

CAN THE UNITED STATES AND RUSSIA COOPERATE? ANALYZING THE RESULTS
OF BILATERAL AND MULTILATERAL COOPERATION ON THE SYRIAN CONFLICT

by

PETER BRIAN WARD

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Student: Peter Brian Ward

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This thesis has been accepted and approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Arts degree in the Russian, East European, and Eurasian Studies program by:

Julie Hessler	Chairperson
Craig Parsons	Member
Keith Eddins	Member

and

Scott L. Pratt	Dean of the Graduate School
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Original approval signatures are on file with the University of Oregon Graduate School.

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THESIS ABSTRACT

Peter Brian Ward

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The discourse regarding US/Russia relations focuses intensely on the competitive nature between these two powers. Policy makers echo strategies of the past by making recommendations which embrace competitiveness and mutual mistrust as unavoidable characteristics for future relations. Although these perspectives are not entirely misled, they fall short of illustrating the finer nuances of relations. This paper offers an extensive analysis of three instances of cooperation between the US and Russia in Syria between 2011 and 2017 in order to offer concrete observations about how these antagonistic powers work together. The analysis shows that although the US and Russia are competitive and often have opposing agendas, this does not necessarily prevent them from cooperative engagement that produces substantive results. Their polarity can even contribute to more effective cooperation. This paper also draws conclusions about what circumstances improve the effectiveness of US/Russia cooperation and makes recommendations for future mutual efforts in Syria.

CURRICULUM VITAE

NAME OF AUTHOR: Peter Brian Ward

GRADUATE AND UNDERGRADUATE SCHOOLS ATTENDED:

University of Oregon, Eugene, OR
Binghamton University SUNY, Binghamton, NY

DEGREES AWARDED:

Master of Arts, Russian, East European, and Eurasian Studies, University of Oregon, 2017

Bachelor of Arts, History and Russian Language, Binghamton University, 2012

AREAS OF SPECIAL INTEREST:

Russian Foreign Policy, Domestic Politics, History, Language
Translation Studies
Humanitarian Issues

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE:

Graduate Teaching Fellowship, University of Oregon, 2015-2017

Head Chef, Anglo-American School Moscow, 2013-2014

ESL Instructor, Slavic Anglo American School Moscow, 2012-2013

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DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this to my mother, Mimi, who could not see me graduate from college or graduate school. You are and always will be why I try so hard.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

George Kennan, in his essay published under the pseudonym 'Mr. X' in 1947, famously coined the strategy of *containment* as the only sensible approach for US policy towards the Soviet Union. The essay, titled 'The Sources of Soviet Conduct,' described the domestic history and characteristics that determined the USSR's foreign policy, in particular, its relations with capitalist countries in the West.

Kennan outlined how the USSR leadership's dogmatic socialist/communist idealism estranged them from their own population and created the need for a strictly ordered dictatorship to preserve and increase their authority. In order to legitimize this oppressive dictatorship, according to Kennan, the USSR criticized capitalist countries, holding them up as the enemies of righteous communism (856). This dynamic was corroborated by the basic belief among the Soviet leadership in the inherent antagonism that was supposed to exist between socialist and capitalist countries. In response to this understanding of the Soviet mentality, Kennan advised the following: "the main element of any United States policy toward the Soviet Union must be that of a long-term, patient but firm and vigilant containment of Russian expansive tendencies" (861). He also predicted that, "we are going to continue for a long time to find the Russians hard to deal with" (859).

Kennan's famous argument enjoyed significant influence in its time and many of his assertions have had a recurring relevance throughout the 20th century. Since the fall of the Soviet Union and the development of the Russian Federation in its place, relations between the Kremlin and western powers have progressed and regressed in stages. Today the discourse of inherent east-west antagonism has rekindled. Scholarship and the media are focused on the competitive nature of US/Russian relations to the extent

that some cynics are saying that the Cold War is on again (Rosefielde, xi). George Kennan's poignant analysis of Soviet conduct is seemingly relevant once again.

That an escalation in tensions between the US and Russia has occurred in the past several years is undeniable. Since the beginning of Barack Obama's second term in office, relations between the two powers have worsened over some particularly important issues. For example, when thousands of opposition protesters took to the streets to protest the Duma elections of 2011, Russia blamed the US for meddling in its domestic politics (Stent, *Power Play*, 124). Around the same time, presidential candidate Mitt Romney was calling Russia "America's number one geopolitical foe" (125). This antagonism predated Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014 and its military intervention in the Syrian conflict the year before, both of which seriously concerned western powers and raised questions about Russia's self-assertion on the world stage.

An interdisciplinary wargame conducted by the U.S. Army War College in 2015 analyzed the "'Russian system' and 'the forces of stasis and change at work on its various components.'" According to the report's policy conclusions, the United States must:

- Shift from a cooperative to a more competitive approach towards Russia
- Clearly articulate its position towards Russia, Eastern Europe, and Ukraine
- Challenge Russia in the competition of ideas and influence
- Account for the two national election cycles in 2016 and 2018

(US Army War College,
2015)

These policy conclusions very much describe widely held views about the posture the US must hold regarding Russia today. Views such as this in today's scholarship focus on an inherent antagonism between the US and Russia caused by conflicting agendas that cannot be reconciled. The popular narrative is that Russian

assertiveness in Crimea and Syria has shattered the West's idealistic view for the post-Cold War world order (Rosefielde, 229). Therefore, in the rising struggle between conflicting views, only one side will prevail. Despite a very different geopolitical environment, this narrative bears significant resemblance to Kennan's assertions about the USSR in 1947. It has an ideological component, albeit not socialist or communist but something of a different order. It also recognizes an inherent antagonism between opposing sides, which seemingly cannot be negotiated around.

Angela Stent, in her book, "The Limits of Partnership," discusses the complex history of Russian/US relations since the collapse of the Soviet Union. She discusses the multiple "resets" in relations since Putin came to power (x). Stent's book aims to answer basic questions about US/Russian relations today. In order to do this, it traces relations between these powers back to the Cold War. Stent asserts that, although the Cold War is over, its influence is still felt in relations between Russia and the United States (xi).

Stent also discusses how Russia's leadership struggled to revive the economy in the 1990s and how it felt slighted by the lack of aid from western countries, who treated it like a defeated nation and not like a partner (255). This perception dominated Russia's foreign policy under Yevgeny Primakov in the late '90s. When Putin came to power, relations became better during a brief window after September 11, 2001, but were once again soured by US aggressiveness in the Middle East and other disagreements. Stent observes that subsequent resets in relations have always returned to mistrust and disagreement (xi).

Stent also characterizes the debate in the US over how to deal with Russia as having two camps. She describes one camp as embracing a Realpolitik perspective (257). This view stresses working with Russia where it fits US national interest, while asserting US policy as clearly as possible to avoid grey areas. This camp argues: "the

relationship is most productive when Washington concentrates on pragmatic foreign policy cooperation with Moscow, limits criticism of its domestic system, focuses on the resolution of common problems, and treats Russia with respect” (257). Critics of this perspective take issue with Russia’s domestic situation and its turn away from democracy. They see foreign policy cooperation as being relevant to Russia’s domestic politics and assert that the US should penalize Russia for its growing authoritarianism (257).

Angela Stent also remarks on the relevance of George Kennan’s writings to today’s world. She asserts: “The question that George Kennan raised in his 1947 ‘Mr. X’ article - To what extent does Russia’s domestic system create a unique foreign policy that makes dealing with Moscow unlike dealing with any other power? - remains alive today” (257). Stent considers the echoing assertions of Kennan, and finds them to still be an important voice when considering how the US should be oriented towards Russia.

My research seeks to add to the contemporary discourse regarding US/Russian relations by examining recent and ongoing examples of their cooperation in the Syrian conflict. Both Russia and the US have been involved in the Syrian conflict since it began in early 2011. The conflict is currently ongoing, which makes it difficult in some respects to draw meaningful conclusions from. However, I believe it provides a necessary perspective when considering the trajectory of US/Russian relations in the future.

The goal of my research and analysis is to see if examples of collusion in Syria display adequate evidence of the potential effectiveness of US/Russian multilateral and bilateral cooperative efforts. By thoroughly analyzing three case studies, I also hope to highlight some of the real factors driving the conflict. The goal of my research is to contribute to the global discourse, which aims to determine the nature of relations between the US and Russia in the years to come. In my analysis, I acknowledge a competitive aspect in these relations but strive to find the core components of conflicting

agendas in order to be more precise regarding the competitive/cooperative potential between these two powers.

WHY SYRIA?

The Syrian conflict continues today with no end in sight. Such a current issue might typically be avoided for academic study because it is unresolved and thus difficult to approach with the clarity of hindsight. However, analysis of this conflict is relevant today as the world questions the viability of a US/Russian led diplomatic solution.

The political relationship between the US and Russia since the fall of the Soviet Union has gone through several transformations. In the early 1990s, Russia's foreign policy under Yeltsin and Kozyrev was decidedly pro-western. When Vladimir Putin entered office in 1999, his Pragmatic Cooperation placed Russia first, viewing cooperation with western powers as necessary only so far as they serve Russia's national interests (27). This policy brought Russia into western institutions like the WTO and the G8 (28). However, as time progressed, Putin's policy was sharply distinguished from and often in direct conflict with western agendas. Multiple "restarts" in relations between the US and Russia have been attempted, such as when the Obama administration took office in 2009, but such high hopes have usually fizzled when forced to reconcile with strongly conflicting national interests, especially in the realm of international security (Stent, *Limits*, xi). Considering the volatility of US/Russian relations since 1990, analyzing recent events is actually the best way to represent relations as they stand today.

Syria today represents a unique case for a lot of reasons. The conflict is highly entrenched and touches the domestic politics of many regional and international powers. Indeed, one reason the conflict has become so entrenched is the number of state and

non-state actors trying to assert their agenda in it. Although many powerful actors agree on the need for a diplomatic solution, the US and Russia have asserted conflicting agendas since the conflict began in 2011 and have rallied other powers to their respective causes. This polarity means that the Syrian conflict is an opportunity for diplomatic cooperation between opposing agendas. The three case studies I analyze are examples of cooperation between two powerful states and their allies that have occurred within four years of one another. There is much to be understood from the highly condensed and rich diplomatic history that has transpired over the Syrian conflict from 2011. It merits observation today and in the future so that effective diplomacy between opposing powers can be understood and improved upon.

The intensity of the humanitarian crisis surrounding the Syrian conflict creates another strong need for analysis. As will be discussed in regards to case study II, the US and Russia have the ability to gain humanitarian access to places that are unreachable without their respective leverage, where thousands of people live without adequate food, medicine, and water. Understanding how these powers can influence parties to the conflict to increase access for aid is essential for improving the overall humanitarian situation. This problem provides an opportunity for the US and Russia to reconcile their opposing agendas and work together. My analysis will describe how that cooperation works and under what conditions it thrives.

OVERVIEW OF DIPLOMATIC ACTIVITY IN SYRIA SINCE 2011

From the outbreak of revolution in 2011, the US and Russia have had sharply contrasting views on how and to what end the Syrian conflict should be resolved. Powers like the US, EU, France, and Turkey, favor regime change. Russia, China, and Iran oppose this action, favoring negotiations for a peace that would not remove al-

Assad, but allow the people of Syria to decide in elections. The US supports the opposition and Russia remains loyal to the Syrian Government.

The UNSC has unanimously recognized that a diplomatic solution is the only way to end the conflict in Syria (Geneva Communiqué, 2012). However, for a number of reasons, negotiations on the UNSC to bring about a diplomatic end to the conflict have been underwhelming. This is partially due to the highly political nature of negotiations, which can be frozen in action by a single veto from a P5 member.

The Security Council has managed to pass sporadic resolutions since 2011 aimed at establishing a ceasefire and observer mission but, as a whole, the body is too inflexible to adjust to the ever changing needs of the conflict. When a controversial issue comes to the UNSC such as establishing a ceasefire, it has been too slow or entirely unable to reach a productive consensus. Nonetheless, it has continuously passed resolutions pertaining to UN humanitarian and peace operations in Syria. Today the UNSC is bypassed by other negotiating platforms, such as the International Syrian Support Group (ISSG) and the Astana peace process, which are specifically tailored to meet the needs of this particular conflict. The UNSC is still an important part of the diplomatic process in Syria and its authority can be wielded effectively when the membership are in agreement.

The Geneva Communiqué, drafted in June of 2012, is the foundation for the diplomatic process for peace in Syria. It was issued after multilateral talks took place in Geneva, which included a host of countries from both sides of the political playing field. The talks yielded a road map for a diplomatic resolution to the conflict that all parties, including the Syrian Government, agreed to. The Geneva Communiqué stipulates a specific plan to end the conflict, which includes a detailed outline of the transitional governing body and the role the regime and opposition forces should play in it.

The UNSC unanimously urged the Syrian government to cooperate with the peace plan set forth in 2012 (UNSC resolution 2042). The Syrian Government has formally agreed to the terms set in the Geneva Communiqué but its compliance with those terms is extremely unreliable. The UN has even observed direct and overt violations of ceasefires and provisions guaranteeing humanitarian access, which have created the impression that the Government means to sabotage the peace process (UNSC resolution 2139). It seems that the Syrian Government condones an unregulated approach to waging this war because it considers the opposition to be saboteurs and terrorists, which al-Assad promised to “crush with an iron fist” in a public address in 2012 (BBC, 2015). The goal of the Syrian Government, al-Assad especially, is self-preservation. If this seems threatened in any way by the diplomatic process, their compliance is questionable. As the fate of the current regime in Syria is highly insecure, their compliance has been a major obstacle in the way of a diplomatic peace.

CHAPTER II

CASE STUDIES

The following three case studies are close looks at cooperative efforts between the US and Russia to increase the compliance and accountability of both the Syrian Government and the opposition. They illustrate how these two major foreign influences with differing agendas are helping to implement the terms of the Geneva Communique and actualize a peace process.

My analysis assumes that state actors who agree with the steps outlined in the Geneva Communique of 2012 genuinely prefer a diplomatic peace to a military peace. A lot has changed in Syria since this plan was agreed upon in 2012. Actions such as Russia's military intervention in support of al-Assad suggest that it only supports diplomatic efforts on paper. It is not the goal of this essay to outline the ever-changing roles of foreign militaries in Syria or what their actions mean about the national interest of foreign actors. The sheer presence of foreign military resources on either side is not enough evidence to prove that a diplomatic peace is not the primary goal. At the same time, as my research shows, both the US and Russia have whole heartedly participated in the diplomatic process, often when its costs outweigh its benefits. Only time can tell if making this assumption is wise but, for the purpose of my analysis, it provides a mechanism by which I can trace common goals between opposing agendas.

1. Chemical Weapons Bilateral Framework

According to a 2016 report by the Syrian American Medical Society (SAMS), chemical weapons attacks have claimed the lives of 1491 victims since the outset of the Syrian civil war in 2011. The report claims 14,581 injured and a striking number of

attacks using chlorine gas, an agent that goes unregulated by the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC).

In 2013, The Obama administration threatened punitive military strikes if Bashar al-Assad did not give up Syria's chemical weapons stockpiles. After the August 2013 attacks in Ghouta, Syria in which reportedly more than 1000 people perished in a single attack using sarin gas, the Obama Administration threatened punitive airstrikes against the Syrian government forces if it did not turn over its chemical weapons and allow for full accounting to be done (Shaheen, *The Guardian*, 2016).

Shortly after this declaration, Syria agreed to join the CWC and reported 1300 metric tons of chemical weapons agents to be destroyed (Nikitin, *Progress*). The United States and Russia created a bilateral framework for facilitating the disarmament, which was carried out under very unique circumstances by a multilateral effort throughout 2014. The Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), working jointly with the UN, monitored the procedure to ensure compliance (Trapp).

This framework designed by Russia and the United States required, "expedited transport and destruction of Syria's chemical weapons far faster than any other declared stockpile to date" (Walker 9). The necessity for haste forced the CWC to change in order to accommodate the procedure. The United States provided the crucial watercraft equipped for disarming and destroying chemical weapons while Russia utilized its resources in Syria to move chemical weapons to these watercraft as well as deconstruct weapons facilities. The framework also diverged from chemical weapons seizures hitherto because it took place in a particularly hostile environments where, in some cases, inspectors came under fire (Walker 10). The chemical weapons destruction, which usually takes places relatively nearby the seizure site, had to be done outside of the conflict zone, thus transportation became a crucial elements of coordination that is not usually considered (9).

As a result of this framework, the multilateral effort eliminated 98% of Syria's declared 1308 metric tons (9). The faithful cooperation of all sides made an impression on the world about the potential effectiveness of bilateral cooperation between the United States and Russia over international conflicts. Indeed, the success of the framework contributed to the idea of creating the International Syrian Support Group in 2015, a bilateral negotiation structure chaired by the US and Russia.

Critics of this cooperative effort cite the fact that chlorine is an unregulated chemical under the CWC (Nikitin). Chemical weapons attacks inside Syria are still being reported after this framework already completed its work, many of them are using chlorine gas (SAMS, 2016). Subsequent reports have stirred closer observation of the situation in Syria, revealing "omissions and discrepancies" in Syria's chemical weapons declaration to the CWC (Nikitin). A year after negotiations were underway on September 21st, 2014, Secretary of State Kerry said that a recent OPCW report "raises serious questions about the Syrian regime's compliance with its obligations under the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) and UN Security Council Resolution 2118 as well as its willingness to continue using chemical weapons to kill or injure the people of Syria" (Kerry in Nikitin).

With such criticism, how can one be sure of the effectiveness of the bilateral framework in accomplishing its goals? In order to firmly understand this question, I must place the results of the bilateral framework within a context of absolute gains or losses. In the next section, I will define the explicit goals of the mission and pinpoint if and how its implementation fell short of expectations. I will also explore a counterfactual scenario, in which unilateral punitive airstrikes were carried out in place of bilateral cooperation in order to see how things could have gone had the framework not been implemented. As has already been made clear, the Syrian conflict is highly nuanced and has been constantly evolving since its outset. This makes it very difficult to find absolute clarity

with a counterfactual comparison because of the sheer number of factors one has to control for. Still, as my analysis will show, the counterfactual scenario helps us understand the options available to state actors and brings us closer to understanding the worth of cooperation in absolute terms.

Goal Effectiveness

According to a statement issued by the Obama administration in September 2013, the explicit goal of the bilateral framework is “the elimination of Syrian chemical weapons in a transparent, expeditious, and verifiable manner, which could end the threat these weapons pose not only to the Syrian people, but to the region and the world” (Obama, 2013). Claims of “omissions and discrepancies” in al-Assad's chemical weapons declaration along with the prolific use of unregulated chlorine gas as a weapon after the implementation of the framework point to obvious gaps in how effective the framework was in relation to its goals (Nikitin, *Progress*). The gas attack supposedly executed by the Syrian government in 2017 on the city of Khan Shaykhun, which used chemicals that are banned under the CWC and were supposedly removed from the country by the US and Russia, also points directly to the failure of the bilateral framework in ending the threat of chemical weapons in the region (BBC, 2017). If these weapons are still being used, then clearly the framework failed in relation to one of its primary goals.

However, the framework did successfully coordinate the confiscation and destruction of 98% of al-Assad's chemical stockpiles (Walker, 9). It did so quickly, efficiently, and transparently, by mobilizing the resources of major powers with differing agendas in the conflict. This means that the framework was indeed successful in regard to one of its major goals. The failures of the framework then stem from a lack of

compliance on the part of the regime, a factor multiplied by the chaos inside Syria. Whether al-Assad fully or partially relinquished his chemical stockpiles, it would be easy for him to hide illegal activity (either importing or concealing illegal chemicals) amidst a chaotic war where few international entities have real agency to monitor or control the situation inside the country. Therefore, the failure of the bilateral framework in meeting every aspect of its explicit goals is more attributable to the uniquely chaotic circumstances inside Syria than to faulty design and coordination by the US and Russia.

Counterfactual Effectiveness

The continued use of chemical weapons in Syria has brought the success of the bilateral framework into question. This analysis explores whether an alternative agreement structure (or no agreement structure) might have produced a different outcome.

In order to understand the impact that unilateral punitive airstrikes might have on the Syrian conflict, I will discuss the airstrikes carried out in Libya in 2011, which led to the ousting of Muammar Gaddafi and caused severe protest from Russia, China, and others. The events in Libya bare special relevance to the political situation in Syria because they are one major explanation for Russia's stubborn support of Syria's government, that is, as a statement against international parties meddling in a nation's domestic politics (Morris, 1270-1272).

In the case of Libya in 2011, western powers claimed the humanitarian imperative of coordinated air strikes against positions in Sirte and Tripoli. The results of these airstrikes forced Muamar Gaddafi to flee. The former leader was ultimately killed in subsequent events. Western powers who carried out these NATO airstrikes defended their decision by citing the threat of 'genocide' and the 'responsibility to protect (R2P)' (Campbell, 124). However, they have been strongly criticized by the global community,

especially Russia, for this interpretation of the R2P (125).

The international community called for an investigation into NATO's actions in Libya, citing the likelihood that NATO committed war crimes by carrying out these actions (125). NATO was also blamed for destabilizing Libya and allowing a civil war to consume the country. The Guardian published in 2011 that, "[i]f the purpose of the NATO intervention in Libya was to 'protect civilians' and save lives, it has been a catastrophic failure" (126). The death toll in Libya, which according to UN sources was between 1000 and 2000 at the time of NATO's airstrikes was up to ten times that number within eight months after Gaddafi's death (126).

If similar airstrikes were carried out by NATO in Syria, one could expect an intense international backlash that could even amount to a counterstrike measure and conflict escalation. Russia's stance against R2P in Syria, in favor of protecting the rights of sovereign leaders, can be understood as a direct reaction to NATO's actions in Libya when "Chinese and Russian officials were so upset by the overstepping that they vowed to never approve such kinds of intervention again" (Cronogue, 145).

By understanding what happened in Libya, one can see how unilateral action by a foreign power can be a very unpopular maneuver with severe ramifications for the prospects of diplomatic cooperation on the UNSC and elsewhere in the future. This is especially important considering the unanimous decision that a diplomatic solution is the only path to peace in Syria. Unilateral action from a foreign power has the potential to seriously escalate violence in a civil conflict. In the case of Syria, it can also increase mistrust between relevant parties, reducing the sharing of information and, thus, transparency surrounding the conflict. This outcome could severely damage prospects for a diplomatic peace which requires strong monitoring provisions and effective communication between parties to the conflict and their allies.

The world witnessed this counterfactual scenario in real time, after chemical

weapons were allegedly used in April of 2017 by the al-Assad regime on the city of Khan Shaykhun. The United States launched a unilateral punitive airstrike on the Shayrat Airfield, from which the chemical attack had been launched (Cronk, DoD News). The Syrian Government denied its role in the chemical attacks and Putin called the US strikes a “provocation” (RT, 2017). Although the retaliatory strike was not part of a greater US role in Syria, it did harm the diplomatic process by increasing mistrust. Relations between the US and Russia have reached a new low, leading the world to question whether they can successfully cooperate on anything (Miles, Reuters, 2017). This is important because the diplomatic peace plan outlined in the Geneva Communique requires cooperation between the US and Russia in order to be successfully carried out. If relations between these highly influential countries continue to sour, this will severely limit the ability of the UN to reach a diplomatic peace.

By comparing the counterfactual scenario of unilateral airstrikes with the bilateral framework, we can decide which strategy came closer to accomplishing the intended goal of eliminating Syria’s chemical weapons stockpiles and facilitating further international cooperation to reduce the violence in the conflict. Considering the unanimously accepted decision that a diplomatic solution is the only way to resolve the conflict in Syria, the success of the bilateral framework in nearly entirely destroying Syria’s declared chemical weapons stockpile is an obvious point in favor of the bilateral negotiation strategy. The events that transpired after both the NATO bombings in Libya and the 2017 punitive airstrikes by the US in Syria have confirmed that unilateral action on either side will increase mistrust and hurt prospects for productive dialogue.

With this perspective, the effectiveness of bilateral negotiation on the chemical weapons framework in absolute terms is clearer. Its successes not only include effective coordination to seize and destroy al-Assad's chemical weapons stockpiles, but also the subsequent creation of the ISSG as a platform for cooperation. That is, cooperation not

only facilitated an effective response to accomplish a specific and complex task, it also exposed common threads between opposing agendas, allowing the chance for future constructive cooperation.

The International Syrian Support Group Task Forces

The International Syrian Support Group (ISSG) is a multilateral negotiating body co-chaired by the United States and Russia. Its chief goal is to find a diplomatic end to the war in Syria. This body was conceived and created by joint efforts between the US, Russia, and the UN to utilize the respective leverage of each co-chair and their constituencies (RT, 2016). At its founding, the ISSG consisted of 19 member states but it has since grown to include 26 member states representing various agendas and perspectives in the conflict. The group was established after the 'Vienna Talks,' which took place in the fall of 2015. It aligns its goals with the 2012 Geneva Communiqué on Syria (The Syria Institute, 2016).

The apex of the ISSG is when the foreign ministers of member states meet. High ranking officials, including former US Secretary of State John Kerry and Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov, gather infrequently at the bequest of the UN Special Envoy or the co-chairs. The ISSG ministerial body has been convened in times of special need as a way to redistribute cooperative efforts or change strategy. For example, after the initial cease fire coordinated by the ISSG began to fall apart in April of 2016, the UN Special Envoy called for a ministerial meeting in order to strategize and relaunch the cessation of hostilities (The Syria Institute, 2016).

According to the six-point plan formulated by the UN Joint Special Envoy to Syria and the Arab League, the priorities for reaching a diplomatic solution to the conflict are increasing humanitarian access into Syria and establishing a lasting cessation of

hostilities. These priorities are designed to create a healthy environment for peace talks and eventually became the basis for the formation of the ISSG Task Forces: the Humanitarian Access Task Force (HTF) and the Cessation of Hostilities Task Force (CTF). The task forces meet weekly at the UN headquarters in Geneva. Each is co-chaired by representatives from the US and Russia and moderated by experts on behalf of the UN. The HTF and CTF began to meet in February of 2016 and continue to meet regularly today. These task forces are the subjects of this analysis. I will address each task force individually in order to deconstruct their respective successes and failures in absolute terms and then compare them to one another.

I analyze the ISSG task forces instead of the ministerial body because they meet more frequently and have more explicitly stated goals. The ISSG ministerial body has the broad goal of ending the Syrian conflict through diplomatic means, making it a less specific subject of study. The task forces, on the other hand, have specifically defined goals, which are seen as major benchmarks on the path to ending the conflict. The task forces and the ministerial meetings are highly interdependent. For example, a ministerial meeting might be called in order to relaunch a ceasefire that was negotiated by the CTF and failed to stick. Likewise, the ministerial agendas are dictated to the task forces, which negotiate in bilateral, trilateral, and multilateral meetings to achieve their goals (ISSG statement, 2016).

II. Humanitarian Access Task Force

The humanitarian crisis in Syria has existed since the start of the conflict in 2011 and only grown worse. According to the UN, as of 2016, 85 percent of the Syrian population was living in poverty. There are currently 13.5 million people in need of humanitarian or security assistance. 6.3 million people are internally displaced,

homeless and adrift in their own war-torn country. There are approximately 4.9 million people living in besieged or hard-to-reach areas.

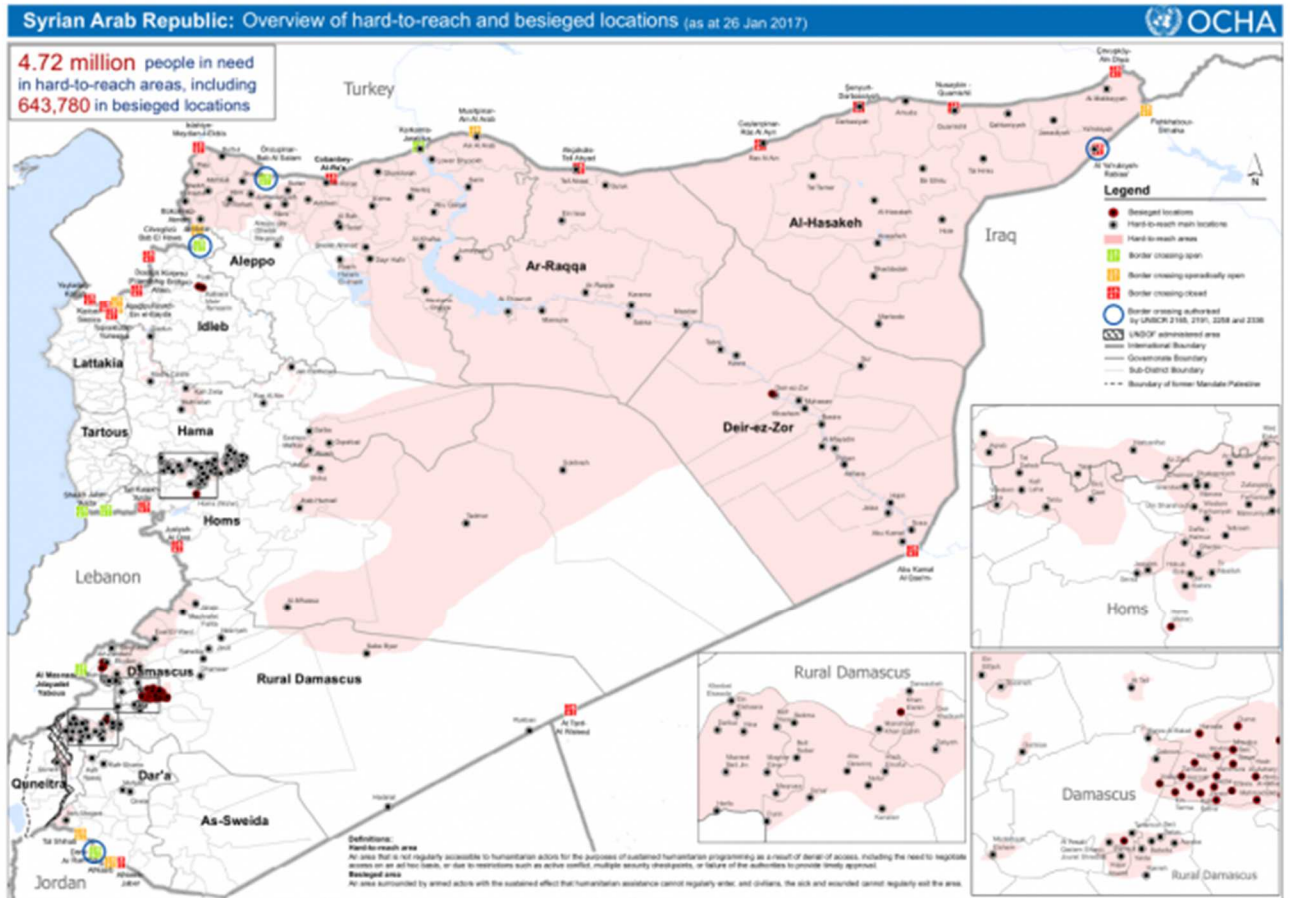
These areas are of primary concern to humanitarian access negotiations on the ISSG (ISSG statement, 2016). The UN defines “besieged areas” as areas where no aid can enter and no civilians can leave. Hard-to-reach areas are slightly less severe, representing areas where denial of access is the chief reason for a lack of aid (UN HATF cable, 2017).

There are two general categories of humanitarian aid that is coordinated by the UN in Syria: cross-border aid and local aid. Cross-border aid began after the UNSC passed resolution 2332 in 2014. This aid does not require permission from the Syrian Government because it enters the country at border crossings that are not controlled by them. Most of this aid goes to opposition controlled areas and does not require dangerous and questionable delivery methods. Both the UN and NGOs participate in cross-border aid. This aid represents a large percentage of the total aid entering Syria, but it cannot gain access to government controlled areas or besieged areas where there remain large populations of people in need (OCHA humanitarian response plan, 2016).

Local aid refers to aid that comes from within Syria itself, usually originating with the UN in Damascus. This form of aid does not cross an international border. It breaks down into two categories: the regular programs and cross-line aid. The regular programs originate in Syrian Government held territory, like Damascus, and go out to other places under Government control. This form of aid does not cross the front line of fighting and is, therefore, relatively safe and reliable. Cross-line aid, on the other hand, originates in Government controlled areas, mostly Damascus, and crosses the front line to go into contested territory. It is cross-line aid that targets besieged and hard-to-reach areas. The chief concern of the ISSG, among others, is facilitating and monitoring cross-line aid (OCHA, 2016).

Cross-line aid has been difficult and dangerous to implement. It requires permission from the Syrian Government on many levels and the guarantee of fighting groups that aid convoys will not be blocked. This guarantee has often proved to be unreliable. However, it is the only method available to the UN for gaining access to besieged and hard-to-reach areas, which the Syrian Government has proven unwilling to deliver to. As my research will show, this kind of access was virtually unattainable before the creation of the ISSG in 2016 (UNSC report 2016).

On February 12th, 2016 the ISSG ministers created the HTF in order to ensure that “all parties allow immediate and sustained humanitarian access to reach all people in need, throughout Syria, particularly in all besieged and hard-to-reach areas, as called for in UN Security Council Resolution 2254” (UN HATF cable, 2017). The word “access” is key for understanding the primary objectives of the HTF. By having allies of the Syrian Government, like Russia and Iran, in the weekly task force meetings, the UN can utilize their leverage with al-Assad to gain access for humanitarian aid to besieged and hard-to-reach areas that would otherwise have been blocked by the Government. Likewise, the UN via the HTF can coordinate with the United States’ allies among opposition forces to ensure access for people in need. *Figure 1* shows the locations of besieged and hard-to-reach areas as of January 26, 2017.



(Figure 1 – UN/ReliefWeb;2017 - a map indicating hard-to-reach and besieged areas)

Goal Effectiveness

This analysis aims to pinpoint exactly how effective the HTF has been at accomplishing its explicit goal of gaining humanitarian access to besieged and hard-to-reach areas inside Syria. Each month, the UN defines the specific number of people in need of aid deliveries in besieged or hard-to-reach areas in its request to the Government for approval of cross-line convoys. The HTF monitors implementation of the UN's monthly plan, through the contacts and leverage of member states, for humanitarian aid deliveries to those places.

The goal for humanitarian access is to reach 100 percent of people in need for any given month. This is, however, rarely possible. When the UN decides on a number, it submits it to the Syrian Government as part of a complicated and ever changing approval process (UNSC report 2016). The Syrian Government responds with the aid deliveries they are willing to allow (often cutting off significant percentages from the original number) and the process for access and delivery continues. The Syrian Government has another opportunity later in the process to inspect the cargo of aid convoys and physically remove items that it does not want to be delivered. These recalls usually consist of badly needed surgical equipment (Hopkins, The Guardian, 2016).

Figure 2 shows the total number of aid deliveries to both besieged and hard-to-reach areas compared to the intended goal for each month starting from April 2016 (just over a month after the HTF began its work) to January 2017. This data includes only cross-line aid delivered to those areas which are reached by land via aid convoy. The data does not include airdrops or airlifts. Also, because aid convoys are not used to deliver aid to ISIL controlled areas, the data only shows the aid delivered to Syrian government controlled areas. It excludes airdrops and airlifts to cities like Dayr al-Zawr, which is controlled by ISIL.

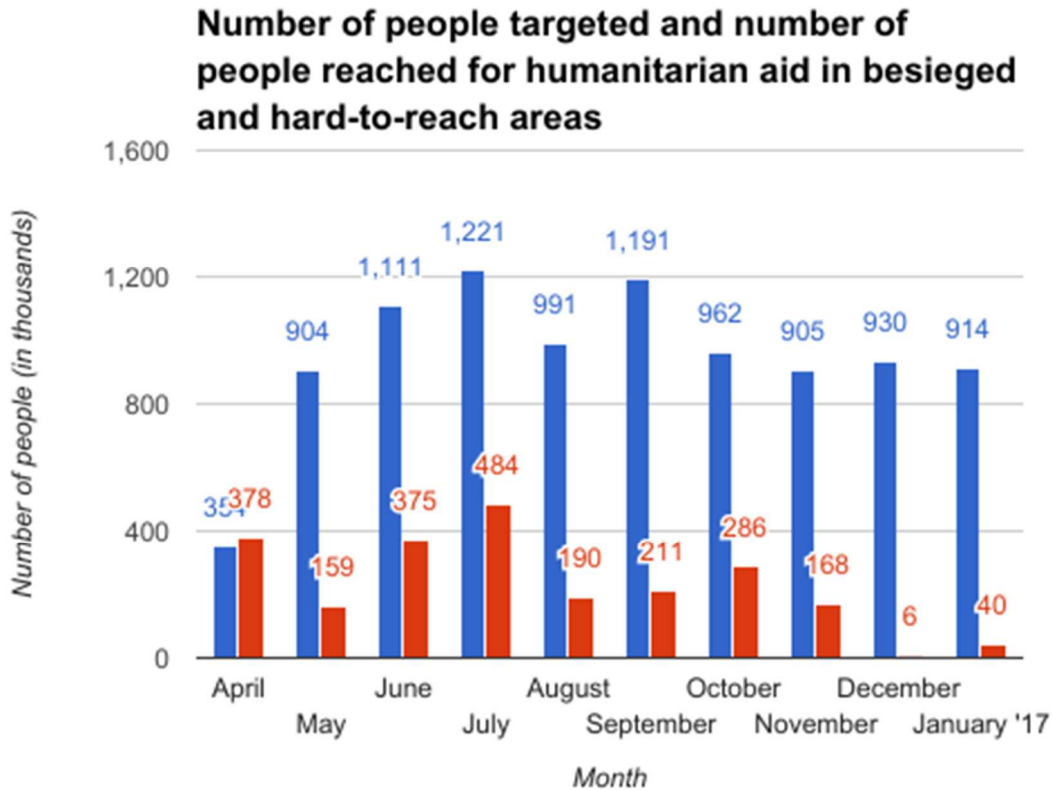


Figure 2 (number of people targeted in blue, number of people reached in red. Numbers for besieged and hard-to-reach are totaled together) (UNHATF cable, 2017)

Figure 2 shows a consistent failure to achieve the requested access. The only month indicating 100 percent of access granted is April. This near complete success in relation to the goal is misleading because it is due to a carryover in numbers from aid deliveries in March (UNHATF cable, 2017). Despite the unanimous agreement of the UNSC and the ISSG Ministers on the need for unhindered humanitarian access, there has not been a single month in which the Syrian government granted full access for the UN requested humanitarian aid. Furthermore, there is an observable drop-off in successful aid deliveries, indicating that humanitarian aid to besieged and hard-to-reach areas has dwindled significantly since November of 2016.

According to a UNSC report released in 2017, “Deliberate interference and restrictions by the parties to the conflict continued to prevent aid delivery.” Whether access is denied in the Syrian Government’s approval process or somewhere further down the line, the Syrian government represents the most significant roadblock for humanitarian missions in Syria. In addition to this, ISIL does not cooperate with the UN as a neutral bystander, which makes access to places like Dayr al-Zawr or Raqqah, which are besieged by ISIL, strictly limited to airdrops and airlifts. This method of aid delivery is far more costly and logistically complex than land convoys and is therefore less able to deliver significant, reliable humanitarian aid (WFP, web).

The UNSC report mentioned above describes attempts to gain humanitarian access from the Syrian Government for the month of December, 2016. The initial request for that month was deliveries for 930,250 people in 21 areas including besieged areas. It laments that the Syrian government approved access for 798,200 of the original number, rejecting access to 14.2 percent of the beneficiaries or 132,050 people. In addition, the report cites:

“As a result of delays in the issuance of facilitation letters, requirements for additional government and security approvals above and beyond the two steps agreed to with the Government in April, lack of adherence to agreed-upon protocols at checkpoints and insecurity, only one inter-agency convoy reached a total of 6,000 people in Khan al-Shih, Rif Dimashq [in December, 2016]”

That means that from the UN requested 930,250 people in 21 areas, only 6,000 people in two areas were reached. In addition, from the single convoy that managed to reach its goal, the Syrian Government confiscated 23,207 medical treatments ranging from pneumonia treatment kits, surgical equipment, antiseptics, and inhalers among others. This is painful evidence of the limitations imposed on cross-line humanitarian aid by factors the HTF members were supposed to be able to influence.

Critics of the UN's poor record winning access for besieged and hard-to-reach areas include 73 Syrian NGOs which backed out of the UN OCHA coordinated Whole of Syria humanitarian aid plan in September 2016 (SAMS, 2016). The NGOs signed a letter professing a mutual frustration with the UN OCHA humanitarian aid efforts, saying they were too complacent in response to Syrian government manipulations. The document criticizes the Syrian Government for non-compliance with humanitarian aid agreements and international law. It states that the UN is complicit in this manipulation by not pushing harder for Syrian compliance.

The list of NGOs that signed this treaty includes organizations like the White Helmets (Syrian Civil Defense), and the Syrian American Medical Society (SAMS), both of which receive funding from the US Government. By backing out of the Whole of Syria information sharing program, the NGOs are refusing to coordinate with UN authorities until a more agreeable mechanism is created, which excludes all political influence from the humanitarian process. Although this critique does not directly target the ISSG HTF, the group may share some of the blame.

To reiterate, humanitarian access is negotiated between the UN and the Government in Damascus and monitored in the ISSG HTF. Therefore, the bilateral US/Russia leadership has a significant politically charged agenda. Russia in particular has an interest in seeing al-Assad's sovereignty, and therefore his politics, protected, even in the humanitarian process. It is mostly Russia's leverage that the ISSG relies on to pressure the Government to provide access. However, it is naive to assume that because Russia supports al-Assad, it has the ability to control him.

In fact, the historical relationship between Russia and Syria has been one of economic collaboration, development aid, and arms deals in an atmosphere of constant uncertainty. For example, when the USSR passed UNSC resolution 242 in 1967, calling for peace and universal recognition of Israel, it was unable to convince the Ba'athist

regime in Syria to tow the same line, despite substantial economic, military, and political support (Kreutz 16). On the same note, Moscow was unable to prevent Hafez al-Assad's intervention against the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) in 1976 and 1983 or to improve Syria's relations with Iraq (also a Soviet ally).

Syria and the USSR signed the "Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation" in 1980, recognizing their strong relations and the need for "military cooperation and consultation in case of threat to the peace and security of one of the parties" (16). However, despite this gesture, the USSR was forced to "respect the policy of non-alignment pursued by Syria" (16). In the later years of the USSR, relations with Damascus were defined by close military, economic, and political ties, while Moscow struggled to exercise full control over Damascus, not wanting to lose its chief regional ally and not having any effective means at its disposal to discipline the Syrians (16). Considering this historical trend of Russian-Syrian relations, it is unsurprising that Russia should have a hard time guaranteeing the compliance of the Bashar al-Assad government today, especially considering chaotic conditions inside Syria and al-Assad's track record of poor compliance with international law.

The ISSG HTF has been unsuccessful in relation to its goal of unfettered access for humanitarian aid. However, this failure stems from extremely unreliable compliance from major parties to the conflict: the Syrian government and ISIL. The following section will continue my analysis of HTF effectiveness by positing counterfactual scenarios. The objective of this method is to see what might be if the ISSG did not exist in order to better understand what impact the group has had, if any, on improved humanitarian access.

Counterfactual Effectiveness

The previous section illustrated to what extent UN efforts via the HTF for cross-line aid to besieged and hard-to-reach areas have failed in relation to the goal of total unfettered access to people in need. In this section, I will analyze the potential impact of the HTF on improved access by positing counterfactual scenarios. The goal of this kind of analysis is to determine if even a marginal difference has been made compared to what could have been if there was no HTF or bilateral cooperation at all.

The first counterfactual is one in which there is no ISSG or HTF to work between the UN and the parties of the conflict. If this relationship did not exist, the UN mission in Syria would be missing that platform which increases transparency and the capacity of the UN to engage leverage (via the US and Russia among others) on either side of the conflict to achieve its goals. This counterfactual actually describes the situation in Syria between 2011 and 2015, before the creation of the ISSG. The UN was heavily involved in cross-line and cross-border humanitarian aid but was handicapped by its lack of leverage with parties to the conflict (UNOCHA performance report, 15). This reduced its capacity to access besieged areas with much needed aid. Humanitarian efforts also suffered from a lack of information regarding the severity of the situation inside Syria. Monitoring provisions and information sharing platforms have been slow to develop, while the conflict itself has evolved rapidly (UNOCHA, 42).

UN Secretary General reports from 2015 lament, “restriction on access and onerous administrative procedures that constrain the effective delivery of assistance” (S/2015/264). The reports cite meager numbers for access to besieged areas in each quarter of 2015. Between December of 2014 and February of 2015, for example, a report cites that less than one percent of people in need in besieged areas could be reached with food or medical aid (S/2015/206). Similar numbers were reported by

another report between June and August of the same year (S/2015/698). For some months in 2015, including February, no food deliveries of any kind reached people in besieged areas. A December of 2015 UN report cited, “[h]umanitarian access to people in besieged areas saw no improvement in 2015, with less than 1 per cent of people receiving food or non-food items per month” (S/2016/60).

Figure 3 shows successful aid deliveries to besieged areas in 2016. The data includes convoys as well as airdrops and airlifts. It is clear from this graph that for a majority of the months in 2016, access to besieged areas was greatly improved from 2015, even reaching nearly 40 percent of besieged populations in September and October. This difference in access to besieged areas suggests that coordination via the HTF did enhance the ability for cross-line convoys to reach communities in need. Unfortunately, the drop in successful access in December continued into 2017, suggesting a troubling return to the former access status quo (S/2017/339). For example, less than five percent of besieged populations were reached in March of 2017, which was actually the best month of the year so far.

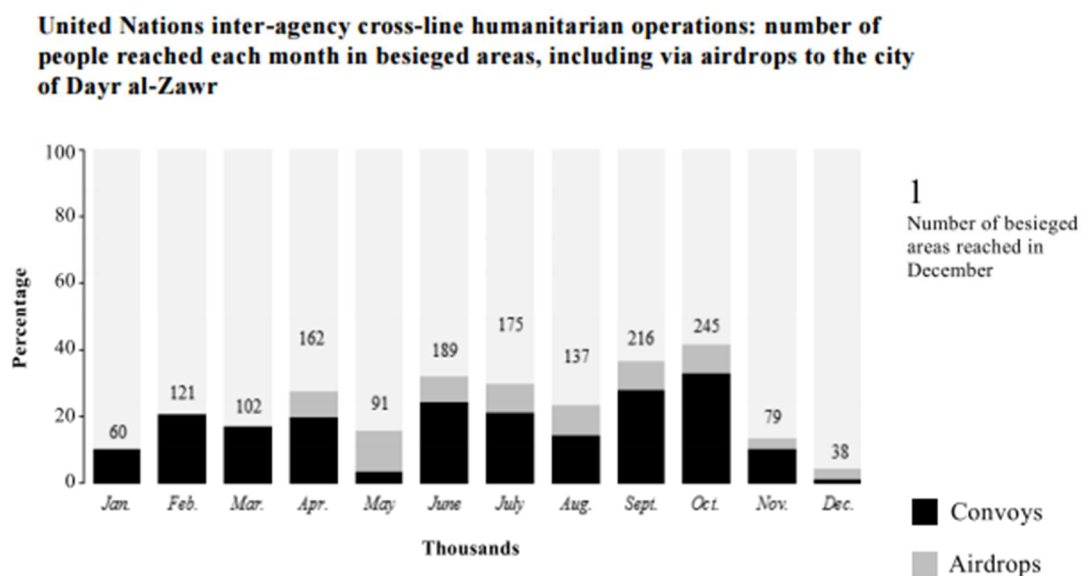


Figure 3 (UNSC report, 2016)

There are certainly many more factors beyond the presence of the HTF that are affecting whether humanitarian access is granted to besieged areas. Unfortunately, as has already been discussed, the control of access is in the hands of the Syrian Government more than any other party to the conflict. Their compliance with granting humanitarian access is historically shifty, regardless of US/Russian relations. Therefore, although this counterfactual scenario does indicate a marginal success for cooperation via the HTF, it does not represent any sort of definitive proof that said cooperation is powerful enough to overpower the agenda of the local regime.

Another possible counterfactual for gaining humanitarian aid access in Syria is one in which a unilateral mission is carried out by either the US or Russia. That means either of these powers acting alone to increase access and take some of the control away from the Syrian Government.

By having a physical military presence inside Syria and good relations with al-Assad's government, Russia has the capacity and the access to push unilaterally for cross-line humanitarian aid to besieged and hard-to-reach places. However, success is highly unlikely based on al-Assad's actions. Russia's unilateral aid efforts would only work within parameters set by the Syrian leader, as Russia strongly supports him and has historically acted only to maintain al-Assad's legitimacy. Al-Assad has little concern for the humanitarian situation in areas not controlled by or friendly to the Syrian Government, as is proven by his Government's unwillingness to allow full access for humanitarian aid. Therefore, one should likely expect little difference between the real life humanitarian quagmire and a Russian unilateral counterfactual. This situation would only reduce coordination with the US, whereby Russia would lose the advantage gained by having the US help facilitate aid deliveries with their allies in Syria.

The Syrian Government would never grant the US permission to deliver aid unilaterally, so any unilateral action by the US could be seen as an invasion of a sovereign state. The same is true of other state actors with similar interests to the US. To avoid this problem, the UNSC passed resolution 2332, allowing cross-border aid without the need for obtaining permission from the Syrian Government. However, cross-border aid does not allow access to besieged and hard-to-reach areas. Its impact is largely along the border territories which are under opposition or Kurdish control. Therefore, if the US wanted to act unilaterally to gain full humanitarian access to all areas in need, it would have to violate the sovereignty of the Syrian Government.

Such an action could take two forms. The US could mount a full scale military intervention in Syria, thus gaining access to critical areas of need by force, or it could initiate a complex and costly mission of coordinated airdrops and airlifts, requiring significant military assets to defend the flights. Either action would require a military presence beyond what is currently in place, which could be costly, risky, and explosive. Although such an action could improve humanitarian access in the short term, it would run several grave risks. The US would inevitably provoke the Syrian Government to countermeasures for such a transgressions. Those countermeasures might even include Russian military forces, which would pit US and Russian forces against each other, the outcome of which is virtually inconceivable. At the same time, a unilateral mission would be a costly enterprise for the US alone that would put US citizens at risk with no guarantee that it would bring the conflict any closer to a resolution.

After considering the counterfactuals, it is clear that cooperation via the HTF is marginally more likely to gain access to besieged areas. At the same time, this option is less risky and costly than any unilateral efforts to increase humanitarian access. Still, my analysis does not show consistent results for access because of the belligerent pursuit of a military victory by the Syrian Government and the growing presence of terrorist

groups. As the humanitarian situation exists today, cooperation for humanitarian access has been insufficient to counteract the forces of chaos and violence, which seem to grow stronger in Syria each year. It remains to be seen if the HTF can regain and maintain the momentum it had in 2016.

Conclusions

What this analysis tells us is that, although ISSG HTF efforts to increase humanitarian access have been patchy, they are still the best hope for gaining consistent humanitarian access inside Syria without escalating tensions between foreign actors. Aid deliveries to besieged areas happen at a very low rate, but what access has been granted is thanks to coordination between the US, Russia and the UN to deliver their respective constituencies.

The recent drop off in access is attributable to an ever more stubborn Syrian Government and the chaotic situation inside Syria. Despite the significant influence of the US and Russia, al-Assad has the final say on whether humanitarian efforts will be granted access. At the same time, the chaotic situation in Syria has gone beyond the means of any member of the conflict to control. The presence of countless armed groups with ever-shifting allegiances and fickle agendas has left powerful state actors helpless to react effectively without cooperation or a costly intervention.

To a certain extent, the recent drop off in humanitarian access is also a sign that Moscow has exhausted its diplomatic leverage with Damascus, despite continuing to provide military and political support to the Syrian Government (Bertrand, Business Insider). Russia appears unlikely to leverage its military support of al-Assad in order to coerce the regime into granting more access for humanitarian aid, suggesting that it is unwilling to compromise the strategic upper hand that the Syrian Government forces

have gained with Russia's help. Other influences, such as the presence of Iranian backed ground troops, also in support of the Syrian Government, might also be diluting Russia's leverage (Bertrand).

The US and Russia continue to meet weekly on the ISSG HTF. Without their cooperation, the UN would have a reduced capacity for gaining and monitoring reliable cross-line access to besieged areas. The results of cooperation on the HTF show that the US and Russia are capable of working together, even when their fundamental goals for the end of the conflict disagree. Although progress is slow, the ISSG HTF is a glimpse of the potential for political cooperation to produce positive results in a difficult environment.

III. Cessation of Hostilities Task Force

A cessation of hostilities would be a fundamental first step towards ensuring a diplomatic solution to the Syrian conflict. Understanding how the US and Russia cooperate towards this goal via the ISSG Cessation of Hostilities Task Force (CTF) is an opportunity to truly test my hypothesis. The CTF is the ultimate test of cooperation for the US and Russia because the problem it aims to solve forces divergent agendas to compromise in a way that directly impacts the outcome. A successful ceasefire is supposed to support peace talks, which determine the outcome of the conflict (Geneva Communique 2012). If those talks fail, the ceasefire fails and violence returns. Therefore, a ceasefire is a highly political compromise. Considering how many parties are involved in the Syrian conflict, establishing a ceasefire is a very difficult proposition.

According to former UN Special Envoy Kofi Annan's six-point plan, the 2012 Geneva Communique on Syria, and UNSC resolutions 2042 and 2043: "All parties must re-commit to a sustained cessation of armed violence in all its forms and implementation

of the six-point plan immediately and without waiting for the actions of others“ (Geneva Communique 2012). Despite an extensive history of diplomacy and humanitarian aid to Syria since 2012, a lasting cessation of hostilities has never been maintained. However, deeper analysis is necessary in order to determine if any substantive progress has been achieved by several ceasefire attempts and the negotiations that surrounded them. In order to analyze the effectiveness of the ISSG CTF in facilitating, maintaining, and monitoring a Syria ceasefire, it will be necessary to outline the order of major events as they occurred since 2016 with the initiation of the February 27th ceasefire.

The ISSG CTF was created because of the strong need for an international body to monitor and maintain a ceasefire in Syria. The CTF remains intact today, meeting weekly in Geneva. It has the same structural components as the ISSG HTF: 26 members co-chaired by the US and Russia and moderated by a special adviser to the UN Special Envoy. The task force has no operational arm inside Syria to do its bidding. It relies chiefly on the voluntary cooperation of armed groups as well as the leverage of its members to convince opposing sides of the conflict to stop fighting (ISSG statement, 2016).

The ceasefire of early 2016 was established with UN Security Council resolution 2254. This resolution, “acknowledges the role of the ISSG as the central platform to facilitate the United Nations’ efforts to achieve a lasting political settlement in Syria” (UNSC 2254). The resolution also acknowledges “the close linkage between a ceasefire and a parallel political process, pursuant to the 2012 Geneva Communiqué” (UNSC 2254). In the 2012 communique, a Syrian ceasefire is the first step of a plan meant to establish a transitional governing body within six months, a committee to draft a constitution, and, “free and fair elections, pursuant to the new constitution, to be held within 18 months and administered under supervision of the United Nations” (UNSC 2254).

The cessation of hostilities was implemented according to plan in that it was monitored and facilitated by the ISSG. The US and Russia, utilizing their respective leverage over armed opposition groups and the Syrian armed forces, managed to get more than 100 armed opposition groups and the Syrian Government to agree to abide by the terms of the ceasefire (Al Jazeera 28 Feb 2016). However, due to a “marbling” of terrorist and non-terrorist fighters, the armed opposition as well as civilians were victims of collateral damage in attacks by Russia or the Syrian Government trying to engage terrorist groups.

This has been a major point of contention in regards to the ceasefire. UNSC resolution 2254 contains a clause, which allows for the continuation of attacks against the terrorist groups ISIL and Jabhat al-Nusra during the ceasefire. The document notes: “the aforementioned ceasefire will not apply to offensive or defensive actions against these individuals, groups, undertakings and entities” (UNSC 2254). ISSG members are expected, under the provisions of this resolution, to coordinate information identifying such terrorist cells in order to operate cohesively to maintain the cessation of hostilities. However, despite further steps taken to strengthen US-Russian communication, this clause has been a major impediment to a lasting ceasefire.

The cessation of hostilities negotiated by the ISSG in February went into effect on February 27th and did have an immediate effect on certain aspects of the conflict. Fighting died down in particular areas, allowing for an increase in cross-line and cross-border humanitarian access (Micallef, Huffington Post). However, the provisions of resolution 2254 which allowed for continued fighting against terrorist groups including ISIL and Jabhat al-Nusra confused the cessation of hostilities by allowing fighting to continue unabated in many areas (Abboud, Al-Jazeera, 2016). Among the areas where fighting continued to rage was Aleppo, which the Syrian Government, with help from Russian air power, was attempting to take back from the opposition since 2012.

Aleppo was seen as a major strategic point of interest for both the opposition and the Syrian Government. It also contained significant populations of terrorist groups associated with ISIL or al-Qaeda, which occasionally enjoyed tactical short term cooperation with the opposition in fighting government forces. The terrorist presence created immediate tension once the ceasefire went into effect because the siege of Aleppo was allowed to continue under the guise that Russia and Syria were fighting terrorists. Russia and the Syrian Government continued to carry out strikes against opposition controlled areas, claiming that they were targeting terrorist groups. Meanwhile, the US and its allies criticized them for attacking elements of the opposition that had accepted the ceasefire (Micallef, Huffington Post).

The official statement from the ISSG ministerial talks in Vienna in May, 2016 reflects their response to the notable failure of the February cessation of hostilities. Since the initiation of the ceasefire in February, Russia accused the US of allowing the flow of fighters, weapons, and financial support to continue into Aleppo, claiming that these resources were going to terrorist groups identified in UNSC resolution 2254. Meanwhile, the US accused Russia of indiscriminate bombing of opposition forces as well as civilians and medical facilities. The official ISSG statement notes “growing civilian casualties in recent weeks,” including attacks on hospitals, and re-asserts that this is completely unacceptable behavior for any member of the agreement. The statement also acknowledges the raging debate over who is violating the provisions of the ceasefire (ISSG statement, May 2016).

The US and Russia released a joint statement on May 9th. It notes each side’s commitment to address the critical failures identified by the ISSG so that the ceasefire can occur in earnest. In the statement, both the US and Russia recognize “the progress that has been made with respect to the cessation of hostilities (CoH) in Syria, in accordance with our Joint Statement of February 22, 2016, and in improving

humanitarian access.” Both countries reaffirm their commitment to the cessation of hostilities and outline new terms for further cooperation. The US demands that both sides, “work with the Syrian authorities to minimize aviation operations over areas predominantly inhabited by civilians or parties to the cessation.” Russia requests “the United States’ commitment to intensifying its support and assistance to regional allies to help them prevent the flow of fighters, weapons, or financial support to terrorist organizations across their borders” (Joint Statement US-Russia, May 2016).

As these statements make clear, by May of 2016, the collapse of the cessation of hostilities was nearly complete. The results of the February 2016 ceasefire would largely be a greater awareness on the part of the negotiators about how to facilitate and negotiate an ultimate end to the conflict. Still, a significant opportunity was lost. Disjointed efforts to regain a meaningful cessation of hostilities continued through the summer of 2016 while Russian and Syrian Government bombings of Aleppo and other areas continued.

The ceasefire was restarted in September of 2016, coinciding with the Muslim holiday Eid al-Adha (Al-Jazeera, Sept. 2016). Like the February ceasefire, it was monitored and facilitated by the US and Russia via the ISSG and followed the structure laid out in UNSC resolution 2254. That means that this ceasefire also allowed aggressive or defensive acts to continue against ISIL or Jabhat al-Nusra. Both the Syrian Government and the rebel forces signed onto the deal. However, al-Assad proclaimed in a public address after religious services on the holiday: "The Syrian state is determined to recover every area from the terrorists," and that the army would continue its work, "without hesitation, regardless of any internal or external circumstances" (Perry, Reuters, 2016). At the same time, opposition forces criticized the ceasefire deal, stating that the logistics regarding attacks on terrorists groups would spark violence towards the opposition itself and contribute to the collapse of the

agreement (Al-Jazeera, Sept. 2016). The provisions of the ceasefire described how the US and Russia would coordinate militarily to target mutual enemies and reduce the confusion that plagued the February ceasefire (Al-Jazeera).

The ceasefire was unpopular among the opposition from the beginning. Major opposition groups including the Free Syrian Army publicly criticized the plan shortly before it came into effect, calling it “unjust” and all but rejecting it (Al-Jazeera). By mid-September, the ceasefire had collapsed, with Russia citing more than 55 instances of opposition aggression and 12 civilian deaths (and growing) since its beginning (BBC Sept. 2016). Then, on September 19th, a UN aid convoy was targeted by an aerial strike for the first time. At least 18 of the 31 trucks in the convoy were obliterated, with no obvious perpetrators named (Perry, Reuters, 2016). This tragic act was the final blow on the September ceasefire. Russia blamed the US for not putting enough pressure on its coalition to comply with the terms of the ceasefire. The US blamed Russia for indiscriminate bombing and not doing enough to ensure compliance from the Syrian Government. In short, little had changed for the better since February.

In late 2016, Russia proposed a new regime of bilateral talks, this time only with Turkey and Iran, to be held in Astana, Kazakhstan. The Astana process was meant to rekindle the ceasefire. A ceasefire was successfully restarted by this group which hangs by a thread today (Alkhshali, CNN, 2017). These efforts were never meant to replace the Geneva peace process, rather to rekindle and sustain a ceasefire (Al-Jazeera, Feb. 2017). It remains to be seen if these diplomatic vehicles are capable of jumpstarting a productive dialogue to end the conflict.

Goal Effectiveness

This narrative makes clear the lack of overall success enjoyed by the ISSG CTF in maintaining a lasting cessation of hostilities. This failure is due to a plethora of conditions pertaining to the situation inside Syria: the allegiances of armed groups, the classification of those groups as terrorist or non-terrorist, and the national interests of individual state actors including Russia and the US. Indeed, it is safe to say that Russia/US cooperation to advance a ceasefire has fallen short of expectations set by the UN.

When comparing between the ISSG Task Forces, it is apparent that the HTF has been more effective in relation to its goal. There is simply less to show for ceasefire efforts than for efforts to gain humanitarian access. However, it is important to understand that humanitarian access and a cessation of hostilities are very different problems.

Establishing a lasting ceasefire, especially in a conflict with so many actors, is a very difficult task. Scholarship suggests that negotiated peace deals have a greater rate of failure than wars that end with military victory (DeRouen et al., 334). This tendency has to do with state actors' capacity and willingness to implement a peace deal. There is a questionable history of the success of UNSC negotiated ceasefire deals and a lack of clarity about their legally binding nature, especially concerning non-state actors (Henderson, 372).

Considering the complex web of actors in the Syrian conflict, it is understandable that the Syrian Government, although it agreed to the terms of Kofi Annan's six-point plan in 2012, suffers from a limited capacity or willingness to ensure a peace deal is followed. At the same time, its patchy compliance is evidence that it will place its own sovereignty above the wishes of the international community, even its own allies.

Russia, which possesses significant military leverage in Syria, has rarely utilized it to coerce al-Assad into compliance. It mostly relies on diplomatic leverage, which al-Assad only heeds as far as it suits his own interests. With these realities in mind, it is unsurprising that the process of establishing a ceasefire is slower going than the process to gain humanitarian access.

The CTF has failed in relation to its goals of establishing a lasting ceasefire. In the following section, I will examine the first ceasefire effort in 2012 as a counterfactual scenario in order to determine what lessons were learned from that experience and see if they helped, harmed, or did not affect the effectiveness of subsequent ceasefires. We cannot say that the CTF has been successful in relation to its goal, but perhaps it represents progress on the path to a diplomatic peace.

Counterfactual Effectiveness

Efforts to establish a lasting ceasefire in Syria have been unsuccessful. However, this does not necessarily make US/Russian cooperation on the CTF frivolous. Despite the obvious failure of these efforts so far, it is reasonable to say that establishing a lasting ceasefire is a process and lessons have been learned with each attempt that inform later efforts for a more effective ceasefire. This section poses the ceasefire attempt of 2012 as a counterfactual and compares it to later attempts in 2016 in order to determine if there was observable improvement in its effectiveness due to lessons learned.

UNSC resolution 2042 represented the first attempt to create a cessation of hostilities in Syria. It was passed together with Kofi Annan's peace plan in April 2012. In order to monitor the progress of this initial ceasefire, the UNSC employed observers to monitor and report on the activities of the ceasefire (The Guardian, May 2012). These

observers were purposely positioned in hot-spots in order to be candid witnesses to ceasefire violations in locations where they were likely to occur.

The ceasefire did reduce violence for a time on the ground. According to a UN report in July, 2012, “[t]he cessation of hostilities... seemed to have a dampening effect in the areas where observers were deployed” (S/2012/523). However, the first sporadic ceasefire violations began shortly thereafter and became more frequent with time. Observers proved valuable for reporting what was happening inside Syria, but were at significant risk in an ever worsening conflict environment (S/2012/523). An increasingly dangerous and environment created the need for an alternative method for collecting accurate and consistent information about what was going on inside Syria. Yet, for a time, the UN had to put up with a severely limited view (S/2012/523). This experience showed the importance of having reliable information sharing that does not place observers at risk.

The failure of this ceasefire also confirmed the need for stronger pressure on either side of the conflict. Kofi Annan, in the announcement of his resignation from the post of UN Special Envoy to Syria in August, 2012, confirmed this observation when he stated that, “without serious, purposeful and united international pressure, including from the powers of the region, it is impossible for me, or anyone, to compel the Syrian government in the first place, and also the opposition, to take the steps necessary to begin a political process” (NY Times, Aug. 2012). What Annan referred to is exactly what the ISSG and its Task Forces are designed to be: a platform for “purposeful and united international pressure, including from the powers of the region.”

The ISSG CTF was established more than three years after the 2012 ceasefire. It addresses the failures of 2012 by providing a necessary instrument for monitoring and facilitation that has the capacity to constructively engage both sides of the conflict through representative member states. The ISSG CTF is also very flexible by design,

which allows it to adapt to the conditions of the conflict and diplomatic environment without having to start over with each ceasefire attempt. Another platform meant to play a similar role is the Astana process trilateral monitoring group. It was established in December of 2016 to monitor and facilitate the ceasefire negotiated in Astana by Russia, Iran, and Turkey. This trilateral group is similar to the CTF in structure because it is led by parties from either side of the conflict (Turkey on one side, Russia and Iran on the other) who can engage leverage with both the opposition and the Syrian Government.

So has the presence of the CTF or the trilateral monitoring group improved chances for a lasting ceasefire? It is already clear from my analysis of goal effectiveness that neither group has been effective in relation to its goal. Still, there are subtle indications that having a group like the CTF increases the chances for a lasting ceasefire.

The February 2016 ceasefire also had a dampening effect on conflict areas throughout Syria. Various sources reported, “the number of military activities and air strikes has decreased significantly” (S/2016/272). However, the UN was never able to ensure complete compliance from any party to the conflict. UN reports from February and March of 2016 laud the increase in humanitarian access but can only cite ceasefire violations with no obvious sign that anything more than a temporary reduction in violence was taking place (S/2016/272).

Despite there being no lasting reduction in violence, there was more significant agency on the part of international actors to re-coordinate their strategy and try again. In 2012, the UN could only withdraw its observers and watch the situation in Syria worsen. In 2016, the ISSG co-chairs were in direct communication via the CTF. A joint statement issued by the US and Russia in May of 2016 shows their cooperative reaction to ceasefire violations:

“Recognizing challenges related to the COH in certain areas the co-chairs have re-emphasized the terms of the COH with field commanders on all sides, especially in Aleppo, Eastern Ghouta, and Latakia, where we are determined to improve and sustain the COH. We are using our influence with the COH parties on the ground to press them to abide by the COH, refrain from disproportionate responses to provocations and demonstrate restraint” (Joint Statement US-Russia, May 2016).

Russia promised to “work with the Syrian authorities to minimize aviation operations over areas that are predominantly inhabited by civilians or parties to the cessation” (Joint Statement, 2016). Likewise, the US promised its commitment “to intensify its support and assistance to regional allies to help them prevent the flow of fighters, weapons, or financial support to terrorist organizations across their borders” (Joint Statement, 2016). These efforts proved unable to produce a lasting ceasefire in 2016, but they did inform future ceasefire attempts.

In December, Russia, Turkey, and Iran agreed to relaunch a ceasefire as part of the Astana platform. The ceasefire, which went into effect on December 31, 2017, had a similar temporary dampening on the conflict with persistent fighting in many areas. However, these powers have agree to establish de-escalation zones in 2017, representing the first time that a ceasefire in Syria has had concrete geographic borders. A memorandum published by Russia, Turkey, and Iran describes the need for observation posts and checkpoints to “ensure compliance with the provisions of the ceasefire agreement” (Memorandum, May 2017). At the same time, the new agreement will unite the military presence of its members in the continued fight against terrorist groups like the Nusra Front and ISIL (Memorandum).

A lack of geographically defined borders has been cited as a major weakness of previous attempts (Al-Jazeera, Feb, 2016). As was previously described, there is little consensus between the US and Russia over how to engage terrorist groups under the

terms of a ceasefire, especially because they are intermixed with opposition forces. This is why some have argued for more strictly defined geographic zones where fighting is permissible. The de-escalation zones in the ceasefire plan drawn up in Astana are informed by previous failures to physically control where fighting is allowed to continue and where it is not.

The US, although it is not a direct participant in negotiations or a party to the agreement, issued a statement in support of the plan, stating: “We appreciate the efforts of Turkey and the Russian Federation to pursue this agreement and have encouraged the Syrian opposition to participate actively in the discussion despite the difficult conditions on the ground” (Nauert, DoS, 2017). The success of this plan is yet to be seen, but its structure and information sharing mechanisms suggest that concrete lessons have been learned from past attempts that are informing new efforts to establish a ceasefire.

One guarantee of future ceasefire plans is the inclusion of the CTF or a group like it in order to give parties to the conflict a platform for monitoring the ceasefire to increase transparency and compliance. Groups like the CTF provide a critical platform for meeting the monitoring needs of a ceasefire and engaging leverage on either side to increase compliance. If there is to be a diplomatic peace, it will require a ceasefire. If there is to be a ceasefire, it will need a platform like the CTF that can use leverage and increase transparency to bring parties to the conflict to accountability and compliance.

This counterfactual analysis does not definitively indicate increased effectiveness in subsequent ceasefire attempts. However, it does indicate that each ceasefire attempt is instructive to international negotiators and informs decision making which changes state behavior. Establishing a lasting ceasefire in an entrenched conflict where so many combatants refuse to stop fighting is not a problem that can be solved without trial and

error. Therefore, I argue that bilateral efforts to establish a ceasefire have not been entirely futile and hope remains for their success.

Conclusions

US/Russian cooperation via the ISSG CTF has failed to produce a lasting ceasefire in Syria. The primary contribution of their cooperation on this problem is informing subsequent efforts in order to advance the effectiveness of ceasefire efforts. Establishing a ceasefire is a process. It has evolved a great deal since the issuance of Kofi Annan's plan in 2012. The ISSG CTF is a part of that evolution, but it is not the ultimate end. I argue that such a group is entirely necessary for establishing a lasting ceasefire because of its capacity for monitoring and engaging leverage on either side of the conflict.

The US and Russia are still co-chairs of the CTF, which has taken a backseat to the trilateral body monitoring the Astana ceasefire. Their cooperation informed the peace process about the importance of information sharing between opposing sides. However, it did not improve ceasefire compliance or duration. Cooperation between Turkey, Russia, and Iran on the Astana platform has not proven any more effective at accomplishing ceasefire goals. This suggests that failure to implement a lasting ceasefire stems from the nature of the problem itself more than the ability of international actors to cooperate. Each ceasefire was honored with sporadic promises from the parties of the conflict to comply, which quickly fizzled back into violence. Al-Assad himself has openly criticized ceasefire efforts and clearly favors a military solution to the conflict (Miles, Reuters, 2017). Still, international actors of conflicting allegiances have displayed their commitment to establishing a ceasefire. Only time will tell if these efforts are futile.

In conclusion, I believe that this particular case study offers a great deal of perspective about the limitations of cooperation as well as its potential. On one hand, the US and Russia roundly failed more than once to implement a lasting ceasefire. On the other hand, as their joint statement of May 9th, 2016 shows, they displayed consistent commitment to a diplomatic peace by increasing their bilateral interactions via the ISSG. This kind of interaction is significantly more productive than no interaction because it provides a means for opposing agendas to be reconciled and meet common goals. Their cooperative engagement with Syria's toughest problems is far from finished. Based on my analysis, I am confident that these nations will continue to adapt their cooperation on the road to a lasting peace in Syria.

CHAPTER III
COMPARING BETWEEN THE CASE STUDIES

	<i>Goal effectiveness*</i>	<i>Counterfactual effectiveness</i>	<i>Findings</i>
Chemical Weapons bilateral framework	Strong Continued chemical weapons use in Syria seriously reduces the relevance of these results.	Best alternative for substantive results while maintaining healthy environment for cooperation.	-When goals align cooperation is significantly more effective. -Unilateral action greatly harms diplomacy.
ISSG HTF	Moderate Poor compliance record aided by chaotic environment. Effectiveness percentage for 2017 is much worse.	-Avoids escalation from unilateral mission. -Bilateral cooperation (2016) gets more access than multilateral (2015).	-Goals align=more effective. -Unilateral action=harmful/costly -Bilateral cooperation and information sharing can improve UN aid access. -Bilateral cooperation cannot guarantee compliance, but it is better than nothing
ISSG CTF	Weak -Poor compliance record aided by chaotic environment. -Conflicting rules of engagement under ceasefire reduces effectiveness. -Ceasefire closely linked to peace deal, highly political issue.	A ceasefire will be more effective with: -Information sharing and monitoring -Geographic borders -influence with opposing sides	-Ceasefire is a harder problem than humanitarian access. -Goals diverge=less effective cooperation. -Definitions diverge=less effective cooperation. -Having a cooperative platform is essential -Lack of success is due to problem structure as much as cooperative failures.

Figure 4

The case studies cover a selection of different problems in regard to the Syrian conflict. They represent different cooperative strategies and different outcomes. In this section, I will compare my findings from each case study in order to determine concrete factors which helped or harmed cooperation. The purpose of this comparison is to gain insights about what factors are likely to make Russian/US cooperation more effective and what factors have the opposite effect. *Figure 4* highlights some of the findings that will be discussed in this section, in order to help the reader compare between each case study.

The effectiveness of the chemical weapons bilateral framework in relation to its goal was very high. The US and Russia, with help from other nations, did successfully remove and destroy nearly 100 percent of al-Assad's reported chemical weapons, making this case study the most successful example from the three. However, as noted in *Figure 4*, the continued use of chemical weapons in Syria eclipses the success of this cooperative effort, suggesting that the Syrian Government did not comply with the rules of the CWC or pressure from its Russian allies.

Compared to the counterfactual scenarios of unilateral or multilateral action, however, it is clear that the bilateral framework was the best option for delivering results while also preserving a healthy environment for continued humanitarian cooperation in Syria. This perspective makes clear that unilateral action in a conflict with so many conflicting agendas, even for a humanitarian cause, is likely to escalate tension and will work against future cooperative efforts. Multilateral action, on the other hand, does not create enough pressure to ensure compliance from the parties to the conflict, who are desperate for self-preservation and incentivized to break international laws in order to stay alive.

The fact that both the US and Russia, along with their allies, were in agreement about the goals of the bilateral framework is a major reason why operations were successful. By designing and implementing the framework, these countries aligned their agendas over this particular issue and were able to overcome problems that have plagued other cooperative efforts for peace in Syria. A major reason why the US and Russia were able to agree on the terms of the framework was that it did not directly impact the outcome of the conflict. That is, they did not have to reconcile their fundamental differences in agenda in order to successfully carry out their bilateral mission. At the same time, the normative significance for both the US and Russia in the eyes of world incentivized them to cooperate faithfully.

The ISSG HTF was much less effective than the chemical weapons framework in relation to its monthly goals for aid deliveries. However, it still enjoyed some success in gaining access to besieged and hard-to-reach areas that were virtually unreachable before. The difficulties experienced by this group in reaching their monthly goals are mostly attributable to a lack of compliance from the Syrian Government in allowing aid convoys full access to communities in need.

There are many who blame the lack of humanitarian access on Russia for not exercising enough leverage with the Syrian Government to ensure compliance. Although this argument has merit, it over estimates the influence Russia has with the Syrian Government, especially considering the fact that many aid convoys are delayed, deterred, or ransacked at armed checkpoint with unreliable accountability to Damascus, let alone Moscow (UNSC report, 2017). The chaotic conflict situation inside Syria greatly contributes to the difficulties experienced by the HTF in guaranteeing access.

Compared to counterfactual scenarios describing humanitarian access achieved unilaterally, via rampant airdrops or outright military intervention, or access achieved without the support of the ISSG HTF, it is clear that the Task Force does legitimately

improve access to besieged and hard-to-reach areas without compromising the potential for continued US/Russia cooperation. Although access is sporadic and largely dependent on the interests of the Syrian Government, it has improved to conflict hot spots where many people are still in need of regular aid.

Airdrops coordinated via the HTF to the city of Dayr al-Zawr offer an interesting observation of cooperation for humanitarian access, which corroborates some of my findings. Dayr al-Zawr is besieged by ISIL, which is a mutual enemy of the US, Russia, and the Syrian Government. The goals of these conflicting parties are actually united against ISIL and this greatly increases humanitarian access because all parties are more likely to cooperate with each other. Although humanitarian access is less political than a ceasefire, it is still controversial as neither side wants aid to end up in the hands of its enemies. As most besieged areas are occupied by the opposition and besieged by Syrian Government forces, al-Assad is unwilling to allow full access. In the case of Dayr al-Zawr, the aid being delivered is going to civilians loyal to the Syrian Government, making al-Assad's compliance in reaching them more reliable.

As of August 22nd, 2016, the World Food Program (WFP) had successfully performed 100 air drops of much need supplies into the city of Dayr al-Zawr. Deliveries were momentarily halted in 2017 due to advances by ISIL but soon resumed and continue to keep the 110,000 residents of the city adequately supplied (WFP, online source). These operations benefit from cooperation between the US and Russia via the HTF by providing the WFP with the capacity to perform this highly specialized maneuver on a regular basis with a good success rate (UNSC resolution 2268). Considering the example of Dayr al-Zawr it is clear that the success of cooperative efforts is greatly improved by a cohesive and well defined agenda between cooperative partners. This suggests that even highly competitive powers like the US and Russia can cooperate effectively if they share common interests.

The ISSG CTF has been the least effective of my case studies in relation to its goal of facilitating, maintaining, and monitoring a lasting cessation of hostilities. The problems with this cooperative effort begin with the fact that a ceasefire is a very hard thing to establish through diplomatic means without an enforcement body. This problem is augmented in Syria because of the plethora of actors involved with diverging agendas. Compliance from various groups on both sides of the conflict has been extremely difficult to ensure for long. This problem is caused by unclear definitions between the opposing sides over how to engage ISIL and Jabhat al-Nusra. A ceasefire has also failed to stick because it is directly linked in the peace plan to holding peace talks and determining the outcome of the conflict. This nuance makes a ceasefire highly political and, thus, highly controversial and fragile.

Compared to a counterfactual scenario in which the UN attempts to establish a ceasefire without a body to monitor for violations and engage leverage from either side of the conflict, the presence of the CTF becomes more understandable. The contribution made by this body towards a lasting ceasefire and successful peace process is small but promising. It is important to understand the peace process as, indeed, a process. At the present moment, it is far from complete, but by looking at ceasefire efforts from 2012 a progression in tactics is evident, which has produced positive results. For example, information sharing and monitoring on the CTF has proved more effective as a lasting tool than the UN observers deployed in 2012, which were placed in serious danger and produced a more limited perspective on what was happening.

Considering the close link in the Geneva Communique of 2012 between a ceasefire and the peace process, it is only natural that there be a platform for maintaining a ceasefire that represents agendas on both sides of the conflict. Such a body is required if a diplomatic solution is to be found in Syria, because only this structure can utilize leverage from each side to bring the parties to the conflict to

negotiate. This means that, although greater unity regarding how the conflict is defined is essential for a successful peace process, it is, in fact, the opposing agendas represented on the CTF that make the body effective has an instrument for leverage.

Diverging agendas make cooperation harder, especially when dealing with a problem like a ceasefire that impacts the outcome of the conflict. Diverging definitions also reduce chances for successful cooperation. The trials of the CTF and the peace process in Syria illustrate just how important it is to find common ground when working towards a solution. However, information sharing and bargaining between opposing sides on the CTF is a fundamental part of allowing peace talks to occur. This analysis of US/Russian cooperation on the CTF illustrates an interesting paradox in which the basic polarity of the negotiators is necessary structure within the peace process.

BILATERALISM VERSUS MULTILATERALISM

The distinction between bilateral and multilateral cooperation is important to understand when analyzing how the US and Russia have cooperated in Syria. According to Keohane, the nominal definition of multilateralism is, “the practice of co-ordinating national policies in groups of three or more states” (Keohane in Ruggie, 565). That is, the simplest explanation is that multilateralism entails cooperation between groups of three or more states where bilateralism includes only two states. However, John Gerard Ruggie insists that this definition does not address the qualitative characteristics of multilateralism. He concurs with William Diebold on the need to distinguish between a nominal definition of multilateralism and a qualitative dimension of the term, citing: “the issue is not the number of parties so much, Diebold suggests, as it is the kind of relations that are instituted among them” (Ruggie 566).

According to Ruggie, multilateralism organizes a group of three or more states “on the basis of ‘generalized principles of conduct’” (571). By “generalized principles of conduct,” Ruggie is referring to a set of rules akin to traffic laws, in which a certain action is stipulated for a given situation and this applies to all participating members in the institution (571). An example of this principle might be the obligation of states participating in a multilateral collective security agreement such as NATO to come to the aid of an ally no matter what their individual interests are in that scenario (571).

Bilateralism, according to Ruggie, offers a more tailored approach to treaty structure, which is more akin to a traditional alliance (571). This approach to negotiations allows for a case-by-case approach, which relies on flexibility to tailor needs to very specific problems. Thus, where a multilateral agreement is based on general obligations that apply across all member states, a bilateral agreement is based on obligations that apply to particular states to fit the needs of a particular problem.

This distinction is significant to diplomatic negotiations on Syria because the most impactful element of each of my case studies is bilateral, according to Ruggie’s definition. At the same time, these bilateral structures have replaced a multilateral structure that failed to produce results. For example, the Chemical Weapons Convention, a multilateral international agreement to eliminate the use of chemical weapons, has been soundly violated by al-Assad multiple times since 2011. This failure enraged the international community and galvanized the US and Russia to initiate a bilaterally organized seizure of Syria’s chemical weapons stockpile. The CWC relies on predetermined rules that apply equally to all treaty members. Syria was not a member of this treaty before 2013. When it became a member as a part of the weapons seizure process, the CWC itself was unable to carry out operations to confiscate and destroy al-Assad’s chemical weapons. That is when the OPCW was created and the highly

specialized bilateral framework was implemented and executed to perform the necessary tasks.

The Geneva Communique on Syria and UNSC resolutions 2042 and 2043 are multilateral, according to Ruggie's definition, because they require all parties to the conflict to adhere equally to the same steps for de-escalation, regardless of their individual preferences: "All parties must re-commit to a sustained cessation of armed violence in all its forms and implementation of the six-point plan immediately and without waiting for the actions of others" (G Communique 2012). This multilateral treaty has been a failure precisely because it could not take into account neither the polarizing agendas of various state actors nor the increasingly complex and chaotic conditions inside Syria. For example, debate over the structure and goals of the transitional governing body meant that the Geneva Communique could not simply be followed equally by all sides. Thus, the ISSG was created as a more specialized instrument with bilateral and trilateral components between the US and Russia (at times including other group members) in order to facilitate and monitor the peace process in Syria.

The ISSG task forces are multilateral in structure with bilateral characteristics that make them more flexible. The 26 member body is united by the "generalized principles" stipulated in the six-point plan, the 2012 Geneva Communique, and UNSC resolution 2042 and 2043, among others. That is, the group is committed to a diplomatic solution to the Syrian conflict and agrees unanimously on the process to get there. However, the ISSG is co-chaired by the US and Russia, giving them leadership roles that go beyond the responsibilities of other members. The US and Russia assume a leadership position because of their significant leverage with their respective constituencies inside Syria. The US can bring the opposition to the bargaining table while Russia can bring the Syrian government. In this feature alone, the specificity of a bilateral structure is evident.

A bilateral structure seems to be the preferred mechanism for meaningful cooperation between the US and Russia in Syria. A multilateral structure does not provide the flexibility these powers require to compromise, reconcile their differences, and act. Indeed, a common feature of all of the case studies is US/Russia leadership. There is strong evidence to suggest that equal footing, and even equal leadership roles are necessary features of any meaningful cooperation between the US and Russia. This necessity is caused by the unique history between these powers, including their Cold War legacy. It is also caused by individual characteristics of both the US and Russia regarding ideologies and how they perceive the mission itself. This nuance highlights, once again, the paradox of cooperation between these states. They are highly competitive and often have disagreeing positions. This can actually make them more effective as cooperative partners, because they possess complimentary leverage and a strong incentive to co-lead in order to ensure a fair balance of their opposing influences.

CHAPTER IV

FINAL REMARKS

Time will tell how much the US and Russia can accomplish through cooperation. Although evidentiary and qualitative analysis yields uncertain results about the overall effectiveness of US/Russia cooperation in Syria, their perseverance and leadership in various cooperative efforts speak to their fertile capacity for cooperation when conditions are right. The case studies corroborate this observation and offer clues about what features of cooperation might be more conducive to the US and Russia working together.

Based on my observations, cooperative features that are more likely to increase US/Russia capacity for cooperation include: a bilateral agreement structure (preferably with US and Russian leadership), complimentary capacities in the problem, and strong monitoring provisions with high transparency. That is, if the US and Russia are cooperating bilaterally so that the capacity of their partnership is increased by their equal participation and the international community is witness to their joint efforts, then they will be more likely to continue cooperating. Where this gets tricky is when their complimentary capacities, represented in my research by the different but equally important leverage that the US and Russia have in Syria, stem from conflicting agendas. Conflicting agendas tend to reduce the effectiveness of negotiations. However, a paradox of bilateral cooperation is that conflicting agendas actually increase the importance of having a bilateral negotiating platform that can provide an environment for unifying those agendas.

The case studies also show in what way cooperation can be made more effective. They demonstrate that US/Russian cooperation today tends to be more successful when: goals are aligned and non-political, definitions are cohesive, and

transparency is high. That is, if they can agree on the details of what exactly they are trying to accomplish while also agreeing on how to define aspects of the conflict (i.e. parties to the conflict as terrorist or non-terrorist), then efforts will not be bogged down by conflicting national interests or divergent political agendas. In the case of humanitarian access, the conflicting national interests do not directly reduce access because the US and Russia are in agreement on the need for access to besieged and hard-to-reach areas as well as where those places are and how it should be done. In establishing a cessation of hostilities, on the other hand, there are fundamental differences between how each side confronts a terrorist group, which relate directly to the national interests of each party and are therefore highly politically charged issues. Cooperation is less likely to be effective in this case.

According to George Kennan, cooperation is possible when it serves the interests of the Soviet Union and their socialist ideals. He writes: “When there is something the Russians want from us, one or the other of these features of their policy, [anti-western, anti-capitalist], may be thrust temporarily into the background; and when this happens there will always be Americans who will leap forward with gleeful announcements that ‘the Russians have changed...’” (858). His observation has been echoed today regarding Putin’s Russia and its actions in relation to the West. Angela Stent, in discussing contemporary Russia, asserts that America plays a key role in Russia reaching its foreign policy goals (*Limits*, 264). Therefore, it is not surprising that their cooperation is both necessary and selective when it suits the national interests of each state. Stent admits that this dynamic, although antagonistic a times, can also manifest constructive partnerships (264).

Considering the case studies, I argue that the reasons for Russia/US cooperation over Syria today are highly nuanced and their success is dependent on numerous factors. I assert that it is an over simplification to assume a competitive relationship

precludes cooperation. National interests certainly have a significant influence on either side, but the lack of ideological contrast between each side, as well as the international representation of parties to the peace process, moves the reasoning beyond cryptic opportunism to a more internationally accountable and progressive cooperation.

Therefore, although it is important to understand how the US and Russia are pushing their own national agendas in regards to Syria, this is not the only valence for understanding their cooperation. In this respect, it is incomplete and slightly pompous to assert that the motivations for US/Russian cooperation during the Cold War have been transplanted to the 21st century without taking into account the full complexity of today's world, and specifically the Syrian conflict, in comparison with Kennan's time.

Another somewhat tangential but altogether important observation that can be made regarding the case studies is how to improve US/Russia cooperative efforts towards a lasting ceasefire. Cooperative progress towards this goal was slowest of all the case studies by far, but my research did yield observations about how to improve it. In order to ensure greater compliance and a longer lasting ceasefire, the US and Russia, along with their cooperative partners, need to reach an agreement on who specifically to target as a terrorist group and where specifically to target them. They then need to act in unison as the ceasefire goes into effect with the relevant parties to the conflict to engage the enemy in that area alone. This plan calls for a highly synchronized military assault on terrorist forces in Syria which utilizes resources from both sides of the political field.

By identifying a mutual target and working constructively together, the US and Russia could simultaneously reduce the prevalence of terrorist forces in the region while buying time for peace talks to reach meaningful progress. Ceasefire violations are less likely in this scenario because those groups that were most likely to commit violations in past ceasefires would be engaged in cooperative offensives against the ISIL or al-Qaeda presence in the country, distracting them from petty quarrels with other parties to the

ceasefire. The goal of this strategy would be to buy time for peace talks and begin a major international offensive (the first of its kind) against a mutual enemy of all parties to the conflict.

Significantly more research needs to be done in order to account for the complex maneuvering required by this plan. Still, it comes from the simple observation of ceasefire attempts on the ISSG and US/Russian cooperation to improve them. This plan eliminates grey areas between cooperative partners by creating a more cohesive goal and strictly defined definitions and rules of engagement, which unite all parties to the conflict. The international nature of this intervention and a bilateral US/Russia leadership structure would utilize the inherent paradox of the peace process discussed above, by harnessing complimentary leverage and establishing a mutually defined goal.

If a diplomatic resolution to the conflict in Syria is to be found, the US and Russia will have a meaningful role in reaching it. If these inherently competitive powers are able to find modes of cooperation that work, it could create a brighter future for both cooperation and competition in the future. Although the common discourse of antagonism between these powers is not entirely wrong, it fails to account for the inherent dependency between cooperation and competition. If the US and Russia are to truly thrive in the international environment of the 21st century, they need to understand the nuances of that essential paradox.

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