



Russia's Involvement in the Syrian Civil War: Motivation and Consequences

Izza Saeed¹

¹Mphil International Relations/ Political Science, University of Management and Technology, izzasaeed0068@gmail.com, ID: F 202403952

[DOI: https://doi.org/10.70670/sra.v3i1.401](https://doi.org/10.70670/sra.v3i1.401)

Abstract

The war in Syria which started in 2011 is one of the most destructive and long conflicts involving many actors internationally. Of all the stakeholders, Russia has been one of the most influential ones, especially after it entered the conflict in 2015. This work examines the Russian participation in the Syrian crisis based on geopolitical factors, the desire to have authority in the Middle East, fighting terrorism, and opposing the western powers. This paper explores how Russia has bolstered the Assad regime, and shifted the course of the war through its military and diplomatic actions. Further, the article measures the overall effect of Russia's participation; military and civilian analyzing the sufferings of the Syrian people. The analysis is also done based on regional stability, Russia's position in the international system, and the balance of power in international relations. In conclusion, the Russian case in Syria illustrates some of the issues related to foreign military engagements, interests, and diplomatic actions as well as the impacts in the conflict management systems. Act

Keywords: International Relations, Civil War, Hama and Homs, Bashar al-Assad, Islamic Extremists, Russia-Syria Relations, Geopolitics, Military Intervention, Cold War Alliances

Introduction

Currently, being one of the longest conflicts that started in 2011, the Syrian civil war is one of the bloodiest and most multidimensional wars in the modern world. Originally in the form of demonstrations against Bashar al-Assad's presidency they escalated into a civil war due to sectarianism, regional and international influences and intervention. Of these, the most significant is the Russian participation in the conflict and its possible further development. Firstly, analyzing its motives, it can be stated that the intervention of Russia in the Syrian conflict in 2015 has been a significant blow in changing the tides to the benefit of the Assad regime and has implications for the Syrian conflict, the Middle East, and international politics. The Russian-Syrian relations can be traced back to the cold war era where Russia sided with the Syrians because of the cold war conflict created by the Soviet Union against the western world. In the course of its history, Syria has evolved into a key strategic partner of the Soviet Union and later of Russia due to the economic, military and political ties developed between the two countries. This was followed by an attempt by a new power, Russia after dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, to continue with the domination of the region. Syria was not immune to some strain in its relations with Russia during the post-Soviet years especially in the 90's, but the renewed cooperation was apparently under Putin's presidency when he understood the conflict has involved regional players like Turkey, Iran,

Saudi Arabia whom all have had their own motive; the US and the European Union have funded rebel movements with an agenda to diminish Assad's influence. The war has become increasingly complicated over the years and the emergence of something like ISIS now complicates matters. Essentially, this war is over the power and authority in the Syrian state, with Assad's government on one side and a motley crew of rebels on the other. Since the beginning of the war, Russia's main goal is to protect the unlawful presidency and to avoid the collapse of a long-time allied nation. Russia saw the possibility of the fall of the Assad regime as a hostile to its national interests in the Middle East, and in particular, its naval base in Syria and the overall anti-Western globalization strategy. Western powers from the United States were eager to see the weakening of this government since this party was seen as undemocratic, violating human rights and sponsoring terrorism. Russia on the other hand viewed its engagement as a way to check on the increasing dominance of the west in the region and as a way of defending its self interest. However, the Russian Federation intensified its commitment further in the Syrian conflict in September 2015 by deploying military forces. The intervention was couched in terms of combating ISIS, but it was soon evident that Moscow's main interest was in averting the fall of the Assad regime. Russian support of the Assad regime was mainly in the form of military support which included air and ground support, intelligence sharing and cooperation. Russia also armed the Syrian government with sophisticated equipment such as surface-to-air missiles and battle tanks while training the Syrian forces and opening other necessities for them. The Soviet intervention determined the outcome of the war and directly influenced what happened during the conflict. Assad with the support of Russia regained major territories which had been occupied by the opposition and various Jihadist groups. By 2017, almost the entire side of the war had shifted towards Assad's favor, especially after receiving assistance from Russia. It is also not only direct support to the Syrian regime, which Russia directed in the Syrian conflict. It also had implications on the diplomatic realm. These mechanisms ceased to exist since Russia as one of permanent members of the United Nations Security Council, vetoed any resolution that sought to condemn Assad or sanction international action against him. Russia insisted that there was Western attempts to remove Assad as an illegitimate action while demanding that Syria's rights as a sovereign state be honored. This placed Russia in foil with the United State as well as its allies who were insisting on Assad to relinquish his presidency. Its diplomacy was also equally proactive as it involved helping parties to the conflict find a diplomatic solution including the Astana process involving Syria, Russia, Turkey and Iran among others. The Astana process has not provided any final outcome for Syria's future, but has guaranteed Russia's role as a major power in the process of Syria rebuilding after the war. The decision of Russia to intervene in the Syrian conflict was, thus, based on several factors. In addition to safeguarding its alliance with the Assad regime, Russia aimed at boosting its influence in the Middle East and undermining the Western powers' influence in the region. In Syria, Russia was able to gain a military strategic position in the Mediterranean where it owns several military navy bases and direct entrance to the strategic sea ways. In addition, Moscow looked to assert its military muscles, as well as to restore its status of an influential world actor capable of actively influencing the processes taking place in the world. To President Vladimir Putin, Syria is a playground where he could give the United States a dose of its own medicine and assert Russia's position as the world's super-power. The implication of Russia in Syria has elicited the following impact. From the military viewpoint, Russia's intervention was crucial in helping the Assad regime to stay afloat or even gain an upper hand in certain battles. Political wise Russia has become strategically relevant power in the Middle East, intensifying cooperation with Iran and Turkey and countering the US and NATO influence in the region. Russia has also used its military muscle in a global conflict which is a challenging environment to showcase its military might. However, it has also been criticized for causing deep concern about its increasing influence in

Syria related to humanitarian issues. Airstrikes that Russia carried out have been said to have targeted populated areas, schools and even hospitals hence the many casualties. The civil conflict has led to the internal displacement of millions of people in the country, and although its effects on the overall infrastructure and the economy may not be felt for years to come, they are grim. In the broader context, the Russian intervention in Syria accentuates some of the failures of military intervention in a seemingly intractable peace. Having saved the Assad regime and boosted its regional influence, Russia has prompted debates as to whether or not such interventions are justified and what their implications may be. The destruction, sufferings of innocent people, millions of refugees, and a continuing war in Syria demonstrate that conflicts cannot be solved solely by military forces. This paper will offer an extensive review of reasons for the Russia's engagement in the Syrian Civil War, approaches it has taken, and the outcomes that ensued. To this end, this article provides an analysis of the military, political, and humanitarian aspects of Russia's involvement in Syria in order to highlight the general effects of superpowers intervening in contemporary conflicts and changes in power relations within the region. Overall, this assessment provides us more insight into the Russian foreign policy and its consequences for the Syrian state and the region beyond.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical foundations of approaching the case of Russia's involvement in the Syrian civil war incorporate the Realism, Neorealism, Constructivism, and Liberalism theories in the field of international relations. Realism offers the base by suggesting that Russia's foreign policy is driven by national interests, such as power, territory, and containing Western countries. Thus, the tensions ease in line with Moscow's goal to ensure stability in the region to guarantee its ally, the Syrian regime, and remains in power. Neorealism builds on this by explaining that Russia's actions are conditioned by the world structure, where Russia aims at countering the dominance of the United States and establishing itself as one of the poles in the bipolar world. Constructivism reveals Moscow's participation based on identity, connections and stories of power and terrorism to justify intervention in order to protect a historic ally. Last, liberalism addresses the economic and foreign policy related interests of Russia like arms selling, energy supplies, and peace mediator roles. Applying these theories simultaneously, this framework presents a clear picture of Russia's interests and the likely outcomes of its actions in Syria.

Relationship of Russia and Syria

Russia and Syria have been having a diplomatic relationship since 1944 but this was greatly enhanced during the cold war period. Following Syria's futile efforts to get the Western support, it turned to the Soviet Union for military support. It steadily developed during the time of Hafez al-Assad in power starting from 1970 up to 2000 and after by his son Bashar al-Assad. Russia remained to be supportive for Syria after the Cold War although the western countries turn deaf ears on the government of Assad. In 2005 Russia reinforced their friendly relations with Syria that was transferring 73% of Russia's debt. The civil war in Syria began in 2011 due to the Arab Spring uprisings. Protests against Bashar al-Assad started for some time non-violent, but later, the government's forces suppressed it. While opposition parties received support from the Gulf governments, Turkey and Western countries it turned into civil war by 2012. Religious division and interference of outsider made the conflict messier and that continued as a longtime worsening tragedy. As it was earlier suggested, one of Russia's roles in the Syrian crisis was providing military and diplomatic support to the Assad regime. To be able to be first against the action by the West and condemn the Syrian regime, Moscow used its power in the UN to vote down resolutions. Russia has raised their activity level in 2015 by assisting the Assad's army by sending

soldiers, performing an airstrike and initiating a military operation. As for the conflict, it shifted direction through this engagement, and the opposition forces were affected negatively while the Syrian government regained the upper hand in occupying strategic populations. In addition to the Syrian experience, the interaction deepened the subject's other strategic goals by both demonstrating its military power on a global level and establishing Moscow as the regional hegemon. There are prehistoric relations of Russia with Syria although the two countries as modern entities were not recognized until they came into being as different states. In fact, relations originated in the tenth and eleventh centuries when Russian pilgrims and merchants came to the Levant for both business and religious reasons. Russian Church, especially, was investing considerable amount of money and efforts to control the area and protect its faithful. Although years of diplomatic relations between the two cultures fostered a strong lasting foundation of a social relationship both the October Revolution and the formation of the USSR in 1917 greatly changed the political relations between the two locations. The people of the Soviet Union were dedicated atheists and the authorities of the USSR did not bother about religious affiliations forged due to the interfaith pilgrimages received by both Muslims and Christians. However, it was important for the Soviet authorities that growth of the communist movements in the Arab East occurred. Ideologically, the Soviets supported actors and sided with whoever they considered to be dominated by bourgeoisie and capitalist states. In doing this, they aimed at gaining control over the area in an attempt to spur Bolshevik style uprisings and nurture the development of friendly. Therefore, the Soviet Union recognized Syria in 1944 when the latter was not independent yet, until 1946. At first, it revealed that they were not very close to one another. On the one hand, the Soviet Union aimed to exert influence over Syria while on the other, it criticized the Syrian rulers for being aligned too much to the western powers. Subsequently, it was realized that cooperation is good for both nations, and the relations between them grew friendly. For the Soviet Union, Syria was an important country because of its location. Syria had a port on the Mediterranean Sea, which helped Russian ships travel easily without passing through Turkey. Syria also acted as a counterbalance to Turkey and Iraq, which were friendly with the West. Economically, Syria bought a lot of military and civilian products from the Soviet Union. In 1954, they signed a trade agreement, and the The Soviet Union started helping Syria with weapons, electricity projects, and farming systems. This made the Soviet Union look powerful in the Middle East. As Syria's government changed, the Soviet Union continued to support it. In 1961, when Syria separated from Egypt, the Soviet Union was the first country to recognize it as an independent state. Even though Syria's Ba'ath Party had different political beliefs from the Soviet Union, they still worked together. Under Hafez al-Assad, who became Syria's leader in 1970, the country tried to be more independent, but the Soviet Union continued to send military equipment and economic help. Until the late 1980s, Syria and the Soviet Union remained close allies. Between 1974 and 1985, Syria relied heavily on the USSR for military support, with about 90% of its arms coming from there. However, tensions began to rise for two main reasons:

Syria wanted more military power: Syria aimed to be on equal footing with Israel and had disagreements with the USSR about the quality and quantity of weapons they were receiving.

Improved Soviet-Israeli relations: The USSR began improving its ties with Israel, and a large number of Soviet Jews immigrated to Israel. This made Syria uneasy because the USSR was growing closer to its enemy, Israel. The USSR, which had been backing Syria to counterbalance Israel's relationship with the US, refused to give Syria weapons to the same extent that the US was arming Israel. Moscow encouraged Syria to pursue peace with Israel instead of using military force. When the USSR collapsed, Syria lost a crucial ally, and the situation became even more difficult as Russia underwent significant political and economic changes. The collapse of the

USSR had a major impact on Syrian-Russian relations. First, Russia inherited most of the Soviet military and economic legacy but was weakened by the loss of land and population. It also had to focus more on its new neighbors, which made the Middle East less of a priority. Additionally, the new Russian government lacked the ideological drive that had guided Soviet foreign policy, becoming more pragmatic and self-interested. Tensions arose between Russia and Syria, particularly over Syria's debt to Russia and the continuation of arms supplies. Syria tried to use its debt as leverage, but Russia pushed back, ending Syria's ability to rely on Moscow as a counterbalance to the US and Israel. However, both sides still saw mutual benefits in maintaining ties, mainly due to Syria's need for Russian weapons and repairs and Russia's desire to collect Syria's debt. This led to continued cooperation, with Russia even writing off part of Syria's debt in 1994 to improve relations. Despite some disagreements, especially with Russia trying to engage both Syria and Israel, the two countries' relationship improved in the 1990s, and this trend accelerated after Vladimir Putin became president.

Syrian Civil War

History

Syria was under the Ottoman Empire's rule for approximately 400 years until the end of WWI, and conflict has been an ongoing part of Syria's existence. Syria was a part of the Ottoman Vilayet called "Bilad-u-Sham," of which it was divided into four divisions, and consisted of present-day Syria, Jordan, Lebanon, Israel, Palestine, and Iraq. With the Sykes-Picot Agreement in the year 1916 the European powers particularly Britain and France carved up the region after the fall of Ottoman Empire by drawing a new map which paid no regard to the ethnic and cultural diversities of the people living there. This was due to the division created by the Treaty of Versailles and through the Mandate System of the League of Nations, which later led to further turbulence when France took over control of Syria and Lebanon. Internal conflict, including the Sunni Muslim majority and other minorities such as the Alawites, Druze, and the Christian groups characterized the Syrian state after it got its independence in 1945. A sequence of coups was also witnessed in the nation, the Baathist coup of 1963 followed by the coup of Hafez al-Assad in the early 1970. The Syrian economy, education and military also developed during Assad's rule, his government was however marked by oppressive measures and authoritarianism and the consolidation of power in Assad's Baath Party, the Military and the security forces. The upheavals in Syria could be attributed to the Sunni majority's uprising against the Alawite-rule government during the Arab Spring. Bashar al-Assad inherited power from his father Hafez al-Assad after the latter's death in 2000 but maintained the previous policy, which hampered the Syrian people's happiness, economic inequality, and corruption that fanned the civil war.

a) Origin

After most of the Arab Spring protests occur, the Syrian Civil War began in March 2011. The Assad government responded violently detaining protesters and employing the army and security to disperse protests, usually with lethal force. As a culmination of this escalation, armed confrontation between the government forces and the opposition rebels was witnessed by the end of the year 2011. The Alawite led the government with a fairly opposition facing them in the form of a coalition of fighters that were mainly Sunni. Thus, through the involvement of regional and international powers and the addition of moderately Islamic militants added to the conflict. It is crucial to know who is fighting whom in Syria in order to comprehend the situation and any possible peace initiatives.



Stakeholders: In Syria, who is battling whom?

The regime, the opposition rebels, foreign powers, and Islamic jihadists are the four main groupings of people involved in the Syrian Civil War. We will talk about each of these groups' objectives, driving forces, and plans later. (AFP, 2016). Waseem Khan and Hafez Ulla Khan 562

ii) Stakeholders: In Syria, who is battling whom?

The regime, the opposition rebels, foreign powers, and Islamic jihadists are the four main groupings of people involved in the Syrian Civil War. We will talk about each of these groups' objectives, driving forces, and plans later.

b) Regime

The Syrian regime is fighting against various rebel groups and both Syrian and foreign jihadists. It is supported by around 300,000 soldiers in the Syrian Army, along with allied forces (AFP, 2016). The largest opposition group it faces is the Army of Conquest. President Assad has vowed to continue fighting until he regains control of the entire country. The regime is also in conflict with the Islamic State, which was expelled from the ancient city of Palmyra in March 2016. Additionally, it faces opposition from Syrian Kurds seeking to establish an independent Kurdistan in the region. The regime is supported by 200,000 irregular forces, mainly from the National Defense Forces, and about 5,000 to 8,000 fighters from the powerful Shia militia Hezbollah, along with fighters from Iran, Iraq, and Afghanistan. Russia provides strong military and diplomatic support to the regime, offering air support (AFP, 2017).

c) Opposition the main members of the opposition are rebels opposed to the government, especially Kurds, who want to topple it. The biggest anti-regime coalition, "The Army of Conquest," unites jihadists like Fatah al-Sham Front, formerly known as Al-Nusra Front (an Al-Qaeda offshoot), with Islamist groups like Ahrar al-Sham and Faylaq Al-Sham (AFP, 2016). The Free Syrian Army (FSA) was the primary force opposing the regime at first, but it has since faded and dissolved. The Syrian Armed Forces officers who defected formed it. However, internal strife has reduced its influence.

While excluding terrorist organizations like Al-Nusra, the West, which includes the US, UK, and France, backs moderate opposition forces in Syria. These countries support democratic reforms and the overthrow of Assad. In the meantime, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and Turkey covertly support the opposition for various reasons: The Gulf powers support it on sectarian grounds, while Turkey supports democracy and wants to overthrow the Alawite (Shia) regime and install a Sunni-led administration. Extremist organizations like ISIS have also received backing from some of these nations. Opposition factions, however, have different objectives. For instance, Fatah al-Sham wants to establish an Islamic emirate. The Syrian Kurds, an ethnic minority residing in Syria, Turkey, Iraq, and Iran, are another important resistance group. An independent Kurdistan has long

been their goal. Securing Kurdish territory is their immediate objective, taking advantage of Syria's chaos. The Syrian Kurds, an ethnic minority residing in Syria, Turkey, Iraq, and Iran, are another important resistance group. An independent Kurdistan has long been their goal. Their immediate objective is to secure Kurdish territories and advocate for autonomy following the war, taking advantage of Syria's instability. Their ultimate goal is a united Kurdistan. Although they mostly avoid getting involved in the battle between Assad's administration and other opposition organizations, Assad has attacked them and opposes their autonomy. Working under the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), the Kurds have established a semi-autonomous territory through their People's Protection Units (YPG) and are an important US ally in the war against ISIS. In general, the resistance against Assad is heterogeneous and fragmented.

d) Foreign Powers

Each of the foreign countries has its own objectives and plays a significant role in Syria. Since 2015, Russia has been conducting airstrikes in support of Assad. It mostly targets rebels, aiding Assad in regaining power, even if it claims to be targeting ISIS. In addition, Russia tries to increase its power in the Middle East by forming an alliance with Turkey and Iran and thwarting UN initiatives against Assad. The United States and other Western nations, on the other hand, are against Assad and covertly back rebels, but their primary goal is to combat ISIS. Leading a coalition of 60 nations against ISIS, the US backs organizations such as the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF). In the meantime, rebel organizations are financed by Saudi Arabia and Qatar in an effort to topple Assad's Shia-led regime and install a Sunni-led Syria. Iran, on the other hand, backs Assad with finances, which it views as a terrorist organization associated with the PKK, a Kurdish separatist organization in Turkey. Russia and Turkey support different parties in Syria, but they have one thing in common: they want to keep the Kurds from becoming independent. The Syrian Civil War has been exploited by a number of Islamic extremist organizations to seize control. To increase its power, the Islamic State (IS) seized portions of Syria and waged war against the government, rebels, and other jihadist organizations. It was covertly financed by certain nations and received revenue from taxes and resources in the territories it ruled. Through airstrikes and combat, the U.S. and its allies, in addition to Kurdish combatants, attempted to eradicate IS. Al-Qaeda-affiliated Fateh al-Sham (previously Al-Nusra Front) was another influential organization that sought to overthrow Assad and establish an Islamic state. It occasionally cooperated with IS and other times opposed it. It posed a greater threat than IS because it had numerous local fighters and was covertly backed by Qatar. It was a greater threat than IS because it had a large number of local fighters. Assad was backed by a Shia terrorist organization from Lebanon that battled the rebels, IS, and Fateh al-Sham. Syria has become a battlefield because of the several factions battling for their own objectives, with the Syrian people bearing the brunt of this.

Russia's Involvement in Syrian Civil War

Russia Replies the SOS Call from Bashar al-Assad

In the Soviet period, the Russian Federation has relevant political and military relations with Syria, as a result of their treaty signed in 1971 that allowed the Soviet Union to build a naval base at Tartus. The Russian gave military training, providing arms, and political support to the Assad regime after the uprising of the Arab Spring protesting in Syria in 2011. However, Russia stepped up its involvement as the adversaries such as Islamists and FSA fighters threatened Assad's power. After three years of civil uprising, Syria officially called for Russia's intervention in September 2015 when Assad's regime was nearly to collapse. Russia commenced an aerial attack against ISIS and anti-Assad opposition in Syria based on counter terrorism and stability of the region they provided as a reason. This influenced the shaping of the further turn of events in Syria in favor of

Assad's forces, and although the dispute has not been completely solved, the Syrian army was significantly supported by this action.

Russia's Strategic Motivations in the Syrian Civil War: Geopolitical and Geo-economic Dimensions

Geopolitical and geo-economics interests are the key factors through which Russia has been getting involved in the Syrian civil war. Thus, Russia's actions in the Middle East drawn with primary concern on the military and economic aspects are based on geopolitical principles and desire to regain and protect the lost territory. Russia thus has an important interest in Syria's Mediterranean coastline, particularly the naval base at Tartus, as it is the only one remaining in the region. This can be traced from Russia to achieve warship warm water ports including after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Thus, it is having a military presence and preventing the further penetration of Western powers led by America, this makes it possible for Russia to have influence in an area of the world known as the Mediterranean. A Sunni-dominated opposition taking over Syria would undermine Russia's power in the region and jeopardize its partnership with Iran, which has similar geopolitical objectives to the United States and Sunni Arab governments. This is another reason why Russia supports Bashar al-Assad. Additionally, although this is less important than its larger geopolitical objectives, Russia's engagement aims to maintain its arms trade with Syria. Russia wants to maintain its monopoly grip over natural gas shipments to Europe; therefore, the Syrian crisis has important geo-economics ramifications as well. In an effort to lessen Russia's economic sway, the United States has adopted a contradictory approach, helping Kurdish insurgents build a substitute natural gas pipeline. Therefore, Russia's continuous support for the Assad government is not merely a defense of a long-standing ally but also part of a larger endeavor to keep its place as a major actor in the Middle East, oppose Western expansion, and establish control over energy routes that are essential to the energy security of Europe. By defending Assad's regime, Russia intends to maintain its hegemony in the region, regain its influence globally, and keep Syria, its last Arab ally from falling under the influence of both regional and Western Sunni groups. Russia's involvement in the Syrian Civil War is driven by a mix of geopolitical, strategic, and geo-economic interests. First of all, Russia's interest in preserving the regime of Bashar al-Assad helps it to keep its foothold in the Middle East, avoid threaten by Kurdish state backed by the United States and monopolize the export of natural gas to Europe. The Russian governing body has vested interests on the Syrian Oil, gas and the infrastructure, due to the fact that oil and gas are the main source of revenues for Russia. Secondly, Russia shares interest in Syria for military sales, positioning in the Middle East region, and controlling the Syrian energy sector, especially regarding the East-Med pipeline project. Although Russia could be accused of hampering the international efforts in the Syrian crisis, its attitudes stem from its organizational and particular concerns, such as strategic partnership in the Middle Eastern country since the Cold War period. It also means that the behavior of Russia concerning the Syrian Civil War is a component of the Russian confrontation with the US and its hopes for the role of the world's leader.

A Realist Strategy to Counter Western Influence

The best approach in understanding the role of Russia in the Syrian civil conflict is that of realism, a fundamental theoretical paradigm in the context of the relations between states that evidences great concern for power and geopolitical survival. As per relativist scholars, Russia has been supporting the Assad government militarily as well as diplomatically because of the geostrategic interest of countering the west intrigue and maintaining a foothold in the Middle East. Russia's intervention is explained as safeguarding its arms deals and its naval base in Tartus which are considered insufficient explanations. While some argued that the Russian action was to gain arms

supplies and protect its naval base in Tartus, such reasons deemed insufficient. Instead Russia demonstrated that it is against regime changes instigated by the West such as in Libya and is keen to curb the influence of the United States in the region. Russia is concerned that authorization of action in Syria may provoke further interference in the nation's affairs in the future. The support offered to Assad enables Moscow to reactivate its status on an international level, counteract the American predominance, and guarantee allies of its steadiness. There are also internal factors like leadership concerns, for instance, Putin's efforts to restore pride for the country after the collapse of the Soviet Union and to increase his power back home. The reason for Russia's anger at the Western interventionism in Syria is that Russia lost money in Libya as NATO overstepped their UN mandate to depose Gaddafi. In conclusion, for Russia it is important to cement the position in the Middle East and in the eyes of Russian authorities Syria is an important pawn in the materialization of the goal, which is to prevent a regime change instigated by the West in the region.

The Creation of Narratives in Relation to the War and Western Involvement

Besides force, Russia has been strategizing on an argumentation to justify its support to the Assad government in the Syrian war. For the past eight years, Russia has represented Syrian opposition as a Western conspiracy, stating that the EU and the US are plotting to remove Assad and weaken Russia. This was supported by Russian state-controlled media outlets in which the western powers are depicted as the attackers and Assad's government as the lawful authority. Instead of presenting the conflict as a Sunni-Shia one, Russia portrayed the conflict as an attempt to retake Syria from foreign intervention in an effort to strengthen its role in the conflict. Putin thus established that the Syrian conflict was not about Sunni-Shi'ite divide but an anti-Western aggression by groups like ISIS and Jabhat al-Nusra; a strategy of justification for Russia's actions abroad and at home. It presented itself as a shield against Western imperialism and linked Syria's war with other global conflicts like Ukraine. Finally, the Russian version depicted the Assad regime as legitimate and its opponents as mercenaries masquerading for the West to be fought.

Russia's Military Assistance in the Civil War in Syria

For years, Russia has been supporting the Assad government militarily as soon as the Syrian civil war began. Despite even before the upheaval really begun in Syria, Russia signed an arms deal with the Assad regime in 2012 for \$ 1.5 billion, which was 10% of total weapons export in Russia. Russia stifled criticism by urging that an ally must be defended 'said its spokesperson. Moreover, Russia provided weapon systems: anti aircraft missile system Buk-M2, trainer and helicopter attack aircraft MI-25, military training and logistics in form of oil supplies. These incidents were further worsened when the Syrian government operations used fighter jets and helicopters which were sourced from Russia. Russia became far more involved in September 2015 after President Putin was given the go-ahead to send soldiers and fight terrorism, especially that of ISIS. To aid Assad, Russia dispatched a variety of missile systems, tanks, artillery, and airplanes. With Russia supporting Assad and accusing the West of aiding opposition forces, this intervention turned the Syrian crisis into a wider proxy war. With barely an hour's notice from the United States, Russia launched its first airstrike in Syria on October 30, 2015, targeting Al-Rastan, Talbiseh, and Zafar Aniya in Homs. Because it served as a buffer between Tartus and important Russian military installations in Lattakia and Homs, it was strategically important. At first, it seemed that Russia's involvement was restricted to airstrikes. Yet, according to a November 2016 Reuters article, Russia reportedly engaged in ground operations using hired mercenaries, sometimes known as "ghost soldiers." Despite operating informally, these private military organizations received funding comparable to that of Russian military forces. Deeper Russian engagement in the Syrian crisis is

confirmed by reports that these mercenaries were operating even prior to Russia's formal intervention in September 2015. When the Syrian conflict began in 2011, Russia opposed direct UN participation in the UN Security Council (UNSC) by adopting a diplomatic approach. Russia drew a parallel between the Libyan intervention that led to the state failure and warned about the chaos in Syria and the negative impact of foreign intervention. Russia resisted sanction and did not support the proposal for the no-fly zone primarily due to military ties with Syria. Having condemned violence and advocating for dialogue, Russia consistently voted against resolutions which aimed at sanctioning or holding the Assad regime accountable for the violations of the right to be free from violence by using their veto right in the UNSC. As a result of this save tactic, the conflict has been prolonged in response to the power struggle between Russia and the western countries. Other essays show how Russia often uses veto to show how superpowers tend to use UNSC process to retain their power rather than the overall security in the world.

Effects of Russia's Involvement in Syria: Impacts on the Syrian Crisis

Over 470,000 people have died as a result of the conflict in Syria from 2011 to 2016. Children accounted for about 55,000 deaths, or 11.7% of the total, while civilians made up the bulk (63.41 of 470,000) (Human Rights Watch, 2017). Based on these figures, it is indisputable that Russia's direct and indirect military engagement is one of the causes. At the same time, Russia's UNSC position serves as a crucial mechanism that results in the following three main

1) Humanitarian Access: Activities by pertinent parties in Syria have had a major impact on civilian lives, displacing people, denying them access to essential infrastructure, and denying them their homes, among other things. Because of this and Russia's willingness to support Assad's regime, the UNSC is unable to adopt resolutions that exert pressure on other parties. The UNSC's responses are mainly restricted to "non-binding statements," with the hope that Russia will back its position.

(2) Political Solution: The UN has made a cautious effort to persuade pertinent parties to engage in a political dialogue, known as the Geneva Process. Important prerequisites for this to succeed include all pertinent power actors, such as Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and Iran.

(3) Ending Impunity: During the protracted Syrian civil war, the world witnessed numerous massacres of civilians carried out by different armed actors. As the violence rages, the Human Rights Council's Commission of Inquiry has produced a number of reports documenting these crimes, which may be used to bring the perpetrators to justice. If the procedure is desired, the data can then be sent right away to the International Criminal Court (ICC). In order to identify and classify the Syrian situation within the framework and jurisdiction of the ICC, a response to the UNSC is required during this procedure. This is comparable to the case of Libya and Darfur, when Russia had cast a different vote on such crimes, which may be used to bring the perpetrators to justice. If the procedure is desired, the data can then be sent right away to the International Criminal Court (ICC). In order to identify and classify the Syrian situation within the framework and jurisdiction of the ICC, a response to the UNSC is required during this procedure. This is comparable to the case of Libya and Darfur, when Russia had cast a different vote on such occurrences have the potential to prolong violent situations and breed animosity.

Current situation

At the moment, the government is winning. It controls about 35% of the nation. These regions include key cities and regions, including Damascus, central Hama and Homs, the seaside, and a sizable portion of Aleppo. Sixty percent of the population lives in the territory it controls. Its main points were the recent rebel rule of Aleppo and the reoccupation of Syria from IS in March

2016. However, about 12% of the nation is under the control of insurgents, notably Fateh al-Sham. The majority of their territory is in the Army of Conquest-controlled province of Idlib. Despite suffering setbacks since 2015, the Islamic State still controls over 35% of Syria. But a large portion of this region is deserted. It controls the Iraqi border provinces of Deir Ezzor and Raqqa. However, it is also found in a few other areas. Additionally, about 18% of Syrian territory is in the hands of the Kurds (YPG) and SDF. About three-quarters of the Syrian-Turkish border is included in this. In the areas they control, they have established a federal region. Syria is in ruins as a result, with each faction dominating a portion of the nation.

Conclusion

In summary, a mix of geopolitical, security, and strategic factors led to Russia's engagement in the Syrian Civil War. Russia's assistance was essential in turning around President Bashar al-Assad's government because it aimed to maintain its long-standing alliance with Syria, project military might in the Middle East, and oppose Western influence. Russia effectively reclaimed important territories and severely undermined opposition groups through military assistance, diplomatic initiatives, and strategic alliances. Nonetheless, Russia's interference contributes to a number of results. Many civilians were killed and a lot of infrastructures were destroyed, although it helped in preventing the total collapse of the Syrian government. Also, Russia's participation in the war brought its dominance over the sovereignty of the region, but at the same time, it only raised global concern and criticism of its military actions and disregarded human lives. Russia will remain a major player that will play a role in determining the position of Syria in the future and consequently the Middle East and Russia's global image as well. Consequently, the conduct of Russia in Syria also shows the challenges of intervention and the consequences of having national interests in a tumultuous world.

References

- Amnesty International. (2016). *Syria: Russia's role in targeting civilians in Aleppo*. Amnesty International. <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2016/11/syria-russia-targeting-civilians-aleppo/>
- Götze, E. (2017). Russia's role in the Syrian conflict. *International Politics and Society*, 1(1), 34-50. <https://www.ips-journal.eu/>
- International Crisis Group. (2018). *Russia in Syria: From intervention to stabilization*. International Crisis Group. <https://www.crisisgroup.org/middle-east-north-africa/eastern-mediterranean/syria/russia-syria-intervention>
- Makovsky, A. (2015). *The Kremlin's war: Russia's intervention in Syria*. Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. <https://carnegieendowment.org/>
- Mouat, C. (2016). Russia's military intervention in Syria: Strategic considerations and consequences. *Strategic Studies Quarterly*, 10(3), 3-19. <https://www.airuniversity.af.edu/SSQ/>
- Rossiyskaya Gazeta. (2016). *Russia's military presence in Syria: A timeline of key events*. Rossiyskaya Gazeta. <https://rg.ru/2016/09/27/>
- Sukhankin, S. (2017). *Russia's involvement in Syria: A strategic analysis*. European Council on Foreign Relations. <https://www.ecfr.eu/>