

RUSSIAN-SYRIAN RELATIONS SINCE THE ARAB SPRING:
A STRONG ALLIANCE

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ABSTRACT

RUSSIAN-SYRIAN RELATIONS SINCE THE ARAB SPRING: A STRONG ALLIANCE

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This thesis analyzes the relations between Russia and Syria since the Arab Spring within the framework of small state foreign policy behavior and alliance formation mechanism built upon by Syria. By doing so, historical background of the relations, major challenges, vulnerabilities as well as strenghts were pointed out within the prism of Russian-Syrian relations in the region and its regional and international effects and consequences tried to be evaluated under an Russian-Syrian alliance.

Keywords: Russian-Syrian Relations, Arab Spring, Small State Foreign Policy Behavior, Alliance Formation Mechanisms

ÖZ

ARAB BAHARI SONRASI RUSYA-SURİYE İLİŞKİLERİ: GÜÇLÜ BİR İTTİFAK

Şen, Ayça Hüma

Yüksek Lisans, Orta Doğu Araştırmaları Bölümü

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Bu tezde, Arap Baharı sonrası Suriye-Rusya ilişkileri, Suriye'nin küçük devlet dış politik davranışına ilişkin ittifak oluşum mekanizmaları çerçevesinde ele alınmıştır. Bunu yaparken, bölgedeki temel güçlükler, tehdit ve fırsatlar ve bölgesel ve uluslararası etki ve sonuçlar Rusya-Suriye ittifakı optiğinden altında değerlendirilmeye çalışılmıştır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Rusya-Suriye İlişkileri, Arap Baharı, Küçük Devlet Dış Politika Tercihleri, İttifak Mekanizmaları

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

*Syria couldn't do without alliances.*¹

In his article titled 'Syrian Foreign Policy under Bashar al-Assad', Hinnebusch was stressing on the idea that forming an alliance is an obligation for the Syrian state. The question is, can it be an obligation for a state to form an alliance with another one in order to survive? If the answer is yes, is it really an obligation for all or can there be any exceptions, are there any differences between the states depending on their capabilities, vulnerabilities and their contribution regarding world politics?

In this thesis, those questions are tried to be answered over Syrian-Russian relations within the scope of small state foreign policy behavior and the patterns drawn by those decisions for Syria. In the light of this primary question; what were the driving forces, which made Syria to form an alliance with the Soviets in the beginning and Russia later on will be identified. Through those questions raised, Syrian-Russian relations will be case of the

¹ Hinnebusch, Raymond, "Syrian Foreign Policy under Bashar al-Assad", Ortadoğu Etütleri, July 2009, Volume 1, No 1, pp. 7-26

research in order to analyze small state's capabilities and limitations in terms of foreign policy choices and the level of dependency with a great power.

Maintaining power, opposing revolutionary movements, upholding the balance of power were the critical concerns of the diplomats representing their state during the Congress of Vienna in 1815 since they tried to ensure their survival and independence.² By referring to the French domination Napoleon almost reached; as a new European order, balance of power represented the idea of an equilibrium in which no single state is able to dominate.³ This was the general idea behind the representatives' mind; however, no certain agreement was made regarding the definition of it. What Castlereagh relied on depended on the territorial changes among the states, which poses threat to each other since he simply stressed on territorial arrangement while defining the term balance of power.⁴

On the other hand, to sum up, what great powers agreed was the term 'just equilibrium' with different meanings and ways of contribution.⁵ Since territorial agreement was not enough; strategic and military balance was questioned as well. As Chapman stated, Talleyrand observed that;

² Chapman, Tim. *The Congress of Vienna: Origins, Processes, and Results*. London: Routledge, 2006 p.16

³ Ibid

⁴ Ibid

⁵ Ibid, p.19

The general equilibrium of Europe cannot be composed of simple elements; it can only be a system of partial equilibrium [...] The actual situation admits solely of an equilibrium which is artificial and precious and which can only last so long as certain large states are animated by a spirit of moderation and justice which will preserve that equilibrium.⁶

Here the spirit of moderation and justice Talleyrand mentioned was continued with the idea that smaller actors had the right to contribute as sovereign entities.⁷ Basically, the idea behind his decisions and support for the smaller powers was the very elemental concern of a diplomat; survival and vital interests of his state. However, this couldn't prevent categorization among the states and presence of smaller states among the others as well.

Small powers as a category emerged as a result of the discussions held in the Congress of Vienna of 1815 and referred to the states not belonging to the great powers' camp.⁸ For 1815, early 19th century, major determinant attributed by Chapman was size; size was everything from his own words.⁹ However, military and economic limits of the states and certain vulnerabilities

⁶ Chapman. 2006 p.16

⁷ Ibid, p.37

⁸ Tür, Özlem and Salık,Nuri. "Small States" in International Relations: Development, Definition, Foreign Policy and Alliance Behavior. Uluslararası İlişkiler Dergisi, 2017. Volume 14 , Issue 53, pp.3-22

⁹ Chapman. 2006 p.16

such as size and population lied in the mainstream literature on small state studies as well.

Starting from the World War I; together with the collapse of the empires, decolonization period in which certain states experienced independence, Cold War years are the turning points for the emergence of small state studies.¹⁰ Especially, in the field of International Relations, their presence and emergence as the new actors of world politics drive attention onto those small powers.

Considering early-studies regarding small state behaviors, decolonization period by the end of World War II required a focus on security and survival of the states. As Fox stressed on, those vulnerabilities were the determinants of those states while deciding on their moves. Similarly, they needed to join alliances since they couldn't afford standing on their own.¹¹ What we see during the Cold War period was a focus on the deficit of those states and a call for others' to fulfill each other's weaknesses, as a cover to some extent.

Parallel to the territory-size based definitions of small states; major focus was on material capabilities of the states in that period. Considering major elements of post war period and early Cold War politics; the dominant theoretical approach was realism and major focus was on security issues.

¹⁰ Tür and Salık. 2017 p.5

¹¹ Keohane, Robert O. "Theory of World Politics: Structural Realism and Beyond" in Ada Finifter, ed., Political Science: The State of the Discipline(Washington D.C., 1983)

However, together with the transformation on the dominant International Relations theory, there also occurred a shift from military, material-based issues of the small states to their economic survival, needs and dependency issues.¹² Together with the emergence of social constructivism and the concept of norms and values as a central behavior motivation; post-Cold War period and the so-called new order had to face ethnic problems and political conflicts accelerated accordingly as well.

This kind of evolution in small state studies show us the lack of a general definition of the term 'small power' in literature. What is agreed upon is the fact that different perspectives and the definitions formulated accordingly caused the lack of a general definition.¹³ Considering this scheme drawn by Neumann and Gstöhl; it can be seen that; mainly the dominant International Relations theory and 'small states' position and contribution to world politics accordingly determine the borders and frame the concept and label the topics small states will be discussed around. As a results, their foreign policy behavior was shaped regarding the definition made and the characteristics attributed to them.

¹² Neumann, Iver B. ve Sieglinde Gstöhl. "Introduction: Lilliputians in Gulliver's World", Christine Ingebritsen et.al. (der.), *Small States in International Relations*, Seattle, University of Washington Press, 2006, pp.3-36

¹³ Tür and Salık, 2017 p.7

Although Elman stressed that International Relations theories had largely ignored small states¹⁴; Thorhallsson provided a counter-question asking: "could the theoretical frameworks created to explain the behavior of great powers also be used to explain the behavior of smaller states" and tried to answer this question under three systemic theories of realism, liberalism and conservatism.¹⁵

In addition to those core theories; Thorhallsson mentioned two recent studies regarding small states; application of status-seeking to small states and shelter theory¹⁶. The former assumed that small states are deeply concerned with achieving status rather than with practical benefits and security.¹⁷ As Wohlforth et. Al. stated; status game is more significant than material gains because they are unable to compete or interact with other states in any other way.¹⁸ Shelter theory, on the other hand, assumed that small states are highly constrained by their vulnerabilities, which prevent them from making decisions alone and seek shelter by allying with larger states or being a part of certain

¹⁴ Miriam Fendius Elman, "The Foreign Policies of Small States: Challenging Neorealism in Its Own Backyard", *British Journal of Political Science*, Cilt 25, No.2, 1995, p.171

¹⁵ Thorhallsson, Baldur. Studying small states: A review, *Small States & Territories*, Vol. 1, No. 1, 2018, pp. 17-34 p.23

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Wohlforth, W. C., de Carvalho, B., Leira, H., and Neumann, I. B. Forthcoming. Moral authority and status in International Relations: Good states and the social dimension of status seeking. *Review of International Studies* cited in Thorhallsson 2018 p.26

¹⁸ Ibid

international organizations¹⁹. This doesn't have to be in political terms as Thorhallsson pointed out; instead in economic and societal term they will seek shelter of larger states or institutions.²⁰

In both developments in literature; we see that major focus was on vulnerabilities of those powers categorized under 'small' or 'weak'. This situation fits the 'residual category' developed by Neumann and Gstöhl which brings us to the point we have started; lines that are expected to differentiate small powers from the greater ones are not clearly drawn.²¹

Nevertheless, as Tür and Salık stated; three models were formulated regarding small state definitions; quantitative, qualitative and perceptual. First, quantitative model relied on material objectives such as population, territorial size, economic prosperity which was formulated by Tom Crowards.²² Although population was regarded as a common denominator of defining the category of a state; no such consensus was reached regarding

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Thorhallsson 2018, p.27

²¹ Jeanne A. K. Hey, "Introducing Small State Foreign Policy", Jeanne A. K. Hey (der.), *Small States in World Politics: Explaining Foreign Policy Behavior*, Boulder, Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2003, s.3; Kotchikian, *The Dialectics of Small States*, p. 17 cited in Tür and Salık 2017.

²² Tom Crowards, "Defining the Category of Small States", *Journal of International Development*, Volume 14, No.2, 2002, pp.160-173. Cited in Tür and Salık 2017, p.7

population as well. Still no general standards were determined regarding quantitative explanations; which led us to the second category.

Considering qualitative model; power politics was at the center of the research. Goetschel was among the scholars defining small states within power, in positive and a negative way. According to him, power, in positive way, is the capacity of an actor of influencing the others' behaviors. In negative way, on the other hand, it is the ability to prevent others' impact.²³ Goetschel, referring to small states as externally helpless and constantly threatened by extinction²⁴ was not alone in defining states under the concept of power and relational dimension. Knodsen and Erling Bjong also stressed on the importance of the definition from relational perspective.²⁵

From this point of view; it might be understood as Castlereagh associating small states with weak states. Although, Handel used the term weak state for the states having both large or small territory²⁶; Elman didn't specify any difference between small, weak and unsecure states.²⁷

²³ Ibid p.8

²⁴ Ibid p.18

²⁵ Ibid p.9

²⁶ Michael Handel, *Weak States in the International System*, Londra, Frank Cass, 1990, p.10-11.

²⁷ Elman, 1995, p.171

Third category, as represented by key findings of Rothstein; is perceptual approach. According to him, “small state is the state who admits that it has to be based on the developments and assistance of the other states for its own security”.²⁸ Similarly, they stated that the term small state depends on the perception that the state has; if it understood itself as small; then it is small basically. In addition; Keohane provided a systemic emphasis on perceptual model by stating that small state is the state that is aware of the fact that it couldn’t make influential impact on the others or the system alone.²⁹ Under his four stage category of states; small states were considered under the last; uninfluential ones.³⁰

Last but not least; we first referred to the importance of ‘size’ in Chapman’s findings that ‘size was everything in 1815’. Throughout the major development in world politics; emergence of new actors in international arena; Thorhallsson defined six categories of small powers; fixed size by referring to population and territory; sovereignty size as the ability of maintaining sovereignty over its territory; political size as military and administrative capabilities; economic size as state’s gross domestic products; perceptual size as its ability to influence and lastly preference size referring to ambitions and priorities of the

²⁸ Rothstein, Robert L. *Alliances and Small Powers*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1968., p.29 cited in Türk and Salık, 2017.

²⁹ Keohane, p.29

³⁰ *Ibid*

states.³¹ Depending on environmental factors, this scheme shows the evolution of the concept of small state and how the developments experienced since 1815 make it emerge as a separate area.

Considering those key approaches and the points and how insufficient they are to define what small power is and is not; there occurred problems in efforts to explain their foreign policy behaviors. ³² Parallel to the conflicting view on definitions; their foreign policy behaviors couldn't provide a general understanding as well. However, by considering findings of Hey, Maurice East and Handel; Tür and Salık summarize common foreign policy behavior categories as low profile commitment to world affairs, significant participation in multi-national organizations, limited foreign policy goals, geographical elimination, military power based choices rather than economic or diplomatic ones, alliance-based relations, preventing themselves from the conflicts with great power, supporting international law and international institutions.³³

Regarding foreign policy behaviors of small states listed above; we can say that those preferences are mostly at the same page with the realist understanding, which underlines that small states are in need of more security due to their limited capabilities and vulnerabilities. However, this need didn't always result in similar reactions depending on circumstances. Being aware

³¹ Thorhallsson, 2006 p.

³² Tür and Salık, p.12

³³ Ibid, p.12

of the fact that it is not the only option and one of the most debated issues in international relations; forming alliances is among the top choices states make during above-mentioned conditions especially when their survival is at stake. In the literature, alliance formation mechanisms were mainly developed around realist and neorealist approaches through positioning security issues at the center and formulating policy behavior accordingly.

Considering the origins of international alliances; in the literature, Stephan Walt's work was considered as a milestone not only by offering a different way of thinking on security but also by refining of balance of power politics by asking 'how states respond to threats³⁴; whether by balancing or bandwagoning? In other words; whether they ally with others against the prevailing threat or ally with the source of danger? Through this central question; he differentiates the motivation behind allying with others by stressing on balance of power theory in the literature and he outlines the tendency of small states in preferring bandwagoning policies while they presume their survival is under attack.

Considering alliances as a response to a threat in a broader sense was dated back to the balancing and bandwagoning terminology of Wolfers and Waltz respectively. Wolfers stated that under balance of power politics there is the sense of equilibrium among states as the ideal distribution of power³⁵.

³⁴Walt, Stephen. *The Origins of Alliances*, Ithaca and London, Cornell University Press, 1987.

³⁵ Wolfers Arnold, *The Balance of of Power in Theory and Practice*, in *Wolfers, Discord and Collaboration: Essays on International Politics* , Balimore, Md: The John Hopkins University Press,1962 p.4-5 cited in Schweller, Randall L. "Bandwagoning for Profit: Bringing the

According to him, on the one hand, peace can not only be achieved through checks and balances, but also by 'making overwhelming power available to those who are ready to oppose potential aggressor nations or to punish actual aggressors' under the idea of the collective security.³⁶ The idea behind this principle was that, potential violator of the peace can be deterred better depending on the collective strength of the others. On the other hand, in contrast to this automatic reaction of the weak; Wolfers stated that 'some weak countries seek safety by ascending power in the hope that they might somehow escape complete subjugation once their powerful friend has gained supremacy.'³⁷

Taking Walt into account; he asserted that as a response to 'threat' states might either ally against the principal source of danger or ally with the state representing the major threat, which is balancing or bandwagoning.³⁸ Similarly, Labs pointed out how important external factors were regarding alliance formation motivations.³⁹ By explaining foreign policy behaviors of small states around neorealist perspectives; he stated that, whether through

Revisionist State Back In." *International Security* 19, no. 1 (1994): 72.
<https://doi.org/10.2307/2539149>

³⁶ Wolfers, 1962 cited in Schweller p.10

³⁷ Ibid, p.11

³⁸ Walt, 1987 p.4

³⁹ Labs Eric J. Ph.D. (1992) Do Weak States Bandwagon?, *Security Studies*, 1:3, 383-416, DOI: 10.1080/09636419209347476 p.385

balancing or bandwagoning, those behaviors resulted from the international system.⁴⁰

As Gulick stated; 'The surest means of preserving balance of power would be making sure that no state should be much superior to others';⁴¹ Walt supplemented this point with the case that 'joining the more vulnerable side increases new member's influence, because the weaker side has greater need for assistance. Joining the stronger side, by contrast, reduces the new member's influence since it adds relatively less to the coalition.'⁴² In his 'Theory of International Politics'; Waltz also argued that

on the weaker side, [secondary states] are both more appreciated and safer, provided ... that the coalition they join achieves enough defensive or deterrent strength to dissuade adversaries from attacking.⁴³

⁴⁰ Ibid, p.406

⁴¹ Gulick, Edward Vose. Europe's Classical Balance of Power: a Case History of the Theory and Practice of One of the Great Concepts of European Statecraft. Westport: Greenwood Press, 1982., p.61-62

⁴² Walt, 1987 p.6

⁴³ Waltz, Kenneth. Theory of International Politics, Reading, Massachusetts, Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, 1979.

Similarly, considering Middle East at the regional level, Goodarzi stressed on the importance of alliance formation mechanisms in the region as they diminish possible threats posed by other regional or international powers.⁴⁴

However, besides external factors in trying to identify the motivations behind alliance formation mechanisms small states pursue, according to certain scholars, that internal factors should be considered as well. By providing an explanation through learning theory, Dan Reiter was one of the main contributors of this idea.⁴⁵ According to him, rather than international system, world politics or the external threat directed to those states; small states' alliance formation preferences and the motivations behind them were driven by their historical experiences.⁴⁶

In addition to Reiter, Schweller also represented a shift from the focus on external threats while explaining small states' alliance formation characteristics to another dimension - opportunities.⁴⁷ He didn't ignore any importance of security considerations of those states; however, he added another category to the scheme that was represented by opportunity and political interests. Here, as he developed 'balance of interest' theory and

⁴⁴ Goodarzi, Jubin M. *Syria and Iran: Diplomatic Alliance and Power Politics in the Middle East*. London: Tauris, 2009

⁴⁵ Dan Reiter, "Learning, Realism, and Alliances: The Weight of the Shadow of the Past", *World Politics*, Cilt 46, No.4, 1994, p.519-520 cited in Türk and Salık p.16

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Schweller, 1994 p.85

categorized states under revisionist and status-quo oriented ones⁴⁸; he recalled revisionist states back as well.⁴⁹ According to Schweller alliances are formed not only as a response to threat, but also to opportunities.⁵⁰ Here, we can see that the alliances formed should be compatible with the states' political goals as well. Since he puts interests at the center of the characteristics an alliance should be built on, he stated that bandwagoning would be the appropriate way for small states in order to achieve their goals while preserving their security as well.⁵¹

Nevertheless, as Reiter and Schweller shared the similar assumption that Walt's focus on external threats directed towards small states was the determinant factor influencing their alliance formation motivations was insufficient; Steven David also formulated "omni-balancing"⁵² approach as a combination of both external and internal threats. He was focusing on the choices made by Third World leaders by choosing their allies according to contributions they would provide in order to keep them in power internally and serve their survival as well.⁵³

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ TÜR and Salık, p.17

⁵⁰ Schweller, 1994 p.92

⁵¹ Ibid. p.93

⁵² Steven R. David, "Explaining Third World Alignment", World Politics, Cilt 43, No.2, 1991, p.233-234. Cited in TÜR and Salık p.17

⁵³ David, p.234

Last but not least, a systemic analysis was made by Hey while analyzing foreign policy behaviors and alliance formation considerations of small states.⁵⁴ She stressed on the importance of interdependent three-levels of analysis, systemic-domestic and individual, considering both external and internal factors affecting foreign policy decisions of small states.⁵⁵

Taking post-Cold War period and 21st century determinants such as globalization, transnationalism and economic interdependency into account; small states participate in international system in various ways through certain cooperation mechanisms motivated by above-mentioned considerations as well. In an overview of recent literature concerning small state foreign policy there is a discernible pattern of small states pursuing policies in international relations and their foreign policy behaviors.

With this theoretical background regarding small state foreign policy behavior and alliance theories, this thesis will be an analysis of Syrian and Russian relations since the 2011 civil war in Syria and the Russian intervention. It will look at the Syrian foreign policy behavior throughout the period and will analyze both the Syrian and the Russian considerations, expectations and contributions in this alliance. Bearing in the mind that studies on small state foreign policy behavior and alliance theories are mainly based on the dominant International Relations theory and the related conditions studies

⁵⁴ Hey, 2003, p.194

⁵⁵ Ibid.

and analyses presented in this thesis are mainly attempts to analyze whether relations between Syria and Russia can be regarded under balancing or bandwagoning. Can we make a strict distinction between those foreign policy behaviors in this case, were there any turning points or shifting situations regarding the alliance that they formed, tried to preserve and behave accordingly? Did balancing and bandwagoning behaviors represent different poles that when a state made its choice for one side, does it mean a break from the other?

These questions will be discussed under three chapters in this thesis, covering the post- civil war period of the Syrian – Russian alliance. Second chapter will provide a framework for the analysis of the relations between Soviet Union and Syria since 1946; Syrian independence and Russia after the dissolution of the Soviet Union. By referring to the building blocks of the relationship and its continuing legacy, this chapter will determine the main characteristics of the relationship and the cooperation mechanism. It will position the Russia-Syria relations on the alliance spectrum and while looking at both the developments in international politics and in the region, it will focus on the periods of convergence and divergence.. Looking at the Syrian side, the legacy of the French mandate and its impact on alliance formation mechanisms after the independence will be studied. Political dynamics and internal challenges that the Syrian state had to face and its response against regional and international developments will be discussed within the framework of its relations with the Soviet Union during the Cold War

period as well. Here, Syrian government's decisions will be analyzed under alliance theorists' assumptions regarding small state foreign policy behavior and alliance formation mechanisms until the death of the Hafez al-Assad.

Chapter 3 titled 'Russian-Syrian Relations under Putin and Bashar al-Assad: From 2000s on the Road to the Arab Spring', will analyze Syrian-Russian relations with an emphasis on two leaders, Putin and Bashar al-Assad. Internal, regional and international challenges that the Syria government and its new president had to face will be examined.. As a new challenge not only to Syria but also to the world, under the American hegemony, we will see Bashar al-Assad's courageous attempts at the U.S. invasion of Iraq and how far he could stretch his own reality as well as the hegemon's response to this small state will be studied. We can see that; after the dissolution of the Soviets; Russian foreign policy wasn't pro-active. Under Bashar al-Assad and Putin the thesis will argue the major points that led to a renewed Syrian-Russian rapprochement, emphasizing the issues, which brought Russia actively to the Middle East. Finally, Chapter 4 will be the synopsis of the Arab Spring experience of the Syrian Government and the evolving period towards the Russian intervention of 2015. It will look at the international struggle Russia made for its ally, Syria, in the Middle East and the continuation of the alliance despite the international reaction against it.

CHAPTER 2

SYRIAN – RUSSIAN RELATION: HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

2.1. From Independence of 1946 to Hafez al-Assad

Syria was a part of the Ottoman Empire for approximately four centuries. It gained a high status as a holy town for Damascus being an 'entrepot' for Mecca.⁵⁶ Until the end of the Ottoman rule; the territory of the Great Syria comprised modern Syria, Lebanon, Israel, Jordan, Palestine, the Gaza Strip, certain parts of the Turkey and Iraq. However, it couldn't preserve that territory in her independence and couldn't depart the term instability near independence from the Syrian soil it represented.

While introducing Syrian state as an independent one, we have dated back to 1946. Even though Syria declared its independence in 1946 from France; Syria won't be able to achieve its political aspirations for a significant period of time while it was experiencing chaos and disorder. Since Syria could not deny economic, political, strategic and even religious rationale of the French presence and their remnants; Syria continued experiencing instability and

⁵⁶ Collelo, Thomas. Syria, a Country Study. Washington, D.C.: The Division, 1988. p.23

confusion until Hafez al-Assad and was shaken with series of coup d'états up until his reign.

In the period between the outbreaks of the World War I, more specifically in 1914 to 1922; the exact date on which the French mandate was agreed to be established; Syria experienced a moment of independence.⁵⁷ However, reconstruction of Syria didn't left to the hands of the local leaders.⁵⁸ Against British interests in the regions, Jewish community and French claims; Faisal couldn't stand still and in San Remo Conference of 1920; Syrian independence was granted provisionally.⁵⁹ According to San Remo Resolution;

The High Contracting Parties agree that Syria and Mesopotamia shall, in accordance with the fourth paragraph of Article 22, Part I (Covenant of the League of Nations), be provisionally recognized as independent States, subject to the rendering of administrative advice and assistance by a mandatory until such time as they are able to stand alone. The boundaries of the said States will be determined, and the selection of the Mandatories made, by the Principal Allied Powers.⁶⁰

As a result of the French-British rivalry in the region, despite they had divided their sphere of influences; as Collelo stressed on, French mandate was based

⁵⁷ Collelo, 1988 p.25

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid. p.26

⁶⁰San Remo Resolution of April 25, 1920.
<http://web.archive.org/web/20071017031147/http://www.therightroadtopeace.com/infocenter/Heb/SamRemoRes.html>

on strengthening religious minorities in order to weaken the Arab nationalist movement.⁶¹ That's why, French tried to establish sectarian states first; an Alawi state in the North, a Druze state in the south and at the center – a Sunni Muslim state and three of them to be incorporated under the Federal Syria.⁶² However, Sunni Muslim state was not realized and the Syria was divided into five and forced to be ruled under the oppressive French governors.⁶³ Economy was in the hands of the French bankers rather than Syrian and French language became compulsory for all. To sum up, every feature of Syrian life was determined to be controlled by French.⁶⁴ Thus, considering the French mandate as a whole, we can say that unity was the primary issue to be achieved that caused instability and unrest among the population. In addition, it was the issue brought diverse groups together against the foreigners too.

As Cleveland pointed out as well; without independence, institutions of self-governance and territorial unity – referring to the powerless political units divided by French under divide and rule policies of interwar years, Syrian

⁶¹ Collelo, 1988 p.26

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

leaders failed to achieve any measure of success.⁶⁵ Administrative conditions created for Syria by French to prolong their rule in the region instead of encouraging the formation of local administrative institutions made Syria dependent to political agents of the French. Thus, guarantee of political instability in Syria was the legacy left from the French⁶⁶ and Syria felt herself responsible to carry this sense of being governed for a long time. During the Cold War years; this sense manifest itself in the alliance formation priorities of the Syrian state as a small one that was security in the first place.

There are certain milestones in the history of that state; period between 1946 and 1970s was not an easy one for Syrian people. Post-independence period couldn't bring a stable and comfortable place. In 1947, when the Arab Socialist Ba'ath Party was formed, due to above-mentioned concerns and uncertain status of certain territories such as Golan Heights since the 1948 Israeli war; power was concentrated in security and military instead of parliamentary institutions.⁶⁷ This wasn't a new situation for Syria. From 1516, from the Ottoman rule of Syria; Syria was governed through pashas granted with unlimited authority over the territory they were responsible from and in

⁶⁵ Cleveland, William L., and Martin Bunton. *A History of the Modern Middle East*. 4th ed. Philadelphia, PA: Westview Press, 2009. p.225

⁶⁶ Cleveland 2009. p.225

⁶⁷ Kainikara, Sanu. *In the Bears Shadow: Russian Intervention in Syria*. Canberra BC, ACT: Air Power Development Centre, 2018. p.55.

order to do so; they were both administrative and military leaders.⁶⁸ However, under the legacy of ancient Syria, Arab empire or the Ottoman rule; inner-conflicts weren't so apparent that brought a threatening instability that was felt in the every corner of the country. During the French rule, since Syrian unity was the primary issue against certain demands raised by diverse groups within the country; what Collelo stated was that they postponed their claims over power.⁶⁹ However, when the French were departed, so-called unity among those leaders was disappeared immediately as well which dragged the country into the series of coup d'états.

Considering political dynamics of the country; after independence, parliamentary democracy tried to be established has failed. According to Collelo, major reason why they couldn't achieve that was the political culture centered on personalities and factional and sectarian minorities' conflicted demands.⁷⁰ As mentioned before, in 1940s; leaders devoted themselves to find a way to free Syria from the French rule since they believed that 'Renaissance' of the Arabs could take place only when they were freed from the colonial rule.⁷¹ Zaki al Arsuzi, Michel Aflaq and Salah al-Din Bitar were the

⁶⁸ Collelo, 1988. p.22

⁶⁹ Ibid.. p.29.

⁷⁰ Ibid. p.123

⁷¹ Rabil, Robert G. Syria, the United States, and the War on Terror in the Middle East. Westport, CT: London, 2006. p.17

three leading figures of nationalist movements in Syria in 1940s. Aflaq and Bitar initiated the 'Arab Revitalization Movement', Ihya movement in other words that would take the name Harakat al-Ba'th al-Arabi in 1943 and in 1947 Arzusi merged with the Ba'th Party as well.⁷² However, The Arab Ba'th Party couldn't emerge as a legal one until the independence.⁷³

Considering the doctrine of the Ba'th Party, Bitar emphasized on the three tenets that were freedom, unity and socialism. Aflaq, on the other hand, had formulated the essentials of the Arab nationalism on the road to the Arab unity and he wrote that

The nationalism for which we call...is the same sentiment that binds the individual to his family, because the fatherland is only a large household and the nation a large family.

We later on saw the expression of those ideas in the Ba'th Party's Constitution of 1947 as the opening article that 'the Arabs are One Nation, which has its natural right to live under One State and to be free in running its potentials.'⁷⁴ In addition, in Article 6 of the constitution, the Party identified the revolutionary character of the movement as well through the words

The (BASP) is revolutionary and believes that its main objectives in the resurrection of Pan-Arab Nationalism and the establishment of Socialism can't be fulfilled but through the road of revolution and

⁷² Rabil 2006 p.17

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Ba'th Party Constitution, Fundamental Principles. http://www.baath-party.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=category&layout=blog&id=307&Itemid=327&lang=en&limitstart=1

struggle; and that dependence on slow development and contentment with superficial, partial reform menace these objectives with failure and loss. Therefore, the party decides:

- a - To struggle against foreign colonialism in order to liberate the entire Arab Homeland.
- b - To struggle for establishing solidarity among all Arabs within One Independent State.
- c - To revolt against the corrupt reality in all intellectual, economic, social and political aspects of life.⁷⁵

Those words were the reactions against the colonial rule Syria subjected to the French mandate. However, freedom comprises personal one as well apart from the national independence as Rabil stated.⁷⁶ It represented the freedom of speech, assembly liberated from colonialism as well.⁷⁷ Furthermore, he stressed on the idea that Ba'th kind of socialism was different from the term socialism came into mind in Europe or in Western bloc as an internationalist movement in order to stand against Western practice of exploitation. Instead, what they understood from socialism was rebirth of the Arab nation as a guarantor of justice, equality and generous living for all.⁷⁸ As stated in the Article VI of the Party Constitution, it represented the revolutionary character of the Arabs for the transformation of the society.

⁷⁵ Ba'th Party Constitution, Fundamental Principles, Article VI.

⁷⁶ Rabil, 2006 p.18

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Ibid. pp.18-19

Here, we should also open a parenthesis for Nasser as an important political figure, pan-Arabism and anti-imperial ideologies and impetus created for Syria. On February 1st, 1958; it was announced that the two states, Syria and Egypt were merged into the United Arab Republic and lasted until 1961. Discontent with Egypt dominating the merged entity led to yet another coup in Syria, when elements opposed to the union seized power on 28 September 1961. Two days later Syria established itself as the Syrian Arab Republic.

Creation of Israel in 1948, outbreak of the first Arab-Israeli war and nationalization of the Suez Canal drew in superpowers. Incidents took place in Yemen in 1960s drew in Egypt and other Arab states. 'War of Attrition' opened another chapter in the Middle Eastern history and a full-scale war accelerated superpower confrontation. However, not those incidents but especially civil war in Lebanon drew in Soviets deeply.⁷⁹ Those principal incidents and their consequences taken place nearly in 30 years have proven that Breslauer's definition of the Middle East was the proper one; 'The Middle East has been a region of constant crisis.'⁸⁰

At this juncture; critical rapprochement between USSR and Syria has emerged together with the Suez Crisis of 1956; in other words, it became the principal occasion that fortified the relations although Soviet interest in the

⁷⁹ Breslauer, George W., Galia Golan, Benjamin Miller, James Clay. Moltz, Dennis Ross, and Yaacov Roi. *Soviet Strategy in the Middle East*. Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2016. p.3

⁸⁰ Ibid.

region and in Syria was dated back to 1940s. The relations has been initiated with a secret agreement signed on February 10, 1946, just before the declaration of independence of Syria.⁸¹ That agreement prescribed the provision of diplomatic and political support of the USSR to Syria in the international arena and the Soviet military help for the foundation of the national army of that country. The non-aggression pact signed on 10 April 1950 had carried the Soviet – Syrian relations to an advanced dimension. The rapprochement between the two countries was said to be emerged as a natural outcome of the international conjuncture in that period⁸² especially after the Suez Crisis of 1956.

At the same period, the United States announced the Eisenhower Doctrine hoping to protect Middle Eastern countries from the Soviet influence together with aiming at containing Arab nationalism. President Eisenhower believed that, as a result of the Suez conflict, a power vacuum had formed in the Middle East due to the loss of prestige of Great Britain and France.⁸³ He feared that this had allowed Nasser to spread his pan-Arab policies and form dangerous alliances with Jordan and Syria, and had opened the Middle East to Soviet influence. He had wanted to fill this vacuum before the Soviets. However, this

⁸¹ Aghayev Elvi and , Katman Filiz, Historical Background and the Present State of the Russian-Syrian Relations, European Researcher, 2012, Vol.(35), № 11-3

⁸² Aghayev and Katman, 2012.

⁸³ The Eisenhower Doctrine, 1957; <https://history.state.gov/milestones/1953-1960/eisenhower-doctrine>

kind of involvement was understood as an attempt at overthrowing of Syrian regime.⁸⁴

As mentioned before, from the alliance theorists' perspective, the Soviets was the aggressor state created imbalance among the states that poses threat even to their vital interest. Considering Soviets as a threat to stability; behavior choices of the others would be whether balancing by preventing the aggressor from dominating or positioning themselves under the aggressor so that benefiting from capabilities of the aggressor. In this equation; as a small state, Syria positioned herself under the protection of the Soviet Union, by following the characteristic policies of bandwagoning.

Here, we should also mention the role United States played in that alignment. As mentioned above, Eisenhower doctrine played as a catalyst in Russian-Syrian alliance. In other words, we also see how influential one state can be in other players' decision-making process. Here, the US represented an important dynamic that brought Syria and Russia close. As a result of this situation, with the Economic and Technical Assistance Agreement signed between the USSR and Syria on August 6, 1957, Syria began to be heavily armed.⁸⁵

⁸⁴ Takeyh, Ray. "The Origins of the Eisenhower Doctrine," 2000. p.14

⁸⁵ Primakov, Yevgeny, *Russia and the Arabs: Behind the Scenes in the Middle East from the Cold War to the Present*, Basic Books cited in Lund , Aron. *From Cold War to Civil War:75 Years of Russian-Syrian Relations*. Swedish Institute of International Relations, 2019.

According to Lund, what Soviet Union started to export to Syria was arms first.⁸⁶ However, it would not last long to export its ideology to the country, in other words, it wouldn't take long for Syria to be evaluated as a Soviet ally in the region. The Syrian Communist Party had not become a mass movement and suffered from the independence of Israel when they had Stalin's support.⁸⁷ Although they were founded in 1922; young Arab nationalists, Baath Party were much more influential in politics. Although they converge to the idea of seeking Soviet aid in order to fight with Israel; they distanced themselves from each other under Marxism as well as Lund stated.⁸⁸ After 1957, major economic agreement was signed between Syria and the Soviet Union; United States and Western camp regarded Syria as a Soviet ally/satellite.⁸⁹ In that period; Baath Party was still worried about further SCP success; so much that they maneuvered the country into a union with Nasser's Egypt.

Major alignment towards the Soviet Union in terms of ideology was dated back to mid-1960s; especially when Baathists forced the party to issue a socialist program. 1967 Six Days war with Israel became a turning point for Syria when

⁸⁶ Lund, 2019.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Lund 2019.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

it lost the Golan Heights. In 1970s, together with corrective movement⁹⁰ of Hafez Assad's takeover; together with Hafez Assad's visits to Moscow; relations between Syria and the Soviet Union began to be deepened.

2.2. Syrian – Russian Relations under Hafez al-Assad

February 22, 1971 became a remarkable day for the Syrian history since Hafez al Assad became Syria's first Alawi president.⁹¹ Nikolaos Van Dam regarded him as a symbol of a political evolution of the Alawis from a discriminated community to a nationally emancipated group in position of dominance.⁹² He relied on people with whom he had a close relationship in order to secure his position. However, in the end, as oppose to its own ideals; regime was infested with corruption, clientelism and favoritism so much that socialism and social equality couldn't be achieved.⁹³ Since sectarianism, regionalism and tribalism were the factors dominating power struggle in Syria,⁹⁴ according to Hafez, only through a loyal team and an effective security apparatus internal political stability can be achieved. As Patrick Seale stated,

⁹⁰ Seale, Patrick. Assad - the Struggle for the Middle East. University Presses of California, 1989. p.171

⁹¹ Dam, Nikolaos Van. Destroying a Nation: the Civil War in Syria. London: I.B. Tauris, 2017. p.45

⁹² Dam, 2017 p.45

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Ibid p.58

from the start of Assad's presidency; he would allow no challenge to his rule and wide popular backing was necessary.⁹⁵ He furthermore abolished the title of 'presidency' to 'head of state' with the aim of guaranteeing that there would be nothing collective about his rule.⁹⁶ Like Seale, Nikolaos Van Dam also stressed on the point that during his three decades of ruling of the country; he had the monopoly of power in Syria and the power structure had a very little change since 1970s⁹⁷.

Considering the Soviet-Syrian relations, one other reason that prompted the improvement of the two Hafez Assad. The period that will mark the Syrian politics which had to experience chaos⁹⁸, instability and many military coups, was ended with Hafez Assad. He had made his first visit to a foreign country after his accession to power by visiting Moscow on 3rd February 1971.⁹⁹ This visit was an indication of the importance that the Syrian government has attributed to her relations with the Soviets. They already had a close military and economic relation for 15 years as of that date. It could be wrong for Hafez Assad to take credit for Russian backing himself alone. However, Hafez Assad had managed to raise those relations to a higher level. Hafez Assad

⁹⁵ Seale, Patrick. Assad - the Struggle for the Middle East. University Presses Of Californ, 1989. p.172

⁹⁶ Ibid. p.173

⁹⁷ Dam, 2017 p.54

⁹⁸ Phillips, Christopher. Battle for Syria: International Rivalry in the New Middle East. S.I.: Yale University Press, 2018 p.11

⁹⁹ Ibid.

has demanded more military and economic aid from the USSR as soon as he came to power.

When we look at the reasons why Hafez Assad adopted this strategy, first of all, the idea of protecting Syria's national interests together with its national interests stands out. Both under the French mandate and in the first years of the independent years; it would not be wrong to say that Syria's tradition of articulating itself into a power has become a necessity. Of course, the fact that the geography in which it is located is a region that has experienced Cold War problems and has spread not only to political but also to economic and social areas has also played a critical role.

The reasons that led Hafez Assad to continue the alliance ties with the Soviets and engage in more cooperation with it are the following; the non-existence of an alternative other than USSR in a bipolar World conjuncture, the fact that Syria has established its economic and military structure according to the Soviet model almost since gaining its independence, the closeness of the Hafez Assad government to the Soviet regime in ideological terms and make use of the aids of the eastern bloc. Especially considering the importance attributed to the issue of security for Syria not only in internal political dynamics but also for foreign policy decision making processes; Syria's lack of alternative sources of military support was a significant. A report that had numbered that 17 billion dollars' worth of weapons delivered to Syria through

1985.¹⁰⁰ In addition, military advisers and technicians were also sent in order to train Syrians in operating the equipment provided by the Soviet Union and they were present at Syrian armed forces as well.¹⁰¹

Considering the Soviet foreign policy priorities on the other hand, Breslauer grouped major priorities of the Soviet roles they ascribe to themselves under four categories that were superpower, continental power, global power and the leader of the Communist movement in the world.¹⁰² Major reasons for the Soviets extending her support Syria in that period can be summarize under two. First was the strategy which had as its target to use Syria, which exhibited anti-imperialist and anti-western attitudes and opposed the rival pole in the bipolar World system, and spread these thoughts in all Middle-Eastern countries and cause the loss of positions of the western block in the region in this way. Second was the necessity for the Soviet to have an influence zone in the eastern Mediterranean for the purpose of maintaining the nuclear balance. Here, the USA could have upset that balance by installing nuclear missile warheads in its submarines in the eastern Mediterranean. For that reason the geo-strategic position of Syria was quite important.

¹⁰⁰ Soviet Policy Toward the Middle East, CIA Research Paper, December 1986, Santized Copy Approved for Release on 29.11.2011 p.13.

¹⁰¹ Ibid. p.15

¹⁰² Breslauer, George W., Galia Golan, Benjamin Miller, James Clay. Moltz, Dennis Ross, and Yaacov Roi. Soviet Strategy in the Middle East. Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2016 p.10

During Hafez Assad's period, another development that made the Syrian-Soviet relations even stronger was the death of the Egyptian President Nasser and his replacement by Anwar Sadat. Because the summit of Enver Sadat, Hafez Assad and King Hussein was held in Cairo on September 10, 1973 for the recapture of the Egyptian and Syrian territories occupied by Israel in 1967, and the military and political issues related to the war were discussed and the Triple Pact was signed.¹⁰³ The fact that the Arab world could not reach the desired result during the Yom Kippur War that started on October 6 made it clear that the Egyptian administration could solve the problems by sitting at the negotiation table with Israel. As an analysis conducted under CIA pointed out, despite the fact that Soviet weapons enabled Egypt to score early gains at the October War of 1973, Arab – Israeli War, Sadat turned to Washington in the end in order to obtain a settlement with Israel.¹⁰⁴

In more detail, the truce of November 11, 1973, was the beginning of the developments that would extend to the Camp David agreements. In the negotiations, the US Secretary of State Henry Kissinger's Shuttle Diplomacy and the "Step-by-Step Diplomacy" techniques, which allow the Israeli withdrawal from the territories occupied by Israel, were used. It paved the way for the signing of the Treaty of Israel on 27 March 1979. Egypt was thus drawn

¹⁰³ Cleveland 2009.

¹⁰⁴ CIA paper, 1986. p. 7.

into the Western system during the 1970s, while Syria became the leader of Western opposition in the Arab world.¹⁰⁵

In the late 1970s and early 1980s, Assad also became more sensitive to Soviet concerns. His government suffered economic troubles, internal feuds, and a Sunni Islamist insurgency that also targeted Soviet advisers; and he was concerned that Israel would bring its full military might to bear on Syria after its peace agreement with Egypt.¹⁰⁶ He began to get closer to the Soviet Union for defense in retaliation and proceeded to provide military supplies. In 1980, by refusing to condemn the Soviet Union's occupation of Afghanistan, the Syrian leader questioned the Arab-Muslim public opinion. In the same year, by signing a Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation, he also made Syria's pro-Soviet orientation official, as Moscow had long demanded.¹⁰⁷

For the mid-1980s, Lund described Soviet-Syrian ties as “close and deep” but also complicated.¹⁰⁸ Billions of dollars in arms changed hands, and the

¹⁰⁵ Armaoğlu, Fahir, (1991), *Filistin Meselesi ve Arap-İsrail Savaşları (1948-1988)*, Türkiye İş Bankası Kültür Yayınları, Ankara p.320-336

¹⁰⁶ Korany, Bahgat. Dessouki, Ali El-Din Hillal. *The Foreign Policies of Arab States: the Challenge of Change*. S.I.: Routledge, 2019

¹⁰⁷ The Soviet Union signed similar agreements with several Arab governments: Egypt in 1971 (abrogated by Sadat in 1976), Iraq in 1972, Syria in 1980, South Yemen in 1979, and North Yemen in 1984. According to Farouq al-Sharaa, Syria's deputy foreign minister at the time, Assad accepted the agreement mainly to ensure continued Soviet weapons shipments, reasoning that there was no other possible source of supply. Farouq alSharaa, *al-riwaya al-mafqouda: mudhakkirat washahadat*, Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies, 2015, p. 67 cited in Lund 2019

¹⁰⁸ Lund, 2019.

number of Eastern Bloc consultants in Syria officially peaked at 13,000 in 1984 – far more than any other Arab country hosted. The Soviet naval presence in the Mediterranean relied heavily on access to Syria's Tartus port, close cooperation with intelligence, and joint Syrian-Soviet listening posts eavesdropped over Israel and its US-made military technology. Even then, Assad managed to frustrate Soviet officials by arresting SCP members from time to time, making under-the-table communications with the U.S., and threatening Soviet partners like the PLO of Yasser Arafat.¹⁰⁹

Here, we should consider Syrian-Iranian axis as one of the most significant development in the region. An alliance that was formed between a revolutionary and pan-Islamic Iran and a secular, pan-Arab socialist Syria and the longevity of this alliance took many people's attention.¹¹⁰ Revolutionary changes Iran experiences in 1979 brought significant changes at the regional level as well. After the overthrow of Pahlavi dynasty pursuing pro-Western and status quo oriented¹¹¹ foreign policy brought challenges to Syria at regional level. Regarding the remnants of the war of Iran-Iraq of 1980s; we can say that again in Syrian history an external factor brought two neighbors close each other.

¹⁰⁹ Primakov, Yevgeny, *Russia and the Arabs: Behind the Scenes in the Middle East from the Cold War to the Present*, Basic Books, 2009 pp. 240–245

¹¹⁰ Goodarzi, Jubin M., "Syria and Iran: Alliance Cooperation in a Changing Regional Environment," *Ortadoğu Etütleri* Vol. 4, No 2 (January 2013). P.2

¹¹¹ Goodarzi, 2013, p.2

As Goodarzi stated, in 1960s and 1970s, Iran regarded Syria as menace for its close relations with the USSR and support for the radical Arab movement.¹¹² On the other hand, Syria regarded Iran as a source of instability with its close ties with Israel and the United States. Although Syrian attempt at establishing close ties with other Arab countries in the region in order to keep Israel away had certain limits; we can say that Hafez Assad was pushing the limits of a small state that had certain capabilities and vulnerabilities. Although he couldn't achieve much success regarding Egypt and Iraq; Syrian-Iranian alliance became a significant one that will be called as an enduring one in the region.¹¹³

In 1985, the reforming Communist Party leader Mikhail Gorbachev took over the Kremlin and began to reorganize his stagnant political and economic system. His reforms included a doctrine of "new thinking" that aimed to defuse tensions with the United States, de-ideologize Soviet policy, and end the Cold War. That was bad news for Assad, who had become accustomed to helping the Soviet Union. Nonetheless, his first meeting with Gorbachev in 1985 went well.¹¹⁴ Thousands of new T-80 tanks, SS-23 missiles and MiG-29 jets continued to supply weaponry.¹¹⁵ In July 1987, the Syrian-Soviet

¹¹² Ibid. p.13

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ Farouq al-Sharaa, *al-riwaya al-mafqouda: mudhakkirat wa-shahadat*, Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies, 2015,p. 135 cited in Lund 2019.

¹¹⁵ Vasiliev, Alexey, *Russia's Middle East Policy: From Lenin to Putin*, Routledge, 2018 pp. 247–248

collaboration hit such heights that it literally breached the stratosphere, as the first Syrian cosmonaut, Lt. Col. Mohammed Fares, took part in a flight to the MIR space station. Despite these developments, Hafiz Assad's short visit to the Soviet Union in 1985 caused bilateral relations to stagnate. During this visit Gorbachev; he stated that "Syria should give up its hostile attitude towards Iraq and the Palestinian movement because it is not the only ally of the Soviet Union in the Middle East."¹¹⁶ to reduce military spending and to avoid possible tensions.

By that time, however, there was trouble back on Earth. Assad heard in April 1987 that Syria was no longer going to receive its weapons on credit and that the Soviet Union was going to restore diplomatic relations with Israel. The attempts by Syria to keep Moscow on its side by allowing it to build its own naval resupply station in Tartus have failed to change the course of history. The Syrian Foreign Minister, Farouq al Sharaa, recalled being surprised by the lack of a "comradely spirit" when he was brusquely told in June 1988 that Syria could no longer expect military support, that it needed to resolve its problems with Israel peacefully, and that it should withdraw from Lebanon.¹¹⁷ According to Sharaa, Assad left his last meeting with Gorbachev in April 1990

¹¹⁶ Karabulut, Bilal, "Karadeniz'den Ortadoğu'ya Uzanan Bir Dış Politika: Geçmişten Günümüze Suriye-Rusya İlişkileri", Karadeniz Araştırmaları, 2007 Volume:15, p.70

¹¹⁷ Sharaa 2015, p. 146-147

“with a ‘pessimistic’ impression of the changes in Soviet strategy towards its allies and of the beginning of a decline in the Soviet Union’s global position”¹¹⁸.

Assad spent 1989–1991 trading favors with the West to ensure the transfer of the Baathist dictatorship to a unipolar, U.S- dominated global order. Syria has joined the peace talks between Israel and Arab countries and has forced its Palestinian partners to cooperate or remain silent It also sent troops under U.S. command to fight in Kuwait¹¹⁹ The Gulf States rewarded Damascus with a new wave of financial support, and implicit US Saudi support for a resolution of the war in Lebanon that allowed Assad's army to stay at gunpoint and dominate Lebanese politics.

The Soviet Union finally broke up at the end of 1991. The Cold War was over and the U.S. prevailed. Assad cautioned in a speech to the Syrian Parliament that the world's "balance" was disrupted, "causing chaos followed by a tumultuous motion." No doubt there would emerge some new equilibrium, he said, but "the road ahead and its destination remain unclear"¹²⁰

With the collapse of the USSR, Syria was in danger of losing its first military visit to Moscow, which it owed to Moscow, and losing its economic and

¹¹⁸ Ibid. p. 150

¹¹⁹ Lund, 2019 p.11

¹²⁰ Speech by Hafez al-Assad on 12 March 1992, PresidentAssad.net, presidentassad.net/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=624:12-3-1992&catid=274&Itemid=493.

intelligence network. However, the pragmatic understanding that Assad had entrusted to his foreign policy envisaged the substitution of the physical and psychological emptiness created by the USSR by another power. The paths of the two states, which have been moving in a common line for more than 40 years, were separated, and the path followed by Syria was pointing to the US policies for the time being.

The first stop on this road was Iraq. During the First Gulf War in 1991, Syria joined the US-led alliance and supported the actions taken regarding Iraq. Russia, on the other hand, decided not to intervene within the framework of the policy of avoiding any foreign policy obligations that could be a burden on domestic policy and to keep the Middle East policy at a level that would not pose a threat to the 'close environment' doctrine but would not require it to take an active role.

Nevertheless, decades of collaboration in the Cold War have not simply disappeared overnight. Continued such cultural and economic interactions, sometimes through inertia rather than design¹²¹ Military and intelligence collaboration have proceeded secretly, providing a basis for increased arms exports, and a new defense agreement was signed in 1994. Russia also decided to retain its naval base in Tartus as it began to dismantle all its other military facilities outside the borders of the former Soviet Union.¹²²

¹²¹ Vasiliev 2018, p. 385.

¹²² Ibid.

The late 1990s saw a "relative revival of diplomatic relations" and a series of mostly unsuccessful attempts by Russia to find a place in the peace talks in the Golan Heights.¹²³ When Russia introduced new anti-tank missiles, small arms, and ammunition, arms sales have picked up slightly around 1998. In July 1999, for the first time since the end of the Cold War, the frail, sickly Syrian President returned to Moscow to be feted as "an old friend of Russia"¹²⁴ which will be his final visit.

On 10 June 2000, Hafez al-Assad died. Although a press statement from the Kremlin hailed him as "one of the most vivid and outstanding political personalities of our time", neither the Russian President nor his foreign minister attended the funeral.¹²⁵ France was represented by President Jacques Chirac. Madeline Albright, the US Secretary of State; Romano Prodi, the President of the European Commission and the foreign ministers of the United Kingdom, Canada, Spain, Switzerland, the Netherlands, and the Vatican were all attend the funeral. However, State Duma Speaker Gennady Seleznyov and former Prime Minister Yevgeny Primakov of Russia had attende. It was the sign of the distant relationship between Syria and Russia

¹²³ Lund, 2019, p.13

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ President Vladimir Putin expressed his condolences to the people and leadership of the Syrian Arab Republic on the death of President Hafez Assad of Syria", Russian Presidency, 10 June 2000, en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/38528

and represented an unfortunate start for the relationship between two statesmen: Vladimir Putin and Bashar al-Assad.¹²⁶

¹²⁶ Lund, 2019. p.13

CHAPTER 3

SYRIAN – RUSSIAN RELATIONS UNDER PUTIN AND BASHAR AL- ASSAD: FROM 2000S ON THE ROAD TO THE ARAB SPRING

3.1. Syrian Isolation

On the morning of June 10, 2000, an exceptional leader, a leader of rare wisdom, breathed his last and died. Today, a leader who stood firm in the defense of the rights of the nation and the homeland has passed away. The leader of exalted values, ideals, policies and way of life is dead.¹²⁷

The announcement regarding the death of Hafez al-Assad was voiced by Marwan Shaykhu.¹²⁸ Hafez Assad was considered as the cornerstone¹²⁹ of the regime and the major source of the stability in the country nearly for forty years. During his rule, as Zisser stated,

Assad refrained from touring the country [...] abstaining from visits to army bases, industrial plants, agricultural projects or educational and cultural institutions, much less walks through the cities, towns and villages to meet ordinary citizens. His daily schedule, publicized in detail by the Syrian media, revealed minimal meetings with foreign guests or with Syrian public figures, ministers, generals or any other senior members of the

¹²⁷ Zisser, Eyal, *Assad's Legacy: Syria in Transition*, (London: Hurst & Company, 2001). P.38

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

governmental, party or military apparatuses. In effect, he chose to rule Syria by means of a small nucleus of trusted leaders (jama'a) whom he had gathered around him during his rule and essentially from early on in his military and political career.¹³⁰

Similarly, Seale stressed on the fact that Hafez Assad became a disembodied voice on the telephone for most of the people in the country by 1980s.¹³¹ However, his successor, Bashar al-Assad was apparent to the Syrian public. As a result of the goal of putting Bashar in the spotlight, 'vigorous, dynamic young man with an emphasis on fostering modernization and openness in Syria' was the created image.¹³² In other words, despite his father, he draw an image that he was open and accessible to the public. However, this couldn't be understood as a radical change in the political system Hafez Assad created.

On the other hand, Lund described the atmosphere in Syria handed over to Bashar al-Assad using that phrase 'dilapidated and economically rotten state.'¹³³ Similarly, Lecsh added to dilapidated condition characterized by a stagnant economy of this authoritarian state inherited from Hafez Assad the two setbacks that were pervasive corruption and political repression.¹³⁴ In

¹³⁰ Zisser 2001.

¹³¹ Seale, 1985.

¹³² Zisser 2001.

¹³³ Lund, 2019 p.13

¹³⁴ Lesch, David W., Syria: The Fall of the House of Assad (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press). P.5

addition, the problems inhibited economic growth under Hafez Assad were listed as follows. First, banking system was very restricted and small and capital couldn't be organized due to the absence of a stock market. Corruption was very high due to insufficient transparency and regulatory regime was inadequate enough to keep foreign investors away from the country.¹³⁵

Bearing in mind this situation welcomed Bashar in the country, he was also circled by external factors around which he had to build his foreign policy preferences. To start with, Arab-Israeli peace process was the major incident taken into account in the region that was considered as a major obstacle to the stability. In 1990s, under the U.S. initiatives, as Hinnebusch stated, peace negotiations pointed out a possibility of a settlement with Israel.¹³⁶ Although under Hafez Assad, major problems were centered around Cold-War politics of the region under the era of Arab nationalism, Israeli issue and sectarian and tribal diversities for Syrian reality; Bashar Assad became a president under the U.S. hegemony that brought a different dimension to world politics.

Together with the Soviet Union's dissolution and left its seat empty as a superpower; Syrian maneuver between two rival global powers was limited together with the lack of great power protection¹³⁷ it needed as a small state

¹³⁵ Ibid. p., 8

¹³⁶ Hinnebusch 2009, p.12

¹³⁷ Ibid. p.14

whose priority was security and survival of the regime first. Moreover, Syria's military position was corruptive as well due to the lack of Soviet arms supply since 1990s. Together with a certain decrease in combat power of its army, it can be said that Syria lost its leverage regarding its military power over the others as a deterrence power it had for a long time.

For problems resulted from the collapse of the Soviet Union; Syria tried to fulfill the vacuum through Hezbollah and tried to use its capabilities against Israeli forces first as a means to asymmetric warfare. In order to dilute the problems and to access external resources; what Bashar tried initially was construction of multiple alliances as Hinnebusch emphasized on.¹³⁸ Considering relations with Turkey and its adhesion to Euro-Mediterranean Partnership, we can say that those were the attempts undertaken for the realization of this aim. However, tension with the U.S. as a consequence of Syrian opposition to Iraq brought different challenges to Syria that couldn't prevent him from the regional isolation. After 9/11 attacks and challenges it brought to the U.S.-Syrian relations; in his interview with Al-Hayat in 2003; Bashar Assad described the position of Syria through the words;

We are neither a greater power nor a weak country we are not a country without cards or foundations. We are not a country that can be passed over with respect to issues.¹³⁹

¹³⁸ Hinnebusch 2009,

¹³⁹ Interview with Bashar al-Assad – cited in Rabil 2006, p.137

Since 2000s; Bashar al-Assad made his major visits to Russia nearly for five year later. Before, he had visited twenty and more countries nearly forty-five times with an emphasis on pro-U.S. and Arab nations as Lund stated.¹⁴⁰ Just as Zissler, Lund also stated that Bashar al-Assad's presidency couldn't represent a radical breakdown of the basic principles adopted under his father's presidency.¹⁴¹ As Phillips emphasized on, although many scholars and observers hoping that Bashar would end Hafez Assad's ruthlessness at home through his liberal reform movements, it couldn't last long and ended up with disappointment.¹⁴² As discussed before, Syrian reality and certain characteristics made itself to be considered as a small state; Syria had certain limitations for the move it can undertake. Thus, Syria continued to work closely with its enduring ally Iran and preserve its thoughts regarding Israel¹⁴³ while trying to establish relations with its Arab neighbors and the West as well. However, despite Syrian focus on Arab neighbors and the Western states; Syria couldn't elude itself from the image created as a troublemaker for the West. As Hinnebusch stated; the climax that accelerated the crisis in the U.S.

¹⁴⁰ Joel D. Rayburn and Frank K. Sobchak (eds.), *The U.S. Army in the Iraq War: Volume 1: Invasion, Insurgency, Civil War, 2003-2006*, Strategic Studies Institute and U.S. Army War College Press, 2019, p. 417. Cited in Lund 2019.

¹⁴¹ Ibid

¹⁴² Phillips 2018, p. 14

¹⁴³ Lund 2019, p.14

–Syrian relations was the U.S. decision to intervene in Iraq.¹⁴⁴ Although Assad's move of opposing to the U.S. invasion of Iraq in the United Nations Security Council was welcomed in a positive mood at home, its move was a significant one for a small state surrounded by regional limits like Syria. In other words; it went over Syria's head and its dareful move brought both domestic and international consequences for Syria. Initial response came from United States was the sanctions imposed on Syria from 2004 which will be later on updated in August 2013 considering the civil war and challenges brought to the country, at regional level and at the international.¹⁴⁵ According to Syrian Sanctions Program of the Department of the Treasury; it would be implemented in order to

...deal with Syrian policies in supporting terrorism, continuing its occupation of Lebanon, pursuing weapons of mass destruction and missile programs and undermining U.S. and international efforts to stabilize Iraq.¹⁴⁶

Under this report, the urgent problem was defined as an unusual threat of Syrian action put into practice directed towards the national security and foreign policy of the United States. Under certain executive orders; all property and interests in the property of Syria which were located in the U.S. including

¹⁴⁴ Hinnebusch 2009, p.14

¹⁴⁵ Syria Sanctions Program Department of Treasury report, Office of Foreign Asset Control

¹⁴⁶ Ibid p.2

agencies and controlled entities were blocked.¹⁴⁷ Furthermore, new investments in Syria by a U.S. person, directed or undirected export of any services to Syria from the U.S. would be prohibited.¹⁴⁸

However, this wasn't the one and only response directed to Syria by the U.S. for its decision of supporting Iraq against the U.S. invasion. Major impact on Syria was represented under the United Nations Security Council Resolution No. 1559 which calls upon withdrawal of all remaining forces from Lebanon by supporting the extension of the control of the Government of Lebanon over all Lebanese territory.¹⁴⁹ As Hinnebusch pointed out; Syria's role in Lebanon was a significant topic caused tensions between Syria and the West.¹⁵⁰ Although Syria claimed permanent interests in Lebanese territory since saw Lebanon as the detached part of the Greater Syria¹⁵¹ on the one hand. On the other hand, Lebanon was significant for patronage networks as a source of economic resources. What's more, Lebanese territory was also critical for Syrian security interests since it shouldn't be a threatening base for Syria. Its

¹⁴⁷ Ibid p.4

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

¹⁴⁹ UNSC resolution no.1559

¹⁵⁰ Hinnebusch 2009 p.20

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

relations with Hezbollah can also be rooted to this cause as well. However, reflection of those claims were viewed as ‘obstructive and negative.’¹⁵²

Lebanon was the pressure point both for Syria and the U.S.¹⁵³ By using Lebanon as a tool for threatening Syrian regime against its move towards Iraq; as Phillips stated, The Bush administration hit back where it hurt.¹⁵⁴ With the Syria Accountability and Lebanese Sovereignty Restoration Act of 2003; the U.S. showed the signs that against Syrian subversion to Iraq; its presence in Lebanon would be shrink.¹⁵⁵ Under key findings of this Act; there were significant references to Syrian promises that would never be kept such as Bashar’s Assad’s acceptance of not selling oil or other commodities to Saddam Hussein¹⁵⁶ and its illegal import and transshipment. There were also significant references regarding deploying ballistic missiles, chemical weapon warheads, production of chemical and biological weapons and the probability

¹⁵² Ibid.

¹⁵³ Leverett, Flynt Lawrence. *Inheriting Syria: Bashars Trial by Fire*. Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, 2007. p.144.

¹⁵⁴ Phillips 2018 p.14

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

¹⁵⁶ Public Law 108–175—Dec. 12, 2003, Syria Accountability and Lebanese Sovereignty Restoration Act of 2003, United States of America.

and the level of danger Syria represented as a source of threat in the region.¹⁵⁷

After listing the findings Congress made; it stated that

Government of Syria should immediately and unconditionally stop facilitating transit from Syria to Iraq of individuals, military equipment, and all lethal items, except as authorized by the Coalition Provisional Authority or a representative, internationally recognized Iraqi government; cease its support for “volunteers” and terrorists who are traveling from and through Syria into Iraq to launch attacks; and undertake concrete, verifiable steps to deter such behavior and control the use of territory under Syrian control.¹⁵⁸

In addition, it is also stated that Government of Syria should declare its commitment to withdraw its armed forces from Lebanon as well.¹⁵⁹ In the beginning Assad showed resistance against those decisions tried to be imposed under the Act mentioned above and the UNSC Resolution No.1559 demanding Syrian withdrawal from Lebanese territory; Hariri’s death under bomb attacks in Beirut changed the course of actions since fingers pointed

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.

¹⁵⁸ Public Law 108–175

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

out Syria¹⁶⁰ by producing such pressure that Syria pull its army out of Lebanon finally in April 2005.¹⁶¹

Together with the investigation regarding Hariri assassination; Syrian regime understood those attempts as a tool of regime change in Syria.¹⁶² As a response, what Hinnebusch stated was the tightening of the relations between Iran and Syria¹⁶³ and it was understood that Hezbollah was their leverage they can use against Israel and the West indirectly. Similarly, Lund also pointed out that instead of put an end to Assad regime; Syrian government 'dug down and deepened its alliance with Iran and Hezbollah. Especially when it was understood that Hezbollah was an important player that should be taken into account together with its success over Israel in 2006; the line between the West and Iranian-Syrian-Hezbollah axis was sharpened. From the alliance theorists perspective; what Syria did can be evaluated under balancing attempt of a small state surrounded by the major threat directed towards it security and survival of the regime resulted from its own misinterpretation of its capabilities and weight in the international system. As Leverett concluded;

One area where Bashar has perhaps been able to increase the value of [Hezbollah] as an adjunct to Syria's national security posture is in the cultivation of

¹⁶⁰ Phillips 2018, p.14

¹⁶¹ Lund 2019, p.14

¹⁶² Hinnebusch 2009, p.21

¹⁶³ Ibid.

[Hezbollah's] paramilitary apparatus in southern Lebanon as a deterrent to a potential Israeli invasion.¹⁶⁴

3.2. Russian – Syrian Rapprochement

Considering Russian-Syrian relations; on June 18, 2000, Bashar Assad visited Moscow and met with Putin but until 2005, there has been no significant development in relations as mentioned above. However, the only exception to this is the agreements reached during negotiations on the sale of arms. Especially after the US invasion of Iraq in 2003, the sale of Alexander's ballistic missiles and S-300 to Russia came to the agenda, but because of Israel's security, Putin faced pressure from the USA and Israel and could not be sold.¹⁶⁵

Similar to the Cold War period, Russian-Syrian relations developed as a result of a strategic struggle. However, this time, as oppose to Yeltsin and his prudent foreign policy preferences; there was Putin with much more active and assertive decisions. As Freedman pointed out;

Under Putin, there was a more centralized control over Russian foreign policy as the new Russian leader sought to have a more assertive foreign policy for his country, and became much more

¹⁶⁴Leverett 2007, p. 119

¹⁶⁵ Rumer, Eugene, Russia in the Middle East: Jack of All Trades, Master of None, 31 October 2019, <https://carnegieendowment.org/2019/10/31/russia-in-middle-east-jack-of-all-trades-master-of-none-pub-80233>

active than Yeltsin had been in promoting Russian interests in the Middle East.¹⁶⁶

During Putin's early years, Iran, Iraq and Libya were Russia's most important allies in the Middle East. In January 2002, US President George W. Bush included Iran after Iraq and North Korea in his definition of evil axis.¹⁶⁷ After the invasion of Iraq in 2003, Russia suffered major financial losses and opposed the embargoes against Iran. More importantly, the governmental changes in Georgia in the autumn of 2003, Ukraine in 2004 and Kyrgyzstan in 2005 damaged the relations between Russia and the United States and gave the impression that they were surrounded by Russia.

One of the most serious security problems that Russia has experienced after the Cold War is that the Black Sea Fleet remains on the territory of Ukraine.¹⁶⁸ Although the Sevastopol Port was rented in 1997 as a result of long negotiations, the disputes continued. In the Russian Geopolitics of the Duma's Foreign Policy Adviser Aleksandr Dugin, the lower wing of the Russian Parliament, the Kiev-Moscow axis is mentioned as the essence of Russian statism, and if the broad integration process of these two countries does not

¹⁶⁶ Freedman, Robert O. Russian Policy Toward the Middle East Under Yeltsin and Putin, 2 September 2001, Jerusalem Letter / Viewpoints

¹⁶⁷ Text of President Bush's 2002 State of the Union Address, 29 January 2002, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/onpolitics/transcripts/sou012902.htm>

¹⁶⁸ Victor Zaborovsky. "Crimea and the Black Sea Fleet in Russian-Ukrainian Relations." CSIA Discussion Paper 95-11, Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University, September 1995.

happen, Ukraine will sooner or later become NATO will become the base of its main geopolitical enemy.¹⁶⁹ The idea of joining NATO following the change in government in Ukraine in 2004 confirmed this view. In addition, according to the 2001 Russian Sea Doctrine¹⁷⁰, the Mediterranean Sea, an element of the Atlantic region and a dimension of Russian naval power in terms of regional security were accepted and it was stated that the security of the Black Sea Basin started from the Mediterranean Sea. Therefore, the necessity of having a naval force in the Mediterranean for the security of the Black Sea came into the agenda.

As Andrej Kreutz also pointed out; Syrian international isolation initiated after Syrian position in the U.S. invasion of Iraq represented as important factor allowing Syrian-Russian rapprochement from 2005.¹⁷¹ Considering Russian abstention during the voting procedure of UN Security Council Resolution No.1559¹⁷² calling for Syrian withdrawal from the Lebanese territory; we can say that Syrian-Russian relations were still not amicable in the sense of Russian limited international support to Syria. Especially considering its fight

¹⁶⁹ Ibid.

¹⁷⁰ Maritime Doctrine of the Russian Federation, 2015

¹⁷¹ Kreutz, Andrej. Russia in the Middle East: Friend or Foe? Connecticut: Praeger, 2007. p.14

¹⁷² Ibid.

for Syria in 2012s at the United Nations Security Council; we can say that relations were actless until 2005.

In 2005, Russia's insecurity in its immediate vicinity moved Syria-Russia relations to another dimension. The January 2005 visit of Bashar al-Assad to Moscow was a key turning point in relations. 73% of Syria's \$13.4 billion debt, which has been a major problem for many years in bilateral relations, has been wiped out¹⁷³ and the remaining \$ 3 billion 600 million has been tied to the installment.¹⁷⁴ The rights of the Russian naval base in the Tartus Port of Syria, which is connected to the Black Sea Fleet, continued. Russia also accepted the sale of advanced air defense systems to Syria, despite U.S. and Israel's objections. However, several weapons and energy agreements have been signed and cash entry for the Russian arms industry and energy companies has been given.

After this agreement was signed with Syria, many Russian strategists began to argue that if Ukraine creates a problem, the Port of Tartus should be expanded and the Black Sea Fleet should be moved to this region. In February of the same year, the assassination of Lebanese Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri was asserted that there was a Syrian connection behind the assassination of the Syrian administration, but Russia opposed the embargo on Syria at the UN and rescued Syria from international pressure. As Kreutz

¹⁷³ Ibid

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¹⁷⁴ Ibid.

stated, only Russia backed Syria against allegations pointing out Syrian motivations behind Hariri assassination by stressing on the point that

Hariri was considered an opponent of Syria but not an enemy to that country, since the Syrians have cooperated with various political forces in Lebanon at various times.¹⁷⁵

Once again, international challenges have brought the two countries closer. US President George W. Bush's National Missile Defense System project¹⁷⁶, which was introduced in early 2001, was another continuation of the Strategic Defense Initiative project, known as Reagan's Star Wars in the early 1980s. The Bush administration reached an agreement in 2008 to deploy defense missiles with Poland and the radar system with the Czech Republic. However, the Obama administration, which came to power in January 2009, announced in September 2009 that the long-range missile defense system to be deployed in Eastern Europe was abandoned.¹⁷⁷ The negotiations started in 2007 caused serious discomfort in Russia.

At the 43rd Munich Security Conference of 2007, Putin made a historical speech and expressed his discomfort with the enlargement of NATO.¹⁷⁸ By

¹⁷⁵ Kreutz 2007, p.15

¹⁷⁶ National Security Presidential Directive 23, available at <https://fas.org/irp/offdocs/nspd/nspd-23.htm>

¹⁷⁷ Obama abandons missile defence shield in Europe, 17 September 2009, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2009/sep/17/missile-defence-shield-barack-obama>

¹⁷⁸ Putin Vladimir, Speech and the Following Discussion at the Munich Conference on Security Policy, 10 February 2007, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/24034>

quoting from Franklin Roosevelt; Putin stressed on the point that 'when peace has been broken anywhere, the peace of all countries everywhere is in danger;' he stressed on the very basic principle of security that was 'security for one is security for all' as well.¹⁷⁹ However, considering the enlargement of NATO; he criticized the role attributed to NATO as a mechanism that can use military force. Instead, according to Putin; the one and only authority would be the United Nations if necessary.¹⁸⁰

By the end of 2007, Russia had the result it wanted on its behalf against the bloody Chechen struggle. In addition, with the monopoly of energy it has established over oil and natural gas pipelines, it has begun to use this card as a means of printing in countries where it has problems. Russia, which started to gain its old power again, made a military intervention against Georgia in August 2008. When Russia intervened in Georgia, Syria became one of the few countries to support Russia.¹⁸¹ With this atmosphere, Syria and Russia have agreed to expand the naval base in Tartus. In 2009, Russia announced that it had begun expansion work on the port.¹⁸²

¹⁷⁹ Ibid

¹⁸⁰ Ibid

¹⁸¹ Lund 2019, p.16

¹⁸² Ibid.

Until Medvedev, neither Russian nor Soviet head of state have visited Damascus; his visit in 2010 was the first.¹⁸³ At this point, Lund considered Russian-Syrian relations as much stronger than at any point since the end of the Cold War, but there were still limits to how far Russia would go for Syria he added.¹⁸⁴ Both the U.S. and Israel relied on the Russian government to prohibit sales of some sophisticated missile systems, arguing that they would upset the balance of power and encourage Iran, potentially bankrolling some of Syria's military acquisitions. Israel had asked, among other things, not to allow Syria to buy the long-range S-300 anti-aircraft system, even though Syria had reportedly made an down payment to initiate an agreement in 2010. The Kremlin also decided to block the sale of Iskander-E missile batteries to Syria, which in the event of a war could have sent deep into Israel conventional or chemical payloads.¹⁸⁵

Although some in the Russian defense establishment grumbled that military cooperation with the Middle East had fallen “under the control of Tel Aviv”, both Medvedev and Putin seemed unwilling to let Syria upset Russia’s friendly relations with Israel. “In Russia, Syria has not found the champion that it seeks to rival the support the US lends to Israel”, concluded Kreutz.¹⁸⁶

¹⁸³ Ibid.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid

¹⁸⁵ Ibid.

Part of the problem was that Syria had very little to sell to Russia, apart from security and intelligence cooperation, naval access and arms sales. The Syrian economy has been underdeveloped, corrupt, and inhospitable to investors. Repeated attempts have been made to promote business between Russia and Syria, but with limited success. From the words of a Russian diplomat, high-level delegations came and went without producing more than "vague statements of mutual support, a photo op for the Syrians, and then a complete lack of follow-up on either side."¹⁸⁷

As the first decade of the 21st century came to an end, the relationship between Russia and Syria was certainly renewed, but it was by no means a formal alliance and lacked the diplomatic strength that held it together in the days of the Cold War. It was highly asymmetrical: very important to Syria, but of moderate interest to Russia alone. The Middle East, seen from Moscow, was a complex mosaic of conflicting relationships. The relative importance of Syria to the Kremlin definitely increased with the loss of influence in Iraq and the increasing isolation of Russia from the West – but Syria was still just one piece of a bigger puzzle.

¹⁸⁶ Kreutz 2007

¹⁸⁷ SARG trumpets burgeoning economic ties with Russia", US Embassy in Damascus, 22 March 2006, 06DAMASCUS1261_a, wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/06DAMASCUS1261_a.html. cited in Lund 2019.

CHAPTER 4

RELATIONS BETWEEN SYRIA AND RUSSIA: THE ARAB SPRING AND AFTERWARDS

4.1. “Is it your turn Bashar?” Syrian Experience of the Arab Spring

“...the last decade in spite of the vast changes that are surrounding the world and some areas in the Middle East, including Iraq, Palestine, and Afghanistan, because we had this stagnation we were plagued with microbes. So, what you have been seeing in this region is a kind of disease. [...] If you want to talk about Tunisia and Egypt, we are outside of this; at the end we are not Tunisians and we are not Egyptians.”¹⁸⁸

Syrian President Bashar al-Assad replied the questions raised in his interview with The Wall Street Journal that ‘How do you see what is happening in Tunisia, Egypt, Algeria and Jordan? How do you see region changing and eventually, what does that means for Syria itself?’¹⁸⁹ as quoted above. He regarded revolts irrelevant to Syria although they forced leaders to either leave or change. He even called the unrest grew up and showed in different ways as a microbe that caused a disease from which Syria will be able to distance itself¹⁹⁰; it wouldn’t be the case. Instead, his regime was dragged into

¹⁸⁸ Interview with Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, The Wall Street Journal, 31.01.2011

¹⁸⁹ Ibid

chaos and uncertainty resulted from the diffusing of the microbe among the society.

Considering the initial unrest in the Arab World; Tunisia was the first among the series of uprisings. Reaction exhibited by Muhammad led President Zine al-Abidine Ben Ali to promise to initiate certain moves as providing more jobs for new graduates at first together with engaging 'national dialogue' with the opposition.¹⁹¹ The period ended with the ouster of a ruler as a result of a popular uprising was summarized by Gelvin as follows;

“...In the town of Kasserine in western Tunisia, where twenty-one died at the hands of government snipers, infuriated protesters turned their sights on those responsible, demanding the immediate departure of President Ben Ali. The stakes had risen dramatically and quickly. Fueled by new media (such as text messaging), old media (such as al-Jazeera), and word of mouth, the uprising spread throughout the country. When it reached Tunis on January 13, chief of staff of the Tunisian armed forces told the army to stand down.”¹⁹²

When predicament of authoritarianism, corruption and exploitation in the Middle East, especially in the Arab World was associated with the category of Arab Spring created by mass media and protestors; the idea that led the overthrow of authoritarian regimes in other countries of the Middle East was interconnected with Syrian example as well. Associating Syrian regime with

¹⁹⁰ Wall Street Journal Interview of Bashar al-Assad

¹⁹¹ Gelvin, James L. The Arab Uprisings: What Everyone Needs to Know. New York: Oxford University Press, 2012. p.46

¹⁹² Ibid p.47

that of Tunisia, Egypt and even Yemen; overthrown of Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali, Hosni Mubarak, Muammar Gaddafi and Ali Abdullah Saleh had aroused the feeling that Syrian regime was ready to fall as well.¹⁹³ People started to believe that they would have a chance against Assad. However, it is complicated for Syrian structure that who would have a chance against Assad for what purposes? This question will be recalled for a detailed analysis not only by stressing on Syrian dynamics but also by reflecting third party involvements as well.

“It’s your turn, Doctor Bashar al-Assad” Naief Abazid had painted under the window of the principal’s office of the all-boys al-Banin school in Daraa.¹⁹⁴ Bashar al-Assad was the heir apparent after he lost his elder brother in a car accident in 1994 and he prepared accordingly since then. He was introduced to the public as a moderate, honest and to some extent reformist; however, his dignity was overshadowed by his dictator actions which get reaction from his people.¹⁹⁵ On the light of the hope spread through Arab Uprisings; what was expected was expressed through the hands of a 14-years old student. However, government was responded with arrest and torture of

¹⁹³ Gelvin, 2012, p.47

¹⁹⁴ Burke, Dave, The boy whose graffiti changed the world, 15 March 2017, <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-4312502/The-boy-anti-Assad-graffiti-changed-world.html>

¹⁹⁵ Zisser 2001

23 school-boys as we know regarding certain news published.¹⁹⁶ Their round up sparked protests in Daraa and opposition spread with the desire of overthrowing the dictator in their country. In an interview with Bashar al-Assad's cousin Rami Makhlouf; he summarized the idea echoed by state as follows;

“We will not go out, leave on our boat, go gambling, you know... We will sit here. We call it a fight until the end...They should know when we suffer, we will not suffer alone.”¹⁹⁷

Sharing is caring. A common phrase having a big meaning. While Makhlouf was mentioning about sharing the pain in a kind enough way not to be understood as posing a threat to his own people; he was not taking the opposite into account; wealth. Whether there was nothing to share or nothing remained after the lion's share was distributed among the limited; socioeconomic and political pre-war conditions of Syria are very significant. Not only by being the defining characteristics of the transformation of demands for freedom, democracy and simply better living conditions, but also significant in order for the people to understand the potential Syrian society had in accommodating such varied fractions together on an extremely wide spectrum that would reveal themselves as aggressive parties positioned at the corners of a polygon called Syrian soil.

¹⁹⁶ Dave, 15 March 2017.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid.

Considering socioeconomic environment of pre-war Syria; unequal distribution of wealth would be the right step to take. Neoliberal policies and privatization initiated by Bashar al-Assad became the origin of this uneven distribution.¹⁹⁸ Assad saw the dynamism Syrian economy needed and he understood that free-market economy was the way of overcoming of those problems on the one hand¹⁹⁹. On the other hand, he didn't want to lose his control over the masses since the regime based on a system of loyalty to authority. Taking Chinese model of both modernizing country through economic reforms and assuming control of the people at the same time into account; Syrian model was implemented as privatization of certain banks and public goods as well as lifting of the ban on carrying foreign currency.²⁰⁰ However, this reform attempt didn't cover the whole, applied to those who are and who will be loyal to the state and to those providing the ruler more power by not only creating needed resources but also keeping him in the safe side.²⁰¹ In 1970s, Hafez Assad prioritized one thing, ensuring peoples loyalty to the regime. Statist economic program put into practice, as Hinnebusch

¹⁹⁸ Abboud, S., & Arslanian, F. (2008). Growth in Transition and Syria's Economic Performance. Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers. cited in Kargin Aksu, İnci. P.36 The Unending Arab Spring in Syria: The Primary Dynamics of The Syrian Civil War as Experienced by Syrian Refugees, Turkish Studies, Volume 13/3 Winter 2018. p.36

¹⁹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰⁰ Ibid.

²⁰¹ Ibid.

identified 'revolution from the above'²⁰² was based on land reform and nationalization; forcing state to take responsibilities of those didn't satisfied with the regime.

Syria's internal dynamics and the security concerns that have been prioritized since the Hafez Assad era have been embodied by the domination of the security forces on the society. This led the opposition to organize abroad. However, since various entities were organized in different countries; differences among their ideologies and point of view varied as well due to the policies of the countries they became a part of. So, a unity couldn't be achieved. However, the political group that has been the only effective opposition to the Baath administration for a long time has been the Muslim Brotherhood and the people they are connected to.

After Hafez Assad's death, the social and political opposition in Syria became more visible.²⁰³ Following the disappearance of the influence of Hafez Assad's despotic personality and Bashar Assad's promise to initiate a reform process, the political environment encouraged the opposition groups to make their voices audible against the government and to establish political parties and civil society organizations.²⁰⁴ Bashar Assad was introduced to the public as

²⁰² Hinnebusch, Raymond. Syria, Revolution from Above. London: Routledge, 2005

²⁰³ Syrian President Bashar al-Assad: Facing down rebellion, 3 September 2018, <https://www.bbc.com/news/10338256>

²⁰⁴ Ibid.

honest, reformer and the moderate man of his time and he would govern accordingly. However, in reality, he had always proved that he was the successor of Hafez Assad. He had never hesitated to express his discomfort aloud and he had never hesitated to articulate his harsh reaction to the leading intellectuals of the country who directly targeted his power and demanded reform.²⁰⁵

Assad's reaction to the declaration, which was directly aimed at the Baath government for the first time since the 1970s, was harsh, suppressing the reform process and ultimately ending the process were the immediate responses²⁰⁶. Eight influential opposition leaders and several non-governmental organization leaders who signed the manifesto, including Riyadh Seyf, Memun al-Humsi, Riyad al-Turk and Arif Delila, were arrested and some opposition non-governmental organizations, newspapers and magazines were closed down.²⁰⁷

During the Arab Spring uprisings; the Syrian opposition, which was held aside by Hafez Assad's death, got its share from the violent reaction of the regime, came together and sought a political solution. Although the differences of opinion among the opponents, lack of coordination, the problem of trust

²⁰⁵ Ibid.

²⁰⁶ Lesch, p.53

²⁰⁷ Ibid.

between the opposition and the internal opposition in the diaspora, and the lack of political parties of the opposition groups, unity steps were taken even though it was difficult for the opposition to take a common stance against the Assad regime. And what formations are trying to create itself through this process by taking courage from the complex situation of the country with the Arab Spring and are now struggling against Bashar Assad?

Since the beginning of the rebellions, the Syrian National Council, Local Coordination Committees, the Muslim Brotherhood, the Damascus Declaration for National Democratic Change, the Free Syrian Army, the National Change Movement²⁰⁸, and many other organizations in the opposition but whose names are not mentioned here, have expressed their demands against Bashar Assad. In fact, he could not unconsciously be a victim of his own diversity, and this had the effect of strengthening Bashar Assad's position on the other hand. Following the outbreak of protest movements in Syria, Assad's bloody suppression of demonstrations led the opposition movements in the country and abroad to come together to form a roof council. The Syrian National Council (SNC), established in Istanbul on August 20, 2011, expanded in a short period of time and increased the number of its members to 310 so immediately that it became the biggest opposition group in Syria in a short period of time²⁰⁹. The SNC, which was

²⁰⁸ Kainikara, 2018.

²⁰⁹ The Syrian National Council, 25 September 2013, <https://carnegie-mec.org/diwan/48334?lang=en>

established to transfer the demands of the Syrian people to the international community and to end the Assad regime, promotes the opposition movement from many factions. The Syrian Muslim Brotherhood was supported by the Damascus Declaration Movement for National Democratic Change, the Assyrians, some Kurdish, secular and independent dissidents, and local coordination committees.²¹⁰

The riots that broke out in Syria were no surprise. However, it will not be wrong to say that the resistance of the regime was. As the next stop of the quest for democracy, freedom and human rights, as the next stop of the rebellion wave; the opinion that it wouldn't be possible for the Syrian regime to bear much longer was so strong that it couldn't keep turning its deaf ear to people's cry. Of course, the involvement of both regional and global actors by supporting different sides with various motivations had changed the course of the actions as well and gave an unpredictable direction.

4.2. Syrian Civil War as a Regional and International Agenda

While evaluating the balancing policy of Syria, especially Assad administration, it is equally important to consider the attitude of other countries towards the civil war and the Assad regime itself and Syrian-Russian rapprochement. Since Bashar Assad couldn't have a chance to maneuver between the two superpowers in the region in order to achieve his goals; he

²¹⁰ The Syrian National Council, 25 September 2013, <https://carnegie-mec.org/diwan/48334?lang=en>

had to consider the others in order to draw the lines between each other. In other words, although in the first place their relations was thought to be consolidated around common denominators of the bilateral relations; the points that differentiate them from the other countries and their ingrained policies were the two converging factors for both allies as well. That's why, from the beginning of Syrian uprisings, attitudes, policies formulated and implied, interventions or even certain touches by other actors will be identified in order to structure Syrian-Russian relations appropriately.

4.2.1. The Arab League

The Syrian administration has not changed the course of the existing relations with the Arab countries since the Arab rebellions reached Syria. However, Arab countries could not remain indifferent to what was happening in Syria upon the reaction from the Western countries due to the use of violence against Syrian people. By putting active and interventionist clothes on; The Arab League called for the Assad Administration to carry out the necessary reforms immediately²¹¹. There were various negotiation attempts and peace plans initiated by the League but not fully implemented.²¹² The Syrian case was not only a regional crises needed to be considered, instead, it became a test case for the League and a challenge to the role attributed to.

²¹¹ T.M., The Arab League's Role in the War, 2014 Vol.6 No.07
<http://www.inquiriesjournal.com/articles/906/the-arab-leagues-role-in-the-syrian-civil-war>

²¹² Ibid.

To follow the timeline, in the first place, Nabib-al Araby, The Chief of the Arab League, stated that they were against any outside interference in Syria's internal affairs.²¹³ Initially Arab League tried not to alter its status-quo oriented policy making and behaved accordingly. However, considering Assad ignoring any pressure directed both towards regional and international actors; The Arab League convened on October 16 and called for the ending of the Baath Regime's use of violence, withdrawing all tanks and armed vehicles from the streets as well as releasing the political prisoners who were estimated to be around 70.000.²¹⁴ Briefly, it was a call for the Syrian regime to fulfill the public's legitimate demands. Previously, Syria saw those decisions made by the League and its insistence on implementing immediately, as an intervention in her internal affairs. Although, Syria accepted the Plan after the time Arab League had elapsed, the mentioned negotiation period with opposition would not be realized.²¹⁵

As one of the opposition leaders living in Saudi Arabia pointed out; Syrian government was aware the fact that it had already lost its credibility and legitimacy in the eyes of his people and it was aware of the fact that on the day it pulled the tanks and all armed vehicles off the streets; the regime would collapse.²¹⁶ Although it has agreed to end its violence against protesters,

²¹³ Küçükkeleş Mújge, Arab League's Syrian Policy, SETA Policy Brief, April 2012.

²¹⁴Ibid.

²¹⁵ Ibid.

release political prisoners and start talks with the opposition within 15 days under a peace plan drawn up by Arab states; it didn't fulfill. At the same time, UN report numbered casualties as 3500 in 8 months. Suspension of Syrian membership and imposing of economic sanctions were always on the agenda.²¹⁷ Suspension was realized in an extraordinary meeting of November 12, 2011. It was followed by sanctions as well in order to isolate Syria in diplomatic political and economic terms as well. To sum up, there were other initiatives taken and measures tried to be implemented and among them observation mission was very significant. However, it couldn't be a manageable process. In the end, the issue was brought to the United Nations.

4.2.12. Gulf Countries

Along with the rebellions, the relations of Saudi Arabia and other Gulf countries with Syria deteriorated once again. Previously, the Gulf countries' outlook on Syria was negative due to Baathist, Nusayri, secular, pseudo-republican and socialist qualities; Soviet and pro-Iranian politics; and their intervention in the Lebanese and Palestinian problems. Saudi Arabia sent its troops to Bahrain in order to protect the administration against the Shiite population. In the following stages, the increase in violence, the media

²¹⁶ Ibid

²¹⁷ Ibid.

coverage of the Gulf media and the news of the sectarian conflict in Syria played a major role in the anti-Syrian attitude of the Gulf countries.

As of August Gulf countries, especially Saudi Arabia and Qatar, began to support opposition groups in Syria especially the Salafist groups and the Muslim Brotherhood.²¹⁸ This attitude of change in the Gulf countries in April, the UN Human Rights Council on the Syrian vote in Saudi Arabia put a reservation, Qatar and Bahrain did not attend the meeting. In a more negative decision vote in late August, these three countries voted in favor. Four of the Gulf countries (Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Qatar and Kuwait) recalled the ambassadors of Damascus and asked their citizens to leave Syria.²¹⁹ The Gulf Cooperation Council also called on the Syrian Government to stop violence.

The financial relations between the Gulf countries and Syria was a significant determining factor as well. When the Arab League decisions were announced, one of the most disturbing issues in the Syrian regime was cutting of financial support coming from the Gulf. Walid Muallim reacted violently to the withdrawal of this support and described it as an economic war against Syria. Considering the economic activities of Arab countries in Syria, this reaction of Muallim is more easily understood. While the total direct investment of Arab countries in Syria was around 10 million dollars in 2000, it increased to 1.5

²¹⁸ Qatar and Syria, Crisis

²¹⁹ Blanga Yehuda, Saudi Arabia's Motives in the Syrian Civil War, Middle East Policy Council 2017

billion dollars in 2009 and 1.8 billion dollars in 2010.¹³⁴ Saudi Arabia became the biggest trade partner of Syria in 2009. ; the trade volume between the two countries was around 2 billion dollars. After the Arab Union's sanction decision, pro-Government newspapers in Syria claimed that they would not be affected by the sanction decision by trying to underestimate the investments of the Gulf countries and that the Arab countries would suffer from this sanction decision.

4.2.3. Iraq

Considering the relations between Syria and Iraq; it held many ups and downs throughout decades. They left various crises behind during and after the Cold War period. Most catchy and remarkable ones were Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in 1990s, US invasion of Iraq and its presence in the region for a long period and the Arab Spring of 2011.

Iraqi leaders have made different statements about the rebellion in Syria. Iraq abstained from the Arab Union's sanction against Syria, but some political actors such as the Iraqi Front criticized the Iraqi government's position. Kurdish groups and politicians, such as Iraqi Foreign Minister Hoshyar Zebari, are worried that the turmoil in Syria will spread to Iraq. In other words, political actors within Iraq are divided on sanctions against Syria. There is a high level of interdependence between Iraq and Syria. Since the trade volume between the two countries is relatively high, the open Iraqi border makes the Syrian regime breathe easily Against the sanctions. The current Maliki

Government in Iraq has abstained from the Arab League's decision because of its pro-Iranian policy. The possibility of an internal conflict awaiting Iraq after the US withdrawal from Iraq will in the future lead to a lower-profile Syrian policy in Iraq. However, the turmoil in Iraq may have a different reflection on Syria, which will only serve to increase the chaos in Syria.

4.2.4. Turkey

In addition to historical links; Syria and Turkey shares the longest common border. Since the Cold War period, there were significant issues that certain impact on the tense relations between two neighbors. However, as a result of assertive foreign policy of the Turkish administration since 2000s; Turkish-Syrian relations became closer and many bilateral attempts were taken since the civil war of 2011.²²⁰

However, Syrian Civil War brought another dimension to the relations as well and Turkey became the imminent sphere in which the political, humanitarian and security challenges would be put into practice. Turkey built its foreign policy on the aim that preserving Syria's territorial integrity and resolving the crisis through peaceful processes. With this aim, it participated in international efforts at resolving the issue. However, terror became a significant issue for the Turkish agenda it couldn't ignore the challenges directed toward.

²²⁰ Bishku, Michael B., Turkish-Syrian Relations: A Checkered History, Middle East Policy Council, Volume 14, No.3

4.2.5. Iran

Iran and Syria, the two closest allies in the region, have continued their close cooperation after the recent developments and Arab rebellions. Due to the ongoing interdependence between the two states, Iran's uninterrupted and indifferent support to the Syrian regime continues.

The preservation of the Baath regime, which has been pursuing a policy of repression against the Muslim Brotherhood in the country for decades, has destroyed the positive image of the Islamic Revolution in the Arab world, albeit limited. However, Iran has no other political alternative. With the fall of Syria, it will not be possible for the Shiite Crescent to take shape after the invasion of Iraq.²²¹ The regime change in Syria is not only the loss of Syria for Iran, but also the loss of Lebanon and Palestine. Because the overthrow of Assad means that the aid that Iran sends to Hezbollah, which was established in 1982, mostly through Syria.²²² Thirdly, with the regime change in Syria, one of the most important anti-Western and anti-Israeli regimes in the region will come to an end, further weakening the confrontational discourse that has dominated the region for decades and is often used by Iran. This is in fact not in line with the interests of the West, which continues to intervene in the region, or of Israel, which is fed by the confrontational discourse.

²²¹ Goodarzi, 2013

²²² Ibid.

4.2.6. Western Countries

Western countries' view of the uprisings in Syria is generally positive. The overthrow of the Baath Administration, one of the region's most anti-Western regimes, can be seen as a positive development for number one priority of the West; Israel. Both the US and European countries support the anti-government activities of the opposition groups and all steps taken by other actors to weaken the government. Therefore, the Syrian authorities have been accusing the rebels as collaborators defending the interests of Western countries. The US policy and expectations against the rebellion are in line with other Western countries. The US Administration, which has been embargoing Syria for a long time, has expressed satisfaction with the European and Arab countries' sanctions against Syria and all developments against it.

European countries have supported all activities towards the fall of the Assad regime and took an important step by taking an economic embargo decision. Due to the importance of European countries' trade with Syria in the country's economy, the tension between the parties increased after the EU's decision to impose sanctions on Syria. Since the economy is both the starting point of the rebellion and the reason for the pressure being tried to be established with sanctions, sanctions imposed on Syria cause dilemmas. Oil, which makes up about 25% of Syria's revenues, accounts for 90% of its trade relations with the EU. It is claimed that after the sanction decision of EU countries, oil

production in the country decreased by 75%.²²³ Thus, Syria became unable to pay foreign oil companies and foreign workers began to leave the country. Following the adoption of the sanction decision of the Arab League, Britain, Germany and France called for the sanctions to be imposed by the UN General Assembly and and a further isolation of the Syrian Government.²²⁴ (Iranian support regarding oil exports)

This resolution, which called for the condemnation of the Assad Government for the resolution of the Karart bill, systematic human rights abuses, excessive use of force, the execution of human rights activists, human abductions and torture, could not be passed upon the opposition of other global powers. He called for the change of the regime through diplomatic means, saying that an international intervention would not be possible.

French Foreign Minister Alain Juppe stated that the situation in Syria is completely different from that in Libya, so there is no military intervention in Syria. In a statement on 11 November, Juppe argued that the use of force against the peaceful people of Syria is not true. For the implementation of reforms agreed to stop the violence and made to increase the pressure on the Syrian leader would be enough. Arab League sanctions Saudi sympathizers Assad reacted to the decision Arabia, Qatar and Turkey on the attacks on

²²⁴ <https://www.nytimes.com/2011/11/28/world/middleeast/arab-league-prepares-to-vote-on-syrian-sanctions.html>

diplomatic representation in France, back to the diplomatic representatives in the country as well.

4.3. Russian Policy towards the Syrian Arab Spring

What happened in Tunisia, I think, is quite a substantial lesson to learn for any authorities. The authorities must not simply sit in their convenient chairs but develop themselves together with the society. When the authorities don't catch up with the development of the society, and don't meet the aspiration of the people, the outcome is very sad.²²⁵

One might ascribe Medvedev's words to the view that he was on the same page with the Western idea of accepting how necessary was a democratic change in Tunisia. In fact, it was very hard and risky for states to express their reactions openly, especially for the Arab Uprisings suddenly taken place and covered the region in a large scale in a short period of time with varied consequences.

Considering Russian influence in the region before the Arab Spring; it has started to restore her traditional power and influence in the region through commercial relations, by selling arms in particular as Erenler pointed out.²²⁶ As he continued, Russian attempts at power consolidation was about to bear its fruits, until the Arab Spring; it caught Russia off-guard.²²⁷ In order to remain

²²⁵ C. Freeland, "In Egypt and Tunisia, Lessons for Autocrats Everywhere," New York Times (February 3, 2011)

²²⁶ Erenler, Muharrem, Russia's Arab Spring Policy, p.173

²²⁷ Ibid.

in power, it would prefer the region that didn't have to experience such a transformation at all regarding increase in her influence and popularity in the region. That's why it would prefer authoritarian governments who would preserve stability.

According to Putin, political elite and pro-Kremlin media; the end result of 'regime change' is the proliferation of failed states, the advance of radical groups wreaking havoc across national borders and giving rise to instability, terrorism, and mass migration.²²⁸ This point of view might be the result of certain revolts, revolutions and civil wars Russia had to experience throughout the history and from this point of view; Russia is fighting for stability, legality and order rather than supporting rulers²²⁹ in order to prevent the situation in which radical Islamists would rise into power²³⁰ as well since authoritarian regimes were opposed to them too.

However, this wouldn't mean siding with the losing entities.²³¹ Thus, Russian foreign policy turned out to be hesitant, unstable and volatile regarding foreign policy followed toward each revolution/ uprising. To begin with the unexpected

²²⁸ Bechev Dimitar, Russia in the Middle East: From the Arab Uprisings to the Syrian Conundrum, 12 February 2016, <https://research.sharqforum.org/2016/02/12/russia-in-the-middle-east-from-the-arab-uprisings-to-the-syrian-conundrum/>

²²⁹ Ibid.

²³⁰ Magen, Zvi, Russia in the New Middle East, INSS Insight (2011),p. 252. Cited in Erenler, p.174

²³¹ Ibid.

result of the Tunisian Revolution; as Erenler argued, from the realist point of view, Russia should position herself together with the protestors that would take over the government. Considering the relations between Russia and Tunisia both in political and economic terms; there was less for Russia to risk in supporting protestors. As Erenler stated; trade volume between Russia and Tunisia was limited and they didn't have a long-lasting and well established political relationships. Tunisia wouldn't be a part of the wait and see strategy of Russia; however, Egypt was.

Russian and Egyptian alliance has ended very long time ago. Russia seemed indifferent to protests first and continued watching even during the Tahrir Square protests. Since they were in loose political relations and their trade volume was rather low; power vacuum created as a result of ousting of Hosni Mubarak would be an opportunity for the Russians to obtain a new foothold in the region.²³²

Libyan case was rather the different one and yet the test case for the Russian foreign policy making during the uprisings. In this case; Russia was called for her 'zig-zag policy' according to Freedman instead of formulating a consistent policy. Considering involvement of the international community mentioned before; Russia remained passive in shaping Libya's future. Although stressed

²³² Erenler, p.175

her discomfort; apart from taking an assertive position to prevent NATO from taking action; just voiced her displeasure.

“Syria is a country with which the Soviet Union had and today’s Russia has special, warm relations.”²³³

As reflected in Putin’s words; Syria was an important ally for Russia and thus, her reflection towards uprisings turned out into a civil war later on; would expected to be different, and it was. As Margelov stressed;

“Leaders come and go, politicians come and go ... but for Russia, there remains a single reliable and trusted friend: the Syrian People.”²³⁴

Bearing in mind all those experiences of the Arab Spring countries having in relation with Russia; defining characteristics of foreign policy strategies were as follows. First, Russia was in favor of serving for the stability first in general and preferred to open the ‘Pandora Box’ depending on the significance and the scale of relations between countries, of course by preserving the necessary space for the newcomers as well. Secondly, by referring to Medvedev’s words; initially reacting to Tunisian Revolution; Russia followed a policy of aligning with that of West except from the Syrian case. Finally, it held a substantive role rather than following a proactive one.²³⁵

²³³ Bourtman, Ilya. “Putin And Russia’s Middle Eastern Policy.” MERIA 10,2006, p.2

²³⁴ Freedman, Robert. “Russia And The “Arab Spring: A Preliminary Appraisal.”

²³⁵ Ibid.

Considering the spectrum of Russian –Syrian relations; it was positioned near being allies most of the time they intermingled crucially since 1970s as outlined in the second chapter of this thesis titled 'Russian-Syrian Relations: Historical Background' 21st century brought different challenges and opportunities to those two countries strengthened their bilateral relations. Especially after American intervention in Iraq in 2003; as Bryc summarized, Russia began play the role the protector of Shia Alawite minority, Assad's protector and diplomatic shield.

Considering the motivations Russia hold in trying to keep her those titles; arms trade, Tartus being Russia's sole base in the region, significance of resources, the threat of radical Islam, international prestige and power struggle, the case of Libya and historical proximity in Syria-Russia relations were the interpenetrating factors Russia had taken into account while determining her foreign policy choices and her stance towards Arab Spring and resilience Assad was trying to keep. Since those determinants were the key factors Russian interest based on; those factors will be mentioned briefly as well.

The most intense relationship between Russia and Syria is undoubtedly Russia's arms exports to Damascus. The Soviet Union was the largest arms and military equipment supplier of Syria and his legacy was further sustained by Russia, especially during and after Putin. This relationship was personally founded between Assad and Putin and realized considerably with Assad's first visit to Moscow in 2005 as mentioned in the third chapter of this thesis.

As a result of the six agreements on cooperation signed in various areas between the two countries; Putin wrote off 73% of debt owed to Russia worth USD13.4 billion.²³⁶ Moreover, as a main arms exporter of MENA Region; her market comprises traditional customers such as Iraq (1.4 per cent of exports), Syria (1.4 per cent), Egypt (1.4 per cent) and Yemen (1.2 per cent), as well as newer markets such as Algeria (9.1 per cent), Iran (2 per cent) and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) (0.7 per cent) and worth 17,8 of the total exports of Russia.²³⁷ Since 2005 there was a sharp increase in Syrian part and had a stable process to some extent from the beginning of the civil war.²³⁸ Although it decreases sharply in 2014; Russia compensated this decline on the ground itself in 2015.²³⁹ Russia was not only controlling Syrian arms export but it was supplying spare parts of military vehicles.²⁴⁰ Therefore, Syria's dependence on Russia on this issue continues and it seems that it will. If Assad's regime falls, Russia will lose its strategic superiority over Syria, its presence in the region and its control over the Syrian army along with its arms

²³⁶ Lund, 2019.

²³⁷ Connolly Richard, Sendstad Cecilie, Russia's Role as an Arms Exporter The Strategic and Economic Importance of Arms Exports for Russia, Russia and Eurasia Programme | March 2017

²³⁸ Ibid.

²³⁹ Ibid

²⁴⁰ Ibid.

market. In order to prevent those consequences, Russia seemed willing to support Assad since Arab Spring experience of Syria.

Although Ruslan Aliev, the head of information at the well-connected Centre for Analysis of Strategies and Technologies (CAST) in Moscow told that

"Tartus is not a real naval base. ... It is just a point on the map to replenish food and water and carry out some occasional repairs. There are a maximum of 50 Russian sailors and specialist technicians there."²⁴¹

One of the most important issues determining Russia's Syria policy is the Tartus naval base in Russia and it remained important since the Syrian deal in return for a multi-billion dollar debt write off during the Soviet period. It meant the only access to the Mediterranean both for commercial and military purposes for Russia.²⁴² While assessing the possibility of the Assad regime to collapse, Russia would encounter the loss of her only naval base in the region together with the replacement of Assad with one of opposing parties having not good relations enough for preserving her privileged situation in the region. In order to prevent this situation come into practice, in order not to be destitute of Mediterranean; Russia tried to keep Assad in power and together

²⁴¹ Gardner Frank, How vital is Syria's Tartus port to Russia <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-18616191> 27 June 2012

²⁴² Ibid

with those dimensions Tartus served as a door opening to Russian claims over the region.²⁴³

One of the most important reasons behind Russia's Syrian struggle is the natural gas pipeline planned to be installed from Syria to the Europe via the Persian Gulf. The main actor of this plan is Qatar and its aim is to acquire the natural gas markets of Europe in search of alternative energy sources.

The future of Qatar's economy is based on its natural gas strategy, and large amounts of loans have been received for it. The reason why Qatar has turned to Europe is that the US, which will become the main natural gas consumer of Qatar, will abandon its natural gas imports and turn to rock gas if the projects are completed. This change in the US energy policy has affected Qatar as well as other countries.

In this case, two big markets opened in front of Qatar. One is the US's ally Europe with consumption of trillion cubic meters and the other is China, which is economically developed and will rival the US in the future. Qatar used its choice in favor of Europe. This choice is in line with US policy aimed at breaking Russia's natural gas monopoly over Europe and excluding Russia from Europe²⁴⁴. Qatar plans to realize the natural gas it intends to export to Europe via Syria. Russian aims at preventing Qatari domination over European region.

²⁴³ Ibid.

Although there is no official research in Russia, President Vladimir Putin said the Muslim population in the country is between 18-20 million. This corresponds to 14-15 percent of the total Russian population, which is a notable rate. It is known that separatists, mostly radical Islamist Chechens, joined ISIS and fought in Syria. Russia is convinced that ISIS terrorism is now directly threatening its national and regional security interests. If the number of Russian citizens going to fight in the ISIS ranks exceeds 2,200 in official figures and this number increases day by day, the destabilization of the North Caucasus and Ural-Volga region may be an unpleasant result for Russia.

The reason for this is the fact that the militant groups in the North Caucasus, which the Moscow Caucasus Emirate considers as a terrorist organization, recently declared their loyalty to ISIS. The idea that the terrorists fighting on the ISIS will lead to instability in the country when they return to Russia is also accepted at the highest level in the Russian political elite. Again, more than 5,000 people fighting in the ISIS ranks, especially from some Central Asian countries, justify this concern for Moscow.

Moscow is thought to be inevitably going to increase in Russia's radical movements in the North Caucasus in the event that power in the hands of radical Islamic groups in Syria will increase.²⁴⁵ Another issue that Russia perceives as a threat to the national security of the Syrian crisis is the radical

²⁴⁵ Rumer, Eugene, Russia in the Middle East: Jack of All Trades, Master of None, 31 October 2019, <https://carnegieendowment.org/2019/10/31/russia-in-middle-east-jack-of-all-trades-master-of-none-pub-80233>

Islamic movements that can come to power if the Damascus regime falls. Among the opposition groups aiming at the post-Assad power, those who aspire to power the most are multi-part Islamic organizations.

Concerns about Russia will be the result of an intervention without a resolution of the UNSC, which would be Iran's next ally in the region, after Syria.²⁴⁶ Russia is worried that similar interventions will be opened to the Commonwealth of Independent States and Central Asian countries, which it sees as her own national interest.²⁴⁷

The overthrow of the Assad regime as a result of foreign intervention will also blow the prestige of Russia, a permanent member of the UN Security Council, in the world. Russia is trying to show international actors that it is impossible to make any decision without their consent to solve international problems of their own interest, and that it is a force that is heard in their spheres of influence.

Russia absolutely opposes the repetition of the scenario in Libya and the military intervention from outside. Prime Minister Vladimir Putin compared NATO's action against Libya to the Crusades and criticized the totalitarian

²⁴⁶ Popescu, Nicu and Secieru, Stanislav, Russia's return to the Middle East: Building Sandcastles?, CHAILLOT PAPER N° 146 — July 2018

²⁴⁷ Ibid.

regime in Libya.²⁴⁸ Avoiding this situation and preventing it from recurring is very important for Putin as well.

To sum up, each of the above listed independent, intertwined elements plays a decisive role in Russia's steps in Syria on the one hand and prevents the development of an inclusive Syrian strategy on the other. After discussing the determinants of Russian foreign policy, the last part of this chapter will be an assessment of the dimension of events and relations between civil war and Russian intervention.

When Syria first came up in the United Nations Security Council in April 2011, Russia and China from the permanent five countries used their veto powers to prevent a decision that would be made against Syria. This was followed by vetoes for other decisions on 4 February 2012 and 19 July 2012. Russia's views on Syria - reflected in the discourse - were that this was an internal affair of Syria. Putin writes in his article regarding the United Nations' desire to intervene;

The Arab Spring was initially perceived with a hope for positive change. People in Russia sympathized with those who were seeking democratic reform. However, it soon became clear that events in many countries were not following a civilized scenario. Instead of asserting democracy and protecting the rights of the minority, attempts were being made to depose an enemy and to

²⁴⁸ Bryanski, Gleb, Putin likens U.N. Libya resolution to crusades, 21 March 2011, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-libya-russia/putin-likens-u-n-libya-resolution-to-crusades-idUSTRE72K3JR20110321>

stage a coup, which only resulted in the replacement of one dominant force with another even more aggressive dominant force.²⁴⁹

Putin expresses his attitude towards the UNSC decision on Syria with the following words as well;

We are against the adoption of UN Security Council resolutions that may be interpreted as a signal to armed interference in the domestic developments of Syria. Guided by this consistent approach in early February, Russia and China prevented the adoption of an ambiguous resolution that would have encouraged one side of this domestic conflict to resort to violence.²⁵⁰

However, veto power was not enough for Russia; In November 2011, 3 warships were sent to Tartus to intimidate and the news that a warplane would be sent to the press was leaked. In his article, Putin signals that Iran has been taken to the center of the international agenda and that the threat of an attack is always on the Russian agenda.²⁵¹ The fact that Iran, which attracts the attention of the world about the nuclear arming program in the region alone, will be an unwanted outcome of Russia, and it is trying to prevent Syria from

²⁴⁹ Putin, Vladimir, Russia and the changing world , 27 February 2012, <https://rusemb.org.uk/press/612>

²⁵⁰ Ibid.

²⁵¹ Putin, Vladimir, Russia and the changing world , 27 February 2012

pursuing a pro-Western policy.²⁵² In the balance based on the relationship of interest, Russia is aware that the slightest movement of Syria has the potential to move stones of different sizes and tries to protect Iran against a possible military action against Iran; and the regime change pressures in Syria.²⁵³ Based on Putin's letter, it will not be wrong to say that Russia's priority issues could be grouped under these two headings in early 2012.

Given the rupture in bilateral relations in the post-Cold War era, which is mentioned in the historical development of Syrian relations in Russia, when Syria assesses the threats facing Syria in and out of the post-Cold War period, it goes to a policy of articulation to the party that can provide the support it needs in order not to waste the last bullet attention. On the other hand, it will not be possible for Russia to say that Syria is an eternal friend. When Yeltsin's idea of Russian thorny issue in Russian foreign policy is taken into consideration, it is evident that both parties cannot find what they are looking for in each other and that they are not indispensable for each other when they do not have the motivation to take the steps to fill the gaps or ignore the deficiencies. In the current situation, since the beginning of Syria's Arab Spring experience, Russia has stood firmly and steadily behind Syria, since it would not be acceptable for Russia to establish itself with a Western-oriented power and would endanger the Russian presence in the region. It is possible to observe that the triangle of relations between Syria, Iran and Russia has

²⁵² Goodarzi 2013.

²⁵³ Goodarzi, 2013.

been strengthened since any shrink between two of them would have common consequences for all.

At the end of May 2011, Russia opposed any UN involvement in the Syrian uprising stating that the 'situation in Syria did not pose any threat to international peace and security' and that an intervention would destabilize the nation further. Russia also stated that President Assad had attempted major reforms.²⁵⁴ However, in June, sufficient pressure was put on Russian policy makers for them to accept the visit of a Syrian antigovernment protesters group to Moscow. After the group met with a Russian envoy, Russia called for 'an end to any and all forms of violence'. The Western press quickly seized on this as a Russian shift away from Syria.²⁵⁵ Through July 2011, the Russian Prime Minister, Dmitri Medvedev worked in conjunction with German Chancellor, Angela Merkel, to seek a solution to the Syrian crisis. Their aim was to end the violence that was becoming widespread to ensure that the country did not slide into civil war like Libya.²⁵⁶

²⁵⁴ Meyer, Henry, Cook, Brad, & Arkhipov, Ilya, 'Russia warns U.S., NATO not to aid Syrian protesters after Libya', *Bloomberg News*, 2 June 2011, http://www.cleveland.com/world/index.ssf/2011/06/russia_warns_us_nato_not_to_ai.html

²⁵⁵ 'Kremlin Envoy Calls for End to Syria Violence', *The Moscow Times*, 28 June 2011, <https://themoscowtimes.com/news/kremlin-envoy-calls-for-end-to-syria-violence-7898> accessed on 15 November 2016.

²⁵⁶ Baetz, Juergen, 'Medvedev: Syria must not go the same way as Libya', *The Associated Press World Stream*, 19 July 2011 at Highbeam Research <https://www.highbeam.com/doc/1A1-6623ffa3b2104a6d817fa8dbb1f4fdef.html> and *Al Arabiya News*, 22 July 2011, <https://www.alarabiya.net/articles/2011/07/22/158845.html>

4.4. On the Road to the Russian Intervention of 2015

Considering Syrian history, we see that it was full of harassing and imprisoning political critics of government, strict control of the rights of free speech and assembly.²⁵⁷ As a result of the ‘emergency rule’ lasted nearly forty year from 1963 to 2011; the state of human rights has been criticized harshly as well. Together with the discrimination against women²⁵⁸ and ethnic minorities especially in the public sector; nearly all determinants of the equations pointing the Arab Spring were ready.

Pro-reform protests broke out in Daraa in 2011 demanded democratic reform and the release of political prisoners first. However, the protests were met by a government crackdown and the Syrian army was deployed to suppress any further unrest. Starting from the attitude directed towards school-boys; security forces shot and killed a number of people which triggered further protests that would turned into a civil war later on.

Prior to this civil war; Bashar al-Assad initiated certain policies in liberalizing economy on the road to a free market. The government encouraged the establishment of private banks and raised the prices of certain subsidized items. Since the emphasis of the reforms was on the service sector, these policy changes benefited only a minority of the population especially those

²⁵⁷ World Report 2010, Human Rights Watch

²⁵⁸ Violations against women in Syria and the disproportionate impact of the conflict on them – Universal Periodic Review of the Syrian Arab Republic submission to the Human Rights Council, May 2016.

with connections to the government²⁵⁹ which resulted in widespread crop failure, increase in food prices and mass migration to the urban.

On March, 2011; when protesters demanded democratic reform in Damascus; security forces opened fire on them. On March 20, 2011 it turned into a confrontation between officers and protesters caused 21 people's death. In three weeks, people started to demand the overthrow of Assad as well. After the large-scale attacks initiated by the security forces by using tanks, artillery and infantry. By the end of May, more than 1000 civilians and 150 security forces had been killed and 1000 were detained.

As Kainikara summarized; together with the environment prevalent during the crisis; geographical position of Syria and Assad government's autocratic policies combined with previously mentioned problems within the country.²⁶⁰ They were so critical that it drew Middle Eastern and Westerns states. As a result; starting from pro- and anti-government parties; combating each other; belligerents increased to a significant number with their own objectives they carry since 2011 never converge to each other they transformed into in the end.²⁶¹

²⁵⁹ World Fact Book, CIA, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/>

²⁶⁰ Kainikara, 2018 p.34

²⁶¹ Ibid. p.34

Initially, Assad regime can put down protests by using their own security forces before it turned into an armed conflict that will resulted in civil war. However, mid-2015s were the times Assad was in need of Russian support in order to survive. In the beginning, Assad relied on Syrian Armed Forces. It was composed of regular soldiers as Yara stated.²⁶² However, government was supported in terms of military equipment and financial needs; Syrian National Defense Force was on the stage.²⁶³ It was also the source of direct combat against rebellions on the ground.

Apart from official forces; Shabiha was said to be the militia supporting Assad since it was drawn from Alawite minority. From the words of Abdul Salam, former ally of Rami Makhlouf; making of the shabiha – ‘armed criminal gangs and terrorists’²⁶⁴ was Assad’s plan of dealing with the dirty work on the

²⁶² Yara, Bayoumi ‘Military defections expose cracks in Syrian army’, Reuters World News, 30 June 2011, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-syria-defections/military-defections-expose-cracks-in-syrian-armyidUSTRE75S5E620110629>

²⁶³ Weiss

²⁶⁴ Syria unrest: Who are the shabiha?, 29 May 2012, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-14482968>

ground.²⁶⁵ Later on, Shabiha was declared as a terrorist organization by the U.S. as well.²⁶⁶

Apart from Muslims, Christian minority was said to support Assad regime since matter of survival was key to Christian minority as Kainikara stated. Since they believed that they can only guarantee their survival within a secular ruler, Assad became the only option for them.²⁶⁷ Moreover, the words of Bishop Nicholas James Samra of the Melkite Eparchy of Newton is supporting this idea in a way that raising the question that who will come in if Assad goes by stressing on the 'big fear' of the majority.²⁶⁸ Christian minority makes up nearly 10% of the population and among those who tolerate Assad since they saw him as the guarantor of stability. Especially considering the possibility of an Islamic state as rebellions trying to achieve; it wouldn't be a surprise when Christian minority is backing Assad.

²⁶⁵ Amor, Salwa, How Bashar al-Assad created the feared shabiha militia: an insider speaks, 23 March 2014
<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/middleeast/syria/10716289/How-Bashar-al-Assad-created-the-feared-shabiha-militia-an-insider-speaks.html>

²⁶⁶ United States Commission on International Religious Freedom, USCIRF Annual Report 2014 - Countries of Particular Concern: Syria, 30 April 2014, available at: <https://www.refworld.org/docid/5369e5b9b.html>

²⁶⁷ Kainikara 2018 p.37

²⁶⁸ Jones Emily, Assad Regime Named Number One Threat to Syria's Christians After 120+ Churches Intentionally Attacked, 09 October 2019,
<https://www1.cbn.com/cbnnews/world/2019/september/assad-regime-named-as-number-one-threat-to-syria-s-christians-after-more-than-120-churches-intentionally-attacked>

Being an important part of the 'Axis of Resistance'; anti-Western and anti-Israeli alliance of Syria, Iran and Lebanese Hezbollah in a broader sense²⁶⁹; evolution of Syrian uprisings into a civil war was critical for Hezbollah too. In the confrontation with Israel; Hezbollah considered himself as the frontline and Syria as the 'backbone'.²⁷⁰ Moreover, as Sullivan stated; without Syria, Iranian support to Hezbollah would be more difficult and Hezbollah would suffer more without outside military and financial assistance and this line should be secured from any rebel interference.²⁷¹ Moreover, there is also this concern for Hezbollah that further overthrow of Assad regime will be replaced by Sunni-dominated one which Hezbollah wouldn't be agreed upon.²⁷²

The scheme mentioned above can draw a close relationship between Syria and Hezbollah. However, he stressed on the mutual distrust and conflicting goals as the defining characteristics of the relations since both parties had conflicting political priorities.²⁷³ His contribution was critical since it showed that alliance formation mechanisms were and are based on material interests

²⁶⁹ Sullivan Marisa, Hezbollah in Syria, Middle East Security Report 19, April 2014.

²⁷⁰ Hassan Nasrallah called Syria as the backbone of the resistance. Report, p.9, 5.dipnot

²⁷¹ Sullivan 2014, p.10

²⁷² Ibid.

²⁷³ Sullivan 2014.

states seek to maximize. This situation was not unique for Syria and Russia so as relations with other actors.

So as major aim of pro-Assad groups is keeping Assad regime on power; the opposition seek to remove him. However, the armed opposition to the Syrian regime consists of disparate groups, from moderate ones to the radicals, even fighting each other from time to time.

In August 2015, President Assad openly admitted that he couldn't hold the territory, his remaining military forces were incapable of doing so. The Syrian Army was reduced to less than 50% of its pre-war strength. Moreover, they couldn't achieve expected results with inexperienced, young soldiers. More importantly, Syrian Army, in other words, Syrian government was controlling only about 17 per cent of its territory as Columb stated.²⁷⁴ In addition, as Putin pointed out;

Sixty percent of Syria is controlled either by ISIS, Jabhat al Nusra, or other terrorist organizations, organizations that have been reorganized as terrorist by the US as well as other countries and the UN. It is them and not anyone else who have control over 60 percent of Syrian territory.²⁷⁵

Russia couldn't remain indifferent to Bashar Assad's appeal for assistance to Russia. This decision of moving from diplomatic support to physical

²⁷⁴ Strack, Columb, 'Syrian Government no longer controls 83% of the country', IHS Jane's 360, 24 August 2015, <http://www.janes.com/article/53771/syriangovernment-no-longer-controls-83-of-the-country>

²⁷⁵ Putin, Vladimir, 'Vladimir Putin Quotes about Syria', *AZ Quotes*, http://www.azquotes.com/author/11940-Vladimir_Putin/tag/syria cited in Kainikara 2018

intervention was thus the result of Assad's request. With their involvement; Russia had a chance to show his military strength, capability on the ground to his potential customers in the Middle East as well²⁷⁶ as a great power. Second, it would contain ISIS without fearing a spill into Russian territory. This was very crucial for them since ISIS included a large number of Chechen fighters who would have the potential to become active in Russian territory as well²⁷⁷. Interestingly, this containment policy was nearly same as the policy Soviets subject to during the Cold-War years.

Russia had embarked on a war that was fought by combining all elements of national power that were military forces, diplomacy, information, intelligence, economic strength from the beginning of the intervention. Initially, in terms of territorial advance; intervention didn't gain much for the Syrian regime. Almost a year had spent to start repelling rebels and ISIS. However, at the table, Russia had placed itself as a promoter of political dialogue.²⁷⁸

From Soviet Union to Russia; transformation in the balance of power and some sort of equilibrium achieved in the region had changed. Dissolution of the Soviet Union left the Middle East to the U.S. himself and his understandings of security and governance. Soviet was active in the Middle

²⁷⁷ Russian air strikes hit CIA-trained rebels, commander says', Reuters World News, 1 October 2015, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisissyria-camp-idUSKCN0RV4KM20151001> cited in Kainikara 2018.

²⁷⁸ Kainikara, 2018 p.96

East as a threat to the Western security in terms of ideology and arms suppliers. Soviet legacy left to Russia in the Middle East remained the same together with being a diplomatic agent this time. In addition, rapid attack and operational capabilities and military hardware showed that Russia remained a modern military superpower as well as compared to the U.S and its unsuccessful attempts and his afterwards in Iraq.

While re-establishing Russia's position and stressing on Russian role as a major outside power, together with containing IS; Russia would also had a chance to build geopolitical alliance that allow them to create conditions for a permanent military presence in the region as well. Recalling Russian priorities that protecting Russian interest in the region through stationing military forces, containing IS and extremist ideology; we can say that Russia involved not only to hold Assad on power but also to protect its long-lasting alliance with Syria as well.

In order to express the importance of Syria for Russia; we should also picture ups and downs regarding the relations with other states. When Turkey shot down a Russian fighter, relations with Turkey had entered into another dimension. Relations remained tense until May 2017; the time which Russia had lifted the sanctions.

Russian intervention of 2015, specifically military deployment of Russian forces to Latakia represented different meanings for each above-mentioned belligerents of the war. On the one hand, it made it impossible for the

opposition to capture the province; it provided a lifeline for Syrian military forces and a supply chain for Hezbollah forces on the other.²⁷⁹ Kainikara summarized Russian action of starting air strikes on targets in the anti-Assad held territories under three points for Russia that expanding its political and military influence in the region, emphasizing its national will to initiate decisive action and supporting its allies. Although it can be hard to consider those three commitments of the Russian intervention separately; this chapter will stress on the motivations behind the third point through alliance formation mechanisms undertaken by Russia and Syria.

As analyzed previously as well; what was certain in Russian response towards Syrian civil war of 2011 was that the survival of Assad regime should be provided. It couldn't be understood as the survival of Assad himself. As a priority, mid-term goal, one couldn't deny the fact that having Assad in power was very critical. However, as an ultimate goal, objective of Russian administration was ensuring the survival of the Syrian state since Syria will serve for her interests as a political entity.

First, what Russia tried to seek through his politics towards Syria is ensuring her position at the naval base Tartus, the only one in the Mediterranean which is critical to its power projection capability. By projecting Assad and strengthening his physical presence in the country; Russia is also ensuring

²⁷⁹ Kainikara 2018 p.63

that it will play a critical role in determining Syria's future as well whether with Bashar al-Assad or not.

Russian move of taking a decisive action and direct involvement instead of ambiguities and changing aims, Russia strengthened her position in a way that US can no longer deny her significance and can no longer isolate Russia in her conflict with IS. Furthermore, focus was also shifted from Assad to IS since defeating IS became the major and common objective of the two as Kainikara pointed out.²⁸⁰

Since 1980s, Russia was always active in the region as an arms supplier. That's why, Russian intervention shocked many. Considering operations; military campaign demonstrated how powerful Russian weapons are as a proof of Russia being a superpower in practicing Gerasimov Doctrine²⁸¹ on the ground. As a result, Russia ended isolation imposed by the US on the one hand and shifted major focus from Assad to IS on the other. Furthermore, Russia initiated certain peace processes as well. September 16 became a significant date in the name of discussing the resolution of the Syrian Civil War in Ankara when the presidents of Russia, Iran and Turkey met²⁸² as an

²⁸⁰ Kainikara 2018. p.63

²⁸¹ 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*, January-February 2016.

²⁸² Ramani, Samuel Russia's efforts to expand the Astana process in Syria, 7 October 2019.

initial step of Astana Peace Process. Throughout the negotiations, as Shibutov pointed out, settlement in the Middle East was as equally important as the settlement in Syria.²⁸³ By positioning itself in key players regarding this settlement process; Russia showed how it is interested in its influential position in the eyes of both regional and international actors of that conflict.

After eight years of conflict evolved into a civil war in Syria, we can picture the situation in the county as follows. Areas controlled by Assad are mainly under protection of Russia and Iran. North-Western part of the country is protected under Sunni-rebellion groups and the Southern West is under the U.S. protected groups.²⁸⁴ Considering its picture, together with the Russian presence in the region, it couldn't be wrong to say that Russian influence over the Syrian government is at the highest point throughout their relationship. Not only in terms of military protection and arms and training assistance, Russian backing in managing regional and international diplomacy is very key to Syria. This kind of influence is taken into account as direct involvement in Syrian domestic issues; Bashar Assad's words stating that 'not once did Russia try to impose anything on us'²⁸⁵ pointing out the issue from the Syrian perspective claiming that balance was always preserved among the alliance formed between Syria and Russia. However, we can say that depending on

²⁸³ Lusev, Geonid, The Astana Process - Problems and Prospects, <http://www.themarketforideas.com/the-astana-process-problems-and-prospects-a236/>

²⁸⁴ Lund 2019, p.33

²⁸⁵ Lund p.33

the complexity and the diversity of the parties of the conflict, Russian-Syrian and even Iranian alliance will evolve into another one depending on the moves Russia will take around the new understanding of conflict management points of view and how far it can go for Syria by preserving its own interests.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS

In this thesis, the major aim was pointing out Syrian-Russian relations and alliance formation mechanisms regarding small state foreign policy behavior of Syria. Regarding key findings of the research made for this thesis; it can be seen that starting from the period in which decisions made by Syria as an independent state since 1946, it can stand to both domestic and international challenges itself up to a certain point. Being a newly established state whose not only politics but economic, social and even cultural life was dominated by Ottoman rule for a long period of time and by French after World War I; Syria was in need of articulating itself around a great power reflexively. Especially considering its priority of maintaining its survival from the very beginning, foreign policy choices of this small state was surrounded more by its vulnerabilities compared to its strengths.

As Fox pointed out in determining major tendencies of small states behaviors, their motivation was shaped around security and survival of the state from the very beginning of the considerations. Considering Syria, what we observe was that throughout the Cold War years, Syrian tendency towards forming alliances was seen as a common reflection of its reaction against certain challenges it had to face. From United Arab Republic to enhanced relations

with the Soviet Union, what is certain for Syria was that it was in need of outside support not only in political terms but also in economic and social terms that would determine the way it turned its face. It can also be observed that, depending on the political leadership in the country and the tendency of its ideological preferences, alliance formation mechanisms shaped around; there were major considerations for Syria at the top of the list that it cannot ignore or turn its back such as historical claims associated with the project of 'Great Syria', relations based on Israeli issue and significance of Lebanon for itself. Hafez Assad's major contribution regarding that issue was the words he voiced that 'without alliances, Syria could do nothing'. He couldn't list Syrian interest and the leverage it had in order to achieve; instead, he tried to bring Syrian state into being under certain shadows it approached with parallel to a decision that a small state should make.

Hence, considering security determinants and the survival of a state, military capabilities were one of the most significant issue for the small states around which their major expenditures were positioned. Considering Soviets as an arms-supplier of Syria its dependency over the military and technical power imported from the Soviets and its growing significance considering Cold-War politics and incoming threat directed towards Syria; we can say that Syrian foreign policy priorities regarding its alliance formation mechanisms were in compliance with the decision would be made as a small state.

What we observe from the Cold-War years' alliance mechanisms; we saw a relative balance in the region in the sense that it brought a stable table around

which states could have a seat. However, the end of the Cold War and the dissolution of the Soviets brought new challenges to international politics as well as the regional dynamics. Those times marked a new chapter in Syrian politics too together with the political elite operating under Bashar al-Assad. As mentioned before and tried to be analyzed in this thesis; maintaining its power and sphere of influence under a great power backing; Syrian moves were somehow protected. If not, under a balancing system, there were a carrot and stick model of relations according to the choices made of a particular state. This was also the result of the bipolar international system in which states tried to preserve their political integrity without major sacrifices.

The U.S. as a new hegemon, however, brought different challenges. Together with the collapse of the Soviet Union and its absence from the equation the region physicalize; Syria staggered enough to drag itself towards a period of isolation in the region. Under Hafez Assad; Syrian political, economic, social and cultural structure were in compliance with that of the Soviet to some extent that allow them to take same moves without trying to adopt Western ones. However, under Bashar al-Assad, as a driving force of the change the world had to undergo; the idea of reform started to walk around in Syrian population and when those ideas combined with some sort of pressure, Bashar al-Assad tried to fill the vacuum with the Western powers first.

Inherited Soviet-Syrian, Russian - Syrian later on, relations weren't disappear overnight. However, together with Russian relative withdrawal from the region and behind Syria's back made Syria vulnerable to regional threats. Syrian

attempt at establishing good relations with the West, on the other hand, couldn't be achieved due to its misinterpretation in a sense that supporting Iraqi regime against the U.S. in 2000s. What we saw so far regarding Syrian foreign policy decisions as small state behaving under a principle priority of survival were in compliance with the moves undertake in the literature. In other words, they were in compliance with the role that was written for a small state.

Nevertheless, Assad has forgotten his lines and tried to act on his own by putting aside the requirements of being a small state. Regarding his decision he made between Saddam and the U.S., we can say that it represented a major breakdown of its role as a small state of the region. Instead, he hoped to behave in pursuit of its claims rather than its needs and realistic considerations. However, Syria couldn't stand still and couldn't evade attacks coming from the U.S. and the West on its own. Syria had to face regional isolation and lost its sphere of influence in Lebanese territory as reinforced under the United Nations Security Council Resolution No.1559.

When we came to 2005; with reference to the U.S. response against Syrian position regarding the U.S. invasion of Iraq, Russian-Syrian rapprochement since then will be elaborated under a small state foreign policy behavior of Syria. Although there were certain convergence between Iran and Hezbollah as a non-state one in the region; Russian factor was very critical for Syria while it was also suffering from economic problems as well as the political ones. This enduring alliance between Syria and Russia showed its strength

during the Arab Spring experience of Syria as well. Especially considering Russian diplomatic support initially and its fight for Syria at the international level by using its veto power at the UNSC and the physical presence in the region in 2015; what we saw was a strong alliance, in which both great power and the small state remained loyal to their role, strengthened by regional and international challenges directed towards both Syrian and Russian interest.

While doing this research and making major assumptions related to Syrian-Russian relations evaluated under small state foreign policy behavior and alliance formation mechanisms; major issues taken place under the period analyzed, major incident considered as turning points and major words voiced that changed the course of actions and considerations determining one step further for the states were tried to be evaluated under organic limits of a master's thesis. In a broader sense, Russian-Syrian relations couldn't be analyzed only regarding the two countries' realities, expectations and products regarding their alliance. Instead, it is a complex web of issues, considerations and result of too many relations' consequences both at regional and international level.

Hence, there were certain issues couldn't be a part of the research made under Syria-Russian alliance evaluated under small state foreign policy behavior studies. At regional level, Syrian relations with Egypt, Iraq, Iran in a detailed way, Saudi Arabia couldn't be analyzed as well as Turkish-Syrian relations. The projection of those countries' contributions and challenges brought to Syrian foreign policy decisions were included in a limited context,

more related issues and distinct event caused major considerations gained a seat in this research made for this thesis. Moreover, Iranian-Russian-Syrian triangle couldn't be mention in a detailed way under regional alliance mechanisms in which Syrian involvement was very critical.

At international level, considering Cold-War politics, relations between the U.S. and Syria wasn't take place as a continual timeline of relations. Instead, major issues and explicit considerations that had a significant impact on Russian-Syrian alliance were mentioned and referred in this thesis. While evaluating Syrian-Russian relations as a whole, what was significant was the point that Syrian relations with its neighboring states and other regional actors as well as international players affected its rapprochement to Russia as well as Russian consideration of Syrian position regarding its own interest at home and abroad. That's why, position of the U.S. and policies adopted were taken into consideration in a detailed way compared to the other. However, it had certain limits and we had to be selective considering the determination of the issues taken into consideration. That's why, certain issues remained out of the scope of the research.

Being aware of the fact that this research provided a roadmap to Syrian-Russian relation through the prism of alliance formation mechanism and foreign policy behavior tendencies of a small state surrounded by vulnerabilities and capabilities like Syria, each assumptions made and key findings come in sight also represent a beginning of a deeper analysis and light the way for a further research related to this issue. Every limitation and

challenge resulted from the period in which this thesis was evolved will become an opportunity and an area of research by putting a comma.

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APPENDICIES

A. TURKISH SUMMARY / TÜRKE ÖZET

Bu tezde, Arap Baharı sonrası Suriye-Rusya ilişkileri, Suriye'nin küçük devlet dış politik davranışına ilişkin ittifak oluşum mekanizmaları çerçevesinde ele alınmıştır. Bu tez için yapılan araştırmanın temelini öncelikle literatürde küçük devlet kavramı, küçük devletlere yönelik yapılan tanımlar, küçük devletlerin belirlenebilir ve belirlenemez sınırları oluşturmuştur. Realizm çerçevesinde ittifak oluşumları, soğuk savaş dönemi ve sonrası güç dengesi politikaları ve bu kavramlar çerçevesinde devletlerin yönelimleri ve güç algıları da bu bağlamda dikkate alınmıştır.

Araştırmanın derinleştirildiği noktada ve bu Suriye-Rusya ilişkileri bağlamında ele alınmaya başlandığında, öncelikle Suriye'nin 1946'dan bu yana bağımsız bir devlet olarak aldığı kararlardan, hem yerel hem de uluslararası zorluklardan ve salt siyaseti değil, bunun yanı sıra ekonomik, sosyal ve hatta kültürel yaşamına da nüfuz etmiş uzun süren bir Osmanlı egemenliği süreci ve akabinde Fransız himayesinde kendini var etmeye çalışan Suriye'nin öncelikleri değerlendirilmiş; bu hususların refleksel olarak büyük bir güç etrafında kendisini ifade etmeye ihtiyacını doğurduğu görülmüştür. Özellikle hayatta kalmaya devam etme önceliğini göz önünde bulundurarak, bu küçük

devletin dış politika seçenekleri devletin yumuşak karnına odaklanmış, zayıf yönleriyle çevrelenmiştir.

Fox'un belirttiği gibi, küçük devletlerin davranışlarının ana eğilimlerini, motivasyonları, devletin güvenliği ve hayatta kalmasıyla ilgili düşüncelerin şekillendirmektedir. Suriye'ye baktığımızda, gözlemlediğimiz şeyin Soğuk Savaş yıllarında Suriye'nin ittifaklar kurma eğiliminin karşı karşıya kaldığı bazı zorluklara karşı tepkisinin ortak bir yansıması olarak görüldüğünü söylemek yanlış olmayacaktır. Birleşik Arap Cumhuriyeti'nden Sovyetler Birliği ile olan ilişkilerin güçlendirilmesine kadar, Suriye için kesin olan, yalnızca siyasi açıdan değil, yüzünü çevireceği yolunu belirleyecek ekonomik ve sosyal koşullarda da dış desteğe ihtiyaç duymasındır. Ülkedeki siyasi liderliğe ve ideolojik tercihlerin eğilimine bağlı olarak, çevresinde şekillenen ittifak oluşum mekanizmalarına ilişkin listenin başında Suriye'nin 'Büyük Suriye' projesiyle ilgili tarihsel iddialar, İsrail meselesine dayanan ilişkiler ve Lübnan'ın kendisi için önemi gibi görmezden gelemeyeceği veya geri dönemeyeceği konusunda önemli düşünceler bulunmaktadır. Hafez Assad'ın bu konudaki en büyük katkısı ise ve izlediği politikalarında hatırında olan cümle ittifaklar olmadan Suriye'nin hiçbir şey yapamayacağı sözleridir. Bu bağlamda, Suriye'nin kırmızı çizgilerinin dışında konumlandığı çıkarlarından ziyade bunun yerine, Suriye devletini küçük bir devlet olduğu bilincinde olarak vermesi gereken kararlarla paralel bir politika izlendiğini söylemek mümkündür.

Dolayısıyla, güvenlik belirleyicileri ve bir devletin hayatta kalması göz önüne alındığında, askeri yetenekler, büyük harcamalarının konumlandırıldığı küçük

devletler için en önemli konular arasındadır. Sovyetleri Suriye'nin bir silah tedarikçisi olarak kabul ederek, Sovyetler'den ithal edilen askeri ve teknik güce olan bağımlılığını ve Soğuk Savaş politikalarını ve Suriye'ye yönelik tehditleri dikkate alarak artan önemini göz önünde bulundurduğumuzda; Suriye dış politikasının ittifak oluşum mekanizmalarına ilişkin önceliklerinin küçük devlet olarak alınacak kararlarla uyumlu olduğunu söyleyebiliriz.

Soğuk Savaş yıllarının ittifak mekanizmalarından gözlemlenen iki kutuplu dengenin yerini Soğuk Savaşın sona ermesi ve Sovyetlerin dağılması ile bölgesel politikaların yanı sıra uluslararası politikalara da yeni zorlukların aldığı görülmüştür. Bu kapsamda, Başar Esad'ın altında faaliyet gösteren siyasi seçkinlerle birlikte Suriye siyasetinde de yeni bir devrin başladığını söylemek yanlış olmayacaktır. Daha önce de belirtildiği ve bu tezde analiz edilmeye çalışıldığı gibi; gücünü ve etki alanını büyük bir güç desteği altında konumlandırmak Suriye'nin küçük bir devlet olarak barındırdığı ve her hareketinde bir parçasını yansıttığı bir husustu. Ancak ABD'nin yeni bir hegemon olarak varlığı farklı zorluklar getirdi. Sovyetler Birliği'nin çöküşü ve denklemden yoksun olması ile birlikte bölgedeki güç boşluğunun Suriye açısından ele alındığında Suriye'nin attığı adımlar ve bir noktada kendi gerçeğinin dışına taşan hareketleriyle bölgedeki izolasyon dönemine doğru kendisini sürüklediği görülmüştür.

Hafez Esad döneminde Suriye'nin politik, ekonomik, sosyal ve kültürel yapısı, Batıya dönük bir hamleye müsaade etmeyecek ölçüde Sovyetlerin yapısı ile uyumlu idi. Bununla birlikte, Başar Esad altında, değişimin itici gücü olarak,

reform fikri Suriye nüfusunda dolaşmaya başladı ve bu fikirler bir çeşit baskı ile birleştiğinde, Başar Esad bölgesel ve uluslararası ittifak arayışlarında yaratılan güç boşluğunu önce Batılı güçlerle doldurmaya çalıştı.

Sovyet-Suriye, daha sonra ise Rusya - Suriye, ilişkilerinin bir gecede yok olduğunu söylemek doğru olmayacaktır. Ancak, Rusya'nın bölgeden ve Suriye'nin arkasından görece geri çekilmesi ile birlikte Suriye'yi bölgesel tehditlere karşı savunmasız bıraktığı bir gerçektir.. Öte yandan, Suriye'nin Batı'yla iyi ilişkiler kurma girişimi, 2000'lerde ABD'ye karşı Irak rejimini destekleyen bir anlamda yanlış yorumlanması nedeniyle elde edilememiştir. Küçük devlet olarak dış politika tercihlerini incelediğimiz Suriye'nin, hayatta kalma ilkesi altında hamlelerinin literatürdeki hakim tartışmalarla uyumlu olduğunu söylemek mümkün olsa da bu noktada bir kopuş Başar Esad döneminde kendini var etmiştir

Bu kapsamda, Esad küçük bir devlet olmanın gerekliliklerini bir kenara koyarak kendi başına hareket etmeye çalıştı. Saddam ve ABD arasında verdiği kararlar ilgili olarak, bölgenin küçük bir devlet rolündeki rolünün büyük bir bölümünü temsil ettiğini söyleyebiliriz. Bunun yerine, ihtiyaçlarından ve gerçekçi düşüncelerinden ziyade taleplerinin peşinde davranmayı umuyordu. Ancak küçük bir devlet olduğu ve belirli sınırlar çerçevesinde hareket etmek durumunda olduğu gerçeğinden kaçamayan Suriye, yanlış ve kapasitesinin üzerinde verdiği kararlarının sorumluluklarını göğüsleyememiş, bir diğer deyişle ayakta kalmayı başaramamış ve ABD ve Batı'dan gelen saldırıları tek başına karşılamamıştır. Suriye, bölgesel izolasyonla yüzleşmek zorunda

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2005'e geldiğimizde; ABD'nin Irak'a işgali konusundaki Suriye'ye karşı tepkisi ile ilgili olarak, Rusya-Suriye'nin yakınlaşması Suriye'nin küçük devlet dış politika davranışı altında ele alınmıştır. Her ne kadar İran ve Hizbullah arasında bir yakınlaşma sağlanmışsa da; Suriye'de Rus faktörü çok önemli bir etken olmuş, siyasi sorunların yanı sıra ekonomik sorunlardan da zarar gören Suriye için tercih olmanın ötesine geçmiştir. Suriye ile Rusya arasındaki bu kalıcı ittifak, Suriye'nin Arap Baharı deneyimi sırasında da gücünü göstermiştir. Özellikle başlangıçta Rusya'nın diplomatik desteğini ve Birleşmiş Milletler Güvenlik Konseyi çatısı altında veto gücünü kullanmaktan çekinmediği görülmüştür. Bu itibarla, hem büyük gücün hem de küçük devletin rollerine sadık kaldığı, hem Suriye hem de Rus çıkarlarına yönelik bölgesel ve uluslararası zorluklarla pekiştirilmiş güçlü bir ittifak haline gelmesi sonucu doğmuştur.

Bu araştırmayı yaparken ve küçük devlet dış politikası davranışı ve ittifak oluşturma mekanizmaları kapsamında değerlendirilen Suriye-Rusya ilişkileri ile ilgili temel varsayımlarda bulunurken; İncelenen dönemde ele alınan önemli konular, dönüm noktaları olarak kabul edilen hadiseler ve devletler için bir adım sonrasına uzanan eylemlerin ve kaygıların yönünü değiştiren önemli sözler dile getirildiği, yüksek lisans tezinin organik sınırları altında değerlendirilmeye çalışılmıştır. Bu bağlamda, Rusya-Suriye ilişkileri yalnızca

iki ülkenin gerçeklikleri, ittifakları ile ilgili beklentileri ve katkıları ile analiz edilemeyecek, bunun aksine, hem bölgesel hem de uluslararası düzeyde çok sayıda ilişkinin sonuçlarının, sorunlarının, düşüncelerin ve dinamiklerinin yer aldığı karmaşık bir ağıdır.

Bu nedenle, küçük devletlerin dış politika davranış çalışmaları kapsamında değerlendirilen Suriye-Rusya ittifakı kapsamında yapılan araştırmaların bir parçası olamayan ancak önem arz eden bazı hususlar da mevcuttur. Bölgesel düzeyde, Suriye, Mısır, Irak, İran'la ilişkiler detaylı bir şekilde analiz edilememiştir. Dahası, İran-Rus-Suriye üçgeni, Suriye'nin katılımının çok kritik olduğu bölgesel ittifak mekanizmaları altında ayrıntılı bir çalışma olarak yer almamıştır. Bu ülkelerin Suriye dış politika kararlarına getirdiği katkı ve zorlukların sınırlı bir bağlamda ele alınması da, bu tez için yapılan bu araştırmada önemli kazanımlara neden olmuştur.

Uluslararası düzeyde, Soğuk Savaş politikaları göz önüne alındığında, ABD ile Suriye arasındaki ilişkiler sürekli bir ilişki zaman çizelgesi olarak ele alınamamıştır. Bunun yerine, Rusya-Suriye ittifakı üzerinde önemli bir etkisi olan ana konular ve açık düşüncelerden bahsedilmiş ve bu tezde atıfta bulunulmuştur. Suriye-Rusya ilişkilerini bir bütün olarak değerlendirirken, önemli olan nokta, Suriye'nin komşu devletlerle ve diğer bölgesel aktörlerle ve uluslararası aktörlerle ilişkilerinin, Rusya'ya yakınlıklarını ve aynı zamanda Rusya'daki yurtiçinde ve yurtdışında yaşadığı problemlerden de etkilenmesi ve ittifakın temellerinin bu ilkeler doğrultusunda da atılmasıdır. Bu nedenle, ABD'nin konumu ve benimsenen politikalar, diğerlerine göre ayrıntılı bir

şekilde dikkate alınmıştır. Ancak, bu konuda da benzer sınırlamalar dikkate alınmış ve detaylara ilişkin bazı konular araştırmanın kapsamı dışında bırakılmıştır.

Bu araştırma, Rusya –Suriye ittifakına, Arap Baharı sonrasında daha da derinleşen ilişkileri küçük devlet dış politika davranışları bağlamında ele almış ve bu kapsamdaki araştırmalar için bir kaynak oluşturmaktır. Eksikliklerinin bilincinde olarak, yüksek lisans tezi olarak ele alınması ve tezin yapısal sınırları çerçevesinde dikkate alınması neden alınması nedeniyle Rusya ve Suriye odağından dışarı çıkmamıştır. Ancak, bu araştırmanın bir sonraki adıma taşınması sürecinde yol haritası oluşturma ve temsil ettiği eksiklerin tamamlanması yönünde bir araştırmaya kaynaklık etmesi durumunda amacına ulaşacaktır.

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