

Article

# Interpreting China's (Non-)Intervention Policy to The Syrian Crisis: A Neoclassical Realist Analysis

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## Introduction

Few issues on the international agenda have attracted as much global attention as the Syrian crisis, provoking vigorous debates in the international community and academia in the past three years. Similar to Libya, which was influenced by the Arab Spring, Syria has been plunged into a bloody civil war, resulting in an urgent humanitarian disaster. Despite the fact that the governments of Libya and Syria engaged in the massacre of civilians, the two countries hitherto have endured different fates. The former Libyan government has been overthrown by the swift international interventions in the manner of military actions, while the Syrian crisis has continued due to the inability of the United Nations Security Council's (UNSC) permanent members to reach consensus on a plan of action. This crisis invokes a long-standing question: would and should international actors interfere if they knew they could mitigate the crisis? With the stalemate of the international efforts and the debates on the normative and empirical issues regarding the Syrian crisis- such as the conditions under which interventions are worthwhile, successful, and legitimate- two camps have formed. These consist of the advocates of intervention, which include Western countries as well as a large majority of countries in the international community, and opponents of intervention, represented by Russia and China. The following analysis provides insight into China's diplomatic motivations and effort on the issues of the Syrian crisis.

Along with Russia, China has vetoed many UN draft resolutions initiated to curb a possible escalation of violence in Syria, which raised an important question on China's foreign policy: why has China joined Russia to block draft resolutions on Syria? First, China's explanation of insisting on the principle of non-intervention in the domestic affairs of other countries for its vetoes is not convincing. A retrospect of China's international behavior in the post-Cold War era demonstrates that its responses to international interventions are flexible, especially its participation within international organizations. With respect to UNSC interventions, including sanctions and peacekeeping operations, China has seldom wielded its veto power to impede such interventions.<sup>1)</sup> Moreover, regarding the Syrian crisis, China did not oppose all resolutions of interventions in the UNSC, and it made diplomatic efforts to deal with this conflict. These activities undermine

the notion that China's foreign policy toward Syria is rooted in its the non-intervention principle regarding domestic affairs.

Second, China's insignificant strategic and economic interests in Syria make its vetoes more anomalous. Despite a remark that China sees Syria as an important trading hub (Yan, 2012), Syria is neither an ally nor a major trade partner of China.<sup>2)</sup> China barely sells any weapons to the Syrian regime. In 2011, China exported \$2.4 billion to Syria and imported \$26 million of goods from Syria (National Bureau of Statistical of China, 2012). China's investment in Damascus was less than \$20 million, and it had approximately 30 companies and little more than 100 workers in Syria (Hille & Peel, 2012). China's economic interest in Syria is very moderate. It seems irrational for China to block the actions of the UN concerning the Syria crisis, since its veto might not only lead to isolation from the West but also damage its reputation in the Arab world. China had another alternative: an abstention. If China had abstained from voting for intervention in Syria, the outcome would be the same, and Sino-Russia relations would not likely be negatively impacted. However, in addition to preventing international interventions in Syria in the UNSC, China continually offered financial support to the Assad regime. Hence, the innenpolitik-oriented theory lacks sufficient explanation for China's non-intervention policy toward Syria.

Ching (2012) suggests that China's veto of the UNSC resolution on Syria reflects its assertiveness, in contrast to an earlier period when the Chinese would simply go along with the majority by abstaining. This argument follows in the same vein of the view argued by James Traub (2006) in the *New York Times Magazine*, who stated that China used its power to "protect abusive regimes with which it is on friendly terms," and that "China is prepared to play the role of spoiler" on issues discussed in the UNSC. Similar assessments of Chinese assertiveness have prevailed in the Western media and among academia.<sup>3)</sup> Consequently, China has been portrayed as an anti-status quo power that pushes back against Western countries. If this is indeed the case, one could ask, why Syria? The Assad regime is not an "old friend" of China,<sup>4)</sup> and Beijing has no direct interest to protect this abusive regime. This assumption of assertiveness is not in accordance with the previous instances of China's diplomatic engagements. For instance, China did not vote against the UNSC resolutions to issue sanctions against North Korea and Iran; comparing with these countries, Syria is a less significant partner for the Chinese government. Therefore, this judgment based on the theory of shift of relative power in the international system alone cannot explain China's foreign policy toward Syria.

These interpretations of China's response to the Syrian crisis are scattered in the reviews of the Western media and the blogs of some observers.<sup>5)</sup> In contrast, academic literature on China's foreign policy toward Syria is rare. Michael Swaine (2012) investigates Chinese views of the Syrian conflict, which comprehensively reviews the perspectives of the Chinese government and the non-authoritative Chinese scholars and observers. According to Swaine, Chinese scholars offer an explicit and full-throated criticism of Western behavior, which is consistent with the government's pronouncements. For example, Qu Xing, the president of the China Institute of International Studies, explains that China's vetoes are based on the basic principles of the UN Charter, and the norm of Responsibility to Protect is easily misused and cannot apply to the Syrian crisis (Qu, 2012).

Additionally, some literature has discussed the incentives of the Russian and Chinese double veto, but they either inappropriately presume identical or similar motivation of Russia and China or inadequately analyze China's considerations.<sup>6)</sup> China and Russia usually seek a convergence of political stances on international issues. Nevertheless, it does not mean China and Russia harbor the exact same concerns. Moreover, previous literature lacks discussion on China's interventionist behavior in the Syrian crisis.

In order to better interpret China's (non-) intervention policy toward Syria and recuperate the oversight of previous literature, this article aims at addressing the questions why China has vetoed three UNSC draft resolutions on the Syrian crisis, and why China has supported certain UNSC resolutions authorizing international interventions, as well as why China has conducted diplomatic interventions in Syria. To answer these questions, this article is structured as follows. Section I is a brief survey of the Syrian crisis and international interventions, as well as China's responses. Section II examines the factors affecting China's foreign policy based on the theory of neoclassical realism. Section III applies these factors to an analysis of China's foreign policy, including vetoes in the UN and interventions in the Syrian crisis. The article concludes with the contributions to the theory of international relations and to the understanding of China's non-intervention policy, and also presents the direction of future study.

## **I. The Syrian Crisis and International Efforts**

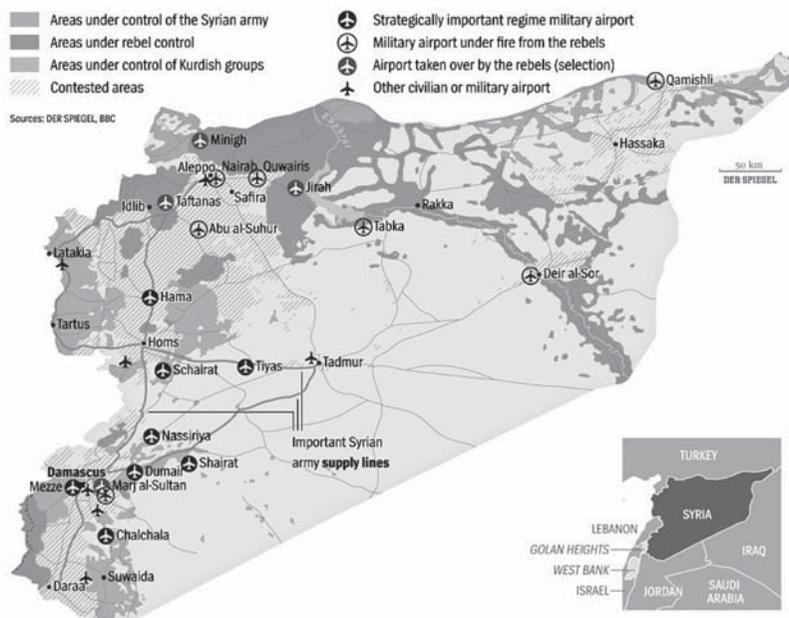
### ***Background of the Syrian crisis***

The Arab Spring, in which citizens have engaged in mass protests and demonstrations to depose their governors, has spread across North Africa and the Middle East since late 2010. Affected by this democratic movement in this region, people of some nations have organized protests to overthrow their government. In the cases of Libya and Syria, the government employed a military attack against its opposition. The Syrian uprising began in February 2011, following those that had occurred in Tunisia and Egypt, and it escalated in 2012 and 2013. Two main opposing groups, the Syrian National Council (SNC) and the National Co-ordination Committee (NCC), emerged during the conflict.<sup>7)</sup> Nevertheless, they did not reach a consensus on whether to conduct dialogue with or to overthrow the Assad regime to end the crisis. Consequently, the situation came to a civil war, with opposition groups seizing villages and fighting more sophisticated battles against government forces. The Assad regime did not concede to the opposition forces. Rather, the regime waged air attacks on the regions occupied by the insurgents. According to UN data, more than 100 thousand Syrian citizens have died, and more than 2 million Syrian people have become refugees, pouring into neighboring countries within nearly three years of the conflict (*The BBC*, 2013a; UN Refugee Agency).

The conflicts in Syria incorporate complicated religious and historical problems, and they were gradually turning a naturally domestic problem into a regional issue. Syrian President Bashar al-Assad inherited power from his father, Hafez al-Assad, and this authoritarian regime of the two generations has ruled Syria since 1970. The Assad family belongs to a sect of Shi'ite Muslim, the Alawite,<sup>8)</sup> which makes up just 12 percent of the Syrian population.

This minority sect governs the majority Sunni Muslim citizens, which account for 76 percent of Syria's population of 22 million.<sup>9)</sup> In 1982, President Hafez al-Assad launched a suppression in the Syrian town of Hama, and massacred over 10 thousand citizens when he ordered the Syrian army to squash a purported revolt against the regime, driving tens of thousands citizens into exile. This event buried a potential bomb in Syrian soil, which exploded into the 2011 conflict. The uprising against Assad initially was organized by Alawites who called for greater freedom and government transparency. As the conflict progressed, Sunni rebels targeted Alawite communities, thereby transforming this democratic move into a dispute between two opposing political forces underpinned by religious disputes (Burke, 2013). Former exiles of the bloody suppression of the 1979-82 Islamist insurgency joined the insurgence against the incumbent administration within and outside Syria.

Syria's geopolitical situation and its relations with neighboring countries make this issue more complex. Syria is located in the heart of the Middle East surrounded by the countries with divergent religions and complex interactions with each other. As Pankin, Russia's ambassador to the UN, has said, "Syria is the cornerstone of the Middle East security architecture" (UNSC, 2011a, p.7). In terms of religions, Iran, Iraq, and Lebanon sympathize with the Assad administration, while Turkey, Saudi Arab, and Qatar support the Sunni Muslim rebels. The Syria- Iran alliance was born out of defense against the Israeli invasion of Lebanon and the Iraqi invasion of Iran.<sup>10)</sup> Therefore, as a leading role in the Arab world opposing Israel, Syria's entangled relations with the latter easily invite external interventions.



**Figure 1. Syria: Mapping the Conflict (September, 2013)**

Source: Sharp & Blanchard (2013)

***International interventions in Syria (2011-2013)***

Syria had been a sanction target of Western countries since the conflict broke out (Sharp, 2011). With the escalation of the insurgence, members of the UNSC started to express their concern about the rapidly deteriorating Syrian situation in April 2011. The UNSC did not take any action due to members' disagreements over both the characteristics and potential remedies of the crisis. The UNSC only issued a presidential statement without adopting a binding resolution until August 2011. In October, China and Russia blocked a proposed UNSC resolution sponsored by the UK, France, Germany, and Portugal. The resolution would have condemned the ongoing violence and threatened Syria with possible sanctions if the government failed to halt its violent offensive (UNSC, 2011b).

**Table1. Voting record on the Syrian crisis in the UNSC (2011-2013)**

Date	Resolution/ Draft	Votes	China's reasons
October 4, 2011	Imposes arms embargo on Syria	Russian and Chinese vetoes; Abstentions: Brazil, India, Lebanon, South Africa	CP (sanctions); TI
February 4, 2012	Threatens to use further measures to Syria and calls on Syria's President Assad to step down	Russian and Chinese vetoes	CP (measures to put pressure to Syria); TI
April 14, 2012	Resolution 2042; endorses the Six-Point Plan	Aye unanimously	Inapplicable
April 21, 2012	Resolution 2043; establishes the UNSMIS	Aye unanimously	Inapplicable
July 19, 2012	Extends UNSMIS in Syria	Russian and Chinese vetoes; Abstentions: Pakistan, South Africa	CP (sanctions); TI
September 27, 2013	Resolution 2118; endorses the Geneva Communiqué and deals with chemical weapons issue	Aye unanimously	Inapplicable

Sources: Official Document System [ODS] of the UN; UN Bibliographic Information System [UNBISnet].

Note: CP refers to the measures in question would be counter-productive; TI stands for that the measures do not respect territorial integrity/ sovereignty.

When the Arab League's observer mission was conducted and then proved a failure, a draft resolution supported by the Arab League and the Western countries was put to a vote on February 4, 2012. China and Russia vetoed that draft. Following the setback of this double veto of UNSC resolutions, the UN General Assembly passed a non-binding resolution containing similar wording to the vetoed UNSC draft, which strongly condemned the "continued widespread and systematic human rights violations by the Syrian authorities" (UN General Assembly, 2012). China and Russia, along with a small number of countries, vetoed this resolution, but these vetoes did not affect the eventual outcome.

Following the second double veto in the UNSC, the UN and the Arab League appointed Kofi Annan, former Secretary-General of the UN, as Joint Special Envoy to Syria. Annan

proposed a six-point plan, which was agreed to by the Syrian government and subsequently endorsed by the UNSC in April 2012 (UNSC, 2012b). The UNSC adopted Resolution 2042 and 2043 that established the UN Supervision Mission in Syria (UNSMIS) with 300 observers to monitor the cessation of violence. However, the six-point plan was not effectively implemented. Then, Annan quitted from that position. Divisions between Western countries, Russia, and China re-emerged in the UNSC in July 2012, when the UNSC draft resolution supported by Western countries on whether to extend the UNSMIS was vetoed by China and Russia. The impasse of international efforts was not broken until the UNSC unanimously approved of Resolution 2118 in September 2013, after the use of chemical weapons in Syria was confirmed.<sup>11)</sup> This resolution endorsed results of the negotiation between the US and Russia in Geneva and focused on the elimination of Syrian chemical weapons.

China has vetoed three UNSC draft resolutions on the Syrian crisis and one resolution in the UN General Assembly. Some resolution drafts were weak or even watered down in order not to be hindered by China and Russia, but China did not make a compromise. However, China has not blocked all the resolutions aiming at intervening in Syria's issues, and it also proactively engaged in the Syrian conflict. We investigate China's motivation and payoff underlying these actions based on the theory of neoclassical realism in the following sections.

## **II. Neoclassical Realism and China's (Non-)Intervention Policy**

### ***Neoclassical Realism***

The international relations theory of neoclassical realism draws upon the theoretical insights of neorealism without sacrificing the practical insights into foreign policy, integrating the complexity of statecraft found in classical realism with the theoretical approach in order to construct a stronger explanatory analysis on countries' foreign policy (Sørensen, 2013; Taliaferro, Lobell, & Ripsman, 2009, p. 4). Neoclassical realists share the base assumptions with neorealism that the international system is anarchic and that states seek to maintain their survival. Trapped by the anarchical international system, different states in similar structural positions act alike. Hence, systemic incentives are determinant in one state's external activities.<sup>12)</sup> However, as Waltz's insistence that neorealism is a macro theory of international politics rather than foreign policy (Waltz, 1996), neorealism is not applicable to analyzing specific foreign policy behavior. In contrast, neoclassical realists assume that systemic effects on the foreign and security policies of states vary, and thus, countries' behavior in the international system also vary (Wohlfarth, 2008). Neoclassical realism does not challenge the ontology of neorealism. Rather, it highlights the systemic incentives with ontological priority in a theoretical paradigm.<sup>13)</sup> Nevertheless, it shares some nuances with the neorealism in epistemology.

A country's relative power in the international system is a reality, but this concept has uncertainties on how decision-makers interpret such a reality, as well as on the extent to which they mobilize their resources to achieve foreign policy objectives. Neoclassical realism thus "brings the state back" into the theoretical analysis and opens the "black box"

of the state. It reconsiders the significance of unit-level factors that impinge on foreign policy outcomes. Every state faces a two-level game in conceiving and implementing foreign policy: on the one hand, they must respond to the limited choices set by the international system, but, on the other, they need to extract and mobilize domestic resources from domestic society and simultaneously maximize their ability to satisfy domestic pressures (Putman, 1988, pp. 433-435; Taliaferro et al., 2009, p. 7). Neoclassical realists bring domestic dynamics into the causal train, holding that decision-makers' calculations and perceptions of relative power and domestic constraints are intervening variables between international pressures and a country's foreign policy (Taliaferro et al., 2009, p. 28).

**Table 2. The theoretical assumptions and logic of neoclassical realism**

View of international system	View of units	Causal Logic of neoclassical realism		
		Independent variable	Intervening variable	Dependent variable
Important; Anarchy is murky	Differentiated	Systemic Incentives	Decision-makers	Foreign Policy
			↑ Domestic constraints	

Source: Rose (1998, p. 154), adjusted by author.

As discussed above, it is difficult to understand China's foreign policy toward the Syrian crisis by looking solely at one theory or perspective that considers systemic incentives and domestic factors. Hence, neoclassical realism, which incorporates both external and internal factors, has a high potential to improve the theoretical analysis of China's foreign policy, particularly its non-intervention policy.

***Motivation of China's (non-) intervention policy***

*The determinant role of systemic factors*

When applying neoclassical realism, one initially focuses on the systemic factors. In other words, the starting point is to determine the effects that the international system has on countries' behavior (Zakaria, 1992, p. 197). Following the aftermath of the Cold War, unipolarity has become the distinguished feature of the international system. This current system features a highly asymmetric distribution of relative capabilities in which the US is a dominant superpower, wielding power that is difficult for others to counterbalance. States confront opportunities and constraints underlying the unipolar system. On the one hand, the unipolar system creates incentives that prompt states to counterbalance the dominant pole. On the other hand, the potential cost and risk of the challenge would be very high (Hansen, Toft, & Wives, 2008). Hence, it is rational for states to be free riders when they face limited options provided by the international system. China's foreign policy in the last three decades demonstrates this rationale. China has avoided direct conflicts with the US, enjoying the public goods provided by the US, and thereby achieving the second-rank power position in the world.

However, conceding to the superpower is not an unchangeable behavior of states, particularly for powers. Rather, powers consistently pursue economic wealth, prestige, and influence.<sup>14)</sup> Hence, if a transformation of the system is imminent or the distribution of power starts to change, rising powers tend to challenge the dominant power's legitimacy. The assumption of neoclassical realists is that states respond to the uncertainties of international anarchy by seeking to control and shape their external environment (Rose, 1998, p.152). When rising powers' relative capabilities are not strong enough to directly confront the hegemon, they attempt to shape the environment by subtly resisting against a superpower.<sup>15)</sup> China's material capability has gradually increased, marking it as the second tier power in the international system. It resists the unipolar system by two dimensions: pragmatically accommodating US hegemony and, on the other hand, contesting the legitimacy of US hegemony by discourse and activities (Schweller & Pu, 2011, p.52). Concerning international interventions, China condemns US interventionism and hegemonism through newspaper and official statements, and it joins Russia or other likeminded states as a countering coalition to vote against the US in international institutions.

By far, the international order based on the principles of sovereignty supplies a beneficial environment for China to assume more power.<sup>16)</sup> Beijing's insistence on effective control of absolute sovereignty affects its interpretation of international intervention. China is hesitant to associate itself with traditional Western countries, particularly the US, and remains skeptical about their intentions and the actual benefits from international interventions. China continually denounces that some Western countries force other countries to follow their value and political systems. Certain countries may use an authorized UNSC intervention to overthrow a local government and to acquire the targeted state's obedience or compliance. Therefore, a foreign-imposed forceful regime change is China's gravest concern. China's opposition of international interventions derives from maintaining sovereignty, thereby preventing regime change by external interventions from achieving legitimacy.

#### *The important role of domestic factors*

The domestic factors influencing a state's foreign policy are driven by the relationship between state and society. Neoclassical realism takes into account the state power that refers to the ability of state leaders to determine foreign policy free of or out of domestic political constraints.<sup>17)</sup> The state power is closely associated with state autonomy and state legitimacy.

Broadly, realism assumes that survival is the primary goal of states. The states vary depending on the characteristics of regimes, so the "state" in some instances can be motivated by regime survival rather than national survival, especially in the case of authoritarian countries.<sup>18)</sup> As an authoritarian state, maintaining political survival of the existing regime is the crucial objective of Chinese reigning elite, i.e. the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). Having gone through some grave crises of legitimacy, such as the Cultural Revolution and the Tiananmen Square Carnage, the Chinese government has been sensitive to international issues that may shake its legitimate foundation.<sup>19)</sup> Sarotte

(2012) concludes from the Tiananmen Square issue that the collapse of party authority abroad weighed heavily on the minds of the CCP's leaders (p.181). Accordingly, the overthrowing other kinds of regimes, especially by means of external intervention, likewise concerns the Chinese government.

A country's development is an indispensable approach to sustaining a regime's survival, provided that the common good to citizens is the rightful source of domestic political authority.<sup>20)</sup> The goal of self-preservation engages CCP to maintain the absolute control and to keep economic development at a high rate in the post-Cold War era. Bulwarking China through two serious economic crises underscores the effectiveness of economic performance as the critical way to CCP's legitimacy. China's high-speed economic growth is supported by abundant energy sources and merchandise exports. China transferred its role in the market of resources, especially natural oil, from exporter to importer in the early 1990s. Nowadays approximately half of China's natural resources are imported.<sup>21)</sup> It has thus developed a growing hunger for more energy and natural resources. More than half of the crude oil imported is supplied by the Middle East, and one-third comes from Africa.<sup>22)</sup> The demand of China's domestic development shaped China's foreign policy toward resource-rich countries. The stability of these regions for China means a guarantee of the security of resource importation.

In addition to the historical legacy of China's conventionally political value of unity, unified territoriality is an efficient strategy for enforcing control. As Mearsheimer (2001) points out, "Powers seek to maintain their territorial integrity and the autonomy of their domestic political order"(p. 31). In order to guarantee the physical control over Tibet, Xinjiang, and Inner Mongolia, China has sought to hinder outside supports for separatist movements in these areas inhabited by ethnic minorities. External intervention explicitly entails a threat to a state through the empowerment of dissident groups inside the state. Therefore, the Chinese government has been acutely sensitive to these domestic issues, and it has denounced other countries' actions and words that advocate for the independence of Tibet, Xinjiang, and Inner Mongolia, among others. In short, the political stability of largely ethnic and marginal areas is an important element driving China's non-intervention policy as well as overall foreign policy.

**Table 3. Motivation of China's (non-)intervention policy**

Systemic incentives	Internal factors
Unipolarity and distribution of power Maintenance of sovereignty order	Regime survival Economic development Domestic issues

### III. China's (Non-)Intervention Policy Toward the Syrian Crisis

This section investigates how these systemic incentives and internal factors affect the interpretation of China's decision makers on the Syrian crisis. It explains the conditions under which China disagrees or agrees with international intervention in Syria.

### ***China's vetoes***

The systemic factors, including the powers' attitudes toward the Syria crisis, interactions between powers and relevant stakeholders, and the current situation in Syria, set the backdrop of China's non-intervention policy in the Syrian crisis. China's three vetoes in the UNSC took place during different stages within the crisis, and it gave different explanations for these three vetoes. However, these vetoed draft resolutions have some similarities that the US and other Western countries were proponents and Russia vetoed all of them. China is not capable of directly challenging the US on the international arena, but the situation in which the international community lacked a consensus left room for China to maneuver the diplomatic power in dealing with this international issue. When the international community divided due to sharp contestations, China was disposed to pursue the Sino-Russian convergence. By acting in concert with Russia, China not only expresses its dissatisfaction with Western powers' interventions, but also takes no responsibility in obstructing international actions for China's own sake. In the Syrian case, China has two options- veto or abstention- on the UNSC draft resolution.

China should have abstained from the resolution to avoid condemnation from international society, as well as to evade the responsibility to a geographically distant country with which it has insignificant interests, but it chose to firmly stand with Russia to protect the Syrian regime. Russia's attitude obviously played a large role in China's consideration of the Syrian crisis. During the World Economic Forum in 2014, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi met with his Russian counterpart Sergei Lavrov in Montreux, Switzerland. He reiterated China's stance on a political settlement of the Syrian issue, calling for political efforts continue the negotiations (*Xinhua News Agency*, 2014). China also regarded its political alliance with Russia as a success in opposing the Western countries. At 2013 APEC meetings, Chinese President Xi Jinping called his government's cooperation with Russia on Syria an example of how the two nations "are cooperating very closely to resolve urgent and acute international and regional issues" (Hayoun, 2013). The draft proposed by China and Russia has not been adopted by the UNSC, and directly resulted in China's second veto, which was viewed as a Russian and Chinese diplomatic riposte.<sup>23)</sup> Furthermore, a de facto Sino-Russian alliance could counterbalance the US and oppose unilateral action by the US at the UN.<sup>24)</sup>

Moreover, China drew like-minded countries over to its side against the US and other Western countries' intervention. In April 2011, one month after Resolution 1973, which established the non-fly zone in Libya, was passed, the BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa) meeting opened in China's Hainan Province. It was obvious that BRICS members did not share the West's enthusiasm for the Arab Spring and saw more troubles than gains ahead (*The Telegraph*, 2012). The agreement they reached likely supplied the reason for Brazil, India, and South Africa to support Russia and China by abstaining from the UNSC draft resolution on Syria in October 2011. China pursued political support from like-minded countries in multilateral organizations in which it can play a role, such as BRICS and SCO (the Shanghai Cooperation Organization). The Syrian affair has been an issue in summits on these platforms since 2011, and China's proposition of resolving the crisis by means of dialogue has been written into the declarations.<sup>25)</sup>

In addition to developing the political coordination against the West, China tried to control or, at least, influence the discourse by denouncing US intention and behavior toward Syria. China condemned the US interventionism through the media. *Renmin Ribao* [*People's Daily*], a China's official media, commented on the US foreign policy toward Syria in February 2011. The article criticized that the US self-perception as "protector" of the Arab citizens was a product of its arrogance and immoral superiority complex, and China called for Arab citizens to judge and control the Arab's issue (Zhong, 2012). After US allegations that the Syrian regime was using chemical weapons, *People's Daily* claimed that US had hidden motivations concerning the Syrian crisis, stating, "Syria does not acknowledge allegiance to America but is allied with America's regional rival Iran; so Syria is a thorn in America's flesh; and America has hoped there would be regime change in Syria since the 2011 Arab uprising" (Zhong, 2013). Through media propaganda, China's defiance of US interventionism became morally grounded.

China has also justified its non-intervention policy and opposing attitude to the West through international law and appeal to norms in the UNSC, claiming that interventions should be based on international law and the UN Charter. Concerning the draft vetoed in October 2011, China opposed the idea of interference in other countries' internal affairs on a basis of principles set out by the UN Charter and its non-intervention policy. It implied that the methods advocated by Western countries would threaten the security and survival of small and medium-sized countries, as well as world peace and stability (UNSC, 2011c, p. 5). Regarding the second double veto on Syria, Chinese Ambassador Li Baodong also argued that the actions of the UNSC on the Syrian issue should comply with the purposes and principles of the UN Charter. He said that the draft would have served only to "complicate the issue" and would "prejudge the result of dialogue" since it was designed to pressure the Syrian authorities instead of condemning the opposition's violence (UNSC, 2012a, pp. 9-10). After China's third veto on Syria in the UNSC in July 2012, China said that the draft issued by the US, UK, and France completely contradicted the aims of a political settlement to the Syrian crisis. China highlighted its altruistic behavior and emphasized the sovereign equality and non-interference in the internal affairs of other countries (UNSC, 2012c, pp. 13-14). By casting vetoes along with Russia, China expressed its concerns about the tension between its foreign policy principles and normative reasons for international order, and let its voice to be heard.

The blowback effect from Libya is key to understanding why China has taken this negative position on the intervention in Syria. By acquiescing to the UN military intervention to protect civilians in Benghazi, Beijing felt it was tricked into accepting a western-led regime change in Libya (Anderlini, 2013). During the debate on the Libyan issue, China's Permanent Mission to the UN clearly stated, "We oppose any discretionary view toward Resolution 1973 and foreign countries purposely overthrowing the current regime of a sovereign state or becoming involved in an internal war in the name of protecting civilians" (*Xinhua News Agency*, 2011b). In addition, Chinese President Hu expressed his disquiet about the multinational coalition's air attack on Libya, which might have caused additional civilian human rights disasters. President Hu once said, if the air attack caused civilians casualties in Libya, this would probably breach the original

intention of UNSC Resolution 1973 (*Xinhua News Agency*, 2011a). China's abstention did not bring the desired outcome. Instead, Beijing has suffered an unstable relationship with the Libyan National Transitional Council (NTC), and neither NTC nor the West showed appreciation for China's compromise. Beijing lost its historical relationship with Gaddafi as well as oil deals. The Libya's situation made China contemplate its non-intervention policy of supporting an authoritarian regime, which substantiates China's resistance to referring to the "Responsibility to Protect" in the case of the Syrian conflict. From the Libyan case, China reaffirmed the idea that the West power's method of resolving humanitarian problems through a foreign-imposed regime change is justified by an authorization of the UNSC. Although similar intervention would not occur in China because of its status as a permanent member of the UNSC, it is reluctant to set a precedent of justified intervention to topple the incumbent regime through actions in Syria.

Syria suffers from a complicated situation. Firstly, there are entrenched ethnic and religious divisions, intricate geopolitical games, and growing terrorist threats behind the Syrian uprising (*People's Daily*, 2013a). The insurgency in Syria has become increasingly tied to the religious issue deviating from a purely anti-government democratic movement. No cohesive Syrian opposition emerged in the protest, though the West tried to gather these oppositions onto one side. An article in the *People's Daily* (2012) predicted that even if the Assad regime were overthrown, oppositions could not establish a democratic state due to lack of solidarity. Moreover, if the religious minority regime fell to the rebels, sectarian violence or ethnic cleansing would likely break out.

Secondly, Syria is of enormous strategic significance in the Middle East. Chinese officials have referenced Henry Kissinger's words, "You cannot make peace without Syria in the Middle East," to demonstrate the significance of Syria's strategic location (Wu, 2012). The Syrian regime is not isolated in this region, and reinforcement from Iran, Lebanon, Iraq, and Palestine could add strength to the Syrian defense (Zifcak, 2012, p.89). For instance, Iran has continually provided military support and dispatched military troops to Syria (Coughlin, 2012). Furthermore, China is concerned that a military intervention would provoke the Assad administration as well as oppositions, which could lead to an escalated conflict or even a regional war that involved all the regional stakeholders (*People's Daily*, 2013a). Besides, from China's perspective, the Iranian regime could be the next target that the US sets out to overthrow after the Assad government (*Beijing Wanbao [Beijing Night News]*, 2013). If Western countries overthrew the Iran regime, the strategic structure in the Middle East would be entirely altered, which may severely affect China's interest in this region.<sup>26)</sup>

China's prior interest in the Middle East is in the economic arena. The Middle East is the largest crude oil exporter to China. In 2010, the largest crude oil exporting supplier to China was Saudi Arabia, and Iran ranked third (China Industrial Map Editorial Committee; China Economic Monitoring and Analysis Center, 2011, p. 65). The instability in the Middle East directly impacts China's resources and its economic development in general. Saudi Arabia is the primary regional supporter of the Syrian opposition, but China remains confident that its Syria policy will not affect its economic cooperation with Saudi Arabia.<sup>27)</sup> Therefore, China insisted that military action in Syria would produce a negative

result, which would be a great risk facing China.

The Syrian opposition's connection to terrorists is one factor that forced China to conceive its current policy on Syria. Al-Qaeda, the global terrorist network, and other Islamism extremists supported the opposition and participated in the fights against the Syrian government. Other central Asian jihadists in Syria have increasingly publicized their activities with Al-Qaeda in Iraq and al-Sham, and the Eastern Mediterranean (Zenn, 2013b). China has confronted a series of separatist violent incidents in Xinjiang since 2009; when the violent riots broke out in Ulumuqi, the capital city of the Xinjiang Uyghur autonomous region, more than 200 Ughurs and Han Chinese were killed. The Chinese government claimed Eastern Turkistan Terrorists (ETT) had organized these riots. The ETT has become the main target of China's counter-terrorism activities, especially following the connection between localized separatist movements and al-Qaeda, which was discovered in 2009.<sup>28)</sup> Pan Guang, China's Middle East specialist from the Shanghai Academy of Social Science, has stated, "In the July 2011 Xinjiang bombings, for the first time Uyghur separatists planted a Salafist flag (black with Arabic writing) rather than their usual East Turkestan flag (blue with star and crescent similar to Turkey's flag)" (Lin, 2013). Syria's ambassador to China affirmed that there were more than 30 Uyghurs who received military training in Pakistan and went to Turkey to join the anti-government fight. The Chinese government has claimed that since 2012 the Uyghur militants from Xinjiang have been fighting with the rebels in Syria against the regime, one of which returned to Xinjiang and was arrested while planning to carry out violent attacks in China (*Huanqiu Shibao [Global Times]*, 2013). The Chinese Foreign Ministry (CFM) highlighted the alleged connection between militants from China's Turkic and Muslim minority and Al-Qaeda (CFM, 2012). Chinese Foreign Minister Spokeswoman Hua Chunying claimed that the member of ETT who returned from Syria was associated with China's core interests (i.e. the stability of Xinjiang) (CFM, 2013). If the Assad regime were replaced by an Islamist regime, extremism would quickly spread to the Muslim republics in Central Asia and Xinjiang. Thus, China's concern over the stability of Xinjiang affected China's decision on Syria.

**Table 4. Mechanisms of China's vetoes regarding Syria**

<i>Systemic incentives</i>	<i>Internal motivation (perceptions)</i>	<i>Outcome</i>
<i>Background factors</i>	<i>China's perception on some UNSC draft resolutions</i>	
• West (US)-initiated interventions	• High possibility of authorizing legitimacy of foreign-imposed regime change	
• Russian vetoes	<i>China's predictions for potential outcomes of interventions in Syria</i>	
<i>Trigger factor</i>	• Regime change in Syria	
• The military intervention in Libya	➔ • Opposition backed by terrorism attains power	
<i>Additional factors</i>	• Instability in the Middle East	➔ Vetoes
• Internal complexity of the Syrian crisis	<i>China's concerns over domestic demands</i>	
• Geopolitical significance of Syria	• Avoids legitimacy of foreign-imposed regime change → strong	
	• Maintains stability of Xinjiang → strong	
	• Guarantees security of imported resources in the Middle East → strong	

As Kadercan (2013) has argued, “Concern for relevant losses stimulates much of international politics”(p. 1018). Although protecting the Syrian regime would not serve ostensible interests, China’s perception that a foreign-imposed regime change would yield profound negative consequences for its domestic security and stability is reasonable. Internationally, the dissent in dealing with the Syrian conflict provides China more foreign policy alternatives. The conjunction of its domestic vulnerability and the Syrian conflict provides the incentives to maintaining the Assad administration, and thus affects its robust foreign policy toward this crisis.

### ***China’s engagement in Syria***

China’s Syria policy is sophisticated, and its non-intervention policy is inconsistent. With regard to the Syrian crisis, China’s interventions can be classified into two categories: authorizing international intervention and diplomatic intervention. First, China did not block all UNSC Syria-related resolutions by vetoes. China was favorable to Resolution 2042 and 2043, which endorsed Annan’s six-point plan and authorized the deployment of an advance team of monitors to Syria to oversee the ceasefire there. It also supported Resolution 2118, which addressed the issue of using chemical weapons in Syria. Resolutions 2042 and 2043 were followed by the second double veto in the UNSC. The Syrian government has accepted Annan’s proposal, and these resolutions were not binding, which excluded the possibility of using force and implementing other punitive measures. The international community has reached consensus on the ways of addressing the Syrian crisis. Moreover, the plans of these resolutions accorded with China’s preference of political negotiation and coordination rather than coercive measures, so China has no reason to go against these initiatives.

China seconded Resolution 2118 largely because of the international consensus. The US intelligence organization assessed that Syrian government forces used sarin nerve gas in limited attacks and conducted a mass casualty chemical weapons attack against rebel-held areas near Damascus on August 21, 2013 (Sharp & Blanchard, 2013, p. 1). China viewed this information as a rumor made by the US and as a pretext of the West to intervene militarily to alter the balance of forces in the Syrian civil war. It claimed that the US was eager to use military intervention, stating, “The rumor that the Syrian government had used chemical weapons against the rebels was a perfect excuse for America to launch an attack on Syria” (*People’s Daily*, 2013b). After the UN report affirmed that chemical weapons had in fact been used in Syria, Russia and the US underwent several days of strenuous negotiations. This resulted in an agreement between the two countries to destroy the Syrian arsenal of chemical weapons, which they signed in Geneva on September 14, 2013.

It is worth noting that using chemical weapons violates the Geneva Conventions signed in 1925 and other related international laws. However, Resolution 2118 did not invoke Chapter VII of the UN Charter, which excluded the implementation of strongly punitive measures, such as sanctions. This resolution was a compromise among the international community, particularly between Russia and the US. Washington had intended to use force against the Syrian army. On August 31, President Obama submitted

a draft resolution requesting the authorization from Congress that mandated the use of force for military operations against Syrian regime targets to hold the Assad regime accountable for their use of chemical weapons, to deter this kind of behavior, and to diminish their capacity to carry it out (Sharp & Blanchard, 2013, p. 19). Washington has bolstered its naval presence in the Eastern Mediterranean and military leaders from the US, UK and their allies have convened a meeting in Jordan (*The BBC*, 2013b). Nevertheless, through the Geneva negotiations in September 2013, the US abandoned the original intention of using force.<sup>29)</sup> Hence, China's concerns over foreign-imposed regime change as well as a possible increase of instability in the Middle East were not presented, which led to China's support of Resolution 2118.

Second, in contrast to China's foreign policy toward Libya, China did not stand aside to wait and see what the issues developed. Instead, China actively mediated between the Assad administration and the opposition. Beijing proposed a so-called "third path" for Syria and hosted a delegation of Syrian opposition members to demonstrate that it could communicate with both sides (Ching, 2012). Although Beijing shielded the current regime by veto in the UNSC, it quickly and actively established relations with the Syrian democratic opposition. Two days after China's second UNSC veto, a delegation from the SNC visited Beijing at the invitation of the Foreign Ministry to meet Zhai Jun, Vice Foreign Minister on Africa and West Asia (Sun, 2012). From February 17 to 18, 2012, Zhai Jun as envoy of the CFM visited Syria and met with both the Assad regime and the opposition. On March 4, CFM elaborated its Peace Plan for Syria, the six-point plan, and called for dealing with this crisis by negotiation and dialogue; the Plan was improved by the CFM in October (*Xinhua News Agency*, 2012b; 2012c). On March 6, 2012, China dispatched Li Huaxin to visit Syria again, persuading two political sides of Syria to accept China's proposal, which called for the end of violence and cooperation between the two sides. Although China's diplomatic intervention has proved ineffective, it still attempted to ease the high-tension political atmosphere in Syria.

Furthermore, China tried to mediate with Syria and any other countries in the Arab League (AL). On one hand, it seeks support for its Syria policy in the Middle East. Wu Sike, as China's Middle East envoy, visited the region during 19 to 21 February 2012. He separately visited Israel, Palestine, and Jordan, and had conversations on the Syrian issue with their Foreign Ministers and officials in charge of foreign affairs. On the other hand, China emphasized the AL's role in addressing the Syrian issue. China supports the AL's efforts to end the crisis in Syria and has called on concerned parties to implement the AL's resolution at an early date and in a substantial and appropriate way. Liu Weimin, Chinese foreign ministry spokesman, said, "Concerned parties should make concerted efforts and the international community should create favorable conditions for the implementation process" (*Financial Times*, 2011).

China pursued a mediation role inside and outside of Syria by diplomatic leverage. It robustly promoted the approach to resolve the crisis in a manner of dialogue, rather than the coercive sanctions or military actions advocated by the West. Additionally, China actively coordinated with other countries in destroying Syrian chemical weapons by sending a group of warships with more than 1000 marines to Syrian Coast (*Before It's*

*News*, 2013; Watson, 2013). Since the threat of West-led intervention has not manifested, China's Syria policy was motivated by domestic needs. China maintained its prestige as a responsible player in this region, illustrated by Wu Sike's words, regarding China's foreign policy toward Syria, "China is deeply aware of its responsibilities to strictly follow the principles of the UN Charter and international relations norms in safeguarding the fundamental and long-term interests of developing countries" (Wu, 2012). China paid lip service to woo the Middle East countries, but simultaneously vetoed the draft resolutions initiated by the Middle East in the UNSC. However, in China's view, its behavior is not controversial, similar to its non-intervention policy.

**Table 5. Mechanisms of China's intervention**

<i>Systemic factors</i>	<i>Internal motivation</i>	<i>Outcomes</i>
	<i>China's perceptions on certain UNSC resolutions</i>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• exclusion of foreign-imposed regime change</li> </ul>	
<i>Background factors</i>	<i>China's predictions for potential outcomes of the UNSC interventions and its diplomatic effort in Syria</i>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• International consensus</li> <li>• US compromise</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Assad administration still stays in power</li> </ul>	Approval of UNSC intervention;
<i>Additional factor</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Terrorism would be under control</li> <li>• No threat to the stability in the Middle East</li> </ul>	➔ Diplomatic intervention
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Geopolitical significance of Syria</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>China's concerns over domestic demands</i></li> <li>• Avoids legitimacy of foreign-imposed regime change → weak</li> <li>• Maintains stability of Xinjiang → weak</li> <li>• Guarantees security of imported resources in the Middle East → strong</li> </ul>	

### Conclusion

China's response to the Syrian crisis begs an important question as to why China exerted its veto power to protect the incumbent regime, a government with which China has insignificant interest. Additionally, China's motivations of supporting certain UNSC resolutions on Syria as well as Beijing's diplomatic interventions in Syria are worthwhile to analysis. Therefore, it is necessary to systemically investigate China's foreign policy toward the Syrian conflict. Previous works rarely provide insightful understanding of China's motivation. This article adopted the international relations theory of neo-classical realism to analyze China's Syria policy. By doing this, it not only enriched the empirical application of neo-classical realism but also deepened an understanding of China's non-intervention policy as well as its foreign policy.

The framework exploring independent and intervening variations can account for China's non-intervention policy. A combination of systemic factors and domestic factors underlying the Syrian crisis has determined China's non-intervention in Syria, and has encouraged Chinese leaders to make a diplomatic effort aimed at alleviating the tensions in Syria and the Middle East. In the unipolar international community, China as an

emerging power cannot directly confront the hegemony, yet subtly challenges the legitimacy of hegemony on principle. Concerning the Syrian crisis, China took advantage of Russia's Syria policy to counterbalance the US. Moreover, China's experience with Libya acted as a triggering factor that affected its negative response to international interventions in Syria, which was greatly based on its domestic vulnerability. As George Lawson and Luca Tardelli (2013) have pointed out, "Non-intervention is an attempt to secure domestic stability in a context of increased interdependence"(p.1250). China's domestic priority of the regime survival, associated with the concerns over foreign-imposed regime change, security of resources, and stability of the Xinjiang ethnic minority area, motivated China to maintain the sovereign order by wielding veto power and condemning the US interventionism.

On the other hand, China's extensive stake in the contemporary order drove it to compromise with the majority of countries in the international community, as well as to cooperate with international efforts aimed at minimizing disruption to this order. China's approval of certain resolutions on Syria is the case in point. When the systemic factors yield positive outcomes to China, its interventionist behavior is consistent with national development objectives. Its economic interests and prestige in the Middle East created incentives for its diplomatic intervention in the Syrian crisis. Hence, China non-intervention principle and interventionist impulses are determined by the systemic factors, simultaneously constrained by its domestic factors.

In terms of the theoretical implications, China's non-intervention policy and interventionist activities in the Syrian crisis could contribute to the development of neo-classical realism. Scholars have criticized this theory "has yet to offer a distinct set of explanatory hypotheses of its own" (Walt, 2002, p. 211). This theory thus fails to be an independent research program. However, China's non-intervention policy is an appropriate case to which to apply this theoretical paradigm, given China's peculiar status in the international system and its domestic demands concerning the principle of non-intervention. In order to strengthen this theory's explanatory power, more empirical cases in China's foreign policy, such as China's interventionist behavior toward different issue areas and different countries, should be investigated through future research.

## NOTES

- 1) The record of vetoes in the UNSC, see *Security Council - Veto List*, available at: [http://www.un.org/depts/dhl/resguide/scact\\_veto\\_en.shtml](http://www.un.org/depts/dhl/resguide/scact_veto_en.shtml)
- 2) For the discussion of Russia's interests in the Syrian conflict, see Bagdonas (2012).
- 3) For example, see Swaine (2010) and Small (2010).
- 4) Chinese officials and media label a foreign leader an "old friend" to express their deeply political relations.
- 5) See, for example, Carpenter (2012); Pena (2013); Stone (2013).
- 6) For the representative works, see Eminue & Dickson (2013); Janik (2013).
- 7) At the beginning of the demonstrations, the Syrian opposition did to be organized, in contrast to Libyan rebels (Shadid, 2011; Suleiman & Simon, 2011).
- 8) Alawites consider themselves Muslims, but most mainstream Muslims call them heretics.
- 9) For details of religious sections in Syria, see Aoyama & Suechika (2009, pp. 8-9).

- 10) Syrian military and diplomatic support for Iran helped check Iraq and was reciprocated by Iran's mobilizing of the Lebanese Shi'ites to shift the balance in Lebanon against Israel (Hinnebusch, 2009, p. 222).
- 11) For the report on the alleged use of chemical weapons in Syria, see (UN, 2013).
- 12) Concerning contents of neorealism, see Baldwin (1993) and Waltz (1979; 2008). This article aims at highlighting the explanatory power of neoclassical realism that applies to China's foreign policy, so it does not specially discuss the differences among neorealism, defensive realism, and offensive realism.
- 13) Concerning the problem of ontological priority and weight versus epistemological priority and weight, see Tang (2011, pp.214-215). Neorealism made an apparent mistake in overestimating the determinant of ontological priority.
- 14) For a discussion of states' interests, see Choucri & North (1975); Rosecrance (1986); Wolforth (2009).
- 15) Schweller and Pu (2011) call this behavior as "rightful resistance", and they analyze the possible roles of emerging powers in the international system after unipolarity by investigating China's case. They argue rising powers tend to be shirkers, who pursue power's privileges but do not want to take responsibilities.
- 16) Chinese scholars think that China has integrated into the international system, and it has started to recognize and, to some extent, maintain this system. See, for example, Shi (2013).
- 17) On factors that affect the degree of state power, see Taliaferro (2006).
- 18) It does not mean that the regime interest is totally separated from nation interests. To a large extent, an authoritarian or dictatorial regime takes its interest as the nation interest.
- 19) The Tiananmen massacre is a prominent case in which the CCP was worried about the contagion of democratic movements yielding domestic chaos and party factionalism in Eastern Europe (Sarotte, 2012).
- 20) A regime usually adopts three approaches including ideological legality, performance legality, and procedural legality to achieve legitimacy (Beetham, 1991; Easton, 1965). In China's case, after the Cultural Revolution, the ideological legality gradually loses effectiveness; and as an authoritarian country, it does not satisfy the procedural legality. Thus, the performance legality is the last method for the Chinese government.
- 21) China's import dependence ratio of natural oil is as high as 55.2% from January to March of 2011, and that number is higher than that of US. The data is adopted from a report (Li & Ma, 2011, p. 2), but there is other accumulated data resulting in figures of 53.5% and 61%, given respectively by the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology and the National Development and Reform Commission of PRC.
- 22) See the statics provided by the General Administration of Customs of the PRC.
- 23) China explained its veto that the suggestions of Russia and itself had not been adopted by the UNSC, which led to a seriously division between parties over the current situation of the Syrian crisis (UNSC, 2012a, pp. 9-10).
- 24) Although the US might bypass the UNSC and set out a unilateral intervention in Syria, this intervention without authorization of the UNSC, in China's opinion, would be no legitimacy, and hence it would be immoral.
- 25) See BRICS (2012; 2013); Mcdermott (2013); Panin (2013).
- 26) Author's interviews with Chinese scholars, September 4-15, 2013, at Tsinghua University, Beijing, and the Shanghai Academy of Social Science.
- 27) An Huihou, former Chinese ambassador to Egypt and Tunisia, received a television interview

- and said assertively that China's veto would not affect the traditional friendship between China and the Middle East countries (*Xinhua News Agency*, 2012a).
- 28) Al-Qaeda issued a video of Abu Yahya al-Libi, a member of the ETT, who claimed that Xinjiang was the Muslim world's forgotten wound (*Zenn*, 2013a).
- 29) The US compromise was partly driven by its own concern that the opposition was not trusted due to the prominence of radical jihadist groups among its ranks (*Felgenhauer*, 2013).

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## 中国のシリア危機に対する（不）干渉政策の解説 —— 新古典的現実主義からの分析 ——

シリア危機は、国際政治における未解決の紛争の一つであり、多くの論争を引き起こした。国際社会はその解決に向けて努力しているものの、紛争は深刻化しつつある。この問題に関して、国際連合安全保障理事会常任理事国である中国とロシアは、制裁を含むシリア非難決議案に拒否権を行使した。しかし、その一方で中国は、いくつかのシリア危機解決に向けた国連の議案に賛成しており、介入の正統性を認め、シリア内戦の仲裁にも尽力している。一見すると一貫しないように見える中国のシリア問題に対する対応は何故発生するのだろうか。先行研究においては中国の国連シリア非難決議案に対して立ち入った分析がなされておらず、特に、シリア危機に対する一部介入を中国政府が支持していることに関しては、軽視される傾向にある。その結果、依然として中国のシリア危機に対する外交政策は十分に理解されていない。

この問題を克服するため、本稿では、新古典的現実主義の理論に基づき、中国のシリア危機に対する（不）干渉政策を分析する。本稿は結論として、中国の一貫しないかのように見える対シリア政策は、中国の主體的な判断基準が一貫しないことによるのではなく、一貫した判断基準の下で、客観要因が変化した結果であることを主張する。すなわち、中国は主體的な判断基準として、介入による体制転換への正統性付与の拒否、新疆などの中国内政問題への介入正当化の拒否、中東における経済的権益の確保、危険にさらされる人々の保護を行う国際的責任に同意することによる外交の優位性の獲得という基準を持つ。したがって、国連決議案が介入による体制転換や新疆など内政問題への介入の正統性を付与する可能性があり、国際社会が決議案に対して一致した立場になく、とくにロシアが強い拒否を示し、さらに、シリアに続いてイランへの介入を正統化する道を開くことで中国の中東における橋頭堡を危険にさらす可能性があるなかで、中国は拒否権の行使を行ったのである。また、リビアにおいて、西側諸国のトリックにかかったとの認識があることや、シリアの反対体制勢力が、中国の国内問題とも密接に関係する有るアルカーイダとの関係を持っていることも、拒否権発動の要因となった。しかし、アメリカの妥協により介入による体制転換や中国内政問題介入への正統性付与の可能性が低まったこと、イランへの介入の正統性に連動する可能性が低まったこと、またそれらによって決議案がロシアを含め国際社会が同意する内容となった結果、中国は危険にさらされる人々の保護を行う国際的責任に同意することによる外交の優位性の獲得という判断基準の下に、国連決議案に賛成するに至ったのである。

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