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## RUSSIA'S RESURGENCE IN SYRIA: A NEW COLD WAR?

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### ABSTRACT

After the end of the first Cold War, scholars agreed that the United States became the dominant power in the Middle East. US hegemony created a certain degree of regional stability; titled by some as the “Pax Americana”. However, that stability has ended after the uprisings referred to as the Arab spring. This has been particularly evident since the beginning of Syrian civil war. The US has tried to influence events in Syria but has failed. In contrast, Russia has been actively intervening since the beginning of Syrian civil war; first diplomatically and then military. In this paper I argue that Russia's intervention reflects the decline of US power in the region. Russia is using the Syrian civil war as an opportunity to regain its influence in the Middle East and to contain US impact. I will demonstrate this by comparing and analyzing Russian and US interventions in Syria between 2011 and 2015.

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## I. Introduction:

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During the Cold War (CW), patterns of stability and instability were the product of super-power rivalry (Walt 1990; Waltz 2000; Mearsheimer, 1990). After the end of the Cold War there was a period of US dominance or hegemony that some refer to as Pax American that brought relative stability to the Middle East (ME) (Layne 2012, Ajami 2001). This stability has ended after the unrest the region has undergone the past four years. The Middle East region has been facing hot conflicts since the rise of Arab Spring movements. The ongoing conflicts in Syria, Yemen, Iraq, and Libya are some of the “deadliest conflicts and worst humanitarian emergencies of our times” (Demir, 2013). The emergence of Arab spring has made many states like US, and Russia to defend their allies and interests in the region and locked their attention on each other again. However, Syria has been one of the most deadly conflicts that have been lasting for 5 years now. The Syria conflict is perhaps an ongoing example of instability which is the product of super power rivalry, recently.

This instability and super power rivalry is highlighted in this conflict because both US and Russia have intervened in the conflict to show their supremacy. Russia has been supporting Assad regime since the beginning of the conflict, and they vetoed all decisions taken against his government. On the other side, US have been against Assad since the beginning of the conflict and said that Al Assad must go. Moreover, at the outset of the uprising in Syria, the United States showed clear position towards what should happen. However, Russia protested and managed so far to maintain Assad in Syria. Most expected that Assad would crumble and that US would intervene either directly or via proxies, like it did in Afghanistan, and Iraq, but this did not happen. Instead, Russian intervention on behalf of Assad has evolved from diplomacy to armed intervention in

order to support its word, and US could not achieve what it has asked for. This might indicate the weakness of US reaction if compared to similar cases like Iraq and to its hegemonic role that existed post-Cold War.

This scenario in Syria resembles a scene from the Cold War when both sides were acting and interfering, through proxies, to balance their power and attempting to maintain their sphere of influence in the Middle East which will be demonstrated hereinafter in the historical background. In order to explore Russia's sudden intervention, we have to look back in history, when Syria was under the USSR's sphere of influence, until the latter collapsed and the US became the sole hegemonic power. At this point, the Syrian government started to reach out to the US, demonstrating the shift in the balance of power towards uni-polarity.

Now, during the start of Syrian civil war, we see a shift in Syrian alignment again. Syria aligns itself again with Russia and consequently ignores US demand for the Al-Assad regime to leave. This shift might be illustrated by Christopher Layne's (2012) argument that uni-polarity will not last forever, and there will be new emerging great powers that will balance US hegemonic power. According to Layne's argument, Russia's intervention in Syria is a signal that uni-polarity is in decline.

In this project, I argued that the behaviour of external actors in Syria, along with the humanitarian suffering and instability, took us back to the days of Cold War. It involves shifting of alliances, plots, and network of intrigues that have not been seen since 1990. The rising power and actions performed by Russia is one of the main reasons behind the assumption that this is a second Cold War. Russia has consistently blocked any action suggested in the Security Council against al-Assad regime; and recently it has intervened militarily to fight the rebels and Islamists groups in Syria. Some argue that Russia's recent actions are a showcase of its military strength; others believe that Russia

wants to protect its interests in the Taratus port in Syria. Although all of these assumptions might be true, the main assumption of this project is to demonstrate how Russia's re-appearance in Syria is a signal of changing the balance of power under the shifting of alliances lens.

This paper is focusing on how actors are behaving in Syria and why it is an important case study to look for power shifts. It is a good case study from where we could look and analyze the shifting of balance of power and actors' alignment behaviour towards such change from Cold War until today. Now, we have seen instability and chaos in Syria and US declared that Al Assad regime must go, but this did not happen and it is notable that Syria has been realigning with Russia (old client) again and Al Assad regime did not go as Russia desired. US could not maintain what it has dictated for Syria, which might indicate US declining power and Russia's rising power. This is important because it justifies Russian sudden aggressive intervention actions that did not occur since its war on Afghanistan. Therefore, Syrian bloody conflict might be an indication of another Cold War. This has been demonstrated through a historical background, mainly focusing on Syria alignment strategy during the old Cold War and the type of alliances and interests that existed between the two Super Powers: US and USSR. This helped me better compare and analyze this with today's situation. Looking at and indicating what is currently happening in the region, and what happened in the region historically and linking it with the shifting of alliances, and balance of power theories will help raising the assumptions that Russia's intervention now is to shift the balance of power, and end US hegemonic role in the region.

## II. Research Question:

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Syrian civil war is the main case study in this paper. I addressed this case study through my research question: Does Russia's intervention signal a new Cold War between the US and Russia? To answer this question, I will examine why Russia intervened when it did, and what prompted it to take aggressive action?

*Sub Questions:* Is Russia forming new alliances, and establishing new sphere of influences in the ME? Has US withdrawn from region, and Russia is filling a void? Or US could still dictate outcome but has chosen not to? How does regional players have an impact in shifting the balance of power?

These questions helped me address and demonstrate that Russian intervention signals a change in the regional Balance of Power, an end of US uni-polarity and start a new era of bipolarity. That might be a reasonable illustration for Russia's aggressive action in Syria, and helped explore and demonstrate the shifting of alliances the ME region is going through.

I addressed these questions by looking closely at how Russia has behaved in Syria during the past four years, how Syria has behaved with Russia, in contrast with US behavior. I have looked at news reports, scholars' analyses, and I also did interview with journalists who have covered this issue and have seen that this situation is signaling a new Cold War to answer my questions. I did an interview with Dr. Ibrahim Eissa, he is a well-known journalist who has tackled this case study several times in his articles. I went to his office on the 5<sup>th</sup> of December. We have discussed the Syrian conflict with all its perspectives. I have asked Mr. Eissa several questions that are related to Russia's intervention in Syria, and how this reflects the declining of US power. We have also

discussed the emergence of a new cold war in the ME, and how regional and international actors are behaving towards Syrian conflict. The interview lasted for one hour. It helped me strengthen my argument and better demonstrate my research question.

Demonstrating and implementing the concepts and theories on today's conflict will help me link the theory with actual actions; since, understanding and analyzing the situation might help in reaching a solution to the Syrian crisis. Later, I had a comparing analysis between US and Russian intervention over the past four years that helped me understand and demonstrate the sphere of influences and how Russia is trying to gain and maintain its status "like the old days". This endorsed me to frame my analysis of US decline versus Russian re-emergence that will lead to the concept of shifting the balance of power and changing the world order again. Last but not least, I concluded this inquiry and summarized my arguments in substantiation of the main thesis that we are in a status of new Cold War, which might lead to the shifting of balance of power to Uni-polarity, or Bi-polarity.

### III. Regional and International Institutions:

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The idea of emerging another Cold War that is highlighted in the Middle East region again, is of high importance to many regional and international institutions like the United Nations, the League of Arab States as the conflict includes regional and international states. The conflict has threatened the stability of many states like, France, because the terrorist groups started to launch terrorist attacks there. However, the emerging of many revolutions in different Arab countries like Egypt, Yemen, Libya, and most importantly Syria is a highly concern for shifting the Balance of Power in the region.

“The League has as its purpose the strengthening of the relations between the member-states, the coordination of their policies in order to achieve co-operation between them and to safeguard their independence and sovereignty; and a general concern with the affairs and interests of the Arab countries” (Charter of Arab League, 2014). Therefore, it should be the LAS highly concerns to understand the situation in Syria in order to achieve such purpose. Although, many of the LAS member states were against Assad regime in the beginning of the conflict, but after considering what Libya has ended to they should reconsider their stance. Syrian war started with groups of rebels who wanted change, but were hijacked by Jihadist and Islamists, like ISIS, and Nusra Front, which want to declare the Islamist states like they did in Iraq and Libya. Thus, it is important for the LAS members to re-evaluate their stands in Syrian conflict because if Islamist groups overthrew Assad government, the other neighboring countries (Saudi Arabia, Jordan) might be next. This paper will give LAS a reasonable analysis to the situation, and why Russia, US and western countries are intervening in Syria.

#### IV. Historical Background:

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##### **Middle East Alliance patterns during the Cold War**

The historical background will back to the Middle East alliances patterns during Cold War. It will describe the concept of conflict and stability between 1956 and 1990. This is to demonstrate Syria's alliances behaviors under Bi-polarity through Uni-polarity to help compare and analyze it with today's conflict.

There were many shifts of alliances between regional powers and super powers during the Cold War. After WWII, there was no power that could lie between USSR and US. The USSR consolidated its control over Eastern Europe block, and US extended its military and financial aid and created NATO alliance to contain USSR. They both have competed for influence in many regions, but mainly in the decolonizing states of the Middle East (Waeber, 2003). "The statement that peace is indivisible was controversial, indeed untrue, when it was made by Litvinov in the 1930's. It became a truism in the 1950's" (Walt, 1990). The period between 1956 and 1990 has witnessed a pattern of conflict and stability in the Middle East.

The end of World War II has changed the structure of the international system and created a power vacuum due to the declining power of Britain and France in the ME. British and France power and influence were declining because their imperial order was decaying as "the colonial powers relinquished control over the areas they had inherited from the Ottoman Empire" (Walt, 1990). Such declining in Britain and France power, made them too weak to create internal balance. They could neither hold their world empires, nor balance their security. "The power resources necessary to continue

dominating far-away places were no longer in the possession of Paris or London. Economically, they were both significantly weakened. Militarily, they were both significantly weakened”(Jakobsen, 2013). The result was World War II and accordingly the end of France and Great Britain as great powers” (Jakobsen, 2013). This is in addition to the emergence of “Arab awakening” and their struggle against foreign powers that have dominated the region for decades. By 1950’s, “a variety of political movements espousing nationalist ideas had emerged through the region” (Walt, 1990). Most of the Arabs have felt that the division occurred between them was a result of foreign domination. Thus, they had a strong desire to restore “the political unity of Arab World”(Harel, 2015). All this has signalled a shifting in the Balance of Power towards US and USSR, and the transition to Cold War era and bipolarity.

Syria for instance was under France imperialism until 1945, when it restored its full independence from France. Syria transitional Ba’th party was one of the political movements that were established in 1941, and its goals have stressed on “unity, freedom, and socialism” , and its leaders were among the foremost advocates of an Arab union.” Syria’s status after independence did not only rest on military power but it also rested on its image as “the cradle of Arab nationalism, commitment to Palestine cause, and creation of greater Syria that encompass parts of Jordan, Israel, and Lebanon” (Walt, 1990). France was too weak to keep its colonial power under its mandate, not any more.

The declining power of France and Britain due to the declining of their economies after the war, have left a vacuum in the ME region that has been filled by the two rising powers at that time: USSR and US. They both had growing interest in the region. The US had begun to assume “Britain’s tradition role in the Eastern Mediterranean, and both superpowers played key roles in the creation of Israel”(Miller, 2007). After the 1948 war, the US has devoted its effort to develop a “new pro-western security system in the region,

and it sought neutral position in the Arab-Israeli conflict”(Walt, 1990). As for USSR, it had a great awareness that Arab nationalism is opposing “imperialism” which encouraged its shift towards Arabs. They both have seen the importance of the region in achieving their interests and had poised a more active role. The end of WWII, and the beginning of Cold War between the superpowers has been seen in a wave of post war alliances in the ME that began in 1955 with the Baghdad Pact. For US, the Baghdad pact offered the hope for Britain and US to retain their “dwindling influence throughout the Middle East while helping defend western influences against Soviet pressure” (Walt, 1990).

However, this pact was not likely pleasant to Egypt and Syria. They saw it as another intervention from great powers in Arab Affairs. Moreover, Nasser was afraid that having this collaboration from the Arab League and Britain’ military support could make Iraq the dominant leading Arab power. Thus, Baghdad Pact clash was the first post war rivalry between most powerful regional states. Egypt responded to this pact by convincing Saudi Arabia and Syria to reject the pact; and they formed a unified military command and a series of “Bilateral Defence Treaties”(Walt, 1990). Jordan and Lebanon were neutral for not joining the pact. Syria has joined this alignment because of “pan-Arab policy in post colonial Syria; the lingering suspicion that Iraq still harboured revisionist aims towards Syria; the triumph of leftist coalition strongly opposed to close ties with the West” (Walt, 1990). Syria has already started to receive military support from the Soviets, and also diplomatic support that helped Syria resist its neighbour pressure in 1955. Since then, Soviet Union has suddenly entered the ME region, and since then Syria has always been in Soviets sphere of influence.

US tried to react several times to break this alignment by offering aid to Syria, but it did not work. The alignment was very strong and offered Syria stability and strength knowing that it’s allying with strong power that will protect it from any external

threat(Waever, 2003). Soviet ties with Syria have strengthened after the Suez crisis as Syria received a new arms package in 1956. They have a growing alliance because “Syria has faced considerable overt and covert pressure from Turkey, Iraq, Great Britain, and US, all of them have had hopes to pressure Syria to join the pact” (Walt, 1990). Syria has entered into a number of eleven alliances between 1955 and 1979, from which ten were to balance against external threat (Wallsh, 2013). The threats were most commonly from ‘an inter-Arab rival but also came from Israel, US” (Walt, 1990). Syria has always been a Soviet client. This can be viewed from the military and economic aid Syria had from USSR, no matter what US offers to Syria.

Although there was partial stability in the ME due to the bipolarity, there has been several proxy war made by superpowers due to their interest in containing each other. There was the Anglo-French invasion, the Syrian crisis, and the Lebanese crisis. US under Eisenhower decided that US had to counter Soviets role in the region and that US must fill any existing vacuum in the ME before Soviet Union. US decided to use armed forces and authorized 200 million dollars as military and economic assistance to help friendly states in ME(Miller, 2007). US also wanted to weaken Egypt and Syria growing influence to contain the Soviets. The Eisenhower doctrine has pushed states away from Egypt; Saudi Arabia for instance was afraid from Nasser’s growing influence and they started to seek ways with US to “counterweight Nasser”. Jordan was next to abandon Nasser, and had received aid package from US and signed a mutual defense pact with Iraq (Walt, 1990). As a result of US hard intervention in the ME, Soviet Union has strongly increased and strengthened its ties with Egypt and Syria to protect its influence in the ME.

While superpowers allied with regional states in the Middle East to balance against each other, the regional powers allied in response to the threat. Walt in his book has demonstrated that superpower alliances in the ME were for balancing each other, while regional states align to protect themselves from threat. That was the game during Cold War as each super power were trying to strengthen its allies circles, and even extend them to balance itself and maintain its sphere of influence.

Although both superpowers invested many resources into the region, neither ever was able to establish control over their client's behavior. Each one of them had their own clients and was trying to maintain their relations with; like Syria was always a Soviet client and Jordan a US client. In other words, the superpower seeks allies to protect their interests and balance the power in front of each other, while regional powers are indifferent to the global balance of power, and they form allies to protect themselves from threat and gain power and legitimacy in the region (Waltz,1993). This shift in balance of power, made medium and smaller states to shift their alliances and change their pole of power and act toward the new patron. This shift can be seen in many cases like the WWII were regional states shifting their alliances towards new superpowers. The rising of many events after 1973 war, like the Gulf War and the peace process with Israel; has made Soviet Union clients to shift to US sphere of influence that marked the end of bi-polarity.

**Ending of COLD WAR/ BI-POLARITY, EMERGENCE of UNI-POLAR ERA:**

**Changes in Alliance Pattern in the Middle East.**

The collapse of the Soviet Union has left its regional allies, like Syria, vacuumed without any help or support, which made them turn to search for allying with US. This

was an evidence of changing the balance of power to uni-polarity; to view states in the sphere of influence of a super power and then their shift to the other because the former collapsed.

The aftermath of the Six Day War, 1967 to 1979 has changed the alliances formation in the ME and started to signal the shifting of balance of power towards uni-polarity. After 1967 some of the regional states have shifted their attention from Pan Arabism interest to material interest (regaining the occupied territories)(Walt, 1990). It has been clearly understandable that regional states ally to protect their local interests, and they do not care about the global Balance of Power or the competition between US and USSR. Their alignment with a Superpower is to response to a threat, while allying with a regional state is to isolate rivals and proximate powers. For instance, when Syria decided to ally with Egypt in 1955, it left Iraq isolated, and efficiently condemned Baghdad Pact. This was the key element for US that helped it gradually manage to exclude the Soviets from the region, and establish a partial hegemony post 1973 war.

The US has managed to initiate the Arab- Israeli peace process, “thus, cooling the regional conflict” (Miller, 2007). US made a great effort on establishing and contributing to a cold peace between Egypt and Israel in 1978-1979, which increased Egypt’s dependency on US that ended successfully during Camp David. As for Syria, it was the most important client for USSR in the ME after the October War, and totally depended on the Soviet aid that increased after the triumph of Hafez Al Assad(Miller, 2007). However, Soviets did not have the capacity to influence Syrian policies. In 1976, Syria intervened against PLO in Lebanon “in direct defiance of Soviet pressure and a brief and ineffective suspension of Soviet arms deliveries”(Koshy, 1995). Syria did not obey Soviets request to withdraw from Lebanon. The Lebanese civil war was ongoing, and

Syria has managed to regain most of the power “over Lebanese affairs that it had lost to the Israelis and Americans in 1982” (Krayem). Most of the Arab states at that time were against Syria’s expansion in Lebanon. In 1989, Iraq intervened in support of “General Aoun and the Lebanese Forces against Syria. This could have led to an escalating regional conflict between Iraq and Syria; therefore, the Arab states, led by Saudi Arabia, held a summit meeting in Casablanca and formed a Tripartite Committee composed of King Fahd of Saudi Arabia, King Hassan of Morocco, and President Shadli Ben Jedid of Algeria to deal with the Lebanese crisis” (Krayem). Saudi Arabia wanted to counter Syrian influence on Lebanon, and renew Saudi role there. As for US, it did not want the Lebanese crisis to derail the Arab-Israeli peace process. The outbreak of First Gulf War in 1990 had made US more concerned in containing Iraq and to gain Syrian support for the Gulf war coalition.

It was a good opportunity for US because the USSR was collapsing at that time, and US had successfully strengthened its influence in the region and pursued its policy objectives. Syria and US had their first opportunity for cooperation and mutual support during the first Gulf War. For Syria, It has joined the coalition because it thought that this cooperation would ease Washington diplomatic pressure, and raise hope “for the removal of sanctions against it”(Waltz,1993), which succeeded for a while. In November 1990, Hafez al-Assad met with George Bush and discussed “Kuwait’s post-war government, negotiations over ending the civil war in Lebanon, and the Middle East peace process, among other issues” (Wallsh, 2013). Furthermore, US have tactically approved Syria to consolidate its “hegemony over Lebanon via the 1990 Ta’if Accords”(Wallsh, 2013). The Ta’if agreement was the document that provided basis for ending civil war in Lebanon, in which Syria was involved militarily to support Lebanese National movement and

Palestine. The US was interested in curtailing the Lebanese crisis to avoid derailing the Arab Israeli Peace process, and it also wanted to gain Syrian support after the Gulf crisis in 1990. Furthermore, the end of Cold War and the collapse of the USSR has strengthened US position in the region and allowed US to achieve its policy objectives. “The U.S. supported the Ta’if negotiations and lent its support both in Arab circles and vis-à-vis Syria toward the successful completion of those talks” (Krayem). Syria’s behaviour and its closer relation with US at that time was a clear balancing against regional power, and the shift of balance of power to uni-polarity has contributed to this trend.

This good relation has continued with Madrid peace process that occurred after the defeat of Iraq during the Gulf war. US and USSR has co-convened international peace conference in Madrid, Spain, “to discuss a diplomatic end to the Arab-Israeli conflict. The conference opened on 30 October 1991, and included delegations from Israel, Syria, Lebanon, and Egypt and a joint Jordanian-Palestinian delegation, as well as observers from other nations and organizations” (Koshy, 1995). Focusing on Syria, president Assad wanted to maintain his position in Lebanon to continue negotiations. Moreover, Syria agreed for resumption of talks with Israel, but it made it clear that “decision return to Washington was one of principle, and that Israel will return for full withdrawal from the Golan to pre 1967 border and from South Lebanon”(Koshy, 1995). Before 1991, US position was against Israel withdrawal from Golan Heights; however, Syrian participation in the US- led alliance against Iraq has changed US attitudes. US wanted to gain Syrian support against Iraq and Iran the other two major powers in the region. This has shifted US attitude in order to win Syria. Thus, it started to urge both sides for agreement on Israeli withdrawals from the Golan and “discussion centers around the' possible security arrangements in the area, in case Israel withdraws from the region”

(Koshy, 1995). Although the Madrid peace conference was initiated by US and USSR, US was the dominant actor in these negotiations and was dictating the actions.

The US has achieved a significant success following the collapse of USSR, the Gulf War, and the peace agreement that made most of the states to bandwagon with US and under its security umbrella and has caused stability under Arab-Israeli peace treaty. Syria changed its alignment strategy and traditional balancing conditions due to the shifting of the balance of power to uni-polarity. Syrian alliance has become more diverse, and innovative in response to the threats that accompanied “the international order’s transition to uni-polarity”(Ashley, 2012). However, Syria was always cautious from the regional allies as they might intrude its interest “of dominating Lebanon, reclaiming the Golan Heights, and consolidating regional predominance; Damascus will therefore not hesitate to balance against them”(Wallsh, 2013). In conclusion, Syria has aligned with US to balance against region powers, and to strengthen its position in the region, and was as a reaction to uni-polarity.

### **Signs of Changing Balance of Power after 2001 (Axis of evil)**

“Following a brief honeymoon between the Bush administration and Bashar Al-Assad forged by cooperation against their mutual enemy al-Qaeda, Syria grew fearful as the US prepared to invade Iraq” (Wallsh, 2013). After the 9/11 attacks, Bush has divided the world between those who support US war on Terror, and those who would not. Bashar Al-Asad has first cooperated because he thought that it’s a good opportunity for Syria to get rid of Sunni Islamists group and to defeat al-Qaeda. Thus, “Syria aligned with a global superpower to balance against a local enemy” (Wallsh, 2013). However, this security cooperation did not last for long. Assad has opposed US invasion in Iraq because he felt that US will not be dissuaded. US has decided to invade Iraq under the

banner of “destroying dictatorial supporters of terrorism and Al- Assad certainly fit the bill”. Moreover, Syria has cooperated with US against al-Qaeda but it refused to cooperate against “Israeli rejectionist groups such as Hezbollah and Hamas, whom it saw as carrying on a legitimate resistance to an illegal occupation” (Wallsh, 2013).

The withdrawal of Israel defence forces from Lebanon has threatened “to undermine the *raison d’etre* of Syria’s military presence in Lebanon, which was justified under the guise of defending Lebanon from Israeli expansionism” (Wallsh, 2013). Furthermore, US officials and supporters have suggested that Syria might be next on US list after Iraq and Afghanistan. In 2004, Bush has given an order of implementing economic sanctions against Syria “for failing to cease completely support for the anti-American insurgency in Iraq and for anti-Israeli terrorism by Hezbollah, Hamas, and Islamic Jihad”(Ma'oz, 2005). Bashar has become more concerned because US did not only implement sanctions on him, but it also deployed troops in Iraq, his neighbor. Bashar has tried to increase his cooperation with US on closing its border with Iraq to the continued flow of anti-American guerillas, and also on investigating money deposited in Syrian banks for Saddam Hussein. Furthermore, Damascus has supported “U.S.-sponsored resolution at the UN Security Council authorizing UN cooperation with the U.S.-led multinational force in the reconstruction of Iraq. But Bush and his administration have not been impressed and have continued to denounce Bashar sharply for his misdeeds in Iraq, sponsoring terror, associating with the "Axis of Evil," and developing WMD” (Ma'oz, 2005). US also made it clear that Syria has to withdraw its troops from Lebanon, which was against the Ta’if agreement, which US approved.

Although US and Syria had a good relation post-Cold War, US has always seen Syria as a threat because it has developed WMD and after years of good relation Syria has replaced Iraq as a “full-fledged member of Bush’s Axis of Evil alongside

Iran”(Kocharyan A. , 2005). In addition to Syria’s good relations with Iran and Hezbollah, Syria has attained Iranian help in providing training, weapons and intelligence to Hezbollah, as well as developing Syrian long range missile. In 2005, after the assassination of Rafiq Hariri, Syrian Prime Minister Mohammed Naji al-Utri publicly announced that “Syria and Iran presented a “united front” against regional threats, and the two countries signed a defense agreement in June 2006” (Wallsh, 2013). It was to create a common front to avoid US threat to dislodge Syrian control in Lebanon. US, as a result has reacted by recalling its ambassador from Damascus, and linking Syria’s occupation to the assassination. In April 2005, US led an intense diplomatic campaign against Syria to withdraw from Lebanon, and demanded to withdraw all Syrian secret services agents and end its occupation to Lebanon. Bashar position has been weakened and he was afraid to be isolated in the region; thus, on March 2005 he announced the phased withdrawal of his army(Ma'oz, 2005). US have achieved what it demanded.

Syria has felt threatened from all the regional challenges or demand posed by Bush like freedom and democracy. Thus, Syria felt threatened and started to get closer ally with other regional and global powers. Syria has been assisted not only by Iran but also by Russia. Moscow has helped Syria in developing its chemical, biological weapons and also Moscow has helped Syria to start civic nuclear power program (Ma'oz, 2005).

When Syria felt threatened from US after the invasion of Iraq, it looked for old regional allies and Russia to protect itself from isolation and for balance against US threat, which was the first signal of rising Russia power. Furthermore, the formation of Syrian-Iranian alliance, followed by Russian alliance is a clear balancing against global and regional threats. This shift in alliances has also contributed after the end of bipolarity towards uni-polarity. Syria in both situations contributed to this trend in order to protect its interests and to contribute with the changes in the global balance of

powersphere.

The US has been the only hegemonic super power after the end of Cold War, and it has the strongest military in the world. However, the active alliance between Russia and Syria might be seen as an attempt to counter US hegemonic power, and to maintain Russian's influence in the region again. Moscow has perceived its military engagement as "a counterbalancing action against a declining US primacy and legitimizes its interference by pointing to the destabilizing forces that have been unleashed after each American intervention in the Middle East" (Guerisoli, 2015). Both US and Russia have interests in Syria for their own separated agenda and interest, which draw us back to the status of Cold War. As Ibrahim Eissa described it, they both are using their regional allies as chess pieces and they are the main players where they move and manipulate chess pieces to help them gain power and influence.

## V. Literature review:

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In order to understand Syria behavior in both phases of time, after Cold war and now, we have to demonstrate **why states ally and how changing the balance of power makes states shift their alliances** in order to ascertain that we are facing the same phases of the first Cold War, Stephen Walt has demonstrated carefully why super power and regional states ally, and what make them change or shift their alliances. Walt explained that states always create different type of alliances to keep the balance of power. He added that there are two types of alliances; balancing and bandwagon behavior. The former is the belief that “states form alliances in order to prevent stronger powers from dominating them lies at the heart of traditional balance of power theory” (Walt, 1990). Therefore states join alliances “to protect themselves from coalitions whose superior resources could pose a threat.” The latter, is the belief that states will ally to resist a threatening state or coalition. This is usually happen when states are justifying an “overseas involvement or increased military budget”(Walt, 1990). In other words, balancing is to align with weaker side, while bandwagon is to align with stronger state.

Changing of alliances behaviour under uni-polarity and bi-polarity is the theoretical framework that will help better speculate state’s behaviour in Syrian conflict. Strong states act to maintain and secure their interests, which are delineated as gaining and maintaining power; while, weaker states form alliances to protect itself from external threats, according to Walt’s argument. Within this framework, explaining and analysing the alliances behaviour backing it with shifting of power theory helped define the analysis and findings. This allowedme to better demonstrate the emerging of alliances

again in the Middle East region after the reviving of Russian interest and influence in the region.

**Drivers of alliances, patterns of change under bipolarity and unipolarity:**

The unification of east and west Germany and the fall of the Berlin wall in 1990 marked the end of the Cold War and beginning of a new world order. “Bipolar structure gave way to an increasingly multi-polar and fragmented system with one remaining superpower – the United States”(Lieber, 2001, 29). Uni-polarity objectively was to preserve US hegemonic role “in a uni-polar world has been the overriding grand strategic objective of every post CW administration from George H. W Bush’s to Barack Obama’s” (Layne, 2012). This shift to uni-polarity has made states like Syria, which has always been in USSR sphere of influence, to have a gradual improvement in its ties with US. Syria has joined US “led alliances against Iraq in the gulf war of early 1990 which brought better relations with US” (Olanrewaju, 2015).

The emerging of uni-polar hegemonic system has made few scholars, like Christopher Layne and Kenneth Waltz, to argue that it will not last forever and it will be transitional period to bi-polarity or multi-polarity. Pointing this argument to long historical background of the failure of hegemonic state such as, “Habsburgs (under Charles V, and Phillip II), France (under Louis XIV and Napoleon), and Germany (under Hitler) were defeated by the resistance of countervailing allies, and by the consequences of their own strategic overextension” (Waltz, 1993).

After twenty years from the end of Cold War, it is now clear that uni-polar era has begun to decline. The reasons for this decline might be cumulative from the Cold War; however, there are two main drivers for it. The first is the external driver, the emerging of

great powers in world politics and “the unprecedented shift in the center of global economic power from the Euro-Atlantic area to Asia” (Layne, 2012). China, and Russia’s rise signals ending of uni-polarity. Moreover, the emerging of old power causing regional states to shift their alliances to protect themselves from US threat; takes us back to the post-Cold war scene and the end of bipolarity. Considering Syria’s insecurity today, we should glean its policy implications with caution. When Syria face threat from regional and global powers likes US and Israel, Syria “tends to reinforce its relation with old and close allies like Iran, Hezbollah, and Russia” (Wallsh, 2013). This can first be seen in 2001 when US declared its war on terrorism and their declaration of you are either with us or against us. Then in 2003, and US war on Iraq that threatened Syria. US imposed sanctions on Syria because they signed “Syria accountability and Lebanese sovereignty restoration Act” that US saw it as an act that supports Palestinian terrorist groups(Wallsh, 2013). US imposed economic sanctions on Syria and recalled its ambassador in 2005, which drove Syria to strengthen its relation with Hezbollah, Iran, and Russia to avoid being isolated.

The second driver is domestic, the decline in America’s economic power, “the looming fiscal crisis confronting US, and increasing doubts on the dollar’s long term hold on reserve currency” (Layne, 2012). Since US was virtue of economic and military supremacy, and it was the most powerful actor in the international system,the US has used this hegemonic position, and wanted to create post war international order that lasted for 3 decades, the Pax Americana. However, the collapse of economic foundation of US, and the emerging of great powers have weakened the military and economic hard power, on which Pax Americana was built. Thus, the international system order might be shifting again to bi-polarity. Layne for instance has explained this through the neorealist

theory lens to argue that “Uni-polar moment” will not last forever, and that it’s “a geopolitical interlude that will give way to multi-polarity” (Layne, 1993). He argues that Uni-polar world is not “terra incognita”, and it cannot last because according to structural realism: “Uni-polar systems contain the seeds of their own demise because the hegemony’s unbalanced power creates an environment conducive to the emergence of new great powers” (Layne, 2012).

Comparing this with the above discussion that is associated with balance of power theory and shifting of alignment among states; demonstrate that we are in stage of shifting the balance of power again. The great power emerges due to anarchy, shift of alliances and differential growth rate. Layne and Waltz has both argued that uni-polarity will “spur the emergence of great powers to act as counterweights to US hegemony”. Since many scholars accept realism as the main rule of the game, there can be two kinds of outcomes: “balance of power/threat or uni-polarity with an emerging international order of multi-polarism. Balance of power theory explains order and the pattern of relations among major states as a result of balancing to counter opposing power concentrations or threats” (Ikenberry, 2002, 7). The logic of realist balance of power is simple: “weaker states will form alliances to counterbalance against a major power which will start representing a threat to the international order and to the states themselves” (Kocharyan, 2006). Balancing can occur either by a single state possessing the capability or by an alliance of states feeling threatened by a major power. This is the main argument on today’s conflict; Syria has shifted its alliance with Russia to counter the US threat, and Russia to balance against US because it has the capabilities now to do that.

However, in general states are willing to balance more than bandwagon because historically states do not balance “solely against power; as predicted, they balance against

threat”(Walt, 1990). Middle East is a good example to this because it has always been and remains “an area of considerable strategic importance. Its importance is revealed by the efforts superpowers have devoted to acquiring and supporting allies in the region”(Wallsh, 2013). In addition, ME have seen alliance commitment that shifted frequently according to the post-war period because they adjust their alignment to internal and external circumstance. The ME is a good example to provide a strong hypothesis about alliance formation and shift in the balance of power.

Syrian government is seeking to stay in power and maintain its regional balance of power, especially after the uprising of the Arab spring in the Middle East and the fall of Libya and Yemen under the Islamists groups. Therefore, in order for Syria to maintain that balance of power, state must “maintain its intrastate power, as a means to achieve this goal. States in civil war are vulnerable to external influences” (Bound, 2013). Walt demonstrated that states form alliances “in order to prevent stronger powers from dominating lies at the heart of traditional balance of power theory.” In this case Syrian government has been strengthening its alignment with Russia to protect itself from superior resources that might front a threat on it. And since “great power are the main actors in the world politics and they operate in anarchic system”, Russia has been seeking to exist in the world hierarchical system again, and Al Assad regime wants power to eliminate interstate anarchy and balance against Sunni’s power. Therefore, they worked on creating strong alliances with each other.

From the other side, Russia has been developing its military capabilities, and looking for strengthening its allies and power to maintain hegemony and be recognized again in the region. Thus, it is joining weaker side, Syria, and strengthening its ally with to regain its supremacy and power again (Waltz, 1993). Russian sudden intervention in the region is not something new. This happened in several occasions during Cold War.

For instance, in 1955, when Nasser started negotiating with Soviet to supply him with arms, and Soviets had granted Egypt and Syria arms. This has broken the “western monopoly on arms in the Middle East” (Walt, 1990). The diplomatic support from Soviet Union to Syria at that time has helped Syria continue its resistant pressure from their neighbours and increased pressure on US. This is the case now, where Russia has been offering all types of support to Syria, in order to defy western and US pressure and to balance its dominant status in the region with US.

The alliance behaviour under uni-polarity and bi-polarity helped illustrate and analyze the above-mentioned interest of both US and Russia in Syrian conflict. This explores the existing of competition between both states to maintain their sphere of influences through their allies. Thus, Russian intervention now signals a new Cold War between US and Russia based on the past behaviour and present changes in alignment and interest that argued about Syria and Russia in today’s conflict. However, to substance this, there should be a recent evidence and mode of analysis that will allow trace and compare US and Russian intervention in Syria during the last four years.

## VI. Conceptual Framework:

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Based on the above historical description and the theories of when alliances change, the arguments showed that events in Syria point to a possible decline in US power, resurgence of Russian influence and the re-emergence of a bipolar order in the region that could be described as a new COLD WAR. The alliance behaviour under uni-polarity and bi-polarity help analyze the above-mentioned interest of both US and Russia in Syrian conflict since it demonstrates the existing of competition between both states to maintain their sphere of influences through their allies.

Both U.S and Russia are having their proxy war, where each is using either allies, or external factors like, terrorism, to drain each other. Russia for instance is using Iran, Hezbollah, and Syria to drain US interest and allies in the region. US from the other side is using terrorist groups, and conflict in Ukraine to drain Russia. It is a series of conflicts and each of them is using their regional allies like “pieces of chess to maintain their interests and power” (Eissa, 2015). Each one of them, along with regional and international powers is trying to avoid real confrontation by having their own proxy wars.

The US has been the dominant power in the ME region after the collapse of USSR, but this has changed dramatically as mentioned above. The resurgence of Russia in the ME, and its success to have decisions against US wishes, like keeping Assad regime in power until today and recreating good relations with ME states is a good mean to regain its position again, like old days.

## VII. Methodology:

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The evolution of Russian intervention in Syrian conflict over the past years reflects a broader change in the balance of power that reflects end of uni-polarity. In order to support my argument and explore how international behaviour and regional characteristics produce the shift in alliances in the Arab world I used evidence and mode of analysis to support this. The evidence used will be as follows. First, demonstrated and analyzed the US behaviour in Syria, and what this behaviour indicates, and how it reflects end of uni-polarity. Then I discussed and explored Russian strong intervention in Syria and the different phases, diplomatically and militarily, and how this behaviour indicates Russian resurgence in the region and act towards bi-polarity. I explored this indication through the competing propositions that states form-balancing alliances to contain each other through linking historical events with today's event.

In order to achieve this and support my argument I have compared, analysed, and traced the evolution of these behaviours in the Syrian civil war through using news reports, using interviews with journalists like Ibrahim Eissa, and other secondary literature. However, the finding on recent issue that involves Middle East politics and international actors is uneven because it is very difficult to have accurate and unbiased scholar opinions. To avoid this problem I have tried to keep track on events and arguments to document them as much as possible, depending on multiple recent and historical sources to support my hypothetical argument.

## VIII. ANALYSIS

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The war in Syria, along with “the monumental human suffering it has brought in its wake, to some extent reflects a return to the days of the Cold War” (Harel, 2015). It involves a complex of states interests, shifting alliances and plots that are found during and after the end of first Cold War. Syria has split the International Community into two different camps. The first camp is US, Turkey, France, Britain, Saudi Arabia and Qatar. All these countries are calling for regime change as the only solution to end the Syrian conflict. The other camp is represented by Russia, China, Iran, and Hezbollah which continue to support al-Assad regime by all means to keep him in power. Russia and China were supporting Assad regime since the beginning of the conflict, and they vetoed all decisions taken against his government. “The way that the two camps are positioning towards the Syrian crisis answers to particular interests and strategic goals as well as on their particular vision on the future regional architecture” (Demir, 2013). The Syrian had a proxy dimension in the conflict, in which those regional and international actors has joined to gain either regional leadership and influence, like Iran, or to preserve their regional and hegemonic interests and balance of power like US and Russia.

### ***The US position on Syria: Diplomatically, Militarily, and Policy Objectives***

US from one side have been asserting itself more “forcefully in the Middle East, with regional states like Syria and Iran increasing their security cooperation as a result” (Wallsh, 2013). Syria has always been a challenging for US, but this time US cannot predict the situation to develop strategy to contain the situation to its side. The Obama administration has announced that “Assad must go”, and sought to support “moderate political and military opposition forces against the Damascus regime” (Khoury, 2015).

The military element has been given in small measures to the rebels that have lately increased. US warned Syria that it would face American military intervention if there were signs of using chemical weapons or even being prepared. However, in August 2013 Syria has used chemical weapons (which was denied by al-Assad regime), and US threatened and “moved resolution in the congress to authorize the president to use US armed forces for carrying out appropriate enquiry into the use of chemical weapons in Syria in order to prevent the proliferation and transfer of these weapons to other parts of Syria or parties hostile to US” (Olanrewaju, 2015). Although US has threatened and made clear that it will intervene militarily in such case, US did not take any strategic action and suggested that it needs proof to act.

The US and Turkey has taken steps to help revolutionary forces to be better organized. Thus, they established a Syrian National Council, settled in Turkey, to manage the political aspects while the Free Syrian Army was organized as a military wing to fight Assad’s forces (Demir, 2013). Moreover, the US has founded a Syrian National Coalition (SNC) in 2012 because it thought that it has to give the opposition larger base representation by “bringing together various political and military opponents”. Western countries including US recognized the coalition as Syrian’s legitimate government and they saw it as an opportunity to normalize the situation in Syria. Although, the SNC remained weak and divided and could not take any decisions in Syria, the US was highly reluctant towards arming the Syrian opposition fighters by sending them weapons and arms.

On the political side, US have coordinated with Saudi Arabia in its proxy confrontation with Iran, and in its support to the Syrian opposition. US has also played a direct role in supporting Saudi led coalition in Yemen. The major interest of US in coordinating this act with Saudi Arabia, or its other regional allies is that it wants

regimes that aligned with western security interests. Having Saudi, US ally, to lead its proxy war with Iran and Yemen and supporting US in Syrian crisis will counter Iranian influence, contain Hamas and Hezbollah support to Syria, and weaken Russia's regional ally that will contain Russia's influence in the ME.

The US and its main regional allies, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and Turkey have been increasing pressure on the Assad regime, and support different levels to Anti-Assad forces. The US wants first to weaken Iran's role and influence (Syria's sole major state ally) as this will also weaken Iran's influence over Palestine, Iraq and Lebanon. Iran has been a strong supporter for Syria, and fighting by the Assad regime side. Iran has regional ambitions, after its revolution 1979 to spread its influence over region and to contain Sunni and US influence. Iran has been supporting Al Assad regime because it is not willing to lose its only regional ally in the region (Lister, 2014). Iran supports Assad's regime because it helps contain US and Israel threat, and Syria help Iran in shipping its arms through Syria to Lebanon and Gaza militant group Hezbollah and Hamas. Iran feels isolated and insecure; and if Assad falls, it will lose a major ally and be cut off its militant proxies, leaving it very vulnerable" (Fisher, 2013).

Thus, US knows this very well, and strengthening of Iran and giving weapons and aid to Hamas and Hezbollah is against US interests because it threatens US existence in the ME and it threatens US regional allies like Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Jordan, and Turkey. Therefore, in order for US to control Iran's influence in the Middle East and to balance the power in the region; it will work on isolating Iran and weakening its main regional ally, Syrian influence among other state and non-state actors. US do not want to have direct involvement in Syria's combat; thus, it is doing it through its regional ally. US cannot ignore the regional spill over Syria caused, and how it will have its "deep and unforeseen consequences on the precarious sectarian balance in Lebanon, the security of

Israel along its northern and eastern flanks, the stability of Jordan at a time of increase internal unrest, and pressure along Turkey's southern flank as Ankara tries to contain increasingly assertive Syrian and Iraqi Kurdish groups”(Nerguizian, 2015).

US has been very hesitated about having full scale of military integration into the Syrian crisis because it has learned from its deadly experiments in Afghanistan and Iraq operations that have been ruled by Islamist and jihadist groups after US withdrawal. Moreover, the US invasion in Iraq has cost hundreds of US lives, “wildly exacerbate anti-Americanism in a boon to Jihadists ad Nationalist dictators, and would require the United States to impose order for years across a country full of people trying to kill each other” (Fisher, 2013). In addition, US might not be able to have a full scale military integration like it did in Iraq, and the evidence is when Syria used chemical weapons, as mentioned above, US did not take any military action as it threatened and said that it will need more investigation. This is a sign of its declining power, and that it's not acting solely in the region anymore.

Therefore, US might be using the strategy of “having all eating themselves” (Eissa, 2015). By letting Russia drain itself in Syrians civil war with all the Jihadist and Islamist groups, without any losses from the US side. Moreover, Saudi Arabia has lowered oil production costs, “and US is enjoying a boom in a shale oil. Iran and Russia's oil revenue reserve fund, on the other hand, has reportedly been drained” (Nashashibi, 2014). This might drain Russia economically because it has spent a lot of money since its military intervention in Syria. This might be a repetitive scene from the first Cold war, where USSR was drained in Afghanistan war, which led to its collapse. Thus, US might be using the same strategy to let Russia drain itself without US intervention. But on the other side, US have been the sole actor in the ME after Cold War, and now it is not. If al-

Assad failed then US has gained Russia's weakness again, and the weakness of the counter regional allies for US like Iran and Hezbollah, but it did not then US have definitely lost its hegemony.

**Russia Position on Syria: Diplomatically, Militarily, and Policy Objectives:**

Russia has been Syria's ally for decades, and one of the most international backers in the region. For Russia it is important to maintain its strong relation with Syria and protect the regime because first, it wants to protect its naval facility at the Syrian port, Tartous, which serves "Russia's sole Mediterranean base for its black fleet" (BBC news, 2015). Moreover, after Cold War, Russia was in a mess "no longer enemy or even a rival but certainly not a friend nor even a partner" (Serfaty, 2015). Thus, for Putin, he wants to be seen as a player again, after all these years of isolation. It was a good chance for Russia to act again in the region and rival for power in its periphery. Putin has founded a great opportunity to "showcase recent advances in Russian military and to needle the US for its lack of spine and reluctance to intervene in any kind of meaningful way" (Beehner, 2015). In other word, Putin is using Syrian conflict as a method to increase his influence in the region again, and to show off his military powers "for deterrence purposes and to mark his decisiveness on the international arena in contrast to his western counterparts, and make himself appear indispensable" (Beehner, 2015).

Russia intervened on the ground to save Al-Assad regime; and we can see shifting in the great powers actions. Russia and China have supported Al-Assad regime and backed it first diplomatically and then militarily. Russia has vetoed any Security Council initiative against Assad regime, since the beginning of the Conflict. Not only that, but Russia has intervened militarily on 30 September (Please mention the year) through air

strikes to oppose the rebels and Jihadist groups in Syria because they started to take control over strategic places in Syria (BBC news, 2015).

Russia takes Syria as a good opportunity to be taken seriously again in the ME, especially that US has been leading as a regional actor after the CW. Russia's decision to step into the war in Syria – “in defense of Bashar al-Assad - has been called everything from a game changer to unconscionable” (Goudsouzian, 2015). This is not the first time for Russia to try weakening US power and influence in the ME region through military involvement. Back to 1950's and 60's the Soviets were supplementing Egypt and Syria with heavy arms and weapons against Israel. Russia intervention now can be caused for different reasons. Putin intervention now can be taken as an advantage against US failure in solving the crisis. Andranik Migranyan, a prominent foreign policy expert, argued that the Refugee crisis in Europe might be one of the reasons; “the hearings in the US on aid to the Syrian opposition showed the failure of the Western response and the lack of serious, moderate alternatives to Assad”(Migranyan, 2015). Migranyan added that when there is a vacuum in international system, someone has to fill it.

At the beginning of the conflict, Russia has blocked the UN Security Council action on Syria three times. Russia wanted to protect its regional ally from being pressurized and has the same fate as Gaddafi in Libya. Russia has gradually deliberated into the conflict with arms shipments to al-Assad regime “which were at first routine and based on contracts signed prior to the 2011 uprising. As the war in Syria intensified, however, Russian arms shipments quickly evolved its importance and graduated from sophisticated artillery to combat helicopters and Mig fighter jets” (Khoury, 2015). Russia has supplied Assad regime with different types of military arms, and air missile systems

to support the regime in its fight against the rebels. Unlike US, Russia has made it clear that it will not allow any Islamic militias to be representative at the interim government or the permanent government that will be established after the elections. Any Sunni Jihadi groups currently fighting Al Assad worry Russia to have Islamist takeover because it will threaten Russia's other strategic ally, Iran, and its interest in the region.

Russia gave its long-term support to the diplomatic solutions rather than military intervention. At first, Russia hoped that Assad would contain the rebels and appease them through political reforms such as ending state of emergency and approving Public Elections. But this did not work because the rebels wanted regime change not some reforms. Then Russia supported the LAS' peace plan "that Assad should desist from using tanks, release political prisoners, stop violence against protests and open dialogue with the opposition". Furthermore, Russia supported transitional government made up of Assad regime members and opposition groups. It held meetings with China and met with all LAS members; and Assad in 2013 showed intention of power sharing and reconciliation. However, all these diplomatic efforts had failed. But Russia insisted that no foreign intervention would occur in Syria's internal affairs, stressing the principle of "noninterference" (Olanrewaju, 2015). Russia continued to support the regime with weapons under the notion of responsibility to protect.

In September 2015, joint information center set by Iraq, Russia, Syria, and Iran to coordinate their strike against ISIS. The time Putin realized that he has to intervene militarily because there was a moment pressures has increased on al-Assad regime. Ibrahim Eissa demonstrated that Russian intervention at that time was because Turkey funding to the civil war for weapons were overpowering, and Saudi Arabia and Qatar huge amount of money funding the rebels. At this time Russia has realized that al-Assad regime is facing a crisis, and by the time Russia intervened in Syria, there were serious

and small victories for terrorists, which led Syrian regime to withdraw from strategic places in Syria as they could not contain them. Thus, Russia had to intervene at that time to protect Damascus from falling under the terrorist hands and to strike them to push them back to their borders (Eissa, 2015). Russia cannot lose al-Assad regime now because it is his major ally in the region, and if al-Assad regime fall, Syria will be under the hands of Islamists, which will not be in Russia's favor. Russia have concentrated its strikes against anti-Assad forces. It has built up "sophisticated surface to air missile system. The S-400 has radically altered the nature of Russia's foothold in Syria and the ME" (Khoury, 2015).

Putin has intervened at this time specifically to show off his influence in the region, to showcase his strong military capabilities and to mark his revived military prowess for deterrence purposes, and to mark his authoritativeness in the international arena and to western counterparts and US. Putin has made himself, in a word, "indispensable" (Beehner, 2015). In other words, Russia wanted to show the weakness of the west in solving this conflict and showcase its military strength. Putin wants to send a message that Russia is filling the "thrones of power", and that Russia is limiting US presence in the region, "a realignment of the regional balance of power - one in favor of Iran and against Turkey and Saudi Arabia- and a resurgent Russia" (Beehner, 2015).

Russia's intervention also targets all active groups that refuse "to participate in any political settlement associated with the regime's survival, and Russia is also concerned over ISIS expansion to other areas close to Russia such as Afghanistan which dramatically expands threats to Russian National Security" (Islamic Movements Studies Program, 2015). Since these groups could cooperate with other groups from the Caucas and coordinate to create "Jihadi hotbeds around Russia". Therefore, it is a good chance for Russia to eliminate these groups and weaken the parent organization in Syria, rather

than having this fight near its borders. Thus, Putin wanted to strike them in Syria, rather than waiting for them in Afghanistan.

Another reason might be a reply on the western policies of isolating and punishing Russia after Crimea. Therefore, intervention in the region now and with this power shows Russia credentials as a great power, capable of shaping the decisions, and posing its will and influence as much as it could. Moreover, Putin found it a good opportunity to showcase Russian military capabilities, and highlight that US lack the reluctance and thorn to intervene meaningful way (Beehner, 2015). The US actions in invading Iraq and Libya has been criticized and cost US its reputation in the region. And as for Syria, US said that Assad has to go, but at the same time it did not take any action to push him to leave, which can be viewed as a weakness or a fear to be involved in new conflict again. Moreover, by helping shore up al-Assad, Putin has not only backing Iran but he also marking Russia's role as a mediator in regional conflicts. Foreign Minister Lavrov "has offered to help mediate and resolve conflict in Yemen, Iraq and elsewhere in the region as needed" (Khoury, 2015).

Russia has announced a deployment "of the anti-aircraft system following the downing of one of their fighter aircraft by a Turkish Air Force plane on November 24, and has since announced a series of tough economic sanctions against the Turks" (Harel, 2015). The US did not respond to this action, although, Turkey is in a good ally with US. Moreover, US has dispatched group of Special Forces in Northern Iraq and in Syria to support Russia in its war against ISIS (Harel, 2015). Russia is not willing to let the Assad regime go because the status quo is less chaotic and stable to Russian interest. During the conflict, Russia insisted that any peace talks should include Assad's regime, and his strong ally Iran. In 2013, Moscow has sent "sophisticated anti-aircraft batteries, anti-submarine missiles, and other munitions to Assad, plus the provision of 12 Russian

warships to patrol the Mediterranean. Russia wanted to circumvent a repetition of what the western powers did in Libya under the “responsibility to protect”; thus, it has done everything to protect Syria from having Libya’s fate. Even when al-Assad used chemical weapons against civilians, Russia announced that US shall not attempt any attack against Syria without cooperation of UN Security Council. The race of arms supplied to Syria either from Russia to Assad, or from US to rebels has revealed an old cold war scene.

**Regional actors position on Syria- Ally with US or Russia:**

Events in Syria have indirect effect on regional actors’ alignment with US and Russia. The Protracted conflict in Syria raises the possibility of a wider regional war between “Sunnis and Shi’as, with Assad forces, Syria’s Alawites, Hezbollah fighters, Iraq’s Shi’a militias, and Iran on one side, and Syria’s rebels; jihadists; and al Qaeda fronts in Lebanon, Iraq, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and the Gulf kingdoms on the other”(Crosston, 2014). “The most dominant actors in Syrian conflict and which intervened directly to the conflict were Saudi Arabia, Iran, and Hezbollah” because the conflict in Syria will highly impact their regimes. The other regional actors had roles like Jordan and UAE but not as strong as the other. We have now two blocks Russia and US, and each one of these regional actors has allied with one of them to protect their interest and balance in the region.

***Saudi Arabia*** has always been in US sphere of influence. Saudi Arabia wants Assad regime to be gone. The Saudi’s ruling government has made it clear that Assad cannot be part of the solution to the conflict and must handover power or be removed by force. Saudi Arabia is a major provider of military and financial assistance to the rebels; they considered being the main funding source for the rebels in Syria(Hove, 2015). Saudi has supported forces fighting against al-Assad, and worked closely with US to support

Syrian opposition groups because it is at Saudi's interest to have Sunnis ruling Syria. However, Saudi did not agree to Obama's decision not to intervene militarily in Syria after the chemical attack that was blamed on Assad's forces. Despite all Saudi Arabia's efforts to overthrow al-Assad, it did not succeed, and it also has increased the rivalry with Iran.

*Iran* from the other side has a strategic close ally with Syria and it has provided al-Assad regime with significant support since the beginning of its civil war. Iran has tried to make a series of practical moves to end Syrian crisis, "including holding the Syrian National Dialogue between Syrian opposition and government in November 2012, in Tehran" (Crosston, 2014). Like Russia, Iran does not like the western-US intervention in Syria because it has a clear agenda for Assad's survival. "Its diplomatic agenda is built in terms of Real politick aiming at increasing its regional hegemonic position and reducing the ability of the other competitors, especially Turkey, to challenge its new assumed role." In addition, Iran's regional ambitions threaten Saudi Arabia and other gulf monarchies in the region. Since, Saudi main interest in ending Assad rule may break "Iranian- Syrian axis, would create a religious divide between Sunni Syria (that will likely emerge if Assad fall), isolate Iran and Hezbollah, limit Iran's regional influence, and make Saudi Arabia the Muslim hegemony in the Middle East" (Demir, 2013).

Moreover, Iran has been committed to retain Syria within its regional orbit, and it has granted Damascus a "line of credit nearly 5 billion dollars, and has spent billions of dollars more on providing direct military support to the Syrian government" (Shanahan, 2016). Iran did not spend all this money just to protect the Shi'aa government, but it wants to have a reliable ally in the region from where it could protect its economic and military interests in the region. Therefore, any change on Syrian political system will be considered a geopolitical, ideological and strategic loss for Iran.

Another important regional actor is *Hezbollah*; it completes the axis of alignment in Syria: Russia, Hezbollah, and Iran. Since the beginning of Syrian crisis, Hezbollah was not very involved but its leader, Hassan Nasrallah, has mentioned in different occasions that he will side with Syrian government as “strategic need and a religious duty”. However, when battle increased in Aleppo, Syrian largest city, Hezbollah has taken more roles along Iranian forces in Syria. Hezbollah has served as conduit “for arms deliveries from Iran”. Moreover, when Russia started its air campaign late September, Hezbollah has increased its fighters in northern Lebanon to back up al-Assad regime. “Experts estimate the number of Hezbollah fighters in Syria at 6,000, many of them are concentrated in Damascus and Homs, with smaller numbers in Aleppo and Hama provinces” (Kajjo, 2015). Hezbollah has approximately lost more than 900 fighters in its war in Syria although they never said. But it is better for Hezbollah leader to portray campaign in Syria and “defense their bastion in Lebanon designed to prevent Sunni rebels from crossing the border to stage attacks closer to home” (Kochler, 2014). Although Hezbollah were trying to combat rebels’ north Aleppo, their operation has failed and has suffered serious casualties. Thus, their interference in Syria did not result in good terms as expected from Hezbollah.

The Syrian crisis has shown the struggle for regional supremacy pits an alliance of ‘Sunni Arab monarchies—the Gulf Cooperation Council members plus Jordan and Morocco (GCC+2) —against the Shiite regimes and militias in the Levant—Iran, Iraq, the Al-Assad regime, plus Lebanese Hezbollah and the Iraqi Popular Mobilization forces”. However, internationally, the GCC+2 supported reluctantly, by “the United States and NATO, whereas the Shiite coalition is supported by Russia” (Khoury, 2015). Syria has shown the battleground for international and regional alliance competition. Russian resurgence in Syria and the strong actions it has been taking indicate the

returning pattern of Cold War. The ability of Russia to intervene and indicate what should be done, and to protect Assad against US and western wish has marked its leading role in the international arena again. This change in balance of power and the broader change in alliance patterns signal a new Cold War. This has been addressed theoretically through literature review on alliances formation at the system level, and how shift of alliances indicates shifting in the balance of power.

### **What has changed since Russia intervened?**

Russia's involvement in Syrian crisis signals a new strategic paradigm in the ME and global arena. This will mark significant implications for "the balance of power and the rivalries in Syria's civil war, and for the struggle between the superpowers for global influence". Putin views Assad regime as the only vital solution to solve the radical Islam problem and end the Syrian conflict because he is fighting the jihadist terror. Russian forces that have been involved are fighting rebels and train and arm al-Assad military forces to combat the jihadist. Against this backdrop, Russia announced the establishment of a coalition against the Islamic State, parallel to the existing United States coalition with a similar objective(Dekel, 2015).

The development of Russian resurgence again creates a significant challenge to US and its hegemonic policy in the ME that existed for three decades, and to its allies including Israel. The Russian intervention in Syria following its intense political activity in the region, which has succeeded in some diplomatic achievements with most of the countries in the region, makes Russia a player. Russia has also positioned itself as a leader of internal reconciliation efforts in Syria. Indeed, in recent months, "two rounds of talks between the rival parties have been held under Russian auspices, and preparations have been made for an additional round of talks in collaboration with the UN" (Dekel,

2015). Russia's actions in the region show its intention to advance its role globally and to increase its effort as a senior and major actor in the international arena. "For good reason, Putin compared the current circumstances to the World War II era and the need to reach understandings between the superpowers, similar to the Yalta Conference on the Crimean Peninsula that was designed to divide the spheres of influence between them after the war" (Dekel, 2015). Putin views his willingness to intervene directly in the Syrian quagmire by turning the crisis in that country into a lever of influence that will provide Russia with a position of strength vis-à-vis the West and assist it in easing the pressure leveled on it due to its policy in Ukraine.

In Late September 28, 2015 Russian and American Presidents have met at the United Nations to lay a foundation of new understandings between the superpowers, together with an attempt by Putin "to achieve American and Western recognition for Russia's military involvement in Syria" (Serfaty, 2015). The parties discussed "cooperation in the fight against Islamic State, while for his part Putin strove to delineate agreed upon spheres of influence". Progress of a settlement agreement in Syria, including Assad's future, is secondary piece in the chess game between US and Russia. In statements at the UN, President Obama had difficulty granting Assad the status "part of the solution" and stressed that the civil war erupted because of the regime's brutal response to nonviolent demonstrations that sought to advance a democratic process in the country(Dekel, 2015). Therefore, Obama cannot agree to Putin's position that only Assad's regime can domain Syria as a political actor and maintain integrative sovereignty there, but at least Obama accepted Assad to be in the transitional government. Russia has strengthened its position as a dominant actor in Syria, while President Obama and the West have exhibited helplessness toward the situation.

Moscow has perceived its military engagement as “a counter-balancing action against a declining US primacy and legitimizes its interference by pointing to the destabilizing forces that have been unleashed after each American intervention in the Middle East” (Guerisoli, 2015). This has made many western powers to start follow Russia in its war against the rebels because the situation has gone out of US control, especially after the terrorist attacks that occurred in Paris. As mentioned above, both U.S and Russia have interests in Syria’s conflict and had their own separated agenda and interests, which draw us back to the status of Cold War. They have been using “all sorts of diplomatic, economic and military actions on the soil of third countries, playing tit-for-tat games to increase their influence - it's an old scene from the Cold War" that marks ending of unipolarity (Serfaty, 2015). Syria has become part of regional and global tussle that is about recalibration of balance of power and interest. The situation today might be a shift of balance of power to either uni-polarity again, or bi-polarity. The 21<sup>st</sup> century has drew us back to the CW era, since both has seen an outbreak of numerous brutal wars caused by ethnic and nationalistic rivalries that justify the turn of international system and change of balance of power(Serfaty, 2015). The Syrian civil war has shown shifts in balance of power, and made medium and smaller states to shift their alliances and change their pole of power and act toward the new patron.

Furthermore, looking at the Middle East region and allies, we will notice that Egypt has shifted its alignment to Russia. This can be seen from the military aid received from Russia, and all the diplomatic and economic negotiations that have been going on between the two countries after the revolution. Egypt was in USSR sphere of influence during the Cold War, but it started to shift towards US after 1973 war because Anwar Sadat wanted to have peace with Israel. Now, we can see Egypt shifting back again to its

old ally, Russia, because it has been offering Egypt military support since the revolution to help Egypt fight terrorist attacks happening in Sinai.

Moreover, Jordan which has always been in US sphere of influence is now cooperating with Moscow in its military actions in Syria. Jordan has taken part in the airstrikes that targeted Iraq and Syria since September 2014. Jordan might be afraid that it will be the next from these terrorist groups, and it feels that US is not taking any action to protect or stop these groups from spreading. Therefore, allying with Russia in having these military attacks is in Jordan's interest at the end.

Although Saudi Arabia is still walking on US footsteps, but sooner or later it will realize that it will be the next threatened country. Saudi Arabia has been exhausted from its war in Yemen, and Houthis are crossing Saudi borders since the war (Eissa, 2015). Thus, falling of Syria under the jihadist or ISIS groups will be a great threat on Saudi's regime because it will be the next target and it has been already drained in its war with Yemen (Eissa, 2015). It is the first time for Saudi to face financial deficit this year because of the war in Yemen. Furthermore, the recent conflict that occurred between Saudi Arabia and Iran has made Saudi indifferent to US decisions. The Saudi government is tired of what it sees as Tehran "thumbing its nose at the West," including the recent launch of ballistic missiles, while no one does anything about it. Every time the Iranians do something, the U.S. backs off. In the meantime, Saudi Arabia is actually doing something about it in Syria, in Iran and in Yemen" (Reuters, Haaretz, and The Associated Press, 2016).

This instability and super power rivalry is highlighted in this conflict involves shifting of alliances, plots, and network of intrigues that have not been seen after Cold War. The rising power and actions performed by Russia is one of the main reasons

behind the assumption that this is a second Cold War, and that states change their behaviour and alignment according to the new balance of power.

## IX. Conclusion

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The shifting in alliance regionally and internationally due to the Syria conflict is a strong vibe towards returning to bi-polarity. The failure of US to achieve what it has proclaimed as “a New World Order” in the wake of unilateral, and its continuous failure in solving any conflict successfully, leads us to witnessing “global realignment towards a new balance of power” (Kochler, 2014). Russia is regaining its position and influence again starting from the Crimean crisis, reaching to the Syrian civil war. Putin’s sudden appearance marked two failures for US and western policies; first, this whole idea of isolating Russia (after Crimean intervention), and the insisting that Assad regime must go.

In addition, Russia is now asserting itself as a leading power in the ME which is capable of launching effective military operations. Before that, U.S was the only power that could act this way and could take any decision without negotiating like the war on Iraq. However, we can see the US Secretary of State John Kerry who held talks in Moscow to find ways “to bridge gaps over ways to end Syrian conflict; he told Putin that he is hoping to find common ground” (BBC News). US is trying to reach a middle ground with Russia to convince Putin that Bashar Al Assad should take part in the transition, but Russia disagreed and said “only Syrian people should decide this fate.” This small action or move from US illustrates that Russia is controlling the situation and US has nothing to do against Russia’s will. If U.S was the only hegemonic power, it would have never start negotiations with Moscow, which show the declining of US power in having a hegemonic role in the region and rising of Russia as a balance to its power.

Russia has used Syria to display its renewed ability to have an impact and effect on events, and make change on the ground. Syria has given Putin the chance to be seen as a player again. The end game for Russia is “a diminished US presence in the region, a realignment of the regional balance of power – one in favor of Iran and against Turkey and Saudi Arabia – and a resurgent Russia, whereby foreign leaders must once again come to the Kremlin to kiss his ring” (Beehner, 2015).

Therefore, the Middle East region has been divided between two camps now, and rivals and competition has been intense once again. The world has been unstable for many years now, starting from Iraq invasion in 2003 as this instability did not exist since the end of Cold War. Both US and Russia are fighting their Cold War using their alliances in the ME region to maintain its power and influence. The idea of shifting the alliances now towards Russia’s interest marks the changing of balance of power. However, we cannot assert whether this shift will be bipolar or multi-polar because we can see that China and Russia are acting on lock steps in the Syrian conflict. Although China and Russia are working closely, we cannot assume which is guiding which. This might keep the question of shifting the Balance of Power towards bipolarity or multi-polarity open until the conflict ends.

#### **X. Recommendations for the League of Arab States (LAS):**

The failed diplomatic efforts for solving the conflict created a major international concern. The LAS and UN had failed efforts to reach a peaceful resolution to the deadly conflict in Syria due to the presence of regional and international interests. Therefore, from the regional side, the LAS should encourage its members that Syrian conflict requires a political solution and begin engagement process rather than providing arms and weapons to the rebels and government. Understanding the conflict and its domino effect on the regional actor should make the Arab states reconsider their status. Given the recent

escalation of ISIS militants and establishing caliphate states in Syria and Iraq, the LAS should make it clear to the members supporting the rebels and the fall of Assad regime that this will threaten their sovereignty and territorial integrity as mentioned above.

Furthermore, the LAS should encourage a strong dialogue between all conflict resolving organizations, and all stakeholders in this conflict notably Russia,U.S and their allies. From one side, US, and its allies, have to respect the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Syria, and deter supporting invading forces from (turkey, Saudi Arabia, and Qatar) that protect rebels because they are helping into power groups like ISIS and AL-Qaeda which is a repetitive scene from Iraq and Libya. Russia on the other side, should accept the fact that some Syrian people will be against Assad's autocracy; thus, Russia should encourage him to engage opposition in his politics.

The LAS should make it strong and clear message that stakeholders should encourage the reconstruction, reconciliation and integration of all parties to solve this conflict. Furthermore, it should encourage the announcement of Russia and its ally as important actors in this conflict and that they had vision to fight for Assad government against those rebels. To end this conflict, interest drive and hegemonic role should be set aside, and real peaceful resolution should be accorded priority.

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