

# A Comparative Comparison of the U.S. and Russian Foreign Policy and their Behavior Patterns in the Syrian Crisis

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## Abstract

The Syrian crisis has been one of the most critical developments in the international system since 2011, involving most international and regional actors. This crisis has undoubtedly been one of the most important arenas of confrontation between great powers such as the United States and Russia. This article examines the United States and Russia's behavioral patterns and policies in the Syrian crisis since 2011. It is hypothesized that Syria has strategic and vital interests for the United States and Russia. Therefore, a new arena has been created for competition between these two and other allies. The findings show that U.S. foreign policy in the Syrian crisis is based in its interests and other allies' interests, but pursuing unilateral policies and direct military intervention has been hampered by a number of international issues. Thus, they have to deal mainly with the developments in Syria indirectly. On the other hand, the situation is different for the Russians, and they have a maximum presence in Syria by forming alliances with actors such as Iran. They believe that the fall of the Assad government seriously endangers their interests, and therefore they try to prevent Opponents of the Assad government from gaining power in various ways.

**Keywords:** Foreign Policy, Middle East, Syrian Crisis, United States, Russia

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## Introduction

The Middle East is one of the most controversial areas in the world today, and in recent years, Syria has been at the center of the region's conflict. The Syrian civil war, which has been going on for about nine years, has reached the crucial phases in 2019. Some of the most critical events in Syria in recent years include the establishment of a constitutional committee, recapture of important parts of Idlib province by Damascus and its allies, Turkish invasion of the east of the Euphrates, and military occupation of parts of Syria following the inaction of the Donald Trump administration, repeated Israeli attacks on various parts of Syria, the spread of the economic crisis and the sharp devaluation of the national currency. The crisis has involved many international and regional powers and is undoubtedly the most critical arena of rivalry between the United States and Russia. Many have called the Syrian crisis a second round of the confrontation between Moscow and Washington after the Ukraine issue and Crimea's annexation in the 21st century. U.S. intervention in the Middle East should be considered part of the geopolitical plans in which Syria is an integral part of the scenario for forming the new Middle East. New regionalism has led Washington to different patterns of behavior. In other words, it is no longer willing to engage in a full-blown war in the Middle East for fear of a multipolar world, as its crisis management is out of Washington's control in recent times.

Washington has been the most important player in the developments in Iraq and Syria. By leaving Iraq, the U.S. will organize the scenario of ISIL in the region. The main reasons for this scenario are the movement towards forming the Greater Middle East and the domino effect of the overthrow of non-aligned governments. This scenario, which stretches from North Africa to Iran, seeks to control the sensitive geopolitical regions of the Middle East with the help of its allies to reduce Tehran's regional role. On the other hand, given Israel's importance, the U.S. tries to support its so-called geopolitical code.

Syria has always had a particular position in Russia's foreign policy in the Middle East in the post-Cold War world. Thus, the developments in Syria is not only a crisis involving one of Russia's longtime friends, but also a crisis in the last circle of Russia's strategic allies in the region. Syria's importance in Russia's international equations includes its unique geopolitical and geostrategic situation, the long-standing and traditional Kremlin-Damascus relations, the existence of the Tartus military base in Syria, the prevention of monopoly influence of the West in the region, Russian distrust of the West over the Syrian crisis, fear of the repetition of the Libyan scenario in Syria, confrontation with the United States, economic considerations, preventing NATO expansion, and military agreements with Syria. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, different approaches emerged at certain points in the Russian Federation's foreign policy. The presence of the United States and its allies on Russia's borders has raised concerns among many Russian nationalists. On the other hand, the Arab Spring's domino in 2011 somehow brought former Soviet allies like Iraq and Libya closer to the West. These events changed the attitude of the Russians towards international and regional issues. When Vladimir Putin came to power, the official slogan of a "powerful Russia" was raised. Therefore, Russians sought to increase their presence in areas such as the Middle East and prevent the West from having a more significant presence in Russia's sensitive areas. To achieve these goals, the Russians reached important strategic agreements with the West's opponents and sought to use them to regain their long-held power.

Accordingly, this study explores the foreign policy and behavior of the United States and Russia in the Syrian crisis and examines its related issues and equations.

## **U.S. Foreign Policy and Behavior in Syria**

According to the Pentagon classification, Syria was declared a rogue state and a supporter of terrorism in 2003. Accordingly, the war with Syria was seen as part of a more massive war with Iran, and Iran, Iraq, and Syria became the target for regime change to reach the new American century's goals (Niakui, Behmanesh, 2012, p. 114). The change in U.S. attitude towards Syria began after the assassination of former Lebanese Prime Minister Rafik Hariri, which led to the escalation of pressure on Syria and a Security Council resolution against Syria. As a result, Syria was forced to withdraw its forces from Lebanon. At the same time, U.S. political and propaganda attacks against Syria spread. These attacks even took on a limited military dimension, and once U.S. forces attacked an Iraqi convoy inside Syria, injuring and capturing five Syrian soldiers (Rezazadeh, Najafi, 2016, p. 158).

Given the emergence of new issues in the international system and its changing issues, Christopher Line believes in a different understanding of other traditional approaches to American foreign policy. He believes that based on new international realities, the United States must design its new strategy. His intended strategy is a change in traditional American roles in unipolar and bipolar environments. He believed that this change is due to the critical importance of military issues compared to the past. Accordingly, if the United States prioritizes military matters, it will incur high costs.

Christopher Line's strategies for the United States include: 1. Due to economic and financial constraints, the United States must redefine its strategic priorities and reduce its military presence abroad. 2. Providing a clear definition of strategic priorities: Accordingly, the deployment of ground forces for war in Eurasia is not a U.S. advantage, and the U.S.'s competitive and strategic advantages are still its air and naval power. 3- Emphasizing the critical responsibility of maintaining security in the regions of Europe, East and West Asia using regional actors.

Accordingly, the strategy of offshore balancing means transferring responsibility rather than sharing it with other countries; In a way that other countries strive for their security more than the United States. [This means more costs for the allies] 4. Significant reduction in military force: The United States can reduce its military presence in the Middle East to reduce terrorist group attacks against its forces, and rely on its naval and air power to protect its regional allies (Layne, 2012).

At the beginning of the Syrian crisis, the United States mainly sought political reform by Bashar al-Assad and the gradual secession of Syria from Iran. The U.S. Deputy Secretary of State stated: If the leaders of Damascus reconsider their relations with Hezbollah in Lebanon, the Hamas movement and Iran, the internal situation in Syria will return to normal. Of course, this stance raises important questions about the possible role of the United States in Syria's internal unrest. However, with the escalation of the crisis in Syria and the non-fulfillment of U.S. demands, the country's position towards the Assad regime became more severe. Hence, U.S. officials talked about the end of Bashar al-Assad's legitimacy and the need for the fall of the Ba'athists government (Mirzaei et al., 2016, p. 10).

U.S. policy on the Syrian crisis has been indecisive and hesitant. On the one hand, the Americans are trying to overthrow the regime of Bashar al-Assad and change the power structure in Syria with the goals of restraining China and Russia, restraining Iran's power and regional role, ensuring energy security, and other factors. On the other hand, The United States is skeptical of Syria's developments because of Iran, Russia, and China's support, the lack of cohesion in the opposition structure, fears of extremist groups coming to power, and fears of jeopardizing the Israeli's interests.

"The invasion of Iraq and the Abu Ghraib prison have caused the world to lose faith in our goals and principles," Obama wrote in an article published in Foreign Affairs a year before winning the presidential election. He continues that to renew U.S. leadership in

the world, we must first end the Iraq war and then focus our attention on the Middle East on a large scale" (Adami et al., 2013, p. 77). According to the National Security Strategy Papers released in 2010 and 2015, Obama took different approaches to pursue goals as their Cold War approaches. Acknowledging that the continuation of the direct presence policy is detrimental to the national interest, Obama stressed the need to shift the U.S. presence from a direct presence to an "alternative choice" in the region. This change led to the U.S. pursuing an Offshore Balance strategy in strategic areas (Research Center of the Islamic Consultative Assembly of Iran, 2019, p. 4).

During Obama's administration, a turning point happened in American foreign policy; While Bush's foreign policy was based on unilateralism and the emphasis on achieving security and profit through hardware, Obama organized his foreign policy based on multilateralism, soft power, public diplomacy, democracy, and international rules (Karimifard, 2015, p. 161). However, Obama's approach to terrorism in the Middle East has been somewhat passive, as he has withdrawn his frontline forces from the region to give full control to unarmed and inexperienced local forces. The Obama administration's policy of intermittent bombings not only failed, such as the time of Lyndon Johnson, but also created a power vacuum in various areas. Obama had to conclude that his allies could not play the proxy game well in his place. The documents of the National Security Strategy of the United States of America in 2015 addresses the tactical mission of the U.S. Armed Forces and the need to avoid some unnecessary warfare:

"We have clearly distanced ourselves from the pattern of full-scale and costly ground wars in Iraq and Afghanistan; The wars in which the United States and our military carried the brunt. Instead, we today pursue a more sensible approach that prioritizes a series of specific counterterrorism operations, collective action with responsible parties, and increasing action to curb violent extremism and fundamentalism with increasing threats. We will act

selectively in the use of military force. Military force should not be our first choice, but it will sometimes be a necessary choice. The United States will use military force unilaterally if necessary, and that is when our lasting interests and our people's lives are threatened; When our lives and our allies' security are in danger. In such situations, we prefer to work with our allies and partners" (National Security Strategy of the United States of America, 2015).

To understand Obama's foreign policy and its difference with Bush's realist doctrine, one must understand U.S. power's relativization. "Today, we need to know the two inevitable truths that describe our world: First, no nation can meet the challenges of the world alone," Hillary Clinton said. She continued, these issues are very complex. Many actors are competing for influence, from rising powers to corporations and criminal cartels; From NGOs to al-Qaeda; From state media to people equipped with Twitter and Facebook. Second, most nations are concerned about similar global threats, from non-proliferation to the fight against terrorism (Mirkoushesh, 2016).

In general, the negative axes in the Obama Doctrine were: avoidance of unilateralism, avoidance of preemptive war, avoidance of reliance on military intervention, and his positive axes were: multilateralism, emphasis on economics, and new regional capacity building. Barack Obama believed that he should pursue security through partnership, cooperation, and multilateralism because if the political and security environments are accompanied by cooperation and partnership, there will be fewer costs to overcome regional crises (Karimifard, 2015, pp. 168-167).

In his address to the nation on 10th September 2013 President Obama explained why he believed the U.S. should take military action against Syrian regime:

The Assad regime will see no reason to stop using chemical weapons. As the ban against these weapons erodes, other tyrants will have no reason to think twice about acquiring poison gas, and using

them. Over time, our troops would again face the prospect of chemical warfare on the battlefield. And it could be easier for terrorist organizations to obtain these weapons, and to use them to attack civilians. If fighting spills beyond Syria's borders, these weapons could threaten allies like Turkey, Jordan, and Israel. And a failure to stand against the use of chemical weapons would weaken prohibitions against other weapons of mass destruction, and embolden Assad's ally, Iran which must decide whether to ignore international law by building a nuclear weapon, or to take a more peaceful path. Our ideals and principles, as well as our national security, are at stake in Syria, along with our leadership of a world where we seek to ensure that the worst weapons will never be used (Boke, 2016, p. 108).

The U.S. approach during the Trump administration was influenced by various global issues, especially competition with China. Trump tried to achieve some success in this area. However, in practice, he failed.

Trump believed that Obama's internationalism had weakened America's position in the world and increased its rivals' strength. They are using the principle of free ride and are reducing their distance with the United States. Accordingly, Trump believed that Obama's internationalism was more in the interests of its allies than in the United States' interests (Kahl & Brands, 2017).

Donald Trump seeks to maximize power and advance America's first power. To this end, most countries in the Middle East and even the world are seen as tools for the United States. The Trump administration released its first national security strategy document in 2017. Although he was expected to focus on military issues as much as Bush Jr., he used a combination of Obama and Bush Jr. approaches in U.S. foreign policy for two reasons. First, the existence of new and complex issues that required the formation of multiple alliances and diplomatic instructions, and second, the need to resolve some U.S. domestic issues based on the

Trump administration's specific understanding of relinquishing some international responsibilities.

Trump clarifies the National Security Strategy for 2017 as follows:

"Above all, we will serve the American people and protect their rights in a government that prioritizes their security, success, and interests. This is a national security strategy to advance the first policy of the United States". He also continues, "Our allies, who are also targets of terrorists, will work with the U.S. to share responsibilities in the fight against these groups. We will help our allies to use their capabilities to discredit terrorist acts and maintain pressure on terrorists. We will also encourage our allies to take independent action against terrorists themselves" (National Security Strategy of the United States of America, 2017).

The combination of Trump's top policies with his applied policies in Syria has led some to conclude that there has been a significant shift in Trump's stance toward Syria. Trump has said he will not go to war in Syria because he sees it as a big problem. Trump said ISIS is a bigger problem for the United States than Syria. He emphasizes that in the case of the fall of the Assad regime, Syria will face Iraq and Libya's conditions (Ali Tabar et al., 2018, pp. 193-194). Despite resorting to limited action such as bombing the Syrian airbases under the pretext of the April 2017 Khan Sheikhun chemical attack, Trump's administration follows the U.S. Middle East strategy that is based on indirect action in support of regional allies, including the Syrian crisis. Donald Trump's logic in following this strategy is slightly different from the logic of the Obama administration. Barack Obama is fundamentally committed to the need for a strategic shift to Asia-Pacific and therefore believes in reducing the need to intervene in the Middle East. However, Trump believes the Middle East is a big quagmire that the United States should avoid and should not pay for its security and give free rides to Middle East allies (Ali Tabar et al., 2018, p. 198).

United States has taken two approaches to keep the battlefield balanced: First, political pressure

on the Syrian government, especially the Syrian government's threat to use chemical weapons against the opposition, an option that Obama described as the U.S. red line. Second, Sending non-lethal financial and even non-military aid to the opposition, providing intelligence assistance to them, and paradoxically prohibiting their supporting governments, namely Saudi Arabia and Qatar, from uncontrollably delivering sensitive weapons to forces whose loyalty was questionable; Because they could be used against Israel. (Kushki, Karimi, 2014, pp. 95-96).

Their allies' role in the Syrian crisis was another U.S. problem. At various times, the United States decided to watch the developments in Syria without any effective mobilizations other than propaganda measures supporting the opposition. Therefore, they decided to cede Syria to its regional allies, namely Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and Turkey. This action made Syria an arena for competition between the governments. As a result, even the Syrian opposition forces fell victim to these countries' competition, especially the competition between Qatar and Saudi Arabia. On the other hand, the United States' action destroyed the coordination and cohesion between these forces (Kushki, Karimi, 2014, p. 94).

In general, the United States pursues different goals in Syria, the most important of which are:

- Giving power to the elites and agents in line with their interests and those of their allies, especially Israel.
- Confronting the anti-American axis in the Middle East's heart and cutting the ties between Iran and militias and proxies.
- The weakening of Islamic fundamentalism on a large scale.
- Involving activists such as Iran in a great crisis and reducing and eroding its power in proxy wars.

- More control over the Middle East and facilitating its conditions for projects such as the Greater Middle East.
- Creating supporting countries in the new international order and preventing their inclination towards non-liberal values (whether Islamic or communist ideology).

One of the grounds for providing strategic rationality in U.S. security mechanisms is Russia's role in managing the Syrian crisis. In fact, this should be considered one of the main reasons for the U.S. military operation in Syria. Russia sought to establish crisis management through the participation of regional and international actors. Russia's role is one of the signs of the transformation of uncertainty into regional crisis management (Musalnejad, 2017, p. 134).

With all of the above, there is a kind of confusion in U.S. policy towards Syria. The ambiguous U.S. policy in Syria stems from three main factors. First, the U.S. approach and strategy have changed, unlike in the last decade, and they are no longer looking for scenarios such as the invasion of Iraq. The Americans have concluded that direct military strikes have cost them dearly, and that it would be better for them to achieve their goals by supporting allied groups in Syria. Second, after weakening its hegemonic position, especially after the rise of China and potential threats from India, Brazil, Russia, and even Iran, the United States is trying to hand over some of its roles to allies in areas such as the Middle East. These allies also have their interests. Therefore, they are not just following the interests of the United States. This has caused some tensions between the United States and allies, such as Turkey (especially concerning the Kurdish issue) and even Saudi Arabia (in terms of action and behavioral model)<sup>2</sup>. This has led to a behavioral dichotomy between allies. Third, Americans cannot leave Syria entirely and have to be present in that country somehow. However, they do not want to

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<sup>2</sup>The highest level of concern in US-Saudi interactions over Middle East issues arose during Obama's presidency.

clash with the allied forces of Iran and Russia. On the other hand, they know that the opposition does not have much ability to change the situation in their favor. Therefore, they are trying to achieve their goals through politics and the continuation of the negotiations. However, the negotiations for peace in Syria have practically remained fruitless. The most important reasons for the failure are:

1- Extroverted rather than introverted and local view: Holding meetings and negotiations to achieve peace is mainly extroverted in nature. These meetings focus on the political groups of the opposition in Europe and the United States, instead of Syria groups. This has led to these negotiations' illegitimacy by many Syrian domestic actors and other regional and international actors.

2- Prioritizing the opposition: the issue of supporting and prioritizing the views of the opposition is one of the reasons for the disagreement of the ruling regime in Syria and its allies with the negotiation process to reach an agreement on the future of Syria. As the opposition is largely supported by the U.S. and Arab allies, it will seek to oppose the current regime and its allies in the future political structure. Therefore, the Assad government and its allies do not pay much attention to the talks.

3. non-consideration of some effective actors: Although there are many actors in the Syrian crisis, but the weight and importance of some of them, such as the Islamic Republic of Iran, is more than others. However, Iran was not invited in the negotiations to reach an agreement, led by the United States and its Arab allies, and its interests were not taken into account. Obviously, given the explicit support of Iran and its paramilitary allies for the Assad government and the dependence of many political groups on this country, it seems unlikely that the negotiations will be able to achieve a real result without Iran's presence.

4. Playing dual and contradictory roles: In numerous negotiations, the United States and its Arab allies have emphasized democratic mechanisms, but in practice, they have armed their ally groups and even destroyed

some critical infrastructures of the Assad government. This has reduced the legitimacy and status of the negotiations for actors such as Iran and Russia. Therefore, they have accused the United States and its allies of double standards in dealing with Syria.

5. Extensive and complexity of the various crises: Despite much information on the Syrian crisis, the conflict's depth and breadth and the challenge are too great to reach a comprehensive agreement through negotiations outside Syria. In fact, the existence of multiple variables and factors has led to the transformation and complexity of the issue, and it is not possible to reach an agreement based on specific agendas.

6. Moreover, the existence of sub-leaders and its absence in some groups: Despite the efforts to reach an agreement, the opposition's number is not exactly clear. On the other hand, many anti-Assad groups lack efficient leaders, and some have lost their leaders. Accordingly, not all groups and opponents can be brought together to reach an agreement.

The president and founder of the Stratfor think tank, George Friedman, believes that the United States and its European allies do not have the strength to end the bloodshed in Syria. If they try to do so, they will be responsible for more bloodshed without achieving any strategic goal. There are places to go to war, but they must be few and must be very important. The importance of the bloodshed in Syria is no more significant for the United States than it is for the Syrians themselves (Simbar, Ghasemiyan, 2014, pp. 171 - 172).

U.S. foreign policy toward the Syrian crisis manifests itself in several general indicators, namely "conservatism and caution," "indirect role-playing," "avoiding interference and refraining from playing the role of leader," and "wasting-time policy." This approach has had significant implications at three levels, including micro-level, i.e., limited to the Syrian crisis, intermediate-level, i.e., concerning the Middle East region, and macro-level, i.e., concerning the U.S. position in the international system. U.S. goals were

continually changing and unstable during the Syrian crisis. The United States supported the fall of Bashar al-Assad, but it did not want military intervention without international authorization. The United States did not also want to provide weapons to the Syrian opposition; It did not intend to take over the leadership of the countries hostile to the Syrian regime and consolidate their power, nor did it intend to create the necessary cooperation between them (Kushki, Karimi, 2014, p. 103).

ZalmayKhalilzad, Special Adviser to the State Department and the Pentagon on the US-Soviet War in Afghanistan, the former U.S. Representative and Ambassador to the United Nations and U.S. Special Envoy to Afghanistan and Iraq, offers some suggestions on how the United States should play a positive role in the Syrian crisis in an article in the Washington Post. Accordingly, he proposes a five-step solution to the smooth transfer of power in Syria without using U.S. military force:

- 1- First, the United States should form a coalition of related influential countries in Syria (including Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Qatar, and the Persian Gulf countries, along with Britain and France), in parallel with pursuing the issue within the framework of the United Nations, Friends of Syria Group and NATO.
- 2- In the second step, close cooperation with this coalition is needed to organize the Syrian opposition in the form of a broad front for a stable transition in Syria. This step is necessary because regional powers such as Turkey and Saudi Arabia have been unable to unite Syrian opposition forces.
3. In the third step, the United States must end the apparent division of labor between regional powers that enable them to arm the opposition. Military support is needed to balance the formation of a united political front. The direct participation of the United States in the military support process reduces the likelihood that the military balance will shift in favor of Islamist and sectarian groups. Therefore, the more moderate forces contributing to the formation of a stable order in Syria's future will be strengthened.

4. In the fourth step, the United States must reach a common understanding with Moscow. Iran and Russia play a significant role in Syrian society and will only stop supporting Assad if they are convinced that supporting the Assad regime is a failed strategy. The coalition must help Russia change its policy by ensuring that Russia's actual trade and strategic interests are not lost with Assad's ouster.

5. In the fifth step, Washington must open its arms to the United Nations' active role in ending the transition in Syria so that the United Nations can play a role similar to what it played in post-Taliban Afghanistan (Khalilzad, 2012, p. 175).

## **Russia's Behavioral Pattern and Foreign Policy in Syria**

### **The Russians and the Return to the East**

Russia's foreign policy is based on specific determinants that the World Order cannot be formed in isolation from the Middle East, and the main reason is its geostrategic location. In fact, Russia aimed at preserving its areas of influence from aggression. It stands in the face of the United States by strengthening its relations with countries such as Iran as a means of expanding spheres of influence in the Middle East in contrast with U.S. dominance over the Middle East - including the Arab region. Russia set out on the basis of the war on terrorism and non-intervention in the wake of the Arab Spring revolutions. The adoption of such a policy is a means to gain support and credibility to maintain its position in strategic areas, and to regain its active roles in conjunction with the American presence (BaniSalameh & Mashagbeh, 2018, p. 28).

In his book " Russian Foreign Policy, Return of Great Power Politics" Jeffrey Mankoff says, "The end of the honeymoon between Russia and the West after September 11 was a political disappointment, but it could hardly have been a hope for the convergence of the post-communist Russia with the Western institutions and accept Western norms. Western



perceptions of Russia's foreign policy since 1991 have been based on the dialectical process of expectation and frustration about Moscow and Western institutions' convergence. It is important to determine Russia's distance from the West. This is the question that has always existed in Russia's foreign policy. In 2006, Dmitry Trinen stated that until recently, Russia saw itself as plutonium in the Western planetary system, far from the center, but still fundamentally part of that system. Nevertheless, it has now wholly abandoned that rotation. Russian leaders have abandoned being part of the West and begun building their Moscow-centric system. Due to the change in the internal and external environments resulting from rising energy prices, the war in Iraq, and the color revolutions in the Soviet Union, the Kremlin's strategy to achieve its geopolitical goals has also changed (Mankef, June 2014, pp. 70-68).

The "look east" policy means that Putin's view has prevailed in his rivals in the Kremlin. Contrary to Western views of the "Atlanticists" and the cautious views of some, such as Medvedev, who want Russia not to take military action in the Middle East, this policy means a clear shift from the West to Asia and the Middle East. "Look East" policy dominated Russia's foreign policy, mainly with Putin's rise to power to redefine Russian interests and confront the West. In this regard, they turned to "Eurasianism" instead of "Atlanticism" and approached actors such as China, India, Iran, and other Asian allies. Therefore, these actors have found a more significant place in Russian foreign policy. Closer proximity to China and India, especially at the security and economic levels, and the acceptance of Iran as an observer member of the Shanghai Treaty are examples of such policy.

In his book, "Chess," Brzezinski says, "while increasing Russia's understanding of the continent's sensitive regions, looking to the east of Russia from a political-geographic point of view can have a huge impact on reviving Eurasian thinking and re-empowering the country in the world." Russia has more than 20 factors to revive and become a superpower in

the world, the most important of which are: nuclear power, basic industries and technology, strategic and geo-strategic position, Hartland's position, homogeneous population, territorial size, democratic tendencies, abundant energy, the traditional interest of some countries in Asia and the Middle East to stabilize and expand their relations with Russia (Ashrafi, Akbar, Babazadeh Judi, 2015, p. 52).

Following the developments in Syria, China and Russia expressed their disagreement with the military attack on Syria. These two strategic allies have been deceived by the complex U.S. policies in the Egyptian revolution, especially Libya's war. However, It will not happen again in Syria, and Russia will do everything to protect Assad and its interests to prevent extremist groups, Salafist and al-Qaeda extremists from coming to power. The repeated veto of the anti-Syrian resolution by China and Russia was a clear message to the United States, as the veto history of the two members in dealing with such crises is generally based on minimal use of the veto. However, when the UN Security Council, under pressure from the United States, voted to condemn, impose sanctions and, finally, use military force against Syria, these two countries repeatedly vetoed (Amini et al., 2013, p. 72).

### **Syria; The Arena of Unity between Iran and Russia**

All the actors present in Syria's developments know very well that Iran has a permanent but unpredictable presence in Syria. Iran did not intend to establish a military base in Syria before the crisis. That is still the case today. The Syrian crisis issue is so important to Iran that Tehran will not be willing to quickly lose what it sees as its strategic depth in the region.

As stated by some political analysts, it is hard to find another country other than Iran whose relations with Moscow could experience such a huge number of drastic twists and changes in a short period of time. In Moscow's view, volatility of bilateral relations could be explained by the fact that between 1991-2012, Russian

national interests in Iran played a secondary role in determining the Kremlin's approaches towards the Islamic Republic. In most cases, the Kremlin's diplomacy in Iran was shaped by drivers of Russian foreign policy that were not always directly connected to Tehran. Among these drivers the following played the most important role:

1. Russia's interest in maintaining a certain level of positive dialogue with the West (especially the United States).
2. Russia's interest in ensuring its dominance in the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) space as the zone of Russia's national aspirations.
3. Russia's interest in securing stability around the borders of the CIS and Russia (which included Russia's interests in the deterrence of nuclear proliferation) (Dutkiewicz & Kozhanov, 2016, p. 4).

Vladimir Putin's rule has two aims: 1) preserve the system of patronage and personal enrichment he and his allies created after breaking the power of the original oligarchs established in the 1990s; and 2) restore Russia's role on the world stage and reassert its sphere of influence. The regime is opportunistic and focused on survival and profit. That survival is dependent on a base level of economic stability essentially, preventing a recurrence of the volatility of the 1990s and entrenching the regime in the identity of the nation-state. Recent cooperation between Russia and Iran has encouraged the perception that Moscow has influence over Tehran; indeed, Russia has acted as a de facto representative of Iranian positions in talks with other regional players such as the United States and Israel. However, the Russia-Iran relationship is better characterized as opportunism rather than as a binding alliance. The United States should seek to highlight differences between the two states' objectives (Brockwehl, et Al, 2018, pp. 6-7).

Despite the cooperation in Syria, there are many difficulties in the path of cooperation between Iran and Russia, making the Syrian crisis the only

common ground for convergence. These factors are:

- Russia's efforts in 2018 to withdraw Iranian forces from Syria and play a more independent role in Syria's equations
- The Iranians' historical skepticism towards Russia and its intensification during the case of the S-300 systems and Russia's contradictory tendency towards Saudi Arabia and Israel.
- Russia's fear of Iran's power and the spread of Islamist influence in Central Asia
- Poor economic convergence between Iran and Russia, especially during Trump's administration, not supporting Iran against Western sanctions and Russia's efforts to gain concessions from Iran.
- Security relations between Russia, Israel, and Saudi Arabia and Iran's annoyance with Russia's double standards.
- Russia's weakness over the West and Iran's efforts to get closer to the European Union as a more secure partner against Russia.

For Iran, the nexus with Moscow carries many potential risks and could also backfire through divergences on specific objectives. Many outstanding issues between Iran and Russia need further careful monitoring:

- 1- Iran and Russia will remain significant competitors on energy markets
- 2- Russia aims to remain the main gateway for the export of Central Asia's vast natural resources and in the light of Iran's post-JCPOA rapprochement with the West may start seeing Iran as a threat to this ambition
- 3- Russia will remain cautious and suspicious over Iran's post-revolutionary Islamic ideology, taking into consideration its already fragile set of challenges (i.e., the rise of Islamic extremism)
- 4- Russia will tread carefully with Iran and may be willing to compromise the nexus in order to broaden its cooperation with the United States,

Gulf states or Israel, especially for the development of lucrative arms trade deals (Kurzanalysen, 2017, p. 1).

At the beginning of the crisis, Russia had a relatively neutral and even passive approach. But with the intensification of the crisis and the emergence of regional and international alliances and some internal changes within Russia, this country tried to play the role of mediator and participate in international meetings. As the crisis intensified and became internationalized, the Russians' approach changed dramatically, and they emerged as a major power, trying to play a more prominent role alongside Iran in the Syrian developments. After the chemical attack in Syria, the issue became much more severe, and the military presence replaced taking mere positions. Fear of Russia's presence led to the issue of a military strike on Syria. Moscow went on to take a more authoritative stance against the international and regional opposition and vetoed anti-Syrian resolutions in the Security Council. Thus, in the Syrian crisis, Russia seeks to end the unipolar system. Russia tries to make it clear to the West that the era of unilateralism is over. Russia has explicitly acknowledged this in its national security and foreign policy, and we have seen it in the positions and statements of Putin and other Russian officials in recent years, especially after 2012.

Although Russia has serious competition with Iran over economic issues and its future influence on Syria's political structure, it is unlikely that they vote to eliminate Iran from Syria in their meetings with Bolton and his Israeli counterparts in June. This does not mean that there is no dispute between Iran and Russia, nor does it mean a lack of coordination between Russia and the West. It indicates that Russia does not match the data and output if it plays in the U.S. puzzle. Hence, the Russians will continue to manage the Syrian crisis and continue to engage with all parties, including Iran and Israel.

To maintain its position alongside its strategic alliance with Iran, Russia is trying to prevent further escalation of the crisis through Turkey. In this regard,

when Turkey was able to cover the distance of about 115 km from Tal abyaz to Ras al-Ain near the M4 highway, the Kurds were forced to leave the area, Russia has agreed to suspend its attacks under Article 10. However, Turkey's concerns about the Syrian Kurds and some terrorist acts have led to some kind of tacit agreement between Turkey, the United States, and Russia, according to which the right to have limited military operations for Turkey in parts of northern Syria has been accepted. There is no official and reliable information on the agreement between these three important actors in Syria. However, it seems unlikely that this action was taken without Russia's coordination with Iran. On the other hand, it is not yet clear what concessions Turkey has made to Russia. However, it can be assumed that Russia will have to give a number of concessions to actors such as Turkey to bring all the actors together for negotiations.

### **Russia's Behavioral Pattern and Foreign Policy in Syria**

From the late 1950s to the late 1980s, with Egypt's withdrawal from the Soviet Union, Syria was Moscow's most important ally in the Middle East. During this period, the Syrian army was always equipped with the most advanced Russian military equipment. With the delivery of SAM-50 missiles to Syria, Moscow tried to change the region's balance against Israel. Among those in Russia who supported Syria against Israel were Yuri Andropov and Konstantin Chernenko. Andropov revealed his firm determination to support the Soviet Union's allies by sending Soviet troops and Sam-500 to Syria. In the years following the collapse, Russia had continued its proximity to Syria in the form of a desire to resolve global issues (Akhraddin, 2013, p. 53). For the Kremlin leaders, the fall of the Syrian political system means losing their last allies in the Middle East. In other words, it means NATO's entry into the realm of Russia's interests, the weakening of Russia's international credibility and position, and finally, the failure to implement the principles of the

Russian National Security Doctrine (Shahramnia, 2015, p. 136).

The Russians are eagerly pursuing two primary goals and two secondary goals in Syria. Russia's primary goals include securing its strategic interests in Syria on the one hand and resolving threats and terrorism on the other. Nevertheless, Russia's secondary goals include two issues: identity and prestige. Russia seeks to turn the Syrian issue into a matter of reviving Russia's international position as a major world power and parallel to the United States, which can play a significant role in managing global crises. Moreover, Russia is using the Syrian crisis to revive its position in the Middle East. Russia prefers to manage the Syrian crisis so that all goals are achieved, even to a minimum (Shuri, 2016, pp.1-2). Russia also has significant financial interests in Syria. Selling weapons to Syria could be one of Russia's most important interests. Along with India, China, Venezuela, and some other countries, Syria is one of the primary buyers of Russian weapons. Russia benefits from arms sales to countries such as Syria in several ways. First, in the global arms market, it can achieve significant financial benefits; in other words, in the competition with other arms dealers, Russia can always have buyers for its products. Also, the sale of weapons has a significant effect, and that is the military dependence of the buyer and consequently, the dependence of other parts of the buyers' countries to Russia (Zargar, 72, p. 2013).

Russia's interests in Syria far outweigh any other point in the Arab region. Syria's proximity to Israel, the undisputed ally of the West, its proximity to Iraq, Lebanon, Jordan, and Saudi Arabia, has been hailed as a gateway to the Arab world and the Western world's interests. Apart from all this, Russia has a significant presence in Syria. Russia views Syria as a realm because of its dominance over Tartus's port and its traditional ties between Damascus (Rezazadeh, Najafi, 2016, p. 175).

Russia's most important goals in the Middle East, especially in Syria, are:

- Preventing the West from being more present in the Middle East and preventing elites aligned with the United States from gaining power.
- Promoting international power, attracting more allies, and arranging new patterns of friendship and enmity.
- Military and economic benefits, primarily through arms sales and more significant presence in regional markets.
- Creating new strategies to achieve better opportunities in the global arena and achieving more leverage to confront the West.

According to Sharp and Blanchard, the Syrian crisis is the arena of competition between the two groups of international and regional powers, whose strategies and strategies are at odds with each other. Most countries close to the United States, such as Turkey, most European actors, Saudi Arabia, and Qatar, have supported Bashar al-Assad's opponents in various ways. On the other hand, some countries and Militia led by Iran and Russia have insisted on supporting Syria's ruling regime in various ways. Of course, in the meantime, some countries have taken a vague approach (Sharp & Blanchard, 2013). However, the approach of countries such as China can be considered closer to Iran and Russia than the United States.

Putin's policy during his first term in office was based on Russian society's economic weaknesses. During the U.S. invasion of Iraq and Afghanistan to confront terrorism, we saw a sort of confusion in Russia's foreign policy. Putin first cooperates with U.S. policies to combat terrorism, but he later withdrew. In fact, Russia opposed the U.S. invasion of Iraq, one of Russia's most traditional allies. However, given its policy of maintaining the status quo, Russia tried to avoid a challenge with the United States and the West, which was costly (Akhraddin, 2013, p.54).

President Putin attempted to strengthen the geopolitical positions of Russia against the US, primarily in the Middle East as the majority of conflicts in this part of the world are, at the very least, viewed differently by Moscow and Washington. At the same

time, one should not underestimate the strong domestic motive behind such a move – to divert the attention of Putin’s base electorate from domestic issues to the “outside threat.” This threat is portrayed as being capable of undermining the Kremlin’s efforts to stabilize the situation in Russia and in its near neighborhood. For example, in the Beslan attack “some circles in Saudi Arabia” were quickly pointed to by Moscow as the key outside sponsors to blame (Shumilin, 2014, p.3).

Putin has actively promoted the image of himself as a modern (re) uniter and protector of Russian greatness. Unable to reconcile itself to the West’s vision and values, Russia has sought to reassert itself as an alternative diplomatic and military power, featuring lower standards for human rights and democracy coupled with access to and willingness to use vast natural resources and territory. Russia has used protection of Russian minorities or former Russian territory as a pretext for its attacks on Georgia and Ukraine and support for frozen conflicts in Moldova and Armenia. With its armament and support of the Syrian regime in the face of fierce international criticism, Russia has acted to protect its interests outside its traditional sphere of influence (Brockwehl, et al, 2018, p.7).

Putin’s presidency has emphasised on strengthening its relations with the Middle East. Two distinct ways of strengthen Russian soft power has been through broadcasting the Russian TV channel “Russia today”, not just in Syria, but all over the Middle East and a huge increase of Russian export market to the Islamic world (Kozhanov, 2016, p. 10). Enter Syria. Russia had three main reasons to join the Syrian conflict in the way that it did in September 2015. The first was for domestic political consumption. Putin needed to demonstrate to the Russian people that Russia’s power had not atrophied under his rule. The second reason was for international consumption. He needed to prove to the United States that Russia was still a formidable power and that it would not hesitate to intervene in areas where the U.S. was already

engaged. The Assad regime in Syria was a historical friend of the Soviet Union and was both looked down on by Western sensibilities and in danger of being overrun by the various rebel and opposition groups fighting it – the Islamic State among them. The groups arrayed against the Assad regime were small enough that a limited Russian deployment could help stabilize Assad’s forces: Russia deployed about 70 aircraft of various types, with around 5,000 support personnel to protect and maintain its air assets. This was not a major deployment, but it was enough to steady the Assad regime and enable it to push back against its enemies (Shapiro, 2017, p. 8). Russia also seeks to strengthen its presence in crisis areas, such as: Georgia, Ukraine and the Crimea, and it are seeking a strong presence in Syria. Russia wants to use its political expertise and exploit opportunities. It believes that the Arab Spring’s legacy can be controlled to serve its own interests, especially given the abandonment of the U.S. of its allies. For example, abandoning the Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak, the United States lost its credibility to the Allies in exchange for Russia’s commitment with its allies; an example is its position towards President Bashar al-Assad in the Syrian crisis, Russia entered strongly in the and Syrian crisis, and stood by the Syrian regime forces, supported military maneuvers, retained its naval base in Tartus, and established air bases in Latakia; in doing so, it provided a positive review to the Syrian ally, some viewed them with credibility, and they embodied their position on the Syrian allies (BaniSalameh & Mashagbeh, 2018, p. 32).

A review of Russia’s behavior in the face of the Syrian crisis shows that they can no longer wait and watch the events in Libya and Egypt, and color revolutions in Georgia. Accordingly, they seek to preserve yesterday’s allies and gain new and influential allies such as Iran. For Russian, the fall of the Syrian political system means losing their last allies in the Middle East. In other words, that means NATO’s entry into the realm of Russia’s national security doctrine. In fact, regime change in Syria and establishing a

government aligned with the United States and its Arab allies mean an end to Russia's presence in the Middle East and the Mediterranean's strategic region. This is the last step to limit Russia within its borders. This policy has been pursued since 2001 by the United States in the Balkans, Central Asia, and the Caucasus.

Russia's absence from some of the Friends of Syria Group meetings is also a reason for Russia's support for political stability in Syria. "Our position on unilateral meetings, called Friends of Syria, is unchangeable," said a spokesman for the Russian Foreign Ministry's Press and Information Office. Emphasizing that the Syrians, not foreigners, should resolve the Syrian crisis, Russia said that supporting the parties involved in Syria and granting them international legitimacy would be to the detriment of the Syrian government and cannot solve the main problem of the country (Akhreddin, 2013, p. 62).

Before intervening militarily in Syria in September 2015, Russia had two poor choices: a) intervening and being part of the Syrian civil war, or worse, b) not intervening and facing the consequences of no-action. Although Russia knew that the situation in the Syria was very problematic, with violations of human rights and criminal actions by the Syrian army, it was motivated to intervene by the following six tactical factors:

1. To preserve Syria as a singular and secular state (preferably with but possibly without Bashar al-Assad as head of state). Russia has consistently criticized the doctrine of regime change and opposed every attempt by the US-led coalition to impose it on Syria.
2. To avoid the collapse of a friendly regime and a tragic scenario like that in Libya, where the removal of Gaddafi brought about a rapid disintegration of the country<sup>11</sup>. For Russia – at the time of its decision to support Assad militarily –the possibility of Syria becoming a “failed state”, eventually governed by multiple regional/local warlords competing with IS was very realistic indeed.
3. To show the capacity to break the US-led coalition's “security umbrella” and demonstrate Russia's military

capacity, including use of some of the most advanced weapons in the Russian arsenal<sup>13</sup>; also to prevent further Western-led military interventions in Russian areas of interests.

4. To protect Russia's national security by eliminating as many potential enemies and Islamic radicals (terrorists) as possible before the possible return to Russia of the estimated 4000-5000 Russian-born IS fighters that are currently in Syria and Iraq.
5. To prevent Muslim radicalism/IS or similar groups from mushrooming in Central Asia and/or destabilizing the region and challenging current regimes, which is a very important area for Russia and China's future economic development and mutual cooperation. (Dutkiewicz & Kozhanov, 2016, p. 9).

The Syria crisis is one theater where Russia projects itself as a competitor in great power politics. It has taken advantage of opportunities there to strengthen ties with U.S. allies in the region and present itself as a powerful broker of regime security, undermining U.S. influence in the process. A key tactical partner in this effort is Iran. Because Russia consistently defines its interest in opposition to those of the West, its short-term tactics may have negative and destabilizing long-term consequences. Moscow's intervention on behalf of the regime of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad has precluded the United States' preferred outcome of regime change; bolstered the regional position of Russia's tactical ally, Iran, a rival of the United States and its regional allies; and created opportunities for Russia to build constructive relationships with various American allies and undermine U.S. influence in the Middle East. Although Russia has stabilized Assad's position, it may have increased the potential for conflict in the long term, particularly between Israel and the Iranian forces and militias in southern Syria (Brockwehl, et al, 2018, pp. 6-7).

On March 14 2016, Putin declared a bold move: a partial withdrawal of Russian military forces from Syria. However, the West should not be deceived by this move. Kremlins current motives are not a full

withdrawal. The withdrawal was limited and included a portion of Russian military force. Russia still has two large military bases up and running where they train, support and provide the Assad regime with necessary equipment. The partial withdrawal clearly demonstrates that Russia, Kremlin and Putin's intentions were about keeping the Assad's regime in place. This has given Russia more Power and kept the West out, not battling terrorism, IS or peace settlements. Russia always claimed to give aid to Assad because he is the only one who can control the chaos that Syria is in. But the withdrawal of Russian troops occurred while IS still controlled a large part of the Syrian territory (Kozhanov, 2016, p. 72). The Russian intention with Syria was not just to fight terrorism, the Islamic state and solely save the regime on its shoulders. The priority has always been to re-establish military and political capacities for Assad. Meaning a threat to Damascus is an indirect threat to Russia and its interest. Therefore, has all groups, even Western supported "rebel" groups immediately become a target of Russian air strikes and military force. Although neither Russia, Kremlin nor Putin has ever acknowledged this as their top-priority. Russia and its officials have always insisted that their goal with the intervention in Syria is and always has been to bomb the Islamic State (Söderlund, 2017, p. 31).

Given Russia's approach, their solution for the Syrian crisis is a combination of war and peace. Russia's expected behavioral pattern concerning the Syrian crisis include, the gradual elimination of the opposition (especially the Syrian groups affiliated with the United States and Saudi Arabia), the reduction of violence and the holding conferences and meetings to achieve minimal sharing with the Assad government (Inside Syria), creating groups, aligned with its interests, to make a greater impact on the future of developments and political power in Syria, making the Assad government dependent on its military weapons, and ultimately creating an allied country and taking advantage of the Syrian government's power and its allies, especially Hezbollah and the Islamic Republic of

Iran, as a tool to threaten the interests of Western actors. Russia, along with Iran, disagreed with the peace talks with Assad's opponents. Therefore, Russia is trying to persuade China to take action, such as countering Security Council resolutions, to prevent a situation like Libya's.

Russia has been a key player in balancing power against reaching an agreement on further intervention in Syria. Russia is likely to spend more to use its military approach in the Mediterranean and "decisive" military aid to Syria to deter the United States and its allies from aggravating Syria's situation and eliminating their opportunities for intervention in the east. Nevertheless, other members of a BRIC Nations group, including Brazil, Russia, India, and China, are expected to cooperate with Russia, at least at the Security Council level. Until 2014, such forces prevented the Security Council from drafting a resolution against Bashar al-Assad's government in Syria (Mosallanejad, 2017, p. 133).

As the Syrian crisis continues, Russia has proposed an international monitoring plan on Syria's chemical weapons, according to which Syrian chemical weapons will be moved to Russia or another country. The U.S.-Russia agreement on the proposed plan has halted a military strike on Syria. Following the agreement, Western countries, along with some countries such as Saudi Arabia, Turkey, France, and the United Arab Emirates, called for the issuance of resolutions under Chapter VII of the UN Charter on Security Council aimed at forcing Syria to cooperate with international inspectors to eliminate its chemical weapons. If the commitment is violated, military action against Syria will be on the international agenda. Finally, a resolution proposed by the United States, Britain, and France on Syria's chemical disarmament was presented to the Security Council. With Russia and China's satisfaction, resolution 2118 was finally adopted by the member states of the Security Council on September 27, 2013.

Given some of Russia's behavior with Turkey, it is understood that Russia has adjusted its position on

Syria. However, at the same time, with the presence of Russian warships and its extensive naval exercises, with the presence of Black Sea and Baltic navies, it can be concluded that Russia adheres to its previous strategy of opposing military intervention and unilateral foreign action in Syria. In this regard, Russia began its largest naval exercise after the collapse of the Soviet Union in the Mediterranean, the Black Sea, and near the Syrian coast to remind the nature of its relations with Syria (Adami, Akhraddin, 2013, p. 65).

## **Conclusion**

In the present study, the United States and Russia's foreign policy and behavior patterns were evaluated. The findings indicate that the developments in Syria since 2011 have been an arena for competition between regional and trans-regional powers, each of which has used different approaches, ultimately leading to more challenges. The Syrian crisis is, in fact, the most crucial confrontation between Russia and the United States in modern times, and will have significant consequences for other issues. Most international relations analysts believe that U.S. foreign policy in the Syrian crisis has been very erratic, confusing, and ambiguous and that this is due to several important issues, including Obama and Donald Trump's differing views, changes in the status of Assad's allies, Russia's entry into the crisis, confusion and ambiguity in U.S. foreign policy strategy, fear of the outcome of the crisis, and ultimately different roles for U.S. allies, especially Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and Qatar.

Under the Obama administration, the United States has failed to take effective action in Syria except to condemn it and impose sanctions to put pressure on Syria. Even in the case of more actions, the United States was concerned about other international actors. There were also challenges such as Russia's and China's lack of support in the Security Council that overshadowed U.S. plans. A review of the U.S. National Security Doctrine by Barack Obama and Donald Trump in various regions of the world,

especially in the three strategic regions (Europe, East Asia, and West Asia), shows a marked change in U.S. defense and security strategy. Over the past decade, factors such as the high and fruitless costs of direct intervention in West Asian developments, diminished importance of West Asian energy, confronting China and advancing U.S. economic interests in East Asia, and Russia's presence in various regions and its conflicting interests with the United States (Russia's intervention in the developments in Ukraine, military presence in Syria) have had a serious impact on Washington's policy in the field of defense-security policy.

The American approach to the Syrian crisis is largely based on patterns of balance and restraint. They seek to weaken Iran's axis of power in the Middle East and minimize potential threats against Israel. However, the Americans are well aware that the Middle East's situation is not the same as in the past, and that regional powers have an important role to play in changing issues at the international level. The issue of power change at the international system level in regional and trans-regional centers has become inevitable. On the other hand, after 2011, Americans' presence in the Middle East has decreased, and it is no longer possible to predict and manage developments as before. Accordingly, the United States is trying to prevent the Assad regime from gaining power in Syria by supporting the Assad government's opponents. Since the Obama administration, the West Asian strategy has changed dramatically, and Donald Trump has sought to reduce military costs for the United States based on the U.S. First policy. Some incentives of the change in West Asia's strategy are: to prioritize the economy in U.S. foreign policy, the reduction in the importance of West Asian energy, complicate developments in West Asia, the idea of the need for an indirect U.S. presence in the region, and ultimately the idea of the East Asian rotation policy.

Therefore, the Syrian crisis is one of the most important US foreign policy issues in the current



decade. Different approaches have always been used to achieve the desired concessions. In general, it can be said that American foreign policy follows two general approaches: First, a relatively moderate approach that pursues military policy through its regional allies, and second, irregular military intervention and insistence on the Assad government's fall. Of course, in the meantime, pursuing peace talks, especially from 2015 onwards, has been on the agenda.

When Putin came to power in 2000, his primary priority was to restore Russia's long-standing national interests, away from specific Russian prejudices. With the start of the Syrian crisis, Putin has repeatedly stated that he will not allow the repetition of Libya's events in Syria. Russia's involvement in the Syrian civil war began with the outbreak of war. Russia tried to increase its political weight in the international arena by placing Russian advisers among the Syrian military. They used their veto power to prevent any possible action and condemnation by international organizations against Bashar al-Assad's regime. It should be noted that the Russians have played a key role in reaching an agreement to disarm the Assad regime's chemical weapons. Russia's actions in Syria as a "veto player" have led to their satisfaction and the necessary solutions.

Putin first sought to overcome them by recognizing Russia's weaknesses and problems, then by following the path of the great power of the past. The issue of Israel is one of the most critical issues regarding Russia's behavior in Syria. Despite deep animosity between Iran and Israel, Russia will consider Israel's interests for two reasons. Of course, this strategy has probably been coordinated with Iran. These two reasons are 1. The Russians and the Iranians know that the Syrian issue is beyond the scope of the Palestinian issue and that issues cannot be tied together, and their degree of importance is different. Accordingly, the protection of Israel's interests has been pursued only in the face of the

Syrian crisis and will be continued until the crisis is resolved, not forever (at least, on the part of Iran). 2. Despite much disagreement between Russia and the United States, they both know that they have many interests in Syria. Russia has deep economic and security ties with Israel, and considering Tel Aviv's interests can be the beginning of some collaboration between the two great powers.

Russia's pattern of behavior toward the Arabian Middle East is based on their security concerns about the United States' ambiguous and dual approach and its allies to popular revolutions. They believe that the ambiguous and contradictory behavior and the silence of Western countries and the United States have led to human rights violations and human values in the Middle East. Accordingly, they interpret the behavior of actors such as Iran and Syria towards the United States as a result of not accepting the unilateral hegemony of the United States. They also believe that the West is trying to impose its values in the region and manage regional developments in favor of the West. Therefore, serious resistance has been put up by the region's people and the revisionist countries, such as Iran.

Russia's type of action in the developments in the West Asian region in general and in the Syrian crisis in particular, shows the country's interaction with all actors. Accompanied by Iran, the Russians in Syria were able to keep Assad in power. Russia could pursue political and military processes with Turkey's relative coordination and, to some extent, Iran. Moreover, it did not take a firm stand against Israeli attacks on Syria. Thus, Russia has so far not pursued a policy of elimination in the face of any of the parties involved in the Syrian crisis. In 2019 and 2020, Syria's peace talks were pursued while solutions to key issues remained weak, including issues such as the Syrian Kurds, Turkey's unilateral clashes, disputes over Idlib, and the dispersal of Assad's opponents. Therefore, there is a difficult path to peace.

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