Show of Force: Russian Intervention in the Syrian Civil War

A Thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degrees of Master of Science at George Mason University and Master of Arts at the University of Malta

by

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DEDICATION

This is dedicated to my father, my mother and my grandparents.
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ABSTRACT

SHOW OF FORCE: RUSSIAN INTERVENTION IN THE SYRIAN CIVIL WAR

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George Mason University, 2016,

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This thesis set out to increase understanding of Russian foreign policy with regards to the civil war in Syria. The conflict has drawn in many different international actors, and cooperation will likely be indispensable for bringing the war to an end. Improving understanding of Russian foreign policy might foster the required cooperation. The research question was phrased as follows: "To what extent can the theories of neorealism and constructivism help understand foreign policy of the Russian Federation towards the Syrian Arab Republic during the Syrian civil war?" After a short exploration of International Relations, constructivism and neorealism were chosen as the theoretical lenses through which to interpret Russia’s actions in Syria. First, overviews of the history of Syrian-Russian relations as well as the Syrian civil war were provided. Then the two theories were used to analyze important elements of Russia’s behavior with regards to the conflict. The findings suggest that Russia’s foreign policy can be explained by both theories together. Neorealism can explain the importance of the international system and
Russia’s place in it. Constructivism can account for the way in which Russian identity relies exactly on those neorealist factors of power and place in the international system. Constructivism can also account for the changes which Russia’s identity and interests have gone through. Both theories together can explain important elements of Russia’s foreign policy during the Syrian Civil War.
1. INTRODUCTION

The civil war in the Syrian Arab Republic continues to have a tremendous impact not only on the Syrian people, but on the Middle East and the European Union as well. It has also made its mark on the relationship between the Russian Federation and the United States of America. Actions taken by the Russian Federation during the Syrian civil war, such as the sudden withdrawal of troops, have been met with surprise globally.¹ For example, the New York Times wrote that State Department officials were surprised to the extent that they “reacted with disbelief” upon hearing Moscow’s announcement of a military withdrawal.² The Obama administration too, was faulted with being caught off guard as well; U.S. President Barack Obama had repeatedly claimed that Russia and Iran’s intervention was “just going to get them stuck in a quagmire and it won't work”, and two months later, that Russia would be "bogged down in an inconclusive and paralyzing civil conflict."³ In contrast, Russia’s intervention was able to turn the tide around and prop up Assad, and the announcement of a military withdrawal showed the

opposite of becoming stuck in a quagmire. The fact that both experts and the United States government did not anticipate Russia's actions in Syria, suggests that something has changed regarding Russian foreign policy, and that current mainstream explanations of Russian foreign policy are falling short. This paper aims to find out whether mainstream International Relations theories can still account for the behavior of the Russian Federation with regards to the Syrian civil war.

1.1 Research Question

In order to improve understanding of the aims and interests, and hence actions, of the Russian Federation in the Syrian Arab Republic, this paper intends to specifically study Russian foreign policy with regards to the Syrian civil war from 2011 to 2016, through the use of International Relations theories. After an analysis of the most prominent theories, which can be found in the theoretical part of the literature analysis, two major theories are found to be most suitable for understanding Russian foreign policy during the Syrian civil war: constructivism and neorealism. For this purpose, the research question is as follows: "To what extent can the theories of neorealism and constructivism help understand foreign policy of the Russian Federation towards the Syrian Arab Republic during the Syrian civil war?" The answer to this question will be relevant, as misunderstanding of Russian goals and actions in Syria's civil war hinders cooperation and hardens attitudes between all parties involved. Subsequently, this can stifle the negotiations between those parties that seek a potential resolution to the conflict. The
research problem, it's relevance and the manner in which this paper will be structured will be further explained below.

1.2 Study Relevance

According to critics, the United States government was caught unaware by the course of action undertaken by the President of the Russian Federation, Vladimir Putin, multiple times. Examples of these misunderstandings are the intent and scale of the deployed Russian military forces in Syria, and the subsequent announcement regarding a withdrawal of those troops.4 The talks held in Geneva in 2012 between the government of Syria, the Syrian opposition forces, the United States, the Russian Federation and the United Nations was bewildering as well: the parties agreed on a communique, but immediately afterwards U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, and Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs Sergey Lavrov contradicted each other on what this communique meant.5 It appears as if in the past few years Russian foreign policy has changed, but the United States did not keep up, which has lead to misapprehension between the two superpowers.

Misunderstanding between two powerful states can lead to dangerous situations. Underestimation of what either party would do in a given conflict can not only lead to a stalemate or further escalation of that conflict, but it can also spill over to the hampering of cooperation on other issues. For example, in response to the course of action


undertaken by Putin in Ukraine and Syria, the Obama administration chose to isolate Russia internationally. However, this isolation also hinders cooperation on a range of other issues, such as combating nuclear proliferation and international terrorist organizations. It is possible that this response of isolation could have been taken even with full understanding by the U.S. of Russia's course of action. However, the United States has an interest in combating nuclear proliferation and terrorism as well, and hence, the course of international isolation does not appear to be the most optimal one. It is more likely that if there had been a full comprehension of Russia's aims, the United States could have responded in a different way, or could have at least pressed for a resolution that would not directly harm its own interests. This is underscored by the statements made by Barack Obama, and the reports of reactions by State Department officials, which strongly suggest that the U.S. failed to interpret the intent of Russia’s actions.

Improving the comprehension of the foreign policy of other states allows for a better adaptation to certain courses of action. In turn, this might prove to be beneficial to solving global issues and the resolution of conflicts. Through this paper, I aim to contribute to an understanding of Russian foreign policy, specifically that towards Syria.

1.3 Chapter Division

Plenty of research on the topic of Russian foreign policy can be found already, and it is often explained as either being driven by power seeking, as an issue of identity,
or as a mixture of these two. Still, the surprise with which Moscow's moves in Syria were received by the international community suggests that these explanations are inadequate. It conveys the message that a closer look needs to be taken at what exactly drives Russian foreign policy, and that the current explanations need to be reconsidered.

The aim of this thesis then, is to create a better understanding of Russia's foreign policy towards Syria, and for this purpose the research question is as follows: "To what extent can the theories of neorealism and constructivism help understand foreign policy of the Russian Federation towards the Syrian Arab Republic during the Syrian civil war?"

By considering the historical relationship between Russia and Syria, the existing theoretical frameworks that seek to explain foreign policy making in general, such as neorealism, neoliberalism and constructivism, and by analyzing the particular traits of Russian foreign policy making, I aim to find an answer to this question.

This thesis is structured as follows: The next chapter will provide an explanation of the methodology, the single case study, which is employed in this thesis. It will also explain which methodological choices were made and how I arrived at these choices. The chapter thereafter is devoted to an analysis of the relevant literature on the links between Russia and Syria, and Russian foreign policy making. This literature review will contain a comprehensive overview of what the available literature on Syria, Russian foreign policy and the theories of international relations has contributed so far. The subsequent theoretical chapter will introduce the theories of neoliberalism, neorealism and constructivism, and provide their explanation of Russia's foreign policy in general, and towards Syria in particular. The theoretical chapter will also include a justification
for not including neoliberalism in the analysis of Russia’s foreign policy. The subsequent chapters will explore the findings of neorealism and constructivism when applied to Russian foreign policy in Syria. Finally, the last chapter will contain my conclusion and formulate an answer to my research question.
2. METHODOLOGY

This chapter will clarify how this paper and research method is set up. Firstly, the choice for a qualitative, single case study will be explained. Secondly, this chapter will expand further on the structure of the subsequent chapters, and how this particular structure contributes to a comprehensive paper. Lastly, the research limitations will be explained as well.

2.1 Single Case Study

The research method used to explore these topics, and to find an answer to the research question, will be a qualitative, single case study. A single case study is an ideal tool for this paper, because the aim of this thesis is to create an in-depth understanding of a "single case set in its real-world context". The research done for this thesis will mainly consist out of analyzing written works stemming from both primary and secondary sources. In other words, it will be done through desk research. Primary sources will mainly exist out of speeches, statements, documents and policy white papers from a wide variety of governmental institutions and international organizations, such as the Ministry of Defence of the Russian Federation, and the United Nations (U.N.). Interviews such as those done with Bashar al-Assad and Vladimir Putin might provide useful information as

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well. Secondary sources, such as books and articles written by scholars and pundits will be of importance too, specifically when it comes to the historical analysis of Russian-Syrian relations. To prevent bias in the analysis of Russian foreign policy, a wide variety of sources with diverse backgrounds will be used.

The data collected from the sources above will be analyzed through the use of International Relations Theory. International Relations (IR), or the study of the relations that states have amongst each other and with international organizations, should be able to provide excellent frameworks through which to make sense of the data stemming from the Syrian civil war. This is because in contrast to other civil wars, the Syrian civil war is characterized by the myriad of international groups, states and coalitions of groups and states involved in the fighting. As a result, Russian foreign policy towards Syria is not limited to the ties between Damascus and Moscow, but to many other states as well. Thus, International Relations Theory will help understand Russian foreign policy in the Syrian civil war.

The specific IR theories that will be used for analysis in this case study will be constructivism and neorealism, as these two are most likely to provide a good explanation of the three most prominent IR theories. The manner through which the choice fell on constructivism and neorealism, and the absence of analysis through the lens of the third mainstream IR theory, neoliberalism, will be explained in the theoretical chapter. Finally, the absence of other IR theories will be discussed in the research limitations subsection in this chapter.
2.2 Research Structure

One can not start to examine Moscow’s policy towards the civil war in Syria without adequate background knowledge. In order to get a firm grasp of Russian foreign policy with regards to Syria, it is necessary to extensively discuss the history of Syrian-Russian relations and the developments that led to the Syrian civil war. The historical chapter will explain how the relationship between Syria and Russia has developed since Syrian independence, and what it's defining characteristics are. It will provide an overview of important historical connections between Syria and the Soviet Union and of the Russian-Syrian relationship from the fall of the Soviet Union up until the outbreak of the Arab Spring. Comprehending the intricacies of this relationship will be crucial to understanding current Russian policy towards Syria. The chapter on the Syrian civil war will cover the beginning, starting at the Arab Spring, up until May 2016, shortly after Putin had announced the withdrawal of the majority of Russian troops. This chapter will be broader than just an analysis of the Russian-Syrian relationship; It will also include factors such as the role of Islamic extremism and Western influence, as these will be necessary for understanding the context in which Russia's actions were taken.

The chapters thereafter concern the theory on how Russian foreign policy is shaped. The creation of foreign policy is a complex process, which varies from state to state depending on both international and domestic factors. Through the literature review two main explanations of Russian foreign policy emerge: one based on power and geopolitics, and another on status and identity. These explanations correspond to the theories of neorealism and constructivism, respectively. As will be further explained
below, the third major International Relations theory, neoliberalism, will not be included in the analysis of Russian foreign policy. The theoretical chapter will elaborate further on the limitations of applicability of neoliberalism. In addition to those limitations, because of limited time and space, the exploration done in this paper will be limited to neorealism and constructivism. These explanations are neither mutually exclusive, nor are they guaranteed to provide an adequate explanation of Moscow's policy in Syria. Still, exploring what these theories can and cannot explain about Russia's actions will increase understanding regardless, as they will either be sufficient, or show that different theoretical insights are required.

2.3 Research Limitations

The first, and most apparent, limitation of this research is that at the time of writing, the civil war is still ongoing. This means that the policies which states have towards the Syrian civil war might be part of something larger, or more long-term, than the period which is being analyzed in this paper. Perhaps the announcement of a military withdrawal by Vladimir Putin will be similar to George W. Bush’s premature “Mission Accomplished” in Iraq, and time will tell it was only the beginning of Russia’s intervention. Though it is important to keep that possibility in mind, it does not fully undermine the value of analyzing foreign policy of the past five and a half years. This is because many developments occurred during that period that have elicited reactions of all parties involved, including Russia. In other words, even though the Syrian civil war appears far from over, the goals of Russian foreign policy have become more evident
through actions, for example, the deployment of anti-aircraft weapons and the bombing of both U.S. supported rebels as well as ISIS. This will help understand Russian foreign policy even as the civil war continues to go on.

A second research limitation is one of language and political objectivity. I am not able to read Russian, which limits the amount of sources I can use. Luckily, there are Russian sources that come with their own translations, such as the websites of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and kremlin.ru; the website of the President of the Russian Federation. However, this ties in to the issue of objectivity: governmental sources, both Russian, American as well as those of other states, might have a biased view and an interest in propagating certain information. They do this by framing, or releasing only particular pieces of intelligence. Most parties involved in the Syrian civil war are likely to be biased in the information they share. This is something I will attempt to relegate by showing both sides of a story and finding independent sources.

Thirdly, though the choice for the theories is expanded on in the theoretical chapter, there are many other IR theories which will not be used in this paper. The literature review pointed in the direction of mainstream IR theories, and their suggested feasibility combined with limited space and time prevents a deep exploration of other theories. The possibility remains that theories such as Marxism, neocolonialism or feminism might provide their own, coherent explanations of Russia’s actions in Syria.

It is worth noting that even though this paper seeks to explain behavior which has happened in the past, the predictive value of these theories remains limited. Mainstream IR theories are not able to fully predict exactly what actions states will take on a policy
level. However, they do provide frameworks with general expectations on how states will act and interact. The surprise with which Russia’s actions were met, suggested that these theoretical frameworks were falling short. Therefore, this paper will focus on whether Russian actions still fit within larger theoretical frameworks that seek to explain state behavior.

A case study like this has several strengths and weaknesses. The strength lies in the extensive and detailed analysis that becomes possible with analyzing one case, which allows for a high degree of complexity. In other words, it allows for a deep analysis of Russian-Syrian relations that would not be out of place in a broader analysis of Russian foreign policy in general. With a higher number of cases, generalizations would become feasible, but this is not the aim of this paper. The aim is to understand a specific course of action in the context of a single case, and to see whether it (still) fits in larger theoretical frameworks. The weakness is, however, exactly that: a lack of easy generalization. Conclusions drawn in this research on Russian actions in Syria might say little about actions undertaken by Russia in other states, such as Ukraine and Georgia. In fact, the conclusions of this paper may be case-specific to the extent that they are irrelevant for any policy the Russian government will undertake towards other countries or conflicts. Still, this does not undermine the importance of understanding Russian foreign policy in this particular context, as the Syrian civil war is still ongoing, and as it might lead to new theoretical insights.
3. LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature necessary for finding an answer to the research question can be divided into three parts. The first part is literature on Syria, specifically the intricacies of the domestic situation both historical and current, as well as defining aspects of Syria's relations with Russia. As the same regime in Syria has stayed in power for several decades now, being aware of the historical background of that regime and its relations with the Soviet Union is imperative for analyzing the current foreign policies of Syria and Russia towards each other. Secondly, literature on the Syrian civil war is discussed. Even though it is a fairly recent event, several books have already been written on the civil war. The last part of the literature review is devoted to literature on Russia, specifically on how Russia's foreign policy is created, relevant factors and the degree to which these influence foreign policy, and how these factors come into play with regards to Syria.

3.1 Historical Factors of Russian-Syrian Relations

The historical background of Syrian-Russian relations can be viewed from many different angles. Generally speaking, the literature on this subject can be divided into two main perspectives. One camp considers the relationship from purely political maneuvering, highlighting tenets such as the need to increase power and security of the respective governments of both parties. The other perspective is one that views the
relationship as constructed mostly by the populations of these states, with emphasis on
conscepts such as culture and shared values. This bifurcation of power versus norms and
values continue to shape the debate on Russian foreign policy to date, and both these
perspectives will be crucial in understanding how the Russian-Syrian relationship
developed. I will discuss literature on both these perspectives briefly.

The relationship between Syria and the Soviet Union can be traced back to weeks
before Syrian independence in 1946, when the Soviet Union covertly started supporting
Syria in its effort to throw out the French.8 For the purpose of this paper, however, the
history of Russian-Syrian relations is examined more closely starting from the coup d’état
in 1963. The reasoning behind this is because this coup set the stage for several important
developments that tied Syria with the Soviet Union, and have continued to underpin the
relationship between Syria and Russia ever since. Among these developments is the rise
of the dominant Baath party, the Alawites and the Assad family, which are still in power
to this day. This shared history set the stage for increased cooperation and, eventually,
increasingly closer ties between Vladimir Putin and Bashar al-Assad. Rami Ginat's paper
"The Soviet Union and the Syrian Ba’th Regime: From Hesitation to Rapprochement"
go in depth on this crucial period, with a particular focus on the development of the
Soviet-Syrian alliance.9 Raymond Hinnebusch's "Syria: Revolution from Above" focuses
on the 30 year rule of Hafiz al-Assad, and is a very thorough guide for understanding
how the modern Syrian state developed.10 By closely examining the pre-Bashar al-Assad

9 Ibid., 150-171.
period, Hinnebusch lays the groundwork for analyzing how the current revolution, and subsequent civil war erupted, and how the relations with Russia influenced this. Again, David Lesch's book "Syria" is of great use here as well, as he combines his expertise on Syria and Bashar al-Assad together with the responses of the international community, including Russia, to the civil war in Syria.

In contrast to the article above, which focuses on a purely political history of Syrian-Russian relations, Karen Dawisha highlights the "cultural instrument" of the Soviet Union used to create "shared values, images and goals between countries." The discussion of this mechanism shows the great importance which the Soviet government attributed to international cultural cooperation, and shines the spotlight on interesting elements of the Soviet-Syrian relationship. A drawback of this approach is that eventually, after the collapse of the Soviet Union and of its communist ideology, an altered set of values was adopted by Russia, complicating what can be said about effects the cultural mechanism had relevant to the present day. However, even though ultimately the communist ideology did not successfully spread to Syria, there were also values of authoritarianism, nationalism and anti-Western sentiments which were reinforced, and continue to be reinforced to this day. Other books, such as David Lesch's "Syria" also consider the influence of values and ideological links between authoritarian regimes in addition to strategic, material concerns.

Though not an exhaustive list of sources used, the literature mentioned above will be essential in providing an overview of historical, strategic, and ideological factors that

shaped the relationship between Syria and Russia. Understanding this historical relationship will be essential for understanding recent Russian foreign policy towards Syria.

3.2 Syrian Civil War

Though a fairly recent conflict, the civil war in Syria has been the subject of many writings. One book which explores the intricacies of the revolution extensively is "Burning Country: Syrians in Revolution and War" by Robin Yassin-Kassab and Leila al-Shami. This book was published in 2016, and considers the Syrian civil war from a wide array of perspectives such as the grassroots movements, the elites, the exiles, the Assad family, the international community and the role of Islamic fundamentalism. Moreover, there is also a chapter dedicated to the cultural changes that have happened since the start of the revolution. The examination of Russia's role remains limited in this book, however.

Another major building block of the gathered literature is the book "Syria" of David W. Lesch, an expert on Syria who befriended Bashar al-Assad in 2004. His book provides valuable insights in the role, and outlook, of Bashar during this conflict, including a close look at the role of Russia. A drawback from this particular book is that it was published in 2012. Considering the fact that the endpoint of this research is May 2016, closely after President Vladimir Putin announced the drawback of a majority of troops from Syria, more information will be drawn from primary sources, as the endpoint lies very close to the time of writing.

As the conflict is still ongoing, parties are sometimes reluctant to provide full details on their actions. Sometimes, actions are widely displayed, such as Russia’s
televised bombardment of the Islamic State with a volley ship-launched cruise missiles.\textsuperscript{12} Often, however, actions remain obscure and details fuzzy. For this reason, too, many primary sources from a wide array of actors will be used as well. For example, there have been many statements and speeches published by the Russian Ministry of Defence, the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the Kremlin/President of Russia website.\textsuperscript{13} Moreover, international organizations such as United Nations and other governmental officials of other states make statements too on what courses they and other actors are undertaking. Lastly, both the Russian government as well as other states publish foreign policy & defense white papers and sometimes reveal information acquired through intelligence agencies. Naturally, it is important to remember that as the conflict is ongoing, states might be eager to hide their intentions, and some of the released information might be biased in an attempt to influence the conflict, so some discretion combined with validation by multiple sources will be necessary.

3.3 Russian Foreign Policy

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation provides a good place to start comprehending Russian foreign policy. On December 2, 2013, the Ministry published the Foreign Policy Concept on the Russian Federation on its website. Approved by President Vladimir Putin, it offers general guidelines on what to expect

\textsuperscript{13} “President of the Russian Federation,” Official Internet Resources of the President of Russia, accessed August 23, 2016, http://en.kremlin.ru/
It can be argued that it has not changed much from previous iterations, that is rather undetailed, and it can easily be dismissed as a generic, bureaucratic document. However, it does contain some insights on how Moscow views the recent international development pertaining to the Arab Spring, and a careful reading of the document suggests that Russia would become "more active in international affairs." Hence, this policy document, and the subsequent analyses made by experts, might prove to be important for understanding Russia's behavior. Similarly, previous iterations of the Foreign Policy Concept will be used as well.

The report "Syria as an Arena of Strategic Competition" by the RAND corporation spells out the interests of all parties involved in the Syrian conflict. This report, created by several experts identifies several Russian interests in Syria. Their first finding is Russia's longstanding relationship of cooperation with Syria, which provides Russia with its only Mediterranean port. The report also claims that Russia is interested in halting the toppling of authoritarian regimes by a string of popular uprisings, as Russia itself is becoming more authoritarian. Lastly, the group of experts believes Russia's interest in having leverage within a "front-line state" at the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, such as Syria, gives it more power in interacting with powerful actors in that region, such as Turkey and Israel. Indeed, Russia has already managed to restart peace talks between

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Israeli and Palestinian leaders in Moscow, after a halt of several years.\textsuperscript{17} The drawback of this report is that, even though the experts come from both within and outside of the U.S. government, there is a risk of a bias from the United States point of view. This argument of increasing Russian influence in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict through Syria is different, though not opposed, to other works that stress the importance of being able to influence the Saudi-Iranian balance of power. This does not necessarily show a gap, as the Russian interest in being able to influence regional actors through Israel could be part of a broader interest in holding more sway in the entire Middle East.

Gonzalo Pozo's "Russian Foreign Policy from Putin to Medvedev" offers a power-focused explanation too. In his chapter, Pozo puts the spotlight on Putin, Russian institutions and the elite class in Russian society. Additionally, Pozo also argues that there has been a return to geopolitics.\textsuperscript{18} A similar argument on the importance of geographical variables in Russia's foreign policy has been made by Dmitri Adamsky and Stephen Kotkin in their articles on Foreign Affairs, in which they argue that Putin has returned to geopolitics.\textsuperscript{19} These sources focus primarily on security, power projection and resources, which is a far cry from the center which identity takes in other literature. There are also different interpretations of the role of authoritarian regimes. In the report of the RAND Corporation, the fall of an authoritarian regime in Syria is argued to be a possible

danger to the idea of authoritarianism in general, and therefore the authoritarian regime in Russia. Other works argue this the other way around; they tend to focus on the idea that the intervention in Syria is a show of force likely to increase the popularity of the regime in Russia, which becomes necessary as economic prospects began to worsen. In other words, either way the intervention served to enhance the power of Russia's regime. Moreover, in "Russia, Syria and the Doctrine of Military Intervention", Samuel Charap highlights the potential danger of a Sunni regime replacing Syria's secular regime for Russia's immediate neighborhood in the Caucasus, and its own southern regions. This work, like many others, highlights security, as well as economic interests such as arm deals, oil and gas resources, and the pipelines to export them in Syria's region.

What binds all this literature together is that they can be placed inside the realist tradition of focusing on power, security and economic interests. Geopolitics, in terms of the geographical location of the state, is part of (neo)realist thinking too. It becomes evident then, that if one wants to find a possible explanation for the recent events in the Syrian civil war, it would be logical to start with a theory that has managed to provide an explanation for many of Russia's actions in the past. By using this theory for analysis it will become clear whether the realist school of thought can, and perhaps more importantly, what it can not explain with regards to Russia's intervention. The latter might be more important because, after all, this thesis started out with the premise that Russia's actions were met with surprise and misunderstanding, which would not have

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been likely if realism, the most predominant school of thought in International Relations, could provide a full explanation.

In contrast, there are also authors who downplay the importance of factors such as the Russian military base near Tartus, Syria, and who hold a different interpretation of Russia's interests. Derek Averre and Lance Davies argue in "Russia, Humanitarian Intervention and the Responsibility to Protect: The Case of Syria" that Russia's intervention in Syria is part of an effort to have an impact on the normative debate surrounding humanitarian intervention, and on the role of international law. Through Russia's own normative position, and thus it's own identity, Moscow aims to strengthen its international and regional influence, affirm its legitimacy in the global order and challenge western liberalism.21 Instead of portraying Russia as a pure power-maximizer that is only interested in propping up a strategic ally, these authors portray Russia's military intervention in a different light. For example, military intervention is explained along side the idea that large parts of the population still support Assad who else would be at risk of "anarchy, collapse of law and ethnic cleansing".22 Moreover, there is no real unified opposition to take over control, and intervention is necessary to prevent collapse of a sovereign, secular and multi-ethnic state which would increase potential for the rise of fundamentalist terror groups and spillover of instability to bordering countries.23 Averre and Davies thus see a convergence of the different norms Russia is promoting and it's national interests. Roy Allison provides a similar norm-based explanation for Russia's

22 Ibid., 820.
foreign policy; In "Russia and Syria: Explaining Alignment with a Regime in Crisis", Allison posits that the norm which is being challenged by Putin is that of external standards of government legitimacy and external pushes for regime change. In other words, Putin is opposing Western norms of promoting democracy and intervention for the sake of regime change. This aligns closely with what previously discussed authors considered to be the determining factors of Russian foreign policy: things such as values, norms and identity.

The focus of Averre, Davies and Allison on norms is distinct from the material emphasis which previously discussed authors had, but there is a point of convergence here: both camps have authors which provide good reasons for Russia's foreign policy, and emphasize the importance for Moscow of maintaining a friendly, stable, secular regime in Syria. The difference is that one camp sees it as an issue of norms and identity, whereas the other camp considers it in light of geopolitics and relations of power, as an issue of national security. Of course, this does not necessarily mean that one excludes the other. What this literature review does point out is that the two corresponding theories, constructivism and neorealism, have been most suitable for explaining Russian foreign policy in the past. Before jumping to conclusions surrounding the applicability of these two theories, it is necessary to consider other theories as well. The theoretical considerations will be discussed further in the next chapter.

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4. THEORIES OF INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

The political scientist Stephen M. Walt once wrote that International Relations Theory is dominated by three competing paradigms: realism, liberalism and constructivism.\(^{25}\) Arguably, these three theories still dominate academic debate to this day.\(^{26}\) As will be discussed in this chapter, in exploring what these theories entail, and how they might be able to provide an explanation of Russian foreign policy, I found constructivism and neorealism to be the most helpful. This coincides with what has already been written on Russian foreign policy, as most works would either focus on power and the international system, and thus have a realist approach, or focus on issues of values and identity, and have a constructivist approach. In this chapter, the reasons for the lack of neoliberal explanations of Russian foreign policy will be discussed. Finally, further reasoning behind the choice for neorealism and constructivism, as the two theoretical paradigms through which Russian foreign policy will be analyzed, will be provided.


4.1 Neoliberalism

Neoliberalism finds its roots in liberalism, which itself is based on Kant’s guidelines set out in his work “Perpetual Peace”. In Perpetual Peace, Kant argues for the role of trade, democracy and international organizations in order to attain peace amongst nations. Firstly, “The spirit of commerce”, or, free trade, contributes to this through making states economic interdependent, which makes war a costlier affair for everyone. This includes third party states that now have an incentive to try and stop war between two other states. Secondly, states that are democracies allow the people to constrain their governments and their actions, making war dependent on the consent of the people who suffer from it. Lastly, international institutions can help provide frameworks and rules for solving disputes among nations peacefully. In other words, liberalism focuses on the idea that when states cooperate, it will be mutual beneficial. It focuses on absolute gains. This stands in stark contrast to the zero-sum games of realism, which focuses on relative gains, where the benefits for one state will be disadvantageous to other states.

Neoliberalism, though it has many different interpretations, is build on this idea, and originated as a reaction to neorealism. According to neorealists, the structure of the system, though recognized as anarchic, does not carry the same weight as neorealists would contend it does. Robert Keohane and Joseph Nye, two of the most prominent neoliberal scholars, argue in their book “Power and Interdependence: World Politics in Transition”, that the traditional view of power in terms of military capabilities is too limited, and that states can not be viewed as solely unitary actors, or “billiard balls”,

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which only interact through their interstate relations. Complex interdependence between countries exists through the links of multinational corporations, international institutions and organizations, and ties amongst all levels of government across national borders. This interdependence fosters cooperation amongst states despite anarchy: it opens lines of communication and it builds trust. Moreover, it also helps build norms, rules and institutions to facilitate this cooperation.

Mearsheimer, a scholar which will be discussed further in the section on neorealism, has argued that despite the creation of international institutions, states continue to act according to neorealist principles. The formation of institutions such as the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, though creating peace for its members, acts as a deterrent for adversaries, which is “straightforward realist behavior”.

Similarly, Mearsheimer argues that the United Nations, and the European Union, do not affect state behavior but rather reflect and promote the interests of the most powerful states. The debate between neorealists and neoliberals continues to shape around the notion of whether institutions simply reflect the status quo or actually shape state behavior.

With these basic principles in mind, applying neoliberalism theory in order to understand Russian foreign policy becomes a difficult task already. Firstly, Russia’s economic and political interdependence with the West has increased since the fall of the Soviet Union. The World Trade Organization and NATO’s Partnership for Peace are only two examples of how political integration with the West has continued. With support

from the United States, economic integration between the Russian Federation and the European Union has progressed as well, as the EU became the largest trading partner of Russia. Leaving the occupation of Crimea and the war in East-Ukraine aside, however, this has not prevented Russia from engaging in a de-facto proxy war with the United States in Syria, which included the largest display of military force since the end of the Cold War.

Secondly, even though Russia refers to the importance of the United Nations Security Council when it comes to issues of military intervention and sovereignty, the U.N. has failed to hold anyone accountable for one of the gravest violations of international norms, namely the use of chemical weapons. The U.N.’s independent team of investigators were already prevented from assigning responsibility of the attacks, but even when they matched the used missiles with Assad’s chemical weapons stock, Russia questioned the findings and called the report one-sided. Nor did Russia allow the U.N. to include coercive language in a resolution that would allow for military intervention in the case of a party deploying chemical weapons.30 Still, Barack Obama stated he was “comfortable going forward without the approval of a United Nations Security Council that, so far, has been completely paralyzed and unwilling to hold Assad accountable.”31 Instead, cooperation on Syria happened outside of international institutions. U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry made a statement on a possible solution for the chemical

weapons issue when visiting London. Almost immediately, Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs Sergey Lavrov responded to this statement through a public announcement. This diplomatic solution was cobbled together without any organization, which barred the way for a possible U.S. military intervention. The deal entailed that Bashar al-Assad would simply give up its chemical weapons program, an option that would satisfy Putin’s interest in keeping Assad in power. Admittedly, the details of this deal were hampered out through the U.N. and the Organization for the Prohibition on Chemical Weapons (OCPW), but these international organizations served merely as a tool. If anything, the solution for the chemical weapons program shows the irrelevance of international institutions when it comes to affecting the behavior of states, and confirms John Mearsheimer’s notion of how international organizations simply reflect the power and interests of the states that make them up.

Neither political and economic interdependence, nor the role of international institutions seem to carry much weight when trying to understand Russian foreign policy. Subsequently, neoliberalism as a theory appears to have little explanatory powers for this particular case study. This is especially true in comparison with the merits of neorealism and constructivism as will be shown below. Therefore, this paper will focus solely on the explanatory capabilities of neorealism and constructivism.

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4.2 Neorealism

Neorealism, also called structural realism, is one of the most prominent schools of thought in International Relations. Neorealism finds its roots in realism, a theory which can be traced back to the likes of Machiavelli, Thucydides and Hobbes. Realism is not defined by an explicit set of assumptions; it is rather a loose framework in which scholars provide different representations of what it entails. Generally speaking, it begins with the idea that the international system is made up of states, which are the primary subjects of this theory. The international system is characterized by anarchy, meaning that there is no higher authority that can enforce rules for states. These states are rational actors with survival as primary goal, and cannot be sure of each other's intentions. This is also where one of the major drawbacks of neorealism can be found: it treats states as black boxes, where their internal factors such as prominent individuals, religion or ideology do not matter. The most powerful of these states will be better able to guarantee the survival of themselves. Therefore, states resort to self-help and they seek to expand their own power where possible, through the use of increasing their military capabilities. The result of this is the security dilemma: as a state increases its military capabilities, other states can not be sure whether this is meant for offensive or defensive purposes, and might feel pressured to increase their own capabilities. This can result in an arms race, until one

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state finds that it can no longer keep up and decides it is necessary to strike preemptively.\textsuperscript{35}

For classical realists such as Hans Morgenthau, conflict between states erupts in their search for power, which arises out of inherent flaws of human nature.\textsuperscript{36} For neorealists, it is the structure of the international system of states which perpetuates conflict between states. The prominence which classical realism had has largely given way to structural realism, now called neorealism. Neorealists, such as John J. Mearsheimer and the late Kenneth Waltz, consider the structure of the international system, in contrast to human nature, as the driving force of state behavior.\textsuperscript{37} Kenneth Waltz was one of the first to expand on this string of theory in his book "Man, the State, and War". In this book, Waltz analyses international relations through the three images of the individual, the state and the international system. He finds that despite the first two images, the international system, due to its anarchy, is the most influential in understanding why war erupts. One can find the use of the theoretical notion of ‘international system’ in everyday life. For example, Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs Sergey Lavrov continually refers to the position of the Russian Federation in the international system, and the structure of that system, during his speeches.\textsuperscript{38} As the literature analysis has shown, the influence of the international system also appears to be

\textsuperscript{35} False Promise of international institutions - John J Mearsheimer page 11
\textsuperscript{37} Kenneth N. Waltz, Man, the State, and War: A Theoretical Analysis (New York: Colombia University Press, 1954), 159.
widely regarded amongst scholars of Russian foreign policy. Neorealism therefore promises to be very useful for the analysis of Russia’s behavior in Syria.

There is also a disadvantage to the use of Neorealism in explaining foreign policy. For clarity, it is first necessary to discern between to definitions: foreign policy, and international politics. “Foreign Policy”, according to Encyclopedia Britannica, entails the objective that “guides the activities and relationships of one state in its interaction with other states.” Most important, foreign policy is determined by several factors: domestic variables, the behavior of other states, and “plans to advance geopolitical designs.”39 “International Politics” is understood by examining the structure of the international system, which leads to the competitive interplay of self-interested actors and the formation of alliances and cooperative agreements.40 The focus on the international system means neorealism has limited use when it comes to explaining or predicting state behavior. As Waltz puts its: “…a neorealist theory of international politics explains how external forces shape states' behavior, but says nothing about the effects of internal forces.” For an unambiguous analysis of the foreign policy one generally needs to consider unit-level factors too, such as the type of government or dominant religion of a state, instead of only the structure of the system. Only when external pressures are dominating over the internal disposition of a state, can an international political theory, such as neorealism, predict state behavior.41 For Russia’s behavior in Syria, it seems

entirely plausible that this is the case; that the international system is the most important factor in determining it’s behavior. Therefore, there is still value in using the theory of neorealism for an analysis.

Neorealism can be subdivided into Offensive and Defensive Neorealism. John J. Mearsheimer, one of the most prominent authors of neorealism, expanded on the idea of offensive neorealism. "The Tragedy of Great Power Politics”\(^\text{42}\) explains how the feature of anarchy forces great powers to seek three goals apart from survival: regional hegemony, nuclear superiority and maximum wealth as a foundation for military strength. The ultimate aim is to be the hegemon, the sole great power in the system. To this end, "great powers always have revisionist intentions, and will try to alter the balance of power with force if they think it can be done at a reasonable price."\(^\text{43}\) According to Mearsheimer, organizations such as the United Nations will not be able to prevent these quests for power expansion either. As he explains in “The False Promise of International Institutions”, these institutions are created by states according to their own calculated interest, and accordingly, the institutions simply reflect the international division of power.\(^\text{44}\)

Opposite to offensive neorealism is the branch of defensive neorealism. Defensive realism, as defined by Kenneth Waltz in "Theory of International Politics", finds that contrary to the aggressive expansion of offensive neorealism, states will try to preserve the balance of power: Maintaining the status quo will be more likely to guarantee their


\(^{43}\) Ibid., 1.

survival than trying to upend it by waging war.\textsuperscript{45} In other words, defensive neorealists believe that aggressive power expansion will lead to balancing by other states, ultimately making the expanding state less secure.\textsuperscript{46} In contrast, for offensive realists, the fear and suspicion of other states, the dependency on self-help and the need for power-maximization all motivate states to "think and act aggressively" towards each other.\textsuperscript{47} In short, both defensive and offensive neorealism should be able to help us understand Russia's actions in Syria if they can explain the intervention as part of a broader strategy to either maintain or improve Russia's position in the international system.

Another very interesting source on Neorealism for this particular paper is "Revolution and War" by the neorealist scholar Stephen Walt. In his book, Walt considers the effect of revolutions on security competition between states. "Revolutions cause sudden shifts in the balance of power, alter the pattern of international alignments, cast doubt on existing agreements and diplomatic norms, and provide inviting opportunities for other states to improve their position." For Syria, all of the above appears to be relevant. Moreover, Walt also discusses the policy debates that usually accompany revolutions: whether to intervene or to accommodate.\textsuperscript{48} This too might prove to be very useful in considering the positions on Bashar al-Assad's role in a potential solution. Especially because it considers security competition between states after revolution in another state, which is relevant to the current context of the Arab Spring.

\textsuperscript{46} The "balance of power" refers to an equilibrium between (blocs of) states. If one state gets too strong, other states combine their strength to counter that particular state.
As good of a basis these works provide, they also have drawbacks. Firstly, they stem from authors who operate from a U.S. centered perspective. Though neorealism is mainly focused on power, what constitutes power can be very subjective, and an American scholar might have different interpretations than a Russian scholar. Therefore, additional literature will include writings of Sergey Karaganov, a Russian political scientist and chairman of the Council for Foreign and Defense Policy of the Russian Federation. His views are often in line with neorealist theories, but he holds a Russian-centered perspective.\textsuperscript{49} Moreover, he is both willing to be critical of the West as well as Russia and Putin's regime. Secondly, a lot of time has passed since these works were published, so more recent books, such as “Taming American Power”\textsuperscript{50} from Stephen M. Walt will be used to provide a view which takes recent developments into account.

Neorealism appears to have great potential for trying to explain Russia’s actions in Syria. Therefore, this theory will be used as a lens through which to consider Russia’s foreign policy.

4.3 Constructivism

Challenging the theory of Neorealism, constructivist authors provide very different explanations of the behavior of states. Some scholars argue that Russia acts certain ways in order to be recognized as having a certain status, others argue that Russia wants to resist the idea that Western values are global values, or that Western style


democracy is the only acceptable form of government. To consider these arguments, a review of constructivist works will be necessary, as they focus on issues of identity and values.

Constructivism generally has two major assumptions that differ from neorealist thinking. The first assumption is that identity forms the basis of a state's interest, more than power and military capabilities.\textsuperscript{51} For example, constructivists point out that for the United States, the military capabilities of the United Kingdom (UK), a state considered to be a long-term ally, is valued differently than the military power of Russia, a traditional adversary.\textsuperscript{52} Ideas and values, and the identities states have influence how they perceive other states.

The second assumption is that of the state and the international system being mutually constitutive. According to Neorealism, the international system is anarchy, and the main focus is on what effect the international system has on states, their goals and their actions. For neorealists, interactions between states do not affect the self-help structure of the international system in any way.\textsuperscript{53} In contrast, constructivists argue that the actions of state do shape the international system. States have identities and interests, shaped by history and how these states deal with each other.\textsuperscript{54} In other words, the conception a state has of itself and of other states come from social interaction between

\textsuperscript{53} Ibid., 392.
\textsuperscript{54} Ibid., 423.
states, and they define the security interests of that state.\textsuperscript{55} With regards to Russia than, it should be possible to discern its interests, and therefore explain its actions, by scrutinizing the conceptions Russia has of itself and of other actors.

Martha Finnemore’s “National Interest in International Society”\textsuperscript{56} provides a good source for understanding Constructivism. It moves away from the power focus of neorealists by emphasizing concepts such as meaning and social value. Finnemore too argues that the interests of states, are the product of socialization between states. Hence, the norms, understandings and relationships in international relations shape the interests a state has. A strong example of this in her research is the case study of the Red Cross and the Geneva Conventions. The norms which these two elements have created run contrary to how Realism would dictate state interests: they limited the application of power at the time when a state might need it the most, namely in military conflict, yet they exist regardless. Hence, this shows that state interests are (at least partially) the product of norms, values and understandings between states.

Peter J Katzenstein’s “The Culture of National Security: Norms and Identity in World Politics,” questions neorealists assumptions such as power as main interest as well. Rather than state interests being shaped only by physical capabilities and institutional constraints, which are the two main assumptions of neorealism and neoliberalism, Katzenstein argues that "state interests do not exist to be "discovered" by self-interested,

\textsuperscript{55} Ibid., 401.
rational actors. Interests are constructed through a process of social interaction." Social interaction, the behavior and history between states, creates identity for a state. Hence, according to the author, as identities change, the interests and policies of states might change too. With regards to this paper then, Russia's identity, or a possible change in that identity, might be able to explain its foreign policy in the Syrian Arab Republic.

One author who has delved into the relationship between Russia's identity and its foreign policy is Andrei P. Tsygankov. Tsygankov is a Russian-born author and professor of International Relations, who has contributed to both Western and Russian academia. In his book "Russia's Foreign Policy: Change and Continuity in National identity", Tsygankov aims to deepen understanding of Russia's national interest formation in foreign policy. He moves away from "mainstream International Relations theories" and finds that Russian foreign policy can be explained by its relations with the West. Though recognizing that material capabilities and the perspective of the leadership play important roles, and in a similar vein to Katzenstein's idea, Tsygankov believes that the interaction between a changing Russian national identity and its relations with the West is crucial in understanding how Russian foreign policy is made. Tsygankov considers identity as a "product of discursive competition among different groups and coalitions, drawing on different actions of the Other and interpreting contemporary international and local influences in a way that suits the groups interests". In other words, by analyzing the discourse used by Russia with regard to actions of the "Other", meaning the West, it

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58 Andrei P. Tsygankov, Russia's Foreign Policy: Change and Continuity in International Identity (London, Rowman & Littlefield, 2016), 305.
59 Ibid., xxvii.
becomes possible to discern what the identity is, and how it serves the national interests. The author also presents a convincing explanation of how Russia's identity has changed in the past, switching between three different "modes" of ideas and values, and how its foreign policy followed suit.

Andrei P. Tsygankov combines both the idea's of Katzenstein and Finnemore by explaining how the role the West plays in Russian identity and how Russia's identity affects its foreign policy. Therefore, it is his book which will guide the constructivist analysis of Russian foreign policy in Syria.
5. RUSSIAN-SYRIAN HISTORY

To understand the current ties between the Russian Federation and Syria, it is necessary to understand the history of the relationship between the two respective countries. This chapter will provide an overview of historical factors that have influenced the Soviet/Russian-Syrian ties, starting with a few weeks before the independence of Syria. At the same time, this chapter will also lay the groundwork for understanding the political revolution and the subsequent civil war, which will be necessary for the following chapters.

5.1 Syria and the Soviet Union

While Syria was nearing the end of a long struggle for its own independence of the French, it sought international support to establish itself. As will be discussed further below, the principles of Arab unity and anti-imperialism led to a favorable position towards the Soviet bloc, despite adhering to non-alignment. Though now independent of France, there were still concerns about the West trying to dominate the Middle East, and these concerns were embodied by the Western support for Israel. On the first of February, 1946, the Soviet Union signed a secret treaty with Syria, in which Moscow promised political and military support as well as the promotion of cultural and economic relations. The USSR would also defend Syria in future confrontations with its neighboring countries, and shipped arms at favorable prices to Damascus.
Starting in 1954, the Soviet Union expanded its political and cultural activities in Syria and Egypt.\textsuperscript{60} The Soviet Union signed a treaty with Syria for facilitating tourism and the exchange of literature, art, education, culture and sports.\textsuperscript{61} From 1957 onwards, financial aid and economic exports from the Soviet Union to Syria increased significantly as well.\textsuperscript{62} Though the long-term goal of the USSR was to draw these countries towards similar styles of government, Moscow did not shy away from supporting "bourgeois nationalist leaders" in order to achieve short term goals, such as disrupting Western interests.\textsuperscript{63} In other words, Syria in and of itself was less important to the Soviet Union than the global struggle against the West.

The rise of the Ba'ath party and the role of the Assad family can be traced back to a critical moment on 8 March 1963, when the Baath party committed a coup d'état in Syria.\textsuperscript{64} The coup was orchestrated by both Baathist and pro-Nasserites individuals. The Baath party, which derives its name from the Arab word for resurrection, holds a pan-Arab ideology and calls for the union of all Arab states.\textsuperscript{65} The pro-Nasserites wanted unity with Egypt, which was ruled by Gamel Abdel Nasser. A few weeks after the coup d'état, animosity between the Baathist and pro-Nasserite elements grew, and the pro-Nasserite group was forced out, leaving only the Baath party in control of Syria, with

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{60}Karen Dawisha, “Soviet Cultural Relations with Iraq, Syria and Egypt 1955-70,” Soviet Studies 27, no. 3 (July, 1975), 421.
\bibitem{61}Ibid., 426.
\bibitem{64}Rami Ginat, “The Soviet Union and the Syrian Ba’th Regime: From Hesitation to Rapprochement,” Middle Eastern Studies 26, (April, 2000), 150.
\end{thebibliography}

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Amin al-Hafiz at its head. As a result, unity with the only other state under control of a Baath party, Iraq, was given priority over broader Arab unity, and the "old guard", those who advocated for Arab unity, waned. Efforts to unite with Iraq were in vain, however, as in November, an anti-Ba'athist coup d'état in Iraq overthrew the regime in Baghdad.\(^66\) Therefore, despite the initial ideas of unifying Syria with other Arab states, no real actions were taken by the new regime.

Apart from seeking Arab unity, Arab socialism was a principle of the Ba'ath party as well. This was combined with the idea of popular democracy: the vanguard had to "lead the masses towards the socialist future in a scientific way and in a democratic style."\(^67\) Though the Syrian leaders pronounced their adherence to non-alignment, Syria was far closer to the Soviet Bloc than to the West, and this relationship was intensified after the coup d’état. The Ba'ath party considered the socialist camp as a welcome force against imperialism.\(^68\) As the idea of Arab unity was opposed to imperialism as well, non-alignment did not mean that the West and the East would receive equal treatment. Initially hostile towards the Ba'ath takeover, the Soviet Union praised al-Hafiz's regime after several socialist measures were implemented.\(^69\) As mentioned before, though the socialist measures implemented were moderate, al-Hafiz's regime could still count on support of the Soviet Union. The role Syria had in resisting imperialism, or the West, was

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\(^{67}\) Ibid., 152.  
\(^{68}\) Ibid., 155.  
\(^{69}\) Ibid., 158.
more important than the extent to which the ideology of Communism would be adhered to.\footnote{Karen Dawisha, “Soviet Cultural Relations with Iraq, Syria and Egypt 1955-70,” Soviet Studies 27, no. 3 (July, 1975), 422.}

Immediately after the 1963 coup, Amin al-Hafiz sought to broaden the support for his regime by releasing political prisoners and avoid extreme economic politics. However, a split within the Syrian military erupted between elder pro-Arab unity leaders and younger Alawi military officers. The leading influence of the heterodox Alawite minority in the military created resentment amongst the larger Sunni population. Gradually, the influence of the Alawites on the military wing of the Ba'ath party grew, which led to internal strife within the Ba'ath party. In 1966, despite the fact that Al-Hafiz had taken several steps in an attempt to consolidate his power, ultra-left military officers of the Alawite faction led by Salah Jadid committed a successful coup d’etat. Jadid appointed General Hafez al-Assad, the son of an Alawi peasant family and the father of Bashar al-Assad, as Minister of Defence.\footnote{Raymond Hinnebusch, Syria: Revolution from Above, (New York: Routledge, 2001), 11X.} This coup d’etat led to the demise of the old-guard of the Ba'ath party, and to the dissolution of the classic Ba'ath ideas of uniting the Arab world, maintain moderate socialism and preserve democratic freedoms.\footnote{Ibid., 46.}

The 1966 coup did not affect relations with the USSR: As with the 1963 coup, Moscow's initially response was weary, but became more friendly after Damascus adopted measures that were considered a positive development in Russia, such as appointing communists in the administration, removing barriers for the Syrian Communist Party (SCP) and paving the way for the SCP to return to Syrian politics. The
reasons for this rapprochement with the Communist party was the lack of support the Ba'ath party had. On a domestic level, this was the first time Syria was ruled by an elite of Alawi origin which led to disapproval amongst the majority of the population.\footnote{Rami Ginat, “The Soviet Union and the Syrian Ba'th Regime: From Hesitation to Rapprochement,” Middle Eastern Studies 26, (April, 2000), 151.} Internationally, their radical and anti-imperial stance irked both conservative Arab and Western regimes. By moving the Ba'ath party from moderate socialism to Marxism-Leninism and opening up to the Communist party, the regime was appealing to a larger segment of the Syrian population, and could count on support of the Soviet Union as well. Hence, Damascus remained dependent on Moscow for political, military, and economic support.\footnote{Ibid., 156-159.} It is worth noting that despite this dependence, cooperation would happen on mutual respect for sovereignty and noninterference, and the Syrian regime stressed that no Soviet military bases would follow.\footnote{Ibid., 166.} Moreover, the fact that the Communist Party was unbanned only when it became in the interest of the Ba'ath party to do so, shows that strategic interests trumped ideology for the Ba'ath regime.

For the Soviet Union, support for the Syrian regime was part of a broader regional strategy as well. The Soviet Union recognized that a potential right-wing counter-coup could topple the frail regime of Jadid and Assad. Moreover, the Arab world was divided between revolutionary and conservative regimes. The latter, with Saudi Arabia at its helm, was already drawn into the sphere of influence of the United States. The revolutionary camp was led by Nasser of Egypt, who had lost standing significantly after
its disastrous performance in the Yemen civil war. In short, the revolutionary camp in the Middle East was in disarray, and the Soviet Union feared that, without the Syrian regime on its side, it would lose any influence it had in the region to the West.

Losing the 1967 war with Israel had two severe consequences for Syria: The country lost the Golan Heights and became politically split in two. The leadership wanted to radicalize further and refused to accept a political settlement with Israel, fearing that it would mean the end of the liberation of Palestine, but other Arab states would only pay for the military reconstruction if Syria would end its radical ideological warfare. Egypt had accepted a settlement with Israel, and the Soviet Union was urging Syria to do the same. General Hafez al-Assad chose to prioritize the need for military buildup and unity with other Arab states, and support privatization to counter the economic malaise, at the cost of the revolution. This split culminated in a coup d’état by Hafez al-Assad in 1970. Assad combined his nationalist principles with a realist strategy, and did away with any radical ideology or political freedoms. Though still paying lipservice to the socialistic revolution, Assad changed the priority of the revolution towards liberating Palestine. This allowed Assad to become close allies with conservative Arab states that were opposed to Israel as well. The realist approach of Assad allowed him to balance Syria's alignments with states that would prove to be most beneficial to Damascus. Through the continued military and economic support of the USSR, Syria remained a formidable opponent to Israeli interests, despite the 1973 war and Syria's involvement in other conflicts.

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76 Ibid., 163.
78 Ibid., VIII.
79 Ibid., 61.
throughout the Middle East.\(^{80}\) The strong ties between Damascus and Moscow were affirmed in the Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation of 1980, though by now it is worth nothing that this treaty did not include mutual defense.\(^{81}\) That this cooperation was strategic and not one out of a "friendship" was made clear by the leaks of the Mitrokhin Archive on KGB-activities in Syria: Syria's foreign and intelligence services where rife with KGB agents, and by wiretapping Hafez al-Assad, Russia knew how reluctant he was to sign the Friendship and Cooperation Treaty.\(^{82}\)

As oil prices declined in 1986, the Arab states were not able to fund Syria's military spending any longer, and an economic crisis erupt. The subsequent collapse of the Soviet Union deprived Syria of aid, technology, trade concessions with the East bloc, cheap weapons and Soviet protection.\(^{83}\) The disappearance of bipolarity also meant Syria would now have to integrate into the new world order to stay relevant. This meant economic liberalization of the Syrian economy. Assad, being a realist and seeing its main benefactor collapse, now appeased the United States, and joined the U.S. in the multinational coalition against Saddam during the first Gulf War.\(^{84}\) At the same time, Assad was looking for different alliances to prevent U.S. hegemony, such as Iran and China. Eventually, when Russia got back on its feet, economic and military ties were restored and debts were forgiven, though this did not carry the same weight as it did with the Soviet Union: the largest provider of economic aid, and most important trading

\(^{80}\) Ibid., 145.
\(^{84}\) Ibid., 148.
partner, was now Western Europe. The end of the bipolarity allowed more room for Syria to move towards the West while maintaining ties with Russia, which was now focused inward. However, only the current interests of Hafez al-Assad, rather than historical ties between countries, continued to define Syria's foreign policy. Hafez would continue this policy until his death in June 2000.

It is evident that the relationship between the Soviet Union and Syria, and the economic and military transfers that came with it, were purely strategic. There was no ideological convergence concerning Communism, nor can it be said that there was a real "friendship", despite a similarly named treaty. This is despite the fact that the USSR used its social and cultural diplomacy to make Syria's goals and attitudes similar to those of the Soviet Union. The only obvious shared value and attitude that lasted, was one of authoritarianism and an opposition to Western influence.

5.2 Bashar al-Assad

During the beginning of Bashar al-Assad's reign in 2000, there were hopes that Bashar would prove to be a modernizer. He spoke of every citizen participating in constructive criticism, of transparency, accountability and fighting corruption, though for the purpose of creating economic progress. Rejection of Western style democracy remained a feature, however, and Bashar wanted Syria to find its own way of "democratic thinking". Nevertheless, as a result of this opening, political opponents held fora, became organized and voiced their ideas for reforming Syria's political system.

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This eventually culminated in an outcry against authoritarianism, the security-apparatus and martial law. Moreover, there were calls for reviewing the role of the Ba'ath party in society, and to end the legal discrimination of women under sharia-based laws.

Initially, Bashar's regime appeased this movement by paying lip service and releasing political prisoners. However, the regime got caught of guard by the number and intensity of civil society groups.\textsuperscript{87} Consequently, In 2001 Bashar, under pressure of conservative elements in his regime that were afraid of losing power, made a step backwards by requiring people to ask for permission to organize a fora, accusing those who were critical of the government of working for foreign interests. Throughout the early 2000's, media became more restricted, and Bashar increased the power of the security apparatus, for example by expanding a law that would protect all security officials from legal prosecution. In detention centers, torture remained a systemic practice.\textsuperscript{88} The expectations of many for a new, modern Syria were crushed as quickly as they had arrived. However, this small window of hope for a transition to democracy had created a lasting impact on the Syrian population.

Peculiarly, despite the return to repression, Bashar al-Assad remained popular in Syria through his anti-Western, anti-Israel and pro-Arab rhetoric, and because of the stability Syria experienced amidst the wars in Iraq and Lebanon in 2003 and 2006. The crackdown of the regime was blamed primarily on the old guard of the Ba'ath party, who were considered to be independent of Bashar. Assad's anti-American rhetoric was

\textsuperscript{87} Ibid., 9.
strategic opportunism: behind the scenes, Syria was cooperating with the United States. For example, Syria allowed the torturing of suspected terrorists of the U.S. in the "War on Terror", in its own territory. Similarly to his father, Bashar sought to bring Syria closer to either Russia, The US, or other Arab states, according to his interests. However, despite cooperating with the United States, the initial steps of democratization, and the removal of Syrian troops from Lebanon, there was little appreciation of the West for Assad.\textsuperscript{89} Despite the brief moment of cooperation on security issues, Syrian-US relations soured with the opposition of Damascus to the 2003 invasion of Iraq. Furthermore, Syria's history of vocal opposition to the US, the support for Hezbollah and the fact that combatants were entering Iraq through Syria to fight against the US, all culminated in a growing opposition in Washington towards Bashar al-Assad.\textsuperscript{90} This suspicion only grew when in 2005, Lebanon's ex-premier, Rafiq Hariri, was murdered by a car bomb.

The assassination of Rafiq Hariri led a call of the international community on Assad to end Syria's 30-year military occupation of Lebanon. Even Russia forced Syria to end its 30-year military occupation of Lebanon. This did not mean that the strategic alliance between Russia and Syria was over though, as Russia had forgiven Syria billions of debt, and stopped a U.N. resolution that would have imposed further sanctions on

\textsuperscript{90} Ibid., 13-21.
Syria. Economically, Russian investments in the Syrian economy totaled nearly $20 billion by 2009, and Syria was buying over $1.5 billion in arms from Russia.

In contrast to the growth of animosity between the United States and Syria then, the relations between Russia and Syria had reached a similar level as Syria had with the Soviet Union. This relationship would prove vital for Assad in the following years, as the civil war would tear up the country.

This analysis of Syrian-Russian history shows several things. Firstly, despite attempts to draw Syria closer, through heavily supporting the regime through military and economic aid, and establishing cultural programs, the Soviet Union did not manage to create shared values and ideas between the two states. What did keep the regime in Moscow and Hafez al-Assad's regime close together was their form of autocratic regimes and a common interest in resisting the United States. Hafez al-Assad made clear that he would act only in Syria's interest, disregarding the Soviet Union in favor of Arab states when necessary. Similarly, the relationship between Russia and Syria appears to be largely constructed out of convenience as well. Especially Syria's cooperation with the U.S. when its strategically beneficial removes weakens the argument that the usual adversary against the U.S. finds its roots in Syria’s identity and values. Therefore, in terms of theory, this conclusion can be more readily explained by neorealism, for its focus on material capabilities, security and relations in the international system, than constructivism, as the latter would emphasize ideas, values and identity.

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5.3 Arab Spring and Civil War

Near the end of 2010, after the self-immolation of a young street vendor, unrest was spreading in Egypt, Tunisia and Yemen. Remarkably, Syria appeared to be relatively stable, though this would all change early 2011. It is here where this chapter will pickup from the end of the historical narrative provided in the previous chapter. This chapter is devoted to analyzing literature found on Syria’s civil war, in order to create an historical overview of what has happened. A clear overview of what has happened will provide useful for the chapters thereafter, which will aim to explain why some of the events in the Syrian civil war have happened.

During February 2011, 1,500 people gathered to protest against the beating of a man by traffic police. This first public display of protest set the stage for another "Day of Rage", but this time, demonstrations popped up around the entire country. Demonstrators were arrested or met with the violence of riot police, which led to more demonstrations. In contrast to the demands of protesters in other countries, who wanted to see their leaders leave, the demands of Syrians were generally similar to those of the early 2000's: repeal of the emergency law, some political reform and release of political prisoners.93 The protests escalated as 15 children were arrested in Daraa, an economically neglected city that had to handle drought refugees. They had graffitied an anti-government slogan, inspired by Tunisian protests, on a wall, and local police caught on. The mistreatment of

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the children during their arrest drew protests from enormous crowds on the 18th of March. This time, they were met with lethal violence, killing four people. The subsequent funerals turned into demonstrations that spread both numerically and geographically, forming a vicious circle in which the government lost more and more legitimacy. The protests would continue to engulf the country over the coming months, until the descent into civil war.

At the beginning of the spread of demonstrations, Bashar wanted to appease the protestors by releasing some prisoners and replacing the governor of Deraa. It was not enough, however, and Bashar's government quickly moved to arranging counter demonstrations, setting up military and police checkpoints and cutting cellphone coverage. State media was creating a narrative that painted the protestors as "infiltrators", "terrorists" and "foreign parties", and highlighted the victimhood of the regime itself. Syria's U.N. representative even claimed that some domestic groups were being supported by foreign actors to provoke a military intervention. The depiction of protesters as foreign or extremists became a major feature in Assad's strategy.

During the first 6 months, Russia's position towards Assad appeared to be rather unsupportive. In August of 2011, Russian president Dmitry Medvedev stated that Assad

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94 Ibid., 39.
97 Ibid., 40.
would face a "sad fate" unless he carried out swift reforms, and curb his use of violence.\textsuperscript{99} This was followed by a statement on the 9th of October, 2011, in which Medvedev called upon Assad to either reform or step down.\textsuperscript{100} At the same time however, Medvedev warned against intervention by the West or NATO, calling upon the Syrian people and Syrian leadership to make any decisions. Moreover, only 5 days before this statement, Russia vetoed a U.N. resolution that would have condemned the violence of the Syrian government towards its civilians. Vitaly Churkin, the representative of the Russian federation to the UN, stated that the resolution was vetoed because the majority of Syrians wanted gradual change, instead of "quick regime change". Churkin also found that too little attention was being paid to extremist groups. Syria's own representative took a step further and claimed that some domestic groups were being supported by foreign actors to provoke a military intervention.\textsuperscript{101} These statements suggest that, even though support for Assad is low in Moscow, priority was given at this time to the continuation of the Syrian state as it is, with a secular regime and free of Western intervention.

As the war continued, Assad's regime made use of the sectarian lines that run through Syria. It did not take long before Sunni Syrians were targeted randomly. An example of this is the massacre in Houla in May 2012. In Houla, a Sunni village that was surrounded by Shia and Alawi villages, 108 people, 49 of those being children, were

executed by pro-government forces. Experiences like these of torture, death and destruction intensified the role of religion in the lives of many Syrians. The brutality and specific targeting lead to the rise of Islamism amongst Sunnis, and thus fractionalization of the Syrian people. The provocation of Sunni reactionary violence divided the population, and the introduction of Syrian forces, such as Lebanon's Hezbollah and Iranian militias, only exacerbated this sectarianism amongst the Syrian people. Because an extremist Sunni takeover is feared by foreign governments, secular, and religious minorities, Assad exploited this fear as way of garnering support for its own regime. The formation of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) by Abdur al-Baghdadi in April 2013 became the embodiment of this fear. Becoming notorious for its state-building, live beheadings and "being too extreme" for al-Qaida, ISIS has become the focal point for many policymakers in Europe and the United States. The rise of ISIS has also played directly into the arguments of Moscow and Assad that without the current regime, Syria will be taken over by Sunni extremism.

Diplomatically, other states were already involved in trying to find a solution to the civil war, after U.N. envoy to Syria Kofi Annan initiated talks. The resulting conference held on the 30th of June, 2012 in Geneva was attended by Foreign Minister of Russia Sergey Lavrov, U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, and representatives of

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105 Ibid., 129.
China and The United Kingdom as well. Though Russia and the other states had agreed that a transitional government would have to be formed, it did not specifically state anything about whether Assad ought to stay or go.\(^\text{106}\) When Hillary Clinton suggested that Assad could not stay in power, Lavrov immediately dismissed that notion, stating that "several western participants of the Geneva meeting distort the achieved agreements in their public statements."\(^\text{107}\) Again, contrary to Medvedev's statements in 2011, this signals how important it has become in the eyes of the Russian government that Assad remains in power.

### 5.3.1 Use of Chemical Weapons

On the 21st of August, 2013, the Syrian civil war took a turn for the worse when news broke through of the use of a chemical attack. Sarin, a nerve gas, was used to murder a large number of civilians, including children, in the Ghouta area of Damascus.\(^\text{108}\) The use of chemical weapons is one the gravest breaches of customary international law, and U.S. President Barack Obama, who had warned in 2012 that the

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use of chemical weapons would trigger U.S. action, responded swiftly.\footnote{109} The next two weeks were filled with statements and speeches of U.S. government officials, such as those of U.S. Ambassador to the U.N. Samantha Powers, U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry, Former U.S. Ambassador to the U.N. Susan Rice and U.S. President Obama, which all called for military action.\footnote{110} Whether Bashar al-Assad’s government was responsible was disputed by Russia. Later, a leaked confidential report submitted to the U.N. Security Council by U.N. investigators confirmed this as it specifically attributed the chemical attacks to the Syrian government.\footnote{111} At that time, however, it was the United States which claimed to have intelligence that could prove Assad’s government was responsible, but it did not publicize it.\footnote{112} Then, on the eve of President Obama’s attempt to convince the U.S. Congress of launching targeted strikes at Bashar al-Assad’s regime, President Vladimir Putin intervened. To the surprise of many, Putin suggested that Syria could give up its chemical weapons program under U.N. auspices. Obama now had to pull the emergency brake, give in to Russia’s accompanying demand that the U.S. would not attack Assad, and ask the U.S. Congress to delay the vote on military action.\footnote{113}

The success of this Russian-American agreement led to the destruction of Syria's chemical weapon program and stocks. Even though it helped avoid a possible failed Congressional vote for U.S. President Obama, and prevented a U.S. military intervention, it can be considered a diplomatic win for Russian President Putin. It was also the first move in which the Obama administration was widely criticized with being taken by surprise by Russia's actions.\textsuperscript{114} Despite this moment of cooperation, diplomatic talks stalled, and the civil war continued.

5.3.2 Russia’s Military Intervention

In September 2015, the Russian Ministry of Defence announced it had military intervened in Syria by performing airstrikes against ISIS targets. The military intervention in itself was not entirely surprising. Putin had sought parliamentary approval and suggested to team up with the U.S. on attacking ISIS at a U.N. General Assembly, and the buildup of Russian forces in Syria was well reported.\textsuperscript{115} However, the execution of the airstrikes did evoke criticisms.\textsuperscript{116} What was portrayed as an anti-ISIS mission, could in reality better be described as one aimed at propping up Assad. Indeed, allegedly the majority of targets were rebel groups that did not belong to ISIS, but instead were

\textsuperscript{114} Ibid.
fighting both ISIS and Assad's government. Some of these groups bombed by Russian planes belonged to the Free Syrian Army, which is being supported by the US-led coalition. In response, U.S. Secretary of Defense accused Russia of "pouring gasoline on the fire" and warned that the targeting of moderate rebels could lead to an increase of extremism and instability in Syria.

Only 6 months after the intervention, on the 14th of March, Russian President Vladimir Putin announced a withdrawal of troops from Syria. Though this announcement was accompanied with a lower number of airstrikes by the Russian Air Force, little changed in terms of Russian presence in Syria: half of its deployed fighter jets returned to Russia, but in turn some of Russia's latest attack helicopters had arrived to bolster the troops. Indeed, the message of the "withdrawal" appeared to be far more important in diplomatic terms than of actual military value. Putin underscored this importance himself in his announcement. In terms of political effects, it discredited

121 "Meeting of President of Russia Vladimir Putin with Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov and Defence Minister Sergey Shoigu,” The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation,
Washington again. Obama had painted Russia's intervention as one in which Moscow was bogged down and "bleeding", not as a military action that would end as quick as it began.\textsuperscript{122} Again, this lead political pundits wondering whether Washington was caught of guard once more.\textsuperscript{123}


6. CONSTRUCTIVST ANALYSIS

For a thorough understanding of actions undertaken by the Russian Federation in Syria, one can not only look at the actions Russia has taken both in the present and the past towards Syria; It is important to consider the theories surrounding the question of why Russia has taken certain courses of action. After considering several theories in the theoretical chapter, two theories emerged as potential neorealism constructivism, constructivism will now be used to guide this analysis of Russia's foreign policy in this chapter. Both theories provide different lenses, each with their own interpretations and each highlighting their own set of factors, through which they explain Russia's foreign policy in the past. The aim of this chapter is twofold: to provide an overview on how constructivism can explain Russian foreign policy in the past, and to explore how this theory can be further used to explain Russian foreign policy during the Syrian civil war.

6.1 Modes of Russian Identity

Andrei Tsygankov considers Russian foreign policy through a constructivist lens. He provides a helpful way of analyzing Russian foreign policy by identifying three different groups: Statist, Civilizationist, and Westernist. These different ways of Russian foreign policy thinking each have their own particular views on the identity of Russia and the meaning of relations with other states. Statist emphasizes strengthening the state by placing power, stability and security above the values of freedom and democracy. The
long history of invasions and threats to Russian independence have made external threats critical for Statists. This does not mean that Statists are inherently anti-Western, but rather that they would seek recognition from the West through military and economic power. Civilizationists consider Russian values to be different from the West, and seeks to spread these values, such as the "world revolution" of Lenin-Trotsky. Finally, Westernizers considered Russia as a state belonging to the West, exemplified by Gorbachev's push for further de-Stalinization, mutual security with the West and his idea of a "common European home". Starting with the independence of the Syrian Arab Republic, the Russian view alternated between Statist and Westernist, before ending up Civilizationist. It is through these three lenses which I will analyze the constructivist explanation of Russian foreign policy.

Europe and the United States have played an important part in shaping Russian history. Before the revolution of 1917, Russia had sought recognition of these states, and attempted to modernize like the West. However, the socialist revolution stood in stark contrast to the liberal West, and thus Soviet Russia would not gain recognition for its domestic institutions. Instead, it turned to military strength. After a brief period of post-Cold War Westernist course under Boris Yeltsin, the Russian Federation changed it course when Yevgeny Primakov became president in 1998. Instability in Chechnya, combined with a lack of recognition by the West, as NATO expanded despite Russia's opposition, lead to a return to Statism. Strength would bring the security, respect and

125 Ibid., 5.
126 Ibid., 18.
recognition which Russia was lacking at that time. Russia's economy was still in decline, yet Primakov developed an assertive foreign policy. He believed that Russia should pursue an active foreign policy not despite, but because of, limited resources. This is the opposite of what neorealist theory would suggest, as neorealists emphasizes the link between material capabilities and the degree to which one can affect other states.\textsuperscript{127} In Primakov's view, balancing the United States, and thus resisting the unipolar order in favor of multipolarity based on an equal footing between great powers, would allow Russia to help shape the international order in which it can thrive.\textsuperscript{128}

The terror attacks around the turn of the millennium in Chechnya, Moscow as well as New York in 2001 brought the United States and the Russian Federation. Vladimir Putin, who was elected to be Russian president in May 2000, considered terrorism as the only security threat to Russia, rather than the United States, stating that "no one is going to be hostile to us" when talking about the international community.\textsuperscript{129} He began to define U.S.-Russian relations around the fight against global terrorism. Putin was critical of the Primakov's foreign policy being out of step with Russia's capabilities at that time, but continued the Statist course of placing a strong state with its own particular values above democracy. He pursued what Tsygankov calls a course of "pragmatic cooperation", which was neither trying to make Russia politically independent enough for Statists, nor pro-Western enough for Westernizers. In other words, instead of integrating with or balancing against the West, Russia would be a great power in a West-centered

\textsuperscript{127} Tragedy of great power politics page 2.
\textsuperscript{129} http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/21567
world, using limited integration in the world economy to foster economic development which in turn would give Russia the power to preserve Russian interests in world politics.\(^\text{130}\)

This "pragmatic cooperation" accompanied by the economic modernization is exemplified by the development of its oil reserves for export to the West. Putin projected to increase the export of crude oil to the United States with 9 percent per year, and continued privatization and implement market reforms.\(^\text{131}\) Meanwhile, the military saw a sharp reduction in personnel accompanied with an enormous budget increase to modernize the weaponry.\(^\text{132}\) With regards to U.S. foreign policy, Vladimir Putin was pragmatic as well, supporting the war against the Taliban in Afghanistan in 2001 in exchange for U.S. support for Russia's membership in the World Trade Organization and support for Russia's policies against insurgents in Chechnya.\(^\text{133}\) Even on actions undertaken by the United States which traditionally could count on opposition by Russia, such as Washington's unilateral withdrawal of the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty, went uncriticized.\(^\text{134}\) Putin's reaction was muted and tolerant, stating that the decision was a mistake, but that it did not present a threat to Russia's national security.\(^\text{135}\) In short,


\(^{131}\) Ibid., 149.

\(^{132}\) Ibid., 139.

\(^{133}\) Ibid., 150.


cooperation and economic modernization were given priority in Russia's foreign policy. However, Russia would continue to resist the U.S. if actions were taken that ran against its national interest.

One example of the limits of this "pragmatic cooperation" was the invasion of Iraq. Moscow was opposed to the invasion of Iraq, as it circumvented the United Nations, and thus undermined Russia's role in the Security Council (UNSC). Moreover, as Moscow was unconvinced of either the nuclear weapons program or ties of Al Qaeda to Saddam Hussein's regime, it was considered counterproductive to the global war on terror to dethrone a stable regime. Furthermore, there was also the issue of Iraq's 7 billion dollar debt to Russia, and the fact that Russian companies were involved with lucrative oil-exploitation contracts.\(^{136}\) Moscow also ignored protests of the U.S. concerning profitable arm sales to states such as Iraq, Iran and Syria.\(^{137}\) This opposition underscores the idea that Putin sought to balance relations with the West while working on economic improvement and great power status.

The invasion of Iraq, along with continued instability in Afghanistan, threats issued to Iran and the colored revolutions in the former Soviet sphere, were perceived by Russia as harmful to its power and security. The removal of stable, allied regimes and the increase of Islamic radicalization was threatening to Russia. Moreover, the calls of Georgia and Ukraine in favor of joining NATO only exacerbated the concerns surrounding Russia's national security.\(^{138}\) Economically, however, Russia had

\(^{136}\) Ibid., 150.
\(^{137}\) Ibid., 196.
\(^{138}\) Ibid., 178.
dramatically improved its conditions: the size of the economy in GDP had increased six fold between 1999 and 2007. These two developments, accompanied by a growing fear that Russia itself would be subject to Western efforts of regime change, lead to a new change in Russia's identity. The annual address to the Federal Assembly Putin made in 2007 underscored this newly found assertiveness. The Russian president discussed the use of “democratization” by some states as civilization was used in colonial times, the threat some countries were posing to the political and economic independence of Russia, of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and disarmament.\textsuperscript{139} Indeed, in a speech at the Munich Conference in 2007, Putin remarked that "the unipolar model is not only unacceptable but also impossible in today's world", and that the policies of the U.S. stimulate an arms race.\textsuperscript{140} The "Review of the Russian Federation's Foreign Policy" released in that same year had one remarkable change from the previous "2000 Foreign Policy Concept": it emphasized multipolarity and actively challenging unilateral actions of the U.S., while at the same time not being anti-American but calling for collective leadership.\textsuperscript{141} In other words, Russia's foreign policy under Putin became more assertive and defensive, though not with the anti-West sentiments that were present under Primakov's presidency.

When Dmitry Medvedev, with Putin's support, won the election in March 2008, the assertiveness of 2007 increased. One example of this was the renewed activism in the Middle East. Moscow took the lead by suggesting to Tehran that Iran should send its nuclear fuel to Russia in order to quell Western (and Israeli) concerns about the Iranian nuclear program. Russia also engaged in political talks with Hamas after they won Palestinian elections, independently of the usual quartet with the United Nations, the United States and the European Union. This assertiveness in this particular region came after the realization that the intervention in Afghanistan and Iraq did nothing to reinforce security, but was actually leading to more terrorist activity in that region. Moscow also aimed to distance itself from the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, noting the anger and frustration which they had caused among Muslims, and keeping in mind the large Muslim population in its southern regions.\footnote{Ibid., 196-210.} The closer ties with the Muslim world, as well as the economical and political benefits of increased oil exports, and the war in Georgia, reestablished the Great Power status of Russia. At the same time, the financial crisis revealed the economic weakness of the West, while developing economies, such as Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa (BRICS) had experienced unprecedented growth and were establishing their own political-economic institutions outside of Western influence.\footnote{Dominic Wilson et al. “The BRICs Remain in the Fast Lane,” \textit{Goldman Sachs BRICs Monthly}, June, 2011, accessed 23 August, 2016, http://www.goldmansachs.com/our-thinking/archive/archive-pdfs/brics-remain-in-the-fast-lane.pdf} Still, close cooperation with the U.S. continued, demonstrated by the U.S.-Russia summit in 2009 that was attended by both U.S. President Barack Obama and Russian President Dmitry Medvedev.
The period of renewed assertiveness was short lived, however, as global events brought new opportunities and challenges. Firstly, the global financial crisis of 2007-2009 did considerable damage to Russia's economy. Secondly, U.S. President Barack Obama had committed to a reset of the U.S.-Russian relationship in an attempt to improve it, relieving Russian fears of NATO expansion and American "democratization" efforts. Lastly, the Arab Spring was destabilizing the region, dethroning authoritarian leaders, and increasing the potential of terrorism and insecurity in the Caucasus region of Russia. In response to all these events, Medvedev sought increased cooperation with the United States again, by deepening economic relations in order to gain foreign investment in the Russian economy, agreeing to the U.N. resolution on Iran's nuclear program, and providing NATO with a transit point in Russia to support the stabilization of Afghanistan. Though ties between Russia and the U.S., as well as European nations, were strengthened during Medvedev's term, the return of Vladimir Putin as President of Russia would again change the course of Russian foreign policy.

This constructivist explanation of Russia's foreign policy shows how Russian identity evolved since the fall of the Soviet Union, and how it influenced Russia's position vis a vis other states. In 2001, Russia was an inward focused state looking to boost its economy and security, only cooperating with other states where it would be pragmatic but not looking to westernize. After experiencing economic growth, and realizing that U.S. meddling in the Middle East was invoking much criticism from the Muslim world, Russia became more assertive and critical of the West. The subsequent global economic crisis damaged Russia's economic growth, the Arab spring had
destabilized the Middle East and increased the potential for terrorism. Together with the reset of relations by the U.S., Russia resumed the approach of pragmatic cooperation. In 2010-2011 however, as the West had failed to stabilize the Middle East, and even contributed to instability in the region by intervening in Libya during the Arab Spring, while at the same the BRICS continued their path of extraordinary economic growth, Russia returned to assertiveness. This time, however, the assertiveness was build on the idea of a multipolar world, instead of a unipolar one. Where previously Russia aimed to be a great power in a Western world, now Russian values would be given equal weight in determining the world order as would Western values. This would lead to unprecedented poor relations between the West and Russia and set the stage for what some call a "new Cold War". 

6.2 The Civilizationist Turn

By 2011, the Russian economy had recovered from the financial crisis, despite its structural problems of corruption and lack of diversification. Meanwhile, the demise of the unipolar system continued: the United States failed to bring lasting stability to the Middle East, the international economic order had shown its weaknesses while being challenged by the rising economic and political power of non-Western states, and the idea of democratization lost its appeal as it became associated with weak, lawless states rife

with sectarian violence.\textsuperscript{145} The strongest example of this was the NATO intervention in Libya.

NATO's intervention in Libya was based on United Nations Security Council (UNSC) Resolution 1973. The resolution was adopted by the UNSC in response to Libya's civil war, in which Muammar Gaddafi, the leader of the Libyan government, had called the opposition rats and vowed to "cleanse" the streets house by house.\textsuperscript{146} Resolution 1973, from which Russia under President Medvedev had abstained, allowed states to take "all necessary measures" to protect the civilian population.\textsuperscript{147} NATO forces took it one step further however, and as a U.S. drone and French jet targeted and stopped Gaddafi's fleeing convoy, NATO facilitated the eventual capture and killing of Muammar Gaddafi by rebel forces.\textsuperscript{148} Vladimir Putin, prime minister at that time, responded harshly, stating that NATO overstepped the mandate and that it was an infringement of sovereignty. Putin also discussed Gaddafi's authoritarianism, stating that it was a regional practice with the "the mentality of the population and the practices that developed there", and asked whether intervention would be done in every crooked state or internal

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\textsuperscript{145} Andrei P. Tsygankov, \textit{Russia's Foreign Policy: Change and Continuity in International Identity} (London, Rowman & Littlefield, 2016), 236.
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conflict. In Russia's eyes, the events in Libya showed that the West, though rhetorically oriented towards principles such as the responsibility to protect, would still violate principles of sovereignty and go outside the U.N. mandate to pursue national interests.

Vladimir Putin, elected to be President of the Russian Federation again in 2012, reshaped Russia's identity towards a Civilizationist fashion. Where previously Putin would indicate Russia's success by economic and political standards, while being dismissive of any particular national idea's, from 2012 onwards importance was placed on values, identity of civilization and ideological elements in its foreign policy. A good example of this turn are two direct quotes of Vladimir Putin, one from the year 2007, and the other from 2012:

"You expected to hear, no doubt, some philosophical recommendations for the future. But I think that it is not proper for us to evaluate our own work, and not time yet for me to set out my political testament. Of course, we should always be thinking about the future. Here in Russia we have this old tradition, a favorite pastime, of searching for a national idea. This is something akin to looking for the meaning of life. It is, generally speaking, a useful and interesting pursuit, and also one that is never-ending. Let us not

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launch into discussions on such matters today."\textsuperscript{151}

- Vladimir Putin, Annual address to the Federal Assembly 2007

Though the speech acknowledges a Russian identity, and its importance thereof, any talk of applying it to foreign policy was non-existent. In fact, the only mention of civilization was used in a critique of the U.S.'s pursuit of democratization for its own advantage. In the annual address of 2012, however, civilization became important amidst warnings of how the world "enters a period of transition and possibly even shocks" wherein states will either take the lead or lose their independence depending "not only on the economic potential" but their "the ability to move forward and embrace change."\textsuperscript{152}

Crucially, the importance of civilization was now taken together with being independent and influential:

"In the 21\textsuperscript{st} century amid a new balance of economic, civilizational and military forces Russia must be a sovereign and influential country. We should not just develop with confidence, but also preserve our national and spiritual identity, not lose our sense of national unity. We must be and remain Russia. We should let the wealth of Russian


culture guide us. Russia has always been among the nations that not only create their own cultural agenda, but also influence the entire global civilization.  

- Vladimir Putin, Annual address to the Federal Assembly 2012

The Foreign Policy Concept of 2013 reaffirms the role of civilization in the transition towards multipolarity: It notes the decline of the West in terms of economic and political power, and states that "for the first time in modern history, competition takes place on a civilizational level, whereby various values and models of development based on the universal principles of democracy and market economy start to clash and compete against each other. Cultural and civilizational diversity of the world becomes more and more manifest."

In practice, this language served an important goal: moving Russia away from the previously held idea that it would be a great power in a West-centered world, to the idea that as the world would no longer be West-centered, Russia would become an equal partner in shaping world order. This meant Putin's Statist values of sovereignty and security would become just as important as Western ideas of democratization and the responsibility to protect populations from harm by their own governments.

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6.2.1 Value of Non-Interference

In line with previous concerns of instability, Moscow voiced its concerns about possible consequences if the regime of Assad would fall. When the West started supporting the opposition, these concerns only grew. The move of Russia towards a more Civilizationist identity meant it was less willing to put the idea military intervention above respecting sovereignty. This can be seen in Russia's stance towards the events and negotiations as they unfolded from 2011 to 2015.

The first international conference on Syria, held in June 2012 and initiated by United Nation's peace envoy Kofi Annan, produced a joint communique that aimed to achieve several things. Crucially, one of the stated goals was a transitional body that was established of both government and opposition members. As previously mentioned, this communique was immediately interpreted differently by Russia and the United States, who disagreed on whether it meant that Assad had to go or could potentially stay on. Though the Syrian government had shown its willingness to discuss a political transition, the opposition did not commit to this "roadmap for peace" as it wanted a guarantee that Assad would resign.\(^{156}\) Therefore, a second international conference was planned by Russia and the U.S. to get both parties to agree to the Geneva Communique.

On the 20th of December, 2012, Vladimir Putin distanced himself from Assad's regime. In a Q&A session, he stated that he "was not that preoccupied with the fate of al-Assad's regime", before mentioning that he understood what was going on there and that his family has been in power for over 40 years, and that "without a doubt, change is

required. We're worried about something else, about what happens next." Putin also offered his view on how this change would have to come, saying that agreements based on a military victory are irrelevant and can't be effective, and that Russia's only position is not that al-Assad's regime remains in power at any cost, but that the Syrian people agree amongst themselves on how they will live. His main line of reasoning against any intervention that would remove Assad is a familiar one by now: Libya had an intervention, that was "a mistake" and the country now "continues to fall apart". Putin did suggest Syria was important for "Russia's position in this part of the world: it is close by", but he dismissed the importance of either economic relations or personal relations to Assad's regime, reminding everyone that he has visited "Paris and other European capitals more often than here."

These answers already suggest that Vladimir Putin would neither be willing to allow Assad to fall, nor throw Russia's full weight behind Assad to assure him a military victory.

The chemical attacks on Ghouta on the 21st of August, 2013, changed nothing about Putin's unwavering opposition towards regime change. He demanded to see the evidence that would proof that the Syrian government was the one who used the weapon of mass destruction, he warned against military intervention, and reminded U.S. President Barack Obama of the importance of international law and the role of the U.N. Security Council.

Though this appears to be a contradiction to Putin's earlier statement of not

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158 Roland Oliphant, “Putin tells Obama: show us proof Syrian regime was behind chemical attacks.” The Telegraph, August 31, 2013. Accessed August 24, 2016,
being committed to Bashar al-Assad specifically, the focus of his statement was more on the dangers of military intervention against the government forces, without saying anything about Assad in particular. Even though Vladimir Putin was often portrayed as "backing Assad"\textsuperscript{159} by Western media during those weeks when the possibility of military intervention was being discussed, what Putin actually appeared to support was the notion that regime change can not be done through military intervention any longer. Indeed, the role of civilization and the importance of Russian values and norms were put forward again in a wrap up of a Q&A session held by Minister of Foreign Affairs Sergey Lavrov on the 26st of August, 2013, concerning Russia's response to a possible Western military intervention in Syria:

"You can pick any sphere, and it is always better to follow the rules, to respect peoples and help them agree between themselves, rather than thinking in categories of “gunboat diplomacy”, stop to be sick for the colonial past, the epoch, when they needed just to whisper for everybody to show servile obedience. The world is changing today. It is impolite and short-sighted to perceive other civilizations as second class groups of the population. It will catch you up sometime in the future. We need to avoid the war of civilizations in all possible ways. We are for the dialogue, for the alliance of civilizations. But in this case we need to respect each other’s traditions, the history of those communities, which become more and more significant on our planet, to respect the

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values, which have been created, established for centuries in these societies and were transferred from one generation to another. It is so simple – if you wish to get on well within your neighbors in your village, the same principles apply.\textsuperscript{160}

These closing remarks again show how the world is perceived in Moscow: the world is changing in favor of multipolarity, and civilizations will have to respect, and deal with, each other. This also includes the values and traditions of different civilizations, and for Russia this means sovereignty and nonintervention.

6.2.2 No Longer Exceptional

During the day on which U.S. Congress would decide whether to go through with Barack Obama's military intervention in Syria, Vladimir Putin proposed an alternative to the U.S. President. U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry had told reporters that Assad could avoid U.S. military action by handing over its chemical weapons program, and despite the fact that the U.S. State Department had walked back on that statement, Putin suggested to do exactly that. By making sure that military action against Assad would be prevented, while at the same time placing Barack Obama in an awkward position after all his talk about red lines being crossed and the necessity of military intervention, Putin took the lead. In his op-ed published in the New York Times 2 days after his suggestion, Putin described what would happen if the plans for military intervention would continue:

http://archive.mid.ru/bdomp/brp_4.nsf/e78a48070f128a7b43256999005bcb3/1bddd8f28ad26f1bd44257be3004c5c1b!OpenDocument
"A strike would increase violence and unleash a new wave of terrorism. It could undermine multilateral efforts to resolve the Iranian nuclear problem and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and further destabilize the Middle East and North Africa. It could throw the entire system of international law and order out of balance."\textsuperscript{161}

Accompanying the threat of global destabilization, collapsing world order and waves of terrorism, Putin also mentioned that U.S. exceptionalism does not exist:

"I carefully studied (Barack Obama's) address to the nation on September 10. And I would rather disagree with a case he made on American exceptionalism, stating that United States’ policy is “what makes America different. It’s what makes us exceptional.” It is extremely dangerous to encourage people to see themselves as exceptional, whatever the motivation. There are big countries and small countries, rich and poor, those with long democratic traditions and those still finding their way to democracy. Their policies differ, too. We are all different, but when we ask for the Lord’s blessings, we must not forget that God created us equal."\textsuperscript{162}

The fact that Putin chose to close his piece in the New York Times with stressing equality can easily be interpreted as another reminder of his belief in multipolarity in


world affairs, whatever the way in which the United States perceives itself. The warnings of a collapse of multilateralism if the U.S. does not recognize the role of Russia through the Security Council are used to back up this belief. In turn, this downplay of U.S. exceptionalism alleviates the status of Russia, as it places Russia on a more equal footing. The alleviation of Russia's status becomes all the more apparent through the following quotes from the same letter:

"From the outset, Russia has advocated peaceful dialogue enabling Syrians to develop a compromise plan for their own future. We are not protecting the Syrian government, but international law. We need to use the United Nations Security Council and believe that preserving law and order in today’s complex and turbulent world is one of the few ways to keep international relations from sliding into chaos. The law is still the law, and we must follow it whether we like it or not."\(^{163}\)

"Millions around the world increasingly see America not as a model of democracy but as relying solely on brute force, cobbling coalitions together under the slogan “you’re either with us or against us.”\(^{164}\)

"We must stop using the language of force and return to the path of civilized diplomatic and political settlement."\(^{165}\)

\(^{164}\) Ibid.
\(^{165}\) Ibid.
What becomes evident here is that Putin is portraying the United States as the "brute", or at the least, one that relies on brute force instead of democracy. At the same time, Russia is portrayed as the country that is the protector of international law, of international order, and of peaceful resolutions through "civilized diplomatic and political settlement". These are of course, the hallmarks of a global power. By portraying the United States' values as consisting of intervention through brute force and breaching international law, Putin creates the space for Russia to step in as the protector of order. This is in line with the idea that Vladimir Putin is reshaping Russia's identity towards a "Civilizationist" one: Russian values are different from the West, and these values must be spread abroad.

Soon after the chemical weapons issue was solved by Russia in a diplomatic move, a second conference, called the Geneva II Conference on Syria, took place on the 22nd of January, 2014. Again, the U.S., now through Secretary of State John Kerry, held firm to the idea that Assad would not be part of the resolution, stating that there is "no way possible that a man who has led a brutal response to his own people can regain legitimacy to govern." These talks ultimately produced no tangible results due to infighting amongst the opposition for their representation.

As the war continued, the Islamic State conquered more territory, gaining control over almost the entire Raqqa region. In response, the U.S. and several Arab states launched airstrikes on ISIS positions in Syria in September 2014.\(^\text{168}\) Again, Putin objected through the United Nations against the fact that these strikes happened without approval of Bashar al-Assad, which would be a "gross violation of international law", and raise concerns in Moscow about possible airstrikes against Syrian forces loyal to the government.\(^\text{169}\) In the months after the start of U.S. airstrikes in Syria, Kurdish and other anti-government forces managed to expand their territory.\(^\text{170}\) In response, Russia began its own military intervention in support of Assad in September 2015.

The intervention, though rhetorically aimed at ISIS, was immediately criticized for being aimed at anti-Assad forces of all kinds instead of just ISIS, such as the U.S.-backed Free Syrian Army. Apart from propping up Assad however, it was largely a show of force in a way not seen since the end of the Cold War.\(^\text{171}\) The Russian Ministry of Defence reportedly turned itself into "a 24-hours news station, pumping out slick TV footage of cruise missile and airstrikes complete with animated graphics." The video's of missiles launched from the Caspian Sea were commented on by President Putin, stating "That we carried this out from the Caspian Sea at a distance of around 1,500 kilometers, with high-precision weapons and hit all our targets, reflects of course the good

preparation of our military."172 This showcase of Russia's military and technological capabilities served two purposes: it increased approval of the intervention in Syria at home, and it was a reminder to the world of the development Russia has gone through, such as the modernization of its military. The latter becomes very useful when one seeks to alleviate its perceived status globally.

In addressing the United Nations General Assembly on the 28th of September, the president of the Russian Federation reiterated his point of view on the new international order: the time of "a single center of domination" that existed after the Cold War is over. Moreover, the ones who stood "at the top of the pyramid", and were tempted to think they were "strong and exceptional" and "could do without the UN", will now have to work based on broad consensus with the U.N. or face "collapse of the entire architecture of international relations."173 At the same time, Vladimir Putin asserted Russia's role by calling for respect for its differences, by criticizing the approach of the United States towards Syria and by taking the lead through highlighting Russia's course of action as the right thing to do, and inviting the U.S. to cooperate. Most notably however, Putin again pointed to his discontent with how the international system was shaped: "I must note that such an honest and direct approach of Russia has been recently used as a pretext to accuse it of growing ambitions. However, it is not the matter of Russia's ambitions but the recognition of the fact that we can no longer tolerate the

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current state of affairs in the world." Once again, Putin gave notice of his newfound discontent with Russia in a Western-dominated world, instead opting for a more consensus based system in which Russia has an equal say, and can promote it's own values.

6.3 Mission Accomplished

On March 14th, 2016, Putin suddenly announced a withdrawal of the main part of its forces in Syria that were deployed in September 2015, on the grounds that "in accordance with the situation on the ground," the mission had been "accomplished". In his announcement, Putin repeatedly stressed the capabilities of Russian forces modernized. This announcement is a point on which the theories of neorealism and constructivism converge: The increased military capability directly influences Russia's actual power, and thus it improves its place in the international system. The role of these capabilities will be further discussed in the chapter on Neorealism. Apart from just military power however, Vladimir Putin also made sure to emphasize the new capabilities in his speeches, and to broadcast the intervention and the success that allowed the withdrawal, to reach as large of an audience as possible. In other words, it also served as tool for shaping Russian identity and the way in which Russia is perceived globally.

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174 Ibid.
Another event that can be interpreted in this light is the concert that was given in Palmyra a few weeks later. Palmyra, the ancient UNESCO-site that was captured and badly damaged by ISIS, had been recaptured by Russian and Syrian forces, and this success was highlighted in a media event. It was attended by some hundred foreign journalists, who received a guided tour on Russian aid being handed out to Syrian children, unknown militants handing in their weapons, and a military base that included a library, a volleyball court and a "rest-center" with oil paintings for Russian soldiers too look at.\textsuperscript{176} Representatives of Assad's government, of China and of other states allied to Russia, attended the ceremony as well, though Western representatives were absent. The concert, which was broadcasted on national TV, was conducted by a close friend of Putin, and played only Russian and European classical music. As David Schoenbaum puts it in his article "The Violins of Palmyra": music, like religion, culture and language, is identity, and Russian classical music is historically one of the country's most notable exports.\textsuperscript{177} Before the concert, Putin, through a live video-feed at the start of Palmyra's concert, discussed Russia's fight against international terrorism and called the liberation of Palmyra a restoration of humanity's heritage.\textsuperscript{178} The media tour, the concert and the speech all served to reinforce Russia's identity as a global power not just in terms of military power, but also one with great cultural influence, whether through its own


culture or through the assumed role of protecting world culture against barbarism. Thus with Palmyra as backdrop, it became a celebration of Russia's cultural influence and global relevance.

Lastly, though there are neorealist arguments for a limited intervention, rather than a full-scale intervention that would seek to destroy any opposition, there is also a compelling constructivist argument. As mentioned in the theoretical chapter, identity is socially constructed by interaction between states. Russia has been turning towards a Civilizationist identity, in which its own national ideas influence global civilization, and act as a counterweight to U.S. domination. The interaction which shapes Russian identity the most is that with the West, and the West has become associated with democracy-promotion, regime change and unilateral action. In contrast, Russia has sought to adhere to ideas of sovereignty and multilateralism. Therefore, a political solution was advocated by Vladimir Putin from the start of the civil war on. The political solution Russia seeks to eventually stop the civil war was portrayed by Vladimir Putin in his letter in the New York Times as a symbol of Russia as the actor of civilized dialogue and reason, in contrast to the “brute” United States. Calling the military intervention off despite its success, and instead seeking a political solution thus helped to establish Russian identity in accordance with the Civilizationist turn it has made.

6.4 Conclusion

The constructivist explanation of Russia's foreign policy has highlighted some interesting aspects. Through the use of Tsygankov’s three modes of considering Russia's identity, a notable shift has become clear. What used to alter between a "Statist" and "Westernist" identity, Russia has now adopted a "Civilizationist" identity. Russian President Vladimir Putin has profiled the Russian Federation throughout the Syrian civil war as a state on par with the hegemon status which the United States used to have. This becomes evident not only through the speeches and statements of Russian government officials, but also through events such as the concert of Palmyra, or the chemical weapons attack. Specifically in case of the latter, Putin managed to present Russia as the protector of international order, sovereignty and peaceful resolutions by standing up to the "brute force" of the United States that was on the verge of yet another military intervention. Its military intervention remained limited, to the surprise of many as it was successful, because Putin is framing Russia as the voice of reason that wants to cooperate with the U.S. in working towards a political solution on Syria. Most importantly, however, it is also shown by the flat out rejection of Western values as dominant. Instead, multipolarity and multilaterals is now the order of the day, and Russia's insistence on sovereignty, forms of government other than democracy and consensus-decision-making through the United Nations has become more prominent than ever.

What has become clear however, is that the constructivist explanation can not be considered independent from the influence of the international system and concepts of power based on material capability. The international system is not just “Anarchy Is What States Make of It” as discussed in the literature review, i.e. purely socially constructed. Rather, the ideas, values and identity of Russia, and Vladimir Putin in particular, are very much related to the international system and Russia’s place therein. This becomes evident in many of the statements made by Vladimir Putin throughout the years, which continuously point towards the system, the demand for multipolarity and the opposition against a unipolar U.S.-dominated world. In other words, it appears as if the identity is a determining factor for foreign policy, yet it remains constrained by the international system. It is this focus on the international system which points us towards the relevance of another theory. Though constructivism has its own merits for analyzing Russian foreign policy in Syria, the essence of the international system forms the basis for neorealism, which will be used to analyze Russia’s behavior in the next chapter.
The prominence of neorealism in International Relations has been well discussed in the theoretical chapter. However, as previously discussed, even though neorealism is a theory of international politics, and not one of foreign policy, it can still provide explanations about Russia’s actions in Syria, as the two share common ground. The focus for neorealism on explaining foreign policy lies on the international level, not on domestic factors. As will be discussed in this chapter, international politics carries a lot of weight when it comes to the civil war in Syria, and hence it is possible to use it in order to understand Russian foreign policy.

7.1 The Balance of Power

One of neorealism’s most important aspects is the place of a state in the structure of a system. Hence, an analysis of Russia’s foreign policy in Syria should begin with a consideration of how the Syrian civil war might affect the global balance of power. As was discussed previously, Russia is a resurgent state, harking back to a time where it was an undeniable global superpower rather than “a regional power acting out of weakness”
as President of the United States Barack Obama named it in 2014.\textsuperscript{181} This longing for a return to great power status was accompanied by several developments in areas where Russia previously had enormous influence.

The expansion of NATO eastward has been a thorn in the eye of President Vladimir Putin. Indeed, the West has often been criticized by the Russian government that it has broken its promise of limited NATO expansion.\textsuperscript{182} When, during the 2008 Bucharest Summit, NATO announced that Ukraine and Georgia, two states bordering Russia, would eventually become NATO members, Vladimir Putin made the following statement:

“We view the appearance of a powerful military bloc on our borders, a bloc whose members are subject in part to Article 5 of the Washington Treaty, as a direct threat to the security of our country. The claim that this process is not directed against Russia will not suffice. National security is not based on promises. And the statements made prior to the bloc's previous waves of expansion simply confirm this.”\textsuperscript{183}

The perceived direct security threat was made clear with a warning not long after the Bucharest statement, in which the Russian ambassador to NATO Dmitry Rogozin warned of war and separatism in Georgia if it would continue its path to membership. Three months later the Russo-Georgian war started. According to the neorealist scholar John J. Mearsheimer, the war currently going on in Ukraine can be explained similarly to the war in Georgia: Russia no longer tolerates NATO expansion in it’s direct neighborhood and will actively use force to break up states that are moving closer to membership.\footnote{John J. Mearsheimer, “Why the Ukraine crisis is the West’s Fault,” \textit{Foreign Affairs}, September 2014, accessed August 23, 2016. https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/russia-fsu/2014-08-18/why-ukraine-crisis-west-s-fault} In a similar vein, Russia has seen another former state in which had influence taken away by NATO actions. Though not through the prospect of NATO membership, the death of Muammar Gaddafi facilitated by NATO forces overstepping their U.N. mandate, has lead to the collapse of a country that aligned itself close to Russia. Libya was a large importer of Russian arms, and provided Moscow with lucrative contracts for Russian businesses. It also shared Russia’s criticism of the United States being too dominant in world affairs.\footnote{Oleg Shchedrov, “Russia, Libya seal debt accord, eye arms deals,” \textit{Reuters}, April 17, 2008, accessed August 23, 2016, http://www.reuters.com/article/us-russia-libya-idUSSHC61895920080417} Hence, the forced regime change in Libya under the guise of a humanitarian intervention was perceived as yet another imposed limitation of Russia’s capabilities in the international system. At the same time, it probably did not go unnoticed in Moscow that U.S. support for democracy-seeking moderate rebels in Syria stood in stark contrast with its silence on violent crackdowns on protestors in Bahrain. Bahrain is part of the Gulf Cooperation Council, closely allied to the United
States and host to United States Fifth Fleet. The Persian Gulf state saw protests against its government with groups as large as over 100,000 people, or 8% of its population, after a Shia cleric called for a more democratic way of governance. Comparing the response of Washington to protests in Syria versus those in Bahrain, one could easily draw the conclusion that the position of the U.S. in the international system, with its material factors such as naval bases for power projection, constitutes the deciding factor when it comes to foreign policy towards these two countries. Hence, it would only be logical for Moscow to act in a similar vein and consider its actions in Syria in context of how it influences Russia’s international position.

As the neorealist Stephen M. Walt argues in his book “Revolution and War”, revolutions tend to open up opportunities for states to either improve their relative positions, curb the position of other states, or both. This forces other states to intervene, result in security competition within the state experiencing a revolution. It seems no wonder than that the civil war in Syria, along with U.S. support for the opposition, appears as yet another attempt at curbing Russian influence. This time however, it is happening in one of the most important regions in the world when it comes to resources, religion and potential for instability in Russia. Exactly how Syria affects Russia’s security and place in in the international system will be discussed in the following subsections.

7.1.1 Russian Power Projection

At first glance, one of the most important things in Syria in terms of power projection possibilities for Russia, is the naval base of Tartus. Leased to the Russian Federation since 1971 by the Syrian Arab Republic, the military facility at Tartus serves as a base where the Russian navy can go for maintenance. It is the only Mediterranean port Russia has, as well as the only base outside of the region that formerly made up the Soviet Union. Without this base, Russian naval forces would have to go through the Bosporus to reach the Black Sea ports for restocking and maintenance, but the long and narrow straits are dominated by Turkey, a NATO member. For power projection of the Russian Federation, Tartus is placed very strategically not only to avoid being locked down from Black Sea ports, but also because of its proximity to the Middle East. Hence it can be considered to be of great importance. The need for "sufficient naval presence of the Russian Federation" in the Mediterranean was already envisioned in the "Maritime Doctrine of Russian Federation 2020". In this light, it is no wonder that the commander-in-chief of the Russian Navy, Vice-Admiral Viktor Chirkov, had reportedly stated that the base is "essential to us." Though Russian forces are stationed in other places throughout Syria as well, such as the airbase at Latakia from where Russia runs operations against its adversaries, the port of Tartus appears to be the most important for Russia’s ability to project power.

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However, there are some doubts surrounding the role of Tartus too. The important role of warm-water ports in Russia's history of foreign policy seem to have inflated the role Tartus actually appears to play. The de-facto base at Tartus was described by the New York Times as "little more than a pier, fuel tanks and some barracks". It could not dock Russia's most modern ship, the Pyotr Velikiy (Peter the Great) battle cruiser, nor the Admiral Kuznetsov aircraft carrier.\(^{191}\) Moreover, the port meant for repairs and maintenance, was in need of repair itself.\(^{192}\) Even in 2015, when President of the Russian Federation Vladimir Putin discussed the new draft for a Maritime Doctrine, the focus was primarily on the Atlantic and the Arctic instead of the Mediterranean. The policy for the Arctic emphasized the use of icebreakers for the "Northern Route" that will clear the way for Russian access through the Arctic to the Pacific and the Atlantic. Combined with the permanent access Russia now has to the naval base in Crimea, the importance of a base in the Mediterranean for either protecting Russia's southern flank or safeguarding access to the oceans appears considerably reduced. This was reflected in the draft doctrine presented to Putin, which only briefly mentioned that naval presence in the Mediterranean would be restored.\(^{193}\) The port of Tartus itself then, though it has undoubtedly a potential for future Russian power projection, appears to have a relatively marginal role for Russia’s foreign policy in Syria.

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7.1.2 Resisting U.S. Power

When on March 14th, 2016, Vladimir Putin had announced the withdrawal of part of the Russian forces in Syria, the announcement was to a large extent yet another highlight of Russia's performance and capabilities. For example, President Vladimir Putin declared:

"In a short period, Russia has created a military group that is small in number but quite effective – one consisting of different types of forces and diverse capabilities. These include space reconnaissance, drones, combat missile strike systems in fighter aircraft and assault aircraft. They also include Navy forces that used the most modern weaponry from two seas – the Mediterranean and the Caspian – while working from surface ships and submarines. We created a powerful air defence system, including the most modern S-400 complexes."

Particularly the mention of a powerful air defence system is noteworthy, as the air capabilities of either ISIS or the rebels are non-existent. Already in 2014, U.S. Central Command did not see any aircraft belonging to ISIS. Moreover, air forces of both Assad and other governments have flown over Syria without any reports of dogfights with other

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The powerful, most modern air defence system then, seems to have a different purpose. The most obvious reason for these systems is the prevention of a possible intervention by U.S. aircraft. Mac Thornberry and Andrew F. Krepinevich Jr. in their article called "Preserving Primacy" consider the employment of these kinds of systems as part of a greater motive: the direct challenge of U.S. hegemony. They argue that the chief policy of the United States has been the prevention of any region being dominated by a hostile state, and that for over 70 years, it is the U.S. Air Force and the U.S. Navy which form the backbone of this policy. Anti-access/area-denial capabilities, such as the S-400 complexes, are used by revisionists powers, such as Russia, to directly curb the power projection capabilities of the United States. Indeed, the Supreme Allied Commander Europe during the September 2015, General Breedlove stated: “As we see the very capable air defense [systems] beginning to show up in Syria, we’re a little worried about another A2/AD bubble being created in the eastern Mediterranean”. The same can be said regarding the comment on submarines: regarding the mission in Syria, the opposition does not have any naval capabilities, nor is it likely that it matters to ISIS, or other opposition forces, whether the missiles that hit them were launched from a surface ship or

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a submarine. What does matter is that submarines to form a potential challenge to one of the most important pillars of American power projection: the aircraft carriers.

The statement of the Russian Federation regarding submarines and anti-aircraft systems is more in line with what offensive realism would suggest, than what defensive realism would. Indeed, offensive realism entails that states are power-maximizing revisionists seeking to become dominant of other states. In contrast, defensive realism would posit that challenging the status quo runs contrary to the primary aim of survival, and that showing restraint would be the optimal course. Undoubtedly though, it fits the neorealist explanation of how the structure of the international system is shaping the behavior of states. Through the use of area-denial weaponry, and deployment of armaments which are a specific challenge to the pillars of the most dominant power in the international system, Russia aims to improve its own position within the global system.

7.4 Russian Allies

Actions of Russia in the Middle East, then, fit in the mold of the larger struggle against U.S. hegemony. There are many actors involved in the current conflict in Syria. The actors are not solely states, but armed groups as well, each with their own particular interests. Opposition between these actors is formed on many different issues, ranging from the state of Israel, to religious divides, to establishing friendly regimes and securing the supply of oil. The Russian Federation has interest in the Middle East too, and works to protect and promote these. Russia’s relations with Iran, Hezbollah, and in a wider
sense, with autocratic regimes in general, are influenced by Russia’s actions towards Syria.

As discussed in the historical chapter, Syria, along with Iran, are two states which usually align themselves closely with Russian interests. Apart from sharing similar views on U.S. influence, both states can count on military and political support of the Russian Federation. Syria, despite three quarters of its population being Sunni, is ruled by the predominantly Alawite Assad regime. Alawites, are a branch of Shia Islam, and thus align themselves closer to Iran’s Shiite regime and Hezbollah than with other Sunni Arab states. Furthermore, as discussed previously as well, both Iran and Syria are heavily opposed to the State of Israel and what they perceive as U.S. imperialism. This opposition to the U.S. serves as another tie between the group of Russia, Iran, Syria and Hezbollah. That this relationship is only strategic was recently highlighted by drama surrounding the use of an Iranian airbase by Russian airplanes. After Russia’s air force was granted use of the airbase for bombing runs in Syria, Moscow’s trumpeting of the deal as a signal of widening influence in the Middle East had annoyed Tehran to such a degree that the access was revoked within a week. Not mutual friendship but a shared opposition to the United States is what appears to tie Russia to Iran.

The U.S. group consists of smaller armed groups such as the Free Syrian Army and the Kurds, whom are opposed to both ISIS and Assad, and several states such as Turkey and other NATO members, as well as Saudi Arabia and other members of the

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This division between a U.S. led group against Assad, Russia and their allies underscores the idea of the proxy war between two larger powers, only regionally.

Lastly, other states that align themselves closer to Russia instead of the United States will look to Syria, and the extent to which Bashar al-Assad can count on support from Moscow. Often times, autocratic regimes cooperate with states such as Russia with the knowledge that demands for democracy and human rights will not be part of the equation. If it becomes clear that Moscow’s support for Bashar al-Assad wanes as soon as an uprising starts, these autocratic regimes might look elsewhere. They might align themselves with other powerful states, in order to keep themselves in power. Vladimir Putin has even already offered Assad asylum if all else fails, which highlights his continued support for regimes that are being challenged. For Russia, propping up Syria’s regime is not just about maintaining power and influence in Syria, but indirectly about creating trust among its wider network of allies too.

7.5 Intervention

For neorealism, security and the survival of the state are the primary goals. The Syrian civil war has the potential to become a huge security risk for Russia. As previously discussed, Vladimir Putin came to power during the Second Chechen War,

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after the terrorist attacks in Russia’s capital, Moscow. Not long thereafter the terror attacks in New York, in Pennsylvania and on the Pentagon happened. This led Putin to define U.S.-Russian relations around the fight against global terrorism. The Chechen War has many similarities to the current civil war in Syria, and the civil war carries a risk of spillover, or reigniting, violence in Russia’s southern regions.

The most prominent threat is that of the Islamic State (IS), also called Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) or Daesh. This Sunni Islamic fundamentalist organization started out as a franchise of Al-Qaeda, before using the civil war in Syria as an opportunity to establish itself and grab a hold on territory in Syria and Iraq. Since then, apart from the violence and cruelty exerted on the population in the areas it controls, it has used terror attacks to kill over 1200 people in 21 countries outside of Iraq and Syria. Apart from Sunni fundamentalism and the use of terror attacks, the Islam State shares another characteristic present amongst insurgents during the Chechen Wars: the role of foreign fighters. The Second Chechen War saw the Arab Mujahedeen: non-Russian’s who traveled to Russia to fight against the Russian army, who envisioned the creation of “an Islamic state”. Now, experts say that over 800 Russian militants have joined the Islamic State in Syria, with Chechens being one of

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the largest groups of foreign fighters.\textsuperscript{205} Indeed, fighters of ISIS have already promised to “liberate Chechnya and the Caucasus”.\textsuperscript{206} With these links, and the history of conflict in Russia’s southern regions, It is not hard to imagine the security threat that a successful Islamic State in Syria will pose to Russia. Limited intervention in Syria serves as way of quarantining this threat by keeping IS occupied in Syria, rather than giving it the chance to focus on expansion rather than survival.

One positive argument for role of the Islamic State in Russia’s foreign policy, is that it makes discrediting the opposition to Assad easier. Some opposition forces do not envision a secular Syria while at the same time, are not extreme in their religious practice to the extent of ISIS. This grey area between secular democracy-seeking rebels and ISIS has allowed Assad and his allies to blur the distinction between moderate and extremist. As a result, according to Secretary of State John Kerry, Russia has been able to bomb legitimate opposition groups in Syria, under the guise of fighting terrorism.\textsuperscript{207} The choice has been framed by Russia as either Bashar Hafez al-Assad, or chaos and the Islamic State.

This debate around what would the best outcome for the conflict in Syria has also been largely influenced by U.S. actions in Libya, Iraq and Afghanistan. In October, 2015,


at the United Nations, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov summarized this idea by stating: “Saddam Hussein, hanged. Is Iraq a better place, a safer place? Qaddafi murdered, you know in front of viewers. Is Libya a better place? Now we are demonizing Assad. Can we try to draw lessons?” In other words, the chaos in countries where the U.S. has removed leadership before, combined with the threat of ISIS, provides a helping hand in undermining the moderate rebels who seek a change of leadership for Syria.

Lastly, financial power is part of the material equations underlying neorealism as well. As mentioned in the historical chapter on Russian-Syrian relations, economical ties between Moscow and Damascus are not trivial. Syria was buying over $1.5 billion in arms from Russia, and investment from Russia in Syria was nearly $20 billion in 2009. Since then, Russia’s economic prosperity has suffered both from sanctions and falling oil prices, while at the same time Moscow had to foot the bill of the intervention. However, the latter was not a too costly affair; it came with a price tag of 1 to 2 billion dollars per year. Even when the costs of the intervention remained limited, the faltering economy might still explain why Putin announced “mission accomplished” as soon as Bashar al-Assad’s troops could go on the offensive again. The military intervention appeared to be a last resort for keeping Assad in power, while the main effort appears to rely on political and diplomatic power. This will be discussed in the next subchapter.

7.6 Political Resolution

The survival of the Syrian state is Russia’s priority, but possible financial
limitations, and the risk of becoming bogged down as Obama had suggested, prevented
Russia from undertaking an extensive campaign. Without relying too much on military
power then, Vladimir Putin has emphasized a political settlement for the conflict in Syria,
to safeguard its interests in the Middle East.

During the early phases of the civil war, Putin’s commitment to Assad was
questioned. For over three years Russia’s diplomats have continuously assured Western
criminals that they are not tied to Assad.211 The historical analysis in this paper
showed that the relationship between Bashar Hafez al-Assad and Russia were similar to
those between his father Hafez al-Assad and the Soviet Union: one out of strategic
convenience. And, as mentioned earlier, this was confirmed by Putin himself as he
reminded people that personal ties with Assad were barely existent, and that Bashar
frequented Western capitals far more than he visited Russia.212

A political settlement with Assad in power, in a dominant position, and only with
moderate rebels appears to be the aim of Russia’s actions. Indeed, Putin has continuously
stated that there is “no other solution than a political one”, and that it is up to the Syrian

211 Colum Lynch, “Why Putin Is So Committed to Keeping Assad in Power,” Foreign Policy,
is-wedded-to-bashar-al-assad-syria-moscow/
212 “News conference of Vladimir Putin,” Official Internet Resources of the President of Russia,
people to “decide who to be governed by”. As Putin stated in a Q&A: “That is our proposal and our position; not that al-Assad and his regime remain in power at any cost, but that people first agree among themselves about how they live, how their security and participation in government will be assured.” This ran contrary to what U.S. President Barack Obama has been demanding since 2011, namely that Bashar al-Assad must go before the Syrian people can decide on their future. Since then, throughout a series of talks, conferences, cessation of hostilities and temporary truces, the role and future of Assad has been the main point of contention in the search for a political resolution for the conflict in Syria between Russia and the United States. Only in November 2015, two months after the start of Russia’s military intervention, did Obama soften his position by stating that “we can start looking at Mr. Assad choosing not to run” in a framework for political transition. Secretary of State John Kerry showed a sign of a softened position as well, stating that Assad moment of departure was to be decided in negotiations. The military intervention then, strengthened Russia’s negotiation position on Assad in two ways: It significantly reduced the chance that Assad would be removed by force, and it

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increased Russia’s presence in Syria, and thus increased the necessity of dealing with Moscow for any actions. The political influence helps Russia set the terms for any negotiation on Syria’s future. Hence, Moscow is provided with the ability to maintain Syria’s regime, and through that, guarantee all the benefits that Syria brings to Russia’s international position. At the same time, the intervention has allowed Russia to avoid the potential security risks that would come with state collapse in Syria.

7.6 Conclusion

Neorealism can accurately explain Russia’s behavior in Syria. The civil war in Syria directly influences Russia’s power and place in the international system. To this end, Moscow has sought to keep Assad in power while avoiding a huge burden on its economy, and it has expanded the presence Russian troops already had in Syria to prevent any foreign intervention or political solution without its approval. Russia has halted the expansion of the Islamic State, which poses a particular threat to the Russian republics of Chechnya and Dagestan. Furthermore, Moscow has also given a strong signal to its allies and other parties of the extent Russia will go to back up authoritarian regimes when things go south. Russia’s power has arguably increased through the enhanced role of its Shiite allies in the Middle East, as Iran and Hezbollah have increased their relevance to other actors in the region. Lastly, Syria has been used as a stage for Russia to display its recently modernized military capabilities. Amongst these capabilities are some of the most advanced area denial weapons, such as anti aircraft guns and submarines, which form the antithesis of the backbone of U.S. power projection, namely
airpower and aircraft carriers. All these factors support the idea that the international system, through its anarchy, self-help and security competition, can still adequately explain Russia’s foreign policy in Syria.
8. CONCLUSION

This paper started out with responses of the U.S. government to Russia’s recent foreign policy decisions with regards to Syria. Because some of Russia’s actions in the Syrian Civil War, such as the sudden end of the military intervention, were met with surprise, this paper set out with the aim of increasing understanding of Russian foreign policy in Syria with the help of IR theory. For this purpose, after exploring different theories, the research question was defined as following: "To what extent can the theories of neorealism and constructivism help understand foreign policy of the Russian Federation towards the Syrian Arab Republic during the Syrian civil war?"

The history between Syria and the Soviet Union has shown it was one of strategic interests; it was not one of shared identity, ideological or other ties, even though there were attempts by the Soviet Union to make it so. This relationship has not changed, despite the fall of the Soviet Union and the succession of Hafez al-Assad by his son, Bashar al-Assad. During the civil war, the same strategic interests characterized this relationship. Support for Assad has come mostly from Russia’s own goals, rather than close-knit ties between the two authoritarian leaders. This was confirmed in both the analyses, through neorealist and constructivist lenses.

As the separate conclusions of the chapters on neorealism and constructivism have shown: both can provide explanations on important elements of Russian foreign
policy during the Syrian Civil War, each in their own separate way. Neorealism, through its focus on international politics, highlights the security competition between two larger powers in a smaller state that is experiencing a revolution. Constructivism shows how a changing identity has both affected Russia’s willingness to stand by while Western norms of democracy promotion and regime change are applied to sovereign nations, and has motivated Russia to establish itself more as a great power indispensable to global affairs.

What is the most interesting find, however, is that not only can both theories provide an answer to the research question, but they can do so together; they are mutually reinforcing. Analyzing Russia’s behavior towards Syria with the help of neorealism, highlights material capabilities, issues of power projection and Russia’s place in the international system. Constructivism highlights Russia’s ideas, values and identity which are all closely tied to its military capabilities, the United States and great power status. What the constructivist lens highlights is thus closely intertwined with what the neorealist lens highlights. Their different approaches and angles can be combined to establish a coherent view of Russian foreign policy in Syria. Take for example Russia’s diplomatic efforts in a resolution for Syria’s civil war. It does not merely serve Russia’s interest in safeguarding material capabilities of power projection and protecting an ally, its also befitting of a great power to be involved in the political processes that determine the eventual outcome for Syria. Disagreement with the United States on Assad’s role has not affected the value Russia attaches to stability or its opposition to regime change. Moscow has stuck with its position for almost five years, throughout alleged chemical attacks by Damascus, a narrowly avoided U.S. intervention, and its own intervention to halt a near
collapse of Assad’s regime. Russia’s military intervention of late 2015 did not merely assure the continuation of Assad’s regime, and thus Russia’s interests in Syria, but it was also an expression of (desired) identity; a celebration of Russian culture and relevance to “humanity” through its concert at Palmyra, of its values of multilateralism and sovereignty. The deployment of military capabilities of Russia, such as anti-aircraft systems and submarines, and the rhetoric surrounding these weapons, can both be explained in neorealist terms and in constructivist terms too. Physically, they defend Syria from the possibility of U.S.-led intervention while challenging U.S. military primacy. They are also a statement about Russian power in general, especially when one considers the rhetoric that surrounded the use of these weapons. Lastly, the speeches and answers given by Russian government officials consistently contain referrals to the status of Russia, its identity, and its rightful place in the international system. The open letter written by Vladimir Putin in the New York Times is a very good example of how the identity of Russia is constructed; it challenges the unipolar international system in which the U.S. has an identity as an “exceptional” great power in favor of the multipolar system wherein Russia is of equal importance. At the same time, the letter served to cement opposition against forced regime change in Syria.

More specifically, the limited military intervention can be explained by combining Russia’s interest in maintaining a friendly, secular regime with a degree of stability while avoiding the trap of “becoming bogged down” as U.S. President Barack Obama had warned. At the same time, the intervention had to be limited because, as Russian President Vladimir Putin had been claiming from the start, the only solution will
be a political one. In Vladimir Putin’s own words, Russia is seeking to be a fully sovereign state among a new balance of military and civilizational forces, that is true to its national identity and cultural agenda, and one that influences global civilization. In line with this Civilizationist identity, the political solution for Syria highlights Russia’s commitment to stability, multipolarity and multilateralism in world affairs, and sovereignty, rather than the values of forced regime change and full scale military intervention associated with the United States.

In short, Moscow has displayed diplomatic and political relevance, as well as its modern military capabilities too accompany its great power identity. Neorealism and constructivist perspectives on the external factor of the international system and internal factors of ideas, values and identity converge and provide a clear view of Russia’s foreign policy in Syria.

8.1 Recommendations

The research done in this paper has put forward interesting insights regarding what motivates Russia’s actions in the Syrian civil war. From these insights, several recommendations can be derived for both academics and policymakers.

Because the findings of the paper showed that both neorealism and constructivism together can provide a clear explanation of Russian foreign policy in Syria, it would be interesting to see whether a new theoretical approach can be created by combining elements of the two. More research is needed to explore the feasibility of a combination of these two theories, and whether it would be applicable to other cases than the one presented in this particular paper.
For policymakers, this paper has implications too. The need of Russia to be considered as a great power and equal partner in influencing global affairs needs to be recognized. Theories can not precisely predict what course of action Russia will take next, and whether to give in to Russia’s demands is a different question. However, one can safely assume that frustrating this desire by, for example, calling the Russian Federation “a regional power” is not likely to foster cooperation in areas where it is needed. Recognizing the changes Moscow has gone through in the way in which it envisions the international system and Russia’s place in it might prove to be essential for future multilateral solutions to international issues.
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