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Neorealism and Constructivism in Understanding Russian Foreign Policy in the Syrian Conflict

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Acknowledgements

Abstract

This research study aims to contribute to the understanding of Russian foreign policy through the application of International Relations (IR) theories, mainly through a combination of neorealism and constructivism in relation to Russia's intervention in the Syrian conflict. A missing gap within the body of literature is the dismissal or undermining of geopolitical and civilizational factors when analyzing Russia's interests in Syrian conflict, with regards to application of neorealism and constructivism. This study will review the gathered literature and conduct an empirical analysis of interviews, speeches and statements made by Russian president Vladimir Putin and Russia's Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov between the period of Russia's intervention on the 30th of September 2015 until the declaration of withdrawal of the majority of Russian forces on the 14th March 2016. In addition, to publications made by the Russian Ministry of Defense and the Kremlin thereafter. This study has found that the two IR theories (i.e. neorealism and constructivism) rather than conflicting with one another, help to provide an answer wherein; they are both mutually reinforcing with regards to the Syrian case.

Abbreviations

USSR = Union of Soviet Socialist Republics

UN = United Nations

UAR = United Arab Republic

A2/AD = Anti-Access/Area Denial

IR = International Relations

EU = European Union

1. Introduction

1.1. Research Question

This case study will attempt to analyze the motives behind Russia's military intervention in the Syrian civil war starting from President Vladimir Putin's announcement on the 30th of September 2015 until his declaration of withdrawal of the majority of Russian forces on the 14th March 2016. This study aims to improve upon the understanding of Russian foreign policy's interests and aims with regards to the Syrian conflict, through the application of International Relations (IR) theories (i.e. mainly a combination of neorealism and constructivism). Misinterpretation or miscalculation of Russian policy directives and actions within the Syrian conflict escalates and prolongs the conflict while forestalling any chance of cooperation and negotiation between all of the involved parties. This study will analyze the available literature, speeches and interviews made by Russian president Vladimir Putin and Russia's Foreign Minister, Sergei Lavrov. In addition, to military and governmental documents published by the Russian Ministry of Defense and the Kremlin, while attempting to address the gap/imbalance within the application of neorealism and constructivism towards Russian intervention in Syria. Hence, the research question of this study will be "What are the motives/interests behind Russia's intervention in the Syrian civil war?"

1.2. Study Importance

The courses of action taken by powerful states are important to understand and analyze, it is through a clear and proper understanding of their foreign policy can present actions and future responses be understood and guarded against.

Misunderstandings that may occur between powerful states (e.g. United States and Russia) can lead to an escalation of tensions which may exacerbate conflict (e.g. Syrian conflict) or lead to a spillover of the conflict into other issues of previous cooperation or negotiation, in reaction to a certain response. For instance, NATO's intervention in Libya (2011), although this military intervention was sanctioned by Russia in the UN, the same was not apparent within the Syrian case. In response the U.S. (under the Obama administration) enacted sanctions and attempted to isolate Russia internationally. (Stent, 2016) The United States' response may have been made with full understanding of Russian foreign policy with regards to Syria, however the conflict may spill over into other spheres of previous cooperation such as nuclear proliferation or counter-terrorism. However, different courses of action may have been adopted under a different understanding of Russia's foreign policy towards the region, without harming U.S. interests and aims. (Stent, 2016) Russia's actions in Syria have been met with international surprise which underlines a misunderstanding or misinterpretation of its foreign policy and motivations. (Hokayem, 2014) Syria retains extensive strategic value in the Middle East due to retaining a border with several neighboring countries such as Turkey, Iraq, Lebanon, Jordan and Israel. In turn, Syria becomes an involved party and player in several of the ongoing conflicts and disputes associated with these countries, such as the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and it has a strong influence over militant groups in Lebanon such as Hezbollah. (Hinnebusch, 2001) In addition, Syria borders the Mediterranean Sea which is of extreme strategic importance to Russia's naval forces, being its only route via the Turkish straits to the Mediterranean allowing it to expand its naval influence in the region. (Altman, 2016) Cutting off Russia's route via the Turkish straits and Syria's ready-port would cripple and contain Russian naval presence in the Mediterranean. More so, it would limit Russia's access to the energy

resources present along the seabed of Syria's coast. (Altman, 2016) Any future pipelines that would attempt to connect the Arab Gulf's vast energy resources with energy-hungry Europe would require Syria as a transit route which would dramatically affect Russia's position as the EU's major energy supplier. (Plakoudas, 2015) These aspects in turn underline the importance of the Syrian case in relation to understanding Russian foreign policy and its underlying interests in the region. Hence, Syria and Russia's intervention present a contemporary case (i.e. as it has been met with surprise form the international community) (Stent, 2016), for understanding Russian foreign policy which would allow for better preparation and adaption to its different courses of actions. This in turn plays an important role in addressing ongoing conflicts (i.e. specifically, Syrian conflict) and working towards their resolution or at least limiting the scale of the escalation of tensions within the conflict itself. Academically, the importance of the study relates in telling us something broader regarding states interests and how they expand in relation to other states, as such this study hopes to help inform us more generally about the interests behind foreign policies and contribute to the ongoing debates surrounding foreign policy. Hence, this research study aims to contribute to the understanding of Russian foreign policy towards Syria through the application of IR theories (i.e. constructivism and neorealism) as theoretical frameworks.

1.3. Chapter Division

This research study will be divided into seven chapters. The first chapter details the research question this study hopes to answer and clarifies the importance of the research question and why it should be studied. The second (next) chapter explains the methodological underpinnings of this study and acknowledges the limitations that

follow. The third chapter will provide an intellectual justification for the use of neorealism and constructivism specifically, instead of other IR theories. The fourth chapter reviews the gathered literature and divides its authors into groups/camps in accordance with their positions and views; while stating the critical drawbacks of each group. This is followed by a clear statement of the knowledge gap apparent in the literature. The fifth chapter provides a historical overview of Russo-Syrian relations, starting from Syria's independence until Russia's military intervention and withdrawal in 2016. The sixth chapter analyzes Russia's economic and security interests within the Mediterranean under neorealism and attempts to address civilizational identities and links between the two countries under constructivism, stating in turn, the corresponding relationship found between the two theories. Finally, the last chapter provides a brief conclusion stating the findings of this study and the perceived answer to the research question.

2. Methodology

2.1. Single Case Study

This research study aims to adopt a qualitative methodology centered towards providing an in-depth understanding of a single case within a real-world setting as a means of answering the study's research question. (Baxter & Jack, 2008) The data collected will be derived from primary sources consisting of speeches, interviews and policy white papers provided by governmental institutions such as the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Russia and the Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation. Secondary sources will be derived from published academic articles and books. The use of such sources and justification for the use of them specifically will be further elaborated below.

Content analysis as defined by Krippendorff (2004), is a research technique wherein, through working with texts and analyzing them, does a window of drawing conclusions exist concerning not only the texts themselves but rather the larger context within which they are placed, in a reliable and valid manner. (Krippendorff, 2004) This research aims not only to interpret the texts grammatical structure and apparent meaning but rather attempts to draw conclusions about the text's larger context and its author. (Krippendorff, 2004) Content analysis will be conducted on primary sources consisting of a series of Presidential speeches and interviews of Vladimir Putin, in addition to speeches made by Sergei Lavrov, Russia's Foreign Minister between the periods of (2015-2017). Focus is provided on speeches such as, Putin's speech during the 70th session of the UN General Assembly on the 29th September 2015. Putin conducted this speech prior to Russia's military intervention and contains a large whole concerning Russia's narrative in intervening within Syria and its perceived interests. In addition to

speeches made on the 2nd June 2017 during St. Petersburg International Economic Forum plenary meeting, wherein Putin was asked regarding his stance towards the Assad regime and its use of Chemical weapons; this speech contains Russia's perceived commitment to the Assad regime and the level of its accountability. Moreover, focus is placed on Putin's speeches in the Khmeimim Air base on the 11th December 2017; wherein Russia's position after achieving its main objectives and perceived role within the newly expanded military facility are mentioned. The provided speeches present a comparison between Russia's stance prior to the intervention and shortly after, highlighting certain notions and perceived continuity within the speeches. More so, interviews such as Putin's with American TV channel CBS and PBS on the 29th September 2015 provides valuable insight into Putin's perception of opposition groups and his sectarian narrative regarding extremism and Russia's role within this view. In addition, Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoygu provides important statements with regards to the Eastern Mediterranean and Russia's geopolitical concerns. Finally, focus is placed on speeches of Sergei Lavrov during his press conference in Moscow on the 26th January 2016; wherein Russia's position in relation to the West are underlined. Lavrov's has been the main provider of statements and speeches in contrast to Putin with regards to the Syrian mission. Hence, his role is important in providing sufficient information with regards to the Syrian conflict. This presents a list of most of the primary sources adopted within this research and their intended empirical use. Secondary sources will be derived from published articles and books especially when it comes to analyzing Russian-Syrian relations and the formulation of Russian Foreign policy in Syria. The data collected thereafter, will be analyzed through the lenses of neorealism and constructivism as the most suitable International Relations (IR) theories for this study, these two theories are considered the main two lenses within which

Russian Foreign policy is best understood with regards to the Syrian Civil War. In the following (below) chapter, intellectual justification for the use neorealism and constructivism over other IR theories will be provided.

IR Theory is best applied in understanding and analyzing the relations between international actors such as states and international organizations; through the adoption of different analytical frameworks. The preference for the use of IR theory is due to the involvement of a multitude of actors within the Syrian civil war. The Syrian conflict has been subjected to the influence and involvement of states, international organizational and militant groups that have each played a role in the ongoing conflict. Hence, the conflux of actors expands the formulation of Russian foreign policy not simply towards the Syrian regime but also is subject to considerations and ties with other state actors within the ongoing conflict. IR theory is thus applied in order to help grasp Russian foreign policy towards Syria while minding its regional and geopolitical concerns. This dissertation hopes to show that the relationship between these IR theories (i.e. constructivism and neorealism) is mutually supportive and each provide an answer in analyzing and understanding Russia's motivations and interests towards Syria. This study hopes to, rather than highlight the differences and contradictions as is sometimes argued between constructivism and neorealism, to show that the relationship rather than being contradictory, is mutually reinforcing in relation to the Syrian case.

2.2. Limitations

There are several limitations that must be acknowledged with regards to this research study. Firstly, due to the nature of this project being a single case study; extensive information is gathered and a detailed analysis is construed with regards to a

single case. Thus, generalizations aimed outside of the confines of the countries analyzed within this study (i.e. Syria and Russia) are in turn, less reliable. However, although conclusions drawn within this paper may be case-specific, they do still retain validity with regards to theoretical application of future studies. Secondly, the Syrian civil war is still an ongoing conflict and is not likely to end during the time of writing this study. Hence, as a result, the prevalence of interests and the involvement of a multitude of actors with the outcome of the Syrian conflict, allows for the publication and distribution of biased and falsified information, in addition to the concealment of intentions or interest in speeches and interviews provided with any of the involved parties. Therefore, caution, validation and reliance on a multitude of primary and secondary sources will be used to undermine the effect of any biased or falsified information that might be prevalent. Thirdly, lingual limitations are present due to the unfamiliarity of the author with the Russian language and the existence of a limited number of resources that are translated into English. However, governmental websites do provide an English version of their publications, such as the Russian President's official website; Kremlin.ru. Again, the possibility of biased information or specifically portrayed pieces of intelligence is an inherent obstacle. Finally, due to the limitations of both time and scope of this study, the application of all International Relations (IR) theories was not applied. Instead, focus was maintained on mainstream IR theories (i.e. neorealism, constructivism) rather than critical IR theories that may also provide compelling interpretations and analyzations of the motives behind Russia's military intervention in the Syrian conflict.

3. International Relations Theories

This chapter will provide an intellectual justification for the use of neorealism and constructivism, what they involve and how they may be best suited towards explaining Russia's military intervention in Syria. As exemplified within the literature review, Russian foreign policy revolves around either a focus on power/security (i.e. falling within the realist tradition) or on identity and norms (i.e. falling within the constructivist tradition), their suitability is explained within this chapter. Hence, being the main dominant tools within interpreting Russian foreign policy, this study hopes to contribute to their understanding and application.

3.1. Neorealism

Neorealism also known as structural realism, defines the international system as anarchic and lacking a central authority to force compliance with any agreed upon rules or norms. (Waltz, 1979) The main actors within the international system are states; who are sovereign. Being sovereign, states are not bound by an international structure or the societies within them to organize relations between them. Relations between states are thus conducted and organized either by coercion or their own consent as sovereign actors. The main aim of states within an anarchic system is to ensure their survival through gaining power. Power is subjective and can be defined differently within realist lens as economic, military or diplomatic power; the distribution of these material capacities is seen as the main definitive feature of relations between states and the international system. (Waltz, 1979) Realists retain three main assumption with regards to the international system described above; that state are rational actors attempting to maximize their interests and capacities where possible. Secondly, the international system and relations between states are defined by suspicion and pessimism; wherein

each state possesses unequal military capabilities wherein, understanding the underlying motives behind improving such capabilities be it defensively or offensively is uncertain (i.e. the Security Dilemma). Finally, the most influential actors among states are 'great powers'; who hold the most economic and military might. (Mearsheimer, 2001) Hence, international politics is dictated and revolves around great powers more so than any other state.

Realists are sometimes categorized into two main camps within their interpretation of the manner through which states attempt to ensure their survival; offensive and defensive Realists. In his "The Tragedy of Great Power Politics" John Mearsheimer (2001), one of the main thinkers of offensive Realism, argues that states will continue to maximize their power, in contrast to other states until they reach the status of hegemony within the international system. (Mearsheimer, 2001) However, defensive Realists such as Kenneth Waltz (1979) disagree with this notion, highlighting that the international system will punish the state attempting to achieve hegemony through forming alliances and attacking the hegemonic state, in order to persevere a balance of power; wherein each great power has an approximately equal distribution of power safeguarding it from attack. (Waltz, 1979) Hence, defining polarity and the distribution of power among states within the international system is a central theme within realist theory. In addition, Realists' do not consider international organizations or international law as either constraining nor directing state behavior. In "The False Promise of International Institutions", Mearsheimer (1994) argues that enforcement within an anarchic system is difficult and it is not within the interest of any state to cooperate or enforce treaties or participate in international organizations unless the state has a direct material interest with regards to a certain outcome. (Mearsheimer, 1994) Hence, the

creation of international institutions and laws are a symptom of state interaction and not its cause; wherein material interests and power relations are a definitive feature in analyzing why states behave in a certain manner. (Mearsheimer, 1994) The need to increase power within the international system is a clear motivation within Russia's intervention within the Syrian conflict. Realism's focus on power-maximization and security in face of fear and suspicion of other states. Indeed, Russia has always been aggravated by NATO and Western-led interventions amidst the Color Revolutions along its periphery and sphere of influence. The tenets of realism that advocate a state to think and act aggressively are present within Russia's behavior in Syria; the largest show of force since the Cold War. In addition, the focus on security implications is present within the context of radicalism and extremism. Therefore, neorealism seems most apt and has significant potential in attempting to explain Russian foreign policy towards Syria. In addition, realism seems apt to explain the Assad regime's actions amidst the Syrian civil war; wherein it has disregarded the international community and isolated itself under the assertion that it is a sovereign state, refusing either accountability for its transgressions and grave human rights infringements it has committed against its own people. Moreover, the need to maximize power internally and the pessimistic nature of mankind are tenets of realist thought, wherein the Syrian conflict has become increasingly exploitative in nature, following the disregard of the Syrian people's welfare in return for financial gains aimed towards the Assad family. Finally, realism's focus on materialism and survival is displayed within the Syrian state's refusal to take part in any treaty or negotiation, where it does not have a substantial investment in or does not provide it with an extensive advantage or at least in turn does not disadvantage it. (Hokayem, 2014)

3.2. Constructivism

Constructivism in contrast to neorealism does not consider economic clout, military might and international institutions important as objective facts but rather underlines their significance within the social meaning attributed to them. The social meaning of such factors is formulated from a mix of norms, identity and history that authors must analyze to interpret state behavior. (Wendt, 1995) Constructivism is not a theory but rather an ontology denoting a set of assumptions with regards to the world and human agency. (Slaughter, 2011) Constructivists focus on issues of identity and belief asserting that although states are self-interested actors, they are however, influenced by their identities and beliefs, in contrast to a pure notion of rationality driven by the pursuit of survival and power. (Hopf, 1998) Constructivism focuses on the social context within international relations, its perceptions of in-groups and out-groups, friends and enemies in interpreting state behavior. (Wendt, 1992)

Constructivism differs from realism in several main themes; including the meaning of anarchy, the balance of power and the relationship between state's identity and its interests. Constructivism concentrates on issues of identity amidst world politics and the role of norms and culture in international relations. (Copeland, 2000) Hence, the behavior of states is conducted within an intersubjective social context through which actors develop their relations and understanding of each other through norms and practice. Constructivist make the argument that without the existence of these norms and practices, an exercise of power is devoid of meaning. (Hopf, 1998) Norms as such define identity by specifying which actions will cause others to recognize the portrayed or adopted identity and how they will respond to it appropriately. As such anarchy and the international structure is meaningless without a set of intersubjective norms and

practices. Anarchy which is defined as the main constitutive feature of mainstream IR theory becomes meaningless in turn. As neither the distribution of capabilities nor the absence of an authority above the state, can "socialize" states to act in a desired manner in the international structure without some set of meaningful norms and practices. (Copeland, 2000) Hence, Constructivists state that interests are subject to identity and social practices. They are mutually constituted by both actors and the international structure, in contrast to realism which assumes that all states have the same priority of interests. Constructivists in turn preclude the acceptance of a presumed/preassigned set of interests as defined by realists.

An example would be the United States' perception of the United Kingdom as a long-term historical ally regardless of its military capabilities, in contrast to China or Russia who have been viewed historically and ideologically as adversaries. (Slaughter, 2011) Hence, identity is a crucial component within the formation of state's interest more so than military and economic capabilities. The identity perception of Russia is therefore, definitive in interpreting its interests and creating a continuity within its perception as a great power within the international system. Another example would be made with regards to the possibility of appeasement during the United States war with Vietnam. Wherein constructivism would argue that its image as a 'great power' precluded such considerations and made them unimaginable during the U.S.'s military expedition due to its own image as a 'great power' and how it chose reproduce this image through the use of its military power against others. In addition, the same tenets of constructivism regarding a states self-perceived identity would also apply to Russia during its military intervention into Syria, highlighting its role as a 'great power' and pillar of the international community in relation to the West. In turn, Russia attempted

to depict itself in a certain 'image' through the norms it seeks to promote such as territorial integrity, sovereignty and non-interference in the internal affairs of other states while contrasting this 'image' with the West's externally-led regime change such as during the West's intervention in Libya and Syria. Moreover, Russia also falls within constructivist's tenets by its depiction of the Syrian conflict along with the Assad regime in sectarian divides, foregoing previous depictions between 'state and opposition' towards 'secularism and religious extremism'. (Copeland, 2000) Hence, constructivism seems to have great potential in analyzing Russian foreign policy towards Syria while providing payoff through analyzing the identities of the actors involved in the Syrian conflict and the 'images' they attempt to portray throughout the conflict.

Moreover, constructivism in contrast to realism does not consider non-governmental organizations (NGOs, non-state actors) as tools for the use of great powers and does not undermine their agency. Constructivists emphasize the role of social norms within the international arena and the role of NGO's in promoting them. In their "Rediscovering Institutions: The Organizational Basis of Politics" Olson and March (1989) emphasize how social norms within the international system affect states chosen behavior; a distinction is drawn between a 'logic of consequences' whereby a state attempts to maximize its interests while avoiding any excessive losses, and a 'logic of appropriateness' wherein the state will attempt to mediate its actions and narrative in accordance with the social norms prevalent within the international arena at that time. (Olson & March, 1989) Again, an example would be with regards to the norm of sovereignty which promotes non-interreference among states regardless of the benefits derived from intervention. A parallel can be drawn between the West's promotion of

humanitarian intervention and democracy, and Russia's emphasis on sovereignty and non-interreference. In "Rules for the World: International Organizations in Global Politics" (2004), Finnemore and Barnett highlight that NGOs work to promote their own interests over that of the state, for example the promotion of human rights and free trade. (Finnemore & Barnett, 2004) Constructivists' more so than any other theory emphasize the role of non-state actors within the international system.

Hence, the relationship between constructivism and neorealism has often been depicted as contradictory and incompatible. Both theories are often differentiated from each other through binary oppositions such as materialism/social construction and rationalism/idealism. However, this study aims to show that both theories can not only provide an answer to the research question but also provide a coherent view of Russian foreign policy in a manner where, they are both compatible and supportive. Neorealism's tenets such as issues of power projection, material capabilities and economic incentives will be used in analyzing Russia's behavior and actions towards Syria. Constructivism's focus on norms, values and identity will be used in analyzing Russia's identity as a 'great power' in relation to its material capabilities. As such, this study hopes to show that constructivism and neorealism, in spite of their different approaches can be used to provide a clear understanding and view of Russia's foreign policy towards Syria in manner where both theories are mutually reinforcing. A brief look has been made into other IR theories such as Marxism, the English School, Feminism and Liberalism which due to limitations of time and scope of this study, in addition to considerations with regards to the Syrian case, have not been found the most suitable in providing sufficient input with regards to Russian intervention in Syria.

4. Literature Review

The literature review will be divided into three sections. The first section deals with the historical relationship between Syria, the Soviet Union and the Russian Federation; identifying both strategic and cultural aspects within the relationship. The second section deals with the literature surrounding the Syrian civil war. The third section deals with the ongoing debate surrounding Russia's foreign policy and its underlying interests towards Syria.

4.1. Syria-Soviet/Russian Relations

The literature diverges within the interpretation of Syrian-Russian relations into two main perspectives. The first camp applies a neorealist approach in its analysis of Syrian-Russian relations, highlighting such tenets as; the need to increase security and power while garnering economic benefits. The second camp adopts a constructivist approach in its analysis of the Syrian-Russo relationship, highlighting such aspects as shared values, a common identity and culture constructed through cooperation between the two countries. Both perspectives provide unique input in analyzing the manner through which Syrian-Russian relations developed, and how they culminated into Russia's intervention during the Syrian civil war.

The first camp adopts a neorealist approach in attempting to analyze Syria-Russian relations, highlighting such themes as the need to increase power and ensure economic gain. A mode of analysis based on strategic and economic concerns is prevalent. In his book "Syria: Revolution from Above" Raymond Hinnebusch (2001) provides a detailed account of the formation of the Syrian state under the rule of the Ba'ath Party and Hafez Al-Assad. In addition, he provides a theoretical framework for understanding

the factionalism that has divided the country and the role of neighboring powers (Israel, Iraq, Turkey) in exacerbating the need of the Syrian state to "power balance" against its rivals; through internal power mobilization and alliance formation. Hence, Hinnebusch (2001) underlines how the buildup and expansion of the military ensued under the Assad family for the consolidation of the Syrian state; which drew its arms, expertise and training heavily from the Soviet Union and how the pattern of cooperation and reliance continued with Russia. (Hinnebusch, 2001) In his article, Olson (1979) provides a historical analysis of the route of development and consolidation adopted by the Ba'ath party within Syria between 1947-1979. He provides a larger scope of study of not only Hafez's ascendency but also Syria's relationship with Egypt and Iraq during the tripartite union negotiations and the influence of pan-Arabism on Syria's state-identity formation. (Olson, 1979) However, a drawback of Olson's study is that it does not include the USSR's role and response after Hafez's ascendency.

To address this gap Rami Ginat (2000) provides an in-depth analysis of the process of rapprochement between Syria and the Soviet Union during the period of 1963-1966 (i.e. after the 1963 military coup). He highlights the role of the USSR in creating a 'revolutionary' bloc in the Middle East (i.e. Syria, Egypt and Algeria) and underlines how the USSR's bolstering of Syria, helped fuel the regime's militant foreign policy which he identifies as the root cause of the 1967 June war. (Ginat, 2000) Moreover, John Galvani (1974) analyzes Syria's foreign policy with regards to the Golan Heights and the its strategic importance. He traces the lessons and consequences learned from the 1967 June war; underling the security threat Israel represents to Syria and the growing need of the Syrian regime to "balance" against Israel with Moscow. (Galvani, 1974) Hence, patterns of continuity based on the Syrian state's need to address its

security concerns, power balance against its enemies and ensure internal mobilization are the predominant theme within Syria's engagement and focus of relations with Moscow.

With the decline and later on, the collapse of the Soviet, Shad, Boucher and Reddish (1995) attempt to analyze Syria's foreign policy and its search for an alternative patron. They analyze how Syria attempted to break its international isolation and reconsolidate its relations with Egypt, the Gulf and the United States through participating in the Gulf War (1990-1991) against Iraq, signaling a shift in alliances and a realignment within the region during the 1990s. (Shad, et al., 1995) However, a drawback of the above mentioned sources is that they provide a brief analysis of Bashar's reign upon his early accession to power and do not provide input following patterns of continuity following the twenty-year reign of Bashar and his relations with Moscow during the onset of the Syrian civil war. Therefore, what binds the above-mentioned literature together is a clear focus on realist themes such as power balancing, alliance formation and pursuit of strategic and economic interests. In addition, a realist approach wherein the mode of analysis disregards identity or ideological affinities, in the pursuit of power maximizing interests and economic benefits is also applied.

The second camp adopts a constructivist theme of analyzing Syrian-Russian relations focusing on the manner through which a common culture and identity is constructed between the two sovereigns (i.e. Russia and Syria). In addition to highlighting a norm-based mode of analysis that draws upon the international norms both Syria and the USSR hoped to promote. In contrast, to the realist political history described above, cultural, ideological and identity politics are addressed by Audrey

McInerney (1992); who analyzed the different factions among Soviet policy makers in their 'framing' of the status quo in the Middle East and their relationship with Syria during the 1967 June war. She emphasizes how a Socialist-orientated Syria was desirable among ideologue policy makers in spreading Soviet influence in the Middle East, in light of the Sino-Soviet split and contestation of Soviet leadership within the region. McInereny (1992) analyzed how ideologue Soviet policy makers (i.e. attached to Marxist-Leninism and a great power worldview) favored a more risk-acceptant and loss-averse policy in the Middle East; underlining the role of ideology and identity-perception in 'framing' the USSR's relationship with Syria among Soviet policy makers. (McInerney, 1992) In addition, Karen Dawisha (1975) attempted to highlight the "cultural instrument" used by the USSR; in selecting certain aspects of its social system to transmit and promote among foreign populations in the Middle East (i.e. Egypt, Iraq and Syria). Dawisha (1975) underlines how the Soviet "cultural instrument" was used to create a commonwealth of shared attitudes, values and goals between the USSR and Syria, emphasizing the role of cultural cooperation between the two states. (Dawisha, 1975) Both studies work to highlight how identity-based and ideological affinities were employed in the formation of the Syrian-Russo relationship.

However, a drawback of both studies is that with the fall of the USSR and the decline of its communist ideology, a different set of images, values and ideas were adopted within contemporary Russia; creating a disconnect between previous and current cultural mechanisms and the ideologies adopted thereafter. Yet, as this study will attempt to highlight within its analysis, certain shared values and images do exist and continue to be shared and promoted among the two countries regardless of the absence of ideological affinities which include both governments self-image as anti-Western, secular and authoritarian. Therefore, the relationship between Russia and Syria has

been shaped by ideological, strategic and historical factors that still play a role in Russia's foreign policy towards Syria today. The literature gathered diverges within its interpretation into roughly two camps, each adopting either a realist or constructivist approach. Both prove essential in providing a historical overview that includes both strategic and ideological dimensions of the Syrian-Russian relationship.

4.2. The Syrian Civil War

In the direct analysis of the Syrian civil war, a divergence between realist and constructivist approaches takes place between roughly two opposing camps. The first camp adopts a realist approach and focuses on the Assad regime's need to maximize power, secure economic interests and power balance against its perceived threats. In addressing, the domestic underpinnings of the Syrian conflict, Emile Hokayem's book "Syria's Uprising and the Fracturing of the Levant" (2014) provides a detailed account of Bashar's reign, outlook and policies, from accession until the ongoing civil war, highlighting the security needs of the state and the Assad family. In addition, she analyzes the role of external actors, including the Russian Federation and its material interests in the Syrian conflict. (Hokayem, 2014) In addition, Matthew Crosston (2014) provides a wider analysis of the role of regional actors involved in the Syrian conflict and their interests with regards to the Assad regime. He attempts to define Russian, Iranian and US interests, within a larger framework across multiple regional actors invested in the survival of the Assad regime rather than a singular analysis of each actor's interests. (Crosston, 2014) However, considering that this research encompasses the Syrian conflict until 2016; when the majority of Russian forces were withdrawn. Further reliance on primary sources is used to offset this source's limitation, since the sources were published in 2014. In addition, Hokayem's (2014) book does not take into

consideration identity-based factors in its analysis of the domestic intricacies of the Syrian civil war such as the identity of the Assad regime and the opposition groups. Crosston (2014) also does not take into his analysis a constructivist-based approach, in highlighting Russia's commitment to the Syrian regime.

The second camp adopts a constructivist approach focused on the ideas and identities shared or adopted among various internal and external actor involved in the conflict. Jackson Diehl (2012) analyzes the sectarian narrative enacted by the Assad regime, in depicting different opposition groups under headings of 'extremists' and 'jihadists'. He underlines the Syrian regime's use of sectarianism in; frightening its own minorities (i.e. Ismaili's, Kurds, Druzes, Alawites and Arab Christians) against the 'Sunni' threat, in a similar manner as conducted during the Lebanese civil war and attempting to gain international appeal through portraying opposition groups as terrorist groups. (Diehl, 2012) Moreover, Samer Abboud (2015) provides a detailed account of the phases through which Syria's uprising went through, starting from; peaceful demonstration to violent civil war. He analyzes the warring factions and groups engaged within the Syrian conflict, underlining their role, influence and objectives among other internal actors (e.g. ISIS, Al-Qaeda, Syria's National Forces (SNF)). (Abboud, 2015) However, Abboud (2015) does not provide an analytical framework surpassing the ideological leanings of each warring faction and is largely descriptive in dealing with the role of international actors involved with the conflict.

Hence, this study hopes to provide a balanced account adopting both neorealist and constructivist approaches in its analysis of the role of the Russian intervention in the Syrian conflict. A clear divergence within the literature exists between adopting either a realist or constructivist approach, foregoing either one or the other. This study, in

turn, hopes to address this gap and imbalance within the literature, further justification will be provided within the last section of this chapter.

4.3. Russian Foreign Policy

The ongoing debate surrounding Russian foreign policy towards Syria, diverges into roughly two opposing camps. The first, attempts to explain Russia's intervention within the Syrian conflict due to the international norms Russia wishes to promote and its own identity perception as a global power; advocating as such a constructivist approach and point of view that focuses on norms and identity. The second, analyzes Russian intervention through the consideration of strategic interests and economic gains; most attributable through a neorealist lens and hence, the need to increase power within the international system. This division between the two groups (i.e. norms versus power) is vital in interpreting and understanding Russia's relationship towards Syria and in adopting the proper theoretical frameworks required in understanding Russian foreign policy in Syria.

The first camp centers around a constructivist approach focused on norms and identity-based themes. In his article "Russia and Syria: Explaining Alignment with a Regime in Crisis", Roy Allison (2013) argues that Russia's response to the Syrian Civil war is due to Western-led interventions and the overthrow of the Gadhafi regime in Libya. Allison (2013) highlights that the Russian narrative is centered around its fear of externally induced regime change and outside military intervention. Moscow's alignment with Damascus is thus, induced more by the norms Russia seeks to promote concerning territorial integrity, sovereignty and to prevent the practice of regime change from gaining further legitimacy. (Allison, 2013) In addition, Fyodor Lukyanov

(2016) argues that Russia views Western-led interventions as having eroded the principles of, balance of power, non-interference and sovereignty on which the previous multipolar world-order rested and which Russia seeks to reinstill. (Lukyanov, 2016) In concurrence, Walter Mead (2014) and Mathew Crosston (2014) depict Russia as a "revisionist" power, attempting to challenge the political settlement of the Cold War and help transition into a multipolar world order; Syria is thus, depicted as tool for Russia to maintain its global status and diplomatic significance as an influence peddler. (Mead, 2014) (Crosston, 2014) Hence, Russia's global self-perceptions and ideological concerns should be weighed as more important than narrowly defined material interests.

In addition, Samuel Charap (2013) does not differ in his interpretation of Russia's position in Syria; he defines Russia's ongoing position as a response to, and fear of western-led military interventions and externally promoted regime change. However, Charap (2013) undermines the strategic and economic links between Moscow and Damascus and defines them as not sufficiently binding in interpreting Russia's commitment towards Syria. (Charap, 2013) In relation to Syria's economic value, Azuolas Bagdonas (2012) also emphasizes that focusing on material interests in the Syrian conflict is misleading and fuels the assumption that Russia's confrontational course can be diverted by providing enough economic incentive and bargaining. (Bagdonas, 2012) In support, Jefferey Mankoff (2012) argues that the Syrian regime is not valuable as an economic incentive and that the Assad regime represents only four percent of total arms value exported from Russia and has not made through on half of the payments of weapons purchased from Russia. (Mankoff, 2012) Thus, both authors argue that focusing on material emphasis disregards Russian foreign policy's ideological stance in attempting to create a multipolar system on the basis of statist

norms and values, wherein, it views itself as a vital player. In turn, Syria is viewed as the manner through which Russia militarily attempts to reassert its self-image as a global power.

What binds the above-mentioned authors together and their common denominator is their use of norm-based and identity-based interpretations in determining Russian foreign policy towards Syria. Thus, the authors above mentioned fall within constructivist tradition with regards to their analysis of factors such as norms, values and identity of Russia's foreign policy.

The second camp centers around a realist approach focused on themes such as power projection, economic incentives and security considerations. In contrast to above mentioned articles, Andrej Kreutz (2010) argues that Russia's foreign policy towards Syria, is specifically aimed around developing economic and political interests, in addition to protecting its southern borders. Kreutz (2010) underlines that the Assad regime's significance can be diminished as closer economic and political relations are developed with other states in the region. (Kreutz, 2010) In relation, Mark Katz (2013) highlights that Putin's position regarding the Syrian conflict is best suited in advancing Russia's commercial interests regardless of how modest they are (i.e. arms sales and maintaining access to the Mediterranean) while preventing the rise of a democratically elected pro-Western government. Both Katz (2013) and Robert Kaplan (2016) stress that Putin values the Assad regime's stance towards Chechnya (i.e. non-interference) and fears the position a Sunni government might have towards the Southern Caucasus. (Katz, 2013) (Kaplan, 2016) In her article, Angela Stent (2016) makes the claim that instability within the Middle East, especially with the rise of Islamic extremism has

spillover effects into Russia, (e.g. Northern Caucuses) and the former Soviet bloc which through Russia's experience in the second Chechnya war (1999-2009) can have detrimental effects and consequences. (Stent, 2016) In addition, following Russia's withdrawal of the majority of its armed forces from Syria in 2016, Illya Bourtman (2016) and Souleimanov (2016) have argued that Russia's intervention and increasing influence within the Middle East and Syria will be used as a bargaining chip with the U.S. in order to gain a pledge of "non-interference" in Central Asia, the Caucasus or Eastern Europe (i.e. Ukraine). (Bourtman, 2016) (Souleimanov, 2016) Yet, Dimitri Trenin (2016) highlights several motivations within Russia's involvement in the Syrian civil war. He highlights Russian intervention in line with its self-perception and identity as a global power, attempting to reestablish itself in the Middle East by working alongside the US as a guarantor of any ensuing peace settlement. (Trenin, 2016) Hence, Russia's foreign policy places greater stress on maintaining profitable economic relations, protecting its southern borders and increasing its spheres of influence; more than ideologically-based norms and identity.

An emphasis on domestic factors, is provided by Pavel Baev (2016), who argues that Russian aggression and military adventurism is the authoritarian regime's only viable option of sustaining domestic mobilization. Moscow's regime is driven by its own need for survival and sees external power projects and military interventions (e.g. annexation of Crimea) as the only way to mobilize and sustain domestic support. (Baev, 2016) In addition, Ryszard Machnikowski (2015) underlines that Russia's use of force and military advantage is used to convince external actors and its own domestic population that ignoring it interests can result in military confrontation and chaos; attempting through which to increase its international and domestic position. (Machnikowski,

2015) Hence, as economic prospects within Russia worsen, the Syrian intervention is induced by Russia's regime to prevent internal unrest and maximize power domestically. On the other hand, Jiri and Leni Valenta (2016) emphasize Putin's attempt to reestablish Russia's military presence in the eastern Mediterranean without ensuing long-term and large-scale invasions, such as the USSR's invasion of Afghanistan. They highlight Russia's annexation of Crimea and involvement with Syria as its attempt to establish a clear line to warm-water ports. (Valenta & Valenta, 2016) Hence, intervention in Syria is analyzed through the lens of Russia's concerns with regards to warm-water sea ports.

The authors contrasted focus on security, power projection and economic interests in their analysis of Russian foreign policy binds them all within the realist tradition. As such they can all be thematically be placed within the realist approach in their focus and choice of factors relevant.

Therefore, the first camp places extensive focus on the identity and norms in explaining the motivation behind Russian foreign policy and intervention within Syria, in light of preventing the legitimization of external regime change and Russia's self-perceived role within the international community. In contrast, the second camp maintains a material emphasis in attempting to understand Russian foreign policy in Syria with regards to issues of national security, economic interests and geopolitics. This clear divergence within the literature is used to further justify the use of the two IR theories adopted; Constructivism and Neorealism as most suitable and relevant in attempting to explain Russian foreign policy and intervention in the Syrian civil war.

4.4. Knowledge Gap

The body of the realist literature attempts to analyze material and strategic motivations such as arms sales, countering terrorism, domestic mobilization and increasing diplomatic significance. However, there has been less focus and consideration of the military and energy-based interests of Russia within the Eastern Mediterranean. An imbalance and gap within the literature relies overlooking energy resources and military application within the Eastern Mediterranean. In addition, a clear bifurcation exists within the literature between roughly realist (i.e. power) and constructivist (i.e. identity and norms) camps. This study hopes to emphasize the value of combining a realist approach explaining Russian motivation both economic and military (i.e. perceived gap) in the Eastern Mediterranean and a constructivist approach relates the importance of identity, norms and values; wherein Russia has demonstrated its commitment to depict itself as a global power, attempting to help transition into a multipolar world order.

An equal consideration of both theories (i.e. neorealism and constructivism) is missing within most of the ongoing debate which diverges between a bifurcation between power versus norms and does not seek to use both approaches in solidifying its analysis. Moreover, with regards to the neorealist approaches, a consideration of Russia's arms sales to Syria (i.e. economic incentives), Russia's fear of Islamic extremism, preventing the spread of U.S. influence in the former Soviet bloc and using the Syrian conflict to garner more diplomatic influence are used as the main factors analyzed in Russia's intervention in Syria. Realism has not been used to analyze the geopolitical interests with regards to Syria's strategic position and energy concerns following the discovery of large carbon deposits in the Mediterranean which are rarely

mentioned and are missing within the application of neorealism. Such considerations are missing and this study hopes to improve upon the application of neorealism in the Syrian case through analyzing geopolitical and energy-based incentives along the Mediterranean seeing as such realist tenets fail to gain foothold within their arguments. In addition, the use of both neorealism and constructivism will be used in concurrence with each other to provide an answer to the research question. The gathered literature is missing a clear use of certain relevant factors within its analysis and an equal application of both theories in interpreting Russia's foreign policy towards Syria. Secondly, within the constructivist camp much emphasis is made regarding Russia's fear of western-led regime change and the norms it wishes to promote. However, constructivism has not been used to analyze the common values, culture and identities shared between the two regimes (Syria and Russia) themselves with regards to their autocratic, secular and anti-Western nature. As such, a singular consideration of Russia's own identity-perception, in relation to Syria, is missing from the above-mentioned literature. Therefore, this study hopes to fill the perceived-gap and provide a balanced analysis of both IR theories with the missing considerations within the application of both neorealism and constructivism made above.

5. Historical Overview

This chapter aims to provide an overview of the historical relationship between Syria, the Soviet Union and the Russian Federation. The overview will attempt to provide an understanding of the historical factors; both cultural and strategic that have influenced relations between Syria, the USSR and Russia, in addition to the domestic intricacies necessary for understanding Syrian history and the subsequent civil war. This chapter will start with a brief history of Syria's independence, followed by the military upheavals prevalent in Syrian history until the rise of Hafez Al-Assad, thereafter, examining transition to Bashar Al-Assad and the subsequent civil war, finishing with Russia's military intervention.

5.1. From Independence to Hafez

Several weeks prior to Syria's independence in 1946, a secret treaty was signed with the USSR which entailed the provision of diplomatic and international support in the international arena, in addition to military and economic assistance. (Olanrewaju & Joshua, 2015) This translated into military training in the foundation of the Syrian national army and favorable economic terms (i.e. mainly the procurement of arms at affordable prices). (Hinnebusch, 2001) In 1950, the non-aggression pact between Damascus and Moscow was signed which entailed military support, in case of Syria's confrontation with any of its neighboring countries. (Olanrewaju & Joshua, 2015) Hence, Syria has received Soviet aid and assistance, since its inception as a sovereign. It has founded its military in accordance with the Soviet model and shared the USSR's anti-Western leanings; due to its recent independence from France and the West's support of Israel. (Olson, 1979)

From 1949 to 1954, several military coups were enacted within Syria. In 1949, three coups occurred in Syria, all within the same year. Syria's first president Shukri Al-Quwatli was overthrown by Colonel Husni Al-Za'im; due to loss of legitimacy after defeat in the war against Israel (1948-1949). (Hinnebusch, 2001) Colonel Al-Za'im was himself overthrown by Col. Sami Al-Hinnawi, however, due to extensive factionalism within the Army, Col. Hinnawi was overthrown by Col. Adib Shishakli; who abolished the multiparty system. (Olson, 1979) In 1954, another military coup was enacted and Col. Shishakli was overthrown and the multiparty parliamentary system was reinstated. (Olson, 1979) The consequences of multiple and consecutive coups led to the concentration of power within the military and security apparatus which was relatively the most stable institute within the Syrian state. (Hinnebusch, 2001) In 1954, the National Front government (i.e. which was a coalition of diverse and even opposing political groups) came to the fore to stabilize internal unrest within Syria. Following the National Front's ascent, in 1954 the USSR signed several treaties with Syria and Egypt advancing tourism, cross-cultural exchange and cooperation within the fields of education, art, literature and sports. (Dawisha, 1975) The USSR attempted to engage with what Karen Dawisha (1975) terms the "cultural instrument"; in creating a commonwealth of shared attitudes, goals and ideas between both countries. (Dawisha, 1975) However, by 1957 the National Front government could not sustain nor reconcile itself among its varying groups. Wherein, the increasing factionalism and radicalization of Syrian politics and the army itself, combined with internal division and external pressure created a feeling of intense vulnerability within the Syrian state which led to the union with Gamal Abd Al-Nasser's Egypt in 1958. (Hinnebusch, 2001) Nasser's extensive purging of "progressive" groups within the army and lack of a political class with a stake in the survival of the United Arab Republic (UAR) led to a military coup,

conducted by conservative Syrian military officers in 1961; marking the end of the UAR and the formation of the 'Infisal' (i.e. separation) government. (Hinnebusch, 2001) In 1963, a military coup was conducted by a coalition of Ba'athist and pro-Nasserist groups against the unpopular 'Infisal' government, setting the stage for the rise of the Ba'athist party and Hafez Al-Assad; who were soon to dominate politics within Syria. (Olson, 1979)

After the 1963 coup, tensions rose within the Ba'ath party between ultra-leftist Alawite officers (i.e. mostly concentrated within the military wing of the Ba'ath party) and the more moderate, pan-Arabist "old guard" leaders of the party. President Amin al-Hafiz was not able maintain control which led to a split within the party that escalated into internal strife. (Olson, 1979) This culminated in the 1966 bloodless coup termed the "corrective movement" against President Al-Hafiz. The ultra-left military faction was led by General Salah Jadid; who appointed Gen. Hafez Al-Assad as his minister of defense and introduced a neo-Ba'athist ideology; focused more on radical reform, class struggle and the threat of imperial capitalism. (Olson, 1979) However, the Ba'ath party even after introducing its neo-Ba'athist ideology worked excessively to set the differences between it and Communist parties, even if these differences were merely nominal. (Hinnebusch, 2001) Although weary, the USSR did not oppose the takeover and continued to provide support and aid to Syria despite the abrupt change in leadership. A Socialist-orientated Syria was desirable among ideologue policy makers in spreading Soviet influence in the Middle East, in light of the Sino-Soviet split and contestation of Soviet leadership within the region. (McInerney, 1992) The 1960s also witnessed a deterioration of relations between the USSR and the West, Soviet aid significantly increased towards Syria in relation. (Dawisha, 1975)

From 1963-1966, the USSR remained Syria's third largest export outlet, forming more than ten percent of the country's total exports. (Ginat, 2000) During the Cold War, the Middle East was increasingly divided between revolutionary (i.e. under the leadership of Nasser's Egypt) and conservative blocs (i.e. under the leadership of Saudi Arabia). (Hinnebusch, 2001) However, due to Egypt's disastrous performance during the Yemeni civil war (1962-1970), Nasser suffered a loss of prestige and standing in the region. The leadership of the revolutionary bloc was further weakened by the loss of the Syrian-Egyptian coalition against Israel in the 1967 June war which cost Syria it's only natural border with Israel, the Golan Heights. (Galvani, 1974) The loss of the Golan Heights added a territorial dimension to Syria's confrontation with Israel which in turn, increased internal divisions within the Ba'ath party and exacerbated the Israeli security threat leading Damascus towards further reliance on Moscow. (Galvani, 1974) Hence, the USSR viewed Syria amongst the weakening of the revolutionary bloc, as increasingly its only foothold into the Middle East.

In 1970, General Hafez Al-Assad conducted a military coup against Jadid and entrenched himself as the president of the country. Hafez shifted from the ideological priority of the revolution and focused instead on liberating Palestine; using the Palestinian case to draw himself closer to other Arab countries such as the Gulf states. Hafez attempted to draw Syria out of its isolation and gain international support, garnering both Soviet aid and Saudi oil. (Hinnebusch, 2001) In 1971, Hafez signed an agreement with the USSR allowing the establishment of a military naval base in Tartus; an increasing number of Syrian military officers, trained personnel and professionals were educated and trained in Russia, thereafter. (Dawisha, 1975) In 1980, Syria signed the "Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation" with the USSR and continued to receive soviet military and economic support, in spite of its failure in the 1973 October war and

the occupation of Lebanon (i.e. within which Syria repressed parties funded by the USSR). However, the treaty did not include mutual defense assurances. (Hinnebusch, 2001) (Olanrewaju & Joshua, 2015)

The late 1980s were followed with a weakening of Soviet influence within the region. Syria noting the withdrawal of its patron attempted to shift alliances within the region by taking part in the US-led coalition against Saddam's Iraq during the first Gulf war (1990-1991). The collapse of the USSR in 1991 affected Syria heavily, having lost its international protection, trade concessions (i.e. mainly cheap arms deals) and aid; it attempted to realign itself with the West. (Shad, et al., 1995) Hafez maintained relations with the newly formed Russian Federation and a resumption of economic and military ties ensued, in addition to the abolishment of any debts from the Soviet era. (Hinnebusch, 2001) However, Russia was no longer Syria's main trading partner and provider of economic aid (i.e. Western Europe took the fore) and trade levels never reached the heights of their Soviet counterpart with Russia. (Shad, et al., 1995) It is worthy of note that a reoccurring theme within Syria's history is that in order to avoid being victimized by other great powers within the region (e.g. Iraq, Turkey and Israel), it has always attempted to "power balance" against them; through internal mobilization and alliance formation, of which the most sought-after partner was Moscow.

5.2. Transition to Bashar

In 2000, Hafez died and the reins of power were transferred to his son, Bashar. (Hinnebusch, 2001) Bashar Al-Assad was perceived as a possible reformer within the autocratic system of Syria. Optimism ensued as Bashar made speeches about the advanced participation of citizens in combating corruption and increasing the transparency of the state. (Ghadbian, 2001) However, Bashar did not shift from his

reliance on the 'Mukhabarat' (i.e. intelligence agency of Syria) and the security apparatus of the state. (Hokayem, 2014) Nonetheless, political repression was minimized or lessened in contrast to Hafez's reign and political prisoners were freed; for some after more than twenty-five years in horrendous prisons. (Ghadbian, 2001) In turn, opposition parties voiced their opinions regarding the Syrian regime's shortcomings and possible reforms to the political system. This surge of political freedom and opposition frightened the conservative elements within the Ba'ath party and the Assad family. (Diehl, 2012) In response, political demonstrations were repressed, media coverage was restricted, the jurisdiction of the security apparatus was expanded (e.g. laws safe-guarding security personnel form legal prosecution were introduced) and the iron hold of the Syrian regime was reinstated. (Abboud, 2015)

In 2003, the Iraq war ensued and U.S. President George Bush placed Syria under the "Axis of Evil", Syria's refusal to take part in the war following Bush's rhetoric of 'you are either with us or against us' increased its international isolation. (Hokayem, 2014) This was followed by Israel's 'operation orchard', in which it conducted air raids destroying nuclear facilities under construction within Syrian territory. (Diehl, 2012) In 2005, Syria ended its thirty-year military occupation of Lebanon due to the assassination of Rafiq Hariri (i.e. Lebanon's ex-prime minister) and international condemnation of the occupation. (Abboud, 2015) These events in turn; increased Syria's security threat-perception and in response, Bashar rekindled ties with Moscow. By 2009, Syria had purchased one and a half billion dollars of arms and investments in the Syrian economy totaled twenty billion dollars following Russian rapprochement. (Hokayem, 2014) Therefore, Syria's security perceptions have been a driving force in Damascus's rapprochement with Moscow. Moreover, the long-standing history of

Syria-Russo relations and the autocratic nature of the two regimes exacerbated identity-based affinities such as authoritarianism and anti-Westernism which have acted as a basis for increased cooperation following Syria's civil war.

5.3. Syria's Civil War & Russian Intervention

In 2011, a Tunisian street vendor set himself on fire in protest against the corruption and oppression of the Tunisian government amidst a public gathering. This act of public demonstration set off a series of demonstrations that had a spillover effect into other neighboring countries in the region. (Abboud, 2015) The call for reform when met with repression eventually led to revolution and civil war in several Arab countries such as Tunisia, Libya, Egypt and eventually, Syria. (Diehl, 2012) Initially, Assad retorted by replacing provincial governors, releasing political prisoners and paying lip-service to political reform. However, as demonstrations grew, Assad activated the security and military apparatus of the state fueling tensions and igniting the civil war (Hokayem, 2014)

Following the onset of Syria's civil war, Russia attempted to contain the conflict within the parameters of the United Nations. (Quinn, 2016) Russia has successfully vetoed three U.N. draft resolutions that have safeguarded the Assad regime from international scorn. In October 2011, Russia vetoed its first draft which under chapter 41, threatened to apply sanctions against the Syrian government. (Quinn, 2016) In February 2012, another draft was vetoed which condemned violence and atrocities committed during the Syrian crises, however, Russia stated that the draft placed disproportionate blame on the Assad regime. (Hokayem, 2014) In June 2012, the third draft was vetoed which required the Assad regime to abide by previous resolutions and desist from further violence. (Quinn, 2016) During the early stages of the conflict

Russia framed its position as one not concerned with the survival of the Assad regime but with the survival of the Syrian state wherein President Vladimir Putin announced Russia is 'not concerned with the fate of Assad's regime'. (Herszenhorn & Cuming-Bruce, 2012) However, in September 30th 2015, Russia gained formal permission from its upper house of parliament to conduct air strikes against militant groups opposing the Assad government in Syria. (BBC News, 2015) On 14th March 2016, Russia announced the withdrawal of the majority of its forces from Syria, declaring that the intervention has achieved its main objective. (Souleimanov, 2016) However, President Putin evoked that as Russian forces were withdrawn, they are as easy to reintroduce again should the need call for it, highlighting the diplomatic value of such a move rather than its militaristic value. (Souleimanov, 2016) Russia's intervention marks a turning point in the Syrian civil war, wherein the Assad regime was able to regain much of its foothold in the country after being on the brink of collapse. Also, the possibility of the triumph of opposition groups against the Assad regime seems less likely than it was before; as does an end to the protracted conflict.

6. Analysis

This chapter provides an analysis of Russia's intervention in Syria through applying both neorealist and constructivist insights supported with empirical evidence such as presidential speeches, statements and governmental documents. Analysis will be divided into two sections; firstly, neorealism dealing with material and military considerations within the Eastern Mediterranean and secondly, constructivism which will be analyzing Russia's identity, values and self-perceived role within the international community.

6.1. Neorealism

Neorealism highlights material (i.e. includes economic incentives) and security interests prevalent within the Syrian case as the main propellers for Russia's intervention in Syria and its unwavering support of the Assad regime. Hence, two factors are identified as relevant within neorealism explanations; firstly, the discovery of energy-reserves within the Mediterranean and Russia's interest in preventing its dominance of the European energy markets from wavering through blocking the passing of pipelines via Syria to Europe. Secondly, Russia's security concerns with regards to NATO expansion are addressed through increasing its presence in the Mediterranean and reestablishing its military significance outside of its own territory.

6.1.1. Material Motivations in the Mediterranean

John Mearsheimer (2010) states that "it makes good strategic sense for states to gain as much power as possible and, if the circumstances are right, pursue hegemony". (Mearsheimer, 2010) Neorealism contends that states need to increase their security and interests within the international arena against their rivals. (Mearsheimer, 2001) In

this light, Russia's intervention within Syria falls within offensive realism's claims regarding the state's need to maximize its material interests and influence within the region; the military nature of Russia's intervention makes it fall into offensive rather defensive realism.

The Eastern Mediterranean is geographically and strategically an important region through which it is possible to project power and influence into the Middle East. The region has seen extensive superpower competition between the U.S. and the USSR during the Cold War period, however, with the resurgence of Russia and its military intervention within Syria, its significance might be further underlined. (Altman, 2016) The Eastern Mediterranean contains within its regional politics important international issues such as nuclear proliferation and international terrorism. In addition, it contains sea and land routes that connect East to West, such as, historically the Silk Road and the Suez Canal through which, access to the Arabian Gulf and Indian Ocean become viable. (Plakoudas, 2015) In recent years there has been a surge of oil and gas discoveries within the Mediterranean basin including Israel's Tamar, Cyprus's Aphrodite and Egypt's Zhor. (Lo, 2017) In turn, the Eastern Mediterranean acts as an important energy-transit zone; wherein five percent of the world's global oil supply and fifteen percent of its liquefied gas pass through the Suez Canal on its way to the European Market, in addition, several international pipelines pass through the region, transforming it into an important energy hub. (Inbar, 2014)

Since the time of the czars, Russia has always been preoccupied with securing warm-water seaports leading to the Mediterranean and the trade acquired through it, therein. (Inbar, 2014) This has been further exacerbated by the ice-capped nature of the

country wherein, there are no accessible nor viable ports during the whole of the winter year. (Altman, 2016) In turn, Russia's only available naval bases after the fall of the USSR (i.e. due to the loss of the Baltic states) have become, the Sevastopol port in Crimea and the Latakia port in Syria which are its only remaining accessible warm-water ports. (Valenta & Valenta, 2016) Yet, these ports lie outside of Russian territory and the discovery of vast energy reserves along the Eastern Mediterranean seabed have increased the stakes within the region and changed its energy landscape. Russia is primarily an energy-exporter and does not retain a diversified economy, in 2013, sixty-eight percent of its total revenue was received from its oil and gas reserves, its biggest trade partner and energy-consumer being Western Europe. (Plakoudas, 2015) However, with the rise of tensions between the West and Russia, in addition to the implementation of international sanctions, Russia's fears that the EU will attempt to bypass Russian energy pipelines have been exacerbated. There have been several energy projects such as the Trans-Atlantic Pipeline (TAP) that attempts to connect energy resources within the Middle East via Turkey to Europe and the Eastern Mediterranean Pipeline (East-Med pipeline) which draws from the energy deposits within the Eastern Mediterranean basin via Greece and Cyprus to the EU, that have exacerbated such fears. (Plakoudas, 2015) Thus, Russia's intervention within the Syrian conflict can be understood by its need to secure its monopolistic dominance within European energy markets and its historical desire to maintain a strategic position in the Eastern Mediterranean.

On the 25th December 2013, Russia signed a 25 years energy agreement with Syria. In its accordance, Russia's Soyuzneftegas has exclusive rights and access for the exploration, development and production of energy reserves of Syria's eight-hundred and fifty-mile-long Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) along the cities of Tartous and Banias. (Valenta & Valenta, 2016) In the advent of the survival of the Assad regime

and the end of the Syrian civil war; the investment provided by Russia allows it to be the leader within the development and management of gas resources within the Eastern Mediterranean, controlling in turn their pace and destination. (Plakoudas, 2015) The energy reverses within the Eastern Mediterranean have not yet been fully exploited and its gas industry is still in its infancy requiring large amounts of funding and investment. This is largely due to the tenuous relations within the region which have undermined attempts at energy coordination between Cyprus and Turkey, Israel and Lebanon, Egypt and Turkey. (Renz, 2016) Russia's intervention within Syria and its claim to production rights within the EEZ of Syria has boosted its diplomatic significance within the region; since any decisions for construction of energy pipelines would have to include Moscow. In addition, in line with the withdrawal of US involvement within the region, Russia's stance by its historical ally has demonstrated and depicted itself as a consistent and stable ally. (Plakoudas, 2015) The political turmoil within the region can be characterized by the following cases; an undeveloped gas field exists off the coast of Gaza which cannot be used due to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Secondly, the Tamar field discovered off the coast of Israel contains an estimated 30 trillion cubic feet (tcf), however, proposals to transfer gas through pipelines from Israel to Turkey have not been forthcoming due to Syrian civil war and the myriad of actors it affects such as Jordan, Israel, Lebanon and Turkey. (Valenta & Valenta, 2016) In addition, the long-held dispute between Turkey and Greece over Cyprus has not helped in allowing for coordinating plans for future exportation. The levant basin alone which covers Syria, Lebanon, Israel, Cyprus and the small strip of Gaza contains an estimated 1.7 billion barrels of oil and an estimated 122 tcf of gas. (Inbar, 2014) Hence, Russia's perceived future rule in securing the gas reserves within the levant basin allows it to safeguard its position as the dominant exporter of gas to Western Europe.

In addition, Syria is not simply perceived as an energy hub due to its large gas deposits in the Homs field but it is also a transfer state controlling which pipelines may or may not pass through it. This is exemplified by Bashar Al-Assad's refusal in 2009 to sign an agreement with Qatar allowing for the construction of pipelines running through it via Iran and Turkey. (Renz, 2016) However, this agreement was refused due to it bypassing Russia, Syria's patron. Hence, Russia's aims of reestablishing its presence in the Black Sea and Eastern Mediterranean without excessive long-drawn and costly occupations such as the War in Afghanistan (1979-1989) have been achieved through its intervention within the Syrian conflict and its propping up of the Assad regime. Moreover, in accordance with neorealism's emphasis on material benefits and equations which include financial gains, Russia has clear economic incentives present in protecting the Assad regime from falling apart. Russia's structural position in the international arena seems to be better enhanced through securing Assad's Syria as an ally. Russia's economic ties with Syria have been historically significant and seem to have been better reinforced following the advent of the Syrian conflict, wherein contracts with the Russian defense industry have reached four billion dollars' worth by 2012. (Hokayem, 2014) In addition, to its energy-interests in preventing any volume of the Arab Gulf's and especially Qatar's gas or oil from reaching the European market through pipelines passing via Syrian territory. (Orenstein & Romer, 2015)

6.1.2. Military Considerations in the Mediterranean

One of the principles of neorealism states that "states are rational actors, which is to say they are capable of coming up with sound strategies that maximize their prospects of survival." (Mearsheimer, 2010, p. 80). In 2013, Minister of Defense Sergei Shoygu

announced that the "Mediterranean region was the core of all essential dangers to Russia's national interests", this statement was later on followed by the establishment of military bases within Syria on a "permanent bases" for Russian forces. (Trenin, 2016) (Thorton, 2018) Russia's military intervention has been seen to provide multiple benefits; firstly, the Syrian conflict has acted as the operational ground wherein Putin demonstrates his power and Russia's newfound military capabilities, in similar contrast to the U.S.'s display of power during the first Gulf War. (Zonova, 2015) In addition, Russia's narrative regarding its role as a guaranteer within the Syrian conflict, holding great global influence and as a vital player in global affairs, has greatly increased Putin's popularity and domestic constituency. (Baev, 2016) Secondly, Russia's strong support of the Assad regime has provided strong groundwork for formulating future alliances with other neighboring countries in the region such as Iran, the Gulf States and Egypt. (Crosston, 2014) This was exacerbated following the U.S.'s gradual withdrawal from the region, hence, leaving a vacuum in the Middle East. Thirdly, the Syrian conflict demonstrates adequate ground for gaining operational experience and testing new weapon systems. More than 200 weapon systems have been tested within Syria from 2015-2016. (Altman, 2016) Among the weapons tested has been the Iskander-M road-mobile and nuclear capable tactical ballistic missiles which have been used against small groupings of 'terrorists' or enemies of the Assad regime. (Altman, 2016) The application of these weapons seems very costly against low-value targets which could be cheaply dealt with simply by aerial bombing. (Zonova, 2015) In 2016, Putin stated that the Syrian conflict has allowed Russian forces to deploy "new weapons in real action for the first time" such weaponry includes the S-400 defense system, the ship-based cruise missiles and the Sukhoi Su-34 fighter; this was followed by his mention that there "is no more efficient way of training than real combat". (Business

Insider, 2016) In turn, Putin has acknowledged the importance of the Syrian conflict in testing its new technological weaponry which has worked as an advertisement of Russia's military hardware and consistent support as an ally. It is through the gruesome display of force made in Syria that economic benefits have been derived, wherein Russia's weapon sales in 2016 were doubled, (Trenin, 2016) and economic relations with Gulf States were strengthened towards unprecedented levels. By 2016, Qatar following Russia's intervention in Syria had invested approximately eleven billion dollars in Russian oil producers such as Rosneft and dramatically shifted its stance towards the Assad regime and the Syrian opposition. (Alsaadi, 2017) Hence, Russia's involvement within Syria retains certain military considerations that need to be analyzed, since the provided explanations given above and in the gathered literature don't attempt to fully explain Russia's need for permanent bases within Syria.

The port of Tartus retains extensive strategic importance with regards to Russia's power projection into the Mediterranean, by avoiding being contained within the Black Sea, in addition to projecting power into the Middle East region. In addition, the port of Tartus is capable of docking nuclear submarines and receiving weapon shipments. (Altman, 2016) Hence, the port of Tartus in line with neorealist arguments is part of Russia's material capabilities and its power projection abroad. In 2015, the Kremlin issued the new 'Maritime Doctrine of Russian Federation 2020'; the newly adopted maritime doctrine identifies military maritime activity across the world's oceans in accordance with the methods most needed and most efficient for providing sustainable development while achieving the national security of the Russian Federation. (President of Russia, 2015) It is in this light, that the annexation of Crimea and the return of the Sevastopol ports are highlighted within the document amidst the need to maintain "a

permanent Russian Navy presence in the Mediterranean". (President of Russia, 2015) Hence, the document makes note of the need of the Russian Federation to maintain political stability, in addition to long-term military constellations within the Mediterranean Sea, wherein the deputy Prime minister Dimitry Rogozin stated that the document was made in response to the alliance formation and eastward expansion of NATO towards Russian borders. (Zonova, 2015) Moreover, Russia has begun placing the required infrastructure for producing Anti-Acess/Area Denial (A2/AD) bubbles in Syria's coast along the Eastern Mediterranean. (Thorton, 2018) If fully realized, an A2/AD envelope would greatly limit and threaten the West's access to the Suez Canal, the Black Sea, and the resource-rich eastern Mediterranean should Russia choose to implement aggressive maneuvers against NATO. (Altman, 2016) The advent of A2/ADs is extremely significant as it limits the military superiority between NATO and Russia, although this does not fill the gap between both armies. It demonstrates Russia ability to maintain influence and military presence within the Mediterranean.

In January 2017, Russia concluded an agreement with Bashar Al-Assad, wherein the port facilities at Tartus and the air base in Latakia would be greatly expanded and modernized while extending their lease for another forty-nine years. (Nordland, 2017) The A2/AD bubble consists of anti-aircraft missile systems such the S-400 and the S-300 missile system which can reach a range between 200 to 400 km. (Altman, 2016) The newly installed anti-aircraft weaponry presents an increase in Russia's geopolitical leverage in creating no-fly zones around Syria, this in turn would have implications for the airpower capacities of involved states such as NATO, the U.S. and Turkey. Russia's bargaining power in relation to its military capacities is thus, greatly increased while providing a firmer foothold into the Mediterranean. (Zonova, 2015) The A2/AD bubble

created retains an effective suite of military weapons that within neorealist thinking (i.e. the security dilemma) can not only be used defensively but also offensively. (Mearsheimer, 2001) The anti-aircraft systems installed can reach a distance of up to 400 km which allows it in turn to enhance its operational utility while gaining protection from any aircraft or military warship operating within the region. (Altman, 2016) Hence, Russia's military presence in Syria has provided it with strategic deterrence qualities that increase the security of not only Russian forces in Syria but also to the Russian Federation itself, wherein any future military engagement would be placed within Russia's favor due to the presence of A2/AD missile systems. (Thorton, 2018) It is in this light maybe that Russia's naval commander-in-chief, Viktor Chrikov announced that the bases of Tartus and Latakia are "essential" to the Russian Federation, in relation to the operational abilities of Russia to project power. (Gardner, 2012) Hence, the Syrian intervention provided Moscow with extensive geopolitical leverage in a crucial part of the world, in relation to military gains in both operational and strategic terms. These aspects as defined above can help to explain the presence of Russian forces in both Syria and in the Eastern Mediterranean on a permanent basis.

Therefore, Russia's military campaign in Syria has it allowed to increase its economic ties with the Gulf States, test out its new military weaponry and modernize its military bases along the Mediterranean coast of Syria. In turn, Russia's actions fall within offensive realism tenets such as its claims that states should attempt to maximize power and attempt to achieve hegemony when chances are permitting, in an attempt to retain dominance over others. (Mearsheimer, 2010) In contrast, defensive realism would suggest restraint to ensure survival rather than attempting to shift the status-quo. (Waltz, 1979) Hence, Russia's actions through the use of A2/AD systems and its

increased investment in military bases along Syrian cities of Tartus and Latakia while adding to the military bulk in the region would fall within offensive realists claims regarding a state's aim to maximize its power within the international system while challenging the status-quo.

6.2. Constructivism

Constructivism highlight ideational and social elements within its analysis of Russia's foreign policy towards Syria, wherein material facts are considered secondary. The constructivist approach is divided into two sections; the first providing an empirical analysis of speeches made by president Vladimir Putin and foreign minister Sergei Lavrov, highlighting ideational factors present within their speeches. The second section, deals with Russia's religious and civilizational identity and character.

6.2.1. Norms, Identities & Images

In 2012, Russia's foreign minister, Sergey Lavrov announced that the recent tensions concurrent between Russia and the West reflect different civilizational underpinnings and identities, referring in stark contrast to Samuel Huntington's 'Clash of Civilizations' which he dubbed as accurate in predicting impending conflicts and highlighting their nature. (Lavrov, 2012) Russia's civilizational identity and 'unique' place within the international system are often referred to amongst Russian officials amidst intervention in Syria, highlighting Russia's importance as a key shareholder in global affairs. (Alsaadi, 2017) Hence, justifications for Russia's foreign policy made in relation to aspects of Russia 'unique' place in the international system and its civilizational identity fall within constructivists thinking regarding the role of ideational factors in promoting intervention in Syria. Thereafter, Lavrov continued to underline

the role of the West in eroding norms and adopting destructive practices prevalent within the international order under US hegemony; wherein norms of sovereignty and non-interference in internal affairs of states have been undermined and disregarded. (Lavrov, 2012) This was preceded by Putin claim in 2005, that the fall of the USSR was the "greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the century". (NBC News, 2005) Constructivist insights in turn, would attempt to highlight the norms mentioned within Lavrov's speech such as the undermining of sovereignty and non-interference. (Bagdonas, 2012) Hence, in contrast to neorealists, Russia's moves within Syria are identified under its desire to defend certain international norms and rules, wherein material interest are seen as only secondary. (Finnemore & Barnett, 2004). This was further highlighted amidst Lavrov's exclamations that Russia's role within Syria was aimed towards the creation of a "fair, democratic and, ideally, self-regulating" international system". (Lavrov, 2012) However, in addition to the promotion of norms, constructivist also underline incentives for the increase of structural power; wherein, the state is capable of transforming or changing the rules or norms of the international system. (Charap, 2013) Hence, Lavrov's claims relate not to defending international norms, in an effort to create a fair and self-regulating international system, but is rather aimed towards increasing Russia's structural power within the international system while attempting to take part in the process of redesigning the international system.

Russia's fear of externally-led regime change in light of Lavrov's speech amidst the Color Revolutions and the Arab Spring, underlines the norms it wishes to prevent from gaining legitimization. (Charap, 2013) In addition, Russia's increased involvement within global affairs provides its portrayed 'image' as a great power, legitimacy abroad amidst its claims regarding the erosion of sovereignty and non-interference-based

norms. (Charap, 2013) Hence, Russia is attempting to create an image of itself as a great power bound by international norms, laws and principles. Russia's depiction of the West and especially the United States as irresponsible, aggressive and reckless is cited in contrast to, its own promoted 'image' as a responsible great power attempting to limit the chaos and erosion caused by the West, highlighting conservatism's claim that identities are social constructs. (Alsaadi, 2017) This was further exacerbated following Russia's intervention and withdrawal from Syria in 2016, having achieved its goals without retaining long-term, large-scale and costly military invasions in Syria. (Katz, 2013) Constructivists argue that Russia's military intervention in Syria would have been enacted regardless of the material incentives or costs present within the campaign due to the primacy of ideas over material facts. (Bagdonas, 2012) Therefore, Russia's actions within Syria are seen within its attempts at establishing certain 'images' of itself while garnering diplomatic and political importance within global affairs, increasing the ideational benefits derived from its intervention regardless of the material gains achieved.

In 2013, during the advent of the Syrian civil war, president Vladimir Putin wrote an open letter titled "A Plea for Caution from Russia" to the New York Times, wherein he stated the need for increased cooperation with the U.S., while denying the involvement of the Syrian regime with the use of chemical weapons against civilians, in addition to, a recollection of the disastrous outcomes of U.S. involvement in Iraq war and the chaotic state of the Middle East following the Arab Spring. (Putin, 2013) From a constructivist perspective, the letter has to be placed within the larger context it was sent, highlighting the notion of that words imply. Firstly, the letter was addressed to the United States. In this manner, Russia places itself on an equal footing as the United

States within the context, the letter was provided in, as if the US and Russia are not only equal actors within the international system but also equal powers. Secondly, the letter makes frequent mention of the Cold War and its implications between the U.S. and Russia, denoting the impression that the world order is bipolar rather than unipolar. Thirdly, within the letter Putin condemns Russia's actions within Syria, the Iraq war and the Middle East accusing it in turn of spreading chaos. Constructivists highlight that identities and images are social constructs, wherein, Putin attempts to create an 'image' of the U.S. as an irresponsible and aggressive great power. On the other hand, Putin follows through by providing solemn advice and rhetoric under the heading of "millions around the world increasingly see America not as a model of democracy but as relying solely on brute force", creating in turn an image of Russia where it is the responsible great power. (Putin, 2013) Fourthly, after giving solemn advice regarding the negative role of the U.S., Putin continues with recommendations surrounding increased cooperation between Moscow and Washington surrounding several issues such as conflict-resolution regarding Syria and an anti-ISIS coalition. In turn, the image of Russia as a sole responsible actor needs to be reinforced through cooperation and coordination with other great powers as well. In addition, Russia's self-perceived identity as a great power is constantly alluded to in Lavrov's speeches where he highlights Russia's importance as a global player, and its bearing significant diplomatic and political influence, wherein Russia is a great power "by right [and] has the role as one of the key experts". (Lavrov, 2013)

Hence, Russia's foreign policy towards Syria is dictated within its desire to restore its place as a vital player within global affairs. In accordance with constructivist theory, Russia is attempting to reestablish its 'image' as a great power through a process of

identity formation and social interaction (e.g. New York Times letter). (Slaughter, 2011) An image of the "self" (i.e. Russia) is created in relation to the "other" (i.e. the U.S.), wherein the former is depicted as a responsible great power while the latter is depicted as an aggressive and irresponsible great power. This process is achieved through constant reference amongst speeches to the Soviet Era, referring to the Cold War and confrontational issues surrounding Russia and the US today, attempting in turn, to draw a continuity wherein the U.S. and Russia are equal power. (Alsaadi, 2017) However, although Russia's material capabilities are far behind the West's, constructivism does not take into consideration material factors when measuring socially constructed images or identities, this is highlighted by Russia's success in conveying its great power 'image' across the Middle East, forming economic ties with the Gulf States, Egypt and Iran while increasing its arms sales through portraying itself as vital player in global affairs and a reliable ally, has it increased its foothold in the region. (Trenin, 2016)

6.2.2. Civilizational & Religious Identity

Different states hold different world views which in accordance with constructivism, lead to confrontation or peace with others in the international system irrespective of material considerations. (Bagdonas, 2012) An example would be with regards to China, Russia and India, who all retain an aversion to the unipolar world order and attempt to limit U.S. influence within their spheres of influence. (Alsaadi, 2017) In addition, Russia and China both display antipathy towards liberal democratic values through citing a unique and independent civilizational path that is special to China or Russian. (Allison, 2013) However, a common theme among the above-mentioned states is their respect and adherence to norms of sovereignty and territorial integrity, in contrast to

Western universalism. (Finnemore & Barnett, 2004) Hence, a common understanding between China, Russia and Syria regarding the norms and values best adopted, do they work together in mitigating any sanction, resolution or disadvantageous development in support of the Assad regime. This fall within constructivist arguments that identities, ideas and values are significant in analyzing relations between states, since China has no material advantages to derive from Syria.

Constructivist's take into consideration historical and cultural factors in analyzing the adopted identity of a state-actor. (Bourtman, 2016) Tsyankov (2016) draws a Russia's civilizational identity as part of its commitment to be part of the West. Although he highlights that Russia may not always act like the West, it aspires historically to be part of the West. (Tsygankov, 2016) Indeed, comparisons can be drawn between the binary oppositions of civilized and barbarian that are generally a prevalent theme within European history, this underlined due to president Vladimir Putin's remarks against radical groups in Syria (e.g. al-Qaeda, ISIS) as denoting ad ideology of "barbarity" and as "enemies of civilization", of which Russia seeks to present itself as its protector. (Tsygankov, 2017) Hence, Putin's remarks denote that Russia although may not act like the West, does consider itself to be part or at least ascribes itself to be like the West.

Religious identity also plays a role amongst constructivist explanations, wherein, following the ascension of Vladimir Putin as president of Russia, a reconciliation was enacted between the Orthodox Church and the State. (Trenin, 2016) Tsygankov (2016) highlights the role that Russia's Christian identity has in influencing its foreign policy. (Tsygankov, 2016) Following the advent of the civil war in Syria, Russia took on itself

the role as the protector of the Christian communities present under the Assad regime. The Russian Orthodox Church declared that in line with the sectarian narrative of the Assad regime that the Russian state was justified in intervening amidst the holy war in Syria. (Tsygankov, 2017) Minorities under Assad's rule have been given preferential treatment and always protected in contrast to the larger urban Sunni population. (Hokayem, 2014) Hence, Russia's Christian identity as a spiritual leader and civilizational protector have ascribed as ideational factors relevant to the military intervention in Syria. Moreover, Constructivist take into consideration cultural and ideological affinities present within the Syrian intervention. Protecting a cultural ally such as Syria is a possible motivation for intervention, where thousands of Russians live in Syria, in addition to the local Christian communities, not to mention ideological and value-based affinities shared between the Assad regime and Moscow during the Cold War and contemporarily. Tsygankov's theory of honor commitment that relates to Russia's historical identity and ambitions also fall into the Assad regime similar nature. (Tsygankov, 2016) The Russian Federation and the Assad regime have not only had ideological affinities during the Cold War but also retain value and identity-based affinities today, in relation to their secular, authoritarian and anti-Western dispositions. (Tsygankov, 2017) Roy Allison (2013) has even argued that the extensive similarities between the two regimes, led Russia to intervene for of Western-led invasions retaining further legitimacy and parallels have been drawn between Assad's autocratic survival and Putin's Russia. (Allison, 2013) Hence, Russia was encouraged to help a cultural ally and a strong internal state to survive due to fears of it being sucked into similar circumstances and the need to halt the precedent of externally-led regime change from gaining further legitimacy, wherein Lavrov stated that the loss of the Syrian state would lead to the existence of a "black hole" within the international system.

Hence, constructivism has been applied in analyzing Russia's civilization, cultural and religious identity in lines with the empirical evidences derived from speeches and governmental documents. Russia's ideological and cultural affinities with the Syrian republic have encouraged it to intervene in supporting the Assad regime amidst international condemnation, such affinities include the presence of large Christian and Russian communities in Syria, ideological affinities during the Cold War and a common understanding surrounding the norms, values and identities adopted (i.e. autocratic and secular). This is followed by Russia's civilizational image as a protector of European civilization and its right to adopt its own unique path in the international system amidst its rhetoric against radical opposition groups in Syria (e.g. ISIS, al-Qaeda). As such, constructivism assumes that identity and culture are what influence state interests which in turn shape the country's foreign policy.

7. Conclusion

This study has attempted to analyze the key driving factors and motivations present in Russian foreign policy that have driven it towards its military intervention in Syria. This study has attempted to make use of a more coherent understanding of Russian foreign policy through applying a combination between neorealism and constructivism; the prior adhering to the role of material and strategic interests, the later emphasizing the role of values, norms and identity. The presented findings have led to the conclusion that Russia's interests in Syria are prompted by a set of interrelated motivations and interests falling between neorealism's desire to increase military capabilities and economic interests, and constructivism's identification of Russia's self-image as a 'great power' and its view of the international system, in addition to the norms and rules it wishes to change or promote. Russia has taken a series of activities aimed at increasing its material power in relation to its military capabilities within the Mediterranean and its economic interests within the Middle East which include the creation of A2/AD bubbles, placement of Russian forces on a permanent basis in the Mediterranean, control of pipelines passing through Syria and increased economic cooperation with the Gulf States. However, this study underlines that these activities and maneuvers involving Russia have been taken in an attempt to reinstate itself as a global actor, advocating a restructuring of the international system towards a multipolar world order safeguarded by norms of non-interference and sovereignty.

Arguments within the literature reviewed above, emphasize the focus of neorealism on material power as the main driving force behind Russia's intervention in the Syrian conflict. However, this view fails to take into consideration the role of norms and the manner in which they are used to strategically gain forms of power outside the confines

of material capabilities. This pertains to the structural power present within the order of the international system and the rules adopted therein. In addition, insights and consideration revolving around geopolitical factors such as Russia's military interests within the Mediterranean and its economic interests along its sea-bed have also been undermined. On the other hand, in relation to constructivism, focus has been placed on the ensuing disagreements present between great powers (i.e. Russia and the U.S.) over the rules and norms of the international system, such norms include non-interference versus externally-led regime change and sovereignty versus humanitarian intervention. However, this view fails to take into consideration the role of material interests in promoting the desired norms and rules amidst Russian attempts to restructure the international system. In addition to the images created by Russia of itself and the United States (i.e. the other).

Hence, this study has attempted to create an account of Russia's intervention in the Syrian conflict through a combination of both neorealist and constructivist insights; wherein, ideals such as values, identity and norms, and material capabilities such as economic incentives and military capabilities have been used in cohesion in analyzing Russian foreign policy. The use of both IR theories has helped in creating a coherent and comprehensive understanding of Russia's foreign policy, in a sufficient and wholesome manner that neither of the two theories can do individually. Therefore, the argument of this study revolves around the role of ideational (i.e. Russia's worldview) and materialist factors (its military and economic interests) in informing Russia's military intervention in Syria.

Finally, this study has derived several insights through its application of neorealism and constructivism in relation to Russia's intervention in Syria. The findings of this study have been conducted within a specific case (i.e. the Syrian civil war) through an application of two IR theories, wherein both theories have been found to complement one another in providing a coherent view of Russian foreign policy. More research and study could, in turn, be conducted in relation to combining elements of both IR theories, in an attempt to create a new theoretical approach amongst International Relations Theories. In addition, a larger and comprehensive study could be conducted, for future researchers, with regards to whether the combination between neorealism and constructivism is attributable in relation to other circumstances and cases outside of the scope of the Syrian case. Again, in creating a new IR theory or theoretical approach that adopts both ideational and materialist elements derived from both theories in explaining international relations is also plausible. Moreover, the findings of this study regarding Russia's identity as a 'great power' and its vehement desire to be considered as a pillar of the international community amidst global affairs has relevance amongst policy makers in understanding and dealing with Russian interests amidst future attempts at cooperation regarding issues such as nuclear proliferation and international terrorism, in addition to issues surrounding conflict-resolution such as the Syrian case.

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