

Essay #1

International Arena Survival Guide

553137

On November 13th, a group of terrorists planned a series assault involving shootings and suicide bombings in Paris and caused more than 129 deaths. ISIL, the Islamic State of Iraq

and the Levant, claimed responsibility for the attack and drew the world's attention to the civil war in Syria once again (Gilsinan, 2015). The international community could not

tolerate the blatant terrorism assault to take place and within a month, the United Nations Security Council unanimously adopted Resolution 2254, endorsing a peace process in Syria.

However, not every country is satisfied with the resolution as their political and national interests invested in the outcome of this conflict might differ. This serves as a perfect

example to illustrate how states behave in the international community. According to

Professor Lussier (2016), the international system is anarchic because, "there is no central position of authority". In such a system, countries act based on their own rational decisions.

From a realist's point of view, under the anarchic nature of the international arena, the primary determinants of political decisions for any states are national security, power maximization, and seeking hegemony.

The most important thing a state should consider in the international arena is to survive. To be more specific, "states seek to maintain their territorial integrity and the autonomy of their autonomy of their domestic political order" (Mearsheimer, 2001, p.31). The reason for this is simple and straightforward, a state must exist in order to pursue any other interests. It is therefore necessary for a state to behave and make political decisions in a way that can enhances security and national sovereignty. For example, on the issue of the Syrian civil war,

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Comment [2]: Perhaps its better to say that they can no longer tolerate the series of terrorist attacks.

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Comment [3]: When talking about the UN, it's always better to refer to the countries as 'members'.

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Comment [4]: It's more accurate to say that countries act based on their national interest rather than rational decisions.

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Comment [5]: That's not exactly. In the current international system, only the US has hegemonic power, other countries would be seeking to maximize their global influence, e.g. China.

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a number of nation states have interfered militarily in Syria without the consent of the Syrian government, but based on the justification of combating against terrorist groups. Furthermore, a lot of countries have proposed a democratic re-election in Syria after the end of the crisis in Syria, which means that the legitimacy of current government, the Assad government, would be denied. It is very natural for the representative of the Syria government in the in-class simulation, while calling for a robust implementation of the relevant Security Council resolutions, prioritizing the maintenance of national sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity of the Syrian Arab Republic (Sachdev, 2016). This behavior supports the idea that states will not compromise on national sovereignty in the international system.

Power is the most important basis of security for a state in the international arena. As gaining power is the best way to ensure the security of a state in the Machiavellian world, each state is trying to maximize its power through different means. Cooperation is one of the more popular tools within international community to achieve this. However, any form of cooperation between states is based on mutual benefit and the appropriate distribution of benefit. As the famous saying goes "No permanent allies, no permanent enemies, only permanent interests". Therefore, cooperation between nations may be difficult and is always hard to maintain. On the issue of the Syrian civil war, for instance, Russia and Iran are among the few states that actually support the Syrian government. Russia's support stems from the fact that it has been selling Syrian weapons, and making a lot of profits in the process. The Islamic Republic of Iran provides military support for Syria because Syria is its closest ally.

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Comment [6]: I suspect this is also illegal under international law if it's not for a humanitarian purpose and not sanctioned by the Security Council.

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Comment [7]: Who and how?

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Comment [8]: Is it currently legitimate? Is his government recognized by the international community?

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Comment [9]: Can you please rephrase? I'm not sure what you mean here.

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Comment [10]: What kind of power? Gaining power domestically or globally?

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Comment [11]: It has 'selling weapons to Syria' and not 'selling Syrian weapons', the first one means that Russia is selling weapons to Syria, whereas the latter means that Russia is selling weapons produced by the Syrians.

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Therefore, it is necessary for Iran to support Assad's view that all his armed opponents are terrorists (Blair, 2015). Both countries would not want to witness the fall of the Assad government, as it would bring an end to both the trade partnership as well as strategic allies relationship. We can see that these two states can gain power if they succeed in securing the Syrian government.

For a state in the international community, power is never enough, as intentions of other states are hard to conjecture until it reaches hegemony. A hegemon, as Mearsheimer (2001) defined, is "a state that is so powerful that it dominates all the other states in the system" (p.40). While every state wants to become a hegemon, it is almost impossible to realize.

Hegemony is hard to achieve because of the security dilemma, that the increase of one state's security almost always decrease the security of others' (Mearsheimer, 2001, p.36). As strong a state as the United States, it is the only regional hegemon in modern hegemon. Once a state has achieved regional hegemony, its duty is to stop other states from expanding their sphere of influence. For example, while the United States can gain little direct benefit from Syria, it can sabotage Russia's economic gains in the region by supporting a ceasefire and followed by a democratic election for the people of Syria. As a representative of United States in the simulated UN council stated "A ceasefire is also necessary to be able to begin the negotiations toward a political process to create a new, stable Syria" (Grubbs, 2016). This behavior, while supporting democratization on the surface, might suggest implicit suppression on Russia's economy.

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Comment [12]: 'either' is the wrong word here, you need to use 'both' because either implies that you have to make a choice between the two options, whereas in this instance, it will bring an end to both of those things if the Assad regime falls.

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Comment [13]: Do you mean maintain rather than gain power?

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Comment [14]: Why would this be hard to achieve?

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Comment [15]: The US is not a regional hegemon, it is the sole global hegemon.

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Comment [16]: What do you mean by direct benefit? The US has always had a direct benefit on the stabilization of the ME because of it's interest in oil security and global terrorism.

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Comment [17]: What do you mean by the simulated UN council?

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Comment [18]: Do you have any evidence to support this argument? The Assad regime has been around for a long time, why is this happening now?

In conclusion, the crisis in Syria serves as a prime example in studying the behavior and political decision-making processes of different states in the international arena. As shown above, states tend to view survival as the top priority in making decisions, and then to gain power and achieve hegemony as a means to achieve and maintain security in an anarchic environment.

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Overall, you've done a fairly good job at explaining the idea of how the interest of different countries differ. Please make sure you follow my comments and suggestions to help you improve. Furthermore, I think it would make your essay more persuasive if you explain what the interest of the US is, beyond their intention to restrict trade between Russia and Syria. Given the US' position as the sole hegemony of the world, it's national interest expands globally and will therefore help to further contrast the different interest of nation states based on their economic situation, geography and global position.

Good work though!

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Reference

Blair, D. (2015, December 19). Iran repeats backing for Assad and rejects peace talks with Syrian 'terrorists' Retrieved May 20, 2016, from <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/middleeast/iran/12059722/Iran-repeats-backing-for-president-Assad-and-rejects-peace-talks-with-Syrian-terrorists.html>

Gilsinan, K. (2015, November 15). The Confused Person's Guide to the Syrian Civil War. Retrieved May 20, 2016, from <http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2015/10/syrian-civil-war-guide-isis/410746/>

Mearsheimer, J. J. (2001). *The tragedy of Great Power politics*. New York: Norton, 29-51

Takshil Sachdev (2016). United Nation Council opening remarks (Syria)

Zoe Grubbs (2016). United Nation Council opening remarks (United States)