

## Interests of Britain, France and Germany in the Syrian Conflict

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**Abstract:** *Since the outbreak of the Syrian conflict in 2011, it is still difficult to see its clear end, which is related to the complexity of the internal forces in Syria, but also related to the intervention of external forces in Syria. Britain, France and Germany, which have closer geographical and historical ties to Syria, are naturally involved. This is determined by the interests of the three countries in the Syrian conflict. Overall, the interests of the three countries in the Syrian conflict are: overthrowing the Assad government, opposing the Syrian government's possession and use of chemical weapons, and combating the Islamic State. Of course, there are some differences in the enthusiasm and means of realizing the above interests among the three countries, and they are greatly influenced by the US and Russian policies towards Syria.*

**Key words:** *Anglo-French-German; Syrian conflict; interests; Islamic State; United States; Russia*

Before the Syrian conflict, Britain, France and Germany had not paid much attention to Syria. For example, although the European Union has negotiated the Association Agreement with Syria, it has not signed the agreement with it as with other Mediterranean countries. Similarly, compared with its relations with Russia, the United States, Iran and Lebanon, Syria has never regarded its relations with the European Union or its member States as an important part of its foreign policy. <sup>①</sup>However, in the context of the so-called “Arab spring”, the

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\*This article is part of the research work for the major program “Research on the Global Islamic Extremism” (16ZDA096) financed by the Chinese National Planning Office of Philosophy and Social Science.

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① Marc Pierini, *In Search of an EU Role in the Syrian War*, Belgium: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2016, p.4. Of course, the failure for the EU to sign an association agreement with Syria has a lot to do with the EU's view

Syrian conflict has increasingly attracted the attention of the three countries. After all, Syria is close to Europe, and the evolution of its internal conflict has spawned terrorist groups such as the Islamic State, creating a widespread refugee crisis that tests the values of the European Union. All this touches on the national interests of the three countries and forces them to take practical action to deal with the Syrian conflict. As far as external forces are concerned, the Syrian conflict is generally a game between the two sides, led by the United States and Russia, mainly around the fate of the Bashar regime. Therefore, as the backbone of the Western camp, the interests of Britain, France and Germany in the Syrian conflict are basically the same, but there are differences in the means to realize the interests and the priority of all kinds of interests. Let's take a look at the interests of the three countries in the Syrian conflict.

### **I. To Overthrow the Assad Regime**

Like the United States, in the eyes of Britain, France and Germany, the Assad regime in Syria is a dictatorship, far from meeting the standards of Western democratic regimes. In particular, after the emergence of popular protests in Syria, the three countries believe that the Syrian government has used excessive violence against protesters in its own country. As the conflict intensified, the three countries followed the United States in a joint statement on August 18, 2011, claiming that Assad had lost his legitimacy as president and urging him to step down. The three countries believe that promoting the downfall of Assad is conducive to safeguarding the international discourse system of foreign interference by Western countries. This international discourse, which carries the values of "human rights above sovereignty" and that the western democratic system is the fundamental guarantee of human rights, is conducive to the formation of relevant international norms conducive to the West, thus not only reducing the cost for the West to lead the world, but also taking up a certain advantage in their competition or possible conflicts with Russia, China and other non-Western powers.

The Syrian regime has relatively close relations with Russia and Iran, so from a geopolitical point of view, the overthrow of the Assad government is conducive to the geopolitical repression of Russia and Iran by western countries, including Britain, France and Germany. The crisis in Ukraine was caused by the West's containment of Russia. Containing the Islamic Republic of Iran is also a consistent practice in the West. For example, while western countries supported some of the uprisings in Tunisia, Egypt and Libya, they were surprisingly silent about Bahrain's crackdown on protesters, particularly Saudi Arabia's military intervention in Bahrain. They did so in an attempt to use Saudi Arabia to contain Iran. Since the overthrow of the Assad regime is also an important interest of the United States in the Syrian conflict, Britain, France and Germany regard the overthrow of the Assad regime as an important goal in the Syrian conflict, reflecting its consistency with the foreign policy of the United States and the cohesion of the Western Alliance. This is in line with the long-term foreign strategy of the three countries. With the goal of overthrowing the Assad regime, it can also maintain the consistency of the foreign policy and foreign discourse of the three countries. The reasons given by the three countries,

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that Syria's Lebanese policy and human rights situation are unsatisfactory, as well as the existence of weapons of mass destruction in the country. See Radka Havlová, "The European Union and the Crisis in Syria," *SOUČASNÁ EVROPA*, Vol.20, Iss.2, 2015, p.70.

especially Britain and France, in trying to overthrow the Assad regime are similar to those given when they overthrew the Libyan regime of Moammar Gadhafi. In addition, because the Arab countries in the Gulf region, led by Saudi Arabia, and other Sunni Arab countries also want the pro-Iranian Syrian regime to fall, the three countries having the same goal would make them gain a certain degree of affection from those Arab countries and help them develop relations with most Arab countries in the region (such as selling them more weapons) and thus maintain and expand their influence in the region. In fact, throughout the Middle East, the West is largely on the side of pro-Western countries such as Saudi Arabia. Finally, the United States is the only superpower in the world today, so it is less risky for the three countries to follow the United States in activities such as opposing the Assad regime which can present themselves as a great power. This is especially true for the UK and France, which are permanent members of the UN security council and must be out of place not to do something significant about their neighborhood.

The three countries have made great political and diplomatic efforts to overthrow the Assad regime. As the United States called for President Assad to step down, the three countries also followed the United States and joined other countries in announcing the severing of diplomatic relations with Syria, imposing all kinds of economic sanctions on it, <sup>①</sup> and trying to cut off the capital flow of the Syrian government. In the international multilateral arena, such as the United Nations Security Council, the United Nations Human Rights Council and the United Nations General Assembly, they have worked together to promote the adoption of resolutions condemning and sanctioning the Syrian Government. After failing to increase political and economic pressure on the Syrian government through multilateral mechanisms, which Russia and China resisted, the three countries led a revival of the strategy they had pursued in Libya, establishing the so-called Friends of Syria as the main initiators to avoid resistance from China and Russia. It is an American-led bloc of many western and Arab countries with only one goal: to overthrow the Bashar al-Assad government. At the end of the second “Friends of Syria” Congress, in which both China and Russia refused to participate, a presidential statement was issued expressing support for the Syrian opposition. It also recognizes the “Syrian National Council” as the legitimate representative of the Syrian people (France was the first to recognize it). There is no doubt that Britain, France and Germany contributed to the outbreak of civil war in Syria and intensified the conflict in Syria. To a large extent, the opposition is encouraged by Western support for anti-government activities in Syria, so its activities are more extremely violent.

After recognizing that the “Syrian National Council” is the legitimate representative of the Syrian people, the three countries have gradually begun arms assistance to the Syrian opposition. In order to balance the military situation on the ground, in early 2013, France and Britain called for the lifting of the EU arms embargo to facilitate the delivery of weapons to the so-called moderate opposition. Germany was concerned that this would promote an arms race and lead to greater instability in the regional situation, so it opposed it. However, under the pressure of Britain and France, in order to maintain the unity of the three EU countries, Germany

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<sup>①</sup> The three countries’ sanctions against Syria are based on the European Union’s common foreign and security policy as well as U.S. sanctions because the United Nations has not imposed sanctions on Syria.

made concessions and agreed to deliver weapons to the Syrian opposition under a series of restrictive conditions. In May 2013, at the height of the conflict in Syria, the European Union lifted the arms embargo.

At the same time, the media of the three countries have also distorted the situation in Syria, whitewashed the violent acts of the opposition and even terrorist assassinations, and exaggerated or even made up the so-called brutal characteristics of the Syrian government. The politicians of the three countries and their media, who advocate freedom and human rights, describe the conflict in Syria as a popular uprising and call radicals, salafists and religious forces “freedom fighters”.

Like the United States, Britain and France have tried to carry out military strikes against the Syrian government under the pretext of chemical weapons attacks in Syria to help the Syrian opposition in a more direct and powerful way, but due to domestic and international resistance, in the end, there was only a lot of thunder and little rain. In March 2013, after the Syrian chemical weapons attacks, Britain, France, the United States and other countries, without giving any evidence, believed that the chemical weapons attacks were carried out by the Syrian government, so the Syrian government crossed the red line they drew. Britain, France and the United States claimed to carry out a military strike against the Syrian government, but the British Parliament was the first to oppose the use of force against the Syrian government. Under the influence of Britain, the Obama administration in the United States also failed to fulfill its promise to strike by force. A week after the chemical weapons attack, a large number of Republicans in the United States Congress wrote a letter to Obama, bluntly threatening him: in the absence of a direct threat to the United States and without the prior authorization of Congress, sending US troops to fight in Syria would violate the principle of separation of powers, which is clearly enshrined in the Constitution.<sup>①</sup> Without the participation of the United States and other allies, France’s remarks on the use of force against the Syrian government are also difficult to implement in the end. In September 2013, the United States and Russia reached a “chemical weapons for peace” agreement, indicating that the United States and other Western countries do not want to send troops directly to carry out regime change in Syria.

However, after the emergence of the Syrian chemical weapons crisis, the rise of the Islamic State and the intensification of the refugee crisis, especially after Russia’s strong military intervention changed the situation on the Syrian battlefield, the three countries have changed their attitude and means of overthrowing the Assad regime, no longer insisting, at least on public occasions, that Assad must step down immediately, but instead acknowledging that the political development in Syria should be decided by the Syrian people. But at the same time, the three countries stressed that agreeing to Assad to remain in power is only temporary and that he can only perform his duties as president during the political transition period in Syria. In other words, the attitude of the three countries in pushing for Assad to step down has not changed fundamentally, but has only focused on political means, such as intervention in the composition of the Syrian Constitutional Council. The strategy of the three countries and the United States may be that in the absence of regime change in Syria in the short term, the

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<sup>①</sup> Ben Rhodes, “Inside the White House during the Syrian ‘Red Line’ Crisis,” June 3, 2018, <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2018/06/inside-the-white-house-during-the-syrian-red-line-crisis/561887/>.

top priority is to prevent the Assad government from recapturing the northeastern region of Syria in order to maintain a strong bargaining chip to put pressure on it. At the same time, they are also trying to use the fact that the reconstruction of Syria needs a lot of money as an opportunity to influence the political process in Syria.

## **II. To Oppose the Possession and Use of Chemical Weapons by the Syrian Government**

The three countries oppose Syria's possession of chemical weapons, especially when the internal conflict in Syria intensifies. Although the three countries want to overthrow the Assad regime, they are not willing, as the United States, to send troops directly to achieve this goal, but through proxies, that is, by supporting the Syrian opposition and even extremist groups to achieve their goals. Before the Syrian chemical weapons crisis, Syria was not a party to the Chemical weapons Convention. The chemical weapons it possessed formed a deterrent not only to the Syrian opposition but also to Western countries. Therefore, this was a great obstacle to regime change in Syria. Moreover, the three countries were also worried that when the Syrian conflict became fierce, the Syrian government's ability to control chemical weapons might weaken, so it could not be ruled out that Syrian weapons would fall into the hands of terrorists. Even falling into the hands of Hezbollah guerrillas is not good for the three countries, because it may pose a direct security threat to Israel, and Hezbollah guerrillas support the Syrian government against the Syrian opposition.

To a certain extent, in order to embolden the Syrian opposition, the three countries, especially Britain and France, together with the United States, drew a red line for the Syrian government a long time ago, claiming that once the Syrian government uses chemical weapons, it will suffer military strikes from them. The Assad government admitted possession of chemical weapons as early as July 2012. A month later, president Obama said the use of such weapons was a red line that would have serious consequences.<sup>①</sup> But in August 2013, when the Syrian opposition accused the government of using toxic gases in attacks in places such as the East Guta near Damascus, Obama found himself in trouble. The attack reportedly killed nearly 1429 people, including 426 children.<sup>②</sup> In response, the United States, Britain and France formed a coalition and decided to launch air strikes against Syria. But the House of Commons refused to support a military strike. Influenced by a veto in the House of Commons and worried about alienation and a negative attitude to military strikes, Obama has also retreated. With neither the United States nor Britain willing to take military action, France had no choice but to make concessions. Francois Hollande, then president of France, was convinced that this was a missed opportunity that could have changed the course of the war. In other words, although France wanted to use force against Syria at that time, it had to give up the idea because of the negative attitude of the United States. The historical legacy of British intervention in Iraq and its decision to participate with France in the overthrow of the Gadhafi regime in Libya have had a significant impact on British decision-making on the Syrian crisis and limited its policy choices. France's attitude of actively advocating armed strikes against Syria was very different

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<sup>①</sup> Romain Houeix, "A History of the Syria Chemical Weapons 'Red Line'," April 14, 2018, <https://www.france24.com/en/20180414-syria-chemical-weapons-red-line-obama-macron-assad-russia-usa-france-idlib>.

<sup>②</sup> 张蔚然：《美笃信叙政府用化武致 1429 人丧生 含 426 儿童》，2013 年 8 月 31 日，中新社华盛顿 2013 年 8 月 30 日电，[http://news.youth.cn/gj/201308/t20130831\\_3801168.htm](http://news.youth.cn/gj/201308/t20130831_3801168.htm)。

from its attitude toward the United States launching the Iraq war a decade ago. This was largely because the Saddam regime in Iraq had closer economic and political ties with France than the Syrian government does today. In 2009, Qatar proposed the construction of a natural gas pipeline through Syria and Turkey to Europe. Instead, president Assad struck a deal with Iraq and Iran to lay a pipeline east that would allow the Shiite-dominated countries to enter the European gas market while denying access to Sunni-controlled Saudi Arabia and Qatar.<sup>①</sup> Assad's approach is also likely to upset France. Although Germany had condemned the chemical weapons attack, it was basically opposed to the use of force. Germany believed that the legality of the use of force against Syria was insufficient without the authorization of the Security Council. Compared with Britain and France, Germany paid more attention to the legality of its actions in terms of force intervention, and it has always been more cautious in the use of force.

It is doubtful whether the Syrian government has used chemical weapons, but Western countries such as the United States, Britain and France believe that it has used such weapons. The relatively fierce reaction of Britain, France and the United States to the use of chemical weapons by the so-called Syrian government is consistent with their practice of opposing the possession and use of weapons of mass destruction by hostile countries. Because the use of chemical weapons will cause a large number of civilian casualties, resulting in a humanitarian crisis, the fierce response of Britain and France can consolidate the human rights discourse they have always advocated such as the protection of human rights is the primary responsibility of the government and the human rights of a country is not only a matter of one country, but also the common responsibility of the international community, so as to facilitate its possible interference in Syria and other countries in the future.

After a month of stalemate between the two sides of the chemical weapons crisis, with the intervention of Russia, the United States and Russia reached a "chemical weapons for peace" agreement, that is, Syria is required to accede to the Chemical weapons Convention and destroy its possession of chemical weapons, in exchange for the United States not to use force against Syria. The "chemical weapons for peace" agreement gave the United States a reason not to use force against Syria even though it crossed the red line. In other words, the Obama administration found itself a step down. Besides, Britain, France, the United States and other countries also achieved the goal of removing chemical weapons from Syria. From this point of view, the Western "red line" on Syrian chemical weapons had not been drawn in vain.

Although Britain and France conducted two air strikes in April 2017 and April 2018 in coordination with the United States, they were also concerned that a confrontation with Russia would escalate the war, so the strikes were measured and claimed to be aimed at deterring the Syrian government from continuing to use chemical weapons. Although Germany expressed verbal support for the air strikes, it made it clear that it did not want to participate in the air strikes.<sup>②</sup> The more intense reaction of the three countries to the chemical weapons attacks in Syria is, on the one hand, to strengthen the human rights discourse they have always held, and, on the

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① Maj. Rob Taylor, "Pipeline Politics in Syria," March 21, 2014, <http://armedforcesjournal.com/pipeline-politics-in-syria/>.

② See Youssef Badawi, "Syria: Who's Involved, and What do They Want?" April 14, 2018, <http://theconversation.com/syria-whos-involved-and-what-do-they-want-95002>.

other hand, perhaps more important, to maintain the status quo in Syria, warning Russian and Syrian government forces not to launch new offensives, such as against Idlib, the last concentration of the Syrian opposition.

It is worth noting that France has been more active in carrying out air strikes on Syria than Britain and even the United States, not to mention Germany. The reason why France is so, in addition to practical reasons, there are also historical reasons. France believes that chemical weapons attacks do not distinguish between combatants and civilians and that it is France's responsibility to protect chemical weapons taboos because France was the first country to suffer the use of chemical weapons in the modern world during the First World War. It is the depositary of the 1925 Geneva Protocol and the sponsor of the 1997 Chemical weapons Convention. In particular, unlike in 2013, the Syrian regime is now a member of the Convention. <sup>①</sup>

### **III. To Fight against the Islamic State**

Before the agreement of "chemical weapons for peace" was reached, there were many Islamic extremist organizations in Syria, even terrorist organizations engaged in various activities. After the agreement was reached, the extremist organizations in Syria grew rapidly, while the secular opposition forces were weakened instead of developing. After the United States failed to practice its "red line" against the Syrian chemical weapons attacks, the western support for the Syrian free army was overshadowed by the support of regional powers for the Islamic armed groups, because Saudi Arabia, Turkey and other countries had no hope of the western direct force against the Syrian regime. Even before that, in order to attract funds from the Gulf countries, some groups in the Syrian free army had begun to adopt a more religious image display. Some of the fighters had also defected to better equipped Islamic radicals. Jihadi organizations cleverly used the weaknesses of other anti-government organizations to enhance their strength and influence in the anti-government movement, and sometimes targeted the Syrian free army. The jihadists were better organized, more efficient and better able to provide benefits to their families in the event of disability or death of combatants. At the same time, the direct participation of militias (such as Hezbollah guerrillas) supported by Iran, Shia militias from Iraq and pro-government forces from Afghanistan and other countries was more conducive for the Islamic Organization to characterize the conflict as part of the regional Shia Sunni struggle. This allowed Sunni Islamic organizations to use sectarian discourse, such as fear of Shiite militias, to recruit more militants. Among the extremist organizations, the Islamic state is the most prominent. The Islamic state originated from Al Qaeda in Iraq, later became the Islamic state of Iraq, and entered Syria as part of Al Qaeda after 2011, and then separated from Al Qaeda in 2013 to become an independent organization.

In May 2014, the Islamic State entered the Iraqi city of Mosul and beheaded two American hostages, prompting the West to adopt counter-terrorism rhetoric against the Syrian conflict. In doing so, the Western

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<sup>①</sup> Bruno Tertrais, "Syria: The 'Red Line' Dilemma," March 19, 2018, <https://www.institutmontaigne.org/en/blog/syria-red-line-dilemma>.

powers inadvertently aligned their words with those of the Syrian regime. It was clear, however, that there was a big difference in understanding of the denotation of terrorism between the two sides. Western attention to the Syrian political process has diminished since the failure of the second round of peace talks in Geneva in 2014, with a growing view of the Syrian conflict from a counter-terrorism perspective. The United States sees the Islamic State as a threat to its interests in Iraq, especially to the Kurdish regional government. This prompted Washington in August 2014 to create an international anti-Islamic State coalition led by the United States, of which Britain, France and Germany are members. As the Islamic State recruits more foreign fighters and gradually extends terrorism beyond Syria and Iraq, the West's determination to fight the Islamic State has become stronger.

In order to fully demonstrate the image of a great power, France has been active in the upheavals in the Middle East, and it is also the most prominent of the three countries in the fight against the Islamic State. On November 13, 2015, Paris, France, was attacked by the Islamic State, killing 130 people. In fact, on September 27 of the same year, France began to launch air strikes against Syria, which had not yet been legally authorized by the governments of Britain, Germany and other European countries. France is also the strongest opponent in the West of the view that Assad should play a role in the Syrian transition process.<sup>①</sup> After the attack in Paris, France stepped up its crackdown on the Islamic State in Syria and sought the support of Western countries such as Britain and Germany<sup>②</sup>, while communicating and coordinating with Russia in a timely manner. In December 2015, in response to the Sousse attack, in which 30 British nationals were killed, and as support and sympathy for France, the British Parliament authorized airstrikes against the Islamic State in Syria. Since September 2014, Germany has provided military support to the US-led global coalition against the Islamic State and provided weapons to the Kurdish "freedom fighters" (Peshmerga) forces in northern Iraq. Germany has been a strong supporter of local forces in the fight against the Islamic State. In December 2015, the German Parliament approved the German Tornado aircraft reconnaissance mission over Syria.<sup>③</sup>

However, attacks on the Islamic State by the western countries, including Britain, France and Germany have been differentiated. They focused first on the threat posed by IS in Iraq, but they didn't take the fight against IS in Syria seriously enough, and in a sense, they hit IS in Syria in order to mitigate the threat posed by IS in Iraq. This can be seen from the following aspects. They did not launch simultaneous operations against the

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① Samuel Ramani, "Why France is so Deeply Entangled in Syria," November 19, 2015, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2015/11/19/why-france-is-so-deeply-entangled-in-syria/?noredirect=on&utm\\_term=.82d3620a5244](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2015/11/19/why-france-is-so-deeply-entangled-in-syria/?noredirect=on&utm_term=.82d3620a5244).

② After the November 2015 terrorist attacks in Paris, France invoked article 42.7 of the Lisbon Treaty of the European Union, a previously untested provision of mutual assistance. See Eric Langland, "Germany's Vote to Strike ISIS in Syria Signals a Shift in its Approach to International Law," June 2016, [https://www.ssoar.info/ssoar/bitstream/handle/document/54244/ssoar-2016-langland-Germanys\\_Vote\\_to\\_Strike\\_ISIS.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y&lnkname=ssoar-2016-langland-Germanys\\_Vote\\_to\\_Strike\\_ISIS.pdf](https://www.ssoar.info/ssoar/bitstream/handle/document/54244/ssoar-2016-langland-Germanys_Vote_to_Strike_ISIS.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y&lnkname=ssoar-2016-langland-Germanys_Vote_to_Strike_ISIS.pdf).

③ Andis Kudors, Artis Pabriks, eds., *The War in Syria: Lessons for the West*, The Centre for East European Policy Studies, Rīga: University of Latvia Press, 2016, pp.22-23.

IS in Iraq and Syria at the beginning, but adopted an “Iraq first” strategy, focusing first on the fight against the IS in Iraq; They have invested more resources in the fight against the IS in Iraq; They are willing to work with the Iraqi government to fight the IS, but they are not willing to work with the Syrian government, which would be better. In fact, like the United States, Britain, France and Germany have given priority to the overthrow of the Assad government over the fight against the IS in Syria, and they have tried to use the IS to overthrow the Assad government. They wouldn’t focus on the fight against the Islamic State until the overthrow of the Assad government. Britain, France and Germany attacked the Islamic State in Syria in part because Russian troops entered Syria in September 2015 and began to launch a military strike against the group. Their campaign against the Islamic State in Syria is in part to compete with Russia for a sphere of influence in Syria and to expand its influence in Syria. Their fight against the Islamic State in Syria is mainly carried out through support for Syrian Kurdish forces. The Kurdish forces they support control a large area of northeastern Syria, which is home to one of Syria’s few important oil fields and is therefore strategically important. Of course, the attacks by the Islamic State against countries such as France have also forced the West to step up its fight against the Islamic State in Syria. In 2015, attacks in the Tunisian seaside resorts of Sousse and Paris in the name of the Islamic State led Western countries to view the Islamic State as their most prominent national security threat.

Another reason for the Anglo-French and German crackdown on the Islamic State in Syria is that its ravages in Syria have created a large number of refugees and created a refugee crisis. In addition to fleeing to Syria’s neighboring countries such as Turkey, Jordan and Lebanon, these refugees have also poured into the European Union and had a great impact on their politics, because refugee protection is political in nature. While international law and values inevitably affect the decisions of governments on how to respond to refugees, power and interests are bound to have an impact on it. For example, the commitment of host and donor countries to assist, protect and provide solutions to refugees depends on whether and to what extent they consider refugees to be a burden or benefit to security and development outcomes. Evidence of this can be found in almost every aspect of the functioning of the refugee system, from donor-designated humanitarian contributions to resettlement decisions and to host country decisions on whether to provide socio-economic freedom to refugees.

From 2011 to 2016, more than half of Syria’s population fled the conflict, making Syrians the world’s largest refugee population. Some 6.5 million Syrians are internally displaced in Syria. Nearly 5 million Syrians have fled to neighboring countries. As of 1 June 2016, 4.8 million Syrians were registered as refugees in neighbouring countries, of whom 2.1 million were in Egypt, Iraq, Jordan and Lebanon; 2.7 million were in Turkey; The number of Syrians seeking asylum in Europe continues to rise, but the number remains small compared with the number of Syrian refugees living in Syria’s neighbours. Between April 2011 and June 2016, some 1.1 million Syrian refugees applied for asylum in Europe, of which about 750,000 sought asylum in the European Union. <sup>①</sup>The influx of refugees into Europe to promote the victory of so-called populist parties in the elections threatens the unity of the European Union. Therefore, it is in the interests of Britain, France and

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<sup>①</sup> See The National Audit Office, *The Response to the Syrian Refugee Crisis – An International Comparison*, National Audit Office, 2016, p.7.

Germany to crack down on the Islamic State in order to solve the refugee crisis.

### **Conclusion**

Since the Syrian conflict, Britain, France and Germany have been external interventionists. Their intervention must be driven by certain interests. Britain and France are permanent members of the Security Council, while Germany is not. At the same time, France has deeper historical ties with Syria than Germany and Britain, and although all three countries are allies of the United States, their closeness to the United States is different. As a result, the degree of influence by the US policy towards Syria is also different. This difference in national identity between Britain, France and Germany makes them different in their attention and focus on Syria. However, in spite of this, the interests of the three countries in the Syrian conflict are generally the same, but there are differences in the means to achieve them. In general, the interests of the three countries in the Syrian conflict are: overthrowing the Assad regime, opposing the Syrian government's possession and use of chemical weapons, and combating the Islamic State.

For Britain, France and Germany, the overthrow of the Assad regime has priority over the fight against the Islamic State, while opposition to the possession and use of chemical weapons by the Syrian government is closely linked to the overthrow of the Assad government. In other words, the overthrow of the Assad regime is the fundamental interest of Britain, France and Germany in the Syrian conflict. Interest is the unity of the need and the means to realize it, which determines that Britain, France and Germany have certain characteristics in realizing their interests in the Syrian conflict. First, its intervention is limited. Although they strongly support Syrian opposition groups, on the whole, they have not carried out a sustained and decisive military strike against the Syrian government directly. This is partly because one of the tools by which the three countries realize their interests in the Syrian conflict-Syrian opposition groups-is not only lack of cohesion, but also enemies of each other. Secondly, its intervention has dependence and follow-up to the United States, and is greatly influenced by the United States. Thirdly, its intervention is greatly influenced by Russian policy and action towards Syria. Russia's political support for Syria makes it difficult for them to replicate the model of regime change in Libya; Russian military operations in Syria have accelerated their counter-terrorism military operations in Syria and loosened their positions on the fate of President Bashar al-Bashar, at least on the surface. These show that the power of Britain, France and Germany is limited, and it is difficult for them to play a leading role in major international events.