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THE SYRIAN CIVIL WAR ON HUMAN DIGNITY:

International approaches towards domestic quarrels

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1. INTRODUCTION

The Arab Spring uprisings of 2011 triggered a wide set of social movements and regime change across the Middle East and North Africa. While interconnected, the uprisings in each nation took different forms and reached varied effects. This article focuses on the development of conflict in Syria under Bashar al-Assad in order to flesh out the main roots and consequences of the Syrian Civil War – currently enraging across the country – and pinpoint the political, humanitarian and international outcomes of the current situation in Syria.

In order to better understand the aforementioned topic, this article will give an insight elapsing through different topics. First, an analysis of the changes in the logic of security will be introduced, in order to elucidate why the Syrian civil war can be considered an international security issue. The traditional concept of security was too limited to deal with the new post-Cold War threats to international security. In this sense, wider conceptions of international security emerged, which included new sectors other than the military security as well as a variety of non-state actors. In addition, the connection between human dignity, fundamental rights and international security has also been examined.

The political and historical context of the Syrian conflict will also be explored in the article. First, through the contextualization of the civil war within the larger framework of the Arab Spring, bringing up the notion of spillover effect. Second, with a comprehensive analysis of the historical background that resulted in the

popular uprisings and the development of the civil war. And finally, with the examination of the internal consequences of the conflict.

The article also analyses the flexibilization of the concept of state sovereignty in the post-Cold war era due to the prioritization of human rights. In addition, the article introduces the idea of the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) and examines its relation with state sovereignty. At last, it focuses on the role of the UNSC in implementing the Responsibility to Protect and discusses the Security Council's decisions regarding the Syrian conflict.

2. INTERNATIONAL SECURITY: A CONCEPTUAL ANALYSIS

The concept of security went through significant changes since the end of the Cold War. For many years, internal disputes within states were not considered issues of international concern. In order to comprehend why the Syrian civil war – an internal quarrel – can be considered a matter of international security, it is essential to understand how the concept has been expanded in order to include new threats and agendas, such as environmental security and human rights, as well as to accommodate other actors besides the state. This section aims at analyzing why and how these changes occurred, how international security theory dealt with them, and how this new conception of security relates to the principle of human dignity.

2.1. Changes in the logic of security

The traditional concept of international security, which was in force until the end of the Cold War, was closely related to:

the use of force between nations, with a particular focus on the role of great powers. This reflected the view that international security involved the territorial integrity of nations and the greatest threat to such territorial integrity was posed by wars between states, and particularly between great powers (ST. JEAN, 2007, p.21).

In fact, Buzan, de Wilde and Wæver (1998) point out that previously there was an intense narrowing of the field of security studies, focusing on military and nuclear security, due to the bipolar international scenario and the arms race. Moreover, another important feature of this traditional definition is its state-centric character, posing the state as the main object of external threats, reinforcing thus the ideals on national security and state sovereignty (ANDERSON, 2012).

However, the post-Cold War context was marked by significant changes in the international system, followed by a perception that the international threats had changed. Anderson (2012) highlights four “far-reaching shifts” especially important. The first is globalization, because of its contribution to the strengthening of international interdependence. The second “far-reaching shift” is the so called “rise of the rest”, which refers to the economic emergence of several developing countries – such as Brazil and India – and the consequent strengthening of a multipolar economic order. Another important change stressed by Anderson is what Joseph Nye characterizes as “a power transition among states and a power diffusion away from all states” (NYE, 2011, apud ANDERSON, 2012, p.30), marked by the rise of non-state actors. Finally, the last shift was the demographical trend of mass migration, urbanization and high fertility rates in poor countries, such as Mali and Afghanistan, which may contribute to political instability in those areas.

These shifts, combined with the rise of the economic and environmental agendas in the 1970's and 1980's, and the emergence of transnational crimes and identity issues in the 1990's, highlighted by Buzan, de Wilde and Wæver (1998), contributed to a change of perspective regarding international threats. Anderson (2012) points out that internal conflict has gained prominence in the 21st century's international security agenda. That is mainly due to the increase in this kind of conflict – as a matter of fact, few armed conflicts nowadays take place among solely state actors; however, the international community is more involved in internal conflicts than it was 20 years ago (ST. JEAN, 2007)¹.

This combination of decrease in inter-state conflict and increase in internal conflict – especially in developing countries – contributed to the relative loss of prominence of military might and nuclear deterrence in international security studies (ANDERSON, 2012). Indeed, the main focus of nuclear security nowadays has shifted from great powers control of nuclear arms to the develop-

¹ Kaldor (2001) argues that this greater involvement is evidenced by the increase in the number of peace-keeping, peace-monitoring and peace enforcement operations, combined with the character changes in such operations. In the 1990s, there were only eight UN peacekeeping operations, involving approximately 10.000 troops. By the end of 2000, there were 15 UN operations mobilizing 38.000 troops; including the interventions in Somalia (1992-1993), Bosnia-Herzegovina (1992-1995), Rwanda (1994) and Sierra Leone (1994-2000).

ment of nuclear capabilities by failed² or rogue³ states. Finally, the increase in international interdependence diminished the role of national security and highlighted the importance of multilateralism in the development of an internationally constructed security (ANDERSON, 2012).

In this context, the concept of security has been debated, in order to accommodate other sectors besides the military and political ones. Buzan, de Wilde and Wæver (1998) enumerate five sectors for security analysis: the military; concerned with offensive and defensive capabilities of states; the political, which relates to organizational stability of states, ideologies, systems of government and legitimacy; the economic, which deals with the distribution of resources to guarantee a minimum level of social welfare and state power; the societal, concerned with religious, cultural and national identities; and the environmental, which relates to the preservation of the biosphere. In addition to these sectors, other agendas have also been securitized – that is, taken from the sphere of normal politics to the sphere of urgent security issues that requires exceptional measures (PEOPLES; VAUGHAN-WILLIAMS, 2010). These agendas include, for example, human rights, and are intrinsically connected to the inclusion of other actors in the security logic.

St. Jean (2007) points out that one of the problems of the state-centric definition of security is that it overlooks several threats. The national security, although important in order to guarantee individual security, is not enough to assure individual welfare. This is due to the possibility that the state itself may, passively or actively, harm the population, endangering individual security and thus threatening welfare too. The state-centered concept of security also disregards threats that may arise from within the states and have consequences to the systemic level, such as the spillover effect⁴ (ST. JEAN, 2007). Furthermore, transnational threats, such as terrorism or environmental disasters, are not encompassed in the traditional definition as well. In this sense, the traditional concept was too limited to deal with these new kinds of threats to international security, which fostered the debates about the inclusion of actors other than the state – individuals, firms, regional and international organizations, bureaucracies, among others (ST. JEAN, 2007).

Another influential factor that affected the logic of international security was the development of the idea of human security. The term, coined by the 1994 Human Development Report, refers to the protection of human life and dignity (UNITED

NATIONS DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM [UNDP], 1994). The report also states that the definition of security as the absence of external aggression is too narrow, and that people must feel safe in their daily live. In this sense, there are two main goals of human security: freedom from want⁵ and freedom from fear⁶ (ARAVENA, 2002). In order to achieve these goals, each of the seven components of human security – economic, health, environmental, personal, community, political and food security – must be granted to individuals (UNDP, 1994).

As seen above, there is not a consensus among the academic community or policy makers regarding the limits of the expansion of the concept of international security. The following section will present different approaches to this question.

2.2. New approaches to security

An interesting approach towards the concept of security is the one adopted by the Copenhagen School, the so called “Securitization Theory”. Created by Barry Buzan and Ole Wæver, this theory defines security as “the move that takes politics beyond the established rules of the game and frames the issue either as a special kind of politics or as above politics” (BUZAN; DE WILDE; WÆVER, 1998, p. 23). Buzan understands that there is a securitization spectrum ranging from non-politicized to politicized and then securitized. In this context, securitization consists in moving a topic from the normal politics sphere to the security sphere, meaning that the topic must be prioritized and that exceptional political measures may be applied to it (PEOPLES; VAUGHAN-WILLIAMS, 2010).

² Although there is no universally accepted definition of state failure, this condition is commonly associated to the erosion of the state’s capacity to perform its basic functions effectively. The fundamental elements of state function are the provision of peace and stability, territorial control, economic sustainability and the provision of basic public services (WYLER, 2008).

³ Rogue states are those states that have enough power and credibility to act in a way that conflicts with the interests of international society as defined by major powers, and that actually put such behavior in practice (ROSE, 2011).

⁴ This concept will be explored in section 3.2.

⁵ Freedom from want relates to the economic and social aspects of human security, including freedom from poverty and starvation, as well as access to health care, education and housing (UN, 2005).

⁶ Freedom from fear refers to freedom from all of the threats that can cause death or lessen life chances on a large scale, such as war, civil violence, organized crime, terrorism, weapons of mass destruction, deadly infectious diseases and environmental degradation (UN, 2005).

It is important to notice that Buzan and Wæver do not introduce any objective criteria to define what fits in as a security matter (PEOPLES; VAUGHAN-WILLIAMS, 2010). Rather, they adopt a constructivist approach, where security is a subjective construction between the securitizing actor and the audience (BUZAN; DE WILDE; WÆVER, 1998). In order to be securitized, an issue must be presented as posing an existential threat to a referred object. This is done through a speech act, where the securitizing actor tries to convince its audience that a specific issue is a matter of security. In this context, almost any issue can be securitized, as long as the audience accepts the threat as credible (PEOPLES; VAUGHAN-WILLIAMS, 2010).

David Baldwin also offers an interesting perspective on the definition of security. Based on the work of Arnold Wolfers, he defines security as “the absence of threats to acquired values” (BALDWIN, 1997, p. 13). In addition, security must be specified in terms of referred object and acquired values that shall be protected. The traditional concept of national security, for example, can be defined as the absence of threats to sovereignty and territorial integrity, which are important acquired values for the referred object, the state. Nevertheless, any other values considered important by the referred object might be included as well (BALDWIN, 1997).

Therefore, this definition can also encompass a wide range of issues, expanding the concept of security beyond the military sphere; it all depends on the acquired values in question. It is also important to notice that Baldwin (1997) does not restrict the referred object to the state; other actors, such as individuals, the international system, sub-regional systems, among others, are also included in his definition.

2.3 The nexus between international security and human dignity

This section aims to analyze how the principle of human dignity fits into the broader definitions of international security presented in section 2.2. Human dignity is characterized by Barroso (2012) as a fundamental value. It is not a right on its own, but it represents the foundation for all the truly fundamental rights; therefore, human dignity can be considered an acquired value according to Baldwin’s definition. In this context, human dignity needs to be protected, and any threat to the multiple dimensions of the dignity of individuals – the referred object – can be perceived as a security matter.

The minimalist definition of human dignity encompasses the intrinsic value of all human beings, the individual autonomy and

the community value, which are legitimate constraints on autonomy arising from social values or state interest (BARROSO, 2012). These three aspects are the basis for the rights to life, equality under the law, physical and mental integrity, private autonomy, political participation and the “existential minimum” – minimum material conditions necessary for the exercise of autonomy (BARROSO, 2012). It is interesting to notice that many of the issues considered as part of human dignity are also embedded in the concept of human security discussed in section 2.1.

It is also possible to argue that human dignity has been securitized in the terms of Buzan and Wæver’s theory. Over the last few decades, several researchers and policy-makers, such as Mervin Frost (2009) and Nicholas Wheeler (2000), have made the case of human dignity, in the form of fundamental or civil rights, a universal concern and made its protection a universal role of the civil society, especially in cases when a state is threatening the human rights of its citizens. In this scenario, speech acts have been presented to the international community, arguing that the violation of fundamental rights by the state poses an existential threat to its population⁷. Based on the growing number of humanitarian interventions that have been conducted throughout the years, one can argue that the audience – the international society – accepted the securitization narrative. The session below discusses the Arab spring under the acceptance of the aforementioned topics.

3. THE ARAB SPRING

3.1. Contextualization of the phenomenon

The process of reiterated demonstrations of population dissatisfaction with their respective governments within several Arab States came to be known as Arab Spring (LYNCH, 2012). Although there are critics on the purposes of coining this expression (see MASSAD, 2012), there is no slightest doubt that the term is broadly used to refer to the trends of manifestations that popped throughout the Arab world, especially after the self-immolation of Mohamed Bouazizi’s in Tunisia on 17 of December, 2010.

Initially, the unrests of populations within the Arab States had several different reasons, namely economic instability, unemployment, unjustified raises in price levels, curtailment of fundamental rights, political persecution, and among others, deprivation of

⁷ A more detailed analysis of this argument can be found in section 5.2.

human dignity conditions in general. Moreover, specificities were evident throughout the manifestations among the Arab world: the social-media sway. The popular demonstrations were usually led by young people organized through social networks (SOUZA & COSTA, 2012).

Furthermore, the manifestations, which initially aimed for some specific reforms, turned into passionate demonstrations of peoples willing to make profound regime changes in their States' administrations. Several Middle Eastern and Northern African nations had entered in confront with their governments, which had been refusing to grant civil and political rights to major parts of these societies for decades (TAVARES, 2012).

Tunisia, the birthplace of the Arab Spring, was the first nation to go through an electoral period. Jbeli Hamadi, Secretary-General of the moderate party Ennahda, emerged victorious of the elections of 23/10/2011 (BERÇO..., 2011). Besides Tunisia, on July 7, 2012, Libya also went through elections and elected moderates to the government (STEPHEN, 2012).

Egypt, the country which faced the largest protests during the Arab Spring, went through its first round of elections on May 23 and 24, 2012. Despite the election of moderate Mohammed Mursi with 51% of the votes, the Egyptian electoral process witnessed violent protests against the runner-up, a former minister of Hosni Mubarak, the ousted president (KNELL, 2012). Such events, especially when linked to the bloody protests against the film about Mohammed⁸ in September 2012, have generated uncertainties regarding whether or not the post-Arab Spring Middle East is in the sound path of reaching the peace.

All the above-mentioned countries managed courageously, and sometimes through sanguinary processes, to achieve greater levels of political freedom and are nowadays moving towards a more democratic regime that empowers most of the population to decide the future of its society. Finally, it is important to understand Arab Spring as a process of democratization embraced by several nations throughout the area, a process that started within an Arab country but rapidly reverberated to most of the region. This contiguous aspect of the phenomenon will be more carefully dealt in next section.

3.2. Spillover effect and the Arab Spring

Arab Spring has achieved many successes in the nations in which it occurred, notably the fall of dictatorships and their replacement by democratic regimes. However, this social phenomenon

has also led to the outbreak of new protests demanding for rights throughout the Middle East.

Foremost, a brief explanation of the concept is interesting. The spillover effect could be considered closely linked to the economical concept of externality, namely "cases where the actions of one individual or one firm affect other individuals or firms" (STIGLITZ, 1986, p. 80). Such definition, however, is insufficient when applied to the concept of spillover in International Relations, or the Arab Spring. The spillover could be assumed to be a dynamic in which domestic issues (subjected to domestic legal and legitimacy instruments) turn to international questions, where cross-border elements such as national interest and responsibility to protect⁹, for example, are present (WATKINS & WINTERS, 1997, p.132; GEIß, 2009, p. 02). Thus, it could be argued that, beyond the punctual examples treated below, the very Arab Spring phenomenon (a movement in which protests spread from Tunisia to other countries) could be considered as an example of spillover effect.

The Libyan civil war was the first major military conflict in the scope of Arab Spring and, during the conflict, the defeated Libyan dictator Muammar Kaddafi resorted to sub-Saharan mercenaries against the opposition. With the overthrow of Kaddafi, Tuareg¹⁰ mercenaries hired to defend his government returned heavily armed and better trained to the region of Bamako, in the north of Mali. Once there, these veteran troops, with previous desire to create a homeland of their own, overcame the official forces and began the Civil War in that country (ALSAIDI, 2012). Such conflict culminated with the declaration of independence of the Azawad region and the loss of control of historic towns (such as Timbukutu and Gao) by Malian government, as well as with a large number of deaths.

Besides Lybian and Malian cases, the Arab Spring also encompasses an even bigger and bloodier conflict: the Syrian Civil War. The conflict initiated similarly to the other national revolu-

⁸ In September, 2012, North-American movie "The Innocence of Muslims" (which attacked Islam's prophet's honor) caused a series of violent protests against North-American embassies all over the Middle East. Such protestations lead to the murder of several U.S.'s diplomatic personnel in MENA, including North-American ambassador to Libya. (SPILLIUS, 2012)

⁹ The Responsibility to Protect (R2P) concept will be better addressed in section 5.

¹⁰ Tuaregs, a nomadic people of northern Africa, compose organizations such as the Movement for the Liberation of Azawad. Such political group has long demanded the independence of areas in Mali's north, where he lives his ethnic group, from the Bamako government (controlled by sub-Saharan Africans) (MALI CRISIS..., 2012).

tions in Arab world, but the particular situation of that country – which has a large and heterogeneous population and an unrepresentative government – led to a yet unprecedented conflict in Arab Spring. Syrian civil war has already claimed forty-four thousand lives (MORE THAN...) and hundreds of thousands of refugees, and begins to resemble a sectarian war which seems to be far from its end, whether by domestic or foreign intervention.

Arab Spring, as a movement aiming the change of political regimes, seems to have been successful so far. Despite these earnings in national fields, however, in some cases the violence and lack of accountability of governments – which contributed to the occurrence of spillover effect to such nations – led populations to terrible situations. In the case of Syria, repeated human rights violations, thousands of deaths and the regionalization of the conflict – topics which will be addressed in the next section of this article – do make it imperative that UNSC take action to at least prevent the continuity of such atrocities.

4. THE SITUATION IN SYRIA

4.1. Political and historical background prior to the conflict

The current situation in Syria is a political and social outcome of the nation's recent history – namely, the time span that comprehends from the ascension on the Ba'ath party¹¹ to power in the latter half of the 20th century to the recent events sparked by the broader Arab Spring. Comprehensively, the engenderment of the current political regime in Syria derives from the 1970 *coup d'état*¹², which brought Hafez al-Assad to power. Nevertheless, the nature of the regime is originated from the failure of Syria's early post-independence liberal policy underlying the rise of Ba'athist political groups later on (HINNEBUSCH, 2009).

In a nutshell, this section will shed light – in a critically historical perspective – onto the transition between the failed liberal regime, with foreign intervention and the war with Israel being a reflection of Pan-Arabism¹³, to the rise of the Ba'ath political groups which dominated the political scope since, and the authoritarian regime ruled by the Assad family which is threatened by recent events, where Pan-Arabism once again threatens Syrian sovereignty – the Arab Spring.

4.1.1. The rise of the Ba'ath party

The fall of the Ottoman Empire briefly after World War I left a fragmented Syria, with heterogeneous political and social factions,

together with numerous religious and ethnic groups that were once mediated by the Ottoman Sultan, and thereafter, the forces of Pan-Arabism and the mediation of France (HINNEBUSCH, 2009). In this sense, the notion of Pan-Arabism exhorted a huge influence in the post-World War I regimes in the Middle East, including Syria. The quest for national identity to consolidate sovereignty was hampered by the lack of ethnic-state identification (HINNEBUSCH, 2009).

In accordance with Cleveland and Bunton (2009), the political instability of the untested parliamentary government which was instilled in 1930 was due to the divide-and-rule¹⁴ policies of the French, which had encouraged Syrians to identify with their regional, religious, or ethnic community at the expense of a cohesive Syrian nation; thus, even after independence, individuals tended to retain their communal loyalty. The Arab national-socialist ideologies were taking scene as a series of military coups brought an end to military control by the wealthy urban elite. Instead, young men derived from humble origins, which were trained in the Syrian military academy, replaced them (HINNEBUSCH, 2009).

Tracing Syria's political instability is tracing back the origins of the current civil and military uprisings. Kaplan gives an explanation on one of the factors which contributed to Syria's social fragmentation and political heterogeneity. The control of the parliament under the Syrian elite and a military controlled by younger cadres of society halted any reforms, which rendered the unsuccessful attempt of a liberal Syrian government – a milestone in the Middle East. Syrians have also repeatedly sought an identity in pan-Arabic, Greater Syrian, or Islamic causes, further

¹¹ The Ba'ath (literally resurrection) is an ideology and political movement based on Arab unity, dedicated to revolutionary activism aimed at bringing a complete transformation of Arab Society, reflecting upon the inequality of a oligarchy which controlled Syria – a reflection of its colonial past. The Ba'ath party, assembled in 1947, sought sympathizers in the urban middle class and also by peasants. Nearly dismantled by the 1961 *coup d'état* which ended with the United Arab Republic, the Ba'athists returned to power in 1963 through the mobilization of large sectors of the population.

¹² Also known as the 1970 Syrian Corrective Revolution, or the Syrian Corrective Movement.

¹³ Pan-Arabism was the core ideology of the union between post-colonial Arab states, it merged, namely, into the main driving force behind the successive wars against Israel in the 1960's and 70's.

¹⁴ Divide-and-rule is a strategy used in politics designating the preservation and gain of power through the fragmentation of a large concentration of power, hampering any possibility of union, and therefore, curtail any threat towards the maintenance of the pre-established divide-and-conquer.

impeding any attempt to construct a nation-state on Syrian territory. Furthermore, Syria's complex sociopolitical makeup makes it highly characteristic of its neighborhood as Syria's 19 million people are divided into the majoritarian Sunni Arabs and numerous minorities such as Alawis, Christians, Kurds, Druze, Bedouin, Ismailis, Turcomans, Circassians and Assyrians (KAPLAN, 2008).

Another explanation is given by Hinnebusch (2009) to the complex and unstable Syrian society. The bifurcation of power between the military and the parliament led to a stalemate that brought to the prevalence of pan-Arabism which united Syria and Egypt under the United Arab Republic¹⁵ as Nasser imported Ba'ath ideology into the Egyptian arena. By 1957, Syrian Ba'ath leaders, fearing for their control over the country, sought for Nasser in order to establish a union. Even though the United Arab Republic was dismembered in 1961, it consolidated Ba'ath prevalence in Syrian polity scenario and guaranteed the status quo of Syrian sovereignty under Hafez al-Assad (CLEVELAND; BUNTON, 2009).

4.1.2. The Hafez al-Assad era

In 1970 Hafez al-Assad and his fellow officers carried out a *coup d'état* had them seize power within the Ba'ath party. The social reforms engendered by the Ba'ath party continued with a campaign against the wealthy elite and agrarian reform. Although the regime was governed by civilians, it was in fact controlled by the military (CLEVELAND; BUNTON, 2009). Therefore, al-Assad, as minister of defense, became the dominant force within the armed forces in November 1970. He took power and was confirmed president in a referendum in the following year, retaining his power until 2000, when his death saw the succession of his son, Bashar al-Assad (CLEVELAND; BUNTON, 2009).

In his rule, Hafez al-Assad repeated the political achievements of the Ba'ath party. He used the government to benefit important factions in exchange for political support and an ever-greater hegemony over the Syrian society. Hafez, through his populist policies, has benefited from a growing economy brought by rising oil prices (KAPLAN, 2008). He also governed with an even hand, bringing the Sunni majority into important government positions – having approximately 60% of Sunnis in the People's Assembly (KAPLAN, 2008).

Nevertheless, Hafez harshly repressed the dissent and he also expanded the armed forces and intelligence services throughout Syria in order to maintain swift control of the country. In Febru-

ary 1982, Hafez ordered the Syrian army to conduct a scorched earth operation to quell a revolt by the conservative opposition group of the Muslim Brotherhood¹⁶ – later being known as the Hama massacre – killing many of his opponents. After the massacre, the notable disarray in the insurgents' ranks increased, and rival factions experienced wide internal splits. Conclusively, Hafez hampered its largest opposition group by splitting the Muslim Brotherhood (KAPLAN, 2008).

4.1.3. The Bashar al-Assad era

Bashar al-Assad came to power after his father's death; this transition from father to son made Syria the first Arab republican hereditary regime. Conjointly, he was faced with an unpropitious framework which threatened his secure to power. This framework, in the socio-economic scope, was underlined by Kaplan (2008, p. 104): "Declining production levels of oil directly threaten the state's already weak fiscal position". Kaplan (2008, p. 104) continues: "This financial breakdown is matched by a more serious systemic breakdown typical of multigenerational socialist regimes". The Ba'ath party has become ever increasing corrupt through all state bodies. Even though a short wave of reform was brought during the "Damascus Spring"¹⁷, it was undermined by sectarian tensions and slow progress in civil liberties (KAPLAN, 2008). Bashar implemented some reform; nevertheless, the overall pace of reform was slow and piecemeal. A solid bureaucracy and economic monopolies, allied with Assad's unwillingness – or inability, for fear of the consequences – undermined any possibilities of adopting a more ambitious agenda towards reform (KAPLAN, 2008).

¹⁵ A short-lived union between Egypt and Syria existed from 1958 and 1961. A reflex of the leadership of Egyptian president Gamal Abdel Nasser, which under pan-Arabism, unified both countries to deter the communist threat in Syria, by then, the Ba'ath party was already in power, being a natural ally of Egypt. Nevertheless, the breakup of the union began when Nasser was not eager to share his powers with the Ba'ath party and his wave of economic nationalization and socialist policies were unpopular with the Syrian version of the landed gentry (KAPLAN, 2008).

¹⁶ The Muslim Brotherhood is one of the Arab world's most influential and largest Islamic movements organized politically as opposition in many Arab states, mainly preaching conservative Islamism as a religious, political and social movement, founded in 1928, it came as an opposition force to the Syrian Ba'ath party until it was suppressed by the Syrian government in 1982.

¹⁷ The "Damascus Spring" is the name given to period of intense oppositions activism and tentative political liberalization that followed the death of Hafez al-Assad in the year 2000. It was characterized by demands for political, legal, and economic reforms, some of which were tentatively introduced before being withdrawn.

Furthermore, in recent years – mostly due to Bashar’s reluctance of reforms – a growing use of intimidation, imprisonment, and exile were used as tools to squelch the opposition (KAPLAN, 2008). Greater sectarian unrest came with Syria’s most reprimanded minority – the Kurds¹⁸. According to Kaplan, (2008, p. 105) there was “deep resentment regarding the denial by the Syrian state of two to three hundred thousand Kurds of their citizenship, restriction on the use of their language, and widespread bureaucratic discrimination”. Nevertheless, prior to the escalation of the conflicts in 2011, Bashar provided citizenship for the Kurds which were previously denied (KAPLAN, 2008).

4.2 The Syrian Civil War

After the Syrian Arab Spring’s manifestations escalated from peaceful protests to sectarian violence and widespread combats, there was huge discussion on what was exactly happening in such country. In fact, in Arab Spring several dictatorial regimes were overthrown by uprisings, revolutions or civil wars. In the Syrian case, the presence of a civil war could be seen according to classifications of theorists. Bhardwaj believes that civil war is a “general loss of internal monopoly over the legitimate use of force” (2008, p.77). To such theorist, the constitutive dimensions of a civil war can be broken into four different scopes: internality, the governmental actor, the opposition actor and the violence. The first point is related with the fact that, in a civil war, the conflict is contained by the borders of an internationally recognized state. The conflict must encompass one actor who pursuit the maintenance of political control (the governmental actor) and another group, capable to defend itself from the first, and which uses violence to achieve a political agenda with the goal of controlling the state. Finally, there must be at least 1000 casualties/year to a conflict be considered a civil war (BHARDWAJ, 2012). In Syrian specific case, it was impossible to consider a civil war to be happening until mid-2011. Until then, there was no organized and legitimate opposition with defined objectives and capable to defend itself from the government, although it could be seen generalized violence against a government inside the borders of the Arab republic. With the foundation of Free Syrian Army, in July 2011, and of Syrian National Council, in August that year, it is possible to see a growing unification of Syrian opposition, with increasing legitimacy and definition of objectives. Considering the fast alterations of the political reality in Syria, it is hard to set long turn predictions, but it can be said that, between mid-2011 the writing of this

article, there was happening a civil war in Syria. The parts, escalation and repercussion of such conflict will be beneath addressed.

4.2.1. Between government and opposition: parts to the conflict

Due its origin in civilian protests, Syrian Civil War’s elements remain as two big heterogeneous groups: Ba’ath-controlled Syrian government, on one side, and Bashar al-Assad’s opposition (groups discontent with his policies) on the other. The opponents of Assad’s regime today count, however, with important number of former combatants of the regime, making it difficult to determine the composition of each group.

Ba’ath Party is the main political group in Syria since the 60s. With pan-Arabic and socialist-influenced ideology, the party of Bashar al-Assad has legally become the leader of Syrian’s State and society with the 1973 constitution. The party’s membership suffered great expansion in the past years, counting with large number of Alawite members. Despite encompassing approximately 12% of Syrian population, such minority managed to get control of Syrian State, giving itself career opportunities in government, and also protection against eventual sectarian conflicts, with Syrian Arab Armed Forces (ROSEN, 2012).

Even though the Syrian official forces count on about 300,000 well-armed active man (CIA, 2012), more than a few politicians and soldiers have defected during the war (TRACKING..., 2012). Despite the absence of a defection which truly changed the tide of war, many key figures of Ba’ath’s regime have deserted to the opposition. Riad Hijab, former Syrian prime-minister, has defected from the government in August, 2012. His abandonment, despite its little practical effect, is considered by opposition as evidence of the disintegration of Assad’s regime. Other names such as Manaf Tlass (former commander of Republican Guard and close friend of Assad), Nawaf Fares (former Syrian ambassador to Iraq), both of them Sunni Muslims, and Ryad al-Assad, former Air Force colonel, have as well deserted (TRACKING..., 2012).

Colonel Ryad, however, takes a much more relevant role in the fight against Ba’ath’s government than higher-rank defec-

¹⁸ The Kurds are the largest ethnic minority in Syria and make up nine percent of the country’s population. Syrian Kurds have faced routine discrimination and marginalization by the government; many Kurds seek political autonomy for the Kurdish inhabited areas of Syria. Since the Syrian civil war, Syrian government forces have abandoned many Kurdish-populated areas, leaving the Kurds to fill the power vacuum and govern these areas autonomously.

tors. Commandant of Free Syrian Army (FSA), Ryad al-Assad declares he has under his command about 40.000 men, all Sunni defectors of Syrian official forces, fighting against the regime. The operation of Ryad's troops, according to himself, is however very different of official troops' (FREE SYRIAN..., 2011). Counting with no territory in Syria, FSA men remain in their region of origin, acting with guerrilla warfare against official military personnel, secret police groups and pro-government militias. There is evidence, however, of some rebel groups attacking civilian targets, notably in the episode of the kidnapping of Iranian pilgrims (SYRIAN REBELS..., 2012). FSA's armament is basically composed of light weapons, unlike modern aircrafts and tanks of the official army. The group, despite being dispersed, is affirmed to be in total control of Ryad, aiming freedom and dignity for Syrian citizens, the protection of revolution and the fall of Assad, objectives common to the ones of the main opposition organization: the civilian Syrian National Council (SNC).

Syrian National Council defines itself as the union of Syrian's opposition who "seek to represent the Syrian Revolution politically; embody its aspirations in toppling the regime; achieve democratic change; and build a modern, democratic, and civil state" (SYRIAN NATIONAL COUNCIL, 2012). The Council keeps as its principles national unity and sovereignty (including the rejection of foreign military intervention), the safeguarding of the peaceful character of revolution and the working to overthrow Ba'ath's regime. SNC stands as the major and more organized group against the regime and, keeping great resemblance with Libyan National Transitional Council, seems to be the organization which will control Syrian government after Assad's fall, should it occur.

Syrian Civil War shows itself as a complex conflict with great division among its parts. Assad, despite some defections, keeps loyal at his Ba'ath party and Syrian Armed Forces. The opposition, on the other side, has gained the support of those deserters, and maintains itself organized in both military and political instances, aiming for a democratic State in Syria.

4.2.2. Escalation of violence

In January, 2011, a young man called Hasan Ali Akleh placed himself in fire, protesting against Syrian government. Two months later, students scrawled revolutionary slogans in a school in Deera, southern Syria. Such protests took place in the beginning of the turmoil in Syria, which would soon deteriorate to a civil war with terrible effects to Syria.

Since the death of President Hafez al-Assad, in the year 2000, groups of Syrian opposition began to organize unprecedented forums aiming for change in country's government. In August, 2001, Ryad Al-Turk, a former communist leader, made a public statement calling for transition from despotism to democracy in Syria. Unlike the current opposition, however, the former prisoner praised the new atmosphere brought to the country by Bashar (HAWLEY, 2001). Four years later, a major opposition group published the Damascus Declaration, calling for radical change in Syria. The statement called for the suspension of emergency law, the end of political persecution, protection to minorities and civil rights and the building of a modern democratic State in Syria (BIEDERMANN, 2005). This last declaration keeps strong resemblances with Syrian National Council's principles and objectives, indicating the probable influence it had in the current uprising.

Regarding the already organized opposition, it becomes evident the previous discontentment of Syrian society's groups with their rulers. The government situation was, in fact, already unstable before the protests. The arrestment and torture of the painters in Deera made violent protests erupt all over the country, including the burning of Ba'ath's headquarters in that town. Despite the violent repression of such protests by the government, they remained somehow pacific and civil until the month of June, when appears evidence of military attacks also by the rebels (PET-REL, 2011).

In June 6th, 2011, Syrian State media broadcasted the killing of 120 policemen by armed gangs. Although opposition activists claim the attack was not organized by protesters, it was the first big incident involving the use of armament against official forces in the uprising. The combats followed reaching peaks in the attacks of Homs (June 31st, 75 deaths) and Latakia (August 15th, 25 deaths) by government forces (PET-REL, 2011). In 2012, with the intensification of combats and the growing organization of opposition, the conflict became an open civil war. Between February and April, the city of Homs experienced new attacks by Damascus, resulting in the death of about 700 citizens (OPPOSITION SEEKS..., 2012). In the same month of the beginning of the attacks in Homs, Syrian government suffered attacks in Aleppo. A small opposition group linked with Al-Qaeda (but not with FSA and SNC) claimed the detonation of two bombs near government buildings, killing 28. Bombings also occurred in Damascus (55 deaths) and in Houla (108 deaths) (NEBEHAY, 2012).

Starting with mere graffiti against the government, Syrian uprisings of 2011 quickly evolved to a Civil War which took and

keeps taking countless lives in the country. The conflict has also led to major repercussions inside Syria, in economic, political and social fields.

4.2.3. Threats to Human Dignity: Syrian economic and social difficulties.

Syrian Civil War has become one of the major ongoing conflicts nowadays, involving large mobilization of troops and intelligence apparatus. Therefore, since the securitization of the Civil War before the eyes of international community, there have been several consequences, such as the economic sanctions against Syrian government. Those effects, strongly felt in Syrian economy and society, contribute to make the conflict even worse to Syrian citizens.

Syrian economy had been suffering European and North-American sanctions for years before the uprising began. Although such measures were already detracting Syrian agriculture and business sectors, the economy in Assad's country was even more seriously damaged by the conflict. In fact, it is estimated that 20% (ENTENDA..., 2012) of Syrians are unemployed, in an economy with growing inflation (11% in March, 2012) and weak currency (in the black market, 70 pounds worth one dollar (ZAVIS; SANDELS, 2012)). With such background, Syrian population's dignity become more and more threatened, since daily activities as buying water and food get seriously impaired by the lack of jobs or strong currency.

The Syrian Civil War had, however, an even worst repercussion: the sectarian conflict. Syria has been for a long time the home of many Sunni Muslims, Alawites, Christians and Kurds. Although there is a strong sense of discrimination among some of them and even from the government towards some of those groups (Kurds didn't receive citizenship until the beginning of the crisis, as an example), they had been living in relative peace over the years. Such situation has dramatically changed during the crisis. Alawites are the religious group of Bashar al-Assad and Ba'ath. Controlling the government (although composing only 12% of Syrian population), the Alawites strongly support Assad, believing that, without him, they will be exterminated. Christians, also big allies of Assad, compose 10% of Syrian population. This ancient group reached high positions in the government and private sector during Assads' rule, and, like Alawites, believes in the need of Assad for their safeguard (ROSEN, 2012).

The rebels, however, also count with relevant religious groups in their support. Sunni Muslims, who compose 65% of Syrian population, are the major opponents of Assad. Worried about the

persecutions of *shabiba* (the secret police), and dissatisfied being ruled by a much smaller group, Sunnis managed to take control of the largest opposition groups (like SNC and FSA), and have a central role in the conflict. The Kurds, a smaller group, also support the opposition. Historically treated as second-class citizens (or even non-citizens) by the Assads, many preeminent Kurds joined the Syrian National Council, aiming their better treatment in an eventual future government (LISTER, 2012).

The most serious repercussions of Syrian Civil War, however, are the more and more common violations of human rights by the belligerents. The United Nations Human Rights Council affirmed, through its Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Syria, that “[g]ross violations of human rights have grown in number, in pace and in scale” (UNITED NATIONS, 2012). According to United Nations, 2012, Syrian civil population is suffering from murder, torture, rape and violation of children's rights, among other attacks, by both governmental and opposition groups. The Human Rights Watch (2012) declared that, beyond such violations of basic Syrian people's rights, Assad's troops were using cluster bombs¹⁹ against Syrian civil population, and – against Syrian law – were keeping peaceful activists and international reporters in jail.

Syrian Civil War has shown many secondary effects. Syrian economy is experiencing huge difficulties with the war, with growing unemployment and inflation. Syrian society, however, is facing an even worst situation with the sectarian war, which threatens to create deep and hardly-reversing divisions in Syria, and, more importantly, Syrian people have been suffering repeated human rights violations by the parts to the conflict, creating a sad future perspective to Syria as a country.

5. ADDRESSING THE ISSUE: TOWARD SOVEREIGNTY, THROUGH RESPONSIBILITY

The abovementioned events in Syria shocked the international community and urged the United Nations for actions in order to fulfill its purposes of creation. Uncountable were the claims for a more assertive move of the Security Council regarding the events.

¹⁹ Cluster bombs are one kind of explosive weapons which scatters submunitions, causing great range of damage but little accuracy. That's the main reason why its use in civilian areas is strongly discouraged. They have been prohibited by the Convention on Cluster Munitions (2008), which however was not signed by nations such as the USA, Russian Federation, China and Syria.

However, is the international community entitled of intervening in such matters? The Security Council has the right, or the duty, to do so? Such actions would not transgress the sovereignty of the Syrian state? Had the international community move toward a more accountable approach to state sovereignty? These are some of the questions discussed in this next section of the article.

5.1. Sovereignty Is What International Community Makes of It

In its most ancient definition, sovereignty was envisioned as the natural investing of a supreme and ultimate power in an autocrat in order to enable the ruling over one population of vassals (BODIN, 1992, p.44). The advent of the modern territorial state centralized even more the attribution of sovereignty but did change its personified figure. The liberal revolutions (1648-1814) and their contractual rationale implanted the perception that sovereignty was primarily imbued in each individual and collectively delegated to the state (THAKUR, 2007, p. 389). Therefore, erstwhile, the state as entity should keep mutual recognition towards their equals; compromise to do not intervene within other states' jurisdiction; have the monopoly over the legitimate use of force within its territory and over declaration of war and maintaining sustained relations among other states by the exercise of diplomacy and celebration of treaties (MATIAS, 2005).

Between the end of XVII and the middle of XX century, the almost sacrosanct international norms of juridical equivalence and independence of the sovereign states endured systematic encroachments. Although the efficacy of these principles of international law was very disappointing – which lead some authors to understand sovereignty as an enormous organized hypocrisy (KRASNER, 1999) – their legitimacy was not harmed. On the contrary, the iterant usurpation of these principles reinforced them as a *sine qua non* condition to maintain order in an international system in which the inter-state conflict hitherto prevailed. Thereby, it was not by coincidence that both of them turned out to figure two of the uproot principles of the creation of the United Nations enumerated by Article 2 of the Charter²⁰.

During the Cold War, the first 45 years of the Organization, sovereignty experimented its “golden age”. The violations of its principles were sparse and, additionally, the multiplication of state entities was quantitatively expressive due to the *renaissance* of the Wilsonian self-determination²¹ and the wave of decolonization in the Third World countries (HOBBSAWM, 1993, p.203). However, also during this period, the international community ex-

perienced the broadening of its agenda of security – with the inclusion of themes such as human rights and development processes, which have been tirelessly dealt in section 2. The understanding that, additionally to the traditional attributions of the State as sovereign, there were some obligations towards its citizens – such as the provision of the adequate environment to the development of the individual capacities – helped to insert a dimension of accountability in the logic of State sovereignty (ICISS, 2001).

Moreover, as stressed in Section 2, culminating with the end of Cold War, there was a series of modifications to the concept of international threat. The principal threats to international peace and security were not anymore imminently inter-state wars but states with flawed institutions serving as safe-heaven, facilitators and even sponsors to infra-states criminal organizations; or states with completely disrupted infrastructure incapable or unwilling to provide basic conditions of living to their own citizens (WHITE HOUSE, 2002). Furthermore, the post-Cold War era is also remarked by a never-before so elevated status of the qualitative multilateralism (RUGGIE, 1998, p.20) and by intensification of the process of political, economic, and even ideational entailment among the states. Both of them lead to a dynamic of reciprocal and diffuse effects of their policies: the logic of interdependence (KEOHANE & NYE, 1972, p.8). This new moment in international community raised awareness of the possibilities to the manifestations of the so-called spillover effects, as discussed in Section 3.

Nevertheless, the process of prioritization of issues regarding human rights and the processes to insure development initialized during the Cold War also came to an edge in the very subsequent period (THAKUR, 2007, p. 391). Somalia and Bosnia Herzegovina in 1992; Haiti in 1993 and, definitely, Rwanda in 1994 sparked once again the commotion in turn of the “never again culture”²² (LYONS & MASTADUNO, 1995, p. 1; EVANS, 2007). The perception on the universality of some fundamental aspects of humankind is nowadays the guideline principle in terms of international actions for security purposes.

²⁰ Paragraphs 1 and 7.

²¹ Wilsonian self-determination refers to principle enunciated by Woodrow Wilson, former president of the United States of America, in his renowned 14 guidelines to post-I World War period, what included the foundation of the League of Nations.

²² The “never again culture” refers to the willingness of never let massive killings – like the ones witnessed during Wars, mainly the Second World War – to happen once more in human history.

Finally, the insertion of accountability dimension present in the concept; the ever-changing figure of international threats; the logic of interdependence; the apprehension with conflicts trespassing borders and ideational convergence that elevate fundamental rights of humankind and bring to the fore the concept of human dignity lead to transfiguration of the perceptions about sovereignty. This latest approach had endowed sovereignty with the contingency of fulfilling its responsibilities before their citizens and why not the whole international community (THAKUR, 2007, p. 390).

5.2. Responsibility to Protect: from the edges to the downfall of deviation

The innovative human-centered international approach concerning security issues, dealt in section 2, changed the international perception of what constituted breach to peace and security. In this sense, this section aims to elucidate how this approach, coupled with the above-mentioned advancements to a more accountable concept of sovereignty, has outlined the international reaction profile to these infringements.

The two edges of this process was the publishing of the report named Responsibility to Protect by the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty (ICISS) in December of 2001 and then the recognition of the principle by the Outcome Document of the 2005 World Summit (Outcome Document). This report found the principle called “Responsibility to Protect” (R2P or RtoP) that came to reinforce the perspective that the international community could never again act like a bystander when confronted with massive human rights violations within a State.

The report came to elucidate that understanding R2P as an antagonist of sovereignty is *per se* an oxymoron. It is true that the increase of importance of the former concept poses some challenges to the traditional understanding of sovereignty, but it is far short from denying the later concept as a whole (PELTONNEN, 2011). Otherwise, R2P entails firstly the states to safeguard their populations of massive violations of human rights and with the provision of human dignity conditions. The international community is encouraged to facilitate the states obligations before their population and summoned to act assertively if, and only if, the States had been considered incapable or unwilling to protect their population or are themselves perpetrating the acts against these peoples (GENERAL ASSEMBLY, 2005, Paragraphs 138 and 139).

Furthermore, R2P is upheld by three main pillars: the responsibility to prevent, the responsibility to react and the responsibility to rebuild (ICISS, 2011). Therefore, the principle provides

the states and the international community as a whole with a well-structured framework to avoid the perpetration of fundamental rights abuses; legitimize the employment of vigorous actions when human lives are endangered; and require the reparation of damages infringed to the infrastructure of an evitable conflict in order to permit a long-lasting peace (HIPOLD, 2012).

Moreover, although the initial effort of the ICISS was to pertain R2P broadly in terms of ‘large scale loss of life’ and ‘large scale ethnic cleansing’ (ICISS, 2001), the international community preferred to be more specific on what systematic violations should be considered in dealing with R2P (NASU, 2009). The Outcome Document expressly listed three times the heinous crimes of genocide; war crimes; ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity as being the ones concerning this principle (HIPOLD, 2012).

Notwithstanding, the ICISS Report as well as the Outcome Document consecrated the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) as the ‘right authority’ in making recommendations and authorizing forceful measures regarding R2P. Therefore, the UNSC is the principal body to operationalize the principle regarding international peace and security, as well as regulate even the possible juridical lacunas in terms of scope, stage and strength that may be left by the writings of these documents (NASU, 2009).

Hence, in terms of scope, there are still debates if the UNSC is limited to the application of the crimes definitions, listed by the Outcome Document, to the issues brought before it or it should regard also the quarrel situations that lead to the perpetration of this crimes, such as the targeting of civilians (NASU, 2009). The origin of the dilemma is encountered in the disposal of the UNSC resolution 1296 (2000):

(...) deliberate targeting of civilian populations or other protected persons and the committing of systematic, flagrant and widespread violations of international humanitarian and human rights law in situations of armed conflict may constitute a threat to international peace and security(...)

Additionally, in terms of stage, the R2P concept was founded based on the clairvoyance of the temporal distinctiveness of when the states irresponsibility shall summon the international community to mitigate the harms (NASU, 2009). Although, contrasted with practice, the differentiation of these two stages is hardly-ever possible. Thus, it is reasonable to foresee that the UNSC as the ‘right authority’ is responsible for making this distinction.

Finally, in terms of strength, both the ICISS Report and the Outcome Document incite the use of peaceful means before resorting of more drastic actions, such as military intervention, but also do not state the threshold between those procedures (NASU, 2009). Therefore, the documents also leave to the UNSC the prerogative to determine when the violations of fundamental rights of civilians constitute an existential threat to the population, urgent enough to justify the use of exceptional measures such as economic sanctions or even military intervention.

5.3. UNSC implementations of Responsibility to Protect: From Libya's mishandling to Syria's negligence

The reflection proposed by this section is the righteousness of outlawing peace-operations embedded in R2P principles due to the possibility of misleading their mandates. Therefore, the implementation of Libya's mission mandate and its influence to the UNSC debates over the situation in Syria is a very representative case to analyze.

The UNSC resolutions 1970 and 1973 regarding the issue in Libya should be considered the Council's first instruments satisfying the second pillar of R2P: the responsibility to react. Moreover, even the critiques (NOUGAYRÈDE, 2011; BOISSARD, 2011; RIEFF, 2011) that the operationalization of the resolutions mandate by NATO consisted *de facto* deviations of the allegedly motivation to 'protect civilians' do not undermine the influence that R2P represented to the UNSC decision-making process in order to pass both resolutions.

On the other hand, the defiance by the 'coalition of willing' regarding the performance of its mandate, by clearly politicizing the 'humanitarian aspect' exerted by the resolutions and utilizing it as a regime change vector (POMMIER, 2011), discredited further implementations of R2P legitimized international operations. Pommier (2011) also attributes the so far UNSC failure on addressing the issue in Syria to the repercussion on the Libya mandate conduct.

Since the outbreak of civil war in Syria, the UNSC discussed three different draft resolutions respectively in October, 2011, February and July, 2012. However, the Council did not manage to approve the assertive measures presented by the draft resolutions due to the resilience of some members states - mainly the Russian Federation and Peoples' Republic of China for the Councils voting procedure reasons - to consent with a new R2P inspired resolution.

Nevertheless, the most relevant document published by the UNSC addressing the issue were statements condemning "the widespread violations of human rights and the use of force against civilians by the Syrian authorities" of August, 03, 2011, the terrorist attacks in Aleppo and the Syrian artillery attacks to Turkey, in October 2012. Nonetheless, neither these non-binding statements managed to be approved by unanimity.

Finally, the whole concept of R2P shall not be ostracized based on politicizations of its good intentions. The implementation of the R2P principles contributes significantly to the consecution of UN purposes of preventing future generations from the scourge of war, including humanitarian disasters, and should hereafter figure the hall of UN principles.

6. CONCLUSION

In the course of this article, a review of the Syrian conflict has been conducted under several different perspectives. At first, an analysis of the changes in the logic of security has been carried out, exposing the limitations of the traditional concept of security in regards to the new post-Cold War threats. The more recent and wider conceptions of international security are closely related to the concepts of human dignity and fundamental rights, and include several other actors and themes. In this perspective, it is clear that the Syrian Civil War, with its widespread human rights violations, is a matter of international security.

An analysis of the historical and political aspects of the Syrian conflict, of its connection to the larger Arab Spring phenomenon and of the development of the civil war has also been introduced. The Arab Spring has been identified as a popular-driven process of democratization that spread throughout the Middle East and that largely characterized by the spillover effect. However, one cannot undermine the importance of the political instability in Syria - which dates back to the 1970 *coup d'état* that brought Hafez Al-Assad to the Syrian government - to the current civil war. Hafez's government was incapable of establishing a strong Syrian national identity, which opened up space for sectarian conflicts. Following his death, the slow pace of democratic reforms in Bashar Al-Assad's government, combined with economic and social pressures and the strong governmental repression on the opposition played a decisive role in the breakout of popular uprisings. The popular movements were followed by an escalation of violence, violations of human rights and the or-

ganization of opposition forces, thus characterizing the conflict as a civil war.

Finally, the article addressed the prioritization of human rights in the post-Cold War era and its effects on the concept of state sovereignty and the idea of Responsibility to Protect. While the concept of state sovereignty came to be perceived as a responsibility of the state towards its citizens, the international community became more aware of its role in preventing violations of fundamental rights of individuals in situations where the state is incapable of doing so, or is itself the perpetrator of such violations. In this context, the UNSC has a fundamental role in the implementation of the R2P.

At the present moment, the future of Syria is still uncertain. While the majority of Middle Eastern countries experience a significant decrease in street protests and processes of democratic transitions, clashes between Syrian rebels and Bashar Al-Assad's government are still happening, with death tolls and human rights violations increasing on a daily basis. In this context, it is imperative that the international community take a stand and define the role of the UNSC in this conflict.

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