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US-Russia Relations in the UNSC through the Lens of the
Syrian Conflict

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Chapter 1: Introduction

“After decades when we thought we had successfully outlawed the use of chemical and biological weapons, the world is sitting idly by while their use is becoming normalised in Syria”, responded the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Zeid Ra’ad al-Hussein, after the Douma chemical attacks (Shaheen, 2018). On April 7, 2018, the rebel-held town in Eastern Ghouta, near Damascus, was attacked. Approximately 500 people who visited the medical facilities after the attack showed signs and symptoms closely related to the exposure of toxic chemicals. The World Health Organization reported that 43 people have died from these symptoms (WHO, 2018). The Syrian government stated it is not responsible for the attack on the last holdout that was under opposition control despite allegations from Western powers. Shortly after the Douma attack, missile strikes by the United States, France and the United Kingdom hit sites that were connected to the Syrian government’s chemical weapons programme (BBC, 2018b).

The Douma attack is just one example of the many violent outbursts in the Syrian conflict. After the first seven years of conflict, more than half of the Syrian population has been forced to flee. Over six million Syrians are internally displaced and more than 5,5 million have fled their homes and sought refuge in neighbouring countries. Even though Lebanon, Jordan, Turkey, Iraq and Egypt host the majority of the refugees, other parts of the world have also experienced a large influx of refugees, such as the European Union. In 2017, around 725,000 Syrians returned to their homes. Of those returning home about 70,000 returned from the neighbouring countries, whereas 655,000 refugees had been displaced inside the country. Nonetheless, 1,8 million Syrians were still internally displaced in that same year. Almost an entire generation is growing up in extreme poverty without access to education (UNHCR, 2018). With more than half a million deaths and over 11 million refugees, the war in Syria is one of the largest post-Second World War tragedies in the peace and security domain (Clingendael Spectator, 2018).

The Syrian conflict is entering its 9th year in March 2019. The conflict started with large-scale protests, inspired by the (successful) Arab Spring uprisings, by Syrian civilians who demanded democratic reforms in 2011. The Syrian government, led by President al-Assad, responded to the uprisings with violence: demonstrators were killed and even more were imprisoned. With the formation of the Free Syrian Army, a loose faction founded by officers of the Syrian Armed Forces with the aim of overthrowing the government, uprisings started to escalate into a civil war (Al Jazeera News, 2018). President Obama announced in August 2012

that the use of chemical weapons in Syria would be a red line. Syria's chemical weapons activities would change the US military response. Despite the allegedly use of chemical weapons by the Assad regime in December 2012 in Homs, and the larger attacks in March 2013 in Aleppo and Damascus, Obama withheld from any direct military action even though the chemical red line had been crossed. Other incidents, such as the August 2013 Ghouta chemical weapons attack, were further discussed in the United National Security Council (UNSC) (Sanders-Zakre, 2018). The civil war slowly unfolded into a larger regional and international conflict. The rise of the Islamic State (IS) and the anti-IS coalition contributed to that. The anti-IS coalition, with the US as its leader and other countries as international coalition partners, started bombing IS targets in 2014. In addition, the coalition began to arm and support anti-Assad rebel groups (Al Jazeera News, 2018).

The Syrian conflict is fed by three different campaigns: the violence between the Syrian government and other Syrian opposition forces, the Turkish military operations against the Syrian Kurds, and the efforts of the US-led international coalition to defeat IS. Even though it seems that the violence of the Syrian government and the opposition forces is a national issue, the two parties are supported by international actors. To exemplify, the anti-government rebel groups are backed by the US and Turkey, whereas Russia and Iran support al-Assad and the Syrian government (Council on Foreign Relations, 2018). Due to the involvement of major international actors and existing alliances, this Syrian conflict is not purely a national or regional conflict, but an international one. For instance, the Syrian government held less than a fifth of Syria's territory before the start of Russia's military engagement in September 2015. The Russian airstrikes turned the tides of the al-Assad regime (Perry & Bassam, 2018). Several rounds of peace negotiations in Geneva and Astana have not yet been successful in ending the conflict. In addition, Western-backed resolutions on Syria in the UNSC have been vetoed numerous times by Russia and China (Al Jazeera News, 2018).

The long-lasting hostilities still continue today. One reason that could serve as an explanation for this enduring conflict is the complexity of the alliances in the Syrian conflict. This thesis aims to investigate how the relationship between two main actors, namely the US and Russia, has played out in the UNSC. The five permanent members of the UNSC, the United States, Russia, the United Kingdom, France, and China, have a central role in resolving the Syrian conflict. A resolution does not pass in the UNSC with a veto of any of these permanent members. So far, the Council has failed in its primary responsibility to maintain international peace and security, in particular with regards to the Syrian conflict. The Council is not unified on the Syrian topic and therefore cannot be effective (Nadin, 2017). In an attempt to overcome

the UNSC's deadlock and deep divisions on the subject, talks were held in Sweden instead of in New York City in April 2018. The long-term role of the Council and the United Nations in general were also on the agenda (BBC, 2018a).

The research question this master's thesis aims to answer is: how are the US-Russian relations in the UNSC on the Syrian conflict from March 2011-June 2018? In a heightened atmosphere in international relations, with the US still striving for hegemony and a more assertive Russian foreign policy, it is important to find out if more room for cooperation between the two countries exists within the UNSC framework. The US and Russia are in conflict with each other over the Syrian space which serves as fuel for a dangerous climate in the bilateral relations. It is vital to understand the relations between the two countries. This thesis looks at the rhetoric of the two countries over a long period of time by analysing almost the entire length of the conflict (until mid-2018). Consistencies or inconsistencies in the countries' foreign policy will also be detected. A systematic analysis of the UNSC minutes on the Syrian conflict, in particular focussed on the US and Russia, has not yet been conducted. The added value of this thesis lies in that contribution to the academic literature. An answer to the research questions will be found by coding and categorising the documents across the entirety of the war.

This thesis will firstly provide a literature review which delves into the US-Russian relations and the countries' involvement in Syria and the wider Middle East. In addition, it elaborates on the existing literature regarding the US-Russian relations in the UNSC. Secondly, the methods and methodology chapter will be provided. Thirdly, the analysis of the US and Russian account in the UNSC meetings will be elaborated on. This empirical part consists of three main chapters focusing on chemical weapons, humanitarian assistance, and the political level, such as the position of al-Assad. Finally, this thesis provides a coherent answer to the research question in the conclusion and elaborates on the limitations of this study and provides suggestions for future research. The expected conclusion of this study is that the US and Russian policies have been more inconsistent throughout the years and that there is more room for cooperation than one would initially think.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The relationship between the US and Russia is a dynamic and complicated one. After the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, relations between the two countries were generally warm. Nevertheless, at the end of the 1990s and early 2000s cracks in the relationship began to surface. With the first two presidencies of Vladimir Putin and George W. Bush, tensions arose. Putin showed a more assertive foreign policy, whereas Bush, especially after the 9/11 attacks, took a more unilateral approach in the US foreign policy (Sakwa, 2008; Ditarych, 2014). The gradual deterioration of the more positive times in the first years of the post-Cold War era picked up pace in Putin's second term. Putin's 2007 Munich speech marks the turning point in the US-Russia relations as Putin accused the US heavily by stating the US provoked a new nuclear arms race and has overstepped its national borders. Putin in particular refers to the "unilateral" and "illegitimate" American military actions which did not create more stability (Shanker & Landler, 2007). An example of this is the 2003 Iraq invasion. Despite their opposition, Russia did not veto UNSC Resolution 1441. This resolution was unanimously adopted and states that Iraq is in "material breach" of its other obligations under previous UNSC resolutions. According to Jervis (2005), Russia endorsed the resolution as a result of the position that the US has put them in. The US would pursue the war in any format - with or without the support of the UNSC - and "endorsing the war was the best choice in order to maintain the possibility of influencing the United States and keeping up the appearance that it was not acting unilaterally" (pp. 69-70). Russia perceived that action in a particular way.

This is in line with Jervis' argumentation. Decision-makers interpret information in a certain fashion. Often misperceptions are not the exception, but the normal state of psychology. Information and actions are seen from a certain perspective and due to this subjectivity, not everyone will perceive the information in the same fashion. Leaders are likely to fit the incoming information into their own existing images and ideas which influences what they notice and pick up from the information (Jervis, 1976). Attempts have been made to overcome the misinterpretations in the US-Russia relations. With the Obama-Medvedev Commission launched in July 2009, which aims to improve cooperation between the US and Russia on a wide range of shared interests, hope for a better relationship between the two powers increased (Rojansky, 2010); though, the crisis in Syria put an additional strain on the US-Russia relations.

This literature review will firstly further examine the key moments in the US-Russia relations since 2011 to see what other events, apart from the involvement in Syria, affected the relationship. Secondly, both the US and Russian foreign policy in the wider Middle East and

more specifically in Syria will be described. Lastly, a short overview of the current academic literature on the UNSC involvement in Syria will be given. These subtopics are vital to understand the context in which both actors operate and identify how the policies of the US and Russia differ.

Key Moments in US-Russia Relations Since 2011

A review of the literature focused on US-Russia relations reveals that the relationship has, in the post-Cold War era, been a troubled one, with scholars evidencing both cooperation and conflict. The two countries share numerous interests, such as nuclear security, countering terrorism and exploring outer space. Cooperation between the two powers is vital as the implications of their relationship impacts the international system (CSIS, 2018). However, various crises have brought the bilateral relationship into rough waters. Events other than just the Syrian crisis have contributed to this, as various scholars make clear. For instance, after the 2008 US-Polish agreement on the stationing of US missiles in Poland and the 2008 Russia-Georgia war, bilateral relations between the US and Russia deteriorated rapidly (Ratti, 2013). President Obama first attempted to reset the relations in 2009. This new US policy was soon followed by the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). NATO followed the US lines as the relationship between NATO and Russia had become sour too. This is largely attributed to the large 2004 NATO expansion in which European states mostly sought US protection from Russia. Despite their new status as NATO members, Eastern European states continued to fear Russia's assertive policy (Ratti, 2013; Braun, 2012). However, the attempt to be on friendly terms failed again. From the start in the negotiations, NATO did not see Russia as an equal partner, and Russia did not accept their "junior partner status". Russia wanted to be treated as an equal partner, but the country perceived that they are being marginalised in the negotiations. The (mis)perception influenced the negotiations, which resulted in a no-deal. The Russian idea of a new organisation that would replace NATO and include Russia as a full member was not favourable to NATO members (Ratti, 2013).

One of the most notable crises since 2011 is the Ukrainian crisis. The literature describes the US response to Russian aggression and how the response again resulted in the deterioration of the bilateral relationship. The annexation of Crimea in 2014 by Russia and the following crisis in Ukraine is according to Ditrych (2014) the "most serious crisis [between the two great powers] since the end of the Cold War" (p. 76). Over recent years, Moscow has sought to establish itself more as a great power in the international arena and tried to decrease the US hegemony militarily, diplomatically, and economically. The Russian actions in Crimea must be

seen in this context (Ditrych, 2014). The US sanctions, which were coordinated with the European Union, following the annexation of Crimea have been a key element in the US foreign policy vis-à-vis Russia. The goal of the sanctions is to target the Russian economy and individuals who have close relations to the Kremlin. In addition to the Crimea-related sanctions, the US has taken other measures, such as diplomatic pressure (Weiss & Nephew, 2016). Ditrych (2014) strongly believes that the US and its allies should continue negotiations with Moscow, but solely as part of a new containment strategy to minimise Russia's expansionist activities and not as part of a 'reset' policy (p. 95). Another event that puts pressure on the US-Russia relationship is the Russian hostile state activity in the US presidential election in 2016. The Russian social media strategy attempted to undermine the confidence in the national election and the amplify more attention to critical stories about Hillary Clinton (Persily, 2017). The literature is divided in terms of those who focus on the role of Russia in undermining US-Russia relations and those who concentrate on the US behaviour and its effects. All in all, these events turned the tables of the US-Russia relationship. The traditional mistrust and fear surfaced again and makes collaboration on a different significant topic, ending the Syrian crisis, challenging.

US Foreign Policy in the Middle East and Syria

Since the beginning of Obama's first term, the US strategic interests in the Middle East have remained essentially unchanged, but the means that the US is willing to use to maintain their influence in the region are different. Domestically, Obama had to deal with the legacy left by Bush: costly military engagements in the region, i.e. in Afghanistan and Iraq, austerity measures and public war fatigue. Geostrategically, the transition to an a-polar world, blurred lines between state and non-state actors, and preventive military intervention, challenge the US foreign policy in the Middle East. Despite the strong military power of the US, Obama preferred a strategy that focused on human and technological surrogates (Krieg, 2016). Surrogate warfare is a "patron's externalization, partially or wholly, of the strategic, operational and tactical burden of warfare to a human or technological surrogate with the principal intent of minimizing the burden of warfare for its own taxpayers, policy-makers and military" (Krieg, 2016, p. 99). In short, this means that the US has steered away from the expansive foreign policy under Bush, and that - in case of military action - the strategic and operational burden should be shared in a multilateral context. Additionally, soft power became more part of the foreign and security policy (Krieg, 2016). Contrary to Obama, Trump has showed a preference for stronger regional partnership with Saudi Arabia, a closer friendship with Israel, and a more anti-Iran sentiment. The current Trump administration has also increased the number and frequency of US air and

drone strikes (Black, 2018). It seems that Obama's "leading from behind" strategy is not Trump's motto.

The Bush legacy was interpreted differently by Obama than by Trump. The legacy of past actions is construed differently by the leader in question. The scholarly debate of perception comes into play, but also the agent vs structure debate (Wendt, 1987). For Obama, the legacy of past actions was a structural constraint. This means that this structure influenced or limited the choices and opportunities of Obama vis-à-vis his foreign policy. Contrarily, Trump was less constrained and acted independently and made his own choice, which was free of past constraints. The level of constraint shown explains a political affect or outcome (Hay, 2002).

In Syria, the Obama administration also showed less military involvement than initially anticipated. In 2012, Obama mentioned that if al-Assad would use chemical weapons, it would cross a red line and would invoke US military action. Even after the chemical attacks on rebel-controlled areas of Damascus by the Syrian military, Obama waited with his military response (Chollet, 2016). After the intervention in Libya under the banner of "responsibility to protect" (R2P), the US has been reluctant to intervene in Syria. Despite the atrocities, intervening in the name of human rights proved to be difficult as the cost and complexity of the deployment of US ground troops is expected to be rather high (Mendelsohn, 2014). The humanitarian crisis in Syria has been condemned by the Obama administration; however, the president failed to mobilise sufficient public support to justify the intervention. It seems that the US has shifted its position in the Middle East: from being a world police and protector to being a partner. Regional actors act as surrogates and have the ownership of providing their own security in the region (Krieg, 2016).

Russian Foreign Policy in the Middle East and Syria

Debates in the literature show the heightened interest of Russia on the world stage. With Moscow's withdrawal from the Middle East, the importance of the region declined under President Mikhail Gorbachev. However, a renewed interest in the Middle East surfaced during Putin's term. Russia has reappeared as a key player in the geographically close region and tries to restore its position as a significant power on the world stage through its action in the Middle East. In addition, other main political objectives of Putin's foreign policy in the Middle East are: containing and reducing Islamist radicalism and extremism, seeking long-lasting alliances in the region with friendly regimes, and establishing military presence in the region. Moreover, economic reasons such as attracting foreign investments from the Gulf region and coordinating

energy policies with oil and gas producers also play a role. Contrary to the US, Russia has different key partners in the region, such as Iran (Trenin, 2016).

Since the re-election of Putin as president in 2012, the Kremlin has had a more assertive foreign policy towards the Middle East and increased its presence in the region. By intensifying its contacts with the dominant countries in the Middle East, Moscow hoped to avoid international isolation as a result of the imposed sanctions by the West. Additionally, by presenting itself as a more active player in the Middle East, Russia demonstrated that it plays a crucial role in international conflicts and issues (Kozhanov, 2018). Russia's renewed interest in the region also became notable when the Russian launched airstrikes in September 2015 hit groups opposing al-Assad in Syria (Kozhanov, 2018).

Russia and Syria have been on a friendly footing since the 1950s. Russia's involvement in Syria demonstrates this good relationship. Moscow supports al-Assad against destabilizing forces, such as the US-led support for regime change. However, Russia's engagement has wider geopolitical reasons as well. Geographically, Syria lies between Moscow's allies and influence in the country would form a new axis (Trenin, 2016). The refusal to support UN actions against the al-Assad regime also has pragmatic roots: the Syrian regime imports arms from Russia (Stent, 2012). Ultimately, through its vital role in the Syrian conflict, Russia wants that its voice is being heard and is taken seriously as an international player (Kozhanov, 2018). Russia's diplomatic and military weight should not be ignored.

The underlying reasons for Russia's involvement are different than that of the US. The country also puts an emphasis on national sovereignty as the fundamental basis for the international order. The general western scholarship perceives that the western-led norms of humanitarian intervention and the responsibility to protect are running counter to Russia's foreign policy. One of the arguments made is that the state itself must bear the responsibility and guarantee the order in its own country - without foreign interference. Nonetheless, some scholars argue that Russia's statist international legal framework does not exclude humanitarian considerations and R2P, it is Russia's view of the means of implementation that is diverging: Moscow is against forcible intervention, but in favour of action by responsible actors that respect the national sovereignty (Averre & Davies, 2015).

US-Russia Involvement in Syria in the UNSC

The two powers show opposing ideological approaches in their foreign policy. On the one hand, the US stresses two crucial principles: humanitarian intervention and the responsibility to protect. On the other hand, Russia puts an emphasis on non-interference and state sovereignty

(Stent, 2012). Even more, the civil conflict in Syria has turned into a proxy war between the two and other powers. Moscow pursues its geopolitical interests in the region and, at the same time, tries to limit the US influence in the region (Ditrych, 2014). The two countries are irreversibly involved in the region. Both players have their own goals and strategies, which leads to areas of cooperation and conflict.

Debates on the voting behaviour of the US and Russia have already surfaced. Odeyemi (2016) shows that the support of the BRICS countries regarding R2P is vital. The voting behaviour of these countries are guided by three principles: military intervention is not acceptable, any intervention in Syria has to be seen in light of the Libyan experience, and draft resolutions from the P3 members (the US, United Kingdom, and France) mostly put pressure on the al-Assad regime without giving the same accusatory tone to the rebels regarding the violations of human rights. Consequently, the divide in the UNSC could not be more present (p. 142). The P2 (Russia and China) vetoes in the UNSC regarding Syria show the countries positions and interests should be taken into account in world politics. However, the West argues that these vetoes are a way for Russia and China to block and overthrow the UN system (Chaziza, 2014).

To conclude, the US-Russian involvement in the Syrian conflict centres around several principles: sovereignty, non-interference, humanitarian assistance, and R2P. These guiding principles have affected the foreign policy of the two countries in the world and in the Middle East in particular. Debates in the literature have shown that on these topics, cooperation between the two countries is not always easy at hand. The representatives could misinterpret and misperceive statements that are made and adapt their policy on these interpretations. There has not yet been a systematic academic analysis that focuses on the different principles from the start of the Syrian conflict until June 2018. This thesis aims to bridge that particular gap and tries to show where more room for cooperation is possible, if policies have been consistent, and how the agents are vital in the decision-making. A systematic account of the US and Russian engagement in the UNSC on the topic of Syria will be given which shows whether the underlying themes, such as sovereignty and humanitarian assistance, indeed form the basis of their policy in the UNSC. Moreover, this research aims to investigate if the US and Russia have been inconsistent in their policies and whether more areas of cooperation in the Syrian context can be identified. This would show the state of US-Russian relations in the UNSC in regards to the Syrian conflict. The next chapter will focus on how the data has been analysed.

Chapter 3: Methodology and Methods

The goal of this research is to see how the United States and Russia behaved in the UNSC meetings with regards to the Syrian conflict. This research looks primarily for evidence of whether a policy change can be detected when leadership changed, for instance, the US presidency. In order to see whether changes are present and how the US and Russia respond to and deal with the Syrian conflict, a mixed-methods approach is employed in this thesis: both quantitative and qualitative methods are applied.

Throughout this thesis, primary and secondary sources are relied on. On the one hand, the primary sources mostly consists of the minutes of the UNSC meetings on Syria. On the other hand, secondary sources are comprised of articles from renowned think tanks, newspaper articles, and academic literature. The academic literature is vital in developing an understanding of the context surrounding the UNSC meetings on Syria. The primary data is gathered from the research website of the United Nations. The UN Documentation Research Guide offers an overview of the meetings and outcomes of the UNSC from 1994 onwards. The records are listed in reverse chronological order and are freely accessible to the public. For this thesis, meetings records and outcomes from March 2011 until June 2018 are used which enables the author to draw conclusions that are not limited to solely one year, but to the entirety of the war until June 2018. As seen in figure 1, representatives of the UNSC meet to discuss a particular topic, for example “the situation concerning Iraq” or “peace consolidation in West Africa”.

Security Council Meetings in 2018				
Meetings conducted by the Security Council in 2018 (in reverse chronological order)				
Meeting Record	Date	Press Release	Topic	Security Council Outcome / Vote
S/PV.8439	21 December	SC/13643	The situation in the Middle East	S/RES/2451 (2018) 15-0-0
S/PV.8438	21 December	SC/13642	The situation in Guinea-Bissau	--
S/PV.8437	21 December	SC/13641	Threats to international peace and security caused by terrorist acts	S/PRST/2018/21
S/PV.8436	21 December	SC/13640	The situation in the Middle East	S/RES/2450 (2018) 15-0-0
S/PV.8435	20 December	SC/13637	Peace and Security in Africa	--

Figure 1: Overview of meetings conducted by the Security Council in 2018 (UNSC, 2018).

The Syrian conflict is mainly discussed under the topics “The situation in the Middle East” and “The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question”. Other topics that are also heavily discussed under this theme are the war in Yemen and the Israel-Palestine conflict. The

Syrian conflict is to a certain extent also discussed during meetings on “threats to international peace and security by terrorist acts” and “non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction”. However, meeting records of these topics are not always available due to consistent error notifications and it is therefore not possible to check whether the Syrian conflict is discussed in those meetings. In addition, meetings on the Middle East serve as the main platform for discussions on the Syrian conflict and the use of chemical weapons and threat of ISIS are also debated during those meetings. Consequently, data is only drawn from the first two mentioned topics.

The meetings records will solely include those in which either or both the US and Russian representative spoke as this research looks at the interaction of the two countries. The interaction can be direct, by asking for instance questions, or indirect, by referring to the other country in a speech. If neither of the representatives spoke in the meetings, then the interaction between the two countries is not present and thus excluded from the data set. These meetings are often briefings by a UN representative on the situation in Syria. This also accounts for the meetings in which either the US or Russian representative spoke in their role as president and thus chairing the meetings. Additionally, the meetings outcomes – presidential statements, resolutions, and draft resolutions, will also be analysed. The outcomes show the (dis)agreements of the UNSC on the Syrian conflict.

In total, 137 UNSC documents were analysed. As the first four years of the conflict are relatively contained as a national conflict, the UNSC did not have the topic high on the agenda. From 2015 onwards, the Syrian conflict gained a more “secure” spot on the agenda. As a result, less data is available for the first years of the conflict. The data collection ends in June 2018. June marks a two-month period after the Douma attacks in April 2018 and therefore the attacks can still be taken into account in the analysis. Table 1 (see next page) presents a short overview of how many documents were analysed in what year.

Year	Presidential statements (outcome)	Resolutions (outcome)	Draft resolutions (outcome)	Syrian conflict mentioned in UNSC meetings, but not discussed by US or Russia	Meetings records analysed
2011	1	0	1	7	3
2012	3	3	2	15	7
2013	1	1	0	19	2
2014	0	3	1	12	6
2015	3	4	0	19	11
2016	2	8	3	13	23
2017	0	1	6	13	19
2018	0	1	3	3	19
Total	10	21	16	101	90

Table 1: An overview of the amount of documents in which the Syrian conflict has been mentioned in the UNSC meetings and output of those meetings.

In this case, a document analysis will be applied to the UNSC meeting records. Documents can have a variety of purposes in research, such as tracking change or development (Bowen, 2009). Given this is the purpose of this thesis, a document analysis is an appropriate methodology to employ. Bowen further describes such an analysis as a “systematic procedure for reviewing or evaluating documents – both printed and electronic [...] material” (Bowen, 2009, p. 27). The procedure consists of multiple steps. The finding and selection procedures have already been outlined above. The next step will be to ensure the contents of the documents can be analysed in a comparative fashion. This is achieved by delivering a hybrid form of content analysis. Content analysis most often takes a purely quantitative form but this can be allied with a qualitative analysis and that is what is conducted here. The advantage of a qualitative approach is that it can provide details and extensive descriptions of phenomena, which do not result from a purely quantitative analysis (Abbott & McKinney, 2013).

Woodrum (1984) used the definition of Stone and Holsti, two leading scholars in content analysis methodology, to explain content analysis as “any technique for marking inferences by objectively and systematically identifying specified characteristics of messages” (p. 2). Several advantages of using content analysis for this research project are: 1) the research technique can

be broadly applied to analysing cultural phenomena as an empirical method, such as to study political discourse, 2) content analysis is focussed on communication, particularly in recognising symbolic message patterns between the communicating parties, and 3) this type of analysis forces the researcher to stipulate category criteria, which means the researcher investigates the texts in-depth and looks beyond the generalisations (Woodrum, 1984). The hermeneutic understanding of the texts tries to explain the exploratory research question. By understanding the complex historical context of the data, the texts are interpreted on a higher, less superficial, level (Bos & Tarnai, 1999). Coding and categorising are a common features of qualitative content analysis. This type of content analysis is used to systematically transform large quantities of text into concise results (Erlingsson & Brysiewicz, 2017).

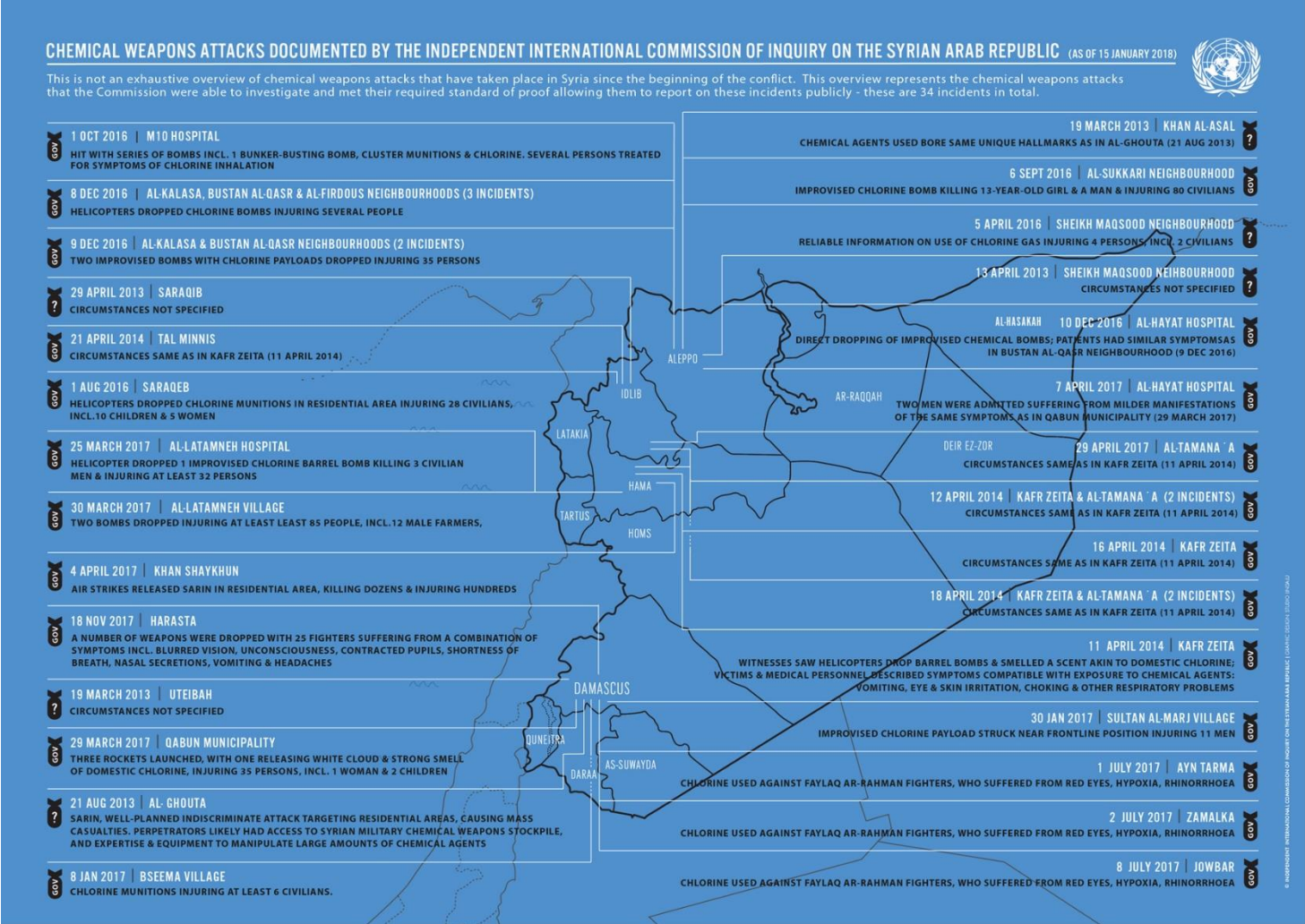
The first step of the analysis process is preparing the data for analysis. After an initial reading, the information will be organised into different categories related to the research question (Bowen, 2009). This means that all the meeting records are scanned for their relevance, i.e. if representatives of the respective countries speak. After this, the speeches will be coded. Coding the documents will assist in revealing dominant patterns. The first phase of coding will be open coding, which assigns labels to fragments of text. The second phase will be axial coding, which compares all the codes to each other. In this way, overlapping concepts are detected and transcending codes created. Through this system of coding, the most important topics will become evident (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2009). These steps of analysis are part of a reflective process: coding and categorising are a continuous process. The codes serve as labels which will be grouped together in different categories. Codes that are closely related to each other, either through context or content, are grouped in the same category (Erlingsson & Brysiewicz, 2017). Categories can be generated in a deductive manner and in inductive manner (Woodrum, 1984; Bos & Tarnai, 1999). In this case, both have been applied. From the literature review some categories have been established, such as “sovereignty”, “humanitarian assistance”, and “responsibility to protect”. These categories are established deductively. Other categories that emerged from the data, such as “chemical weapons”, are established inductively. All in all, the categories are best fitted into three different categories: chemical weapons, humanitarian level, and political level. These categories also form the basis of the empirical chapter of the thesis.

As already set out, quantitative methods will also be used. Content analysis serves as a link between qualitative symbol usage with quantitative data. By systematically transforming large texts into smaller texts and eventually into codes and categories, the texts can be analysed in a quantitative manner. Through content analysis, characteristics of communications are

measured. To illustrate, one can count the word frequencies or identify the symbolic meanings or identify the thematic interrelations (Woodrum, 1984). The quantitative aspect to this study will merely consist of counting. For instance, through the content analysis it will become apparent how often a particular delegation voted in favour or against a resolution.

Chapter 4: The Use of Chemical Weapons in Syria

One of the widely discussed topics in the UNSC on Syria is the use of chemical weapons. Since September 12, 2013 Syria is party to the arms control treaty, the Chemical Weapons Convention, which entered into force in 1997 (Sanders-Zakre, 2018). The convention prohibits the development, production, stockpiling, and use of chemical weapons and regulated the destruction of existing chemical weapons. Except for Egypt, Israel, North Korea, and South Sudan, all other UN states are parties to the treaty. The Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) administers the treaty (OPCW, 2019). Despite its prohibition, the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, an independent body established by the UN Human Rights Council, has confirmed at least 34 chemical attacks by the Syrian government from 2013 until December 2017 (Almukhtar, 2018). These attacks are illustrated by below infographic.



Infographic 1: Confirmed chemical attacks documented by the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (OHCHR, 2018).

This chapter will further delve into topic by first providing a coherent overview of the resolutions in the UNSC and how many meetings are centred around chemical weapons. Second, both viewpoints and statements from the US and Russia will be discussed. Finally areas of (potential) cooperation are explored.

Short Overview of UNSC Documents

Chemical weapons have been widely debated in the UNSC; though, we see an upward trend over the years. The first time “chemical” is mentioned in the UNSC meetings is July 19, 2012 (UNSC, 2012, July 19)¹. This was well-before one of the first confirmed chemical attacks in Syria which took place in March 2013. The first UNSC resolution on chemical weapons passed on September 27, 2013. Resolution 2118 was unanimously adopted by the UNSC and laid out the procedures for the destruction of Syria’s chemical weapons. Other resolutions that have been adopted are Resolution 2209 (March 2015), Resolution 2235 (August 2015), Resolution 2314 (October 2016) and Resolution 2319 (November 2016). The resolutions deal with the condemnation of any use of chlorine as a chemical weapon in Syria and the establishment of a Joint Investigative Mechanism (JIM) of the United Nations and the OPCW to identify the perpetrators who are involved in the use of chemical weapons in Syria, the extensions of JIM respectively. Table 2 provides an overview of how many times the use of chemical weapons was discussed in the UNSC. The numbers represent in how many documents “chemical” has been mentioned, often relating to the OPCW, chemical weapons, chemical facilities, chemical disarmament or chemical materials. The use of chemical weapons was not discussed extensively in all meetings. In 33 out of 67 meetings the word “chemical” was used 10 times or less.

¹ When referring to UNSC documents, the reference will be as followed: “UNSC, year, month, day”. As there are many documents of the same year, it would be less clear if the reference “UNSC, year and letter” would be used. For instance, referring to a meeting on September 27, 2013 would be: UNSC, 2013, September 27 instead of UNSC, 2013a. In addition, references to the outcomes (presidential statements, draft resolutions and resolutions) are made clear by adding “doc” at the end of the reference. This is clarify to what exactly is referred to: either the text of the resolution – the doc – or to the discussion – which are the minutes of the meeting.

	Presidential statements	Resolutions	Draft resolutions	Meeting records
2011	0	0	0	0
2012	0	0	0	1
2013	1	1	0	2
2014	0	0	0	6
2015	0	2	0	10
2016	0	2	0	14
2017	0	0	5	17
2018	0	0	3	17
Total	1	5	8	67

Table 2: An overview of the amount of documents in which “chemical” has been mentioned.

Failing to Prevent the Mass Atrocities in Syria: The Use of Chemical Weapons

2012-2013: Stepping Stone to Cooperation

On July 19, 2012, Ms. Rice, former US ambassador to the UN from January 26, 2009 – June 30, 2013, argues that the potential use of chemical weapons by the Syrian regime against its own people should be a concern for the UNSC and the large stockpiles should remain clear (UNSC, 2012, July 19). After this, a year of silence in the Middle East meetings occurred. The discussion about and anonymous adoption of Resolution 2118 on September 27, 2013 sparked new insights on the use of chemical weapons in Syria. Resolution 2118 welcomed the Framework for Elimination of Syrian Chemical Weapons initiative by the US and Russia which showed the commitment to the immediate international control over Syria’s chemical weapons and related items. In addition, the resolution condemned the use of chemical weapons by the Syrian regime and argued that this is in violation of international law. The individuals that are responsible for the use of those chemical weapons in Syria should be held accountable (UNSC, 2013, September 27, doc). The US and Russia were presented by their respective Foreign Affairs ministers – Lavrov and Kerry – which showed the importance of this resolution. Kerry reaffirmed that responsibility to “defend the defenceless” and thanked Lavrov for “his personal efforts and cooperation beginning before Geneva and continuing through this week so that we could find common ground” (UNSC, 2013, September 27, pp. 4-5). Through these diplomatic efforts, an option of military force had been avoided, according to Kerry. For the first time in the UNSC, binding obligations had been placed on the al-Assad regime, and this text reflects

what the presidents of the US and Russia had hoped. In contrast to Kerry, Lavrov mentioned the importance of the professional and impartial behaviour of OPCW and UN experts and their full respect of Syria's sovereignty when destructing Syria's chemical weapons. Additionally, all parties, especially the regional actors, must report any attempts by non-state actors to acquire chemical weapons to the UNSC. Other representatives welcomed the US-Russia accord and cooperation (UNSC, 2013, September 27). Lavrov underscored Russia's commitment of finding a political and diplomatic settlement whilst working on chemical disarmament (UNSC, 2013, October 22).

2014: The Continuation of Success

In April 2014, Lavrov noted with satisfaction that over 92 percent of the chemical agents in Syria had been removed by the Syrian authorities. He stressed that the authorities did this under difficult security circumstances, which, according to Lavrov, have been ignored by many international players. The US ambassador Power was less optimistic. Power referred to photographs that depict horrors imposed by the Syrian regime and notes the victims of chemical attacks. Power's called for accountability. The UK supported Power by stating that those responsible for war crimes and crimes against humanity must be held accountable (UNSC, 2014, April 27). Through the course of 2014, the US and Russia continued to emphasise a collective course and one voice. When unity was present in the UNSC, concrete positive results had been reached. The aim of Resolution 2118 was reached in July 2014 with the complete elimination of all declared chemical weapons of the al-Assad regime (UNSC, 2014, July 14; UNSC, 2014, July 22).

2015-2016: Cracks in the Cooperation Despite Adopted Resolutions

Despite the elimination of all declared chemical weapons, the OPCW released a third report with further evidence that chemical weapons had been used against civilians by the Syrian government. Power saw this as a violation of international norms and the international legal obligations Syria had. In this particular meeting, the Russian ambassador did not refer to the use of chemical weapons at all (UNSC, 2015, January 15). On March 6, the second resolution regarding chemical weapons in Syria had been adopted: Resolution 2209. Venezuela abstained, but all other UNSC members voted in favour of the resolution which strongly condemned the use of chlorine gas as a weapon. Power's statement elaborated on the fact that the al-Assad regime had the capabilities to deploy and use chlorine weapons. Taking the floor for the second time, Churkin, Russian ambassador to the UN, responds strongly to this statement: "the

statement made by the representative of the United States forces me to make rather detailed comments, since Ambassador Power cast the situation in such a light as to suggest that the onus is exclusively on the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic”, adding that “Ambassador Power alleged, although she did not state it explicitly, that the Syrian Government was behind it [chemical attacks on sarin attack of August 21]. It was not” (UNSC, 2015, March 6, p. 5). Churkin believed that the UNSC, in particular the US and UK, should adopt a more professional approach and not rush and blame the Syrian government. Power responded again by urging the Council members to carefully read the reports by the experts. Churkin finally replied by stating that the inaction of the US after the supposed crossing of Obama’s red line by the Syrian regime in August 2013 is “very strange”. His logic is that the US president did nothing and therefore the al-Assad government did not use chemical weapons (UNSC, 2015, March, p. 7).

Another significant step in ending the use of chemical weapons in Syria is the unanimous adoption of Resolution 2235 which established JIM. Power said that these steps are necessary as, despite the previous efforts, attacks in Syria have continued. To prevent future attacks, a mechanism was necessary which would help gather information and point fingers. Churkin noted that with the existing mechanisms the question of who used chlorine gas remained unanswered as no mandates to identify the perpetrators was given. Earlier statements by UNSC representatives were politized. JIM will close that particular gap of accountability if the mechanism works impartially, professionally, and objectively (UNSC, 2015, August 7).

Already before 2016, Russia had indicated that chemical weapons could be used not solely by the al-Assad regime, but also by terrorists. This is again stressed by Churkin in May 2016. The OPCW found genuine evidence of the use of mustard gas and according to Churkin, there are serious grounds to believe that the gases are used by terrorists. He is disappointed: “It is unfortunate that [...] some Western members of the Council, under contrived pretexts, are stifling the Russian-Chinese initiative aimed at neutralizing the threat of the production of chemical weapons by terrorists in and around Syria” (UNSC, 2016, May 4, p. 11). Countries like France, the UK, Japan, Uruguay, and the US continued to reiterated that accountability is important. The UNSC must unite in order to bring those responsible to justice. On October 19, the US representative stresses this fact by emphasising that JIM had stated that both the al-Assad regime as well as ISIL (ISIL, the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant, is the alternative name for IS) have used chemical weapons. The Council members cannot change the conclusions of the investigation, despite some doubts. One should therefore stop debating the approach and methodology of JIM and the first steps of the accountability process should be made. Again the Russian representative is compelled by this US statement. “The United States

is systematically attempting to shield the terrorists by assigning a priori blame to Damascus” (UNSC, 2016, October 19, p. 32).

Despite these allegations, the UNSC unanimously adopted Resolution 2314 which extends the mandate of JIM. JIM’s scope and nature of further extensions were also discussed during the meeting of October 31. The US representative urged that JIM should remain focused on Syria. So far, since the creation of JIM, the chemical attacks had been reduced. Contrarily, the Russian delegation believed that JIM’s geographic scope should not be limited to Syria and should also be focussed on non-state actors in general and terrorists in particular. Churkin adds that JIM “is not a toy for yet again enabling someone to criticize the Syrian Government” (UNSC, 2016, October 31, p. 3). Shortly after another resolution unanimously passed: Resolution 2319 which extends the mandate for JIM for another year. Power commended the spirit in which Russia carried out the negotiations. The work of JIM is vital and not complete. She added that JIM is the only body that has the mandate to identify the perpetrators. Additionally, she stressed that the Council members need to ensure that those who used the chemical weapons also faced consequences. The Russian representative noted that the resolution text was the outcome of a negotiation marathon between the representatives of the US and Russia. He voiced his regret that the Russian efforts, including a draft resolution with the Chinese partners, had been repeatedly blocked by some countries. These initiatives drew attention to the use of chemical weapons by terrorists. The Russian representative closed by encouraging the Council members to set aside any political differences (UNSC, 2016, November 17).

2017-2018: The Years of Vetoed and Not Adopted Draft Resolutions

The year 2017 was marked by failed draft resolutions. Firstly, on February 28 the draft resolution 172 was not adopted due to a double veto by Russia and China. Bolivia also voted against and three other countries, Egypt, Ethiopia, and Kazakhstan, abstained. The draft resolution would have imposed sanctions on individuals or entities that play a role in the production or use of chemical weapons in Syria. The UK’s representative responded to the Russian veto and wondered what other proof was necessary that Moscow favoured the protection of the Syrian regime over the Syrian people. The Russian representative replied and stated that draft text is offensive and flawed and was based on “Western capitals’ anti-regime doctrine” (UNSC, February 2, 2017, p. 6). According to Russia, JIM does not speak about any Syrian officials or entities that would justify the sanctions list and JIM’s conclusions are based on suspicious sources and that the resolution would levy sanctions against Damascus. Nikki

Haley, US representative, replied that Russia and China made an outrageous and indefensible choice. She believes that they are ignoring the facts and putting their friends in the regime first. The vetoing countries did not like the conclusions that can be drawn from the JIM's report and questioned their credibility. Haley wondered why the two respective countries have not objected to the investigators during the course of the past year (UNSC, February 2, 2017).

Other draft resolutions have also failed. To exemplify, the draft resolution 315 of April 12, 2017 was vetoed by Russia, Bolivia voted against and three other countries abstained. The draft resolution would have condemned the chemical weapons attack in Khan Shaykhun and stressed the importance of the accountability of those who used the chemical weapons. Again, Russia emphasised that the troika of drafters (US, France, and UK) already named the perpetrator (the al-Assad regime) before the attack had been properly investigated. Haley replied that by this veto, Russia is further isolating itself in the Council (UNSC, 2017, April 12). Two other draft resolutions in 2017 – 962 and 970 – were also vetoed by Russia. Draft resolution 968 was not adopted as the resolution did not get the required majority. With no adoption of any of these resolutions, the mandate of JIM was not extended (UNSC, 2017, November 16; UNSC, 2017, November 17). Draft resolutions proposed by Russia in April 2018 (175 and 322) did not gain a majority support either. The alternative resolution was vetoed by Russia (321) (UNSC, 2018, April 10). The UNSC cannot agree upon a new independent mechanism that would investigate the continued use of chemical weapons in Syria.

Room for Cooperation?

Despite best efforts, the use of chemical weapons has not been eliminated. In the first years of the Syrian conflict, both the US and Russia agreed on the severity of the chemical weapons attacks and that action had to be taken. Accountability was a significant concern for both parties. With the establishment of JIM, significant steps were made in order to identify who should be held accountable for the mass atrocities in the Syria. However, when discussing which individual or entity was accountable, different perspectives surfaced. Many Western countries, including the US, believed that the al-Assad regime is responsible for the attacks. In addition, ISIL is also to be blamed. Contrary, Russia believed that the outcomes of JIM have not always been impartial and objective and it started to question the legitimacy of the JIM process. Russia perceived the US view as too one-sided and too focused on the Syrian government. Nevertheless, the US representative did name ISIL's use of chemical weapons occasionally. Both the US and Russia agree in the broad sense that perpetrators should be held accountable,

but cannot seem to agree how this should be done. Accusations to both countries account are being made.

So far, the JIM findings did not lead to any accountability. Russia vetoed any referral of the Syrian conflict to the International Criminal Court (ICC) (Wintour, 2018a). An example of this is the veto of draft resolution 348 of 2014, which refers several times to the referral of the situation to the ICC (UNSC, 2014, May 22, doc). With this regard, Russia has taken the same stance for the past 8 years. The US takes a different position. After al-Assad crossed Obama's red line, the US changed its position and became less hostile towards the ICC. Although Obama has not always been vocal about his support of an ICC referral by the UNSC, the US did support the draft resolutions regarding this topic (Meeùs, 2014). Given Trump's stance towards international law and international organisation, it is less likely the US would support future draft resolutions on the ICC referral (Bellinger III, 2018).

The UNSC generally recognised that there is a need for accountability regarding the use of chemical weapons in Syria. However, this idea has not yet led to any concrete action. The US and Russia could cooperate more and support an independent evidence-gathering mechanism. Albeit the renewal of JIM or a new initiative, gathering evidence is vital for the future when political circumstances are more amenable to accountability (Edwards & Cacciatori, 2018). As the US has not been consistent with their chemical weapons strategy – Obama has been more diplomatic, whereas Trump initiated military action – it is vital to set aside the political differences in order to end the use of chemical weapons in Syria. Taking into account the different strategies of the US presidents, it does matter who is in office. Therefore, the UNSC should continue to work on resolutions that surpass the specifics of the accountability as there is currently no consensus on this topic in the UNSC.

This chapter has shown that the Russian viewpoint with regards to destruction and accountability of the use of chemical weapons has been rather consistent throughout the years. This is in contrast to the US view as we can see a new line of thought in the Trump administration. The inconsistent policies are somewhat reflected in the outcomes of the UNSC meetings. There is less agreement on what action should be taken and since Trump took office in 2017, no new resolution has been passed (until June 2018). The following chapter will delve into the humanitarian aspect of the Syrian conflict.

Chapter 5: Humanitarian Assistance in Syria

After many years of conflict, the humanitarian situation in Syria continues to be critical. One of the main ongoing factors in this conflict is the lack of safe, sustained humanitarian access that would aid the Syrian people. The Syrian government has been removing crucial items from the convoys and imposed bureaucratic hurdles on the humanitarian assistance. By doing so, the government is limiting the humanitarian access. The access to humanitarian aid often comes after the civilians have been exposed to long periods of deprivation and violence. Critical humanitarian assistance has often come too late (Security Council Report, 2018). Humanitarian assistance is a widely debated topic in the UNSC. This chapter will firstly give a short overview of the resolutions and draft resolutions regarding humanitarian assistance. Secondly, the viewpoints and statements from the US and Russian representatives will be elaborated on. Particularly regarding the (draft) resolutions on the humanitarian assistance. Lastly, areas of (potential) cooperation are identified.

Short Overview of UNSC Documents

In almost all meetings of the UNSC, humanitarian assistance was part of the debate. Already in 2011, the topic of humanitarian aid was discussed. In the presidential statement of August 3, 2011, the Security Council calls “on the Syrian authorities to alleviate the humanitarian situation in crisis areas by ceasing the use of force against affected towns, to allow expeditious and unhindered access for international agencies and workers, and cooperate fully with the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights” (UNSC, 2011, August 3, p. 1.). Many resolutions include some aspects of humanitarian assistance, but some resolutions are more explicit than others. Notable resolutions regarding the humanitarian situation in Syria are: Resolution 2139 (February 2014), Resolution 2165 (July 2014), Resolution 2268 (February 2016), Resolution 2332 (December 2016), and Resolution 2336 (December 16). These resolutions deal with the access to humanitarian aid, the humanitarian situation in Syria, the access to humanitarian workers in Syria, cross-border aid delivery, and the unhindered access of humanitarian agencies in Syria respectively. Despite these resolutions and agreement on particular topics, as already mentioned, humanitarian aid is hindered by the Syrian government. The Syrian population is still in dire need of critical goods. The following sections will look at the draft resolutions and resolutions regarding the humanitarian assistance and how the US and Russian representatives have dealt with these issues.

Humanitarian Assistance Throughout the Years

2011: The First Need for Cooperation

The first draft resolution that was vetoed regarding the humanitarian situation in Syria was in 2011. On October 4, 2011 Russia and China vetoed against draft resolution 612. The draft resolution specified that the Syrian government should allow unhindered and sustained access for humanitarian aid and organizations, and should welcome the help of the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). It furthermore urged the Syrian regime to cooperate comprehensively with the UN as the ongoing violence continued and the humanitarian needs are present (UNSC, 2011, October 4, doc). Neither the US or Russia further specified their opinions on the humanitarian assistance. Other members of the UNSC did: the representatives of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Brazil reiterated that humanitarian workers should have access to the population, and the representative of South Africa also stated that, under international humanitarian and human rights law, the Syrian authorities should facilitate access by the UN humanitarian agencies (UNSC, 2011, October 4).

2012-2013: Making Some Progress

Resolution 2042 (April 2012) and Resolution 2043 (April 2012) also deal with humanitarian assistance. Resolutions 2042 reiterated that the Syrian authorities should allow “immediate, full and unimpeded access of humanitarian personnel to all populations in need of assistance” (UNSC, 2012, April 14, p. 2, doc). The Six-Point Proposal of the Joint Special Envoy of the United Nations and the League of Arab States, which is part of Resolution 2042, elaborates on the need of timely provision of humanitarian assistance to all affected areas. It further wants to include a daily two hour pause in fighting for humanitarian purposes (UNSC, 2012, April 14, doc). Resolution 2043 offers the same viewpoints in securing humanitarian assistance (UNSC, 2012, April 21, doc). US representative Rice, in her statement on Resolution 2043, noticed that little progress had been made on the issue of humanitarian access and that an estimated one million Syrians are still in need of humanitarian aid and the US patience is running out (UNSC, 2012, April 21). With two resolutions that refer to the importance of the Syrian people having access to humanitarian aid, another draft resolution in 2012 (538) was shut down and vetoed by China and Russia. The resolution included the possibility of sanctions on the country if the demands of ending the violence were not met (UNSC, 2012, July 19, doc). A presidential statement made on October 2, 2013 showed the continued commitment to providing immediate humanitarian assistance throughout the whole country (UNSC, 2013, October 2, doc). Both the US and Russia agreed on the urgency and necessity of the humanitarian assistance. Nonetheless,

specifics on how the assistance should be conducted was not specified. For this reason, it was relatively easy to come to agreements and details were not yet significant. The willingness of both countries and all other UNSC members was sufficient at this stage.

2014: The Long-Overdue Resolution

Real change came in 2014. More details were discussed and fortunately for the Syrian people the UNSC members came to an agreement on the humanitarian assistance. This is most notable in Resolution 2139. After a period of intense negotiations, the UNSC finally laid out further details around the urgent need to increase humanitarian aid access. By further terms, the UNSC demanded that, among other things, all parties in Syria would allow the delivery of humanitarian assistance and ensure a rapid, safe, and unhindered evacuation of all civilians who wish to leave the country (UNSC, 2014, February 22, doc). In a reaction to the resolution, Power emphasised that this resolution was long overdue and that because of previous failures the Syrian people did not receive the appropriate assistance. She further continued by stating that this resolution was not about politics or ideology, but simply about doing what is necessary for the people in desperate need. Power is shocked that this resolution took so long: “It is remarkable to the world that it has taken three years for the Security Council to recognize basic facts and to call for such basic principles of humanity [...]. It is a gross understatement to say it should not have taken so long” (UNSC, 2014, February 22, p. 6). Churkin stated that the Russian government had taken on a balanced nature regarding this resolution. He emphasised that all parties must cooperate with the humanitarian agencies. More room for cooperation was possible as Churkin believes that the improvement in the humanitarian situation was only possible through political settlement (UNSC, 2014, February 22).

In light of this positive change, another resolution was unanimously adopted. Resolution 2165 authorised (for 180 days) relief delivery across conflict lines and through border crossings. This cross-border humanitarian assistance was necessary to ensure that the assistance would reach the Syrian population through the most direct routes. In case of non-compliance by any Syrian party to this resolution or Resolution 2139, further measures will be taken (UNSC, 2014, July 14, doc). The Russian representative stressed that there was no trigger in the resolution text that would allow for the use of force in case of non-compliance. Churkin was pleased to see that the UNSC took into account the Russian concerns. Russia had consulted with OCHA and was assured that Syria’s territorial integrity, independence and sovereignty was respectfully maintained. Power emphasised that this resolution would ensure the implementation of Resolution 2165, but that the Council should be ready act in case of non-compliance (UNSC,

2014, July 14). What one can understand from these resolutions, is that when the values of the Russians, namely sovereignty and territorial integrity, are upheld, cooperation within the UNSC is possible on such a topic. On December 17, 2014 the Council adopted another resolution on the humanitarian assistance. Despite the challenges that the UN and its partners faced in delivering aid across borders, the actors that used the routes were authorised to so do for another year (UNSC, 2014, December 17, doc).

2015-2016: More Progress?

In December 2015, the Council adopted Resolution 2258 unanimously. With this, the decisions in Resolution 2165 were renewed for another year. Russia supported the draft resolution as they believed that the maintenance of cross-border provision of humanitarian assistance was vital to accessing people who lived in areas that are not easy to reach. However, the delegation would have liked to see more provisions in the resolution. According to the Russian representative, the cross-border points were being used for other purposes than humanitarian purposes as weapons were crossing the Syrian borders. Samantha Power argued that the humanitarian access of millions of people had been denied or restricted and that this resolution was necessary to provide life-saving assistance to those who required it (UNSC, 2015, December 22).

On October 8, 2016, two draft resolutions did not pass. The draft resolution proposed by the Russians (847) was not adopted as only 4 countries voted in favour, 9 against and 2 abstained. The other draft resolution (846) was vetoed by the Russians. The UNSC failed to adopt a resolution in a heated debate on the content and the need for humanitarian intervention in Aleppo. Draft resolution 846 would have demanded an immediate halt to the aerial bombardments and military flights over Aleppo, an immediate implementation of a cessation of hostilities, as well as the immediate, safe and unhindered humanitarian access (UNSC, 2016a, October 8, doc). Contrary, the Russian text would have also urged an immediate cessation of hostilities, but added that all parties prevent support, either in material or financial forms, to groups associated with Al-Qaida or ISIL (UNSC, 2016b, October 8, doc). One the main reasons why Russia vetoed the draft resolution 846 is because there were some significant gaps in the text. It was not evident if the ban on flights also included intelligence flights or flights over the western part of Aleppo, which was still under control by the government. Other gaps that were identified by the Russian representative was the duplication of monitoring efforts. Additionally, Churkin agreed with the United States that more action was needed: “it took our [Russian] Minister for Foreign Affairs and the United States Secretary of State several months to work out an agreement, but the United States could not implement it or manage to

separate the moderate opposition from terrorists. It could not [...] provide better conditions to get humanitarian aid to eastern Aleppo” (UNSC, 2016, October 8, pp. 16-17). The US representative already stated earlier that there was only one goal to the text and that was to stop the bombing of Aleppo. The airstrikes by the Russians and Syrian regime aimed to further the regime in Damascus. The US representative added that “Russia, as always, will offer a different narrative. Russia had said that it is fighting terrorism. They will probably somehow blame the United States of America for the suffering in Aleppo [...], [but] the truth is that Russia is using counter-terrorism as an excuse to help the al-Assad regime” (UNSC, 2016, October 8, p. 8).

The year 2016 did end on a positive note. Resolution 2332 was unanimously adopted. The unacceptable and escalating violence in Syria was sufficient to come to a conclusion on the topic. All parties in the Syrian conflict, especially the Syrian authorities, should comply immediately to all their obligations under international human rights law and international humanitarian law. The Council renewed the part of Resolution 2165 which authorised the humanitarian agencies to cross the conflict lines and monitor the loading of all humanitarian relief consignments (UNSC, 2016, December 21, doc).

2017-2018: Still Going Strong

With the adoption of Resolution 2393 at the end of 2017, the UNSC still formed a unity on this topic. The Council again renewed the authorisation for cross-border and cross-conflict-line humanitarian access to Syria for another 12 months. Russia did not veto the resolution, but together with China, abstained. The Russian representative emphasised that the authorisation was only meant to be a temporary measure and that continuation of the authorisation could impinge on Syrian sovereignty. Adding to that, the Russian representative said that a transition to a more traditional means of providing humanitarian assistance should be considered. This assistance should go in coordination with the Syrian regime and should eventually end the cross-border scheme. Contrary, the US representative welcomed the adoption without any reservation and said that 17,000 aid deliveries, monitored through the mechanism, had been made possible (UNSC, 2017, December 19).

In early 2018, the Council adopted Resolution 2401 unanimously. The resolution laid out a 30-day cessation of hostilities to ensure a durable humanitarian pause which would enable weekly humanitarian aid deliveries. Despite the adoption, the US representative voiced deep concern about the delay in this resolution caused by the Russian delegation: “Every minute the Council waited on Russia, the human suffering grew” (UNSC, 2018, February 24, p. 4). The Russian delegation responded by stating that the immediate cessation of hostilities would be

impossible without the agreement of the concerned parties. Russia would like to see that concrete, on-the-ground agreements are made. The delegate closed his statement by expressing the “deep concern about the public statements by certain United States officials threatening aggression against Syria, a sovereign country [...] [and] we demand an end to this irresponsible and hateful rhetoric” (UNSC, 2018, February 24, p. 6).

Cooperation is Present, But for How Long?

It becomes clear from the previous section that more cooperation between the US and Russia is present on this topic. Both countries have been in favour of cross-border assistance, which is important as cross-line aid from Damascus could be politicised. Therefore, the need of cross-border humanitarian aid was necessary in order to provide assistance to those Syrians in need. Over the course of the past years, some cracks have surfaced in the cooperation between the US and Russia. One of the most notable things is that Russia would have liked to see more incorporation of the fight against ISIL in Syria. The cross-border points are, according to the Russians, now also used by terrorists to smuggle weapons into the country. Additionally, the cross-border assistance was only meant as a temporary solution. Keeping in mind these statements by the Russian delegation, one can conclude that necessary cooperation on the humanitarian aid is currently present in Syria, but that it will most likely not continue in a cross-border and cross-line manner. The Russian delegation has already expressed its doubts and even abstained when voting on Resolution 2393.

Chapter 6: The Political Process: The Road to Peace in Syria

From the start of the Syrian conflict, the political process in Syria has been highly debated. The first presidential statement on the Syrian topic in 2011 already referred to the political process. The UNSC affirmed its strong commitment to the “sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of Syria. It stresses that the only solution to the current crisis in Syria is through an inclusive and Syrian-led political process” (UNSC, 2011, August 3, p. 1, doc). Outside of the UNSC, certain initiatives were developed. The Geneva processes, held in 2012, 2014, 2016, and 2017 were aimed at the political transition of Syria. The goal of the meetings was trying to bring together the Syrian government and the opposition to discuss the transitional government. In 2012, the US already took the position that al-Assad could not be part of this transitional government, whereas Russia stressed that it was not yet decided who should or should not be in the new government. During Geneva I, Russia blocked a provision that would have called al-Assad to step down and to not be part of the transitional government (BBC, 2012). The Geneva process has so far failed in its aim to guide the political transition in Syria. In 2016, Russia, Iran and Turkey partly took over the Syrian peace process by launching the Astana talks. The representatives mainly talked about de-escalation zones or cease-fires between the Syrian army and rebels (France24, 2018). This chapter will look give a brief overview of the UNSC documents regarding the peace process. Secondly, the chapter will further elaborate on the developments of the peace process and how the US and Russian representatives have responded to that. Lastly, the continuity of the US and Russian policies will be looked at and an answer will be given whether there is more room for cooperation in the political peace process in Syria.

Short Overview of UNSC Documents

The representatives in the UNSC form different opinions on the political process and transition in Syria. It, therefore, took until December 2015 before a resolution was passed in the UNSC that discussed the transitional plan of Syria. Resolution 2254 finally overcame the gridlock on the Syrian transitional process that had persisted since the start of the conflict. The resolution was adopted unanimously and endorsed the road map for Syria’s peace process (UNSC, 2015, December 18, doc). After this rare show of unity among the P5 members regarding Syria’s transitional process, it took another year before the UNSC adopted another resolution that was largely dedicated to the peace process. Resolution 2336 supported the efforts made by Russia and Turkey in the Astana process. The resolution was unanimously adopted and was aimed to

end the violence in Syria and created a jump-start for the political process as it included negotiations on a political settlement aimed at a peaceful solution to the Syrian crisis. As many other (draft) resolutions and political statements, Resolution 2336 reaffirmed its “strong commitment to the sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity of the Syrian Arab Republic” (UNSC, 2016, December 31, p. 1, doc). These terms have been mentioned often in the UNSC and are underlining Russia’s main points when it comes to how the involvement of the UNSC in the Syrian conflict should be conducted.

The Political Dossier: Small Steps are Made, Concrete Actions are Lacking

2014: Still Not Moving Forward

Despite the Geneva processes and the broad support of the implementation of the main outcome of the Geneva I and II processes, namely finding a political solution for the Syrian conflict by means of creating a Transitional Governing Body, concrete steps were not made. The political process was not moving forward in early 2014 and the actors that play a significant role, which are Russia, the US and Iran, are not sitting at the same table. On October 21, Western countries called for a renewal of the political process. The US, UK, France, Australia, and Luxembourg rather clearly spelled out that a role for al-Assad in future Syria was out of the question. The US representative stated that “more than three years ago, Bashar al-Assad lost the legitimacy to lead when he responded to peaceful protests with brutal violence” (UNSC, 2014, October 21, p. 11). Ms. Power also referred to the accountability of al-Assad’s regime for the widespread atrocities. A long-sought solution is necessary and the influence of Iran and Russia are critical to that, Power added. Russia had been referring to a political solution more than often in previous meetings but did not further elaborate on that in this particular Council meeting. The Russian representative did, however, condemn the airstrikes in Syria against the terrorists. The airstrikes were executed on Syrian soil without the consent of the Syrian government. Russia believed that the anti-terrorism efforts should be taken in compliance with international law (UNSC, 2014, October 21).

2015: A Breakthrough

The year 2015 started off on a more positive note. In the first debate of 2015, the Russian representative stated that the military option to overthrow the Syrian regime had not been justified and that the only way to end the conflict is through dialogue. New intra-Syrian consultations were planned for later in January in Moscow in which the Syrian government and opposition could have direct talks on equal footing. Several UNSC members applauded this

Russian initiative. The US, however, once again stressed the importance of accountability regarding al-Assad and the individuals that surrounded him (UNSC, 2015, January 15). Despite these efforts, the humanitarian situation in Syria continued to be dire and improvement of the living conditions of the Syrian people was dependent on a political solution. The international community had to strive forward and continue to collaborate in order to find a solution. Finally, at the end of 2015, the UNSC had a breakthrough. Resolution 2254 was unanimously adopted. The resolution set out a road map for the peace process in Syria and provided a timetable for the UN-facilitated talks between the representatives of the Syrian government and the opposition. In addition, it outlined a nationwide ceasefire. The only condition to this ceasefire is that it would only be initiated once the concerned parties had taken the first steps towards political transition. The Council expresses its support for “a Syrian-led political process that is facilitated by the United Nations and [...] [that] established credible, inclusive and non-sectarian governance” (UNSC, 2015, December 15, p. 2, doc). Both the US and Russia presented gratitude to each other. The US representative especially thanked Foreign Minister Lavrov for his collaboration and efforts in both of the Vienna conferences. In return, Lavrov thanked Secretary of State Kerry for his initiative to convene the meeting of the International Syria Support Group. Lavrov referred to the Vienna conference as the sole platform that unites all the influential external actors regarding the Syrian crisis. Kerry confirmed that a broadly supported process was needed and that this resolution should put Syria on the road to political transition (UNSC, 2015, December 15).

2016: Failing to Implement Resolution 2254

Despite the success at the end of 2015, the implementation of Resolution 2254 did not start off smoothly. In October 2016, two draft resolutions were tabled: draft resolution 846 was vetoed by Russia, whereas draft resolution 847, which was the initiation of Russia, was not adopted at all. The atmosphere during this Council meeting was bitter. The UNSC members were pointing fingers to the other members instead of realising how severe the situation in Aleppo was and that something had to be done. Words did not seem enough to illustrate the mutual disgust. The common manners in the UNSC slowly crumbled. To illustrate, the Russian representative only thanked the countries that did not criticise Russia after Russia’s interventions during the meeting. This goes against all regular norms in the UNSC. The Russian representative underlined that Russia’s draft resolution was a political demonstration aimed at keeping the multilateral formats alive. Churkin stated that the failure to adopt this resolution was guided by anti-Russian sentiments or that countries simply did not have the courage to have a positive

vote. In return, the US representative stated that the fight against terrorism was used as an excuse by al-Assad and his allies to kill anybody who is in the way of their military objectives. Additionally, Russia was called a thug: “Russia has become one of the chief purveyors of terror in Aleppo, using tactics more commonly associated with thugs than Governments. Russia and the Al-Assad regime think the world will look the other way if they recite the word “counter-terrorism”” (UNSC, 2016, October 8, p. 8). The US representative stated that the Russian draft resolution was a deceptive attempt to get the international community to ratify Russia and al-Assad’s actions. Russia denounced that this meeting was a waste of time as none of the two draft resolutions tabled had any chance to be adopted (UNSC, 2016, October 8).

On December 5, 2016, draft resolution 1026 was vetoed by Russia and China. Before the vote, Russia surprised by stating that it would veto the resolution on procedural grounds instead of veto the resolution on its content. In addition, it stated that the draft resolution does not refer to a withdrawal of fighters from eastern Aleppo but to an immediate cessation of hostilities. The Russian representative was afraid that the danger of the regrouping of the rebels and resupplying was too high (UNSC, 2016, December 5). Implicitly, one could argue that Russia supported a military victory over a political resolution. Moreover, Russia believed that the vote came too early. This in light of previous steps the Americans and Russians made during negotiations about Aleppo in Rome earlier that month. The US denied this by stating that a clear solution was not found in Rome. Russia had made vague commitments about a deal. However, so far, these commitments have always led to a new round of bombardments in Syria. The US did not want to allow that Russia would be stating these vague promises again and that therefore Russia was buying time. Finally, the US representative stated that this situation is a cynical act. The resolution was rather simple as it concerned a brief humanitarian pause to aid the citizens of Aleppo. According to the US representative, the Russians said “No, the Security Council cannot help you” to the Syrian citizens. The US claimed that “Russia, together with its ally, Bashar al-Assad, will keep bombing these people instead” (UNSC, 2016, December 5, p. 10). A week later, the Russians accused the US, France, and the UK of their propaganda, disinformation and fake news (UNSC, 2016, December 13).

2017-2018: No Political Solution in Sight

The trend continued in 2017 and 2018. The US stated at the end of 2017 that it remained committed to Resolution 2254 as the “sole legitimate blueprint for a political resolution to this conflict” (UNSC, 2017, December 19, p. 3). The US representative also reaffirmed its support for the Geneva process as this was, according to the US, the only framework that would be a

viable option for the Syrian political process. No such statement was made by the Russians during this particular meeting (UNSC, 2017, December 19). On January 23, 2018, an ad-hoc meeting was called for by the Russian delegation to discuss the use of chemical weapons. The US called this a new political stunt by Russia that is purely meant to distract the attention from the for Russia uncomfortable truth regarding the Syrian conflict: the irrefutable proof that the al-Assad regime had used chemical weapons against Syria's own civilians. When these facts surfaced, Russia always remained rather quiet or tried to doubt the proof and deviated the attention from the facts. This was all to still support the al-Assad regime, according to the US representative (UNSC, 2018, January 23). The US is accusing the Russians of their support to al-Assad. This also stands in the way of a solution to peaceful process as these accusations have formed the basis of the negotiations in the past months and even years.

A Peaceful Syria: A Long Road Ahead

The political peace process started off slowly in the UNSC. However, with the adoption of Resolution 2254 hope returned and the unity of the UNSC regarding this topic showed that a political transitional process was possible. Nevertheless, the implementation of the resolution proved to be more difficult. Despite the commitment of the UNSC to still implement the solutions that are in the resolution, concrete and successful practical steps have not been made. One of the main hurdles in the UNSC is the position of al-Assad in this transitional process. The US wants to hold al-Assad accountable for his actions and does not incorporate him in Syria's future. This position has been made clear throughout the discussions in the UNSC regarding the political process. Contrarily, the Russians oppose this viewpoint. They refrain from voting in favour of any resolution that would state that al-Assad cannot be part of the political process. Discussions on this topic have been rather heated and throughout these past years accusations at the US and Russian address have intensified. As long as there is no agreement on the position of al-Assad, it would be very challenging to have a unified voice in the UNSC on the Syrian political and peace process. This dossier has proven to be the most challenging one and the viewpoints of the US and Russia are too diverging. The relationship between the two countries could suffer from their disagreement and it puts a standstill on further positive developments and solutions regarding Syria's peace process.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

The Syrian conflict has been raging since 2011. While the international community closely watches the horrors that still unfold in Syria, some action has been taken in the UNSC. However, more cooperation on the topic is required in order to stop the atrocities in Syria. The rise of anti-immigrant and xenophobic parties in Europe, the homelessness of many Syrians and the grand humanitarian disaster that is present are all consequences of the raging war. This thesis aimed to investigate how the relationship between the US and Russia is in the UNSC through the lens of the Syrian conflict. This conclusion will provide an answer to that and also discusses the limitations to this research and provides suggestions for future research.

The UNSC has initiated several initiatives that would investigate the use of chemical weapons in Syria. Both the US and Russia agreed in the early stages after the chemical attacks that the perpetrators have to be held accountable. With JIM, the UNSC hoped to gather more information on the chemical attacks in Syria. However, the Russians doubted the outcomes and believed that the information was not objective and impartial. In addition, the Russian representative interpreted that the report was too one-sided and too focused on the al-Assad regime. Cooperating on this dossier proved to be difficult and Russia vetoed the draft resolution that would renew the mandate of JIM. As long as the two parties cannot agree on how the process of accountability of the perpetrators should be conducted, it would be difficult to come to further agreements. Russia's policies have been rather consistent throughout the years, whereas we can see a turning point in the US policy when Trump became president. Nevertheless, he has been criticised for his inconsistencies regarding the response to chemical warfare in Syria and his flip-flopping forms a weak basis for the development of a strong US foreign policy regarding this issue (Bentley, 2017).

Taking into account the cooperation on the other dossiers, the collaboration between the US and Russia on humanitarian assistance is more present. Both countries agreed on cross-line and cross-border assistance. Nevertheless, draft resolutions that included a cessation of hostilities and that would allow more humanitarian assistance on the ground, have not always been adopted. The US has been consistent on this policy and often referred to the importance of the assistance by the international community to aid the Syrians. Russia has supported cross-border assistance so far – at least until June 2018 – but new doubts may initiate a new take on this policy.

Cooperation on the last dossier, the political level, proved to be the most challenging. Only one resolution that is in large parts dedicated to the political transition and peace process

in Syria has passed. Despite the talks in Geneva, Astana, and Vienna, the implementation of Resolution 2254 has been challenging. From the start, the US and Russia have been clear on their policies regarding al-Assad's position. Both countries have made this a breaking point. If they do not find a solution together, then a political transition in Syria is unlikely in the near future. What has also become evident from the data, is that the political process, humanitarian situation and the use of chemical weapons are often intertwined. For instance, the US often referred to the humanitarian situation and the need for assistance when discussing the use of chemical weapons. A clear line in these topics would most likely spark more collaboration.

All in all, with regards to the Syrian conflict, the US and Russia seem to agree on a broader level, but filling in the details proves to be problematic. Cooperation is evident, but in order to end the Syrian conflict, collaboration on the specifics is necessary. As the years progressed, the representatives of the US and Russia have disagreed increasingly during the UNSC meetings. It led to pointing fingers: accusations were made and arguments that the other party obstructed the road to peace or stability surfaced more than once. These heated discussions have not been fruitful for the relations of the US and Russia. Nevertheless, Trump and Putin tried to come closer on this topic during the Helsinki Summit of July 2018 and discussed, among other things, the reconstruction of Syria (Wintour, 2018b). With 13 vetoes on the Syrian topic, rapprochement continues to be vital. The Helsinki Summit showed that more cooperation is possible, but it yet remains to be seen whether these public announcements have an impact on the UNSC outcomes regarding the Syrian conflict.

Moreover, the level of US involvement in the Syrian crisis is also dependent on individuals. It matters who holds the presidency. For example, the Obama administration focused more on solving the Syrian crisis diplomatically, whereas the Trump administration engaged more militarily. Obama's hesitance for military involvement was born out of the perceived Bush legacy. In addition, the inconsistency of the presidents also plays a part. To illustrate, at the end of 2018, Trump announced the complete withdrawal of the US soldiers in Syria as, according to Trump, ISIL was defeated. However, this idea was later killed and a remaining force would continue to be present in Syria (NOS, 2019). Trump's Syria policy continues to be incoherent and unclear. Other individuals that can be seen as intervening variables and who have some sort of agency are the US ambassadors to the UN. For example, Nikki Haley already announced that the US would level new sanctions after the Douma attacks in April 2018. The new sanctions would target Russian companies that helped in the chemical weapons program of the Syrian regime. According to the White House, Haley got ahead of herself and overstepped as the US was only considering additional sanctions (Diamond, Liptak,

Collins, & Labott, 2018). These individual statements and policies can affect the dynamics of the Syrian conflict.

Lastly, this research had some limitations. Not all UNSC documents on terrorism or chemical weapons were publicly accessible. Therefore, this data set has been excluded from the analysis. If the documents are accessible in the future, then more research could include these topics to grasp the US and Russian positions on chemical weapons in an even more detailed way. This thesis did also not delve into the relations of the US and Russia concerning Israel and Iran. In one of the UNSC meetings, Haley mentioned that more discussion is necessary within the UNSC on Iran's destabilising presence in Syria (UNSC, 2018, May 15). The US protection of Israel and the attempt to limit the power of Iran could be the real reason behind the US involvement in Syria. This topic can be further explored in future research by for instance looking at the developments, discussions, and resolutions regarding UNDOF – the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force. Moreover, future research analyses the public statements of Trump and Putin regarding the Syrian conflict. The UNSC proved to be a good starting point to investigate the relations and tensions between the US and Russia, but due to the diplomatic character of the meetings, the public statements could be an interesting addition. As of now, the individual actors, who are less constrained by the structures in the Syrian conflict, do not have the strong will of solving the war. It is a continuous circus of confrontation.

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