



# THE RESURGENCE OF RUSSIA

*- A case study examining the reasons for the Kremlin to intervene in Syria and its new modus operandi -*

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## ABSTRACT

This study focuses on how Russia, in modern days, through historical and current relations with Syria, is reasserting itself as a global political force to be reckoned with. The research methodology chosen is a comparative case study that uses qualitative research methods to develop the case based on existing data. The theoretical framework is primarily based on two theorists, representing the two major schools in international relations: realism and liberalism. By applying the two popular theories and discussing their relevance to Russia's approach, it allows for a rationalisation of the intervention. Moscow's involvement in Syria has become a turning point in the U.S. led, multilateral world order of today. Since the dissolution of the Soviet Union, liberalism appeared to be Russia's only way to go on the international stage. The study however finds that the U.S. often uses "multilateralist cooperation" flexibly in regards that suit its interest; with the purpose of achieving consensus for its policies. Russia is following a realist approach in Syria and figures that if liberals can interpret the role of multilateral decision making in an easy-going manner, then they can too. The study concludes by claiming that this ideological divide has turned Syria into a battleground where Russia wants to show what it is capable of.

***Keywords: Russia, U.S., Afghan Syndrome, Pax Americana, Realism, Liberalism, Multilateralism, Perpetual Peace, Kant, Hobbes***

## **TABLE OF CONTENTS**

Abstract .....	2
Research Question and Purpose of the Case Study .....	4
Methodology and Method .....	5
Theoretical Framework .....	7
Previous Research .....	9
Background .....	9
Since the 1970's .....	11
The Afghan Syndrome .....	13
End of the Cold War - Arab spring .....	14
Russia in Syria, Syria in the World .....	17
Clash of Ideologies.....	19
Results .....	20
Pax Americana & Multilateralism.....	20
Strategy & Goals of Kremlin .....	22
Kant, Hobbes & Reality .....	25
Analysis.....	28
Conclusion.....	31
List of References.....	34

## ***RESEARCH QUESTION AND PURPOSE OF THE CASE STUDY***

- What has the historical relationship between Russia and Syria been since the 1970's and how can a contemporary intervention from their side be viewed rationally?
- How does Russia's intervention in Syria manifest its realist approach to foreign policy and does it challenge the multilateral world order?

The purpose of this study is to focus on Russia and examine the rationale behind its intervention in the Syrian civil war, a conflict that will be remembered as a milestone in the contemporary history of the Middle East. The war has not only left its marks on the domestic political situation in Syria, but it has evidently changed the political relations between major powers worldwide. The civil war prompted a large part of the population to seek refuge abroad, challenging the EU's cohesion on the matter like never before in its history; it made the United States fearful of commitment to a long-lasting conflict; it saw the establishment of ISIS and gave room for regional powers to fight proxy wars with one another. Until 2015 no one believed that an intervention from the Russian side would be plausible given that the region had long seen the United States militarily involved. Nevertheless, the Russians with their objectives set and their commitment to supporting their ally Bashar al-Assad, commenced their Syrian operation on September 30, 2015. What is the rational explanation for a military intervention in a country that puts the Russian diplomatic ties with multiple countries at risk? Also, how is the Syrian civil war playing a significant role for the long-term political assertion Russia aims to achieve vis à vis the American influence. As such, these questions are related to and are seeking to emphasise the initially posed two questions at the beginning of this chapter.

The United States is an essential actor to include in the research albeit, it is important to highlight that the paper due to limitation in time and scope, is not focusing on the American role proportionately in comparison to the role of Russia. As for the purpose of why this study is important, understanding why the dominant actor in the conflict is acting the way it does seems necessary. A substantial discussion regarding the Russian intervention in the civil war could assist in understanding the causality of actions. As described vividly in the summary of the scholar Alexei Vassiliev's book, *Kremlin's Middle East policy: The Syrian problem* is so

tragic and multifaceted, and its role in Russia's regional and global policy is so great, that a detailed presentation of facts and their analysis are required.<sup>1</sup>

This is why the particular case of Syria is significant and could prove instrumental in examining a new paradigm of Russian foreign policy, post- Cold War. To illustrate the differences in Western versus Russian foreign policy approaches, the paper will make use of two popular international relations theories, *liberalism* and *realism*, each represented by a theorist from the respective schools of thought. Thomas Hobbes and Immanuel Kant will manifest the application of the two different foreign policy approaches in this case. Throughout the study, there is an underlying understanding that the U.S. represents a liberal world order while Russia a strictly realist one. That having been said, the study's main purpose is to rationalise the approach of Russia and examine to what extent, the intervention in the Syrian civil war possibly means to challenge a multilateral world order.

## **METHODOLOGY AND METHOD**

*Methodology* and *method* are two separate aspects that need to be differentiated because, while methodology is about the overall structure the study follows, method stands for the tools applied in order to conduct the research.<sup>2</sup> The methodology chosen and applied for this particular case study is qualitative nevertheless it is important to firstly clarify the ontological and epistemological concepts that in turn shape the methodology. To describe the phenomenon of the Russian rationale and the reason for it to intervene, the constructivist-ontological position<sup>3</sup> happens to be the most relevant one to adopt. It is complemented with the interpretivist-epistemological position, meaning that unlike an epistemological-positivist the researcher believes reality is only studied by interpreting.<sup>4</sup> Historical relations among states, ideological understandings and strategical ambitions are ambiguous most of the time and require interpretative approaching. The nature of the study requires that actions from state-actors and patterns be discovered through contextualisation so that it can give answers to the research questions posed initially. Those research questions outlined in the chapter *Research questions and Purpose of Thesis* are the underlying reason for the research methods used. As indicated

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<sup>1</sup> Vassiliev A, *Russia's Middle East Policy*, p.439.

<sup>2</sup> Chowdhury R, "Embarking on research in the social sciences", pp.101-110.

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> *ibid.*

previously, the data is not one that is easily measurable or value-free instead it is socially constructed and context based. That is why this comparative case study has an extensive historical research segment aiming to contextualise and create understanding<sup>5</sup> for the present situation. This comparative case study utilises two popular international relations theories, liberalism and realism to study Russia's intervention. The two theories are part of the study's method since they are instruments for answering the research questions. Both liberalism and realism have a vast array of sub-groups inspired by distinct understanding of the World, therefore it was decided to only incorporate one philosopher from each field in this study. They were selected to make the case based on preconceived knowledge of their respective approaches as well as their relevance to the subject. Relevance of course is relative and that is why material like the interview with Mikhail Bogdanov and the Pentagon statement, included further ahead, guided my choice of theories.

Another important aspect to the case study that needs to be discussed is how it stands in relation to the terminology, validity and reliability. Knowing that the case study is one that follows qualitative methodology, the words validity and reliability will be exchanged with the term trustworthiness and consistency.<sup>6</sup> Trustworthiness and consistency still entail the same things as validity and reliability however, this qualitative case study does not use numerical data meaning that the two aspects are measured in a different manner. The reason for this has to do with the constructivist-ontological approach previously mentioned that relies on the interpretation of data and not just the presentation of it. Relevant data for the research is of both secondary and primary nature. The case is built on years of evolving relations, creating a pattern, therefore sources of the collected data are from various authors and experts in the field of Russia, the Middle East as well as international relations. This poses an obvious issue of bias that was partially dealt with using peer reviewed articles, books and articles whose authors seem trustworthy and academic. One example is Dmitri Trenin whose book, *What is Russia up to in the Middle East*, I cite; he is head of the world-renowned think tank Carnegie Endowment for International Peace- Moscow office. The other part that seems necessary to mention in how this study worked towards high trustworthiness is the triangulation of sources i.e. looking at the given topic from various perspectives. By triangulation I refer to the comparative nature of the historical and ideological perceptions that were analysed by being deconstructed and put to test.

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<sup>5</sup> Chowdhury R, "Embarking on research in the social sciences", pp.101-110

<sup>6</sup> *ibid.*

The consistency of this study can be considered high in spite of it being plausible for misinterpretations of the ideological contributions of liberalism and realism. As I come to mention at a later stage, both Thomas Hobbes and Immanuel Kant are said to have been misinterpreted by historians, researchers and politicians over time. Their contributions date back to the Renaissance which in turn makes it difficult to interpret their views the exact same way as they perhaps envisioned they should be. In my opinion this does affect the trustworthiness to some extent, however, not enough to damage the consistency of the study. This can partially be motivated by the fact that I incorporate various authors' interpretations that in turn carry or find flaws in each other's conclusions. The other part as to why the trustworthiness remained high is because I set up the condition for theories used to be anchored in real-life examples, that way the interpretations could be considered relevant or not.

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

The theoretical framework of this study sets out to accentuate the context adopted for the conduction of the research. I am referring here to the theories and concepts that are of instrumental importance for the rationalization and justification of Russia's behaviour in this case. Liberalism and realism, that will be defined later on, as mentioned previously make for two grand theories within international relations and security policy discourses. They are implemented in this study due to their affinities to Russian respective U.S. foreign policy convictions. This is made clear by Miller<sup>7</sup> when he describes the two powers' approach to foreign policy during the cold war. However, due to the amount of subbranches related to the great theories the ones chosen as relevant are Thomas Hobbes representing a worldview shaped by classical realism and Immanuel Kant embodying the liberal approach. The incorporation of two classical philosophers, that have influenced their respective theories as well as the general international relations field, is utmost useful considering the existing rivalry between Russia's and the United States' dominating approach to conflicts and diplomacy. Hobbes<sup>8</sup> and his view of mankind as utterly egoistic and aggression as a prevalent threat makes for a great embodiment and analysis of the Russian intervention in Syria. While Kant, is often attributed with setting up and shaping a framework that sets out to sustain international peace<sup>9</sup>, an

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<sup>7</sup> Miller B, "Contrasting Explanations for Peace".

<sup>8</sup> Korab-Karpowicz, J, "Political Realism in International Relations".

<sup>9</sup> Buchan B, "Explaining War and Peace: Kant and Liberal IR Theory".

important part of the U.S.'s foreign policy approach. Since the end of the second world war, perpetual peace and the establishment of an international liberal order with a global government, in the form of the League of Nations and later on the United Nations, became the dominating goals of the West.<sup>10</sup> The following quote underlines Kant's importance to the implementation of liberalist ideas in modern days, "Kant has even in-filtrated the State Department. Giving full credit to the analysis of Kant, George V. Allen, an assistant secretary, once said: 'The United Nations, with all its virtues, has not yet been able to achieve freedom from fear. The reason is easy to understand. Its second most powerful member is not a democracy.'" <sup>11</sup>

In the study there are key terms such as *Afghan syndrome* and *Pax Americana* that either conceptualise ideas from applied theories or are somehow relevant to the background of the conflict. The Afghan syndrome remains Russia's earliest encounter with Muslim guerrilla and thus, acted as a precautionary tale against how not to approach similar actors in the future.<sup>12</sup> Pax Americana or an American World Order as utilised by Daniel J. Sargent replaces what others would describe as a liberal world order and comprises it as<sup>13</sup> " /.../ a hierarchical configuration of international relations, in which the United States exercises singular responsibilities for order. /.../ American power also constitutes an institutional framework for international order. This framework is the Pax Americana." I contend that multilateralism has to some extent been promoted by the U.S. in the post-Cold War period to protect its interests<sup>14</sup>, making it an illegitimate concept. This is historically exemplified through the way that the United States after the Second World War had become the supreme power in the West.<sup>15</sup> Hence after the transition to a post-Cold War world, the U.S. continued acting under the unilateral premise of the Pax Americana to protect its interests abroad.<sup>16</sup> By applying international relations theories of liberalism that resonates with the U.S. foreign policy and realism that is

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<sup>10</sup> Waltz K, "Kant, Liberalism and War".

<sup>11</sup> Waltz K, "Kant, Liberalism and War", p.331.

<sup>12</sup>Trenin D, *What is Russia up to in the Middle East*.

<sup>13</sup> Sargent D, "Pax Americana: Sketches for an Undiplomatic History", pp.2-5.

<sup>14</sup> MacDonald J, *When Globalization Fails*, p.199.

<sup>15</sup> *ibid*.

<sup>16</sup> MacDonald J, *When Globalization Fails*, p.199.



associated to Russia, there can be a discussion on Moscow's relation to Pax Americana respectively a multilateral world order.

## **PREVIOUS RESEARCH**

A vast array of scholarly work exists on the topic of the Syrian civil war. The studies range from discourse analyses through the perspective of Russia and the United States, to their economic ambitions for the region or how they adhere to various ideological premises. There are plenty of examples of studies examining the bilateral relations of the United States and respectively Russia with Iran, Turkey or Israel. In brief, the list is extensive. The questions this study set out to examine, are best answered by giving a historical context of Russia's relationship to the region leading up until today, something that is seldom elaborately discussed. Dmitri Trenin contributes to this study with vital insights like the Afghan syndrome that remained in Russian consciousness and sophisticated their approach to foreign policy. James MacDonald on the other hand discusses how the U.S. Department of State's correspondence concerning a hegemonic role on the foreign stage has had to be rephrased by the White House to prevent public outcry. Both sources as well as many other authors of scholarly work are included in this case study aiming to further advance the subject in order to create an understanding for the Russian behaviour.

In applying two classical international relations theories, namely realism and liberalism, the study will focus on a neglected part in previous research. Namely, the ideological structure of Russian contemporary conduct in international affairs seen through the case of the Syrian intervention. This is where the case hopes to add to the list of elaborate work on Russia in Syria. In questioning the established consensus on the notion of a multilateral world order and looking at the U.S. as a liberal and Russia as a realist power, this study examines ideological misconceptions surrounding the powers' behaviour.

## **BACKGROUND**

"A plea for caution"<sup>17</sup>, that is the title of an Op-ed piece in the New York Times written by the incumbent president of the Russian Federation, Vladimir Putin. The purpose of this piece at first glance seems multifaceted but, just after mentioning the U.S.'s and Russia's historical past as allies, it becomes clear that Putin aims to put the U.S. on the spot for an ambitious claim

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<sup>17</sup> Putin V, "A plea for caution".

regarding US “exceptionalism”, made by the then current President of the United States, Barack Obama.<sup>18</sup> Both the op-ed and Obama’s speech were released in 2013, the very early stages of the Syrian civil war. Since then a lot has changed and in October of 2019 the American president, Donald Trump, tweeted “(..) it is time for us to get out of these ridiculous endless wars, many of them tribal, and bring our soldiers home. We will fight where it is to our benefit, and only fight to win”. Turkey, Europe, Syria, Iran, Iraq Russia and the Kurds will now have to figure the situation out, and what they want (...).<sup>19</sup> In a recent publication from 2019, published by the IISS named, *Should We Stay or Should We Go? The United States and the Middle East*<sup>20</sup> it is discussed whether the American withdrawal from the Middle East is a step in the right direction for establishing stability in the region or not. The conclusion being that the U.S.’s ramped up oil output has made them less reliant on Middle Eastern reserves therefore they would not need to maintain military presence in Iraq and Afghanistan. Not only that but there was an overwhelming domestic consensus among Americans that the U.S. should withdraw from the region, the withdrawal would come to be evident.<sup>21</sup> Some scholars such as Daniel Sargent, a history professor at Berkeley University, goes as far as claiming that the Pax Americana, that infers a world that economically and politically is dominated by the United States, is on the downfall.<sup>22</sup> An international order centred upon only the U.S.’s capacities is in today’s world unsustainable.<sup>23</sup> The op-ed that Putin wrote back in 2013 was written as a way of warning that Russia will whatever the cost, stand firm next to its allies not only in Syria but wherever they might be. Russia’s military intervention in Syria in 2015 was a crucial moment for the Kremlin’s ability to shape contemporary Middle East policy and establish itself as a regional actor after a period of absence.<sup>24</sup> To further understand the tension between Russia and the United States and why Moscow decided to intervene in the conflict, it is of importance to clarify the past.

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<sup>18</sup> Putin V, “A plea for caution”.

<sup>19</sup> Breuninger K, “Trump: Others have to ‘figure the situation out’”.

<sup>20</sup> IISS, “Should We Stay or Should We Go? The United States and the Middle East”.

<sup>21</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>22</sup> Sargent D, “Pax Americana: Sketches for an undiplomatic history”

<sup>23</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>24</sup> Rumer E, “Russia in the Middle East: Jack of All Trades, Master of None”.

## SINCE THE 1970'S

At the height of the Cold War the World was divided into two hemispheres, one under the influence of the United States and one under the influence of the Soviet Union. At several instances, did the two archnemesis end up financially or militarily supporting opposite actors and fighting proxy wars in foreign territories.<sup>25</sup>

The Soviet Union considered the Middle Eastern region and several of the leader's regimes there as friendly and had hence developed extensive military, cultural and financial cooperation with them. Getting closer to Middle East states was part of the Soviet strategy to gain influence over the United States. For example, its cooperation with the Egyptian president Gamal Abdel Nasser, who wished to involve the Soviets in the region by increasing military presence by 15 000- 20 000 men, was a decision to make sure that the Arab coalition would be protected in the case of another future war with Israel.<sup>26</sup> Syria, as a socialist nation under the rule of the al-Assad family and the socialist Ba'ath party, also enjoyed the Soviet support in the form of military cooperation and financial investments. Even after the successor of Nasser, Anwar el-Sadat, expelled the Soviet military personnel from Egypt, Syria's president Hafez al-Assad, maintained a very close relationship with the Soviet Union. For Syria, it was also a matter of ideology, al-Assad a hardened socialist leader, was looking up to the Soviet Union as a role model.<sup>27</sup>

The intimacy of the relationship has historically varied a lot due to differences on certain matters. One of the most serious altercations occurred when Syria in 1976 entered Lebanon and attacked the Soviet-allied Lebanese and Palestinian militias.<sup>28</sup> Albeit, Leonid Brezhnev of the Soviet Union urged al-Assad to withdraw from Lebanon, the Syrian president refused.<sup>29</sup> It was first after the Kremlin froze exports of military supplies to Syria and they mutually started fearing the regional upheaval in Egypt as well as a growing Israeli force, that the relations were restored.<sup>30</sup> Hafez al-Assad had by then also come to experience growing economic downturn

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<sup>25</sup> Britannica, "Cold War".

<sup>26</sup> Trenin D, *What is Russia up to in the Middle East?*, p.24.

<sup>27</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>28</sup> Lund A, "From Cold War to Civil War", p.9.

<sup>29</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>30</sup> Lund A, "From Cold War to Civil War", p.9.

and an uprising from Sunni Islamists<sup>31</sup>, which convinced him further on the importance of being on good terms with the Kremlin. As Egypt under el-Sadat started preferring a more moderate political allegiance having U.S. support behind them, the Soviets were received with open hands in Syria by Hafez-al Assad. As a sign of good faith and the Syrian fidelity towards the Soviet regime, the Syrians allowed for the Soviets to use Tartus (a naval port strategically located on the Syrian coast of the Mediterranean) as a supply and maintenance facility.<sup>32</sup> Russia in return transferred as many as 8 000 soldiers to protect Syria and deter Israel from invading the country in 1982 as well as kept a steady inflow of modern military equipment.<sup>33</sup>

The Middle East in the 1980's was as Trenin expressed "very much a Cold War battlefield".<sup>34</sup> While the U.S. had become allies with Turkey, Saudi Arabia and by then Egypt the Iranian revolution had ended the long past of U.S.-Iranian cooperation. This was a huge gain for the Soviets however the Islamic leadership in Iran did not perceive them as the big brother that Syria did, instead they remained vigilant on Soviet cooperation. The Soviets had millions of Muslims within the Caucasian republics of today's Chechnya, Dagestan, Azerbaijan etc. which in turn made them believe that the Iranian revolution could lead to mutiny from within those Soviet Muslim communities. The regime in Moscow saw the American withdrawal from Iran, that in turn neighbours Afghanistan, as a green light to support pro-Communist Afghani factions that were trying to seize power. Since the Truman and the Brezhnev doctrines were the two blocs' vowed policy vis à vis protecting friendly regimes, every left out chance of expanding was seen as a chance for the opposing side to exploit the conflicts.<sup>35</sup> Meanwhile, relations between Syria and the Kremlin had become affable enough for Hafez al-Assad to challenge the Arab League and the dominating Muslim opinion by not condemning the invasion of Afghanistan.<sup>36</sup> The Soviet Union engaged in a ten-year-long war in Afghanistan, leaving the trust in the Kremlin's domination flagrant and scarring the politicians back at home with the so called "Afghan Syndrome".<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Lund A, "From Cold War to Civil War", p.10.

<sup>32</sup> Trenin D, *What is Russia up to in the Middle East*, p.27.

<sup>33</sup> Trenin D, *What is Russia up to in the Middle East*, p.31.

<sup>34</sup> *ibid*, p.27.

<sup>35</sup> *ibid*, p.29.

<sup>36</sup> Lund A, "From Cold War to Civil War", p.10.

<sup>37</sup> Trenin D, *What is Russia up to in the Middle East?*, p.29.

## THE AFGHAN SYNDROME

As it would come to appear much later, the Afghan Syndrome taught the Soviets (post-Cold War) that the Muslim guerrillas' resilience, the traditional societies values and its importance are hard to fight and win against. In turn Kremlin made sure not to impose its ideology and to try to take control of a Muslim country. The war demonstrated what Islamist radicalism can achieve and its ability to be organised on a transboundary level such as what the guerrilla warfare required.<sup>38</sup>

The last leader of the Communist Party in the Soviet Union, Mikhail Gorbachev, took it upon himself to "defuse" and dismantle Soviet policy so that the Cold War could be ended.<sup>39</sup> A prolonged and failed military involvement in Afghanistan became damaging to the Soviet perception among its allies in the Middle East.<sup>40</sup> As for the al-Assad dynasty in Syria, the change of hearts in Moscow had implications on the pattern they had become habituated to, which usually meant huge orders of weapons being given on credit to Syria. In combination to that, the Soviet Union's attempt to befriend Israel and its urge for Syria to resolve its Israeli dispute peacefully, left the Syrian regime thinking that the Soviet Union's end had come.<sup>41</sup>

Rearranging its priorities of combatting Western influence in the region, the Ba'athist government then joined the Israeli-Arab peace talks, sent troops to fight alongside U.S. military in Kuwait and exchanged various favours with the West. By November 1991 the Soviet Union had dissolved, ending the Cold War and leaving the United States as the single most powerful country in the World. The Soviet Union's alliances had either ended or been disrupted and to reflect the sinister view beheld by al-Assad, after the relationship with the Soviets growing cold, he stated "the 'balance' of the world had been upset, 'causing disorder followed by a turbulent motion'. Some new equilibrium would no doubt emerge, he said, but 'the road ahead and its endpoint remain unclear'".<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Trenin D, *What is Russia up to in the Middle East*, p.29.

<sup>39</sup> Lund A, "From Cold War to Civil War", p.10.

<sup>40</sup> Trenin D, *What is Russia up to in the Middle East?*, p.32.

<sup>41</sup> Lund A, "From Cold War to Civil War", p.11.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid, p.11.

## END OF THE COLD WAR - ARAB SPRING

Leading up to the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Syria was one of the main recipients of Soviet military equipment. In less than the 35 years of bilateral relations between the countries Syria was said to have received weaponry amounting to over \$26 billion in worth including: 65 tactical and operational-tactical missile systems, some 5000 tanks, over 1 200 combat aircrafts (incl. Su-22, MiG-29 and Su-24MK), 4 200 artillery pieces and mortars, anti-aircraft missile systems and approximately 70 military vessels. By the arrival of the new century 90 % of the Syrian army's military was equipped with Soviet-made weapons and equipment. The debt of Syria for the equipment totalled \$14.5 billion and it was first in 2005 that an agreement was reached on writing off 73% of the debt.<sup>43</sup> From 1991 to 2011 Syria signed arms contracts with Russia for about \$1 billion, a fraction of the amounts it had reached during the Cold War. The period after the Syrian uprising in 2011, that soon after that transformed into a full-blown civil war, saw Russia deliver another \$1 billion worth of military equipment including training, aimed at fighting insurgents.<sup>44</sup>

Syria has never to Russia been the most lucrative arms market, it has and it is still today mainly attracting Moscow with its strategic geopolitical location.<sup>45</sup> Hafez Al-Assad had by the turn of the century ended up in a worsening health-condition which resulted in him passing away on June 10<sup>th</sup> 2000.<sup>46</sup> Shortly thereafter, his son Bashar al-Assad inherited the throne and vowed to introduce reforms that would revive the country while still remaining loyal to the values set by his dad and the Ba'athist party.<sup>47</sup> Initially Bashar focused on meeting leaders of Western and U.S.-friendly regimes, leaving the newly formed Russian federation to focus on solving its many issues after the transition to an open-market economy.<sup>48</sup>

On the morning of September 11<sup>th</sup> 2001, the residents of New York City woke up to the horrifying view of their landmark, the two "Twin Towers", being struck by two passenger planes in a terrorist attack. Another plane had also hit the headquarters of the U.S. Department

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<sup>43</sup> ТАСС, "Военно-Техническое Сотрудничество России и Сирии. Досье."

<sup>44</sup> Trenin D, *What is Russia up to in the Middle East*. p.118.

<sup>45</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>46</sup> Lund A, "From Cold War to Civil War", p.13.

<sup>47</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>48</sup> *ibid.*

of Defense, also known as “The Pentagon”. Vladimir Putin, the recently elected president of Russia, called his U.S. counterpart George W. Bush in Washington D.C. almost right away to offer his condolences and ensure the full Russian support.<sup>49</sup>

In reality, what Putin expected was to be supported in his own war on Islamist terrorism that he had been conducting against Caucasus republics, but despite his offers, his ambitions would soon be dismissed. Bush had made his decision to finish what had been started in Iraq a decade earlier and a Russian alliance was nothing that interested him. Russia was supportive of the UN Security Council resolutions adopted after the first Iraq war, however were now strongly disapproving of the force that the U.S. and Britain used without being authorised by the Security Council. Although Russia, France and China, three out of five permanent UN Security Council members, opposed the idea of invading Iraq the United States and Britain ignored this article and moved on to invade Iraq in the spring of 2003. The friendly direction that the American-Russian relations had taken at the start of the new century, had now become irremediably damaged. To Moscow, the aggression imposed on Iraq added to the already existent discord on the NATO bombing of Belgrade in 1999 and led Russians to feel that the United States acted dangerously on the international stage. The invasion of Iraq was to the Kremlin not only seen as a failure of D.C. in “draining the swamp” where terrorists received their training but it destroyed an already functioning and secular state between the Gulf and the Levant; unleashing forces of terrorism, sectarianism and radicalism that would come to merge into the Islamic State of Syria and Iraq (ISIS). A dictatorship like the one of Saddam Hussein, was in the Russian felicific calculus neither repressive nor evil enough to compensate for that.<sup>50</sup>

Following the Iraq invasion, Putin had accumulated a list of objections against the Americans’ actions abroad, such as its invasion of Iraq; support of opposition forces in Russia-friendly allied states (Serbia, Georgia, Ukraine), as well as deployment of missile defence systems in NATO’s eastward enlargement.<sup>51</sup> In the eyes of Russian national strategists, these so called “colour revolutions” (series of movements that developed in the ex-Soviet sphere of influence) could very much be U.S. instigated, aimed at spreading into Russia itself. Since the previous Soviet republics and current allies were at risk of turning against them it ended up worrying the

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<sup>49</sup> Trenin D, *What is Russia up to in the Middle East*, pp.38-40

<sup>50</sup> Trenin D, *What is Russia up to in the Middle East*, pp.38-40

<sup>51</sup> *ibid*, p.42.; Lund A, “From Cold War to Civil War”, p.14

Kremlin about its geopolitical “underbelly”.<sup>52</sup> As a result the international stage once more became a stage for tension between Moscow and Washington D.C.

When Tunisia in late 2010, as a result of increased globalisation and demand for democratic reforms, with a swaying public support, challenged its government for reforms it was not yet clear that the phenomenon would come to be known as the Arab spring.<sup>53</sup> No one would have realistically thought that it would come to reach Syria by the first half of 2011 as well; so while it to the West was presented as a revolution of the people for the people, the Kremlin’s narrative focused on the overarching aim of the U.S. to spread “Western-style democracy”. The aim being to replace the complacent, corrupt regimes with others that would establish the U.S. foothold in the region once and for all.<sup>54</sup> The enthusiasm around toppling authoritarian regimes led to an overall Russian fear that the West could attempt to instigate a “Russian spring” as well. While this might not have been the very case, Russian analysts firmly disagreed with western predictions on the success of democratic transformation during the Arab spring. Instead of an Arab spring they predicted an “Islamist winter” that would plague the region for years to come by unleashing forces the West was not prepared to face.<sup>55</sup>

Finally, the turning point for Russian foreign policy in regard to the Middle East seems to have come amidst the Libyan crisis in early 2011. Russia had back in 2008, just as it had done with Syria in 2005, formally written off Muammar Qaddafi’s debt to the Soviet Union. They had agreed on multiple arms and infrastructure contracts that would amount to around \$7 billion, a lucrative opportunity for Russia, one it wanted to keep. Nevertheless, the North African country was in the very periphery of the Russian geopolitical sphere of influence, all that was historically binding them together was their socialist past. With that in mind, Kremlin decided to have Libya be the test case of its relations with the U.S. and Europe. By Russian expectations, a partnership with the West to manage the internal conflict in Libya was the favourable alternative at choice. They were supposed to save civilians and work towards a new constitution under the aegis of the UN Security Council, therefore Russia chose not to intervene and abstained from vetoing the “no-fly zone” that was established. The outcome of the NATO intervention caused the ousting and the killing of the dictator Muammar Qaddafi, a regime

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<sup>52</sup> Trenin D, *What is Russia up to in the Middle East*, p.42.; Lund A, “From Cold War to Civil War”, p.14

<sup>53</sup> Trenin D, *What is Russia up to in the Middle East*, p. 40

<sup>54</sup> *ibid*, p. 41.

<sup>55</sup> *ibid*, p. 43.



change and the collapse of the Libyan state. Qaddafi's arms arsenals were raided and found their way into the hands of Islamist extremists; Russia had experienced a déjà vu of the course of events that took place in Iraq a decade earlier. The moral of this story was to the Kremlin not only that the United States and its allies had once more shown that they were not to be trusted but also that their ideological convictions diverged significantly. Western interests and "faulty" ideologies lack comprehensive strategic outlook which consequently makes them unable to view the immediate implications of their actions, that was the Russian understanding of the West. Hence Russia vowed to not rely on Western cooperation in the future, a mindset that reflected clearly in Syria where the Arab spring had arrived by the spring 2011.<sup>56</sup>

## **RUSSIA IN SYRIA, SYRIA IN THE WORLD**

Russia had by the time of the uprising reduced its cooperation and exchange with Syria to a minimum. Even so, it was around that time that Putin decided that outside military interventions under the American maxim "responsibility to protect"<sup>57</sup>, would not be allowed.<sup>58</sup> According to the director of the Carnegie Moscow Center, Dmitri Trenin, the position of Moscow regarding the occurrences in Syria were less about Syria and the Middle Eastern region and more about the structure of the global order.<sup>59</sup> Trenin says, "Syria was meant to be the place where the momentum of the Arab Spring and Libya-style intervention would be stopped."<sup>60</sup> Russia had at several occasions proposed to summon an international conference on Syria in order for the parties involved to sign a truce and find a political settlement.<sup>61</sup> From the U.S. side, they were in favour of replacing the al-Assad dynasty without contemplating with Damascus, however such an approach, Russia argued, would only be a repetition of the Libyan crisis.<sup>62</sup> The Kremlin insisted that the Syrian future should only be decided by Syrians albeit need for reforms was stressed as well. The Russian side managed to establish a formal consensus on Syria at the G8 summit in Mexico on 18 June 2012, where the framework for a transition to a sovereign,

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<sup>56</sup> Trenin D, *What is Russia up to in the Middle East*, pp.44-47.

<sup>57</sup> Saira M, "Taking Stock of the Responsibility to Protect". p.319.

<sup>58</sup> Trenin D, *What is Russia up to in the Middle East*, p.48.; Business Insider/YouTube, "Why Russia is So Involved With The Syrian Civil War"

<sup>59</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>60</sup> *ibid.*, p.49.

<sup>61</sup> Vassiliev, A. *Russia's Middle East Policy*, p. 465.

<sup>62</sup> *ibid.*, p. 465.

democratic political system should be in the hands of the Syrians. The conference held in Geneva in late June 2012 was attended by the entirety of the UN Security Council, including Turkey, Iraq, Qatar, Kuwait and the EU; however due to various interpretations the report ended up being futile.<sup>63</sup>

Following a chemical attack in Ghoutta, a suburb of Damascus, in August 2013, the United States accused the Syrian government of deliberately targeting its domestic population with chemical weapons and began planning a possible military intervention to punish the regime.<sup>64</sup> According to various sources<sup>65</sup> the accusation could not entirely be verified and so an information warfare had begun. Barack Obama, being re-elected on the promise of withdrawing troops from the region, was extremely unwilling to commit the United States to a military operation in Syria. His famous “red line”, that he encouraged not be overstepped, had become his own weak link in his approach to the Syrian conflict; because he was not ready to interfere militarily but was shaping a narrative that made it seem as if he was.<sup>66</sup> During the G20 summit in 2013, Putin in line with Damascus, offered Obama to get rid of Syria’s alleged chemical weapons in exchange for Obama’s promise not to attack. This suited Obama who was eager to prove that his “red line” was respected, so shortly thereafter Russian and American teams agreed on the conduct of the operation.<sup>67</sup> Moscow had for the first time since the Cold War achieved what they were aiming for, to deal with Americans as equals in a multilateral world order. As the civil war in Syria continued, the war took new forms one of which was the increasing pressure that ISIS were starting to put on the Syrian state by expanding its territory.<sup>68</sup> In 2015 al-Assad, at the verge of collapse to ISIS did what very few had expected, he officially asked Vladimir Putin for assistance and he accepted the request the same day.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Vassiliev, A. *Russia's Middle East Policy*, p. 465; Trenin D, *What is Russia up to in the Middle East*, p.50.

<sup>64</sup> Trenin D, *What is Russia up to in the Middle East*, p.50.

<sup>65</sup> Vassiliev A, *Russia's Middle East Policy*, p. 468-469.

<sup>66</sup> *ibid.*; Trenin D, *What is Russia up to in the Middle East*, p.50.

<sup>67</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>68</sup> Lund A, “From Cold War to Civil War”, p.29.

<sup>69</sup> Trenin D, *What is Russia up to in the Middle East*, p.60.

## CLASH OF IDEOLOGIES

Two of the most popular and contrasting theoretical perspectives in the discipline of international relations are sometimes said to be realism and liberalism. In this chapter there will be an examination of Immanuel Kant's (liberalism) and Thomas Hobbes' (realism), approach to international affairs.

Realism or political realism emphasises the conflictual and competitive nature of international relations. The supporters of this school consider the principal actors on the international stage to be states that are dealing with their own security due to national interests hence, the constant power struggle. Among the main counterarguments towards them is that they often neglect ethical considerations in dealing with other countries. In the realists' perception the rule of law only covers national politics whereas the global scene is set for war and absence of justice.<sup>70</sup> Thomas Hobbes is often considered one of the founders of the modern realist approach and is known for describing human beings as naturally individualistic rather than moral or social, with an unsaturated hunger for power. He contributed to the founding of neorealism that focused on the 'anarchic state of nature' and claimed that the world was a realm open for powers to face off and ensure their own gains.<sup>71</sup> The following quote gives an essence on Hobbes' view of the nature of the world:

Once states are established, the individual drive for power becomes the basis for the states' behavior, which often manifests itself in their efforts to dominate other states and peoples. States, "for their own security," writes Hobbes, "enlarge their dominions upon all pretences of danger and fear of invasion or assistance that may be given to invaders, [and] endeavour as much as they can, to subdue and weaken their neighbors".<sup>72</sup>

To many Hobbes is seen as extreme in his reasoning and at times close to the Machiavellian view on security and international relations nevertheless, Hobbes believes that the foreign policy should aim to be defensive. Contrary to popular belief his theory does not entail that individuals or nation-states should do whatever is beneficial to them. It is made clear that cooperative international relations are possible and the international laws' existence are compatible with a realist worldview. He argues that international rules are rarely able to be

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<sup>70</sup> Korab-Karpowicz J, "Political Realism in International Relations."

<sup>71</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>72</sup> *ibid.*

efficient in restraining power disputes. It is the nation-state that will decide if obeying the international order is advantageous that is going to determine when international laws are followed.<sup>73</sup>

Liberalism on the other hand is the theory that war and conflicts can be eliminated from society if principles and rules that respect the rights of people are adopted. While the realists put the power in the hands of the state, the liberals believe human beings to be the main actors and value their rights above anyone else in society. The state is considered a “necessary evil” that is required to govern and ensure the fundamental rights of liberty to its citizens. Its jurisdiction can however be overrun as well and turned against the people it is meant to serve. The philosopher and theorist, Immanuel Kant, has undoubtedly shaped the field of international relations with his work “To Perpetual Peace”. In it he presents the importance of interdependence, international cooperation and shared “republican” values in order to avoid conflicts.<sup>74</sup>

Similarly, to Hobbes many have come to misinterpret Kant, because even though he is considered a moral universalist he opposed all states uniting in a universal cosmopolitan liberal community, such as the UN, to ensure world peace.<sup>75</sup>

## **RESULTS**

### **PAX AMERICANA & MULTILATERALISM**

Woodrow Wilson, the President of the United States during the First World War, in an attempt to unite nations worldwide in accordance to his interpretation of Kant’s perpetual peace, set up the predecessor to today’s United Nations, namely the League of Nations in 1920.<sup>76</sup> The organization that was supposed to ensure peace however, was doomed to fail since the U.S. at that time did not consider involving themselves on matters outside their sphere of influence.<sup>77</sup>

A changing point for the United States foreign policy incurred during the Second World War when prominent scholars came to suggest a Pax Americana. Pax Americana meaning a U.S.

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<sup>73</sup> Korab-Karpowicz J, “Political Realism in International Relations.”

<sup>74</sup> Obo, “Liberalism.”; Encyclopedia Britannica, “Liberalism | Definition, History, & Facts.”

<sup>75</sup> Gaus G, Courtland S & Schmidt D., “Liberalism.”

<sup>76</sup> Macdonald J, *When Globalization Fails*, p.145.

<sup>77</sup> *ibid.*

dominated world order that presents them the right to legitimately exercise force. The fall of the Soviet Union and the decision of the United Nations, under the U.S mandate, to invade Iraq in 1990 established the fact that Pax Americana was set.<sup>78</sup> Even though in a post- Cold War and post- bilateral world, multilateralism seemed to be the world order pledged by the United States, the attacks on September 11<sup>th</sup> 2001, leading to the invasion of Iraq would make it clear that the world had in fact become unilateral.<sup>79</sup> The New York Times had in March 1992, acquired access to a Pentagon policy paper stating that with the Soviet Union weakened the U.S. should prevent rising powers that could challenge the U.S. The newspaper wrote that the Pentagon-document had been a clear rejection of the state of internationalism that the League of Nations and the UN were founded on.<sup>80</sup> In reaction to the scandalous document, the White House refuted the expressed opinions by the Pentagon and instead said that the emphasis for U.S. foreign policy is cooperation and multilateralism.<sup>81</sup> The aspiration, D.C. claimed, was not to become a hegemony but to turn hostile actors (implying countries like Russia) in to a community of democratic nations.<sup>82</sup> Noam Chomsky, a famous American political activist, has time and again criticised the United States for not obeying to the international rules. In his opinion piece *De-Americanizing the World*, he cited the political analyst Samuel P. Huntington that warned for the growing U.S. influence in the World by saying, “ the United States is becoming the rogue superpower/.../the single greatest external threat to their societies”.<sup>83</sup>

How is it possible that the U.S. that led the free world is now shying away from engagements that up until the not so long ago were considered vital to its interests. The exceptionalism that Obama spoke of, see *Background chapter*, was the result of increased internationalist ambitions after the Second World War and an economy to support those goals.<sup>84</sup> The once very modern model the U.S. possessed has been outdone by other actors that now challenge the American led world order. Their institutional framework for international order that entails a world dominated by Pax Americana has become outdated yet it is still today guiding D.C’s conduct

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<sup>78</sup> Macdonald J, *When Globalization Fails*, p.197.

<sup>79</sup> McGuinness M, “Multilateralism and War”.

<sup>80</sup> Macdonald J, *When Globalization Fails*, p.199.

<sup>81</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>82</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>83</sup> Chomsky N, *Because we say so*, p.136.

<sup>84</sup> Sargent D, “Pax Americana: Sketches for an Undiplomatic History”, p.15.

in international affairs.<sup>85</sup> The increasing gap between hegemonic presence and respectively the capabilities of maintaining the presence has for many years been covered by the transnational resource sharing.<sup>86</sup> One thing however is becoming certain, the U.S. is finding it difficult to keep exercising a leadership role, especially when the sitting president, long-time internationalism sceptic Donald Trump, vowed to minimise U.S. presence abroad.<sup>87</sup> Whoever one chooses to ascribe the blame for D.C.'s increasing inability to reassert itself internationally, the reasons remain internal political and institutional impairment.<sup>88</sup> The demise of the Pax Americana was inevitable, Russia just happened to seal its faith by intervening in Syria and challenging American influence.

## STRATEGY & GOALS OF KREMLIN

The main objective of a Russian intervention in Syria was to keep Bashar al-Assad in power and at the same time eliminate hardened terrorists that had originated from its own Muslim-dominated Republics.<sup>89</sup> It however, aimed at correcting the multilateral world order that the U.S. had previously set to impose on Russia whenever suitable for the White House. The Kremlin's adroit seize of control in the region did not only portray the U.S. as the underachiever in the conflict but also proved that Russians were loyal to their allies no matter the difficulties.<sup>90</sup> Russia has re-established itself throughout the Middle East as a power broker ready to deal with more or less anyone.<sup>91</sup> It is exactly that sense of operational strategy that will be looked at next.

“Assad is not our ally... We support him in the fight against terrorism and in the preservation of the Syrian state. But he is not an ally in the same sense as Turkey is a U.S. ally.”<sup>92</sup> That was how Russia's foreign minister Sergei Lavrov described Syria's relation to Russia after struggling to have al-Assad agree to concessions. In this statement there is a conclusion to be made, which is that Russia does not care about who it is allied with. For the duration of the Syrian civil war, the Kremlin has sided with Turkey, Israel, U.S., Saudi-Arabia, Syria and

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<sup>85</sup> Sargent D, “Pax Americana: Sketches for an Undiplomatic History”, p.15.

<sup>86</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>87</sup> *ibid.*, p.16.

<sup>88</sup> *ibid.*, p.15.

<sup>89</sup> Trenin D, *What is Russia up to in the Middle East*, p.62.

<sup>90</sup> Eugene R, “Russia in the Middle East”.

<sup>91</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>92</sup> Solovyov D, “Russia's Lavrov Says Syria's Assad Is Not an Ally”.

various rebel groups at different instances.<sup>93</sup> The Russian felicific calculus considers its goal, which is to be seen as an actor strong enough to face the U.S., more important than obeying to the U.S. narrative of a multilateral order in which decisions are to be made by D.C. The Middle East is home to the largest Muslim population worldwide hence, for Russia, the success in Syria will also shape the public opinion of Muslims inside Russia.<sup>94</sup> Meaning that, by learning from the Afghan syndrome, a way was found in which to liquidate Russian-made extremists who had fled to Syria, while also creating a self-image of Russia as loyal to its Arab ( and Muslim) allies. Additionally, an intervention was meant to guarantee that arms deals and economic cooperation was not lost the way it had been with Libya and Iraq. The weapon shipments to Syria do not amount to the same quantity it did prior to the fall of the Soviet Union<sup>95</sup> however by being the one that sets the outcome, Russia ensures that its investments are to reap benefits. Putin is well aware that his deployment of Russian military equipment, in a successful operation as Syria has turned out to be, will attract many countries to approach and sign contracts for military material.<sup>96</sup> His defence industry supplies countries across the whole Middle Eastern region, even long-time member of NATO, Turkey.<sup>97</sup> This once again goes to show how Russia is looking to maximise its profits without being tied to one partner or one specific approach.<sup>98</sup> The following excerpt is from an interview between Alexei Vassiliev and the Deputy Foreign Minister of Russia Mikhail L. Bogdanov in which the Russian approach and its modus operandi in Syria is discussed.<sup>99</sup>

**THE AUTHOR :** Can we assume that we were ready to cooperate with any regime?

**M. L. BOGDANOV :** Let us not speak so categorically. The choice of a form of governance

is a sovereign right of the people of a specific country. If the president fled, and normal, say, patriotic forces took the power, even if they had different socio-economic objectives, but as long as they were in favour of independence, the protection of the country's sovereignty, in such matters we

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<sup>93</sup> Eugene R, "Russia in the Middle East".

<sup>94</sup> *ibid*, p.50.

<sup>95</sup> Trenin D, *What is Russia up to in the Middle East*, p.116.

<sup>96</sup> *ibid*, p.117.

<sup>97</sup> Trenin D, *What is Russia up to in the Middle East*, p.123.

<sup>98</sup> *ibid*. p.114.

<sup>99</sup> Vassiliev A, *Russia's Middle East Policy*, pp. 438-439.

were partners, allies and were always ready to help. It is built on the basis of the traditional friendly relations and decades of cooperation. We build relations not with individuals or parties, not with some non-governmental organizations, but we build relations with a state which has internationally recognized authorities.

**THE AUTHOR :** And what was the main thing for us in determining the position on the Syrian affair?

**M. L .BOGDANOV :** The principle of non-interference in internal affairs. Were the reforms overdue? Of course, we agree. And in this respect we worked with Bashar al-Assad. But the achievement of socio-economic progress and the implementation of democratic reforms are possible only in a peaceful environment, when security is provided, because if there is war, which actually happened, one cannot count on democratic reforms or socio-economic development. We proceeded from the fact that we had had decades of friendship and cooperation with Syria and its people. We very actively supported the Syrians when they just gained independence, before the arrival of the Baathists to power and thereafter. We are building relations with the Syrian state and its people. And the Syrian people should eventually determine the form of government through transparent and universally acceptable democratic procedures, preferably national elections, and choose its leadership. Our policy is not opportunistic, it is consistent, it is fundamental. Recently there was a coup attempt in Turkey. At the time we had very tense, spoiled relations with Erdogan. But we still came out in support of him as a legitimate president and against the anticonstitutional coup attempt to overthrow the legitimate authority by force.

To what extent the answers given by the Deputy Foreign Minister, are transparent and earnest can be put to question given the natural bias he carries. Still it can certainly be said that his opinions, seem to align to the arguments presented earlier in the text, for the Russian intervention.

In summation there are three main reasons for Russia to have acted the way it has done and that in turn has marked clear turning points in its foreign policy.

1. Challenge U.S. power in the region by forcing it to cooperate on Russian terms.
2. Support its long-time ally in the region and protect its a) financial b) military interests.
3. Liquidate extremists and isolate the possibility of a “Russian spring” taking place.



## KANT, HOBBS & REALITY

Russia could have allowed for Syria to evolve into a foothold for ISIS, opposition militia and various armed groups, transforming into another Libya.<sup>100</sup> But it intervened, with its interests in mind, it exploited U.S. hesitance earning long-sought credibility among its allies. The reasons for its actions there and why its approach differed from the U.S.'s can be anchored in their respective set of beliefs.

As previously described earlier in this study, the liberal values fundamentally contradict the realist views on the nature of the world, liberalism's general ideals being freedom, equality and independence from force.<sup>101</sup> The specific set of ideals allow for an "othering" of ideologies that do not conform to the liberal ones. As an example, non-liberal states will be considered hostile, irrational and therefore illegitimate.<sup>102</sup> Hence in regard to states, only liberal states are morally pure in world politics allowing for them to be overlooking justice at international level.<sup>103</sup>

In a more abstract notion, there is also a distinction made in the discourse when talking about evil from a liberal point of view. A state is also antagonistic if it acts as an aggressor towards other states or its domestic population.<sup>104</sup> In Kantian view, the liberal peace thesis entails that liberal states do not fight other liberal states but only non-liberal actors; because by not conforming to the principles of liberalism non-liberals have turned themselves into targets.<sup>105</sup> Immanuel Kant is often wrongfully said to have believed in an everlasting peace that would neutralise the state of conflict.<sup>106</sup> He did call for a "universal International State" that would be dissolvable and include States however he did not envision a world state. In his approach he figured that states already had constitutions therefore implementing another one would be illogical. Adding to this, he unlike Woodrow Wilson was a non-interventionist, inspiring him to denounce any suggestion of an outside force interfering with internal "arrangements" of other state actors.<sup>107</sup> Second and more importantly, Kant feared that a world state, if achieved, would

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<sup>100</sup> Trenin D, *What is Russia up to in the Middle East*, p.54.

<sup>101</sup> Vaha E, "We Kant Have Bad States", p.299.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, p.301.

<sup>104</sup> Vaha E, "We Kant Have Bad States", p.301.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>106</sup> Waltz K, "Kant, Liberalism and War", p. 331.

<sup>107</sup> *ibid.*, p. 337.

become a greater evil than any of the conflicts it was supposed to prevent.<sup>108</sup> In his opinion a peaceful world was the goal but not necessarily the way to reach it.<sup>109</sup> War is unavoidable in the state of nature of humans, but it should not be considered as a definite fact, all states may become ‘unjust enemies’ and all states may transform into republican states.<sup>110</sup> As long as war is present, “evil” also needs to be facilitated meaning recognising and respecting the other is important.<sup>111</sup>

In the case of the United States’ liberal political tradition, the divergence on whether the military interventions aimed at imposing democracy in foreign states are rational according to liberal principles has existed for a long time.<sup>112</sup> Arguing that an intervention like the one in Iraq or Libya are justified is seen as incoherent with Kant’s conviction that a “civil condition” i.e. the existence of rule of law in a state is more imperative than a republican constitution. If the criteria for a civil condition is neglected and the rights of the independent people are undermined, it can only be seen as a serious offense.<sup>113</sup> The Kantian objective of a state to turn into a republican regime does not justify foreign forces meddling or forcefully compelling the regime to change.<sup>114</sup> Liberalism has relied heavily on Immanuel Kant’s political theory in shaping internationalism though he can not be blamed for the questionable interpretation of today’s liberals.<sup>115</sup>

Juxtaposed to the liberals there are the realists that believe that the constant struggle for power and naturally conflictual state of the world determine world politics. Thomas Hobbes did not really elaborate on interstate relations as much as he did on the relationship between states and individuals. This could in part be because he asserts the ‘state of nature’ i.e. the structure of life in pre-societal times, as the natural condition, meaning that no moral restraints and fights for resources would lead people to fight each other. Building on this, the suspicion versus one’s foes, the constant need of securing one’s position as well as the strive for glory condones pre-

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<sup>108</sup> Waltz K, “Kant, Liberalism and War”, p. 337.

<sup>109</sup> *ibid*, p.340.

<sup>110</sup> Vaha E, “We Kant Have Bad States”, p.303.

<sup>111</sup> *ibid*, p.313.

<sup>112</sup> Wilson J & Monten J, “Does Kant Justify Liberal Intervention”, p.1.

<sup>113</sup> *ibid*, p.3.

<sup>114</sup> *ibid*, p.4.

<sup>115</sup> Vaha E, “We Kant Have Bad States”, p.312.

emptive strikes and aggressive approaches. Hobbes believes that the subjugation of individuals to states, acts as a buffer and protects individuals from the constant fear of being aggressed. The anarchical state of nature in his view will still dominate the state relations, maintaining the possibility of states fighting each other however, the citizens will be ensured greater safety than under any alternative condition. The realist philosopher is seen as very grim and Machiavellian for describing enemies and states as “enemies by nature” nevertheless he still urges actors to maintain a defensive approach to foreign policy. He maintains that actors by nature might be antagonistic, yet it is still imperative to strive for peace.<sup>116</sup> Hobbes maintains that international peace is not as secure as civil peace but still suggests that states can cooperate for their common welfare.<sup>117</sup> By discussing mutual recognising of sovereigns and the role of ambassadors he hints the existence of an international order that is peaceful, at least to some extent.<sup>118</sup> Peace he claims cannot be expected to last forever thus, no matter the level of cooperation, at any given point in time the need for defensive measures could be required.<sup>119</sup> Hobbes unique approach within the realist approach to international relations makes him more difficult to map out ideologically than some might argue. The current world order differs with his vision of international relations, one example being the establishment of the UN.<sup>120</sup> Yet it is also the case that realism to some extent supports the idea of a multilateral world order.<sup>121</sup>

The Pax Americana or unilateral world order of the 1990’s has shifted to a multipolar world that Russia today wants to be a part of.<sup>122</sup> In contrast to the U.S. spread of liberalism, the Russian strategy has remained mostly pragmatic and non-ideological (although showing strong signs of realism).<sup>123</sup> The need for external intervention in Syria became clear, not the least when al-Assad officially asked Putin for assistance in his military offensive. The most suitable external powers that could uphold stability in Syria and the region would be those that: have experience in the Middle East, are not directly affected (as Turkey is) and finally are capable of

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<sup>116</sup> Korab-Karpowicz J, “Political Realism in International Relations.”.

<sup>117</sup> Maximilian J, *Thomas Hobbes’s Conception of Peace*, p.72.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid*, p.73.

<sup>119</sup> *ibid*, p.74.

<sup>120</sup> *ibid*, p.102.

<sup>121</sup> Cheneval F, “The Hobbesian Case for Multilateralism.”, p.311.

<sup>122</sup> Stepanova E, “Russia in the Middle East”, p.2.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid*.

operating without being immobilised by political affiliations or other.<sup>124</sup> Russia fits that description, which is why as it stands today they are the ones leading the effort. In making sense of how it comes that U.S. chose to abstain from intervening, but Russia did not there is one critical aspect to take in to account. Moscow having decided that they wanted to become a key actor in the multipolar world understood that they had to show that the U.S did no longer dictate the pace as it wished. To reactivate multilateral cooperation Russia had to show that they were able to act on their own.<sup>125</sup>

A suitable opportunity to display this capability presented itself in the Syrian civil war, or as the Russian researcher Ekaterina Stepanova argues “it was the use of unilateral action to enforce multilateralism”.<sup>126</sup> Russia indeed stepped up and acted unilaterally in the case of Syria but most likely not as part of any region-wide strategy to become a hegemon.<sup>127</sup> Matter of fact is that Russia’s weak economic output does not allow for its global involvement the way the U.S. does, any signs of interest for involvement it shows is primarily related to its Eurasian neighbourhood.<sup>128</sup> The intervention in Syria acted as an attempt to prove to the West that Russia is worthy of being included in multilateral cooperation yet it also aimed to create a more representative multilateralism than the one U.S. conveyed at the start of the century.<sup>129</sup>

## ANALYSIS

The study’s main ambition has been to rationalise the approach of Russia’s intervention in Syria and consequently examine whether it could be aimed at challenging the multilateral world order. Adding to this, it has also been the purpose of this work to highlight the historical context and its intricacies that inevitably shaped the countries’ modern relations. Russia has often earned itself the title of being the greatest archnemesis of the United States. It was therefore imperative to examine what the underlying factors for Russia’s modus operandi/rationale could be.

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<sup>124</sup> Stepanova E, "Russia in the Middle East", p.7.

<sup>125</sup> *ibid*, p.8.

<sup>126</sup> Stepanova E, "Russia in the Middle East", p.9.

<sup>127</sup> *ibid*, p.10.

<sup>128</sup> *ibid*.

<sup>129</sup> *ibid*, p.12.

Choosing to approach the context of a Russian intervention in Syria through analysing two classical theorists from liberalism and realism was aimed to display differences as well as similarities between both fields as well as between the U.S. and Russia. The description of approaches to the conflict that has been presented in this study showed that it is not possible to tie neither Russia nor the U.S. to a certain ideology. If one looks at how the U.S. approached international affairs at the start of the First World War in comparison to how it approached the Iraq War, one comes to see a big difference in attitude. The same is valid for the case of Russia, it is enough to compare how it engaged with allies and enemies during the Cold War in comparison to how it interacts today. Pax Americana that finally became established after the collapse of the Soviet Union was fundamentally different from the initial U.S. approach to not engage in international politics. The increased strive to support friendly regimes and remove hostile ones in American foreign policy was the result of an increased American consensus on internationalist world order. This approach, even though affiliated with a liberal world order, seems to have had a lot of inconsistencies with the liberal world order Immanuel Kant<sup>130</sup> envisioned. A common understanding being, that the liberal world needs to be fought for by toppling antagonist states in the World or as Woodrow Wilson imagined, by establishing a world state to monitor state behaviour.<sup>131</sup> What the study can point to is that plenty of authors see these arguments as misled or even misinterpreted.

For Russia however as it was established, the case was different. They had with the Afghan syndrome learned that their interventions in an unstable area, without the consent of the locals, would only exacerbate the internal political issues of Russia. Its multiple attempts aimed at befriending Western states and incrementally making it to the multilateral team-table failed. It was not that they did not desire U.S. cooperation but the other way around. At the change of the century, the European Union, China and other countries had made it clear that the world was no more bipolar nor unipolar but was multipolar. Despite that, the call for a greater global presence by the U.S.<sup>132</sup> appears nothing else than counterproductive to the *Perpetual Peace* that Immanuel Kant called for. The U.S. seems to have neglected the fact of a changing world order in which other actors come to play a bigger role. They had set up a moral framework for themselves to follow and that the world community expected them to act according to. In reality

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<sup>130</sup> Vaha E, "We Kant Have Bad States", p.299.

<sup>131</sup> Waltz K, "Kant, Liberalism and War", p. 337.

<sup>132</sup> Macdonald J, *When Globalization Fails*, p.199.

though, their approach was masked by liberal values while actually showing signs of realist intentions. Unlike its counterpart, Russia is not regarded as the leader of the free world, allowing for the Kremlin to remain more “pragmatic”<sup>133</sup> in their conduct abroad.

As was noted in the chapter on *Strategy & Goals of Kremlin*, Putin has cooperated with actors around the whole region no matter their political affiliation. Even though the Kremlin’s disposition is pragmatic it is easily interpretable that the Russians follow realism-inspired maxims just by reading the excerpt from the interview with Mikhail L. Bogdanov<sup>134</sup>. His rhetoric stressing the choice of governance form and the fact that they only build ties to states, leads one to see plenty of similarities with the realist understanding of international affairs. One key aspect of realism being that the individuals will always be ensured greater safety under the armistices guaranteed by states. Hence it could be argued that Bogdanov and most likely the Kremlin, view politics as shaped by realism in general. More interestingly however it is the Russian view on foreign policy and their actions the last 20 years that make it possible to associate them to a Hobbesian view of international affairs. Since there are various of realism subgroups, it is interesting why it is Hobbes’s theory that apply well to their case. Hobbes discussed the possibility of living in peace and was in fact a proponent of it as has been made clear in this study. Nonetheless, he considered individuals as actors that at any time could seek war and disturb the fragile peace. The goal of states, he claimed, should be to seek peace and to cooperate; this is how the realist approach of Hobbes makes room for a multilateral concept. This, at its core is what this study set out to discover, if a multilateral world can be compatible to the Russian approach in international relations. Evidently the Russian intervention manifests its realist influence by means of action and results but also proves that it is possible to cooperate with other states. Their modus operandi has been that anyone can be an ally, but anyone can be an enemy as well and this has made them unpopular among Western liberal countries. It is very important to underline that Moscow sees peace, even if short-lived, as possible in the style of Hobbes. Therefore, their resurgence onto the global political stage through engaging themselves in Syria, does most likely not mean that they are looking to challenge the multilateral world order, but that they are rearranging it to include them too. The purpose of the thesis and the

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<sup>133</sup> Stepanova E, "Russia in the Middle East", p.2.

<sup>134</sup> Vassiliev A, *Russia’s Middle East Policy*, pp. 438-439.

research questions can hence be considered upheld and answered. Below I will analyse and reflect around the choice of methodology and the methods chosen for the case study.

To be able to examine the causality of the intervention, this comparative case study, adopted a qualitative approach with a constructivist- ontological and interpretivist- epistemological setting. The historical view considered necessary to do an adequate study of the Russian rationale led me to apply the aforementioned ontological and epistemological approach. They seemed most suitable for a case concerning ambiguous parts such as identity and historical context. The methodology that I chose, allowed for the comparative case study to have the depth it was initially aiming to possess. My understanding that the meaning lies in interpretation and not in observation explains why I chose to shape the study accordingly. Moreover, the choice of narrowing down the theories of international relations to only liberalism and realism from two specific philosophers, undoubtedly influenced the outcome. A demarcation of theories that could be considered relevant for the case was done when beginning the research; however, if the approach would have been ontologically-objective and epistemologically-positivist, the less subjective approach could have found an alternative methodology or other theories more applicable. The human minds are shaped by judgements, prejudices and ideological limitations that influence how we perceive reality. It is said that we can minimise our biases and be more objective by being “systematic”<sup>135</sup> in choosing methodology and considering relevant methods. To some extent applying quantitative methods with qualitative ones i.e. mixed methods, could allow for the research to neither be lacking subjectivity nor objectivity. When reviewing chosen approaches one can only really rely on the researcher to have been adequate in structuring the study, if successful the results will carry the approach.

## CONCLUSION

This case study has examined the reasons for Russia to intervene in the Syrian conflict with the aim of rationalising its approach. In exploring the underlying historical context that is relevant to comprehend the past relationship and position of the three key actors Russia, Syria and the United States it is possible to analyse the situation from a liberal and realist point of view.

Throughout the study, there is an underlying understanding that the U.S. represents a liberal world order while Russia a strictly realist one. This is tactfully meant to emphasize the

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<sup>135</sup> Chowdhury R, “Embarking on research in the social sciences”, p.108.

divergence in approaches between the two powers during the Cold War and leading up until the Iraq War in 2003. The case study presents how the post-Cold War international relations, established a long sought pax Americana that was hid behind a liberal, multipolar world order. In the course of events Russia, that sought to re-emerge strong from the collapse of the Soviet Union, showed willingness to be a part of a world that was striving to become multipolar. While the Kremlin was hopeful of cooperating actively, they took a moderate political stance. The United States however, refuted the Russian willingness to cooperate since they were not considered as equals. It therefore becomes clear that the U.S. in its wish to be the world dominating power, in the transition to the 21st century, disregarded the fact that their approach to international affairs was growing incoherent with what they had argued for.

Russia, as is made clear in the case study, incorporated a lot of Hobbesian Multilateralism in their wish to resurge onto the global stage. One of the key parts of this study being the premise that two conflicting ideologies (liberalism and realism) as well as two conflicting states (United States and Russia), turn out to possess similarities that often are neglected. Both theories acknowledge that neither constant peace nor constant conflict are the natural states of our societies. The main conclusion regarding the Russian rationale, that the study presents, is that Russia's decision to intervene does not aim to contend with the U.S. for a global role, it is instead a way to show that it deserves an equal role in a multilateral world order. Secondly, they supported a long-time ally that would ensure stability in military and financial cooperation. Lastly, their operation abroad would limit the spread of uprisings in the immediate proximity of their own geopolitical neighbourhood.

With regards to the United States' foreign policy approach in Syria, the study indicates that it has proved itself inconsistent with their claimed values of liberty and peace. An example being Immanuel Kant's notion of peace that implies that some conflicts in fact are inevitable, and that othering of hostile states is existent in the liberal understanding of the World. However, he consistently emphasizes throughout his work that the *other* also needs to be respected. Meaning, that there might be actors that are not founded on republican constitutions and therefore do not fit in to the notion of liberal states; as long as they possess a civil condition it would amount to a serious offense to violate that given state's sovereignty with the aim of installing a republican constitution. The U.S. interventions in Serbia, Iraq and Afghanistan are a few examples of how the United States, by Kantian definition, justified illegal interventions, using liberal rhetoric.



Looking at the Syrian civil war one can see a glimpse of what the future might be holding for us in terms of cooperation and international work. While at the same time, a lot of the existing structures seem to remain untouched and suggest that the intervention of Russia in the civil war is nothing that might change the rules of the game. Undoubtedly though, Russia has succeeded to achieve the goals that they had set out prior to the intervention. The United States was forced to cooperate with Russia and for the first time since the Cold War treated them as an equal actor on the global stage. Bashar al-Assad, a long-time ally was kept in power ensuring vital Russian interests. Thirdly and lastly, they hindered the Arab spring from turning into a Russian spring. One might, at least in the West, argue that the Kremlin and Putin are a lot of things nevertheless, one thing that they certainly proved is that their operation in Syria by all definitions, turned out to be successful.

In concluding remarks, future research would do good in focusing on exploring U.S. ideological coherence and how their liberal values cohere to an increasingly global and multipolar world. The fact remains that new “poles” of power such as China and the EU have emerged and will play an increasingly important role in international relations. With new actors and interests reappearing, it is evident that other approaches and ideologies would appear useful to examine.

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