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**Can Geneva Survive Astana? Measuring Credibility of
the UN Peacemaking in the Syrian Conflict**

By

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Can Geneva Survive Astana? Measuring Credibility of the UN Peacemaking in the Syrian Conflict

Ferhat Tutkal

ABSTRACT

Despite 12 years of violence and numerous attempts to end the conflict, the Syrian conflict stands among the largest humanitarian crises of the twenty-first century. Currently, there are two peacemaking interventions: the United Nations-backed Geneva process and Iran, Russia, and Turkey-sponsored Astana. By the initiation of the Astana process, the UN lost its monopoly in peacemaking, and its legitimacy as a mediator started to decrease gradually. Eventually, the UN's peacemaking in Syria became paralyzed, and UN mediation passed the point of credibility. This study focuses on the reasons for this state of paralysis by analyzing the structural challenges within and outside of the United Nations. This study defines four credibility-undermining indicators specific to the UN mediation in Syria, namely, a) fragmented Security Council, b) Geneva's sidelining by Astana and subsequent loss of leverage, c) parties' noncompliance with mediators' initiatives and minimal progress, and lastly, d) lack of accountability in the face of mass atrocity crimes. This research will examine all the factors causing the credibility loss of Geneva starting from the initiation of the Astana process in January 2017. The study aims to show that the initiation of the Astana format, which was the manifestation of geopolitical interest clashes between major powers, overshadowed and absorbed the UN's role in peacemaking.

Keywords: Syria, Conflict, Peacemaking, United Nations, Astana Process, Geneva, Mediation

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1. Introduction

As of December 2022, it has been more than 11 years since the Syrian conflict started. The protracted conflict has caused more than 350,000 deaths (United Nations, 2021b). More than 6.5 million people had to leave Syria, and another 6.7 million were forced to migrate internally (UNHCR, 2021). Although the intensity of the civil war has decreased gradually in recent years, the documented yearly death toll of the war was 6762 and 3884, respectively, by the end of 2020 (SOHR, 2020) and 2021 (SOHR, 2021).

Syria was ruled by a one-party regime - Baath Party - without any political opposition before the civil war. The Assad family has controlled the Baath Party since 1970, and the Assad family remained in power by suppressing any political opponent (Ma'oz, 2022). Political corruption, high levels of clientelism, and patronage networks were among the deeply rooted problems of the country (Sadowski, 1987). The Alawite minority, which includes the Assad family, wielded power in the governing and security systems, and they were challenged by the Sunni majority (Mazur, 2018).

The accumulated structural problems were triggered by two proximate causes. First, the protests in Tunisia and Egypt encouraged the masses in the Middle East to demand political reforms (Raghavan, 2011). Second, the state violence against civilians by the Syrian state sparked the conflict; In March 2011, a group of children from a middle school was imprisoned for writing messages on a wall condemning the government. Their actions culminated in their arrest and torture. The imprisonment and ill-treatment of the youngsters ignited nationwide protests (Sterling, 2012). The Assad regime reacted by deploying the army - including security

forces and state-sponsored militias, or what is commonly known as Shabiha - to quell unrest, concluding in military operations in numerous Syrian towns, with hundreds of civilians killed and thousands imprisoned. In the summer of 2011, defectors from the Syrian army declared the establishment of the Free Syrian Army, and the Syrian National Council was founded in the following months with the claim of being Syria's legitimate representative.

In the same month, the Arab League (LAS) stepped in to settle the conflict. However, despite their efforts, they were unsuccessful, and the violence kept escalating (Samir & Solomon, 2012). Soon after the Arab League's failure, the experienced diplomat Kofi Annan was appointed by the UN General Secretariat as a Joint Special Envoy of the UN and League of Arab States on the Syrian conflict. He resigned from his mission in August 2012. The failure of Annan's mediation was attributed to the fragmentation in the UN Security Council (UNSC), the government's intransigence and reluctance to adopt Annan's six-point plan, and the Syrian opposition's intensifying operations on the ground (Hinnebusch & Zartman, 2016). Annan's position was taken over by veteran diplomat Lakhdar Brahimi between August 2012 to May 2014, followed by Italian-Swedish diplomat Staffan de Mistura until October 2018. Ever since the resignation of his predecessor in 2018, the mediation mission has been carried out by Geir Pedersen.

Despite 11 years of violence, international attempts to resolve the conflict continue to remain ineffective. There are several causes for the ineffectiveness of peacemaking in the conflict in Syria. Geneva's credibility and legitimacy as a mediator was challenged by the emergence of the alternative mediation process and the UN Security Council's inefficiency (Muriel Asseburg et al., 2018; Abboud, 2021; Hellmüller, 2022). The UN's leverage on the conflicting parties shifted to an alternative illiberal peacemaking intervention, and the conflicting geopolitical interests reflected themselves in the Security Council, weakening the leverage of Geneva.

Given the long-standing Syrian conflict and the various unsuccessful attempts to resolve the conflict, it is essential to analyze the challenges the UN faces in peacemaking in deeply internationalized disputes. As the thesis attributes the UN's loss of monopoly in mediation to the shift in international power dynamics and the following polarization, it is necessary to focus on the manifestation of this polarization in peacemaking. Framing the other variables that undermine UN mediation in Syria and examining their interwoven nature will fill the gap in the literature on the outcomes of the UN's loss of monopoly in peacemaking. That is why this thesis investigates the circumstances under which Astana emerged, as well as how Astana influenced the UN's credibility and legitimacy as a mediator. This study bridges the phenomenon of the UN's loss of monopoly in mediation with other credibility-undermining variables, including Security Council fragmentation, lack of accountability, and intransigence of the parties to the mediation process. The thesis analyzes these four interrelated indicators in one research by using a new method for measuring credibility, which makes it an original contribution to the literature.

The assessment will encompass the duration from the initiation of the Astana process and will be held by considering two major points. Firstly, it will tackle the challenges intrinsic to the UN's structure, such as conflicting interests between the regional and major stakeholders and the clash of transnational and intergovernmental forces within the UN body. Second, it will examine the external challenges to the UN mediation mission, including the effect of a second mediation process - Astana Talks - which is simultaneously executed by the regional powers in the context of the credibility loss of the UN mediation. Also, the noncompliance of UN mediators' strategies by the parties of the conflict and the absence of accountability in Syria will be tackled, focusing on the period starting from the initiation of the Astana Talks in January 2017.

1.2. Historical Background and the Conflict before the UN Mediation

Syria already had many structural problems increasing its potential for a conflict eruption before the Arab Spring. The state has been ruled by the same family since 1970. A one-party regime suppressed all alternative political groups and controlled all of the state devices and media (Ma'oz, 2022, p. 258). State violence and repression, growing income inequality between the sectarian lines, and the following sectarian polarization were some of the features of pre-2011 Syria (Sorenson, 2016). Also, the country was highly corrupt. According to the 2011 Corruption Perceptions Index, the nation was placed 129th out of 183 countries (Transparency International, 2011). Another reason for the nationwide discontent was the environmental challenges. Syria suffered a multiyear period of catastrophic drought, which resulted in agricultural failures, economic problems, and population displacement, all of which played a significant part at the beginning of the conflict (Gleick, 2014).

Besides the structural causes, the proliferation of the pro-democracy demonstrations by the effect of the Arab Spring and state violence against civilians ignited mass demonstrations, and they constituted the proximate causes of the conflict. The conflict erupted after some teenagers were detained in Daraa for spray-painting slogans opposing the government in March 2011. Following the detentions, the protesters congregated in many cities, demanding political reforms and freedom for political prisoners (BBC, 2016). The security forces intervened against the protesters with live ammunition, and dozens of demonstrators were killed by the regime forces in Daraa in order to stop the growing anti-regime demonstrations (Human Rights Watch, 2011). Syrian President Bashar al-Assad made his first speech on March 30 in the parliament since the uprising and blamed foreign powers and foreign-based media while not offering any political reforms demanded by the protestors (Chulov & Marsh, 2018).

In late April, the UN Secretary-General requested Syrian authorities to abide by global human rights principles, with a particular emphasis on free speech and peaceful assembly. At

the same time, President Barack Obama of the US strongly denounced the Syrian government for the violent acts used against demonstrators. On May 9, the European Union (EU) applied sanctions on the Syrian government, comprising of a weapons embargo and freezing assets of the key government officials who were responsible for the violent oppression of civilians. The United States sanctions followed these sanctions by the EU. Bashar al-Assad and six other prominent Syrian officers had their US property blocked by a US Executive Order.

In June 2011, Jisr ash-Shugur witnessed the first armed rebellion against the regime. Protesters took over government facilities and captured army weapons. The Syrian government claimed that the rebels killed 120 troops (Karouny, 2011). Considering the mounting violence, the government of Syria organized a "national dialogue," claiming to open the way for democratic reform; however, the opposition leaders boycotted it because of the government's violent attacks on the opposition. In mid-July, Hillary Clinton, Secretary of State, stated that Bashar al-Assad's right to rule was damaged (Epstein, 2011).

On July 29, former members of the Syrian forces declared that they had established a new armed group called the Free Syrian Army (FSA). On August 3, the Security Council strongly denounced the serious abuses of human rights in Syria and the government's aggression against civilians. Also, it demanded a stop to the carnage and called on the sides to act carefully and refrain from retaliation. The Syrian government was subjected to increased Western pressure during August. The US banned new US investments in Syria, put an embargo on Syrian oil, and froze the property of the Syrian government in the US. Also, The US, Britain, Germany, and France urged Bashar al-Assad to resign by separate declarations.

The Syrian National Council (SNC) was formally established on August 23 as a Syrian opposition alliance comprising both domestic and international Syrian groups aiming to overthrow the Syrian government and build a modern, democratic nation. In the following

month, the EU imposed more sanctions on the Syrian government, and Turkey severed all ties with the Assad administration.

On October 4, 2011, the first reflection of the geopolitical tensions within the Security Council on the conflict in Syria took place. Russia and China blocked a UNSC resolution condemning the Syrian government's repression of pro-democracy demonstrators and requesting an end to human rights violations immediately. On November 2, the Arab League announced a plan demanding the Syrian government to cease the violence without delay; the plan also included prisoner releases and the government's participation in talks with the opposition. Despite Syria's acceptance of the proposed plan, the Arab League had to freeze Syria's membership as al-Assad was unwilling to abide. They decided to enact economic and political measures until the Assad regime complied with the peace plan. In the same month, the Arab League prohibited Syrian officials from traveling, halted civil aviation between Syria and its member states, and froze properties linked to the government. Turkey also joined these sanctions.

In December 2011, Syria accepted the Arab League observatory mission, including the government to start discussions with the opposition, remove security troops and heavy weaponry from civilian areas, and grant entry to media and civil activists. However, concurrently, Jabal al-Zawiya massacres happened in the Idlib region between the Syrian army and rebel fighters. According to human rights and opposition activists, Syrian security forces murdered about 200 people (BBC, 2012a). On December 26, peace monitors from the Arab League arrived in Syria, and two days after their arrival, 750 prisoners whom the government captured were released in order to show goodwill to the peace plan.

By the new year, the LAS urged al-Assad to give up authority to his senior deputy, as well as to create a unified government and to organize fresh elections in Syria. In the first month of 2012, the Arab League declared the suspension of its monitoring mission due to mounting

violence. In early February, Russia and China vetoed a draft UNSC resolution backing the LAS' demand for al-Assad's resignation as well as asking sides to avoid violence and retaliation.

The Arab League requested a joint mission with the United Nations (UN) in Syria in February 2012. Two weeks after the Security Council's failure, a resolution that has a similar language to the vetoed draft was passed by the General Assembly (GA). The adopted draft included a strong condemnation of the Syrian authorities' rampant and organized human rights abuses and an endorsement of the Arab League's plan. This was the last event before the appointment of Kofi Annan and the UN's peacemaking intervention.

Early clashes between the geopolitical competition within the United Nations' structure revealed themselves during the Arab League's mediation several times. Firstly, just before the Arab League's peacemaking intervention, a resolution condemning the state violence by the Syrian authorities failed to be adopted by the vetoes from Russia and China. Secondly, on February 4, a resolution draft promoting an inclusive Syrian-led political transition and support for the Arab League's plan failed to pass by the same vetoes.

The government's legitimacy was weakened through this phase. In parallel with Hillary Clinton's remarks on the legitimacy loss of al-Assad rule (Epstein, 2011), the Syrian National Council was formed, claiming to be the sole legitimate representative of Syria. Many international powers endorsed the newly formed opposition, expressing doubts about al-Assad's legitimacy. The Arab League, Turkey, and the West supported these legitimacy concerns by imposing sanctions on the Syrian government (BBC, 2011).

Bercovitch and Gartner (2006) claimed that mediation by international organizations and the usage of the directive have more likelihood of settling high-intensity disputes. In consideration of the initial phase of the crisis, the extreme international pressures for dispute settlement and the directive strategy of the Arab League's mediation forced Assad to take a defensive position and disobey the Arab League's plan. The League's mediation was considered

biased by the Syrian regime. The regime saw the Arab League as an intervention by Qatar and Saudi Arabia, which sought Assad to resign (Lundgren, 2016, p. 3). The impartiality concerns of the regime were combined with Russia and China's protection in the international arena. Thus, the regime continued its intransigence and obstructionist attitude.

Considering Bercovitch and Gartner's (2006) argument that regional bodies have greater success in resolving minor conflicts, the Arab League's mediation initiative was timely. The League called for a joint mission with the United Nations when the violence was escalating and the situation signaling a shift to a civil war, and Kofi Annan was selected to serve as the first joint envoy of the UN/LAS on the Syrian conflict.

1.3. Research Questions and Objectives

This thesis intends to investigate the role of UN mediation in a conflict under an internationally polarized atmosphere by taking the Syrian conflict as its case. This research seeks to address the factors affecting the UN's credibility in the Syrian conflict mediation. While discussing that topic, it will also examine how and to what extent these factors influenced the UN mediation.

The intent of this research is to build on the existing peacemaking literature by filling the gap of the credibility loss of the UN mediation. Our conceptualization of peacemaking in civil wars has changed as the characteristics of civil wars have transformed in the era of globalization (Kaldor, 2013). Internationalized civil wars brought the necessity of new strategies and international reconciliation in a conflict in order to sustain the credibility of a peacemaking intervention. Most studies focused on macro-level factors hampering the UN's credibility (Touval, 1994; Binder & Heupel, 2014; Bâli & Rana, 2017; Abboud, 2021; Hellmüller, 2022; Murithi, 2022) or addressing some of the micro-level factors including individual mediators' credibility (Kydd, 2003; Maoz & Terris, 2008) mediator's identity and

strategy (Bercovitch & Gartner, 2006; Hill, 2015; Reid, 2017; Hinnebusch & Zartman, 2016), civil society's inclusion (Nilsson, 2012; Zanker, 2014; Alzoubi, 2017; Hellmüller & Zahar, 2019; Hellmüller, 2020) nature of the conflict, (Greig & Regan, 2008; Beardsley, 2011; Heydemann, 2013; Zartman, 2015) separately.

This study contributes to peacemaking studies by investigating all the factors causing the credibility loss of the UN mediation. The research accepts all international conflicts as unique, even if they have a number of similarities. That is why it offers a contextual study that will contribute to comprehending the UN mediation's credibility loss in the conflict in Syria. Offering a broad perspective of the credibility loss of UN peacemaking in Syria and helping to solve the conundrum of unsuccessful peacemaking interventions by the UN in internationalized civil wars like the case of Syria is the main objective of this paper.

This research hypothesizes that the clash of interests among the international stakeholders over Syria negatively affected the UN mediation by creating fragmentation in the UN Security Council. Even if the mediators' strategies matter in the mediation process, the restrictive factors in Syria crippled most of the chance for a successful reconciliation by damaging the credibility of the UN mediation process itself. Also, in the event of atrocity crimes, the absence of accountability violated the UN's transnational values and weakened its credibility. Lastly, the Astana process has accelerated the UN process' legitimacy loss by ending its monopoly in peacemaking and absorbing Geneva's legitimacy gradually. The current UN mediator, Pedersen, was constrained to follow the line drawn by Astana since he has minimal leverage over the parties. As a result of these macro-level elements, the UN's peacemaking in Syria became paralyzed, and UN mediation passed the point of credibility. The UN mediation has lost legitimacy in the opinions of conflicting sides, civil society, UNSC permanent members (P5), and other international stakeholders.

1.4. Methodology

This study aims to use a qualitative research strategy, as Bryman defined (2016). This study's research technique stresses words and contents rather than quantification in gathering and analyzing data. Foster's (1995) qualitative research strategy will be followed as Bryman (2016) summarized his six-step research process in his book. However, since there were no subjects for the research, the second step, including the selection of relevant sites and subjects, will be skipped.

Several steps were followed through the collection and process of the data. Firstly, general research questions were determined, and the relevant data for answering the research questions were collected. Existing documents, books and journals, reports published by international organizations, reports and letters published by the UN mediators, interviews, the UNSC resolutions, verbatim records of the UNSC meetings, and news from credible agencies were used as the primary sources. After the data collection, the data were classified for analyzing them in the relevant chapters. The findings and their relations with the theoretical framework of the topic were analyzed by using grounded theory, which was coined by Glaser and Strauss (2017) as a method of applying inductive reasoning for qualitative research.

A case study approach, which is a comprehensive analysis of a specific case for social research, was used in this thesis (Bryman, 2016, p. 66). The Syrian conflict was determined as the case for the analysis. The reason for choosing the Syrian conflict was its allowance to analyze the structural challenges to mediation intrinsic in the UN body and the effect of alternative peacemaking interventions on the UN peacemaking. The division of the UNSC member states also gives the case a distinct feature. While P3 countries - the USA, the UK, and France - are anti-regime, Russia continues to support the Assad regime by enjoying China's abstention. This case study examines the actors of the conflict, mediators, events, and the UN and Astana peace processes, as well as the factors affecting the UN's credibility. The Syrian

conflict helps the study to reach its aim because it allows it to explore the influence of opposing interests within the UN body as well as assess the effect of an alternative peacemaking framework on the UN's credibility.

1.4.1. A New Way to Measure Credibility

This study examines the factors undermining the credibility of the UN peacemaking in the Syrian civil war and investigates their interwoven nature. In parallel with this purpose, this research defines four factors affecting the UN mediation's credibility: (1) Fragmentation of the UN Security Council as a result of geopolitical competition. (2) The alternative mediation process, which ends the monopoly of the UN in conflict mediation, and further weakens Geneva's already shaky leverage. (3) Lack of credible commitments to mediation and minimal progress. (4) Absence of accountability in the face of atrocity crimes committed by the parties of the conflict and its effects on transnational methods of the UN.

The study defines the first two factors as macro-level independent variables, which also influence micro-level elements like the mediation strategy and nature of the dispute. The third factor is a micro-level variable considering it can also be affected by the strategies and identities of mediators and the conflict's nature. Since the last factor directly affects the United Nations' legitimacy, it is also described as a macro-level factor. These four indicators help this study in analyzing the elements undermining the legitimacy of the United Nations in conflict mediation in Syria.

In line with its objective, this thesis analyzes all four elements affecting the credibility of the UN mediation by focusing on their interrelated nature. The study takes the initiation of the Astana Talks in January 2017 as its starting point to assess the criteria presented for two reasons. First, this research claims that the Astana process challenged the UN's liberal mediation method by ending its monopoly in peacemaking in Syria and ignited the credibility loss process of Geneva. Moreover, it further diminished the leverage of the UN as a mediator, leaving little

room for maneuvering for the individual mediators. Second, it aims to analyze all factors undermining the credibility and legitimacy of the UN peacemaking by focusing on their interrelated and interactive nature, and it requires simultaneous analysis of all four indicators. For this aim, the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria Geir O. Pedersen's continuing mediation period and a part of his predecessor Staffan de Mistura's incumbency will be investigated in the context of challenges to UN peacemaking in Syria.

The new method of credibility measurement is also applicable and has the potential to answer future conflicts considering the trend toward multipolarity. The shifting world order to a multipolar system brings new approaches to mediation. The rising powers, particularly Russia and China, challenged the US-led world order. With the intensifying geopolitical competition, the number of vetoes in the Security Council has also increased significantly (Hellmüller, 2022). The lack of agreement among the Security Council members paved the way for new peacemaking interventions. For instance, the relationship between Geneva and Astana in Syria might be compared to the mediation processes in Libya between UN-initiated Berlin and Russian-led Moscow (Abboud, 2021, p. 342).

Since this thesis hypothesizes that the geopolitical competition within the Security Council on Syria manifested itself in a new peacemaking initiation by the challengers to the world order, it is possible to witness more internationalized conflict and new peacemaking interventions in the future. The four proposed criteria of credibility measurement for UN mediation will be applicable and generalizable in any other internationalized conflict when major powers' geopolitical interests collide, and this collision reflects itself among the Security Council.

1.5. Thesis Structure

There are independent and dependent variables for a mediator in the mediation process. The characteristics of the actors, the nature of the conflict, and the strength of the mandate are independent variables in the conflict, regardless of the mediator's peacemaking method. Dependent variables are related directly to the mediator's agency and strategy. This thesis mainly focuses on the independent variables or, in other words, macro-level factors such as geopolitical competition among the stakeholders and structural disputes within the Security Council with regard to Geneva's credibility loss in Syria.

The purpose of the research is to identify the variables that contribute to the credibility loss of the UN mediation in deeply internationalized civil wars. The second goal is to fill a gap in the literature about the UN mediation's credibility loss, as there is not enough research addressing the effects of all four indicators in one study, and they limit their analyses to one or two of the criteria in most cases. Lastly, the thesis aims to explore what could be done to end the paralysis of the UN's peacemaking in Syria.

Before analyzing the effects of the macro-level factors, comprehending the nature of the dispute and mediators' strategies under the dynamic context of the conflict are essential. In parallel with this objective, literature on international conflict mediation and the UN peacemaking process in Syria will be presented in the next chapter. The chapter will cover the mediation missions of Kofi Annan, Lakhdar Brahimi, Staffan de Mistura, and Geir O. Pedersen by mentioning the main events of the conflict and mediators' strategies. The chapter is required to understand the conflict and the UN mediation comprehensively.

There are two competing forces in the United Nations. While the transnational forces include a global set of norms and interests such as human dignity, human rights, and world peace and security, the UN, as an intergovernmental institution, represents the interests of its member nations, especially the permanent security council members. When these transnational

and intergovernmental forces clash in a dispute such as the Syrian conflict, intergovernmental characteristics of the UN outweigh transnational values such as protecting human rights, preventing mass atrocities, sustaining peace and stability, and achieving the common good (Cronin, 2002). In the third chapter, the clash of interests in the UN Security Council and its fragmented structure in the context of the clash between transnational and intergovernmental forces will be stressed. In addition to the UN structure, the results of the Security Council's fragmentation over the Syrian dispute and the reasons for the paralysis of Geneva, and the UN-related credibility loss will be covered.

The second part of the analysis requires a focus on the end of the UN's monopoly in peacemaking in Syria by tackling the Astana peace process. The UN Security Council resolution 2254 in December 2015 was invoked by Russia, Turkey, and Iran to start an independent peace process than the United Nations in January 2017. The Astana process became an alternative to the Geneva process. With the Astana process, four de-escalation zones were determined, and the Syrian conflict was significantly de-escalated. However, there are claims that Russia's efforts to have discussions outside the Geneva process might weaken the UN's multilateral peacemaking process (Collin, 2018). One important point of the analysis will be whether Astana talks create a competition between it and the UN's Geneva process or whether they have a symbiotic relationship and a mutually supportive nature. As the thesis hypothesizes, the fourth chapter will investigate the undermining effect of the Astana Process on the UN mediation's credibility, as well as will evaluate the alternative peacemaking process as the manifestation of the world's shift to a multipolar world order.

Finally, the Conclusion chapter will consist of two sections. First, all four credibility-undermining elements will be reassessed under one title by emphasizing their interrelated nature. Second, the concluding thoughts and an answer for what Geneva could do in order to survive will be presented.

CHAPTER TWO

THE UN MEDIATION IN THE SYRIAN CONFLICT

2.1. Literature on International Conflict Mediation

Before diving into the UN's peacemaking process in Syria, reviewing some of the theories related to international conflict mediation is crucial. Bercovitch and Gartner (2008) identified three main approaches to conflict resolution; Power-based measures, such as imposing sanctions or deterrence; rights-based approaches, such as appealing to legal standards through judicial processes; and interest-based approaches, which include finding common interest through negotiations between disputing parties or third-party mediation. The United Nations defines mediation as a procedure in which a third party helps two or more disputants in preventing, managing, or settling a dispute by assisting them in developing mutually applicable agreements (United Nations, 2012, p. 4).

Bercovitch (1992) defined eight essential features of mediation: Mediation is an extension of the reconciliation attempts of the conflicting parties. The role of the mediator can be filled by a single person, a group, or an organization. It does not bind the parties involved and does not address violence or coercion. Mediation raises the number of actors involved, and thus, it changes the structure of the dispute. The mediator's intent of joining in a dispute includes the will to influence, change, settle, or modify the dispute in a specific way. Mediators have their own beliefs and motives about the conflict, and they bring ideas, information, and even interests of their own or the organizations/groups they represent deliberately or unconsciously. Mediation is an optional method based on voluntariness, giving disputant sides the power to decide the resolution of their argument. Lastly, mediation works on an unplanned, spontaneous, and contingent basis. Mediation as a dispute-settling third-party conflict resolution method, the

parties of the conflict, the mediator, the mediation process, and the context of it are the components of a mediation system, and without considering all of these factors, it is impossible to analyze mediation (Bercovitch, 1992; Bercovitch & Gartner, 2008).

Bercovitch (1986) also asserted that the outcome of an international conflict mediation depends on three main factors: the identity and properties of the disputing sides, the characteristics of the conflict, and the identity and features of the mediator. Firstly, the profile and features of the conflicting sides highly affect the outcome. When the combatants are acknowledged as the authorized representatives of their factions, mediation has a higher probability of success (Bercovitch, 1985). The odds of effective mediation correlated with how distinguishable and united each party is. Similarly, a larger power gap between conflicting parties reduces the likelihood of effective mediation (Ott, 1972).

Secondly, the nature of the conflict significantly impacts the outcome of mediation. Mediation's effectiveness depends on how much weight the parties place on the disputed topics. Instances when crucial concerns are at stake, such as problems of territorial control or sovereignty, are unlikely to be resolved by mediators (Bercovitch, 1985). The duration of the conflict is another factor for effective mediation. The relationship between duration and effective mediation is assumed as a positive correlation. As the burden of the dispute grows, the conflicting parties will be more likely to reach a negotiated settlement (Greig & Reagan, 2008; Pruitt, 2013). Additionally, the intensity is a substantial component of the mediation. For example, according to Beardsley (2011), the intensity of the conflict affects the chance of mediation being successful.

Lastly, the mediator's identity and features are an undeniable factor of effective mediation. Bercovitch and Houston (1993) discussed how a mediator's personality and actions could affect the outcome of international dispute resolution. They concluded that the likelihood of effective mediation is increased by high-ranking mediators who have prestige, the ability to

commit resources, and leverage to influence the process and result of mediation. Besides, Bercovitch and Houston opposed the idea that the impartiality of mediators works best (Young, 2016, pp. 81-82) and found that a settlement is more likely to be reached when mediators have political bonds to the disputants. Bercovitch (1986, p 164) clearly stated that the fundamental component of effective international conflict mediation is resources, not impartiality. Kydd (2003) investigated in which conditions mediators are more credible in the eyes of conflicting parties. Maoz and Terris (2008) asserted that a mediator's credibility significantly affects the acceptance rate of the conflicting parties on the mediator's offerings. Whether the mediator's proposal is credible and whether the proposer can fulfill the promises are the components of a mediator's trustworthiness.

Additionally, mediation methods matter in effective mediation. According to Zartman and Touval (1985), there are three main roles of a mediator: (a) the communicator, (b) the formulator, and (c) the manipulator. Each of these methods has different effects on mediation outcomes. Bercovitch and Gartner defined three types of mediation methods: Communication-facilitative strategies, procedural strategies, and directive methods. The first method is the most pacific of the three, and it has the least capacity to influence the direction of the peacemaking process. The main function of this approach is to facilitate communication between the parties. The procedural methods have influence over the mediation procedure; the mediator can decide on the structure of conversations or the flow of information, but it lacks coercive power. The final way is directive strategies, which constitute substantial power and provide mediators the authority to utilize their resources to manipulate conflicting parties in accordance with their strategies (Bercovitch & Gartner, 2006, pp. 338-339). Bercovitch also asserted that manipulation is the most effective way of mediation. This is because a mediator, as a manipulator, may utilize more resources, such as power and influence to shift a situation in the mediator's favor (Bercovitch, 1986, pp. 164-165).

2.2. UN Mediation in Kofi Annan's Mission

Kofi Annan's incumbency as the UN and the Arab League joint envoy started on February 23, 2012. One day after his appointment, top diplomats of more than 50 states convened in Tunis for the "Friends of Syria" meeting. They urged that Bashar al-Assad stop using violence and permit humanitarian supplies to enter Syria, as well as a UN peacekeeping mission to be sent there. On February 26, a new constitution establishing a multiparty system was passed by Syrian voters in a countrywide referendum; however, the opposition leaders denounced the poll as dishonest (BBC, 2012b).

On March 10, Kofi Annan visited Damascus and met with Bashar al-Assad. He put several proposals on the table before he finalized his plan. The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states agreed to shutter their Syrian missions in the same month. On March 21, the UN Security Council endorsed the six-point plan proposed by Annan, which asked for a stop to violence, access to humanitarian organizations to offer help to people in need, the liberation of captives, the beginning of an inclusive political discussion, and unfettered access for foreign media to the country.

After two weeks of intense diplomacy, the joint Special Envoy Kofi Annan achieved a fragile ceasefire on April 12. The UN Security Council passed the UNSC Resolution 2042, giving the green light for a task force to observe the truce in Syria. Following this, the UN established a 300-person observing mission in Syria (UNSMIS), according to UNSC Resolution 2043, to monitor the execution of the Annan plan and the truce.

During the second month of the United Nations monitoring mission, the state authorities resumed the intervention and appealed to heavy weapons, killing large numbers of civilians. The United Nations reported that 108 people were murdered by the regime forces in the Houla region on May 25 (Oweis, 2012). Soon after the Houla Massacre, Kofi Annan visited Damascus and met with Bashar al-Assad. He called the state authorities to execute the six-point plan.

However, due to the escalated violence, the UN suspended monitoring operations in Syria on June 12.

Kofi Annan managed to convene the international stakeholders under the name "the Action Group for Syria" (The convention later will be mentioned as Geneva I), including the six UNSC members, the EU, Turkey, Qatar, Kuwait, and Iraq. Iran and Saudi Arabia were not invited to the meeting due to the accord among their allies in the UNSC. The summit resulted in an agreement on the Geneva Communiqué by all of the attendees. The Geneva Communiqué included a strong endorsement of the six-point plan, a political transition procedure led by Syria and a transitional government, cessation of violence, and demobilization of armed groups. Also, it provided a design for Syria's future, such as fair multiparty elections, women's inclusion in the transition process, and constitutional reforms.

The situation of Bashar al-Assad in a transition process caused a rift among the US-led West and Russia. While the Russian Federation insisted on not adding a statement to the communiqué on Assad's leave the office or exclusion from the process, the United States authorities believed that Assad's leave was a prerequisite since the opposition would not accept Assad in the political transition process (Hinnebusch & Zartman, 2016, p. 9).

In the end, the Geneva Communiqué stayed on paper. The Security Council was unable to approve a resolution that would support the communiqué. The main disagreement between the P3 states and Russia was the resolution's extent and which chapters of the UN Charter it refers to. While the P3 states asked for a resolution under Chapter VII, believing that a resolution under Chapter VI would not be useful and lacked coercive measures, Russia wanted a resolution under Chapter VI in order to protect the regime. Kofi Annan encouraged a resolution under Chapter VII thinking that it would increase his leverage. However, he also believed that a resolution endorsing the communiqué under Chapter VI would still be useful and serve his strategy (Hill, 2015, pp.467-468).

The UNSC's failure was the breaking point for Annan. Kofi Annan's top-down approach required a strong mandate and unified support from the international community, and without it, he did not find any reason to continue. Eventually, he resigned from his position as the mediator. He has mentioned the Assad regime's discontent with following the peace plan, the opposition's military escalation on the ground, and the lack of unified support from the UN Security Council as the causes of his resignation.

His first trial was to cease the violence throughout the country in order to reach a settlement and prevent a possible civil war. The main problem he faced; the conflict was very distant to a hurting stalemate point. The opposition groups were eager to fight and increase their influence on the ground. Moreover, the Syrian government feared a renewed consolidation of the opposition during the ceasefire, which would end the regime's military predominance on the ground. Also, both the opposition and the Syrian government were not completely under the influence of foreign patrons. The spoilers and rapid escalation of the violence in May brought about the suspension of the mission and ended the ceasefire attempt.

It is indeed the geopolitical competition among the Security Council states that hindered the mandate of the mission and weakened Kofi Annan's leverage. However, the disunity in the UNSC was not the only factor contributing to the downfall. Annan applied mostly a similar plan to its predecessor LAS' plan. He followed a top-down approach, aiming to reconcile the international stakeholders before moving further, which makes his plan dependent on external pressure. His multilateral strategy collided with the different agendas of major and regional powers. Conciliating the international community on the point of conflicting interests was a grueling mission, even for a veteran diplomat like Kofi Annan.

2.3. UN Mediation in Lakhdar Brahimi's Mission

UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon selected Lakhdar Brahimi after Kofi Annan as the new Joint Arab League-United Nations Special Representative for Syria on August 17, 2012. Brahimi believed that the disunity among the UNSC hindered the progress of Kofi Annan's strategy. He also thought the mission was impossible because of external limitations on mediation (Hinnebusch & Zartman, 2016, p. 13).

The United States reiterated its support to UN mediators after the appointment of Lakhdar Brahimi and exercised its coercive power on the Syrian government. On August 20, US President Barack Obama stated that if Syria appealed to chemical attacks, it would increase the likelihood of more direct US intervention in the conflict (Ball, 2012). Concurrently with the external military threats on the regime, Iran declared its support to the Syrian government by stating that it has troops in Syria and will militarily respond if provoked (Black, 2012).

Brahimi started his mission by meeting with both the opposition and the regime figures. Brahimi's second meeting with Bashar al-Assad took place on October 21. When Brahimi mentioned the possibility of Assad resigning, Assad stood by his assertion of being a rightfully elected leader, claiming that he could not step down. The government labeled Brahimi as partial and sided after the meeting (Hinnebusch & Zartman, 2016, p. 13).

The United States officially accepted the Syrian National Coalition (SNC) as the true spokesperson for Syrians, the decision mirrored by the LAS. The LAS gave the SNC Syria's place in their organization. While the regime was losing its legitimacy in the eyes of the West, Brahimi continued his efforts to convene all stakeholders in an international conference. Brahimi convened with high-level diplomats from the US and Russia on January 11, 2013. Following the meeting, Brahimi stated that he did not expect a political settlement soon. After four months of shuttle diplomacy, the US Secretary of State arrived in Moscow in early May,

and the two states came to a consensus to convene an international gathering to resolve the Syrian civil war.

The military escalation on the ground continued concurrently with Brahimi's efforts to gather the international community together. The European Union removed the ban on supplying arms to Syrian insurgents, and the United Nations increased the goal for foreign assistance to Syria, noting the conflict's fast escalation. At the same time, a chemical crisis broke out. The US authorities have determined that the Syrian government resorted to chemical weapons against rebel forces, and on June 13, US President Obama approved direct US military assistance to the rebels (DeYoung & Gearan, 2013). In late August, US Defense Secretary informed BBC, the UK's national broadcaster, that US military troops in the region are ready to act if US President Barack Obama gives the directive to strike Syrian targets (France 24, 2013). In reaction to the State authorities' resort to chemical weapons usage, US President Obama has requested Congress to grant permission for a US military assault on the positions belonging to the Syrian state (Neuman, 2013). Vladimir Putin, President of Russia, answered the moves of the United States and warned the US not to intervene militarily in Syria, expressing that they had strategies if it were to occur (Roberts et al., 2013).

The crisis settled down after mutual steps by the US and Russia. On September 9, Russia offered Syria's surrender of its chemical weapons under international supervision and proposed gradual destruction of them to avert a US military strike. In response, the President of the US declared that he had asked Congress to delay voting on allowing military action against Syria as a diplomatic option is explored. In mid-September, the US and Russia negotiated a broad agreement that called for the chemical arsenal of Syria would be dismantled or eliminated by the next year, thereby putting an end to the danger of American airstrikes (Gordon, 2013). On September 27, all 15 members of the UNSC voted in agreement to pass Resolution 2118, requiring the Syrian government to destroy its chemical weapon stockpile. Also, the resolution

underlined the need for an international peace conference on Syria as soon as possible. The settlement of the chemical weapons crisis paved the way for a consolidated will for an international peace conference on the Syrian conflict.

After a long diplomatic traffic, Brahimi managed to organize a peace summit in collaboration with the US and Russia. The delegations of the Syrian state and the opposition attended the meeting reluctantly after a push from US and Russia. Brahimi could not achieve inviting Iran, even if he thought their presence was significant, to Geneva II because of the pressures from Syrian National Council and the US. The conference started in late January 2014. The Geneva II conference's first round concluded without making any progress. The status of Assad was the main issue of the summit. At the end of the meetings, the parties had not even agreed on a single topic for discussion. The second session of Geneva II discussions was convened on February 10, 2014. Regime and opposition delegates could not reach an accord regarding a plan of action again. Following the failure of peace talks in Geneva, UN mediator Lakhdar Brahimi offered his apologies to Syrians. Four months after the failed conference, Brahimi resigned from his position as the mediator.

Similar to Kofi Annan's approach, Brahimi tried to convene the US and Russia to obtain support from the UNSC. He also believed that the Syrian government's cooperation relied on Russia's inclusion in the process. However, these parties could not be successful in convincing their fighting allies. Both the opposition and the government participated in Geneva II without their will. Also, they believed in a military solution rather than a political solution. Consequently, the intransigence of the warring parties cracked Brahimi's top-down strategy.

Brahimi's strategy also consisted of building leverage on the opposition by convincing its regional supporters, such as Turkey, Qatar, and Saudi Arabia. Brahimi turned to Iran to enhance his leverage over the Assad regime. Iran proposed a four-point proposal for conflict settlement, including a cease of violence, a transitional government, a constitutional revision

aimed at decreasing the president's powers, and fair elections overseen by the United Nations. Brahimi endorsed the plan and presented it to the UN Security Council. However, he was confronted with strong opposition to Iran's plan by the Arab League. Saudi Arabia criticized Brahimi's briefing to the UNSC and voiced his determination to exclude Iran from the resolution of the Syrian conflict (Dergham, 2014). The exclusion of Iran against Brahimi's will damaged his strategy. Additionally, the regional powers continued their support to the warring parties, which helped them to maintain their obstructionist attitude against a political solution, and Brahimi's leverage on the regional powers was not enough to change it.

2.4. UN Mediation in Staffan de Mistura's Mission

The UN Secretary-General appointed the Italian-Swedish diplomat Staffan de Mistura as the new mediator for the Syrian conflict in July 2014, one month after Syria's presidential elections conducted in territories controlled by the regime. President Bashar al-Assad received 88.7% of the votes cast and was reelected for a seven-year term by dubious elections (Reuters, 2014a). Four days after de Mistura's appointment, the UN unanimously adopted UNSC Resolution 2165, which aims to increase access to Syrians in locations that are difficult to reach by enabling the delivery of assistance across borders and war lines. By adopting Resolution 2165, the UNSC also renewed its endorsement of the Geneva Communiqué and welcomed the new mediator.

Staffan de Mistura's incumbency coincided with the emergence of the Islamic State (IS), an extremist armed organization. Islamic State escalated violence in Syria with its horrendous crimes against humanity. In August 2014, the UNSC passed Resolution 2170, condemning armed extremist organizations like the IS and al-Nusra Front for systematic breaches of international law and human. This resolution against extremist groups was followed by the

UNSC Resolution 2199, which the Russian Federation had drafted and aimed at identifying the funding sources of the Islamic State.

On November 3, 2014, Staffan de Mistura presented a new strategy to freeze the war and encourage political settlement. According to Mistura, the Syrian conflict must be halted in local-level in order to effectively address the mounting threat presented by the IS (United Nations, 2014a). Also, de Mistura stated that he had positive conversations with the Syrian President about his plan to imply increasing local ceasefires in various areas (United Nations, 2014b). After the positive response from the Syrian government, de Mistura met with Turkish officials as part of regional negotiations aimed at resolving the Syrian conflict. He also met with a delegation from the Syria National Coalition to discuss his plan to freeze the fighting in Aleppo. Staffan de Mistura continued his efforts to implement local ceasefires in early 2015. On February 18, 2015, he expressed optimism about his plan to suspend fighting in Aleppo during ongoing combat between government forces and entrenched opposition (United Nations, 2015a).

While de Mistura has concentrated his efforts on conversations with the Syrian regime about his proposed local ceasefire in Aleppo, he planned to start a new initiative and organize a series of independent discussions with regional, international, and Syrian stakeholders to gauge their perspectives on resuming peace negotiations in accordance with the Geneva Communiqué of 2012 (United Nations, 2015b). On May 15, de Mistura announced the commencement of negotiations aimed at bringing Syria to the political track. According to de Mistura, 40 Syrian factions, in addition to the Syrian government, would take part in the new negotiations, as would around 20 regional and international parties, including neighboring states and the UNSC permanent members.

Staffan de Mistura increased his visits and meetings with the stakeholders in order to gather them in an international conference. On May 7, de Mistura met with a Saudi minister as

part of the ongoing Geneva negotiations on Syria. Following the meeting, de Mistura emphasized that Saudi Arabia's views had to be taken into consideration during the talks due to the country's standing as a key actor in the region. One week later, he met with officials from the Russian Federation and the United Kingdom in Geneva. In addition, de Mistura did not neglect the importance of the warring parties; he focused on the inner cycle as well as regional and international stakeholders. He met with the delegates of the opposition factions, the Syrian regime, and thirty-nine social and political organizations between May 5 to June 10. He also continued his shuttle diplomacy to mediate the Syrian opposition and the government in the following period.

On July 29, Staffan de Mistura proposed "The four committees initiative." He called on the Syrian parties to convene four thematic committees to handle four major issues: Security, political issues, military issues, the possibility of a ceasefire, and the country's rebuilding (United Nations, 2015c). The Security Council backed Staffan de Mistura's proposal, urging all parties to participate in good faith in the Special Envoy's work and to continue consultations and themed discussions.

Staffan de Mistura stated that it was time for a genuine conversation to resolve the conflict in September 2015, considering the dire humanitarian crisis in Syria (United Nations, 2015d). He managed to convene the highest-ranking diplomats of the US, Russian Federation, Saudi Arabia, and Turkey in Vienna, Austria, hoping to resolve the Syrian conflict. The first session of the Syrian peace talks took place in Vienna on October 30, with foreign ministers from 20 nations in attendance. The participants were referred to as the International Syria Support Group (ISSG). The Syrian government and opposition were excluded from the convention. The ministers agreed that the parties of the conflict must begin political discussions. After the first session of discussions, de Mistura stated that the United Nations is prepared to support any conclusion made at the subsequent round of international discussions in Vienna.

The ISSG's second conference in Vienna resulted in a consensus on the need for a political transition process driven by the Syrians and built upon the Geneva Communiqué. They also agreed on the importance of convening the delegates of the conflicting parties in UN-facilitated formal talks. Since the ISSG tasked Staffan de Mistura with selecting opposition delegates, he attempted to unite the opposition ahead of the scheduled official discussions. Soon after the Vienna Talks, de Mistura met with representatives of the opposition factions and armed rebel groups in Istanbul, Turkey, to brief them on the ISSG summit in Vienna. Between December 9-10, a conference aiming to consolidate the opposition factions and create a unified delegation to participate in upcoming discussions was held in Riyadh. Russia slammed the negotiations for failing to include significant opposition factions. Following the summit, thirty-four opposition factions formed the High Negotiations Committee (HNC).

December 18, 2015, was a milestone for peacemaking in Syria. The UNSC unanimously passed Resolution 2254, which endorsed a plan for peace in Syria and established a timeframe for discussions. It also reaffirmed the 2012 Geneva Communiqué and endorsed the ISSG's statement in Vienna Talks. The UNSC requested the UN Secretary-General to assemble the opposition and government for formal discussions on a transition process. One year later, a new emerging peacemaking intervention by Russia, Iran, and Turkey, namely Astana Talks, set this resolution as their legal basis. The UN's support raised the expectations for the upcoming negotiations.

On January 29, 2016, the UN-facilitated peace negotiations for Syria began in Geneva, with the top objective being a comprehensive ceasefire, humanitarian relief, and the elimination of the danger presented by the Islamic State. At the start, both sides refused to come together in the same room. Intra-Syrian negotiations to resolve five years of bloodshed started with discussions between the UN envoy and the opposition's HNC. One day after meeting with leaders of the HNC, de Mistura convened with a delegation from the Syrian government. Also,

de Mistura declared the formation of the Women's Advisory Board (WAB), an advisory committee consisting of twelve women, for the United Nations-mediated peace talks in Geneva.

On February 3, Staffan de Mistura ordered a suspension of the discussions, saying they would resume on February 25. Syria's government and opposition have blamed each other for the suspension of Geneva peace negotiations. According to the Syrian government, the suspension was the result of the opposition, who took orders from Turkey and the Gulf states. However, the opposition's HNC stated that they would not return until the situation on the ground changed, blaming government forces for bombing and starving people. In the following days, the International Syria Support Group (ISSG) announced in Munich that humanitarian access to besieged locations would begin in a week, and an ISSG task team would develop methods for a nationwide cessation of fighting since the conference was held during the Syrian government's Aleppo offensive.

On February 22, a deal was announced by the top diplomats of the US and Russia, as co-chairs of the ISSG in Munich, on the conditions of a statewide truce in Syria. A Ceasefire Task Force was created, and the ceasefire was set to begin on February 27. The UNSC also passed Resolution 2268, supporting the joint statement issued in Munich. Syrian opposition and government officials resumed their negotiations under UN mediation. Aside from the negotiations, two task groups created by the ISSG have been given the responsibility of ensuring that thousands of Syrians get humanitarian relief after the ceasefire agreement.

On March 18, the latest session of intra-Syrian negotiations came to a conclusion; de Mistura stated that the "proximity system" of the talks, in which participants meet indirectly through his mediation, had helped the talks going forward (United Nations, 2016a). On March 24, Staffan de Mistura concluded the second session of the talks by releasing a paper on the "commonalities" and said that the negotiations might resume by the second week of April (United Nations, 2016b). On April 12, de Mistura made a visit to Tehran. He emphasized the

necessity of talking with Iranian officials since they "have an influence" and may give important recommendations (United Nations, 2016c). One day after de Mistura's Tehran visit, a new round of peace negotiations to resolve Syria's five-year conflict was started. However, the parties could not make any progress, and the opposition delegation announced a pause in the intra-Syrian talks.

Staffan de Mistura benefited from the partial ceasefire between February 27 and early July 2016. He achieved the ceasefire with assistance from the international community, particularly the agreement between the US and Russia. However, the negotiations were not fruitful, and no tangible results could be achieved. The main use of the ceasefire was to deliver humanitarian help to the Syrians. On April 21, Staffan de Mistura announced that the UN reached more than five hundred thousand civilians during the ceasefire and, they evacuated five hundred people from multiple besieged regions (United Nations, 2016d).

In late April, the ceasefire agreement started to be broken. A rebel group conquered the city of Jisr al-Shughur as a consequence of a fresh operation conducted in the northwestern part of Syria. On April 28, de Mistura cautioned that the current session of negotiations had been shadowed by a significant deterioration in the halt of hostilities and urged Russian and US officials to support saving the "barely alive" accord (United Nations, 2016e). He met with Russian Federation Minister of Foreign Affairs Sergey Lavrov to discuss resuming the cessation of hostilities deal. On May 19, de Mistura warned that the credibility of the following session of negotiations would be jeopardized unless humanitarian access was improved and Syria's cessation of hostilities was restored (United Nations, 2016f).

On June 26, Staffan de Mistura met with top officials from the US and Russia in Geneva. Following the meeting, he announced that he hopes to begin peace talks in late August. However, he halted the regular international humanitarian task force meeting in Geneva in August, saying it made "no sense" to continue until there was a halt in the fighting to allow

supply convoys to reach besieged towns (United Nations, 2016g). Russia and the US reached a ceasefire between the Syrian government and US-backed opposition groups, including the HNC, while continuing to attack al-Nusra Front and the IS on September 12. Soon after the deal, the violence erupted, and the Syrian government declared that it would no longer respect the truce.

The violence continued to increase in the following months, especially in rebel-controlled Aleppo, and the international arena could not broker a truce. The UNSC failed to pass a resolution aiming to stop the violence because of the disunity among its member states. Firstly, in October, the UNSC failed to adopt two resolutions aimed at putting a stop to the carnage in Syria's besieged eastern Aleppo. The first resolution submitted by France and Spain was rejected because Russia voted against it. The second resolution, submitted by Russia, was likewise rejected by the Council due to a lack of support from a majority of its members. Secondly, on December 5, the United Nations Security Council failed to pass a resolution seeking a seven-day truce in Aleppo to let humanitarian supplies reach those besieged in the city because permanent members Russia and China voted against it. After these failures, the UN General Assembly passed a resolution requesting an immediate cessation of all hostilities in Syria by a vote of 122 in favor, 13 against, and 36 abstentions.

In late December, Turkey, Russia, and Iran are scheduled to meet in Astana in mid-January 2017 to seek a cessation of hostilities in Syria as part of a conference described as a "confidence-building step complementary to the Geneva process" (Erkus, 2016). Additionally, Turkey and Russia reached an agreement on a national ceasefire plan for Syria, which will go into effect on December 30, 2016. The truce excluded Islamic State, the al-Nusra Front, and the People's Defense Units (YPG), and an Ahrar al-Sham official denied signing it. Staffan de Mistura praised the announcement of a statewide ceasefire between the government and armed opposition groups. Also, the UNSC passed Resolution 2336 on December 31, which backed

Russian Federation and Turkish efforts to end the Syrian conflict and jumpstart a new political process.

On January 23, 2017, the Astana peace process officially began. The Syrian opposition delegation met with the representatives of the Assad government in Astana for indirect talks labeled the International Meeting on the Syrian settlement, which was sponsored by Russia, Turkey, and Iran. The UN envoy Staffan de Mistura also attended the discussions. The sponsor states agreed to form a trilateral body to supervise and execute the truce. Staffan de Mistura evaluated the deal as a concrete step toward implementing Security Council resolutions on the matter. Secretary-General António Guterres also stated that the UN presence in Astana was critical in order to restart the discussions.

Under the supervision of the UN, the Geneva IV peace talks on Syria took place with the participation of the Syrian government and the Syrian opposition on February 23. Direct conversations between the two parties could not be achieved in the peace talks. While the negotiations continued in Geneva, on February 28, Russia and China vetoed a UN Security Council resolution that would have imposed sanctions for the use of chemical weapons by the regime. The UN-mediated intra-Syrian negotiations ended on March 3 with a clear agenda and intentions to continue later in March.

Russia, Iran, and Turkey gathered for peace negotiations in Astana for the third time in mid-March. These conversations led to Iran joining Turkey and Russia as guarantor countries. Concerned by the recent increase of violence in Syria, the UN Special Envoy for Syria has asked Iran, Russia, and Turkey to take immediate measures to maintain the truce that has been in effect since late December 2016. While the UN mediator applied to Astana in order to reduce the violence on the ground, Geneva was struggling to include all parties in the negotiations. In protest of the High Negotiations Committee's policies, the Kurdish National Council resigned from the Syrian opposition's HNC. The Kurdish National Council (KNC) stated that the HNC

failed to include the Kurdish issue after withdrawing from the Geneva talks. The Geneva V Conference was completed without the participation of the KNC and without any tangible results.

Staffan de Mistura faced a chemical weapons crisis like the 2013's chemical crisis. The regime bombed Khan Shaykun in the Idlib governorate with chemical weapons on April 4, 2017. The US launched 59 Tomahawk cruise missiles from the Mediterranean Sea into Syria on April 7, targeting the Syrian government-controlled Shayrat Airbase. The action was carried out under the direction of US President Donald Trump in response to chemical attacks on Khan Shaykhun. Staffan de Mistura stated that the chemical weapons attack following US airstrikes and escalated combat on the ground had put the delicate peace process at grave risk. He stressed the importance of the US and Russia's collaboration to calm the situation and promote the political process (United Nations, 2017a). On the same day with de Mistura's call, Russia vetoed a Security Council resolution condemning the use of chemical weapons in Syria and urging the Syrian government to assist with an inquiry into the attack.

On May 4, representatives from Russia, Iran, and Turkey signed a pact to establish "de-escalation zones" in Syria during the fourth round of Astana negotiations. Staffan de Mistura, the UN envoy, also attended the meeting and praised the idea of creating de-escalation zones in Syria as an important positive step. Also, de Mistura stated that the dynamics of the discussions that began in Astana would help the following UN-mediated talks in Geneva.

The United Nations-mediated negotiations to help resolve the Syrian war were held in mid-May in Geneva. Staffan de Mistura expressed satisfaction that some progress had been achieved. In Geneva VI, the opposition and the government sat in the same room for the first time since the beginning of the conflict. Both sides agreed on de-escalation of the conflict and forming a constitutional committee. The outcomes validated the Astana process because a

compromise between the stakeholders was achieved in Geneva soon after the agreement was signed between the Astana guarantor states.

The conflict witnessed disunity in the UN Security Council in the Fall of 2017. First, due to Russia's veto, the Security Council failed to pass a resolution in late October, extending the term of a joint UN-OPCW body tasked with identifying the perpetrators of chemical weapons attacks in Syria. Second, the United Nations Security Council rejected two resolutions in November, one sponsored by the United States and the other by Bolivia. As a result, the Security Council once again failed to prolong the panel examining the use of chemical weapons in Syria. Under this polarized atmosphere, de Mistura tried to consolidate the opposition since he believed a unified representation of the opposition in Geneva Talks was crucial. The opposition factions convened in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, on November 22, 2017. Following the meetings, Syria's opposition parties announced a deal to send a united delegation to the next round of UN-mediated peace negotiations in Geneva. Staffan de Mistura also emphasized the importance of forming a unified front with the opposition before the next round of Geneva negotiations. Also, de Mistura indicated that neither party's preconditions would be accepted in the next session of Geneva negotiations (United Nations, 2017c). However, the eighth session of Syria peace negotiations in Geneva ended without a breakthrough. Syria's government delegation left the UN-mediated peace negotiations in Geneva, saying it would not return unless the opposition pulled back its demand that President Bashar al-Assad has no part in any interim post-war government. After the failed negotiations, de Mistura stated that it was a missed opportunity, and he blamed Syrian government officials for the failure (United Nations, 2017d).

On January 30, 2018, Russia hosted the Syrian National Dialogue Congress, which gathered 1,500 delegates in Sochi. The negotiations reached an agreement on a new constitution. The major Syrian opposition coalition SNC boycotted the event. The SNC also chastised UN Special Envoy Staffan de Mistura for participating in the summit. In February,

the Security Council unanimously adopted Resolution 2401, calling for a 30-day ceasefire in Syria and the urgent removal of sieges on war-torn areas such as eastern Ghouta. Staffan de Mistura called on all parties to facilitate full implementation of the UNSC Resolution (United Nations, 2018a).

The Astana Process for Syrian Peace held its ninth round in mid-May. Staffan de Mistura was also present at the negotiations. The discussions centered on how Syria would be governed; a timeframe and process for drafting a new constitution; and conducting elections as the foundation for a Syrian-led, Syrian-owned approach to end the conflict. All sides agreed to keep the de-escalation zones in effect. Following months, de Mistura intensified his efforts to find a path forward for the implementation of a settlement and the creation of an UN-facilitated committee on drafting a new constitution as part of the Geneva process and in line with Security Council Resolution 2254. Staffan de Mistura referred to Astana guarantor states in order to achieve his aim. In a separate summit from the Astana talks in Tehran, de Mistura had meetings with the presidents of Turkey, Russia, and Iran. He asked all parties involved in the conflict to work together to avoid a tragedy in Idlib, the last rebel stronghold. On September 17, Russia and Turkey agreed to establish a buffer zone in Idlib ten days after the summit in Tehran.

On October 17, 2018, four years and four months after his appointment, the United Nations Special Envoy for Syria, Staffan de Mistura, informed the Security Council that he would step down at the end of the following month. António Guterres, Secretary-General of the United Nations, has appointed experienced Norwegian diplomat Geir O. Pedersen as the new Special Envoy for Syria. Staffan de Mistura continued his mission until January 2019. He worked to create a constitutional committee until he stepped down. On October 26, he met with the Syrian Foreign Minister in Damascus, and discussed how to maintain a constitutional committee's credibility and legitimacy (United Nations, 2018d). In December, de Mistura

convened high-level leaders from Iran, Russia, and Turkey in Geneva to discuss the potential of forming a reliable and inclusive constitutional committee.

Staffan de Mistura faced many challenges and stayed in his office for more than four years. He tried to revive the Geneva process, and he could achieve that by gathering international stakeholders in Vienna. The peace talks in Vienna paved the way for a Security Council resolution. The UN Security Council passed Resolution 2254, which established a road map for the Syrian peace process and set a timetable for negotiations in December 2015. Even if the resolution was under the Chapter VI of the UN Charter and lack of coercive measures, the resolution shaped the UN's Geneva as well as being a base for the Astana peace process.

The UNSC Resolution 2254 was not enough by itself to revive the talks; de Mistura appealed to Russia and US in order to convene the Syrian government and the opposition to an international peace conference. The parties' lack of consent and reluctant participation in the negotiations hindered any breakthrough in the following year. In fact, the opposition and the Syrian government refused to stay in the same room until Geneva VI in May 2017. The effect of the Astana peace process was non-negligible for this convention. The Astana peace process started in January 2017, and de Mistura attended many of the summits in person to obtain leverage over the warring parties. While he saw Astana as a mutually supportive process, in reality, the guarantor states paid lip service to Geneva and served for their own agenda and peacemaking approach. The debate of Astana's undermining effect on UN peacemaking will be covered thoroughly in chapter four of this thesis.

Along with the Geneva process, Staffan de Mistura tried to achieve local ceasefires to de-escalate the violence on the ground, which he believed was a major obstacle to peacemaking. However, none of his local ceasefire attempts, as well as the nationwide ceasefires, were durable until the agreement on de-escalation zones by the Astana guarantor states in 2017. These acts of violence against de Mistura's strategy escalated the erosion of the UN peacemaking in Syria.

Staffan de Mistura's most significant initiative was trying to form a legitimate and credible constitutional committee to make a new constitution that facilitates the political transition and ends the conflict. The final statement of the Syrian National Dialogue Congress in Sochi in January 2018 appealed to the UN to shape the structure of the constitutional committee and demanded de Mistura's assistance in forming the committee. Staffan de Mistura agreed with the Astana guarantor states on a new constitution-making process in the ninth round of the Astana Talks in May 2018. The constitutional committee was supposed to include 50 representatives from the opposition, 50 from the Syrian government, and 50 from civil society and independents. Staffan de Mistura achieved a compromise between the stakeholders on a middle-third list in September after meeting with the representatives of Iran, Turkey, and Russia. He waited until the violence on the ground decreased and the warring parties abided by the de-escalation zones before increasing his efforts for his initiative. However, the committee would be established by his successor, Geir O. Pedersen.

2.5. UN Mediation in Geir O. Pedersen's Mission

The last UN Special Envoy for Syria, Geir O. Pedersen, started his mission by meeting with stakeholders. Following his contacts with all parties, Pedersen emphasized the significance of Security Council Resolution 2254. He also underlined the need for unity and sovereignty in Syria and added that he sees the constitutional committee as a possible door opener for the political process, but he also emphasized the importance of working on other issues (United Nations, 2019a). On February 28, 2019, Pedersen briefed the Security Council on the complicated political roadmap for ending the conflict. He emphasized the significance of creating trust and confidence between the government and the opposition. He also believed that some tangible progress had been made so far, and he would not have to start from scratch,

referring to the Sochi peace negotiations that resulted in the formation of the Constitutional Committee.

In March 2019, Pedersen convened with the local stakeholders. First, he met with the Women's Advisory Board (WAB) in Geneva. The attendees discussed the trauma and sorrow experienced by all Syrians, as well as the various ways Syrian women have suffered during the crisis. Second, he visited Damascus. He addressed various issues, including the implementation of Security Council Resolution 2254. Lastly, he visited Riyadh to meet with the Syrian National Council (SNC) and discuss the same topics from his visit to Damascus.

In late April, the 12th session of Astana peace negotiations on Syria was held in Nur-Sultan, Kazakhstan's newly renamed capital. The formation of a constitution committee, measures to de-escalate tensions in Idlib, the return of refugees, and post-war rebuilding were among the subjects discussed. The UN envoy Geir O. Pedersen also attended the talks and stated that there was significant progress. Following the UN Security Council meeting on April 30, Pedersen presented a briefing including his intentions to strengthen talks with both the Syrian government and the opposition SNC. He indicated that he will continue to speak with a wide range of Syrians and will work on the subject of prisoners, abductees, and missing people. He also mentioned that he would continue to work on developing a new international format to assist the Geneva talks (United Nations, 2019b).

The formation of the constitutional committee gained acceleration by the summer of 2019. The 13th session of the Astana peace talks on Syria took place in Nursultan in early August. The summit focused on the hostilities in Idlib province and northeast Syria. The participants also discussed ways to increase confidence between the sides and improve the political process, such as establishing and operating a constitutional committee.

Following Pedersen's meeting with Syrian government officials in Damascus about resolving the remaining concerns before the formation of the Constitutional Committee, the UN

Secretary-General publicly announced the agreement between the Syrian government and the opposition Syrian Negotiations Commission to form a credible, balanced, and inclusive UN-facilitated Constitutional Committee in Geneva. Pedersen stated that the formation and operation of the Syrian-owned and Syrian-led Constitutional Committee would be carried out in compliance with Security Council Resolution 2254. The parties also reached an agreement on the details of the constitutional committee's formation.

On October 30, 2019, the Syrian Constitutional Committee (SCC), a 150-member committee (50 from the government, opposition, and civil society each), held its first meeting in the United Nations Office in Geneva. A small group was also created, with 15 persons from each group focusing specifically on crafting constitution ideas. Following the UN-mediated face-to-face meetings between the Syrian government and the opposition, the committee approved a Code of Conduct for its members as well as procedural procedures for the co-chairs (United Nations, 2019c). The Syrian Constitutional Committee's first week of working sessions was completed on November 8. The two co-chairs decided to meet again in two weeks in Geneva. They gathered again in Geneva from November 25 to 29, but the second round of the negotiations concluded without the group of 45 delegates meeting. On the first day, the government delegation left the discussions. The Syrian government and opposition failed to reach a consensus on a set of topics for constitutional negotiations. In the following month, Pedersen described the process as "protracted" and "deadlocked," and he called the parties to determine an agenda (United Nations, 2019d).

In the first months of 2020, the conflict witnessed an escalation of violence on the ground. Turkey launched Operation Spring Shield against the Syrian government forces in order to prevent a new wave of migration from Idlib to Turkey. Following the death of dozens of Turkish soldiers on the battlefield, on February 28, the UN Security Council gathered in an emergency session on Syria, urging Russia and Turkey to build on prior agreements to ensure

a fresh ceasefire across the northwest. On March 5, Russian President Vladimir Putin and Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan agreed to start a ceasefire around Idlib, as well as to set up a security corridor and joint patrols. This agreement put an end to the recent conflict and de-escalated the violence throughout the country. The Spring Shield operation was the last military operation of Turkey in Syria, and the areas controlled by warring parties have not changed significantly after that date.

The UN peacemaking in Syria was interrupted by the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. On March 24, Pedersen called for an urgent statewide truce in Syria to allow for an all-out attempt to eradicate COVID-19. The pandemic created dire conditions for the Syrians and brought the urgent necessity of humanitarian aid. Pedersen continued his call for all domestic and international stakeholders to find a way ahead that allows the Syrian people to overcome their suffering and determine their own destinies, and he reaffirmed his appeal to a nationwide ceasefire at every possibility.

In late August, the constitutional committee held its third round in Geneva. The discussions on Syria's constitution failed to produce any visible results, but UN Special Envoy to Syria Geir O. Pedersen stated that the parties found "commonalities" and intend to meet again (United Nations, 2020b). Pedersen also indicated that the important international players and all factions in the Constitutional Committee clearly supported the continuation of the peace process (United Nations, 2020a). The fourth meeting of the Syrian Constitutional Committee's Small Body was conducted in Geneva for five days in early December. Following the negotiations, the delegations agreed that the next meeting would begin on January 25, 2021, and that they had also agreed on the agenda, which is constitutional principles or fundamental elements of the future new Syrian constitution. However, the fifth session of Syrian constitutional discussions finished with no substantive results and no schedule for the next

round. In statements to the press following the meeting, Geir O. Pedersen criticized the slow progress of the peace process (United Nations, 2021a).

The fifteenth round of Astana talks, which was postponed due to the COVID-19 outbreak, took place in mid-February in Sochi. The meeting occurred soon after the Constitutional Committee's failures in Geneva. The summit underlined the committee's intention to support its work by maintaining constant contact with Syrian factions, members of the committee, and Geir Pedersen to guarantee its long-term and efficient operation.

Pedersen continued his relations with international stakeholders during the first half of 2021. He intended to maintain close contact with Iran and Turkey within the Astana framework as well as carry out negotiations with the US and Russia. Pedersen also worked on the detainees, abductees, and missing persons besides the constitution-making process. The 16th round of Astana talks on Syria took place in early July in Kazakhstan's capital city of Nur-Sultan and covered a wide range of topics, including the humanitarian situation in the state, aid, the political process to put an end to the conflict, the creation of a new constitution, the situation in the northwest region of Idlib, and the war on terrorism. UN envoy Geir O. Pedersen also participated in the talks and brought humanitarian issues to the table. One day after the Astana summit, the Security Council unanimously passed Resolution 2585, extending the use of the border crossing to enter humanitarian supplies into Syria. Pedersen praised the resolution's passage and the UN's decision to keep providing cross-border aid to millions of people in Syria.

Following the Syrian government's offensive against the Syrian city of Daraa in late July, a new series of humanitarian crises erupted. Pedersen urged all parties to de-escalate the situation in the country's southwest, and he emphasized to everybody that the principle of civilian protection and international humanitarian law must be followed. Pedersen also voiced his growing concern over events in southern Syria during the International Syria Support Group's (ISSG) Humanitarian Task Force meeting, which was held online on August 12.

The constitutional committee convened for the sixth time in October 2021. Pedersen faced the bitter reality of the paralyzed negotiations and the failure of the initiative. Following the conclusion of the Geneva talks, UN Special Envoy for Syria Geir Pedersen stated that the process of creating a new Syrian constitution had been "a big disappointment." He also stated that no schedule for the next round had been set (United Nations, 2021c). However, Pedersen continued his efforts to solve the problems of the Syrian people. He met with Syrian Foreign Minister Faisal Mikdad on December 12. After the meeting, Pedersen stated that they thoroughly examined all of Syria's difficulties, including the military situation, the economic situation, the humanitarian situation, and the political process.

When 2022 arrived, Pedersen explained his three priorities in the Security Council meeting on January 26: Continuing to work on the Constitutional Committee, developing a step-by-step strategy, and highlighting the necessity of confidence-building measures. He also stated that a military solution for the conflict is unrealistic since there have been no changes in the front lines over two years by adding that the status quo is not acceptable (United Nations, 2022a).

Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 impeded any top-down approach to conflict resolution in Syria since the relations between Russia and the West severely deteriorated. The humanitarian crisis on the ground worsened, and the accelerated geopolitical polarization would reveal itself in the already nonoperating constitutional committee. As expected, the Syrian Constitutional Committee's seventh session ended on March 25 in Geneva without making significant progress. The emphasis of the debates was on four constitutional concepts: State identity, governance, state symbols, and the regulation and operation of public bodies (United Nations, 2022b).

Furthermore, in late March, the normalization process of the Assad regime by regional powers was revealed. Bashar al-Assad traveled to the United Arab Emirates (UAE) for the first

time since the civil war started. The new normalization process gave the regime credibility and recognition from certain regional powers by allowing the regime to establish new diplomatic contacts and launch new commercial deals. This normalization strengthened the Assad regime's hand and further reduced the Syrian government's incentives to follow the Geneva process (Heydemann & Shaar, 2022). In the following month of al-Assad's UAE visit, the Syrian government granted general amnesty on terrorist crimes committed before April 30, 2022.

The eighth session of the constitutional talks finished on June 3 in Geneva. The main discussion themes were unilateral coercive procedures from a constitutional position, the development of the state institutions, the supremacy of the constitution and the hierarchy of international agreements, and transitional justice (United Nations, 2022c). The 18th round of the Astana talks on Syria was held in Nur-Sultan in mid-June. The ground situation and counterterrorism, recent advances in the political process, and humanitarian relief concerns were all examined, and a joint statement was issued. In the following month, the United Nations Security Council adopted Resolution 2642, extending life-saving assistance deliveries from Turkey into northwest Syria for another six months, although the UN Secretary-General António Guterres appealed for a twelve-months renewal.

Geir O. Pedersen announced that the scheduled ninth session of the constitutional discussions in Geneva in July 2022 was no longer possible on July 16 (United Nations, 2022d). However, continued his attempts to remove impediments to gathering the constitutional committee again. He met with Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov on August 25. Also, he met with Syrian Foreign Minister Faisal Mikdad on October 17 in order to clear the way for the next round of the Syrian Constitutional Committee. Pedersen stated after his meetings in Damascus that he expects the Constitutional Committee would be able to convene in Geneva again in the near future (United Nations, 2022e).

Geir O. Pedersen spent the first months of his mission negotiating between government and opposition leaders. He established five points for mediating the conflict. The first move was to hold direct talks with both the Syrian government and the opposition to build trust. The second step was the establishment of the Constitutional Committee. Third, expanding dialogue with the civic society. Fourth, action on captives, abductees, and missing persons. Lastly, the fifth step was carrying out international talks in favor of a political solution. Despite the fact that Pedersen started very fast and formed the constitutional committee without losing much time, his mission coincided with two major worldwide events that hampered peacemaking in Syria: the COVID-19 pandemic and the Russia-Ukraine war.

Pedersen believed that there was no military solution and that neither party could determine the result of the conflict without compromising with the other parties. However, the UN mediator was constrained to follow the line drawn by Astana. Even though Pedersen's leverage over the Syrian government and the opposition factions was weak, he successfully channeled his efforts on humanitarian issues and could keep the way for humanitarian assistance open by achieving the UNSC resolutions 2585 and 2642.

Pedersen maintained his close contact with Astana guarantors during his mission. Rather than starting a new initiative, he referred to the Astana Working Group on Detentions and Abductions on the issues like prisoner exchanges and the release of detainees. The UN peacemaking was overshadowed by Astana in almost every issue, and it did not only lose its monopoly in peacemaking, but it also lost its credibility and leverage on the warring parties during Pedersen's mission.

CHAPTER THREE

GEOPOLITICAL COMPETITION AND FRAGMENTATION OF THE UN SECURITY COUNCIL

3.1. Structure of the United Nations

The United Nations was built upon four interrelated pillars that reflected the UN's liberal norms and values (United Nations, n.d.). The United Nations' first pillar is security and peace. One of the main duties of the United Nations is to prevent wars and to maintain international peace and security. To that end, the United Nations strives to stop mass atrocities, the use of chemical, biological, or nuclear weapons, terrorism, international organized crime, and interstate conflicts. The UN also tries to strengthen the democratic institutions of a country since the lack of democracy poses a threat to peace and security. It has a liberal approach to peacebuilding, and it conducts its peace operations in accordance with liberal values. Human rights, the rule of law, and development are the other pillars of the United Nations.

The United Nations is comprised of six major organs. The Secretariat, General Assembly, Security Council, Economic and Social Council, and Trusteeship Council are all located at UN Headquarters in New York. The International Court of Justice, as the sixth body, is situated at the Hague. In order to comprehend the UN's intrinsic challenges, all of the primary bodies, as well as the liberal values upon which the UN was constituted, should be reviewed.

The secretariat is the executive wing of the United Nations. It is responsible for determining the agenda for the UN's organs and implementing their decisions. The head of the secretariat is the Secretary-General, whom the General Assembly appoints for five-year terms. The UN Secretary-General is in charge of delivering issues threatening global peace and security to the Security Council; presenting topics for discussion by the General Assembly or

any other UN bodies; when a controversy or conflict occurs between the member nations, intervening as an arbitrator in those issues; and utilizing his good offices to settle disputes.

The Trusteeship Council was formed in 1945 to oversee the governance of "trust territories," which is defined in the UN Charter Chapter XII as a solution to sustain the stability of the colonies in the process of gaining their independence. The council ceased its operations in 1994 when the last of the trust territories achieved independence.

The United Nations Economic and Social Council was founded in 1946. It has fifty-four member states and works on issues such as economic development, human rights, social development, and societal issues of the states.

The International Court of Justice is the United Nations' judicial organ, and it is based in The Hague, Netherlands. It. The International Court of Justice's primary responsibilities can be summarized as resolving legal disputes between states and providing legal advice to the UN and its special organizations. Only nations can join and present their disputes to the Court. The states may choose to participate in the Court since the participation is voluntary, but if they do, they must abide by the Court's decision.

The General Assembly is the main deliberative and policy-making body of the UN. It is based on the principle of equality of states, and each member state has one vote. The General Assembly may offer suggestions on any topic within the mandate of the UN, with the exception of peace and security issues, which are addressed by the Security Council. However, if the Security Council is divided on a situation threatening global peace and security, special emergency sessions might be held in the General Assembly. With the exception of critical topics such as peace and security, the accession or suspension of new members, and budget issues, all decisions are made by a simple majority vote. There should be a supra-majority on the significant subjects described above. General Assembly resolutions do not have the same legal force as Security Council resolutions, as they are not legally binding for the member states.

Despite this non-binding aspect, the General Assembly's resolutions still have a significant political and moral impact on governments.

The Security Council is the most influential and powerful organ of the United Nations. The fundamental mission of the Security Council is to ensure international peace and security. When the peace is threatened, the Security Council may convene at any time. Unlike the General Assembly, the Security Council resolutions are legally binding. The UN Charter requires all member states to implement Security Council resolutions. The Security Council has 15 member states. Five of these states, namely, the United States, Russia, China, England, and France, consist of permanent members. The other ten temporary members are selected among the UN member states and serve for two years. In order to adopt a resolution in the Security Council, at least nine nations must vote "yes." However, permanent members of the Security Council (P5) have veto power over proposed resolutions, and a "no" vote by P5 states prevents a suggested resolution from being adopted. The UNSC has the authority to start peacekeeping operations, impose international sanctions, and authorize military intervention.

Since its establishment, the United Nations has remained the primary pacemaker in an increasingly unpredictable world. It possessed the leverage, resources, and impartiality to play this role. The Security Council is the main body of the UN for conflict resolution. The Security Council can authorize the use of force to maintain peace or can use peaceful dispute resolution methods. The Security Council derives its legitimacy from worldwide consensus, enforcement tools, and international laws. In theory, the Security Council wields considerable influence. However, when the P5 states' geopolitical interests clash, the Security Council may be crippled by the absence of consensus, and it may be unable to respond to the crisis effectively. The Syrian case provides the best example of it.

3.2. Fragmentation of the Security Council

Shifts in global power dynamics and increasing geopolitical competition significantly influence the execution and outcomes of peacemaking attempts (Paris, 2014). The efficiency of UN peacemaking has been affected by various macro-level factors. As it is defined in the method, the first element undermining the legitimacy of UN mediation in Syria was the fragmentation of the UN Security Council as a result of geopolitical competition. The clash of interests among the major powers over Syria manifested itself in the UN structure.

Touval (1994) investigated the macro-level factors affecting the mediation's credibility. He stressed the United Nations' difficulties in delivering several functions necessary for an effective mediator. He claimed that the UN mediation suffers from its lack of political leverage and its unreliable promises and threats. He asserted that these deficits are caused by the clash of interests within the United Nations body, which diminishes the UN's credibility in international conflict resolution. Bruce Cronin distinguished two contradictory forces within the United Nations structure: intergovernmental and transnational. The United Nations serves the interests of its member states as a result of its intergovernmental identity. However, it also reflects a common good that transcends the interests of individual nations as a result of its transnational identity (2002). The continuous clash of these forces inside the UN manifests the geopolitical interests of its member states, especially the permanent member states of the Security Council.

Syria has been affected by the disagreement between the permanent members of the Security Council most. The Security Council remained incapable of adopting strong resolutions that strengthened the mediators' hand and leverage over the parties. Contrarily, the disunity among the Security Council weakened the mandate of the peacemaking intervention in Syria.

While the P3 countries - the United States, the United Kingdom, and France - submitted resolutions serving Geneva's interests to the Security Council, Russia continued to defend the

Assad regime with China's backing in many cases. Russia has vetoed 17 Security Council resolutions on Syria since the conflict began in 2011. Before the conflict turned into a civil war, the clashing geopolitical interests manifested themselves in the Security Council meeting 6627 in October 2011. A resolution condemning the Assad regime's violence against peaceful protests was vetoed by Russia and China. Russia evaluated the draft as accusatory to Damascus, and the failed adoption was a conflict of political approaches between the members (United Nations Security Council, 2011, p. 3). Also, on February 4, 2012, the resolution draft endorsing the LAS plan, which consisted of a ceasefire, releasing political detainees, and withdrawal of the Syrian troops from the cities, was submitted to the Security Council. The draft was vetoed by Russia and China. Russia explained its veto by stating that the draft resolution did not fully reflect the actual situation in Syria and gave a biased signal to Syrian factions (United Nations Security Council, 2012, p. 9). Soon after the failed attempt to support the League of Arab States Plan of Action, the Arab League demanded a joint mission in Syria with the United Nations. Kofi Annan was appointed as the first UN/Arab League Joint Special Envoy for Syria.

Kofi Annan could achieve a fragile truce on April 12, 2012. The Security Council unanimously approved Resolution 2042, establishing a team to monitor the truce in Syria. A 300-member UN Supervision Mission in Syria (UNSMIS) was then formed by UNSC Resolution 2043 to oversee the implementation of the Annan plan and the ceasefire. However, when he needed a powerful resolution to put an end to the conflict, the UN Security Council member states could not pass the required resolution. Russia wanted a resolution under Chapter VI of the UN Charter to stop any military intervention in Syria similar to the 2011 NATO-led military intervention in Libya, whereas the P3 states asked for a resolution under Chapter VII because they considered a resolution under Chapter VI would not be helpful and lacked coercive measures. The disagreement between the Security Council member states caused the failure of the adoption of a resolution in Syria and paved the way for Annan's resignation.

Following Annan's resignation, the Secretary-General appointed veteran diplomat Lakhdar Brahimi as the new UN envoy for Syria. Brahimi attempted to reconcile Russia and the United States on Syria in order to gain UN Security Council support. However, Brahimi could get the support of the UN Security Council on humanitarian issues and the elimination of chemical weapons. The UN Security Council Resolutions 2118, 2139, and 2165 were adopted in parallel with those issues during his incumbency. He could not benefit from this unity in a strong resolution that would strengthen his mandate and leverage over the parties. He resigned in May 2014. Also, in the same month, the UN Security Council failed to pass an essential resolution to hold the Assad regime accountable for its numerous human rights violations. The draft resolution was vetoed by Russia and China.

On October 8, 2016, the UN Security Council voted for a resolution draft demanding an immediate end to the bombing and military flights over Aleppo. The draft was denied by Russia's veto, and China abstained. Russia claimed that the regime was fighting against terrorism in Aleppo. The United States, on the other hand, blamed Russia for using a few hundred al-Nusra members in Aleppo to justify their indiscriminate aerial bombardment operations that devastated and trapped hundreds of thousands of civilians in Aleppo (United Nations Security Council, 2016, p. 8). Also, in the following months, a draft resolution requesting a one-week ceasefire in Aleppo was vetoed by Russia and China. Russia successfully blocked all Security Council attempts to halt the regime's and its own indiscriminate violence in Aleppo. Five days after the seven-day ceasefire proposal in the Security Council, the General Assembly adopted a resolution demanding an urgent cessation of all violence in Syria. Since the General Assembly resolutions are not legally binding, they had symbolic values in protesting the incompetence of the Security Council.

Date	Draft Content	Vetoed by
October 4, 2011	Condemns the Syrian government's violence against anti-government demonstrators.	Russia and China
February 4, 2012	Endorses the Arab League's plan and demands its implication from the Syrian government. Condemns of systematic human rights abuses by Syrian authorities.	Russia and China
July 19, 2012	Acting under Chapter VII of the Charter of the United Nations. Endorses the Geneva Communiqué and supports Annan's six-point plan.	Russia and China
May 22, 2014	Refers to Syria's case to the International Criminal Court (ICC).	Russia and China
October 8, 2016	Demands an urgent cessation of aerial bombardment and all military flights over Aleppo.	Russia
December 5, 2016	Demands a seven-day halt to all attacks in Aleppo.	Russia and China
February 28, 2017	Imposing sanctions on the Assad regime for its use of chemical weapons.	Russia and China
April 12, 2017	Condemns the Syrian government's use of chemical weapons. Urges an investigation into the chemical weapons incident.	Russia
October 24, 2017	Extends the mandate of the Joint Investigative Mechanism (JIM) in Syria.	Russia
November 16, 2017	Extends the mandate of the Joint Investigative Mechanism (JIM) in Syria.	Russia
November 17, 2017	Extends the mandate of the Joint Investigative Mechanism (JIM) in Syria.	Russia
April 10, 2018	Establishment of the United Nations Independent Mechanism of Investigation (UNIM)	Russia
September 19, 2019	Demands cessation of hostilities in Idlib.	Russia and China
December 20, 2019	Humanitarian access to Syria across borders and lines.	Russia and China
July 7, 2020	Cross-border and cross-line access for humanitarian assistance to Syria.	Russia and China
July 10, 2020	Cross-border and cross-line access for humanitarian assistance to Syria.	Russia and China
July 8, 2022	Cross-border humanitarian assistance to Syria	Russia

Table 1 - Vetoed Drafts in the Security Council on Syria by Russia

Russia vetoed five draft resolutions on Syria in 2017. First, a UN Security Council resolution that requested sanctions for the Assad regime's use of chemical weapons was blocked

by Russia and China's vetoes on February 28. A second draft resolution calling on the Syrian government to cooperate with an investigation into the suspected use of chemical weapons in Syria was vetoed by Russia on April 12. The voting took place under a highly polarized atmosphere. Because the United States hit the regime-controlled Shayrat Airbase with cruise missiles responding to the use of chemical weapons by the Syrian state five days before the Security Council meeting. A draft resolution to extend the mandate of a joint UN-OPCW body charged with identifying perpetrators responsible for chemical weapons attacks in Syria was not adopted by the Security Council due to Russia's veto on October 24. The other two attempts on November 16 and November 17 to renew the mandate of the Joint Investigative Mechanism were also blocked by the veto of Russia.

Due to Russia's veto in the Security Council, a resolution that seeks to establish a new investigation mechanism for one year and identify the perpetrators of the use of chemical weapons was refused on April 10, 2018. As a result, the UN's responsibility to prevent mass atrocity crimes was challenged by its own member Russia. Any attempts to hold the Assad regime accountable by the other Security Council members were hampered by Russia. Again, the transnational values were defeated by the individual interests of its member states. The UN's failure to hold the Assad regime accountable damaged its credibility in the eyes of the Syrian factions.

The attempt to de-escalate tension and cease the violence in Idlib in order to allow humanitarian aid to enter was failed by the Russian veto in the Security Council on September 19, 2019. The regime forces launched a new military campaign against the last rebel stronghold Idlib in December 2019. The northwestern offensive of the Syrian government on the last rebel stronghold was interrupted by the Turkish military operation Spring Shield in February 2020. The long-awaited truce in Idlib was achieved in March 2020 after the military intervention. A truce deal was signed between Russia and Turkey on March 5. The United Nations liberal

approach to halting the violence in Idlib remained incapable, and the ceasefire deal was signed under the scope of the Astana process.

As of December 2019, there were three humanitarian crossing routes from Turkey, Iraq, and Jordan to Syria. Russia intended to close two points while leaving just the Turkish entrance available for humanitarian access. A draft resolution re-authorizing the humanitarian access from Turkey, Iraq, and Jordan and emphasizing deteriorating humanitarian conditions and the urgent need for humanitarian assistance was rejected by Russia at the Security Council on December 20, 2019. As a result of Russian efforts to block the continuation of two of the crossing points, only the Turkish point remained for humanitarian access to Syria. Russia and China blocked two other draft resolutions on humanitarian access to Syria on July 7, 2020, and July 10, 2020, respectively. A final draft resolution addressing the same issue was adopted with 12 votes in favor and three abstaining votes by Russia, China, and the Dominican Republic on July 11, 2020.

Lastly, Russia blocked a draft resolution renewing humanitarian access on July 8, 2022, and the Security Council adopted another resolution addressing the humanitarian situation in Syria and extending the cross-border access for another six months to Syria on July 12, 2022. These incidents showed that not only peacemaking but also the most straightforward tasks, including humanitarian aid to a war-torn country, can become a big case when there is geopolitical tension among the UN Security Council member states.

3.3. UN-Related Credibility Loss of the UN Peacemaking

Bâli and Rana (2017) defined two main narratives on the United Nations' failure to mediate peace in the Syrian conflict. According to the first interpretation, the Geneva process hampered any major foreign military involvement by reducing political will in the United States, Europe, or the Gulf Cooperation Council to insist on direct military measures. Second,

the UN's efforts to open a dialogue channel with Bashar Al-Assad, rather than holding him accountable, damages the peace process and justice since it legitimizes a regime that committed mass atrocities.

The fourth factor undermining the credibility of the UN peacemaking as defined in the methodology is the lack of accountability in the face of mass atrocities perpetrated by the conflicting parties and its impact on the transnational principles the United Nations represents. Mass atrocities during the mediation undermine the UN peace process since it shows the UN's inefficiency in preventing the atrocities and holding the perpetrators accountable, as well as threatens the liberal values of the UN.

According to Van Schaack, the UN Security Council became incapacitated in holding the regime accountable for its atrocities because of Russia's protection of the Assad regime (2020). The Security Council, in fact, has failed to hold the Assad regime accountable for its countless crimes against humanity and war crimes. Any attempts to hold the Assad regime accountable by the Security Council were vetoed by Russia. The referral of Syria to the International Criminal Court was rejected in May 2014 due to vetoes by China and Russia. Furthermore, many demands for ending indiscriminate bombing of the cities, finding abductees, releasing detainees, and investigating chemical weapons usage were hampered by the Assad regime's allies in the Security Council. On December 21, 2016, the United Nations General Assembly adopted a resolution forming the International, Impartial, and Independent Mechanism (IIIM) to aid in the investigation of mass atrocity crimes in Syria as a last-ditch effort. The primary responsibilities of the IIIM include gathering and analyzing evidence related to atrocity crimes in Syria since March 2011 and creating files to support independent criminal procedures in conformity with international law norms. There has also been an increase in the number of states investigating and prosecuting individuals for atrocities committed in Syria (Devereux, 2019, pp. 400-401). The use of universal jurisdiction by States and the

establishment of the IIM helped to close the accountability gap in Syria; still, the Security Council's support is vitally needed to hold the Assad regime and perpetrators of atrocities accountable.

The main narrative of the UN was on humanitarian aid and serving transnational values by the international actors from the beginning of the Syrian conflict. However, the actions of the regional and great powers did not go beyond using the conflict as a battleground for their power wars (Bali & Rana, 2017). Many draft resolutions aiming to deliver humanitarian assistance to the war-torn country have failed to be adopted because of disagreements among the Security Council.

Additionally, the geopolitical competition between P5 states paved the way for individual states to find new solutions and caused sanctions outside of the UN. The most significant sanction on the Assad regime was the Caesar Act in 2020 by the United States, which created a substantial economic burden on the regime. This intervention also affected the regime's ability to claim a total victory (Shatz, 2021).

The normalization process of the Assad regime began in March 2022, as it was mentioned in Chapter II. Considering the atrocities by the Syrian government, such as chemical weapons use, barrel bombs, and many other crimes against humanity, a normalization process with the Assad regime would undermine liberal international norms and values (Alrifai & Zelin, 2021). Pedersen's endorsement of Assad's normalization would also weaken the UN's credibility since it directly contradicts the liberal mediation approach of the UN. Easing the sanctions on the Syrian government would be detrimental to international law and universal norms, which are the most effective tools for holding the Assad government responsible for its crimes and atrocities. Furthermore, as a result of the normalization, the Syrian government and Russia have lost the desire to engage in Geneva on a genuine basis since Geneva has lost its function as a gateway for normalization (Heydemann & Shaar, 2022).

Another argument comes to mind considering the United Nations' acquiescence in the abuses of its liberal principles. The UN's inability to apply a liberal peacemaking method due to the Security Council fragmentation manifested itself in the emergence of an alternative peacemaking method. Astana challenged the UN by breaking the UN's monopoly on peacemaking and bringing its own strategy aimed at resolving the war through control of violence rather than a liberal transition (Hellmüller, 2022, p. 557).

Murithi (2022) argued the dysfunctionality of the UN Security Council and stressed the necessity of radical reform within the UN Structure in order to mediate current and future crises effectively. He also pointed out that the division among the Security Council's permanent members is the culprit of the unresolved conflict in Syria. Also, the shift toward a multipolar world order is among the causes of the Security Council's inefficiency. Hellmüller (2022) claimed that shifting from a unipolar to a multipolar world order will increase geopolitical competition, which affects the UN mediation by creating disunity among the UN Security Council member states. The interest-based division among the Permanent Five states in the UN Security Council weakens the UN mediation process in various ways, as they were mentioned above.

When the macro trend toward a multipolar world order, the rise of new regional powers, and the UN's inability to respond to a geopolitically contentious crisis like the Syrian conflict were combined, the necessity for an alternative mediation method manifested itself in the initiation of the Astana peace process. In the following chapter, the impact of the Astana process on UN mediation and its credibility, as well as the reasons for its inception, will be thoroughly discussed.

CHAPTER FOUR

ASTANA'S ALTERNATIVE PEACEMAKING INTERVENTION

4.1. The Astana Process, its initiation, structure, and method

UN mediation was challenged not only by the clash of geopolitical interests among Security Council member states but also by the initiation of an alternative peacemaking approach and competition outside of the United Nations (Hellmüller, 2022, p. 553). The Astana process contributed to the UN mediation's credibility loss in Syria by ending its monopoly in peacemaking and further reducing its flickering leverage over the warring parties. Astana's peacemaking strategy, which responded to the interests of the rising powers, also challenged the United Nations liberal method of peacemaking. However, before investigating Astana's effects on UN peacemaking's credibility in detail, it is crucial to review the Astana process starting from its initiation.

Russia, Iran, and Turkey decided to establish an alternative peacemaking process on December 20, 2016. The three states agreed to meet in Kazakhstan's capital, Astana, for peace negotiations by taking the UN Security Council Resolution 2254 as its basis. They also stressed the expected facilitative effect of the new process on the UN-led political transition. In the following days, a national ceasefire plan for Syria was agreed upon by Turkey and Russia, starting from December 30, 2016. Islamic State (IS), the al-Nusra Front, and the People's Defense Units (YPG) were not included in the scope of the ceasefire agreement. On December 31, the Security Council unanimously passed a resolution in support of Russian and Turkish efforts to end the Syrian war and kickstart a political process in Astana.

The first meeting of the Astana Talks was officially held on January 23, 2017, in Astana, Kazakhstan. The Syrian government and the opposition delegations had indirect talks facilitated by Russia, Iran, and Turkey. The UN envoy Staffan de Mistura also participated in the talks showing the recognition of the new initiation by the United Nations. As a result of the first summit, Russia, Turkey, and Iran achieved a deal to establish a trilateral organ in order to oversee and enforce the truce.

The second round of the Astana Talks took place from February 14 to February 16, one week before the Geneva IV conference. Normally, Geneva IV would have been convened in early February. However, Staffan de Mistura, the UN envoy for Syria, requested the Security Council to postpone the UN-mediated talks scheduled in Geneva until February 20. Also, it should be mentioned that the truce between government troops and opposition throughout the nation has deteriorated, resulting in new confrontations in several spots and a new rebel offensive in Daraa just before the second round of the Astana summit. Two days of negotiations in Astana on improving the ceasefire regime finished on February 16 with the approval of a document to formalize monitoring of the ceasefire accord signed on December 29, 2016.

The third round of talks in Astana was conducted on March 14, 2017. The talks resulted in an additional agreement by all participants to the existing truce deal. As a consequence of these discussions, Iran became a guarantor state along with Turkey and Russia. The opposition factions boycotted the third round of the talks by claiming Russia and the regime's attacks despite the ceasefire. The increasing violence on the ground in the following weeks raised concerns about the failure of the truce. Staffan de Mistura, the UN envoy for Syria, has asked Astana guarantor states to take urgent steps to safeguard the truce on March 25. In early April, the United States targeted a Syrian airbase due to the regime's chemical attacks in the Idlib governorate. The escalated tensions between the United States and Russia as a result of the recent US operation forced Astana to revitalize the delicate truce.

The Astana guarantor states reached an agreement to establish de-escalation zones, where all hostilities should halt in three separate regions, and the civilians can be protected from any assault as a result of the fourth round of negotiations. Staffan de Mistura also attended the conference and welcomed the idea of establishing de-escalation zones. However, the agreement was not ratified by the Syrian government or opposition factions. Also, the Kurdish left-wing Democratic Union Party (PYD) blamed the agreement for dividing Syria on a sectarian basis through the de-escalation zones. Astana's state-level non-inclusive peacemaking approach and the guarantor states' coercive influence on the warring parties made the creation of the de-escalation zones possible.

The fifth round of the peace talks in Astana concluded in failure to reach an agreement on the ceasefires on July 5, 2017. Staffan de Mistura attended the negotiations and expressed the UN's appreciation for the progress. He evaluated the relationship between Geneva and Astana processes as two separate but complementary and mutually supportive missions. He attributed the role of violence reduction to Astana and believed that the de-escalation agreement was an interim agreement and should be complemented by the UN-led political transition process. That is why he scheduled the next round of the Geneva conference five days after the Astana summit (United Nations, 2017b). In parallel with Astana's efforts to reduce the violence, a de-escalation agreement for southwest Syria was reached by the US, Russia, and Jordan on July 9.

The Astana guarantor states convened for the sixth round of the talks on September 15, 2017. In addition to the three existing de-escalation zones in Daraa, Eastern Ghouta, and Homs, Russia, Iran, and Turkey agreed to establish a fourth area of de-escalation in Idlib. The seventh session of the Astana summit for Syria was held on October 29-30. The negotiations upheld previous agreements of the talks and covered the detainees, war prisoners, and missing people exchanges. Russia, Turkey, and Iran reaffirmed their commitment to finding a diplomatic

settlement in accordance with UN Security Council Resolution 2254. However, the convention ended without achieving tangible outcomes. The Astana talks' eighth round took place on December 21-22, 2017, in Astana. The negotiations intended to resolve the violence in Syria. Following the meeting, the guarantor nations released a united statement emphasizing Syria's independence and sovereignty. The Russian, Turkish, and Iranian presidents praised Syria's progress in combating terrorism, notably the elimination of the Islamic State. They reiterated their commitment to working together to defeat Islamic State, Nusra Front, and other extremist terrorist organizations. They also stressed confidence-building between the warring parties.

A conference outside the formal Astana negotiations took place in Sochi, Russia, on January 30, 2018. However, the summit was added to the Astana talks. The aim of the summit was to unify the opposition factions before the formal talks between the opposition and the Syrian government. The Syrian National Council (SNC), Syria's main opposition alliance, boycotted Sochi Talks. The SNC also blamed UN Special Envoy Staffan de Mistura for his participation in the conference. It has also been argued that the absence of any major Kurdish faction in the convention harmed the Sochi efforts (Kostelyanets, 2019, p. 18). The participants agreed to form a 150-member Constitutional Committee to draft a new constitution for Syria. Turkey was granted the responsibility to represent non-participating opposition factions to the congress and offered a list containing 50 names for the Constitutional Committee in collaboration with the opposition.

On March 14, Russia, Iran, and Turkey met for a trilateral ministerial meeting on Syrian peace outside of the formal Astana negotiations. Staffan de Mistura did not personally attend the talks, but his technical staff did attend the meeting and the first round of the Working Group on detainees and missing persons. Following the meeting, he stated that his team put pressure on guarantor states in humanitarian matters (United Nations, 2018b). The Astana Process for Syrian Peace held its ninth round on May 15-16, 2018. Staffan de Mistura was also present in

the negotiations. The discussions centered on how Syria would be governed; a timeframe and process for drafting a new constitution; and conducting elections as the foundation for a Syrian-led, Syrian-owned approach to end the conflict. All sides agreed to keep the de-escalation zones in effect.

The tenth round of Astana negotiations took place in Sochi, Russia, on July 30-31, 2018. All parties agreed to maintain tripartite cooperation on the Syrian crisis and reaffirmed their commitment to oppose separatist agendas that would endanger Syria's territorial integrity and the security of its neighboring states. The Idlib Memorandum was signed between Russia and Turkey in Sochi on September 18. The agreement included establishing a buffer zone in Idlib and restoring Syria's two important trade routes known as M4 and M5 highways. The agreement was hailed by Iran and the Syrian government. Staffan de Mistura also welcomed the agreement and indicated that it was the right moment to move on in the political process (United Nations, 2018c). The memorandum was followed by the eleventh session of Astana negotiations, which took place in late November 2018. At the two-day summit, the Astana guarantor states agreed to increase their joint efforts to avert ceasefire violations in Idlib.

Geir Otto Pedersen, a Norwegian diplomat, was appointed as the new Joint Special Envoy for Syria in 2019. While attempting to remove the obstacles to the formation of the Constitutional Committee, he continued to maintain relationships with Astana guarantor states. The twelfth session of the Astana peace talks on Syria was held in Nur-Sultan, Kazakhstan's renamed capital city, between April 25 and April 26. The UN envoy Geir O. Pedersen also attended the talks. The major issues were the constitution drafting and the constitutional committee, humanitarian access, political transition, peacebuilding, and the cessation of hostilities in Idlib. Astana's focus on the political reforms and postwar state-building in its twelfth round revealed that Astana was sidelining Geneva's role in the political transition. Despite the former UN mediator, de Mistura, having believed that Astana's role primarily was

violence de-escalation, Geneva had to appeal to Astana for the Constitutional Committee formation and other issues on the political transition.

The thirteenth round of the Astana peace process on Syria was held in Nur-Sultan on August 1-2, 2019. Lebanon and Iraq attended the meeting between the guarantor states as observers for the first time. Thus, more regional stakeholders besides Jordan were included in the Astana process. The major topic of discussion was the violent clashes in Idlib province and the situation in Kurdish-controlled northeast Syria. Topics such as political transition, constitution drafting, and humanitarian access were also discussed. A deal was also made between the United States and Turkey to establish a 115-kilometer-long buffer zone between the Turkish border and territory held by the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF). Russia, Iran, and the Syrian government condemned the deal. The agreement collapsed on October 9 following a Turkish offensive in the region. A second buffer zone agreement was signed between Turkey and Russia on October 22 in Sochi and has continued in effect so far. It was essential to see that while the first buffer zone agreement out of Astana's framework collapsed rapidly, the second agreement between Russia and Turkey stayed in effect until today. These two agreements also revealed the exclusion of international stakeholders from the Astana process.

After long shuttle diplomacy of the UN envoy for Syria, Geir O. Pedersen, the obstacles to forming a constitutional committee were eliminated. The Syrian Constitutional Committee was officially founded in Geneva on September 23, 2019. The Astana guarantors highly influenced the member selection process. The first convention of the committee took place on October 30 in Geneva. During the meeting, a small 45-member group was formed, including fifteen members from each of the Syrian government, opposition, and middle-third groups. The small group's goal was to facilitate the committee's decision-making process by determining ideas for the new constitution.

Turkey, Iran, and Russia delegations convened in Kazakhstan's capital, Nur-Sultan, for the fourteenth round of Astana negotiations on December 10-11 amid violence escalation in the last rebel stronghold Idlib. The discussions came to a conclusion without a clear agreement on a ceasefire in Idlib province. The Syrian regime's military advance in northern Syria to capture the M5 highway raised Turkish concerns about a new migration wave. Turkey responded to the regime's campaign with a new military operation in late February 2020. Following the Turkish military operation, Russia and Turkey signed a truce, including the Idlib governorate, and established a security corridor in early March 2020.

The March 2020 truce agreement coincided with the outbreak of the COVID-19 virus, and Astana guarantors were unable to convene for a year. The fifteenth round of the talks was held after fourteen months on February 16-17, 2021, in Sochi. Following the summit, a joint statement by the guarantor states was declared. The joint statement underlined the importance of the UN-mediated political process in Geneva, and they restated their support for Geir O. Pedersen's and the Constitutional Committee's works. The sixteenth session of the Astana format gathered in Nur-Sultan on July 7, 2021. UN Special Envoy for Syria Geir O. Pedersen also participated in the talks in person. Pedersen put his efforts to solve the humanitarian access crisis in the UN Security Council in his meetings during the Astana conference. The main topics were mainly political since the violence on the ground de-escalated significantly. Continuation of the Constitutional Committee's operations, humanitarian access, prisoner exchanges, and detained and missing persons were among the issues on the table.

The seventeenth round of Astana negotiations ended on December 22, 2021, in Nur-Sultan with an emphasis on preserving Syria's territorial unity and ratcheting up efforts to battle terrorist organizations and the importance of the constitutional reform similar to the old final statements. However, there was one difference in the seventeenth round's final communiqué from the previous communiqués; it asked the international community and international bodies

to support Syria's early recovery phase, which hinted at a reconciliation. The Astana talks had their first convention after Russia's invasion of Ukraine. The eighteenth round was held in Nur-Sultan on June 15-16, 2022. The final statement was not different from a restatement of the older statements. No concrete steps have been made, and the peace process in Astana was criticized for losing its momentum (COAR Global Ltd., 2022).

4.2. Astana versus Geneva: Mutually beneficial or exclusionary?

The emergence of the alternative peacemaking intervention was defined as the second credibility-undermining factor in the methodology. Astana's initiation ended Geneva's monopoly in peacemaking and weakened its leverage. Two separate peace processes may have mutually supportive and facilitative relationships or an exclusionist relation. In the Syrian case, this thesis hypothesizes that Astana does not have a symbiotic relationship with Geneva, and it claims that Astana sidelines Geneva gradually for two reasons. First, ending the monopoly of the UN in peacemaking reduced the UN's already shaky leverage over the conflicting parties. Second, peacemaking processes in Geneva and Astana diverge with liberal and authoritarian conflict settlement methods respectively, and the differences between their methods prevent them from working together.

When the idea of establishing the Astana peace process in December 2016 was initially introduced, the UN Security Council and UN Envoy Staffan de Mistura expressed their gratitude for the new effort. The UN envoy de Mistura also has been invited to the Astana first round of the negotiations, which indicated that Astana was aiming to be a complementary process of the UN mediation in Syria. However, Astana overshadowed Geneva by increasing its influence while enjoying legitimization from the United Nations. According to Astana guarantors, Staffan de Mistura's main function was to provide international legitimacy to the Astana process (Kenner, 2018).

The Astana process was established to respond to controlling violence on the ground while also balancing the interests of neighboring states Russia, Turkey, and Iran. All three states had different interests and objectives in Syria before the initiation of the new peacemaking intervention. Russia's main objective was to avoid any Western intervention in Syria as well as to protect its geopolitical and economic interests and its loyal ally Bashar al-Assad's position. The rising threat of further refugee influx from Syria prompted Turkey to establish safe zones within Syria, which required negotiations with the states holding leverage over the warring parties. Another goal of Turkey was to limit Kurdish expansion on its southern borders and keep its territories secure. When it comes to Iran, it sought to expand its sphere of influence over Syria, protect its national interests, and not lose its anti-Western ally (Jaecke & Labude, 2020, p. 2).

A major difference between the Astana process and Geneva was the Astana guarantor states' leverage. All three countries had military presence and the ability to intervene directly in the situation on the ground. Their leverage over parties allowed them to de-escalate hostilities in the war-torn country. However, the UN's impartiality left itself to a "sponsored mediation" method in which the mediators were also a part of the conflict (Lundgren, 2019, p. 9). The Russian-influenced mediation process and its outcomes served the regime's and Russia's agendas independently from Astana's declared principles. One example of it was the formation of de-escalation zones which aim to cease hostilities and allow humanitarian assistance to enter the war zones.

The Astana guarantors started to work by enforcing a ceasefire and forming a tripartite monitoring body to supervise it in early 2017. They established three de-escalation zones, Daraa, Eastern Ghouta, and Homs, in Syria by their fourth meeting in May 2017, and they added Idlib later in September 2017. However, the de-escalation zones established by the Astana process helped the regime consolidate its power to eliminate its opponents one by one.

For example, the Assad regime never lifted the siege from Eastern Ghouta and the humanitarian situation even deteriorated by continuous indiscriminate bombing (Jaecke & Labude, 2020, p. 3). In April 2018, the regime managed to capture the "de-escalated" Eastern Ghouta after using chemical weapons, which also triggered the United States missile attack in response. As a result of the Assad regime's offensives on the de-escalation zones, Homs in May and Daraa in July 2018 was occupied by the regime. As of September 2018, only the Idlib de-escalation zone remained uncaptured by the regime.

According to Jaecke and Labude, the de-escalation zones failed for three main reasons. Firstly, the guarantor states did not agree on any measurements of the violations of the truce in de-escalation zones. Second, they did not invite a neutral monitoring mission. Lastly, they did not have an agenda for a political transition (2020, p. 7). The United Nations' participation could have eliminated two of these causes of the failure. Firstly, the UN was the perfect candidate to provide the necessary neutral peacekeeping force and supervise the de-escalation zones. However, Astana's exclusion of the UN from peacekeeping made peace very vulnerable and short-lived. Second, the guarantor states, Russia and Iran, did not use their leverage on parties to enforce a political transition process since the regime was advancing on the ground. Aiming to de-escalating violence without applying political reforms erased any chance for a sustainable solution to the conflict. The United Nations' Geneva was once again the best option for Astana in initiating the political transition by using its influence.

It should also be noted that Staffan de Mistura chose to back the new emerging process in the hope of using the Astana trio's leverage to achieve a ceasefire. However, he was ultimately unable to move beyond providing political cover and legitimacy for Russia's national interests (Diab, 2018). It was argued that, unlike their names, de-escalation zones were military tactics designed to undermine American interests in Syria (Ghanem, 2018, p. 17).

Abboud believed that the UN's Geneva had failed in Syria because the conflicting parties adhered to a military solution to the conflict which was rooted in the geopolitical interests of the regional stakeholders (2021, p. 332). Clearly, the UN-acknowledged Astana process strengthened the Assad regime's hand and brought the idea of a military solution to the conflict, which contradicted the UN's peacemaking strategy founded upon the "there is no military solution" argument. Ultimately, Astana's exclusionist strategy damaged Geneva's credibility. Astana hollowed out Geneva by taking its remaining leverage over parties from it. The Assad regime's growing belief in a military solution weakened Assad's incentives to comply with the UN mediators' strategies.

The exclusionist characteristic of Astana, as well as its undermining influence on UN mediation, is inherent in its structure and method of intervention. While the United Nations has a liberal peacemaking method, Astana uses an authoritarian peacemaking approach. Abboud investigated the Astana peace process by considering its illiberal nature. He stated that two ongoing peacemaking interventions are the reflections of a global trend toward illiberal peacemaking against its liberal counterpart. He asserted that authoritarian peacemaking methods by the Astana process contradicted the liberal peacemaking interventions, which include political transition, such as constitutional reforms and democratic elections. Astana's peacemaking strategy inherently opposes the liberal inclusionary ideology implicit in UN mediation. Conversely to the UN's inclusionary method by de Mistura and Pedersen, the Astana process inserts new rules of exclusion dividing the Syrian society and the opposition by offering legitimacy to participants in the Astana discussions (Abboud, 2021, p. 338).

Hellmüller (2022) also asserted that the UN mediation in Syria was a liberal approach aiming liberal transitional process. She agreed that Russia's position in Astana differed from the UN's liberal approach in that it attempted to control violence by de-escalating hostilities rather than political transformation. She believed that the decline of the current unipolar world

order and the weakening liberal system caused new alternative methods for peacemaking to emerge. As it was discussed in the third chapter, Astana was founded on the cracks of the UN Security Council. The absence of consensus over Syria in the Security Council because of the challenges by the rising powers to the current world order necessitated an alternative peacemaking method prioritizing the rising powers' interests.

Another critical difference between Astana and Geneva was the inclusivity of the stakeholders. The UN's Geneva is viewed as a Western-led process (Cengiz, 2020, p. 210). Even if the UN envoys for Syria acknowledged the influence of Iran on Syria, Iran was excluded from the Geneva talks or had a limited share of the table. On the opposite side, the fundamental criterion under the Astana framework for Moscow was military importance and forces on the ground (Kizilkaya & Michels, 2021). The participation of Turkey and Iran, besides Russia in Astana, created a strong initiative responding to the realities on the ground. However, Astana's military prioritization brought the exclusion of Western powers from its framework.

Unlike the UN's Geneva, the Astana process did not place emphasis on finding a political settlement to the Syrian conflict. Rather than that, it focused on balancing the military situation on the ground in parallel to its sponsors' national interests (Kizilkaya & Michels, 2021, p. 109). Cooperation between Astana's power on a military solution and Geneva's legitimacy in leading the political transition could be quite effective for conflict resolution. In line with Astana's role in balancing the military situation, Geneva's position was narrowed down to the deadlocked constitution drafting process (Heydemann & Shaar, 2022).

The United Nations was compelled to take a stand concerning this alternative peacemaking process. Staffan de Mistura attended the Astana talks and labeled them as complementary to the UN-facilitated talks. He believed that Astana talks would handle the military side of the conflict by de-escalating violence while the UN process focused on the political side (United Nations, 2018b). Staffan de Mistura's view of Astana and Geneva as

mutually beneficial peacemaking interventions diminished his credibility in the eyes of the warring parties. His acceptance of Astana's de-escalation strategy, which the opposition believed, was in favor of the Syrian government. Thus it damaged the opposition's impression of him as an unbiased mediator. In terms of the Syrian government, de Mistura's insistence on a democratic transition contrasted with the government's military superiority on the ground (Hellmüller, 2022).

When Pedersen took office in late 2018, he had little choice but to support de Mistura's initiative to draft a new constitution. Staffan de Mistura's endorsement and legitimacy grant to the Astana process accelerated the UN's loss of credibility and leverage in peacemaking. As of 2018, Astana started to bring political issues to the negotiation table. Astana guarantors facilitated the formation of the constitutional committee by deciding on the delegates and convincing the conflicting powers by using their leverage. However, as it is mentioned above, Astana never prioritized a political transition. Russia used Astana to put forward topics like democratic elections and new constitution drafting. Thus, it was able to suppress the demands for a transitional government and al-Assad's leave. As a result of the political shift toward Astana legitimized the rule of the Assad regime and paved the way for Assad's normalization (Kizilkaya & Michels, 2021, p. 109). While Astana had a great influence over the Constitutional Committee, Geneva's leverage decreased gradually. Currently, the UN-facilitated Constitutional Committee's agenda is determined mostly by Astana guarantors, and the political transition process shifted further to Astana's track (Jusoor for Studies, 2021).

While Astana has undermined the UN's legitimacy in peacemaking because of the provided elements above, it also has not been successful in conflict resolution. The most significant advantage of Astana in conflict settlement was drawing lines between conflicting groups and reducing violence in the country. However, the military stalemate uncovered the country's institutional and economic weaknesses, and the Astana guarantors lacked the

resources to rebuild the country, which is required for sustainable peace (Kizilkaya et al., 2021, p. 248).

As Heydemann and Shaar asserted, abandoning the Geneva process would enhance the opposition's legitimacy and allow them to concentrate their efforts on institution-building and developing governance in opposition-controlled areas (2022). Astana needs to engage in genuine discussions with the West in order to settle the conflict, and Geneva's paralyzed peacemaking intervention is the most significant impediment to this dialogue. Furthermore, the deepening international polarization with the current Russia-Ukraine war suggests that it would be unrealistic to expect Astana to use its leverage over the conflicting parties to facilitate the Geneva process and achieve reconciliation with the West.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

5.1. Four Indicators of Measuring Credibility of the UN Peacemaking

The thesis defined four indicators for measuring the credibility of the UN peacemaking in Syria: (1) fractured Security Council, (2) Astana's sidelining of Geneva and consequent loss of leverage, (3) parties' noncompliance with mediators' efforts and little progress, and (4) absence of accountability in the face of atrocity crimes. The indicators were examined in each chapter by referring to relevant cases, but for completeness, they should all be assessed together.

The second chapter showed that all UN mediators have suffered from noncompliance and obstructionism by conflicting parties. The reasons for this absence of credible commitment to mediators' strategies changed over time. Kofi Annan and Lakhdar Brahimi's tenures coincided with the early phase of the conflict, and apparently, the conditions were not ripe yet. The Assad regime was concerned that a truce would lead to further consolidation of the opposition and eventually would harm the regime's situation on the ground. Concerning the opposition groups, they were willing to continue fighting and expand their ground control. There was also a strong sense that a military solution to the dispute existed. This view encouraged opposition-supporting regional powers not to use their leverage to achieve a ceasefire, and they even backed opposition groups' intransigence to Geneva.

Staffan de Mistura came into office in mid-2014, in parallel to the rise of extremist groups like the Islamic State. He hoped the common threat posed by the Islamic State would help to cease fire between the opposition and the regime forces (Reuters, 2014b). He aimed to halt the violence by applying local ceasefires and broadening them gradually to achieve a nationwide truce. The local freezes worked in some places for a short time. Staffan de Mistura

attempted to cease the violence in Aleppo. However, the regime forces violated the ceasefire, and de Mistura accused the regime of using barrel bombs in May 2015. This argument severed the relationship between de Mistura and Bashar al-Assad. After the failed local ceasefire attempt in Aleppo, al-Assad never met with de Mistura again, and the negotiations were made with lower-level representatives (Kenner, 2018). Staffan de Mistura had experienced the intransigence and noncompliance of the Assad regime until he stepped down. He was obliged to appeal to international stakeholders and was forced to follow a top-down approach after this failure.

A top-down strategy for peacemaking necessitates the cooperation of the major powers, specifically the P5 states. The UN Security Council was divided by the national interests of its permanent member states on the Syrian conflict. One of the biggest obstacles against peacemaking was the inefficient international support of the mediation process. The Security Council left the mediators with minimal leverage on many occasions. Even the rarely-seen consensus of the major powers on local issues was sabotaged by conflicting parties or faded away as a result of stagnant progress. For instance, due to the joint efforts of the United States and Russia, Staffan de Mistura was able to achieve a partial ceasefire between late February and early July of 2016. However, the conversations were unsuccessful, and no concrete progress was made.

The little progress and absence of commitments to mediation damaged the credibility of Geneva. Nevertheless, Geneva's monopoly in peacemaking helped it to protect its legitimacy to a certain level until the emergence of an alternative mediation process. The new peacemaking initiative in January 2017, sponsored by Iran, Russia, and Turkey, represented a radical shift from Geneva and made Geneva's credibility vulnerable and guardless.

Astana's initiation under the acknowledgment and endorsement of the UN Security Council and Staffan de Mistura's participation in many of the rounds within the Astana

framework increased Astana's international legitimacy. Unlike the United Nations, Astana guarantors were a part of the conflict and had a military presence on the ground. The guarantors sought to balance the military situation in accordance with their national interests and tried to resolve the crisis by de-escalating violence. However, they overlooked the importance of political transition in conflict resolution. The peacemaking method used by Astana reinforced the Syrian government's hope for a military solution to the conflict, which increased the government's reluctance in Geneva.

The fourth indicator of credibility measurement, lack of accountability in the face of mass atrocities, manifested itself in the United Nations' inability to hold the Assad regime accountable for its mass atrocity crimes. The Assad regime's use of chemical weapons in Douma, one of Astana's four de-escalation zones, in April 2018 demonstrated the fourth variable's interconnectedness with the other three indicators. Three days after the chemical bombardment of Douma, on April 10, 2018, the Security Council failed to adopt a resolution establishing an investigation mechanism for perpetrators of the chemical attacks in Syria. Russia vetoed the resolution draft and prevented the creation of an accountability mechanism.

Rather than holding the regime accountable, Russia supported al-Assad in legitimizing his authority over Syria through the Astana process. Astana started seizing political influence from Geneva in 2018. After the Sochi Conference in January 2018, Russia's focus moved to a political transition that would aid the regime's survival. It should also be noted that Russia initially proposed the concept of a constitutional committee in the Sochi Conference, which was later taken over by the United Nations. Russia used Astana to promote subjects such as fair elections and a new constitution. As a result, it was able to silence calls for a new government and the removal of al-Assad by shifting the focus of interest to the constitution drafting process.

When Pedersen came into power in late 2018, there was little room for him to follow since Staffan de Mistura limited Pedersen's mediation strategy by endorsing the Astana process.

He chose to follow the line drawn by his predecessor. He intensified his efforts to work for the Constitutional Committee. However, three years after the committee's establishment, no progress has been made so far, and Geneva has become paralyzed. Today, the agenda of the UN-facilitated Constitutional Committee is largely controlled by Astana guarantors, and the political transition process has shifted further into Astana's course.

The growing acknowledgment of the Assad regime was followed by some regional powers' attempts to normalize relations with it. The United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Bahrain reopened their embassies in Syria during Pedersen's tenure. Also, al-Assad visited the United Arab Emirates in March 2022. The visit was Assad's first trip to an Arab state since the conflict began in 2011 (Reuters, 2022). Pedersen's endorsement of the Assad regime's normalization further damaged the legitimacy of the Geneva process since it undermines the international law and the global norms that the UN stands for (Heydemann, 2022). Furthermore, the regime's noncompliance with the Geneva process has worsened since Geneva's role as a bridge to normalization has been diminished as a result of Astana's impact.

5.2. Concluding Thoughts

The Syrian conflict stands as one of the most serious humanitarian catastrophes of the 21st century. The conflict quickly became regionalized after its eruption and then internationalized (Cakmak, 2019). As of 2022, there are troops from Turkey, Iran, Russia, and the United States in the country. The direct military participation of regional and major powers is one distinguishing feature of the Syrian conflict. Crocker et al. (2014) described four types of conflict: conflicts stemming from legitimacy issues, state fragility, existential threats, and complex international involvement. They contended that each one has its own set of challenges and chances and that the Syrian crisis contains elements of all four types of conflict.

While all conflicts have their unique characteristics and should be operated distinctively, the power clash between major powers and following fragmentation of the Security Council differs the UN peacemaking in the Syrian conflict from many other conflicts. However, the four offered indicators of credibility measurement for the UN peacemaking are applicable in any other internationalized conflict which poses geopolitical interest clashes between major powers over it. For example, the struggle between Geneva and Astana in Syria can be associated with Berlin and Moscow processes in Libya (Abboud, 2021, p. 342).

There have been several macro-level challenges and limitations for Geneva's peacemaking intervention, which can be divided into two; the difficulties inherent to the UN's structure and limitations rooted outside of the UN. The absence of consensus among the Security Council's permanent member states crippled the leverage of the UN mediators by limiting the Security Council's support to Geneva. Additionally, the alternative peacemaking intervention, the Astana peace process, emerged as the reflection of geopolitical competition inside the Security Council. Astana made the UN peacemaking lose its monopoly and reduced its leverage over parties, which resulted in Geneva's legitimacy and credibility loss in the judgment of the stakeholders. While Geneva's minimal progress in peacemaking and its incapacity to respond to atrocity crimes vitally damaged its legitimacy, endorsement of the Assad regime's normalization by the current UN mediator Geir O. Pedersen was the last straw for the struggling process. When Geneva lost its function as a pathway to normalization, the Assad regime's last incentives to comply with Geneva disappeared. Consequently, the four credibility-undermining variables congruently functioned in Syria, and the Geneva process has been paralyzed, with little hope of changing in the future.

The thesis thoroughly examined the four criteria of credibility in order to answer the questions of what elements affect the UN's legitimacy in peacemaking and why Geneva has been paralyzed. Given that the causes for Geneva's collapse are evident, the issue of how

Geneva will survive Astana arises. There are two arguments that should be mentioned before offering a third answer.

Reid (2017) asserted that the mediator's leverage is context specific and has two aspects: capability and credibility leverages. The capability leverage represents the coercive power of the mediator, and it is supported by resources and military power. Strong capability leverage allows the mediator to use directive and manipulative strategies, including implementing sanctions and military intervention. On the other hand, credibility leverage is affected by the mediator's identity. It comprises communication-facilitation and procedural mediation strategies and is related to soft power.

The first argument emphasizes the UN's inability to back its mediator's leverage over conflicting parties because of the geopolitical interest clash within the Security Council. Kizilkaya and Michels suggested that the United Nations must work on its capability leverage to maintain its credibility in the Syrian conflict mediation. Because without a strong mandate and significant external support to bolster the hands of its mediators, the UN mediation may be overshadowed by other initiations, as witnessed in the Astana process (2021, p. 112).

The second discourse stresses the incapacitation of Geneva and the Constitutional Committee. Geneva gradually became paralyzed by losing its legitimacy due to the alternative peacemaking intervention, as argued in the fourth chapter. According to Heydemann and Shaar (2022), the best option is to simply end the Geneva process because of this state of paralysis. Ending Geneva would facilitate the opposition factions to channel their energy to institution-building, and this would improve the conditions of Syrians living in the opposition-controlled areas. They also proposed that if Geneva is halted, the UN should concentrate on building and supporting accountability mechanisms in Syria, as well as developing additional initiatives for missing and detained people.

Between these two options, this thesis suggests a third strategy for the United Nations in order to regain its legitimacy in peacemaking. Kizilkaya and Michels' (2021) suggestion for increasing the capability leverage of the UN is unrealistic to apply. Because it would be difficult for the UN to increase its leverage easily, considering that it is restricted by the fragmented Security Council. On the other hand, Heydemann and Shaar's (2022) proposal on halting Geneva and focusing on accountability mechanisms is more consistent. However, it should be the last resort since the Geneva process may survive Astana by taking certain measures without terminating itself.

Firstly, the UN should put an end to the constitution-drafting process, which is mainly under Astana's sphere of influence. Because Geneva has minimal authority over the agenda of the constitutional committee, maintaining this initiative operational would allow Astana to absorb the UN's legitimacy as a mediator, as explained throughout the thesis. Geneva's priority should be separating its track with Astana and obtaining its control over the political transition process again. As the thesis indicated, Astana narrowed down the political transition to a constitutional process and thus silenced the demands for regime change.

Halting the constitutional committee, minimizing the dependency on Astana, and forcing it to function in the conflict de-escalation area would allow Geneva to survive. To do this, the UN should focus on developing new accountability mechanisms, strengthening existing ones like the International, Impartial, and Independent Mechanism, and, finally, focusing on establishing a transitional government. By doing so, the UN would eliminate two of the four indicators that undermine credibility. First and foremost, Astana's hollowing out of Geneva would stop. Second, given the Assad regime's atrocity crimes, the UN would abandon its inconsistent policy of endorsing the regime's normalization. Recognizing the regime as it is, with its numerous documented humanitarian crimes, contradicts the international law and norms that the UN represents. This abandonment would restore some of the legitimacy of UN

peacemaking by rendering the regime's pathway for normalization dependent on Geneva again and forcing the regime to cooperate with accountability measures.

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