

American University of Armenia



A Conflict of Competing Interests: Stakeholders in Syrian Civil War

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**A Master's Essay Submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of Political Science
and International Affairs for the Fulfillment of the Degree of Master of Arts**

Yerevan

2016

Acknowledgments

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my capstone project advisor, Dr. Donald Fuller, for his support, helpful remarks and comments. I want to thank him for guiding me throughout this hard process and at the same time for giving me enough freedom to explore the topic on my own.

Besides my advisor, I would also like to thank the whole faculty of Political Science and International Affairs. I am filled with high respect and paramount gratitude towards our professors who are high quality professionals, who were always supportive and ready to help.

Though it was time consuming and required much energy and effort to study in AUA, I have never regretted that I am a part of the AUA family. The experience and the knowledge that AUA gave to me is really of great value.

Abstract

Nowadays one of the crucial issues that disturbs the peace and security of the Middle East is the Syrian civil war. Despite the fact that the war in Syria is qualified as a civil war, third parties are involved in it. This research attempts to prove that primary reason for the interest in Syria of selected countries, namely the US, Russia, Turkey, Iran, Saudi Arabia and Qatar, is power maximization. The thesis studies the issues from the realist approach and applies it to different issues connected with the stakeholders in the Syrian conflict. In order to achieve the goal, the research uses official documents, resolutions, statements made by various officials on the topic, press releases and transcripts of meetings during the negotiations between the parties; also, it covers academic articles and recent (2015-2016) newspaper articles. The research proves that each country by its actions in the long-term was thinking more about the future of its own country and, consequently, its position in the Middle Eastern region. Thus, Turkey, Saudi Arabia and Qatar are more concerned about Iran becoming hegemon in the region if Bashar Al-Assad's regime wins in the end. Whereas two major powers, the U.S. and Russia, are trying to demonstrate their strength to each other and the World.

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Table of abbreviations

CBS – Columbia Broadcasting System

HR/VP – High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy/Vice-President of the European Commission

IRGC – Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps

ISIS – Islamic State of Iraq and Syria

NATO – North Atlantic Treaty Organization

OPEC – Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries

PYD – Syrian Kurdish Democratic Union Party (Kurdish: Partiya Yekîtiya Demokrat)

UN – United Nations

US – United States

Introduction

The Middle East has been considered a conflict region for many decades. The tensions in this region are mostly associated with conflicts over natural resources, terrorism, nuclear weapon questions, ethnic-religious struggles, etc. Syria is one of the most vulnerable countries in the region. Nowadays one of the crucial issues that disturbs the peace and security of the Middle East is the Syrian civil war. The relevance of the issue is the fact that until now the Syrian civil war continues and new factors of the conflict are rising up.

Despite the fact that the war in Syria is qualified as a civil war, the involvement of third parties is observed. This involvement becomes apparent through political and military support. Though various observations were made on this topic, there is one very important question that still needs an answer: what makes those countries seek interest in Syria. There are some reasons for some countries to have partnership ties with Assad and for others to want the destruction of Assad's regime. This research will attempt to prove that primary reason for the interest in Syria of selected countries, namely the United States, Russia, Turkey, Iran, Saudi Arabia and Qatar, is power maximization. The main question the thesis will try to tackle is as follows:

Research question

RQ: Why do some countries support and others oppose Assad's regime?

Hypothesis: The stakeholder countries (mentioned above) are interested in the Middle East, more precisely in Syria, to maximize their power in the region.

The thesis paper has the following structure. It consists of several parts. First comes an introductory part. Secondly, methodology of the research is presented. Then follows the theory part, which covers the analysis of the realism theory. Afterwards analysis of the situation looking from the perspective of each of the selected countries is provided. Moreover, in the analysis part the relations are discussed through the theory of realism providing the answer to the research question mentioned above. Finally, major findings and conclusion are provided.

Methodology

The research is conducted based on the deductive approach. In this case, the thesis studies the issues from the realist approach and applies it to different cases of stakeholder countries in the Syrian conflict to approve or disapprove the hypothesis. The main powers participating in the conflict are the U.S. and Russia. Besides those countries, among the stakeholders, on the one hand, is Iran, that together with Russia supports Assad's regime and, on the other hand, are Turkey, Saudi Arabia and Qatar that together with the US support the opposition.

The qualitative method is used to conduct the analysis. The research is based on both primary and secondary data. As a primary data, the research uses official documents, resolutions, statements made by various officials on the topic, press releases and transcripts of meetings during the negotiations between the parties. As a secondary data, the thesis paper covers academic articles in order to provide an answer to the research question and present the main reasons of the stakeholders' interest in Syria. Moreover, the capstone analyzes recent, i.e. 2015-2016, newspaper articles to illustrate the recent events connected with the conflict and the reaction of the stakeholder parties. The collected data is analyzed in the framework of realism theory. Furthermore, the limitations of the study is the fact that the Syrian conflict is not over yet. Though the paper will also try to discuss some new official documents, reports, agreements if available, course of events is developing too fast, thus making the process of examining more difficult.

Theory of realism

The theory of realism will help to understand the geopolitical strategy of the countries involved in the conflict. Moreover, as the realist theory is about power maximization, it will help to better explain and cover the research question.

The theory of realism is considered a predominant theory in the field of international relations since World War II. The main reason is that during that period it was easier to explain the political strategy of the states via the realist theory.¹

Herz describes the classic type of international relations system as something anarchic. The reason is that the system was established on unevenly shared power and was insufficient in supra-national type of authority. In other words, this system can be characterized as the one with absence of rules and special higher authorities, which would be able to govern states. In the conditions of being able to rely on themselves, states needed to make sure to survive. In order to achieve that goal, states were maximizing their power.² According to Morgenthau³ and Jervis⁴, it is natural that states seek power in order to survive and establish the dominance. This is one of the main reasons, which involve states in wars. Power is an ability and potential to force another state to do something it does not want to do or to prevent it from doing something it wished. As Mearsheimer puts it, realism is about “the security competition and war among the great powers”.⁵

However, what is “power” and how to understand it? Morgenthau explains “power” in a broad manner, describing it as “anything that establishes and maintains the control of man over man.”⁶ The same way states establish control over each other in the international relations

¹ John Mearsheimer, “Realism, the Real World and the Academy,” *Michigan University*, 2002, 25.

² John H. Herz, “Rise and Demise of The Territorial State,” *World Politics* 9, no. 4, 1957.

³ Hans Morgenthau, “Politics among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace,” *New York: Alfred A Knopf*, April 19, 2005.

⁴ Robert Jervis, “Realism, Neoliberalism, and Cooperation: Understanding the Debate,” *International Security*, Summer 1999.

⁵ Mearsheimer, “Realism, the Real World and the Academy,” 23.

⁶ Morgenthau, “Politics among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace.”, 11.

framework. Walt claims realism to be a struggle between strong states and he has a pessimistic forecast that those types of conflicts are difficult to exclude.⁷ Jervis mentions, that in the theory of realism “power” is understood as a relative idea. Due to international system’s anarchic character, in case a state gains power it will become a significant threat for not only its neighbor states, but maybe also beyond the territory of the region.⁸

As Morgenthau puts it, according to the theory of realism, the world consists of interests going against each other, that is why clashes among those interests are unavoidable. He mentions that the power quest is an innate result that comes from “bad” human nature, which is described as egoistic and self-oriented.⁹ In the modern world, where the international system is described and accepted as anarchic, i.e. without higher authority, as mentioned above, this egoistic human nature becomes easy to assert.¹⁰

The behavior of states in the frames of realist theory can be explained by the existing self or the so-called national interest in a world where the strive of existence must be put over all other moral things.¹¹ In the realist theory interests are expressed in the scope of power. Moreover, national interests in the ethics of realism can be defined as amoral.¹² Morality as such is eliminated from the theory of realism. According to Ashley, whenever the time comes for national interests realists do not discuss morality. If states follow moral rules, national interests can suffer.¹³

In order to explain the theory of realism in a more thorough manner, I want to refer to its offensive and defensive divisions. Offensive realists consider it is almost impossible to achieve mutual security, as states are guided by their interests and seek to gain and maximize

⁷ Stephen M. Walt, “International Relations: One World, Many Theories,” *Foreign Policy*, no. 110, 1998.

⁸ Jervis, “Realism, Neoliberalism, and Cooperation: Understanding the Debate.”

⁹ Morgenthau, “Politics among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace,” 9.

¹⁰ Jack Donnelly, “Twentieth Century Realism,” *Traditions of International Ethics*, Cambridge University Press, 2000.

¹¹ Morgenthau, “Politics among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace.”

¹² Donnelly, “Twentieth Century Realism.”

¹³ Richard Ashley, “Political Realism and Human Interests,” *International Studies Quarterly*, vol. 25(2), 1981.

their power. This branch of realism claims that armed conflicts are a normal reaction to the perception of states interests. Moreover, wars burst out not because states seek security, but because one or both parties show aggression. What concerns defensive branch, its defenders are in solidarity with neoliberals. They refer to Waltz's "security dilemma". Parties for security preservation have to defend themselves, at the same time, those type of actions can threaten the security of some other country even in cases when this is done for protection. Thus, those conditions make it hard for states to understand how to behave and how to react.¹⁴

The explanation mentioned above makes it clear why this particular theory will be used to explain the decisions of the main actors, such as Russia and the U.S., and regional players, such as Turkey, Iran, Saudi Arabia and Qatar to choose special tactics as a foreign policy towards Syria and their primary interests in the region.

¹⁴ Jervis, "Realism, Neoliberalism, and Cooperation: Understanding the Debate."

The Syrian war and the stakeholder countries

The weakening of President Assad's ruling regime¹⁵ and arising of the "Arab spring" in Syria¹⁶ led to an uprising which began in March 2011 and in June gradually turned into armed clashes in the form of a civil war. In order to face and soften the uprisings, reforms were promised to be done. However, President Al-Assad allegedly never kept his promise and just tried to crush the rebellion.¹⁷

During last five years, the Syrian civil war continues to gain analysts' attention. First, because now it is not only the domestic issue of Syria, but it is also an international one. The interference of external forces gives the conflict a new light. Syria has become not strictly open but, in any case, a fighting arena between Russia and the United States. Both want to gain a solid piece of benefits from this war.

As the situation in Syria is constantly changing the stakeholder countries make changes in their geopolitical strategy. Moreover, the six stakeholder countries, that the paper discusses, are using Syria as a tool to regulate their relations with each other. Furthermore, Syria is a "playing card" that the game changers are using to strengthen their position in the region. Thus, it is important to observe not only the attitude of the stakeholders towards Syria, but also the relations between those countries. This will help to reveal some facts that explain the stakeholders' behavior.

Russia

While talking about the strategy of Russia in Syria, first, it should be mentioned that Russia and Syria have been allies ever since 1960s. Second, the Syrian port Tartus has become a harbor for Russia's overseas naval base. Third, Syria and Russia are trade partners especially

¹⁵ Jonathan Spyer, "Syrian Regime Strategy and the Syrian Civil War," *Meria Journal*, Fall 2012.

¹⁶ Tugce Varol Sevim and Merve Sune Ozel, "Rethinking russian mission in Syria," *European Scientific Journal, ESJ* 9, no. 19, July 9, 2013, 445.

¹⁷ Joseph Holliday, "The Assad Regime: From Counterinsurgency To Civil War", *Middle East security report*, March 2013, <http://www.understandingwar.org/report/assad-regime>.

in the exports of arms. Moreover, Russia and Syria share the similar problem connected with Islamist terrorism expressed in a suicidal aggressive manner. Another point is connected with the protection of human rights in Syria by Russia.¹⁸ Moreover, the point that Russia cannot stand the appearance of the United States in the Middle Eastern region can be one of the causes Russia is for Assad's regime.^{19 20}

Russia's intervention into the Syrian war

Since the beginning of the Syrian war, Russia has been supporting Assad by supplying Syria with military but only in 2015 formally got involved into the war. On the one hand, Russian intervention and bombings concerned the West. On the other hand, the West understood that possibly this could become a solution to this long lasting war.²¹

The explanation for Russia's intervention was that the latter, by its support of Assad's regime, wanted to fight the terrorism in the region. The position of Russia is that the defeat of Assad would have a direct impact on spread of terroristic organizations. According to Russia, they need to support state institutions, as the emergence of the ISIS in the region can be described as West's failure to deal with the consequences. Furthermore, Russia hoped that the fight against terrorists would decrease the number of refugees, which sounded very beneficial for Europe.²²

However, according to Kalb, one of the reasons Russia intervened in the Syrian war is that Putin was afraid the Muslim population of Russia would be in the track of Islamic

¹⁸ Eric Engle, "Humanitarian Intervention and Syria: Russia, the United States, and International Law," SSRN Scholarly Paper, Rochester, NY, Social Science Research Network, July 22, 2012, <http://papers.ssrn.com/abstract=2115191>.

¹⁹ Camilla Committeri, "When Domestic Factors Prevail Upon Foreign Ambitions: Russia's Strategic Game in Syria," *Istituto affari internazionali*, 2012, <http://pubblicazioni.iai.it/pdf/DocIAI/iaiwp1226.pdf>.

²⁰ Ekaterina Chirkova, "Key Aspects of Russia's Current Foreign and Security Policy", *Policy Department, Directorate-General for External Policies of the Union: European Union*, 2012, [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/briefing_note/join/2012/491446/EXPO-AFET_SP\(2012\)491446_EN.pdf.s](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/briefing_note/join/2012/491446/EXPO-AFET_SP(2012)491446_EN.pdf.s)

²¹ Joshua W. Walker, "The West's Silver Lining in Turkey-Russia Tensions," *The National Interest*, December 4, 2015, <http://nationalinterest.org/feature/the-west-silver-lining-turkey-russia-tensions-14509>.

²² Angela Stent, "Putin's Power Play in Syria," *Foreign Affairs*, February 2016, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/united-states/2015-12-14/putins-power-play-syria>.

extremism. Kalb mentions that Russia now shows that it is a major power and wants to resolve the Syrian war. During the meeting of Bashar Al-Assad and Putin in Moscow, the latter was suggesting a new strategy to end the war.²³

Russia was bombing the rebels of Sunni origin in Syria. Moreover, by this step Russia was supporting the Shia coalition in the Middle East. According to Kalb, de facto, it was a war towards Sunni Arabs, who in their turn support Saudi Arabia and its ally – the US. The vulnerable region of the Middle East has become even more unbalanced with the appearance of the two main powers in the arena: the US and Russia. During one of his interviews to CBS, Vladimir Putin mentioned that the most considerable cause for Russia to be involved in the war is the existing threat that islamists would escape and endanger Russia.²⁴ Putin is concerned that the failure of Assad's regime would bring chaos in the region of the Middle East and would increase the strength of the Islamic extremism not only in the region, but also in Russia.²⁵

However, Russian intervention in Syria is not only about the fear that Islamic extremists would gain power. It is also about Russia's intention to spread its control in the region. By its military actions, Russia wants to guarantee it will be able to set rules in Syria in the so-called "post-Assad period". In contrast to the US, which in 2011 refused to provide help to the President of Egypt Mubarak, when he started to lose his position, Russia was supporting Assad even in the hardest of times. Thus, Russia sends a warning to both the regional and non-regional powers, that it has its say in this conflict.^{26 27}

For Russia, leaving Assad in power is an opportunity to spread its influence and the ability to leave space for further adjustments if needed.²⁸ The strategy of Russia made the

²³ Marvin Kalb, "Putin's Muslim Nightmare," *Foreign Policy*, November 2, 2015, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2015/11/02/putins-muslim-nightmare-syria-assad-iran/>.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Stent, "Putin's Power Play in Syria."

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Franz-Stefan Gady, "Why Putin Is Withdrawing (Some) Troops From Syria," *The Diplomat*, March 16, 2016, <http://thediplomat.com/2016/03/why-putin-is-withdrawing-some-troops-from-syria/>.

²⁸ Stephen M. Walt, "Who Is a Better Strategist: Obama or Putin?," *Foreign Policy*, October 9, 2015, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2015/10/09/who-is-a-better-strategist-obama-or-putin/>.

opposition of Syria agree with the temporary suspension of fighting which took place on 27th of February 2016. Furthermore, this move earned Russia a better and stronger position at the table of negotiations. The United States, in its turn, has loosened its position about Assad. The US was able to cooperate without the initial condition of the “negotiations without Assad”.²⁹

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One of the outcomes of Russia’s interference in the civil war of Syria was the fact that Russia dissolved its ties with Turkey, after the latter shot down Russian jet on the border of Syria in November 2015. Another impact was that Russia put at risk radicalization of Sunni Muslims in the South of Russia, who were not supporting Russia for helping Assad.³¹

The withdrawal of Russian troops from Syria and its consequences

It is hard to give an analytical material on the current global situation in the world after the dramatic changes in the military-political situation. The so-called withdrawal of Russian troops from Syria rapidly changed the global picture of interests not only of the various nations in the Middle East, but also the interests of the stakeholder countries involved in the conflict. The same way the picture has changed dramatically when Russia abruptly sent troops to Syria.

One of the most intriguing events that took place on March 14, 2016, was the withdrawal of the main part of the Russian troops from Syria. According to Stavridis, this step can move the war closer to the end. The reasons why Russia has picked that strategy can be various. First, possibly Russia is sure in Bashar Al-Assad’s success. Second, Russia relies on a fruitful cooperation during the peace talks.³² It can be an opportunity for Russia to continue

²⁹ Kimberly Marten and Rajan Menon, “Putin’s Mission Accomplished?,” *Foreign Affairs*, March 15, 2016, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/syria/2016-03-15/putins-mission-accomplished>.

³⁰ Jeffrey A. Stacey, “Russia’s Pyrrhic Victory in Syria,” *Foreign Affairs*, March 20, 2016, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/syria/2016-03-20/russia-s-pyrrhic-victory-syria>.

³¹ Lucian Kim, “He Came, He Saw, He Withdrew From Syria,” *Foreign Policy*, March 15, 2016, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2016/03/15/he-came-he-saw-he-withdrew-from-syria/>.

³² James Stavridis, “Was a Fake War in the Saudi Desert a Dress Rehearsal for a Syrian Invasion?,” *Foreign Policy*, March 15, 2016, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2016/03/15/fake-war-saudi-desert-syrian-invasion-putin-russia-assad/>.

with the “head up” and further not get involved in the affairs with unknown consequences.³³

Third, Russian ruble is unstable and oil prices are low, thus, Russian economy cannot afford the high costs of the operations.^{34 35 36 37}

Gvosdev mentions, that one of the reasons of such an abrupt and sudden withdrawal of troops can be that in reality for Russia it was a mission only for short period of time. According to him, the evidence can be the fact that Russia has never made any promises about its involvement in the war and its further actions. Russia’s mission was helping Assad out and it has accomplished it.³⁸ As Russian President Vladimir Putin has mentioned while withdrawing the troops from Syria: “the missions that were set for the Ministry of Defense are accomplished”.³⁹ Moreover, according to him, the time has come to solve the problem via diplomatic means.⁴⁰

Another reason Gvosdev mentions, concerns Russia’s role in the global arena. By its intervention, Russia has demonstrated its abilities and opportunities. It is the time when Russia shows its “hard power”. It can operate and deploy actions not only in the territory of the former Soviet Union, thus, sending a message to another great power – the United States.⁴¹ Russia has proven to be powerful and an important key player in the whole proxy war of the region.⁴²

However, no matter what reasons are behind this step, it is too soon to make any predictions about the kind of effect, from the long-term perspective, this action will cause.⁴³

According to the data received later in March, Putin will still keep Russia’s naval and air bases

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Nikolas Gvosdev, “5 Ways to View Putin’s Syrian Surprise,” *The National Interest*, March 15, 2016, <http://nationalinterest.org/feature/5-ways-view-putins-syrian-surprise-15499>.

³⁵ Stavridis, “Was a Fake War in the Saudi Desert a Dress Rehearsal for a Syrian Invasion?”

³⁶ Marten and Menon, “Putin’s Mission Accomplished?”

³⁷ Stacey, “Russia’s Pyrrhic Victory in Syria.”

³⁸ Gvosdev, “5 Ways to View Putin’s Syrian Surprise.”

³⁹ Marten and Menon, “Putin’s Mission Accomplished?”

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Gvosdev, “5 Ways to View Putin’s Syrian Surprise.”

⁴² Stacey, “Russia’s Pyrrhic Victory in Syria.”

⁴³ Marten and Menon, “Putin’s Mission Accomplished?”

in Tartus and Hmeymim correspondingly. Moreover, Russia is going to keep some air assets in Syria to protect its planes from Turkish attacks. In contrast to Stavridis, Slim believes that, as Russia's main aim was the preservation of Assad in power and that for this reason Russia got involved in the war in the first place, whenever Russia feels the threat of not accomplishing this mission, it would send back its troops. Therefore, it can be assumed that Russia considers the situation in Syria for today stable and secure for the president Assad.⁴⁴

The fact that Russia has called back its troops can have some negative consequences on its way of the establishment of power. The cooperation of Iran and Syria may strengthen and this will give Iran a grandiose opportunity to switch places with Russia and have more valuable position in the final decisions of Syrian conflict.⁴⁵

On the bright side, the fact that Russia called back its military assets and the establishment of a temporary ceasefire is a win-win situation, both for Russia, for the mentioned above reasons, and for Syria, which has suffered a lot and will need time to try to recover. On the other hand, the conflict that is rising between Turkey and Russia may settle down to some extent.⁴⁶

Shift in Russian-Syrian relations

As the negotiations over Syria began, the US considers that Russia's strategy towards Syria has changed. If previously Russia was blindly supporting Assad and his actions, now, according to the US, the fact that Russia agreed to discuss the UN resolution on the usage of chemical weapons by the Syrian party, talks about a shift in Russia's policy towards Syria.⁴⁷

The diplomatic relations of Moscow and Damascus indeed have changed. In addition, the shift was done to the worse side. President Assad neglected requirements and advice from

⁴⁴ Randa Slim, "Putin's Master Plan for Syria," *Foreign Policy*, March 18, 2016, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2016/03/18/putins-master-plan-for-syria-assad-isis-russia-peace-deal/>.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Marten and Menon, "Putin's Mission Accomplished?"

⁴⁷ Dan De Luce, "After Iran Deal, U.S. Bids to Revive Peace Talks on Syria," *Foreign Policy*, August 10, 2015, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2015/08/10/after-iran-deal-u-s-bids-to-revive-peace-talks-on-syria/>.

Russia to change the governing methods towards the opposition and make it more based on trust. Another issue is that the Kremlin for the last four years was not satisfying Assad's proposals to meet. Only last year, 2015, in October, the two presidents finally met. Although Russia, during the peace talks in Geneva, was not supporting Assad's idea of the upcoming presidential elections and retrieving the monitoring of the whole Syria, it still does not take its back from Assad.⁴⁸

The United States

One of the main game changers in the Syrian war is the United States. The primary purpose of the United States is, allegedly, an attempt to establish peace and democratization in the region by removing Assad, at the same time solving some issues connected with other countries that the United States are in conflict with.⁴⁹ Another reason for the United States is the strategic needs of the country, i.e. power maximization in the region, thus, preventing Russia to establish its rules in the region.⁵⁰

The strategy of the United States is very confusing. On the one hand, the US considers that Assad cannot lead the country and he must go. On the other hand, the US is not ready to accept any opposition group that is fighting against Assad's regime to rule the country either. The US fights against the Islamic State. Moreover, the US expects to gain Kurdish support in the Syrian issue, simultaneously, it wants also Turkey to participate in the actions towards Syria.⁵¹

Russian foreign policy affects not only the course of the Syrian war, but also it affects president Obama's administration management. The fact that the United States is unable to prevent Russia from spreading influence in the Middle East puts under question the

⁴⁸ Slim, "Putin's Master Plan for Syria."

⁴⁹ Katerina Dalacoura, "US Democracy Promotion in the Arab Middle East since 11 September 2001: A Critique," *International Affairs*, Vol. 81, No. 5, October 1, 2005.

⁵⁰ Scott Gerschwer, "The Realist Looks at Syria," accessed December 10, 2015, https://www.academia.edu/1648541/The_Realist_Looks_at_Syria.

⁵¹ Walt, "Who Is a Better Strategist."

effectiveness of the administration of the current president. Thus, the dilemma is whether the US should try to work on its diplomatic issues or just expect the new administration to impose its new ways of dealing with the problems.⁵²

Iranian “Nuclear Deal” and the US

The main obstacle for the United States to achieve its goal in the region is Iran, which is supported by Syria. The U.S. has tensed relations with Iran on Iraq question. From the realist theory perspective, as Iran is becoming hegemon in the region, the United States wants Assad out in order to minimize Iran’s power.⁵³

During the nuclear deal, the US was trying to eliminate Iran, a supporter of Assad’s regime, from the peace talks over Syria, being afraid that Iran-Syria ties would strengthen even more. However, for Iran successful nuclear deal was a starting point on Syrian negotiations.⁵⁴

According to some scholars, Iranian nuclear deal was supposed to bring peace in the region. However, for the US the deal was just a guarantee that Iran would not construct a nuclear weapon and maybe in the future they would be able to cooperate with Iran over Syria.⁵⁵

Finally, in October, the United States made a decision to include Iran in the peace talks over Syria in Vienna, thus, allowing Iran after all this time to have its value in the peace building issue. The president Barack Obama marked the growing involvement of Iran in the conflict. According to the United States, in order to solve the conflict in Syria they will need Iran’s support. However, with this step the U.S. does not expect to become allies with Iran.⁵⁶

⁵² David Rothkopf, “The Future of Putin’s Russia and the Syria Dilemma,” *Foreign Policy*, February 29, 2016, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2016/02/29/the-future-of-putins-russia-and-the-syria-dilemma/>.

⁵³ Gerschwer, “The Realist Looks at Syria.”

⁵⁴ De Luce, “After Iran Deal, U.S. Bids to Revive Peace Talks on Syria.”

⁵⁵ Nahal Toosi, “Scholars: Iran Deal Will Stabilize Mideast,” *Politico*, August 27, 2015, <http://www.politico.com/story/2015/08/iran-deal-praised-for-stabilizing-mideast-121778.html>.

⁵⁶ Howard La Franchi and Vladimir Isachenkov, “What’s behind US Special Forces in Syria? A New Realism,” *Christian Science Monitor*, October 30, 2015, <http://www.csmonitor.com/USA/Foreign-Policy/2015/1030/What-s-behind-US-Special-Forces-in-Syria-A-new-realism>.

Nevertheless, an important role have played the fact that sanctions are lifted from Iran. As Russia is temporarily in an economic crisis and Saudi Arabia loses its share in the market within the frameworks of OPEC, Iran again can enter the market and cooperate with the US.⁵⁷

Know your “enemy”: Russia and the US

As already mentioned above, Russia started its intervention in the Syrian conflict late in September 2015 with air striking of terrorists. This interference moved the Syrian war to a new level, turning it into a proxy war between two major powers – the US and Russia. Though Washington administration would like to accept Russia as a regional power, Russia’s actions show that it has serious intentions and will fight for its place in the international arena. The US has a ground to worry: in 2008, Russia has shown its readiness to use force against its neighbor, Georgia, which was moving in the direction of the West, thus, on more time insuring its power over the former Soviet Union countries. For the US and the President Obama, it is important to know and deal with Russia’s goals both in Ukraine and in Syria, as the US cannot isolate Russia forever.⁵⁸ An interesting point that Pakhomov focuses his attention on, is connected with the cooperation of Russia and Israel, for the latter to improve the offshore areas of the natural gas. In case this cooperation works out, and at some point Iran and its proxy, Hezbollah, become a threat to this plan, as Pakhomov puts it, Russia would try to decrease the threat. From Russia’s point of view, this can strengthen its position in gas markets worldwide, particularly, from the standpoint of Turkey and the European Union.⁵⁹

⁵⁷ Ian Bremmer, “Will Iran Become America’s New Saudi Arabia?,” *The National Interest*, July 27, 2015, <http://nationalinterest.org/feature/will-iran-become-americas-new-saudi-arabia-13424>.

⁵⁸ Stent, “Putin’s Power Play in Syria.”

⁵⁹ Nikolay Pakhomov, “The Strategy Behind Russia’s Moves in Syria,” *The National Interest*, March 15, 2016, <http://nationalinterest.org/feature/the-strategy-behind-russias-moves-syria-15497>.

Turkey

Syria and Turkey have various unsolved problems since each state was created. Among the issues are resource-related, territorial, ideological and, of course, political ones.⁶⁰ The tension in Turkish-Syrian relations made Turkey reconsider its strategy in the Middle East. For Turkey, Syria was a “gateway to the Arab east”.⁶¹ Cultural, diplomatic and more considerably economic benefits are among the reasons why Turkey was trying to keep a stable relationship with Syria.

However, starting allegedly with the failure of Bashar Al-Assad to perform the reforms to regulate Syria’s conditions, the relations of the two countries went for the worse. On the one hand, Erdogan was accusing Assad for not following Ankara’s advice. On the other hand, Assad was accusing Turkey for supporting the opposition.⁶² Turkey sees the main cause of the Syrian conflict in the president Bashar Al-Assad. Erdogan blamed Assad for massacres against the population and was one of the first parties to demand his removal. During the meeting of G-20 in Antalya president Erdogan tried to severe the attention of the members on this issue. Erdogan accused Assad for standing in the roots of terrorism in the region and for becoming the major cause of the refugee crisis not only in Europe, but also in Turkey. Moreover, he added that the supporters of Assad’s regime should be blamed as well. However, Turkey’s strategy has changed a little bit after the shift in its relationship with Russia. Turkey allegedly become more anti-ISIS and ready to provide its help to the West. Moreover, even Russia and the US agreed upon their actions in Syria, talked about the maintenance of the ceasefire and the possible solutions to end the war.⁶³

⁶⁰ Christopher Phillips, “Turkey’s Global Strategy,” *LSE Ideas*, May 2011, <http://www.lse.ac.uk/IDEAS/publications/reports/SR007.aspx>.

⁶¹ Ömer Taspinar, “Turkey’s Strategic Vision and Syria,” *The Washington Quarterly*, Summer 2012, 137.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 138.

⁶³ Walker, “The West’s Silver Lining in Turkey-Russia Tensions.”

The Kurdish question

Though each country has its interest in Syria, they all have something in common: they all fight against ISIS. For this purpose, in 2015, Turkey opened its air bases for the US, which it was refusing to do for a long time. According to Barkey, Ankara has changed its strategy in Syria: while Washington was fighting against ISIS, Ankara was trying to deal with Bashar Al-Assad's regime.⁶⁴ It seemed that for Turkey the weakening of Kurdish troops both in Syria and in Iraq was of major significance rather than fighting ISIS.⁶⁵ Nevertheless, Turkey had to join the US as an ally fearing to lose their relationship. Another important factor was the fact that weakening the relationship with the US would lead to an interaction of the latter with Syrian Kurds in Kobani, which is unacceptable for Turkey. The US sees Syrian Kurds as a strong force in the terms of military that would be able with their help from air to fight against IS. Turkey considers this partnership can affect their thirty-year-long struggle against Kurds. They are afraid that Syrian Kurds will gain power next to the Turkish border, which would let their domestic conflict with Kurds out of control.⁶⁶

After the intent to give the Syrian President an exile in the Russian Federation became publicly known, Russia went for a new wave of bombings in Syria. The U.S. and Turkey claimed that main targets became hospitals. Those operations gave Syria a chance to regain the better part of once lost territory. Moreover, Kurds were given the opportunity to seize some territory adjacent to Turkey, making it apply protection actions and start a destruction of protection assets of Kurds in Syria.⁶⁷

In March 2016, the Syrian Kurdish Democratic Union Party (PYD) and some of their allies started a campaign to establish independent federation in the Syrian North. The autonomy

⁶⁴ Henri Barkey, "What's Behind Turkey's U-Turn on the Islamic State?," *Foreign Policy*, July 29, 2015, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2015/07/29/whats-behind-turkeys-u-turn-on-the-islamic-state-kurds-syria/>.

⁶⁵ Ted Galen Carpenter, "Is It Time to Expel Turkey from NATO?," *The National Interest*, December 4, 2015, <http://nationalinterest.org/blog/the-skeptics/it-time-expel-turkey-nato-14518>.

⁶⁶ Barkey, "What's Behind Turkey's U-Turn on the Islamic State?"

⁶⁷ Stacey, "Russia's Pyrrhic Victory in Syria."

was declared for the areas, which are controlled by Kurds. Kobani, Afrin and Jazira are included in the recently established district, called Rojava. The reason for such an action became the fact that Kurds were ignored during the last peace talks in Geneva. As the speaker of the Democratic Forces of Syria mentions, Kurds do not want to become a tool in the hands of major powers and they will stand for their rights. Furthermore, Kurds are for just results of the peace talks and they are for undivided Syria. Kurds see the future of the whole Syria in federalist democracy as under this regime equality will be ensured. Important to mention, that Syrian government is against this move, which goes against the constitution of Syria. To add, this scenario probably would become the worst nightmare for Turkey, which considers that the increase of Kurds' power is a threat to Turkey as they spread separatist moods.⁶⁸

Tensions between Turkey and Russia

While completing the “anti-terrorist” operation in Syria, the Russian plane allegedly crossed for some seconds Turkish air space. Without a second of hesitancy, Turkey shot down the Russian plane. As the National Interest reports, “it was the first time since the war in Korea a NATO member shot down a Russian aircraft”.⁶⁹ Undoubtedly, Russia's attitude regarding Turkey rapidly changed. According to the US media, Russia's strategy in Syria was very aggressive and its actions, i.e. crossing Turkish airspace, was not justified. Moreover, they mention that Russia did not take into consideration the red lights as warnings.⁷⁰

Furthermore, Turkey itself has violated the airspace of Greece for several times since 2014. However, Greeks were more prone to allocate money to their defense to stop the violators. What concerns Russia, it imposed sanctions on Turkey, but warned Turkey that

⁶⁸ Al Jazeera, “Syria Civil War: Kurds Declare Federal Region in North,” March 17, 2016, <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2016/03/syria-civil-war-kurds-declare-federal-system-north-160317111902534.html>.

⁶⁹ Ariel Cohen, “Russia's Quarrel With Turkey Is Distracting—and Dangerous,” *The National Interest*, December 3, 2015, <http://www.nationalinterest.org/feature/russias-quarrel-turkey-distracting%E2%80%94dangerous-14498>.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

repetitive actions of this kind would result in worse outcomes. According to the NATO's Article 5, the countries, which have signed it, should consider an attack on any of the members, as an attack on all of them. Thus, it is difficult to judge whether it was an aggression from Russia's side or a provocation from Turkish side, any kind of wrong action in this situation would bring to destructive outcomes.⁷¹

NATO's reaction to those events can be twisted. As NATO is for peace and democracy, it cannot accuse Russia for its actions towards Georgia in 2008 and Ukraine in 2014, without accusing its ally, Turkey, for its actions in Cyprus since 1974. NATO should think twice while keeping such an ally.⁷²

Russia and Turkey have been experiencing good partnership since the Soviet Union collapsed: the citizens of Russia year after year were traveling to Turkish resorts and Russia was supplying Turkey with natural gas. However, this incident with the jet put an end to this cooperation. Russia accused the son of Erdogan in trading oil with ISIS.⁷³ In order to trade oil worldwide, Turkey has given ISIS an opportunity to convey oil to Turkey from the northern part of Syria, thus supporting the terrorists. Moreover, Russia's assumption about Turkey attacking their plane was that Turkey was afraid Russia's actions would spoil their oil plans.⁷⁴ The conflict between Russia and Turkey was worsening the situation in Syria. For a certain moment, the countries forgot their major priorities, such as fighting together against ISIS and looking for exhaustive adjustment of the Syrian war.⁷⁵

Iran

Iran is the strongest and most important ally of Syria in the Middle East. However, for Syria this alliance is considered a dilemma. The reason behind this issue is that the good

⁷¹ Carpenter, "Is It Time to Expel Turkey from NATO?"

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Cohen, "Russia's Quarrel With Turkey Is Distracting—and Dangerous."

⁷⁴ Carpenter, "Is It Time to Expel Turkey from NATO?"

⁷⁵ Cohen, "Russia's Quarrel With Turkey Is Distracting—and Dangerous."

relationship with Iran worsened Syria's relations with Turkey, Iraq and Israel.⁷⁶ Iran perceives Syria as an important strategic ally and cannot let it be ruled by a Sunni government.⁷⁷

Iran has put much effort to preserve President Assad's rule in Syria. It has assisted Syria especially in the sense of military support. One of the main reasons is that Iran has a geostrategic interest in Syria. The failure to keep Assad's regime for Iran will mean a gradual loss of power in the Levant and, thus, Tehran would lose the ability to spread its power.⁷⁸ Assad provides Tehran a bridgehead in the Eastern Mediterranean and a supply channel to Hezbollah in Lebanon.⁷⁹ However, the overall strategy of Iran toward Syria is constructed in a way Iran can use Syrian territory for its intentions till the opposition takes the whole power in its hands.⁸⁰

Syrian Arab Army, Lebanese Hezbollah, Iranian Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) and Russian Air Force, have formed the hybrid army of Syria. The participation of IRGC is important in two ways. First, it would be a historical shift, and the units of IRGC would not participate as just authorized units but as direct members. The Middle East should be concerned about the willingness of those Corps to have a direct fight. Second, their participation can become a problem, in the sense that Iran would probably think about not using these forces, which would minimize the security towards the Syrian territory that they are defending. Third, their presence could affect Russia's military strategy.⁸¹

Hezbollah, Iranian supported group, under Bashar Al-Assad's regime got support both from political perspective and via weapons supply. Such kind of backing during Assad's father, Hafez, was impossible. Iran was supporting Assad's regime from the very beginning of the conflict in Syria since 2011. Though Iran was backing Assad, it was also making "Plan B" in

⁷⁶ Fred H. Lawson, "Syria's Relations with Iran: Managing the Dilemmas of Alliance," *Middle East Journal* 61, no. 1, 2007.

⁷⁷ De Luce, "After Iran Deal, U.S. Bids to Revive Peace Talks on Syria."

⁷⁸ Will Fulton, Joseph Holliday, and Sam Wyer, "Iranian Strategy in Syria," *Institute for the Study of War*, May 2013, <http://www.understandingwar.org/report/iranian-strategy-syria>.

⁷⁹ Cohen, "Russia's Quarrel With Turkey Is Distracting—and Dangerous."

⁸⁰ Fulton, Holliday, and Wyer, "Iranian Strategy in Syria," 7.

⁸¹ J. Matthew McInnis, "This Is How Iran Just Raised the Stakes in Syria," *The National Interest*, October 23, 2015, <http://nationalinterest.org/blog/the-buzz/how-iran-just-raised-the-stakes-syria-14157>.

case Assad's regime falls. Despite the fact that Iran was among the parties who were participating in the negotiations over Syria in Vienna, it still was thinking beyond the conflict without omitting its primary goals. The objectives that Iran has connected with Syria are as follows. First, Iran wants to make sure that Hezbollah would continue to receive arming. It is a crucial moment in Iranian strategy. For Iran, Hezbollah has become the strongest authorized power in the region. In the Syrian conflict, Hezbollah plays a significant role by making shifts in the war and protecting Syrian capital, Damascus, from being defeated.⁸²

Second, Iran is looking forward to build a bridgehead in Levant and strengthen its position against Israel. In this case, again Hezbollah comes to help Iran. Gaining power from the Syrian war would allow Iran to hold a new position and a new strategy toward its main enemy, which is Israel.⁸³

Next, Iran works against the establishment of a new government in Syria that would oppose Iran. If Russia can see post-Syrian period without the president Bashar Al-Assad, for Iran the presence of Assad is of high priority. IRGC, which are the guarantee of Iranian policy in Syria, consider Assad as a security precondition that after the conflict is solved there will not be any actions against Iran or Hezbollah.⁸⁴

Saudi Arabia and Qatar

What concerns other parties, more precisely Saudi Arabia and Qatar, they are against Assad's regime. Being the allies of the United States, they are trying to fight against Iran. For Saudi Arabia and Qatar, Syria is a way to their rival, with which they have security, economic and religious issues.⁸⁵ Together with this, the reason for opposing the President Assad's regime for Qatar is the fight for natural resources, such as gas. More precisely, Qatar is concerned that

⁸² Joyce Karam, "Iran's Plan for Syria Without Assad," *The National Interest*, December 30, 2015, <http://nationalinterest.org/feature/irans-plan-syria-without-assad-14762>.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Slim, "Putin's Master Plan for Syria."

⁸⁵ Mark N. Katz, "Russia, America, and Syria," *E-International Relations*, October 17, 2012, <http://www.e-ir.info/2012/10/17/russia-america-and-syria/>.

the building of gas pipeline of Iran-Iraq-Syria will shift the power to Iran.⁸⁶ Among other reasons for those two countries to support the opposition is that Syria supports Hezbollah, an organization which Saudi Arabia has included in its terrorist list.⁸⁷

Saudi Arabia, Turkey and Qatar are against Assad and want him out. The important issue those three countries came to realize is that in order to achieve their main goal, through peaceful talks or by using power, they should be more united, be more consistent and be able to merge their troops in the battleground. The objective is to create a strong combination of the rebels in Syria and the authorities in order to succeed. None of the sides, the opposition or Assad's supporters, cannot reach their goals on the account of their rival or without solid spending. During the meeting in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, the sides came to the conclusion that it would be hard to solve the Syrian conflict with military forces. A political decision should be suggested.⁸⁸

Moreover, there is a clash of religion divisions: Sunnis and Shiites. Being Sunni countries, Saudi Arabia and Qatar do not want Iran, as a Shia country, to establish its hegemony in the region.⁸⁹ The relations between Iran and Saudi Arabia are tensed. In January 2016, Saudi Arabia and Iran diplomatic relations were ceased. The latter was protesting against the execution of Shia clericals in Saudi Arabia. This became a reason for attacking Saudi Arabia's embassy in the capital of Iran, Tehran. This was the last drop to make the diplomats of Iran leave Saudi Arabia in forty-eight hours.⁹⁰ Sudan, United Arab Emirates and Bahrain, which are

⁸⁶ Dmitry Minin, "The Geopolitics of Gas and the Syrian Crisis: Syrian 'Opposition' Armed to Thwart Construction of Iran-Iraq-Syria Gas Pipeline," *Global Research*, September 19, 2014, <http://www.globalresearch.ca/the-geopolitics-of-gas-and-the-syrian-crisis-syrian-opposition-armed-to-thwart-construction-of-iran-iraq-syria-gas-pipeline/5337452>.

⁸⁷ Lazar Berman, "Bahrain Asks Gulf States to Put Hezbollah on Terror List," *The Times of Israel*, May 30, 2015, <http://www.timesofisrael.com/bahrain-asks-gulf-states-to-put-hezbollah-on-terror-list/>.

⁸⁸ Bilal Y. Saab, "Saudi Arabia's Plan in Syria," *Foreign Affairs*, December 17, 2015, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/syria/2015-12-17/saudi-arabias-plan-syria>.

⁸⁹ Diana Alghoul, "Iran and Saudi Arabia Move beyond Proxy Conflict," *Middle East Monitor - The Latest from the Middle East*, October 8, 2015, <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/articles/middle-east/21528-iran-and-saudi-arabia-move-beyond-proxy-conflict>.

⁹⁰ Al Jazeera Staff, "Saudi Arabia Cuts Diplomatic Ties with Iran," January 4, 2016, <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2016/01/saudi-arabia-severs-diplomatic-relations-iran-160103202137679.html>.

Sunni-dominating countries, followed the example of Saudi Arabia and severed their ties with Iran. These events can furthermore have their negative impacts on the resolution of the Syrian conflict. The main bothering factor was that both Saudi Arabia and Iran were going to participate in the Geneva talks over Syria.⁹¹ As the HR/VP Federica Mogherini has mentioned during the conversation with Javad Zarif, Foreign Minister of Iran, the main goal of the major players in the Middle East and the international actors is coming to a decision over Syria via political means. Moreover, all the forces should be directed towards the liquidation of terroristic groups, and the tensions in the region and between the members, dealing with the Syrian question, should not endanger the negotiation process.⁹²

Furthermore, the withdrawal of Russian troops from Syria can also have negative effects on Assad's regime opponents. Saudi Arabia has gone conducting the most extensive military trainings that ever took place in the Middle East. This means that maybe the position of Sunni forces would be strengthened in the conflict. According to Saudi Arabia, those are only "war games", which in reality would serve as a message to the terroristic organizations, as well as Iran, that Saudi Arabia and its allies have enough forces to fight against them. With these actions, Saudi Arabia tries to show its power and the fact that it can be a strong ally to the US in the Iranian confrontation. Those actions demonstrate the basics of Shiite – Sunni struggles in the head of Iran and Saudi Arabia. What concerns the Syrian case, on the one hand, together with the US air forces those troops would loosen the strength of Assad's regime and would empower Sunni opposition. On the other hand, those actions would exacerbate the relations of Saudi Arabia and Iran, both of which want to become a hegemon in the region. Thus, Russian troops' withdrawal can lead to unknown consequences.⁹³

⁹¹ Dan De Luce, "Saudi-Iran Rift Threatens Syria Diplomacy," *Foreign Policy*, January 3, 2016, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2016/01/03/saudi-iran-rift-threatens-syria-diplomacy/>.

⁹² Federica Mogherini, "Press Release on the Phone Call between the HR/VP Federica Mogherini and Iranian Foreign Minister, Javad Zarif," *European Union - EEAS (European External Action Service)*, January 3, 2016, http://eeas.europa.eu/statements-eeas/2016/160103_01_en.htm.

⁹³ Stavridis, "Was a Fake War in the Saudi Desert a Dress Rehearsal for a Syrian Invasion?"

Nevertheless, Saudi Arabia is generally concerned about the presence of the troops of Russia in the Middle East. History shows that it is for the first time that Saudi Arabia does not have support from the United States or Europe, which have stepped back leaving Saudi Arabia with this problem by itself. Another important issue for Saudi Arabia is Iran, which is cooperating with Iraq and Syria and is considered Russia's ally in the Syrian conflict. The nuclear deal has strengthened the position of Iran. Furthermore, as Peek mentions, one of the most significant issues that disturbs Saudi Arabia is the fact that it has lost the support of the United States as a defender. What is more, a reason to oppose Assad and his regime for Saudi Arabia can become the fact that Shia countries, among which are Iraq, Lebanon, Iran and Syria, will become stronger compared to Sunni ones in the region.⁹⁴

The current situation

In 2012 on the Geneva Communiqué, world powers, among them Russia and the US, negotiated for Syria to establish temporary government including all executive powers. However, Syria was not moving with haste in that direction. Moreover, since September 2015 when Russia got involved in the Syrian war, he strengthened his position.⁹⁵

Staffan de Mistura, envoy of the U.N., has called both supporters and the opposition to concentrate on political operations, i.e. think about new constitution and try to start the process of elections of both parliament and president during 18-month period. However, on March 13, 2016, Walid al-Moallem, Foreign Minister of Syria, in his speech mentioned that Syria is not approving the proposal of the U.N. Moreover, he mentioned the U.N. has no right to impose presidential elections, as it is the right of the Syrian people. Moallem has also mentioned that opponents would be wrong if they thought they could gain power during the negotiations in

⁹⁴ Andrew L. Peek, "Saudi Arabia Needs a Crisis," *Foreign Affairs*, March 7, 2016, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/saudi-arabia/2016-03-07/saudi-arabia-needs-crisis>.

⁹⁵ Colum Lynch, "Kerry Accuses Syria of Trying to Undercut Peace Talks," *Foreign Policy*, March 13, 2016, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2016/03/13/kerry-accuses-syria-of-trying-to-undercut-peace-talks/>.

Geneva if they had not done it before in the battlefield.⁹⁶ The US Secretary of State John Kerry accused Moallem for not following the agreement points signed by Assad's allies, Russia and Iran.⁹⁷

United Nations Security Council Resolution 2254

The meeting of the United Nations Security Council, headed by John Kerry, the US Secretary of State, took place on 18th of December in 2015. The aim of the meeting was the establishment of the resolution on Syria and its conflict. On the agenda was the elimination of bloody massacres in Syria, cessation of bombing and terroristic acts. One of the objectives was to assure Syria's neighboring countries and the World, that actions should be undertaken to prevent the spread of violation from the borders of Syria. Furthermore, the meeting members were to discuss the steps necessary to abolish ISIS. The third aim was to give the Syrian people an opportunity to choose their future by supporting them with diplomatic means.⁹⁸

The representatives of the US, Russia, France and the United Kingdom agreed upon the draft version of the resolution of Security Council, accepting leading tenets of the second communique of Geneva as the ones that can deal with plausible adjustments and approving special timetable for this operation which was discussed during the meeting in Vienna. The significance of the draft resolution is that the sides agreed on creation of transitional government, ceasefire between the government and the opposition and on peace talks. However, the hardest part is still the understanding by the sides who is their enemy, which organization to consider terroristic. An important role in this question during the negotiations played Jordan.⁹⁹ ¹⁰⁰ Furthermore, the responsibility to regulate, realize and fulfill the ceasefire

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ DipNote Bloggers, "United Nations Security Council Adopts Syrian Roadmap Resolution," *DipNote. U.S. Department of State. Official Blog*, December 18, 2015, <https://blogs.state.gov/stories/2015/12/18/united-nations-security-council-adopts-syrian-roadmap-resolution>.

⁹⁹ Andrew J. Bowen, "Who Wants What in the Syria Negotiations," *The National Interest*, December 22, 2015, <http://nationalinterest.org/feature/who-wants-what-the-syria-negotiations-14703>.

¹⁰⁰ Saab, "Saudi Arabia's Plan in Syria."

was given to the UN. Nevertheless, it is not mentioned in the resolution how the UN should act while dealing with the groups that Russia identifies as terroristic.¹⁰¹ The actions of the United States and Russia over this issue are more one-sided, but at the same time consensual, rather than combined, which can turn out more effective against fighting the mutual enemy.¹⁰²

One of the significant questions during the negotiations, however, remained unsolved. The question concerned Assad's position in transiting process. The parties, who are against his regime, were discussing the possibility to let Assad stay during the transition period, but with different conditions. Saudi Arabia and Jordan were for Assad staying but with limited power, regional officials considered Assad should not have the right to be involved in the transition, France was for Assad leaving the post of the president immediately after the transition. The supporting parties, Russia and Iran, did not accept any of these suggestions.¹⁰³

During the ceasefire established on February 27, Syria finally received the aid and assistance. However, according to the opposition groups, the forces of Syria broke the violence cessation. Moreover, Syrian authorities block the delivery of medicine by the U.N.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰¹ Bowen, "Who Wants What in the Syria Negotiations."

¹⁰² Slim, "Putin's Master Plan for Syria."

¹⁰³ Bowen, "Who Wants What in the Syria Negotiations."

¹⁰⁴ Lynch, "Kerry Accuses Syria of Trying to Undercut Peace Talks."

Findings and Conclusion

The conducted analysis reveals the intentions and the goals of the sides directly or indirectly involved in the Syrian civil war. Findings show that though officially some countries claim they are engaged in this war allegedly for the purposes of peace, establishment of democratization, as in the case of the United States, or have the purpose to solve security issues like Russia. However, this is not always the case. The facts presented in the analysis part drive to the conclusion that the real purpose for high interest in Syria by six stakeholder countries discussed above is power maximization in the region. Thus, the hypothesis is accepted.

At this stage, the facts mentioned above are considered to be the primary issues why those parties have been involved in the Syrian war. However, the facts are changing, as the war is not over yet. Still new factors emerge and the countries try to operate based on the new issues. What is more, even the alliance groups can be changed, if it turns out they have a common goal, for instance, the fight against ISIS. For example, nowadays, the US and Russia are more prone to cooperate over Syrian issue.

The relationship between the parties engaged in the Syrian civil war is a total mess. The countries can be divided into groups according to their support or opposition to Assad's regime. Even the proxies involved in the war do not strictly stick with one of the sides. For instance, Syrian Kurds. From the very beginning of the war, Kurds were cooperating with the US and were considered as their main tool against ISIS. Nevertheless, after Russia started its campaign there was a shift in the relations of Russians and Kurds. Moreover, Russia was supporting the idea of Kurdish involvement during the talks in Geneva.¹⁰⁵

The research shows that each country by its actions in the long-term was thinking more about the future of its own country and, consequently, its position in the Middle Eastern region. Thus, Turkey, Saudi Arabia and Qatar are more concerned about Iran becoming hegemon in

¹⁰⁵ Pakhomov, "The Strategy Behind Russia's Moves in Syria."

the region if Bashar Al-Assad's regime wins in the end. On the other hand, two major powers, the U.S. and Russia, are trying to demonstrate their strength to each other and the World.

Thus, the Syrian civil war turned out to be "playing" arena for the stakeholder countries. Though forecasts cannot be made about Syria's future, it is high time for parties to understand the war, that took lives of so many people-both soldiers and civilians-and turned the other half into refugees, should come to an end.

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