
BY

GWEZUVA TAKUDZWA

(R115507K)

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS OF THE MASTER OF SCIENCE DEGREE IN INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL AND ADMINISTRATIVE STUDIES

FACULTY OF SOCIAL STUDIES

UNIVERSITY OF ZIMBABWE

MARCH 2016
DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my loving family.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am forever grateful to the Almighty God for all His love and grace that kept me going throughout my studies.

Special thanks goes to my supervisor Mr L. Mhandara whose academic supervision, constructive criticism and assessment of my work came to be enlightening and inspiring. I also express gratitude to all the respondents from the embassies, different fields of profession as well as friends and colleagues from the University of Zimbabwe, namely Musemani, Tatz, Valz and Tinevimbo who participated in this research. Without the above this would have been an incomplete and fruitless academic endeavour.

I am deeply indebted to my parents Mr and Mrs Gwezuva and my family for their moral and material support during my academic studies. Even the most eloquently expressed words can never echo half the depth of my thoughts, love and appreciation for everything that you have done for me.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Full Form</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CIA</td>
<td>Central Intelligence Agency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FSA</td>
<td>Free Syrian Army</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IISS</td>
<td>International Institute for Strategic Studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IRC-QF</td>
<td>Iran Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corp-Qods Force</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ISIS</td>
<td>Islamic State of Iraq and Syria</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SALSRA</td>
<td>Syrian Accountability and Lebanese Sovereignty Restoration Act</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SNC</td>
<td>Syrian National Council</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UN</td>
<td>United Nations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNHRC</td>
<td>United Nations Human Rights Commission</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNSC</td>
<td>United Nations Security Council</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>US</td>
<td>United States</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USSR</td>
<td>Union of Soviet Socialist Republic</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
ABSTRACT

The civil war in Syria started as demonstrations calling for political reforms. However, the handed response by the government forced the demonstrators to take up arms to counter the government’s actions. This result was a full blown civil war. On its part, the US opted for a limited intervention by assisting the insurgent forces. This research analyses the efficacy of the US military assistance to insurgent groups in the Syrian civil war. The general objective guiding the study was the need to understand the considerations that informed the US to opt for an indirect intervention in the civil war as well as ascertain the effectiveness of such an approach in defeating the Assad government. The study made use of a case study with the Syrian civil war being put under study. The research methodology was qualitative in nature employing in-depth interviews and documentary search as data gathering techniques. Data was analysed using thematic analysis. Strategic theory was adopted as the framework for analysing data. The study finds that US actions were informed by a rational calculation and understanding that war could be used for the fulfilment of US long standing interest of regime change in Syria without full commitment of its resources and military personnel. The civil war turned into a proxy war with the involvement of other external actors such as Russia, Iran, Hezbollah and ISIS being accounted as the chief impediments to the realisation of US goals in the conflict. The study came to the conclusion that the US policy of indirect military intervention in the Syrian crisis has been failing to oust the Assad government as there is a stalemate on the battle front. The study recommends the need for coordination amongst great powers whenever their interest clash in domestic issues of other states so as to avoid proxy wars with no prospects for an ending. This would help to consolidate the effectiveness of its approach in the Syrian crisis.
# Table of Contents

DEDICATION .................................................................................................................. i  
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS ............................................................................................... ii  
ABBREVIATIONS .......................................................................................................... iii  
ABSTRACT ...................................................................................................................... iv  

## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION ....................................................................................... 1  
1.1 Background to the Problem ................................................................................... 1  
1.2 Statement of the Problem ..................................................................................... 2  
1.3 Objectives of the Study ....................................................................................... 3  
1.4 Preliminary Literature Review ............................................................................. 3  
1.5 Justification of the Study .................................................................................... 7  
1.6 Research Design ................................................................................................... 7  
1.6.2 Research Methodology .................................................................................... 8  
1.6.3 Population ....................................................................................................... 8  
1.6.4 Sampling Techniques ..................................................................................... 8  
1.6.5 Data Collection Methods .............................................................................. 9  
1.6.7 In-depth Interviews ..................................................................................... 9  
1.6.8 Documentary Search .................................................................................... 9  
1.6.9 Data Analysis ................................................................................................ 10  
1.7 Limitations .......................................................................................................... 10  
1.8 Delimitations ....................................................................................................... 11  
1.9 Dissertation Overview ....................................................................................... 11  

## CHAPTER 2: CONCEPTUALIZATION OF LIMITED MILITARY INTERVENTION AND INSURGENCY ......................................................................................... 12  
2.1 Introduction .......................................................................................................... 12  
2.2 Definition of Concepts ....................................................................................... 12  
2.2.1 The Concept of military intervention: Limited intervention ....................... 12  
2.2.2 The Concept of Insurgency ......................................................................... 13  
2.3 Strategic Theory ................................................................................................ 13
2.4 Conclusion .............................................................................................................17

CHAPTER 3: THE HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE ON US-SYRIA RELATIONS .............18
3.1 Introduction ...........................................................................................................18
3.2 US-Syria relations in the Cold War ......................................................................18
3.3 Post-Cold War Era: Mending of Relations ............................................................22
3.4 In the wake of 9/11 attack ....................................................................................24
3.5 US’s quest for Syria’s support in the Middle East Politics ...................................27
3.6 The Arab Spring ....................................................................................................28
3.6.2 Syria: Democratisation from Outside ...................................................................29
3.7 Diplomacy in Middle East ....................................................................................30
3.8 Russia’s Resurgence in Middle East: A challenge to US’s Influence ....................32
3.9 Conclusion ............................................................................................................33

CHAPTER 4: THE EFFICACY OF US MILITARY ASSISTANCE TO INSURGENT GROUPS IN SYRIA ...............................................................34
4.1 Introduction .............................................................................................................34
4.2 Considerations Behind US Limited Intervention in the Syrian Civil War ............34
4.3 The Nature of US Military Assistance to Insurgent Groups ................................36
4.4 Effectiveness of US Limited Military Assistance ..................................................37
4.5 Effects of the US Commitment in Iraq on the Syrian Civil War .............................40
4.6 Effects of the Involvement of Other External Actors on US Goals in Syria ........41
4.7 Conclusion ............................................................................................................43

CHAPTER 5: SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS ......45
5.1 Introduction ............................................................................................................45
5.2 Summary of the Study ..........................................................................................45
5.2.1 Purpose of the Study .........................................................................................45
5.2.2 Restatement of the Objectives .........................................................................45
5.2.3 Restatement of the Research Methodology ......................................................46
5.2.4 Framework of Analysis ....................................................................................46
5.3 Limitations ............................................................................................................46
5.4 Summary of Findings and Analysis ................................................................................................. 47
5.4.1 Considerations that Informed Limited Intervention .................................................................... 47
5.4.2 Nature of military assistance ........................................................................................................ 47
5.4.3 Effects of External Actors ........................................................................................................... 48
5.4.4 US’ Shift of Priorities in Syria ...................................................................................................... 49
5.4.5 Implications .................................................................................................................................. 49
5.5 Conclusion of the Study .................................................................................................................... 50
5.6 Recommendations .......................................................................................................................... 51
BIBLIOGRAPHY .................................................................................................................................... 52
Appendices .............................................................................................................................................. 57
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background to the Problem

In 2011 the Syrian streets were swamped by pro-democracy protests which were inspired by the Arab Spring with voices calling for the Assad regime to instigate some political reforms as well release political prisoners. However, Wiersema (2013:1) postulates that the street protests did not go well with government as it responded with extreme measures such as kidnapping, torture and opening fire on the protestors. With the government brutal attacks on protestors taking a toll, opponents of the government began to loosely unite and create some opposition organisations to resist the government crackdown on the civilians. Organisations such as the Syrian National Council (SNC), an umbrella body of exiled Syrians and the Free Syrian Army (FSA) a militarized element is largely composed of Syrian army defectors backed by some local and foreign armed rebels were the first to be created for this cause. Heydemann (2012:7) articulates that the Free Syrian Army (FSA) which is largely composed of Syrian military defectors backed with other volunteer rebel fighters from various Middle Eastern countries became the leading military force fighting against the pro-Assad forces.

Some of the foreign fighters joined the anti-Assad coalition out of the need to help Syria go through a democratic political transition whilst others joined because of their personal religious opposition to Assad’s secular regime. ICRtoP (2015:2) postulates that it did not take long for the opposition forces to become fragmented as they became divided along the ideological differences and this turned the conflict into a sectarian war. Other opposition forces became linked to long-established terrorist groups such as Al Qaeda and ISIS. The terrorist organisations then took advantage of the chaos that was now prevailing in Syria to expand both their operations and influence and this resulted in a widespread attack of civilians. According to the United Nations Daily News (2014:2), by early 2014, more than 140,000 had been killed while more than 6.5 million people were displaced within and 2.5 million in neighbouring countries. It is argued that with the intensification of the conflict because of the involvement of foreign terrorist groups, the government shifted from sporadic violence to targeted large scale killing with the use of cluster bombs as well as the use of chemical weapons.
The alleged use of chemical weapons by the government raised the international alarm for intervention citing that the Assad government had failed in its responsibility to protect Syrians and this required an immediate and meaningful response. Grohe (2015:1) argues that the US and other Western powers such as France were convinced that the Assad regime had violated international humanitarian law and declared that a red line had been crossed and therefore considered a military operation in order to respond to the chemical weapons attack. However, Sterner (2014:414) argues that such an action was heavily compromised by Assad’s strong political and military ties to China and Russia who vetoed three UN Security Council resolutions that were meant to authorise a military intervention. In other words, the UNSC showed lack of consensus on the decisive action to be taken in relation to the Syrian conflict. The failure of the international actors to act timeously with a unified clear position to address the political crisis in Syria worsened the situation. According to UNHR (2014) the influx of refugees is now affecting hosting countries as there is now an increased risk of sectarian spill-over particularly in areas sympathetic to Assad hence the crisis now pose an international threat to peace and security.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

According to White (2012:1) direct military intervention was understood to have a decisive impact on the Syrian crisis as it did in Libya but the US ruled it out and opted for an indirect limited intervention. Such a strategic decision was informed by reasons that include its failure to get a UN resolution authorizing a military intervention after China and Russia had vetoed all the three proposed US-led resolutions as well as the fear that a direct military intervention would exacerbate the violence in Syria as the regime’s ability to strike back was too high. However with the allegations that the Assad regime had made use of chemical weapons, the degree of threat was raised to alarming levels and this resulted in the US sending military aid to capacitate the insurgent fighters’ capacity to defend the unrestrained use of force by the government.

ICRtoP (2014) argues that a few months into the conflict, the US was supporting the Syrian opposition politically, economically and militarily. The Free Syrian Army which was spearheading the fight received a steady stream of non-military assistance and later on lethal military equipment and funding as a means to maintain their foot in fighting the brutal attacks from the government forces. Limited intervention to the US was implemented through both overt and covert operations providing the Syrian opposition with means to counterattack the regime,
disrupt its military operations, weaken its will to fight and hinder Assad’s ability to function through the provision of military weapons, training, intelligence, diplomatic aid, sabotage and espionage. Blanchard et al (2014:2) articulate that neither pro-Assad forces nor their opponents appear capable of achieving outright victory and this has raised serious questions as to the future of Syrian politics. With insurgent forces appearing not being able to prevail over the Assad forces, there is now a need to assess the efficacy of US’s approach of limited intervention as a means to unseat the Assad government.

1.3 Objectives of the Study

The general objective of the study is to ascertain the effectiveness of US military assistance to insurgent groups in establishing a pro-western government in Syria.

The specific objectives of the study are to:

1. Examine US-Syrian relations since the eruption of the civil war;
2. Ascertain the considerations that informed the US to militarily assist Syrian insurgent groups;
3. Critically examine the nature of military assistance to insurgent groups;
4. Assess the effectiveness of indirect military intervention vis-a-vis direct military intervention; and
5. Examine the effects of other external actors’ involvement in the Syrian conflict on the attainment of US goals in the Syrian conflict.

1.4 Preliminary Literature Review

The current civil war in Syria is evolving into a ‘proxy war’, in which both the Baathist regime and its insurgent oppositions are becoming progressively reliant upon backing from external powers. According to Hughes (2014: 522), proxy warfare has a superficial appeal for sponsoring states, as it appears to offer a convenient and risk-free means of fulfilling foreign policy goals, which will not incur the financial and human costs of direct military intervention.

Proxy warfare in other words has provided the US an opportunity to avert the consequences associated with direct military intervention in a bid to engineer a major political transition within Syria with the main intention of overthrowing the Assad led regime. Hughes (2014: 523) in his study, Syria and the Perils of Proxy Warfare, concluded that external assistance to rebel groups
appears to have become a necessity not only because of humanitarian crisis, but the concern that without any Western aid the anti-Assad rebellion could become dominated by radical Islamist groups hence failure to achieve long term peace both in Syria as well as in the Arab region.

Covert aid to bolster the Syrian insurgency would therefore provide an alternative that the US is currently unwilling to undertake as there exists lessons of failed military intervention. Stevenson (2014: 124) argues that the Obama administration upon taking office recognised the need to salvage US influence in the face of the Arab Spring which stood as a trying test to the US policy makers. One may question the effectiveness of US approach in resolving conflicts in the past as its military interventions have for so many reasons and cases led to the destruction and destabilisation of the Middle East states such as Iraq. It is in this aspect that the US has realised the need to strike a more delicate and shifting balance between diplomatic engagement and the use of ‘threat of military action’ rather than direct intervention. Stevenson (2014:125) articulates that this development in particular has strengthened Obama’s new commitment to replacing Bush’s crude primacy with measured realism.

Because the situation in Syria presents significant political risks for the US, this has put the Obama administration in a dilemma as the conflict has attracted the attention and interests of both state and non-state actors who have great influence in shaping the conflict. Russia alongside China being some of the interested parties to the conflict have demonstrated consistent diplomatic support for Assad’s regime and the consensus that led to military action over Libya has never existed where Syria is concerned. According to The International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS) (2011:1), Syria is a geostrategic linchpin, and instability there has greater ramifications for the region and US’ limited leverage over Damascus has forced it to tread softly, while the so-called Libya hangover effect has further dampened any aspirations to intervene.

In light of the above view, permanent United Nations Security Council members Russia and China feel that the resolution allowing 'all necessary measures' to prevent a humanitarian disaster in Libya was 'over-interpreted,' Stea (2012). It is in this facet of Russia and China’s criticism that the United States and the European Union have failed to obtain a UN resolution condemning Syria for its ruthless suppression on civilians which would necessitate a military intervention resolution. Hughes (2014:532) articulates that the Obama administration has rightly insisted that each country involved in the Arab Spring has its own dynamic character and in-terms of US
policy there is no cookie cutter approach. This therefore paints a vivid picture that the US has grasped so well the complexities in the Syrian crisis hence a shift from direct military intervention as has been in the past to providing military assistance to insurgent forces as a mechanism to resolve the conflict.

The Syrian crisis has presented the most daunting situation for US as non-state actors such as Al Qaeda fighters are competing against each other for control, as well as against other opposition groups, the Assad regime, ISIS, Iraqi militia men, and Hezbollah. Cragin (2015:312) articulates that, this chaotic war is nothing like any previous problem encountered in the Middle East both in its nature and scale and has been made even more challenging by the limited US presence on-the-ground. More worrisome, is that this semi proxy war has spread beyond Syria as similar dynamics have emerged in Iraq, Yemen, and Lebanon and of late Turkey, requiring the US government to develop a new approach to mitigating the impact of the Syrian conflict from overlapping into neighboring states.

Cragin (2015:312) illustrates that policy challenges presented by Syrian conflict are not insignificant as the US has demonstrated a strong reluctance to intervene with security forces even when al-Assad once crossed the red-line in chemical attack in 2013. One can see part of the reluctance being derived from war fatigue after Afghanistan and Iraq whilst other scholars such as Abbott (2014) indicates that intervention in Syria has been avoided so as not to complicate ongoing diplomatic efforts with Iran on its nuclear program as well as not to undermine President Obama’s efforts to ‘reset’ the US-Russian relationship. Taking into account this view, one may therefore appreciate the fact that the US is playing rational thinking into the conflict as the decisions are informed by a cost-benefit analysis as the US seeks to maximise its interests not only in Syria but also on the international platform.

The Obama strategy of militarily assisting insurgent groups in the Syrian conflict is based on burden-sharing, both to limit the costs to the United States and to lower the chances of getting dragged further in if things do not go well in the conflict as has been in the case of Iraq. Throughout history, some coalitions have been built on shared priorities and objectives but the Syrian conflict as illustrated by Roggio (2013:1) paints a different picture as the US is alleged to have bedded some pro-Al-Qaeda groups into a coalition whilst on the other hand has been combating Al-Qaeda in Yemen as well as in Iraq. One may point the fact that the US’ support for
Al-Qaeda linked rebels in Syria depicts a complex nature of the US strategy in resolving conflicts as it depicts double standards.

One of the unknown mysteries in the Syrian war has been whether the US and the rebels share the same long term goals and interests as the idea of arming rebels has raised so many questions with regards to the future of Syrian politics. Roggio (2013:1) posits that, it is understood that the US does not truly understand the size, composition and intentions of the various opposition groups operating under the Free Syrian Army. Blanchared et al (2015:10) concurs with this view by arguing that much is still not known on the profiles, stated political goals and positions of the leadership of certain groups operating in Syria as such information has been largely based on open primary sources. This in other words means the US has not been able to independently verify the size, equipment, and current areas of operation of the armed groups operating in Syria. Blanchared (2015:10) argue that at present, open source analysis of armed groups operating in Syria relies largely on the self-reporting of individual groups and coalitions and that information is not evenly and regularly available for all groups hence more is yet to be known about these insurgence groups.

The US government is now faced with a dilemma of how best it can arm certain sections of the forces that are in line with its regional security and counterterrorism goals in Syria without inadvertently strengthening the al-Assad regime as there has been reports that some of its weapons have gone to find ways into the arms of their enemies as there is a threat that groups may change allegiances. Blanchared et al (2015:10) cements the above view by arguing that many groups and units who claim to coordinate under various fronts and coalitions in fact appear to operate independently and they reserve the right to change allegiances.

Blanchard et al (2015:1) articulate that the anti-Asad forces are still divided over tactics, strategy, and their long-term political goals for Syria. This has put the US under pressure as to how best it can align the long term political interests of the insurgent groups with its long term goals for Syria. This therefore remains a question to be answered as existence of limited information surrounding the activities of the insurgent groups makes it not easy to find a possible means to strengthen the insurgence in a way that does not compromise US interests in Syria.

Some scholars such as Fishman (2012: 1) argue that the US military intervention is unlikely to
produce a stable Syrian government post-conflict and have supported a patient approach of training and modestly arming rebels. It is in this aspect that Washington has opted for the provision of the supply of limited military assistance to some small factions assuming that they can correctly be identified with the good side of the Syrian revolution. However, it can be noted that the US seeks to increase its influence within the rebel forces thereby arming the rebels with modern weapons.

However, it is yet to be established whether helping collapse an existing government by means of aiding rebel groups will not create a vacuum that terrorist groups can exploit to their own advantage as has been in the case of Iraq. Mataconis (2012) argue that aiding rebel forces that still reserve the right to change allegiances and who lack loyalty to the US will serve nothing but prolong the civil war. Considering that Syria exists in the middle of the most volatile region on the planet, there is need to examine if such supported insurgency will not be hijacked by fundamentalist groups thereby spreading the conflict across the Arab world putting the region in a serious security threat.

1.5 Justification of the Study

The study will be of importance as it will be a reference point for further research on aiding US foreign policy in dealing with conflicts in the Middle East. The US had for long been known for military interventions as a measure in resolving conflicts in the Middle East. The Syrian crisis presents a new dimension of indirect intervention through assisting insurgent groups militarily. The effectiveness of such an approach in resolving conflicts needs academic exploration.

There is scarcity literature on this new approach taken by the US as the Syrian conflict is a current issue and the study will add to this budding scholarship. The study will also help to draw useful lessons from the new approach of indirect military intervention taken by the US in resolving conflicts in the Middle East and provide readers, academies, policy makers involved in conflict, peace and security building with insights on how best such a policy can be implemented.

1.6 Research Design

The study made use of a case study. According to Yin (2002:2) a case study research examines a contemporary phenomenon within its real life context and this method was employed for the research to provide context and narratives behind particular events surrounding the US’
assistance to insurgent groups in Syria (Neale et al 2006:1). This was therefore be useful in assessing the effectiveness of US military support to insurgent groups as much information is not yet known about this phenomenon as it is a current issue.

1.6.2 Research Methodology

This study relied on qualitative research methodology. William (2005:85) argues that qualitative methods are often regarded as providing rich data about real life people and situations. This therefore makes it the most suitable method for this study as it seeks to assess a real life case study. Qualitative data gathering techniques such as in-depth interviews with key informants, open ended questionnaires as well as documentary search was utilised for this research. These methods of data inquiry would help to gather an in-depth understanding of US’ assistance to insurgent groups and was also of paramount importance in explaining the motives that govern such limited military action by the US.

1.6.3 Population

Ary et.al (1970: 125) defines a population as the total of all the individuals from whom data can be obtained and generalised on and these have certain characteristics and are of interest to the researcher. For this study, the target population composed of foreign diplomats from two Middle East countries, namely Iran, Yemen and two Western countries that are the US and Russia all that are based in Zimbabwe as these are the countries that have shown great interest in the Syrian crisis. Military personnel, policy makers, lecturers and academics with profound experience in international relations were also targeted respondents. For instance the US being a member to the UNSC as well as being the chief architecture of the interventionist policy in Syria definitely added in-depth knowledge about the topic under study.

1.6.4 Sampling Techniques

Oliver (2006:1) postulates that purposive sampling is a non-probability sampling method in which decisions concerning the individuals to be included in the sample are taken by the researcher, based upon a variety of criteria which may include specialist knowledge of the research issue, or capacity and willingness to participate in the research. Non-probability approach was used so as to afford the study an in-depth understanding of the US’ foreign policy in the Middle East which has been a complex subject. Purposive sampling technique was
employed for this study due to the fact that it is cheap, easy and can bring in high quality data as participants who are most likely to contribute appropriate data, both in terms of relevance and depth are the ones who were selected for in-depth interviews. The researcher guarded against selection bias by creating a criteria under which the only respondents who suit the demands would be chosen.

1.6.5 Data Collection Methods
Data collection is the process of combining all the information and evaluating it on variables of attention. The study made use of in-depth interviews with key informants, open ended questionnaires and secondary sources to gather data.

1.6.7 In-depth Interviews
In-depth interviews were utilised in the course of research. An interview has been defined by Smith (2011:4) as a conversation between two people, an interview and an interviewee. The researcher approached four Foreign Ministries and Embassies for instance Western and Middle East embassy officials in Zimbabwe to solicit their views about what necessitated indirect intervention instead of direct intervention as well as the efficacy of US indirect intervention in the Syrian civil war. In-depth interviews were the best as this method allowed the researcher to establish rapport and gain the confidence and trust of the respondents thereby giving more space to probe and seek amplification of certain aspects of the study.

1.6.8 Documentary Search
The study made use of secondary data. Schwab (2005:1) notes that secondary data is data which has been gathered and recorded by someone else prior to and for the purpose of other than the current project. In this aspect the researcher got data from relevant sources provided by researchers, government institutions as well as other institutions which included government documents, official statistics, technical reports, journals, textbooks, newspapers and archival resources. Online-government reports from the US, Russian and Iranian government as well as UN online library was also used as the key sources in the documentary search. Online publications from scholars, news agencies as well as e-journals were also consulted. These were used to gather data concerning reasons for US’ indirect intervention as well as the developments on the civil war since US started aiding rebels. Documentary search in this aspect aided the
research to understand the complexities surrounding the Syrian war. Such data therefore helped to explain how the international system has evolved in dealing with conflicts in the Middle East as well as understand the consequences of the great powers’ involvement in the war. This method of gathering data was relevant and suitable for the study as it provided a foundation for empirical primary research by enabling the researcher to make thematic conclusions of what was already known and what remains to be learnt.

1.6.9 Data Analysis
The research made use of thematic analysis for analysis of the data which was gathered from the research. According to Braun and Clarke (2006:6) thematic method refers to the technique for categorizing, analysing, examining, classifying and reporting patterns contained by the available data. With this method the researcher reviewed the data collected and made some notes which were sorted into categories from which the themes for further analysis were developed.

The researcher then moved the analysis from a broad reading of the developed themes narrowing the themes to specifics by means of discovering patterns and developing answers to the laid down objectives which the study needed to answer. Thematic analysis was employed as it can afford a rich detailed account of data sets and this can be a better way of getting close to the data thereby developing some profound appreciation of the content.

1.7 Limitations
The study faced difficulties in accessing useful first-hand information. However, the researcher developed in-depth information on the topic and conducted interviews with key informants such as diplomats both from the US and other Middle East countries residing in Zimbabwe who have some knowledge about the Syrian conflict. More so accessibility to non-state actors like insurgent groups which are relevant to this topic was a challenge as this put the researcher’s life at risk. Also the study encountered a risk of bias as some respondents especially foreign diplomats who are interested parties to the conflict as there was a chance that they would give a stance clouded by bias. This limitation therefore required the researcher’s objectivity when recording and analysing data. The researcher also encountered a language barrier as the study made use of some on-line Syrian literature on platforms such as Facebook, twitter as well as Syrian government official website. Such a problem were addressed by making use of online translation services.
1.8 Delimitations

The scope of the study was limited to US’ military assistance to Syrian insurgent groups though it took into account the significance of other Middle East and Western states’ contributions to the conflict. The period of the study was from 2013 to 2015 to examine the effectiveness of US military assistance to insurgent groups in Syria.

1.9 Dissertation Overview

The study was made up of five chapters. The first chapter introduced the research topic, background to the problem, methodology and justifications as well as limitations and delimitations. This chapter was of paramount importance to the preceding chapter as it laid down the road map which the study took.

Chapter two focused on the conceptualization of indirect military intervention as in the case of military assistance to insurgent groups and insurgency. This was adopted so as to give a detailed framework for understanding the nature of the civil war and the extent to which limited intervention in Syria was understood by the study. The chapter also helped to explain the conceptual and theoretic frameworks under-which data was analysed thereby laying down a framework under which the following chapters would follow.

Chapter three gave a detailed analysis of the case study of Syria taking a critical over view of US-Syria relations from the birth of Syria up to the point of this civil war. Under this chapter the study examined US policy on the Middle East and this helped to give a clear picture of other factors and events that led US to involve itself in the Syrian crisis as well as other factors that affected US’s intervention.

Chapter four addressed the specific research objectives related to the efficacy of US military assistance to Syrian insurgency using the data that was gathered from the research. This chapter became the basis under which chapter 5 of conclusions and recommendations was informed.

Chapter five presented the conclusions as well as the recommendations. This chapter was of paramount importance as it gave the insights on how US limited intervention stance of Syria may be enhanced so as to realize the intended goal of removing the Assad government from power.
CHAPTER 2: CONCEPTUALIZATION OF LIMITED MILITARY INTERVENTION AND INSURGENCY

2.1 Introduction

This chapter provides a conceptual framework upon which the study was premised on. In an attempt to provide a theoretical basis for broadening the understanding of the case study, the study engaged some international relations theories such as the Clausewitz theory on war which is heavily embedded in Strategic theory.

2.2 Definition of Concepts

2.2.1 The Concept of military intervention: Limited intervention

Since the ending of the Cold War, the world has witnessed the resurgence of military intervention with particular focus being on the need to address humanitarian and conflict concerns. According to Hauss (2003:1), military intervention can be understood as the use of foreign armed forces in the domestic affairs of another state in operations that are intended to resolve an emergency or intractable conflict once and for all.

Limited military intervention according The Free Library (1996:1) is composed of the conduction of limited air-strikes, military training and non-combat support for allies in small wars, enforcement of sanctions, embargoes and exclusion zones. Limited military differs from full-scale war as there is a cautious limit to the number of workforce and resources that are committed to the war and it is often initiated for a short period. However, limited military intervention remains very much a weapon and an option with the ability to cause harm as it can wield great pressure particularly when initiated in opposition to a weak force.

According to White (2012:1) limited military intervention in the case of US-Syria context can be understood from a technical base of a covert military operation. Such a covert military campaign is conducted with the aim to provide the Syrian opposition with the means to resist the regime, disrupt its military operations, weaken its will to fight and hinder the state’s ability to function in fighting the resistance.

From the above assertion, limited military intervention can then be understood in terms of that help given to the insurgency which may be limited to intelligence and military training so as to consolidate the insurgency fighters’ efforts in fighting the government as is in the case of Syria.
The Syrian insurgency according to White (2012:1) has adopted means in fighting the Assad regime which include armed resistance, sabotage, political warfare and civil resistance. These means has so far been not implemented in a well-coordinated, organized or well-supported way. US limited military intervention would therefore amount to that technical help in coordinating and organizing the national resistance efforts so as to bring down the Assad regime.

2.2.2 The Concept of Insurgency

Mackinlay (2001:141) understands insurgency as an uprising by dissident group that is concentrated on the need to defeat a particular government. The insurgent’s support and resilience usually springs from a community that harbors unbearable grievance and has been a victim of socio-political suppression for quite a long time. According to Todd (2001:1) insurgency in many cases is driven by political demands which are unattainable by means of less violent means and it usually arise when the state is unable or unwilling to redress the demands of significant groups.

Todd (2001:2) posits that insurgencies thrive in states that lack efficient, stable or popular governments and factors such as external agitation may help create a favourable climate under which insurgency may maneuver. Under such a volatile climate, groups with access to violent machinery thereby take advantage of the situation and stage a militarised resistance to ouster the constituted authorities in power. In many instances, insurgencies usually aim to achieve a well-publicized military victory so as to gain the popular support it may be short of at the outset. It is through this support that the discredited state authorities out of fear of further losses may be forced to negotiate for a political deal before popular support is further eroded.

Insurgent forces are mostly constituted by coalitions of disparate forces that are willing to employ violence in challenging the legitimacy of the authorities in power. These coalitions are usually united by a common hate towards the government. In many cases insurgencies end up adopting violent methods to seek redress as they are denied constitutional paths to seek the much needed redress.

2.3 Strategic Theory

The US choice of limited intervention is informed by its strategic calculations. Thus an examination of the assumptions underpinning strategic theory is narrated. Strategic theory
according to Jablonsky (1995:10) emphasizes the rational employment of specific instruments of power to achieve the political objectives. According to Yarger (2006:5), the theory is premised on the understanding that the state must be aware of an end it seeks to achieve and this would help in shaping the policies to be adopted in pursuit of these interests. It is in this aspect that strategic theory provides direction for understanding US use of indirect coercive power to initiate a downfall of the Ba’athist regime in Syria and install a puppet government instead.

Yarger (2006:6) further posits that strategic theory is centered on the view that political purpose must dominate all strategy and this is in line with Clausewitz’s dictum that war is merely the continuation of policy by other means. It can be advanced that the Syrian civil war proffers a platform for the US to extend its political hegemony by influencing a political change that would advance its foreign policy objectives in the Middle East. Stephenson (2014:124) supports this view by arguing that the Obama administration upon taking office recognised the need to salvage US influence in the face of Arab Spring. This can therefore be achieved by means of diplomacy or military force depending on their suitability as informed by a rational thought as Schelling (1980:5) argues that actors behave rationally making use of a cost-benefit analysis when pursuing their interests.

Yarger (2006:7) purports that Strategic theory is premised on the view that policies are developed from a thorough consideration of the strategic situation and knowledge of the strategic environment. Hughes (2014:532) concurs with the above view when he articulates that the Obama administration has rightly insisted that each country involved in the Arab Spring has its own dynamic character and in-terms of US policy there is no cookie cutter approach hence taking a different approach for the Syrian crisis. It can be discerned that the moderation of the US’ approach to conflicts as in the case of Syria is a clear indication of a thorough consideration by the US government of the many factors that shape the environment under which the Syrian conflict has fallen under.

According to Lykke (1989:4), under strategic theory, the process is on how (concept or way) leadership will use power (resources or means) available to the state to exercise control over sets of circumstances and geographic locations to achieve objectives (ends) in accordance with state policy. Taking this theoretical aspect in reflection to the Syrian civil war, it can be asserted that the Obama administration has greatly understood the nature of the war which they are about to
embark on. Clausewitz theory on war which is heavily embedded in Strategic theory as noted by Kass et al (1996:2) stipulates that the most supreme act of judgment statesman and commander have to make is to establish the kind of war which they are embarking on as this would help to equip them with relevant information about the nature of enemy as well as parties involved to the conflict. Taking into account the controversial circumstances surrounding the Syrian conflict such as involvement of several state and non-state actors such as Russia, Iran and ISIS respectively, it is clear that it has evolved into a proxy war and the US has evaluated the political sympathies of great powers’ sympathies to the Assad regime. Such considerations have led to the adoption of an indirect or limited military intervention mechanism in a bid to avert dire consequences associated with direct intervention as such presents probability of a great war between world powers.

According to Gordon and Bernard (2006:498), Clausewitz’s states that, “War is the continuation of policy by another means” and this is in line with Strategic theory which purports that force can be used in pursuit of political ends. In the Syrian case, the US seeks to employ the use of force to achieve its political interests of establishing pro-western type of governments within the Middle East. For the US involvement in this war seems to be the best political tool for the realization of this policy as the conflict has provided it with the best opportune to initiate a long standing goal of regime change within Syria.

Guided by rational thinking, the US approach to the Syrian crisis takes a different dimension from that of Iraq. Parret (2000) makes reference to Clausewitz thought by citing that violence should express political purpose and express it in a rational and utilitarian manner. The US has taken a rational towards the war in Syria out of great understanding of serious political consequences surrounding the conflict. US’ limited intervention in Syria is guided by the need to restrain its war aims so as to afford its political objectives the control over the use of violence. Clausewitz articulates that war and politics should be so intimately intertwined due to the fact that a country’s military without direction would tend to spiral into meaningless violence and loss.

The US choice of limited intervention in the Syrian case has been informed by its strategic calculations and considerations. According to Rothkopf (2014) the Obama administration has been showing signs of resisting the lure of the region’s unending wars and has opted to limit their
involvement in the Syrian civil war due to US’ need to cut military commitments in the Middle East. Such a stance has been as a result of serious considerations taking into account serious repercussions that would come out involvement in a proxy war which has attracted the interest of many great powers as is in the case of Syria. In other words the US appreciates the view that they can still achieve their goals without necessarily involving its military directly in the war as informed by the Clausewitz theory on war which is within the rubric of Strategic theory.

Clausewitz develops a concept of limited war, wherein a nation wages war with something less than its full resources with aims of complete annihilation of one’s enemy (Griffin 2014:449). However, in limited war, as with all war, victory is achieved when one’s enemy has been compelled to do one’s will and one’s political objectives have been met. With reference to the Syrian conflict, the US has committed some military resources to the insurgent groups to overthrow the Assad regime by rendering it politically helpless and militarily impotent.

Strategic theory through Clausewitz’s theory on war brings another dimension to the understanding of war through the trinity concept which can be understood as a sophisticated system of checks and balances where the organised use of armed force is concerned. According to Callum (2001:67), the trinity presents a dynamic relationship between separated elements of people, army and government where relevant functions or powers and the proper use of armed force has to be a matter of balanced, mutually constitutive co-operation. One may understand other reasons behind the US’ limited intervention in the Syrian war. Wroughton (2013:1) clearly outlines that the US public has for long enjoyed great shear portion of influence when it comes to military operations abroad. However, the Americans have strongly opposed US intervention in the Syria’s civil war and believe that Washington should stay out of the conflict and the US has failed to completely stay out of the conflict but has minimised its presence on the Syrian soil by means of extending military assistance to insurgent forces fighting against Assad.

Yarger (2006:8) further indicates that the strategic theory can anticipate the future but cannot predict the future with absolute certainty. It is in this aspect that the theory will help in understanding the Syrian crisis as much on the political future remains largely unknown. Strategic theory therefore cements the need to determine whether attainment of the specified end justifies the risks of initiating action at the same time citing the need for the strategist to consider how other actors may react to that action.
2.4 Conclusion

This chapter has attempted to define and examine the two guiding concepts of limited military intervention and insurgency. Limited military intervention has been understood as a cautious military expedition in a foreign country with a limit to the number of workforce and resources that are committed to the war and it is often initiated for a short period. The chapter noted that insurgency is a politically motivated uprising led by a dissident group that is concentrated on the need to defeat a particular recognised government. It also focused on Strategic theory in trying to understand the study from a theoretical perspective. Under the theoretical assumptions, it has noted that the US choice of limited intervention has been informed by its strategic calculations in understanding that indirect coercive power can be used to initiate a downfall of the Ba’athist regime in Syria. This has been directed by the understanding that war is the continuation of policy by other means. The US understood that war can be waged with something less than its full resources and its objectives can still be met, hence a calculated limited intervention has been initiated instead. Use of force or war has been adopted as a tool to fulfill a long standing political objective of installing a pro-western government in Syria. Though the conflict has evolved into a proxy war, strategic theory has informed the US that its goals can still be fulfilled by means of limiting its involvement in the face of great powers opposition and the opportune to be involved can still be used to achieve its interest.
CHAPTER 3: THE HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE ON US-SYRIA RELATIONS

3.1 Introduction

US-Syria relations have never been as good for a long time as they have been marred by mutual hostility. This stems from many factors that include the US’ unreserved support for Israel in the Syrian-Israel antipathy, US role in the 1957 failed coup, US marginalisation of Syria and denunciation of its domestic and regional policies. The US also accused Syria for playing a leading role in international terrorism as well as for its negative role in the current Iraq war. On its part, Syria criticises the US policies in the Arab region as being pro-Israel. Sadat et al (2009:1) articulate that the US has for long failed to craft and maintain a constant foreign policy towards Syria as deviating impulses have steered American policy with regards to Syria. This chapter gives a historical analysis of the US-Syria relations from the Cold War era up to date. It examines the changes in US policy towards Syria taking into account how other great powers such as Russia have indirectly affected such changes in policy. Focus will also be on how the US foreign policy towards the Arab region as a whole has affected its relations with the regime in Syria. This would help the study to understand the considerations that informed the US to militarily assist Syrian insurgent groups as well as ascertain the effects of external actors’ involvement in the civil war on the attainment of US goals in the conflict.

3.2 US-Syria relations in the Cold War

After the World War 2, the participation of US in the Middle East region began to grow as there emerged a need to counter the expansion of communism in the region. The US sought to give support to Arab states as failure to do so would have handed Soviet Union an advantage. According to Gani (2011) the US embarked on a policy to secure Syria as it had already began to develop ties with Soviet Union since the recognition of its independence. The US started to craft policies which were centred on its strategic and economic interests and it began to interpret the region’s political activities within the frame of its own ideological battle with the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR).

Gani (2011:125) articulates that with Syria gaining independence in 1946, the US was skeptical that it would become hostile toward Israel because of the historical territorial dispute that had existed as well as the ties with Soviet Union that had started to grow. The Syrian government regardless of the emerging ties with Soviet Union was so eager to establish cordial relations with
the US as it had not shown any imperialist tendencies within the region compared to former European colonisers. This created a positive ground for cooperation between these two states.

The US-Syrian relations were further cemented under the pro-western government of Kuzbari who pledged closer political and economic relations with the US than had ever been permitted before and the US even went on to provide political and economic support to the regime through financial loans. Gani (2011:259) laments that despite the fact that prospects for political stability in Syria were poor by then, the US continued to encourage the regime in Syria to pursue a pro-Western course with the promise that in turn it would promote US-Syrian trade and encourage the IMF and other countries to assist Syria with loans and restoration of a strong currency.

However, with time US’ economic interests in the region started to develop deeper as they sought to institute indirect rule so as to control the flow of oil in a bid to strengthen European economies as well as that of Japan as a means of combating the spread of communism. The increased US interests in the region (the 1953 attempted coup against Iran’s Mosadeq, the support for British occupation of the Suez Canal and the policy to discredit Nasser), it lost much of the earlier goodwill that the Syrians had felt for them as its actions made it look more of imperialists. It is in this aspect that the US failed coup against the pro-Soviet Syrian government as well as US support for Israel in the Syrian-Israel antipathy further eroded the little goodwill that had been left and this resulted in sour relations between the two.

Relations between the two did not last for long as was anticipated by the US judging from the initial eagerness the Syrians had exhibited in establishing relations with the western world. Gani (2011) argues that the Kuzbari’s regime which was tolerant of the US passivity did not last long in power, as was often the case with pro-Western regimes in Syria and was dethroned within two years by the Ba’thist Revolution. According to Zisser (2003:29) the Soviet Union had been a model and sources of inspiration for the Syrian Baath regime as well as a prime source of political, military and economic aid and support. Because of great alignment in Soviet’s ideology, the coming in of the Bathist party brought about a radical change in Syrian politics as it was driven by anti-westernism and a strong hatred of Israel. The Ba’thist hatred of the west was seen in the fact that it did not even pursued recognition from, or relations with the west which is a

---

1 In-depth interview, Harare, 28 January 2016.
strong and deliberate show of autonomy from western influence. Much of the hatred for the US on the Ba’thist side was as a result of the US’ open recognition of Israel’s post-1967 conflict borders and this drove Syria’s position towards the US from one of cautious opposition to open provocation and hostility. This in other words marked the end of cordial relations between the Syrian and the US government and the beginning of closer ties between Syria and the Soviet Union.

According to Kabalan (2010:28) throughout the 1950s and 1960s Syria relied heavily on the USSR not only for security assurances but also for economic aid as relations with the US had gone sour. Gani (2011:116) argues that though Syria had established relations with the USSR, they had not fully adopted the Soviet Union’s ideology but they had just welcomed relations with a world power that at least accepted Arab’s main concerns in the region as well as shared their goal of combating pro-Israeli and Western interference. Though the Soviet Union had been one of the prime supporters of the establishment of Israel, by 1950s it gradually started to backtrack from this position after realising the strong pro-Western course that Israel had adopted and this drew Syria closer to the Soviet Union.

Soviet-Syria relations during this era were mainly influenced by the shared ideology towards Israel as well the common hatred for US. The Syrians had some serious objections with regards to Israel’s aggressive actions in the region which according to them was a result of US’ reluctance to rectify. The Syrians argued that the US was directly accountable for Israeli actions because of the unregulated support it enjoyed. Quandt (2005:13) cements this view when he argues that the Syrians felt that US was showing no any signs of pressuring Israel to compromise with the Arab demands as well as UN resolutions which demanded Israel to push back its borders and this reflected a whole delusion of Middle East politics and a failure to respect the wounds of its very fresh history. This in other words made the Syrians less eager to cooperate with the US and made it align with the Soviet as the unregulated support which the Israeli were receiving from US installed a sense of mistrust as they viewed the US as an imperialist and not as a neutral party.

The improvements in the Soviet-Syrian bilateral ties perpetuated the already existing coldness between the US and Syria as the US was of the perception that the Syrians were a rowdy and
obstructionist entity in the region that was unreliable. For the Syrians, US reactions to their ties with the Soviet Union confirmed that the US was a self-interested party that was only for the monopolisation of power and all allegiances for itself. According to Fletcher (2008) in the 1980s Syria’s role in international terrorism became so pronounced by the US and the US developed a more realist approach towards Syria by adopting various executive orders and legislative actions which restricted trade with Syria as well as economic sanctions. In doing so the US isolated Syria and coupled with the global financial crisis and falling oil prices, the Syrian economy suffered heavily. However, regardless of the problems at home Tooher (2008:3) argues that Syria continued to enjoy a growing relationship with Russia as they penned down many arms deals. As a result of this marginalisation Syria attracted sympathy from Russia and this cemented their ties which the US strongly resented.

The speed at which the Russia had been able to secure Syrian alliance in the Middle East became so alarming to the US that it made them calculative of what such an alliance could do to their interests in the region. Being cautious of such a development, one respondent argued that it became no longer viable for the US to continue implementing a passive approach to the internal affairs of the Arab states. In the past the US had clandestinely supported individuals in the Middle East who were already in search for power as a way of putting in place governments that were pro-Western in a bid to secure their interests. However, with the way the Syria-Soviet relations were advancing, the US became so disposed to actively initiate domestic and regional opposition for the defeat of regimes which they deemed as threats to its interests in the region.

Apprehensive of the Soviet expansion in the Arab world as was learnt from the Syrian case, the US then introduced what came to be known as the Eisenhower Doctrine in 1957 as a counter to the imminent Soviet expansion. According to Gani (2011:157) under this doctrine the US called for alignment against the East and set in place means of strengthening the internal security of all states that were threatened by communism as well as providing military assistance against any communist aggression. It can be understood from this perspective that the doctrine imposed a bipolar framework onto local conflicts altering them as extensions of the Cold War as every relation according to the US was now being interpreted from the lens of this conflict.

---

2 In-depth interview, Harare, 23 January 2016.

3 ibid
The US State Department (1957) posits that the US then enlisted support from regional states to isolate Syria from its neighbours. Arab states such as Saudi Arabia, Lebanon, Turkey and Iraq were all consulted and gave their endorsement to the Eisenhower Doctrine. It can be noted that from this approach the US had come to an understanding that Syria had become a Soviet satellite and there was need to take all measures to put it down to its knees. Washington Telegram (1957) argues that in the same time frame the Syrian government announced the discovery of a US plot to overthrow the pro-Soviet regime and this resulted in the two states expelling each other’s foreign diplomats. According to Lesch (2003:141) this incident had a substantial and long-standing impact on US-Syrian relations as it marked the genesis of profound hostility towards the US and sense of imperialist victimization on Syria’s part. It is clear from the above argument that Syria had found justification for its feeling of great suspicion and anti-westernism as they became mistrustful of future US governments.

Hinnesbuch (2010:8) posits that during this era Syria felt insecure due to US’ indirect presence in the region through its isolation tactics. This pervasive sense of insecurity stemmed from the fact that Syria was being surrounded by a number of stronger states which had violated its borders on many occasions with the US on many events selectively enforcing international law in a way that undermined further its security within the region. For example Syria’s chemical weapons were targeted by the West while Israel’s nuclear one was accepted.

However, after years of great isolation, the Iranian Revolution of 1979 provided Syria with an unforeseen ally as Syria became the first state in the Middle East to recognise the new Islamist regime and was the individual state that offered its support to Iran during the Iranian hostage crisis. From this development a long-term strategic alliance was forged between the two anti-imperialist states. This in another way served to further cement US-Syrian hostility throughout the 1980s and this resulted in the US placing Syria under sanctions due to its role in sponsoring international terrorism.

### 3.3 Post-Cold War Era: Mending of Relations

The dominant issue that guided US-Syria relations during the post-Cold War era was the Arab-Israeli peace process. Fields (2007:267) posits that in this conflict President Clinton felt that there was need to court Syria as there was a high chance that it may assume a significant role in the quest for a long lasting peace settlement in the Arab conflict. The Clinton administration
according to Sadat et al (2009:3) ignored the probable indecency of negotiating with a state that had been accused of playing a leading role in state sponsored terrorism, which had violated Lebanese sovereignty and suspected of seeking to acquire weapons of mass destruction. In this instance the Clinton administration opted for diplomacy though it was not a pleasant way as it had serious interests at stake as well as the responsibility to protect the Israel state. Sadat et al (2009) posit that for the US it was realistic to overlook the dictatorial nature of the Syrian government when it was in the US national interest to pursue its help.

According to Genest (2004) over the cold war era, Syria became a critical partner for the maintenance of balance of power in the Middle East and because of its stature in the Arab world it became indispensable for the US not to isolate Syria in the post-Cold War era. Porter (2015:1) articulates that the US and Syria found a common ground for cooperation when Saddam Hussein invaded neighbouring Kuwait in 1990 and it is in this conflict that the US pursued Syria’s help and this marked a dramatic turn-around in the prospects of US-Syrian relations. This became a period of temporary reconciliation between the two states.

In August 1990 Iraq invaded and occupied Kuwait and the UN Security Council responded by passing a resolution which condemned the invasion and demanded complete unconditional withdrawal, secured by the use of force if necessary. Lesch (2003:320) states that what made the Gulf war unique was Syria’s participation on the side of the US against Iraq. In the eyes of US, Syria’s presence represented a new dimension in their relations and this came as a source of hope for restoration of the lost friendship.

Kabalan (2010:30) argues that Syria partnered with US in the Gulf War despite being ideologically opposed to much of American policy towards the Arab world due to the fact it had acted in accordance to a UNSC resolution that had been passed. In this aspect Syria saw a rare opportunity under which the US needed its support and participation and would then use that as leverage to make its own demands which the US had been reluctant to consider. From this view it can be understood that Syria saw this opportunity as a means under which it would present its plea and question why the US had come to Kuwait’s rescue against Iraq and had not done the same for Palestinians against Israel’s aggression.
3.4 In the wake of 9/11 attack

The 9/11 attack on US had a great impact on US security concerns and this resulted in a fundamental change to its foreign policy particularly in the Middle East. According to Kabalan (2010:29) prior to 9/11, the US policy in the Middle East was centred around the maintenance of the status quo and the reliance on strong leaders to sell any peace deal with Israel for the sake of maintaining peace in the region. However, with the attack on US, Washington realised that the strong Arab leaders had failed to deliver peace as well as check the threats to US’ interests and with that in mind peace shifted from being an asset to a liability.

Larrabee (2002:43) posits that war on terror became the central focus and guiding organising principle of the US foreign policy in the Middle East. To this view, the 9/11 provided a unique opportunity for the US to challenge the conservative interpretation of Article 51 of the UN Charter. One respondent argued that the Bush Administration justified their pre-emptive attacks in the Middle East on the grounds that any suspicion that a country might be contemplating a strike or capable of carrying one would be sufficient for the US to launch an attack against it in self-defence.

This became the underlining ground under which Iraq was attacked as the US political elite shared a broad consensus that Saddam was a threat to US and the international system would be better off if Saddam was removed from power (Larrabee 2002:46). However, in the wake of the attacks it was not only Saddam who was labelled a threat to US interests and security in the Middle East, Saudi Arabia and Iran and Syria were also targeted. According to Larrabee (2002:48), one of the important repercussions of the September 11 attack which became visible then was the deterioration of the US-Saudi relations. Saudi Arabia was accused of being tolerant of terrorism as it was reported that 15 out of the 19 terrorists involved in the attacks were of Saudi origin. Once viewed as the US’ critical ally in the Middle East, Saudi Arabia changed to be seen as part of the problem rather than part of the solution. Iran was not also spared as President Bush in his State of Union speech lumped Iran as part of the ‘axis of evil’ which was to be destroyed.

Sadat et al (2009:4) posit that prior to President Bush tenure, US-Syrian relations were amicable and with him assuming office in 2001 that the US made a first substantial shift in its foreign policy toward Syria. According to the respondent President George W. Bush came to office with
a strong determination to impose US hegemony in the Middle East with power elements that were deeply hostile to Arab nationalism and this became a threat in the eyes of the regime in Syria. Zisser (2003:33) articulates that Iraq issue was however the main issue that led to the worsening of Syrian-US relations as President Bashar opened to trade with Iraq in 2001 in which the US had slapped Iraq with sanctions. This was a setback to Bush administration’s endeavour to check Iraq from creeping out of the isolation the US had tried to uphold since 1990. However, the immediate catalyst to the souring of the US-Syrian relations was the US determination to invade Iraq. Kabalan (2010:33) argues that at UN and in the Arab League, Syria attempted to build a coalition to block or at least withhold legitimation from an invasion and this was a direct challenge to US policy.

Such an event led to the western demonization of Syria and this precipitated a period of unrelenting US hostility towards Syria. Hinnebusch (2010:17) argues that under US threat, Syria rapidly backed away from overt support for the resistance in Iraq and sought an accommodation within the US camp by opting to support the invasion though in a limited way. Moustapha (2008) argues that despite Syria’s willingness to cooperate through the provision of valuable intelligence on al-Qaeda following the 9/11 attacks, the US continued to raise demands for political reform of the Syrian regime before any cooperation would be allowed as it deemed it a rogue state that could not be trusted. This was a clear testimony that the historical mistrust between the two states was the still a hindrance to smooth relations.

Leverett (2005:47) articulates that with President Bush announcing that states that were not with the US on the war on terror were foes and their opposition against this war made them enemies of the US, Syria became a known enemy of the States. Syria being one of the initial states opposing the invasion of Iraq, efforts by the US political elites to paint Syria as a threat to the doctrine of war on terror were made as it was argued that it supported terrorism and had weapons of mass destruction and therefore was a direct threat to the US and liable to suffer under the US’ preventive war. In 2002 it became clear that any state in the Middle East in conflict with America’s principal ally Israel and its interest became a target of the Bush administration and Syria was designated as an enemy. Syria’s relations with the US were further strained by allegations of the role it had played by supporting terrorism against Israel, supporting Hezbollah
in Lebanon and foreign fighters in Iraq\(^4\). This was a direct attack on the US interests in the region.

The US went on to take a number of actions to isolate Damascus as its role in state sponsored terrorism became a matter concern to US security interests. One can appreciate the view that during President George W. Bush term of office, opposition through isolation rather than engagement became the central tenet of the US approach toward Syria. Sharp and Prados (2007:29) articulate that several number of bills were passed in imposing sanctions against Syria with the Syrian Accountability and Lebanese Sovereignty Restoration Act (SALSRA) of 2003. However this did not yield any better results in weakening the Assad regime as was intended. The relations between the two were worsened in 2005 when the US withdrew their diplomatic representatives from Syria and in 2007 President Bush started to engage Syrian opposition figures instead. Kabalam (2010:33) concurs with the above view when he argues that the Bush administration activated a plan to support Syrian opposition in exile and channelled millions of dollars to groups that were in quest of the overthrow of the Bashar al-Assad regime. Such realist tactics by the US were an attempt to isolate Syria and lay down the groundwork for regime change should the affording opportunity had come to rise.

Sadat et al (2009) articulate that such covert actions by the US government engaging the opposition forces became a direct threat of regime overthrow in the eyes of the Syrian government. Sullivan (2008:127) argues that when the conflict between Israel and Hezbollah escalated in 2006, the US encouraged Israel to expand the war into Syria and the US acted as a spoiler to the negotiations by pressurising Turkey not to mediate and weighed on Israel against resuming the talks. This in other words was aimed at weakening the regime in Syria and then engages the opposition forces to assume control by taking advantage of the failing Assad regime.

According to Zunes (2004:53), after the 9/11 attack the US foreign policy in the Middle East became highly neoconservative as both the Republicans and the Democrats felt that evil regimes had to be opposed. Saddam Hussein regime in Iraq is the most visible demonstration of the idealistic influences in neoconservative policies during the Bush administration. According to

\(^4\) In-depth interview, Harare, 12 January 2016.
Krauthammer (2005:25) regime change has been perceived as the ultimate neoconservative goal in Middle East with Iraq, Afghanistan and Lebanon being the main targets before Syria.

According to Sadat et al (2009:6) the pursuit of democracy has long been a goal of democratic peace theory based on the idea that democracies do not go to war with one another and the spread of democracies increases peace in the international arena. According to Sadat et al (2009:13) the neoconservatives in the Bush administration exploited and manipulated the democratic peace theory to advocate for a realist policy in which they made use of the US military power to overthrow Hussein in Iraq.

In 2004 the US took a neoliberal approach towards Syria which was based on the view that transformation of the autocratic regime into liberal democracy was a worthy goal to be pursued. This approach was different from that of Iraq as it was implemented through isolation rather than military engagement so as to force Assad so as to bring about a political economic and social liberalisation transition within Syria. The US intended to achieve this by other means such as imposing embargo on all exports to Syria as well as blocking Syria’s membership application to World Trade Organisation (WTO) a means to force political reformation in Syria.

3.5 US’s quest for Syria’s support in the Middle East Politics

Kattouf et al (2007:1) argue that the neoconservative approach the US had taken towards Syria had set it in a defensive posture and as long as Syria remained targeted by the US for regime change it was in Damascus’ interest to keep the US bogged down in Iraq. Bush administration then came to comprehend that it was in US national interest to elicit Syrian backing in stabilizing Iraq as opposition had started to brew at home that the administration was failing to contain the Iraq war.

The disengaged US policy towards the Palestine-Israel conflict made Syria a more relevant entity not to be dismissed in brokering a two-state solution in this conflict. Sullivan (2008:127) advances that Washington had no influence on this process of Near Eastern negotiations and Perthes (2006:34) supports the argument when he argues that because of this western powers could not dismiss Syria’s role. Because of the profound Syrian relevance and importance, the US was forced to take into account legitimate Syrian interests so as to persuade Assad to work constructively with the Lebanese government to stabilise Lebanon and withdraw support from
forces trying to undermine an Israeli-Palestinian settlement. Perthes (2006: 35) argues that with such an important role Syria was to assume, its agenda in the Arab-Israeli conflict became separate with that of Iran and US saw a partner in Syria than an enemy.

3.6 The Arab Spring

Heydemann (2013:62) purports that the Arab Spring was inspired by the failure of the autocratic regimes to address the deeply held political and socio-economic grievances which characterised the politics within the region. At first the revolution wave seemed to only target to topple the four long time rulers in Egypt, Tunisia, Libya and Yemen but however grew to threaten the stability of others within the region as well. Freeman (2015:1) postulates that the US saw a chance for change within the region and mistook the mob rule in the streets of the Middle East for democracy and turned its back on leaders whom they had previously supported. Turning back on old friends then costed the US its reputation as a reliable ally in the Middle East which could be trusted. This indeed was not something new to the Syrian regime as their relationship with the west had been characterised by great mistrust since the Cold War era. However it has been reiterated that the Arab Spring resulted in the instalment of incompetent governments in Egypt, state collapse and anarchy in Libya and civil war in Yemen which the US had not anticipated.

This can also be projected in the Syrian as Heydemann (2013:60) argues that the Syrian revolution has resulted in the collapse of state institutions with the civil war pushing the Assad regime to reconfigure its social base and restructure its military and security apparatus for its maintenance in power. According to Keiswetter (2012:1) The Arab Spring particularly in the case of Syria has however exposed the limits of American power in the Middle East as it does no longer have the prestige and resources to dominate Middle East affairs considering the resurgence of Russia’s influence in the region.

The political demonstrations within the Arab Spring have also exposed the difficulty of overcoming the strong institutional and historical legacies of authoritarian rule. Heydemaaan (2013:15) concurs by arguing that it was only Tunisia that seemed likely to produce a consolidated democracy in the foreseeable future. In Syria the possibility of the popular demonstrations to bring down the autocratic regime was extinguished early by the regime’s...

---

5 In-depth interview, Harare, 28 January 2016.
repression and the country descended into a brutal and increasingly sectarian civil war thereby limiting the possibilities of transition to democracy.

Today democratic prospects appear bleak in Syria for reasons that extend beyond the destructive effects of civil war as the scenario has evolved into a proxy war. The civil war has not only battered possibilities for democratic reform but has also provided the impetus for a process of authoritarian restructuring and this has increased the Assad regime’s ability to survive through the mass protests and resist the international efforts to topple it from power.

3.6.2 Syria: Democratisation from Outside

It has always remained a pertinent debate in the circles of international scholars as to whether allowing the Syrian regime to democratise at a self-determined stride be a more effective option than pushing democratisation from the outside. According to Kaplan (2008:117) preserving security and the unity of the state rather than promoting Western-Style personal freedoms and elections should be paramount when formulating policies to develop the country.

Due to sectarian politics that characterise politics in the Middle East, it remains a danger engaging the Syrian regime strictly on its progress toward internal democratisation through measures inspired by democratic-peace theory as it poses a risk as has been the case in Iraq. According to the Klopp and Zuren (2003:2) instituting democracy which is associated with peace in Syria is problematic taking into account that the process of achieving that democracy is often associated with increased instability and conflict. This is so considering the fact that such a process would mean the imposition of foreign standards on traditional Arab societies and this is most likely to brew strong anti-western sentiments within Syria.

Kaplan (2008:108) articulates that given the numerous communal identity groups within Syria, any easing of the string authoritarian control Bashar al-Asad exerts over the country might result in the emergence of conflicts. Kandris (2005:10) concurs with the above view when he articulates that a number of Syrian specialists have noted that any regime replacing the current one would at best be no improvement and might be far worse for US interests in the region. This view can be cemented by the Palestinian experience in which the US pushed for democracy and liberal reforms only to result in the rise to power of the illiberal and anti-American Hamas.

---

6 In-depth interview, Harare, 28 January 2016.
Lessons on the Syrian debate can also be drawn from the events that took place in the neighbouring Iraq which demonstrates some understanding on the difficulties of installing democratic institutions in a country that is ill-prepared for them. According to respondents though the Syrian regime has not been preferred by the US, it has stabilizing elements such as social welfare and a strong security apparatus that have proven effective in controlling its diverse population though at the cost of civil rights. It is therefore clear from this observation that the forced removal of such a regime may have negative consequences on the domestic stability which in-turn may affect regional peace. Libyan case is another case study under which such lessons may be drawn as the removal of Gadaffi resulted in the creation of a political vacuum and intense chaos and now the territory has been reduced to a brewing ground for terrorism.

However, it has been suggested that democratization of Syria should be instigated through gradual adoption of reforms with the cooperation of both internal actors and external powers\(^7\). Kaplan (2008:117) posits that as a gesture to improve relations between the two states as well as democratic principles within Syria, the US may consider asking the Syrian government to foster credible state institutions responsive to the needs and desires of the Syrian people and allow freedom of expression and free all political dissidents.

3.7 Diplomacy in Middle East

Magen (2013:34) articulates that after the 9/11 attack the US pursued a more aggressive war on terror and regional policy of modernization and democratization manifested in the imposition of foreign standards on traditional Muslim societies. The Arab world viewed this as a declaration of war on Islamic radicalism as a challenge to Islam itself and it fanned anti-Western flames. Magen (2013:34) further purports that this resulted in the realization of the opposite declared goal as the conservative and radical powers of the Arab world resisted and regional security was compromised and international terrorism grew more powerful than before.

This view of US fanning insecurities in the region can also be understood in the context of the growing desire for nuclear power in the region in which Megan (2013:34) argues that it has been as a direct result of an attempt to resist foreign standards on the region although Iran perceives the increased pressure to which it is being subjected as contributing to regional instability.

\(^7\) In-depth interview, Harare, 28 January 2016.
Some scholars such as Freeman Jr (2015:1) articulates that such bruising encounters with inconvenient realities of the Middle East in a way has taught the US lot on how to conduct diplomacy and war as well as the limitations of when not to apply purely military solutions to political problems. The New York Times (2007) notes President Obama’s sentiments to this when he argues that, “what we should be doing is not only reaching out aggressively to our allies but also talking to our enemies and focusing on those areas where we do not accept their actions.” One may also notice that in the Obama era, the US has embarked on a very limited military action in the region. The use of military force has been considered only to be used when necessarily and cautiously and coercion has been carefully combined with the other non-military, non-coercive tools at disposal such as diplomacy.

From the above views it can be noted that the Obama administration has taken a liberal route in approaching the pressing issues in the Middle East. According to Genest (2004:124) liberalism argues that states cooperate more than they compete because it is in their common interest to do so and success and stability in the international system are the direct result of that cooperation. At the heart of this strategy of raising the primacy and centrality of diplomacy has been the bilateral and multilateral negotiations seen through the P-5 + 1 negotiation with Iran over its nuclear programme as well as over the Syrian crisis. Genest (ibid) goes on to explain that this cooperation has been as a result of the expansion in political and economic interdependence thereby averting military confrontation and encouraging negotiations and diplomacy as a means to resolve conflicts.

The US government has on many occasions been criticised for its quick adoption of military means to solve disputes and neglecting the capabilities of diplomacy. Freeman Jr (2015:2) concurs with the above view when he argues that for a long time Washington demanded that Iran end its nuclear program but declined to speak with Tehran. He buttresses his point by articulating that by the time US diplomats finally opted to negotiate with Iran, their nuclear program had expanded and advanced and the US ended up accepting Iranian nuclear capabilities much beyond what they had earlier offered. This explains the point that given the Americans had appreciated the conduct of diplomacy earlier and accepted that some political problems needed political solutions there would not be the Iranian nuclear problem today.
The Syrian crisis has also presented the US with limited military options considering the intensified presence of Russian interests in the case. In other words, the US has had to apply limited military intervention balanced with dialogue as the crisis has evolved into a proxy war that has attracted other great powers such as Russia and emerging powers in the Middle East such as Iran.

3.8 Russia’s Resurgence in Middle East: A challenge to US’s Influence

Magen (2013:14) argues that the end of the Cold War marked a new era where Russia was forced to take up secondary roles in international politics including those of the Middle East as well. This was in contrast with the US which managed to exert a great deal of influence on the major processes around the world and this pushed Russia to take a backseat role. However, Friedman (2011:1) articulates that Russia has always had the desire to resuscitate its glory of the past and rehabilitate its status by acquiring the ability to shape the global agenda again. As a result of globalisation, the world witnessed a shift from a unipolar to multipolar system and this seems to have afforded Russia the chance to build its influence in world issues.

Katz (2001:4) articulates that competition between Russia and the West for influence over the Middle East region was renewed when the US became preoccupied with war in Iraq in 2003 and Russia saw the opportunity to expand its inroads into the region. Magen (2013:34) explains the above point by arguing that Russia achieved its resurgence into the Middle East by establishing good relations with all players in the Middle East by manufacturing weapons for any interested party. This was the time when US’ military presence within the region was being resented and anti-Western flames within the region had begun to grow. Russia based its inroads into the region on the calculation that the status of the United States in the Middle East was diminishing. This assessment was thus translated into a determined Russian effort to oust the United States from the region in the hope of overtaking it as the leading player. The assumption to overtake the US and establish itself in the region as an alternative power to the US acceptable to all sides remains a challenge considering the effects of the Arab Spring.

The Middle East region has been one of the regions in which Russia seeks to enhance its status as it has always perceived it a geopolitically valuable location where regional and global interests
converge\textsuperscript{8}. The democratic wave that swayed through the Arab world in 2011 created a new regional reality which saw the re-establishment of Russia in the region making significant strides in relations with Middle Eastern nations especially Iran and Syria.

According to Keiswetter (2012:1) The Arab Spring has shown the limits of American power in the Middle East as it does no longer have the prestige and resources to dominate Middle East affairs. The strong presence of Russia in the Middle East politics especially as has been in the case of Syria has presented the Obama administration with the pressure to move away from the Bush administration’s policies of using force and be more open to dialogue.

3.9 Conclusion

The eruption of the Cold War marked the emergence of serious US interests in the Middle East as there was a rise of the need to counter Soviet’s expansion within the region. The US began to craft policies that were hinged on securing its strategic interests and because of this its foreign policy was then interpreted within the premises its ideological battle with the USSR. However, it has been noted in this chapter that US-Syrian relations have always been tense and occasionally hostile as they have sank in proxy wars and discreet cooperation. Due to this, the US has on several occasions isolated Syria through sanctions as well as funding external forces that seek the overthrow of the Assad regime. The Iraq case was the most contributing factor to the deep entrenchment of the relations as the US accused the Syrian government of resisting US war on terror whilst to the Syrians it was a threat to Arab nationalism. However, it was also noted that the Arab Spring of 2011 presented to the US an opportune to fulfill its long term interest in Syria of regime change as it initiated an external effort of militarily assisting insurgent groups that had taken arms against the Assad regime.

\textsuperscript{8} In-depth interview, Harare, 28 January 2016.
CHAPTER 4: THE EFFICACY OF US MILITARY ASSISTANCE TO INSURGENT GROUPS IN SYRIA

4.1 Introduction

This chapter is a presentation of the major findings on the efficacy of US limited military assistance to insurgent groups in the Syrian civil war. It presents findings on the considerations that informed US to militarily assist insurgence forces, the nature and effectiveness of the military assistance to rebel groups as well as the effects of other external actors on US approach in seeking the ouster of the Assad government.

4.2 Considerations Behind US Limited Intervention in the Syrian Civil War

US direct involvement in the Syrian conflict was limited by a number of strategic considerations. These considerations make the underlining strategic calculations which informed the US to opt for limited military intervention as a feasible way out to achieve its goals in the conflict considering the circumstances that had developed. The failure by the US to secure a UN resolution after Russia and China vetoed the authorization of a military intervention in the civil war was the first obstacle to US intentions of militarily intervening in the conflict to dethrone the Assad regime. Herszenhorn and Bruce (2012:1) argue that Moscow was adamant that it would not allow what happened in Libya to be repeated in Syria hence it did not agree with the no fly zone which the US and allies were calling for in the Syrian case. It can therefore be noted that Russia’s consistent diplomatic support to Assad regime became the turning point for US intentions as it then resorted to a limited alternative.

The Syrian crisis evolved into a proxy war that attracted many external actors such as Russia and China who proved to limit the probability of a direct US military action. Iran another interested external party played to be an important instrument in influencing US to make some changes to their initial position of direct intervention in the Syrian crisis. According to Rozen (2014) Iran preferred the maintenance of the status quo in Syria and Iranian officials at one point indicated that Syria was not up for negotiation as removal of Assad would weaken Iran’s position in the region. Iran had for long regarded Syria a geographical entry point into the broader Middle East and such an interest was threatened by the installment of a pro-western government in Syria

---

9 In-depth interview, Harare, 21 January 2016.
10 In-depth interview, Harare, 28 January 2016
hence to them the ouster of Assad regime could not be accepted. In light of the above view, Entous and Barnes (2014:1) argue that the US intelligence then registered its concern that a US military move on Syria could trigger a wider regional war as it had drawn to attention serious interests of many countries and urged the US government to find a political solution to the Syrian crisis.

Another issue that compelled US to opt for non-intervention in the Syrian case was the recognition of the growing global opposition against military intervention in internal affairs of independent states\textsuperscript{11}. Great criticism against military intervention has been centred on the view that use of force by the US over the past years in seeking regime change has resulted in failed states in the most of the instances it was employed. In other words, the US came to the point of understanding that military intervention was unacceptable in strategic and diplomatic terms as it would do little to resolve the underlying political dispute in Syria. One respondent argued that such a realization was informed by the likelihood of how a military intervention would result in causing instability as was with the Libya and the Iraq case.

Intervening in the Syrian case became more threatening to stability as it would put the US to more commitments which it was not prepared for as it was in the process of withdrawing its troops from the region. On this point it has been reiterated that Iraq experience in some way influenced the decision not to militarily intervene as the regime change agenda was achieved but at the expense of international peace and stability\textsuperscript{12}. Iraq appeared stabilized but the moment the US began to pull out there was a relapse of violence and conflict and such developments in the neighbouring Iraq had the capacity to further the conflict in Syria.

Respondents argued that though the US had great interests in the Syrian civil war, the US Congress opposed the commitment of US troops in the Syrian civil war after realising how the US could be entrenched in a long time war. The argument was premised on the view that US authorities did not truly understand the intentions of the various opposition groups and they became concerned about the unforeseen possible consequences that would come with their direct involvement as they did not want to get involved in long wars as has been in Iraq and Afghanistan cases as they ventured in a war which they had not fully understood their nature. The

\textsuperscript{11} In-depth interview, Harare, 28 January 2016.
\textsuperscript{12} In-depth interview, Harare, 13 January 2016.
opposition to use ground therefore forces explains why the US attached great importance in enhancing the capacities of Syria’s moderate rebels which it could use to enhance its interests without necessarily taking the leading role in the conflict. In this sense the US plan was then premised on the need to develop and train moderate forces in neighbouring states that oppose Assad regime, like Saudi Arabia in preparation for the war.

It has also been echoed that Washington’s decision to arm Syrian rebels was also driven by the military setbacks the rebels were registering after the involvement of Lebanon’s Hezbollah militia which was fighting alongside the regime\(^\text{13}\). The alleged use of chemical weapons by the Assad regime also raised the flag for the US to intervene in the conflict though in limited terms as it could not continue to ignore the civil war anymore.

4.3 The Nature of US Military Assistance to Insurgent Groups

Blanchard et al (2015:15) argue that the Obama administration since mid-2014 has embraced limited overt intervention in the conflict in Syria. It requested and received congressional authority and funding for the training and equipping of “vetted” Syrian rebels to counter terrorism and to contribute to conditions intended to lead to a negotiated settlement of the conflict.

It became US approach to develop moderate forces in Saudi Arabia where they received military training before helping them return to the battlefield in Syria to fight the government forces. Initially the Obama administration was opposed to the policy of providing the rebels with lethal force as they were afraid that the weapons would end up in the hands of extremist rebels whom the US would not be able to control. However the increased defeat of rebel forces as well as the advancement of the extremist groups such as ISIS in the conflict compelled the US to expand its support to anti-Assad forces both in scale and scope (Entous and Barnes 2013).

The US afforded the Syrian rebels with support through its organizations such as the CIA in heavily covered covert operations\(^\text{14}\). Arms and ammunition have been transferred to the rebels through US’ key allies Turkey and Jordan and this has been done as a way to ambush the pro-

\(^{13}\) In-depth interview, Harare, 21 January 2016.

\(^{14}\) In-depth interview, Harare, 12 January 2016.
Assad forces. Rebel operations have also been enhanced by diplomatic interventions by the US making use of threats and sanctions against the Syrian government. It was reiterated that the US government has also made use of propaganda and espionage to weaken the credibility and legitimacy of the Assad regime since the beginning of the conflict. US intelligence is reported to have interrupted military communication networks of the regime and helped the coordination of rebel forces in organising attacks on strategic areas thereby weakening the regime’s capacity to fight. The rebels have also been operating under air cover from the US-led coalition that has been carrying out strikes against extremist terrorist as a means to enhance their protection from the ever growing terrorist threat.

4.4 Effectiveness of US Limited Military Assistance

The question as to how effective the US limited military assistance has been in bringing about regime change in Syria has been at the heart of this discussion. The involvement of the US in the Syrian civil war in 2013 by expanding the scale and scope of military aid to insurgent groups has resulted in many developments which seek to be explored and understood. The central theme to the Syrian conflict today was that both the Assad regime and its opposition have not shown the capacity to use foreign support to make plausible gains as neither side has demonstrated the capacity to win decisively.

The US seems to be reflecting inconsistency and dissonance in their policy towards the Syrian conflict as they have shifted from their initial position of fighting Assad to now fighting ISIS. This view has been supported by making reference to utterances by US representative to the anti-ISIS coalition, Retired General J.Allen who at one point reiterated that the US trained rebels were intended to fight ISIS and not Assad as it was their intention to make the FSA a credible force which Assad government would ultimately acknowledge and recognise. It is therefore clear that the US now seek a political solution to the Syrian conflict that would include Assad and this shows that the US efforts of removing Assad are now being directed to another war front with ISIS. This in its own proves that the US is now skeptical of its initial policy of arming rebel forces to dethrone Assad from power and establish a pro-western government in Syria.

15 In-depth interview, Harare, 28 January 2016.
16 Ibid
17 In-depth interview, Harare, 13 January 2016.
However Metz (2014), is of another view as he articulates that arming rebels without a US presence on the ground has been the chief obstacle to the success of this policy. The fact that there has been a multiplicity of interest groups (rebel forces) without a single civil leadership commanding the fight has resulted in the overshadowing of the initial goal of the US policy. The scenario has turned disastrously murky and the commitment of the range of actors involved has become ambiguous, particularly within the military opposition forces. This view is understood in the sense that the absence of US advisers on the war front has contributed to the failure of the so called “moderate” rebels to advance their fight in a united front that can oust Assad regime. One respondent echoed the same sentiments arguing that clashes within the anti-Assad camp were driven by ideological differences and this has gone to divide the groups as they could not agree on which strategy or tactic to employ when engaging the pro-Assad forces. This has therefore limited the success of US efforts as it has been put under a tight situation with a limited way out as to how best it can align the interests of various insurgent groups with its long term goals for Syria and produce a united front.

However, it was noted that US military assistance has only been effective in terms of gaining territory from Assad forces but a failure in stabilisation of the country as it has failed to secure conditions which can result in the ouster of Bashar al-Assad as his regime has remained input regardless of loss of territory\(^{18}\). In his point of view, he echoed that since the inception of US military weapons into Syria on the side of the rebel forces, the conflict has grew in degree and the situation has been very chaotic and disastrous. This has been the situation due the fact that some elements in the Free Syrian army are foreigners coming from as far as Somalia, Saudi Arabia, Chechenia, Libya and Iraq who migrated to fight for financial gains. This view was elaborated by arguing that when the US cut its financial aid to the rebels in 2014, some elements within the forces defected to extremist groups where they were paid handsomely. Some are reported to have sold the US sponsored military equipment and intelligence to the extremist forces and it has been the same weapons that have been used to advance the ISIS agenda. From this argument raised it can therefore be understood that the US policy of militarily assisting rebel forces has been a failure as the US found itself in a dilemma of fighting against its own weapons as its policy of arming rebels was met with an unintended consequence of strengthening its own enemy.

\(^{18}\text{In-depth interview, Harare, 28 January 2016.}\)
According to one US Senator, Randy Paul (before the Committee on Foreign Relations in 2014) there has been reports that there has been leadership disputes and confusion within the FSA which has been the largest coalition receiving US support with three different individuals claiming to be leaders denouncing each other19. Because of this, it has not been clear as to whether the US has been aiding legit elements as reports indicate that some elements within this force have been aligned to other groups such as al-Qaeda. It was also noted by Senator Paul that the Syrian Revolutionary Army which is part and parcel of the FSA has been the leakage for weapons to the extremist forces like ISIS. This therefore purports to suggest that US weapons have been used to breed and advance terrorism. With such a situation at hand, the US efforts have met some serious resistance as the pro-US forces are now forced to fight at two fronts, against Assad as well as extremist forces which therefore has lessened their chances of removing Assad from power. This can be translated to mean that US military assistance to insurgent forces has been heavily compromised by the circumstances which it has been initiated under and by virtue of this it has not been effective in toppling the Assad regime.

Some respondents have projected that the US weapon aiding mechanism has been a failure. This reasoning has been aided by evaluating the utterances that were made by the then US Secretary of State; Hillary Clinton that the Assad regime would be destroyed within six weeks from the time the US began to aid rebel forces. The fact that the Assad regime remains in control three years after the policy was initiated and prospects for the US goals being achieved in the conflict being out of picture under this policy is a clear testimony of the failure of the policy to achieve the intended goals. The fact that the Obama administration decided to send in some special forces in 2015 is a clear indication of the failure of their initial plan which suggests that they ought to modify their approach to the civil war20.

Mauro (2013:2) reiterates that the US was wishful in its thinking that it could accurately ‘vet’ the rebels whom they wanted to aid with weapons and that all rebel forces would cooperate on the same level in fighting Assad. However it turned out that the US failed on vetting process dismally as the situation on the ground explains that the FSA has been evolving into an enemy of the US as extremist forces such as Jabhat al-Nusra has absorbed a sheer number of FSA fighters. One responded concurred with this view when he argued that the US policy towards Syria created

19 Video accessed on youtube Senator Randy Paul (debate in Committee on Foreign Relations 2014)
20 In-depth interview, Harare, 12 January 2016.
quite the conundrum as it endorsed Syrian rebels who later endorsed Al-Qaeda backed Al-Nusra. This has been the trend with US intervention policies as it has in most cases produced unintended outcomes citing examples of Tunisia, Libya, Egypt and Mali and argued that the Syrian trajectory was moving along the same path.\(^{21}\)

Cyril (2014:3) argues that the US military assistance has not been able to break the tight command and control, credible intelligence sources and task-organised combat formations which the pro-Assad forces have been enjoying since the coming in of the Russians to their help. This has been due to the fact that the insurgent forces have become less cohesive and the Assad regime has gained some momentum.\(^{22}\) Such developments therefore suggest that limited military assistance to the insurgent fighters has yielded poor operational returns and intractable political complications. The Assad regime regardless of losing certain regions to terrorists groups has been able to maintain the loyalty of its fighting units and forces one thing which the insurgent forces has failed to do. Due to this factor defections in last year have greatly decreased with momentum turning in favour of the pro-Assad forces.\(^{23}\) This therefore explains how pathetic US assistance has been in weakening the effectiveness of Assad’s regime on the battle front as situation on the ground suggests that it has been the rebel forces that have been losing the grip in the war as Assad has been resurging claiming back lost territory.

### 4.5 Effects of the US Commitment in Iraq on the Syrian Civil War

According to an anonymous respondent, US military intervention in Iraq in 2002 drove the state into chaos and instability creating a situation which led to the resurgence of more radical Islam which has emerged in the form of ISIS. US Senator, Rand Paul (2014) reiterated on the same point arguing that intervention in the Middle East to topple secular dictatorship has been the primary source to chaos and terrorism which has necessitated jihadist groups to emerge more powerful than ever. It has been argued that the problem of ISIS came as a result of US foreign policy in the Middle East and the US has tried by all means to stay put in a bid to prove that it has been in control of the situation on the ground.

\(^{21}\) In-depth interview, Harare, 13 January 2016.
\(^{22}\) In-depth interview, Harare, 28 January 2016.
\(^{23}\) In-depth interview, Harare, 21 January 2016.
In light of the above raised view, it has noticed that since the beginning of Russian air strikes on ISIS bases in Syria, the US has of late shifted its primary focus from fighting Assad to combating ISIS activities both in Iraq and Syria in a bid to reclaim relevance in the more pressing issues of the Middle East\textsuperscript{24}. The US at one point reiterated that the US trained rebels were now intended to fight ISIS and not Assad citing new prospects of developing the FSA into an army which Assad would recognise. The rate at which ISIS’ international threat has been growing seems to be the chief reason among many why the US shifted its attention of focus as Assad has proved to be a less threat to US domestic security as compared to ISIS which has over the months launched several attacks on US allies such as France.

Marcus (2015) argues that the US has led a number of air strikes against ISIS positions in Iraq and Syria with President Obama emphasizing that the primary objective was to degrade and ultimately destroy ISIS. One respondent argued that though the US had not committed ground forces to Iraq for this cause, it used the already 3500 troops in Iraq to help train Iraq forces for combating ISIS. It can therefore be noted that the US has played a more combating role in Iraq than in Syria as a sheer force of military has been used in Iraq as compared to Syria and with much attention being directed to Iraq. It is therefore clear that ISIS has grown to be the first priority and this has lessened US’ attention over Assad as the US has gone to cut financial aid being directed towards anti-Assad coalition.

\textbf{4.6 Effects of the Involvement of Other External Actors on US Goals in Syria}

The Syrian crisis has attracted quite a number of both state and non-state actors who have fought on both fronts of the war. According to Blanchard et al (2015:10) regional and global powers including Iran, Turkey, the Arab Gulf states and Russia and the US have responded to the conflict in Syria by prioritizing their own interests and perspectives. The Russian blockade of US-led attempt to secure a UNSC authorization to use force in Syria became the first setback for US’ intentions over the Assad regime\textsuperscript{25}. Russia since the inception of the conflict has remained a strong critic of what it describes as unwarranted external interference aimed at regime change in Syria. This has pushed the US to opt for other alternatives thereby projecting the preliminary effects of other great powers’ involvement in the conflict.

\textsuperscript{24} In-depth interview, Harare, 28 January 2016.

\textsuperscript{25} In-depth interview, Harare, 21 January 2016.
Stevenson (2014:133) echoes the same sentiments as he argues that Moscow has protected the Assad regime politically by vetoing any strong resolutions, providing selective but important practical help (such as through the supply of banknotes printed in Russia) and largely continuing military support supply, maintenance and training relationships with respect to key weapons systems, such as helicopters, anti-aircraft missiles and anti-ship cruise missiles. Such support has contributed directly to the intensification and continuation of fighting across Syria since the eruption of the conflict up to date. Also the involvement of external pro-Assad forces has had the potential to reshape the conditions on the battlefield as it has bolstered the prospects for Assad’s maintenance in power thereby creating new operational considerations for the ongoing US military aiding campaign26.

The pro-Assad forces with Russian, Iranian and Hezbollah’s assistance in 2015 were able to overturn the initial setbacks they had recorded with at the hands of both US backed rebels as well as jihad extremists27. The new infusions especially from Russia’s airstrikes targeting ISIS and rebel forces helped Assad to reassert control over wider areas that had slipped from his grasp which had gone under control of the rebels.

Marcus (2015) reiterates that the shift by the US from concentrating more on Assad to ISIS came as a result of Russia’s strong intervention in favor of Assad. The US realised that Russia’s involvement had changed the military and diplomatic dynamic of the crisis and this left the US struggling to catch up as it highlighted the deficiencies in its approach and proved that the train and equip programme for Syria was largely going nowhere.

According to Fikins (2013) and Gordon (2013), argue that Iran has also played a leading role in the defeat of US approach towards Syria. They both argue that the Iranian military advisors have helped boost the capacity of Assad’s forces in resisting US backed rebels by coordinating attacks and establishing systems to monitor opposition forces’ communications and they have forced Assad’s security services to cooperate more fully than they have in the past. The Iran’s Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corp-Qods Force (IRGC-QF) has also been engaged to help facilitate the transfer of weapons and thousands of fighters to help coordinate Assad’s campaign. Also in financial terms Iran has devoted over $4.6 billion in financial aid and credit to help bolster the

26 In-depth interview, Harare, 12 January 2016.
27 In-depth interview, Harare, 28 January 2016.
Assad regime. One may therefore reason that the degree and nature of this help was never anticipated by the US when it embarked on the train and equip policy in Syria and due to this surprise that caught their approach; it has proved to be less effective as the counter by the Assad forces backed by allies has been overwhelming.

Stevenson (2014:134) further postulates that the Lebanese group Hezbollah acting both at Iran’s behest and its own interests has sent thousands of fighters into Syria and their direct participation in Assad regime’s military operations, sometimes at the command level has enabled the regime to survive opposition offensives and regain momentum. This has helped the Al-Assad forces to retake most strategic cities it had lost; cities such as Qusayr have been reclaimed from opposition fighters. Such a victory represents a turning point in the efforts to strengthen Assad vi-a-vis the opposition forces (US backed rebels).

4.7 Conclusion

In conclusion the US limited military intervention in the Syrian civil war has proved not to be producing any positive results when taken into perspective to US intended goal of seeking regime change. According to the US strategic calculations before the inception of the policy, the Assad regime was never to last for six weeks and the fact that it has been almost three years since the policy was adopted and the Assad regime is still put and in control is a clear testimony of the failure of the approach to work within the anticipated time frame. It was raised in this chapter that the intervention mechanism was heavily compromised by many factors such as the inconsistency of the Obama administration in dealing with the Syrian civil war, the lack of unity for purpose amongst rebel forces who were receiving US aid, involvement of other opposing external forces as well as US commitment to ISIS in Iraq and outside Syria. The inconsistency of the US as the emergency of extremist groups such as ISIS has resulted in the divergence of efforts to combat ISIS rather than seek regime change as was the initial primary goal. Also the effects of other external state and non-state actors such as Russia, Iran and Lebanese Hezbollah has greatly affected the success of the approach as these actors have presented daunting challenges which the US had not anticipated when they first embarked on the policy. With the defections of the FSA elements to the enemy side, US military assistance has found its way into

\[^{28}\) In-depth interview, Harare, 21 January 2016.
the hands of its enemies and these unanticipated consequences has derailed the success of the policy.
CHAPTER 5: SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction

The chapter makes a summary of the key findings, recommendations and implications of the findings.

5.2 Summary of the Study

5.2.1 Purpose of the Study

The US-Syrian relations have been marred by mutual hostility since the beginning of the Cold War and the two states have hardly enjoyed cordial relations. The US has had a long standing interest of instigating regime change in Syria and replace it with a pro-Western regime which would further its interests in the Arab region. The eruption of a civil war in 2011 in Syria which was motivated by the Arab Spring became the best opportunity for the US to intervene and act upon its long standing interest of regime change. However, circumstances such as the failure to secure UNSC support for military intervention became an obstacle for USA’s intentions of direct military intervention. For this reason, and other strategic considerations, the US then opted for limited intervention by means of military assistance to insurgent groups opposed to the incumbent. The research therefore sought to assess the effectiveness of US policy of limited intervention in bringing about regime change in Syria.

5.2.2 Restatement of the Objectives

The study examined the effectiveness of US military assistance to insurgent groups in establishing a pro-western government in Syria by:

- Describing the US-Syrian relations from Cold War up to the eruption of the civil war;
- Ascertaining the considerations that informed the US to militarily assist Syrian insurgent groups;
- Examining the nature of military assistance to insurgent groups;
- Assessing the effectiveness of indirect military intervention and
- Analysing the effects of other external actors’ involvement in the Syrian conflict on the attainment of US goals in the Syrian conflict.
5.2.3 Restatement of the Research Methodology

The study made use of a case study in which qualitative methods of data gathering such as in-depth interviews, open ended questionnaires and documentary search were utilized for the research. Respondents for the interviews were picked through purposive sampling technique. Under documentary search, the study made use of e-journals, books, newspapers, online government reports and dissertations of other scholars. The researcher used thematic analysis for data analysis and the information was presented using emerging themes.

5.2.4 Framework of Analysis

The study made use of the Strategic theory in analysing the efficacy of US military assistance to insurgent groups. The theory understands that war is the continuation of policy by other means and the US took its foreign policy into action by making limited intervention in the Syrian civil war in pursuit of a regime change agenda. Strategic theory understands that states behave rationally by making use of a cost-benefit analysis in making strategic considerations on how and when to pursue their interests hence the US’ actions are understood to have been influenced by a thorough consideration of the circumstances that had surrounded the Syrian civil war. Lykke (189:4) in a broader way concludes that under strategic theory, states’ actions are guided by how (concept or way) leadership will use power (resources or means) available to the state to exercise control over sets of circumstances and geographical locations to achieve objectives (ends) in accordance with the state policy. It can be understood that US limited intervention in the Syrian civil war was guided by strategic calculations.

5.3 Limitations

The researcher encountered a challenge in getting in touch with targeted key informants. Key informants in the study included academics and officials from the US and Iran embassies in Zimbabwe. Some of the key informants were busy and access to them for in-depth interviews could not be afforded easily and the researcher resorted to make use of questionnaires which were filled at their convenience. The study also made use of data which was gathered through documentary search to compliment interviews and questionnaire.
5.4 Summary of Findings and Analysis

US limited intervention in the Syrian civil war has been less effective in achieving the intended goal of regime change as the Assad regime is still in control in view of support from its allies. Several allies of the Assad regime such as Russia, Iran and Hezbollah have extended political, military and financial support to the Assad regime which the US had not anticipated when they launched the operation and this has cemented Assad’s resistance to its limited intervention efforts. US absence on the ground has also greatly affected the effective implementation of the policy in strengthening unity of purpose amongst the insurgent groups as they have clashed over strategic and ideological differences resulting in serious splits with others joining hands with extremist groups. Groups such as Syrian Islamic Front, Suqour al-Sham and Liwa al-Faith joined the Islamic Front reducing the military strength of the rebel forces. This has led US aided weapons to fall into the hands of extremist groups such as ISIS, Al-Qaeda and Al-Nusra who now pose a threat to US goals in the conflict. In a broader view these factors have exacerbated the degeneration of the situation in the Syrian civil war thereby blurring prospects for an end soon.

5.4.1 Considerations that Informed Limited Intervention

US’s limited intervention in the Syrian crisis was informed by a number of factors with the failure to secure a UNSC resolution authorizing military intervention being the chief obstacle. Russia and China vetoed US-led calls for the authorization of direct military to oust Assad after they vowed never to allow the US manipulate the no-fly zone by making use of force. A number of serious strategic calculations seeking to limit US direct involvement in the unending conflicts as has been in the case of Iraq and Afghanistan are said to have informed the US approach towards the conflict. The US realizing that the Assad regime enjoyed the sympathy of many external great powers such as Russia, China, Iran and other non-state actors such as Hezbollah realised that a direct attack on Assad would trigger a long time proxy war which the US was not prepared for hence opted for an indirect involvement. The US having realised that allegations of use of chemical weapons by the Assad regime had been reported, saw an opportunity to institute a long term interest of regime change it had held for a long time by means of assisting the insurgent groups with lethal aid to oust the regime.

5.4.2 Nature of military assistance
The scope and nature of intervention has not been appropriate to the weaknesses of the insurgent forces as the Assad regime has been able to counter the capabilities of the resistance especially after the inception of help from its allies. The US did not increase the share of aid being sent to insurgent groups to match to the aid Assad was receiving the moment his allies came to his rescue. At the eruption of the civil war the resistance elements within Syria, both armed and unarmed were connected into cooperation by the common goal of removing the Assad regime but the US efforts have been greatly limited in fully integrating the insurgency under a responsive single, coherent military leadership that would spearhead the fight in a widely calculated and coordinated manner. The results also suggest that the beneficiaries of the US military support have on many occasions split with more than 15 splinter groups emerging from the initial umbrella rebel group, the Free Syrian Army that the US was assisting with military support. Also the US provided military support to what it called moderate rebels but results from the study suggests that some of the beneficiaries have been linked to some extremist groups such as Al-Qaeda and ISIS and this has been a major drawback to US efforts as some of its weapons have gone on to be used to fight against its efforts. It has emerged that the physical absence of the US in the Syrian conflict to coordinate the fight has been the major limitation to the success of the rebels to oust Assad from power as the rebel forces have clashed over strategies on how to encounter the pro-Assad forces citing lack of a leading force with a commanding voice in leading the war.

5.4.3 Effects of External Actors

The involvement of other actors in favour of Assad regime has greatly affected the realization of US objectives in the conflict. Moscow which has been the leading critic of US intervention in Syria protected the Assad regime politically by vetoing US led resolutions which were calling for the direct military intervention in the Syria conflict. Militarily, Russia provided the regime with weapons such as helicopters, anti-aircraft missiles and anti-ship cruise missiles. Other actors such as Iran and Hezbollah have extended their commanding intelligence and thousands of fighters who have helped to consolidate Assad’s firmness in resisting the rebel forces. Financial loans to bolster the fight against insurgent forces have also been secured from these external forces and this has weakened US efforts of regime change through insurgent forces. Such external help has helped to reshape the conditions on the battlefield by bolstering prospects for Assad’s maintenance in power. Due to this degree and nature of support, the US has realised that
this limited intervention approach has been a failure as they had not anticipated that the Assad allies would be as effective as they have been thereby making new operational adjustments of sending some special forces to help their efforts by ground force. The US efforts have been overwhelmingly countered by the allies of Assad as the regime has regained some lost territory in the past year.

5.4.4 US’ Shift of Priorities in Syria

The initial US policy towards Syria was that it would take only six weeks for its efforts to oust the Assad regime. However, situation on the ground as gathered by the study suggests that the Assad regime remains in power and prospects for its demise remain blurred as the US seems to have put ISIS as number one priority rather than the oust of Assad. Much effort now has been directed to the fight of ISIS both in Iraq and in Syria as the US believes it poses a real serious threat to its interests as compared to Assad. Now the US and Assad seem to be fighting a common enemy, ISIS and the US has not come out open that its efforts and those of Assad are complimenting each other. The US has cut its aid to insurgent groups as they have realised that some of its weapons have found their way into ISIS’ hands. Such withdrawal of assistance has weakened several insurgent groups making them weak to fully secure and maintain control over territories they had captured. This has resulted in both extremist groups as well as pro-Assad forces overpowering them reclaiming back that territory.

5.4.5 Implications

The efficacy of limited intervention through military assistance to insurgent forces to instigate a regime change as in the case of US approach to Syrian civil war made an empirical case for the understanding of the strategic theory. Central to the theory is the argument that states’ actions are guided by how (concept or way) leadership will use power (resources or means) available to the state to exercise control over sets of circumstances and geographical locations to achieve objectives (ends) in accordance with the state policy (Lykke, 1989:4). US approach towards this civil war has been met with intense challenges that the US has to deal with. These include the involvement of other external actors, weakness of the nature of its support as well as the weakness of the theory to predict the emergence of unanticipated new enemy ISIS which compromised US’ efforts in this case. These observations therefore imply that;
There is need for a multilateral approach in addressing domestic issues of states in the Middle East so as to solve political crises amicably as global criticism to unilateral interventions has gained momentum thereby defeating unilateral actions. Unilateral actions have proved to bring limited results in achieving the intended goals due clash of interests amongst great powers. The Syrian civil war has evidenced the existence of a multipolar system as the US’ powers have been limited by other actors interested in the civil war thereby pushing US prospects of victory far from being realised. Clash of interests has resulted in a protracted proxy war with blurred prospects of victory for the two warring sides thereby exacerbating the danger of anti-American terrorism.

There is need to consolidate external peaceful means (for example through diplomatic means) to oust dictatorial regimes as military interventions of any nature in the Middle East are prone to exacerbate unrest and thereby defeat prospects for peace in intervened states as it is highly probable that worst regimes replace ousted regimes. Military intervention has in past created political vacuums as there is no a smooth transition of power from one regime to a legit authority. Such a situation has enabled extremist groups to assume power thereby resulting in worst regimes forming governments instead.

There is need for the US to cement its long term strategic interest of combating terrorism by engaging all governments in the Middle East whenever they share a common interest of combating terrorism. It has been noted from the research that US antipathy with some regimes in the Middle East such as the Assad has gone on to weaken both the US and Assad’s. Such antipathy has afforded enough space for the emergence of extremist groups such as Al-Nusra and ISIS which have grown to pose an international threat to peace and security.

5.5 Conclusion of the Study

The limited intervention approach taken by the US in the Syrian civil war by means of military assistance insurgent forces to oust the Assad regime has proved to be a failure as the Assad regime seems to be in control years after the US embarked on this approach. The study has established that the involvement of many external actors in the conflict such as Russia and Iran on the side of Assad turned the conflict into a proxy war with no prospects for an end soon as both warring parties remain far-fetched from realizing ultimate victory. US efforts have been met
with resistance which it had not anticipated. The involvement of extremist groups such as ISIS who emerged into the conflict by surprise has also been another obstacle to US intentions in the conflict and has forced the US to reconsider sending in some special forces as they have realised that limited intervention with no ground forces will have no positive results for them. The study therefore noted that the ouster of Assad can only be achieved by means of negotiation that would involve all interested parties to the conflict as one side’s efforts will not bring any results soon.

5.6 Recommendations

The following are suggestions on the US limited intervention approach;

- There is need for the US to embrace diplomacy and appreciate that it is not in all circumstances that its goal of regime change can be fulfilled through military means.

- US need to improve its co-ordination with other powers interested in Syria to realize its goals.

- There is need for the US to conduct an objective vetting process guided by long term interest to instigate long term peace in the region whenever equipping insurgent forces with weapons so as to avoid an indirect arming of extremist groups who in-turn pose a threat to both its interests as well as international peace and security.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


Appendices

Appendix A

INTERVIEW GUIDE

Research Topic: The efficacy of US military assistance to insurgent groups: Case of Syria (2011-2015)

QN1. How has been US-Syrian relations before and after the eruption of the conflict in Syria?

QN2. What considerations informed US decision to militarily assist insurgent groups?

QN3. What is the nature of US military assistance to insurgent groups?

QN4. How effective is the US military assistance in achieving its goals in the Syrian conflict?

QN5. How is US’ commitment to Iraq (combating ISIS) affecting the realisation of its objectives in Syria?

QN6. How has the involvement of other external actors in the conflict affected the attainment of US goals in the conflict?

QN7. How best can the US achieve its goals in the Syrian conflict?
LETTER OF INFORMATION

Thank you for taking interest in my research. My name is Takudzwa Gwezuva (R115507K). I am currently enrolled for a Master’s degree in International Relations at the University of Zimbabwe. I wish to provide information of my research study so that you have a clear understanding of what it is about. The title of my study is “The efficacy of US military assistance to insurgent groups: Case of Syria (2011-2015).

The US indirectly intervened in the Syrian conflict in 2011 by means of militarily assisting insurgent groups that were driven by the desire to proffer a political transition in Syria through the overthrow of an authoritarian regime. Through this approach the US therefore limited its military participation in the civil war. It is therefore the focus of this study to understand the reasons behind the nature of this new approach as well as understand the effectiveness of such a mechanism in addressing political issues in the Middle East.

Your participation is voluntary and you may withdraw at any time. There will be no negative consequences should you choose to withdraw from the study. You will not be paid for participating in the study and you will not be expected to pay anything to take part in the study. The interviews will be conducted at times convenient to you.

You will not provide your name in interviews and I will not use your name when presenting findings.

Should you have any problems or queries please contact me on +263 77509739 or my supervisor Mr L Mhandara at (lmhandara@gmail.com) or the Department of Political and Administrative Studies on 04-303211 Ext 14013 email: polad@sociol.ac.zw

Sincerely

Takudzwa Gwezuva
Statement of Agreement to Participate in the Research Study

- I hereby confirm that I have been informed by the researcher Takudzwa Gwezuva about the nature, conduct, benefits and risks of this study.
- I have also received, read and understood the above written information (Participant Letter of Information) regarding the study.
- I am aware that the results of the study including personal details regarding my name, age, date of birth, initials and diagnosis will be anonymously processed into the study report.
- In view of the requirements of research, I agree that the data collected during this study can be processed in a computerized system by this researcher.
- I may at any stage without prejudice withdraw my consent and participation in the study.
- I have had sufficient opportunity to ask questions and (of my own free will) declare myself prepared to participate in the study.
- I understand that significant new findings developed during the course of this research which may relate to my participation will be made available to me.

…………………………………………………….                 …………………..
…………………………………………………….                 …………………..
……………………………………………………..               …………………      ……………….

Full name of Participant                                                                 Date                         Time

I …………………………………… herewith confirm that the above participant has been fully informed about the nature, conduct and risks of the above study.

…………………………………………………….                 …………………..
…………………………………………………….                 …………………..
……………………………………………………..               …………………

Full Name of Researcher                                                                 Date                        Time
DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL AND ADMINISTRATIVE STUDIES
P. O. Box MP167
Mount Pleasant
Harare, Zimbabwe

A/CHAIRPERSON: Dr D. P Chimanikire
PhD, MPhil (Nehru University, India) MA (Keiv State, Ukraine) Email: polad@socsci.un.ac.zw

UNIVERSITY OF ZIMBABWE

22 January 2016

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

Dear Sir/Madam

RE: APPLICATION FOR RESEARCH ASSISTANCE: TAKUDZWA GWEZUVA (R115507K)

This letter serves to introduce Mr Gwezuva Takudzwa a Postgraduate student in the Department of Political and Administrative Studies. He is doing field research in fulfillment of the requirements of a MSc. in International Relations Degree.

The Department kindly requests you to assist the student to the best of your ability. His research topic is: "The Efficacy of US Military Assistance to Insurgent Groups: The Case of Syria (2013-2015)."

May I also assure you in advance that the information gathered during this exercise will be used for academic purposes only.

Should you have any queries, please contact the Department.

Yours faithfully

MR. T. C. RUBAYA
ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANT