

Doctoral Dissertation

**The United Nations Security Council and the Syrian Conflict:  
Exploring the Influence of Elected Members in the Context of Great Power  
Struggle**

**(Summary)**

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## SUMMARY

The United Nations Security Council (Council) comprises fifteen members, among whom five are permanent members (P5), and ten are elected members (E10). While both the P5 and the E10 play a significant role in the Council, news reports and some scholars tend to downplay the latter's contribution. This tendency was apparent in news reports on the Council's handling of the Syria conflict. Even though many E10 served as penholders on the conflict's humanitarian issues, drafted resolutions, led negotiations for their adoption, and successfully ensured assistance to the affected Syrians, their efforts have been rarely recognized in the media. In other words, contrary to the common belief of the E10's powerlessness, the Syrian experience has shown that they can play a significant role in shaping Council outcomes and deliberations.

Similarly, the P5 remained largely divided throughout the conflict. Furthermore, the P5's divisions now go beyond issues involving their interests. This trend shows that the Syrian conflict is, in fact, a reflection of the ongoing growing great power rivalry and struggles in the Council.

This dissertation explores the conditions under which the E10 are likely to influence the Council and the type of contribution they can make in the actual context of increasing great power contest and polarization. It analyzes the involvement of the E10, namely, Australia, Luxembourg, Jordan, New Zealand, Spain, Egypt, Sweden, Japan, Kuwait, Belgium, and Germany, as penholders on the Syrian conflict's humanitarian issues. These E10 have taken twenty initiatives, among which seventeen dealt with humanitarian issues and ceasefire. In terms of the outcome, the E10 succeeded ten times and failed seven times to influence the Council

This study uses process tracing to investigate the penholders' initiatives and explores the processes and mechanisms the E10 used in their attempt to influence the Council. The analysis covers 189 Council meetings on Syria, twenty draft resolutions, presidential statements, press statements, reports by the Secretary-General, one interview, and other secondary sources such as reports by think tanks and the press and scholarly works. The dissertation mainly analyzes the negotiations processes by looking into the dynamics at the Council, contentious issues, penholders' strategies, and leadership.

After a thorough analysis of the negotiation processes surrounding some successful and failed initiatives the penholders undertook on the conflict's humanitarian issues, this dissertation argues that three factors contributed to their influence. The first factor is the Council dynamics. The P5 have remained divided throughout the Syrian conflict.

However, their commitment to solving the humanitarian crisis while disagreeing on the appropriate strategy opened a space that some penholders skillfully exploited.

Moreover, the penholders' diplomatic capabilities and leadership enabled them to bridge various positions and propose solutions to contentious issues. Many times, their proposed solutions crucially informed the Council's response to humanitarian issues. Finally, many of these penholders were determined to influence the Council's response. Determined to play a leadership role and contribute to the Council's deliberations and outcomes, they committed significant resources. In other words, while dynamics significantly conditioned their influence in the Council, the success of these countries was also influenced by their determination and capacity to bridge different positions and provide solutions when contentious issues emerged during negotiations. Even when they failed, they strived to play a middle power role or diplomacy, that is, fostering compromised solutions and building consensus on issues, and became critical actors in shaping the Council's response to the conflict's humanitarian issues. Therefore, drawing from the Syrian case, the dissertation argues that as the P5 remain divided on many issues, playing middle power diplomacy is crucial today. This, in return, makes the role of middle powers or countries that play this role critical to the Council's effectiveness.

The Syrian case offers many insights to understand the conditions under which the E10 can influence the Council in the current context of growing great power rivalry. It is a conflict that has directly involved four of the P5 and where the interests of the P5 and other regional actors are at stake. The Syrian case perfectly reflects the resurging power struggles among the P5. The case has also seen the participation of many E10 serving as penholders on humanitarian issues. As a result, the Syrian case informs about the type of contribution the E10 can make in today's configuration of the Council. As this dissertation shows, middle power diplomacy is undoubtedly the path through which the E10 can emerge as influential actors in actual Council dynamics.

While many scholars and practitioners accept that the E10 can influence the Council, the type of contribution they can make under the current political context has been rarely addressed. Under current dynamics in the Council, middle powers, countries with significant resources and attempt to mediate and bridge positions, or carry out an intellectual and conceptual leadership by providing solutions during deadlocks, or countries that play a middle power role will remain critical to the mission and life of the Council.