Article

Inter-State Wars in the 21st Century: Implications for Global Peace and Security

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Abstract
The inter-state wars in the 21st century have remained a significant concern to global peace and security. The thinking was that the post-Cold War global system would usher in a more peaceful and secure world, but what we have instead is an international system that is characterised by conflicts. The paper advanced reasons for international collaboration and cooperation in a world ravaged by conflicts with a view to ascertaining whether globalisation alone, without sacrifices, guarantees international peace and security. On this problematic premise, this paper critiqued the argument that globalisation has ameliorated conflicts in the international system. The paper employed the qualitative content analysis approach and relied mainly on secondary sources of data, such as textbooks, journal articles, periodicals, etc., and argued that previous studies were on the significant in-roads made by the US-led liberalisation without considering the factors made on all fronts. Within this gap, this paper interrogated why wars persist, despite the bogus claim of its amelioration. It is revealed that though the East/West rivalry eased off after the Cold War, recent events around the globe point to a resurgence of conflicts, among others. The paper concludes that concerted international cooperation is somewhat absent amongst major powers. What is evident is unilateralism as against collectivism. The paper recommends the need for major powers, and the international community in general, to synergise and show the political will to cooperate on all fronts; by this, conflicts would be mitigated.

Keywords
Inter-State Wars; 21st century, Global Peace; Security.

Introduction

International peace and security have been the subject of extensive debate and concern in international relations literature. For over three centuries now, there has been a search for an ideal world devoid of conflict, which at various times, ushered in what world leaders feel will mitigate it. Of course, from the "concert of Europe system" to the League of Nations and, presently, the United Nations, in which the Security Council is saddled with the task of maintaining international peace and security. Despite this mandate on the Security Council, peace seems to elude the globe. It must be said that most part of the 20th century was characterised by the East and West rivalry, otherwise known as the Cold War.

However, the end of the Cold War in the early 1990s impacted international relations. First, the Soviet military withdrawal from Eastern Europe and the Third World brought an end to the Cold War and allowed the democratization process to proceed in many states previously ruled by Leftist and Marxist dictatorships. Second, it was touted to have made significant progress in the attempt to resolve several Third World conflicts that had been prolonged during the Cold War. The questions begging for answers include; has conflicts in Third World countries and some countries in Eastern Europe been resolved? Has the democratization process been able to address the issues that led to conflicts in these regions, and why is peace a utopian simulacrum? The reduction in East-West tension in the globe only attenuated for a while, given the bogus assertion that it was impactful, with unverified proofs of a great decrease in inter-state conflicts, some of which they said occurred due to the superpower ideological rivalry during the Cold War. Even it became heuristic to argue that force, used here as military power, has run its course in international politics; what really occurred during this era is the triumph of capitalism and democracy over communism; but the use of force in international relations is still relevant and potent.

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It would be rather puerile to argue that the world is now at peace; because what can be deciphered is that the 21st-century conflict is a carryover of the Cold War era, the difference being that it is not ideologically based. As Mearsheimer (2011) observed that tension in the globe is aggravated by the US globalist interest. However, the collapse of the Soviet Empire was followed by the emergence or explosion of many severe conflicts in several areas that had been relatively quiescent during the Cold War. As captured by Strand and Hegre (2021), in their study of global conflicts from 1945-2020, they assert that between 1989 and 2020, the number of conflicts has risen, but the number of casualties is slightly low. According to this study, most of these conflicts are old but with renewed hostilities in 2020, and these have been taking place within the former Soviet Union, such as the war between Armenia and Azerbaijan over Nagorno-Karabakh, and the fighting in Chechnya, Russia- Georgia conflict and recent Russia- Ukraine conflict, which the US and NATO are involved because of the intended Ukraine membership of NATO and Russia repudiation that has led to a total war since February 24th, 2022. Not only that, but some other conflicts also erupted or intensified in several countries outside of it, and many Third World conflicts in which the superpowers were not deeply involved during the Cold War have persisted after it, like the secessionist movements in India, Sri Lanka, and Sudan, IS-Syrian conflict and others in Africa. While the war in Somalia has been ongoing for more than 30 years and has been classified as an every-year war since 2005, recording, on average, approximately2000 casualties every year for the past five years. Mention must also be made of an intense war that had raged in Yemen since 2015 when the Ansarallah group attempted a government take-over, unsettling the sitting president Abdrabbuh Mansur Hadi. The Yemeni government has been supported in this war by a Saudi- led multinational alliance, and the number of fatalities increased significantly between 2019 and 2020, from about 1,700 to more than 2,300 (Strand & Hegre,2021).

Aside from ethnopolitical conflicts, there have been other threats to the international order that are beyond the full control of major powers, even the United States, the victor of the Cold War. The most notable include religious militancy, terrorism, North-South conflict, and severe competition over scarce resources. Thus, the end of the Cold War has brought about some stability and instability to international relations in which the former outweighs the latter. This article aims to evaluate about three decades of the post-Cold War era in terms of whether international peace has been attained or the world is drifting towards a global crisis of the highest magnitude, given the renewal of the superpower rivalry between the USA and Russia. In this respect, the study will start with an overview of the general characteristics of the present international system. This will be followed by a more detailed discussion of basic trends and new threats in international relations. Several observations will also be outlined in concluding the study with respect to possible future directions of international affairs.

Theoretical Framework

The paper is couched in the language of constructivism. Constructivism focuses on human awareness or consciousness and its place in global affairs. Constructivists argue that there is no external objective social reality as such. The social and political world is not a physical entity or material object outside human consciousness. Therefore, the theorist repudiates the assertion that the international system is anarchical and independent of man's creation. The comprehensive approach to the understanding of the international systems that is of its own, but it exists only as an inter-subjective awareness among people. It is a human invention or creation not of a physical or material kind but of a purely intellectual and ideational kind. It is a set of ideas, a body of thought, and a system of norms, which has been arranged by certain people at a particular time and place. This is to say that the present international system, characterised by major powers' rivalry, is created to suit their capricious whimsicality.

Leading international relations constructivist theorists include Peter Katzenstein (1996), Alexender Wendt (1992), Friedrich Kratochwil (1989) and Nicholas Onuf (1989). To them, constructivism as an approach to international relations postulates that (a) Human relations, including international relations, consist essentially of thoughts and ideas, not material conditions or forces. (b) The core ideational

element upon which constructivists focus are inter-subjective beliefs (ideas, conceptions, assumptions, etc.) that are widely shared among people. (c) Those shared beliefs compose and express the interest and identities of people: e.g., how people conceive of themselves in their relations with others. (d) Constructivists focus on the ways those relations are formed and expressed: e.g. by means of collective social institutions, such as state sovereignty, 'which have no material reality but exist only because people collectively believe they exist and act accordingly' (Finnermore & Sikkink 2001: 392).

It is believed that the anarchical international system of the realist is of human creation, and peace in the system can as well be created. Constructivism in international relations is often associated with the end of the Cold War, an event that traditional theories such as realism and liberalism treated with levity. This neglect can be linked to some of their core tenets, such as the conviction that states are self-interested actors who compete for power and the unequal power distribution among states, which defines the balance of power between them. By having a dominant focus on the state, traditional theories have neglected to observe the agency of individuals. After all, the actions of ordinary people ensured the end of the Cold War, not those of states or international organisations. The actions of the leaders of the United States and the Defunct USSR accounted for the relative peace and rapprochement in the world then. Constructivism accounts for this issue by arguing that the social world is of our making (Onuf 1989).

The inter-state wars of the global system of the 21st century could be viewed from the same lens. While exhibiting the same realist traits that characterised the cold war era of tensions and disquiet moments, the great powers are at it again. It must be said that actors (usually powerful ones, like leaders and influential citizens) continually shape – and sometimes reshape – the nature of international relations through their actions and interactions. The war in Ukraine triggered by Russia is their creation and not a result of chaos in the international system. The constructivist sees the world and what we can know about the world as socially constructed. This view refers to the nature of reality and the nature of knowledge. Alexander Wendt (1995) offers an excellent example that illustrates the social construction of reality when he explains that 500 British nuclear weapons are less threatening to the United States than five North Korean nuclear weapons or that of Russia. These identifications are not caused by nuclear weapons (the *material structure*) but rather by the meaning given to the material structure (the *ideational structure*).

Constructivists argue that agency and structure are mutually constituted, which implies that structures influence agency and that agency influences structures. Agency can be understood as the ability of someone to act, whereas structure refers to the international system that consists of material and ideational elements. Returning to Wendt's example discussed above, this means that the social relation of enmity between the United States and North Korea represents the inter-subjective structure (the shared ideas and beliefs among both states). In contrast, the United States, North Korea and even Russia are the actors who have the capacity (that is, agency) to change or reinforce the existing structure or social relationship of enmity. This change or reinforcement ultimately depends on the beliefs and ideas held by both states. The social relationship can change into friendship if these beliefs and ideas change. This assertion presupposes that an atmosphere for peace can be created if parties agree. This stance differs considerably from that of realists, who argue that the anarchic structure of the international system determines the behaviour of states.

Therefore, inter-state wars in the 21st century can be analysed effectively using the constructivist approach to international relations, which is attributable to the actions of those acting on behalf of the state. On the other hand, constructivists argue that 'anarchy is what states make of it' (Wendt 1992). From the foregoing, the study asserts that anarchy can be interpreted in different ways depending on the meaning that actors assign to it.

The Extant International System

With the demise of communist regimes in Eastern Europe and the collapse of the Soviet Union, the bipolar international system dominating the Cold War period evaporated, ushering in a somewhat unipolar system under the suzerainty and leadership of the United States, speaking especially from a military/political viewpoint. The former rivals of the United States, especially the Soviet Union and China, have jettisoned the central features of their ideologies that were hostile to the United States and embraced capitalism. Other countries have turned to American military protection. The "American Empire" may best be seen operating in the Persian Gulf, Iraq, and the Middle East, in general, where the armed forces of the United States have established a semi-permanent foothold and thousands of soldiers deployed at bases keeps a watch on Iran, Syria, and other "potential enemies".

Although widely criticised, American military power serves a number of critical functions: in some areas, in the Persian Gulf, for example, it shields weak states against attacks by their stronger neighbours. In Asia, the presence of the United States stabilises the region in which a number of states might otherwise feel compelled to develop much larger military forces than they currently have. American military presence in Japan does only protect Japan against foreign enemies. It indirectly protects other Asian states against the consequences that might arise from a heavily re-armed Japan. Moreover, American military power serves as an organiser of the military coalition, both permanent (such as NATO) and *ad hoc* (such as peacekeeping missions). American military participation is often necessary to command and control coalition operations. When the Americans are willing to lead, other countries often follow, even reluctantly. However, these are certainly not to argue that American interventions occur in every large conflict around the world. But it means that almost any country embarking on the use of force beyond its borders has to think about possible reactions of the United States (Sanders, 2008), for the US is the police of the world, and their involvement in maintaining global peace and security is crucial.

It needs to be stressed that international cooperation has become more pronounced and important in security issues in a conflict-ridden world. However, during the Cold War, the United Nations was limited in its role in international security. Security Council vetoes, both threatened and exercised, circumscribed Council activism. Military interventions during the Cold War were more frequently unilateral than multilateral, in tandem with Sanders (2008) observation. When the superpowers talked of collective security, they referred to their alliances, not the United Nations. With important exceptions, such as the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons and the Nuclear Test Ban Treaty, or during crises between the superpowers that threatened to escalate, such as the Cuban Missile Crisis, the superpowers avoided internationalisation of security issues in the United Nations.

In the post–Cold War order, there has been extensive international cooperation on security, whether non-proliferation, counterterrorism, counter-piracy, or ending civil wars. Nonetheless, there exists an important difference between the economic and security pillars of the current order. The economic pillar relies on theoretically universal institutions: that is, any country qualified based on membership requirements can join. Moreover, there was an attempt to reform international financial and trade institutions to reflect changes in global power. In the security realm, there has been greater use and reliance on the United Nations, but key alliances from the Cold War continue to structure security and balance power. The European order that emerged in 1989 extended Cold War security arrangements from Western Europe to Eastern Europe but failed to include Russia, which remains a problem to this day (Brand, 2018). China eagerly bought into the cooperative economic order in Asia and has become an increasingly important contributor to cooperative security through the United Nations. Still, Asia's security order has yet to find an arrangement that includes a richer, more powerful China.

That being said, from a global security perspective, the Middle East has been the hardest test for the cooperative international order, and for at least over two decades, it has failed. The United States

embraced the United Nations in its response to the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in 1990, and the results seemed to vindicate a hope for collective security in the post–Cold War era. However, by the end of the 1990s, questions of how to enforce resolutions against Iraq and Saddam Hussein divided the Security Council. The U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003 was the signal failure of international order in the last three decades, and its reverberations are still felt in the region. By collapsing the state during the invasion and immediate occupation, the United States created a power vacuum in Iraq, which has since experienced an unending civil war. With the Arab Spring, a second wave of political instability led to another round of failed international cooperation in the region.

Another instance is the UN Security Council agreement on invoking the responsibility to protect (r2p) to mandate humanitarian intervention in Libya but failed to prevent civil war and state collapse after the overthrow of Gaddafi. This observation resonates with Coccia (2010) and Coccia & Bellito's (2018) assertions that international conflicts guided by the superpowers oftentimes influence negatively on countries; the Libyan example is a case in point. In Syria, the Security Council eschewed humanitarian force and authorised mediation and diplomacy to search for a political solution. Successive mediators felt hamstrung by the divergent interests and strategies of Russia and the United States and proved ineffective in the face of escalating violence. Since Russia decided to intervene militarily in support of the Assad regime in Syria, there has been the potential for escalatory conflict between Russia and the United States, which has small numbers of troops in Syria and Iraq to fight ISIS and train anti-Assad rebels. Outside actors, notably Iran, the key Gulf States, and Turkey, have also intervened by financing rebels or other groups, providing weapons, and, in the case of Iran and Turkey, putting "boots on the ground." In Yemen, a carefully mediated agreement to the political crisis disintegrated in the face of rebel violence and American-supported Saudi military intervention. This scenario is reminiscent of the Cold War international conflict in which both superpowers were involved.

In Syria and Yemen, superpowers are flexing muscles and tend to have used indiscriminate military force in wars of attrition. In Syria, Yemen, and Libya, the humanitarian management of the consequences of war broke down due to insufficient funding and attention, leading to a generalised refugee crisis in the region and across the seas in Europe. In the Middle East, we appear to be back in a regime of proxy warfare, very distinct from the cooperative regime that has governed the treatment of civil wars for much of the past quarter-century.

From the political and economic standpoint, the international system is multipolar, rather than unipolar. The United States is certainly a great economic power, but of course, is not the only power. Other power centres exist, most notably the European Union and many nation-states outside these integrations or organisations (Harrison, 2004). When the United States exercised military operations to stabilise the world in Kuwait, Afghanistan, Iraq and elsewhere, it insisted on sharing the costs of the operations with other major powers or relevant countries, especially her allies under the umbrella of NATO. Thus, the international system of the post-Cold War era actually reflects a mixture of both unipolar and multipolar system in which at least five major centres powers, (United States, Europe, China, Japan, and Russia) dominates international affairs.

Impacts of Wars on International Peace and Security

The desire of the dominant powers in the post-Cold War era is to preserve the status quo from which they mostly benefit. Much has been asserted about the relationship between unending wars and the post–Cold War international order. During the last twenty-five years, pundits have repeatedly argued that the mere occurrence of particular wars, such as Somalia and Bosnia in the 1990s or Libya and Syria more recently, prove that international order is weak and tenuous. Wars have played an outsized role in a popular narrative of international conflict. According to this narrative, civil violence, terrorism, and failed states,

are at unprecedentedly high levels. The world is falling apart, most people are worse off than they were over thirty years ago, and globalisation is said to be blamed.
By almost every measure, this narrative is empirically incorrect to pro-West scholars. To them, in the last thirty years, there has been more creation of wealth and a greater reduction of poverty, disease, and food insecurity than in all of previous history (Radelet, 2015). They were of the view that during the same period, the numbers and lethality of wars have decreased (Fearon, 2017). The success of the post–Cold war era in managing civil wars–bringing multiple wars to an end and ameliorating several others–has contributed to a more peaceful world. Great-power confrontations have been few and great-power war a distant memory. As measured by increased trade and reductions of arms expenditures as a percentage of GDP, international cooperation has risen to unprecedented levels (World Bank, 2015). Indeed, international cooperation has been a fundamental characteristic of the international order since the collapse of the Soviet Union.

Nonetheless, the post–Cold War international order is currently under substantial pressure, and in some areas, progress has reversed. Terrorism whether it is fed by religious fundamentalism or not, is another serious threat to peace in the post-Cold War era. While occasional terrorist activities have been part of human history, terrorism particularly became a serious problem after the end of the Cold War, especially after the September 11, 2001 attacks. Terrorism has become a serious problem in the post-Cold War era, though it is not limited to this particular period. Over the past twenty years, terrorists have committed extremely violent acts for alleged political or religious reasons, chief among these groups are al Qaeda in Afghanistan, ISIS, Boko Haram in Nigeria, among others, have demanded international cooperation (Ndidigwe & Adie, 2021).

More so, the Russian annexation of Crimea and invasion of Ukraine signals a return to a militaristic approach to its border with Eastern Europe. At the same time, China's aggressive policies in the South China Sea presupposes that its relations with its neighbours have been tense and dangerous. And after a fifteen-year historic reduction in the number of civil wars, there has been a recent major spike, mostly centred in the Middle East. Russian intervention in Syria and US/Saudi Arabian intervention in Yemen, and their indiscriminate use of force, run counter to how the United Nations and its member states have managed civil wars over the past twenty-five years. The paralysis of the UN Security Council in responding to the conflicts in Ukraine and Syria is reminiscent of the Cold War when proxy competition was the predominant response to civil wars. Understanding the feature of the post-Cold War era is important here; since the West has become the victor of the East-West ideological rivalry, Western systems and Western influences, in general, started to dominate the whole world. For example, the United States has visibly enhanced its influence in the Middle East and in the Caucasus since the end of the Cold War. The invasion of Kuwait by Iraq in August 1990 and the following Gulf crisis, in a way, created an opportunity for the United States to exercise its hegemonic power in the Middle East. In the following years, in the absence of a counter-power, the influence of the United States increased further through the logic of the" Base Force" by the US, which is rooted in the idea that the declining Soviet danger might be replaced by the rise of new hegemonic powers in regions of strategic importance. They believed that the United States was the only power with the capacity to manage the major forces at work in the world. And so they concluded that a high degree of military dominance was critical to preserving the international stability and geopolitical gains offered by the end of the Cold War (Powell& Butler cited in Oberdorfer, 1991). In fact, the "Base Force" label was meant to make clear that if the US were to maintain and expand the stable, liberalising international order that Washington had built in the West after World War II. This is a strategy that the US is a superpower. The US perceived themselves as the major player on the world stage with responsibilities around the world, with interests around the world. All of these ideas figured prominently in subsequent Pentagon planning efforts under Bush and later subsequent US government policies. Early in Bush's presidency, there was broad internal agreement that America would continue to act as a guarantor and stabiliser of the international system. It would encourage favourable

trends, hold back threatening ones, and keep the unequalled hard power necessary to do so effectively; this has been the trend in post-Cold War international relations.

With the US military operations and presence in virtually all regions of the world, which was made possible by their base forces which were critical to their perpetuation, successes and dominance (Yılmaz, 2005). The same could be said of the Caucasian region formerly under the Russian sphere of influence. But the United States managed to enter this energy-rich region with some new allies that used to be part of the Soviet Union, such as Azerbaijan, Ukraine, and Georgia. Although Russia certainly did not want the United States' presence in the region, its ability to prevent it has remained limited, but in recent times Russia tends to object to such unholy romance of the US under the guise of NATO with her former allies (Georgia and Ukraine) to be precise in recent time.

Similarly, NATO expanded to involve Eastern Europe, a region also used to be under Soviet influence. Russia, in the beginning, tried to resist NATO expansion, posing several threats, which include creating a counter-defence organisation. But it was eventually convinced with the "partnership for peace" project, through which it preserved many of its privileges in Eastern European countries (US Department of State, 1996). Also, the European Union expanded towards Eastern Europe, symbolising, once again, Western dominance. Particularly with the 2004 expansion, eight formerly-communist countries, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Poland, Hungary, Slovenia, Slovakia, and the Czech Republic (with the exception of Cyprus and Malta), joined the Union. And in 2007, two other previously-communist states, Bulgaria and Romania, became full members as well.

While all these depict Western dominance in the post-Cold War era, the effects of this dominance can be said to have manifested itself in the world as what the pro-West claim as both stability and instability. On the one hand, the hegemonic power of the United States and the expansion of Western-originated organisations have an impact on reducing international anarchy and, thus, increasing international stability. The question that remains unanswered is, has international anarchy reduced drastically or has it assumed another dimension? On the other hand, however, growing Western dominance brought about many reactions and challenges towards the West. It seems that most of the reactions took place in the Islamic world as it is an affirmation of Samuel Huntington's famous "Clash of Civilisations" thesis (Huntington, 1997). However, such reactions currently appear to be disorganised and less powerful, and thus they are far away from posing a serious challenge to Western dominance. But nonetheless, anti-West in the Muslim world and elsewhere seems particularly to feed terrorism, a serious threat to peace in the post-Cold War period.

More importantly, the dissolution of the Soviet Union shattered the bipolar system, resulting in power gaps in some regions and triggering struggles for influence. In the post-Cold War environment, states that seemed to be in the same bloc or former allies became competing rivals. For instance, the European Union and Japan rose as rival centres of power against established United States dominance. No doubt, the rise of China and the resurgence of the Russian Federation as powerful rivals to the United States are also notable. States -or integrations- aspiring to become world powers (such as Russia, China, and the European Union), states seeking to strengthen their position as regional powers with the burgeoning ambition to become global powers in the future (like Iran and Turkey), and the United States still holding onto its position are strategising to reach their goals in Eurasia. Especially the newly independent states of Eurasia lie at the centre of power struggles. The United States is pushing forward to maintain and strengthen alliances with various states in the region. Particularly three states, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Armenia, are at the centre of much of this struggle. So as to promote their national interests in the region, major powers have often been motivated to take advantage of destabilising conflicts between these states and alternatively have attempted to follow a path of reconciliation or proposing cooperation, oscillating

between these options based on a calculation of which would best fit their own broader agenda and vision for the region (Simons, 2008).

Several reasons were adduced as to why the South Caucasus represents a significant regional interest for major powers, in general, and for the United States, in particular, because of the countries' self-interest and not for global peace. Therefore, controlling the region means containing Russian expansion, containing Iran, controlling natural resources, securing safe transportation of the region's natural resources to the global market, and acquiring bases for the "war against terrorism" (Aslanli, 2008). At present, the United States continues to strengthen its position in the South Caucasus. However, resurgent Russia under the leadership of President Putin certainly does not welcome this development and feels compelled to punish both American military interventions in the region as well as regional states that espouse pro-American policies (Kanet, 2007). The recent past Georgian conflict and the trending Ukraine conflict clearly indicate how far Russia is willing to go to defend its interests in the complicated and unpredictable region.

Lack of Synergy among Great Powers

It has been argued that conflicts in the post-Cold War global system have persisted as a result of the great powers rivalry; here, the US and Russia were seen foot-dragging and perturbing until the conflict in some regions of the world escalated. The war in Syria over governance is among the most severe civil wars in recent decades, with 3,500 casualties recorded in 2020 (Strand & Hegre, 2021). However, it marks a dramatic decline from the 65,000 casualties recorded in 2014 in the conflict. It needs to be pointed out that the Middle East conflict involved key principles of international peace and order, and the failure of the great powers to uphold those principles contributed to larger international disorder, as adumbrated. There are three variations on this theme. The first invokes the international failure to stop mass atrocities in Syria and the lack of commitment to r2p. The second involves the lack of commitment to confront and stop violations of the Chemical Weapons Convention. The third concerns the failure of the US to enforce its own red lines in the conflict. The argument that the failure to prevent perfidious acts in Syria represented a breakdown of international norms overstates the importance of r2p or humanitarian intervention to the post–Cold War order.

As Gowan & Stedman (2018) observed in their contribution, that militarised humanitarianism has been in the ascendant over the last twenty-five years. During that time, there have been many more collective humanitarian interventions than in the previous half-century. And there has been frequent public pressure, mostly in the United States, to use military force for humanitarian purposes. Most humanitarian actions and mandates have been ad hoc, nonstrategic, and thus non-predictable. And no stable international consensus has emerged over when and how humanitarian interventions should be deployed. Precisely because they are unpredictable, humanitarian interventions run counter to the establishment of shared expectations of behaviour on which order is predicated. This can be seen in Mearsheimer's argument that America's liberal agenda has resulted in the superpower being at war for "two out of every three years since 1989", therefore advancing the US's liberal imperialist project to safeguard human rights and spread democracy has snowballed in more global conflict by destroying the peace that it seeks to establish (Mearsheimer, 2011).

In this vein, it is possible to interpret r2p as a way to make humanitarian action predictable and, therefore supportive of international order (Evans, 2008). However, governments, including the West, were exceedingly partial in their interest in and commitment to r2p when it was adopted, and have been wholly inconsistent even in arguing for its application, let alone undertaking r2p interventions. They become committed when it is in their best interest and lethargic when there is no corresponding economic benefit, as such prolonging the conflict. For example, in the aftermath of invoking r2p in Libya, the US and its allies were in full support because of the anti-west stance of Gaddafi led Libya, while in the case of Syria,

the Security Council deadlocked. Yet the Council also drew on r2p to authorise military intervention in Côte D'Ivoire. The intervention, carried out by UN peacekeepers backed up by French airpower, enforced compliance with the outcomes of a democratic election, arrested the former head of state, and sent him to the International Criminal Tribunal. What could be distilled from Cote D'Ivoire's case is that France has an interest in who becomes the next President of the country, hence their involvement. We cite this example to suggest that the failure to act upon r2p in Syria is not evidence of a complete abandonment of the principle but rather proof that great-power support for the principle is conditional.

A more compelling case about Syria and the undermining of principles of international order involves the use of chemical weapons by the Assad government. Central to any international order that relies on cooperative security is the question of enforcement. To the extent that the international order aspires to be grounded in international law, the authority for enforcing security treaties, weapons conventions, and Security Council mandates rests with the Security Council. If the Council cannot cohere behind enforcement due to great-power rivalry and clash of interests, then violations of treaties, conventions, and mandates will go unanswered. This is a perennial challenge for any international order that relies on international law and collective security. In the post–Cold War order, the challenge has arisen regarding the compliance of Saddam Hussein with Council mandates after the First Gulf War, the compliance of Iran and North Korea with their nuclear non-proliferation obligations, and, most recently, with the Russian invasion and seizure of Crimea in Ukraine.

In the face of Security Council inaction, upholding order has fallen selectively on the great powers and disproportionately on the hegemon and leading international power, the United States. This may not be unconnected with the disdain the US have for multilateralism and opting for unilateralism as the policeman of the world and chooses to act alongside their allies, as such, exacerbated the Syrian conflict. Some have argued that the key principle for international order in the Syrian Civil War was a willingness of the hegemon to follow through on its threats. When a hegemon does not enforce its red lines (threats regarding particular actions), it signals a wider retreat from its willingness to enforce the rules of order anywhere.

This argument had its adherents in the Washington policy community after President Obama's retreat from declaring that the use of chemical weapons in Syria was a red line that would prompt a forceful American response. The argument gained wider adherence when Russia intervened militarily in defence of Assad, marking the return of Russian hard power to the region. The problem with this interpretation is that it does not address the counterfactual. Had the United States acted militarily in Syria and become entrapped in a failed intervention, this would have prompted concerns about American recklessness, lack of strategy, and lack of predictability, the very traits that shook international relations after the American invasion of Iraq in 2003.

Nonetheless, the argument about American inaction in upholding its red line in Syria holds a basis of truth. The inability or unwillingness to act in Syria in ways that could mitigate the consequences for Europe or prevent openings for Russia likely contributed to perceptions of a loss of American influence and leadership in the Middle East. In isolation, this might not have been particularly significant, but it came on the back of a series of decisions in Iraq that saw American forces withdraw in a manner that facilitated a return to violence and the (understandable) American withdrawal of support for long-time ally President Mubarak of Egypt. Taken together, these episodes called into question the then President Obama's commitment to the use of American hard power in defence of order. While it is not easy to parse exactly how much Syria contributed to this, our judgment is that it is an exaggeration to portray inaction or weak action in Syria as triggering wider disorder. Also, the Iraq conflict, like others, is a creation of the hegemon, the US which was left unmitigated to allow some elements to harp on the

worthless mission that was unilaterally taken by the US and her NATO accomplice, which has brought disquiet in the region.

From a perspective of rules and expectations of the post–Cold War order, the most acute point concerning the great powers and the war in Syria is not that they did not intervene militarily to stop it, but that they did not invest resources and make the tough choices that would have been required to forge a diplomatic solution to the war. In 2012, when the war was at its peak for a negotiated settlement, the United States did not want to engage Iran, one of Assad's patrons, in Syria talks to avoid complicating its nuclear negotiations with Iran. At the same time, American demands that Assad had to step down as part of any settlement made a negotiated settlement unlikely.

Conclusion and Recommendations

In discussing the inter-state wars in the global system and its implication for international peace and security, several concluding remarks can be drawn from the above analysis and summarised as follows: there is growing globalisation on the one hand which trend will likely be holding; on the other hand, the new international system in the post-Cold War period has been marked by a seeming contradiction and fragmentation, because the rivalry that existed in the Cold War era seems to have resurfaced. The US-Russia interest is heating up the international system by their nationalistic hard lines; international cooperation for peace that is said to be the key in the post-Cold War is becoming farfetched.

More so, on the level of the relations among states, the new world order is based on major power cooperation. The international system contains at least five major powers –the United States, Europe, Russia, Japan, and China. There appears to be a serious threat to these powers synergising. This is so because Russia felt short-changed by the US and its NATO expansionist agenda into its stronghold since the end of the cold war. And this has been a major conflict hotbed in the post-Cold War era. That means world politics and international peace would in the near future, be largely shaped by the above-mentioned powers tension.

As pointed out in this paper, most conflicts that remained unmitigated in the present are conflicts that were carried over from the Cold War era and the superpowers or rather the Security Council that has the responsibility for maintaining peace and security in the international system are well abreast of both the remote and immediate cause of the conflict, should find a lasting solution to the conflict.

The North-South conflict aside, the post-Cold War world faces several other threats, most notably, ethnically-driven conflicts, religious militancy and terrorism, supported by some revisionist powers. These are particularly challenging threats as they are beyond the full control of nation-states, calling for international cooperation if they are to be effectively dealt with.

The study, therefore, recommends the following:

1. There is a need for major powers, in particular, and the international community, in general, to synergise and show the political will to cooperate on all fronts.
2. The great powers should address the issue of poverty, which is the root cause of conflict in the globe.
3. The advanced West should address the gap between the South and the West.

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