.13

Appendix D

Articles used for discourse analysis

Obama Recognizes Syrian Opposition Group. Requested from:

<http://abcnews.go.com/Politics/OTUS/exclusive-president-obama-recognizes-syrian-opposition-group/story?id=17936599>

Transcript of President Obama's Commencement Address at West Point.

Requested from: <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/05/29/us/politics/transcript-of-president-obamas-commencement-address-at-west-point.html>

Obama on the World. Requested from: <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/08/09/opinion/president-obama-thomas-l-friedman-iraq-and-world-affairs.html>

Obama Answers 5 Big Questions About Syria. Requested from:

<http://www.businessinsider.com/obama-syria-questions-speech-chemical-weapons-assad-rebels-2013-9?international=true&r=US&IR=T>

Barack Obama Press Conference on Syria and Sundry Topics. Requested from:

<http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/barackobama/barackobamasyriaetaipresser.htm>

Barack Obama On The Use of Chemical Weapons by Syrian Government. Requested from:

<http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/barackobama/barackobamasyriachemicalweapons.htm>

Barack Obama Address to the Nation on the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant. Requested

from: <http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/barackobama/barackobamaisilspreehtonation.htm>

Barack Obama Address to the Nation on U.S. Military Action in Syria. Requested from:

<http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/barackobama/barackobamasyrianation.htm>

President Obama: "The future of Syria must be determined by its people, but President Bashar al-Assad is standing in their way." Requested from:

<https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/blog/2011/08/18/president-obama-future-syria-must-be-determined-its-people-president-bashar-al-assad>

Remarks by President Obama and President Pena Nieto of Mexico in a Joint Press Conference

Requested from: <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2013/05/02/remarks-president-obama-and-president-pena-nieto-mexico-joint-press-conf>

Remarks by President Obama and German Chancellor Merkel in Joint Press Conference.

Requested from: <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2013/06/19/remarks-president-obama-and-german-chancellor-merkel-joint-press-confere>

Statement by the President on Syria. Requested from: <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2012/02/04/statement-president-syria>

Appendix D (continuation)

Statement By the President on Congressional Authorization to Train Syrian Opposition.

Requested from: <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2014/09/18/statement-president-congressional-authorization-train-syrian-opposition>