

The Syrian Conflict: A Spring Board for Russia to Global Prominence

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Abstract: Even though violent conflicts and wars come with immeasurable human and material consequences it however serves the good for some. World leadership has always depended on the outcome of violent mega conflicts and wars. The United States took over the world leadership from Great Britain after emerging as the dominant power at the end of World War II. It succeeded in lulling the rise of the former USSR which became Russia thanks to the Cold War. Since then the prominence of Russia in global affairs has been dwindling till the advent of the Syrian conflict some five years ago that Russia is using as a springboard to bounce back to prominence. This article tries to detail this sudden rise of Russia thanks to the Syrian conflict.

Keywords: Consequences, Violent Conflicts and Wars, USSR.

1. INTRODUCTION

In **December 2010** a young Tunisian vegetable vendor, Mohamed Bouaziz got raged with the continuous harassment he received from the Police officers and to express his frustration he immolated himself which led to his death some days after. This angered the local population of the town of Sidi Bouzid as they saw the hand of the government in the human rights abuses of common citizens. A protest march started which gradually engulfed the entire nation and brought it to its knees. Fearing for his life, the embattled President, Zine El-Abidine Bin Ali abdicated the throne and fled with his family to Saudi Arabia where they have been given shelter since then. The Tunisian example pushed citizens of other Arab countries who were under eternal family dynasty rule to stand against their leaders. Libya started and later on Egypt then it crossed the Red Sea waters to Syria where the Assad family is too strong to fall. For five years now the people of Syria have been confronted with the heat of constant bombardment and the cry of babies and children and women who are either being killed or forced to become widows in a war without end. It has become a melting point for not just Syrians but major political and economic players in the world today (The Organisation for World Peace, February 2016). Since the end of the cold war and the collapse of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR or the Soviet Union) the world has been confronted with more of intra state conflicts; conflicts taking place within a country, opposing one community against the other, or civil wars, military uprisings and coup d'états. What is happening in Syria may be likened to an internal struggle as per the government of Bashar Al-Assad. However, it goes beyond that as there are many more foreign forces now involved in the Syrian conflict than the Syrians themselves. Even though it started as a peaceful uprising, with activists calling on the premature departure of President Bashar Al-Assad, the war has been hijacked by international players who claim to have become more concerned with Syrian affairs than the Syrians themselves. It has become more of a war among states fought in 5 star Hotels and international conference centers while the penalty is paid on Syrian soil with the blood of the Syrian people. Galtung (2011: 89) named it Macro conflict.

When the wing of change finally came to Syria it started in the streets of Deraa which was the immediate consequence of the torture of some teenagers who had been painting pictures depicting a revolution. Within two months of the uprisings in Tunisia and Egypt their almost eternalized Presidents were already saying goodbye but Assad of Syria has remained glued to the throne he inherited from his father in 2000, sourcing 'one of the greatest conflicts in the 21st century' (The Organisation for World Peace, February, 2016).

In Tunisia, it was a peaceful revolution while in Egypt the military which had first of all used force back out and instead washed the protest gaining steam. But in Syria it became a show of force. This led to so many defections amongst the military; defections both at top positions and within the soldiers of the rank and file who wanted to protect their own people coming under indiscriminate government fire power. These defectors quickly formed the Free Syrian Army (FSA). Civilians at home and abroad quickly swelled the ranks of this newly created armada and with high enthusiasm they knew victory was at their doorstep. Syrians who could not join the fight supported the rebel movement with finances and weapons with Turkey being the major crossing route. Other governments like the Saudis, Qataris and the United States and allies also buttress their actions with funds, ammunitions and intelligence. The government however remained defiant and with the FSA taking too long to deliver the goods this pushed many to abandon what used to be the most important force in the Syrian conflict and either create or join newly created and more radical groups especially those with religious connotations who transformed the war into what they call a Jihad. That is how the likes of the al-Nusra front, the Islamic Front and the dreaded Islamic State gained prominence and a host of pro-Kurdish groups.

Even though there were defections at very high level in the Syrian military and government, Bashar Al-Assad was not left alone in the cold. Traditional friends like Russia, Iran and its Revolutionary Guard including Hezbollah went behind Assad. At first instance these entities refused being behind Assad but with growing evidence and the low morale of government troops which ensured that they could not put up a strong fight, Assad's underground friends became the front liners in the conflict and started clearing the way for his military to assert its legitimacy. Standing ahead of this forward march is the Russian Air force which clears the path for foot soldiers to trample on.

With all these support to President Assad and especially Russian bombardment of civilian and rebel positions the tides have been turned in favor of government forces which are fast recapturing rebel held territories.

From a background position, today Russia is emerging as the most important party in the Syrian conflict standing together with the government of President Assad. Prior to the Syrian conflict Russia had been relegated to the background at almost all levels with newly found Eldorado like Qatar and Dubai making headline while the imposing USA still lords over all. In dissecting Russia's sudden rise we will describe how it first of all challenged the world leader, America for its crown and failed following the end of the Cold War, life of the new leader; how it consolidated its position round the world, then the sudden challenge and hence the renaissance of Russia.

The Cold War and the downfall of Russia:

The Cold War started immediately after the Second World War (WWII-1939-1945) and even though it was practically between two world powers, it also affected the domestic and foreign policies of other nations (Leffler and Painter, 2005:1). At the end of the Second World War, the United States and the Soviet Union were the two surviving empires. Each of these empires wanted to conquer the world and had expansionist policies which came into conflict (ibid: 2). Although the United States emerged victorious at the end of WW II; with a strong economy and military which controlled the waters and the skies, she accounted for about half of the world's manufacturing capacity, she fell more vulnerable to threats and attacks (Ibid: 3) and she knew it was only by making alliances and securing for itself oil sources that she will remain on top while Russia also wanted to conquer more territories too. In order to maintain her leadership position, together with her allies she masterminded the creation of institutions like the United Nations (UN) and became the hosts of the headquarters of the organization and contributes more than any other country (22% of annual UN budget), as well as a strong influence in the designation of its Secretary General. Even though in a distant second position the Soviet Union's appetite for growth and expansion meant toppling of the world leader who was however very jealous of her position. The Soviet Union therefore became the main challenger to America's global leadership and dominion (Flint, 2006: 69)

With the disintegration of the Soviet Empire following the end of the Cold War in 1989, the only real competitor had been defeated and the United States was seemingly the most powerful country in the world. She could penetrate every corner of the world as she had also built alliances with countries in all the strategic corners of the world. There seem to be a period of appeasement which was however tainted by the influence of Saddam Hussein who wanted to capture the entire Middle East.

The 1st Gulf War:

After the fall of USSR, the next challenger to the US supremacy was Saddam Hussein, who in his quest for power and wealth invaded and annexed Kuwait in 1990. Even though majority in the Arab and Muslim world did not support

Saddam's action including hardliners like Bin Laden and his cohorts, Bin Laden was not however, comfortable with the choice of the United States Army to push back Saddam (Flint, 2006:165). This was the sowing of the seeds of 9/11.

US soldiers launched an all-out assault against the forces of Saddam Hussein in what was code named *operation desert storm* and even on mainland Iraq itself in August 1990 and by February 1991, Saddam's forces had shamelessly left Kuwait. If Saddam had succeeded in his Kuwaiti mission he would have certainly extended his expansionist policies to other nearby territories which would have given him control over the oil reserves of Kuwait and other Middle Eastern areas and certainly imposed himself on the entire Middle East barring its juicy oil fields from the United States which are also a source of power. Therefore he would have become the "strong man of the East" and imposing his type of "peace" in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as Russia is doing today with Syria. The United States would have been forced to compromise the situation of its all-time unconditional ally, Israel. Saddam would have also controlled the Middle East waters which are very strategic as most ships from Europe to Asia use that route.

2. UNITED STATES OF AMERICA, CONSOLIDATES ITS TOP POSITION

Embedded Communication:

When the great USSR Empire was crumbling, America, with a mastery of strategic communication invested heavily in it as a means of selling its image; *the American* way of life and asserting its dominance throughout the world. The Cable News Network, *CNN* was heavily empowered and with the communication blackout in the world then, it was the choicest channel of all. The *CNN* was received almost everywhere in the world as it became a vessel at the service of the United States, standing as the *de facto* spoke person of the American government. *CNN* made sure only the American side of every event was told especially in matters of conflicts. To Tjadé Eoné (2012) such journalists were highly embedded in the American system and prior to their coverage of every war like the first Gulf war of 1990-1991 they had to answer in the affirmative that they were *embedded* in the *all-powerful* and *always doing right* American military. In this case the reporters portrayed only what the military wanted them to tell the public. They became an unofficial communication and public relation officers of the US military telling the world that the latter was fighting a just course to liberate a people and it is winning it. It was not just the direct implication of the journalists and their reportage but also the imposition of Hollywood films with its liberation messages and the celebrated American culture.

Hollywood films and American Books:

Beginning the late 1980s and the early 1990s a project was launched headed by a certain Edward Said in movies and books. It was called *Orientalism* meaning any culture which does not portray western values as the best was termed *uncivilized*, *childlike*, and *primitive*, while Western culture was classified as *modern*, *bearers of civilization* and hence rulers of the world (Flint, 2006: 91). These films and books flooded cinema halls in places like Africa and parts of Asia where actors like Sylvester Stallone also known as *Rambo*, Arnold Schwarzenegger who popular went by the name *Commando*, Chuck Norris and many others became heroes around the world. It was the imposition of the *American Way of Life* and whoever was not for it was against the world leader, the United States.

It was entertaining but the underlying reason behind their actions was to portray America as the Police of the world, liberating people who were deemed to be prisoners of their own culture and traditional values and strict religious principles. These movies always carried a romantic touch, the American style with a lot of sexual liberty different from what transpired in the conservative African and Asian countries. According to Flint (2006) the gov't used Hollywood to paint a picture of a Middle East and slavery especially their women in bondage with Americans always the one rescuing them and eventually getting married to them in a relationship where the American is the head. The American government's used of Hollywood was also another way of winning the support of its people to its mission of imposing its culture, installing friendly regimes that will permit them tap the oil of these conquered territories and maintained a 'marriage' relation where it is the man while Middle East the woman.

We grew up in an Africa with strong cultural and social values; sex a taboo subject, the stringent authority of parents over their children, reverence and respect for elders and the omnipotent presence of God who was feared with the last blood. There was no compromise and things like boyfriend/girlfriend relations were off-limits and for the few who could sustained such relations they had to go underground and sometimes would not even tell their best friends, while pregnancy before marriage was unthinkable. However, with Hollywood films and books it was a total contrast with a lot

of liberty and little respect for things and people held in high esteem in Africa, Asia and the Middle East. Boys and girls openly kept relationships to the knowledge and approval of parents, condom openly displayed, a lot of nudity in films coupled with passionate love making, the fear of God was exchanged with believe in human beings and the emergence of the slogan *children have rights* making many off springs to challenge their parents authority over them. The mode of dressing changed in our local Africa with more of jeans and fitting trousers, coupled with miniskirts and hanging blouses. This has even infiltrated the military with men and women of the uniform profession going in for revealing attires that expresses their sensual physiognomy to the public. And gradually it gained grounds and the *American way of life* became the best. With this victory assured the American government did not sleep on its laurels but intensified with other activities in order to fully plant itself everywhere in the world and in the heart of the people.

It is not the first time the US government is using Hollywood to *win a war* or draw the people to its side. When America finally decided to join the Second World War in 1941 after her ships came under heavy bombardment in international waters from the empire of Japan, the government declared war on the latter. However, she needed money to finance this expensive expedition. Hollywood stars were called in to spear head the fundraising as they travelled round the country selling bonds and raising moneys for the US war efforts. These stars including the reigning celebrity of the time, Hedy Lamarr who also sold bonds on behalf of the American government and on one night she raised 7 million USD alone. These Hollywood hottest encouraged the military men through the signing of autographs and even went as far as opening a 'Hollywood Canteen' on October 3, 1942 with free access to all military men. They were served by these Hollywood stars and other workers from the Hollywood film industry and everything inside was free for the military men.

Intensification of American activities round the world:

After the Gulf war of 1991, the US government intensified its activities around the world with agencies like the *American Peace Corps*, the *United States Agency for International Development* (USAID), and US embassies doted round the globe. These instruments of strategic communication came to help people of what is called the under developed world but in turn inculcating in them the *American culture*. Hence, the Diversity Lottery Program that used to be a thing of a privileged few was decentralized and everybody with access to the internet could play and win. That is how every year about 55,000 persons mostly from Asia and Africa became winners of the lottery program. Once in America, they are immersed in the system and their speech is transformed and they are made to see their motherland as being backward and only the *American model* can transform it.

The US embassies was not just limited to consular and visa services but came up with many activities like the establishment of libraries which from time-to-time projected American films. These libraries offer down to earth services to citizens of host countries making them to see America as the new *Father Christmas*. In Cameroon the US Embassy runs a library that goes by the name *James Baldwin Information Resource* (IRC) which regularly organizes what it calls the *Spelling B* competition for schools which is also another way of promoting the American English in Cameroon in contrast to the British English which, together with French are the only two officially recognized lingua franca; a colonial heritage from Britain, former colonial masters of West Cameroon. The IRC also provides free internet services with a very high speed band making it a reference center for online research and work. It also advises nationals on how to gain admission into American universities, and once in such universities they become transformed and hardly come back the same. In some cases juicy and lucrative scholarships like the *Fulbright* are awarded to nationals also. For the few who would come back, their wish is to do things the *American Way* even though not in America. From their dressing, speech and way of doing things they look different and with readily available cash from the states they easily inculcate these values in the younger ones.

The United States Peace Corps is also another arm of strategic communication and today members of the body are very popular in the rural areas of African and Asian countries where they will a lot of power and command so much respect. They come in as volunteers in the social, health and education domain even when some of their activities do not really match with the local realities. However, they are a strategic arm used by their homeland to expand its presence in these countries. In his testimony of the American Peace Corps after he left the body, Robert L. Strauss who used to be country Director for Cameroon between 2002 and 2008 said "While volunteers generate good will for the United States, they do little or nothing to actually aid development in poor countries" (*New York Times*, January 9, 2008).¹

¹ Published in the *New York Times*, available at http://www.nytimes.com/2008/01/09/opinion/09strauss.html?_r=0; accessed on May 26, 2016.

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, the wing of change was blowing throughout Africa with mass movements calling for the downfall of single party regimes and the opening of the political sphere (Sango Ndeh, 2011: 79). This led to the creation of many civil society and pressure groups, a lot of which are funded by the USAID or other bodies in the United States such as the National Endowment for Democracy (NED) that funds projects of civil society groups aimed at preaching the *American model* of democracy. Presently in Cameroon NED is funding a project spearheaded by a local Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) aimed at pressurizing the government to reduce the voting age from 20 to 18 as transpired in *homeland*. Other projects supported by American bodies include that of gay and lesbian persons in African countries which is in total contrast to the culture and constitution of these countries. In most of these countries homosexuality is not just band but a taboo subject (examples, Kenya, Nigeria, Ghana, Cameroon etc where marriage is a man and woman institution). With all these gains the US government knew it was in total control of the world; it has set up a global agenda (Flint, 2006) that almost everybody is working on. However, the new challengers to its prestigious position came knocking right inside America coupled with the resuscitation of Saddam Hussein.

3. MODERN CHALLENGES TO THE WORLD LEADER

Jihadists challenge the world leader:

When Kuwait was invaded by Iraqi forces in 1990, Osama Bin Laden who had been hailed in the Middle East as a liberator following the withdrawal of Soviet forces in Afghanistan asked the Saudi Princes to grant him the permission to use his Arab volunteers or Mujahedeen to face the Iraqi armored divisions. This request was refused and recourse was made to American soldiers and they were stationed in Saudi Arabia which has two of Islam's holiest sites in the world². To Bin Laden American soldiers were infidels and they are not just there to fight Saddam's forces but to plunder the wealth of the Middle East. Because of this humiliation, coupled with the Saudi authorities' corruption and apostasy believed to be an American model, the United States became the principal enemy of extremists groups with Bin Laden taking the lead (Chaliand and Blin, 2007:318).

In mid-1996, the main master minder of the September 11, 2001 attacks, Khalid Sheikh Mohammed met with Bin Laden in Tora Bora, a mountainous hideout since the days of the Afghan war. Sheikh presented Bin Laden with a plan to train pilots which will run planes into buildings in the United States. This eventually became the September 11 attacks of 2001 (9/11) (Fawaz, 2005: 16), what Tjadé (2005) would call the most mediatized attacks of recent times. These testimonies were presented by the 9/11 committee which also said that Bin Laden was 'blindly obsessed' with attacking America and the Americans and said if need be he would do it by himself (Fawaz, 2005: 17).

Many writers would contend that the father of modern day Jihadi groups is Sayyid Qutb of Egyptian nationality. He was born in 1906 and studied in Egypt and the US, and upon returned to Egypt he quickly became the steam engine behind Jihadi movements including the *Muslim Brotherhood* of slain Hassan Al-Banna. Paul Berman illustrated this by saying that according to Qutb, "a proper understanding of the Koran can be achieved only in an atmosphere of serious struggle, and only by someone who is engaged in a ferocious campaign for Islam, not by someone at ease in his armchair" (Berman, 2004: 65). Even though Qutb never went out to fight like Bin Laden he however influenced the minds of all the generations after him through his writings like *Milestone* and *In the shade of the Qur'an*, mostly written in his prison days, which made Berman to describe the latter as *one of the most remarkable works of prison literature ever produced* (Berman, 2003)³.

While commenting on Surah 2 in *Martyrdom and Jihad* Sayyid Qutb said:

The Surah tells the Muslims that, in the fight to uphold God's universal Truth, lives will have to be sacrificed. Those who risk their lives and go out to fight, and who are prepared to lay down their lives for the cause of God are honourable people, pure of heart and blessed of soul. But the great surprise is that those among them who are killed in the struggle must not be considered or described as dead. They continue to live, as God Himself clearly states (Qutb, 164). This is how Fawaz Gerges described Qutb's influence:

² These two sites include Mecca and Medina and the third is in Jerusalem which is being occupied by Israelites since 1967 following the war of the same year. This is against all Palestinian claims and international law.

³ Downloaded from <http://www.nytimes.com/2003/03/23/magazine/23GURU.html?pagewanted=all> accessed on May 31, 2016

More than anyone else, Sayyid Qutb, hanged by Egyptian authorities in 1966 for his alleged subversive preaching and plotting against the nationalist regime of Gamal Abdel Nasser, inspired generations of Jihadis, including Al-Qaeda's senior leaders, Osama Bin Laden and his deputies—the two late military commanders, Abu Ubaidah al-Banshiri and Mohammed Atef, theoretician Ayman al-Zawahiri, and thousands of others—to wage perpetual Jihad to 'abolish injustice from the earth, to bring people to the worship of God alone, and to bring them out of servitude to others into the servants of God' (Fawaz, 2005:4).

Qutb sustained that man is under the bondage of man-made laws and authorities which imprisoned man. God is the only authority and for man to achieve his freedom preaching alone will not suffice; if it could do, then the work of the prophets of God would have been easy. But both 'preaching' and the 'movement' have to be used (Qutb, 2005:45). He was killed by the Nasser regime in 1966 by hanging but his ideology lived on.

Then came Abdullah Azzam who actually discovered Bin Laden and inspired him to join the Afghan Jihad. Azzam is considered the father of Afghan Arabs (Fawaz, 2005: 18) and towards the end of the Afghan war, he thought it would be better to sustain the Jihadi spirit and the Army of Arab volunteers by creating what he called *al-qaeda al-sulbah* or the solid base from which attacks would be launched to recapture Muslim territory (Chaliand and Blin, 2007: 314-315). With his death in 1989, Bin Laden and others moved to establish *Al-Qaeda* which became the *solid base* from which attacks against United States and its interest around the world are launched.

Since the Vietnam invasion of the 1960s America has never suffered any challenge like that posed by Jihadi groups under the leadership of Bin Laden and his *Al-Qaeda*. With the Cold War, it was more of an economic challenge and a proxy war, but *Al-Qaeda* posed direct challenges to America and even its economy (by bombing the World Trade Center (WTC)), the American people, its military as well as the very existence of America through attacks on its soil. Despite the death of American soldiers in the Vietnam expedition no attack was launched on American soil.

America has the best military and the most efficient intelligent services that can picture almost every human activity done on planet earth. It remote controls attacks and changes around the world with its spy men and women. Its Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) was able to back the apartheid government of South Africa and even helped to annihilate the activities of the African National Congress (ANC) and capture its leaders like Nelson Mandela⁴ as well as planned for the overthrow of Ghanaian independence President, Kwame Nkrumah in 1966 because of their communist approach. Even if you succeeded to attack American soldiers everywhere, mainland America was an unthinkable expedition. Only Bin Laden and his *Al-Qaeda* succeeded in demystifying the bravery of the US intelligence network.

Before getting to 9/11, *Al-Qaeda* started with the "minor" bombing of the World Trade Center in 1993. It continued with the bombing of US Embassies in Nairobi and Dar es Salam in 1998, attacks on USS Cole in the Yemeni port city of Aden and the greatest, the 9/11 attacks. According to Flint (2006: 71) Bin Laden's fatwa in 1998 was a geopolitical code aimed at challenging the authority of the world leader, the United States. Like the new 'world leader' Bin Laden actually succeeded to set the global agenda and became one of the most 'popular' figures of the 21st century. He influenced even the global media environment and governments had to readjust with many of them creating 'Counter Terrorism' squads. To Bin Laden America would not be able to sustain two or three of his attacks (Fawaz, 2005: 59) and rightly or wrongly since the 9/11, America has changed, never to be the same again. Her economy was hard-hit and people no longer believed in the supremacy of its intelligent services. Then Saddam staged his comeback.

The return of Saddam Hussein:

While Jihadi groups under the image of Bin Laden were getting stronger and imposing themselves in the open, Saddam Hussein was also amassing power and wealth at the background. America was now faced with two fronts; the war in Afghanistan to dislodge Bin Laden and his Taliban sanctuary and the halting of Saddam's progress. As America concentrated on Afghanistan, Saddam was gradually announcing his "come back" and intentions to take over. Even though Iraq was hard-hit militarily and by sanctions following the end of the first Gulf war, ten years after, the country was blossoming and flourishing and standing as the giant of Middle East and Saddam, once again the strong man showing no signs of hardship even though under sanctions. There was need to stop the advancement of Saddam in a way that he will never rise up again. And since leadership is gotten and maintained through wars, George Bush Junior had to correct

⁴Available at <http://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2016/may/15/cia-operative-nelson-mandela-1962-arrest> accessed on May 15, 2016

the errors of his father a decade earlier by not just defeating Iraq but annihilate Saddam from planet earth. But what will be their case this time around since Saddam had invaded no country?

In their book *Peace Journalism*, Jake Lynch and Annabel McGoldrick (2005) described how testimonies were given in the American parliament of the necessity to invade Iraq once more. It was said by specialists in geopolitics that if allowed Saddam would become very powerful and in control of Middle East oil which America badly needs. With Saddam in control of Middle East and its oil, he will become very powerful—the powerful man of the East, politicians claimed.

According to Sociologist, Immanuel Wallerstein, since the 20th century the United States has been the hegemonic power and such power translates into dominant influence in trade and finance (Flint, 2006:35). Moreover, to be a global economic giant you must control major oil fields in the world since oil is the one commodity that directly and indirectly affects everything in the world, and these major oil fields are found in the Middle East. Hence the mad rush for territories in the Middle East which is a replica of the *Scramble for Africa* in the 20th and 21st centuries. Whoever wins the war in the Middle East can dictate the pace of events and set the global agenda.

In order to gain the support of the population for a war to satisfy their egoistic ambitions, politicians decided to use the media and ferment stories of “weapons of mass destructions” which never existed. As an all-time ally, the United Kingdom was drag into the case and Britain was presented as a country 45 minutes away from Saddam’s attacks. American media described Saddam as a man in possession of Weapons of Mass Destruction and would strike homeland very soon. It was literally translated as “Bush versus Saddam” with their photos facing each other. Yet, there was stiff opposition to the Iraqi invasion; from within America, the United Nations including Russia which vehemently rejected the move. That is how in March 2003, US forces invaded Iraq, deposing Saddam and installing an American, Paul Bremer to lead the interim government who was succeeded by an Iraqi trained American, Ghazi Mashal Ajil al-Yawar before an American friendly regime headed by Jalal Talabani in 2005. Saddam was captured in December 2003 and tried in an American sponsored tribunal, sentenced to death and executed in 2006.

With all these uprisings America realized that her assimilation message has not gone so well via hard diplomacy, so she intensified it with soft diplomacy. That is how in 2010, President Obama launched the Young African Leaders’ Initiative (YALI) and branded it with the name of Africa’s greatest statesman, Nelson Mandela. Through this program, every year about 500 Africans are chosen and taking to the United States where they spent about 6 weeks learning development, civic education and entrepreneurial models according to the American “eye”. However, it remains a tool to accomplish the assimilation process of Africans into the *American way of life*. At the level of the Middle East the US government launched the Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI) in 2002 which gathers about 120 undergraduate students every year for a trip in America to learn about civic engagement and governance so that when they go back home they will be able to implement it.

In running after Bin Laden and his cohorts and the 2003 invasion of Iraq, America instead won more enemies than friends as the ‘war against terrorism’ instead plunged the world into an ‘everything goes’ world with a vacuum that Russia is trying to fill.

4. THE WAR AGAINST TERRORISM MAKES RUSSIA A FRONTLINER

Fawaz Gerges (2005: 23) carefully described how, at the end of the day, the 9/11 committee reported that America’s enemy is twofold; *Al-Qaeda*, a stateless network of terrorists, and a radical ideological movement in the Islamic world, inspired by *Al-Qaeda*. The committee went further to request the government of the United States to wage an ‘all-out war measured in decades, not years to defeat the very ideology of Islamist terrorism’. This was the beginning of what is now called ‘the war against terrorism’. The war against terrorism according to Flint (2006: 72-73) was to secure the continuation of US world leadership position in the world. With this focus on *Al-Qaeda*, the search for Bin Laden and subsequently the invasion of Iraq in 2003, America, as we said above won more friends than enemies for itself with many more radical groups and persons coming up. The vacuum created in Iraq with the fall of Saddam Hussein was quickly fielded by other militant groups like *Ansar al-Islam*, elements of *Jaish Ansar al-Sunnah* and *al-Tawhid wa al-Jihad* all under the coordination of *Al-Qaeda* in the Land of the Two Rivers; a reference to Tigris and Euphrates with radical elements like Abu Musab al-Zarqawi in the command position, and to Bin Laden, Iraq served as a ‘golden and unique opportunity’ to rally forces and defeat the United States (Fawaz, 2005: 251-252). All these ramblings did not give the United States its prestige and privilege it once enjoyed round the world because of its gross human rights abuses, its

regime change policy and the very question of US forces on Muslim soil, and she gradually withdrew forces from these areas opting henceforth, to support nationals to take the fight and not send ground troops anymore.

This support and backing of nationals was first experimented in 2011 together with other NATO partners which led to the downfall of Libyan leader, Colonel Muammar Gaddafi. Again there was a huge leadership vacuum created which is being exploited by more radical groups like the Islamic State (IS); which is an upshot of the local *Al-Qaeda* branch in Iraq. Through this intervention in Libya, Russia's voice was silenced and non-members of the Security Council call them new Eldorado like Qatar, Jordan, United Arab Emirates were now part of the decision making machinery of the world. When it came to the case of Syria, Russia saw an ultimate opportunity to decide the world agenda and turn the global media on her side and be the front liner in international politics. Vladimir Putin's accession to power in 2000 and re-accession in 2012 was also to guarantee Russia a say in global affairs and increased its influence that had suffered in the days of former President Boris Yeltsin. The USSR(Soviet Union) which in the 1990s was reduced to just the Russian Federation even loose its privileged position after the United States as the second economic power of the world after WWII. Russia was relegated to the 9th position behind countries like China, Japan, Germany, United Kingdom, France, Brazil and Italy. All these countries except Brazil were hard hit during the WW II and were no march for Russia economically and militarily. Worst still, a country like Brazil is even classified as a "developing" country and by 1945 was going through power struggle and subsequent military regimes.

With the United States losing its influence and authority over the world, there was the need for an entity that will set the global agenda since the United Nations, handicapped by interest peddling could not do it. Moreover, politicians would always use every situation to make gains and Russian President; Vladimir Putin knew he could exploit the Syrian position to make gains not just for his country but for himself. Proof of this is the fact that after bomb raids in Syria, Putin got an all-time high approval rating that went up to 90% in October 2015, up from 80% when Russia annexed Crimea in 2014.⁵ Since world leadership is gotten by fighting a war (Flint, 2006) Russia had to use the proxy war in Syria and stand against the United States and its colony of supporters. The United States only got the world leadership position thanks to WWII where the drowning Britain that used to be the world leader was overtaken by the former (Flint, 2006: 39). Leffler and Painter in their own way try to describe the situation before and after WWII. According to them before the Second World War, there were seven world powers in order of strength; Great Britain, France, Germany, the Soviet Union, Japan, the United States and Italy, but by the end of the war the United States stood alone as the strongest nation in the world with a distant second, the Soviet Union (2005:3). The United States saved Britain from drowning and in turn became the world leader and it went ahead to decide the pace and agenda of events by spearheading the creation of institutions to impose its authority. That explains why most of these institutions like the United Nations Organisation, and also economic organisations like World Trade Organisation, IMF, World Bank are based in the United States since its world leadership is also economic (Flint, 2006: 73). It is the center of power. Russia knew very well that it would only get the most prestigious position after fighting a war and since it is almost impossible for Russia to openly confront the United States, the former made use of the Syrian conflict by joining on the side of Bashar Al-Assad.

World Leadership entails the building of alliances (Flint, 2006). The United States has built alliances throughout the world as well as Russia and to touch any of their 'friends' means touching them. Syria is a traditional ally of Russia; she host Russia's naval facility at the Port of Tartus and since 1956 Russia has been supplying weapons to the Syrian government. Following the six day 1967 Arab-Israeli war, Syria loose some parts of its territory to Israel (Golan Heights) which up till date it is still nursing hopes of recovering. In a similar position is Iran which is an ally of Syria and has challenged Israel's right to exist. Both countries have no diplomatic relations with Israel. On the other hand the United States has an unflinching support for Israel to the extent that any attack on Israel is a 'direct' attack on the United States. Therefore, the Middle East is divided into practically two groups; friends of America (Israel first class, and in the second class Pakistan, Afghanistan, Qatar, Jordan and others) and friends of Russia including Syria and Iran.

Within 5 years of the Syrian conflict the United Nations is already with the third negotiator (Kofi Annan, Lakhdar Brahimi and now Steffan de Mistura), yet there is no ending to the conflict and gradually the voice of the 'world body' is

⁵ Available at <http://www.nbcnews.com/news/world/vladimir-putins-approval-rating-hits-all-time-high-boosted-syria-n449071>; <http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2015/oct/25/vladimir-putin-approval-rating-hits-new-high-as-ru/?page=all>; <http://www.ibtimes.co.uk/russia-vladimir-putin-approval-rating-hits-90-following-syria-bombing-campaign-1525181>; accessed on May 27, 2016.

being eroded in favour of Russia. The President of Russia, Vladimir Putin has become the 'strongest man' in the world today with the major decisions of the 'sick man' of the world, Syria relying on him. Whatever 'peace plan' being initiated or debated must get his approval. He is listened to more than Bashar Al-Assad and he has succeeded in making a public 'disgrace' of the US and a 'slap' on the face of the same body, the UN that was created to regulate world peace. Instead one man, Vladimir Putin is now deciding on the type of 'Peace' the world should have and it must be that which favours him. Whatever his decision, it is closely watched by everybody as the Syrian conflict now is the major headache of the United Nations and the world in general.

5. CONCLUSION

World Leadership has proven to be different from Leadership in a structure or family. In the family structure, the head/leader sacrifices to make sure that the children are in good shape without making any a slave. Going back hundreds of years, leadership in the world has been that which makes the leader a super hero while those under him are reduced to slavery and servitude. Africans would remember how they were forced into slavery and servitude and after that their territories were invaded by these world leaders taking away their resources and brains. That is how African boundaries were created far away from Africa by world leaders who knew very little or nothing about the place. It was like using a knife to slice a piece of cake with far reaching consequences. And that is how Britain consolidated her position partly thanks to the acquisition of African territories right up to when the United States took over in 1945 after fighting another war. Millions were killed but America emerge victorious and till date Japanese towns of Hiroshima and Nagasaki are still suffering from the fall outs of atomic bombs used on them by US soldiers.

Rather than the world leader being the servant, like what is taught in basic leadership classes, it is instead behind most conflicts and human sufferings in the world, just to keep its position. The world leader has proven to be the one who does not keep peace by peaceful means (Galtung, 1996) but imposed its own version of peace through conflicts and wars and its position on everyone as well as suppressing every uprising against it. Peace by peaceful means will provide a level playing field for everyone; that will mean there will be no country to lord over the other and countries will be in total control of their resources exchanging them with other countries on equal terms. It will also be a United Nations of the People and not a United Nations of the Leader and his "chosen ones".

The United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) reported in 2016 that there are about 55 million refugees or people who have been forced to leave their residence and abode in the world. Most of the refugees according to the UNHCR are coming from Syria, Afghanistan, Iraq and Somalia. All these countries are plague by man-made conflicts, conflicts that could have been avoided and directly and indirectly connected to them is the world leader. The search for power has divided the world and is causing untold suffering to innocent people who are not even concerned with the politicking taking place in high quarters.

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