SYRIAN CRISIS AS A PROXY WAR: A NEW COLD WAR STARTED?

Duygu DERSAN ORHAN[*]

Abstract

More than four years has been passed since the people of Syria started their anti-governmental protests as a part of the wave of "Arab Spring". In the course of time, the crisis in Syria escalated into a "multi-proxy war" in which different countries with conflicting interests compete with each other. The Assad has regime managed to survive so far by aligning itself with Russia, Iran and China. On the other hand, the West played a role in supporting rebel groups and the political opposition along with certain Arab states. The international community failed to form a unified strategy in order to stop the violence in Syria. Rather, tense relations between the US and Russia have play out over the Syrian crisis which lead to the question if "a new Cold War started?" This paper aims to examine the motivations of international actors involving the Syrian crisis and to analyze the current structure of the international system over that crisis.

Keywords: Syria, conflict, proxy war, Russia, USA

VEKALET SAVAŞI OLARAK SURİYE KRİZİ: YENİ BİR SOĞUK SAVAŞ MI BAŞLADI?

Öz

Arap Baharı'nın bir dalgası olarak başlayan,Suriye'deki hükümet karşıtı hareketlerin üzerinden dört yıldan fazla bir zaman geçmiştir. Zaman içerisinde bu kriz farklı çıkarlar ekseninde birbiriyle rekabet eden ülkelerin "çoklu vekalet savaşına" dönüşmüştür. Esad rejimi devamlılığını bugüne kadar Rusya, İran ve Çin'in desteğiyle sağlamıştır. Diğer taraftan Batı, bazı Arap ülkelerini de yanına alarak isyancı grupları ve siyasi muhalefeti desteklemek suretiyle krizde bir rol oynamıştır. Uluslararası topluluk, Suriye'de devam eden şiddeti durdurma konusunda ortak bir strateji izleyememiştir. Aksine, ABD ve Rusya'nın Suriye krizi üzerinden yaşadığı gerilim akıllara "yeni bir Soğuk Savaş mı başlıyor?" sorusunu getirmektedir. Bu çalışma, Suriye krizine müdahil olan uluslararası aktörlerin amaçlarını ve kriz üzerinden uluslararası sistemin mevcut yapısını incelemeyi amaçlamaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Suriye, kriz, vekalet savaşı, Rusya, ABD

[*] Assist. Prof., Atılım University, FEAS, Department of International Relations, Ankara.

Introduction

Internal conflict in Syria started with the Arab Uprisings has been continuing for five years. Clashes in Syria turned into a humanitarian crisis with the death of thousands of civilians, intense clashes and forced migration. In addition to its humanitarian dimension, Syrian crisis became the playground for international powers with conflicting interests. After the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, the United States emerged as the world's sole superpower and the structure of the international system is defined as "unipolar". Today, with the balancing policies of Russia and China during the recent international crisis including Syria, the unipolar structure of the international system has been questioning.

Since the beginning of the conflict, US and the Western countries has been adopted a policy of toppling the Assad regime and maintaining support for the opposition forces, whereas Russia, China and Iran give open support to the Assad regime. The veto power of Russia and China in United Nations Security Council prevented to take any decision including international intervention and implementing sanctions. The formation of international groupings leads to discussions as the international system fundamentally shifted to multi-polarity. It is clear that the United States' economic and budgetary problems and errors during 2003 invasion of Iraq have made American involvement in the Middle East less attractive. US is not interested in another "state-building" process as it did in Iraq. At that point, contrary to its proactive policies during the past crises and conflicts in the Middle East, United States has largely taken a hands-off approach to the Syrian conflict. Despite calls for international intervention and in the existence of reasonable terms for "responsibility to protect", unwillingness of the major powers to solve the conflict interpreted by certain academics as the international system would be defined as a sort of "global apolarity". Rather than direct involvement, international powers involved in a proxy war through supporting Shiite and Sunni blocs and this fueled sectarian conflict in the Middle East. This study will analyze the discussions related with the current structure of the international system over the Syrian crisis; evaluate the reasons for the unwillingness for military intervention and to discuss the arguments if a new Cold War has started. Within the scope of the study, the main motivations of Russia as the leader of the pro-Assad camp (including China and Iran) and the USA backing the Syrian opposition will be examined (the West and the USA will be used interchangeably in the article).

Main Dynamics of the Syrian Uprising

The popular unrest started in Tunisia and Egypt at the end of 2010 resulted with the overthrow of dictatorial regimes. Protests reached Syria in

March 2011. Uprising started in the southern town of Deraa focused on calls for reform rather than overthrowing the Assad regime initially. According to observers, despite the political and economic problems, Syrian people seemed to support their young president Bashar al-Assad who had "an image as a populist anti-western modernizer".[1] While President Assad offered some reforms including lifting the emergency law and the release of political prisoners, his security forces responded with killing protestors. As protests spread and the regime violence continued, the uprising turned out to be a civil war with serious casualties and millions of refugees.

It is possible to come up with different explanations for the causes of Arab Spring. All these factors can be grouped into two headings as internal and external reasons. Authoritarian and oppressive governments, lack of democratic representation and fair elections, human rights violations, income inequalities, widespread poverty, rises in food prices, rise in education levels and discontent among the educated people are the main reasons that can be listed as internal grounds triggering the popular protests in the Arab world.[2] Although the popular unrest in Syria started as a part of the general wave of demonstrations in the Arab Middle East, it has a specific character. In addition to the general explanations, in the Syrian case, it is necessary to point out the ethnic and sectarian problems stemming from the heterogeneous structure of Syrian population. The political system centered on the Allawis had fostered divisions. Despite the strategies of inclusion of Sunni Arabs into the system starting from Hafiz al-Assad era as a way of regime survival, poor Sunni Arab areas and the Kurdish people had been alienated. As a result, the most strong opposition activity has been concentrated in the poorer Sunni Arab regions such as Deraa, Jisr al-Shughour, Homs, Idleb, Douma and Hama[3] and in the northern-east Syria mainly populated by the Kurdish population. In addition to that, regime's violent attack on the protestors across the country triggered the courses of events. The use of force radicalized the opposition and the calls for reform turned out to be a demand for regime change.

There are also those who perceive the protests in the Arab world as an externally driven process in order to create chaos in the region and to redesign it according to newly established interests. Since the Middle East had been a chessboard for the European powers, it is a tradition to perceive any development in the region as related with the West. In that case, this paper

---

[1] Christopper Phillips, "Syria's Bloody Arab Spring", *IDEAS Reports of London School of Economics*, (2012), p.37.
[2] Hasan Duran, Çağatay Özdemir, "Ortadoğu'nun Sancılarına Arap Baharı Çözüm Olabildi Mi?", *Akademik Araştırmalar Dergisi,* (2013-2014), 15 (59), pp.47-72.
[3] Philips, op.cit, p. 48.

argues that the uprisings started with the hopes of political, economic and social change provoked by internal actors however with the involvement of external actors, the conflict acquired a character of a proxy war.

Syrian uprising did not stay limited with the Middle East, it forced many international actors to reconsider their policy over Syria and to redefine their own strategic positions. Neighboring countries and the major international actors define their positions either by siding with Assad regime or with the opposition groups. According to Asseburg and Wimmen, external actors perceive the conflict "as a zero-sum game where success for one is automatically a defeat for the other".[4] Accordingly, this article aims to examine the motivations of the conflicting parties in the Syrian crisis and to discuss its implications for the international system.

U.S. Foreign Policy towards Syrian Crisis: Role of a Reluctant Superpower?

U.S. policy toward Syria since the 1980s has ranged from "confrontation and containment to cautious engagement".[5] U.S. was perceived by Syria as a "satellite of USSR" during the Cold War years. However, Hafiz Assad's pragmatic foreign policy vision provided two countries' engagement with each other even in the most intense years of superpower competition. 1990s were the golden ages for the relations for Syria and the U.S. When it lost the support of the Soviet Union; its superpower patron, Syria transformed its "rejectionist" foreign policy, making a historic decision to join in the American led anti-Iraq coalition in the 1990–1991 Gulf War. Relations between Syria and the West, especially the US, began to deteriorate at the beginning of the 2000s. The stalemate in the peace process, the death of Hafiz Assad, the election of "hawkish" Prime Minister Ariel Sharon in Israel and the rise of the neo-cons through the election of George W. Bush as US president in 2000 were perceived as reasons for this situation. However, the September 11 attacks on the US homeland had a deep impact on Syrian-US relations. Although Syria cooperated with US efforts to gather information about al-Qaeda and its members, the US did not find this sufficient and demanded it cut off relations with all organizations deemed "terrorist" by the US. The invasion of Iraq in 2003 had devastating effects on the Syrian-US relations. During the invasion,

[4] Muriel Asseburg and Heiko Wimmen, "Civil War in Syria: External Actors and Interests as Drivers of Conflict", German Institute for International and Security Affairs, *SWP Comments* 43 (December 2012), p. 3.

[5] Jeremt M. Sharp, Christopher M. Blanchard, Armed Conflict in Syria: U.S. and International Response", *Congressional Research Service*, (July 2012) 7-5700.

Syria was the subject of harsh criticism by the US administration, including that it was providing shelter for Iraqi insurgents and helping them to smuggle military equipment into the country.[6] After Lebanese Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri's assassination, which U.S. accused Syrian authorities, Syria's isolation by the West started. After Obama came to power with a more peaceful Middle East vision, he adopted a policy of limited rapprochement with Syria in 2009.

After the uprising started in Syria, President Obama called for the resignation of Bashar Assad on August 18, 2011 through saying "We have consistently said that President Assad must lead a democratic transition or get out of the way. He has not led. For the sake of the Syrian people, the time has come for President Assad to step aside."[7] In terms of international diplomacy, United States brought resolutions in the United Nations Security Council condemning the Syrian government. However, U.S.' plans were obstructed by Russia and China's vetoes in the UNSC. U.S. began to apply its own measures. The Obama administration expanded U.S. sanctions against the Syrian regime and its supporters. U.S. has designated many individuals and entities and froze their U.S.-based assets and prohibited their access to the U.S. financial system.[8] According to official sources, U.S. intelligence provided lethal aid to the elements of armed Syrian opposition not affiliated with terrorist groups, and non-lethal assistance to the peaceful elements of Syrian opposition such as medical supplies, night-vision goggles and communications equipment.[9]

It is announced that U.S. military has developed contingency plans for various type of interventions including a scenario for a no-fly zone as well as protecting chemical and biological sites in 2012.[10] Once again, Obama administration threatened Assad regime to respond militarily as a reaction to Syrian administration's use of chemical weapons against its adversaries in August 2013. However, a military intervention did not happen, conversely, U.S. accepted a Russian proposal to place Syrian chemical weapons under administration. This process also paved the way for convening a peace conference named as Geneva II Peace Conference under the auspices of United

---

[6] Duygu Dersan, "Responses to International Changes: A Neoclassical Realist Analysis of Syrian Foreign Policy- 1990-2005", *Middle East Techinal University, unprinted PhD Thesis*, (2012), p.211-212.

[7] "Syria: Assad must resign, says Obama", *The Guardian*, 18/10/2011, http://www.theguardian.com/world/2011/aug/18/syria-assad-must-resign-obama (Accessed on 05/10/2015)

[8] Sharp and Blanchard, op.cit, p.17.

[9] Ibid.

[10] "U.S. military completes initial planning for Syria", *CNN*, 14/06/2012 http://security.blogs.cnn.com/2012/06/14/u-s-military-completes-planning-for-syria/ (Accessed on 06/10/2015).

States and Russia that took place on 22 January 2014 in Montreux and on 23–31 January 2014 in Geneva. Aim was to end the Syrian civil war by bringing the Syrian administration and the opponents to discuss the future of Syria. Through this initiative, all the parties including the U.S. accepted that that there is no military solution to this destructive conflict and only a political solution will put an end to it. All these developments pushed Obama administration to the line of solving the Syrian crisis through diplomatic initiatives.

After the activities of Islamic State of Iraq and Levant (ISIL) expanded to Iraq, U.S. announced its 6 point "weaken and destroy ISIL" strategy. This strategy included expanding the bombing campaign in Iraq, training and equipping Iraqi army and Kurdish troops, bombing Syria, training and arming the Syrian rebels, getting regional actors on board to counter ISIL and keeping US troops out and stay away from the Syrian and Iranian governments.[11] This strategy did not brought intended results. In addition to its financial burden for the U.S. budget (airstrikes had a daily cost of 10 million $), it did not become successful in halting the expansion of ISIS.

These are serious criticisms over the Obama administration's Syria policy. Military operations of Russia in Syria are also considered as an outcome of American policy failures. The reasons that have compelled the Obama administration not to intervene in Syria stem from different considerations. First among these are the previous interventions initiated by the George W. Bush administration. During the withdrawal of American troops from Afghanistan and Iraq, Obama personally viewed these interventions as "quagmires whose costs far exceed their benefits".[12] According to Pentagon sources, U.S.' air bombardment in fighting with ISIL forces had a cost of 3,5 billion dollar for a one year period which is considered as a heavy financial burden by the American public and the Congress. It is known that there is a strong opposition in the Congress against a U.S. military strike in Syria. As oppose to the Iraqi case, a military intervention would not maintain U.S. with petroleum contracts since Syria is scarce in natural resources. Concern for Israeli security is also an important dimension in U.S. foreign policy with regard to Syria. Syria's geo-strategic position and its ability to manipulate the ongoing turmoil in Iraq, instability in Lebanon, the Arab-Israeli conflict, activities of Hezbollah and Hamas are issues of concern for Israel which is also shared by the Obama administration. These factors make it harder for the U.S.

---

[11] "Obama's 6-point plan for defeating ISIS", *VOX,* 10/09/2014 http://www.vox.com/2014/9/10/6132815/obama-isis-syria-iraq-war-strategy (Accessed on 06/10/2015).

[12] Mark N. Katz, U.S. Policy toward Syria: "Making the Best of a Bad Situation?", Wilson Center Middle East Program, Viewpoints, No.41, p. 1.

to militarily intervene in Syria. Due to the hostilities between Israel and Syria including the status of Golan Heights, Israel has a fear of a radical Islamic administration in Damascus that would replace the Assad regime in Syria. This would lead to the re-emergence of a hot conflict in the Syrian-Israeli border.

Pro-Assad Camp: Role of a Good Balancer?

Assad regime has been receiving increasingly open support from Russia, China and Iran since the beginning of the uprising. In spite of their different motivations, they unite in their stance supporting the current regime in Syria.

Iran

An essential driver of Syrian civil war which determined the fate of the Assad regime has been the involvement of Iran. In Assad's recovery form serious setback in 2012, Iran's political and military support was critical.[13] In Middle Eastern politics, the alliance between Syria and Iran has had significant impact since 1979. The alliance was born out of common goals and enemies, namely Saddam Hussein's Iraq, and American and Israeli policy.

Religion is generally seen as the main motive for the partnership between Iran and Syria. Although the majority of the Syrian population is Sunni, the ruling Assad family is Alawi, which is a branch of the Shia sect. According to that view, the Assad regime and Iran have an affinity for one another, and have a mutual objective of restraining the power of the Sunni bloc in the region. According to Hokayem, the key in understanding Syrian conflict is the Iranian-Saudi struggle over regional hegemony. [14] Iran aims to prevent a Sunni-dominated Syria as the anti-Assad forces receive main backing from Iran's Sunni rivals: Qatar and Saudi Arabia. Iran also perceives the power struggle in Syria as an element of U.S. and Israeli policy of hegemony." According to Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, it's a "war between the front of hegemony and the front of resistance.[15]

In addition to its political support, Iran supports the Syrian regime with arms deliveries, financial transfers and energy supplies. Syria mainly rescued from Western and Arab sanctions with Iran's financial transfers through extended credit lines and other payment facilities.[16] Western intelligence also

[13] "Emile Hokayem, "Iran, the Gulf States and the Syrian Civil War", *Survival*, Vol.56, No.6 (December 2014-January 2015), pp.59-86.
[14] Ibid.
[15] Holly Yan, "Syria allies: Why Russia, Iran and China are standing by the regime", CNN, 29/08/2013, http://edition.cnn.com/2013/08/29/world/meast/syria-iran-china-russia-supporters/ (Accessed on 17/09/2015).
[16] Hokayem, p.73.

believes that the Iran has maintained Syria with intelligence, communications and advice on crowd control and weapons.[17]

China

China's support for Syrian regime is more nuanced than Russian and Iranian motivations. The most important position of China in Syrian uprising is its decisive stance in vetoing UN resolutions to intervene in Syria in the Security Council along with Russia. This creates suspicion among the Western circles that a united front had been established between China and Russia to oppose Western goals.

According to some analysts, in backing the Syrian regime, China wants to maintain its financial ties which is Syria's third-largest importer in 2010.[18] China invested in Syria's oil sector a few years ago and continued to buy oil to support the Syrian regime's survival amid UN sanctions. However economic interests are not significant enough for China to protect Syrian regime given the scale of the Syrian economy and oil production.

According to the realist point of view, China tries to protect its established strategic interests in the Middle East. The motivation of China is to prevent the formation of a Western backed regime in Syria. The assumption is that a Cold-War style geopolitical game is played by the West versus China and Russia.[19] It is clear that China wants to be more active actor in the international scene. However, China's use of veto in draft resolutions about intevention in Syria and its abstention from UN Security Council Resolution on NATO military intervention in Libya reveals another dimension of Chinese foreign policy. China makes emphasis on non-interference in the internal politics of other states through insisting on UN principle for respecting the sovereignty of that particular government. This is mainly related with China's international disputes over its policies with Tibet as well as human rights violations. In theory, the international community could also apply the same rules for China. Briefly, China's domestic situation has an important influence on its policy over Syria. It is hard for a country dealing with domestically seperatist issues such as in Tibet, Xinjiang, or Inner Mongolia to legitimize an insurrection abroad.

---

[17] Yan, op.cit.

[18] Adrien Morin, "China's Instructive Syria Policy", The Diplomat, 18/05/2014 http://thediplomat.com/2014/05/chinas-instructive-syria-policy/ (Accessed on 17/09/2015)

[19] Nicholas Wong, "China's veto on Syria: what interests are at play?", 25/07/2012, https://www.opendemocracy.net/nicholas-wong/china%E2%80%99s-veto-on-syria-what-interests-are-at-play
(Accessed on 17/09/2015)

Russia

After the end of the Cold War, the Middle East did not became a high priority area for Russia, rather the country concentrated on its internal problems and on her near abroad. Accordingly, Russia could not play a critical role in the Middle East in the post-Cold War period.[20] In the post- Cold War period, Russia's engagement with the Middle East was mainly through trade. Middle Eastern countries were became Russia's important trading partners which were important in strengthening its economy.[21]After Russia's recovery in economic and political terms and its discontent from the American policies in the post-September 11 period, Russia started to be involved in the region more directly. Rising feelings of anti-Americanism or anti-Westernism in the region due to the American involvement were important factors for the countries of the Middle East to engage in high level contacts with Russia. Particularly, through its relations with Syria and Iran, Russia became an influential actor in the Middle East. However, Russia did not pose a direct challenge to the US hegemony in the Middle East till the Arab Uprisings. Actually, severe cleavages started to emerge between Russia and the West with the start of the uprising in Syria.

It is known that Syria was one of the important allies of the Soviet Union, even labeled as a "Soviet satellite" during the Cold War years. Relations with the Soviet Union planted Syria in the anti-Western camp, and was perceived by the US as "a Soviet surrogate and an outpost for Soviet influence".[22] Hafiz Assad had successfully exploited the Cold War rivalry to Syria's advantage by relying on Soviet military and economic assistance.[23] Mutual interests continued after the end of the Cold War. Assad regime remained as the client of Soviet arms and weapons. On the other hand, The Tartus naval base on Syria's Mediterranean Sea coast has been used by the Russian navy since the early 1970s.

As a long-term ally, Russia gave its support to the Bashar Assad regime after the uprising started in Syria. Together with China, it vetoed resolutions concerning applying sanctions and military intervention in Syria. Russia also provided the Syrian regime with arms deliveries on the basis of previous contracts. Russia tried to locate itself as a soft power seeking a non-military

[20] Seven Erdoğan, "Arab Uprisings and Russia's International Standing", *GUEJISS*, 2015, 6 (13), pp.253-263.
[21] Roland Dannreuther, "Russia and the Middle East: A Cold War Paradigm?", *Europe-Asia Studies*, 64, (3), pp.543-560.
[22] Nejad, op. cit, p. 81.
[23] Dersan, op.cit, p.78.

solution to the Syrian crisis since the start of the Syrian civil war. However, with the latest news, it is seen that Russia started to carry out a military strike in Syria and Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said that Russia's airstrikes in Syria "do not go beyond ISIL, al Nusra or other terrorist groups recognized by the United Nations Security Council or Russian law".[24] Now, Russia has been accused of using the strikes to target anti-Assad groups including the U.S.-backed opposition group the Free Syrian Army (FSA). With this development, Russia lost its "soft-power" status in Syria.

Russian foreign policy towards Syrian uprising is an important subject of academic discussions. It is argued that Russia's motivations should be understood through a revived Cold War paradigm. According to that view, Russia supports anti-Western forces in the Middle East in order to challenge the American hegemony.[25] It is just to argue that Russia's decisive stance in supporting the Bashar regime served to position itself against the American policies in the Middle East. However, competition with the West is not the only motivation for Russia, it also has long established interests in Syria. First, as mentioned, Russia had significant arms deals, considerable trade volume with Syrian regime and its only Mediteraneanean naval base is located in that country. Putin's support for Assad regime against the Islamic groups also stems from its threat of Islamic extremism in Russian federation. Against Islamic secessionist movements in Chehecnya and broader Northern Caucasus, Russia threatens from Islamic radicalism in the Middle East which Syria became a center for that *jihadist* groups. Accordingly, maintaining the survival of the secular Bashar Assad regime is significant for Moscow in securing its internal stability.

China-Russia-Iran strategic alliance over Syria has threatened the Obama administration. These three countries are getting closer to each other. Iran is an observer at the CSTO (Collective Security Treaty Organization) and is bound to become a member of the SCO (Shanghai Cooperation Organization) by 2016. Russia provides Iran and China with military equipment equipments through selling S-300 systems to Iran; S-400 systems to China (with new, longer-range guided missiles).[26] There are some efforts on the American administration's side to detach Iran from pro-Assad line through cooperating

---

[24] "Russia's Lavrov on Syria targets: 'If it looks like a terrorist, walks like a terrorist", CNN, 01/10/2015, http://edition.cnn.com/2015/10/01/middleeast/russia-syria/ (Accessed on 02/10/2015).

[25] Dannreuther, op.cit, p. 543.

[2626] "The Growing China-Russia-Iran Strategic Alliance Has Got the Pentagon Trembling", http://www.alternet.org/world/growing-china-russia-iran-strategic-alliance-has-got-pentagon-trembling (accessed on 07/10/2015).

with the country on its nuclear file. Although Tehran wants cooperation and not confrontation with the U.S., Iran is bound to remain alongside Russia.

A New Cold War Started?

The concept of the "new world order", which entered the language of international politics with the collapse of communism, was invoked by US President George H.W. Bush in response to the Gulf crisis, perhaps making its historical reference points the end of the Cold War and Iraq's invasion of Kuwait in 1990. The "new world order" both signifies the end of the superpower rivalry between the Soviet Union and the United States and the initiation of a US foreign policy doctrine based on US hegemony in the international order. Bush described the conflict as a "defining moment", for it was shaped by the changes taking place in international politics and also set a precedent for future developments. The crisis was also an opportunity for the US to display the rules of the "new world order" and to reveal itself as the sole hegemon.[27] Since that date, the United States has involved in nearly every major international issue and forced other actors to take into account American interests. In the 2000s, U.S. followed its own political agenda and did not hesitate to take unilateral actions like the Iraqi invasion of 2003 in the absence of international consensus.

Despite the critics against the hawkish US foreign policy after September 11 which is associated with "imperial overextension", another international actor which had the ambition to enforce the international law or human rights did not emerge. On the contrary, we can talk about a global "free-rider" problem in which a lot of states unwilling and unable to force international norms without the leadership of the U.S. In a similar way, some governments in Europe, Turkey, Saudi Arabia and Qatar sought a more forceful American role in Syrian civil war. This time as oppose to its previous policies, Obama administration adopted a reluctant policy and it had disappointed those eager for a greater U.S. role.

It is apparent that Russia tries to fill the vacuum in the Middle East that is left by the U.S. over the Syrian crisis. Till its air bombing operations started on September 30, 2015, Russia seemed to be cautious in not damaging its relations with the West. Despite its constant vetoes in the United Nations Council and its coherent position in supporting the Assad regime, Russia cooperated with the West and forced them to solve the Syrian crisis through diplomacy. After Assad regime lost its power in various areas of Syria and it became probable that the Syrian regime may collapse under those conditions,

[27] Dersan, op.cit, p.106-107.

Russia started air-bombing operations. Although it is declared by the Russian authorities that they were invited by the Syrian regime to fight with ISIL and other groups, Moscow is accused of bombing groups supported by the U.S. like Free Syrian Army. Russian warplanes violations of the airspace of Turkey, a NATO member lead to the concerns about the potential confrontation.[28] Putin's goals in initiating an air bombing over Syria may be analyzed in two headings. First is to preserve its security and national interests in Syria including the existence of Tartus naval base in the Mediterranean through limiting the influence of anti-Assad forces. Second motivation is to send a message to the world that it is still a player in the international politics.

When Russia's consistent policy in sponsoring the Assad regime and its air operations alleged to target groups supported by the U.S. are taking into account along with the Russian foreign policy over Ukraine and the unilateral decision to annex Crimea, the question if a new Cold War is started comes to the fore. Putin's speeches which criticize the position of the Western counties in controlling the international politics and his emphasis on the rising role of non-Western actors in the international arena could be interpreted as a reflection of his ambitious foreign policy. In Russia's new Foreign Policy Concept published in February 2013, Russia openly express its intention to establish itself as an international model and made emphasis on the declining ability of the West's to control international politics.[29]

It is clear that the dynamics of the international system has been changing. The unwillingness on the American side in directly involving the crisis and Russia's aspirations for restoring her position as a major power could be observed over the Syrian civil war. Despite a serious confrontation between Russia and the West will continue in the long run, it is problematic to argue that a new Cold War is on the eve. Above all, it is hard to talk about an ideological confrontation between Russia and the United States as it was during the Cold War years. Different than the Soviet policy making, there is not an "ideologically driven anti-Western agenda" in Russian foreign policy. [30] It is not also possible to talk about ideological camps. Although Russia, China and Iran are listed as the countries united to support the Assad regime, they could

[28] "Russia offers to reopen, broaden military talks with the U.S. over Syria, *Washington Post,* 07/10/2015, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/nato-secretary-general-rejects-russian-claims-turkish-air-incursions-were-accidental/2015/10/06/8f2a2c42-6c0c-11e5-b31c-d80d62b53e28_story.html (Accessed on 07/10/2015).

[29] "Concept of the Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation", The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Russian Federation, (12/02/2013), http://archive.mid.ru//brp_4.nsf/0/76389FEC168189ED44257B2E0039B16D (Accessed on 07/10/2015).

[30] Dannreuther, op.cit, p.544

not be considered as an ideological camp. They have their own motivations in supporting the Assad regime. Russia does not position itself as an ideological state as Sergei Ivanov indicated that "we do not export ideology anymore".[31] Secondly, both the United States and Russia show willingness to continue diplomatic efforts to find a solution to the Syrian civil war. Each side seems cautious in not alienating the other. In addition to the changing dynamics of international politics, domestic political motivations and challenges of each actor should be considered when analyzing their attitudes with regard to the Syrian crisis. It is necessary to take into account that, non-intervention has important benefits for the domestic politics of U.S. and Russia has vested interests in Syria leading Moscow to be directly involved in the Syrian civil war.

References

Asseburg, Muriel and Heiko Wimmen, "Civil War in Syria: External Actors and Interests as Drivers of Conflict", German Institute for International and Security Affairs, *SWP Comments* 43 (December 2012).

"Concept of the Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation", The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Russian Federation (12/02/2013). http://archive.mid.ru//brp_4.nsf/0/76389FEC168189ED44257B2E0039B16D (Accessed on 07/10/2015).

Dannreuther, Roland "Russia and the Middle East: A Cold War Paradigm?", *Europe-Asia Studies*, 64, (3), pp.543-560.

Dersan, Duygu. "Responses to International Changes: A Neoclassical Realist Analysis of Syrian Foreign Policy- 1990-2005", *Middle East Techinal University, unprinted PhD Thesis*, (2012).

Duran, Hasan and Çağatay Özdemir, "Ortadoğu'nun Sancılarına Arap Baharı Çözüm Olabildi Mi?", *Akademik Araştırmalar Dergisi,* (2013-2014), 15 (59), pp.47-72.

Erdoğan, Seven. "Arab Uprisings and Russia's International Standing", GUEJISS, 2015, 6 (13), pp.253-263.

Hokayem, Emile. "Iran, the Gulf States and the Syrian Civil War", *Survival,* Vol.56, No.6 (December 2014-January 2015), pp.59-86.

Katz, Mark N. U.S. Policy toward Syria: "Making the Best of a Bad Situation?", Wilson Center Middle East Program, Viewpoints, No.41, p. 1.

Morin, Adrien. "China's Instructive Syria Policy", The Diplomat, 18/05/2014 http://thediplomat.com/2014/05/chinas-instructive-syria-policy/ (Accessed on 17/09/2015).

"Obama's 6-point plan for defeating ISIS", *VOX*, 10/09/2014 http://www.vox.com/2014/9/10/6132815/obama-isis-syria-iraq-war-strategy (Accessed on 06/10/2015).

[31] Ibid.

Phillips Christopper. "Syria's Bloody Arab Spring", *IDEAS Reports of London School of Economics*, (2012).

"Russia offers to reopen, broaden military talks with the U.S. over Syria, *Washington Post,* 07/10/2015, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/nato-secretary-general-rejects-russian-claims-turkish-air-incursions-were-accidental/2015/10/06/8f2a2c42-6c0c-11e5-b31c-d80d62b53e28_story.html (Accessed on 07/10/2015).

"Russia's Lavrov on Syria targets: 'If it looks like a terrorist, walks like a terrorist", CNN, 01/10/2015, http://edition.cnn.com/2015/10/01/middleeast/russia-syria/ (Accessed on 02/10/2015).

Sharp, Jeremt M. And Christopher M. Blanchard, Armed Conflict in Syria: U.S. and International Response", *Congressional Research Service*, (July 2012) 7-5700.

"Syria: Assad must resign, says Obama", *The Guardian*, 18/10/2011, http://www.theguardian.com/world/2011/aug/18/syria-assad-must-resign-obama (Accessed on 05/10/2015).

"U.S. military completes initial planning for Syria", *CNN*, 14/06/2012 http://security.blogs.cnn.com/2012/06/14/u-s-military-completes-planning-for-syria/ (Accessed on 06/10/2015).

Wong, Nicholas. "China's veto on Syria: what interests are at play?", 25/07/2012, https://www.opendemocracy.net/nicholas-wong/china%E2%80%99s-veto-on-syria-what-interests-are-at-play (Accessed on 17/09/2015).

Yan, Holly. "Syria allies: Why Russia, Iran and China are standing by the regime", CNN, 29/08/2013, http://edition.cnn.com/2013/08/29/world/meast/syria-iran-china-russia-supporters/ (Accessed on 17/09/2015).