

## Syria: More Than One Flag and Incomplete National Sovereignty

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**Abstract:** *This study addresses gaps in the academic discourse on the multifaceted Syrian conflict through a meticulous examination of the crisis and the impact of external actors on national sovereignty. Employing a comprehensive review of existing literature and rigorous analysis of primary and secondary data, this study adopts a multidisciplinary approach to dissect the intricate dynamics of the conflict, including motivations, strategies, and interests of regional and global actors. The findings reveal how external interference has shaped the conflict trajectory and implications for national sovereignty, shedding light on complex interplay between internal and external factors. This research contributes to conflict resolution, international relations, and humanitarian interventions. The insights offer valuable guidance for policymakers and practitioners addressing the prolonged crisis in Syria. In conclusion, this study presents a rigorous interdisciplinary analysis of the Syrian conflict, offering novel insights for policy and practice in addressing its complexities, contributing to existing literature and informing policy decisions and post-conflict reconstruction strategies. Further research is warranted to deepen understanding and inform effective strategies for addressing the multifaceted challenges of the Syrian conflict.*

**Keywords:** Syrian conflict, national sovereignty, intervention, humanitarian, military, international actors.

### Introduction

The Syrian conflict, which erupted in 2011, has had a profound and devastating impact on the lives of millions of people, making it one of the most complex and prolonged conflicts in modern history (Swinnen, 2023). What began as peaceful protests calling for political reforms in Syria quickly escalated into a brutal civil war, involving a multitude of domestic and international factions, resulting in dire consequences for the Syrian population (Phillips, 2019).

The involvement of diverse international actors, including regional and global powers (Akbar, 2023), has been a prominent feature of the Syrian conflict, with their interventions taking various forms, ranging from military support to different factions to political influence and diplomatic maneuvering. The interference of external actors in Syria has had profound implications for the country's national sovereignty, which encompasses its authority to exercise control over its

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territory, make autonomous decisions on internal matters, and uphold its independence without external interference (Demiryontar & İçduygu, 2023).

The involvement of external actors in the Syrian conflict has undermined Syria's national sovereignty in multifarious ways, challenging the legitimacy and authority of the Syrian government, eroding its ability to maintain control over certain territories and resources, and impeding efforts to achieve a political resolution to the conflict (Mustafa, 2023). The Syrian crisis has witnessed significant intervention from various countries, including the United States, Russia, Turkey, Iran, and other Arab countries (Droz-Vincent, 2020). Countries such as Russia, Iran, and Turkey have assumed pivotal roles, lending support to different sides in the conflict and shaping the trajectory of events on the ground (Hinnebusch, 2019).

The meddling of external actors has played a pivotal role in shaping the conflict, prolonging its duration, and hindering Syria's ability to exercise full sovereignty over its territory (Sarkin & Capazorio, 2022). The repercussions of this interference have been profound, with widespread humanitarian suffering, displacement of populations, loss of life, and devastation of infrastructure endured by the Syrian people.

Furthermore, the geopolitical ramifications of international interference in Syria have exacerbated the conflict, with regional power struggles and proxy wars adding to the complexities of the situation. While existing studies have shed light on the consequences of international interference on Syrian national sovereignty, there are notable gaps that warrant further research (Phillips, 2019). Efforts towards a peaceful resolution of the conflict must take into account the imperative to restore Syria's national sovereignty and enable the country to exercise autonomous control over its own destiny.

It is imperative to continue research in these areas to better comprehend the complexities of international interference on Syria's national sovereignty and its implications for the country's stability and future prospects. Addressing these gaps could provide a more nuanced understanding of the issue and contribute to effective policymaking and conflict resolution efforts. The Syrian conflict has been marked by intricate dynamics and the involvement of diverse international actors. A comprehensive understanding of the role of international interference in Syria is imperative in grasping the complexities of the conflict and its multifarious consequences, both in terms of humanitarian and geopolitical dimensions.

### **Historical Context of Syrian Sovereignty**

Syria, situated in the heart of the Middle East, has a rich historical context as a sovereign nation, characterized by a long-standing struggle for independence and efforts to uphold its national sovereignty. The region has been inhabited for millennia, boasting a diverse heritage of

civilizations, cultures, and religions. In the modern era, Syria gained independence from French colonial rule in 1946 (Imady, et al., 2021, p. 138), marking a significant milestone in its pursuit of self-determination and establishment of its own political system (Swinnen, 2023).

The struggle for independence in Syria was part of a broader wave of anti-colonial movements that swept through the Middle East and other parts of the world in the mid-20th century. Like many other colonized nations, the Syrian people sought to regain their sovereignty and assert their right to self-governance. Through years of resistance and protests against French colonial rule ((Imady, et al., 2021, p. 449), Syria eventually achieved independence, which was recognized by the international community as a sovereign state.

Since gaining independence, Syria has traditionally upheld its national sovereignty, despite facing external pressures. The country has endeavored to assert its authority over its territory, exercise independent decision-making on internal affairs, and maintain its independence without external interference (Sarkin & Capazorio, 2022). Syria has pursued an independent foreign policy, striving to preserve its territorial integrity and safeguard its sovereignty in regional and international forums.

However, in recent years, Syria has faced challenges to its national sovereignty from external actors (Mustafa, 2023). The outbreak of the Syrian conflict in 2011 has witnessed the involvement of various international actors, including regional and global powers (Hale, 2019), who have intervened in the conflict, often pursuing their own interests (Oligie, 2019). This has had a significant impact on Syria's national sovereignty, resulting in the erosion of its authority, loss of control over its territory, and limitations on its ability to make independent decisions on internal affairs.

The Syrian crisis has become a focal point of contention between regional countries and international powers, transcending its initial status as an internal conflict. There have been key regional players such as Turkey, Iran, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Israel, and Qatar, as well as major global powers and Europe (Chen, et al., 2020), have extensively intervened in the conflict (Guerilli & Manaa, 2022). As a result, the entire regional system has shown a keen interest in the developments in Syria. Consequently, due to the strategic significance of the regional system in the Middle East, any changes or advancements in neighboring countries have direct implications for Jordan. This has rendered Jordanian foreign policy susceptible to regional developments, requiring constant vigilance and monitoring of the situation in both Arab and non-Arab neighboring countries (Droz-Vincent, 2020).

Syria's historical context as a sovereign nation has been shaped by a struggle for independence and efforts to uphold its national sovereignty (Akbar, 2023). Despite facing external pressures, Syria has traditionally pursued policies aimed at maintaining its independence, asserting its

authority, and safeguarding its sovereignty. However, the ongoing Syrian conflict and the involvement of external actors ((Demiryontar & İcduygu, 2023) have posed challenges to Syria's national sovereignty, underscoring the complexities of international interference in Syria and its repercussions on the country's sovereignty.

### **International Interference in Syria**

The Syrian conflict, which initially emerged as a popular uprising against President Bashar al-Assad's government in 2011, has been marred by substantial international interference, resulting in the gradual erosion of Syria's national sovereignty (Gegout & Suzuki, 2020). Numerous regional and global powers have intervened in the conflict, exerting their influence over Syria's internal affairs and exacerbating the duration of the conflict.

One of the salient aspects of international interference in Syria has been the multifarious involvement of external actors (Mustafa, 2023). Regional powers such as Iran, Turkey, and Saudi Arabia, alongside global powers like Russia and the United States, have played pivotal roles in the Syrian conflict, often advancing their own interests with little regard for Syria's sovereignty (Uludag, 2015).

Military interventions have been a conspicuous manifestation of international interference in Syria. Russia has provided substantial military support to the Syrian government, including air strikes and the deployment of troops, with the aim of bolstering the Assad regime (Borshchevskaya, 2023). In contrast, the United States and its allies have extended support to opposition groups through training, funding, and the provision of weapons. Additionally, regional powers like Turkey have intervened militarily in Syria; primarily targeting Kurdish groups (Can, 2017, Oğuzlu, 2023). These military interventions have not only prolonged the conflict but have also exacerbated the violence, leading to a considerable loss of life and widespread destruction of infrastructure.

In addition to military interventions, external actors have also exerted significant political influence in Syria (Hale, 2019). This has encompassed diplomatic efforts to shape the political landscape in Syria (Oxford Analytica., 2016), support for various factions, and imposition of economic sanctions (Mukhopadhyay & Howe, 2023, p. 168). Some regional and global powers have supported opposing groups, extra polarizing and fragmenting Syria. Political interference has impeded Syria's ability to establish a stable political process and has often prolonged the conflict, impinging on the country's capacity to exercise full sovereignty over its internal affairs.

Also, external actors have provided support to various factions within Syria, including armed groups, militias, and political parties, exacerbating the complexity of the conflict (Hale, 2019). This has engendered a situation where multiple external actors are vying for influence in Syria,

resulting in a fragmented and volatile landscape (Demiryontar & İçduygu, 2023). The support to different factions has often protracted the conflict, as these groups continue to receive external support, extra undermining Syria's ability to exercise control over its territory and make independent decisions.

The involvement of external actors has not only protracted the conflict but has also impeded Syria's ability to exercise its full sovereignty over its territory (Mustafa, 2023). The interference has often resulted in the erosion of Syria's authority, weakened governance structures, and undermined the country's capacity to establish a stable political process (Bakkour & Sahtout, 2023). The external interference has contributed to the complexity and severity of the Syrian conflict, rendering it a protracted and formidable conflict to resolve.

The international interference in Syria has exerted a significant impact on the country's national sovereignty. The involvement of various external actors, including regional and global powers (Akbar, 2023), through military interventions, political influence, and support to different factions, has prolonged the conflict and impeded Syria's ability to exercise full control over its territory (Oligie, 2019). The erosion of Syria's national sovereignty has more complicated the conflict and intensified the challenges faced by the Syrian people in their pursuit of stability and self-determination.

### **Impact on Syrian National Sovereignty**

The international interference in Syria has had a profound impact on the country's national sovereignty, resulting in significant erosion and loss of control over territories and resources, and posing challenges to the Syrian government in asserting its authority and maintaining national unity (Gegout & Suzuki, 2020).

Firstly, the interference of external actors in Syria has led to the erosion of its national sovereignty. The involvement of regional and global powers in Syria's internal affairs, including military interventions, political influence (Mustafa, 2023, Borshchevskaya, 2023), and support to different factions, has diminished Syria's ability to exercise full control over its territory and make independent decisions (Mukhopadhyay & Howe, 2023, p. 23). The interference has often resulted in weakened governance structures, undermined state institutions, and eroded the Syrian government's authority over certain areas (Bakkour & Sahtout, 2023).

The impact of international interference on Syrian national sovereignty is more compounded by the loss of state control over certain territories and resources. Various factions, including armed groups and militias, have gained control over parts of Syria, challenging the authority of the central government (Sarkin & Capazorio, 2022). This has led to the fragmentation of Syria's

territory, with different factions asserting their own control over certain areas, and has undermined the Syrian government's ability to maintain sovereignty over its entire territory.

Moreover, the control of vital resources, such as oil fields and strategic infrastructure, by different factions has also resulted in the loss of state control over economic assets. This has further diminished the Syrian government's ability to exercise authority and manage the country's resources for the benefit of its people, contributing to the erosion of national sovereignty (Gegout & Suzuki, 2020).

Besides, the Syrian government has had to navigate complex diplomatic challenges in dealing with multiple external actors involved in the conflict (Akbar, 2023), each with their own interests and agendas (Oligie, 2019). This has posed challenges in protecting Syria's sovereignty and maintaining its independence in the face of external pressures and interventions.

International interference in Syria has had a significant and detrimental impact on the country's national sovereignty. The erosion of sovereignty is evident through the loss of state control over territories and resources, challenges in asserting authority, and maintaining national unity amidst external interventions (Mukhopadhyay & Howe, 2023, p. 20). The conflict in Syria has created a complex and challenging landscape, with various external actors shaping the dynamics of the conflict and undermining Syria's ability to exercise full sovereignty over its territory. Respecting Syria's national sovereignty and finding a peaceful resolution to the conflict remains crucial for achieving stability and security in the region, and for the Syrian people to exercise their right to self-determination.

### **Consequences of Lost Sovereignty**

Starting with a humanitarian perspective, the consequences of the Syrian conflict have been dire. The prolonged conflict has resulted in the displacement of millions of people, both internally and externally, leading to a massive humanitarian crisis (Human Rights Watch, 2022). The forced displacement of Syrians from their homes has caused immense suffering and loss, with many seeking refuge in neighboring countries or becoming internally displaced within Syria. The conflict has also resulted in a staggering loss of life, including civilians, humanitarian workers, and combatants (Droz-Vincent, 2020). Moreover, the destruction of critical infrastructure, such as schools, hospitals, and basic services, has severely impacted the well-being and livelihoods of the Syrian population, leading to long-term suffering and dependence on humanitarian assistance (Hinnebusch, 2019).

In addition to humanitarian consequences, the international interference in Syria has had significant geopolitical implications (Abdelbary & Elshawa, 2023). The involvement of regional and global powers in the conflict has fueled regional power struggles and proxy wars, with

different countries supporting opposing factions within Syria (Phillips, 2019). This has heightened tensions in the region and added complicated the conflict dynamics. The geopolitical implications have not been limited to the immediate region but have also had potential spillover effects and broader implications for global security.

Additionally, the international interference has complicated efforts to find a peaceful resolution to the conflict. The involvement of external actors with diverging interests and agendas has often hindered diplomatic efforts and negotiations, prolonging the conflict and deepening the suffering of the Syrian people (Demiryontar & İçduygu, 2023; Mustafa, 2023). The interference has also increased the risk of escalation and additional destabilization in the region, with potential implications for neighboring countries and beyond.

The lost sovereignty of Syria has long-term implications for its future stability and prospects for post-conflict reconstruction. The erosion of national sovereignty has weakened the authority and legitimacy of the Syrian government (Gani et al., 2022), making it challenging to achieve sustainable stability and effective governance (Bakkour & Sahtout, 2023). The fragmentation of territories and the control exerted by different factions has further complicated the process of reconciliation, reconstruction, and restoration of state authority. Rebuilding infrastructure, restoring essential services, and addressing the complex social, economic, and political challenges faced by the Syrian people require a unified and sovereign government with the capacity to exercise authority over its entire territory.

In brief, the lost national sovereignty of Syria due to international interference has had severe consequences, encompassing humanitarian, geopolitical, and long-term implications (Abdelbary & Elshawa, 2023). The conflict has resulted in massive displacement, loss of life, and destruction of infrastructure, fueled regional power struggles, complicated diplomatic efforts, and posed challenges for post-conflict recovery (Hinnebusch, 2019). It is crucial to respect Syria's national sovereignty and support efforts towards a peaceful resolution and sustainable reconstruction for the well-being and future prospects of the Syrian people.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, the Syrian conflict has been a multifaceted and prolonged crisis, with international interference playing a pivotal role in shaping its trajectory. The historical context of Syria as a sovereign nation and its historical struggle for independence underscore the intrinsic significance of national sovereignty to the country's identity and stability. However, the conflict has witnessed extensive interference from various regional and global actors, resulting in the erosion of Syria's national sovereignty and posing numerous challenges for its governance and recovery.

The consequences of lost sovereignty in Syria have been severe and far-reaching. Humanitarian impacts, including massive displacement, loss of life, and destruction of critical infrastructure, have been dire. Geopolitically, international interference has fueled regional power struggles and proxy wars, complicating efforts to find a peaceful resolution and impeding post-conflict reconstruction. The long-term implications for Syria's stability, governance, and regional security are significant, necessitating concerted efforts to address the erosion of national sovereignty.

Therefore, it is imperative for the international community to respect Syria's national sovereignty, support genuine efforts towards a peaceful resolution, and provide aid in the reconstruction process. Upholding Syria's national sovereignty is not only a legal and moral imperative but also a crucial factor in ensuring the stability, security, and prosperity of the region and beyond. Further research and nuanced understanding of the complex dynamics of international interference in Syria are needed to inform effective policymaking and conflict resolution efforts.

In conclusion, the erosion of national sovereignty in Syria due to international interference has had severe consequences, including humanitarian crises and geopolitical tensions. Upholding Syria's national sovereignty, supporting peaceful resolution efforts, and aiding in post-conflict reconstruction are critical for the country's stability and well-being. It is essential for the international community to work towards safeguarding Syria's national sovereignty as a fundamental principle for resolving the conflict and ensuring a sustainable and peaceful future for the Syrian people.

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