

CHAPTER III

RUSSIAN INTERESTS AND STRATEGIES IN SYRIAN CIVIL WAR

Since Soviet security agencies often cooperate with Syrian counterpart regionally. After a short break in early 1990, the relationship between Russia and Syria were revived at the end of Yeltsin era and became more intensive. Firstly, Russia obtained a small naval base or facility in 1971, in the era of the Soviet Union facing Cold war. It is based on the Russian elements of 5th Operational Squadron in the Mediterranean Sea. Moreover, most of all the weapons in Syrian Government forces sent from Russia who has backed Assad with weapons. This old friendship and cooperation led to another reason why was Russia happily jumped into the conflict. Putin has made a strategy for its role in Syria into some important sectors, there are economic and political which brought this relationship to another stage.¹

A. Russian Strategy in Military Sector for the Syrian Crisis

In the Syrian Civil War, Vladimir Putin has brought the cooperation in the military sector into another level. In February 2012, Russian Foreign Minister, Sergei Lavrov was given orders by the president to go to Syria for a peace mission during the Syrian Crisis and he was accompanied by the head of Russia's Intelligence Service, Mikhail Fradkov. In that

¹Cordesman, H. Anthony (2015). *Russia in Syria: Hybrid Political Warfare*. Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS). Retrieved on January, 26th 2018 from <https://www.csis.org/analysis/russia-syria-hybrid-political-warfare>

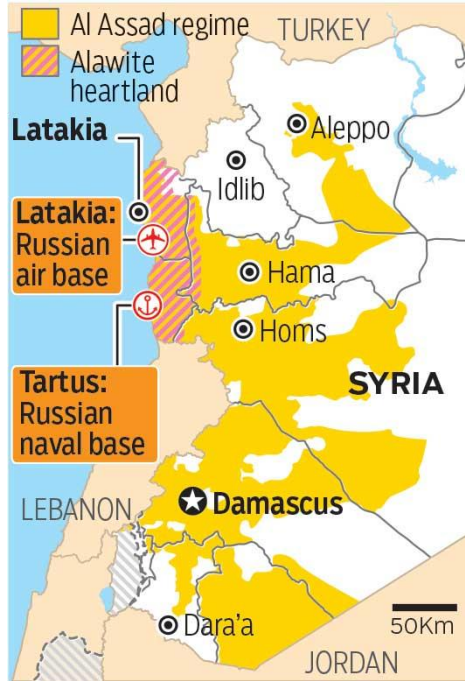
Discussion, they were talking about the stockpiles of Syria's chemical weapons, military and its territory. Russia also supports Bashar Al-Assad in order to improve the naval facilities in the northern mountains on the Mediterranean Sea. And also, to get the naval facilities secured and maintained with the protection from a very loyal and convenient ally which is Assad and his Alawite clan.²

Russia has expanded Russian Port facilities for the naval base at Tartus as well as their air base in the south of Latakia. It has taken the world's attention because Russia seems to build up a Russian airbase which gives a capability to involve actively in the Syrian Civil War when Assad has been losing ground. Putin and Russia have been in the same position before the Syrian crisis. In 2008, Russia had a plan about the major expansion of its naval base in Syria as the hard-line that they took in facing the US and the west over the transmission of missile defense in Poland and in defense of Russia invasion in Georgia.³

²Saradzhyan, Simon (2015). *Russia's Interest in Syria is not Assad*. Belfer Center. Retrieved from <https://www.belfercenter.org/publication/russias-interest-syria-not-assad> on April, 17th 2018

³*Ibid.*

Figure 1 3.1 The Location of Latakia and Tartus as Russian Military Base



Source: Retrieved from <http://gulfnews.com/news/mena/syria/russia-offers-to-send-ground-troops-to-syria-s-aleppo-1.1887139> on January, 30th 2018

In 2011 and 2012, Russia has spread its ships to Syria in order to show its support of Assad, and apparently, they were turning its decaying naval facility into a real base. Russia presence in this civil war really mattered, because of it gave a major impact in keeping Assad regime alive, limiting the movement of the rebels, and also to force and warn the United States and its allies to be more

careful to use their air power. This shows that Putin can and will exploit the use of military forces in the different form of political warfare. Moreover, it also shows that Russia can use its forces to let the world know about the return of Russia as a strong country.⁴

Further, on September 30th, 2015, Russian military initiated the establishment of an air base in the south of Latakia, a city close to the Mediterranean Sea. Moscow and Damascus saw all the opposition groups as the terrorists that should be combated, and yet Russia has always refused to join US coalition to fight terrorism, instead, Moscow started to merge an alliance with Syria, Iraq, Iran and Lebanese Hezbollah. In Latakia, T-90 tanks, the marines from Russia, combat vehicles, and artillery distributed in order to protect the air base from opposition groups. In addition, Russia also sent about 300-500 marines, the Su-24 and Su-34 fighter-bombers, Su-25 ground attack aircraft, Mi-24 attack helicopter has distributed to Latakia in order to give a long-last protection for the Syrian government.⁵

Moscow also relocated weaponry system into Syria for protecting Bashar Al-Assad regime. There are some radars for the anti-aircraft missile system such as SU-30 multirole fighter aircraft and electronic warfare which have a purpose to prevent or limit the enemy actual warfare and protect the forces from enemy's attack. Moreover, Russian airstrikes supported Iranian-Hezbollah-Syrian military ground offensive on six fronts, five against the rebels and one against ISIS. Russia has calculated that the fall of Syria's government would leave Iran weakened and isolated, due to their

⁴*Ibid.*

⁵Kaim, Markus; Tamminga, Oliver (2015). *Russia's Military Intervention in Syria: Its Operation Plan, Objectives, and Consequences for the West's policies*. StiftungWissenschaft und Politik (SWP) (2015), p.1

consideration if there will be a possibility that there is an attack from either Israel or the United States and its allies.⁶

In 2015 and 2016, Russian involvement in Syria has finally succeeded to help the Syrian government to recapture a mere of two percent from its territory. Russia air strike reportedly had a significant effect on the battlefield, besides that, at the beginning of Russia involvement, they succeeded to help the regime to secure its main key roads, developed Syria infrastructure and isolated Syrian opposition bases as well as destroyed every hardware of heavy military that they found from the opposition groups.⁷ However, Russia had a small loss in the battlefield, Turkish air force successfully shot down a Russian Sukhoi SU-24 jets which triggered the high tension between Russia and Turkey, and the opposition group killed a Russian marine during the mission. Moreover, there was 7000 Russian jihadist that came from North Caucasus countries in Syria in order to fight the Russian military for ISIL. Despite the costs and loses, Russia invested their military forces in Syria and it considered can increase the income of Russia from military business. They showed the advanced military aids on the battlefield and how great Russian tactics in winning the war.⁸

Russia is forging ahead and expanding its control over the incendiary issue of Syria. Putin also has lifted up Assad's position which had been under the threat before Russia involve into the Civil War. Russia saw the West has finally failed to remove Assad from

⁶Nizameddin, Talal (2012). Russia and Syria: The Reasons behind Putin's Support for Bashar Al-Assad Regime. The Cicero Foundation (Paris, 2012), p.7

⁷Iddon, Paul (2017). For The Russian Military in Syria, Old Habits Die Hard. War is Boring. Retrieved on January, 31st 2018 on <https://warisboring.com/for-the-russian-military-in-syria-old-habits-die-hard/>

⁸ Hansen, SplidsboelFlemming (2016). The Russian Gambit in Syria: Geopolitics and Non-Western intervention in Syria. Danish Institute for International Studies (Denmark, 2016), p.3

his position as Syrian president and turned the spotlight to Vladimir Putin who acted as the key holder of the Syrian crisis. Neil Hauer, an expert on the relationship between Russia and Syria who has followed the crisis stated that Russia has improved their military ability as they demonstrated it in the Syrian war. Hauer declared that they were using fewer frontline battles in Syria, and they have involved in support roles, for example by giving advisers, ground forces and air army.⁹ Thus, it can be seen that Russia's decision in involving Syrian Civil War as the form of Russia consistence toward its strategy in solving Syrian Crisis in its own way.

B. Russian Strategy in Political Sector for the Syrian Crisis

Russia's contribution in involving Syrian Civil War has expanded to the political sector and it is currently applying a two-track policy in the Middle East, which means Russia is developing their friendly relationship with Israel while simultaneously building and sometimes competing with Arabian countries. Moreover, Russian Foreign Minister, Sergei Lavrov confirmed that Russia's policy is neither Pro-Arab nor Pro-Israel, it has a purpose to keep and secure Russia's interest by maintaining a friendly relationship with Israel and Arab countries. For Russia, Middle East is not the main concern, yet the Middle East has a big role in the development of Russia. Putin interest is not only to continue the army export to the region but also to expand Russian allies for the energy sector like buying oil from Iraq, Iran, Saudi Arabia and Syria.

Since the bilateral relationship between Russia and Syria established, the foreign policies toward both countries tend to be a

⁹Iddon, Paul (2017). For The Russian Military in Syria, Old Habits Die Hard. War is Boring. Retrieved on January, 31st 2018 on <https://warisboring.com/for-the-russian-military-in-syria-old-habits-die-hard/>

defensive policy which has the aim to develop its traditional political and economic interest. Syria is the best friend of Moscow in the Middle East area due to the similar background, vision, and mission that they have. Moreover, Syria leadership still depends on Russia's support in the international politics since Syria's policy could not be proved successfully. Moreover, Russia has played an important diplomatic role for Syria, in late December 2012, Russian Foreign Minister, Sergei Lavrov declared that Russia will not sign up for any diplomatic resolutions to the Syrian crisis based on western nor Arabian countries terms.

Over the past years, Russian interpretation of its position in the Syrian crisis which is pro-regime remains unchanged. In 2015, Russia started a remarkable move in diplomatic activity which has triggered by two factors. The first one is because of the rise of ISIS who threatens the regime position on the ground, and the second is because of the nuclear agreement between international community and Iran. Maria Kholdynskaia – Golenishcheva, the representative of Russia in United Nation in Geneva, was giving a statement toward the development of Syrian Crisis that it was the mistakes of Turkey, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the West for supporting the opposition groups. Dmitry Kiselev also stated that the US stand on the same frontline with the terrorist because they tried to ruin Syria as a secular state.¹⁰

In the International Political level, Moscow has issued three UN Security Council vetoes to ignore a peaceful shifting of authority and refused to involve in the call for Bashar Al-Assad to go from his current position as the president of Syria. Moscow does not believe the Security Council should be in the business of either implicitly or explicitly supporting the removal of sitting government. Moreover, Russia believes that United States interventions in some countries have resulted in a regime change like in Kosovo, Afghanistan, Iraq, and Libya. Russia sees it as a threat to them, the stability of the

¹⁰Katz, N. Mark; Fairfax (2015). *Russian Intervention in the Syrian Civil War*. Russian Analytical Digest (Zurich, 2015), p.8

international political system, and has potential to destruct regime stability for Russia and its allies.¹¹

In addition, Russia uses its power to shape its position in the international system and even influence the international system on the UNSC to avoid creating a precedent that could eventually be used against Russia. In the case of Syria, Moscow could not believe with United States motives were purely based on by the humanitarian crisis that Assad has made. Russia also sees a geopolitical potential by aligning with Iran in order to fight United States who wants to get rid of Syrian government with a foreign policy to Syria who contradicted with US interest.

Putin's decision in involving Syrian civil war was also based on their interests toward political power and influence. Russia has confirmed its foray into Syria as a part of their efforts to reduce terrorism by backing up the Assad regime. According to Vladimir Putin statement, the collapse of Syria Regime will only mobilize the terrorist. For this time, instead of undermining Syrian regime, the world supposed to revive them and strengthening the international institutions to support Syrian Government. For Putin, the failure that happened in Libya, Syria and North Africa combined with the rising of Islamic States demonstrates the mistakes of the west from undermining the authorities of the states in the region.¹²

Therefore, Russia's role in this crisis was established to guarantee that Moscow will have a better way to solve the crisis by using military force in Syria. Moscow also tried to send a message to the world that, Unlike United States, Russia will be always on the side of authorized government and leaders against the opposition groups who want to take control, and also popular uprisings. Fortunately, this message noticed by Middle East countries and the

¹¹ Samuel Charap (201). Russia, Syria and the Doctrine of Intervention.

¹² Stent, Angela (2016). Putin's Power Play in Syria: How to Respond to Russia Intervention. Foreign Affairs, p. 108-109

leaders of Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Egypt, United Arab Emirates and Israel visited Moscow and improve their investment up to 10% by signing agreements to purchase arms from Russia.¹³

However, Russian support for Syrian government led to problematic results and criticism from all over the world. Russian policy toward Syria provoked an expected outcry from the Western and Arabian countries especially in the political sector, there was a lot of protest to the Russian embassies toward in the Middle East such as Libya, Sudan, and Lebanon. Moreover, Russia's reputation in United Nation has a new kind of destructed by its role in Syrian Civil War. However, Sergey Lavrov has reminded repeatedly that the West created the instability in Libya and Iraq, he suggested that the United States could implement their foreign affairs on the basis of mutual respect, equality of rights and mutual interest. Moscow also felt suspicious with the undemocratic Gulf States who supported the call for Syria to be democratized. Moscow thinks, using democracy to be implemented in Syria will advance the Islamist movement there

Yet, on the diplomatic front, Putin succeed to influence some leaders like Angela Merkel from Germany to join him in declaring Assad has an important role in combating ISIS and thus he should not step down from his position. Moreover, by preserving the regime of Assad, it influenced the isolation of Russia that has done by Western countries because of the conflict of Ukraine. Currently, Moscow now is joining with Western countries against ISIS, and also called for the other European countries to work with him to stem the flow of Syrian refugees by negotiating with Bashar Al-Assad. They should put it in mind that the flow of Syrian refugees in European countries might be creating a dialogue between European governments and Russia to call for a problem resolution for the Syrian conflict.¹⁴

¹³*Ibid*, p. 110

¹⁴Katz, N. Mark; Fairfax (2015). *Russian Intervention in the Syrian Civil War*. Russian Analytical Digest (Zurich, 2015), p.3

In October, 20th 2015, Syrian government made a big move during the civil war by holding a meeting with Putin in Russia which known as his first trip after the outbreak of the war. Both of them were talking a political settlement and Syria thanked Putin for the support of Russia for Assad's regime. Russia also encouraged Assad to achieve a negotiated solution with Syrian opposition parties without toppling Assad down from his power.¹⁵ It showed from Russia's support in Resolution 2254 adopted by United Nation Security Council in December, 18th 2015 which encourages all the parties to find the sustainable solutions for the Syrian crisis. In this case, Russia has a big chance in setting an alternative solution on handling conflicts in the Middle East and restoring their international pride since they have lost it in the Ukraine Crisis.¹⁶

Russia has been through two diplomatic-ways that have different objectives toward Syrian crisis issues, there are the formal diplomatic way and informal diplomatic way. In an informal way, Russia tried to unite the opposition groups and Syrian regime into one table. From these informal diplomatic objectives, Russia has succeeded to hold 3 consultative talks in January, April, and August 2015 that resulted "Moscow Platform Provisions". These provisions call all of the conflicting parties to be united in against terrorism, surveillance Syrian statehood, reconciliation, and support the dialogue of inter-Syrian without any external interference. Moreover, in the formal diplomatic way, Russia tried to establish an "anti-terrorism coalition" against ISIS. Since June 2015, Moscow has hosted actively top politicians from Arab World and held conversations with the Arabian leaders toward ISIS role in the Syrian conflict. Thus, Russia diplomatic efforts produced concrete results that all sides recognize the threat posed by ISIS and Russia and Iran are going to postpone the issue of Syrian regime transition until Syria stabilize from the crisis or at least ISIS can be defeated.¹⁷

¹⁵*Ibid* p.4

¹⁶*Ibid*

¹⁷*Ibid*, p.8

C. Russian Economic Interests in the Syrian Crisis

Economic has an important role in the international relations, especially for a country that has a complex war. It can be a place for another country to take advantages by intervening or involving that war because it can control the raw materials and the market. For Russia, one of the main reason they chose to involve in Syrian civil war because of their interest in the economic sector. Since Russia has been imposed by the economic sanction from the west due to its Annexation of Crimea, Russia's economy has been in deficit for some last years and made the Russian lived below the standard of living.

Syria has known with its strategic geography in the Arabian land, they have the largest natural gas in the world as well as Iran and Qatar and has distributed their oil to European Union. Moreover, MiladJokar as the Middle East Expert, he stated that Europe has significant demand for gas energy, and a quarter of it filled by Syria. In this last 6 years, Syrian Civil War has made the Economic of Syria collapsed, yet, fortunately, the resource business could help them to survive.¹⁸ There were some statements from Russian leaders and also from the documents that summed up of several national interests of Russia in Syria, and one of them admitted that Russia was trying to preserve their access to Syria's market, ensured that Syria will be the loyal customer of Russian arms and machinery and also cooperate further in the oil and gas sectors to develop Russia's economic.¹⁹

¹⁸ Gordon, Sean (2017). *Russian Resolve: Why Syria Matters to Putin*. The Globe and Mail. Retrieved on February, 20th 2018 from <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/world/russian-resolve-why-syria-matters-to-putin/article34643406/>

¹⁹Saradzhyan, Simon (2015). *Russia's Interest in Syria is Not Assad*. Harvard Kennedy School. Retrieved on February, 20th 2018 from <https://www.belfercenter.org/publication/russias-interest-syria-not-assad>

Furthermore, Syrian pipeline gas is very controversial in the Arabian land, before Syrian crisis came up, the Gulf States made a plan to build a pipeline through Saudi Arabia, Jordan, and Syria. However, Assad declined this project and preferred to make a pipeline-agreement with Iran. European countries prefer the Gulf States pipeline, so they can isolate Iran by not buying their natural resource. This pipeline project just sharpens more the difference between the Gulf States pipeline (Sunni) and Syria – Iran pipeline (Shia). For Russia, if the opponents succeed to overthrow Assad from his positions, it could threaten the energy deals between Russia – Syria since Syria has shared its natural resources to Russia and from their cooperation on natural resources, it makes Russia become the main exporter of Gazprom to European countries.²⁰

Moreover, Russian interest toward Syrian gas natural resource is as a complementary supplement for developing Russia's economy. Yet, Russia needed Syrian strategy to ensure that other countries will not increase supply in the way that competes with them. Russia prefers to recognize Syria as the transport hub rather than a supplier of energy and oil, therefore Russian companies look forward to participating in the Syrian energy development rather than being a rival to it. As the consequences, all the countries who want to ship its petroleum product through Syria should consider Russia and negotiate with it.²¹

In 2010, *Tatneft*, one of Russian investor in Gas and Oil entered Syrian market and develop their investment there for 4.9 million tons of oil. During the bloody war in 2013, Soyuzneftegaz, a

²⁰Jokar, Milad .*War in Syria: Geopolitics of The Conflict*. The World Post. Retrieved on February, 20th 2018 from https://www.huffingtonpost.com/milad-jokar/war-in-syria-geopolitics-_b_2378683.html#

²¹Editor (2017).*Key Facts for the Economic Gains of the Russians Intervention in Syria*.Rawabet Center for Research and Strategic studies. Retrieved from <http://rawabetcenter.com/en/?p=1567> on February, 24th 2018

Russian company succeeded to win a tender to explore and improve the Syrian offshore gas which located near Syria’s border to Turkey. Further, in 2015, GissaGutchel, the executive director for Russian Oil and Gas Producers Union said that after the situation of Syria is stabilized, the Russian companies that had to freeze due to the civil war will quickly resume activity and fulfill their contract again before the war and has value for minimum \$1.6 billion.²²

In order to fulfill Gutchel’s requirement, President Bashar Al-Assad gave an unprecedented way for Russia to access Syrian energy sector by using the offensive Syrian Army. In February 2016, Syrian delegation flew to Russia to meet the Ministry of Energy for asking help through Russian oil and gas companies to restore Syria’s energy that has been destroyed by the civil war. The other company is *Stroitransgaz*, a Russian engineering company in the field of oil and gas has built a natural gas pipeline in Syria and currently they establish a second plant near Rakka which will produce 1.3 billion cubic meters of gas. WalidMuallem, The Syrian Minister of Foreign Affairs stated that his country ready to assist Russia by providing them “all possible incentives” to the companies who participate in the reconstruction.²³

Table 1 1.1 Table of the Benefits that Russia will get

Year	Amount
2009	4.9 million tons of oil
2015	USD\$ 1.6 billion
2016	1.3 billion m ³ of gas

Furthermore, Russia also developed their economic sector and invested their money on Syria by selling the military aids and services. For 20 years period, Syria could not cut Russia from their top list of a weaponry-producer country. In 2011, there was a Syrian

²² *Ibid.*

²³ *Ibid.*

representative who bought Russian arms such as Anti-tank and aircraft missile system for \$4 billion to develop the security capabilities. From the weaponry system, since 2009 Russian companies have invested \$20 billion in the war, and the prime minister of Russia also confirmed that Russia admitted they supply the military weapons to Syria and it is worth for hundreds of million dollars and the total demand for Russia has estimated for \$15 billion dollars. However, all this agreement could be abolished if Assad toppled down from his position, therefore Moscow involved in this war and gives a fully-support to Bashar Al-Assad.²⁴

Table 1 1.2 Table of the Debt of Syria to Russia

Year	Amount
2009	USD\$ 15 billion
2011	USD\$ 4 billion
2009-2015	USD\$ 20 billion

Furthermore, Russia is also interested in Palmyra, a historical city in Syria that located near to JabalShaer which has natural gas and was occupied by ISIS for some last years. IS has taken over Palmyra in May 2015, this city produces 45% of Syrian gas and electricity resources. This city is also as a transit place for pipeline gas that carried from several fields in north-eastern and eastern Syria, therefore, Russia tried to free Palmyra from ISIS. On 30th March, Russian engineers came to Palmyra and did their mission which is mine-clearing. The sappers cleared the roads from the mine and they succeed to detect and tame the improvised explosive device which has put in several buildings and roads.²⁵

²⁴Talukdar, Indrani (2016). *Russia's Strategic Interest in Syria*. Indian Council of World Affairs (New Delhi, 2016), p.8

²⁵*Ibid*, p.9

