To what extent did regime change in Libya in 2011 affect Russia's stance at the Security Council regarding intervention in Syria during the period 2011-2015?

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Date of submission: 22 August 2017
Word count: 14,973

Declaration

This dissertation is the sole work of the author, and has not been accepted in any previous application for a degree; all quotations and sources of information have been acknowledged.

I confirm that my research did not require ethical approval.

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Abstract

The intervention in Libya in 2011, culminating in the overthrow of the Gaddafi regime, elicited a strong critical response from Russia (amongst other states). It is generally assumed that the intervention in Libya strongly influenced Russia's stance regarding the Syria crisis (and humanitarian intervention more broadly); a number of writers assert that, in particular, regime change in Libya was decisive in Russia's stance on Syria. However, there are notable shortcomings in the literature, including in terms of identifying the precise nature of this causal relationship, and the absence of a thorough examination of Russia's own articulation of its position on Syria. After outlining the constitutive aspects of regime change in Libya in 2011 and Russia's response at the UN Security Council, this paper provides a textual analysis of Russian statements at Security Council meetings regarding Syria during 2011–2015. It finds that while Russia did often and strongly invoked the Libya intervention when explaining Moscow's stance on Syria—which included vetoing proposed resolutions containing Chapter VII prospects—the causal impact of regime change in Libya appears less potent than might be assumed.

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CHAPTER 1 — Introduction

1.1 Research question

In March 2011, the UN Security Council adopted Resolution 1973 authorising the use of force to protect civilians in Libya,[1] a mandate for which a NATO-led coalition subsequently took responsibility through airstrikes, sea-based strikes, and other military activities against Libyan government and pro-government forces. By the end of October, the Libyan regime was overthrown and Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi had been killed. The intervention was highly controversial, with allegations NATO had exceeded its civilian protection mandate by aggressively targeting the Libyan military and directly facilitating the overthrow of the regime. Countries including Russia, China, India, Brazil, South Africa (the 'BRICS' group) and others were particularly critical. Despite its abstention on Resolution 1973, Russia remained vehemently opposed to the prospect of intervention in the Syrian crisis, which had also begun in early 2011. Over the following years, Russia vetoed several Security Council resolutions regarding Syria, often scorning them as pretexts for military intervention. In September 2015, Russia officially launched its own unilateral intervention in Syria in support of, and at the formal request from, the Syrian government.

Through examining Russian statements at the Security Council, this paper assesses to what *extent*, and in what *manner*, regime change in Libya in 2011 influenced and continued to influence Russia's stance on Syria during the period from the start of the Syrian crisis in 2011 through to September 2015. Secondarily, this paper hopes to contribute towards further

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[1] S/RES/1973

understanding Russia's attitude—and the Libya case upon it—towards the operationalisation of humanitarian intervention and civilian protection more generally. As Averre & Davies remark, "[e]volving debates on international practice depend to a large extent on understanding the respective positions of the major powers."[2] The paper finds that while the Libya intervention appears to have strongly influenced Russia's stance on Syria, the specific causal impact of regime change in Libya arguably appears less strong than might be assumed. Moreover, as the Syrian crisis evolved during 2013-2015, Russia's approach was increasingly influenced by the particular dynamics of the crisis, although the Libya case was still invoked, in broad strokes, to justify opposition to prospective coercive measures in Syria.

1.2 Method and structure

This paper provides a textual analysis of Russian statements at formal, open Security Council meetings regarding Syria during the period under question. This method follows those scholars who have also employed it to explore states' attitudes regarding issues in which the Security Council plays—or is perceived to play—a central role, including humanitarian intervention, the 'Responsibility to Protect' framework, and civilian protection missions.[3] In total, this paper examines the records of over thirty-five Security Council meetings. Relevant Security Council resolutions are also examined, to explore the correlation between their textual content and Russian voting behaviour, and to provide additional context for specific aspects of Russian statements.

Not every Council meeting in which Russia mentioned Syria has been included. The Syrian crisis was never placed on the Council's formal agenda, and so meetings that dealt

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[2] Averre & Davies (2015:814)
[3] Berman & Michaelsen (2012); Morris (2013)

most directly with the crisis came under the title 'The situation in the Middle East'. Council meetings regarding, for instance, Lebanon and Yemen also came under this title for the same reason[4] and so are omitted. Also examined are meetings not under this title, but in which Syria featured heavily in Russian (and others') statements due to context (e.g. meetings on 'Protection of civilians in armed conflict'). Finally, some Syria-specific Council meetings merely involved Presidential Statements on Syria[5] or constituted a statement from a UN official[6] or Council member[7] (usually not one of the Permanent 5 (P5)) but otherwise involved no formal country statements, and so are omitted.

Some caveats should be noted. The views articulated in Russian statements did not rise and fall linearly and sequentially over Council meetings; arguments and assertions overlapped thematically and were often intimately bound together (there is no reason to assume it should be otherwise). Some arguments were articulated at a particular time, only to decline in discursive prominence, before being picked up again months or even years later. As such, the paper attempts to capture this by indicating when, over time, particular thematic points were more or less salient. Secondly, Russian statements (indeed, those of any state) at Council meetings—particularly in the case of open meetings, as opposed to closed consultations—might be considered sanitised rhetoric for an international audience, rather than reflective of Moscow's 'real' position. However, the fact that they are indeed official statements means they do matter in a meaningful way. For instance, such statements, particularly regarding states' behavioural attitudes, can arguably go some way towards evidencing state practice in the evolution of customary law norms (although, crucially, *opinio juris* is also required). Finally, it is difficult to determine the causal impact of a single

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[4] E.g. S/PV.7025 (regarding Lebanon)
[5] E.g. S/PV.7039 which produced S/PRST/2013/15
[6] E.g. S/PV.7324
[7] E.g. S/PV.7049

independent variable from one case (regime change in Libya) upon Russia's attitude to another case (Syria), as against the impact of other case-specific independent variables (such as Moscow's strategic relationship with Damascus). One might ask: did Russia oppose Security Council intervention in Syria *because* of, or *regardless* of, regime change in Libya? While the paper does not attempt to conclude that question, it does aim to shed light on the salience of regime change in Libya upon Russian thinking regarding Syria.

The analysis proceeds on a thematic basis within a broader chronological structure. While Security Council intervention—first sanctions etc., then military force—occurred relatively fast in Libya, there was no such intervention in Syria; a chronological analysis could shed light on the extent to which the effects of the Libya case upon Russia's stance regarding Syria might be short-term. Moreover, considering the duration of the Syrian crisis, this approach helps distil the contours of the causal relationship between regime change in Libya and Russia's stance on Syria as the specific dynamics of the latter evolved over time. The remainder of this chapter constitutes a review of the relevant literature. Chapter 2 provides a brief conceptual discussion of regime change, explores the constitutive aspects of regime change in Libya, and identifies the key elements of Russia's response. Chapters 3 and 4 then turn to the Syrian crisis by conducting a textual analysis of Russian statements at the Security Council during, respectively, 2011–2013 and 2013–2015. Chapter 5 concludes.

1.3 The literature

A few writers, especially early in the Syrian crisis, underappreciated the repercussions of what occurred in Libya. In 2011, Patrick called the overthrow of Gaddafi "a significant foreign policy triumph" for the US, declaring "Qaddafi's utter defeat seemingly put new wind

in the sails of humanitarian intervention."[8] In 2012, Pape seemingly denied the intervention constituted regime change at all,[9] an untenable position that is rebuked in the next chapter. Yet both positions were in the minority; the impact of the intervention, including regime change under a civilian protection mandate, was substantial. Across the international community, "[t]he abuse of the Libya mandate… led to a reordering of the coalitions and arguments in international debates on [civilian] protection."[10] Scholars generally recognise that regime change in Libya did not just happen, but that it was not well received amongst much of the international community, especially the BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa) countries. Regime change in Libya "may make it more difficult in the future to forge a consensus on the use of force for [civilian] protection purposes"[11], wrote Bellamy & Williams. Russia's stance on, and thus the Security Council's response (or lack thereof) to, the Syrian crisis supports to this assertion.

Russia's support for the Syrian regime is partially explained by Moscow's geo-strategic and material interests. Borshchevskaya summarises these as being "Cultural Connections"; "Commercial Interests"; the Russia-Syria "Military Alliance"; and Syria's "Strategic Role" in providing a "counterweight to the West in the Middle East" and an external focal point around which to rally a fractured Russian society.[12] Saradzhyan adds Mocow's fear that "the complete failure of the Syrian state" will turn Syria "into a long-term haven for militant Islamists"; and the need to maintain Russia's "reputation as a reliable protector of its allies".[13] However, others stress such interests are insufficient explanatory variables.[14] Trenin writes, "Russia's material interests in Syria itself are relatively modest,"[15]

[8] Patrick (2011)
[9] Pape (2012:69)
[10] Brockmeier *et al* (2016:128)
[11] Bellamy & Williams (2011:848)
[12] Borshchevskaya (2013)
[13] Saradzhyan (2015)
[14] Charap (2013); Morris (2013); Trenin (2013); Allison (2013)

that Syria is more Russia's "commercial client rather than… a strategic partner,"[16] and that "Bashar al-Assad is not Moscow's man in any conceivable way."[17] (The latter point is reflected in Russia's statements at the Security Council, discussed later.)

Several writers directly examined the connection between the Libya intervention and the Security Council's (in)action on Syria, which necessarily includes Russia's stance. The extent to which the Council's Syria deliberations were "influenced by parallels drawn with Libya" was "striking," writes Morris.[18] Criticisms about Libya "came to contaminate discussions over Syria."[19] The Libya case is believed to have heavily influenced Russia's stance on Syria and on humanitarian intervention. "Understanding Russia's approach to Syria begins in Libya,"[20] writes Trenin: "The experience both helped solidify Moscow's position on the evolving crisis in Syria and revealed to the international community where Russia was coming from on the issue of outside military intervention in domestic conflicts."[21] In particular, regime change in Libya is cited as directly informing Russia's refusal to countenance another military intervention. Thakur writes that Russia (and China) is "resolutely opposed to any resolution which could set off a chain of events leading to a [Resolution] 1973-type authorization for outside military operations in Syria."[22] It was not merely the fact of regime change in Libya that enraged Russia, but rather that regime change occurred under a mandate that was designed for civilian protection. The manner in which NATO implemented Resolution 1973 convinced Moscow that humanitarian intervention, specifically "under the banner of" Responsibility to Protect (R2P), could be a "cover for

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[15] Trenin (2013:12)
[16] Ibid.
[17] Trenin (2013:21)
[18] Morris (2013:1275)
[19] Ibid.
[20] Trenin (2013:4)
[21] Trenin (2013:5)
[22] Thakur (2013:71)

regime change".[23] However, the nature of the causal link between the Libya intervention and Russia's stance on Syria is not always clear. For instance, Berman & Michaelsen agree that Libya had "a chilling effect" and it was NATO's expansive interpretation of Resolution 1973 that "resulted in Security Council paralysis" over Syria[24]—but the authors do not say whether this effect was produced by the fact of regime change in Libya, or the further destruction caused by NATO's military actions.

The literature suggests several reasons why Russia rejects regime change outright—whether in Libya, Syria, or anywhere else. Writers including Badgonas and Averre & Davies stress the importance Russia places upon promoting a multipolar system based on statist international legal norms, namely the principles of traditional sovereign equality, non-interference, and territorial integrity.[25] The promotion of a pluralist international society—prioritising states' rights over individual/human rights—contrasts with the solidarist approach often promoted in the West. Opposition to regime change is a natural extension of Russia's worldview. The "illegitimacy of externally promoted regime change" is central to Russia's narratives on Libya and Syria, writes Allison: "the principle of territorial integrity… rejects the notion that states can be held subject to standards of political legitimacy devised in Western capitals."[26] Charap argues the Syrian crisis reveals a "fundamental divergence" between Russia and the West regarding intervention: "Moscow does not believe the Security Council should be in the business of either implicitly or explicitly endorsing the removal of a sitting government."[27] "By standing up for Damascus," Von Eggert similarly argues, "the Kremlin is telling the world that… [no external actor] has the right to decide who should or

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[23] Charap (2013:38) and Averre & Davies (2015:818) use the exact terms quoted here.
[24] Berman & Michaelsen (2012:357)
[25] Bagdonas (2012:71); Averre & Davies (2015:832)
[26] Allison (2013:796)
[27] Charap (2013:36)

should not govern a sovereign state".[28] However, such writers note Russia's protection of the Syria regime also stems from Moscow's concern about the security of its own domestic political order and the fear of eventually finding itself in the crosshairs of Western military interventionism.[29] Averre & Davies add to this a utilitarian Russian concern: that regime change is imprudent because it can "destabilize states."[30]

Together, this suggests that for Russia, responding to the Syrian crisis was never going to be about the Syrian crisis in isolation. "Russia's chief aim [in Syria] has been to prevent the further legitimization of the practice of regime change and the ideas that underlie it," writes Bagdonas.[31] Russia's stance "has more to do with anxieties about the implications of US power than it does with Syria itself," writes Charap, adding that "Russia's buyer's remorse" from abstaining on Resolution 1973 "underscores the centrality of deeply held principles, not concrete regional interests, in Russian thinking."[32] In Charap's view, without a change of regime in Moscow itself (and also Beijing, with China being the other veto-wielding Council member with passionately statist principles), "the Security Council is highly unlikely to pass resolutions that would endorse Western militaries' intervention unless… the intention is to bolster a sitting government."[33]

However, there are limitations to the existing literature. The period 2011-2013 proved something of a peak in terms of literature looking at the effects of the Libya intervention, including its impact upon the Council's deadlock over Syria. As such, there has been comparatively little scholarship considering (or reconsidering) to what extent regime change in Libya continued to influence Russia's stance on Syria as the crisis evolved into armed conflict. Moreover, the scholarship generally has not sought to systemically assess the

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[28] Von Eggert (2012)
[29] Allison (2013:796); Charap (2013:37)
[30] Averre & Davies (2015:824)
[31] Bagdonas (2012:72)
[32] Charap (2013:37)
[33] Charap (2013:40)

specific contours of the causality of regime change in Libya upon Russia's stance on Syria. This paper aims to contribute in part to this endeavour by analysing Russian statements at the Security Council.

CHAPTER 2 — The Libyan case and the Russian response

2.1 Conceptualising regime change

Before considering the Libyan case, a conceptual understanding of regime change is required. Regime change refers to 'foreign-imposed regime change' (FIRC), defined by Downes & Monten as "the forcible or coerced removal of the effective leader of one state—which remains formally sovereign afterward—by the government of another state".[34] Reisman's definition stipulates that regime change necessarily involves (or intends) the imposition of a "successor regime [which] approximates some purported international standard of governance,"[35] particularly regarding human rights. Such normative standards are, however, arguably surplus to the technical instance of regime change. As Payandeh notes, "regime change has, more often than not, been carried out not for the sake of the people that were suffering under a regime, but in order to advance the strategic, economic, or ideological agenda of some external regime changer."[36] Foreign-imposed regime change is differentiated from 'change of regime', which may result primarily from internal processes (e.g. elections; a coup d'état) rather than external coercion.

According to Downes & Monten, regime change requires that "an external actor must be primarily responsible for deposing the leader."[37] This may involve the use or threat of external force (scenarios 1 and 2), or otherwise a scenario (3) wherein "external actors work behind the scenes to overthrow the targeted regime using their intelligence agencies or covert

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[34] Downes & Monten (2013:109)
[35] Reisman (2004:516)
[36] Payandeh (2012:357)
[37] Downes & Monten (2013:110-111)

military force, or by providing critical aid to domestic actors."[38] This latter scenario requires fulfilment of three criteria:

> "(1) the foreign government[s] officially… made removing the target regime its objective; (2) agents of the foreign government[s] were present in the target country and working toward regime change; and (3) the extent of the aid provided by foreign forces was of such a magnitude that regime change would have been unlikely to succeed absent that support."[39]

Regime change is arguably an historical feature of international relations. As Reisman notes, "much of what diplomats rather grandly call 'international politics' has always involved… messing in other states to change specific policies or the regime as a whole."[40] The advent of modern international law and the UN Charter's codification of the principles of state sovereignty, non-interference and territorial integrity did not halt this practise. By some counts, there were 110 cases of regime change from 1816 to 2011;[41] post-Cold War examples include Bosnia (1995), Yugoslavia/Kosovo (1999), Afghanistan (2001), Iraq (2003), and Libya (2011).[42] Evidently, several recent interventions that allegedly possessed wholly or significantly humanitarian purposes have also involved regime change; and the two concepts bear closer relation than might at first be thought.

Humanitarian intervention is the use of external military force within the territory of another state, without its consent, for the purpose of protecting civilians and alleviating or

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[38] Ibid.
[39] Downes & Monten (2013:110-111)
[40] Reisman (2004:516)
[41] Downes & Monten (2013:111)
[42] Downes & Monten (2013:91, note 5)

otherwise halting gross human rights violations.[43] The primary contemporary iteration is found in the 'Responsibility to Protect' (R2P) framework's 'third pillar', which includes, as a last resort, external military intervention to protect civilians against the commission of the 'four crimes'—genocide, ethnic cleansing, crimes against humanity, and war crimes.[44]

In early 2011, Bellamy & Williams reflected that the Security Council-authorised intervention in Côte d'Ivoire "blurred the lines between human protection and regime change".[45] Arguably, this 'blurring' is not entirely novel: while UN Charter Article 2(7) prohibits foreign intervention in states' domestic affairs,[46] some writers note that an "imperative for regime change" is provided by modern human rights–based international law, whose "central concern" is "how to transform" repressive and torturous regimes "into governments whose methods of operation approximate human rights standards."[47] However, attempts to legitimise (even as last resort) the forcible overthrow of regimes have increased tempo markedly in the post-Cold War era, in parallel with a radical and highly contested rethink of the concept of sovereignty. Following UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan's declaration in 1999 that state sovereignty was "being redefined" as conditional upon a government's right conduct,[48] Franck remarked "We are witnessing a sea change in international law… as a result of which the legitimacy of each government will one day be measured definitively by international rules and processes".[49] R2P was largely a product of this agenda, and regime change remains central to the issue of how to operationalise the protection of civilians from the most abusive and violent governments. As Fiott explains, R2P's 'third pillar' raises an "important question":

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[43] Evans & Newnham (1998:231); Buchanan (2003:130); Pape (2012:44)
[44] UN Secretary-General (2009). The 'third pillar' includes both peaceful and non-peaceful measures.
[45] Bellamy & Williams (2011:835)
[46] UN Charter (1945:Art. 2(7))
[47] Reisman (2004:516-517)
[48] Annan (1999)
[49] Franck (2000:29)

"... is it possible for the perpetrators of any of the four crimes to remain in power once military intervention occurs? If military action for third pillar activities rests on the ethical argument that states do not have a sovereign right to harm their own civilians, there is a certain ambiguity associated with the notion that a regime should continue to enjoy sovereign rights at all after, and if, military intervention has succeeded in averting any of the four crimes."[50]

Others are less circumspect. R2P, according to Nardin R2P "includes a responsibility to replace or reform the government that so signally failed to perform its own responsibilities."[51] Pape argues that per the nation–building and democratisation obligations placed upon interveners under the original R2P framework, "humanitarian intervention would become almost indistinguishable from foreign-imposed regime change".[52] Moreover, when the decision is made to use external force for civilian protection, some argue regime change can be practically, rather than just normatively, necessary. "Occasionally... regime change may be determined to be the only viable strategy to prevent the commission of governmental atrocities," writes Zifcak.[53] Regime change, as Rieff famously put it, "is the ghost at the banquet of humanitarian intervention. Use any euphemism you wish, but... interventions have to be about regime change if they are to have any chance of accomplishing their stated goal."[54] For Bellamy & Williams, the 'blurring' of the lines should be expected, as "human protection requires external actors to engage in local wars and politics".[55]

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[50] Fiott (2015:136)
[51] Nardin (2013:78)
[52] Pape (2012:52)
[53] Zifcak (2012:70)
[54] Rieff (2008)
[55] Bellamy & Williams (2011:849)

Charap writes, "The idea that to prevent or stop a humanitarian crisis the implicated government must be toppled… has become conventional wisdom in certain Western capitals".[56] However, many states for whom the principles of traditional state sovereignty, territorial integrity and non-intervention are held high—especially Russia, as discussed in the introduction; but also China and many others—see forcible regime change as unacceptable, despite the supposed necessity deriving from humanitarian intervention and civilian protection. This chapter now outlines the case of regime change in Libya in 2011, before exploring the nature of Russia's response.

2.2 Regime change in Libya

Amidst increasing violence in Libya in early 2011, on 26 February the Security Council passed Resolution 1970 which, under Chapter VII, Article 41, of the UN Charter, referred the situation to the International Criminal Court (ICC) and established an arms embargo, travel ban and asset freeze.[57] On 17 March, with the citizens of rebel-held Benghazi allegedly under imminent threat of massacre by Libyan forces, the Security Council passed Resolution 1973 which—along with the establishment of a no-fly zone, enforcement of the arms embargo, and expansions to travel bans and asset freezes—provided a Chapter VII mandate for member states "to take all necessary measures… to protect civilians and civilian populated areas under threat of attack in the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, including Benghazi, while excluding a foreign occupation force of any form on any part of Libyan territory".[58] On 19 March, the US, UK and France began military strikes against Libyan forces, with NATO assuming responsibility for the intervention—'Operation Unified Protector' (OUP)—at the end of

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[56] Charap (2013:38)
[57] S/RES/1970
[58] S/RES/1973

March.[59] By the end of October the regime had all but collapsed, and Gaddafi had been captured and executed by rebel forces.

The constitutive criteria of regime change (as defined earlier) were met in the Libya case. By decimating Libya's military capabilities, intervening states provided decisive assistance to rebel forces. The US and some European NATO members gave Resolution 1973 "the most expansive possible interpretation, amounting to an all-out assault on Libya's military."[60] On 19 March alone, US-UK-French strikes hit approximately 150 targets including military aircraft, radar installations, command and control centres, ammunition depots, vehicle storage sites, communications and other military infrastructure.[61] This was "beyond the need for 'mere' civilian protection".[62] Moreover, from 31 March through 11 August, NATO attacked over 380 targets in the regime capital city of Tripoli, "far more than anywhere else in the country, despite the fact that there was no active fighting and no immediate threat to civilians in the capital."[63] According to one retired German general, "without NATO support, the rebels would not have been able to make it to Tripoli."[64]

Several intervening countries also conducted military–intelligence activities inside Libya. British special forces were operating in-country since early 2011.[65] At some point during February–March, US President Obama "signed a secret order authorizing covert U.S. government support for rebel forces seeking to oust Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi".[66] Videos showing US and European military personnel working alongside rebel forces reportedly confirmed "foreign special forces are playing an active role in the Libyan

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[59] Garamone (2011)
[60] Schmidtt (2011)
[61] Bell & Witter (2011:24-25)
[62] Egnell (2014:232)
[63] Bell & Witter (2011:29)
[64] General Ramms, cited in Deutsche Welle (2011)
[65] Ramesh (2011)
[66] Hosenball (2011)

conflict."[67] The significance of such activities was more than merely contributory, as some writers otherwise suggested.[68] US covert operations played "a far larger role in Libya than [the US government] has acknowledged, quietly implementing an emerging 'covert intervention' strategy… behind the scenes"[69]. According to *BBC* diplomatic reporter Mark Urban, "Those with a knowledge of the [British covert operations] programme insist 'they did a tremendous job' and contributed to the final collapse of the Gaddafi regime."[70]

Pape argues that military actions against Libyan forces should not be conflated with "a comprehensive, systematic effort to decapitate the Libyan regime".[71] This is misleading: regime change was evidently one, if not *the* objective. UK Prime Minister Cameron, US President Obama, and French President Sarkozy—the leaders of those countries most interventionist in Libya—repeatedly demanded that Gaddafi must "leave,"[72] "step down,"[73] and "go immediately".[74] The US would pursue "a wide range of actions," Obama declared in March, "… to try to achieve the goal of Mr. Qaddafi being removed from power."[75] Cameron, Sarkozy and Obama asserted mid-April that while Gaddafi's overthrow was not mandated by Resolution 1973, "it is impossible to imagine a future for Libya with Qaddafi in power."[76] Such statements suggested regime change was "the final objective of the military operation".[77] "NATO's 'success' is usually attributed to the 'regime change' that occurred in Libya," Michaels reflected later, "rather than the more limited 'defensive' mission for which it received an official mandate."[78]

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[67] Borger & Chulov (2011)
[68] E.g. Grant (2011)
[69] Barry (2011)
[70] Urban (2012)
[71] Pape (2012:69)
[72] 10 Downing Street (2011b); The White House (2011b); The White House (2011c)
[73] The White House (2011a)
[74] 10 Downing Street (2011a)
[75] The White House (2011a)
[76] Obama *et al* (2011)
[77] Payandeh (2012:382)
[78] Michaels (2014:34)

However, some caveats should be noted. NATO was somewhat divided on Libya;[79] most members "had little enthusiasm to meaningfully participate".[80] Once 'Operation Unified Protector' began—following much diplomatic wrangling[81]—unity was conspicuously absent: only half of NATO contributed militarily,[82] and by mid-April only seven members (primarily the US, UK, and France) were conducting strikes.[83] This suggests the intervention "could more appropriately be described as being conducted by a coalition within the [NATO] Alliance".[84] As one observer remarked, the name "Operation Protecting Disunity" would be more reflective of the political reality.[85] Moreover, by some accounts the US was reluctant to commit militarily. Obama reportedly accepted "the case for intervention" only in mid-March[86]—although this decision itself became pivotal in the overthrow of the regime.[87] After 'handing over' to NATO, the US withdrew multiple military assets from the theatre and officials professed Washington's intent to limit involvement to a supporting role.[88] Nevertheless, US involvement, even reduced, was vital to sustaining the mission,[89] while US covert activities in Libya suggest Washington remained keen to influence events 'on the ground'. Indeed, it was a US drone strike that disabled Gaddafi's convoy, allowing rebels to capture and kill him;[90] after hearing the news, US Secretary of State Clinton triumphantly declared "we came, we saw, he died."[91] In sum, regime change was less the aim of a 'NATO operation' than of particular members: namely the UK, US and France.

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[79] See Michaels' (2014) critical assessment of NATO politics surrounding the intervention.
[80] Michaels (2014:17)
[81] Brunnstrom & Taylor (2011)
[82] Bell & Witter (2011:27)
[83] Michaels (2014:25)
[84] Ibid.
[85] Lindley-French (2011)
[86] Bell & Witter (2011:843)
[87] Hastings (2011)
[88] Spetalnick & Brunnstrom (2011); Dombey & Stacey (2011)
[89] Macmanus & King (2011:13)
[90] Harding (2011)
[91] Daly (2011)

2.3 Russia's response at the Security Council

Ralph & Gallagher note that while the UK, US, and France positioned regime change as "the best way to protect civilians" in Libya, "that was not how their opponents [Russia and China] interpreted Resolution 1973."[92] That said, Russian statements at the Council were not as scornful of regime change as might be expected. To start with, as Allison notes, prior to Resolution 1973 "Russian statements were in the normative mainstream. They did not seek to privilege Libyan sovereignty over the need for potential forceful measures in the intensifying humanitarian crisis."[93] When the Council adopted Resolution 1970 (26 February), Russia remarked[94] that Moscow's supporting vote was due to "serious concern over the events taking place in Libya," while emphasizing that the resolution "does not enjoin sanctions, even indirect, for forceful interference in Libya's affairs, which could make the situation worse."[95] (Russia would later repeat this sentiment numerous times regarding Syria.) Instead, Russia sought "a peaceful way out of the current crisis." Russia then explained that its subsequent abstention on—rather than veto of—Resolution 1973 (17 March) was enacted "on the basis of a number of considerations of principle".[96] Moscow's "position regarding the clear unacceptability of the use of force against the civilian population of Libya remains unchanged", with Russia being "consistent and firm advocates of the protection of the civilian population" and being "[g]uided… by the common humanitarian values that we share with both the sponsors [of the resolution] and other Council members".[97]

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[92] Ralph & Gallagher (2015:568)
[93] Allison (2013:797)
[94] Country representatives at the Security Council are henceforth referred to by their host country name. Thus statements from the Russian representative are referred to as voiced by "Russia".
[95] S/PV.6491
[96] S/PV.6498
[97] Ibid.

On the other hand, the draft resolution raised "a whole range of questions" that remained unanswered at the time of the vote, Russia argued, such as "how the no-fly zone would be enforced, what the rules of engagement would be and what limits on the use of force there would be."[98] Importantly, it is here that the notion of 'morphing' enters Russian discourse—that notion appears to crucially underscore later Russian perceptions of, and opposition to, what this paper calls the 'escalatory potential' of Security Council resolutions on Syria. The draft text of Resolution 1973 had been, said Russia, "morphing before our very eyes, transcending the initial concept as stated by the League of Arab States. Provisions were introduced into the text that could potentially open the door to large-scale military intervention."[99]

Yet it is interesting to note the reasons implied as to what would be the problem(s) with a 'large-scale military intervention' in Libya. Asserting "the quickest way to ensure robust security for the civilian population and the long-term stabilization of the situation in Libya is an immediate ceasefire," Russia remarked following the vote on Resolution 1973 that "the passion of some Council members for methods involving force prevailed. This is most unfortunate and regrettable."[100] Moscow thus appeared primarily concerned about the practical consequences of intervention: the "inevitable humanitarian consequences of the excessive use of outside force in Libya" and the likely consequent damage to "the cause of upholding peace and security throughout the entire region of North Africa and the Middle East".[101] Indeed, concerns about the prospect of regime change were not articulated at this time; if they did exist, perhaps Resolution 1973's limited mandate—authorizing "measures… to protect civilians… while excluding a foreign occupation force of any form on any part of

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[98] Ibid.
[99] Ibid.
[100] Ibid.
[101] Ibid.

Libyan territory"[102]—had sufficiently alleviated them. As the situation in Libya further deteriorated with escalating violence, the intervention itself came under increasing international criticism, including from Russia, for using excessive force. The "growing number of civilian causalities" was not only resulting from fighting between Libyan parties, remarked Russia at a Council meeting on 4 May, but "actions by the NATO-led coalition forces are also resulting in civilian casualties, as was seen in particular during recent bombings in Tripoli."[103]

Contrary to what might be expected, Moscow's articulation in the Security Council of its concerns about ulterior political motives behind the intervention emerged fairly late in the day and appeared relatively muted compared to remarks made about Libya during the Syria meetings. For instance, it was only at a Council meeting on 10 May (on the subject of 'Protection of civilians in armed conflict')—that is, nearly a month and a half since the intervention began—that Russia stated "The noble goal of protecting civilians should not be compromised by attempts to resolve in parallel any unrelated issues".[104] The phrase "any unrelated issues" has often been cited to infer Moscow's concern about NATO pursuing regime change in Libya.[105] Yet, explicit concerns to this effect appear absent in Russian statements; instead, Russia made only ambiguous, and not particularly strong, criticisms. For instance, the UK's statement on 10 May that "our actions… are designed precisely to protect civilians and to minimize civilian casualties"[106] was, according to Russia, "not in line with the reality."[107] Later, on 16 September, Russia scorned that "the Council's mandate for conducting the operation in Libya was disregarded, resulting in air strikes that also targeted

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[102] S/RES/1973
[103] S/PV.6528
[104] S/PV.6531
[105] Bellamy & Williams (2011:847)
[106] S/PV.6531
[107] Ibid.

civilian facilities and killed civilians."[108] Once again, however, the criticism of NATO's operations was grounded in the objectionable exacerbation of civilian casualities, rather than the pursuit of regime change. Indeed, Russia appeared to concede legitimacy to the soon–to–be new government constituted by former rebels, asserting that "The declaration on creating a new democratic Libya should be backed by real steps by the National Transitional Council confirming its commitment to tolerance and promoting the process of national reconciliation."[109]

Moreover, following Gaddafi's death on 20 October, Russian statements at the Council similarly failed to articulate any concerns about regime change during two separate meetings that were specifically about Libya. On 31 October 2011, following the Council's adoption of Resolution 2017—which was jointly proposed by Russia and focused on weapons non-proliferation in Libya[110]— Russia remarked that "we could not fail bear in mind the great threat posed by Libyan weapons… falling into the hands of terrorist groups that are highly active in the region." Yet there was no remark regarding how the intervention and overthrow of the regime may have produced this very situation—in contrast to Russia's remarks at the Syria meetings. At a 2 November meeting concerning the Council's referral of the Libya situation to the International Criminal Court (ICC) due to allegations of international humanitarian law violations, Russia's only criticism of the intervention was that "Unfortunately, civilian casualties were also caused by the actions of known NATO coalition forces"[111] (implying that coalition actions, and not only the actions of Libyan parties, should also be investigated by the ICC).

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[108] S/PV.6620
[109] S/PV.6620
[110] S/RES/2017
[111] S/PV.6647

Having outlined first how the intervention in Libya in 2011 constituted regime change, and second the key elements of Russia's criticisms of the intervention, this paper now proceeds with a textual analysis of Russian statements at Security Council meetings on Syria from 2011–2013 (Chapter 3) and from 2013–2015 (Chapter 4).

CHAPTER 3 — Syria: 2011 to 2013

3.1 Syria and "the Libyan experience"

This chapter examines the period from the start of the Syrian crisis in 2011 to circa September 2013. Within this timeframe, the period through circa mid-2012 was the period during which the intervention in Libya figured most prominently in Russian statements at Security Council meetings. The context of Libya remained especially important in the early stages of the Syrian crisis. Trenin writes that in the first several months "the deepening of the Syrian crisis was running parallel to the NATO-led military operation in Libya. Thus, Moscow's central concern became preventing the 'Libyan scenario' from being played out in Syria."[112] For most of 2011, however, the Security Council held few formal meetings on Syria. The first significant meeting took place on 4 October 2011, immediately following Russia and China's veto of the France-UK-Portugal-Germany first draft resolution on Syria. By this time, the excesses of NATO's military actions in Libya, and the growing death toll there, were widely reported; additionally, the Libyan regime had been all but overthrown, most senior regime officials had been killed or detained, and Gaddafi was in hiding. The 4 October draft resolution demanded the Syrian government comply with several specific obligations, including the ceasing human rights violations, allowing full exercise of fundamental human and political freedoms, ceasing violence against civilians, and facilitating humanitarian access to crisis areas.[113]

Taken in isolation, these obligations were arguably relatively uncontroversial and it would be difficult to see how, in and of themselves, they might undermine the Syrian regime.

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[112] Trenin (2013:17)
[113] S/2011/612

However, the draft resolution also declared the Security Council's "intention to review Syria's implementation of this resolution within 30 days and to consider its options, including measures under Article 41 of the Charter of the United Nations".[114] This clause was undoubtedly crucial in motivating the Russian veto. Indeed, following the vote Russia contrasted the draft resolution with an earlier Russia-China draft: while the latter had been based on "respect for the national sovereignty and territorial integrity of Syria as well as the principle of non-intervention," the current draft "was based on a very different philosophy – the philosophy of confrontation," including a "unilateral, accusatory bent against Damascus" and an "unacceptable… threat of an ultimatum and sanctions against the Syrian authorities."[115] Thus we begin to see two key aspects of Russia's opposition: rejection of any (allegedly undue) bias against the Syrian regime; and rejection of the prospect of sanctions.

Moreover, Russia cited a direct link causal link between its veto and the intervention in Libya. Based on the "well-known events in North Africa," Russia explained, the omission from the draft resolution of Russia's "proposals for wording on the non-acceptability of foreign military intervention… can only put us on our guard."[116] Fundamentally, Russia argued, the "situation in Syria cannot be considered in the Council separately from the Libyan experience".[117] Here, as Morris notes, Russia "was making far more than a point about chronology."[118] Russia, in its own words, was "alarmed" that some NATO members viewed NATO's interpretation of Resolution 1973 as "a model for the future actions of NATO in implementing the responsibility to protect. It is easy to see that today's 'Unified Protector' model could happen in Syria."[119] However, it is important to note that the 4 October draft had mentioned Article 41 (i.e. sanctions) rather than Article 42 (i.e. military

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[114] Ibid.
[115] S/PV.6627
[116] Ibid.
[117] Ibid.
[118] Morris (2013:1275)
[119] S/PV.6627

force) measures, and it did not actually authorise Article 41 measures but instead conveyed the Council's "intention… to consider" them.[120] Nevertheless, Russia stressed how the Libya intervention had 'morphed' beyond the intentions of Resolution 1973: the "demand for a quick ceasefire *turned into* a full-fledged civil war"; "the no-fly zone has *morphed into* the bombing of oil refineries, television stations and other civilian sites"; and the "arms embargo has *morphed into* a naval blockade in western Libya".[121] Thus even though the draft mentioned only the potential for the future consideration of sanctions, the implication is that from the Russia perspective the 4 October draft contained sufficient 'escalatory potential' for it to potentially constitute a precursor to the eventual deployment of military force *à la* Libya. Similarly, on 19 July 2012, Russia (and China) once again vetoed a France-Germany-Portugal-UK-US draft resolution on Syria. This time, the draft contained arguably balanced condemnation of both the Syrian government and opposition groups, *inter alia* condemning: "the Syrian authorities' increasing use of heavy weapons"; "armed violence in all its forms, including by armed opposition groups"; "the continued widespread violations of human rights by the Syrian authorities, as well as any human rights abuses by armed opposition groups".[122] However, the draft also included several Chapter VII operative paragraphs, one of which declared the Council's decision:

> "that the Syrian authorities shall implement visibly and verifiably their commitments in their entirety… to (a) cease troop movements towards population centres, (b) cease all use of heavy weapons in such centres, (c) complete pullback of military concentrations in and around population centres, and to withdraw its troops and heavy

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[120] S/2011/612
[121] S/PV.6627
[122] S/2012/538

weapons from population centres to their barracks or temporary deployment places to facilitate a sustained cessation of violence".[123]

Moreover, the 19 July draft provided that the Security Council would, in the event of Syria's non-compliance within 10 days, "impose immediately measures under Article 41 of the UN Charter".[124] Taken together, the 4 October 2011 and 19 July 2012 draft resolutions both included legally binding operative paragraphs containing expansive obligations upon the Syrian authorities, and both also threatened Article 41 measures if Syria did not meet these obligations. Considering Russia's explanation of its veto on 4 October 2011, its veto on 19 July 2012 is therefore unsurprising. Russia voiced disbelief that the latter draft was even proposed:

> "The vote that just took place should not have taken place at all… The Russian delegation had very clearly and consistently explained that *we simply cannot accept a document, under Chapter VII of the Charter of the United Nations, that would open the way for the pressure of sanctions and later for external military involvement in Syrian domestic affairs.* The Western members of the Security Council denied such intentions, but for some reason refused to exclude military intervention."[125]

Once again Russia feared, as Morris recognises, that "the threat of placing even the mildest of sanctions on Syria would constitute the thin end of the interventionary wedge".[126] Russia evidently viewed any inclusion of Chapter VII in a draft resolution as containing the potential

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[123] Ibid.
[124] Ibid.
[125] S/PV.6810, emphasis added)
[126] Morris (2013:1276

for almost-inevitable escalation and eventual military intervention. Moreover, Russia's focus also expanded, viewing intervention in Libya and the West's policy towards Syria as part of a broader pattern of Western interventionism, whereby "Western members of the Security Council" used the Council "to further their plans of imposing their own designs on sovereign States"; now, they were "pushing their own geopolitical intentions" on Syria.[127] Thus it appeared Russia's attitude towards Syria was "no longer simply about specific cases, however they might be linked; it was about a wider normative agenda."[128]

However, on 2 February 2012 Russia vetoed another draft resolution on Syria that did *not* include Chapter VII.[129] Sponsored by nineteen countries including France, the UK, and the US (and, ironically, Libya), the draft *inter alia*: placed obligations upon the Syrian government regarding violence against civilians and human rights violations; called on "the Syrian authorities to allow safe and unhindered access for humanitarian assistance"; and demanded the Syrian government fulfil a six-point set of obligations.[130] The latter were similar to those stipulated in the failed draft resolution of 4 October 2011 (and in the soon-to-be-vetoed draft resolution of 19 July 2012).

On the one hand, Russia's explanation of this veto included no explicit reference to the Libyan intervention. Instead, Russia justified its veto on the basis that the draft failed to take into account three Russian proposals to the effect that: a) "the Syrian opposition must distance itself from extremist groups that are committing acts of violence"; b) "along with the withdrawal of the Syrian armed forces from the cities, there should be an end to attacks by armed groups on State institutions and neighbourhoods" and c) the draft should "show more flexibility for the intermediary efforts of the League of Arab States, which would increase the

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[127] S/PV.6810
[128] Morris (2013:1276)
[129] S/2012/77
[130] Ibid.

chances for the success of an inclusive Syrian political process."[131] Points (a) and (c) regarding, respectively, the rise of extremist groups in Syria, and the imperatives of an inclusive Syrian-led political process became central to Russia's stance at the Security Council (see Chapter 4). However, Russia's point (b) is misleading, as operative paragraph 3 of the draft resolution demanded "all parties in Syria, including armed groups, immediately stop all violence or reprisals, including attacks against State institutions"[132]—although, regarding the perceived 'bias' of the text, this was the only mention or condemnation of violence by opposition groups.

On the other hand, concerns about (mostly) Western intervention in Syria and the threat of potential regime change manifested in Russia's explanation of its veto on 2 February 2012. While the Security Council should be seeking an objective political solution to the conflict, Russia argued, since the start of the crisis "some influential members of the international community, including some sitting at this table, have undermined any possibility of a political settlement, calling for regime change, encouraging the opposition towards power, indulging in provocation and nurturing the armed struggle."[133]

Russia's concern about the potential misinterpretation of Security Council resolutions was also very clearly influenced by the Libya intervention. At a Council meeting regarding 'Protection of civilians in armed conflict' on 25 June 2012, Russia remarked "We regret cases of unsatisfactory implementation of Council resolutions relating to the protection of civilians," and that "there remain a number of question marks hanging over the participants in the NATO operation in Libya regarding how the relevant Security Council resolutions were implemented in practice."[134] Similarly, following the Council's adoption of Resolution 2043

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[131] S/PV.6711
[132] S/2012/77
[133] S/PV.6711
[134] S/PV.6790

on 21 April 2012—authorising the creation of the ill-fated UN Supervision Mission in Syria (UNSMIS) with a ceasefire monitoring mandate[135]—Russia asserted that "Any deviation, whether from the resolution's provisions or in their interpretation, will be unacceptable. The Libyan model should remain forever in the past."[136]

3.2 "Hasty regime change"

Statements made at the Security Council suggest Russia's rejection of the possibility of regime change in Syria might not, however, have been as straightforward as is commonly perceived. For instance, turning again to Russia's explanation of its 4 October 2011 veto, Russia emphasised "we are not advocates of the al-Assad regime". It may be significant that Russia refers to the "al-Assad regime"—not to 'the Syrian regime', 'the regime', or even, as is more common in Russia's discursive legitimation of the Syrian government, 'the Syrian authorities' or 'the Syrian government'. In the context of Russia's well-known statist principles in general and support for the Syrian state in particular, this phraseology, which arguably amounts to undermining Assad's personal leadership position, perhaps implied a greater concern with overall institutional regime stability and security rather than with the longevity of a particular figure at the head of that regime. Indeed, Russia's concession at the Moscow-organised Action Group for Syria, on 30 June 2012, to "a transition governing body, composed of members of the present government and the opposition" indicated, writes Bagdonas, that "Russia was prepared to sacrifice Assad to save his regime."[137] Although Bagdonas also notes that "Russia's position that both sides should simply lay down weapons

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[135] S/RES/2043
[136] S/PV.6756
[137] Bagdonas (2012:61)

and talk without any preconditions, deadlines, sanctions or external pressure clearly favored the government"[138].

Moreover, at the 4 October 2011 meeting, Russia remarked that Moscow supports the view[139] of "a significant number of Syrians [who] do not agree with the demand for a quick regime change."[140] It may also be significant here that Russia did not cite this as being opposition to regime change *per se*, rather as being opposition to 'quick' regime change.[141] Similar sentiments were repeated several months later. At a Council debate on Syria on 12 March 2012, Russia challenged those members of the international community, especially on the Security Council (meaning the UK, US and France), who were voicing "hasty demands for regime change"[142]. Once again, note that the explicit criticism is not of demands for regime change *per se*, but of 'hasty' demands. Of course, it is possible to read (and misread) too much into particular word selections and phraseology; however, governments and representatives are well aware that their statements at international fora—including and especially at the Security Council—are subject to intense scrutiny and carry much political (and arguably legal) importance. Assuming that the above choice of words was intentional, it could be inferred that Russia opposed foreign-imposed regime change due to its tendency to exacerbate rather than resolve conflict. Interestingly, it is only much later in the Syrian crisis that Russia used terms such as "regime change by force"[143]—this is discussed in the following chapter.

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[138] Ibid.
[139] As Russia cited this view of a "significant number of Syrians" during the explanation of its veto usage, it is assumed Russia endorses this view too.
[140] S/PV.6627
[141] In this particular instance, Russia's use of the term 'regime change' is assumed to imply 'change of regime', rather than foreign-imposed regime change (FIRC) to which Russia was and remains undoubtedly in opposition. Nevertheless, the phraseology is somewhat ambiguous in that regard.
[142] S/PV.6734
[143] S/PV.7180

3.3 Exacerbating the crisis

The potential for exacerbating the Syrian crisis often underscored Russia's stance at the Council. As early as April 2011, when some Council members had suggested putting Syria on the formal agenda, Russia had remarked that the crisis did not constitute a threat to international peace and security owing to it being a domestic or internal conflict. A "real threat to regional security," according to Russia, "could arise from outside interference in Syria's domestic situation, including attempts to promote ready-made solutions or to take sides".[144] However, it should be noted that under Article 39 of the UN Charter, the Council must first "determine the existence of any threat to the peace, breach of the peace, or act of aggression" before it can authorise force under Chapter VII in order "to maintain or restore international peace and security."[145] Thus Russia's particular adamance that the Syrian crisis did *not* constitute a threat to international peace and security can be interpreted as an attempt to prevent the escalation towards coercive measures. Nevertheless, Russia argued that "Syria is the cornerstone of the Middle East security architecture. Destabilizing that significant link in the chain will lead to complications throughout the region."[146] In a possibly implicit invocation of the Libya intervention, Russia asked: "What can be done to help resolve the situation [in Syria] rather than cause further harm?"[147] A year later, the Russian statement at the 12 March 2012 Security Council meeting provided a concise summary of Moscow's view:

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[144] S/PV.6524
[145] UN Charter (1945:Art. 39)
[146] S/PV.6524
[147] Ibid.

"Making hasty demands for regime change, imposing unilateral sanctions designed to trigger economic difficulties and social tensions in the country, inducing the opposition to continue its confrontation with authorities instead of promoting dialogue, and calling for support of armed confrontation and even for foreign military intervention are all risky recipes for geopolitical engineering that can only result in the spread of conflict."[148]

The perception of the causal link between seeking 'hasty' regime change, imposing sanctions, providing support for armed groups, and foreign military intervention on the one hand—in other words, any coercive interference—and the 'spread of conflict' on the other, permeated Russia's official discourse on Syria. The "role of the international community should not be to exacerbate conflict or meddle by using economic sanctions or military force," Russia stated on 31 January 2012; "We reject any sanctions, any attempts to employ the Council's instruments to fuel conflict or to justify any eventual foreign military interference."[149] On 26 September 2012, Russia again affirmed that, regarding international action to tackle crises such as in Syria, "There can be no doubt that military methods, and especially outside military interference, pose serious threats to regional security, with unpredictable consequences."[150] Russia also increasingly scorned the support provided by outside powers—primarily the West, but also other states in the region—to armed groups in Syria. On 30 August 2012, Russia criticised Council members for using "pseudo-humanitarian arguments to justify their financial, material, technical or logistical support to illegal armed groups."[151] For Russia, this manifestly reflected the politicisation of, and thus

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[148] S/PV.6734
[149] S/PV.6710
[150] S/PV.6841
[151] S/PV.6826

undermined, the Council's humanitarian efforts: "not all of the ideas voiced here are in keeping with" the humanitarian principles of "neutrality and impartiality".[152]

For Russia, merely the 'call' for regime change alone was further destabilising the situation in Syria. For instance, Russia claimed (26 September 2012) that "a significant share of responsibility for the continuing bloodshed rests upon those States that are instigating Bashar Al-Assad's opponents to reject the ceasefire and dialogue and at the same time demanding the unconditional capitulation of the regime."[153] Doing so "encourages the use of terrorist tactics," said Russia, "to which the armed opposition is resorting to more and more often."[154] While many would argue that it was in fact Russia that bore responsibility for the 'continuing bloodshed' through its blockage of Security Council action on Syria, Russia's argument does, however, have merit. Research suggests that external powers' support for armed sub-state groups, married with external powers' threats against the existential survival of the incumbent regime, can encourage both parties to perpetuate and intensify the cycle of violence.[155]

3.4 September 2012 to August 2013: the Council's hiatus on Syria

The Security Council's meeting on 26 September 2012 was the final Syria-related meeting that year. From October 2012 through August 2013 (the end of this chapter's timeframe), the Council held only two meetings that dealt directly with Syria, on 18 April[156] and 16 July;[157] Russia made no statements at either of these meetings (neither did the other Permanent 5). As

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[152] Ibid.
[153] S/PV.6841
[154] Ibid.
[155] Kuperman (2008)
[156] S/PV.6949
[157] S/PV.7000

such, the period from October 2012 through August 2013—almost an entire year—arguably represents something of a decline in the salience of Syria within the Security Council's formal deliberations. However, the Council did hold three general meetings on 'Protection of civilians in armed conflict' during this period—on 12 February 2013, 17 July 2013, and 19 August 2013—and Russia's statements at these meetings can help provide further indication of Moscow's approach to Syria and the nature of the causal effect(s) of the Libya intervention and regime change upon Russia's broader attitude towards intervention.

Indeed, regarding the operationalisation of civilian protection, Russia cited the Libya intervention as an example, once again, of a case where the use of external force had increased civilian deaths rather than helped protect civilians. Russia's interpretation of the 'lessons learnt' from Libya therefore arguably remained contrary to that of the Council's Western members (UK, US, France). For instance, at the 12 February meeting, the US and France commended the intervention in Libya—the Council "acted, prevented a massacre and saved countless lives"; Libya "remind[s] us that, for civilians in conflict, Security Council action can mean the difference between life and death"; "For France, the protection of civilians and human rights are a priority. We have proven that in Libya"[158]—and considered the experience as constituting the type of action the Council should aim to replicate in Syria. In contrast, Russia argued that Libya showed how civilians could continue to be killed even during civilian protection operations, and condemned "the civilian deaths in Libya as a result of NATO air strikes".[159] On 17 July, in a Council meeting focussed specifically on the protection of journalists in armed conflict, Russia now drew parallels between the Libya and Kosovo interventions, remarking "We saw clear violations of international law and the needs

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[158] S/PV.6917
[159] Ibid.

of journalists in missile strikes in Belgrade in 1999 and Tripoli in 2011."[160] Furthermore, Russia emphasised how the collapse of the Libyan state and the aftermath of the intervention was fuelling the Syrian conflict, especially regarding "the illegal smuggling of weapons from Libya into Syria".[161]

However, despite all three meetings being on the topic of 'Protection of civilians in armed conflict', Russia's only mention of the Syrian crisis was this latter comment regarding the smuggling of weapons from Libya; in total, Libya itself was mentioned only once at each meeting. Furthermore, at the third meeting on 19 August, Russia mentioned neither Libya nor Syria.[162] Russia's minimal reference to Syria across these three consecutive Council meetings is puzzling, considering that each meeting possessed clear relevance to the Syrian crisis and Russia had previously sought to emphasise its humanitarian principles and values. It is plausible that this reflects a desire to, again, divert attention away from the crisis towards NATO's alleged transgressions in Libya. Alternatively, it may reflect a lack of anything more meaningful to add to Russia's prior statements regarding its position on Syria as articulated during 2012.

3.5 Summary

Russia's stance on Syria at the Security Council during this period appeared strongly influenced by Russia's negative interpretations of the intervention in Libya. Since the start of the Syrian crisis, Russia expressed reluctance to have what it saw as a purely internal or domestic crisis be placed formally on the Council's agenda, arguing that the 'real' threat to international peace and security lay in the prospect of further destabilisation through external

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[160] S/PV.7003
[161] Ibid.
[162] S/PV.7019

interference. On several occasions, Russia invoked the case of Libya as direct justification for vetoing Council resolutions on Syria. Specifically, Russia appeared to argue that the Libya case had suggested that the mere threat of sanctions—before even considering the threat of force—against Syria could 'open the door' to full-scale military intervention. Thus, for Russia any resolution that included Chapter VII would be unacceptable. However, while Russia strongly opposed calls for regime change in Syria, this appeared grounded in utilitarian concerns about the potentially de-stabilising effects of the rapid overthrow of the regime, rather than an articulated rejection of regime change on normative or principled grounds. Indeed, when Russia did explicitly invoke Libya to directly explain its stance on Syria, Russia's criticism was less that NATO members had affected regime change in Libya under a civilian protection mandate, and more that NATO members had exacerbated the crisis and increased civilian causalities.

CHAPTER 4 — Syria: 2013 to 2015

This chapter covers the period from September 2013, when the Security Council first debated and adopted a resolution regarding the use of chemical weapons in Syria, to September 2015, when Russia formally intervened military in Syria at the invitation of the Syrian government. For current analytical purposes, this two-year period can be seen as representing the general evolution of the Syrian crisis to an altogether more complex situation. Not only was the Security Council increasingly occupied with the issue of chemical weapons in Syria, but it was during the latter part of 2013 and into 2014 that 'Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant' (ISIL/ISIS) expanded dramatically in Syria and Iraq, before re-branding as 'Islamic State' and declaring a new Islamic caliphate. Both developments are reflected in Russian (and others') discourse at the Council. Russia remained resolute in its rejection of external intervention in Syria, although the connection cited with Libya appeared increasingly weaker compared to the immediate aftermath of the Libya intervention (as discussed in the previous chapter).

4.1 Chemical weapons

From late 2013, the crisis in Syria was further complicated by the use of chemical weapons in the country, the increasing salience of which was reflected in the Russian position on Syria and also in Security Council resolutions. From September 2013 through August 2015, the Security Council adopted three resolutions addressing chemical weapons in Syria: Resolution 2118 (27 September 2013); Resolution 2209 (6 March 2015); and Resolution 2235 (7 August 2015). Following the first reported use of chemical weapons on 21 August 2013, the Security

Council adopted Resolution 2118, with Russia voting in favour. Resolution 2118 effectively demanded the destruction of Syria's chemical weapons stockpile: it called on Syria to, *inter alia*, fulfil its obligations under the Chemical Weapons Convention (to which Syria had just deposited its accession on 14 September); and it called on the international community to support Syria's efforts with the destruction of its chemical weapons stockpile and verification thereof.[163]

Of the three chemical weapons resolutions, Resolution 2118 is particularly notable for several reasons. First, none of its operative paragraphs were placed under a Chapter VII heading, thus presumably alleviating Russian concerns of escalatory potential. Second, the Security Council determined that it was specifically the use of chemical weapons which "constitutes a threat to international peace and security".[164] That is, the resolution does not cite the Syrian conflict itself, nor any of the parties' violence pursuant to the conflict, nor any other aspect of the conflict, as a threat to international peace and security; if the draft resolution had done so, it would likely have been vetoed by Russia, as this would have placed the conflict formally on the Security Council's peace and security agenda. Third, the resolution did not directly condemn, nor place blame for the chemical attack upon, the Syrian authorities. Instead, the resolution condemned "any use of chemical weapons in the Syrian Arab Republic" and prohibited the use, development, production, acquisition, stockpiling, retention or transfer of chemical weapons by both the Syrian government *and* any other "party in Syria".[165]

However, the Security Council also decided "in the event of non-compliance with this resolution… to impose measures under Chapter VII of the United Nations Charter".[166] This

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[163] S/RES/2118
[164] S/RES/2118
[165] Ibid.
[166] Ibid.

was therefore the first time since the start of the Syrian crisis that Russia had not vetoed, but had rather voted in favour of, a resolution containing the threat of Chapter VII measures. At first glance, this arguably conflicts with Russia's previous position on the unacceptability of threats of Chapter VII measures against Syria. According to Russia's explanatory statement, the primary reason why Russia refrained from vetoing Resolution 2118 was its consistence with—or rather, the perception that it did not undermine—Moscow's general political approach to the Syrian crisis, which stressed a 'balanced' approach, apportioned responsibility for violence to both government and opposition forces, and promoted a Syrian-led, rather than externally-imposed, political solution. Resolution 2118, said Russia, was "fully in keeping with the Russian-American agreements achieved in Geneva on 14 September"[167]. At the same time, Russia also sought to re-direct attention—and, presumably, responsibility for the chemical attack—away from the regime and towards the opposition and its foreign supporters, noting that "[p]articular responsibility lies with those who back and sponsor the opposition; they have to ensure that chemical weapons do not fall into the hands of extremists."[168] The resolution's calls upon the international community to assist in the chemical weapons destruction process would arguably allow Russia to position itself as playing a constructive role in Syria, and to demonstrate its credentials as a responsible and valuable player on the international stage.

That said, it is also likely that Russia supported the resolution as a means of dissuading (especially) the US from intervening militarily in Syria. This is because one year earlier, in August 2012, US President Barack Obama had famously declared that any use of chemical weapons by the Syrian government would be a "red line" that would "change my

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[167] S/PV.7038
[168] S/PV.7038

calculus" in terms of taking action.[169] According the *New York Times*, Obama's remarks constituted a clear warning that Syria "would face American military intervention if there were signs that its arsenal of unconventional weapons was being moved or prepared for use."[170] Indeed, at the Security Council meeting on 27 September 2013 immediately following the vote on Resolution 2118, the US remarked that Washington's "original objective was to degrade and deter Syria's chemical-weapons capability," and that the "option of military force that President Obama has kept on the table could have achieved that"[171]. Moreover, it can be assumed that the fact the threat of Chapter VII measures in all three resolutions was linked to non-compliance specifically regarding chemical weapons obligations—rather than, for instance, broader humanitarian or domestic political obligations—would, for Russia, limit the existential challenge to the Syrian government itself.

Nevertheless, despite its votes in support of the three chemical weapons resolutions, Russia was evidently concerned that the resolutions themselves should not become politicised and (mis)interpreted to the detriment of the Syrian regime. Russia explicitly emphasised the constraints of the chemical weapons resolutions and their mandated activities. At the Security Council's immediate post-vote debate regarding Resolution 2118, Russia stressed its implementation "will have to be objective and address the situation with respect to all parties to the Syrian conflict."[172] In particular, the resolution "does not allow for any automatic use of coercive measures of enforcement."[173] Connectedly, Russia raised the issue of potential politicisation surrounding the material evidence of responsibility for chemical weapons usage. While Resolution 2118 clearly provided for the future possibility of Chapter VII

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[169] The White House (2012)
[170] Landler (2012)
[171] S/PV.7038
[172] Ibid.
[173] Ibid.

measures in the event of non-compliance, Russia argued such measures would have to be "commensurate with any violations, which will have to be 100 per cent proved."[174] Similarly, following the adoption of Resolution 2209 in March 2015, Russia remarked that "[a]ny conclusions on the facts related to the use of chemical weapons should be based on sound proof."[175] Any conclusions or assessments about chemical weapons usage should not be used to automatically justify military intervention: "We wish to once again state categorically that we do not accept the possible use of sanctions under Chapter VII… without an attempt to confirm any allegations based on proof."[176] The inclusion in Resolution 2235 in August 2015 of a paragraph recognising that the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons' (OPCW) Fact Finding Mission (FFM) in Syria "is not mandated to reach conclusions about attributing responsibility for chemical weapons use"[177] thus reflected Moscow's anxiety. As Russia remarked following that vote, "the question of who used chlorine [gas] remains unanswered… we have heard many politicized statements in that regard, which have clearly been meant as propaganda. It was necessary to close that gap, as was done with the adoption of resolution 2235 (2015) today".[178]

Based in the discussion in the previous chapter, it is likely that Russia's attempts to limit the escalatory potential of the chemical weapons resolutions reflected Russian concerns about the interpretive precedent set by the manner in which NATO had operationalised Resolution 1973 in Libya. But Libya was not the only influence here. Russia's concerns about the politicisation of material evidence to justify military action, and Russia's

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[174] S/PV.7038
[175] S/PV.7401
[176] Ibid.
[177] S/RES/2235
[178] S/PV.7501

consequent attempts to "cast doubt on the reliability of western evidence of Assad's culpability,"[179] may have also reflected fears of a repeat of an 'Iraqi WMD'–style narrative. In parallel, it seems Russia sought to bracket the use of chemical weapons in Syria as an issue separate from the broader crisis. Following reports from the OPCW FFM that chlorine-based chemical weapons had been used again in Syria, on 6 March 2015 Russia voted in favour of Resolution 2209, wherein the Security Council, in addition to condemning the weaponised usage in Syria of "any toxic chemical, such as chlorine", also reaffirmed its determination "in the event of future non-compliance with resolution 2118 to impose measures under Chapter VII of the United Nations Charter".[180] Similarly, on 7 August 2015 Russia voted in favour of Resolution 2235 (largely a follow-on to Resolution 2209), wherein the Security Council again reaffirmed "its decision in response to violations of resolution 2118 to impose measures under Chapter VII of the United Nations Charter".[181]

It is plausible that normative concerns about upholding the prohibition on the use of chemical weapons compelled Moscow to override its opposition to any resolutions that threatened Chapter VII measures against Syria. For instance, while some Security Council members after the Resolution 2209 vote condemned the Syrian government for using chemical weapons against civilians, Russia implied its support for Resolution 2209 lay not within the context of the Syrian conflict itself, but was "guided by our principled position on the unacceptability of the use of chemical weapons by anyone."[182] Indeed, separating the enforcement of the chemical weapons prohibition in Syria on the one hand, from the broader Syrian conflict and its attendant humanitarian and political dynamics on the other, is not unique to the Russian approach. Although outside the scope of this paper, in April 2017 the

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[179] Averre & Davies (2015:821)
[180] S/RES/2209
[181] S/RES/2235
[182] S/PV.7401

US conducted targeted missile strikes on a Syrian airbase following the use of chemical weapons in a rebel-held Syrian village.[183] While it is difficult to discern and rank the specific motivations behind the US strikes, the enforcement of the international chemical weapons prohibition likely trumped humanitarian imperatives.[184]

However, there are also other possible political reasons why Russia threw its support behind each chemical weapons resolution. For instance, Russia remarked that in supporting Resolution 2209, "We also took into account the need for the Security Council to maintain a unified position regarding the Syrian chemical weapons dossier, as embodied in resolution 2118 (2013)."[185] Such was the seriousness of the use of chemical weapons, and such was the non-controversiality of international opposition to their usage, Russia may have feared that voting against, or even abstaining on, these chemical weapons resolutions would not only severely damage Moscow's international image—particularly as a self-professed adherent and promoter of such international law norms—but might also push the US (amongst others) into taking military action in Syria through, following Russia's veto, a lack of meaningful alternatives to enforce the prohibition on chemical weapons.

4.2 Terrorism and armed groups

During this period, Russia's discourse at the Security Council increasingly focused on the activities of terrorist groups in Syria, which, it must be noted, to a great extent reflected the reality. On 22 February 2014, Russia voted in favour of Resolution 2139, which condemned the "increased terrorist attacks" in Syria, urged "the opposition groups to maintain their rejection of these organisations and individuals," and called upon "the Syrian authorities and

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[183] The Guardian (2017)
[184] Pearlstein (2017)
[185] S/PV.7401

opposition groups to commit to combating and defeating these organisations and individuals".[186] Russia was keen to place terrorism centre-stage in the Security Council's deliberations on Syria and arguably to use the issue to divert accusatory focus away from the Syrian regime. Following the vote, Russia remarked that the resolution "underscore[s] the need for the opposition groups… to support the fight against terrorism in Syria in order to eradicate the problem and to work together with the [Syrian] Government to overcome that challenge."[187] Russia added that "the Security Council should swiftly proceed to discuss a further draft document on countering terrorist activities in Syria."[188]

On 14 July 2014 the Security Council adopted Resolution 2165 *inter alia* condemning increasing terrorist activity in Syria; Russia highlighted the resolution's evident "deep concern" about terrorism.[189] On 17 December 2014, the Security Council adopted Resolution 2191 which *inter alia* expressed concern specifically about the rise of ISIL and groups such as Al-Nusrah Front in Syria, and their impact upon the humanitarian situation. That there was no formal debate following this vote arguably indicates some level of consensus amongst the Security Council, especially the P5. At another Council meeting on Syria on 26 February 2015, Russia now argued that difficulties in getting humanitarian assistance to civilians in Syria was due to "the complex security situation, especially the activity of terrorist groups."[190] Russia remarked that "the governorates of Raqqa and Deir ez-Zor… are controlled by the so-called Islamic State", that "Islamic State is stealing humanitarian assistance from United Nations agencies", and that "terrorists are blocking humanitarian deliveries into Yarmouk refugee camp".[191]

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[186] S/RES/2139
[187] S/PV.7116
[188] Ibid.
[189] S/PV.7216
[190] S/PV.7394
[191] Ibid.

Russia was keen that the threat of terrorism should intensely colour the Council's optics regarding the crisis. At a Council meeting on 24 April 2015 following publication of a UN report on Syria, Russian declared it was "a little surprised that the briefings by United Nations high officials referred to the issue of terrorism only in passing," especially considering that "the Council has been paying increasing attention to the topic"[192]—although this 'increasing attention' resulted much from Moscow's singular persistence. For Russia, terrorism was "the essential issue and threat in Syria".[193] Russia also took the occasion to link the issue of terrorism with the premature cessation of the Geneva II negotiations, which, according to Russia, had been "halted after just two short rounds of talks... Because the opposition and those supporting it were not happy that the Government of Syria was insisting on the priority of jointly combating terrorist organizations".[194] Indeed, on several occasions Russia explicitly condemned the West's support for armed groups. For instance, at a Council meeting on 22 May 2014, Russia scorned how "our Western colleagues… are… asserting that they will supply new types of weapons to good opposition groups only. Their list of good guys now includes the Al-Nusra Front, which has openly confessed to a series of brutal terrorist attacks".[195]

Moreover, at a subsequent Council meeting on the protection of journalists in armed conflict (27 May 2015), Russia focused attention on the threat to journalists posed by Islamic State (in both Syria and Iraq), lamenting the "news of another tragic death of a representative of the press, the Iraqi television journalist Firas Al-Bahri, executed by the Islamic State", remarking that the "kidnapping of journalists by the Islamic State and related terrorist

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[192] S/PV.7433
[193] Ibid.
[194] Ibid.
[195] S/PV.7180

organizations is extremely worrying."[196] Islamic State was increasingly a key focus of the Council as a whole.[197] Russia's alleged prioritisation of countering terrorist activity in Syria arguably reflected Moscow's attitude towards broader dynamics across the region. According to Averre & Davies, in Russia's view the Western narrative of the Arab Spring as being a predominantly pro-democracy struggle "obscure[d] the complexity of the campaigns by Islamist groups to gain control over the region".[198]

4.3 Persistent influence of the Libyan experience

Despite Russia's evident deference to the particular features of and developments within the evolving Syrian conflict, the 'Libyan experience' of 2011, including regime change, apparently continued to influence Russia's stance at the Security Council regarding Syria, even as the crisis entered its third and fourth years. Russia seemed to view the adoption of Resolution 2139 on 22 February 2014—which, *inter alia*, condemned violence by both the Syrian government and opposition groups, and affirmed demands for a political solution to the conflict—as a something of a victory for Russia's approach to the crisis. "The Security Council decided relatively recently to consider the humanitarian situation in Syria," Russia stated following the vote, "and only after it became clear that attempts to use the deterioration of the humanitarian situation to effect regime change were unsuccessful."[199]

When vetoing another draft resolution on 22 May 2014, Russia again invoked the Libya intervention. During this paper's timeframe, this was the final proposed Council resolution regarding the Syrian crisis that mentioned Chapter VII measures. This time, *all* of

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[196] S/PV.7450
[197] See e.g. remarks by the UK and France (S/PV.7450)
[198] Averre & Davies (2015:820)
[199] S/PV.7116

the draft's operative paragraphs were placed under a Chapter VII heading, thus undoubtedly begging the Russian veto (although, once again, there is no guarantee Russia would have refrained from the veto had Chapter VII not been included). Most importantly, the draft resolution, under Chapter VII, referred the situation in Syria to the International Criminal Court (ICC), and demanded that both the Syrian government and armed groups "cooperate fully with and provide any necessary assistance to the Court and the Prosecutor".[200] The Security Council would also, again under a Chapter VII operative paragraph, commit "to an effective follow-up of the present resolution".[201]

For context, the last time a Chapter VII draft resolution directed at the Syria crisis (as opposed to chemical weapons) had been proposed was nearly two years prior, in July 2012, which Russia had vetoed on the basis of it being a pretext for eventual Western military intervention. Now, with a new draft text again mentioning Chapter VII measures, Russia again cited the same concerns. "[W]e understand the motives" behind the drafters of the resolution wanting to refer the Syria crisis to the ICC, Russia explained following the veto, but it "is more difficult to discern the motives that led France to initiate the draft and put it to a vote, fully aware in advance of the fate it would meet."[202] Considering Russia's consistent stance on the unacceptability of Chapter VII measures or clauses, this is a fair comment. Predictably, Russia framed the draft as being an attempt "once again to create a pretext for armed intervention" in Syria.[203] In other words, Russia viewed the referral of the Syrian crisis to the ICC—especially as this was to be placed under a Chapter VII heading—as constituting yet another example of escalatory potential. This proposed referral, Russia argued, revealed

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[200] S/2014/348
[201] S/2014/348
[202] S/PV.7180
[203] Ibid.

"an attempt to use the ICC to further inflame political passions and lay the ultimate groundwork for eventual outside military intervention."[204]

In particular, consistent with its explanations of vetoing earlier Chapter VII draft resolutions since the start of the Syrian crisis, Russia again rationalised its position through reference to the Libya intervention:

> "One cannot ignore the fact that the last time the Security Council referred a case to the International Criminal Court (ICC)—the Libyan dossier, through resolution 1970 (2011)—it did not help resolve the crisis, but instead added fuel to the flames of conflict. After the cessation of hostilities, the ICC… did not contribute to a return of normalcy or justice in Libya, and instead evaded the most pressing issues. The deaths of civilians as a result of NATO bombardments was somehow left outside its scope."[205]

However, it is notable that there were no explicit references to regime change in Libya as having influenced Russia's veto. Instead, the allegation is quite vague, that referring Libya to the ICC had "added fuel to the flames of conflict." That said, it appears that Russia had possibly inferred the potential for foreign-imposed regime change from the very content of the draft resolution. When explaining its veto, Russia remarked that "[p]ursuing regime change by force in Syria at all costs will prolong the crisis and undermine the Geneva negotiations"[206]—although quite how the proposed referral of Syria to the ICC could possibly constitute the pursuit of 'regime change by force' was not articulated.

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[204] Ibid.
[205] Ibid.
[206] S/PV.7180

Reflecting Moscow's comments explored in the previous chapter regarding a 'hasty regime change', Russia occasionally appeared to frame regime change not as normatively negative *per se,* but as negative for its destabilising effects. For instance, directing the charge of 'pursuit of regime change' specifically at the US, UK and France, Russia asked "our Western colleagues to abandon their futile, dead-end policy of endlessly escalating the Syrian crisis."[207] Indeed, throughout this chapter's time period, Russia consistently voiced what amounted to a utilitarian opposition to external military force in Syria, seeking to illustrate how military responses to similar crises—including as per the Libya intervention—can exacerbate conflicts and further instability. For instance, at a Security Council meeting regarding general conflict prevention on 21 August 2014, Russian remarked:

"Clearly, the actions of certain influential States are directly at odds with the goal of conflict prevention, thereby engendering serious crises. The consequences of those crises have led to the destabilization of entire countries or even regions… We are also witnessing uncontrolled destabilization in Libya, with bleak prospects for overcoming that crisis."[208]

This narrative regarding the way in which foreign (again, mostly Western) interference in domestic conflicts had exacerbated crises and destabilised countries, including Libya, framed a key part of Russia's stance on Syria. At a Council meeting on 27 March 2015, Russia argued the spread of terrorist groups within Syria and nearby countries "has been due in large part to the thoughtless actions of players from outside the region, both before and during the

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[207] Ibid.
[208] S/PV.7247

so-called Arab Spring".[209] According to Russia, after regional destabilisation following the US-led invasion of Iraq in 2003, "the situation became even worse in 2011, when the NATO bombing undertaken in violation of resolution 1973 (2011) not only destroyed the Al-Qadhafi regime but all the elements that had previously made Libya a unified State." When articulating Moscow's opposition to military intervention in Syria during a meeting on 24 April 2015, Russia again underscored how Libya "is in free-fall, sending shock waves throughout the entire Sahel and the North Africa region — and now even to the Mediterranean region as well".[210] The implication is therefore that by vehemently opposing any form or even prospect of coercive intervention in Syria, Russia was pre-emptively 'saving' the country, and the broader region, from the type of catastrophe that had resulted from the Libya intervention in 2011.

During this chapter's period there were occasional anomalies in the way Russia linked 'the Libyan experience' with its approach to the Syrian crisis and civilian protection more broadly. For instance, at a Council meeting on 'Protection of civilians in armed conflict' on 12 February 2014, Russia voiced concerns about the "modalities" used for civilian protection operations, noting, with an implicit nod to Syria, that modalities "should be tied to specific mandates defined by the Security Council for each country situation."[211] Yet, Russia only cited the Security Council-authorised intervention in Côte d'Ivoire as an example of a case "where peacekeepers, in breach of their mandate and the main principles of peacekeeping, rendered support to one of the parties to a conflict and were therefore dragged into that conflict".[212] That is, despite Libya's usual prominence in Russian arguments about the dangers of exceeding Council mandates, Libya was not cited. Indeed, throughout the entire

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[209] S/PV.7419
[210] S/PV.7433
[211] S/PV.7109
[212] Ibid.

Russian statement raising concerns about the implementation of civilian protection operations, Libya was never mentioned—and Syria was mentioned only in passing.

In addition to Russia's vetoes and explanations thereof, conversely it is useful to consider those resolutions that were adopted with Russia's positive support. For instance, Russia voted in favour of Resolution 2139 (22 February 2014)—articulating a variety of humanitarian and terrorism related obligations upon all parties in Syria—which while expressing the Council's "intent to take further steps in the case of non-compliance with this resolution" does not mention Chapter VII anywhere in the text; any such "further steps" would require additional authorisation from the Council through a separate resolution. Russia drew attention to this point, noting that the Security Council "can consider further steps" but that "the resolution does not provide for an automatic imposition of sanctions—the Security Council would not have allowed that."[213] Russia used virtually identical language following its vote in support of Resolution 2165 on 14 July that year, which demanded all parties comply with their international humanitarian law and international human rights law obligations.[214] That resolution, Russia remarked, "does not provide for an automatic authorization of enforcement measures."[215] Russia's remarks regarding the non-inclusion of automatic enforcement measures or sanctions can be interpreted both as an affirmation, directed towards other members of the Council, of the resolution's limitations, and also as an explanation for why, in fact, Russia was willing to vote in favour. In a similar vein, on 17 December 2014 Russia voted in favour of Resolution 2191, which, while citing the legal obligations of "all parties" in Syria regarding their treatment of civilians, nevertheless stipulated only that the Council would "take further measures under the Charter of the United

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[213] S/PV.7116
[214] S/RES/2165
[215] S/PV.7216

Nations in the event of non-compliance"[216]—in other words, the resolution specifically omitted reference to Chapter VII. No doubt it also bode well for the successful passage of the resolution via Russia's supporting vote that none of its seven operative paragraphs condemned or otherwise focused singly upon the Syrian regime, which may have also prompted a Russian veto.

4.4 Summary

During the period September 2013 to September 2015, Russia's stance at the Security Council regarding Syria became increasingly influenced by the nature of developments particular to the Syrian crisis and conflict itself, notably chemical weapons and terrorism. Both these developments also increasingly occupied the attention of the Security Council and the broader international community. On the other hand, Russia continued to oppose any Security Council resolutions—beyond the three resolutions on chemical weapons—that mentioned Chapter VII, framing this as virtually a pretext for armed intervention that would destabilise the crisis further; this is broadly consistent with Russia's approach during the period 2011 to August 2013, as covered in the previous chapter. However, while Russia voiced similar concerns during September 2013 to September 2015 as previously, the direct justificatory citations of regime change and intervention in Libya now appeared far weaker and less prominent. This may suggest the effect(s) of what Russia had earlier called 'the Libyan experience' may have been internalised in Moscow to the extent that there was little perceived need to continually reference Libya. Alternatively, Russia may have believed that continually citing an intervention from several years ago (Libya) could give the impression

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[216] S/RES/2191

that Moscow was not properly appraising the Syrian crisis on its own merits, which would be especially important considering Russia had argued that any one crisis requires a tailored response taking into account the specifics of the case.

CHAPTER 5 — Conclusions

This paper has sought to assess to what extent and in what manner regime change in Libya in 2011 affected Russia's stance on the Syrian crisis during 2011–2015. The literature review in Chapter 1 outlined the common assumption that regime change in Libya decisively affected Russia's stance on Syria, while also noting some prevailing methodological limitations to this literature. Chapter 2, after discussing the concept of regime change and its relationship to humanitarian intervention, then identified the constitutive aspects of regime change in the Libyan case, followed by Russia's response to the intervention as articulated at the Security Council: Russia's criticisms were shown to revolve less around regime change *per se*, and more around the alleged destabilisation and civilian deaths caused by NATO airstrikes. Chapters 2 and 3 constituted a textual analysis of Russian statements at the Security Council during the period 2011–2015. From this, several conclusions are apparent.

Throughout the period 2011–2015, although most potently in the period 2011–2012, Russia clearly and repeatedly cited the Libya case when explaining Moscow's reluctance to countenance the possibility of external military force in Syria. The essence of Russia's position could be summarised in terms of disallowing a repeat of 'the Libyan model' or 'the Libyan experience' in Syria. However, the genesis of the causal effect of the Libya intervention upon Russia's stance on Syria appeared, based on Russian statements, to lie more in the destabilising impact of external military force in Libya rather than in the interveners' pursuit and facilitation of regime change there.

Moreover, across the entire period of 2011–2015 Russia invoked the Libya case as justification for vetoing not only those proposed Security Council resolutions on Syria that contained the threat of coercive measures—both sanctions and/or military force—under

Chapter VII of the UN Charter, but also those containing *any* operative paragraphs under Chapter VII; this even included referring Syria to the ICC. In this sense, the causal effect of the Libyan case was to effectively curtail the Council's ability to make any demands under Chapter VII, in line with Russia's argument that only an internally-sourced rather than externally-imposed political solution would be acceptable to Moscow.

However, when citing Libya as justification for this position, again Russia's primary causal argument was that in Libya, Chapter VII measures had resulted in further exacerbating the conflict; any Russian suggestions that a Chapter VII mandate in Libya had led to regime change in a manner likely to be repeated in Syria appeared minimal at best. That said, several times when explaining its veto usage against proposed Syria resolutions containing Chapter VII, Russia criticised other Council members for seeking regime change in Syria. Thus there was a disconnect between how Russia framed what had happened as a result of coercive measures being applied to Libya—namely further destabilisation and civilian deaths—and what might happen as a result of similar measures being applied to Syria—not only further destabilisation and civilian deaths, but also potentially regime change. Further research could help shed light on this issue, as an explanation is currently beyond the scope of this paper.

Finally, during the period 2013–2015, Russia's stance on Syria appeared increasingly influenced—as were other Council members and the broader international community—by the particular dynamics of the evolving crisis and conflict, namely the use of chemical weapons and the rise in terrorist activity. Russia supported three consecutive Security Council resolutions on chemical weapons that threatened Chapter VII measures against Syria for non–compliance. However, these resolutions concerned chemical weapons specifically, not the international politics or humanitarian suffering pursuant to the Syrian crisis itself; and it is plausible that Russia viewed taking a lead role on the issue as further curtailing the prospects for a US military intervention.

More broadly, this assessment contains implications that stretch beyond Libya and Syria. If repeatedly deadlocked and unable to act muscularly to protect civilians during times of crisis, the Security Council's own legitimacy and relevance may be thrown into question. On the other hand, such deadlock is also seen, and will continue to be seen, by many as the Council in fact working 'as it should'—that is, preventing, or at least not legalising, the unilateral use of force against another state. Fortunately, Syria currently represents the only truly large–scale post–Libya humanitarian crisis or civil conflict around which international consensus for action has failed to be built. However, this means that while we might discuss the manner in which the international response to Libya shaped Russia's—and thus, by extension, the Security Council's—response to Syria, it presently remains difficult to determine the extent to which 'the Libyan experience' might have toxified the practice of humanitarian intervention and the operationalisation of civilian protection. On this, future research will be paramount; unfortunately, this may require waiting in perverse anticipation for the next humanitarian catastrophe.

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