

**T.C.  
SAKARYA UNIVERSITY  
INSTITUTE OF SOCIAL SCIENCES  
DEPARTMENT OF INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS**

**THE RUSSIAN ROLE IN THE MIDDLE EAST (SYRIA) 2013-2020**

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**MASTER THESIS**

**Supervisor: Assoc. Prof. Ridvan KALAYCI**

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**“This thesis was defended online on 19/01/2023 and it was unanimously accepted by the jury members whose names are listed below.”**

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According to the similarity report received by your institute within the framework of the implementation principles, the similarity rate of the thesis work, whose information is given above, does not contain any plagiarism; I declare that I accept all kinds of legal responsibility that may arise in a possible situation where the opposite is determined and that I have received the approval document if Ethics.

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- The use of humans and animals (including material/data) for experimental or other scientific purposes,
- Clinical studies on humans,
- Research on animals,
- Retrospective studies in accordance with the personal data protection law.)

**Mustafa Kanaan NORI AL-BASRE**

**19/01/2023**

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**Mustafa Kanaan NORI AL-BASRE**

**19/01/2023**

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## **LIST OF ABBREVIATION**

<b>APEC</b>	: Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation
<b>CIS</b>	: Commonwealth of Independent States
<b>CSTO</b>	: Collective Security Treaty Organization
<b>EU</b>	: European Union
<b>FDI</b>	: Foreign Direct Investment
<b>FSA</b>	: Free Syrian Army
<b>GCC</b>	: Gulf Cooperation Council
<b>GDP</b>	: Gross domestic product
<b>INSTC</b>	: International North-South Transport Corridor
<b>IS</b>	: Islamic State
<b>ISIS</b>	: Islamic State of Iraq and Syria
<b>IRGC</b>	: Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps
<b>JCPOA</b>	: Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action
<b>LNG</b>	: Liquefied Natural Gas
<b>MENA</b>	: Middle East and North Africa
<b>NATO</b>	: North Atlantic Treaty Organization
<b>OPCW</b>	: The Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons
<b>OPEC</b>	: Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries
<b>OSCE</b>	: The Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
<b>PIF</b>	: Public Investment Fund
<b>PNA</b>	: Palestinian National Authority
<b>SAA</b>	: Syrian Arab Army
<b>SNC</b>	: Syrian National Council
<b>UK</b>	: United Kingdom
<b>UN</b>	: United Nations
<b>UNSC</b>	: United Nations Security Council
<b>US</b>	: United States
<b>USSR</b>	: Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
<b>WTO</b>	: World Trade Organization

## ABSTRACT

**Title of Thesis:** The Russian Role in the Middle East (Syria) 2013-2020

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This thesis discusses the role of Russia in Middle East particularly Syria 2013-2020. The thesis also focuses on a number of objectives that govern the activities of Russia in the Middle East. The Middle East had a significant role in the competition between the USSR and the US. Crisis within the Russian Federation and a subsequent lack of interest in the region followed the dissolution of the USSR. After the Arab Spring, which Russian authorities saw as being driven and directed by the West, primarily the US, the Middle East once again entered the Kremlin's geostrategic thinking. This is why Vladimir Putin took action after the fall of the Libyan leader or the open ambitions of the West to depose Bashar Al-Assad. In this dissertation, we offer a reading of Russian foreign policy, its military involvement action in Syria including Moscow's reemerging superpower. A light here is also shed, besides the military intervention, on the necessary motivation of the Russian foreign policy makers who are involved in the Syrian conflict on both regional and international stages. When the Syrian Civil war has emerged, Russia has quickly responded in favor of Al-Assad regime. At the same time, due to the failure of the US on the Middle East policies especially after 9/11, the terrorist activities in the Middle East region have spread to the rest of the world. President Putin's long-term objectives in the Middle East and Eastern Mediterranean region have becoming a power in the Middle East region. This thesis argues that Syria's external ally represented by Russia appears to be continued and that Russia will keep supporting Assad's regime so as to gain common interests and play a major role in regional and global politics.

**Keywords:** Russia in the Middle East, Foreign Policy, Military Intervention, Crisis, Syrian Civil War



## ÖZET

**Başlık:** Rusya'nın Ortadoğu'daki Rolü (Suriye) 2013-2020

**Yazar:** Mustafa Kanaan NORI AL-BASRE

**Danışman:** Doç. Dr. Rıdvan KALAYCI

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Bu tez, Rusya'nın Orta Doğu'daki rolünü, özellikle de Suriye'yi 2013-2020 tartışmaktadır. Tez ayrıca Rusya'nın Orta Doğu'daki faaliyetlerini yöneten bir dizi hedefe odaklanmaktadır. SSCB ile ABD arasındaki rekabet döneminde Ortadoğu önemli bir çatışma alanıydı. Sovyetler Birliği'nin dağılmasının ardından Rusya Federasyonu krize girmiş ve bölgeye olan ilgisini kaybetmiştir. Rusya yetkilileri tarafından Batı, özellikle ABD tarafından körüklenen ve yönlendirilen olarak algılanan Arap Bahar'ının ardından Ortadoğu yeniden Kremlin'in jeostratejik düşüncesinde yer aldı. Dolayısıyla, Libya liderinin devrilmesi veya Batı'nın Beşar Esad'ı iktidardan indirmeye yönelik açık emelleri, Vladimir Putin'i harekete geçmeye yöneltti. Bu tez, Rus dış politikasını, Suriye'deki askeri müdahale eylemini, Kremlin'in Neo-süper güç politikasının prizmasını yorumlamaktadır. Burada, askeri müdahalenin yanı sıra hem bölgesel hem de uluslararası aşamalarda Suriye çatışmasına dahil olan Rus dış politika yapıcılarının gerekli motivasyonuna da ışık tutulmaktadır. Suriye İç Savaşı ortaya çıktığında, Rusya hızla Esad rejimi lehine yanıt verdi. Aynı zamanda özellikle 11 Eylül sonrasında ABD'nin Orta Doğu politikalarında başarısız olması nedeniyle Ortadoğu bölgesindeki terör faaliyetleri tüm dünyaya yayılmıştır. Başkan Putin'in Orta Doğu ve Doğu Akdeniz bölgesindeki uzun vadeli hedefleri, Ortadoğu bölgesinde bir güç haline geldi. Bu tez, Suriye'nin Rusya tarafından temsil edilen dış müttefikinin devam edeceğini ve Rusya'nın ortak çıkarlar elde etmek ve bölgesel ve küresel siyasette önemli bir rol oynamak için Esad rejimini desteklemeye devam edeceğini iddia etmektedir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Ortadoğu'da Rusya, Dış Politika, Askeri Müdahale, Kriz, Suriye İç Savaşı

# INTRODUCTION

## Subject of the Study

Russia has resumed an active participation on the international stage and has taken strong stances on a variety of issues, and with a doctrine of pragmatism. It has broken its connection with the role of the accessory player to the primary player and this has helped it achieve increasing degrees of autonomy in its foreign affairs besides the realization of its native goals without engaging in conflicts with other nations. According to the modern Russian perspective, Russia's foreign policy has been making a slow but steady return to the Middle East. Russia's willingness to move towards areas that serve interests, help it secure a better place in the international system, and open up a new crucial space to maximize its interests has increased since it repaired ties with several nations in the region.

Despite the difficulties to which it was subjected, Russia ranked second in importance behind the US. Its foreign policy objective is to stabilize the region. Since the early 2000s, Moscow's approach to the Middle East has been greatly influenced by strategic and economic concerns.

At the same time, regional countries have their own causes to engage with Russia. In 2005 and after president Putin's description of the breakup of the USSR as (the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the twentieth century), he has the ambition to restore Russia to the global power. Russia has pursued hard diplomacy, economic inducement, military force and other measures to entice allies. Thus, Russia is able now to demonstrate to the US and to EU to play a vital role in ongoing international conflicts.

There are many factors which explain the increasing role of Russia in the Middle East. The weakness of some Arab states, the rising of the religious extremist currents to the political position, the economic and military relations nets with the countries of the region and establishing military bases of a great strategy, the weakness of the US role and withdrawal from some of the countries of the Middle East such as Iraq. all these factors together encouraged Russia to restore itself strongly to the Middle East.

Russia has established itself as a key player in Syria, Libya and negotiation with Iran as well as having extensive ties with Turkey and Israel. The so-called "Arab Spring" since

2011 has presented Russia with both significant security risks and geopolitical opportunities. In the midst of the Arab spring starting in 2010, some Syrian towns began uprising against Assad regime.

Russian and Iranian aids to the regime never stop. At the onset of the Syrian crisis, the EU and the US attempted to draft a resolution to increase international pressure and openly demanded that President Assad stand down. Not only this but they have intended to bolster unilateral sanction upon Al-Assad.

Since 1971, Russia has maintained a naval base in the Syrian port of Tartus, making the country its last reliable Arab partner in the Middle East. Although Syria played a central role in Russian foreign policy, the Kremlin concentrates upon diplomacy instead of force. Russia has so provided Al-Assad with diplomatic cover at the UN, shielding the Assad administration from any attempts at resolution or international action. The image in Syria can be described as follows: Russia and Iran never stop supporting Al-Assad with military, economic and political aids, while US, Europe, and some regional countries such as Qatar, Turkey and Saudi Arabia provide aids to opposition groups in Syria.

In the light of these background, it could be said that the Russian presence as a state power in the region was lackluster, symbolic, and limited after the World War II. However, since the Russian military intervention in Syria in 2015, the Russian role in the region has escalated due to the geopolitical vacuum resulting from the decline of American influence in the region, and Russia is trying through its current options to restore some of its glories during the rule of the USSR. Through the Russian intervention in Syria, Russia presents its credentials as a major power capable of possessing the keys to solving the most complex crises in the region. Russian-Syrian relations date back to the era of the late President Hafez Al-Assad who formed part of the socialist system during the Cold War as a leader of the Syrian Baath Party with socialist tendencies. The Russian intervention in the region was not motivated by religious motives, as it was in the 17th century rather, it is aimed at the ambitions of Vladimir Putin to revive the Russian role as a superpower in the world again. The justification for the military presence in Syria lies in opening a geopolitical gap in the region and establishing Russia as a strategic partner that can monitor the region across the Mediterranean front. And it became clear since the beginning of the air strikes on Syria that confronting ISIS comes in second place in terms

of priority after maintaining the Bashar Al-Assad regime at any cost and controlling the Tartus base in the Alawite region of Syria.

### **Aim of the Study**

1. Fully comprehend the importance of the Middle East to both the US and the West from one side and Russia from the other side. It is necessary to study the interests of these states in the region and if these interests change in accordance to the serious Middle-Eastern transformations.
2. Identify Russia's strategic targets that govern its foreign policy concerning the Middle East and Syria. This requires reasoning the causes of the Russian military campaign on Syria. In addition to the importance of the economic factor especially, nuclear energy, in building Russia's military strength.
3. Appreciate the consequences of the Russian military involvement in Syria and how far this involvement achieves Russia's targets.
4. Recognize the role of Russia in the Middle East and Syria in handling issues in the region and what procedures Russia follows in solving conflicts and establishing peace.
5. Survey Russian behavior in the Middle East and Syria and its efforts to construct alliances with the states in the Middle East to prove to be a great power in the international balance.

### **Importance of the Study**

This study belongs to the field of international relations and is analyzing one of the most important topics of international relations, and the presence and influence of major powers in international regions, especially the Middle East, which is a very important geopolitical region, due to its location in the middle of the world, the large proportion of fresh water in the region, and the presence of black gold and natural wealth. This study intends to analyze future visions, the nature of existing transformations that play an important role in changing the policies of major states.

Also, this study reviews images of Russian intervention in the Middle East, and some issues in which Russia appears as a major actor, particularly the Syrian issue, and the importance of the Middle East to Russia.

This study differs from others since it takes the internal political and military Syrian struggle into consideration. Russia has been dealing with the fight especially when it has increased and become more challenging. Of course, this research has made use of the data and facts mentioned in the literature review because of the different viewpoints concerning the global importance of the Middle East and from that position Russia utilized the Syrian conflict as an access to improve its power in the international scale.

### **Method of the Study**

This research will adopt a qualitative data analysis and collect non\_ numerical data so as to thoroughly understand the theme of the research “The Russian Role in the Middle East, Syria 2013-2020’. In this context, the present study first reveals the background of Russia's Middle East policy in order to detail the research topic. accordingly, the role of Russia during the Syrian civil war is analyzed by making content analysis within the scope of qualitative research methods. This research is prepared by using primary and secondary sources within the scope of scientific research methods. This research is promising trust in findings and references. This research will also work on data found in other resources such as academic journals, books, magazines interviews, reports, news and web sites. This research will surpass all the difficulties and challenges in case they emerge throughout the process of studying.

## **CHAPTER 1: RUSSIAN MIDDLE EAST POLICY**

### **1.1. Russia's Policy Directed at the Middle East States**

Putin has continuously followed special principles linked to his multi-vector Middle East policy orientation: sovereignty protection, economic gain such as arms trade, gas, and oil, and the growth of Russian influence in the Western-dominated region. It is no secret that Russia was alarmed by the "Arab Spring." The "Color Revolutions," which swept through various countries that were formally part of USSR such as Georgia and Ukraine, as well as the Islamic uprisings in Chechnya and Dagestan, were all labeled the "Arab Spring.". All of these battles aided Russia in regaining its status as a great state and as a Middle East actor (Sutyagin, 2017, pp. 106-109).

Since Russia's military intervention in Syria on September 30, 2015, it is vital to understand how Putin has led a transformation in Russia's domestic and foreign policies. and how they impact Moscow's Middle East policy. Russia's primary objective was to establish a warm-water port in the Mediterranean Sea, and Syria has been cooperating with Russia since the 1970s, when Hafez al Assad agreed to build one. In the Syrian Mediterranean city of Tartus, a Russian seaport has been established. Putin also expressed reservations about NATO's operation against Qaddafi, but Medvedev did not reject the operation. Putin stated in 2012 that nobody can be permitted to attempt to execute the 'Libyan scenario' on Syria.

This was the impetus for Russia to station troops in Syria in order to combat terrorism in the Middle East. Putin aided Assad's dictatorship financially, militarily, economically, and diplomatically. Meanwhile, his two previous invasions-Georgia and Ukraine-targeted countries growing closer to the West and possessing warm water ports. In both instances, Putin set the framework for invasion by taking tiny moves that many Western observers overlooked as war preparations. This is referred to as "maskirovka," a notion of military deception that is unique to Russia (Borshchevskaya, 2018, pp. 1-5).

Russia's interests in the Levant cannot be divorced from its global interests and calculations. The increasingly divergent interpretations of national sovereignty, territorial integrity, and the role of military interference espoused by the world's major actors have provided a special challenge for Russia, as well as other nations. Russia wished to

preserve Syria's state system, in which the President and the Army were the only two functional institutions. Meanwhile, the Syrian Army was nearing exhaustion and would have succumbed to exhaustion without foreign assistance. If the opposition, which is partially constituted of extreme groups, succeeds in destabilizing the system, the area as a whole will suffer. This scenario would very certainly result in other developments undermining regional stability: the Sunni-Shiite conflict would likely intensify, anti-Christian attitudes would likely get stronger, inter-ethnic tensions would likely worsen, and violence would spread to neighboring countries like Lebanon and Jordan.

By 2018, Russia has been supporting political steps so as to back gains of the Palestinians, provide them the possibility of getting a firm position at the negotiation table. For Moscow it was essential to establish a dynamic policy line putting into account the radical changes occurring in the community of Palestinians. In addition to that, the existing ideology and political split between Hamas and Fatah has cut all the efforts aiming at settling the conflict. PNA leaders, on 29 November 2012, submitted a request to the UN to recognize an independent Palestinian State with the 1967 boundaries. And while this process was going on, Moscow had really no problem as it adopted the same attitude of that of the USSR in 1988 which had recognized the independence of the State of Palestine. This came after the proclaim by the PNC (Zvyagelskaya, 2018, pp. 121- 131).

The bilateral relations between Iran and Russia are based on economic and geopolitical objectives. However, it is plausible to anticipate that bilateral trade between the two nations is increasing, especially with the signing of a preliminary free trade agreement between the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Russian-led Eurasian Economic Union in April 2018. Iranian agricultural and food exports to Russia have increased significantly.

Meanwhile, both Tehran and Moscow are expanding their cooperation beyond the former Soviet republics of the Caucasus and Central Asia into the Middle East, a move that has quickened since the onset of the Syrian crisis. Yet Russia and Iran shared an anti-Americanism ideology, which resulted in Tehran's diplomatic pragmatism echoing Moscow's *realpolitik*, which seeks to strengthen political and economic ties as a means of not only defending its interests on the international stage against Washington's unilateralism, but also of bolstering its influence and promoting stability on its southern border. Moscow's objective is also to stymie the creation of a new opponent capable of

undermining its own regional and international energy strategy, a critical component of its foreign policy. As a result, Russia seeks to influence Iran's energy policies in ways that benefit its own interests (Therme, 2018, p. 550).

Russia's connection with Iran's Sunni adversary Saudi Arabia has been developing since Saudi Arabia's King Salman's historic visit to Moscow in October 2017, the first time a Saudi Monarch has visited the city since its founding. Moscow asserted that the visit was motivated by economic considerations. Moscow was interested in addressing the possibility of Saudi investment in the Russian economy as well as bilateral cooperation in the high-tech, military-industrial, infrastructure, and nuclear sectors. Not only this, Moscow desired to discuss the future of the OPEC+ agreement and the possibility of Rosneft participating in Aramco's privatization. While Riyadh's primary worry was the political situation in Yemen, Iraq, and Syria, it fears the regional activities of Iran (Katz and Kozhanov, 2018, p. 6).

Russia is able to establish a Russian Turkish-Iranian triangle so as to affect domains of power in Syria, but this may not approach a diplomatic process to solve the Syrian crisis. The Foreign Policy of Turkey nowadays is basically unilateral since it is based on achieving equation in the relationship between the West and Russia. Concerning the US, the weaker the impact of the US in the Middle East, the more will be the actions operated with the West by Turkey, similar to Russia, for its own native benefits (Bechev, 2018, p. 101).

Russia has also been involved in the Libyan Civil war as a mediator, Moscow supplies crucial military backing to General Khalifa Haftar's party. Haftar was also aware of and capitalized on Russia's Syria policy. While the Kremlin tried to persuade Haftar to become a politician by resuming talks on the Libyan Political Agreement, Haftar countered by rising his military activities. At the same time when Russia's Libya narrative shifted substantially in 2017, as Moscow understood that their tactic was damaging its interests for the country by promoting greater violence, it gradually distanced itself from Haftar. Russia could establish a foothold in Libya, thereby strengthening its overall position in the Mediterranean.

The Yemeni civil war is another Middle Eastern crisis in which Russia has attempted to mediate. Yemen's current president, Abd Rabbuh Mansur Hadi, has a lengthy history with



Moscow, extending back to Hadi's tenure in the country's south, when Yemen was divided into two governments, one of which was supported by the USSR. Hadi, who is owed money by Saudi Arabia and the UAE, is attempting to end the country's protracted civil war. Russia is gaining leverage in Aden, like it did in Syria, by rescuing Hadi, who is subject to sanctions imposed by Riyadh and Abu Dhabi (Karasik, 2018, p. 256).

Russia and Saudi Arabia are the world's two major oil exporters. Their energy relations are characterized as follows: first, the competition for market share in Asian markets; and second, a shared interest in price stabilization of energy commodities (oil prices). Thirdly, possible Saudi Arabian investments in Russia's economy, which amounted to a \$3 billion signed during King Salman's visit.

Last but not least, LNG shipments to Saudi Arabia, where Putin's message to Government Minister al-Falih was simple: " Buy our gas, and you will save your oil.". Russia's oil diplomatic effort in Iraq has steadily increased its influence in the country. In addition, Gazprom owns a stake in a number of blocks in the Kurdistan area. Rosneft joined the Iraqi oil market by acquiring a majority interest in Bashneft, which had already been granted authorization to operate in Iraq (Mammadov, 2018, pp. 226-230).

### **1.1.1. The Historic Russian-Syrian Relationship**

Strategic and political concerns governed the relationship between the USSR and Syria. Before announcing Syria as an independent country, political and diplomatic support provided by USSR to Syria. Moreover, military aid for establishing and training the national Syrian army was given to Syria by signing a secret an agreement between the two countries on February 10,1946. The Compact of Non-aggression on April 10, 1950 developed the relations between the USSR and Syria to greater levels.

From the very beginning of the Syrian independence, Syria received Soviet support; the Syrian military pattern was similar to that of the Soviet one, besides sharing the same ideological alliance. The era of power of Hafez Al-Assad in 1970 strengthened this linkage furthermore. It is important to notice that among the Soviet targets was to utilize Syria in such away so as to distribute its thinking as hidden anti-western status in the Middle East. Moreover, the Soviet intended to secure an influential zone in the eastern Mediterranean to acquire a nuclear equation.

The two countries and in 1980 also signed the military Amity Treaty, an affinity by which Syria and the USSR must behave immediately together at any time of threat to safety and settlement. Not only that but also the treaty safeguarded Soviet support to the Syrian army in case of emergencies. This agreement explained why the Soviet established an air base in Tias and a naval base in Tartus. The Russian-Syrian relations passed through tangible varieties throughout the Post-Cold War, ideological and alliance interests came next to the economic concerns and partnership. With the rise of Boris Yeltsin to power after the demise of the USSR, the USSR's economic and military support was paused.

Later, however, in 2000, both Bashar Al-Assad of Syria and Vladimir Putin of Russia came to power, the relations of the two countries resumed again. Their dual ties resulted from security and economic motives in addition to their worry about the US' quality of involvement in the area. The US and Israel had been, for long, part of a global cluster opposing the government of Syria. In 1980s, Iran received assistance from Syria to cultivate Hamas in Palestine and Hezbollah in Lebanon. Iran transported its weapons via Syria to Hezbollah and Hamas to cause harm to Israel. Consequently, Israel and the US stayed the major foe to Syria. Approximately at the end of 1940s, when president Truman decided to assist Israel, Arab neighbors headed by Syria asked the USSR for military help to improve their capacities in facing Israel.

All along the Cold War, Syria remained within the USSR field. Yet, the year 1991 which witnessed the demise of the USSR made Syria bolster its contacts with the West. Syria here joined the incorporation led by the US in 1990s against Iraq in the Gulf War. The outcome of that was achieving better political and economic relations with the US, EU, and rich Arab states. However, from the US point of view, Syria remained as a supporter of terrorism. In fact, Syria participated only little with the US in international fight on terrorism and the combat against the Sunni extremists after the attack in 9/11.

Syria had to subject to sanctions as a result of its refusal to the invasion of Iraq in 2003. And if Syria continued aiding Palestinian terrorist groups, didn't withdraw from Lebanon and didn't stop using weapons of mass destruction, the way was then open for the US to impose economic sanctions against Syria. Therefore, the tension with the US made Syria enhance its relations with Hamas, Iran, and Hezbollah to avoid isolation on the

international scale. The relations joining Syria and the US had greatly been tense, whereas these of the Soviet-Syrian were far closer (Olanrewaju and Joshua, 2015, pp. 44-47)

### **1.1.2. Moscow's Objectives in the Middle East**

The Middle East comes generally after the rank of US, China, Europe, and Asia according to Russia's foreign policy. Once again, the Kremlin looks at Russia as a global mighty power, therefore such a region as the Middle East so close geographically to Russia, having hydrocarbon, unstable politically and socially must be taken into consideration. What indicated the demise of the USSR was the withdrawal of Moscow from the Middle East at the beginning of the Gulf War<sup>1</sup>. Putin has had the target of repeating Russian status in the world as a great power. Thus, the Middle East has become a key ground test for Russia to restore its worldwide position with the start of its military involvement in Syria in 2015. The general goal of Putin in the Middle East is to retain Russia's role as a major player in this region. More of Putin's objectives are:

- Controlling and deleting Muslims extremism and radicalism in order not to allow them expand into Russia and its neighbors of the post-Soviet era.
- Defending friendly government and regimes in the Middle East in addition to constructing authentic alliances to support them.
- Erecting a Russian military modicum in and around the Middle East.
- Widening Russia's markets in the region whether arms, food, gas, oil and others.
- Encouraging investments on behalf of Russia especially from the richer Persian Gulf countries.
- Coordinating procedures with the chief oil and gas producers of the Gulf so as to support energy prices.

To Moscow, there are current priorities which include adapting a peaceful situation in Syria, strengthening relations with Iran, Egypt, Iraq, Syria, Iraqi and Syrian Kurds, Saudi Arabia, other Gulf states besides keeping close to Israel (Trenin, 2016).

## **1.2. Syria in Russia's Foreign Policy**

Russia's connection with the Middle East has been critical, it is an area of examining the foreign policy of Russia toward Syria. Middle East concerns and regional happenings draw the attention of Russia as part of its program of power expansion. External events and structural changes, such as the Arab Spring, could not be overlooked. These developments have influenced Russia's foreign policy. As a major political player, the Russian government has responded to the Arab Spring due to Russia's being a major political player. However, internal political forces as well as collective and individual opinions have influenced reaction options.

Following Putin's re-election as President of Russia for the second time, the Russian foreign policy doctrine despised the idea of implementing and seeking to overturn legal authorities in sovereign states under the excuse of helping civilians. According to Foreign Minister of Russia, Lavrov, the most hazardous aspect of the entire domestic issue lied in the notion that oversea countries could aid in overthrowing the administration, while the international support is tantamount to an invitation to civil war (Allison, 2013, pp. 796-797).

This means that Russia's authority is opposed to the overthrow of a legitimate ruler or government in a sovereign state. President Putin's contrasting perceptions of protests and movements of opposition in the public sphere and the Arab Spring's comprehension and response are underlined. These answers must be analyzed in the context of Russia's domestic circumstances, not just from a regime change perspective. These movements have the potential to elevate Sunni fundamentalists to power, similar to those who oppose Russia in the North Caucasus (Cadier and Light, 2015, p. 215).

Similarly, Moscow is concerned with the Arab Spring, in which Islamist groups expanded their dominance following the removal of previous rulers. As a result, Moscow worries that the forces of Islamists may cause destabilization of southern flank, Central Asia and Northern Caucasus (Klein, 2012).

Russia's backing for Assad's Syrian regime is motivated by a variety of factors. Russia and China share a common goal of opposing regime change in sovereign states backed by the West. Putin expressed reservations about NATO's Libya intervention. According

to the Russian President, humanitarian assistance did not have to lead to the assassination of Qaddafi which resulted in his regime fall. Moreover, Putin emphasized the importance of avoiding a similar Libyan-style involvement in Syria.

Libya is not in a better state than it was before Qaddafi's rule. Nowadays, Libya is a country that needs fundamental institutions whether political or security ones and is in desperate need for direct international military assistance in addition to economic changes. This explained, in particular, why Russia and China exercised their veto over the UN Resolutions of the UNSC that might have authorized military intervention in Syria (Chivvis and Martini, 2014, p. 5).

Significant considerations include the foreign policy of Moscow toward Syria and efforts to contain the US' influence in the region. Syria is one of the few Middle Eastern states that is not dominated by the US. As a result, Syria has a long history of cooperation with Russia and is prepared to work. Russia's unmistakable reaction to the Assad government is that Russia continues supporting Syria as well as doing its best to prevent an easy fall of the regime.

The Obama administration criticized Russia for these actions of support for Assad, stating that Russian military intervention all together with the UN vote helped keep Assad's regime in power. Secretary of State, John Kerry, on his part accused Moscow of going on supplying Assad with arms, and this has created global outrage. Russia has enabled the administration of al-Assad to mercilessly punish the Syrian people as retaining the effect of Russia in the Middle East out of self-interest (Erlich, 2014, pp. 227-228).

### **1.2.1. Russian Foreign Policy Goals Towards Syria**

On September 30, 2015, Syria got jets from Russia which began its military activities there, after receiving a formal invitation from the government of Syria. Moscow, learning a lesson from the faults of the former USSR in Afghanistan in addition to what happened in Iraq by the US, has been involved in activities of low-cost and risk (Hobson, 2015). In this way, Russia gets advantages for its diplomatic and domestic objectives. In fact, jet strikes cost up to \$4 million every day as a result of Moscow's involvement in Syria besides costing \$1.55 billion annually. That appears to be a bargain, especially when compared to the US's \$1 trillion expenditure on Iraq. As a result, altering the international

discourse about Russia as a result of its action in Syria adds to the Russians' pride in their country and leader to some level. Putin cannot bring Russian living conditions up to those of the West, yet he has the ability to restore remnants of the country's previous glory. Putin reclaimed Crimea, and reestablished Russian place in the Middle East's international game, too (Totten, 2015, pp. 7-8).

In theory, Russia intervened in Syria in response to President Assad's invitation, and so did in accordance with international law. Additionally, Moscow, according to official pronouncements, is combating Islamist terrorism, which paints a favorable picture of the Russian Federation. Russian bombers, on the other hand, mostly targeted the opposition groups, other than IS and any other groups of terrorism. From all the aforementioned above, numerous objectives for Russian policy in Syria may be explained.

Supporting the only ally of Russia in the Arab land is the most critical one, to contain America's great power standing as well as restoring the status of Russia as a global power, to establish Middle East stabilization so as to achieve the North Caucasus stability, to end Russia's worldwide isolation as a result of its aggression towards Ukraine, to enhance relationships with the US and the EU, and to restore Russian pride in their country. Russia prefers the pro-Assad camp's victory for political and economic reasons. It will undoubtedly bolster the Shia Crescent (Syria, Iraq, Iran, and Lebanon), therefore bolstering the effect of Russia in the region. Russia is also trying to establish itself as a player in future energy advances that cannot be ignored, considering that this area has more than half of the world's oil reserves. Because higher than 60% of Moscow's budget revenues come from oil and natural gas export, energy issues are critical for Moscow.

Due to the ongoing Syrian crisis, gas pipelines that were supposed to run from Qatar or Iran to Syria and then on to Europe have been impractical. That's good for Russia, because it keeps Russia on top of the European energy market and eliminates its competitors from the Middle East. If Assad's administration survives, it will assist Moscow in becoming a significant international player. Changing Syria's regime may result in the election of a person who has not been as Assad and the Baath regime in being as pro-Russian. As a result, both the Tartus and Khmeimim bases, which are under Russian control may be compelled to close in the province of Latakia. Additionally, this might lead to the

cancellation of ongoing businesses such as the building and sale of two diesel-electric submarines (Barry, 2012).

While enhancing the positions of other countries, bringing down the government would put Russia there in jeopardy. In case the Syrian opposition, which is supported by the US, the UK, France, and some IS, succeeds, the influence of these countries will grow in Syria. Russia's involvement in Syria is a means of reestablishing Moscow's International standing by reestablishing its power in historic areas of action. This tactic also assists to balancing the impact of America in the region by weakening Washington's picture as a fine world policeman and diminishing its hegemony in global affairs.

Attempts are being made by Moscow to cast blame for Syria's current instability squarely on the Western and notably American governments. Jointly, this strengthens Russia's portrait as a law international defender, a foe of foreign involvement in other nations' domestic issues, plus being primary deterrent of the chaos that the US has created. Vladimir Putin's discourse at UN General Assembly, he backed that as evident, for example. Russian policymakers attempt to portray America's weakness, insignificance, and its strategy in the Middle East as inefficient as well. As an example, the Foreign Affairs Minister of Russia, Sergei Lavrov delivered his accusation for the second time to the administration of Obama in assisting Islamist group in Syria in May 2016.

Additionally, Russia appears to have learnt a lot from the Libyan situation (2011) and insists on not repeating the same scenario. In 2011 Russia abstained voting on the 1971 and 1973 Resolutions of UNSC, so allowing their adoption. The purpose of these resolutions is criticizing the Libyan leader and establishing a zone of no-fly in Libya's sky to safeguard the Libyans from the violence of the regime. Despite the resolutions' stated goal of defending the civilians of Libya from government troops, they developed into a NATO-led armed action aimed at regime overthrow. The security council had designated NATO to defend the Libyans but NATO exceeded unilaterally the UN authority in involving in Libya.

For Russia's elite, this brought back memories of previous NATO operations in Kosovo and left Moscow once again in a situation where the West did not treat it fairly. This resentment had its influence on the Syrian case and Russia's decision to obstruct any military operation taken in Syria according to UN future resolution. Russia is pro-

stabilization in Syria, which entails backing the Baath administration and its current government. According to Moscow, only Bashar al-Assad's administration has the capability of combating Islamic terrorism in Syria at the moment. Russia's engagement can be regarded as a prophylactic measure to catch and eliminate foreign soldiers before they return home, Russia and other post-Soviet states provide the bulk of foreign fighters for IS (Trenin, 2015).

Nevertheless, Moscow has been unconcerned with a comprehensive resolution of the Syrian conflict, similar to the Georgian and Ukrainian cases. It is preferable for Moscow to maintain the status quo and freeze the conflict. This will assist Russia in defending its strategic position in a split Syria, as well as averting a protracted armed intervention. There is a second important element is that Moscow's intervention in Syria allows it to divert resources and attention far from the Ukrainian conflict, thus overcoming its global isolation. Moreover, it offers an opportunity to prolong the surge of patriotic mobilization that has swept through Russia in the aftermath of the Crimean seizure.

The mounting political and economic consequences of participation in Ukraine contribute to Russian society and elites' growing dissatisfaction (Stronski, 2015). In fact, it's essential to note that 68% of Russian citizens approved the military intervention in Syria by the Kremlin (Center, 2015).



## **CHAPTER 2: RUSSIA AND THE SYRIAN CONFLICT**

### **2.1. Russia's Turn to the Middle East**

Russia's involvement in Syria is part of a broader geopolitical strategy centered on the West. It's not Russia's goal to exert regional domination in the Middle East, neither is it attempting to undermine US power in the region. Russia's current tactics in MENA are based on a geopolitical logic that aims to restore Russia's great power status. Concerning post-war rebuilding financing, the military intervention in Syria was a unilateral measure aimed at enforcing multilateralism and highlighting the importance of other parties, such as the EU and the Gulf States, must be involved (Stepanova, 2016, pp. 7-12). Relations with the West are strained by Russia's influence in Syria and Libya (Stepanova, 2018, p. 89). MENA has showed the West that Russia is still a vital player beyond the sphere of post-Soviet. Furthermore, it has coerced the West into anti-terrorism cooperation, all the while ignoring the very charged and divisive topic of Ukraine. A number of prominent Russian academics, along with a few European and transatlantic experts, have supported the view (Rodkiewicz, 2017, p. 18).

Russia needs the support of the US in order to reclaim its role as a major world power (Trenin, 2017, p. 82). The US was only allowed observer status in the Astana process of peace regarding Syria, directed by Russia in addition to Turkey and Iran.

Russia's estimations of the role played by the West and MENA actors differ from the viewpoints given above in other geopolitical perspectives. While Russia's presence in MENA may force the West to negotiate or cooperate, it also allows Russia to strengthen ties with other regional players (Kozhanov, 2018, p. 29). So, Russia's foreign policy must be shifted away from the West and directed toward MENA according to the strategies of the Russian Foreign Policy Concept and the Military Doctrine emerged in 2013 and 2014. These documents based on protecting the abroad national interests, including military, and rising its turn to obtain international security for the Russian Federation. (Barmin, 2018, pp. 339 - 340).

Russia can play the role of a mediator in a number of regional disputes, including the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the Saudi-Qatari conflict, and Libya. Russia can rise to a status of major power by engaging with regional players and disputes, rather than relying

solely on Western recognition (Barmin, 2018, p. 358). The existence of People who speak Russian are fighting for ISIS and the possibility that they could return to Russia or other nations of the post-USSR and become involved there are reasons for Russia's MENA policies (Kozhanov, 2018, p. 13; Zvyagelskaya, 2016, p. 87). Often cited as a factor in Russia's involvement in the Middle East is the fact that major demonstrations happened in Russia's cities in 2011-2012, immediately following the events of the Arab Spring. 'Rally around the flag' is a term used to describe the influence of the Russian bombing campaign in Syria on domestic public opinion.

Terrorists' attacks are a plausible source of evidence for this claim. A persistent and actual peril in Russia, plus strong measures facing terrorists and the like have historically increased the popularity of the governments most notably, at the start of Putin's tenure as a country leader, initiating the Second Chechen War. The date of the Syrian involvement, which began in September 2015 strengthened this point. It started as the mobilizing impact of the Crimean taking over waned and the domestic economic situation deteriorated, necessitating the require for a new and urgent foreign policy risk. Military prowess on show in Syria fueled a superpower narrative aimed at home public perception. Domestically effective Russian representatives were also mobilized. particularly, the Russian Orthodox Church backed Syria's battle as a sacred war to safeguard Middle Eastern Christian communities (Issaev and shishkina, 2020, pp. 97-110). Even prior to Russia's beginning air striking Syria, Russia's tight political situation was crucial in knowing the reason of Putin's considering a decisive approach in the Syria's conflict as important to enhance his domestic aid (Dannreuther, 2015, p. 87).

Emphasize on a method to comprehending Russia's MENA policies, Putin takes in addition to domestic emphasis: the importance of ideational issues. A Russian idea is propagated, a Russian policy as defined by Putin in particular is centered on the ideals of stability under authoritarian rule, anti- interventionism of the West, and anti-terror, as well as a kind of traditionalism in contrast to Western hyper secularism, conditionality, and democratic promotion. Russian participation in Syria, in particular, directly aided Putin's efforts to shore up his domestic support base (Dannreuther, 2022, pp. 3-7). The above principles are appealing to a large number of MENA political figures and even segments of population. Additionally, Russia is more likely engaged with powerful IS and movements such as Iran, Hezbollah, and Hamas than the West because of this

ideational position (Katz and Kozhanov, 2018, pp. 2-3). Russia and Arab countries share identity-related characteristics from their enviable position in between the West and East (Zvyagelskaya, 2016, p. 75). The driver of Russia's policy in MENA is identity together with power (Casula and Katz, 2018, p. 296).

### **2.1.1. A New Kind of Multilateralism: Russia's Involvement in Syria's Conflict**

In the course of the dialogue about military intervention in Syria between the two big nuclear powers Russia and the US, during Obama administration, the two agreed to go on deconflicting activities. Russia was motivated by three main considerations when involved in the Syrian war. At the top of the priority list should be preventing the Islamists from taking over Damascus in a manner similar to what happened in Libya; secondly, breaking Russia's international isolation and making it a major Middle East player; thirdly, convincing the US to recognize the position of Russia as a viable regional solution partner and a big power.

Russia has also taken on a balancing role in the region's conflict, which has developed into a regional and international proxy war after being a Civil fighting. Moscow learned a lesson coming out of the mistakes of Chechnya, Afghanistan, and Crimea while pursuing this policy. An invading force that was too large and slow to maneuver through the Afghan quagmire was to be avoided at all costs. Around 3,000 Russian soldiers and Special Forces are on the ground in Syria, as well as 30 to 50 warplanes and 14 to 60 helicopters. Wagner Group, a private military contractor that works with the Russian Army, was responsible for the coordination that united a variety of al-Assad's supporters into a formidable fighting force (Kofman and Rojansky, 2018, pp. 9-13). Russian forces were able to take control of Aleppo which brought back the memory of Grozny embargo during the second Chechen war. By 2016, Russia had chosen to cut off Sunni Islamists group from civilized bastions and exclude them out of Assad's zones on the coast (Gardner, 2016). When coupled with local agents, a small, adaptable force like the one sent in the Crimea was able to achieve considerable results.

The most essential factor in Russia's victory in Syria was the presence of local forces loyal to Assad's administration and their capacity to hold territory that had been abandoned by the militants. More crucially, Russia's cooperation and military control over numerous pro-Assad militias resulted in close ties between intelligence chiefs,

warlords, and influential businessmen in Syria. Russia has directly accessed to most important native characters, including al-Assad (Alami, 2018, p. 2).

The US, unlike Russia, was unable to make use of its mistakes in Iraq and Vietnam. To hold on to the gains made by American military might, there should be a domestic political ally with widespread public backing in both situations (Blank 2018, p. 382). The US initially provided support to the FSA and other apparently Islamists groups with a moderate stance but after realizing that their military help was going to al-Qaeda-and their associated counterparts, and ISIS, the US switched to PYD forces, which is not substitutional to the regime of Assad in any way. With the Syrian conflict, Russia had to contend with a variety of regional players whose interests conflicted with its own. Turkey backed Sunni militias in their fight against Assad's administration in an effort to topple him. In spite of the establishment of well commercial and business connections between Moscow and Ankara, the military involvement of Russia caused a severe broken down in their relationship. Relations between Moscow and Ankara became highly strained after Turkey shot down a Russian fighter plane in November 2015. Moscow utilized its economic clout with Ankara, whose trade in products with Russia in 2015 totaled \$15.8 billion, to obtain Syrian cooperation (Alterman et al, 2018, p. 8).

Russia and Turkey devised framework built on increased talks of the foreign ministries, agencies of intelligence, and general staffs of the two nations. This reconciliation resulted in a collective recognition of the important interests of the parties. Moscow confirmed the security worries of Ankara about the Kurdish presence in northern and eastern Syria. Moreover, Russian-Iranian allies in Syria have grown closer to Turkey by endorsing Syria's territorial integrity and dropping its anti-Assad banners (Erşen, 2017, pp. 6-7). The Astana discussions resulted in the establishment of four de-escalation zones monitored by Moscow, Ankara, and Tehran in May 2017. Six months later and after signing the agreement, the army of Al-Assad ousted rebels from three of these zones with Russian assistance.

Ankara's final card in post-war Syria is the opposition forces in Idlib. Russia, however, is vested in protecting Turkey's chances for economic cooperation. In August 2017, the association of Russia, Turkey, and Iran signed an oil contract of a \$7 billion, and a \$20 billion nuclear power projects in Turkey is being built by Rosatom (Markusen, 2018, pp.

2-7). Israel viewed the Civil war in Syria as a chance to destabilize the axis of Iran, Syria, Hezbollah as well as mitigate the danger posed by proxy forces of Iran on its border in the North. Russia worries that the attacks of Israel against Hezbollah and the bases of Iran in Syria will imperil Al-Assad regime stability. The present fight of Israel-Iran on the soil of Syria may involve the Syrian regime, bringing the interests of both Russia and Israel into conflict (Lappin, 2018).

Although Putin has promised to keep Israel's border 80 kilometers away from Iran, Tel Aviv fears that Russia will not be able to effectively manage the Iranian efforts to expand its military establishment in Syria. Putin is making an offer to Israel by accepting a limited level of duty for the security of Israel, yet this is not in case that Israel launches pre-emptive attacks against Iran and Hezbollah. However, Russia will remain neutral at any confrontation happening because of Israel's seeking it with Iran (Crooke, 2018a).

Despite competing interests in Syria, Russia maintains good ties with UAE and Saudi Arabia. The UAE and Qatar together with Saudi Arabia, have sponsored the main Sunni Islamist rebel factions fighting Al-Assad in Syria. Their energy and economic relationships, as well as supplying the Gulf States with military weapons, constitute the bedrock of these ties. Apart from the collaboration of Russia and Saudi Arabia on worldwide petroleum pricing, the PIF of Saudi Arabia has accepted to spend \$5 billion in an RDIF-led LNG project in the Arctic, while Russian Helicopters and Gazpromneft-Vostok both have Emirati Funds as investors as of 2018 (Mitrousis, 2019, p. 4).

The rapprochement of Russia and Saudi Arabia probably occurred exactly because Putin and Mohammad bin Salman, the Crown Prince of Saudi Arabia share the same goals: they both aim at resolving domestic and international conflicts through the use of hard might. Several Gulf media sites have dubbed the Saudi Crown Prince the Middle East's Vladimir Putin (Barmin, 2017). In terms of the Syrian endgame, the Gulf monarchs may support reintegration of Assad into the Arab system if he maintains a distance from Iran. They did not, however, anticipate that Bashar would terminate ties with Iran, in fact they desired that Bashar would not be exploited by the Iranians (Hearst, 2019).

However, Russia has built commonly advantageous cooperation with Iran in areas other than Syria, including the Central Asia, Afghanistan, and Caucasus, hence Russia cannot abandon close cooperation with Iran or be part of regional antagonisms between Iran and

Saudi Arabia. Syria's reconstruction process is a source of concern for Moscow, which sees Iran's presence as a necessary equation to Gulf Arab dominance in the country and in the region. A new form of multilateralism resulted from Russia's engagement in Syria. A miracle in and of itself is the Astana format, because of demonstrating cooperation of states often wary of one another besides having divergent goals in the majority of areas. The Russia-Turkey-Iran triangle, on the other hand, exemplifies an unconventional form of alliance.

The parties are bound together not by a single objective, but by their desire to accomplish their own. Each participant recognizes, however, that the other two enable everything. Russia has used what Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov referred to as "Network diplomacy," ad hoc alliance policy having a variety of governmental and non-governmental entities, regardless to their worldview, ideology, or goals, since they are in agreement with Russia's interests (Blank, 2018, p. 372).

The emergence of this new kind of multilateralism helped Russia to prevail in Syria and establish close ties with Egypt's Sisi leadership. Egypt's trade with Russia was \$4.6 billion between January and October 2017, up 59% year on year. Russia has also committed \$29 billion to finance and construct Egypt's first nuclear power plant (Farouk, 2018). In 2015, Egypt conducted the post-Soviet era's first maritime drills with Russia, and later in 2016 and 2018 combined military drills were conducted (Zagoritou, 2019, p. 9). Russia has played a significant mediation role in Yemen and Libya (Ramani, 2018; Souleimanov, 2019, p. 100). There is a growing global trend toward a new conception of sovereignty under this particular form of multilateralism. Using this idea, the liberal western form of world order might be seriously undermined (Crooke, 2018b).

## **2.2. Syrian Crisis**

Syria's Civil war is without doubt the most vicious and destructive internationalized Civil war of the twenty-first century. It estimated 370,000–570,000 casualties, over 5.6 million refugees, and approximately 6.6 million refugees as well as its over US\$250 billion reconstruction expenditure, bolster this allegation, as do credible narratives (World Bank, 2017). Describing the extent of the Syrian regime's abuses that are carried against the civilian populace (De silva, et al, 2014, p. 6).

As a result, the conflict's primary drivers and prospects for resolution are primarily confined to areas outside of Syria. On a diplomatic level, there is the dormant, UN-led Geneva peace process focusing on Syria, as well as the faster-moving Astana and Sochi peace processes, which are co-led by Turkey, Iran, and Russia. (Keen, 2017, p. 79).

Finally, Syria's geographical location at the crossroads of Africa, Europe, and Asia, as well as Turkey, Israel, Saudi Arabia, and Iran, positions it as both a player in and a victim of proxy conflict, refugees, radicalism, and criminality. All of this ensures that any political settlement that emerges from its wreckage would cast a long shadow, sparking the neighboring countries' attention. (Hamidi, 2017, p. 121). The US has concentrated its efforts on defeating IS and combating Iran's growing influence in the Middle East (Alaaldin, et al, 2018, p. 4). As a result, only a portion of the US vs. Russia framework is analytically meaningful, namely the observation that Russia views and utilizes the Syrian crisis as part of its effort to restore its status as a global power comparable to the US (Rodkiewicz, 2017, p. 16).

### **2.2.1. How Syrian Civil War Started**

After the success of the Tunisians and Egyptians' uprisings, pro-democratic Syrian demonstrations started in 2011. Demonstrators demanded an end to the Assad's regime abuses and corruption. The majority of the protests were peaceful. The immediate response of the government by shooting and arrests led to violence. Pro-democracy demonstrators confronted Bashar al-Assad's presidency in 2011. They called for the abolition of authoritarian rule. Asaad suppressed the opposition through the use of military troops and severe police. The environment was a critical factor in igniting the protests.

Between 2006 and 2010, Syria suffered a severe drought. Hundreds of thousands of farming families have seen their income disappear. Indeed, it was the province's drought-stricken residents of Deraa who initiated the first protests in March 2011. Police responded violently and harshly, making a large number of people the target of arrests. The regime's brutal reprisal extended throughout the country, triggering protests in new cities and provinces (Ford, 2019, p. 3). The formation of the FSA in July 2011 marks the start of an armed opposition. The FSA was formed by Syrian army defectors. The opposition group grew in size and was recognized in other countries as the official

representative of the Syrian people (Russel, 2018, p. 3). The fight became more sectarian when Sunni extremists began fighting with mild elements of the opposition which led to Syrian Civil War.

The West encouraged negotiations between al- Assad and the opposition groups. This attitude resulted from the western fear of the extremists fighting with the opposition besides the immense of bloodshed. Turkey with the Gulf States pressed to persuade al-Assad to table of negotiation. At the same time Iran mobilized the forging Shi'a militants to fight for Assad's regime. In 2015 Russian air force started striking sites to support president al-Assad. Due to the Assad's restoring power in the western Syria, of course with the support of Russia and Iran, negotiations with the armed and political opposition broke down. The Syrian president refused equalization of sharing power with the opposition or building confidence in different cases like freeing prisoners and human aspects.

The American direction to find a diplomatic solution for the crisis through negotiations without any military pressure on the regime was a big failure. Russia's air strikes along with the Iranian and Shi'a forces enabled Al-Assad to capture all the west side of Syria and concentrate penalty on the weak-armed opposition. In 2014 America's attention tended to fight ISIS that got control over all the east side of Syria and western Iraq and no longer asked for a government turn over. The most remarkable humanitarian crisis is the 5 million Syrian refugees camping in the neighboring countries such as Lebanon and Jordan in addition to Turkey. This problem represents a great challenge for the whole community in the world to do the best to avoid worse conditions (Ford, 2019, pp. 3-19).

### **2.2.2. The Role of Russia in Syria**

In order to understand Russia's involvement in Syria and continuous backing for Asaad, one must first look at the Libyan uprising against Qaddafi's leadership. As part of its massive arms sales to Libya, Russia has sold billions of dollars value of weapons, and in Libya's infrastructure. Moscow wavered between supporting and opposing international intervention in Libya.

Assassination of Gaddafi harmed Russian interests. Libya's commercial and political accords with Russia have been canceled, resulting in huge losses and compromising



Russia's international status. Russia is unable to sustain another incident of this magnitude. Thus, in 2011, 2012, 2014, and 2015, Russia demonstrated backing for Bashar al-Asaad when vetoing UNSC resolutions on Syria (Russell, 2018, p. 2). Even if safety is a priority, the Kremlin wants Asaad to stay in power for political and economic reasons. A total of \$4 billion was spent by Russia on defense contracts for Syria in 2012 (Póti, 2018, pp. 5-12).

Moscow's involvement in Syria extends far beyond the country's internal problems. Russia's official objective for military operations when it entered the conflict was to combat terrorist groups. Moscow expressed concern over the emergence of Islamic extremism. By 2015, between 5000 and 7000 people from Russia and post-Soviet countries had joined the self-proclaimed IS. In the summer of 2015, joining Daesh, most jihadi militants in the Russian Caucasus Chechnya, Dagestan switched from al-Qaeda. Combating terrorists, on the other hand, was an important component to establish authority for their military involvement in Syria (Lavrov, 2018).

Moreover, in Syria, Russia is looking to establish a political foothold. In addition, Syria is a vital geographic location between other allies of Russia, Iran, Egypt and Iraq. The Caspian Sea, the Persian Gulf, the Mediterranean Sea, and the Red Sea all provide easy access to these countries. Since 1950s, Syria is the only Arab state that has maintained consistent relations with Moscow. During the Cold War, President Hafez al-Assad was a staunch Soviet ally. When the Syrian conflict erupted in 2011, Russia recognized a new window of opportunity. Moscow backed Bashar al-Assad's re-election campaign in combating the Arab Spring's destabilizing consequences and resisting the US-led call for change of the regime and democratization.

For Russia, there is also a moment of opportunity to show its leadership in the use of force during this crisis as a member of the UNSC. While Russia incurs costs in assisting Asaad diplomatically, it continues to back the political system. In the event that a solution allowing Asaad to remain in power cannot be reached, Russia will ensure that whatever regime replaces Asaad in Damascus, Syria will remain a friend willing to maintain Russia's naval and air presence in the territory (Trenin, 2016, pp. 3-5). In Syria's Port Tartus, a Russian navy supply and maintenance base was located. The port of Tartus provided the Russian navy with the only direct route to the Mediterranean Sea. Syria and

Russia discussed rebuilding the naval base in 2008, but no agreement was reached. Additionally, Russia developed businesses and signed deals in Syria's energy sector. Russia has also provided Syria with combat training jets.

Syria is the only Arab state to have bolstered Russia's military capabilities and influence. Thus, Russia cannot afford to lose such a vital ally (Olanrewaju and Joshua, 2015, p. 50). Russian airstrikes in 2015 are thought to have killed roughly 18000 Syrians, including 7000 civilians, according to one estimate. Yet, the air raids were successful in regaining major territories previously controlled by the rebels from a strategic and tactical standpoint. Russia conducts air strikes in support of Syria's government at the request of Syria. Russia stated that the airstrikes were directed against Syrian militants, but many of its strikes targeted opposition-controlled areas. In the late 2015, there have been almost 150 incidents in Syria where chemical weapons have been used. Russian armed troops are not engaged in direct ground combat. A lot of Russian soldiers are mercenaries who decided to join the fight in Syria on their accord. Actually, those mercenaries work for private army contractors, Wagner is an example, that have claimed ties to Moscow. The majority of Western actors have placed the responsibility for the incident squarely on the Syrian regime.

Russia recommended dismantling Syria's chemical weapons, but the assaults continued. Russia has obstructed many international efforts to hold Syria accountable for its chemical weapons use. Russia vetoed a UNSC resolution calling for an investigation by the UN-OPCW twice (Russell, 2018, pp. 2-4).

Russia was able to avert government collapse in Syria with the assistance of Russian air power and Iranian and Hezbollah ground forces (Sadden, et al, 2017, p. 5).

Russian state-run media agencies reported that the chemical strikes were orchestrated to discredit Syria's regime. How the conflict was shown by Western and Russian media is interesting.

The Syrian crisis also included a media war. It demonstrated the existence of a perception-interpretation problem. The Russian press was pro-regime. This is unsurprising, given that the state controls the media in Russia. Russia's state run-media propagated the narrative that the state was engaged in anti-terrorist operations. This media painted the opponents as adversaries, Islamists, radicals and criminals exploiting the struggle for

freedom so as to dupe the audience in the West. For example, in the US, the media discourse favored the opposition and offered updates on the country's human rights and humanitarian crises. The Western representation of the regime's atrocities, on the other hand, can be interpreted as propaganda aimed at building support for armed action. (Olanrewaju and Joshua, 2015, p. 53).

Moscow has accused Western nations and Arab Gulf states of giving economic and military assistance to the opposition (Hove and Mutanda, 2015, p. 562). Russia also said that the White Helmets, a group that rescues people from conflict zones on Syrian soil, had ties to al-Qaeda. Moscow did not specify its aims in those terms throughout the war's early years. Gradually, the Russian story began to converge with the Syrian regime.

Russia's military action and the way it is portrayed in the media have developed into masterful examples of strategic misinformation. Russia's campaign on Syrian soil was diametrically opposed to the international coalition's military campaign. Russia's military engagement was presented as a counter-terrorist operation. Rather of combating ISIS, however, Moscow aided Syria's regime in eradicating the only potential political alternative to Asaad's regime. Despite proofs that Russian air strikes targeted opposition-held territory, Moscow declared victory over Islamic militants. As previously stated, Russia depicted the opposition as members of ISIS. Russia's effort was aimed towards the general people in Russia, EU, and the US. It doesn't matter that the Kremlin said that their target was ISIS, their objective quickly expanded to include all militias operating in Syria, dubbed extremists, Islamists, and terrorists.

With the emergence of ISIS in Syria in 2014, Russia labeled all armed oppositions as Islamists or having contact with terrorist organizations. Later in the battle, Russia adopts a new narrative that the Syrian conflict is a choice between the Asaad dictatorship and ISIS. Vladimir Putin has repeatedly declared their combating terrorists via the media. Putin also argued that it is terrorists who make people flee, not the regime of Assad. By reiterating this story, when it came to the Syrian conflict, Russia had a significant impact on public opinion in Europe and the US. In 2015, 53% of Americans thought Russia was a major player in this crisis, while 70% believed the US lacked a clear plan or strategy in Syria (Popescu, et al, 2018, pp. 57-60).

### **2.2.3. Russia's Geopolitical Approach to Syria**

Russia has a friendly relationship with the Middle East and is a strong supporter of the peace process between Arab countries and Israel. It appears that nearest Middle Eastern neighbor to Russia is Syria. Syria is geographically placed amid main Arab states and it is historically a pivotal Arab country. Russia was forced to fight in Syria to overcome its dilemma when the Arab Spring began. To begin, Russia perceives the Syrian situation through the eyes of a Greater Middle East proxy war between Iran and Saudi Arabia. Moscow considered Saudi Arabia and its allies as geopolitical adversaries because they fund terrorist groups in Russia North Caucasus and, to a lesser degree, Central Asia and Afghanistan (Cadier and Light, 2015, p. 132).

Because Iran sees Saudi Arabia as a threat to its leadership in the Islamic world, Russia sees Iran as a strategic friend. Russian support for al-Assad is motivated by two main spheres of strategic interests. First, Russia has endeavored to play a global role as a great power whose interests and concerns must be adjusted, in order to balance power with the US' global hegemony. As a result, Russia wields authority via the UNSC. Second, Russia wishes to increase or maintain its power in the region (Bagdonas, 2012, p. 67).

Two of Russia's most important regional allies are Syria and Iran. By and large, Russia has demonstrated its support for Syria's government and opposition to international efforts to inflict penalties and pursue armed involvement against Syria. Russia has served as a diplomatic shield by vetoing proposed UN Security Council resolutions. It became very clear that Russia strongly opposed repeating Libya's interventionist experience and this formed a warning to the international community. It has also shown their close cooperation and willingness to let al-Assad's government handle the civil war without foreign intervention. The first reason is that Russia does not want Assad's regime to be destroyed and overthrown, as Libya's Gaddafi was, in what would be another western-led campaign to destabilize the legitimate and authoritarian authority. The second reason is that Russia has strong relations to Syria and supports its sovereignty. Russia's determination to enter the global battle shows a desire to be seen as a great power. While Russia's economic goals may have played a role in its support for Syria's dictatorship, when all national interests are considered, it is apparent that Russia and Syria's relationship is ancient and solid.

## **CHAPTER 3: RUSSIAN MILITARY INTERVENTION IN SYRIA**

### **3.1. The Russian Direct Military Intervention in Syria**

The fight in Syria is escalated specifically in May 2015 when the IS captured Palmyra while Al-Nusra Front committed massacres in northwestern Syria; but the Syrian regime had lost momentum. At the same time all the efforts to broker peaceful solution were in vain. Russia was poised to escalate its engagement in these circumstances: in August, Russia and Syria inked a pact establishing an air base of Russia in the Syrian city Latakia Khmeimim and a 'joint intelligence center', included Russia, Iran, Iraq, and Syria was established in Baghdad in September 2015. Russia launched an air campaign in support of the Syrian government on 30 September 2015, following the latter's official request.

Russia's direct military engagement, which went unrecognized by the US and its allies, was a watershed moment in the war's growth. Russia's approach to Syria differed from the opposition-biased one in that it was focused on winning the war. The collaboration of Russia's direct action with the governmental land forces in addition to the Iranian support achieved balance for the benefit of Bashar al-Assad's regime. The Russian president, Putin, announced that the majority of Russia's military parted Syria on 14 March 2016, following the defeat of IS in Palmyra (Wintour and Walker, 2015).

During the initial stages of involvement from 30 September 2015 to the date of ceasefire in 27 February 2016, Russia fulfilled two objectives: it averted a military coup supported by the West and strengthened Russia's geopolitical position in Syria. Russian military actions continued despite Putin's pledge of a retreat. Putin informed the Russian armed forces on 11 December 2017 of the start of their retreat to the fixed bases in Tartus and Latakia. At the same time, Russia's military and Assad's forces seized Dayr-Az-Zawr, Aleppo, Mayadin, and Homs, as Moscow launched the Process of Astana Peace in Kazakhstan alongside Turkey and Iran. Throughout the second stage of Russia's armed participation in March 2016 up to December 2017, Russia achieved the stated objective of defeating terrorist groups operating in Syria, most notably IS, while also establishing a Middle East diplomatic hegemony position. In 2017, the Syrian government had taken back many areas, with 73% of the people living under al-Assad's dominance and less than 1% under the control of ISIS (Hinnebusch, 2020, p. 78).

A third-party intervention that is biased in one direction enhances the possibility of a negotiated settlement as well as a military victory, but a third-party involvement that is balanced in one direction diminishes the likelihood of a negotiated settlement (Balch-Lindsay, et al, 2008, p. 350). The UN' balanced engagement in Syria did not end the civil conflict because it did not successfully mediate a peace agreement. On the contrary, Russia's partisan engagement aided in the Syrian government's salvation. While the Syrian opposition was fractured, it had already received considerable armament support from overseas troops. Government-biased interventions are effective when opposition forces' combat power is equal to or greater than that of the state (Sullivan and Karreth, 2015, p. 3)

Since 2014, opposition forces in Syria have been confronting the country's armed forces. However, the government's military capability was bolstered by the government's allies' counter-intervention. Russian military participation, in particular, was decisive in tipping the balance in the government's favor. The opposition in Syria would probably certainly have won if there had not been a government-biased counter intervention, and the war would almost certainly have spread beyond Syrian borders without Russian participation. Syria has passed the major combat phase of the conflict more than ten years after it began, but some unresolved issues remain. The impasse in Syrian Kurdish-held regions and in Idlib, the absence of development toward an update code in accordance with auspices of the United Nations' Syrian Constitutional Committee, and the cost and plan for Syria's post-war reconstruction are Russia's primary issues for Syria's future (Khlebnikov, 2020, pp. 18-23).

### **3.1.1. The Syrian War Fronts Before Russia's Engagement**

In summer 2015, the situation on the Syrian conflict fronts mimicked that of 2012, signaling that the regime was doomed to fall. This was the period during which Iran, Assad's primary regional partner, reduced its military backing, focusing its attention mostly on Iraq, as a result of the IS military victories. Tehran also demonstrated a degree of prudence, considering the need to await the West's final acceptance of the nuclear program agreement. The year 2015 marked the end of the Syrian war's fourth year. Due to a lack of manpower in the SAA, troops were forced to serve without rotation for an indeterminate period of time.

Only 30% of Assad's military human resources could be employed at the conflict initiative due to the army's predominance of Sunnis and a fear of mass desertions.

ISIS declared a caliphate on June 29, 2014, seizing territory in eastern Syria and western Iraq. This signaled the opening of another front for Syria, necessitating the allocation of suitable forces to resist Jihad fighters (Wood, 2014).

Only 65,500 of the SAA's 220,000 soldiers were regarded "trustworthy" army members. The SAA lost the bulk of their helicopters, which were crucial equipment for facing a foe employing asymmetric warfare methods, in addition to considerable human and heavy tank fatalities. Five Mi-7 and Mi-8 helicopters, as well as six fighter planes, were shot down in October 2012 alone, and helicopters were virtually phased out of combat in 2013.

Furthermore, from the onset of the conflict, the Syrian army can be described as a heavy ground force which is not suitable for combating in urban regions. The civilians were attacked severely by the Syrian Armed forces. The regime's forces used heavy armored in Hama and Homs (England, 2016, p. 23). By mid-2016, 1000 tanks had been lost for every 2500 deployed at the start of the conflict (Watson, 2016).

Finally, in early 2015, it was discovered that new Islamic groups were forming in Syria with the stated purpose of opposing the government. Among the earliest measures in this direction was the formation of Jaish al-Fatah the Army of Conquest by Salman Ibn Abd al-Aziz al Saud, Saudi Arabia's present monarch, in collaboration with Qatar and Turkey (Oweis, 2016, p. 2). This signified the formation of a coalition of many thousand fighters comprising Sham Legion, Ahrar al-Sham, Jabhat al- Nusra and Liwa al-Haqq. This was interpreted as a sign of growing policy dealing with Al-Assad's adversaries (Joscelyn, 2015).

### **3.1.2. The Reasons for Russian Intervention**

A range of variables affected Russia's political decision to intervene militarily in Syria, including external considerations and those related to strategic culture and threat assessment. In part, this was due to a growing consciousness about the shifting global power dynamics. According to what has been emphasized in the aftermath of the US overwhelming dominance from 1992 to 2008, a return is witnessed currently to

multilateralism and poly-centrism, mostly in financial and economic terms, and in some, military terms.

Russia's efforts are to reorganize the world's impact zones, taking into account both the Kremlin's objectives and the Western world's current shortcomings. The military action against the IS was intended to pave the way for the formation of a broad Middle East coalition acting according to the auspices of the UNSC with the communion of the US. Russia in addition to NATO was supposed to enhance their relationship and eventually result in the repeal of economic penalties besides a decrease in western Ukrainian support (Ghitis, 2017).

Moscow fears losing an ally in the Middle East if Syrian President Bashar al-Assad is toppled from power. Along with economic and political goals geared toward excluding Western influence from the Middle East, Syria is a significant receiver of Russian armaments. Annually, Russian defense industry manufacturers have shipped to Damascus 7% of all military equipment intended for export. Additional justifications for Russian participation in Syria have been found in the sector of energy as well as potential for inbred resource exportation. Since Russia began its involvement in Syria in 2015, the Russian economy experienced its steepest decline in GDP which began in 2009.

It was precipitated by western authorities 2014 sanctions against the Kremlin, which were placed as a result of Russian aggression against Ukraine, among other reasons. Another significant reason was sharp decreases in crude oil prices. Between 2015 and 2016, the price of one barrel of oil was \$ 30.00, although the administrative government expected the cost would be \$ 50.00. So, that necessitated a re-balancing of Russia's fiscal expenditures (Luhn, 2016).

Taking all of this into account, the Kremlin's objective was to halt or reverse the declining trend. Syria's military operation proved to be an extremely efficient retaliation. With the start of Russia's Involvement in Syria, it made the price of crude oil spike to \$ 50.00, before finally settling at \$ 46.00 (Bagci, 2015, p. 12). Aside from the issue of controlling the price of crude oil, Russia's policymakers consider Syria as a critical location on the Middle East map for strategic resource transfers. This is because two competing gas supply lines are scheduled to pass across Syria's territory in the near future. Qatar is building one that will connect it to Turkey via Jordan, Syria, and Saudi Arabia. The



second one, prepared by Iran, is aimed at connecting Iraq to Syria, eventually reaching the West, by passing US allies Turkey and Saudi Arabia.

### **3.1.3. The Results of Russia's Military Intervention in Syria**

Russian involvement aided in the battle of Aleppo and the obliteration of rebel supply routes through Turkey. Palmyra, the ancient city, which was on the west part of Syria, was recaptured from rebels of Jihad with the assistance of Russian air-power. In January 2016, Assad's troops took the Sheikh Miskeen military base on the southern front. The passage at the Syrian border with Jordan was sealed by Jordan as it had been utilized previously to receive armament supplies by opposing forces. As was underlined following Russia's engagement in Syria, Russia's actions led to the fragmentation of the forces of rebel into junior groupings, disabling them from cooperating effectively in the future.

The northern front advances, may pave the way for troops of government to invade Idlib, a governorate of Syria's final uninhabitable governorates. On the one hand, Russia's role was restricted to organizing air raids, taking part in missions of special forces, and supplying military equipment. Russia sent neither regular ground troops or helicopter squadrons to aid Assad in taking considerable urban areas. (Oweis, 2016, pp. 3-4) Russian participation had a direct effect on Syria's refugee issue as well. In July 2015, prior to the start of the attacks, the number of refugees was predicted to be four million. In October 2015, people who have fled from fighting zone in Syria increased in number significantly. Their population rose to 4.6 million in January 2016, and to 5.5 million in September 2017 (Corps, 2016).

Russian assaults on civilian goals, all together with chemical weapons used by Assad's regime besides using barrel bombs, could be understood as a policy of "weaponizing" the refugee crisis in order to destabilize Europe (Dearden, 2016). Representatives of Ankara's officials hold a similar attitude. The expanding refugee population places a considerable strain on economy of Turkey. Turkey received nearly \$2.7 million Syrian asylum seekers, and the government spent approximately USD \$25 billion on immigrant assistance in August 2017 (Tisdall, 2016).

Moscow, in fact, expressed its readiness to solve the aircraft shot-down issue with a compromise. Not only that but also Moscow was to support Erdogan on the internal

political coup of the mid -2016. Moscow intended to cooperate with Ankara in Syria. This required a tactical moderate solution for the mutual priorities' interests of both sides. During Erdogan's visit to Petersburg on August 2016, a green light was given to Turkey by Russia to start a military operation in Syria. On October 2016, Putin visited Turkey, and so, indicated that a partial pragmatic partnership has returned. The two countries agreed to avoid open conflicts, to bargain over contentious cases in a continuous way, and to make ad hoc compromises partially. In addition to that, the partnership involved improving the economic linkage. In this way, energy cooperation was established when both leaders signed a deal to build the Turkish Stream Gas Pipeline (Rodkiewicz, 2017, pp. 35-37).

### **3.2. The Ramifications of Russia's Participation in Syria**

The Russian operation's two primary declared objectives were the preservation of Syria's regime and the annihilation of the IS. Certainly, Russian military engagement influenced the consequence of the Syria's fight for the benefit of Assad's regime and versus the IS. The pertinent concerns are what effect Russia's intervention has on Russian economic, geopolitical and security interests, as well as more widely on the Middle East.

#### **3.2.1. Russia: Regional Power and Mediator in the Middle East**

Russian participation in Syria in 2015 was the first offensive operation outside its boundaries after the collapse of the USSR. Since that time, Moscow did not protest the supremacy of NATO besides the military invasions of the West to Serbia (1999), Libya (2011), and Iraq (2003). On the other hand, both pro-NATO and Eastern Partnership members, Georgia and Ukraine, got no military assistance from NATO during their 2008 and 2014 battles with Russia, respectively. Beyond Russia's accepted sphere of influence, Russia's military participation in a Middle Eastern country was an imperialist operation intended to boost Russia's international reputation as a power in the region.

Truly, Moscow increased its sphere of influence in MENA and established a stronger position in the worldwide. Prior to its involvement in the Syrian crisis, Moscow was a relatively insignificant political player in MENA, despite the fact that it had previously enhanced its connections with the region. It may also be unable to become the region's dominant actor because of Russia's inadequate riches. Nevertheless, Russia has developed

into an essential player on both the diplomatic and military fronts. At the military level, Russia has successfully established itself as a dependable military might in the global system. Moscow carried out a military activity to defend its ally by establishing order and destroying terrorist in most of Syria's territories.

On the contrary, Western forces in Iraq, Libya, and Afghanistan failed to accomplish their stated goal of exporting democracy. As a result of the successful intervention, Russia's situation was geopolitically strengthened in the Middle East in addition to creating more economic prospects, because Syria played the role of Russian weaponry showcase.

Diplomatically, the success of the military campaign established Russia's status as a significant actor and a mediator in Syria's civil conflict. The UN-sponsored Geneva talks on Syria have failed. A first Geneva conference was held in 2012, and a second in 2014, a brief ceasefire in February 2016 that was short-lived, as well as the Geneva rounds of 2017 that produced no results, but the UN has been unable to mediate a resolution throughout the war. During that time, in the end of 2015, another unsuccessful effort was made in Vienna.

Russia responded to the failure of the UN peace discussions and the success of Russian operations in Syria by launching a separate procedure to the Geneva IV peace resolution at the end of 2016. Russia initiated peace negotiations in Astana, Kazakhstan's capital, alongside Iran and Turkey, the two major nations participating in the Syrian war. The triangular agreement to establish four zones of de-escalation in Syria was reached in September 2017 (Collin, 2018). Russia has accomplished two objectives regardless of the outcome of the continuing Astana process: From one side, it has cooperated with Turkey and Iran having opposing concerns in the region, in an ongoing diplomatic initiative since 2016. From another side, the US had previously acknowledged Moscow as a potential broker in Syria's crisis.

Trump and Putin acknowledged during their November 2017 summit in Vietnam that the US and Russia had teamed together to fight IS and backed Russia's Astana de-escalation zones. Several months after that, in Helsinki, the two presidents reached an agreement on Syria's post-conflict rehabilitation, without President Trump's conditionality (Wintour, 2018). Russia worked with everyone in the region to undermine the Geneva process and the US' hegemonic diplomatic leadership (Kofman and Rojansky, 2018, p. 17).

### **3.2.2. Relations Between Russia and the West**

Russian participation benefited bilateral relations with MENA and Asian countries, while further alienating Russia from Western countries. Russia has been steadily challenging the US and NATO's hegemony since the second decade of the twenty-first century. As a result of Russia's 2014 annexation of Crimea, sanctions imposed by the US and the EU have been in effect ever since. Russian engagement exacerbated the country's tense relationship with the West, particularly with the US. The more Russia's challenge to American hegemony, the more aggressively the US will react.

According to the US' Interim National Security Strategic Guidance March 2021, Russia is the US' second-greatest enemy, behind only China, due to the severity of the destruction it can wreak on a global scale. It is more of a problem for the EU because of how close they are to each other, as well as how much the war in Syria affects them both. Because of Syrian war's negative externalities such as security threats and regional instability, the issue of returning refugees to Syria is still unsolved. The solution for this problem is deploying a strategy of expensive reconstruction. Even though it may be difficult to come to terms, the EU and Russia are both interested in the political and economic stability of Syria.

EU has financial and resource capabilities but few tools for foreign policy; sanctions and humanitarian aid to Syria are only a few examples of these capabilities. Furthermore, Russia has foreign policy tools at its disposal, but due to Syria's lack of economic resources and political authority, it is seeking EU political and financial assistance (Barnes-Dacey, 2019).

The Kremlin is aware of the relations between the US and the European countries. The Kremlin is waiting for a time when it can exploit the course of proceedings in a similar way to that related to Iraq intervention in 2003. At that year Russia joined the anti-intervention European countries such as Germany and France.

It is difficult for both Russia and the West to thoroughly cooperate because of Russia's engagement in Syria. Moscow wishes that some European countries will be against the sanctions decided on Russia. This is achieved when smaller of European countries respond positively to Russia's hope. These states have relations of a certain nature with Russia. These states are Slovakia, Greece Cyprus, Hungary in addition to New Zealand,

South Korea and Israel. From all this one can comprehend the reason why the West has not totally achieved its target when imposing sanctions upon Russia (Minkina, 2019, p. 14)

### **3.2.3. The Impact of Russia's Airstrikes Campaign**

On March, 2016, Putin's announcement during a TV meeting with Foreign Minister Lavrov and Sergy Shoigu, defense Minister, about ordering the magnitude of his forces home amazed the world. The announcement was then posted on the Kremlin website. The announcement stated that with the participation by Russian military and grouping troops with the Syrian patriotic forces, they fought global terrorism and had the initiative of almost all areas to prepare the ground for a peaceful solution, and so they could radically change the situation. The declaration also indicated that as Putin felt the target in front of the military forces, particularly the Ministry of Defense, was certainly achieved, therefore he ordered these forces to pull back the main part of their military group.

Putin's objectives in the statement as he explained to the General Assembly of the UN are: backing forces of Assad, fighting ISIS and radicals, launching a political process. Yet, the statement proved to be a false information-pattern that identified the campaign. What airstrikes really did was far from what the statement claimed. From all that, four key conclusions could be approached:

- The bombing campaign of Russia had affected ISIS only minimally.
- The bombing of Russia had a direct effect on the regime of Assad when it enabled him to gain progress against the Aleppo surrounding military groups.
- The bombing had no negative influence on al-Qaeda linked Nusra Front as a fighting group.
- The bombing made the opposition, backed by the US, weaker than ISIS. (Czuperski, 2016, p. 19)

## **CHAPTER 4: PEACE EFFORTS AND COLD WAR 2.0**

In 2016, US Secretary of State John Kerry and Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov met regularly to discuss settling the Syrian crisis, but no resolution was reached due to divergent viewpoints. The US advocated that Assad be removed, but Russia insisted that Assad remain in power and went to great lengths to ensure this outcome. In 2017, Putin summoned Assad to Sochi and announced that the war was coming to an end and that Russia would sponsor peace talks to facilitate a political process and reconciliation in Syria, adding, "We still have a long way to go before we achieve complete victory over terrorists, but our joint work in combating terrorism on Syrian territory is nearing completion". Iran and Turkey's leaders came to Sochi the day after that meeting to meet with Putin and participate in these negotiations. Putin and Trump appeared to agree to collaborate on Syria during the Helsinki meeting in 2018 (Stent, 2019, pp. 259-261).

### **4.1. Process of Peace in Geneva**

The Geneva Peace Process began on June 30, 2012, as Geneva I and the process was established by UNSC Resolution 2254. This resolution consisted of four primary steps, all of which have been blocked. In the political process, discussions between the administration and the opposition would begin in mid-January 2016 as the first step toward political transition. A nationwide cease-fire would commence once the first step toward political change is taken. Beginning June 2016, a new constitution will be drafted. In June 2017, UN supervised elections would take place (Cleveland, et al, 2019, p. 29).

Between January 22 and 31, 2014, the second round of talks dubbed Geneva II began. Although no agreements were achieved during these meetings, Walid Muallem, Syria's Foreign Minister, and Ahmad Jarba, President of the SNC, represented the opposition for the first time. Between April 13 and 27, 2016, the third round of talks dubbed Geneva III took place. Following seven encounters between the parties in an indirect manner, the Syrian government had previously refused to accept her own proposal until a new constitution and government were formed. Due to the turmoil in Syria, the opposition delayed plans to join Geneva III directly. No agreement had been achieved between the parties after four meetings.

## **4.2. Process of Peace in Astana**

Indirect discussions between Syrian opposition and government leaders began in Kazakhstan's Astana area on January 23, 2017. Russia, Turkey, and Iran supported these discussions. Moscow invited all opposition combatants except ISIS and HTS. The first meeting, Astana-1, saw parties discuss three critical issues, including starting the ceasefire announced on December 30, 2016. The parties urged that Russia, Turkey, and Iran exercise control over the truce, while also debating the formation of a mechanism acceptable to both parties to avert future hostilities. Second, the opposition desired a division between itself and ISIS and Jabhat al-Nusra, and third, to demonstrate that the groups seeking a solution have fought terrorism in Syria. A significant outcome of that meeting was the establishment of a tripartite system consisting of Russia, Iran, and Turkey providing and supervising the ceasefire, keeping peace, and avoiding any form of provocation (Wintour, 2017).

The Astana-2 negotiations took place on February 15-16, 2017 and were attended by Russia, Iran, Turkey, the Syrian government and opposition, as well as UN and US teams. The Astana-2 talks focused on protecting Syria's ceasefire, passing regulations governing the joint operation group, ensuring the continuation of the ceasefire control mechanism and sanctioning system against parties that violated the ceasefire, and forming a work group between the Syrian government and opposition groups in response to Russia's proposal to draft a new constitution. At the conclusion of the Astana-2 discussions, the guarantor powers Russia, Iran, and Turkey accepted the joint operating group's regulation. This regulation established a distinction between opposition and terrorist organizations. from one another and implementing confidence-building measures in order to reach a political solution to the Syrian crisis. Additionally, guarantor governments agreed that the parties should communicate often on the topic of guaranteeing ceasefire compliance and to investigate those who break the ceasefire. The Astana-3 summit took place on 14-15 April 2017. Opposition organizations were absent from the second session of these discussions due to Russia's inability to adhere to its agreement to suspend air attacks against opposition and terrorist groups. According to the joint declaration of the Astana-3 talks, Russia, Iran, and Turkey are the official guarantor states for the ceasefire's control.

The Astana negotiations are critical in terms of the Geneva process's progress and the scope and consensus reached at the next meeting on 3-4 June 2017.

The date of the fourth round of Astana negotiations has been rescheduled following a chemical attack in Khan Shaykhun, Idlib area. None of the parties accepted formal responsibility for the bombing; the Syrian government and opposition have leveled accusations against one another. The US replied to that strike by launching 60 Tomahawk missiles against the Syrian government-controlled military airfield in Homs. The majority of the Syrian air force's aircraft have been seriously destroyed.

Astana-4 was held from 3-7 May 2017 under the shadow of these events. Establishing de-escalation zones was considered and accepted by the guarantor governments and the Syrian government during those discussions. De-escalation zones have been established in Idlib and certain areas of Latakia, Hama, Aleppo, north of Homs, eastern Ghouta, and southern Syria. The opposition has opposed that idea, believing it was a temporary solution that has failed to sustain calm in Syria. Indeed, none of these attempts will result in a durable solution in Syria. For example, any attempt at a ceasefire did not endure longer than a few hours.

Due to the fact that none of these parties are participating in the process, and each rebel group or terrorist group has its own distinct factions, which are constantly switching sides, it is exceedingly difficult to build a long-lasting solution. Occasionally, rebel organizations engage in combat with one another due to a collision of interests amongst their leaders. To summarize, numerous factors exist, the UN, like the long-debated Cyprus issue, is unwilling to resolve the Syrian question. It is the organization of discrete events and gatherings around various topics; however, these are not productive in nature. (Onjanov, 2018, pp. 149-172).

### **4.3. Syria: A New Cold War**

The fall of the Berlin Wall on November 9, 1989, initiated the Cold War's end. Mikhail Gorbachev's hopeful words about collaboration with the US elicited cautious responses from Western leaders. Thirty years later, one of the most contentious issues has resurfaced. Both sides possess an estimated 14,000 nuclear weapons, with around 1,800 remaining on hair-trigger alert (Heuvel, 2019). The demise of the USSR in 1991



significantly altered Russia's and the US' international stature. Russia had lost the global power competition to the US and was experiencing a severe economic crisis in the early years of the collapse. The Middle East has long been a location in which Russia, as well as the US, has sought to establish their great power status. Since Primakov's appointment as Foreign Minister in 1996, Russia has sought to bolster its connections with the Middle East (Kaya and İsmayilov, 2013).

Putin attended his first Munich Security Conference in 2007, which was the most significant in subsequent international security conferences. A year ago, US Vice President Dick Cheney attacked Russia's domestic system and relations with Lithuanian neighbors. Putin reacted to these points at the Munich Security Conference with a speech directed only at the US. He said that it was a planet ruled by a single monarch, a single sovereign. And ultimately, that was poisonous not only for individuals within the system, but also for the sovereign, since it self-destructs. And that has absolutely nothing to do with democracy... He added that they had been continually educated about democracy in Russia and trained to be unwilling to learn themselves (Monaghan, 2015, p. 4; Stent, 2019, p. 279).

President Putin has also blamed a unipolar world for hyper use of military force in international relations and that is plunging the world into an abyss of perpetual conflict. He has concluded that one state, the US, has overstepped its national borders in every way (Dadak, 2010, p. 89; Putin, 2007).

Russia has also taken considerable steps against the US Russia's strategic bombers are once again patrolling both US coasts, and the Russian navy is conducting maneuvers along the Caribbean coast, exactly as it did during the Cold War. Additionally, in August 2008, Georgia experienced a short-term conflict. Two key factors precipitated the conflict South Ossetia and Abkhazia, both of which had a Russian majority, declared their independence from Georgia, whereas Georgia claimed they were a part of her. The second and more critical factor was the deterioration of Putin's relationship with pro-Western President Mikhail Saakashvili. Saakashvili had desired membership in NATO and the EU.

On August 8, Russia initiated a military campaign between South Ossetia and Georgia, followed by Abkhazia the following day. On August 12, a ceasefire agreement was

achieved, and Putin had shattered the credibility of pro-Western Saakashvili. Russia's invasion and eventual annexation of Crimea on March 2, 2014, is a setback in relations between Russia and the US (McLaughlin, 2020, pp. 120-133).

Later, Putin conveyed a same message to peers over Georgia reminding them of his warrant about pursuing NATO membership and attempting to reclaim Abkhazia and South Ossetia by force; but they chose not to listen. Putin continued his speech when saying that Western allies made assurances about their protection but failed to keep them and he warned that there would be consequences. This incident prompted Kyrgyzstan to close an airbase near Manas in preparation for future US operations.

Russia withdrew from the Conventional Armed Forces in Europe Treaty in order to exert more influence over neighboring nations. With the US' withdrawal from the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty, the European arms control system came to an end (Dadak, 2010, pp. 90-100). Russia has become a significant factor in Europe for the first time since 1989 (Trenin, 2014). Russia's military action in Syria in September 2015 presented an excellent chance for the Obama administration's insecure Middle East foreign policy.

Following a one-hour warning to US military forces in Syria, the US and allies were taken aback and outraged by Putin's order to send a squadron of Russian jets to Khmeimim airfield. Russian planes have shared airspace with the US and its partners in their fight against the same adversary, ISIS. While the US and its allies have stricter standards regarding civilian casualties, Russia has flown more sorties and hit more targets than the US and its allies have. Both parties' goals in defeating ISIS appear to be aligned in 2015, despite the fact that each party interprets the causes, nature, location, and scope of concerns relating to ISIS differently. Nevertheless, each side has unique perspectives on ISIS (Stent, 2019, pp. 247-269).

Throughout the Syrian Civil War, these stances have frequently been incompatible with one another. As a result, neither the causes nor the remedies to the Syrian situation are evident to each party (Monaghan, 2015, p. 5). CIA assistance to a group of rebels in southern Syria was another key occurrence during that time period. The fundamental objective of those groups has been to destabilize the dictatorship of Bashar al-Assad. The Pentagon has established a second \$500 million program aimed at training and equipping a small force of northern Syrians to battle ISIS fighters. However, these well-trained and

equipped groups have chosen to fight alongside Assad's army rather than against ISIS (Kaplan, 2016).

The US launched air attacks on Syria in April 2017 in response to Assad's alleged chemical weapons attack. Putin described that aggression against a sovereign state in violation of international law and on a spurious pretext, according to him, as unacceptable. CIA assistance to rebel groups came to a stop in July 2017. Another key event occurred between Russia and the US when the parties agreed on the Euphrates River as a de-escalation zone. Russia and her allies were to remain on the western flank, while the US and its allies were to remain on the eastern flank (Eilam, 2019, p. 81; Stent 2019, p. 259).

In 2018, following another chemical weapons incident claimed by Assad, the US, the UK, and France coordinated air strikes against Syrian weapons sites in order to avoid any Russian casualties. The competition between Russia and the US over Syria has benefited Russia in 2018. President Trump has stated that the US will no longer advocate for Assad's removal and has indicated that the US will begin withdrawing from Syria (Stent, 2019, p. 259). Putin addressed the Federal Assembly in March 2018 announcing new super weapons that are currently being developed; the Burevestnik nuclear-capable cruise missile and the Poseidon intercontinental underwater drone. Following the introduction of these weapons, Putin sent message to the US declaring that America did not listen to them when they objected to America's unilateral withdrawal from the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty in 2002 or to their opposition to NATO enlargement and that America treated them inconsiderably, as junior partners.

However, Putin said that Russia had returned and would retaliate against any provocation made by the US. Putin also informed that they had to take Russia seriously at that point. He also explained that their nuclear doctrine stated that Russia reserved the right to use nuclear weapons or other weapons of mass destruction in response to a nuclear attack or an attack with other weapons of mass destruction against Russia or her allies, or to a conventional attack that threatened the state's very existence, he continued that the answer of any attack would be immediate and include necessary ramification. In response to that speech, Donald Trump sought to increase the Pentagon's nuclear weapons budget in order to confront Russia's.

Another serious issue in Russia-US relations during Putin's fourth term is the still-active Syrian Civil War. Both air forces continue to operate in Syria. That is why it is critical for Syria and the US to coordinate their efforts. Russia is pressuring the US to secure commitments to aid in rebuilding Syria, Iran's actions in Syria must be curtailed, the US demands (Stent, 2019, pp. 296-320). Russia's Middle East foreign policy is motivated by anti-American emotions. According to Russia, as a result of globalization and the end of the world's bipolar age, the Middle East's ideological perspective has shifted toward religious practice and nationalism, resulting in regional instability and warfare. Not only this, Russia asserts that the US has pursued an aggressive regional policy in the name of modernization and democratization.

The US has imposed unusual values on Muslims adhering to their traditions. As a result of such policy, conservatives and radicals have fought to maintain the status quo, jeopardizing regional security. That is why worldwide terrorism has expanded at a faster rate than ever recorded previously. Even after US forces withdrew from the region, the Arab street's anti-Western sentiment remained unchanged. It resulted in the emergence of extremist Islamic forces seeking new targets, including Russia and her regional interests (Magen, 2013, pp. 32-33).

Although the US military is far stronger than Russia's, Russia claims that as a result of Putin's efforts and accomplishments over the Russian military, Russia has developed into a global competitor to the US. In contrast to the USSR, Russia's economy is interwoven into the global economy, providing leverage while also exposing Russia to critical vulnerabilities. Additionally, unlike during the Cold War, political and military government-to-government channels with agreed-upon rules of engagement had been established between countries. Putin has now established their own set of interaction rules. The previous channels were no longer accessible. However, the West has reverted to Cold War-era deterrence and engagement strategies towards Russia (Stent, 2019, p. 327; Trenin, 2014).

Failure to resolve key concerns, similar to two world wars, a lack of flawless peace settlements between parties, and a lack of full integration into a new international system following the Cold War, all contributed to the emergence of a new conflict (Trenin, 2014). Since the Cold War ended, Western security measures have changed, resources have been

cut, and institutional memory and expertise about the USSR and Russian Federation have been lost. Western security agencies have shifted their attention in the aftermath of 9/11, focusing on counter terrorism and counterinsurgency operations in Afghanistan and Iraq. It drew minimal attention to Russia's evolving military and sparked a paradigm shift in Russia's approach to security. Russia had adapted Cold War-era military lessons for the twenty-first century and implemented them in Crimea (Monaghan, 2015, pp. 11-12).

## CONCLUSION

The Syrian crisis has the shape of New Cold War since it involves the great players of the world and divides them again into two camps. So, it is of a great value in the international politics. The global scenario has dramatically shifted towards the Middle East as a subsequent to the Syrian issue. Russia's influence increases in the area, moreover Putin is more obstinate in surviving Al-Assad regime in Syria. It has become very obvious that the two moves of the US were completely wrong, to oust Bashar Al-Assad and to isolate Russia after the annexation of Crimea.

In fact, Russia has proved to be a great player in Syrian conflict. Moscow's interest in collaborating with Syria is a tool for boosting its own international standing and image. Russia's actual purpose is to establish itself as a powerful actor in all issues especially those related to the Middle East. The Syrian war provides Russia with an ideal opportunity to persuade international parties that decisions must include the Kremlin's input.

The official rationale for Russia's intervention in the Syrian crisis and assistance of Assad was to combat Islamic radicalism. Russia was able to show that it is important for the UNSC to use force when there is a crisis by giving Syria diplomatic support. Indeed, Moscow learnt a valuable lesson when it lost a partner in Libya. As a result, Moscow could not allow further military engagement by the UN leadership. Despite that the profit is less than the cost, Moscow will go on securing and protecting Assad's posture all over the country. The Kremlin has used the crisis in Syria as a means of breaking out of its international isolation following the invasion of Crimea. Putin decided to interfere in Syria because of a desire to maintain Russia's status as a global power with its own zone of influence.

Russia's decision was based on the belief that bolstering al-Assad regime was necessary to effectively combat terrorism. Consolidating state institutions, notably in Syria, was thus essential for winning the war against the IS. Behind doing so, Russia sends a powerful message to regional players that, unlike the US, it will stand by leaders and governments as they face social uprisings against their power. To maintain positive relations with the Arab world is vital to Russia's drive to establish itself as a significant power. Putin's primary motivation in Syria was almost certainly to get the US to

acknowledge Russia's significance in the Middle East. Putin has said that Russia's military intervention in Syria has been successful. The military success of Russia in the middle East indicates the failure of the US as the only guarantor of the countries in the region. The Russian military participation was undertaken primarily to bolster the Assad administration and put it in a better position to lead any peace negotiations. There was now a window of opportunity for Moscow's aerial and naval forces in the Mediterranean. Moscow's military support is essential to the survival of Bashar al-Assad regime. Obviously, Russia fulfilled its dual stated objectives: the protection of Assad's administration as well as the annihilation of the IS. This military involvement results in reinforcing Russia's twofold relationships with the countries of the Middle East, leaving its footmark there, while its relationships with the Western countries have been more untied. Aside from the long-term cooperation with the "axis of resistance," Moscow succeeded in improving its posture concerning countries of pro-Western Middle East: The Gulf states and Israel. Turkey, though a military strong member of NATO, consolidated Moscow's stature.

From all aforementioned above, it is certain that Russia has consolidated its strength as a dependable military force in the global system, as well as its presence in the Middle East. Moreover, Russia's engagement in Syria was an essential point for the transmit from a unipolarity to a multi-polarity in the region, and eventually in the worldwide of power balance.

President Putin's long-term objectives in the Middle East and Mediterranean region have become great rivalry between Russia and the US conflict in becoming a power in Middle East region, the proxy's participation in the rivalry and the endless domestic instability of Syria brought about a new situation. This situation is indicating a new cold war and pronounced as "Cold war 2.0" between the parties in dominance.

Hence, this move may extend into a global rivalry in the long term. Russia seeks opportunity and benefits US failure on the foreign policy since 9/11. And as a result of the different pathways of both parties on the Syrian Civil war, the Syrian crisis seems not over in the short term. The Syrian crisis reveals the world's setback to avoid a real calamity and to provide protection to millions of honest citizens. The problem of the Syrian refugees

remains unsolved. In addition to that it is quite possible that another chapter of this war will flame up again in the future.



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1. Al-Basre, M. (2023). <b>An alliance based on common interest: Russian-Iranian relations during the Syrian civil war</b> , <i>PESA, Uluslararası Sosyal Arařtırmalar Dergisi</i> . 9(1).	