

A CLAUSEWITZIAN READING OF  
RUSSIAN INTERVENTION IN THE SYRIAN CIVIL WAR

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Approval of the Graduate School of Social Sciences

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## **ABSTRACT**

### **A CLAUSEWITZIAN READING OF RUSSIAN INTERVENTION IN THE SYRIAN CIVIL WAR**

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This thesis aims to analyse Russian intervention in the Syria civil war by taking into account Clausewitzian approach to war and strategy theories. In this context, the thesis focuses on two dimensions of the case in terms of its relevance to Clausewitzian approach. After giving a review of Clausewitzian dictum of war and strategy by an assessment of his Trinitarian approach to war, transformation of Russian strategic thinking in 2000s and Russian Federation's view of international system is being assessed in order to prove traces from Clausewitzian approach. Therefore, the thesis focuses on Moscow's military intervention in the Syrian civil war, as well as political characteristics of its strategic approach that is revealed by partial withdrawal decision on 14 March 2016. It is intended to provide an analysis on Kremlin's strategic decision from Clausewitzian perspective of war and strategy theories.

**Keywords:** Russian Federation, Syrian Civil War, Clausewitz, Gerasimov Doctrine, Hybrid Warfare, Reflexive Control Theory

## ÖZ

### SURİYE İÇ SAVAŞINA RUS MÜDAHALESİNİN CLAUSEWITZIAN ANALİZİ

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Bu çalışma savaş ve strateji teorilerine Clausewitzian yaklaşımı dikkate alarak Rusya'nın Suriye iç savaşına müdahalesini incelemeyi amaçlamaktadır. Bu bağlamda, tez, müdahalenin Clausewitzian yaklaşımla ilgisi açısından iki boyutuna odaklanmaktadır. Clausewitzian savaş ve strateji yaklaşımı üzerine genel bir değerlendirmeden sonra, 2000'li yıllarda Rus stratejik düşüncesinin değişiminde ve Rusya Federasyonu'nun uluslararası sisteme yaklaşımında Clausewitzian görüşün izleri değerlendirilmektedir. Ayrıca, bu çalışma Moskova'nın Suriye iç savaşına askeri müdahalesiyle birlikte 14 Mart 2016 tarihinde alınan kısmi geri çekilme kararı ile ortaya koyulan stratejik yaklaşımın siyasi özelliklerine odaklanmaktadır. Kremlin'in bu stratejik kararına Clausewitzian bakış açısı ile bir analiz sunulması amaçlanmaktadır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Rusya Federasyonu, Suriye İç Savaşı, Clausewitz, Gerasimov Doktrini, Hibrit Savaş, Refleksif Kontrol Teorisi

To Ali İsmail Korkmaz



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## **CHAPTER 1**

### **INTRODUCTION**

This thesis aims to analyse Russian intervention in the Syrian civil war by taking into account Clausewitzian approach to war and strategy. As a theoretical linkage between armed conflicts and international relations theories, Clausewitzian approach provides a perspective that argues war is an act of systematic continuation of politics, therefore it occurs to impose the political will of adversaries on each other. For this reason, I argue in this study, Clausewitzian approach is still providing a valid ground for discussion in order to understand recent conflicts, in particular Russian presence in Syria. In other words, Clausewitzian approach is serving enough tools to analyse contemporary conflicts even today. Yet this does not mean there are not changes in the strategy of war, as admittedly there is remarkable transformation whereas role of civilians in implementation of asymmetric warfare occupy more room on the strategic agendas more than ever. However, Clausewitzian theory still approves that change is not in the core of the nature of war – it is the character of war that changes, not its nature. For this reason, from scholarly-thought approach, realist perspective on war and strategy is regarded in form of Clausewitzian dictum. In other words, by its nature, the Clausewitzian approach is deeply rooted in the realist school of thought. As an extension, this thesis also adopts a strict realist approach to evaluate Russia's intervention in Syria. This thesis argues that the Russian intervention, particularly its timing, manner and scope, falls in line with the Clausewitzian, and thus, the realist school of thought, especially when the Russian intervention is viewed as part of Russia's broader international aspirations. In order to accomplish debate on the pursuit of power and security, ensuring the balance between power and security is argued in this thesis within the limits of the newly introduced warfare concepts.

In addition, to be able to grasp what is missing in the recent debate on armed conflicts, this study will be focusing on the Russian strategic thinking – including its background and analysis. Namely, Gerasimov doctrine will be taken as a manual to search for directions of Russian strategies in the recent conflicts. The post-Soviet

legacy theories, deep penetration theory and reflexive control theory, will also be assessed to illustrate key theoretical debates that brings us back to Clausewitzian approach. A couple of historical turning points are highlighted in this thesis to analyse the abovementioned discussion, namely the Chechen issue in Russian domestic politics, Ukrainian crisis and Russia's lessons-learned from Libya, focusing on the rivalry in the international system.

Hence, this study asks a simple, yet crushingly straightforward, question: why Russian troops have been pouring to Syria? Is it in support of the Kremlin's only Cold War remnant ally in the region, the Baathist regime? Is it for fighting ISIS so that radical extremists cannot return to the Caucasus to challenge Moscow? Is it for testing the efficiency of the new Russian military doctrine and Putin's strategic toolkit?

Syria, and Russia's military presence in the civil war-torn country, has never been 'simply' about Syria itself. Rather, it hints Moscow's strategic worldview, on which this study is focusing. Besides, as Putin decided to intervene in Syria, so did he when declaring the withdrawal decision on 14 March 2016. Therefore, I also aim to shed light on the withdrawal decision and its strategic outcomes within the given theoretical framework. Considering the fact that, Russia's political and military objectives in Syria have a meaning beyond supporting its only ally in the region, Moscow also imposes its worldview on contemporary international order through Syrian battleground. On the other hand, Baathist regime of Syria benefits from the Kremlin's superior national power to preserve its security. Thus, it is important to note that the case that is proposed to be analyzed in this study could also have been discussed within the alliance theory rather than Clausewitzian approach to war. However, primary objective of this thesis is to analyse repercussions of the transformation in Russia's strategic thinking in the light of both its relations with Baathist regime of Syria and also its presence on the global agenda in terms of its capability of changing the nature of the conflict.

Consequently, the drivers behind the security partnerships that have unequal balance are going to be underscored in order to identify the security dilemma that might result in regional balance of power. In this manner, Moscow's positioning towards the West and its role in the international system are taken into account as

important elements of such dilemma. To this end, most of the debate in this study will be occupied with changing characteristics of war through Syrian chessboard. It will also point out the exceptional contribution of Russia's military intervention in Syria which is evidently the first case out of Former Soviet Union territory, to war and strategy theory.

The inadequacy in literature in terms of reviewing Russia's intervention to Syria from war and strategy perspective also stirred up the reasoning for this study with the proposed questions on Russian campaign mentioned above. It has been set to analyse the intervention within the scope of new Russian strategic thinking through the lens of Gerasimov doctrine and Russia's assertive foreign policies in the recent years. As popularly discussed, Gerasimov doctrine delivers hints about transformation of Russian strategic 'toolkit' and Ukrainian case have proved its effectiveness in several phases of the conflict. However Syrian civil war is also providing quiet tangible aspects on the issue and could be assessed through such particular angle, too. Subsequently, in this study I aim to contribute to literature in these areas of research.

Precisely for the gap in the literature mentioned above, primary sources are used to get a glimpse of accurate information at first hand of both regimes' worldviews regarding contemporary international system. In this regard, transcripts of Russian President Putin's speeches given at important occasions such as UN General Assembly; press briefings and interviews of Baathist leader Bashar Al-Assad; Russian military doctrines of 2010 and 2014; interviews and commentaries of political elites and high ranking bureaucrats are quoted and analysed. On the other hand, war and strategy theories, particularly Clausewitzian theory is analysed in depth to foster scientific context and characteristics of the thesis. Since the case that has been discussed is relatively a new and quiet dynamic issue on the international agenda, the reports and discussion papers produced by the think tanks working on the relative field are inevitably studied to support strategic analytical explanatory capacity and practical value of the thesis.

In the first chapter, titled "Clausewitzian Dictum of War and Strategy", main focus will rely upon the analysis of Clausewitzian approach in the light of Prussian

General Carl von Clausewitz's comprehensive study "*On War*"<sup>1</sup>. Keeping in mind that the brief introduction mentioned above about his approach to war and strategy is valuable to the extent that it opens a window of thought that can be supported with the debate on changing characteristics of war. And also, contemporary debate on how strategic thinking is evolving towards so called 'new' versions of warfare. To this end, the main argument in this chapter is to get in depth understanding of Clausewitzian theory by an assessment of his Trinitarian approach to war. The different pillars of Trinity are taken as relevant phases of war in contemporary world. Therefore, the actuality of his theory is also aimed to be examined within the given scope of Russian strategic thinking and its implications in Syrian civil war as a case study.

For that reason, in the following chapter, titled "Roots and Characteristics of Contemporary Russian Strategic Thinking", the evolution of Russian strategic thinking is addressed with regards to implementation of Gerasimov doctrine and two Soviet-legacy theories, deep penetration theory and reflexive control theory. In addition, aspirations of Moscow that made possible for us to encounter such evolution in Russian strategic thinking will also be considered to give deeper understanding on the concepts in place.

Briefly, this chapter will open a debate on the conceptual transformation of Moscow's power according to the reformation of Russian Army, which offers tools to confront and breakout the transatlantic encirclement. It is aimed to address its presence in Syria through the assessment of roots and characteristics of its strategic thinking with a linkage to Clausewitzian approach under the circumstances of transformation of its security environment in the post-Cold War era. In this context, the term hybrid warfare is discussed as new generation of warfare in Russian strategic thinking by paving ground for the debate on how it should be perceived. It is aimed to be discussed whether the term hybridity is presenting the same concept as figured in Russian General Gerasimov's doctrine as in the perceptions of the West, namely NATO members. Thereby, it will question how hybrid warfare approach of Russia differs from 'multimodality'-focused western understanding by exploring the Soviet deep penetration theory and reflexive control concept that explains its transformation in

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<sup>1</sup> Clausewitz, Carl von, *On War*, translated by Michael Howard and Peter Paret, Oxford University Press, 2007.

detail. In the light of aforementioned characteristics of Russian strategic thinking, Moscow's new generation warfare is proposed to be examined with a detailed analysis on the General Gerasimov's perspective on use of non-military and military measures in war along with military doctrines of Russian Federation published in 2010 and 2014. Lastly, the core of Clausewitzian approach will be revisited to underscore where this transformation stands in the war and strategy theories.

The following chapter, titled "President Putin's Road to the Syrian Intervention: Russia's Comeback to the Middle East", will look at the changing dynamics of Russian foreign policy that prepared ground for its involvement in Syrian civil war. As a last case to see this change clearly, Ukrainian crisis showed that Moscow is not willing to play the game with the rules that determined by the West. In addition, there have been other developments that drew attention to changing parameters of the Kremlin's strategic concerns. Thus, Putin's Russia started to put its own mark on foreign policies in the international system. This chapter will try to explore the motives of Moscow to change in its agenda by questioning which historical turning points paved way to motivate the Kremlin to get involved in Syrian civil war. To this end, the US invasion of Iraq in 2003 and its repercussions on the regional agenda will be mentioned in order to refer the circumstances that have been faced in 2000s. In addition, the crucial importance of the US-backed NATO intervention to Libya in 2011 will be assessed in terms of the lessons that Moscow learned by not vetoed a UN Security Council resolution. Clearly, the Kremlin's comeback to the Middle East cannot be fully understood without its domestic projection that provided free manoeuvre space for President Putin.

Thereby, bilateral relations between Russia and Syria will be studied under the light of major developments that made President Putin and Bashar al-Asad significant partners. However, this chapter will also question the real enmity in this partnership. Thus, if there is such strategic importance that is addressed by both of the leaders, particular concerns in Russia's involvement to Syrian civil war should not be dismissed. In order to accomplish this, the chapter will aim to explore the national security priorities of Moscow towards the rise of extremism. There has been quite noteworthy emphasis made by Moscow on counter-terrorism as its main discourse in Syrian campaign. Since, the roots of fear of extremism have also been discussed earlier

in this thesis while evaluating the changes in contemporary Russian strategic thinking, it is also important to address it as an instrumental argument for the Kremlin's foreign policy directions to be able to figure out its motivations in Syria. In this respect, President Putin's speech at the UN General Assembly on September 2015 which has been delivered prior to the Russia's engagement in Syria, will be analysed to show where the Kremlin stands. In short, this chapter will set a sight on motivations of Moscow to get involved in Syrian civil war at this stage of conflict. The question on timing of its involvement will also be accompanied with abovementioned reasons.

Therefore, in the second part of this chapter, Russian campaign in Syria will be assessed with a detailed analysis on Moscow's security and political objectives together with its strategic approach to the conflict and international system. Firstly, Russia's security objectives are proposed to be evaluated in the light of its motivations. These motivations are not only focused on Syrian civil war, however they also provide hints about transformation of Russian military capacity. On one hand, it will argue that the shift of focus from Ukraine to Syria has rooted in change of Moscow's perspective while at the same time this new front has also offered a new window of opportunity. In line with this argument, its security objectives will be questioned according to reliability of their partnership. Since its security objectives show that there is no pure intention to back its ally, there is also artificially designated cooperation that allows Moscow to test its new warfare concept.

Regarding political objectives of the Kremlin in Syria, this study will point out to number of issues that has been already set prior to its direct involvement. In its very core, this move has been seen as a shift of spotlight from Ukraine. While all the attention of the West was focused on Ukraine, Russia moved towards a new 'adventure'. From the beginning of its involvement, President Putin raised the need for an alternative coalition, which would alternate the US-led failed attempt. To this end, main argument of this part of the chapter will rely upon the recent political rationale of the Kremlin in international system without an exclusionist approach since it cannot be limited to the Syrian case.

In tandem, Moscow's strategic approach to the conflict will be assessed with the narrative of rise of extremism and its strategic use in Syrian campaign. The



reflexive control theory will be questioned in terms of its repercussion on operations against ISIS. Therefore, "timely" decision of Russia declared on 14 March 2016 to withdraw partially from Syria is going to be part of analysis since it was a well-tailored strategy proved the achievements of Moscow. It was also a remarkable move to leave an impact on international agenda. To this end, last part of this chapter will explore the approach of Moscow to the international system. Clearly, withdrawal decision made a remarkable impact on international agenda in favor of the Kremlin. However, the question on whether its current achievements are durable and realistic is still in place to be examined.

## CHAPTER 2

### CLAUSEWITZIAN DICTUM OF WAR AND STRATEGY

#### 2.1 Elements of Clausewitzian Theory

In order to place the Russian intervention into a scholarly-tailored context, the theoretical analysis of this thesis is planned to benefit from Carl von Clausewitz war and strategy theory due its similar characteristics with realist assumptions. It should be underlined that Clausewitz's theory will not be considered as a 'field manual' to get a good grasp of Russian operations, but a theoretical linkage between the armed conflict on the ground and a scientific approach to International Relations. Accordingly, in his work entitled "the Social Science of Carl von Clausewitz", Klinger claims that "(Clausewitz's) theory is not to provide 'a manual for action', and it is not intended to improve military effectiveness directly. The targets for much of Clausewitz's more acerbic critical observations are those 'theorists' who view theory in this way—as if Einstein's theory of relativity should be discarded if it cannot tell people how to return the space shuttle to earth".<sup>2</sup>

In the essence of Clausewitzian theory, war is seen as a systematic continuation of political intercourse through other means to impose one's political will on the adversary. That is why, war is a part of policy, or emanating from policy itself, then policy will determine war's character. Having referred to war - politics association, this chapter will explore the questions on whether Clausewitzian approach to war is still valid and applicable to the cases which have completely different set of dynamics than the Prussian thinker's era. By doing so, the debate on war definitions that had been proposed in Clausewitz's most read and discussed work *On War* will be addressed in order to provide good ground for rethinking his approach in the light of 'modern' wars. Therefore, it is also aimed to be discussed that whether a Clausewitzian reading is still

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<sup>2</sup> Klinger, Janeen, "The Social Science of Carl von Clausewitz", *Parameters*, Spring 2006.

relevant while there is an ongoing debate on 'new' wars. The question on changing features of war and the reflections of this transformation on Trinitarian approach of Clausewitz will be argued to shed a light on its so called fusty theory. At last, Moscow's desires in both regional and global politics and its use of force in Syria will be aimed to be understood through the lens of Clausewitzian theory. However, as mentioned earlier, the theory will be regarded as a provider of theoretical linkage only. Thus, it will not be regarded as a manual to be followed step by step on the case of Russian involvement in Syrian Civil War. On the contrary, it will be taken as a ground that provides a good variety of fundamental questions on war and strategy. To this end, what is offered by Clausewitzian theory will be evaluated within the scope of changing characteristics of war and conflict and eventually Russia's *raison d'etre* in Syria.

At the very beginning of his book *On War*, Clausewitz starts with a main definition of war but primarily to describe its nature rather than a literary definition. Thereby, he points out that war should be regarded as a duel between competing wills. In his own terms:

*War is nothing but a duel on a larger scale. Countless duels go to make up war, but a picture of it as a whole can be formed by imagining a pair of wrestlers. Each tries through physical force to compel the other to do his will; his immediate aim is to throw his opponent in order to make him incapable of further resistance. War is thus an act of force to compel our enemy to do our will.<sup>3</sup>*

Thereby, Clausewitz defines the main goal of the war as to reach the political object so the motives that pave way to state of war cannot be understood separately since they even determine the scale of military power to accomplish political aspirations. Consequently, the limits of political objective are determinants of his theory. Given the fact that war is being regarded as a duel, limited political objectives of the adversaries make the military victory happen by determinedly affecting their will. Thus, it is more difficult to measure the enemy's political limits since these limits are determining the course of war, than calculating its armaments.<sup>4</sup> In tandem with the

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<sup>3</sup> Clausewitz, Carl von, *On War*, [Michael Howard and Peter Paret ed.], Oxford University Press, New York, 2008, p. 13.

<sup>4</sup> Gray, Colin, *War, Peace and International Relations: An Introduction to Strategic History*, Routledge, 2007, pp. 22 - 23.

aforementioned perspective, war is not regarded as an objective to gain victory over weakness of enemies however it is seen as a tool that plays an assertive role to bring them to their knees according to Clausewitzian approach. Therefore, war cannot be separated from politics; on the contrary, it ensures exactly the continuity of politics. Thus, various objectives of warfare are combined with different forms. While defeating enemy in the battlefield is being considered as direct warfare since its main objective is to conquer territory of enemy, the other form of warfare aims to disarm the enemy by exhausting its forces. In other words, if one's ability to take advantage of the situation can only happen through conducting asymmetric operations then it appears more reasonable path to follow rather than waging a total war at the dispense of losing territory and armed forces.<sup>5</sup>

Within this context, it can be argued that the nature of war is twofold in Clausewitzian theory. It has both objective and subjective aspects to the extent of distinctiveness of war. The objective nature of war derives from the universal elements that every war contains despite the particular characteristics of every state that involved in fighting. On the other hand, the subjective nature of war, as asserted by Clausewitz, is dynamically changeable which actually gives shape to character of war. While objectivity in its very nature of war provides the core of war primitively, the subjective nature tells more about particularity in its character that is subject to change due to the unique dynamics within the warfare.<sup>6</sup> What is more, Clausewitzian dictum of war offers that the use of military force is seen as means to the end that is formulated around the notion of policy instrument. Thus, war becomes a tool of policy to reach the higher end of political objectives in his conception. Given the fact that all actions of states in war are associated with those political objectives, it is subordinated to the motives of political guidance. However, Clausewitz's approach to war does not eliminate the circumstances of giving complete control to political will. As the all-military operations are operated with the policy, he reserves the possibility of refraining from dictatorship of the political objectives. Therefore, the question on how far war's subordination to policy can go further within the boundaries of strategy is an

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<sup>5</sup> Racz, Andras, *Russia's Hybrid War in Ukraine: Breaking the Enemy's Ability to Resist*, FIIA Report 43, Helsinki, 2015. p. 19.

<sup>6</sup> Gray, Colin, *War, Peace and International Relations: An Introduction to Strategic History*, Routledge, 2007, p. 24.

important effort to understand where military mightiness stands in the equilibrium of international politics.<sup>7</sup>

The competition of political wills takes place in different forms of frictions in such conditions of risk and uncertainty that is why Clausewitz describes the war as the realm of chance. In the light of this perspective, his theory is formulated around two dimensions of a debate on war, the role of politics and the nature of war. The link between state of war and politics is seen everlasting in Clausewitzian paradigm, the character of war is highly shaped by the policies that even not in place during warfighting. Since it is counted as core, war is never considered apart from policies but rather as continuation of political power play.<sup>8</sup> As it explained in his work *On War*:

*It (the political aim) must adapt itself to its chosen means, a process which can radically change it; yet the political aim remains the first consideration. Policy, thus, will permeate all military operations, and in so far as their violent nature will admit, it will have a continuous influence on them.*<sup>9</sup>

Hence, Clausewitz argues that war is combination of multilateral and interactive actions that lead the complexity in its very nature. It can be understood through political intercourse of the parties rather than inadequate explanation on military capabilities.

However, subordination of war to politics does not mean that it is under complete control of political desires. On the contrary, the Prussian General underscores that there should be a balance in terms of undertaking war either as subordinate to politics or as a continuation of politics. Since subordination results in underestimating the role of military mightiness, war cannot be undermined to political desires which although shapes the future of it. In the light of the abovementioned discussion on the instrumental role of politics in war, the interaction needs to be

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<sup>7</sup> Waldman, Thomas, "Politics and War: Clausewitz's Paradoxical Equation", *Strategic Studies Institute U.S. Army War College*, Parameters, Autumn 2010, p.2.

<sup>8</sup> Gray, Colin. *War, Peace and International Relations: An Introduction to Strategic History*, Routledge, 2007, p. 15.

<sup>9</sup> Clausewitz, 1976: 87 in Gray, Colin. *War, Peace and International Relations: An Introduction to Strategic History*, Routledge, 2007, p. 22.

underlined in accordance with the political web that provides proper ground for warfighting. In other words, political web is considered to be the place where war is happening and these two cannot be isolated from each other.<sup>10</sup> In fact, against the linear understanding of war, Clausewitz believes that the relationship between war and politics should be addressed as nonlinear, constant and dynamic. Because political intercourse is perceived as a dynamic game changer, he argues that use of force; ends and means are at constant play. Therefore, each change in belligerents' intentions is paving way to new political realities which mark essential changes in the course of war. In addition to this, war is also determined by the aspects that are not directly related to political object but still in play to shape the scenery of war. The uncertainty, cultural norms and friction among several elements can have an impact to limit or marginalize the actions in warfighting. So the ambiguity is considered part of policy that might perform unrealistic actions, and thereby, the theory prescribes that policy should not be followed carelessly.<sup>11</sup>

In addition to the abovementioned brief discussion on the characterization of war, it is fair to underline that Clausewitz collaborates on the role of politics whereas the war is regarded as subordination of its intercourse. However, this does not necessarily lead to continuation of the conditions. In other words, when the war begins, its subordination to politics becomes meaningful with other means. The intercourse between political aims and the military capacity is being governed in tandem with the continuity of all means. Thus, the war itself does not interrupt the political will but at the same time carries out its own law. That is why; Clausewitz considers the significance of “other means” in order to figure out how the political intercourse is reflected in state of war. An explicit presentation of this approach can be seen clearly as followed in the *On War*:

*It is, of course, well known that the only source of war is politics - the intercourse of governments and peoples; but it is apt to be assumed that war suspends that intercourse and replaces it by a wholly different condition, ruled by no law but its own.*

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<sup>10</sup> Waldman, Thomas, "Politics and War: Clausewitz's Paradoxical Equation", *Strategic Studies Institute U.S. Army War College*, Parameters, Autumn 2010, pp. 7-9.

<sup>11</sup> Waldman, Thomas, "Politics and War: Clausewitz's Paradoxical Equation", *Strategic Studies Institute U.S. Army War College*, Parameters, Autumn 2010, pp. 9-11.

*We maintain, on the contrary, that war is simply a continuation of political intercourse, with the addition of other means. We deliberately use the phrase "with the addition of other means" because we also want to make it clear that war in itself does not suspend political intercourse or change it into something entirely different. In essentials that intercourse continues, irrespective of the means it employs. The main lines along which military events progress, and to which they are restricted, are political lines that continue throughout the war into subsequent peace.<sup>12</sup>*

According to Herberg-Rothe, the Clausewitzian approach to the relationship between purpose and means of a war is rather dynamic one that offers its own grammar. In other words, there are always different purposes and means of war and they are not always playing accordingly. That is why their relationship to each other can be considered as dynamic. Furthermore, war cannot be an independent act from political discourse instead; it can totally be part of its desires and aspirations. In addition, distinction between defence and attack that represents the whole nature of war through providing effective forms for success.<sup>13</sup> The strategy of war is not only about the war itself but also about the limits that are pursued to be achieved. Therefore, the question on how far the adversaries would like to keep the fighting constitutes the hard line of their strategy. In tandem, Clausewitz puts remarkable emphasis on psychological and political factors considering the fact that these have definitive impact on military violence.<sup>14</sup> That is why his theory primarily takes into account the tension between goals of policy in accordance with subjective nature of war. Thereby, chance and courage within this very nature resemble war a gamble. As the Prussian General underlines:

*From the very start there is an interplay of possibilities, probabilities, good luck and bad that weaves its way throughout the length and breadth of the tapestry. In the whole range of human activities, war most closely resembles a game of cards.<sup>15</sup>*

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<sup>12</sup> Clausewitz, Carl von, *On War*, edited and translated by Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton, 1976), 87, p. 605. (in Daniel Moran, *Strategic Theory and the History of War*, p. 7)

<sup>13</sup> Herberg-Rothe, Andreas, "Clausewitz's Concept of Strategy - Balancing purpose, Aims and Means", *Journal of Strategic Studies*, Vol.37, Nos. 6-7, 2014, pp. 906 - 907.

<sup>14</sup> Moran, Daniel, "Strategic Theory and the History of War", Naval Postgraduate School, 2001. <http://www.clausewitz.com/readings/Moran-StrategicTheory.pdf> (accessed on 11 May 2016), p. 7.

<sup>15</sup> Clausewitz, Carl von, *On War*, translated by Michael Howard and Peter Paret, Oxford University Press, 2007, p. 26.

At this point, it is important to underline that the central pillars of the Clausewitzian theory on war can be depicted as the trinity, the climate of war, friction and the fog of war concepts, respectively. Since it is widely accepted that ever changing unstable relations between these pillars determine the future of war, Clausewitz underscores that maintaining a balance in between these shifting conditions is crucial to dominate the general course of the war. In the light of this perspective, *the trinity* is consisted on passion, chance and reason which are at play in every kind of warfare. Subsequently, *the climate of war* is defined to underline the atmosphere, which is resulted from danger, uncertainty, and most remarkably, chance. As Colin Gray puts clearly, the Clausewitzian approach points out that chance and uncertainty serve important elements to keep the balance of the war while creating false confidence or overconfidence because of the confusion on capacities that is created by the unexpected circumstances.<sup>16</sup> To this end, Trinitarian approach associates violence, hatred and enmity with passion, chance and reason - in other words the will of the government. The passion relies upon the people who are fighting in the war and identify themselves with the war.<sup>17</sup> While the absolute war is being offered by limitless enmity, the trinity sets the borders of real war. Clausewitz explains these paradoxical tendencies of the war as follows:

*War is more than a true chameleon that slightly adapts its characteristics to a given case. As a total phenomenon its dominant tendencies always make war a paradoxical trinity – composed of primordial violence, hatred, and enmity which are to be regarded as a blind natural force; of the play of chance and probability within which the creative spirit is free to roam; and of its element of subordination, as an instrument of policy, which makes it subject to reason alone.*

*The first of these three aspects mainly concerns the people; the second the commander and his army; the third the government. The passions that are to be kindled in a war must already be inherent in the people; the scope which play of courage and talent will enjoy in the realm of*

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<sup>16</sup> Gray, Colin, *War, Peace and International Relations: An Introduction to Strategic History*, Routledge, 2007, p. 25.

<sup>17</sup> Heuser, Beatrice, "Introduction", *On War*, translated by Michael Howard and Peter Paret, Oxford University Press, 2007, p. XXVIII.



*probability and chance depends on the particular character of the army; but the political aims are the business of government alone.*<sup>18</sup>

On the other hand, according to Clausewitz, theory of war has to address the factors that form the war to provide a proper contribution to general understanding. As in the aforementioned part, Clausewitz undertakes that there are number of factors that govern the war since it is constituted of violent clash of wills. However, violence itself does not explain enough the intercourse within the state of war according to his dictum of war. On the contrary, practical difficulties, which Clausewitz describes as friction, also have an impact on formation of war. Those difficulties are considered as restrictive factors that lead to limited means. Thus, despite the fact that clash of wills are eager to reach higher limits of violence, the definitive momentum of is the friction that allows to reach it.<sup>19</sup> He therefore defined friction in his book *On War* as:

*Friction is the only concept that more or less corresponds to the factors that distinguish real war from war on paper. The military machine -the army and everything related to it- is basically very simple and therefore seems easy to manage. But we should bear in mind that none of its components is of one piece: each part is composed of individuals, every one of whom retains his potential of friction.*<sup>20</sup>

Thus, Clausewitz describes *friction* as another theme of the war because there are always different consequences regarding the planned war and the actual situation. So friction preserves sort of an idea on rethinking the circumstances and possible unexpected moves from the enemies but at the same time counts on the mistakes of policy makers and soldiers. In addition to these central pillars of theory on war and strategy, Clausewitz later introduces *the fog of war* to address the uncertainty that is fostered by the information clouds. In other words, not every kind of information might serve to the objectives of the commanders, and perfect information about the battlefield is never an achievable thing. Furthermore, one aspect of this pillar needs to

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<sup>18</sup> Clausewitz, Carl von, *On War*, translated by Michael Howard and Peter Paret, Oxford University Press, 2007, pp. 30-31.

<sup>19</sup> Moran, Daniel, "Strategic Theory and the History of War", Naval Postgraduate School, 2001. <http://www.clausewitz.com/readings/Moran-StrategicTheory.pdf> (accessed on 11 May 2016), p. 7.

<sup>20</sup> Clausewitz, Carl von, *On War*, translated by Michael Howard and Peter Paret, Oxford University Press, 2007, p. 66.

be underlined considering its importance in modern times, waging a war against irregular forces under this so called fog of information is far more difficult task to accomplish. As already been discussed above, Clausewitz proposes *the trinity* as a composition of tendencies between violence, hatred and enmity that are dominant in state of war. Therefore, he fundamentally argues that these three tendencies are inherently constitutes three pillars of actors at play; people, commanders and the government. Since blind force in war comes from the people, the courage to conduct fight derives from the hatred of the commanders. Lastly, enmity relies upon the political aims of the governments. In this regard, Clausewitz underscores that the theory should keep an eye on the balance between these tendencies to understand best the unequal strength of equilibrium among them.<sup>21</sup> Otherwise it is possible to fail to notice the objective knowledge in the fog of war.

In addition, Colin Gray points out to another aspect of Clausewitzian dictum of war which is the notion of centre of gravity. To this end, he offers an explanation that figures out each state has a centre of gravity during war that needs to be destroyed or credibly threatened in order to be defeated. Thus, it is crucial to find out enemy's centre of gravity and it has to be targeted rigorously to get an edge over it.<sup>22</sup> Clausewitz classifies the strategic elements that enable to target the aforementioned centre of gravity into various types. Despite the variety of these strategic elements, Prussian thinker underlines the interconnectedness among them. Since there are manifold ways of destroying the enemy, it is only vital to make it through the engagements that identify strategic characteristics of the adversary's power. To this end, Clausewitz defines the distinction of strategic elements as follows:

*The strategic elements that affect the use of engagements may be classified into various types: moral, physical, mathematical, geographical and statistical. The first type covers everything that is created by intellectual and psychological qualities and influences; the second consists of the size of the armed forces, their composition, armament and so forth; the third includes the angle of lines of operation, the convergent and divergent movements whether geometry enters into their calculation; the fourth comprises the influence of*

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<sup>21</sup>Moran, Daniel, "Strategic Theory and the History of War", Naval Postgraduate School, 2001. <http://www.clausewitz.com/readings/Moran-StrategicTheory.pdf> (accessed on 11 May 2016), pp. 6-7.

<sup>22</sup> Gray, Colin. *War, Peace and International Relations: An Introduction to Strategic History*, Routledge, 2007, p. 25.

*terrain, such as commanding positions, mountains, rivers, woods, and roads; and, finally, the fifth covers support and maintenance.*<sup>23</sup>

As it is seen in his own words, Clausewitz brings into consideration that the map of his strategic thinking respectively covers every possible actor that might play a crucial role in warfighting.

## **2.2 New Wars, Old Words: Clausewitz in Contemporary World**

Having examined the general framework of Clausewitzian approach to war and strategy, it is fair to mention that all these theoretical assumptions have been made in order to understand and propose an idealistic set of strategies to war that was differently conducted than in today's world. Indeed Prussian thinker's work *On War* was published in 1832; he completed the book between 1815 and 1830 while he was working as administrative director of the Military Academy in Berlin. Clearly, core of his theory is affected and developed by characteristics of the wars in his century. However, the question remains unanswered when it comes to that if only *zeitgeist* can bring an explanatory perception on war today. In other words, changes in the way that war is explained are really essential to prove that it is a new world, i.e. 'new' war. From this point, as it has been mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, the discussion on relevance of Clausewitzian theory on war regarding to 'new' wars will be extended to alternative arguments on war in modern world. Thus, Clausewitzian theory will be tested in order to understand where it does stand in the debate of changing characters of war and conflict, while giving credit to its remaining cores regardless of criticism on its fustiness.

First of all, bringing the debate of 'new' and 'old' wars to the agenda by default requires a definition that explains what is meant by 'new'. Thus, as it is argued that 'new' war is fundamentally different than seen in the strategic history, therefore it is assumed to include modern dynamics that is shaped and guided by the transformation of technology and also politics. Briefly, main argument which claims that there are

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<sup>23</sup> Clausewitz, Carl von, *On War*, translated by Michael Howard and Peter Paret, Oxford University Press, 2007, p. 140.

changing features of war and conflict, focuses on what is brought by all these transformations cannot be explained by old fashion of strategic thinking. Thereby, these arguments also go further that even nature of war is subject to change due to the transformation of all dynamics. In the light of this discussion, it can be noted that very first criticism to Clausewitzian theory on war is rooted in its core that defines war as means of reaching the political object since it is the ultimate goal. Given the fact that, new generation warfighting is formulated on the idea that questions political legitimacy and its gravity in conflicts, how can one argue that *the trinity* of Clausewitzian dictum is still in place. In his article Fleming refers to Martin van Creveld who argues that decline of state which is assumed as a different apparatus than in times of Clausewitz is leading new wars to become non-trinitarian wars.<sup>24</sup> Creveld comes to this conclusion from the proliferation of low intensity conflicts that eventually evolving the rational part of the trinity Clausewitz formulates.

Since the political purpose of the war is in decline due to other focal dynamics such as religious fanaticism, culture, ethnic conflicts and transformation of warfare technologies; it is usually argued that 'new' wars focused on international system which is now led by globalisation. Therefore this argument also goes further with the idea by claiming the substantive difference occurs in the decentralized state authority which is the result of modern economies that prioritizes resource maximization. In other words, while the wartime economies in Clausewitzian times are differing from today's economies in terms of their relation to organised crime.<sup>25</sup> Thus, continuity of the conflicts is directly or indirectly reconstituting the nature of war. Fleming also quotes from David Keen to underscore what underlies behind the motives of new wars as he stresses that new wars are eager to create alternative system of profit rather than waging a total fight against a particular system.<sup>26</sup> To this end, together with transformation of technological features of warfare and global economic system prove that war is no longer an affair of state as claimed in Clausewitzian theory. On the

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<sup>24</sup> Fleming, Colin M., "New or Old Wars? Debating a Clausewitzian Future", *Journal of Strategic Studies*, Vol.32, Issue 2, 2009, p. 218.

<sup>25</sup> Fleming, Colin M., "New or Old Wars? Debating a Clausewitzian Future", *Journal of Strategic Studies*, Vol.32, Issue 2, 2009, p. 223.

<sup>26</sup> (David Keen, *The Economic Functions of Violence in Civil Wars*, 11) in Fleming, p. 223.

contrary, it is discussed as a result of political breakdown. In this context, war is deepened and continued due to the cracks in the political system which is not only serving to its will but also functioning as a provider of eternal violence.

However, against all these arguments, the question that has been asked at the beginning remains unanswered to the extent that how the change in forms of warfare can be concluded as a total rejection of Clausewitzian dictum. In other words, the 'new' war claim argues that nature of war is in change by refusing the strategic rationality and political will that are still in place at its core. As another detractor of Clausewitzian theory, Mary Kaldor argues that the 'new' wars are not taking place as inter-state engagements, they occur as fights between the networks. By doing so, Kaldor expels the state away from the formulation that includes complexity of transnational relations as well as giving enormous role to illegal groups.<sup>27</sup> Despite the rejection of state, Karaosmanoğlu argues that Kaldor's approach to war is still related to Clausewitzian theory in terms of its acknowledgement to political cause of the war. Thus, Kaldor claims that network wars occur in the places where political breakdown is already happening or where states cannot cope with the globalisation. In contrast to Creveld's criticism that prioritizes technological and tactical transformation of the nature of war, Kaldor assesses that social upheaval and collapse of political system are root causes of new wars. Thereby, it is fair to state that even if 'new' war claims are attacking to the Clausewitzian concept of nature of war though their arguments still stand weak regarding how they will succeed to reconsider its nature.

As Fleming argues, the decline in state authority does not necessarily mean that wars will be apolitical or the nature of war will be subjected to a total change.<sup>28</sup> Also, the irrational impulses of the networks cannot be sufficient to consider that the war will be conducted irrationally. Therefore, the political cause behind this cannot be undermined because of irrational influences which even Clausewitz does not fail to notice. As mentioned earlier, in his book *On War*, Clausewitz considers moral factors including the factors that cannot be classified as elements of the strategy. To this end, although the argument that foresees dismissal of the state as a repulsing matter to

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<sup>27</sup> Karaosmanoğlu, Ali L., Yirmibirinci Yüzyılda Savaşı Tartışmak: Clausewitz Yeniden, Uluslararası İlişkiler, Cilt 8, Sayı 29, Bahar 2011, p. 11.

<sup>28</sup> Fleming, Colin M., "New or Old Wars? Debating a Clausewitzian Future", Journal of Strategic Studies, Vol.32, Issue 2, 2009, p. 226.

understand new complexities, it is still not persuasive to prove that the nature of war has changed with regards to irrationality and political weakness. Furthermore, if the decline of state is considered to be part of new era, the claim by default admits the redundancy of Clausewitzian theory. That is to say, transformational changes in the nature of war acknowledged as the change in its characteristics. However, it is controversial why and in which extent it might affect its very nature.<sup>29</sup> Clearly, the way of conduct is in transformation and it is subject to change in time. The argument however is shallower to define how this transformation is regarded by the state. New complexities are opening up new prerequisites and these are not only accomplished by non-political incentives. On the contrary, new trends are also required to be examined with early experiments. For the very reason, Clausewitzian theory provides such an analytical toolset to evaluate 'new' wars.

On another note, Karaosmanoğlu underscores even if technological advancements have an impact on changing character of wars, the nature of war cannot be evaluated separately from its political and historical context. He argues that the Clausewitzian argument is still valid in order to explain that war is a total act of humankind and therefore its subjectivity to political and sociological reasoning is still in place.<sup>30</sup> The so-called fundamental change does not necessarily abolish the analytical relevance of Clausewitzian theory as it is providing a conceptual framework that can also be implemented with respect to 'new' context. To this end, Clausewitzian approach would offer a toolset to develop a better understanding of political and strategic transformation of warfare.

In the light of abovementioned debate, it is important to underline that the question on relevance of Clausewitzian dictum of war and strategy in twenty-first century remains to the extent that in which aspects of war should be taken to consideration. For instance, Mary Kaldor argues that even though it is hard to distinguish the trinity in 'new' wars since there is a blurring line between state and non-state actors; the concept is still useful to describe interconnectedness of social and

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<sup>29</sup> Fleming, Colin M., "New or Old Wars? Debating a Clausewitzian Future", *Journal of Strategic Studies*, Vol.32, Issue 2, 2009, p. 232.

<sup>30</sup> Karaosmanoğlu, Ali L., *Yirmibirinci Yüzyılda Savaşı Tartışmak: Clausewitz Yeniden*, Uluslararası İlişkiler, Cilt 8, Sayı 29, Bahar 2011, p. 22.

ethical tendencies in war.<sup>31</sup> The agreement on Clausewitzian theory among different criticisms, is pointing out that war is a political mobilisation of disparate elements and there is still a concerted conditions that would be explained by the Trinitarian approach. In order to exemplify this, in his article Robert Callum analyzes 1990-91 Persian Gulf War in the light of Clausewitzian theory and explains how great military victory of the United States turned out to be also a political defeat. Callum underscores that lack of strategic linkage in between the Trinity ended up with failure. Due to the volatile factors that Clausewitzian theory sums up in the trinity, military success on the ground did not have a reflection on political end.<sup>32</sup> In this regard, *the fog of war* makes hard to distinguish the trinity while also playing to confuse political goals in the war.

As another example, Christopher Griffin analyses the Afghanistan War from the perspective of Clausewitzian theory to underscore its application in relationship between war aims and actual resources employed in the field. Griffin emphasizes the different aims of NATO allies and the complexity in their strategic interests. Most importantly, he underlines the transition in between years of 2001 to 2014 in terms of how war aims became limited which was once unlimited. In relation to abovementioned debate, Griffin questions the definition of victory in the Afghanistan War to see if there was enough military capacity deployed to gain favourable political gain. Considering the fact that way of conflict has changed, there is a common understanding that suppose political outcomes are no longer linked with military success. However, Griffin points out that, Clausewitzian approach is still relevant with regards to the linkage between policy and use of force. The centre of gravity that remains in this relationship provides enough argument to revisit Clausewitzian theory in terms of the strategy followed even in insurgencies.<sup>33</sup> Keeping in mind the aforementioned examples, the discussion on blurring lines between enemies in 'new' wars would not be sufficient to reject the theory as it is not always necessary to define

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<sup>31</sup> Kaldor, Mary, "Inconclusive Wars: Is Clausewitz still relevant in these global times?", *Global Policy*, Vol. I, Issue 3, October 2010, p. 277.

<sup>32</sup> Callum, Robert, "War as a Continuation of Policy by Other Means: Clausewitzian Theory in the Persian Gulf War", *Defense Analysis*, Vol. 17, No.1, 2001, p. 60.

<sup>33</sup> Griffin, Christopher, "From Limited War to Limited Victory: Clausewitz and Allied Strategy in Afghanistan", *Contemporary Security Policy*, Vol. 35, No:3, 2014, pp. 447-450.

opponents clearly. Since the sides of the conflict will act in certain ways of strategy, even if not in formal forms, their strategic behaviour carries hints from historical and sociological backgrounds. Thereby, as Karaosmanoğlu also pointed out, it is important to see the transformation within the scope of theory without dismissing its disparate elements.

At this point, a major problematic and debate would revolve around the very question of whether the Clausewitzian war theory paradigm could be applied to intra-state conflicts. In order to precisely answer this key question, first, one should develop a thorough understanding of low intensity conflicts. In theory, low intensity conflicts, or small wars, take place under diplomatically and politically sensitive conditions, mostly in territories without adequate government control.<sup>34</sup> Thus, they are more political-driven, or political-intensive, when compared to interstate conflicts. In other words, intra-state conflicts may even better resonate with the war-policy continuum of the Clausewitzian thinking due to the characteristics of the struggle.

Furthermore, as Clausewitz described the war as an intercourse between governments and peoples, such an intercourse cannot be limited with interstate conflicts.<sup>35</sup> Besides, in his article entitled 'the Legacy of Clausewitz', Echevarria from the US Army Strategic Studies Institute claims that the trends of 'civilianization of war' has already brought about more public participation in conflicts both directly and indirectly.<sup>36</sup> Finally, utilizing the Clausewitzian thinking in counterinsurgency operations has long been popular among defense community.

In sum, this chapter aimed to explore Clausewitzian theory from the perspective of contemporary debates in order to see its relevance and actuality. The question on changing characteristics of war is discussed with regards to different viewpoints in the literature. In order to address a theoretical framework on Russia's presence in Syrian Civil War, the relationship between the state and conflict, how it is evolved with the transformation is examined within the elements of the Trinitarian

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<sup>34</sup> Michael, R. Melillo, "Outfitting a Big-War Military with Small-War Capabilities", *Parameters*, Autumn 2006, pp.22-35.

<sup>35</sup> Waldman, Thomas, "Politics and War: Clausewitz's Paradoxical Equation", *Strategic Studies Institute U.S. Army War College*, *Parameters*, Autumn 2010

<sup>36</sup> Echevarria, Antulio J., "The Legacy of Clausewitz", *Joint Force Quarterly*, Winter 1995-96.



approach of Clausewitz. For the very reason, following parts of this thesis aims to study evolution of Russian strategic thinking in the light of its traditional characteristics and explores the question of what is being offered by new generation warfare in terms of serving as its new strategic toolkit. Since Clausewitzian theory is taken as a guide to have a better understanding in Moscow's strategic transformation, the roots and characteristics of Russian strategic thinking will be analyzed with regards to contemporary debates on war and strategy.

## CHAPTER 3

### CONTEMPORARY RUSSIAN STRATEGIC THINKING

#### 3.1 Roots and Characteristics of Contemporary Russian Strategic Thinking

Moscow used the opportunity of rising oil prices from 1999 onwards which gave a boost in its economy. Russia's move to test the limits of its power revived with several ways like energy cut-offs, financial and social destabilization and economic warfare. The Russo – Georgian conflict in 2008 showed its very first indications that Kremlin is willing to actively use military force as a foreign policy lever. In order to achieve this assertive objective, transformation of the Russian military and strong information warfare has set the agenda of Moscow. And later, this agenda became more apparent in its policies towards Ukraine, particularly Crimea in 2014. The annexation of Crimea revealed the characteristic of Russian warfare which is assumed as hybrid in nature. The hybridity is considered to describe Moscow's nonlinear and indirect belligerence which especially seen in the second half of 2014. The term, hybrid war, consists on fighting insurgency through using advantage of cracks among conflicting sides and also benefiting the legitimate ground from irregularity of the war. And thereby, different modes of warfare including paramilitary and civilian components of the puzzle are being considered within this scope.<sup>37</sup>

The general outlook of Russian military capabilities substantially changed after Putin came to power in 2000 presidential elections. Given that the defence budget has dropped from \$ 300 billion to around \$20 billion during post - Cold War era, Putin's efforts to drive up the defence expenditures to a more realistic level in terms of creating an opportunity window for modernization of the armed forces became primary item of his agenda. In order to accomplish this, he prioritized recovery of the economy and addressed political importance of military affairs. The long term development reforms

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<sup>37</sup> Giles, Keir, "Russia's 'New' Tools for Confronting the West: Continuity and Innovation in Moscow's Exercise of Power", Chatham House Research Paper, 2016, p. 6.

set under his presidency and these reforms are aimed to reach their goals by 2020. Both in national security strategies and also in terms of socioeconomic development with systematic changes put in place. In this respect, the overall aim of military reforms was to achieve high level of efficiency by modernizing the equipment and streamlining the command bodies.

As a matter of fact, the efforts achieved at a certain level and left quite impressive effects. However, an important point in these achievements should be kept in mind while embracing Kremlin's confidence is that Russia has been waiting so long to close its gap between old and new world. As Sinovetz and Betz argue that Putin's reformation efforts should not only be considered as an attempt to remilitarization since these developments were belated because of the lack of intention throughout 1990s. In other words, the debate on Russia's increasing military budget does not provide clearly coherent evidence on whether these reforms show the reality of compulsory achievements to keep its strength in the new world order or they are bringing new foods for thought to Moscow's changing perceptions on security.<sup>38</sup> As Moscow's threat perceptions and strategy has been deeply shaped by Russian 'power ministry' system, therefore, its emerging military strategy that focuses on Putin's grander aims evidently create a challenging source of crisis for Europe's strategic encirclement.<sup>39</sup>

Moreover, Russia has demonstrated a shift in its foreign and security policy in recent years. When Kremlin decided to move beyond its non-assertive post Cold War policies, it has been regarded by the West as new concepts are being implemented. However, the perception on hybrid warfare has been a concept that is renewed with traditional Soviet approaches rather than a new set of tools. It has to be understood as Russia's assertive policies are well integrated to each other, since transformation of the Russian Armed Forces is also backed by Moscow's destabilization and active measure policies. In this context, Ukraine and Syria ensured real operational grounds to test the

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<sup>38</sup> Sinovets, Polina and Renz, Bettina, "Russia's 2014 Military Doctrine and beyond: threat perceptions, capabilities and ambitions", NATO Defence College Research Division Paper , No. 117, 2015, p. 5.

<sup>39</sup> Covington, Stephen R., Putin's Choice for Russia, Harvard Kennedy School Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs, 2015, p. 22.

limits of recent rearmament program while reserving a room for political breakout opportunity from strategic encirclement of the West.<sup>40</sup>

Putin's willingness for military reforms and increase in Russia's defence budget since 2008 clearly made Moscow's recent moves in international system possible. Considering annexation of Crimea in 2014 and its involvement in Ukraine would not be feasible if Russian military had not experienced such reformation in the past years. Furthermore, Moscow's desire to intervene Syrian civil war showed that Russia's first appearance in the Middle East is preserving more room to discuss about its deterrence capability beyond the periphery.<sup>41</sup> Russia's presence in Syria first geographically broke a trend that has been followed since dissolution of the Soviet Union. When Moscow decided to support its only ally in the Middle East to fight against ISIS, it also made clear to prove its military capacity. More importantly, its military mightiness and decisiveness demonstrated a backlash for what Trenin calls 'de facto monopoly' of United States on the international system.<sup>42</sup> Therefore, the reformation of Russian Army unfolded two aspirations of Russia behind this effort; first, Moscow's aim to breakout the transatlantic encirclement, namely encountering actions of United States and secondly, its intention to create a sphere of privileged interest by restoring credibility of armed forces as a tool of influence. On the other hand, Russia's efforts to reform its armed forces are also seen as compensation of its relative weakness on other areas.<sup>43</sup>

To this end, this chapter will aim to study further roots of the transformation of Russian strategic concepts in the light of abovementioned aspirations that made possible to encounter this transformation. For this reason, new generation of warfare concepts such as hybridity and 'asymmetric' or 'indirect' warfare are aimed to be addressed within the context of Russian military doctrines of 2010 and 2014. The discussion will be further expanded to challenges between Western and Russian

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<sup>40</sup> Giles, Keir, "Russia's 'New' Tools for Confronting the West: Continuity and Innovation in Moscow's Exercise of Power", Chatham House Research Paper, 2016, p. 2.

<sup>41</sup> Trenin, Dmitri, "The Revival of the Russian Military", *Foreign Affairs*, May/June 2016, pp. 23- 24.

<sup>42</sup> Trenin, Dmitri, "The Revival of the Russian Military", *Foreign Affairs*, May/June 2016, p. 26.

<sup>43</sup> Giles, Keir, "Russia's 'New' Tools for Confronting the West: Continuity and Innovation in Moscow's Exercise of Power", Chatham House Research Paper, 2016, p. 14.

understanding of conducting hybrid warfare. Thus, what exactly is offered by Russian General Gerasimov's interpretation of hybridity will be considered to compare how this transformation is perceived.

### **3.2. New Generation in Strategic Concepts: Gerasimov Doctrine**

The article of General Valery Gerasimov, the Chief of the General Staff of the Russian Federation's Armed Forces, titled "*The Value of Science is in the Foresight: New Challenges Demand Rethinking the Forms and Methods of Carrying out Combat Operations*"<sup>44</sup>, has pointed out his perspective on warfare with respect to previous lessons learned. However it is mostly regarded as if he is proposing totally new sort of warfare which merges conventional and unconventional methods while also making room for inspiring the empowerment of national power. Contrary to what is believed in the West, Gerasimov did not find out completely new warfare, instead he principally formulated his view of operational environment and future aspects of warfare.<sup>45</sup> The term hybrid war is widely used in Western debates to address 'hybrid' threats that Russia has been developing towards NATO member states, explicitly covering the threats in its geopolitical hinterland. However, Gerasimov formulates the term in a different contextual framework than the Western approach.

The doctrine underscores the asymmetric challenges which are put into action to show an ambiguous reality between the state of war and peace. This ambiguity is referred as "Grey Zone" by Gerasimov which deliberately helps to support disinformation campaign and paramilitary power by fostering civil disobedience. This vagueness is also seen as a driver to cope with undeclared wars in modern times. In this respect, blurring the lines between war and peace by maximizing confusion on the adversary's side already became Russia's *modus operandi* that has been increasingly

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<sup>44</sup> Gerasimov, Valery, "*The Value of Science is in the Foresight: New Challenges Demand Rethinking the Forms and Methods of Carrying out Combat Operations*", *Military Review*, Vol. 96, No. 1, Jan-Feb 2016.

<sup>45</sup> Bartles, Charles K., "Getting Gerasimov Right", United States Army Combined Arms Center, *Military Review*, January - February 2016, pp. 31-32.

witnessed following the Russo - Georgian war in 2008. For this reason, Monaghan draws attention to criticisms on Western perceptions of hybrid warfare. Given that the term itself presented as a new concept, it ignores the reality that it is rooted in Soviet legacy if analysed through the lens of aforementioned elements of it and not representing a completely new notion. Furthermore, overemphasis on hybrid warfare concept leads to an ignorance of Kremlin's new military thinking and underestimates the conventional force in it.<sup>46</sup>

Moscow's understanding of hybrid warfare deeply focuses on efficient use of intelligence and strategic premeditation. According to Gerasimov, traditional military assumptions have been changed to address aforementioned combination of requirements for nonlinear warfare. Thus, his doctrine demonstrates a particular and contemporary approach on Russian military thought. Since international agenda is mainly driven by undeclared wars in 21st century, the new military thinking has to be formulated along with entailments of this change. In this respect, it is important to expand authentic perception on warfare to the extent of more indirect methods such as unifying informational sphere for the management of troops, engaging civilians to the military action. While non-military assets are regarded as effective as power of weapons to fulfil strategic goals, operational and tactical requirements of such course of action would need to be supported with centralized political and military structures that ensure the permanence of ambiguous campaign against its adversaries.<sup>47</sup>

Furthermore, Gerasimov doctrine justifies Kremlin's new military thinking through pointing out that there is an increasing importance of non-military measures in the warfare equilibrium, Moscow needs to develop clear understanding on possibility of foreign intervention that comes up as a result of hybrid-type conflicts. Thus, modernization of armed forces and increasing investment to enlarge its strategic capacity are being considered as a requirement to handle the intensive low-level conflicts which are on the rise to change the nature of traditional conflicts. On the other hand, with the involvement of proxy forces and information warfare to halt the

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<sup>46</sup> Monaghan, Andrew, "Putin's Way of War: The 'War' in Russia's 'Hybrid Warfare'", Strategic Studies Institute U.S. Army War College, Parameters 45 (4), Winter 2015-16, p. 67.

<sup>47</sup> Kasapoğlu, Can. *Russia's Renewed Military Thinking: Non-linear Warfare and Reflexive Control*, NATO Defense College Research Division Research Paper No. 121, 2015, p. 2.

perceptions of adversaries Gerasimov underlines the importance of readiness even in the peacetime since a blurred line for state of war has been put in place.<sup>48</sup>

From this point of view, it is important to recall Russia's reactions to past events that have been tailored by Western powers. As argued in the article by Bartles, the Russian view of warfare and forced regime changes redeveloped after the partition of Yugoslavia in 1990s. Since Russia had rather different view on NATO's intervention to Yugoslavia, the Western intervention seen as breaking the legal grounds of collective security norms. In other words, Russia's later actions in such conditions conducted from the lessons of partition of Yugoslavia, thus independence of Kosovo. That is why the justification of all necessary preconditions is met before the annexation of Crimea. On the other hand, it is believed that the pretexts which provide possible ground for a military operation has changed in the past decades. As Bartles remarks, the preconditions of forced regime changes are well serviced through efficient use of information channels. The media outlets, increasing use of social networks and role of NGOs, which are working closely with the regions in question, are considered to be those tools of information warfare.<sup>49</sup>

For this reason, hybrid warfare is started to be used explicitly to describe the nature of aforementioned tactics and strategy of Russia in the post - Cold War era. In general, Western scholars have pointed out to Russia's involvement to conflicts from hybridity perspective however more importantly; NATO has adopted this perspective as well. One of the first cases to examine this form of warfare theoretically occurred with Chechen conflicts in 1990s. Since the help of several elements that are constructed on hybridity shapes Russia's exceptional role in the conflicts, it is also important to note that these elements led to figure out the form of regular and irregular warfare by providing flexible basis to manoeuvre.

First of all, Chechen society has proved that its traditional core is important to play as a cement to back the idea of waging a war against enemy need to be done by all means. Thus, strong family ties have provided substantial power for mobilization during conflict times. Based on this background, the Chechens were successful to

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<sup>48</sup> Monaghan, Andrew, "Putin's Way of War: The 'War' in Russia's 'Hybrid Warfare'", Strategic Studies Institute U.S. Army War College, Parameters 45 (4), Winter 2015-16, p. 71.

<sup>49</sup> Bartles, Charles K., "Getting Gerasimov Right", United States Army Combined Arms Center, Military Review, January - February 2016, pp. 31-32.

conduct network-centric warfare with guerrilla forces besides using their capacity on conventional warfare. Secondly, the most significant part that designed the hybrid characteristic of warfare was Chechens' ability to carry out psychological and information operations. In a sense, they enjoyed the opportunities of the information age through innovative ideas that are supported at the societal level then inherently caused strong belief in realities of war. In other words, the total nature of hybrid war provoked the advantages of ambiguity that made whole society ready and involved in war.<sup>50</sup>

As the case of Chechens showed it clearly, the progress in technology made possible the transformation of warfare into a new generation which offered new forms of weaponry and ways of waging a war in the modern world. On one hand, this transformation caused to substantial sophistication of information warfare and allowed the armed forces to develop all - purpose systems for command and control. On the other hand, especially widespread use of new communication channels provided a new ground to combat. Given the fact that this new ground increasingly derives the motivations of conflicting sides in the modern times, the functionality of communication and other means of power started to be seen as indispensable elements of future state of war. In this respect, new generation can be defined as combination of different tools including economic, diplomatic, information and psychological measures. As Racz points out to the White Paper (2003), which clearly stated as Russia's readiness to threats from all directions has crucial importance and thereby it needs to be ready to respond by taking strategic initiative by widening its capacity to combined strike capabilities. Within this context, Gerasimov also underscores that these capabilities may differ from using robotized weapons to use of regular forces even during peacekeeping operations. So in a manner, asymmetric actions that are conducted even through non-military methods became to employ agenda of new generation of warfare. Whereas superiority at any levels of power can be indirectly used towards the enemy, electronic and information warfare take the lead to transformation of traditions.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Racz, Andras, Russia's Hybrid War in Ukraine: Breaking the Enemy's Ability to Resist, FIIA Report 43, Helsinki, 2015., pp. 28-29.

<sup>51</sup> Racz, Andras, Russia's Hybrid War in Ukraine: Breaking the Enemy's Ability to Resist, FIIA Report 43, Helsinki, 2015, pp. 35-37.



### 3.3. Old Practices, New Instruments: Reflexive Control and Hybrid Warfare

Clearly, the new generation of warfare is reproduced by the transformational changes in nature of war. However, it is also being realized that these new tools have an impact on disabling conflicting sides from measuring how deep and effective their adversary's moves in the battlefield. To this end, Moscow built its military strategy on the context of legitimate use of force through pushing towards legal grounds and diplomatically tailored rhetoric on the denial of use of open military force since there is growing ability of itself to combat asymmetric operations. Thus, the progress of information warfare provided remarkable pillar of its military strategy on reflexive control. The theory of reflexive control refers to the strategic ability to have an impact on adversaries' decision making processes by manipulating its perceptions. Thus, disinformation and circulation of deliberately custom-made information is core to take control of perceptions of its enemies. In other words, reflexive control enables Moscow to modify intelligence capabilities of the West without causing a complete demolition of its system. With respect to this context, Russia aims to take control over existing capacity of outer world while abstaining from any inspiration that leads the West to develop new capacities to halt Russian aggression.

Furthermore, this renewed thinking bears traces from two Soviet-legacy theories. According to Kasapoğlu, reorganization of the Russian Armed Forces could be explained with Soviet Deep Penetration Theory. This theory underscores the integral importance of extended battalions that are capable of acting independently deep into the enemy territory, especially by taking advantage of numerical superiorities in tanks, as a key to complete Russian operational art. As mentioned above, another Soviet-legacy theory, reflexive control, gives an explanatory framework that deep penetration theory leaves in suspense. Briefly, reflexive control could be depicted as a methodology invented by the Soviet strategists that aims to change perceptions of the enemy and by doing so ensures the change unwittingly serves interests of Russia.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Kasapoğlu, Can. *Russia's Renewed Military Thinking: Non-linear Warfare and Reflexive Control*, NATO Defense College Research Division Research Paper No. 121, 2015, p. 2.

Thus, while the new Russian military thinking is formulated around combination of deep penetration and reflexive control theories, elite forces, proxies and massive military build-ups play an enormous role in its hybrid warfare efforts. Moscow implements snap exercises to disguise military build-ups that later effects as turning points on its tactical engagements. Furthermore, it is important to note that centralization of political and military decision making processes helps to carry out such massive snap exercises. The organizational changes in Russian military that have seen in prior to the Ukrainian conflict made cooperation possible between proxy powers and elite forces of Russian army. In that way, the natural sources of hybrid warfare has been put in place coherently thanks to the centralized will of state apparatus. Apart from its capability to compete with necessities of modern warfare, in order to reach its main goal of rising as a major power to challenge the Western security system, Moscow needs to accomplish its deep penetration competency with permanent readiness and manpower. Since Russian approach to hybrid warfare is based on massive deployments with deep penetration capabilities and snap exercises that enable to test the readiness of the armed forces, integration of civilian measurements completes the complex puzzle of Kremlin's geopolitical paradigm.<sup>53</sup>

The differentiation between Russia and the West regarding their understandings on hybrid warfare is lying behind their perspective. On one hand, Western understanding portrays hybrid warfare with multi-modality that is using conventional capabilities to catch up with realities of modern war. On the other hand, Russia's approach to nonlinear warfare represents renewed military thinking which is leaded by paradigm of penetration rather than multi-modality.<sup>54</sup> Gerasimov underscores that there cannot be one simple model to be followed in the operational environment due to the fact that the very nature of war does not allow engraving defined characteristics of national interests.

In this regard, it is meaningful to assess the shifts in Russian strategic thinking not only at tactical levels but more importantly on the operational levels too. As it has seen on the Military Doctrine published in 2000, the concept of de-escalation proves

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<sup>53</sup> Kasapoğlu, Can. *Russia's Renewed Military Thinking: Non-linear Warfare and Reflexive Control*, NATO Defense College Research Division Research Paper No. 121, 2015, p. 10.

<sup>54</sup> Kasapoğlu, Can. *Russia's Renewed Military Thinking: Non-linear Warfare and Reflexive Control*, NATO Defense College Research Division Research Paper No. 121, 2015, p. 2.

that under changing conditions even limited nuclear strike can be considered as part of strategy and operational actions. Even from this perspective, it might be noted as Russia has been started to count in new instruments of warfare. Yet, as Bartles stresses, it is still controversial to acknowledge the Western approach to hybrid war as proposed very new type of warfare.<sup>55</sup>

Against the Western interpretation, Gerasimov's perspective on use of indirect and asymmetric methods is not widely considered as the part of hybrid warfare from Russian standpoint. Rather than that, Gerasimov draws attention to the change in Russia's military thinking not because of use of non-military measures but the substantial importance of the relationship between non-military and military measures in war. Thus, war gained a new meaning that is beyond fighting only with conventional power as already mentioned earlier in this study. One of the most important aspects of non-military measures in this context is that they have definitive impact on how war is conducted. In other words, the difference between the West and Russia is revealed through their measurement of non-military tools, namely counting them as a complementary part of warfighting or not.

Given the fact that, non-military measures are widely used to feed the unrest in the Western perspective, Russian view deeply considers them as equal part of its military capacity.<sup>56</sup> To this regard, it is important to underline difference between Russia and the West in their approach to asymmetry. While NATO assumes that Moscow's attempts to develop non-conventional means are being included in the wider formula to beat Western conventional superiority, Russia does not completely rule out conventional military superiority. On the contrary, Kremlin foresees the use of conventional means if necessary to keep up with intensity of low-level conflicts.<sup>57</sup> In fact, there are number of motivations cultivated from the lessons that Russia faced during the recent conflicts and by extension; these motivations are highly underscored in the core of Gerasimov doctrine.

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<sup>55</sup> Bartles, Charles K., "Getting Gerasimov Right", United States Army Combined Arms Center, Military Review, January - February 2016, p. 36.

<sup>56</sup> Bartles, Charles K., "Getting Gerasimov Right", United States Army Combined Arms Center, Military Review, January - February 2016, p. 34.

<sup>57</sup> Monaghan, Andrew, "Putin's Way of War: The 'War' in Russia's 'Hybrid Warfare'", Strategic Studies Institute U.S. Army War College, Parameters 45 (4), Winter 2015-16, p. 73.

One of the first assumptions that can be drawn from Moscow's current approach that embraces information capabilities is adapted to modern methods. Since the doctrine points out to that the war is perceived as combination of undeclared and unnoticed actions, then indirect ways of fighting against the adversaries should be taken into consideration. Thus, there is not only military power concentration at the core of Gerasimov's doctrine but at the same time, non-military modes of warfare are considered as key to accomplish the new strategy. In addition to that, as mentioned earlier, this so called 'newly' introduced information warfare is bearing traces from Soviet practices that widely used disinformation tactics to have reflexive control on the adversaries. In other words, the contemporary vision of warfare is revisiting old practices with new instruments and structures. Snegovaya underscores that this new vision is consisted on number of tactics that allow Moscow to reshape the perceptions of the enemy. To this end, she lists number of principles as follows; *dismiss* the reality in battlefield, *distort* and *distract* the focus of enemy by creating another story to follow and *dismay* through diplomatic ways. In order to accomplish these tactics, power pressure is used in different forms such as ultimatums, threats of sanctions, psychological attacks and so on.<sup>58</sup>

Considering the abovementioned perspective of Russia, it is significant to turn back to the debate on how hybrid warfare terminology is regarded in Western perception. The contradictive discussion has gained ground in NATO's approach to understand and define Russia's actions towards Ukraine. Since it is used to describe the combinations of military tactics and the concept of hybridity is drawn as mixed nature of these kinds of threats, the debate pointed out that it is being failed to examine the background about the non- military threats within the very simplistic approach of NATO, and the West in general.

Furthermore, the concept is proposed as new to describe something only came out by Moscow's active involvement in Ukraine however the hybridity in characteristics of conflicts has been in place even before Ukraine. Thus, while this approach is missing out the real capacity in hybrid warfare and its newly introduced aspects, it is also misplacing historical background of such examples with similar

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<sup>58</sup> Snegovaya, Maria, "Putin's Information Warfare in Ukraine: Soviet Origins of Russia's Hybrid Warfare", Institute for the Study of War, Russia Report 1, September 2015, pp. 11 - 12.

complexity. Keeping in mind that, war itself is an affair about the consequences of political, economic and diplomatic power in peacetime, it should not be considered completely apart from impacts of these tools together with military power. In other words, the blurring line between war and peace did not only appear with the help of new technology or use of information however changing nature of warfare with these new methods resulted in to evolve its process indirectly. So in terms of military measures, traditional and unconventional warfare became mixed while the new elements like non-military actions started to play crucial role as equal components of the so called 'new' warfare concept.<sup>59</sup>

However, there are several prerequisites that constitute necessary and functional grounds for making the hybrid war successful. Whereas absence of these preconditions may lead to complete failure of actions, it is also important to keep in mind that there are both theoretical and also practical conditions that secure the victorious end. In this regard, Racz underscores that one of the first essential prerequisite for hybrid war is military superiority against the target country. Due to the fact that superior armed forces are needed to suppress and contain the resistance in the target country, they also play an enormous role through the transitional periods by capturing key infrastructures and keep its power at heart of the conflict area. Secondly, weak central leadership and corrupt state apparatus are other prerequisites to function hybrid means of war. Thus, as far as administration of the targeted state is vulnerable to be overthrown, both military and tactical superiority of attacking side can work well. In addition, the legitimacy of the government needs to be on a shaky ground which leaves it open to any intervention from abroad.

The questions on legitimacy along with dissatisfaction with central government also reveals that if there are any ethnic or separatist element in the society then these elements might pave way to reverse the situation and become handy for both military and also non-military actions. Although it is not the case for Russia's involvement in Syria, it is still noteworthy to mention remarkable importance of presence of Russian - speaking minorities which can be seen as source of legitimacy of aggressive actions. Considering the fact that earlier phases of hybrid war focuses on creating an

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<sup>59</sup> Giles, Keir, "Russia's 'New' Tools for Confronting the West: Continuity and Innovation in Moscow's Exercise of Power", Chatham House Research Paper, 2016, pp. 7-8.

atmosphere of political campaign against unlawful acts of the targeted state therefore defending minority rights paves way to very convenient legal ground for the outsider, namely Russia.<sup>60</sup>

Another prerequisite that Keir pays attention -almost a must to establish basis for non-military objectives- is to have strong media power at hand. For the reason that well established media can have two sided impact on the nature of hybrid war. On one hand, it ensures the empathy of international community about rightfulness of future actions towards the targeted country. Despite the fact, cracks may occur in the international coalitions due to propaganda campaigns, the media effectively provides proper environment for massive disinformation at both societal and also governmental level. Hence, as an integral part of hybrid warfare the media which uses all means of recent global communication networks procures the needs for legitimate action. By doing so, such course of action does not solely reinvent the sympathy of society but also gains actual support for irregular armed forces.

In addition to the number of steps that explained new generation warfare with intensive non-military campaigns, Russian military theorists Chekinov and Bogdanov draw attention to mapping out targets in adversaries' territory. They consider the importance of campaigns that can be launched through economic and diplomatic policies and also by discrediting enemy's government and carrying out smear campaigns at societal level. Nevertheless, primary military step forward is sending large scale reconnaissance missions to map out possible future targets such as military units and critical infrastructure. Then, next step would follow as electronic warfare operations to knockdown enemy's critical operational systems which make easier to conduct heavy military attacks afterwards. These steps will leave an extreme damage on the enemy country that even will not be capable of governing some operational systems with crucial importance. Lastly, regular ground forces can demolish the remaining targets and complete the operation successfully.<sup>61</sup>

In the light of this context, it should be stated that the most remarkable phase of this new generation of war is dominated by non-military actions as expected. Since

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<sup>60</sup> Racz, Andras, Russia's Hybrid War in Ukraine: Breaking the Enemy's Ability to Resist, FIIA Report 43, Helsinki, 2015, pp. 73-83.

<sup>61</sup> Racz, Andras, Russia's Hybrid War in Ukraine: Breaking the Enemy's Ability to Resist, FIIA Report 43, Helsinki, 2015, p. 39.

the capabilities of regular forces are more or less providing a ground framework about repercussions of the conflict, irregular assets, like psychological, economic or diplomatic tools, can bring about unlimited opportunities and change the characteristic of the conflict entirely. That explains why the involvement of these new tools of warfare is considered as breakthrough achievements.

Clearly, the new Russian military thinking and Moscow's changing perception on international affairs have to be read along with the lessons derived from its former military interventions. It also needs to be underscored that new forms of threats and levels of existing and potential threats are being perceived more different than as the way it used to be. From this perspective, evolution of military warfare is regarded as refreshing step forward from traditional battlegrounds to more specified warfare such as aerospace and information.<sup>62</sup> In addition, new military thinking is not only formulated around completely separate tools of modern warfare but the asymmetry in this new thinking is conceived to combine these tools together with conventional power. Since the combination of conventional warfare that carried out together with substantial disinformation campaign is not entirely new concept in Russian practice because it was already rooted in Soviet system however, the new technological insights, which flourish various forms of indirect actions, are providing a new ground to neutralize adversary actions. As a result, intensive information warfare became the most important component and it is accompanied the armed forces to subvert the adversary.

Even though the emphasis on information warfare recently took part in Russian military doctrine, its capability has been eventually developed through number of phases. To be able to shed a light on discussion about whether Russia's active use of information warfare is offering new features or old practices on its current military thinking, it is noteworthy to mention that another tool of this warfare has been Moscow's investments which enabled its active presence in media and rekindled the old information warfare what is inherited as Soviet legacy. These investments particularly focus on online presence through use of social media and online forums

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<sup>62</sup> Giles, Keir, "Russia's 'New' Tools for Confronting the West: Continuity and Innovation in Moscow's Exercise of Power", Chatham House Research Paper, 2016, pp. 10-11.

since they are considered as a force multiplier by providing an immense ground to spread out disinformation.

On the other hand, Russia's motivation to invest in its capacity to catch up with internet age has been tested during its involvements in both Chechnya in 1999 and Georgia in 2008. Chechen War of 1999, Russia failed to deal with newly arrived internet while its adversary who is even on the weaker side of power balance was capable of it. Moscow's initial action to control the media was interference in independent reporting so that it could have ability to widen the sphere of its disinformation campaigns. However, perceiving the effectiveness of internet as a dangerous destabilizing factor is mostly embraced by security services to foster the idea of directly taking control of public access. The dilemma of how to encounter use of internet became an essential core of the discussion on development of new information warfare. As the armed conflict in Georgia in 2008 showed that, taking advantage of conventional military power cannot be taken solely to evaluate the whole conflict. Even if Russia had an edge over Georgia with convincing military victory, Moscow's increasing concerns about the need for improving its military capability in information field gained more ground afterwards.<sup>63</sup>

This case revealed some aspects about performance of Russian armed forces despite the fact that they succeed in eviction of Georgia from the conflict zones. One of the most remarkable aspects is that there is backwardness in Russian forces in terms of its outdated equipments, poorly trained troops and ineffectively coordinated command and control structures. As part of the lessons learned from Georgian war, Moscow decided to reinvent the capacity of armed forces and also went through considerable rethinking of its future strategies. It is fair to readdress that restructuring the use of information warfare against the West gained considerable ground after these experiences in the battleground in terms of improving the old techniques which left as Soviet legacy but also to close the gap with its adversaries. Since it became obvious that its disinformation campaigns are conducted with lack of innovation, their impact on the adversary is resulted as futile attempts.

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<sup>63</sup> Giles, Keir, "Russia's 'New' Tools for Confronting the West: Continuity and Innovation in Moscow's Exercise of Power", Chatham House Research Paper, 2016, pp. 27-29.



Based on these assumptions, Russian contemporary information warfare is aimed to be built on reflexive control that initially foresees to take control of enemies' perceptions. Thus, use of information to have an influence on decision making processes of the adversary is primary step forward to manipulate and mislead. It provides Moscow some elbowroom while hitting the adversaries' ability to fight indirectly by paving way to miscalculation of the current situation in the area of conflict.<sup>64</sup> In this concept of strategy, measuring its influence on enemy's decision making process has tremendous importance however on the other side any sort of false background is being served to interest of enemy. Since the urge to reform Russia's military thinking has been brought to the agenda to catch up with modern techniques and to adopt more innovative approach with widespread use of new methods, avoiding these sorts of misleading positions is being made possible. Eventually, there are some characteristics that differ from old information warfare of Soviets. One of the differences of new information warfare is that it is not serving to a propaganda idea, which has been widely used in Cold War era. Rather it is deeply focused on distorting the information flow so that concealment tactics can create a sphere of influence over enemy's manoeuvre capability. On the other hand, the information troops, which have been used as a complementary mode of warfare in the Soviet era, are now being regarded as primary drivers of the warfare.<sup>65</sup>

### **3.4 Hybrid Warfare in Russian Military Doctrines of 2010 and 2014**

After having examined the theoretical framework of Russia's changing perception on military thinking, as it has been already mentioned earlier, this change can be seen clearly on the military doctrines but especially the one that was published on 26 December 2014. For this reason, it is significant to address precise changes in order to underline the weight of hybridity in current strategies. Although the 2014

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<sup>64</sup> Snegovaya, Maria, "Putin's Information Warfare in Ukraine: Soviet Origins of Russia's Hybrid Warfare", Institute for the Study of War, Russia Report 1, September 2015, p. 10.

<sup>65</sup> Snegovaya, Maria, "Putin's Information Warfare in Ukraine: Soviet Origins of Russia's Hybrid Warfare", Institute for the Study of War, Russia Report 1, September 2015, pp. 14 - 15.

doctrine had similarities with its predecessor published in 2010, it has also proposed major changes in definition of military dangers by including information space and the internal sphere that refers to domestic threats for national security. First of all, it needs to be specified that the military doctrine defines military threats and military dangers separately.

According to this distinction, the main military threats are addressed as situations that spark necessary conditions for use of military force.<sup>66</sup> In other words, any aggression from potential threats to Russia's public and military sphere of control such as mobilizing illegal armed groups in the territory of Russia or directly showing their intentions to use force against Russia are considered as military threats. On the other hand, the main external and internal dangers are defined to mark clearly Moscow's perception on future threats that might arise from either domestic activities of terrorist organizations or the activities that aim to create public unrest and more broadly the potential power of the organizations, namely NATO's presence at its borders.<sup>67</sup> Briefly, the doctrine itself provides hints about Kremlin's current and foreseeable understanding on military actions as well as its aspirations on shaping the future world order.

However, as Sinovetz and Retz underline, there are number of differences between the two doctrines, published in 2014 and back in 2010.<sup>68</sup> The scope of internal military dangers is extended to include information space that creates an influence over young population and thereby proposes a danger to national traditions. In addition, the 2014 doctrine drew considerable attention to danger of provocations might stimulate ethnic and social tensions which are also not apart from information space. While there was not any attribution to the activities related to information under the main internal dangers provision in the 2010 doctrine, vital reference to dangers that might occur internally has been made in the 2014 doctrine. Thus, even only with this specific difference, increasing 'paranoia' of Moscow over possibility of social unrest

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<sup>66</sup> *Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation*, 26 December 2014, General Provisions No: 14.

<sup>67</sup> *Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation*, 26 December 2014, General Provisions No: 12 & 13.

<sup>68</sup> Sinovets, Polina and Renz, Bettina, "Russia's 2014 Military Doctrine and beyond: threat perceptions, capabilities and ambitions", NATO Defence College Research Division Paper, No. 117, 2015, p. 2.

gives clear commitment about its motivations of countering the information age. Furthermore, the 2014 doctrine evidently shows Russia's increasing concern on the external threats which are reshaped by newly introduced information and communication technologies. Since they are perceived as threats to Russia's territorial integrity and having substantial impact on its political independence, use of information regarded as source of the growing problems such as global extremism and separatism.<sup>69</sup>

In addition to abovementioned aspects of the 2014 doctrine, there is also strong emphasis on territorial integrity of Russia as the former Soviet area is considered as vital sphere of interest. On one hand, territorial integrity regarded as fundamentally important because any attempt to change the nature of its neighbourhood by way of regime change or military mobilization may result in social unrest and change in policies of Moscow. On the other hand, unlike the 2010 doctrine, increasing presence of transnational terrorism as an external military danger has been clearly put within the context of lack of effective international cooperation in the 2014 doctrine. However, there is an ongoing debate on Russia's willingness to be part of an international cooperation or if it seeks to gain a position of equal dialogue. More importantly, in what ways it can be perceived that repositioning of Kremlin towards the West is offering new tools besides maintaining its vital sphere of influence.<sup>70</sup>

The importance of information warfare was well underlined in the 2014 military doctrine whereas it is also clearly seen in Russia's current engagements. The new information warfare is proposed as a combination of different tools of influence namely use of internet and other capabilities of modern technology. As pointed out at the beginning of this chapter, Giles put evidently, the new investments of Moscow on recently introduced type of information warfare are focusing on three areas. Firstly, internally and externally focused media is essential to reach outer world while paying utmost attention to online presence. Secondly, use of social media has become unavoidable since it has power as a force multiplier to ensure that Russia's grand strategy is reaching its audience appropriately. Lastly, language skills are also regarded

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<sup>69</sup> *Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation*, 26 December 2014, General Provisions No: 12.

<sup>70</sup> Sinovets, Polina and Renz, Bettina, "Russia's 2014 Military Doctrine and beyond: threat perceptions, capabilities and ambitions", NATO Defence College Research Division Paper, No. 117, 2015, pp. 3-4.

as one of the main areas of new information warfare due to its aims to reach wider audience.

In this context, it is fair to note that Moscow's information warfare differs from the Western approach whereas Russian disinformation campaign is organized at state level and waging its fight from all quarters. As a result, Giles draws attention to achievements of disinformation campaign of Kremlin in the light of abovementioned areas. One of its achievements is clearly seen in domestic control over the media while the other is its success to serve doubtful media coverage to Western media which even later causes the confusion among policy makers. However it is important to note that there is still uncertainty about Moscow's ability to control the online social media. Since it is a vast area of influence that is not controlled by the editors of mainstream media outlets, social media remains unregulated besides other instruments of Russian information space. Briefly, Kremlin's brand new version of information warfare includes certain modernization of Soviet legacy and thereby provides a new area of movement for its disinformation campaigns.<sup>71</sup>

As a result, with regards to framework of new generation warfare concepts, Kremlin had to adapt to the new security environment in order to apply aforementioned new military doctrine both in regional and global strategic calculus. In doing so, the Putin administration and Russia's political-military elite needed an effective strategic toolkit. Eventually, Russia's strategic toolkit transformed to a great extent with the efforts mentioned in this chapter. Moreover, one can argue that these developments took convenient place on theoretical ground given earlier in this study. Since Clausewitzian dictum of war and strategy has been offering an extensive framework on nature and characteristics of warfare, as argued before, it has also offered timeless conceptualization which is still valuable to be discussed.

With regards to contemporary Russian strategic thinking, it is possible to argue its relevance in a two-fold argument. First, Trinitarian concepts on warfare is not ignored in transformation of Russian strategic thinking. Given the fact that maintaining balance between different conditions, especially considering that the implementation of military and non-military measures are highly appreciated as seen in Clausewitzian approach. On the other hand, as discussed in last chapter, there are also reflections of

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<sup>71</sup> Giles, Keir, "Russia's Toolkit", in *The Russian Challenge*, Chatham House Report, June 2015, p. 47.

the debate on changing characteristics of war. Indeed, the question on whether aforementioned transformation of Russia's strategic toolkit could explain the change in nature of war is remarkable however it should also be taken in parallel with main argument in Clausewitzian approach. In other words, main argument is still the same when it comes to Russian strategic thinking. To clarify, Karaosmanoglu has pointed that nature of war cannot be evaluated separately from its political and historical context while arguing about relevance of Clausewitzian approach; likewise, main argument on contemporary Russian strategic thinking in this chapter focused on new warfare concepts, such as hybridity and reflexive control, to see if these concepts are proposing totally new perspectives as branded in Western front.

In line with Clausewitz, latest military doctrines of Kremlin proved that strategic linkage between the trinity should be preserved in order to achieve victorious end. Thereby, Syria serves now, at the time of writing, a testbed for Moscow's ability to demonstrate aforementioned arguments with its transformed military capacity. For this reason, next chapter will assess the outcomes of this transformation in the light of Russia's comeback to Middle East at Syrian civil war.

## CHAPTER 4

### **PRESIDENT PUTIN'S ROAD TO THE SYRIAN INTERVENTION: RUSSIA'S COMEBACK TO THE MIDDLE EAST**

#### **4.1 Russian Campaign in Syria: Political and Military Objectives**

Kremlin has set several political and security objectives at the beginning of its direct involvement in Syria. Besides every other aspect, support to Assad regime has been placed as the core of Russia's military operation in Syria. Since Moscow has seen permanence of the regime in Syria for the benefit of its foreign policy goals, its military support is formulated to strengthen Assad's position. By doing this, Russia also aimed to reach a position at the international level as an active player on the agenda. In other words, Syria provided valuable instrument for Moscow to regain its position towards the West that has been in eclipse especially due to Ukrainian crisis. Keeping in mind the abovementioned goals, it can be argued that Russia achieved its political goals partially by the time of the military withdrawal decision has been made on 14 March 2016. First, its 'active participation' to the fight against ISIS provided credible ground for the propaganda in domestic politics. Thus, Moscow pushed to pave way for a new focus of area to the public who have been tired from economic problems. In addition to this, the Ukrainian crisis also weakened the image of Russia's military forces and Kremlin found that its support to Assad regime might lift up the image by providing indirect role.<sup>72</sup>

To this end, perspective of this chapter will focus on which drivers of Russian foreign policy in terms of the transformation explained in prior. Moreover, political and military objectives for Moscow to be part of Syrian Civil War will be examined in order to express historical ties between Russia and Syria while considering the lessons learned for Kremlin in near past.

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<sup>72</sup> Dyner, Anna Maria, "Russia's Military Operation in Syria: A New Stage", The Polish Institute of International Affairs, Bulletin, No.23, 18 March 2016.

Russia's deployment in Syria proves multiple objectives which have been developed behind the closed doors. First of all, Syrian coast has a symbolic meaning which represents Russia's last remaining Middle East base in port of Tartus. As a short result, even Kremlin's limited objective to secure port of Tartus shows clear background on its support to Syria. What is more, the rebel advances that raised the mobilization against Assad regime revealed Moscow's concerns about risk of uncontrolled regime collapse. Considering the fact that such uncontrolled change may risk Russia's interests in the region and furthermore its geopolitical objective on keeping its presence in Mediterranean Sea. Within this context, Russia's insistence on forming an anti-terrorism coalition should be seen as part of these background courses of Moscow. In addition to this, Kremlin's call for coalition can also be understood as Russia's stand against any US-led coalition that opens up a new movement of area for the West in the region.

In the light of this approach, the agreement between the US and Turkey that is signed in July 2015 provided US-led anti-ISIS coalition forces free access to Turkish airbases and aimed to form ISIS-free zone along the Turkish border, is seen as one of the objectives that led Russia take further steps to spoil any possible Western involvement in Syria. On the other hand, the rapprochement between the US and Iran which resulted from conclusion of the nuclear deal on July 2015 is followed by trilateral meetings between the US, Iran and Saudi Arabia. These diplomatic activities indirectly warned Russia to take an active position to maintain its interests in Syria by involving the conflict with its own courses.<sup>73</sup>

Since the start of Russia's air campaign in Syria, President Vladimir Putin is consistently underlining the fact that their involvement is to create an alternative coalition against ISIS. Even before the full deployment of Russian forces to Syria, Putin has addressed this narrative during his speech at UN General Assembly on September 28, 2015. However, Moscow's active involvement is also presumed more different than its anti-ISIS self-assignment while showing clear pursuance of its larger strategic objectives behind the scenes. Despite the reality of terror threat that ISIS led in domestic politics of Russia, Moscow's political and military objectives to confront

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<sup>73</sup> "Russian Deployment to Syria: Putin's Middle East Game Changer", Warning Intelligence Update, ISW, September 17, 2015.

ISIS in Syria are falling behind its intention to preserve the regime in Damascus. Thus, Russia foresees the advantage of backing Assad regime as a tool to recover its international prestige while expanding its strategic partnership with Iran, 'rising star' of the region.<sup>74</sup> On another note, Russian elites had diverse opinions regarding the problem of Islamist extremism that is fostered by ISIS in the region prior to the Russia's involvement in Syrian civil war. However, there were general common view that referred highly deep criticism about American policies in Iraq and later Syria. Since the US had to deal with the consequences of its policies in the region for longer than its real involvement, it has been argued that Islamist threat is being a source that is coming from these policies and will keep recreating itself if the US and other Western powers remain at the same level of fighting against it.<sup>75</sup>

Moreover, on the fear of extremist rise, it is well noted by Souleimanov and Petrtlyova that Salafi-jihadism successfully compete with local elites, which support Moscow. In other words, they have quite well effectiveness at the local level comparing to the social base of other insurgent groups had limited impact in the North Caucasus. What is more, the dominant ideology in that region started to turn towards Salafi-jihadism increasingly whereas secular opposition does require significant local support to stand against Islamist extremists. Briefly, popular support in the North Caucasus both created a domestic alarm for Moscow but also rather an instrumental argument for the recent changes in its foreign policy directions.<sup>76</sup>

For this reason, President Putin made quite remarkable emphasis during his speech at UN General Assembly on support for the regime in Syria and the importance of Kurds as the only group waging a war against ISIS in Northern Syria with an emphasis on U.S.-led anti-ISIS coalition which is evidently failed to achieve its aims. What is more, the increasing role of Kurds has started to cause discomfort among regional alliances. The capability of Assad's regime forces to combat became questionable so that Moscow's concerns over any US-led intervention began to

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<sup>74</sup> Spaulding, Hugo, "Russia's False ISIS Narrative in Syria", Backgrounder Insitute for the Study of War, December 1, 2015, p. 1.

<sup>75</sup> Souleimanov, Emil Aslan and Petrtlyova, Katarina, "Russia's Policy toward the Islamic State", Middle East Policy, Vol. 22, No. 3, Fall 2015, p. 68.

<sup>76</sup> Souleimanov, Emil Aslan and Petrtlyova, Katarina, "Russia's Policy toward the Islamic State", Middle East Policy, Vol. 22, No. 3, Fall 2015, pp. 70 - 71.



increase. At the 70<sup>th</sup> session of the UN General Assembly on 28 September 2015, Putin made clear that radical Islamist threat should be confronted by rather different tactics than the Western powers offer:

*The so-called Islamic State has tens of thousands of militants fighting for it, including former Iraqi soldiers who were left on the street after the 2003 invasion. Many recruits come from Libya whose statehood was destroyed as a result of a gross violation of UN Security Council Resolution 1973. And now radical groups are joined by members of the so-called "moderate" Syrian opposition backed by the West. They get weapons and training, and then they defect and join the so-called Islamic State.*<sup>77</sup>

In this respect, the decision of Russia's military intervention in Syrian civil war is originated with number of both regional and international developments among Moscow's concerns over domestic politics. Clearly, it is noteworthy to emphasise some of these developments to get better understanding of the atmosphere. The formation of an anti-ISIS coalition led by the US heated the debate on active stance against the ISIS in Syria. One aspect that paved way to gain more ground for this debate is that the attempts of the US to establish this coalition in line with the interests of its other allies in the region, such as Turkey and Jordan. The "train and equip program" is launched by this so-called anti-ISIS coalition to train the militants from anti-Assad groups and thereby create a zone of resistance in Northern Syria against ISIS. This resistance therefore considered to establish a no-fly zone.<sup>78</sup>

On the other hand, the political situation in Syria turned in favour of the regime, which is made possible with the efforts of President Assad, and it paved way to reinvigorate legitimacy of the regime's call for international support. Thus, the support it received from Russia, indirectly based on this rehabilitated vision of Syrian regime's stance at the international level. In the light of this argument, Ari Heistein emphasize that there have been two sides of the discussion regarding revisiting the image of the Syrian regime in its fight against 'terrorism'. First, he specifies that the definition of terrorists by the regime has determined the recent agenda of discussion. Clearly, early

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<sup>77</sup> Transcript of Putin's speech at 70th session of the UN General Assembly on 28 September 2015, accessed on 12 May 2016: <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/50385>

<sup>78</sup> Özertem, Hasan Selim, "Russia's Shifting Strategy in Syria: Implications for Turkish Foreign Policy", Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies, Doha, December 2015, p. 2.

attempts of the regime to label all rebels as terrorists worked in a way to radicalize them. When ISIS became more powerful in fighting against regime, sectarian policies of the regime became sort of fuel to rising radicalism. In this context, Heistein further underlines that the regime succeeded to maintain its position to provide services for its people rather than opening a window for rebel groups to fulfil such kind of gap. In other words, Assad managed to create an atmosphere that does not allow opponents of rebels to be competent. In the light of these two successful strategies of the regime, Assad succeed to rehabilitate its image and what is more, these strategies proved enough evidence about the near future of Syria for the US and EU. In addition, the willingness of Western leaders to cooperate with Assad regime in Syria changed enormously due to the help of these strategies. The overall presumption of the West turned into that Assad might be considered as an asset to keep while rising threat of terrorism is surrounding the West.<sup>79</sup>

Considering the fact that right before his speech at UN General Assembly, President Putin has revealed on the eve of Russia's official engagement in Syria that Russia's presence in Syria will be continued to support its ally with respect to principles of international law:

*We act based on the United Nations Charter, i.e. the fundamental principles of modern international law, according to which this or that type of aid, including military assistance, can and must be provided exclusively to legitimate government of one country or another, upon its consent or request, or upon the decision of the United Nations Security Council. In this particular case, we act based on the request from the Syrian government to provide military and technical assistance, which we deliver under entirely legal international contracts.<sup>80</sup>*

Moreover, right before Russia's direct engagement in Syria, there has been other significant developments that paved way to proper grounds for its involvement. First, Moscow aimed to reach its strategic goal of reshaping the nature of the conflict in favour of its interests. As mentioned above, pro-Russian political settlement of the conflict has been the central theme of its military engagement while preserving its old

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<sup>79</sup> Heistein, Ari, "What to Expect in a Postwar Syrian 'Assadistan'", The National Interest, 20 February 2016.

<sup>80</sup> Transcript of Putin's interview with Charlie Rose from American TV channel CBS and PBS aired on 28 September 2015. Accessed on 12 May 2016: <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/50380>

ties with Assad regime. So, the deployment of Russian combat aircraft naturally caused to change the nature of the conflict whereas the escalation between Syrian regime and opposition is goofed up by the time. On the other hand, failure of US strategy of assisting non-jihadist opposition forces had also an important justifying impact on Russia's explicit motives on fight against jihadist groups in Syria and in the region as a whole.<sup>81</sup> It is obviously seen that Russian involvement in Syrian crisis has manifold dimensions to the extent of both Putin's tactical moves to get back Russia's strategic position in international level but also interests and motivations of other actors independent from whether they are allies of Russia or not. One of the most important dimensions of this puzzle is however, each parties' incentives for cooperation over fight against ISIS and other radical Islamist groups. Because this also represents a national security problem since people are joining ISIS without coming from specific nationality, Putin's concern about it also related to legitimacy of his power in domestic politics.<sup>82</sup>

When Russia's concerns began to increase about Syrian regime's capacity to survive, two important developments have emerged on the political scene. On one hand, U.S. and Turkey agreed to put in place an ISIS-free no fly zone in the northwest of Syria. On the other hand, negotiations over Iran's nuclear program concluded with a deal that paved a refreshing way for Tehran to reach out outer world. These two developments had remarkable impact on Moscow's political objectives to evaluate possible circumstances of refraining from military intervention in Syria. Therefore, Moscow tried to breakout polarization between big players by using its proclaimed fight against ISIS. Russia's indirect efforts on this also had a side motivation for leaving US out of the campaign against ISIS. However, futile attempts of Moscow to persuade Saudi Arabia turned into a one-way ticket of its own military intervention at the end. In this regard, aerial campaign of international coalition to restrain ISIS had considerable impact on Russia's efforts to gain legitimacy and political ground for its *raison d'être* in Syria. However, international coalition acted hesitant and ambiguous

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<sup>81</sup> Rogers, Paul and Reeve, Richard, "Russia's Intervention in Syria: Implications for Western Engagement", Oxford Research Group, Global Security Briefing, October 2015.

<sup>82</sup> Zvyagelskaya, Irina, "Russia's Strikes in Syria: New Risks or a Window of Opportunity?" in *Disrupting the Chessboard Perspectives on the Russian Intervention in Syria*, Mohseni Payam (ed.), Harvard Kennedy School Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs, 2015, p.31

towards increasing power of ISIS and extremism in the region, unforeseen number of refugees fleeing from Syria to Europe proved that cooperation with Russia is going to be inevitable in the future if not today.<sup>83</sup>

Humanitarian intervention discourse of the West has also been one of the issues debated. Keeping in mind the characteristics of Moscow's strategies, such intervention has seen more instrumental than purely paving way to create humanitarian shield for the people of Syria. However, legitimacy and continuation of Syrian regime has been key to Russia's concerns when it has been raised in UN Security Council. Given the fact that, its involvement in Syria is politically seen as an instrument to save its strategic interests, Kremlin's veto for UN Security Council resolutions also regarded as a threat for sanctions that might tie Bashar al-Assad's hands. However, Averre and Davies note that Russian foreign policy thinking reserves broader perspective than what is evaluated by the Western point of view. Thus, the geopolitical factors and Moscow's concerns on legitimacy of domestic politics are needed to be highlighted.<sup>84</sup>

Moreover, Moscow's criticism for the resolution drafted by the UN is rooted in the inclusive framework that is presenting for the future of the conflict. Because National Coalition of Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition forces are considered as representative of the Syrian people without specific differentiation between Islamist extremists, Kremlin argued that such resolution would only back these groups whose single aim to topple down a 'legitimate' government in power. In addition to this insight, Averre and Davies underscore that Moscow does not accept that Syria as a failed state because of the fear of potential spill over. While there is already a sovereign state though it is not implementing necessary reforms to halt the conflict, possible disintegration is still not offering any better than existing one. So, the question of external intervention is again occupying the agenda of international system and

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<sup>83</sup> Kabalan, Marwan, "Putin's Unexpected Move in Syria: Perspectives on the Russian Intervention in Syria" in *Disrupting the Chessboard Perspectives on the Russian Intervention in Syria*, Harvard Kennedy School Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs, 2015, p.21.

<sup>84</sup> Averre, Derek and Davies, Lance, "Russia, humanitarian intervention and the responsibility to protect: the case of Syria", *The Royal Institute of International Affairs*, 91:4, 2015, p. 813.

Kremlin's reluctance among all other its strategic interests, comes from the experiences that led to spiral of violence afterwards.<sup>85</sup>

At this point, it is important to analyse Kremlin's motivations and the foreign policy strategies in detail to get a grasp of reality that lies behind the relations between Damascus and Moscow. It is argued that there are different policy drivers that Russian foreign policy is being caught between and these drivers are exclusively having an impact on Moscow's capacity to react developments in global level. Firstly, its state structure has limited flexibility to react promptly and is falling behind the dynamism of contemporary global affairs. Even if Russia can manage to respond rapid changes in multinational level adequately, its slow responsiveness proves that it is still affected by systemic inflexibility. Secondly, there are specific common grounds at the national level shaping Russian foreign policy. Some of those common interests are that focus on modernization to cope with outer world by improving both Russia's international image and also its integration to global economies. Thus, the national consensus driver is mainly based upon pragmatic purposes. Thirdly, Kremlin's course on foreign policy is deeply affected by a ruling caste in political elite. Their specific interests on either political or corporate grounds form Russia's foreign policy with more indefinable steps.<sup>86</sup>

In addition, rationale behind Putin's policy about strategic changes in political, economic and security systems around Russia derives from its post-Cold War experiences. In this respect, Putin's approach towards European security system differs from Russia's previous approaches which consisted on politically divide and overrule principle. His approach prioritizes establishment of new rules which will only be achieved without strategic Alliances and collective policies. By this means, Russia will be able to breakout European security system.<sup>87</sup> To remind that, at the end of 20th century, Gorbachev decided to implement political and economic reforms to strengthen internal capacity of the Soviet system and also to be able to sustain its

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<sup>85</sup> Averre, Derek and Davies, Lance, "Russia, humanitarian intervention and the responsibility to protect: the case of Syria", *The Royal Institute of International Affairs*, 91:4, 2015, pp. 819 - 820.

<sup>86</sup> Stepanova, Ekaterina, "The Syrian Crisis and the Making of Russia's Foreign Policy", *PONARS Eurasia Policy Memo No. 199*, June 2012, pp. 1-2.

<sup>87</sup> Covington, Stephen R., *Putin's Choice for Russia*, Harvard Kennedy School Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs, 2015, p. 4.

competitiveness towards the West. Gorbachev ended external confrontation with the West through these reforms and consequently its strategic disengagement led to isolation of Soviet forces. Similarly, Putin has made a choice to reverse Russia's position however with a different view than Gorbachev's reforms. In his view, change in the European security system has critical importance to strengthen Russia's competitiveness.<sup>88</sup> Also, more significantly, Russia's involvement in Ukrainian crisis made it concrete that Kremlin is no longer staying in the game with rules of the West. In contrast, the tactical arrangements that have been proposed since 1991 are not considered as steps forward to establish political and economic partnerships with the United States and Europe.

As mentioned earlier, Lukin also draw attention to the changing parameters of Russia's relations with the West in terms of its strategic concerns. When NATO's expansion to the Russian sphere of influence became questionable, Moscow's reaction to this expansionism turned out to be a problem of tolerance. In other words, Kremlin simply put its geopolitical concerns and uneasiness about the political power of the United States in its very strategic circle of geography. That is why, Lukin emphasizes that Putin has declared their intentions are not only to show a deteriorating step towards the West however this pivotal change is driven from the global trends that are surrounding agenda of Kremlin severer than past.<sup>89</sup> In tandem with the aforementioned reasons, Russia's campaign in Syria presents multiple levels of focus as a tactical move. Firstly, the campaign aims to destabilize existing security systems that Putin considers unjust and vulnerable. Because the current security system is disproportionately established to serve interests of Western countries, it has to be reconnected and re-stabilized with another tendency and new principles that will allow Russia to reach the limits of its geographic spheres of influence. In this context, Russia will only gain its strategic competitiveness with such opportunistic partnerships that open a ground for blaming European security system.<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> Covington, Stephen R., *Putin's Choice for Russia*, Harvard Kennedy School Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs, 2015, p. 2

<sup>89</sup> Lukin, Alexander, "Russia in a Post-bipolar World", *Survival*, Vol. 58, No. 1, February-March 2016, pp. 98-99.

<sup>90</sup> Covington, Stephen R., *The meaning of Russia's Campaign in Syria*, Harvard Kennedy School Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs, 2015, p.3

Therefore, Putin strategically fuelled nationalism and promised more power to rich people in domestic politics during its campaign against Ukraine to gain support for his policy. Thus, he needed to create an atmosphere of new ideals and vision for Russia so it could be born again from Cold war ashes with increased defense budgets; rearmament and also legitimacy that allow Putin to be able to consolidate his political power.<sup>91</sup> However, against the aforementioned intentions of President Putin, Russia now has to face toxic assets that it created due to the recent aggressive policies of Kremlin. These ‘toxic assets’ are stemming from Moscow’s support to the Ukrainian separatist groups, and of course, the annexation of Crimea. In this regard, the Putin administration has lost the trust and cooperation of the West, something that the Russians badly need for counter-balancing China. Furthermore, the abovementioned ‘toxic assets’ of the Russian foreign policy came at the expense of diminishing status in the eyes of many former Soviet Union nations. As a result, understandably, the Putin administration blames the West and tries to convince the Russian public opinion about this new, old ‘scapegoat’. Yet, at some point, when the policy failure reaches a level that could not be hidden from the Russian people, the blames on the West will be increased in volume that would create a vicious cycle poisoning Russia’s foreign relations.<sup>92</sup>

Moreover, at the international level, interests of the actors that are playing the game from different perspectives have also fuelled Moscow's rising resentment about post-Cold War international order. This difference is not solely attributed to United States but also China and Iran. As a result, Russia has chosen to strengthen its ties with China and Iran through regional cooperations such as Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) that has been formed by China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. The cooperation they have earned from this organization became increasingly important especially after assertive foreign policy moves of US in their spheres of influence, for instance invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq. Aside from its allies, Moscow's concerns about explicit presence of United States have been rooted in what they have experienced in Eastern Europe during the post Cold War period with

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<sup>91</sup> Covington, Stephen R., *Putin's Choice for Russia*, Harvard Kennedy School Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs, 2015, p. 7

<sup>92</sup> Covington, Stephen R., *Putin's Choice for Russia*, Harvard Kennedy School Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs, 2015, p. 17

colored revolutions backed by United States. These so called revolutions had direct impact on Russia's international power, considering the fact that the countries in Eastern Europe had once close ties with Moscow not only opportunistically but also historically. Thus, any attempt of United States to dominate 'battle for the Middle East', especially after Arab Spring, is being assumed as a step up by Kremlin.<sup>93</sup> Whereas Russia's involvement is being represented as a move to keep in control Syrian regime's existing territorial presence, at the end it builds its own moment that is fostered by ideal of Putin about destabilization and then restoration of power at international level. In the light of this argument, every rationale that makes Russia's involvement seemingly inevitable is a cover to hide the idea that Moscow needed such distancing from ongoing problems at home and other front of its indirect confrontation with the West, Ukraine. If it comes to that, in which circumstances it can be considered that Putin's relatively legitimate argument on fighting against ISIS is a valid input to regain Russia's potential bargaining position. Given the fact that, motivations of actors, like US, Iran and China, from conflicting sides might change over time.<sup>94</sup>

With regards to all these assumptions, Russia's military intervention in Syria proposed a political rationale that raised Russia as a central actor to solve the Syrian conflict by relocating the power balance among international community. Thereby, in the first period of Russia's military intervention that covers a phase from end of September 2015 to mid-February 2016, Moscow kept its political interests around a stable notion that fostered the idea of preserving Assad regime as mentioned previously and well established its key strategies in the Syrian battlefield. In other words, Kremlin has set the rules of its presence in Syria not only for Assad regime or the West, but also other opponents of the conflict such as ISIS, Jabhat al-Nusra and non-jihadist groups by conducting collective punishment. In return, Damascus positioned itself towards possible reluctance of the West that caused by Moscow's certain perspective on the political settlement. Since there is such definite will to settle

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<sup>93</sup> Wakim, Jamal, "Russian Troops in Syria: Ensuring Access to the East Mediterranean" in *Disrupting the Chessboard Perspectives on the Russian Intervention in Syria*, Harvard Kennedy School Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs, 2015, p.28

<sup>94</sup> Haddad, Bassam, "The Russian Moment via Syria" in *Disrupting the Chessboard Perspectives on the Russian Intervention in Syria*, Harvard Kennedy School Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs, 2015, pp.17-19.



the conflict without regime change, then the possibility of an alternative coalition gained ground on the regime side in Syria. In order to strengthen this type of strategy, Russia appeared to use different tactics in the battlefield such as Moscow's air power strategy has been conducted in accordance with targeting not only military bases but also civilian neighbourhoods that have critical importance. By doing so, Russia aimed to abandon opposition-held areas to be able to manage the military defeat in a wider spectrum.<sup>95</sup>

Another political objective that had an impact on Moscow's further actions in 2015 has been the conclusion of P5+1 agreement with Iran. Since the agreement made possible the active involvement of Iran to the regional issues other than its own nuclear deal, it also drew more attention to Russia's movements in the international system. Thus, Ukraine and Syria became area of focus for the rest. On the other hand, Moscow's political objective regarding its propaganda against ISIS has gained shared support from Tehran.<sup>96</sup>

Since the beginning of Russia's active involvement to the Syrian civil war, the general perception was reflecting that Moscow's main concern is to support and preserve Assad regime in Syria. However, there has been another dimension to the debate, which refers to a 'grand bargain' over the Ukrainian crisis about Kremlin is trying to pursue behind the doors. Even if it was not the direct intention, Moscow's approach to the conflict with counterterrorist narrative reduces its overall objectives into fight against a terrorist threat by using quite similar arguments that it used in the near past. According to Notte, these arguments are based on firstly, the threats which are *civilizational* and secondly, they are not based on any distinction between the opponents of the conflict like good or bad. Moscow's concerns over terrorist threat that might spill over from Syria is regarded as similar to what is seen during the Chechen separatism because rising extremism has domestically been a threat for Russia as ISIS might rekindle it today. Despite the fact that Chechnya presented different momentum for Russia as its domestic impact inherently situated different catalyst, Syrian conflict still provides comparable motives especially in terms of Kremlin's political objectives

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<sup>95</sup> "Russia's Choice in Syria", Crisis Group Middle East Briefing No 47, International Crisis Group, 29 March 2016, pp. 2-3.

<sup>96</sup> Özertem, Hasan Selim, "Russia's Shifting Strategy in Syria: Implications for Turkish Foreign Policy", Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies, Doha, December 2015, p. 5.

in Syria. Since its discourse on Chechen issue, most notably in its second war in Chechnya, Putin advocated an international campaign against terrorism.<sup>97</sup>

On the other hand, there are also other lessons than Chechen separatism at the international level that strengthen Moscow's willingness to act differently. According to Kozhanov, the US invasion of Iraq in 2003 and the military intervention to Libya in 2011 are most important cases that present a role to change Russia's position towards the West. In other words, hidden motives of Moscow, if there are such, relies upon not only its political ties but also military and economic ones that play role to change its overall attitude. In this regard, Kozhanov argues that irrecoverable loss of Kremlin after military operation in Libya and negative repercussion of its lack of power to prevent the US invasion of Iraq played as another important milestone to demonstrate change of its policies among other concerns.<sup>98</sup> Clearly, one of the lessons learned from Libya for Kremlin has been critical consequences of humanitarian intervention, which took place with a Security Council resolution that is not vetoed by Moscow. Considering the fact that overthrow of Qaddafi had strategic results both in terms of economic side effects for Russia but also losing one of its allies with the US-backed NATO intervention. Even being deceived by such Western coalition in Libya preserves hints about how Moscow's reactions would end up in Syria.<sup>99</sup>

Moreover, it should be noted that Russia's Middle Eastern comeback is not only rooted with the developments so-called Moscow's strategic rapprochements mentioned above, but also developed by lack of domestic opposition that enabled President Putin to have free manoeuvre space. His full control over Russian foreign and security policies introduced new complexities regarding its presence in Middle East. In this regard, it can be argued that bilateral relations between Russia and Syria have been in change accordingly; however, this change should only be taken into consideration in the light of exceptional historical characteristics of cooperation between them. Especially in early 2000s, Moscow has been the only great power that

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<sup>97</sup> Notte, Hanna, "Russia in Chechnya and Syria: Pursuit of Strategic Goals", *Middle East Policy*, Vol. 23, No.1, Spring 2016, pp. 59-60.

<sup>98</sup> Kozhanov, Nikolay, "Russian-Syrian Dialogue: Myths and Realities", *Journal of the Middle East and Africa*, Vol. 5, Issue 1, 2014, p. 2.

<sup>99</sup> Valenta, Jiri and Valenta, Leni Friedman, "Why Putin wants Syria", *Middle East Quarterly*, Spring 2016, p. 7-8.

showed support for the regime in Damascus. Though the limits of its support are open to discussion, its willingness is noteworthy as a reaction to regional context that is dominated by increasing presence of the US. Hence, the bilateral relations had reached at a point where Asad and Putin even declared that they became most significant strategic partners to each other in the region by 2006.<sup>100</sup> Since there have been major developments in bilateral relations in 2005, without a doubt these developments paved way to a breakthrough that lasted in the coming years. First of all exceptional reasons to cooperation, the flexibility that Russia provided to Syria for repayment of its debt showed clear willingness to improve relations. Moreover, the isolation of Syria internationally due to the UN Security Council Resolutions about withdrawal from Lebanon, dragged Damascus into a more enthusiastic position to come side by side with Moscow.<sup>101</sup>

Clearly, Kremlin's constant efforts to prevent any Libyan sort of intervention to Syrian civil war through a legal basis provided by a UN Security Council resolution are rooted back in its bilateral relations with Damascus. However, Moscow's insistence on political solution to the conflict is not only derived from their amity, but also particular concerns of Kremlin, such as rise of extremism, that are believed to threaten even Russia's domestic security can be considered as key to its involvement in Syria. Thereby, Russia considers Syria as a geostrategic ally that opens up a new ground after Ukraine for Moscow to expand its regional role and influence for its undergoing geopolitical rivalry with the West. On the other hand, what Syrian crisis has brought about is a national security matter for Russia, and Iran as well as, serving good excuses to their motivation for playing more assertive role at multinational level. Both countries took it as a national security matter because of their fear about expansion of terrorism and extremism, and thereby inevitable repercussion of destabilization first in the region then at home. Even though Russia and Iran's perspectives on future

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<sup>100</sup> Tudoroiu, Theodor, "The reciprocal constitutive features of a Middle Eastern partnership: The Russian-Syrian bilateral relations", *Journal of Euroasian Studies*, Vol.6 Issue 2, 2015, pp. 147-149.

<sup>101</sup> Katz, Mark N., "Putin's Foreign Policy Toward Syria", *Middle East Review of International Affairs*, Vol. 10, No.1, 2006.

transformation of the crisis are dissimilar, they find common to struggle against a national threat is a mutual need for the region.<sup>102</sup>

In the same vein, the similarities between Putin's Russia and Assad's Syria are not solely suggestive about the striking actions of these leaders however, it is still important to examine which fundamental issues are at play in the core of their political understanding. Thus, while both Syria and Russia are having shared regime identifications, it is noteworthy to get a grasp of their mutual drivers on domestic level. Most importantly, as mentioned earlier, both regimes are dominated by a ruling caste where economic and political power dissemination is highly dependent on the interests of these castes. In this regard, durability of both regimes is consolidated through 'smart authoritarian' approach which allows them to respond with siege mentality when it comes to losing control over power.<sup>103</sup>

In short, it can be argued that political objectives of Kremlin in Syrian civil war are multidimensional and not limited to the context of Syrian case. Since there have been tremendous changes in balance of power at the international level, political aspirations of Russia have been shaped in accordance with its containment by such new equilibrium. In this regard, its strategic approach to Syrian civil war should be undertaken as one of the determinants that provide hints for Kremlin's future intentions in international scene. On the other hand, Russia's military build up in Syria which has begun in July 2015 and continuously increased in the following months, backed the abovementioned arguments on Russia's presence both in Syria and international system. Hence, Kremlin only admitted that build up is to serve as 'military-technical assistance' to the Assad regime rather than complete involvement of Russia to the conflict.

However, as analyzed on ISW update on 17 September 2015, the presence of seven main battle tanks, 26 BTR armored personnel carriers, Russian artillery, two Mi-24 (Hind) helicopters, two Mi-17 (Hip) helicopters at the Bassel al-Assad International Airport has been making hard to prove the officially declared intention of Moscow.

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<sup>102</sup> Barzegar, Kayhan, "Russia's Intervention, an Opportunity for Iran" in *Disrupting the Chessboard Perspectives on the Russian Intervention in Syria*, Harvard Kennedy School Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs, 2015, p.14.

<sup>103</sup> Stepanova, Ekaterina, "The Syrian Crisis and the Making of Russia's Foreign Policy", PONARS Eurasia Policy Memo No. 199, June 2012, p. 3

Against the aforementioned assistance discourse, these military equipments that are combined with ground troops have provided indications of possible Russian deployment in Syria in the following months.<sup>104</sup> In this regard, the deployment of Russian air forces to Syria on September 2015 remarked a substantial change in nature of Syrian civil war. The military engagement of Russia had several repercussions which later led to change of Western policies towards Syrian regime. However, before the impact that engagement left in international politics, it is important to measure Russia's military capacity in Syria to have a glimpse of real intentions behind this move. Russia has deployed the Su-24 and Su-34 fighter-bombers, Su-25 ground attack aircraft, and the marines to protect the air base from ISIS attacks and also to contribute the land operations in Syria. Even if the justification of Russian military deployment in Syria has been put on the agenda to combat the ISIS and opposition groups, Kaim and Tamminga draws attention to the fact that importance of the presence of Russian weapon systems comes from their strategic locations in a specific area of Western and Northwestern Syria where it can present a danger for western combat aircraft. Irrespective of its effectiveness, the strategic motivation of Russia gained ground by breaking out the international anti-ISIS coalition through its supremacy over air operations.<sup>105</sup>

To this end, it can be argued that Russia's military objectives have mainly based on multiple dimensions of motivation which are falling far beyond its political perspective on Syrian crisis and fighting against ISIS. First of all, Moscow enjoys the advantage of relocating its focus away from Ukraine. As a new front, Syria opens a secure geopolitical access for Russia to Mediterranean Sea and then an opportunity to mute substance of the West in the region. Within this context, last military dimension of Russia's strategic build up with surface-to-air missiles and advanced fighter aircraft, which are known as anti-access / area denial forces (A2/AD), becomes contestation of

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<sup>104</sup> "Russian Deployment to Syria: Putin's Middle East Game Changer", Warning Intelligence Update, Institute for the Study of War, September 17, 2015.

<sup>105</sup> Kaim, Markus and Tamminga, Oliver, "Russia's Military Intervention in Syria", SWP Comments 48, November 2015.

spheres of influence for its allies and the US. In other words, Moscow's military presence uncovers artificially designated backing for its client state, Syria.<sup>106</sup>

In addition to the aforementioned military goals of Russia in its involvement to Syrian conflict, Kremlin also has foreseen their support to strengthen combat capabilities of Syrian regime forces as an instrument to test its own new military capacity. Thus, new weapon systems, command and navigation systems have served to assess their capacity in the Syrian battlefield. Despite the fact that Moscow's wider narrative on fight against ISIS is still there to achieve, Syria provided plenty of opportunities for Russia in terms of gaining experience on the battlefield. As Dyer noted in detail, Russia's latest weapons systems including 3M14 Kalibr-NK, Kh-101 and Kh-35U rockets, command and navigation systems, as well as Tu-214R reconnaissance aircraft have been used to support Syrian forces and led them to ease the intense fighting in the battlefield. Even after the partly withdrawal announcement on 14 March, it should be noted that Russia showed its operational capabilities by at least securing its bases at Tartus and Khmeimim.<sup>107</sup> Therefore, Russia's support to Syrian army has been a key move to establish strong confrontation during the conflict. Given the fact that, Moscow's ties with the regime in Syria date back to the Soviet Union, Baathist regime has remained Kremlin's one of significant allies in the Middle East using the pre-existing channels of cooperation. Hence, financial aid and human resources provided by Russia created logistical support for the regime, but also this support paved way for the army to strengthen its capacity in terms of paramilitary power. To understand the depth of Russia's backing for Syria, Khaddour notes that Russia has forgiven debt of Syrian regime for the modernization of Syrian army with Russian equipment in 2005 and Moscow continued to show its support even during the civil war.<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>106</sup> Sage, Christopher and Davis, Michael, "Understanding Russian Strategic Ambiguity in Syria" in *Disrupting the Chessboard Perspectives on the Russian Intervention in Syria*, Harvard Kennedy School Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs, 2015, p.25

<sup>107</sup> Dyer, Anna Maria, "Russia's Military Operation in Syria: A New Stage", The Polish Institute of International Affairs, Bulletin, No.23, 18 March 2016.

<sup>108</sup> Khaddour, Kheder, Strength in Weakness: the Syrian Army's Accidental Resilience, Carnegie Middle East Center, 16 March 2016, p. 6.

In tandem with abovementioned discussion, it should also be noted that Russia's military intervention to Syria has brought up the question about limits to Putin's talent on strategic assessment of conflicts. Thus, his tactical responses to Syrian crisis which is transforming into different paths after every single change in the power equilibrium, is being controversial since these responses give a little idea about Putin's long term strategy towards the region. In the light of this question, the lessons learned from Caucasus in the 1990s could shed a light on Russia's motivations and perceptives of counter insurgency strategy. In other words, crucial similarities between previous conflicts which Russia involved during post-Cold War period and today in Syria point out that counterinsurgency is perceived as decontextualizing effort to the notions of state sovereignty, furthermore borders and boundaries. The Chechen conflict of the 1990s has noteworthy similarities with Russia's involvement in Syria in terms of the ideological characteristics of the parties involved in the fight and the power play of Russia between them. Considering the fact that transnational jihadist networks acted a part on Islamization of the conflict, they also fuelled the upheaval of nationalism and insurgency on the other end of the conflict. Therefore, Moscow's counterinsurgency plan acted according to divide-and-conquer the parties of the conflict. This successful split of insurgents by Russia made possible the '*Chechenization*' of the conflict. In return, Russia succeed to reach at a point of balancing the situation by favouring tactical moves for short term rather than mapping out a long road.

In addition to the abovementioned discussion, Putin's counterinsurgency strategy also highly credits a unique approach to war that is called non-linear warfare. As explained in detail in the previous chapter of this study, specific regions and strategic fields become battle space and these areas are open to opportunistic coalitions. The principle to keep fighting going is 'all on all' rather than war of coalitions. The military perspective of Moscow on Syria is mostly shaped by this strategy which has been seen during some particular periods of the war. For instance, as an equivocal argument, Russia's proximity with the Kurdish opposition political party, PYD, could be an indication of the fact that Putin wants to make an impact that we have seen in the Chechen conflict. Thus, his strategy is constituted on taking advantage of power asymmetry between insurgents. The Kurdish society in Northern Syria proves a valuable asset for this strategy by its networked nature.

Furthermore, Moscow follows the path of impulsive opportunism through empowerment of small battle groups and strengthening the resistance capability of these groups with functional information. These two objectives also feature and enjoy the tactical decentralization of authority for combat groups. However, it is still conditional to the lessons learned from Chechnya that Kremlin's nonlinear warfare succeeds in Syria. Since Russia's tactical moves only serve to symbolic victories within the short term, the question on how it is feasible to reach its objectives in the long term is uncertain. In addition, Moscow's preliminary objective during Chechen conflict in 1990s was to keep territorial sovereignty of Chechnya, it is questionable to the extent that how realistic it is to have same objective for Syria. Particularly, in terms of the ideal of Kurdish forces, which Kremlin lays its back in the region, is to exercise an autonomous and sovereign governance of themselves.<sup>109</sup>

In short, both security and political motivations of Moscow are not limited to the extent of Syrian civil war, however as examined above, Syria provided several legitimate reasons. The chessboard of Syria served as a testbed for so called 'new' Russian warfare concept to challenge the West. In addition, Russia's intervention to Syrian civil war with regards to transformation of its foreign policy drivers, this chapter also demonstrates valuable insights for the theoretical framework that has been explored earlier in this study. As distinct from its contribution to transformation of Russian strategic thinking, Clausewitzian dictum of war, specifically its continuation paradigm, found substantial place in the case of Syria. Although Clausewitzian theory is not considered as a field manual to analyse Russia's presence in Syria, the argument that underscores war as a tool of policy to reach political objectives regardless of its objective or subjective nature. Clearly, the motivation behind Moscow's active initiative in Syrian civil war is not solely relying upon security objectives. On the other hand, as detailed in the first chapter, Clausewitz does not propose complete subordination of military power to political objectives. Instead, the Trinitarian approach clearly rationalizes the need for equilibrium between political will and law of war. To this end, in the next part, Moscow's partial withdrawal decision on 14 March 2016 will be analysed from the perspective of this strategic approach.

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<sup>109</sup> Haines, John R., "A Method to the Madness: the Logic of Russia's Syrian Counterinsurgency Strategy", Foreign Policy Research Institute E-notes, January 2016.



## 4.2 Moscow's Strategic Approach to the Conflict

When Russia intervened to Syrian civil war, Kremlin's primary narrative on the agenda was to defeat ISIS. Yet, the perception on Moscow's decision did not remain limited to an intervention against a joint terror threat but rather it has been argued that the concealed aspirations of Kremlin have become obvious with this step further. For the very reason, its ISIS narrative showed clear reflection on Russian doctrine of *reflexive control*, "the use of disinformation to alter an opponent's perception of events and lead the adversary to respond in a manner that ultimately favours Russia".<sup>110</sup> The reflexive control doctrine has been widely implemented in Russia's disinformation campaign in Syria. The blurring effect of spreading disinformation has provided backing for Moscow's operations against terrorists and rebel groups in Syria. Given the fact that, both Russia and Assad has been accused of conducting air strikes against populated areas, Russia has been legitimizing this with the narrative of fighting against ISIS even when targeting other terrorist groups in particular terrain is part of its larger counterterrorism effort. From this point of view, Russia consistently refused to admit that its air campaign is targeting not only ISIS but also others as part of its strategy in Syria. While the US State Department claimed that Syrian rebel groups have mostly been targeted than ISIS by Russian airstrikes.<sup>111</sup>

Indeed, Russia's air campaign, which started on September 30, 2015 targeted urgent spots of ISIS-held territory while supporting Syrian regime to conduct ground offensive against other Syrian opposition groups. Kremlin has maintained its heavy military support to the Assad regime in order to accomplish the primary motive of its involvement. However, on the other side, it achieved the presence of reflexive control doctrine through challenging and undermining the NATO's southern flank by its air

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<sup>110</sup> Spaulding, Hugo, "Russia's False ISIS Narrative in Syria", Backgrounder Insitute for the Study of War, December 1, 2015.

<sup>111</sup> Spaulding, Hugo, "*Russia's False ISIS Narrative in Syria*", Backgrounder, ISW, December 1,2015, pp. 3-4.

campaign.<sup>112</sup> In addition, an utmost key strategic approach of Kremlin has been its proposal of a political settlement to the conflict which aim to bring together moderate and patriotic opposition groups under Assad regime. Thereby, it aims to disguise the rationale behind the allegations on targeting opposition groups or the civilian population during air strikes. In this context, it has been argued that Russia supported a 'peace dialogue' between the Assad regime and opposition forces during international talks in Vienna on November 2015. However, Moscow also proposed to categorize those opposition groups as either terrorists or 'legitimate' opposition groups. Even this proposed characterization of opposition groups reveals Kremlin's approach to divert the debate on whether its air campaign is exceeding the so-called narrative of fighting against ISIS.<sup>113</sup>

On the other hand, strategic approach of Moscow to Syrian civil war also fall behind the logic that explains a narrative of a domestic anxiety that Russia has back home. As the only reason that supports Russia's presence in Syria could not be implementation of reflexive theory. Clearly, the recent developments in Middle East since Arab Spring caused an uneasiness in Russia considering the fact that its Muslim population is over 20 million and rise of extremism is presenting noticeable threat for governance.

Within this context, Moscow's mistrust to so-called humanitarian intervention of the West derives from the real motives, which threatens both domestic and international aspirations of it. Furthermore, as Charap notes that US motives are not seen completely pure to Kremlin since there are certain developments at the international level considering Russia's alienation at UN as a common ground for discussion.<sup>114</sup> The general overview of Russia's position in the new world order after dissolution of Soviets is mainly spotted that there is a subordinate position that is resulted from the US campaign. As it is noted by Lukyanov, Putin has addressed this disproportional position by naming it as a product of major political disaster. In the

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<sup>112</sup> Spaulding, Hugo, "Russia's False ISIS Narrative in Syria", Backgrounder Insitute for the Study of War, December 1, 2015, pp. 2-3.

<sup>113</sup> Spaulding, Hugo, "Russia's False ISIS Narrative in Syria", Backgrounder Insitute for the Study of War, December 1, 2015, p. 5.

<sup>114</sup> Charap, Samuel, "Russia, Syria and the Doctrine of Intervention", *Survival*, Vol. 55, No. 1, February - March 2013, p. 37.

light of this perspective, Russia's play in Ukraine and Syria is regarded as a restoration process for being major international player. Even it has been widely discussed in this thesis previously; still there is a question on durability of Kremlin's current achievements on international agenda. Given the fact that post-Soviet era has surrounded by a new dynamic, which fostered the use of direct military intervention of Western powers in the Middle East region.<sup>115</sup> Since it is considered as disproportional from Russian view, new world order has not been designed according to Moscow's desires. Especially, there have been tremendous changes in the systemic level for Kremlin's security sphere of influence when we consider the rapid expansion of NATO and consolidation of European Union. Lukyanov raises a point that is not limited to expansion of NATO but also its transformation as a turning point for Moscow's increasing uneasiness.

On the other hand, EU as an organization that encourages its members to incorporate with each other through its own regulations and the norms has significant impact on Russia's approach to its new European sphere. In other words, according to Lukyanov, Kremlin realized that these norms are not only paving way to regulate the functioning of such organizations but also making room for maintenance of concepts like "democracy promotion" by indirectly getting involved in internal orders of the countries.<sup>116</sup>

To this end, it is fair to note that Moscow's strategic approach to the conflict has been shaped by aforementioned reasons, therefore sheds a light to its timely partial withdrawal decision that announced by President Putin on 14 of March, 2016. By the time, there have been significant political developments that provided appropriate ground for such move on the agenda. Even though it seemed like a sharp turn when first heard, it was not an accidental move on Russian side. Since Moscow has been pursuing the establishment of an alternative coalition for the political settlement in Syria, both its diplomatic relations with other Sunni states and also the US did not suspend even during the time of its military involvement. So the withdrawal decision

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<sup>115</sup> Lukyanov, Fyodor, "Putin's Foreign Policy: The Quest to Restore Russia's Rightful Place", *Foreign Affairs*, May/June 2016, pp. 31-32.

<sup>116</sup> Lukyanov, Fyodor, "Putin's Foreign Policy: The Quest to Restore Russia's Rightful Place", *Foreign Affairs*, May/June 2016, pp. 33 - 34.

echoed as a quite political signal to each side of the conflict and paved way to strengthen Russia's position more than ever.<sup>117</sup>

On the other hand, prior to the announcement, Moscow also send a public message to Assad regime by underlining the importance of their role in regaining thousand kilometres of its territory back to the control of its regime. As noted on International Crisis Group brief, Russia's UN envoy Vitaly Churkin drew attention on 18 February to the role of Russian air forces and made clear that Russia is keen to lead the political settlement and warns Damascus not to fail these attempts otherwise it has to pay the cost. In this regard, Moscow maintained its position with the withdrawal decision by prioritizing its interests. First, the main goal of preserving the regime is achieved in the first phase of its intervention. This showed the potential risks of Western intervention with the idea of no-fly zone. On the other hand, Kremlin clarified that its strategic influence over the region has to be taken in to consideration well since it reserved a special manoeuvre space for itself even with the withdrawal decision.<sup>118</sup>

However, one of the arguments on its military objectives remained ambiguous when Putin announced the withdrawal of Russian forces from Syria. The aim of Moscow's aerial campaign was about reversing the situation in favour of Assad regime. In addition, it was focused on to prevent any Western engineered regime change attempt. In order to address these aims among other claims such as fight against ISIS and threat of radical groups, Moscow portrayed its intervention viable. However, after almost six months of aerial campaign, the role of Russian air forces on territorial gains is argued to be overemphasized on one level. As quoted on Ari Heistein's article published on *the National Interest*, the territorial gain of Syrian government during 'assistance' of Russia, only grew by 1.3 percent. That is to say, the ambiguity of whether Russia's intervention succeeded to accomplish all its military objectives is still a valid question. Heistein further argues that not all territorial gain can be regarded as equal without any strategic importance is given. Even so, the comparison with a pre-

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<sup>117</sup> Dyner, Anna Maria, "Russia's Military Operation in Syria: A New Stage", The Polish Institute of International Affairs, Bulletin, No.23, 18 March 2016.

<sup>118</sup> "Russia's Choice in Syria", Crisis Group Middle East Briefing No 47, International Crisis Group, 29 March 2016, pp. 3-4.

intervention map might prove that in which intents and purposes Moscow's presence supported Syrian government.<sup>119</sup>

In other respects, Russia's campaign in Syria has also been promoted as an operation to reduce the refugee flows from Syria. However, the recent upsurge in number of refugees showed that Russian air strikes had completely reverse impact on humanitarian situation of the conflict. In addition, Stent argue that Russia's support to Assad regime might have an impact on Russia's own Sunni population through alienation. Thereby, the Syrian campaign interestingly presents both international and domestic interests at the same time with the contrary impacts on both sides. Stent further notes that, Putin's insistence on drawing a line between Russia's position in Syria and the sectarian dispute is still questionable in terms of where does it stand for Russian Muslims. Briefly, its involvement to the Syrian conflict reflected a mixed message by defending an anti-ISIS coalition that should be engineered with respect to common interests of Russia and the West.<sup>120</sup>

In sum, the announcement of withdrawal drew attention to three victories of Moscow. Even though there are still number of objectives remains to be achieved, first, Russia mostly succeeded to reverse its relations in the international system. That is why, so called 'victories' that changed the scope of regional power relations should be highlighted in order to understand where Kremlin's withdrawal decision stands. Secondly, Moscow managed to undermine the credibility of the US as an ally. Given the fact that, the illusion of American support to the allies in the region has been diminished with the recent developments in Egypt, Moscow's dedication to its ally Syria, caught even more attention than expected by Kremlin.

What is more, thirdly, this advantage will apparently pave way to a more assertive role for Russia in the future of the region. In the light of this context, Russia also succeeded to use the tension between sides of anti-ISIS coalition in favour of itself. When Russia started to support Syrian Kurdish YPG, it inherently upset the balances between Turkey and the US. This caused sort of a proxy war that is stirred up with Russia's tactical moves by using a strategic actor that is linked with both sides.

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<sup>119</sup> Heistein, Ari, "Did Russia win in Syria?", *The National Interest*, March 22, 2016. (accessed on May 8, 2016: <http://nationalinterest.org/feature/did-russia-win-syria-15561> )

<sup>120</sup> Stent, Angela, "Putin's Power Play in Syria: How to respond to Russia's Intervention", *Foreign Affairs*, January/February 2016, pp. 110 - 111.

On the other hand, Russia's involvement also showed that Western approach to Syrian civil war, which is usually defender of the moral principles in foreign intervention, has been changed due to Moscow's 'pragmatist' approach. Since preserving Syrian regime in power is seen as a convenient instrument for Kremlin's aspirations, the question on the political price of Russia's ruthless actions remains to be answered. In addition, whether a long-term settlement of the conflict will be possible with the willingness of Assad regime is yet to be seen.<sup>121</sup>

Clearly, in the light of Moscow's withdrawal decision, it is possible to state that Russia has firmly put its interests both in the neighbourhood and at the international level. Against the general impression, Russia's presence in Syria provided a more equal basis for further deals with the West without full engagement in the conflict. In other words, Kremlin succeed to achieve what is strategically targeted to change the dynamics of the conflict in favour of its grand aspirations.<sup>122</sup> On the other hand, Russia's presence in Syria is questioned in terms of whether its objectives provide a longer-term perspective of its presence in the region that is derived from historical context and also its approach to international system. As Notte points out that, the evaluation of Moscow's involvement should consider both narrow and broad strategic interests of Kremlin. According to this point of view, Moscow's discourse on support for Assad is regarded as its narrow interest, which offers extensive support for Syrian armed forces besides the anti-terrorist campaign. What is more, Moscow intends to increase the justification of its acts by pulling out the 'morality card' for the regime in Syria while also ensuring the fact that all groups in the battlefield are extremists therefore they cannot be addressed as actors to work with or even negotiate with.

On the other hand, Kremlin's broader strategic interests fall into its aspirations over the changing dynamics in international system. In this regard, the post 9/11 context paved way to endorsement of Moscow's anti-terrorism narrative. However, Kremlin could not fully reach out to its aims, especially the systemic confrontation stayed limited. That is why, its Syrian involvement opened up a new room for discussion on whether there is a grand bargain, which Russia keeps for itself behind

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<sup>121</sup> Heistein, Ari, "Did Russia win in Syria?", *The National Interest*, March 22, 2016.  
<http://nationalinterest.org/feature/did-russia-win-syria-15561> (accessed on May 8, 2016).

<sup>122</sup> Lukyanov, Fyodor, "Putin's Foreign Policy: The Quest to Restore Russia's Rightful Place", *Foreign Affairs*, May/June 2016, p. 35.

the doors, or it is only another move to perpetuate its counterterrorism discourse that is left over from Chechen conflict.<sup>123</sup>

Furthermore, Russia's coalition building efforts had different reflections in international system. Since the need for an international coalition to combat against ISIS has been emphasized by Putin on several occasions, Russia's intention to form such a coalition also been promoted as an alternative to the US-led anti-ISIS coalition. Moscow's insistence to alternate the coalition has been supported on the basis of legitimacy. Thus, Russia claimed that US-led anti-ISIS coalition has no legitimacy since there is no given permission by the 'lawful authority' which is still considered as the Assad regime in Syria. Therefore, Kremlin legitimizes its pretext of fighting against ISIS that is built upon as a result of bilateral relations between Russia and Assad regime.<sup>124</sup>

In sum, both its presence in Syria and the decision of withdrawal embraced Moscow's strategic approach to the conflict. It is well noted that, as much as military and political objectives of Kremlin to get involved in such complex conflict, its 'timely' withdrawal decision on 14 March 2016 also made a remarkable impact on the international agenda. In fact, this decision proved reverse the arguments on how nature of war is changing in terms of decline of state apparatus in equation of war. In other words, Kremlin made it clear that war is still an affair of state, strategic rationality and political will still constitute core of modern warfare. Even if the gravity in conflicts is moving out of conventional measures, as argued by Clausewitz, the nature of war is still composed of concerted conditions as seen in this withdrawal decision. For this reason, Russia's engagement in Syrian civil war echoed different circumstances and transformation of Kremlin's strategic toolkit is still open to be discussed. In addition, repercussions of Russian involvement in Syrian civil war showed that Moscow mostly achieved to give its message to international actors. What is more, this message included sort of prevision on its future desires at each level; domestic, regional and

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<sup>123</sup> Notte, Hanna, "Russia in Chechnya and Syria: Pursuit of Strategic Goals", Middle East Policy, Vol. 23, No.1, Spring 2016, pp. 65-66.

<sup>124</sup> Spaulding, Hugo, "Russia's False ISIS Narrative in Syria", Backgrounder Insitute for the Study of War, December 1, 2015, pp. 5-6.

international. Nevertheless, Moscow's approach is still questionable when it comes to longer term consequences.



## **CHAPTER 5**

### **CONCLUSION**

This thesis aimed to analyse Russian campaign in Syria from the perspective of Clausewitzian theory of war and strategy. It asked whether Clausewitzian approach of war which depicts it as a continuation of politics could be implemented to understand Russia's intervention to the conflict. It is seen that the Russian intervention in Syria puts a strong emphasis on legitimization efforts. In doing so, Moscow tries to portray itself as an important actor in fighting ISIS. Furthermore, from a realpolitik perspective it can be argued that Kremlin managed to challenge the West and the international system through this intervention. Even more importantly, the Putin administration timely took a withdrawal decision on 14 March 2016 to avoid a consuming quagmire for Russian Federation. This has ensured that core Russian objectives were achieved without enduring major costs or a protracted engagement that would overshadow military and political gains.

All of this brings us back to the theoretical framework given in this study earlier. The Russian campaign in Syria has offered important lessons-learned with regards to the war and strategy theories. In this respect, it is argued that the Kremlin's political objectives and military aims are in conjunction resembling the Clausewitzian continuation paradigm; and air power sufficed to a considerable extent, to change the course of the civil war. Despite the fact that Clausewitzian approach does not provide a field manual, as stated at the very beginning of this thesis, political objectives that Moscow reached by its intervention proved substantial importance of the continuation paradigm offered by this approach.

It is also intended to argue that Russia's withdrawal decision on 14 March 2016 showed rationality of Trinitarian approach. Since the political will and law of war had to be balanced among the trinity, Clausewitz states the equilibrium as important as to survive and achieve success in warfare. For this reason, taking a step for stabilizing this equilibrium by withdrawal decision on 14 March 2016 had quite applaudable

reflections in both regional and international agendas. Furthermore, debate on Clausewitzian dictum of war and strategy has brought us to rethink about nature of war and changing characteristics of warfare. On the contrary to new war arguments, both intervention and withdrawal decision of Russian Federation underscored that the role of state is still strong in equation of war as it appears to change the course of it. In this regard, this thesis found out that the Russian campaign is achieved to a point that plays a dominant role in shaping the future war and strategy theory debates in the academia, especially on the role of hybridity in contemporary armed conflicts. It is assessed that tactical gains in the battlefield were successfully translated into strategic advancements by the Putin administration, and the Russian Air Force has been playing a central role in these efforts.

Moscow's struggle for power and capabilities for guaranteeing its security came into the picture by its intervention in the Syrian civil war. By doing so, the Kremlin did not only defy the Western policies vis-à-vis the Baathist Regime of Syria, but furthered its strategic and geopolitical worldview. In other words, just like President Putin wants to see, now Moscow is the most important capital when deciding on Syria's future. At this point, hard power has played a dominant role, and enabled the Kremlin to get the upper hand over its competitors in international system. Moscow managed to challenge the West in one of the most important crises of the 21st century.

In this respect, the Russian Federation has so far kept one of its key allies, the Baathist Regime of Syria, alive; and also, succeeded in deterring further Western involvements in the civil war. Such a move also hints the use of Russian military power in pursuance of the Putin administration's foreign policy goals. To this end, Moscow's strategic goal in its intervention to Syrian civil war has been accomplished by reshaping the nature of the conflict. As it has been evaluated as the core of this study, Clausewitzian continuation paradigm is proved by Moscow's timely and strategically made political decisions. Thus, Kremlin set its military objectives without lack of linkage to its political aspirations. It has been argued that the transformation of its strategic thinking is not totally ruling out Trinitarian concepts of Clausewitz, on the contrary strengthening the equilibrium between military and non-military measurements in warfare. In this regard, the case of Syria provided a valuable ground

for discussion in terms of understanding the reasons behind “why” Russia intervened to the conflict. Other than political and military objectives that made possible such an intervention, transformation of its strategic thinking in line with the theoretical framework given in this thesis showed us a determining aspect on Kremlin’s initiative.

Within their military objectives, Moscow has used intensive information operations and psychological operations to pursue their strategic goals in Syria. These strategic moves have been theoretically put in Gerasimov doctrine and proved hybrid warfare concept in terms of Russian strategic thinking. As it has been argued that recent rearmament program of Russian military forces has reserved the idea of such political breakout opportunity from strategic encirclement of the West, Syria guaranteed to test its limits in this respect. The implementation of military and non-military measures as embraced in Clausewitzian approach, also showed that the scope of new strategic toolkit particularly with regards to its Russian perspective. It is concluded that Washington’s hesitant attitude towards the Syrian civil war, as well as the lack of a reliable political-military opposition, which is openly referred as the ‘moderate opposition’, played into the hands of President Putin when running its campaign. Thereby, Russians’ relative political-military success in Syria hints an alarming signal to the NATO alliance, especially with regards to the allies that are located in Russia’s “near abroad”. In this regard, both the effectiveness of the Russian military machine, as well as Moscow’s information warfare campaign, are of critical importance.

It is seen that a constant sense of geopolitical insecurity and hegemonic ambitions come into the picture as the main drivers of modern Russian foreign and security policy. While this policy is rational within its own strategic logic, it does not exclude revisionist moves and game-changer approaches in international relations practice. As the Putin administration perceives the collapse of the Soviet Union as one of the most important ‘geopolitical disasters’ of modern times, the Syrian civil war offered an invaluable opportunity to Kremlin in holding its footprint in a country where the only Soviet-remnant overseas base is located. The Hmeymim Base showed the strategic importance of forward grounding posture for Moscow’s geostrategic priorities both regionally and globally. Besides, military performance of the Russian

Air Force was satisfactory in terms of changing the battlefield tactical and operational balance.

Syria has been serving as a testbed for Kremlin to develop a good awareness about the capabilities of its armed forces. Thereby, the West, especially NATO, should focus on new Russian tactics-techniques-procedures under the new military doctrine of the Russian Federation. So far, Russians managed to employ advanced weaponry and operational art to sustain their air campaign in Syria. Following the downing of the Russian Su-24 by the Turkish Air Force, rising profile of the Russian air defences in Syria has predominantly determined Turkey's involvement in the Syrian civil war. Given the pressing threats emanating from the PKK threat on the one hand and the ISIS threat on the other hand, Kremlin managed to force Ankara to pay a high price in Syria. As seen in August 2016, Turkey found itself obliged to conduct a cross-border operation, Operation Euphrates Shield, to fight against ISIS. Even this has proved that Moscow succeeded to change the environment of the conflict in terms of its power to balance the acts of parties. When Russian aircrafts struck ISIS targets during operation al-Bab in support to Turkish air forces following the rapprochement after Su-24 incident, Moscow also sent a clear message to international actor to build trust relationship for a successful peace deal.

In this regard, Russia's involvement as a game changer in the Syrian civil war has ensured that every major international actor that has a stake in the future of Syria had to abide by the new reality imposed by Moscow. In the case of the United States, Washington had to establish mechanisms for notifying Moscow of its air operations in the early stages of the Russian intervention in order to ensure the safety of its pilots and operations. In the case of Turkey, Ankara's ability to conduct Operation Euphrates Shield rested on its ability to reach an understanding with Moscow, which ensured that Turkish air forces could participate in combat operations free of harassment from Russian air defences. In this regard, as the Turkish engagement in Syria deepens, so will its relative dependency on sustaining the understanding it has with Moscow.

So far, the Baathist Regime has managed to hold the most important parts of the country by the Russian -and Iranian- help. Despite its war crimes, Bashar al Assad's hold onto power appears as one of the most critical challenge that Russians

pose to the West. Thus, this study concludes that Moscow tries to impose its worldview and international system understanding to the West by using the Syrian civil war. Without a doubt, this policy depends on well-calculated military capabilities of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation. Despite serious shortcomings in military modernization, Russia has a mature experience in counter-terrorism and counter-insurgency operations. This very experience has shaped the intervention in the Syrian civil war and enabled an important tactical victory for the Russian forces. Without a doubt, through a carefully designed reflexive control approach, the Putin administration managed to turn tactical advances into a broader strategic push in Syria.

Russia's intervention has ensured that Bashar al Assad and his regime would not only survive militarily but also politically. Russia's intervention and the *fait accompli* it imposed effectively eliminated the prospect of removing Assad from his seat without risking a direct engagement with Russian military forces. Many Western capitals had to adjust to this reality and gradually lifted their objections to Assad's role in Syria's future. Therefore the "red-line" maintained by many Western capitals that Assad's removal should be a precondition for any political solution to the Syrian civil war, also eroded with the Russian intervention.

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## APPENDICES

### A. TURKISH SUMMARY / TÜRKCÖ ÖZET

Bu tez savař ve strateji teorilerine Clausewitzian yaklařımı dikkate alarak Rusya'nın Suriye iç savařına müdahalesini incelemeyi amaçlamaktadır. Bu bağlamda, tez, müdahalenin Clausewitzian yaklařımla ilgisi açısından iki boyutuna odaklanmaktadır. Clausewitzian savař ve strateji yaklařımı üzerine genel bir deęerlendirmeden sonra, 2000'li yıllarda Rus stratejik düşüncesinin deęişiminde ve Rusya Federasyonu'nun uluslararası sisteme yaklařımında Clausewitzian görüşün izleri deęerlendirilmektedir. Ayrıca, bu çalışma Moskova'nın Suriye iç savařına askeri müdahalesiyle birlikte 14 Mart 2016 tarihinde alınan kısmi geri çekilme kararı ile ortaya koyulan stratejik yaklařımın siyasi özelliklerine odaklanmaktadır. Kremlin'in bu stratejik kararına Clausewitzian bakış açısı ile bir analiz sunulması amaçlanmaktadır.

Bu nedenle, bu çalışmada Clausewitzian yaklařımının son çatışmaları, özellikle de Suriye'deki Rus varlığını açıklayabilmek için geçerli bir tartışma zemini oluşturduğu iddia edilmektedir. Diğer bir deyişle, Clausewitzian yaklařımın günümüzdeki çatışmaları analiz etmek için bugün bile yeterli derecede argüman sağladığı savunulmaktadır. Ancak, bu, savař stratejisinde deęişiklikler olmadığı anlamına gelmiyor; kuşkusuz dikkat çekici bir dönüşüm var, asimetrik savařın uygulanmasında sivillerin rolü, stratejik gündemlerde her zamankinden daha fazla yer kaplıyor. Bununla birlikte, Clausewitz teorisi, deęişimin savařın veya çatışmanın doğasının merkezinde olmadığını kanıtlamaktadır. Bu nedenle, bilimsel çerçevede, Clausewitzian yaklařım savař ve strateji teorilerine realist bir bakış açısı getirmektedir.

Clausewitzian yaklařımın yanı sıra, bu tez, güncel tartışmalarda eksik olduğu görülen bir alan olarak Rus stratejik düşüncesinin evveliyatına dair bir analizi de kapsamaktadır. Özellikle, Rusya'nın son dönemde dahil olmuş olduğu çatışmalarda

benimsenen stratejileri doğru okuyabilmek adına Gerasimov doktrininin detaylı bir analizi de sunulmaktadır. Bu minvalde, Sovyetler sonrası varlığını devam ettiren stratejik teorilerden derin nüfuz teorisi ve refleksif kontrol teorisi, Clausewitzian yaklaşımla verilen temel teorik tartışmayı destekleyecek biçimde analiz edilmektedir. Belirtilen teorik tartışma ayrıca Rusya'nın dahil olmuş olduğu bazı tarihi dönüm noktaları ve yansımaları açısından da değerlendirilecektir. Bu dönüm noktaları kısaca Rus iç siyasetindeki Çeçen sorunu, NATO'nun Libya müdahalesi ve yakın geçmişte yaşanan Ukrayna krizi şeklinde özetlenebilir.

Bu noktada belirtilmesi gereken husus, bu tezde analiz edilmesi önerilen Suriye iç savaşına Rusya'nın müdahalesi ittifak teorileri gibi farklı teorik çerçevelerde de tartışılabilir. Fakat Clausewitzian yaklaşımın sunduğu teorik sınırlar içinde Rus stratejik düşüncesindeki dönüşümü, Rusya'nın Suriye'deki Baas rejimi ile olan ilişkileri ve iç savaşın gidişatını derinden değiştirebilme kabiliyetini ne derecede sınıadığı bu tezin temel hedefi olarak belirlenmiştir. Bu sebeple, tartışmanın büyük bir kısmı bir satranç tahtası olarak görülen Suriye nezdinde savaşın karakteristiğinin nasıl ve ne şekilde değişime uğradığı üzerine yapılmıştır.

Tezin ilk bölümünde Clausewitzian yaklaşıma dair derin bir analiz yapılması amaçlanmış, özellikle savaşa dair üçlü (trinitarian) yaklaşım üzerinde durulmuştur. Clausewitz tarafından önerilen üçleme (the trinity) farklı unsurlardan oluşsa da bu unsurların modern savaşlardaki izdüşümleri bu bölümde ve tezin diğer bölümlerinin sonuç kısımlarında tartışılmaktadır. Kısaca, Clausewitz üçleme olarak önerdiği unsurları her savaş koşulundaki tutku, şans ve akıl üzerine kurmuştur. Bunların yanısıra, savaş iklimini bu unsurlara bağlı olarak ortaya çıkan atmosfere, özellikle belirgin olarak şansa, tehlike ve belirsizliğe vurgu yaparak tasvir eder. Bu amaçla, Clausewitzian yaklaşım şiddet, nefret ve düşmanlığı tutku şans ve akılla, diğer bir deyişle hükmetme iradesiyle ilişkilendirir. Clausewitz, şiddet içeren irade çatışmalarından oluştuğu için savaşı yöneten birçok faktörün bulunduğunu kabul eder. Fakat yalnızca şiddetle savaş anındaki ilişkiler bütününe yeterince açıklanamayacağını da savunur. Çünkü varsayılanın aksine, Clausewitz 'sürtünme' olarak tanımladığı pratik zorlukların savaşın oluşumu üzerinde etkisi bulunduğunu belirtir. Bu zorluklar, savaşı sınırlayıcı araçlara ve sonuçlara yol açan kısıtlayıcı faktörler olarak düşünülür.

Öte yandan, savaş halinde baskın olan şiddet, nefret ve düşmanlık eğilimlerinin bir bileşimi olarak sunulan üçleme, bu üç eğilimde rol oynayan aktörlerin de ana dayanağını oluşturduğunu savunmaktadır. Bu aktörler, halk, ordu ve hükümet şeklinde özetlenmektedir. Son olarak, Clausewitzian yaklaşımda düşmanlık hükümetlerin siyasi amaçlarına dayanmaktadır ve teori bu eğilimler arasındaki dengeyi, veyahut dengesizliği en iyi şekilde anlamak için siyasi amaçların çok iyi gözlemlenmesi gerektiğini savunur. Aksi takdirde, savaş halindeki belirsizlikler nedeniyle objektif bilgiyi fark edememe olasılığı ortaya çıkmaktadır. Ayrıca, her devletin savaşta yenilgiye uğratılabilmesi için saldırılarda hedef alınacak ağırlık merkezinin belirlenmesi gerektiğine dikkat çekerek, siyasi amaçların doğru bir şekilde değerlendirilmesi gerektiğine vurgu yapılmaktadır.

Dahası, Clausewitzian yaklaşım, askeri gücün kullanımının savaşta siyasi amaçlar doğrultusunda belirlenen ve şekillenen bir araç olarak kabul eder. Dolayısıyla savaş, siyasi hedeflerin en üst noktasına ulaşmak için etkili bir araçtır sadece. Savaşta olan devletlerin tüm eylemlerinin bu siyasi hedeflerle ilişkili olduğu göz önüne alındığında, savaşı aslında siyasete hizmet eden bir durumdan fazlası olarak görmez. Bununla birlikte, siyasi erke verilen tam kontrolün yaratacağı handikapları da göz ardı etmez. Aslında savaşa dair yapılan teorik tartışmalardaki lineer anlayışın tersine, Clausewitz, savaş ve siyaset arasındaki ilişkinin dinamik olarak ele alınması gerektiğini savunmaktadır. Çünkü siyasal ilişkiler dinamik birer oyun değiştirici olarak algılanmakta ve güç kullanımından doğan sonuçların sürekli olarak etkileşim halinde olduklarını savunur. Böylece, savaş hali siyasi iradeyi belirleyen veya sona erdiren bir üst güç olarak görülmez, her ne kadar kendine özgü bir hukuka sahip olsa da. Bu yüzden, Clausewitz siyasi hedeflerin savaş haline yansımaları anlamada çeşitli araçların önemine vurgu yapmaktadır. Bu perspektiften, savaş sadece düşmanların zayıflığına karşı zafer kazanmak için bir amaç olarak görülmemekle birlikte, aynı zamanda onlara siyasi olarak kendi hedeflerini kabul ettirmede etkin rol oynayan bir araç olarak görülmektedir. Bu nedenle savaş siyasi iradeden ayrı düşünülemez; siyasetin tam olarak devamlılığının görüldüğü yerdir. Böylece, savaşın çeşitli hedefleri farklı formlarla birleştirilerek zafere ulaşılır.

Savaş ve siyaset arasındaki ilişkiye dair Clausewitzian yaklaşım üzerine kısa bir bilgi verildikten sonra, 'yeni' savaş düzeni üzerine halihazırda süren tartışmalara da bu bölümün sonunda yer verilmektedir. Clausewitzian yaklaşımın modern savaşlarda ne kadar geçerli argümanlar ortaya koyabildiği sorgulandığı için, hala geçerli bir teorik zemin yaratıp yaratamadığı da bu tezde tartışılmaktadır. Nihayetinde Moskova'nın hem bölgesel hem de küresel siyasetteki emelleri, Suriye iç savaşına müdahil oluşu Clausewitzian perspektifte bu tartışmalar ışığında anlaşılmaya çalışılacaktır. Modern teknolojiler sebebiyle savaşın değişen karakterinin aslında Clausewitz tarafından önerilen unsurlar bakımından özünde bir değişime uğrayıp uğramadığı bu tezdeki analizin temelini oluşturmaktadır. Diğer bir deyişle, değişimi reddetmeden Clausewitzian bir okuma bugün şartlarında ne kadar mümkün ve mantıklı sorusunun cevabı aranmaktadır. Burada unutulmaması gereken, Clausewitzian yaklaşımın bir saha testi olarak Suriye örneğine uygulanmadığı fakat stratejik bir açıklama getirilebilmesi açısından değerli bulunduğuudur. 'Yeni' savaşlar tartışmasındaki ana argüman, savaşın gerçekleşmesini sağlayan dinamiklerin çoğunluğunun zaman içerisinde değişmesi sebebiyle savaşın doğasının da değiştiği üzerinedir. Bu bağlamda, Clausewitzian yaklaşıma yönelik ilk eleştiri, savaşın siyasi hedefe ulaşmanın aracı olarak tanımlayan özdeki değişimin göz ardı edildiğidir. Savaşın siyasal amacı radikalleşme, kültürel, etnik çatışmalar ve savaş teknolojilerinin dönüşümü gibi diğer odak dinamiklerinden dolayı düşüşe girdiğinden; 'yeni' savaşların, günümüzde küreselleşmenin öncülüğünde olan uluslararası sisteme odaklandığı savunulmaktadır. Yeni savaşlar, belirli bir sisteme karşı toplam mücadele vermek yerine alternatif bir kar sistemi yaratmaya daha meyillidir denebilir. Başka bir deyişle, "yeni" savaş iddiası, savaşın doğasının, çekirdeğinde halen bulunan stratejik akılçılık ve siyasi irade reddedilerek değiştirildiğini iddia etmektedir. Ayrıca 'yeni' savaşlar devletler arası değil, artık ağlar arasındaki çatışmalar olarak gerçekleştiğinden, devlet; sınır ötesi ilişkilerin karmaşıklığını içeren ve yasadışı grupların ağırlıklı olarak rol aldığı bir denklemden uzakta kalıyor. Fakat her halükârda, Clausewitzian yaklaşımı reddederken, savaşın yöntemleri haricinde doğasına ilişkin doğrudan ve kökten bir eleştirinin yapılamadığını belirtmekte fayda var. Devlet otoritesindeki düşüşün savaşların siyasi iradeden bağımsız bir şekilde gerçekleştiği veya savaş doğasının toptan bir değişim içerisinde olduğunu savunmak mümkün değil.



Ayrıca, irrasyonel yönetilen, siyasi iradeyle hareket etmeyen yasadışı grupların dahil olduğu savaşların belli amaçlar olmadan gerçekleştiği de söylenemez. Elbette savaş halinde irrasyonel etkilerin olduğu eylemler olabilir ki Clausewitz de bunu tamamen reddetmez. Fakat siyasi iradeyi bu sebeple görmezden gelmenin de teorik tartışmayı kısır bir döngüye sokacağı belirtilmektedir. Dolayısıyla, savaşın doğasının irrasyonel ve siyasetten arınmış bir hale bürüneceğini ispatlamak hala ikna edici değil. Teknolojik gelişmelerin savaşın karakteri ve nasıl gerçekleşeceğini belirleyici etkisi olsa bile, savaşın niteliğinin siyasi ve hatta tarihi bağlamdan ayrı olarak değerlendirilemeyeceği bu tezde savunulmaktadır. Clausewitzian yaklaşım, insanlığın bütünüyle müdahil olduğu bir eylem olarak savaşı, siyasi ve sosyolojik muhakmeden, öznellikten ayrı değerlendirmemektedir. Kısaca, bu yaklaşım yukarıda belirtilen argümanlar çerçevesinde hala geçerli bir tartışma zemini sağlamaktadır.

Tezin bir sonraki bölümünde Rus stratejik düşüncesindeki değişimler, son dönemde sıklıkla yer verilen stratejik konseptler, Rusya Federasyonu'nun uluslararası sisteme yaklaşımı bağlamında değerlendirilmektedir. Bu bağlamda, stratejik değişimlerin Clausewitzian yaklaşımla benzer yanları tartışılmıştır. Özellikle 2014 yılının ikinci yarısında görülen Moskova'nın dolaylı yöntemlerle yürüttüğü çatışmalarda hibrit savaş kavramı sıklıkla karşımıza çıkmaktadır. Hibrit savaş terimi, ilişkili taraflar arasındaki çatlaklar avantajını kullanarak ve savaşın usulsüzlüğünden meşru zeminin faydalanması yoluyla ayaklanmayla mücadele etmek olarak tanımlanabilir. Bu nedenle, paramiliter ve sivil unsurlar da dahil olmak üzere, farklı savaş biçimleri bu kapsamda ele alınmaktadır. Moskova'nın tehdit algısının ve yeni ortaya çıkan askeri stratejisinin, Avrupa'nın stratejik kuşatmasına karşı olarak şekillendiği düşünülürse hibrit savaş kavramının derinliği daha iyi anlaşılacaktır. Genel olarak bu stratejik dönüşüm, Kremlin'in aktif politikalarının desteğiyle ve askeri modernizasyonunun da iyi entegre edilmiş olmasıyla açıklanmaktadır. Bu bağlamda, Ukrayna ve Suriye müdahaleleri, batının stratejik kuşatmasından bir kopuş alanı sağlarken aynı zamanda yeniden silahlanma programının eksiklerinin ve zafiyetlerinin test edilebilmesi için gerçek birer operasyon zemini hazırlamışlardır. Bu stratejik dönüşüm ve askeri modernizasyonun ardında kısaca Rusya'nın iki hedefinin olduğunu belirtmek mümkün. Birincisi, transatlantik kuşatmayı ortadan kaldırabilmek; ikincisi

ise silahlı kuvvetlerinin prestijini ve güvenilirliğini yeniden yükselterek etkin bir politika aracı haline getirme niyetidir.

Bu çerçevede, Rus stratejik düşüncesi incelenirken son dönemde özellikle daha çok yer alan Gerasimov doktrini üzerinde de durulmuştur. Doktrin, savaş haliyle barış zamanı arasındaki belirsiz gerçeklikte ortaya çıkan asimetrik zorlukların altını çizmektedir. Bahsedilen belirsiz gerçeklik, Gerasimov tarafından 'Gri Bölge' olarak adlandırılır ve bu da sivil itaatsizliğin teşvik edildiği paramiliter gücün desteklenmesi ve dezenformasyon kampanyalarının yapılması şeklinde belirlenir. Bu açıdan bakıldığında, 2008 yılındaki Rus-Gürcü savaşı esnasında bu savaş stratejisine şahit olunmuştur. Moskova'nın hibrit savaş yaklaşımı da yukarıda belirtilen çerçevede istihbaratın etkin kullanımı ve stratejik ön hazırlığa odaklanmaktadır. Sivil unsurlar, stratejik hedefleri gerçekleştirmek için en az askeri güç kadar etkili kabul edilmekte; eylemlerin operasyonel ve taktiksel gereklilikleri nedeniyle devamlılığı sağlayan merkezi siyasi ve askeri güçle desteklenmektedir. Böylece, Rus silahlı kuvvetlerinin modernizasyonu ve stratejik kapasitesinin artırılması için yapılan yatırımlar, geleneksel savaş metodlarının doğasının değişmesiyle artan düşük yoğunluklu çatışmalar için bir zorunluluk haline gelmiştir. Öte yandan, vekalet savaşları ve bilgi savaşı yürütmek zaten Gerasimov'un önerdiği şekilde savaş ve barış arasındaki belirsiz durumda hazırlıklı halde olmak için önemlidir. Bu teorik yaklaşım bağlamında, Rusya'nın Çeçenlere karşı yürüttüğü savaşta da açıkça görüldüğü gibi, teknolojiye ileriye, savaşın yeni silahlarla farklı biçimlerde ve eylem şekilleriyle yürütülebilir hale gelmesi, modern dünyada yeni bir nesile dönüşümü mümkün kılmıştır. Özellikle yeni iletişim kanallarının yaygın kullanımı savaş taktiklerinde yeni bir zemin sağlamıştır. Bu bakımdan, yeni nesil savaş ekonomik, diplomatik, bilgi teknolojilerine ve psikolojik taktiklere dayanan farklı araçların birleşimi olarak tanımlanabilir.

Rusya ile Batı hibrit savaş konusunda farklı yaklaşımlara sahiplerdir. Batı, modern savaşta geleneksel yöntemlerin çok yönlü şekilde kullanılması şeklinde hibrit savaş tasvir ederken, Rus yaklaşımına göre lineer olmayan, çok yönlülükten ziyade etkin nüfuz etme paradigmasının ortaya koyduğu yeni stratejik düşünceyi temsil etmektedir. Çatışmayı beslemek için askeri önlemler Batılı perspektifte daha yaygın

kullanılırken, Rus perspektifi her bir unsuru eşit birer parça olarak görür ve derinden inceler. Özellikle NATO, Rusya'nın geleneksel askeri yöntemlerin dışına çıkma çabasını Batının süregelen üstünlüğünü aşmak için geliştirdiği bir refleks gibi görse de Kremlin aksine, düşük yoğunluklu çatışmalara etkin şekilde yanıt verebilmek için geleneksel araçların yenilenmesi gerektiğini öngörmektedir. Buna ek olarak, daha önce belirtildiği gibi, 'yeni' olarak sunulan bilgi savaşı, sözde muhalifler üzerinde refleksif kontrol sahibi olmak için ve yaygın olarak kullanılan dezenformasyon taktikleri Sovyet uygulamalarının izlerini taşımaktadır. Başka bir deyişle, çağdaş vizyon, eski araçlara, yapılara ve uygulamalara tekrar uygulanmaktadır. Savaş ve barış hali arasındaki muğlaklık yalnızca yeni teknoloji veya bilgi kullanımıyla ortaya çıkmakla kalmadı; aynı zamanda, bu yeni yöntemlerle değişen savaşın niteliği ve süreci dolaylı olarak gelişmiş oldu. Askeri tedbirler açısından, geleneksel ve geleneksel olmayan araçlarla savaş daha karışık hale gelirken, askeri olmayan eylemler gibi yeni unsurlar, 'yeni' savaş kavramının eşit bileşenleri olarak önemli rol oynamaya başladı. Bu perspektiften bakıldığında, askeri anlamda savaşın dönüşümü, her alanda olumlu bir gelişme olarak kabul edilmektedir. Ayrıca, yeni askeri düşünce sadece modern savaşın tamamen farklı araçlar etrafında formüle edilmesi değil, aynı zamanda asimetrik gücün de geleneksel olanla birleştirilmesi açısından toptan gücün yeni bir araca dönüşmesini sağlamaktadır.

Bu bilgiler ışığında, bahsedilen stratejik dönüşümün daha somut bir şekilde analiz edilebilmesi için 2010 ve 2014 yıllarında yayınlanan Rus askeri doktrinleri birbirleriyle farkları açısından bu bölümün son kısmında incelenmiştir. 2014'te yayınlanan askeri doktrin ve 2010n yılında yayınlanan arasında benzerlikler bulunmasına rağmen, bilgi savaşı ve ulusal güvenliği tehdit eden unsurlarla askeri tehlikelerin tanımlanmasından büyük değişiklikler gözlemlenmiştir. Öte yanda, ana iç ve dış tehlikeler, Moskova'nın terör örgütlerinin faaliyetlerinden ya da toplumsal huzursuzluk ve daha geniş anlamda örgütlerin potansiyel gücünü amaçlayan faaliyetlerden kaynaklanabilecek tehditler – yani NATO'nun sınırlarındaki varlığı- üzerine algısı açıkça belirtilmektedir. Bunlara ek olarak, 2014 doktrini etnik ve sosyal gerilimleri tetikleyebilecek provokasyon tehlikesine de ayrıca vurgu yapmaktadır. Ayrıca, 2014 doktrini, Rusya'nın yeni tanıtilan bilgi ve iletişim teknolojileri tarafından yeniden şekillendirilen dış tehditler üzerine artmakta olan endişelerini açıkça

göstermektedir. Rusya'nın toprak bütünlüğüne yönelik tehditler olarak algılandıklarından ve politik bağımsızlığı üzerinde önemli etkiye sahip olduklarından, küresel aşırılık ve ayrılıkçılık gibi artan sorunların kaynağı olarak görülen bilgilerin kullanılması tehditler olarak belirlenmiştir. Öncelikle, iç ve dış odaklı medya, dış dünyaya ulaşmak için online varlığın korunması önemli bir şart olarak konulmuştur. İkincisi, Rusya'nın büyük stratejisinin dış dünyaya doğru şekilde aktarılabilmesi için sosyal medyanın etkin kullanımının elzem olduğu belirlenmiştir. Son olarak, dil becerileri, daha geniş kitleye ulaşma hedefleri nedeniyle yeni bilgi savaşının ana alanlarından biri olarak görülmektedir.

Sonuç olarak, tezin bu bölümü Clausewitzian yaklaşıma göre değerlendirildiğinde görülen odur ki Clausewitz'in önermiş olduğu üçleme konsepti Rus stratejik düşüncesinin dönüşümünde göz ardı edilmemiştir. Clausewitzian yaklaşımında görüldüğü gibi özellikle askeri ve askeri olmayan önlemlerin uygulanmasının çok takdir edildiğini göz önüne alarak, farklı koşullar arasında dengenin korunmasının önemi vurgulanmıştır. Öte yandan, geçen bölümde de tartışıldığı gibi, savaşın özelliklerini değiştiren yeni gelişmelere göre de Rus stratejik yapısının sözü geçen dönüşüm bakımından savaşın doğasına yönelik bir değişim geçirip geçirmediği hala tartışmalı bir konudur. Dikkat çekici olan, bu değişimin özünde savunulan etkin araçların farklı rollerde tekrar birleşim haline getirilmesi Clausewitz tarafından da önerilen temel argüman olmuştur.

Tezin dördüncü bölümünde ise Rusya'nın Suriye iç savaşına müdahalesinin askeri ve siyasi sebepleri tartışılmaktadır. Ayrıca, Rusya'nın 14 Mart 2016 tarihinde açıklamış olduğu kısmi geri çekilme kararı da Rusya'nın uluslararası sisteme yaklaşımı açısından değerlendirilmekte ve tartışılmaktadır. Bu bağlamda bakıldığında öncelikle şunu belirtmek gerekir ki Rusya'nın Tartus limanındaki askeri üssü Ortadoğu'daki son varlığını temsil etmekte, sembolik dahi olsa Suriye'yle ilişkilerini koruması bakımından önem arz etmektedir. Kısaca, sadece bu açıdan bakıldığında bile Kremlin'in Tartus limanını güvence altına alma konusundaki sınırlı hedefi de Suriye'ye desteğin anlamını açıkça ortaya koymaktadır. Dahası, Moskova Suriye'ye yaşanabilecek olası bir rejim çöküşünün kontrolsüz bir şekilde gerçekleşmesinden oldukça endişe duymuştur. Esad rejimi karşıtı radikal grupların sayısının gün geçtikçe

güçlenmesi bu kaygıyı doğrular şekilde ortaya çıkmıştır. Bu giriş ışığında düşünüldüğünde, Temmuz 2015'te ABD ve Türkiye arasında imzalanan IŞİD karşıtı koalisyon Rusya'nın kendi kontrolü olmadan gerçekleştirebilecek bir rejim değişikliği konusundaki kaygısını artırdığı da söylenebilir. Bu anlaşma ile koalisyon güçleri Türk hava üslerine serbestçe erişim sağlayarak, Türkiye sınırında IŞİD karşıtı bir bölge oluşturulması hedeflenmiştir. Bu hedef, Rusya'nın daha fazla adım atmasına yol açan etkenlerden biri olarak görülmektedir. Öte yandan, bölge dinamikleri açısından bakıldığında, yine Temmuz 2015'te nükleer müzakerelerin sonuçlanmasıyla ABD ve İran arasındaki yakınlaşmayı, Suudi Arabistan'nın da katıldığı üçlü toplantılar izlemiştir. Bu bağlamda, Rusya'nın Suriye iç savaşına askeri müdahale kararı, Moskova'nın iç politika konusundaki endişeleri arasında olmakla beraber hem bölgesel hem de uluslararası gelişmelerden kaynaklanmaktadır denebilir. IŞİD karşıtı koalisyonun, iç savaşta rol alan Esad karşıtı gruplardan militanlar yetiştirmek ve böylece Kuzey Suriye'de bir direniş bölgesi oluşturma hedefi önemli rol oynamıştır. Fakat bu stratejinin başarısızlığı, Rusya'nın Suriye ve bölgedeki cihad gruplarıyla mücadeledeki istekliliği konusunda onu haklı çıkararak bir etkiye sahip olmuştur. Buna ek olarak, Putin'in radikal İslamcı grupların ve IŞİD'in güç kazanması konusundaki kaygısı sadece bölgesel siyasette değil, aynı zamanda Rus iç politikasında da bir izdüşüme sahip olduğu görülmüştür. Bütün bu gelişmeler ışığında bakıldığında, Rusya'nın Suriye'ye askeri müdahalesi siyasi sebeplerle daha fazla kaçınılamayacak bir durum olarak karşımıza çıkmaktadır. Politik hedeflerin üzerindeki dolaylı ve doğrudan etkiler Moskova'nın daha aktif bir rol üstlenerek savaşa bir üst aktör olarak dahil olmasıyla sonuçlanmıştır. Fakat bunu yaparken unutulmamalıdır ki Kremlin uluslararası siyasetteki mücadelesini kutuplaşmanın derinleşmesi üzerine kurmuştur.

Bu tezde, siyasi ve askeri motivasyonları incelendiğinde Rusya'nın Suriye ile ilişkilerini koruması aynı zamanda stratejik çıkarlarını korumak için bir araç olarak görüldüğü açıkça analiz edilmiştir. Kısaca, Suriye iç savaşının kapsamı ile sınırlı olmayan bu motivasyonlar, her şeye karşın çeşitli meşru sebepler sağlamıştır. Suriye bu açıdan Moskova için Batı'ya meydan okuyabildiği bir satranç tahtası görevini görmüştür. Aynı zamanda yeni stratejik konseptlerin denendiği bir test sahası da olmuştur. Her ne kadar bu tezde Clausewitzian yaklaşım birebir sahada uygulanabilecek bir teori olarak görülmesi de bahsedilen bu özellikler sebebiyle,

hedefi ya da öznel niteliği ne olursa olsun, savaşı siyasi hedeflere ulaşmak için bir araç olarak gören Clausewitzian savununun yansımaları görülmektedir. Siyasetin devam etme paradigması Suriye örneğinde açıkça görülmüştür. Öte yandan, ilk bölümde ayrıntılarıyla belirtildiği gibi Clausewitzian yaklaşım, askeri gücün siyasi hedeflere tamamen boyun eğdirilmesini savunmamaktadır. Bunun yerine, üçleme konsepti, siyasal irade ve savaş kanunu arasındaki denge ihtiyacını rasyonalize eder. Bu bağlamda tekrar gözden geçirildiğinde, Moskova'nın 14 Mart 2016 tarihinde vermiş olduğu kısmi geri çekilme kararı teoride önerilen dengeyi sağlamaktadır.

Kısaca Suriye'deki varlığı ve 14 Mart 2016'daki çekilme kararı ile uluslararası alanda vermiş olduğu mesajla Kremlin aynı zamanda stratejik yaklaşımı konusunda da net bir duruş sergilemiştir. Kremlin'in bu tür karmaşık bir çatışmaya katılma yönündeki askeri ve siyasi hedefleri kadar, 14 Mart 2016'daki 'zamanında' geri çekme kararı da uluslararası gündem üzerinde belirgin bir etki yaptı. Aslında bu karar, savaş denkleminde devlet aygıtının gerilemesi açısından savaşın doğasının nasıl değiştiğine dair argümanları tersine çevirdiğini kanıtladı. Başka bir deyişle, Kremlin, savaşın hala bir devlet ilişkisi, stratejik rasyonalite ve siyasi irade modern savaşın çekirdeğini teşkil ettiğini açıkça ortaya koydu. Savaşın yoğunluklu olarak yaşandığı alanlarda geleneksel araçlar kullanılmaya devam etse bile, bu çekilme kararında görüldüğü gibi uyumlu koşullar savaşın doğasında bir değişim yaşanmadığı için yer bulabilmektedir. Bu nedenle, Rusya'nın Suriye iç savaşındaki rolü farklı koşulların biraraya getirilmesi ile mümkün olmuş ve stratejik araçlardaki değişim bu birleşimin tartışılmasını olanaklı kılmıştır. Buna ek olarak, Rusya'nın Suriye iç savaşına katılımının yankıları, Moskova'nın çoğunlukla mesajını uluslararası aktörlere aktarmayı başarabildiğini göstermiştir. Dahası, bu mesaj her kademedeki -bölgesel ve uluslararası- gelecekteki arzuları üzerine öngörülerini de içermeyi başarmıştır.

Sonuç olarak, bu tez Rusya'nın bir oyun değiştirici olarak Ortadoğu'ya yeniden dönmesinin Clausewitzian perspektiften bir okumasının mümkün olup olmadığını tartışmıştır. Bu bağlamda, Suriye'nin geleceğinde rol alacak her uluslararası aktörün Moskova'nın dayattığı veya dayatacağı yeni gerçekliğe uyması gerektiği açıktır. Bu tezin tartışmaya odaklandığı 14 Mart 2016 geri çekilme kararı sonrasında dahi Rusya ile uyumlu olmayacak herhangi bir gelişme kabul görmeyecektir. Türkiye örneğinde,

2016 yaz aylarında başlatılan Fırat Kalkanı Operasyonu'nun yürütülebilmesi Rus hava savunma mekanizmaları tarafından taciz edilmediği sürece mümkün olmuştur. Rusya'nın müdahalesi, Beşar Esad'ın ve rejiminin yalnızca askeri açıdan değil aynı zamanda siyasi olarak da ayakta kalmasını sağlamıştır. Rus askeri kuvvetleri ile doğrudan bir angajmana girmeksizin Esad'ı koltuğundan çekme ihtimalini etkili bir şekilde ortadan kaldırmıştır. Rusya'nın aktif müdahalesiyle iç savaş için önerilecek herhangi siyasi çözüm için önkoşul Esad rejiminin son bulması olmaktan çıkmıştır.

## B. TEZ FOTOKOPİSİ İZİN FORMU

### ENSTİTÜ

Fen Bilimleri Enstitüsü

Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü

Uygulamalı Matematik Enstitüsü

Enformatik Enstitüsü

Deniz Bilimleri Enstitüsü

### YAZARIN

Soyadı : AL

Adı : Nazife

Bölümü : Uluslararası İlişkiler

**TEZİN ADI** (İngilizce) : A Clausewitzian reading of Russian Intervention in the Syrian Civil War

**TEZİN TÜRÜ** : Yüksek Lisans

Doktora

1. Tezimin tamamından kaynak gösterilmek şartıyla fotokopi alınabilir.

2. Tezimin içindekiler sayfası, özet, indeks sayfalarından ve/veya bir bölümünden kaynak gösterilmek şartıyla fotokopi alınabilir.

3. Tezimden bir bir (1) yıl süreyle fotokopi alınamaz.

**TEZİN KÜTÜPHANEYE TESLİM TARİHİ:**