

CHAPTER II

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN RUSSIA AND SYRIA

The Syrian Civil War 2011 has involved a lot of groups and countries in the world with different interests in this war and has lasted for almost 8 years since the first blow up in 2011. From a lot of international actors that decided to intervene in this crisis, Russia as one of the most powerful country is also decided to intervene in it, even it has a big role in this war. As the writer have stated before, the involvement of Russia in Syrian Crisis has a big role due to its important support throughout the crisis. However, the involvement of Russia in this war makes the political world questioning the reasons behind why Russia deciding to involve itself in the crisis.

Moreover, to understand the alliances of two countries or more, it is so important to know the history or the background between those countries that are involved in the agreement. Thus, the history or the background might really help to analyze and explain the behavior of one country towards another countries.

A. The History of Russia and Syria Relationship

The long relationship between Russia and Syria was formally began on the Post-Cold War began when the Soviet Union collapsed. When the Soviet Union collapsed, it split into Russia and several countries around Russia. After the collapsed of the Soviet Union, Russia has gone through some difficult period of time, such as politically, economically, and also socially. In fact, after the collapsing of the Soviet Union on 1991, the military of Russia was struggling due to facing a lot

of problems regarding the shortage of equipment, and weapons as well as the lack of training and discipline for the Russian army. Although, it was known how powerful the Soviet Union before collapsed, it is shocking how much problems Russia needs to face at that time. Additionally, when the Soviet Union collapsed, Russia also needs to face an act corruption, and because of it Russia became really fragile and lost a lot of its allies, including Syria. Since it faces a lot of problems then, Russia began to focusing its interest on the former of the Soviet Union.

However, as one of the European States that has the majority Muslim population, it is really important for Russia to establish a good relationship with the Middle East that also have the majority of Muslim population. In fact, the relationship between Russia and Syria established because of the similar problems that they need to face which is the issue of radical Islam movement and also the desire of Russia to has an access to the Mediterranean Sea. Therefore, Syria was appeared to support Russia to rise up again from the fall and from that point they is known as a “support-system” or an “old-friend” until now. This event is proved by the Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation which signed on October 8th 1980 by Leonid Brezhnev and Hafez Al-Assad.

Historically told, the relationship between the two countries (Russia and Syria) had been established since 1944 by the diplomatic links. In the year of 1950 until 1980 Russia or the Soviet Union and Syria was known to often do multi-faced bilateral relations, specifically in the military trading –it also proves that Russia and Syria has a long history of having a military contract until now. Furthermore, the relationship between Russia and Syria escalated to some points when Egypt decided to separate from the Soviet Union and became alliance with the United States. Because of this, Syria has become the only country in the Middle East that has received more attention from the Soviet Union, especially in the military and weaponry system in accordance with their military contract that have been

made. It also because Russia wants to restore its importance in the international view and get the prominent position in the Muslim World – Arab (Kreutz, 2010).

B. Russia Foreign Policy towards Middle East

Russian leaders, especially Vladimir Putin, have been saying on many occasions about how Russia is once again being the powerful and have a great power –after the Soviet Union. Since Vladimir Putin ruling the country, Russia has been pursuing an active foreign policy towards the Middle East. The foreign policy towards Middle East under Putin and Medvedev administration, is not much of an assertive great power as the power pursued relatively limited objectives. Primary among these limited Russian objectives are: First, keeping the North Caucasus from becoming an anti-Russian cause célèbre in the Muslim Middle East the way Afghanistan was in the 1980's; second, working with others to prevent the rise of radical Sunni forces in the Middle East that would be hostile to Russia; and third, pursuing Moscow's economic interests in the Middle East. Putin and Medvedev have pursued these objectives through seeking good relations with virtually all the Middle East's disparate actors and avoiding taking sides in the many disputes among them. Up to now, Moscow has been remarkably successful at this balancing act. Going forward, though, it may become more difficult for Moscow to do so (Katz, 2017).

In this case, Russian leaders, especially Vladimir Putin, sincerely hope that foreign policy towards the Middle East that has been made by them will strengthen the relations between Russia and countries in the Middle East and can mutually reach the national interests of each country involved. Because as is well known that Russia's national interest in the economic sector of the Middle East is very high, Russia therefore hopes that all foreign policy towards the Middle East can be achieved

as good as possible and can form an alliance as in the past the alliance between Russia and countries Middle East in the Post-Cold War era.

C. Russia Foreign Policy towards Syria

Surprisingly, Russia Foreign Policy towards Syria is known as refreshingly straightforward and ethnically, which is a little surprising to be said in a term for political in general, especially in Russia's political term.

As Syrian Civil War started to blow up and begin its chaos, its old-friend Russia becomes more and more become the center of attention. Russia's policy towards Syria is suspected as a throwback of the Soviet Union period because of the continuous refusal to step up pressure on President Bashar al-Assad. However, if the prediction of Russian leaders were right, the crisis that happened in Syria could be the biggest chance of Russia to become an indispensable international actor in other states view, constructively shaping the global politics. Thus far, Russia who was known desperately craving for a great power status but has never proved that it is able to bear the responsibilities as one. Thus, Russia could take the chance and make Syria as its watershed for Russia's role in international relations view.

Over the last year, it can be seen that the Syria Crisis has become more than just a regional conflict, instead it becomes more like a proxy war between the most powerful countries in the world. While policy-makers still discussing the 'threat of civil war', here, the United Nations under-secretary for peacekeeping operations, Herve Ladsous, had acknowledged that Syria is already in the midst of a civil war and a test case for the conflict resolution capabilities of the international community. As the country implodes, the world start debating

about the right approach to solve the problem in this crisis, such as; keeping the regime in power and turn a blind eye to the severe human rights violations or intervene for humanitarian reasons in an ethnic and religious mayhem. The indecisiveness of the international community in Syria is alarmingly reminiscent of the Balkans case in the 1990's.

Facilitating the decision-making process in such dilemmas, the UN World Summit in 2005 adopted the norm of 'responsibility to protect' stating that the international community has the responsibility to intervene through diplomatic, economic and even military measures if a state fails to protect its population from mass atrocities. Despite frustrations that need to be face, it is important to understand that Russia does not act the way it does to annoy the West. The fundamental tenets, fears and interests of Russian foreign policy are on display in the Syrian case.

First of all, Russia hates revolutions. From the start, the Arab Spring was met with strong scepticism and mocked as the 'Arab Fall'. Putin himself is deeply suspicious of movements from below. From his view, mass movements are either foreign-funded attempts to overthrow the rulers (one reason for his suspicion over Saudi Arabia's role in Syria), or if authentic, a threat to stability and security. Violent protests are quickly condemned as terrorist acts. In a recent article for the Huffington Post, Russian foreign minister Lavrov wrote: "The shelling of residential areas by government troops is unacceptable, but it cannot be viewed as an indulgence for terrorist acts in Syrian cities, for murders conducted by insurgents opposed to the regime, including those of Al-Qaida". Aleksey Pushkov, head of the Duma foreign affairs committee, compared the situation in Syria with Chechnya, thereby implicitly suggesting that the use of force might be sometimes necessary to avoid a country's break-up and regain stability.

From a Russian perspective, the West has exacerbated the instability created by the Arab revolutions and exploited the

situation for its own gain. The crucial example is Libya. In Lavrov's words, the West tried to 'shape a new political reality to its taste while taking advantage of the softening of state structures'. Russia is convinced its self-denial within the Security Council gave NATO an authorization to pursue regime amendment without any consultation with Russia. Dictatorship was replaced by chaos, and consequently Putin stated in his foreign policy manifesto: "No one should be allowed to use the Libyan scenario in Syria."

President Bashar al-Assad and his profane regime are perceived because the anchor of stability against Muslim insurgents and also the Kremlin is decided to stop an overthrow of the regime by foreign intervention. Not due to some form of autocratic commonality – the relationship was never warm-hearted – however as a result of Russian leaders do not wish to repeat a similar mistake and lose all say and influence. Furthermore, Syria is strategically and geographically more important to Russia than Libya. Although trade and economic relations are usually overestimated, Russia is Syria's most important arms supplier and the Tartus naval base counts as Moscow's only military base outside the former USSR territory.

Against this backdrop, severe human rights violations are not likely to cause a change in Russia's foreign policy course. Even though, Russia agreed to the UNSC condemnation of the Houla massacre, but in principle Russia assumes that human rights concerns are only a fig-leaf for the West and Sunni countries to pursue their interests. Russia believes it is not yet depending on a losing horse with Assad. But to let the door open, Russia cautiously signaled openness to the Yemen option, which would see Assad step down with impunity but his regime still in power, possibly followed by presidential elections.

Russia managed to become the key international actor in this conflict; a diplomatic success for a former great power

which feels all too frequent bypassed and neglected. However, Russia range itself to an obstructive force by blocking all resolutions and hiding behind the Annan plan. However, it is not enough. Russia need to use its leverage on Syria to come up with different ideas. The Lavrov plan which modelled on the Dayton Agreement, as proposed by Fyodor Lukyanov was regrettably lack of far-sighted strategic, thinking it has always been the Achilles' heel of Russian foreign policy.

Russia's ability to lead suffers from its resistance approach. Russia has to learn that mutually acceptable solutions and rallying support for your arguments is the name of the game in international diplomacy. By acting on these lines, Russia could not only do Syria good but also itself and its standing in the world. (Fix, 2012)