

RUSSIA'S POLICY TOWARDS WEST ASIA
OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES, 2000-2015

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DECLARATION

I declare that the thesis entitled “Russia’s Policy Towards West Asia Opportunities And Challenges, 2000-2015” submitted by me for the award of the degree of **Doctor of Philosophy** of Jawaharlal Nehru University is my own work. The thesis has not been submitted for any other degree of this University or any other university.

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CERTIFICATE

We recommend that this thesis be placed before the examiners for evaluation.

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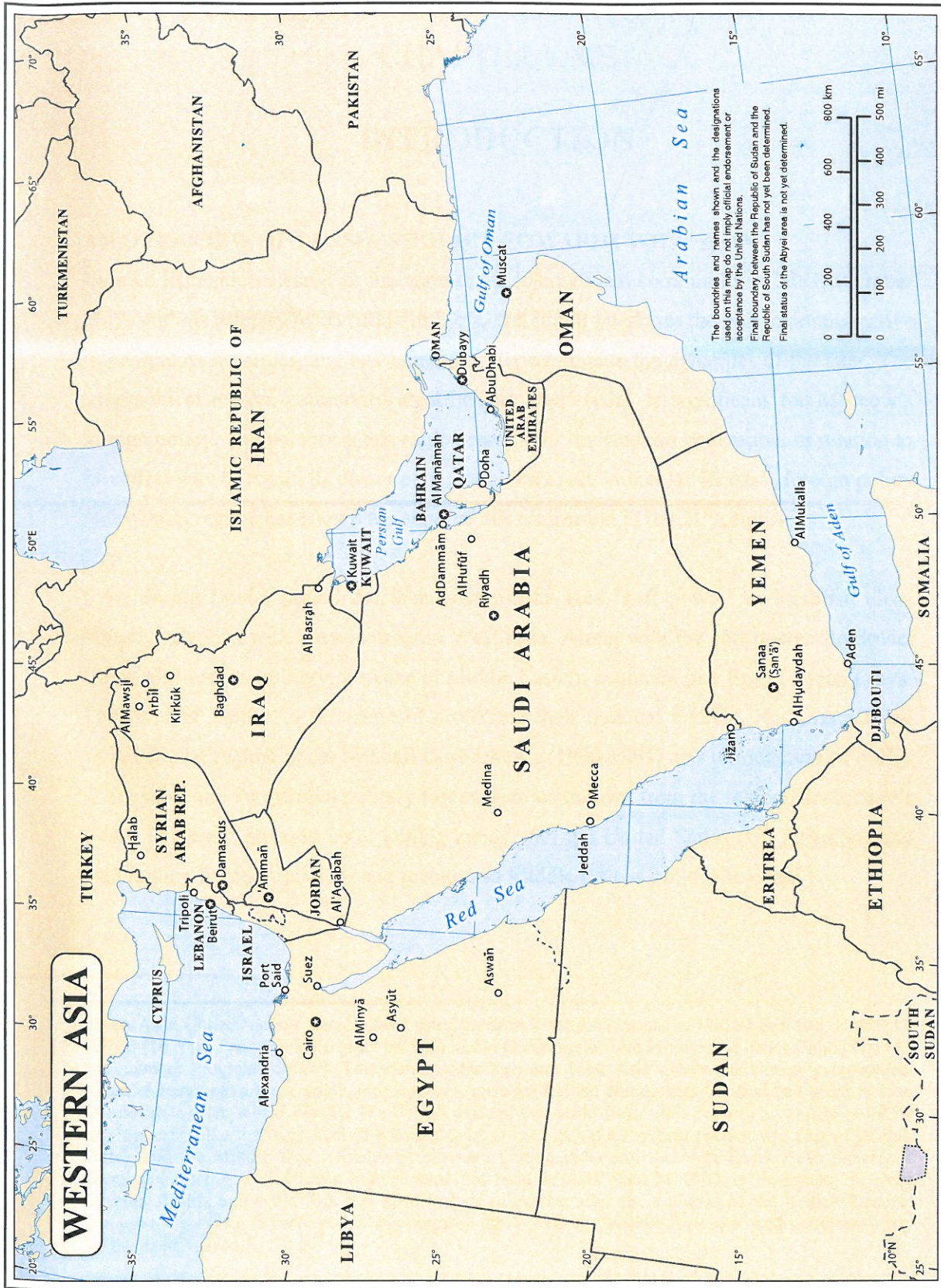
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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

AN OVERVIEW OF RUSSIA'S POLICY TOWARDS WEST ASIA

Russian Federation cleared its intention to the international community in late September 2015, with its military intervention in Syria, that it still possesses the will to remain active in international politics, and has capabilities to manipulate the dynamics of the later. The geographical region, commonly identified as West Asia¹ is significant for Moscow's foreign policy. The potentials this region carries for the Russian Federation, in relation to its endeavours to regain its power on a global scale, are immense. Russia's foreign policy under Putin regime has shown the signs of this realization in the 21st century.

Even during Soviet period the then government used 'soft power' to establish close friendly relations with the countries in West Asia. Along with the soft power the Soviet Union also had its military presence in Middle Eastern countries like Egypt, Syria, Libya, Tunisia, and Yemen in the name of protecting their national interest. However, during end of Soviet regime under Mikhail Gorbachev's (1990-1991) and introduction of policy of Glasnost and Perestroika military forces were withdrawn from the region. Gorbachev's "New Thinking" stressed upon joining hands with the United States (US hereafter) and maintaining friendly relations and recognized Middle East as politically equal.

¹ West Asia: United Nations has also been using the term West Asia instead of Middle East and launched a 10FYP (10 Year Framework Program on Sustainable Consumption and Production) under United Nations Environment Program (UNEP). The term Middle East and West Asia denote the similar geographical region and may have made some geographical sense for British colonialists but that had seem to lose its relevance after World War II. The British divided the world from their country's vantage point by coining terms like the Near East (the area closest to the UK), the Far East (which was east of British India), and the Middle East (which was between British India and the Near East). Even American naval strategist Alfred Thayer Mahan used the term Middle East in 1902 to designate the area between Arabia and India. But this term lost its relevance after the collapse of the British Empire. The term West Asia is preferred in this research thesis over the Middle East and used simultaneously for the same reason.

The new state policy of Russia under Prime Minister Yevgeny Primakov sought to re-engage with the Middle East countries. This new policy strongly supported the idea to maintain a close relationship with most of its former allies in the Cold War era.

Russia is not only involved in this region because of its strategic, economic and political interests but also for the sake of bigger interests that lie within this region i.e., to regain the superpower status outside the erstwhile Soviet Union. To a certain extent, the same reason can also be applied on Russia's intervention in Syrian Crisis for rescuing Bashar-Al-Assad's regime, the major ally left in West Asia. Arab Spring not only brought changes in West Asia but was also important for Russia, where it has lost its allies and regimes have been changed which do not have friendly relations with Moscow.

On the other hand West Asia, because of its geo-strategic location and richness in hydrocarbons occupies a significant place in international politics from the beginning of 20th century. There is a competition among the so-called powerful states, including Russia in this region, for getting an access to rich natural resources. Russia's concern is associated with the fluctuations in the price of natural gas and oil in the international market as it is directly connected to the economy of Russia. In addition to this the export of military weapons/technology and nuclear energy to foreign countries is also a valuable source of revenue for the Russian Federation.

The territorial disputes between the states, the presence of Western forces, presence of rich hydrocarbon reserves are some of the major causes of instability in the region worsening the conflict between states like US and Russia (in the Soviet and post-Soviet era). The energy resources as well as global geopolitical security interest continue to be quite troublesome for the countries in the region. Among other major factors responsible for the crisis in West Asia are religious conflicts within the Islamic States as well as between the States supported by external powers the rise of radical Sunni extremist forces and so on; the tussle among the States to get hold of nuclear weapons, and security and preservation of rich natural resources.

The initial financial aid received from the West and US to cover up the economic crisis and political instability of Russia during 1990s was negligible and insufficient to bring financial and political stability. However, this act of West and US provided a platform to intervene in the internal structure of Russia's political and economic sphere. This led to the emergence of debate between Atlanticists and Eurasianists. Eurasianists gained power in Russian politics; Near Abroad policy was launched under new leadership and further extension of this policy was to focus on its neighbourhood countries in Central Asia, West Asia, South Asia, and Far East Asia respectively. Eurasianists' argued that the national and foreign policy interests of Russia should not be compromised for the sake of nominal financial help received from the West and US.

Russia also needed to contain US and North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO hereafter) forces from their eastward expansion. It has vital economic and security interests in West Asia. The rise of radical Sunni Islamic extremism in this region in 1980s, proved to be a bigger threat to internal security of Russia. The presence of external actors in Northern Caucasus and the Caspian Sea basin also posed a security threat to Russia. Policies introduced by Putin brought economic and political stability in the country. The Economic crisis of 2009 negatively affected the image of Russia globally including in Middle East countries.

In the light of the above the prime focus of proposed research will be on what has been Russia's policy towards West Asia beginning from 2000 to 2015. What are the major economic and security challenges, Russia is facing in the Middle East. An attempt is made to critically examine the relations between Russia and West Asian countries keeping in mind Russia's national interests in the West Asia.

Strategically the West Asian region is complex as a number of these countries are US ally or they support the presence of NATO forces, while Russia is trying to secure its economic and political interests in this region by establishing a close bilateral relation with regional actors. The scope of the study undertakes an examination of the interaction between some key regional players and Russia. Some of these countries are also allied

with Russia while some have friendly relations with it (Iran, Iraq, Syria, and Turkey to some extent); on another hand, some are pro-US, by the support of whom it continues to play a crucial role in regional politics like Israel and Saudi Arabia, remain indispensable for a balance study.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The historical background of the Soviet foreign policy towards Middle East (post-1917 Russian Revolution) is discussed in first portion of review of literature, while the background of foreign policy can be traced back to Tsarist period which is highlighted in second chapter with details in ‘The formation of Russian foreign policy’. The literature related to strategic and economic policy of Russia in general (during Soviet and post-Soviet period) are reviewed in second and third part of literature reviewed, respectively. Last portion is denoted for the rise of Arab Spring (i.e. Arab Uprising) in the Middle East and its impact on Russia’s policy towards this region, while it further elaborate the causes responsible for the rise of Arab Spring and direct military involvement of Russia in Syrian Crisis and against Islamic State (IS hereafter).

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF RUSSIA’S POLICY

There has been a longstanding policy of Russia pursued towards the Middle East or West Asia since Bolshevik Revolution (1917) took place. Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) under the Communist leadership started to show more interest in this region, as Lenin categorized this region into the third category which was oppressed by foreign colonialism (Lenin 1920). Scholars like Campbell and Hamid, in their respective analyses have stressed that it was after the Second World War, when Soviet Russia got actively engaged in the Arab World and started looking for some partners to wage ‘proxy war²’ against the capitalist imperialist powers. All these events and further actions taken by the Soviet Union during Cold War has been discussed by Campbell (1972) as well as by Hamid (2011) in their articles ‘The Soviet Union and the United States in the Middle

² Proxy War – Firstly being introduced in the World War I, later in the Cold War era it became famous. Robert Jervis has described this in his offense-defense theory, the term proxy war was used during Cold War when Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) and the United States of America were indulged in ideological confrontation, not directly but through their allies all over the World.

East' and 'Russia and the Arabs: The Rise of Pragmatism and the Waning of ideology', respectively.

During Cold War, USSR was engaged with the US in 'balance of power³', though the Middle East was not on the priority list of Moscow's policy, still this region was not ignored by the Soviet Union. Dmitri Trenin (2016) has also been passing a similar argument that the active engagement of Soviet Union in the Middle East started in the mid-1950s with the presence of military and naval forces in the Mediterranean Sea and close relation with Egypt and Syria in 1950-60s.

During the periods of Suez Canal Crisis (1956), Syrian Crisis (1957), Iraqi revolution (1958), armament deliveries, economic aids and political support was provided by the Soviet Union to its allies in this region, while the Soviet Union was providing assistance to the regime friendly to Moscow, i.e. The US entered this region largely because of two reasons, to contain the Soviet Union, and to have access to rich natural resources. Till mid 1960s USSR has its naval presence in the Mediterranean Sea, Red Sea, and from the Persian Gulf to the Indian Ocean. The Soviet Union still remained concerned with its southern borders which could pose an immediate threat to the security of Soviet Union. After Stalin, West Asia remained isolated for the time being and when its successor returned, they found the countries in the region were already under the influence of the West and organized against the Soviets. Shah of Iran and Soviets still continued with the arms deals and other economic deals after Iran signed a mutual agreement to stop US aid program in 1967. Gaub and Popescu (2013) observe in the context of the relationship between the Soviet Union and Syria that the longstanding relationship between the Soviet Union and Syria became stronger after Soviets lost Egypt with the West; their main ally in the region and Center of Middle East policy of Moscow, in 1976.

The Baghdad Pact in 1955 was signed between Iran, Iraq, Turkey and Pakistan, which was meant to be an anti-Soviet alliance, because of this pact Iraq remained out of

³ Based on structural realism as advanced by Kenneth Waltz in *Theory of International Politics* (New York: Random House, 1979).

Moscow's approach till 1958, till the time a coup took place in Iraq under the leadership of Abd-al Qasim. Again, in the 1960s the relationship began to cool, because of Qasim's hostility against Iraqi communist party, Kurdish issue and Moscow's improving relation with Egypt. Soviets had been continuously supporting the Kurdish demand for the autonomous region made it difficult for both the countries to enjoy close friendly relation. Fukuyama (1980) in his article 'The Soviet Union and Iraq Since 1968' tried to put some light on the relation between Moscow and Baghdad, the then leader of Iraq, Saddam Hussein. Further he explains in his article about the ups and downs that came in relationship of the Soviet Union and Iraq, only for the period of 1972-75 Iraq was dependent on Moscow for certain reasons which he discussed as, the nationalization of the Iraqi oil industry, Arab-Israeli war of the October 1973, war of Kurdistan in March 1974, and Iran's massive militarization under Shah, all these facts together combined for Iraq and dependency on Soviet Union. They signed a Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation with Moscow in 1972, when Iraq was looking for an increase in arms purchase. The Soviet Union had supported Iraq with a supply of heavy military armaments during Iran-Iraq war, under the obligation of the treaty. The invasion of Afghanistan made Arab World to isolate themselves from the USSR and so on the policy pursued under Gorbachev's leadership. The relationship between Moscow and Iraq was primarily based on commercial interests rather than strategic, Iraq continued to get military armaments from the Soviet Union and the US had targeted Iraq for the same.

American Historian Walter Laqueur also quoted about Soviet and Syria relationship "*as a field of large-scale Soviet investments and a political showcase for the advantage of Soviet help, Syria was a somewhat more promising choice than Egypt*". After Egypt broke up its alliance with the Soviet Union and joined the US in the 1970s, Moscow supported Syria like never before. Soviet interest in a relationship with Israel, while Gorbachev's perestroika made a dramatic change in the 1980s and Soviet arms supply to Syria started to decline, till the collapse of Soviet Union the relationship between these two states were almost evaporated (Kreutz 2010).

1980 onwards, Soviet Union had started losing its power and political influence on a Global scale and the policy pursued by the leadership in Moscow had contributed for the same. Dmitri Trenin (2016) has discussed the importance of the Middle East in Moscow's foreign policy. He maintains that even during Cold War, Soviet Union had a number of Arab Countries as its quasi-allies, for a period of time, i.e. Iraq, Egypt, Algeria, Libya, South Yemen, and Syria. At the starting, Soviet Union showed its support to Israel but felt disappointed, which made Moscow support Arab foes and Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO). The withdrawal of Moscow from the Middle East under then President Mikhail Gorbachev, was also marked by the decline of superpower status of Soviet Union, while the Soviets invasion of Afghanistan was also a contributing factor. During Afghanistan intervention of Soviet Union, Saudi Arabia was among the donors to the mujahedeen. Russians still believe that Saudi Arabia also contributed to the fall of the Soviet Union, the oil prices are driven down in the mid-1980s. The re-Islamization of former Soviet space and spreading of Wahhabi ideology by the Saudi's have always been a threat to Russian national security, as well as the competition in the Oil market. The withdrawal of Soviet Union from the Middle East under the leadership of Gorbachev led to the acknowledgment of American hegemony over the Arab World as well as on Palestinian issue (Hamid 2011).

Egypt was not only the first but also a most important nation in the Middle East for the Soviet Union, established friendly relationship and cooperation. The Soviet Union had supported Egypt against Israel with massive military assistance and for reconstruction of Egyptian army after the defeats in wars, including the construction of Aswan Dam for Egypt. In 1972, when Egypt expelled its Soviet advisors, the relationship between these two was cooled off till the time USSR was dissolved (Magen 2013).

Russian-Syrian relations gained some importance during the 1990s, but bilateral relations were partly restored after 1992-1994 interruption. Moscow's new Middle Eastern diplomacy was largely shaped by regional and global developments, though needed some time to re-establish its relation with Syria. In November 1997, Russia had pursued Syria and Iran to terminate their support for Hezbollah and Hamas, after Lebanese Crisis. The

expansion of NATO during 1999-2004, further alienated Russia from its neighbourhood (Dannreuther 2004; Blank 2014). Threat perception and tension had increased from the former Soviet States and in Northern Caucasus region after the rise of Radical Sunni Islamism in the Middle East, which would have a direct impact on the population of Muslim in Russia (Katz 2010).

After USSR was dissolved and Russia emerged as a successor state, it became more important for Russia to change its foreign policy and establish a close relation with neighbouring countries. There was an ongoing debate in Russia just after the dissolution of USSR which can be characterized as Atlanticist/Zapadniki and Eurasianist or National Patriots, the same concept has been discussed by number of authors and how it had influenced the foreign policy of Russia in the beginning of 1990s (Dannreuther 2004, Shlapentokh 2006, Belopolsky 2009, Hunter 2010, Legvold 2012).

The primary focus of Russia's foreign policy towards the Middle East was on Iran, which was crucial for Russia in terms of economic recovery and to regain the status of Soviet Russia. The reasons are well explained by Hunter (2010) in her book 'Iran's Foreign Policy in the Post-Soviet Era: Resisting the New World Order', that Russia would have fulfilled three purposes, first, a powerful friend on its side would contribute to International profile of Russia, Second, Iran would provide an upper hand over the US for Russia and also put an end to the US approach to diminish the Russian influence in the region and economic recovery of Russia. On the other hand Iran was also looking for a partner which could counter balance the US in the region and can also contribute to the reconstruction of Iran (economic and military) after Iran-Iraq War (Belopolsky 2009, Blank 2014).

There are some key regional strategic interests involved in West Asian region for Russia as Katz (2010) puts forward in his article "Russia's Greater Middle East policy: securing economic interests, courting Islam" that the foreign policy of Russia towards the Middle East is driven by certain key factors as Dmitry Trenin and Alesksey Malashenko put it,

“the principal challenge for Moscow is stabilizing the still weak post-Soviet states, while finding an acceptable modus vivendi with the increasingly turbulent Muslim world beyond the former Soviet territory, other factors complicate Russia’s task, from the 2003 Iraq war and its efforts, to the Israeli-Palestinian situation, to the developments in and around Iran” (Katz 2010)

Yevgeny Primakov, former Foreign Minister and Prime Minister of Russia, was in support for the formation of the strong foreign policy of Moscow towards the Middle East, under Yeltsin leadership. Later in September 1998, Primakov was replaced with Igor Ivanov by the then President Boris Yeltsin, because of his Eurasianist approach in foreign policy formation and over emphasis on the Middle East region. Primakov was also the director of foreign intelligence and until his death he remained influential in Kremlin and brought the Russian interests in the Middle East to the forefront, while Putin, after coming into power in 2000, has continued with the same legacy. Even after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Primakov still believed Russia as a superpower in global politics, geopolitical location of the Middle East was also acknowledged as a contributing factor to achieving the same (Trenin 2016; Hamid 2011).

The incident of 9/11 attack on the US was a turning point of International politics which enabled the US to launch its new policy of ‘War on Terror’, Russia had to cooperate with the same under the legitimate pressure of international community. The assistance provided by Russia to the US, in the Middle East region and in Afghanistan created a doubt in Middle East region about the intension of Russia, which directly had a negative effect on Russia’s interests in this region. Hamid (2011) has also noted in his article about the terrorist attack on the US and its effect on Russian interests in the Middle East region as a whole.

STRATEGIC POLICY OF RUSSIA

Russia having threats to its domestic and international interests lie in the West Asia region which is mainly because of the rise of Sunni radical Islam, the existence of pro-West countries in this region along with the presence of NATO forces and the US in Caspian Sea region and further eastward expansion of the same. Russia continues to attempt friendly relations with the countries in West Asia which are mainly the competitor to Russia in the international market for energy exports for instance, the export of oil and gas. Dannreuther (2004) in his article 'Russia and the Middle East' clearly explains why Russia and Iran came closer and what have been the common interests for both in the Middle East region, and Eran (2003) explains in his article 'Russia in the Middle East: The Yeltsin Era and Beyond' why Russia gave preference to Iran and Turkey in his foreign policy towards the Middle East. During the Cold War Iran and Turkey had close strategic relation with the US, while Soviets were giving much of their attention to Arab-Israeli conflict and after the dissolution of Soviet Union, Russia pursued a strong foreign policy towards the Middle East region mainly for two reasons i.e. security and economic. The Ethnic minority problem plays a key role in the relationship between these two, as Russia and Iran share the common problems within their territory. Both Russia and Iran share the same feeling that they have been marginalized from their rightful position in the international arena because of the Western oriented containment policy. Russian economic and strategic interests have been threatened in Europe and because of NATO enlargement in its neighbourhood, at the same time Iran has its strategic and economic interests in the Persian Gulf, and Caspian Sea Basin region which is threatened by the presence of the US and its allies. They both share the same feeling in Northern Caucasus region and Central Asia because of the presence US and NATO (Dannreuther 2004; Katz 2010).

The policies pursued by Moscow towards the Middle East under Putin's leadership can be categorized as to achieve three main objectives, multipolarity, Near Abroad policy, and the economic interests of Russia. The Iranian nuclear project not only threatens the national security of the Gulf States along with Saudi Arabia but also the status of Russia in the Middle East region for its support for the same. Russia's continuous support for the

Shiite's regime in the region against all the Sunni nations made it difficult for Russia to establish a friendly relation with Saudi Arabia, so called Sunni leader in the Middle East. The success of Russia in its strategic policy have influenced pro-US countries in the region like Israel, Turkey, and Saudi Arabia to make deal with Russia and ease the influence of US over the Middle East (Katz 2010; Magen 2013; Blank 2014).

Russia has also realized the importance of playing a leading role in Israel-Palestine peace process and to form alliances with the regimes which are anti-West in nature, to challenge the presence of the West and the US in the region (Katz 2010). In 2004-2005, Russia's policy towards the Middle East took a major shift and started supporting Arab nations, taking a pro-Palestine stance and criticised Israeli activities in West Bank and Gaza Strip. During the war in 2006, Russia extended its support to Syria with backing in the international arena, and military aid which indirectly reached to Hezbollah (Magen 2013; Blank 2014). Russia also criticised Israel for using 'disproportionate use of force' during the invasion of Lebanon in 2006 (Trenin 2010). Still Russia managed to have balance relationship with Israel and continued to support Arab World and their demand to find a solution to the Israel-Palestine conflict. Israel criticises Russia for supporting the terrorist group in its neighbourhood, while Russia doesn't consider Hezbollah and Hamas as terrorist organizations.

The strategic relation between Russia and Syria was relaunched when Putin came to power in 2000 and President Bashar Al- Assad took office, it was mainly because of Russia had enjoyed close military ties with Syria during Cold War and having military base in Tartus, which is one and only Russian military outpost outside Russia after Putin decided to close down Russian military bases in Vietnam and Cuba. The Russia's military base in Tartus served as a symbol of longstanding diplomatic and military ties between Russia and Syria and continued to boost their low-cost diplomatic relationship (Kreutz 2010; Trenin 2010). There is certain strategic interest involved in Syria for Russia, geographical location of Syria in the Middle East, independence from the West or the US, having a secular government and distant from the radical Islamic ideology make Syria a natural ally for Russia. Syria has never tried to influence Islamic sentiments in

Russia or opposing Russia's actions against the Chechen rebel. The Syrian President also stated that "the Arab World pins great hopes on strengthening Moscow's hand in the world." On the other hand, Russia does not want to be involved in the dispute between Syria and Israel over the ownership of the Golan Heights (officially annexed by Israel in 1981). At the same time Russia continue to get closer to Israel which actually make Syria, Hamas and Hezbollah feel uncomfortable about Russian intentions but remain friendly (Katz 2010). Still, Syria is an important ally to Russia for one of the reasons that through the Mediterranean Sea Russia would enable to get access to the Indian Ocean and to its Southern neighbourhood and South Asia, to its allies (Kreutz 2010).

In 2005, with the first visit of Bashar Assad to Russia, relations between these two nations had moved to next level. On the other hand, Vladimir Putin's rise to power and the American war in Iraq made Russia rethink its policy towards the Middle East for security and economic interests. The debt issue was also settled between Russia and Syria, when Russia agreed to give up 73 percent (i.e. \$9.8 billion) of its Soviet debt on Syria. In return of cancelled debt, Syria also offered Russia new seaports in Latakia and Tartus. All these events have been highlighted by Magen in his book 'Russia and the Middle East: Policy Challenges' (Magen 2013).

During the visit of 2005, a number of armament deals were discussed between Russia and Syria which ended up supplying MIG-29s, MIG-31s or some older generation aerial defence systems to Syria, still Syria have never received any advanced military technology weapons from Russia. Even after Medvedev came to power in 2008, but still it was Prime Minister Putin who actually took part in shaping domestic and international policies of Russia (Kreutz 2010; Magen 2013). It was clear enough that Russia can't afford to have a direct confrontation with the US or its allies in this region but through 'proxy war', establish close ties with the local regime which could wage war against the West and US (Hamid 2011).

Turkey's geo-political location in the Middle East and pro-West (NATO member) policies make it a competitive entity with Russia's strategic interests lie in this region.

There is enough Turkish influence over Russia as well as on the former Soviet States, most of the Muslim population speaks Turkish dialects. In 1997, Viktor Chernomyrdin visit to Ankara in last 25 years made it clear that Russia is looking for economic-interdependence even after the geo-political rivalry with Turkey. Dannreuther (2004) and Eran (2003) have clearly highlighted these facts in their respective articles “Russia and the Middle East” and “Russia in the Middle East: The Yeltsin Era and Beyond”, which enabled Russia to become a major commercial partner of Turkey. Russia with the support of Iran and China trying to contain Turkey in the Caspian Sea region, meanwhile Turkey was determined to stop Russia from drilling the gas near Cyprus and Nabucco pipeline project concern Russia as it bypasses Russia and conveys gas through Central Asia to Europe (Trenin 2010). Russia had also intervened in a dispute between Turkey and Cyprus over gas finds in the eastern Mediterranean, Russia sent its navy in support of Cyprus and seeking an airbase for the same at Paphos (Blank 2014). Turkey is also looking for its expansion in Caucasus region as well as NATO and Russia competing with the same for their strategic and economic interests. Turkey challenging Russia in Southern Caucasus as it is actively involved in a relation with Iran and Syria, so called Russia’s ally in the region, and participating in the formation of the Azeri-Georgian axis against Russia (Magen 2013).

Unlike Iran and Syria, Saudi Arabia is accepted as a sworn enemy of the Soviet Union or Russia Federation in the Middle East region, posing a direct threat to internal (i.e. promoting Wahhabism) and regional security interests of Russia as well as to economic interests. After 9/11 attack on the US and the support provided by Russia against radical Sunni Islamist in the Middle East, created a doubt in Saudi Arabia. Russia was trying to improve relation with Saudi Arabia even after its pro-West alliance, and also aided Afghan Mujahedeen, while Russia also suspect that Riyadh was assisting Chechen rebels in the 1990s. Since 2003, Russian-Saudi relation had begun to improve and friendlier in nature, with the series of high profile visits for example two Crown Prince Abdallah visit to Moscow in 2003, and Putin’s visit in 2007 (Katz 2010). In 2007, during the President Putin’s visit to Riyadh agreements of cooperation were discussed with delegations including the issue of joint security ventures. Russia concerns about the involvement of

Saudi Arabia in the reconstruction of Chechnya, destroyed during the war with Russia (Magen 2013; Katz 2015). As it has been discussed already that the close relation of Russia with countries like Iran and Syria have created doubt in Riyadh leadership.

Trenin (2010) has noted in his article “Russia’s policy in the Middle East: Prospects for consensus and conflict with the United States” the importance of Saudi Arabia in Russia’s Middle East policy. Russia clearly understands the importance of a country, which has holiest Muslim sites in its territory, Saudi Arabia. Saudi Arabia is also a country with rich natural resources and possesses the capacity to threaten the interests of so called super powers in the region, portrayed itself as Sunni Islamic leader in the Middle East region. Russia cannot deny the importance of Saudi Arabia, as Russia itself having 20% Muslims in its total population, and the Hajj or visiting Mecca is obligatory for all able Muslims. Saudi Arabia as a competitor for Russia in the field of energy resources also makes it difficult for Russia to establish close ties with Saudi Arabia, the so called close ally of the US in the region.

ECONOMIC INTERESTS OF RUSSIA

Russia did not want to spoil its improving relations with the US but the financial aid and help provided by the West, was not sufficient enough for the recovery of the Russian economy and political stability. The Gore-Chernomyrdin agreement (1995) was the result of the same but soon Russia had also realized the strategy of the US and started to withdraw from the support it was having from the West and US. Russia under Putin’s leadership relaunched their former Soviet policy to establish bilateral relations with the countries lie in West Asia region i.e. Iran and Syria, which were becoming more beneficial for Russia in terms of economic recovery and for improving its status in the international community after the dissolution of USSR. The Gore-Chernomyrdin agreement was abrogated by the Putin Administration in 2000, since the then relationship between Russia and Iran was continuously improving and creating a suspicion in Western nations about the intention Russia may have by providing nuclear technology to Iran and other military weapons and armaments (Dannreuther 2004). Russia and Iran nuclear cooperation were continuously improving with signing up new agreements to extend the

cooperation in nuclear field i.e. after BNPP (Bushehr Nuclear Power Plant) new agreement also took place between these two to build some new nuclear power plant in Iran (Eran 2003; Khrestin and Elliot 2007; Trenin 2010). After 9/11 attack on the US, Russia also came under pressure of international community to cooperate with the West and US but still trying to save its relationship with Iran even after the sanctions were imposed on both Russia and Iran, these events have been briefly discussed by Belopolsky (2009) and Hunter (2010) in their respective texts 'Russia and the Challengers' and 'Iran's Foreign policy in the Post-Soviet Era'.

The events took place at regular intervals like 9/11 attack, disclosure of secret nuclear facility built in Arak and Natanz, specially the nuclear facility in Qom arose suspicion in International community even in Russia, on the other hand, stopping International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) officials from the inspections of that facility made Russia think about Iranian intentions regarding the nuclear research program, whether its sole purpose was to produce energy for civilian use or to develop nuclear weapon. It was IAEA, under the influence of US, referred the matter of Iranian nuclear program to United Nations Security Council (UNSC hereafter), the relations between these issues have been explored by Caravelli (2011) in his book 'Beyond Sand and Oil'.

During the peak years (1995-1996) the cost of trade between Russia and Turkey was around \$10 billion US dollars annually. In 1998, a new agreement was signed between Moscow and Ankara to supply Russian natural gas, worth \$20 billion and in 1998 only, even after the economic crisis in Russia, the Russian-Turkish trade stood at \$3.5 billion. It was primarily energy and textile trade between these two countries. According to Katz (2010) article "Russia's Greater Middle East Policy: Securing Economic Interests, Courting Islam", the trade relation between Russia and Turkey have improved rapidly, for example from \$2.2 billion to \$33.8 billion US dollars during the period of 1995-2008. On the other hand, unlike the first Chechen war, Turkey was not providing any formal or informal support to the Chechen rebels during the Second Chechen war. Turkey is a major trading partner for Russia because of common economic interests, their trade has increased from \$10 billion to \$25 billion per annum. Russia also sells military weapons to

Turkey, and because of Russia's policies achievements in the Middle East, countries like Israel, Turkey and even Saudi Arabia were also encouraged to make deal with Russia (Blank 2014). The main objective of Russia's Prime Minister's visit to Ankara was to conclude a massive natural gas deal (i.e. Blue Stream), the underwater pipeline in the Black Sea to convey natural gas to Turkey. Turkey was also looking for partners to meet the demand of energy resources for its growing population. Dannreuther (2004) and Eran (2003) have clearly highlighted these facts in their respective articles "Russia and the Middle East" and "Russia in the Middle East: The Yeltsin Era and Beyond", which enabled Russia to become a major commercial partner of Turkey.

In the beginning it was basically the commercial interests of Russia involved in a relationship with Syria and other Middle Eastern states, in 2008 bilateral trade between Syria and Russia reached almost \$2 billion. In November 2009, Stroytransgaz (Russian firm) launched its largest project in Syria, a gas processing plant near Homs. In May 2010, President Medvedev's visit to Damascus was a step to bolster relation and cooperation between the two nations (Kreutz 2010; Magen 2013).

Magen (2013) has clearly highlighted the developments of the economic and strategic relation between Russia and Turkey in his book "Russia and the Middle East: Policy Challenges". The military cooperation between Russia and Turkey indicates that they have moved beyond their so called mortal-regional rivalry. While Russian Government Company (Rosatom) is dedicated to building the nuclear reactor for Turkey, Turkey is also a customer of Russian oil and natural gas. Turkey is looking for an alternative (Nabucco pipeline) to surpass Russia transportation to Europe through Turkey. The Southern Stream project and the East Siberia-Pacific Ocean project are clear examples of a Russian strategy to convey natural gas to Europe through Black Sea and oil to China, respectively. In November 2011, Russia also inaugurated Northern Route project to convey gas to Europe. Russia needs Turkish support in its strategic and economic interests in the Middle East region, like membership in OIC, backing the Islamic rebels in Northern Caucasus region and as a partner of Georgia, Turkey opposes the invasion of

Russia in Georgia. Even on Syrian crisis issue Russia (pro Assad) and Turkey have been standing against each other (Katz 2010; Magen 2013).

The importance of Saudi Arabia for Russia as an economic partner for energy export cannot be ignored by the leadership in Moscow. As Trenin (2010) has tried to put some light on Russia-Saudi Arabia bilateral relations in his article 'Russia's policy in the Middle East: Prospects for consensus and conflict with the United States'. In its Middle East policy, Russia has been trying to establish friendly relations with Saudi Arabia not just because of Muslim sentiments but for economic interests, as they both are leading oil and gas producers competing against each other in the international market, rather than cooperating for greater mutual benefits. The economy of Russia has been largely affected because of Middle Eastern countries or US allies, and not limiting the production of natural gas and oil (Katz 2010). Observer status in OIC is symbolic of the fact that Russia is taking Saudi Arabia with seriousness and willing to improve the relationship with it.

The Russia-Israel relation can be characterized mainly as political and economic cooperation. Israel still has limited interest in having political, economic and security cooperation with Russia, even after the large scale migration of Jewish community took place from Russia. Under President Yeltsin, Russia had lost its political leadership to the US, in the Middle East region. Iran and Syria are assumed to be the greatest thorn in the friendly relationship between Russia and Israel, the sale of military weapons and nuclear technology to Iran is a bigger concern for Israel and so on in terms of Syria. (Dannreuther 2004). Russian Foreign Minister Kozyrev (Russian Foreign Minister) failed to utilize the opportunity to play an active role in Oslo Accord (1993-1995), and also when the peace agreement was signed between Israel and Jordan in Aqaba (Eran 2003). Russia's aspiration of becoming a superpower after 1995, made it difficult for it to give attention to establish a close relation with Israel. Israel has also realized the importance of having bilateral relation with Russia, not just economic but political relation as well, which would actually help Israel to slow down the supply of military weapons to its enemies (Katz 2010).

The economic interests of Russia lie in the Middle East region include Russian nuclear industry (Rosatom), which has been engaged in Iran for building Bushehr nuclear reactor and looking for new contracts. Lukoil, the Russian private oil company, is engaged in Iraq. Gazprom, the Russian Gas Company, is the main supplier of natural gas to Turkey and looking to expand its area to Southeast Europe through pipeline close to, or via Turkey. Iran is also a key member of the Gas Exporting Countries Forum along with Russia. Saudi Arabia, a major oil producer in the region, and other OPEC countries have also been important for Russia and its economic interests. In terms of grain supply Russia has been on top for Egypt. Ever increasing the number of Russian tourists to visit Egypt, Turkey and Israel is also an important factor for having close economic relations with the same. Technological cooperation with Israel is also having a major interest in Russia, including visa-free travel (Trenin 2016).

THE ARAB SPRING AND RUSSIA

The Arab Spring started from Tunisia in 2011, when President Ben Ali lost his regime and that initiated a chain reaction in Arab World, to bring qualitative changes in the Middle East. The Arab Spring not only changed the government in Tunisia but in Egypt, Libya and Yemen and now Syria, last remaining strategic ally of Russia in this region. There have been negative effects of the Arab Spring in this region like widespread Jihadist terrorism, and it has also given rise to the extremist fundamentalism in the Middle East. It has also contributed to rising of IS terrorist Organisation in the Middle East and ever increasing refugee problem in the Europe Union. The countries in the Middle East have begun to interfere in the internal affairs of their neighbor. Saudi Arabia and its ally fighting against ISIS and intends to remove Assad from the power, do not support the involvement of Russia and the support it has been providing to Assad's regime. All these events and more have been discussed by Kostyuk (2016) in his article 'How did the Arab Spring change Russia's influence in the Middle East?'

The Arab Spring in the Middle East was seen as mobilized effort of the West to replace regimes allied to Moscow with ones allied to the West. Russia's strategy to deal with Arab Spring in the Middle East specially in case of Syria has been highlighted well

enough by Katz (2015) in his article “Conflicting Aims, Limited Means: Russia in the Middle East”. Russia has been blocking all Western/Arab backed efforts against Assad’s regime in Syria at the UNSC. Russia has been providing arms, to prevent the downfall of the Assad regime and also collaborating with Middle East countries who oppose the downfall of the Assad’s regime or fear of its replacement, which could be worse. (Iran, Iraq under the Shi’a, Egypt under Sisi, Algeria, Israel). On the other hand, Russia has been cooperating with Europe and America in their efforts of anti-WMD against Iran and Syria, so that they perceive Russia as their partner with all differences. At the end, Russia attempting to isolate Saudi Arabia and its Gulf Arab allies (supporting Islamic State, IS) from the West. Russia’s support to Assad regime actually serve the Western interest in the region as the democratization will lead to the rise of hostile Sunni Islamist forces in the region and not stability (Magen 2013; Blank 2014).

Before the breakout of Arab Spring in the Middle East, Putin was trying to establish a relation with almost all the governments in the region, whether they were pro-West (Saudi Arabia or other Gulf Arab Countries, Israel, Egypt under Sisi etc.) or anti-West (Syria, Iran, Algeria and Libya). Russia was uncomfortable with the downfall of Mubarak’s regime in Egypt as it was a longstanding ally in Middle East region. Moscow saw Arab Spring backed by the West and the US to change the anti-West regime with the pro-West instead. This act of the West seen as to target Russia and give rise to similar Muslim forces in Russia (Magen 2013; Katz 2015).

At the end, if Russia failed to serve Assad’s regime in the Middle East, the last remaining strategic ally after Egypt and Iran, it will largely effect the status of Russia on the global stage as well as on regional level. It has become a testing ground for Russia weaponry and the performance of the same, it would also help Russia to find new customers in this region for Russian military export, particularly in the Gulf region. In 2015, the Middle Eastern countries share 36 percent out of total military export of Russia after Asia (42 percent). And, the geographical location of Syria is surrounded by the other allies of Moscow in the region, starting from Iran, Iraq, the Kurds (North and East), Egypt in

Southwest covering the area from the Caspian Sea and the Persian Gulf to the Mediterranean Sea and Red Sea (Trenin 2016).

DEFINITION, RATIONALE AND SCOPE OF THE STUDY

The international community witnessed a change of era, with the end of Second World War in 1945. The Cold War assumed its massive proportions from 1948, between the US and the USSR. Both of these super powers had formed military alliances against each other, the US and its allies formed the NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, 1949), while the Soviet Union and its partners formed the Warsaw Pact (Treaty of Friendship, Co-operation, and Mutual Assistance, 1955). Through 'proxy wars' both the US. and the USSR took on each other as a show of strength and dominance. West Asia was also affected by these proxy wars, beginning with the Suez Crisis of 1956, and leading on to perpetual Arab-Israeli conflicts leading to offshoots such as the rise of radical Islam in 1980s. This ideological conflict took massive proportions, with numerous incidents which shook the stability of the world. It assumed destructive proportions and lasted until the end of the Cold War.

After more than five decades the Cold War ended in 1989, leaving behind a weakened Russia and newly independent states. Under the influence of the Atlanticist group, closer relations with the west was sought to be the best method of recovery. The Eurasianist group opposed the influence of US in Russia and as an alternative emphasized on friendly relations with the neighbouring countries of Russia with states in its neighbourhood. Under the Near Abroad policy, Russia had started focusing on West Asia, South Asia, Far East Asia and Eastern Europe for economic as well as political relations.

Russia's places its focus on the economic and strategic aspects in West Asia, which is known to be a global hotspot for its abundant natural resources, geo-strategic location, the continuous ongoing conflict between regional states, the rise of radical Islamic forces, and the presence of external actors in this region. In the starting of its policy towards West Asia the main thrust was laid on economic relations that later on developed into

constraining American influence and building strong political relations as well. The continuous expansion of NATO and US in Northern Caucasus, Caspian Sea Basin region, Central Asia and West Asia are the greater security concerns for Russia. The rise of radical Islamism in the 1980s, cautioned Russia to adopt a softer approach towards such issues keeping in mind its own Muslim population. Weapons trade and export of hydrocarbons are the two major sources of revenue as a result of which good relations with the West Asia are of prime importance to Russia.

The Arab Spring in 2011 brought regime changes which changed the balance of power in the region. It is assumed by many Russians to be a conspiracy perpetrated by the US to decrease the influence of Russia. In return, Russia has tried to establish good relations with all the countries in this region in order to counter the motives of the US. This region has contributed immensely to super power status of Russia, active participation in the Syrian crisis, Iranian nuclear program, friendly relation with Turkey and Israel as well as Saudi Arabia which are so called pro-US states in this region.

In this proposed thesis the main focus would be on Iran and Syria, than Iraq and Turkey, which have nominal relations with Russia. At last Israel and Saudi Arabia will also be discussed for being the key regional actors of West Asia and their pro-West alliance. In terms of economic, political and strategic interests of Russia it will be important to see the gains it has made. It will also discuss the stance of Russia on Iranian nuclear crisis and how does it affect the relation between Russia and Iran, particularly after the JCPOA agreement in 2015. The Syrian crisis and Russia's military involvement to rescue Assad's regime, and its implications will also be discussed. Egypt and Turkey are mainly the trading partners for Russia, while Egypt was also a close ally of Russia under Mubarak's regime. Israel being the only non-Muslim state in the region has serious implications for Russia's foreign policy. On the other hand relations with Saudi Arabia are also important. Both these countries could affect the foreign policy of Russia. For instance, Saudi Arabia could promote radical Islam in Russia, affect global oil prices, whereas extremely close relations with Israel could make the other countries suspicious.

So the overall policy of Russia towards the Middle East is based on economic, strategic and political in some form. Russia's policy towards West Asia can be characterized, as an attempt to regain its lost glory and to become a dominant power with a vibrant economy. It also attempts to restrict the US in its immediate neighbourhood and to surpass it. This thesis will therefore, attempt to draw out the level of success that Russia has achieved in pursuing these objectives.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The qualitative methods of social research includes theoretical as well empirical analysis of research. Under the empirical method, this research deals with economic and political linkages between Russia and West Asia. This study has also involved casual methods of inference and description. Both agency and structural factors has also been acknowledged and implemented in this research.

The data collected for the concerned research has been divided into two categories, primary and secondary data. Primary data of this research includes the various reports and surveys by different national and international institutions and annual reports of government departments like External Affairs Ministry, government publications, reports of IAEA, UNSC resolution, and the online data available on government websites.

The secondary data contains books, journals, periodicals, articles published in newspapers, reportage, online data sources, media, unpublished papers and some insightful thoughts expressed by individuals related to, or working on this research topic.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES:

1. To highlight the changes in policy of Russia towards West Asia in soviet and post-Soviet Era.
2. To critically examine the response of West Asia and the Western powers towards growing presence of Russia in the region.
3. To identify the major challenges and future prospects for Russia in West Asia.
4. To discuss the economic and political interest of Russia in West Asia region.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS:

1. What are the challenges and threats that Russia is facing in West Asia and how it has been trying to cope up these threats?
2. What is the response of the US and its Western allies, including countries in the West Asia region, towards the growing presence of Russia in the region?
3. What are the possible political and economic interests of Russia in West Asia?
4. What are the security threats posed to Russia by the Western Forces and its regional allies in West Asia?

HYPOTHESES:

1. Radical Islam in West Asia has created a threat to the internal security in Russia leading to proactive Russia's policy towards this region.
2. Russia has a variegated policy towards West Asia characterized by close security cooperation with Iran and Syria, a strong economic partnership with Turkey and Neutrality towards Saudi Arabia.

STRUCTURE OF THE THESIS

The first chapter introduction dealt with the synopsis of the thesis and review of available literature related to the policy of Russia towards West Asia in Soviet and post-Soviet era. It gave a brief description, the hypothesis, research questions and objectives of the thesis, followed by the tentative chapterisation or the structure of the thesis. The second chapter titled, *The Russia's policy towards West Asia: A historical background*, deals with the conceptual and theoretical understanding of the research area by the international community. A detailed discussion of historical background of Russia's policy towards West Asia beginning from the end of World War II to the beginning of Putin is the main focus of the chapter. The chapter emphasises the debate between Atlanticist and Eurasianist group regarding the character of Russia's policy towards the neighboring countries.

Third chapter, *Russia's strategy in West Asia*, emphasizes some of the major security policies pursued towards West Asia during the Soviet period. It also serves as a

background for comprehending the bilateral security relations with the West Asian countries in 21st century. This is followed by the fourth chapter titled, *Russia-West Asia Economic Relation*, which deals with economic and political interaction of Russia with West Asia. Prime focus of the chapter is the bilateral relations with regional actors like Iran, Syria and Turkey (major importers of Russian military equipment and nuclear energy) including new emerging commercial partners of Russia in this region i.e. Israel, Iraq and Saudi Arabia as well.

The next chapter, *Arab Spring and its impact on Russia's policy*, deals with the rise of Arab Spring and its effect on Russia's foreign policy. It delineates the shift in Russia's foreign policy in the wake of Arab Spring. Furthermore, it highlights the importance given to establishing a friendly relationship with Turkey, Israel and Saudi Arabia (the so called pro-Western countries in the region). The Iranian Nuclear Crisis followed by Syrian Crisis and the role of Russia has also been a part of the discussion. The concluding chapter projects the major findings of the research, highlighting the main arguments related to the issues raised in the hypotheses as far as the role of national security of Russia is concerned.

CHAPTER TWO

RUSSIA'S POLICY TOWARDS WEST ASIA: A HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

INTRODUCTION

It was late seventeenth (Tsar Fyodor, 1676-82) and early eighteenth century, when Tsarist Russia started to demonstrate its interest in the region that was later termed and called 'Middle East' by the British. There were number of instances of confrontation and economic interaction between Russia and Turkey including the then Persia (now Islamic Republic of Iran). The importance of the Middle East in Tsarist period was to get access to the hot waterways for commercial purpose, which include Turkish Straits and Caspian region. By the nineteenth century Russia was able to proclaim itself to be the local power in this region. This policy continued even after the Russian Revolution until the Second World War.

The Sykes-Picot agreement of 1907 between British, French and Russia decided the area of influence for all three concerned countries. The exploration of oil in 1930's in the Middle East could be a factor for the Soviets that attracted the attention of Soviet policy makers, for the oil rich countries were under the influence of the Western powers, and the West could manipulate the oil and gas prices in international energy market. Same was the reason for active participation of United States (US hereafter) in regional politics of West Asia and exploitation of available natural resources.

It was in mid-1950s when the Soviet Union realized the strategic importance of the Middle East and perceived threat to its national security with the growing presence of European Powers in the region, while Soviet Union was sharing borders with Turkey and Iran which had gone under the Western Influence. After this realization Soviet Union soon initiated a policy of active engagement with the regional countries to 'counter balance' the supremacy of the West and US, starting with Egypt under Nasser regime,

followed by Syria, Libya and Tunisia. Naval Base in Egypt and Syria along with major deliveries of Soviet weapons to fight against the pro-West states in the region including Israel.

Most of the Gulf countries (Oil rich states) were under the influence of the West, especially US, and they had established pro-West regime in Iran (under Shah Reza Pahlavi) as well. This prompted the Soviet Union to start looking for possible strategic allies which could actually contain the expansion of the West and neutralize the threat of eastward expansion of North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO hereafter). Egypt, Iraq and Syria showed their interest for strategic relation with the Soviet Union. These new strategic alliance proved to be helpful for Russia to wage 'proxy wars' and create a 'balance of power' within this region, while its borders remained secured from any imminent threat from the Western powers along with threats coming from within the region. The control of the West over rich natural resources and countries in the Gulf region was an imminent threat to the Soviet economy, because oil and gas were major source of income for the Soviets, and competition in international energy market for exports of oil and gas provided an upper hand to the West and US over Soviets to harm their economy anytime through fluctuation in price of oil and gas. The US continuously used the Gulf countries and their richness in natural resources as a 'soft power' against the economy and power of the Soviet Union from the beginning of the Cold War.

Including these external factors (US and the West), posing challenges to the Soviet policy in the region, regional factors were also an addition to the problem and played a crucial role. For instance, the rise of radical Sunni Islamism in the region during 1980's was a major concern for the Soviet Union. This security concern of the Soviets was not false as the radical Sunni Islam could also try to influence the Muslim population within its border and that could create threat to its internal security. The reason behind Georgian war and the rise of Chechen rebel can be traced back to rise of radical Islamism in West Asia. The invasion in Afghanistan and failure of the Soviet military capabilities against the locally trained terrorists (believed to be trained by the West and US) and the final withdrawal are contributing factor which has weakened its position globally and affected

the economy drastically. Other factors are still in play even after the dissolution of the Soviet Union under the leadership of Mikhail Gorbachev and marked by beginning of military withdrawal from the Middle East region.

Even though Russian Federation, more or less, remained neutral from this region and to a certain extent the strategic policy was also absent for the period of time (i.e. till mid 2000s under Boris Yeltsin) after the disintegration of the Soviet Union, but threats in this region and presence of the West and US still hold the capacity to affect the interests of Russia on global and regional level. The debate between Atlanticists and Eurasianists was a result of this situation created in Russia and except in the beginning the Russian policy was later dominated by the Eurasianist which eventually changed the course for policy of Russia abroad. It can be translated into a shift in foreign policy of Russia which began with greater emphasis to establish a strong relation with the West and US, and later, as the Eurasianist gaining power in the administration, it was diverted towards the regional politics and to focus upon the neighboring countries in the region, including Far East Asia, South Asia and the Middle East as well. Lastly, the Middle East remained important for the Soviets or now the Russians and never lost its importance or denied, while there were so many ups and downs in the politics of the region.

This chapter deals with the historical background of Russian foreign policy towards West Asia and begins with the explanation to the formation of Russian foreign policy for the concerned region. Starting from the Tsarist Russia and the then interaction taken place between countries or empires in the region and Russia, till twentieth century. Further it has emphasized on bilateralism and multilateralism in terms of economic and strategic relations developed between Soviet and key regional actors in the West Asian region. It highlights the opportunities and major problems faced by the Soviets during this period which made them to change their strategy over time, till the time it was dissolved and became dependent on the aid received from the West and US to bring stabilities to economic and political condition of the country. Chapter includes the account of how the debate between Eurasianist and Atlanticist played the crucial role in decision for the

future of Russia's policy at home and abroad, and the contribution of the Prime Minister Yevgeny Primakov for rejuvenating Russia's policy towards Middle East.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

In the historical background of Russia's policy towards West Asia, Tsarist period holds the most important place. The policy pursued towards this region under Tsarist rule served as a base for the formation of Russia's policy in the Soviet and post-Soviet era. There were some common reasons behind active engagement of Russia during 17th century and after, which stayed relevant for the Soviet Union and now for the Russian Federation. There were other reasons as well but two of them have continued to influence the policy of Russia till date. First, the national security and especially the southern border from the external aggression or imperial powers. Second, to acquire the access to the hot water ways, which was necessary for the trade and transportation, and still holds the importance for the Russian Federation. There are other factors including these two, which will be highlighted in this chapter as follows.

THE FORMATION OF SOVIET POLICY: AN OVERVIEW

The Soviet Union has its long-standing interests in the area south of its border. Tracing back to the formation of Russia's policy towards West Asia in history was simply possible and difference of opinion can confuse the one with ease. The Soviet policy toward the Middle East can be traced within two sources of the Tsarist legacy and second, the Marxist-Leninist ideology (Adelman and Palmieri 1989: 20).

During the Tsarist period Tsar Fyodor, and later his successors (Peter the Great) continued using offensive thrust against Turkey (Azov or Azak) and Iran but failed to accomplish the desired result meant to get access to hot water ways of Black Sea. The closure of the straits by the Turks for the Russian shipping was directly linked to the health of the Russian economy (Bushkovitch 2002: 35; Kagan 2002: 249). This policy of aggression was continued by his successors Catherine the Great (Catherine II, 1762-1796) and Alexander I. Catherine II succeeded to achieve the permanent access to the hot water ways of northern Black Sea after defeating Turks in two wars (Warth 1963: 13).

Tsarist Russia was among the European powers in nineteenth-century that considered itself a local power in the area called the Middle East. As one of the major aims under Tsarist regime was to have control over the Turkish Straits, and in the same way Middle East was important for the Soviet Union as it provides the water-ways for the Soviets and its Warsaw Pact allies (Adelman and Palmieri 1989: 27). Although, Russia was using its offensive thrust towards the Arab World during Tsarist period, at the same time interactions with this region (part of the Ottoman Empire) was existing in the form of cultural exchange, pilgrimages, tourism, and including the connection through commerce (Kreutz 2011: 2).

Meanwhile, maintaining stable and friendly relations with the countries on its borders has always been Russia's interests, which were perceived to be achieved through the extension of Russian influence and control over the region (Agwani 1967: 51). This also meant to prevent the domination or presence of hostile forces near or on the borders. Access to the Turkish Straits has always been important to Russia as it connects Russia to the West (the Black Sea to the Mediterranean Sea, westwards to the Atlantic) as well as to Asia and the Far East (Southeasterly through Suez Canal), in the lack of Russian Warm Water Ports. As a result of victories in two wars with Persia (wars in 1801, and 1828), Tsarist Russia gained control over Baku and Erivan region, and also acquired access to warm waterways (the strait of the Dardanelles). The agreement of 1907 (Sykes-Picot Agreement) divided the area of control in the Middle East after the collapse of Ottoman Empire, among British, French and the Russians. British gained control over much of Iraq and Persian Gulf region while French got access to Syria, Lebanon and partial control over Anatolia. At the end Russian also received access to Mediterranean Sea from the Black Sea (Adelman and Palmieri 1989: 30).

From the Russian Revolution in 1917 until the Second World War, Soviet policy was centred on Iran, Afghanistan and Turkey. In September 1947, bipolar worldview was

enunciated by Zhdanov as a ‘two camp theory⁴’, at the founding of the Comintern. In this view, a country can be socialist or capitalist and only way to deal with the latter is its overthrow, policy based on continental military doctrine while limiting itself to the periphery of the Soviet Union (Golan 1990: 8-9). In the mid-1950s the Soviet involvement increased in the Middle East very rapidly, and according to Western observers and political leaders, by late 1950s and early 1960s, Soviet Union was identified as a dominant power in this region (Dawisha and Dawisha 1982: 1; Freedman 1991: 3).

The Marxist-Leninist ideology (Marxism-Leninism) refers to the collection of ideas and concepts of Karl Marx, originated in the nineteenth century Europe, while it was enriched and developed by the European Marxist movements and its leading figures like Vladimir I. Lenin. It was an attempt to highlight the characteristics of the international politics and foreign policy of the Great empires and nation-states of the second half of the nineteenth century. Marx defines that the international politics is determined by the clash of interests of various social forces (labor and capital) of different communities existing and operating in any nation-state and beyond. These two social forces exist in every nation-state and always contradictory to each other even in terms of international politics. The socio-economic formations determine the nature of foreign policy of a nation-state and so on the capitalist and working class (whichever is dominant in a nation state) with their aims and objectives are bound to promote their interests, which further leads to clash between these two forces. Hence, the international politics is defined by the nature of a nation state and its foreign policy which is linked and dependent on its domestic needs i.e. proletarian interests are linked to the promotion of proletarian internationalism (Imam 1991: 2-4).

Under the leadership of Lenin, after the formation of the Soviet Union, primary objective of the Soviet foreign policy was to achieve peaceful co-existence (between capitalism and

⁴ In September 1947, Andrei Zhdanov during the founding session of the information bureau of the Cominform (the main European Communist Parties) defined the emergence of two hostile camps (Capitalist camp lead by the United States of America and Communist camp of the Soviet Union) competing for global supremacy after WWII (Boterbloem 2002). This was believed to be in response to counter the Truman Doctrine and the Marshall Plan of the US in the beginning of the Cold War.

socialism), competition and transition to socialism (Adelman and Palmieri 1989: 149). The primary objective of further expanded the view of Marx about international politics and included other social forces which were fighting against colonialism and semi-colonialism in Asia, Africa and Latin America. These new social forces playing a determining role in global politics along with other two social forces, and the forces of national liberation movements are potential allies to labour as they are raging against the capitalism-imperialism. For the same reason, in terms of foreign policy the Soviet Union was supporting and encouraging the anti-imperialist movements all around the world against capitalist-imperialist forces. Simultaneously, Lenin had also stressed upon the peaceful co-existence of states with different social systems and promoting proletarian internationalism was another important goal (Imam 1991: 7-9, 19). The foreign policy of Marxist-Leninist ideology was continued by the future Soviet leaders, and remained significant till the period of Gorbachev served as the last statesman of the Soviet Union.

From the Russian Revolution in 1917 until the Second World War, Soviet policy was centred on Iran, Afghanistan and Turkey. In September 1947, bipolar worldview was enunciated by Zhdanov as a 'two camp theory', at the founding of the Comintern. In this view, a country can be socialist or capitalist and only way to deal with the latter is its overthrow, policy based on continental military doctrine while limiting itself to the periphery of the Soviet Union (Golan 1990: 8-9). In the mid-1950s the Soviet involvement increased in the Middle East very rapidly, and according to Western observers and political leaders, by late 1950s and early 1960s, Soviet Union was identified as a dominant power in this region (Dawisha and Dawisha 1982: 1; Freedman 1991: 3).

Stalin lacked the qualities of Lenin in terms of foreign policy of the Soviet Union and where Lenin had pursued a pragmatic, firm and yet flexible Soviet foreign policy in his period of time. Stalin's approach towards Soviet foreign policy was extremely firm, inflexible and at the same time secretive in nature. In the beginning of the Cold War international situation again turned hostile for the Soviet Union due to the monopoly of the US over nuclear weapons and policy of aggression pursued by the West i.e. Truman

Doctrine and Marshall Plan after the end of Second World War. The Soviet foreign policy was also transformed into a stiff, uncompromising, and dogmatic one (Imam 1991: 11, 29). Russia had evolved through the hostile international situation where its territorial security was threatened by the continuous aggression and intervention of the external actors, beginning from the period of Tsarist Russia.

The International Department (ID) of the Central Committee, under Soviet Russia, was responsible for the area of foreign affairs. While under Khrushchev leadership the role of the ID was expanded and series of research institutes (some in the party, but most of them in the Academy of Sciences) were set up (Freedman 1991: 14). The most important and prestigious institutes of ID were World Economy and International Affairs (IMEMO), the Africa Institute, the Oriental Institute, the Far East Institute and the most important, the Institute for the Study of the US and Canada (Golan 1990: 7).

Khrushchev took important steps to ease the tension in international politics by diluting its confrontational approach towards the West and US, during 1955-62. The Soviet foreign policy became more flexible and accommodative under the leadership of Khrushchev. Later, during the period of détente, Brezhnev also supported and pursued the same policy to relax the tension of confrontation between superpowers, took initiative for nuclear disarmament and proliferation. Soviet Union also expanded its ties with the new emerging countries in the Third World for which it's the flow of economic aid and arms was never paused (Imam 1991: 35).

In 1970s, the greatest achievement of the Soviet Union was to achieve the relaxation of tension prevailing in the international politics for decades due to the ideological differences between the East and the West (Imam 1991: 37). The defense sector of the Russian Federation was so vast (large armed forces and huge military production) mainly because of its experiences of World War II, nationalism and communist regime and a greater demand for national security strategy. In the late 1970s, Soviet Union had also increased the share of defence sector in the Russian economy while compromising with the economic growth rate for the same. It can be assumed that Soviet “middle

technology” was better but its military technology failed to compete with the Western high-end technology, and during the period of 1980-90s Soviet tried to counter Western quality with the Soviet quantity which was increasingly negative for the Soviet economy (Imam 1991: 113). The Soviet leaders also realized that and numbers of attempts were made to reduce defence budget and to focus on production of civilian use. It was Mikhail Gorbachev’s policy which brought huge changes in Soviet foreign policy, to reduce threats from abroad, 1985 onwards more emphasis was given to negotiations abroad than to arms production. Gorbachev focused on improving relationships with Western powers and the US and in 1987, Soviet signed Intermediate Nuclear Forces Treaty while in the twelfth five-year plan (1986-90) defence budget was increased. From 1988, the size of Soviet armed forces was reduced and so on the defence budget too, but along with the declining budget in the defence sector, the Russian economy also went into deeper crisis (Rivlin 2005: 15-16).

The Gorbachev’s policy failed to deliver the expected results and in the 1990s the defence sector took advantage of last communist regime to squeeze out the resources from the state budget, receiving higher defence spending than ever before. The defence industry plants were distributed throughout the USSR and with the breakup of Soviet Union, these plants were also got divided. While the majority of these industries were still located in Russia, the system of interdependence made it less significant for Russia as well. In Russia itself, there was huge pressure from these structures to increase independence but Russia failed to utilize that as Russian economy was going into deep into crisis in the early 1990s (Rivlin 2005: 16).

STRATEGIC POLICY OF SOVIET UNION IN WEST ASIA

The traditional factors behind the active policy of the Soviet Union toward West Asia was closely related to the protection and promotion of interests including the security against military actions and designs. Other traditional factors include the creation of a friendly international environment which could help the Soviet Union (new State) to develop steadily and fast on its chosen path of development, lastly the establishment of socialist society was the main objective. Though, the Soviet policy had changed overtime

and adopting new things as the international situation transformed and the new leadership coming into power (Imam 1991: 10).

West Asia was always been important for the Soviet since Tsarist period and from then it remained actively engaged in this region. The policy of the Soviet Union remained inactive in Asia initially after the Second World War (1948-1954), and later it gradually acquired importance in 1954-1955, for instance the arms supply to Egypt and to Syria, later (Imam 1991: 99). However, the active engagement or strategic policy of the Soviet Union towards the Third World (the Middle East) was initiated with the death of Stalin (1953) and the abandonment of the two-camp theory introduced by Andrey Zhdanov in 1947 (i.e. the world is divided into two camps imperialist and democratic, which are led by the US and the Soviet Union, respectively). Malenkov and Khrushchev promoted the policy of peaceful coexistence rather than two-camp approach but the competition between communism and capitalism was not abandoned. At the same time, the Third World was fighting against colonialism and it was against the West and not the Soviet Union, and this anti-Western policy was actually reducing the influence of the West and in a way serving the Soviet interests (Golan 1990: 9).

On May 25, 1950, the foreign ministers of Britain, France and the US made a joint declaration regarding the security and armaments in the Middle East, the declaration was known as the Tripartite Declaration. This declaration called for arms rationing to prevent the arms race in the Middle East and allowed the countries in the region to take care of their internal security and “play their part in the defence of the area as a whole”. This declaration was actually meant for creating a regional defence alliance in the Middle East by the Western power, and clearly, their main target was the Soviet Union itself. In October 1951, through a proposal, Egypt was invited to join and establish a “Middle East Defense Command”. The Soviet Union had a little to react against the West and US, except to wait and hope that the Middle Eastern countries would turn it down (Tal 2009; Librach 1965: 177).

It was after the Second World War and especially in mid-1950s, when Soviets started to get actively engaged in the Arab World or West Asia. From the strategic point of view this region was the hotspot for global politics and the West has already been present there, while the Soviets were looking for partners or strategic ally in the region. This ally can simply help the Soviet Union to contain the West in the region and also to wage proxy war against them. All these events and further actions taken by the Soviet Union during Cold War were to create a 'balance of power' with the US, though it was not possible without expanding its area of influence and making new allies. The West Asian region was not ignored by the Soviets during the Cold War even though it was not on their priority list at that time and had little interest at the beginning of Cold War (Campbell 1972: 130; Hamid 2011: 4).

During 1950s, the Middle East was going through some significant changes in regional politics, as the West (British and French) began to withdraw from the region and wave of decolonization was becoming strong in the Third World. The US had failed to fill the gap, after the withdrawal of the British and French from the region, while both were pre-occupied by the threat of communism. The British and French offered pacts to the regional countries to curtail the growing influence of the Soviet Union, believed to be a new form of neo-colonialism by many Middle Eastern states. Khrushchev offered economic and military aid to the countries in West Asia, which was conditioned on the denial to participate in anti-Soviet regional pacts, for example the Baghdad Pact of 1955 which was sponsored by the West. Hence, the Soviet Union was using arms supplies (regimes friendly to Moscow) as a primary instrument of foreign policy to compete with the West and US in the West Asian region (Adelman and Palmieri 1989: 145, 149, 165; Imam 1991: 103).

The active military engagement of Soviet Union in West Asia started in the mid-1950s. The Soviet military and naval forces marked their presence in the Mediterranean Sea by that time while supporting Arab countries against the French, British and Israeli aggression on Suez Canal crisis with military supplies. In mid-1950s Khrushchev launched a program to strengthen its foreign relations through supplies of economic aid

and arms to the emerging new countries in the Third World. The nature of Soviet foreign policy was becoming global and not limited to Europe or Euro-centric anymore (Imam 1991: 33). During the period of 1950-1960s, the Soviets were looking forward to establish friendly relations with Egypt, and Syria as well (Trenin 2016: 2).

Simultaneously, the Non-Alignment Movement (NAM) of the Third World played a positive role for the Soviet Union, by announcing neutrality from alliances (not to join any alliance) and refusal to grant military rights and bases, as the West was seeking overseas bases an opportunity to form a network of regional alliances. During Cold War period the Soviet Union pursued a strategy towards the Third World, joining their anti-imperialist and national democratic revolutions and later leading them to proletarian socialist revolutions (Golan 1990: 10, Imam 1991: 33).

The traditional interests of Soviet Russia, in post-Stalin 1950s, was primarily the political interests or removing the West from the immediate border and beyond by peaceful but active competition in political, economic and ideological spheres. In the 1960s, Soviet policy had undergone another major change which was the result of a shift in Soviet interests in the Middle Eastern region. Military-strategic interests were preferred rather than just political interests. The change in Soviet policy in the 1960s was the more specific response to the deployment of the Polaris nuclear submarine (SSBM, a seaborne nuclear weapon launcher) by the US in the Mediterranean Sea, the US also deployed a modified Polaris and Poseidon in the Indian Ocean. It was then the decision was taken by the Soviet Union in the 1960s to develop aircraft carriers. The Soviet Union started seeking military bases and alliances in the Middle East because the expulsion of the West from the region was not enough for securing the Soviet interests in the Middle East (Golan 1990: 12, 13).

Moscow's image as an anti-imperialist superpower was compromised as the Soviet Union had pursued a new policy of strategic and military alliance with the countries in the Middle East region and gave a rise to the possibility that these Soviet efforts might even push these countries back into the hands of the West, by creating the same image as

an imperialist power like the West. On another hand, the Soviet Union became dependent on the host states and was forced to make concessions in order to maintain their presence, which turned out to be costly for the Soviet Union providing military aid and other concessions (Golan 1990: 13).

In October 1964, during the fall of Khrushchev, the position of the Soviet Union in the Middle East was considerably better than when Khrushchev came to power. Khrushchev was succeeded to establish diplomatic relations with almost all the Middle Eastern countries and among them, many received the Soviet economic and military aid. Overall the Soviets position in the Middle East was improved, countries in Northern Tier (Iran and Turkey) were still a close ally of the US and the West but also developed their relationship with the Soviets to a point that the economic interaction was taking place. The Soviet influence was increased among the Arab countries (Egypt, Syria, Algeria, and Iraq), still these countries maintained their independence from the Soviets in both domestic and foreign affairs. In fact, during Khrushchev period the Middle East was not the primary concern for the Soviets that was preoccupied with problems of Eastern and Western Europe and Sino-Soviet conflict which was escalating very rapidly. In 1964, it was Brezhnev-Kosygin leadership which primarily focused on the Middle East (Freedman 1991: 26, Imam 1991: 35). Shah of Iran and Soviets still continued with the arms deals and other economic deals after Iran signed a mutual agreement to stop the US aid program in 1967.

The strategic interests of Soviet Union are more or less linked with the political interests in the Middle East area, security for Soviet bases and facilities was the concern larger than to establish a communist regime, which could help to prevent the possible dangers and threats from outside world. The second most important strategic-political interest of Soviet Union has been to neutralize the Chinese from the Middle East and to end the competition. In the late 1970s and early 1980s, the military-strategic interest began to lose its priority over the political interest in the region for the Soviets. There was a highly competitive approach followed by Washington in the Middle East, while the détente cease to exist at the super-power level. It broadens the support of Moscow in an attempt

to create a bloc of radical states in the area and increase role of Soviet in the Middle East affairs. The communist sentiments were never been able to penetrate into the Middle East because of the strength of both nationalism and Islamic ideology. Khrushchev still encouraged the local Marxists to cooperate with the bourgeois nationalist leaders so that any revolutionary idea could be delayed for near future (Golan 1990: 20-22).

Kosygin and Andropov were against the policy of Soviet Union pursued during détente and emphasized on keeping ‘Soviet-Union-first’, which could help the Soviet economic development and ease the risk of provoking world war by the engagement of Soviet in conflict and heavy involvement abroad. Ultimately, it was the task of the party to form the Middle East policy and the final decision-making in the Politburo. Under the leadership of Stalin, Molotov along with Y. A. Zhdanov played an important role in the formation of Soviet’s policy toward the Middle East, in post-World War II and later under the Khrushchev leadership regarding the involvement in Egypt. Afterwards, Yevgeny Primakov (Deputy Director of IMEMO, head of the Oriental Institute) the senior Soviet Middle East specialist, worked as the primary spokesman of the policies regarding the Middle East in the 1970s and onwards (Golan 1990: 8).

In 1970s, the political interests of the Soviet Union in the region was not necessarily a communist regime but to secure bases and facilities which can be used by other competitors. Later, under Brezhnev leadership and during détente, and post-détente gave more stress over military intervention in the Third World to compete with the US and NATO forces. As the Soviet Union was getting involved in regional conflict by providing assistance to their ally, Yom Kippur War, Afghanistan War and other major support had made the Soviet Union economically weak and unable to continue their strategic policy and compete with the West and the US, united (Golan 1990: 26-27).

1980 onwards, Soviet Union had started losing its power and political influence on a Global scale and the policy pursued by the leadership in Moscow had contributed for the same. The importance of the Middle East in Moscow’s foreign policy, during Cold War, had a number of Arab countries as its quasi-allies, for a period of time, i.e. Iraq, Egypt,

Algeria, Libya, South Yemen, and Syria. At the starting, Soviet Union showed its support to Israel but felt disappointed, which made Moscow support Arab foes and PLO (Palestine Liberation Organisation). The withdrawal of Moscow from the Middle East under then-President Mikhail Gorbachev was also marked by the decline of superpower status of Soviet Union, while the Soviets invasion of Afghanistan was also a contributing factor. During Afghanistan intervention of Soviet Union, Saudi Arabia was among the donors to the mujahedeen. Russians still believe that Saudi Arabia also contributed to the fall of the Soviet Union, the oil prices drove down in the mid-1980s. The re-Islamization of former Soviet space and spreading of Wahhabi ideology by the Saudi's have always been a threat to Russian national security, as well as the competition in the Oil market. The withdrawal of Soviet Union from the Middle East under the leadership of Gorbachev led to the acknowledgement of American hegemony over the Arab World as well as on Palestine issue (Hamid 2011).

Under the leadership of Gorbachev, there was a major shift in the Soviet policy with the introduction of 'The New Thinking', which was actually meant to create the balance of interests while the clash of interests was still existing in the international politics (Imam 1991: 10). For the same reason during Gorbachev period, the Soviet Union started to withdraw from the regions where it was actively engaged before and continuously provided economic aid and arms in return of their support to the Soviet cause all around the world. This policy of aid and assistance was creating a huge burden on the economy of the Soviet Union, and directly affecting the capacity of the Soviet Union to actively pursue its policy abroad.

ECONOMIC POLICY OF SOVIET UNION AND WEST ASIA

The Soviet policy makers always stressed upon the mutual cooperation through which the mutual benefits can be received (Imam 1991: 113). In the late 1960s, the Soviet Union instructed its clients in Eastern Europe to start purchasing oil elsewhere, which actually eased the oil export burden. Domestically, it began a strict programme for energy conservation, which reduced the yearly rate of domestic demand for energy from 8 percent to 4 percent. During this period the Soviet Union had formed a three-way deal,

under which i.e. the Soviet Union had to provide oil and natural gas to Egypt and Egypt in turn exported oil to Japan and India, the same way Soviets exported oil to Europe for the Kuwaitis and the UAE, which in turn sent oil to the Far East. The same three-way deal was also existed between the Soviet Union and the Shah of Iran, who exported oil to Western Europe, in turn of Iranian oil was sent to southern Russia (Golan 1990: 16).

The economic and military aid provided by the Soviet Union to the West Asian countries till 1967, i.e. Iraq (US \$ 1329 million), Iran (US \$ 440 million), Syria (780 million US dollars), was still quite impressive, while the military aid was absent in terms of Turkey (US \$ 210 million). Nevertheless, Israel and Saudi Arabia were missing due to their pro-West stance in West Asia (Imam 1991: 108). Although, these aids given by the USSR were assumed to be economic but the strategic and political aspects were also linked with them.

In term of oil and natural energy reserves in the Middle East, Soviets did not want to take risk of disrupting the flow of oil from the Middle East to the Western countries. There was temporarily a brief time in the 1970s when the Soviet Union was importing oil from Libya and Iraq (when these countries nationalized the Western companies in their territory) to meet the domestic demand for energy, which was rising by 8 percent every year. In the lack of infrastructure and technology, Soviet Union was not able to meet the energy demand of the West and suggested the same to look for an alternative. Even when the Soviet Union was facing a problem with extraction and transportation of Soviet oil and gas reserves, it was still producing over 600 million barrels per year, and was the largest exporter of oil after Saudi Arabia, exporting 150 million barrels per year (Golan 1990: 15).

The political side was also linked with the oil factor, i.e. Western Europe and Japan were clearly dependent on the import of oil from the Middle East and disrupting the same could have caused action against the Soviet Union which may have been a military response from America. The Soviet Union did have an interest in control over the flow of oil but it could have a more adverse effect on Moscow. At the same time, oil-producing

Middle Eastern states were becoming wealthy and more independent. Russia helped the less fortunate Arab states i.e. Egypt and Syria which eventually enlarged the power of Arabs. The energy crisis of the 1970s drew the US deep into the Middle East to compete with the Soviet Union for the influence over the region. The oil boycott in the early 1970s made the Western powers to search for an alternative source of energy outside the region and they succeed as in 1980s because of the oil glut, at the same time the fall in oil prices was a major blow to the Soviet hard currency revenues (Golan 1990: 17-18).

The Soviet Union changed its foreign policy in the early 1970s and emphasized on economic factor more, firstly Soviet shifted its trade patterns to the states which could actually pay, and states in the Middle East were petrodollar-rich fits in this category. Second, for more favourable trade balances which included payment of Soviet arms in an immediate manner not in a long-term return with some low-interest loans, like before. The USSR started accepting the payment of arms in hard currency and for the reason arms became the leading Soviet export, contributing 20 percent to Soviet hard currency earnings. The Gulf States fit in this category that Soviets were looking for, so the Soviet Union had shifted their interest from Fertile Crescent (Egypt and Syria, except Turkey) to the Gulf area (Golan 1990: 19).

During the period of Khrushchev and even Brezhnev-Kosygin period Moscow's policy in early 1970s was shifted from the strategic-military policy towards the Middle East and given priority to economic interests in the region, while competing with the US monopoly and neutralizing the increasing influence of the Chinese in the region (Golan 1990: 26-27). In 1971, Soviet Union was engaged in various projects for the developing countries, 320 projects of industrial enterprises and out of which include 53 mechanical engineering and metal works plants, 47 light and food industry enterprises, 32 Iron and steel works and mills, and 30 electric power stations were in progress. Along with above mentioned projects, Soviet Union was also providing help for over 100 agriculture enterprises, 50 grain elevators, and for construction of over 120 schools and colleges dedicated mainly for technical training. By the end of 1973, the USSR was providing aid to the developing countries for more than 200 projects. On the other hand, it had also

trained 150 thousand skilled workers and technicians during the period of 1953-1970 (Imam 1991: 106).

From seventies onwards, economic policy of the USSR was taking a shift and the share of projects decreased, replaced by sophisticated machineries and equipment, including oil. Soviet Union, which usually traded with the states or state-controlled entities before, was now emphasizing on free trade with private companies, which were dealing in consumer and services industries. In terms of economic policy, Soviet Union was agreed to the stable prices (purchases and deliveries) on a long-term basis, usually for the period of five years (Imam 1991: 109, 112).

During the period of 1976-1986, the total economic aid provided by the Soviet Union to the developing countries can be presented in three periods of time. First, in the period of 1976-1980 Soviet Union provided economic aid of 30 billion (roubles), translated into US \$ 43 billion (standard currency exchange value in 1986), to the developing countries, and which actually accounted for 1.3 percent of total Soviet Gross National Product (GNP) in 1980. Second, during the period of 1981-1985, Soviet Union provided economic aid of 48 billion roubles (US \$ 62 billion) to these countries which was 1.5 percent of the total GNP in 1985. Lastly, the economic aid of the Soviet Union in 1986 was 15.1 billion roubles (US \$ 26.8 billion) to the developing countries including countries in West Asian region (Egypt, Syria etc.), accounted for 1.5 of total GNP in 1986 for the Soviets. These economic aids provided by the Soviets were meant for heavy projects of manufacturing industries and installations for generating energy for public sector. The aids were given to the developing countries in the form of loans and credits, which were supposed to be repaid with an interest of 2.5-3 percent within the time frame of 10-12 years through export of indigenous materials and that to without utilizing foreign exchange reserve of the concerned country (Imam 1991: 104). The Soviet Union had two basic objectives in the Middle East in post-World War II period, first, to ensure its presence in the south of its border and second, to weaken the western influence in the region close to its border i.e. West Asia. The policy pursued towards West Asia in the

post-World War II period was meant to form bilateral relations, to secure its economic, political as well as strategic-military interests in the region.

The data provided in the table: 2.1 helps to understand the status of economic relations between the Soviet Union and West Asia. In this data, the value to trade is considering rouble as the standard currency for exchange and not US dollar. Whereas, the table has not included all the countries in the region, but only for the specific countries concerned for this research (except Israel, whereas the data was not available). With the help of the data it can be explained that Iraq was one of the major economic partner for the Soviet Union during this period of time, followed by Iran. However, in case of Saudi Arabia the Soviet Union was experiencing the trade deficit, as the export of the USSR was nominal compare to the imports from Saudi Arabia. In 1985, there was a huge difference in the value of trade taking place between these two countries, where the total value of export to Saudi Arabia was only 15.1 million roubles compared to the value of imports from Saudi Arabia (378.8 million roubles). For Turkey, the value of export was constantly higher during this period of time, while comparing it with the imports for the Soviet Union. This was the same case for Iran and Syria, where the Soviet Union was domination the trade with greater value of export. Though, the value of export was continuously declining for the Soviet Union with Iran, and the value of export in 1982 (577.3 million roubles) had declined to only 57.8 million roubles in 1986.

In 1989, the Soviet Union debts in roubles to West Asian countries increased, for instance Iraq (3795.6 million), Iran (1 million), Syria (6742.6 million), Turkey (91.8 million), and Egypt (1711.3 million) in total (Imam 1991: 105).

TABLE: 2.1
SOVIET EXPORT-IMPORT TO AND FROM ASIAN COUNTRIES
(in mln. Roubles)

X= Export

M= Import

Countries	1982		1983		1984		1985		1986		1987	
	X	M	X	M	X	M	X	M	X	M	X	M
IRAQ	975.9	18.2	371.4	382.5	272.8	668.8	267.5	556.7	293.0	345.6	324.3	788.3
IRAN	577.3	188.7	559.2	377.3	241.7	242.4	203.8	144.1	57.8	18.2	110.4	49.5
Saudi Arabia	143	-	12.9	156.5	25.1	292	15.1	378.8	18.6	175.1	12.4	-
SYRIA	210.8	300.8	205.0	299.9	249.3	219.5	319.5	188.8	295.1	177.4	250.1	190.5
TURKEY	152.8	95.4	129.8	83.0	136.2	122.2	162.6	153.0	121.2	99.3	200.1	110.7

Source: Imam (1991), Soviet Foreign Policy 1917-1990, New Delhi: Sterling Publishers

SOVIET ERA: POLICY OF BILATERALISM/MULTILATERALISM

The international situation was not in favour when the new state was formed after the Bolsheviks revolution of 1917 (the Soviet Union), and it directly affected the policy of Moscow towards the West Asian region. The political instability in Europe, started from First World War and lasted till the end of Second World War, was a major factor that the Soviets were not able to concentrate on its southern borders sharing with the West Asian region i.e. Turkey and Iran. Though Russia shares a long history with this region dating back to the Tsarist period when Russia was using its offensive thrust against the Ottomans to gain access to the hot-water ways (Straits of Dardanelles, Turkish Straits) for the shipping, transports and economic interests. After the formation of a new state, the Soviet Union, more emphasis was given to the European politics and the West Asian region remained secondary in its foreign policy. The Soviet Union remained actively engaged in the two World Wars and it was after the wars when Moscow sought an active policy towards this region and especially after mid-1950s (Imam 1991: 99).

Iran just like Turkey shares a long history and geography with Russia, sharing a long border with the Soviet Union and in last 400 years fought numerous wars with Russia's invading troops- the reason why it was difficult for the Soviet leadership to extend its influence over Iran (and Turkey) compared to other states in the Middle East. In a same way countries in the Southern tier experienced the Western imperialism (Britain and

France), and for the same reason, Soviet Union had experienced the increase in its influence in this region by the end of World War II (Freedman 1991: 15).

In the nineteenth century, on three occasions Iran lost its territory to Russia, i.e. treaties of Gulistan (1813) and Turkomanchai in 1828, and the treaty of 1881 between Russian Minister (Ivan Alekseevich Zinov'ev) and Mirza Said Khan (Foreign Affairs Minister of Persia), further delineated the border from Caspian Sea to the village of Baba Dormez (Kazemzadeh 2013: 80).

During this period of time (1891-1914), consulate of Tsarist Russia operating in the Ottoman Empire was also controlling Jeddah, now major city of Saudi Arabia near Red Sea (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Russia). I. A. Zinov'ev, who was now ambassador in Constantinople, in a memorandum highlighted the measures taken by Russia to increase influence in Persia, which included the formation of Cossack Brigade, the establishment of plague quarantine (Khorasan), the corporation of the Russian bank, and the consulates opened in Bushehr and Bandar Abbas. The policy Russia pursued toward Iran gained considerable influence over Qajar dynasty and created an influence over Iranian Cossack Brigade which helped Russia to destroy Iranian newly proclaimed parliamentary system and constitution in 1908-09. In 1907, an agreement between Russia and Britain divided Iran into Russian (area of Azerbaijan (Baku), Gilan, Mazandaran, Gorgan and Khorasan including Isfahan and Yazd) and British sphere of influence (Kazemzadeh 2013: 485, 521-522, 539).

The Soviets invaded Iran and established its first experimental Soviet Republic of Gilan in 1921, with the help of local rebel Kuchik Khan and communists active in Baku (city of Azerbaijan). The Gilan republic collapsed with the retreat of the Red Army in 1922 but prior to that in 1921, Iran and the Soviet Union signed a treaty of friendship (Imam 1991: 77). Just like Iran, Turkey had also gone through the same situation and experienced the invasion of Russian imperialist troops for a long period of time, 400 years. The geographical location of Turkey has a great importance for the Soviet Union for the connectivity with rest of the World. It was not easy for the Soviets to establish a friendly

with Turkey after the experience it had with imperialist Russia. The Soviet Union was in search to take advantage of Turkey, to further secure the Soviet interests in the post-war international situation, especially under the leadership of Stalin. This interaction with Turkey was meant for the access to the Turkish Straits (Freedman 1991: 15).

The Soviet Union demanded the territory of Eastern Anatolian provinces of Kars and Ardahan, as it was taken from the Ottoman Empire by the 1920 treaty of Alexandropol, returned to Turkey, and later, the beginning of revolutionary friendship was confirmed with the signing of the 1921 treaties of friendship and cooperation between the Soviet Union and Turkey. During this period, Soviet Union also tried to establish and develop diplomatic relations with the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia but failed drastically to place their ambassadors (Imam 1991: 77, 116). Although, the Soviet Union was the first country to recognise Saudi Arabia when it became independent and the Kingdom of Nejd, Hejaz and other dominions also joined, later it was renamed as the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in 1932. On February 19, 1926, the USSR and the Kingdom of Hejaz, after certain notes exchange, established their diplomatic relations. In 1932, Prince Faisal (Foreign Minister of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia) also paid an official visit to the USSR. Unfortunately in 1938, due to some complication in domestic and international situation the diplomatic mission in Jeddah was closed and de-facto the diplomatic relation between these two countries also discontinued (MFA, Russia).

In 1941, Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi came into power with help of the British and the US and overthrew Mohammad Mosaddeq with a coup. Under Shah's regime, it was difficult for the Soviet Union to establish diplomatic relation with Iran, as Shah of Iran was pro-US and supporter of the West. In September 1945, the meeting took place in London between Foreign Ministers of Britain and the Soviet Union and proposed that Soviet troops pull out from Iran, in return British had to withdraw from the Egypt and Palestine. Stalin's intention became clear as the Soviet Union refused to remove its troops from northern Iran and demanded under the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact that Iran would remain under the Soviet influence. The Soviet-Iranian relationship began with the 1921 treaty meant for the Soviet military assistance if a third-country threat arises to Russia

through Iran or hostile activities within Iranian territory, it was later invoked in 1941. In 1941, the communist party (Tudeh) was also formed in Iran. The Soviet Union was apparently providing support and encouraged the minorities in Iran namely the Kurds and the Azeris (Golan 1990: 29-30).

In case of Turkey and the Soviet access to the hot water ways, the Turkish Straits were governed by the Montreux Convention and Turkey received full control over these water ways since 1936. The Soviet Union was satisfied with the situation, during close Soviet-Turkish relations, as under the convention there were limitations placed on non-Black Sea navies to use that passage. The Soviets demanded the bases and especially a naval base in the Sea of Marmora (which connected the two straits), at the Potsdam Conference. In March 1945, Soviet Union pressed its new demands directly with Turkey, as they decided not to renew the 1921 friendship treaty (which was renewed in 1925 for 20 years as the treaty of friendship and non-aggression). The regulation purposed by Moscow in August 1946 was meant for sharing joint defence of the waterways by Turkey and the Soviet Union (other Black Sea power). These conditions were accepted by the West after Potsdam conference, because of the reiterated condition of Moscow, and which allowed for the passage of Black Sea powers warships at all time with specific Black Sea powers consent (except UN was an acting authority) (Golan 1990: 32-33).

In the autumn of 1945, Soviet Red Army prevented the Iranian government to take control over Azerbaijani area, when an ethnic disturbance broke out. On 12 December 1945, the Autonomous Republic of Azerbaijan was created with the help of local communists and, the Autonomous Kurdish Republic of Azerbaijan was also established just a month later. These two entities were under the Soviet protection and denied the entry of Iranian government forces. Iran raised the issue in UN, America and Britain also protested against the withdrawal of Soviet troops. As the Iranian Prime Minister Qavam visited Moscow in February and March 1946, Stalin agreed to withdraw his troops from certain areas of Iran, later USSR withdrew all his troops by early May 1946. Both the governments agreed to a joint Soviet-Iranian oil company (51 percent Russian share

against 49 percent for Iran) and honour of Kurdish and Azerbaijani rights (Golan 1990: 30, Imam 1991: 93).

After the Soviet withdrawal from Azerbaijan area, Qavam brought three communists into the government, but in December 1946 he dismissed the Tudeh ministers and sent the army into the Azerbaijan area. Even the oil agreement was rejected by the new Iranian government in 1947, which arose the hostility and tension between these two. By the end of the 1940s, a numbers of border clashes took place, so on an economic boycott of Iran by the Soviet Union. In this event Britain and the US played an important role, i.e. British troops dispatched to Basra port in Iraq (South of Iran) and US ambassador George Allen played an influential role in the decision of Qavam (Golan 1990: 31).

Actions taken by Stalin regarding Turkey and countries in Northern Tier did not work out as expected and opposite to that Soviet Union lost these countries to the West. As usual, the US and Britain protested against the Soviet-proposed regulations and also backed Turkey for the rejection of both of these territorial demands by the Soviet Union. The Soviet Union deployed massing troops on the Turkish border, in already Soviet-dominated Bulgaria, for the backup of its demands (Freedman 1991: 15).

Through the Balfour Declaration, Britain made a confirmation of creating a Jewish National Home in Palestine, which further created the hostility among Communist towards Zionism. It was in the interest of the Soviet Union that the issue of Palestine was internationalized in the 1940s, which provided Moscow with some access to play a key-role in decision making. Soviets supported the idea of an International trusteeship and super-power participation in United Nations Special Committee on Palestine (UNSCOP) to settle the Jewish and Arab demands. The US simply wanted the Soviet Union to take its position on the issue so that it could enjoy the favour of both parties involved. Britain was worried about the Soviet Union taking the side of the Jewish as it was British agreement for the creation of Jewish state, which would enable Moscow to take control over the Middle East because the west was becoming weak in the region. The Soviets supporting Arab position against the Jews had little to gain because the Arab regimes had

pro-British orientation. On 14 May 1947, during a special session of the General Assembly, these short-term and long-term objectives were also mentioned by Andrei Gromyko (Soviet representative to the UN). Gromyko posed four possible solutions to the Palestine situation; a single Arab-Jewish state; partition into two independent states; an Arab state; a Jewish state. Rejecting the last two choices on the basis that it would deny the legitimate right of either, Gromyko expressed support for a bi-national or federated state of Arabs and Jews in Palestine (Golan 1990: 34).

Soviet policies towards Israel were parallel with the policies of America towards the Jewish state. These two superpowers were competing with each other to take the advantage of their internal 'Jewish factor' and to manipulate the same to take the greater advantage of their interests in the Middle East region while competing on the superpower level. This internal 'Jewish factor' gave the US to take a favourable attitude towards Israel and in the Soviet case, this internal factor was jeopardised with an unfavourable attitude towards the Jewish state, to take advantage of broader Soviet interests in the region. By the Soviet standards, the Jews in Palestine were progressive and not to be described as anti-Soviet. Nor the majority of the Zionist movement was sympathetic to communism and not even the economy of the Jewish community in Palestine was socialist or following a Marxist design. The Palestinian Jews were clearly having links with the Jews in America and the economic assistance they got, that the Soviet Union could not compete. When the UNSCOP submitted its recommendations then the UN General Assembly was bound to take action, while the British had cleared their intention to withdraw from Palestine. The Soviet changed their position (pro-Jewish) as they supported the partition, the Arabs were surprised and disappointed with their position at the end. The long-term interests of Arabs were denied by Soviets on a short-term Soviet objective attached to a Jewish victory. British was preferred over UN and the Americans for the supervision of the transition period, still, Moscow had some participation through UN, the US suggested for the quick partition implementation to deny the possibility of participation of Moscow (Golan 1990: 35-36).

At the same time, when Moscow was supporting the partition of Palestine its spokesperson was trying to console the Arabs too. During the 1948 war, the Soviets attributed to the Arabs hostility against British, and the partition was portrayed as to end the British exploitation of the Arabs. The Soviet Union assisted the defence of New Jewish State and on 18 May 1948, just three days after the declaration of the State, the Soviet Union accord Israel *de jure* recognition, while diplomatic recognition was already given by the US (*de facto*) and Guatemala (Imam 1991: 116). Soviet permitted around 200,000 Jews to emigrate from Eastern Europe and provided the facility for military training for Israelis. In early 1948, under the Soviet control, the arms and equipment (10,000 rifles and 450 machine guns) were also supplied by East European countries, especially by Czechoslovakia with the Soviet permission. Meanwhile because of its defence pact, the British were also arming Iraq, Egypt and Trans-Jordan. In December 1948, Romania started creating obstacles in Jewish emigration and Soviets called it a matter of another state, the Jews emigration was taking place via Eastern Europe and not directly from the Soviet Union (Golan 1990: 37). The defeat of Arabs in the first Arab-Israeli war also created a pressure on the West (French and British) to gradually withdraw from the West Asian region (Imam 1991: 117).

The visit of Golda Meier, the first official envoy of Israel, and appearance at Moscow synagogue in September 1948 made the Jewish crowd enthusiastic and expressing their affinities with Israel. This resurgence of Jewish nationalism was an internal threat for the Soviets, three million highly educated Soviet Jewish Community now had an attraction of emigration to a new state (Israel). On 21 September 1948, the article written by Ilya Ehrenburg (a Soviet Jewish writer), published in *Pravda* did a mild attack on Zionism and Moscow signalled the reconsideration of its pro-Israeli policies (Golan 1990: 40). The USSR restricted the interaction between Israeli diplomats and Soviet Jews, commercial relation came to a halt, and cultural relation became minimal. The Soviet Union was expecting that the progressive nature of the *Yishuv* would enable Marxist development in Israel but in March 1949, the Soviet felt disappointed when the only pro-Soviet (MAPAM) Israeli party was excluded from Israel's first elected coalition (Golan 1990: 38).

Another disappointment was Israel turning towards the West and granting of a \$100 million loan from America. Earlier, Israel had requested the Soviet Union for the same amount of loan, which was turned down. The pro-American orientation of Israel was not clear until 1950 (the Korean War) when Israel responded to the American call for the support of the United Nations. In 1949, the USSR started showing its interest in anti-imperialist groups in the Arab world just like before and meanwhile it abandoned Israel. Until Stalin's death no significant change took place in policy towards Arab, it became cooler towards Israel and nor it supported the Arabs on various Arab-Israeli disputes. The Soviets were becoming neutral, less involved and abstaining from taking a position in the matters related to the Arab-Israeli conflict. There was supposedly three main reasons behind this shift in the Soviet policy; first, Arab states were still pro-British; second, Moscow was still weak to compete with the West; third, Zhdanovism and the two camp theory of the world could have created an obstacle to pursuing its policies towards the Arab world (Golan 1990: 39, 41).

The US was alarmed with the situation in Turkey and civil war in Greece and announced the Truman Doctrine to contain Soviet expansionism and to secure the regimes in Turkey and Greece. In September 1946, the US cleared the intention to maintain a permanent naval base in the Mediterranean. Turkey sought protection from the West because of the Soviet action and requested the membership of NATO which was accepted in 1952. The Soviet Union protested and even warned that they could not tolerate the presence of the West and the US on its border, as the US created military bases in Turkey (Golan 1990: 33). Even if Egypt is not included in this thesis but still during Soviet period Egypt was not just the first but also a strong ally for the Soviet Union in West Asia, established friendly relationship and cooperation. After considering the importance of Egypt in Soviet policy towards West Asia, the major elements of cooperation have been highlighted. In 1947, Egypt was demanding to abrogate the Anglo-Egyptian Treaty of 1926, and meanwhile, the anti-British sentiments were also growing in that country. In early 1950s, monarchy in Egypt was overthrown by Gamal Abdul Nasser (a young army officer), which also marked the beginning of Arab nationalism (Imam 1991: 117).

On April 17, 1950, the Soviet Union informed the secretary general that Moscow was withdrawing support from the internationalization of Jerusalem, as it had voted for General Assembly's resolution of December 9, 1949, for the same. On September 1, 1951, Moscow casted its vote in favour of Security Council resolution which was meant to force Egypt for opening the Suez Canal to Israeli shipping, this action of the Soviet Union was somehow driven by the fear that it might encourage Turkey to temper with Montreux Convention. Moscow also joined in with others Security Council members and calling it a violation of Constantinople Convention, governing navigation in Suez Canal, blocking the passage of Israeli shipping. On the other hand, in 1952, the Soviet Union abstained on a resolution calling for direct negotiation between Israel and the Arab countries and voted against the resolution in General Assembly to support the Arab States.

On February 9, 1953, the bombing over Soviet legation in Tel Aviv injured the members of its staff, even though Israeli government denounced the action and extended apologies but the Soviet Union broke off its diplomatic relations with Israel just after two days of the incident. The diplomatic ties were resumed with Israel on July 21, 1953, after the death of Stalin (March 5, 1953), with that Israel also committed itself not to join any anti-Soviet pact, treaty of arrangement. In December 1953, an oil-for-citrus barter trade agreement with the Soviet Union for oil supply, was so important to Israel, after the blockade of Suez Canal and Tiran Straits and as Israel was cut off from the Persian Gulf oil fields and dependent on the supply of oil from the US. In June 1954, the Israeli legation in Moscow and the Soviet legation in Tel Aviv were raised to embassy level and instead of Tel Aviv, the Soviet ambassador presented its credentials in Jerusalem, the capital. After Netherlands and Chile, the Soviet Union became the third country doing so, after the internationalization of the Jerusalem by the United Nations resolution.

The Soviet Union had willingness to restore good relation with Israel without compromising the relation with Arab countries, for the same reason it favoured Arab states over Israel in an Arab-Israeli dispute like Nahalin incident, the Lake Huleh

conflict, and 1952 resolution on a free passage in the Suez Canal. The first Eisenhower administration replaced the 'containment policy' with New Look or massive retaliation policy, generally associated with the name of John Foster Dulles (Secretary of State). This New Look policy was not limited to the use of a conventional weapon to meet the communist aggression but massive retaliation, and it also permitted to launch the vast nuclear and thermonuclear armaments program which provided the US with a distinct superiority over Moscow by 1953, including the second-strike capacity of America. The US created a ring of airbases around the Soviet perimeter, which could be used by American bombers to attack any part of the Soviet Union. To find the alliances for the airbases in the area, Dulles had toured the area in early 1953 and reported that the "Northern Tier" countries seemed to be responsive i.e. Turkey, Iraq, Iran. At the same time, when the British and French were withdrawing from the region, US immediately began to gradually replace the West from the West Asian region, by creating its influence over Israel and other countries as well (Imam 1991: 117).

There was a time when the Soviet policy towards West Asia remained inactive (1946-1954) and picked up pace after in mid-1950s. It considerably developed through the end of 1960s and continued this upward trend during seventies and eighties, and about fifty five countries were recipient of Soviet aid and arms supply throughout the world (Imam 1991: 103). The Baghdad Pact under the New Look policy was far more worrisome for the Soviet Union than the containment policy, which was defensive, because of its defensive and as well as offensive nature. In such conditions, Israel was the only asset left for the Soviet Union, vigorous opposition to the pact and the commitment not to join any anti-Soviet bloc. Israel was left out of the Allied Middle Command scheme, as Egypt took priority. It was clear that its Arab opponents were getting large quantities of military hardware from the West for their participation in the Western-sponsored defence pact.

The Baghdad Pact in 1955 was signed between Iran, Iraq, Turkey and Pakistan, which was meant to be an anti-Soviet alliance, because of this pact Iraq remained out of Moscow's approach till 1958. Meanwhile, Israel was looking for a guarantee of security from the West during the conflict with the Arabs, the Soviet Union found a new

candidate in the region which could oppose the Baghdad pact on a local level. In mid-1954, Egypt revealed itself as an opponent to the pact and the Western alliance project. The shift in Soviet policies towards the Middle East also brought a new phase to the Soviet Union and Israel relations. Premier Bulganin sent two notes to Israel, in which the very existence of Israel was questioned. Later, the barter trade agreement was also cancelled and the Soviet ambassador was summoned back to Moscow, where he stayed back for five months.

In February 1955, Khrushchev ousted Malenkov and came to power with a new worldview (three main zones or bloc) different from the Stalin two camp view of the World. The three main bloc of the World according to Khrushchev were the socialist bloc, the capitalist bloc and the third world. He hoped to spread the communism into the Third World through political support along with economic and military aid. The Soviet Union began to replace the Egyptian weapons with more and better weapons as it had lost in the war. The Soviet Union was passing the statement time to time to remind that Moscow still recognizes Israel's right to exist, and meanwhile portraying itself as Arabs saviour and faithful ally.

On August 16, 1955, Nasser stated in an interview with *Al-Jarida*, Lebanese paper, that “nothing prevents us from strengthening our economic ties with Russia even if we arrest the communist at home and put them on trial.” Nasser declared the communist party illegal and arrested its leaders in Egypt. Nasser considered the communism as a threat to his dictatorship. On several occasions, Khrushchev complained about the treatment of communist in Egypt but Nasser condemned that by calling it an interference into ‘internal affairs’ (Freedman 1991: 18).

The Soviet Union made an arms deal with Egypt after seeing an opportunity to fight against the Baghdad Pact. The Soviet diplomats were almost apologetic to Israel for the implication when the deal was concluded with Egypt. The continuous assurance was given to Israel that it has nothing to do with Arab-Israelis conflict but Egypt gained the military advantage over Israel. After the arms deal with Egypt, there was widespread

reports and speculations that the Soviet Union might supply arms to Israel, too. On April 17, 1956, the Soviet Union issued a statement that the Palestine question should be resolved through “mutually acceptable basis.” It was after the Suez Canal crisis that the Soviet Union started supplying more and more arms to the Arab States as a defence against the Israeli aggressiveness. During the Suez Canal crisis, the open support of the Soviet Union to the Arabs eventually made it famous in the Arab world and helped Egypt to gain full control over Suez Canal (Imam 1991: 117, Freedman 1991: 16-17).

The Sinai campaign of 1956 made it clear to the Soviets about the danger of the Soviet weaponry is going to be used by the Middle Eastern countries. Israel’s endorsement of the Eisenhower Doctrine in May 1957, Franco-Israeli alliance, and Israeli military cooperation with West Germany made it clear about Israeli pro-West stance (Imam 1991: 117). During Syrian crisis of 1957, Israel stood neutral when Turkey, Iraq and Jordanian troops massed to Syrian frontiers and the Sixth Fleet was deputed near the Syrian coast. In 1957, Syria seemed to become a communist state in the Southern Tier of the Middle East, as the Syrian communist party had gained more power in Syria after the dictatorship of the Shishakli was overthrown in 1954. The Syrian government was becoming pro-Russian and in 1957, the great deal of economic and military aid was also sent to Syria by the Soviets. Yet, as Syria was on the brink of “going communist” the event of the United Arab Republic took place and just like Nasser, Syrian government also banned the communist party in Syria, which brought a shock and disappointment for the Soviets. This was marked as a victory of Arab nationalism and defeat of Arab communism or to some extent for the USSR (Freedman 1991: 17-18). In 1957, Khrushchev threatened to go for a war against Turkey for Turkish intention to invade Syria. The number of incidents took place in world politics during détente made these two countries to get closer, Cuban missile crisis of October 1962 and Cyprus crisis and role played by the Soviets enabled the USSR to move closer with Turkey (Freedman 1991: 23).

Again in 1958, the crisis in Lebanon and Iraq, Israel’s contribution was limited to allowing the overflights of the US and British planes on their way to Jordan. The Egyptian request for Czech arms was denied but Czechoslovakia did sell 11\$ million

worth of arms consignment to Syria, which eventually fell into hands of the Israelis en route to Syria and no further arms deal took place with Arabs. The transformation in the Soviet Union military and strategic interests in the Middle East region was the result of continued expansion of the US military and technology advancement in 1960s-70s, from the Mediterranean Sea to the Indian Ocean. After the deployment of Polaris and Poseidon submarines by the US in the Mediterranean Sea and the Indian Ocean, the role of Egypt was also transformed for the Soviet Union into a strategic-military partner. Egypt was the strategic and military ally of the Soviet Union in the Middle East region, for multifaceted support facilities for Mediterranean Squadron from the Red Sea to Indian Ocean moorings, the sole purpose of this was to gather intelligence and other purposes (Golan 1990: 15).

In July 1958, the pro-Western regime of Nuri Said was overthrown in Iraq and Abd-al Qasim emerged as a leader of the new regime. Nasser had high hopes that the Arab nationalists who backed Qasim for bringing him to power would also convince him to join the Egyptian-dominated United Arab Republic. Soon, it became clear that Qasim as an independent Arab nationalist would fight against Nasser's followers in Iraq with the help of the Iraqi communist party.

The relation between Israel and the Soviet Union were declined further when Jordan water dispute supported by Moscow and vetoed a resolution in Security Council in favour of the Arabs. After Second World War, the Soviet Union tried so hard to create its "security belt" with the help of Turkey and Iran but opposite to that these countries fell into the powerful embrace of America. These countries were always suspected and fear Russian expansionism, but Nasser provided an opportunity to establish itself in the Middle East heartland and later it can be utilized for neutralization of the Northern Tier.

By 1959, the Soviet Union had established itself in Iraq, Syria and in Egypt, riding on the wave of Arab nationalism was quite powerful to engulf the Arab east. The communist quickly created a stronghold in the regime established by General Kassem in Iraq. The importance of the Northern Tier countries began to lose their strategic importance for

both superpowers as they engaged themselves in intercontinental missiles and development of missile-carrying submarines. Turkey and Iran began to show greater response to the Soviet offers of friendship, aid and trade, it provided the Soviet government with a hope of improving its position in the Northern Tier without compromising with its stronghold on the heartland. The Soviet Union's breakthrough into the Middle East heartland was realized as an end itself, and Khrushchev withdrew from the offer, made after 1958 Iraqi revolution, that he would discuss the Middle East with big Western powers.

The Soviet leaders provided Iraq large amounts of economic and military aids, just like they did for Syria and Egypt earlier. On March 30, 1959, the Soviet stated in *Pravda*:

“It has lately become apparent that some public figures in the Near East mean by Arab nationalism the immediate and mechanical unification of all Arab states by one of them, regardless of whether they want it or not. All who do not agree with this are denounced as Zionists, communists and enemies of the Arab people.” (Freedman 1991: 19).

Again, in the 1960s the relationship began to cool, because of Qasim's hostility against Iraqi communist party, Kurdish issue and Moscow's improving relation with Egypt. By 1961, the last positions of power also lost by the communists in Qasim's regime. Soviets had been continuously supporting the Kurdish demand for the autonomous region made it difficult for both the countries to enjoy close friendly relation. The Soviet support to Qasim regime in Iraq brought an open clash with Nasser. Qasim's war against the Kurds raised a question of reliability on these allies for the Soviets. The Soviets were implicitly compromised on the issue of repression of opposition at home by Iraqi chief. In 1963, Ba'athists overthrew Qasim and broke off the relationship with the Soviet Union, as Qasim's successor was not generous toward the Iraqi communist party. In May 1961, Khrushchev clashed with Egyptian leaders when the Egyptian parliamentary delegation visited Moscow, headed by Anwar Sadat (Chairman of the United Arab Republic's National Assembly). Khrushchev told the Egyptian leaders for opposing communism, “If

you want socialism, you should not oppose communism,” “Arab nationalism is not the zenith of happiness,” and “Life itself will impose communism.” After this event Soviet-Egyptian relation was cooled off for a period of time (Freedman 1991: 19).

As the Soviet Union established itself as a Middle Eastern power with several Arab states, it started facing the same problem like the US and British were facing, like inter-Arab and intra-Arab politics. In case of Syria, first, it supported the merger with Egypt and later opposed it, then recognised and helped the secessionist regime which was overthrown by Ba’athists and Arab nationalists. Meanwhile, the US was sitting back and taking advantage of Soviet troubles in the Middle East in much a same way as the Soviets were profited from the US difficulties. In 1962, Shah of Iran made an announcement that on Iranian territory no foreign missile would be permitted. After a year in 1963, Leonid Brezhnev made a visit to Iran and sanctioned \$38.9 million loans in the same year (Freedman 1991: 23).

Although there was no diplomatic relation between Russia and Iran, there still were economic relations between industrial and political elites of Russia and Iran. Russian industries were cooperating with Iran, in the field of military weapons and armaments, nuclear research and supply of uranium and other technologies. In the beginning, the Russian government was apprehensive about Iran, because it had to maintain good relation with the US and the West. Later, Russia realized that increasing close relations with the West or the US was not going to help Russia because the US and its allies never wanted Russia to pose any threat to their supremacy in the region (Talukdar 2014). The US and the West always wanted Russia to accept their supremacy, which was against the sovereign policy of Russia, as it had enjoyed in the past and never wanted to compromise with that. While it was believed by the school of thought “offensive-successful” that the Soviet Union is using offensive instruments to keep the US and the West away from the region, and its rich oil resources and geopolitically important location in global politics. At the same time, opposite to the recent school of thought “defensive-unsuccessful” argues that the defensive policy of the Soviet Union pursued towards the Middle East remained unsuccessful and curtail the Soviet influence in the region. Lastly the school of

thought “offensive-unsuccessful school” propounds that essentially the orientation of Moscow’s policy is offensive towards West Asia and tries to snatch any opportunity which could weaken the position of the West in the region, due to presence of neutral local actors and their opposition to the Soviet influence. That is the reason Moscow tries to squeeze any opportunity to mediate in peace-making process, and cannot be fully trusted for the same (Freedman 1991: 2).

In April 1964, Khrushchev visited Egypt and examined the situation himself. This visit was considered as a *rapprochement* between Egypt and the USSR. After the visit, Egypt was meant to receive \$227 million as a loan and Nasser was made a “hero” of the Soviet Union, second Arab leader after Ben-Bella of Algeria (Freedman 1991: 20).

In order to consolidate its position in the conflict-ridden the Middle East, the Soviet Union utilized the impression of Israel as an immediate threat to augment solidarity within the Arab nations. The Soviet Union was struggling with the problems of “Arab cold war”, and continued to treat Israel in an already established pattern of ‘qualified hostility’. In early 1964, it gained some relief from inter-Arab conflicts as the all-Arab summit was called by Nasser to consider the Jordan River’s water diversion by Israel, for irrigation projects. This was the opportunity when Moscow backed the Arabs water claim and clearly denied the legitimacy of Israel’s existence. The Arabs again began to fight among themselves and the net outcome of the ‘summitry’ was that Syria had to engage in a small war with Israel, as a contribution to Arab counter-diversion project with the strategy of guerrilla.

In February 1965, a coup took place in Syria and brought a “left Ba'athist” government in power, which was more aggressive than its predecessor against Israel, to launch guerrilla operations. The Soviets were pleased with this new government as it had one communist minister. In May 1966, Premier Kosygin himself visited Cairo to reunite the Egyptian and Syrian regimes and in November a mutual defence treaty was signed while the leadership was given to Egypt.

According to the Soviets, the Syrian regime was ‘progressive’ since it had a communist minister but the US hate the progressive regimes and using Israel as a tool to turn down the same in Syria, like Indonesia, Ghana and Greece. On May 13, 1967, Egypt was informed that Israel was about to invade Syria and Egypt as a leader of the “alliance of progressive Arab states” should do some military demonstration to deter Israel. This military demonstration was converted into war and Egypt got crushing defeat along with Syria and Jordan as well. Heavy arms shipments to Egypt and Syria from the Soviets took place not just in the Six-Day War in 1967 but later in the Yom Kippur War in 1973 too, while Moscow was clearly in danger for involvement in each war (Freedman 1991: 34, 50-51). The Soviets economic aid and supply of arms and equipment continue to serve the countries in the region i.e. Iraq, Syria, and Egypt (frontline Arab states in war with Israel), until 1976 (Imam 1991: 101, 117-118).

In 1971, Egypt and the Soviet Union signed a treaty of friendship and cooperation, and it was for the first time after 1945 that the Soviet Union had signed a treaty with a developing country (Imam 1991: 118). The Soviet Union had supported Egypt against Israel with massive military assistance and for reconstruction of Egyptian army after the defeats in wars, including the construction of Aswan Dam. In 1972, as the Egypt expelled the Soviet advisors from its territory, the relationship between these two countries were also cooled off until the time USSR was dissolved (Magen 2013: 41).

In 1972, after the expulsion of a Soviet military advisor from the Egypt and in late seventies also turned hostile towards Moscow. The Soviet Union sought a strategic alternative in Syria, mainly for the port and air-base access. The USSR was also involved in the negotiations and the settlements of the conflicts (Arab-Israeli wars) through diplomatic efforts within and outside of the United Nations (Golan 1990: 13, Imam 1991: 102, 118). American Historian Walter Laqueur also quoted about Soviet and Syria relationship “as a field of large-scale Soviet investments and a political showcase for the advantage of Soviet help, Syria was a somewhat more promising choice than Egypt”. After Egypt broke up its alliance with the Soviet Union and joined the US in the 1970s, Moscow started supporting Syria like never before. Soviet interest in a relationship with

Israel, while Gorbachev's perestroika made a dramatic change in the 1980s and Soviet arms supply to Syria started to decline, till the collapse of Soviet Union the relationship between these two states were almost evaporated (Kreutz 2010: 7).

There was sufficient amount of suspicion between the Soviet Union and Iran which restricted these two to have a close relationship in the beginning because of Iran's Islamic Revolution which made it clear that Iran is anti-West and against the US and its allies. It was most expected that Khomeini's Islamic fundamentalism could have a major impact on Soviet Muslims (Azerbaijan and Soviet Central Asia Muslims). The Soviet Union always had a suspicion that Iran would try to influence the Chechen Muslims against the Soviets, which could have been troublesome for the situation in the area. These assumptions made the Soviet Union maintain its distance from Iran and not to get involved in a bigger domestic problem (Freedman 1991: 9). Later on, it became clear to the Soviets that Iranian foreign policy was neutral from radical Islamism and pursue a secular foreign policy. For Example, Iran was not trying to influence Chechen Muslims rebels against the Soviets, and in Chechen war, Iran played a neutral role and did not interfere in the matter and called it a domestic problem of the Soviet Union.

The longstanding relationship between the Soviet Union and Syria became stronger after Soviets lost Egypt to the West; their main ally in the region and centre of Middle East policy of Moscow, in 1976 (Gaub and Popescu 2013: 1). The Arab-Israeli conflict was largely exploited by the USSR and establishing close ties with so called enemies of Israel, led to distancing from each other, though they both had enjoyed diplomatic relations from 1967 until 1988.

The ups and downs that came in relationship of the Soviet Union and Iraq, only for the period of 1972-75 Iraq was dependent on Moscow for certain reasons, the nationalization of the Iraqi oil industry, Arab-Israeli war of the October 1973, war of Kurdistan in March 1974, and Iran's massive militarization under Shah, all these facts together combined for Iraq and dependency on Soviet Union. They signed a Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation with Moscow in 1972, when Iraq was looking for an increase in arms

purchase. The Soviet Union was supporting Iraq with supply of heavy military armaments during Iran-Iraq war, under the obligation of the treaty. During the Yom Kippur War of 1973, although the Arabs gained advantage in the beginning but were not able to utilize their advantages due to massive air-lift of arms and support of the US for Israel. After the defeat in war, Arab also realized that without the US support they will not be able to gain any advantage over Israel, first instance was Egypt, when it unilaterally abrogated the treaty (treaty of friendship and cooperation, 1971) with the Soviet Union and moved closer to the US in 1976. It was great loss for the Soviet Union and its policies towards this region and for the same reason it started to give more attention on other smaller states in the region like Iraq, and Syria (Imam 1991: 118). The invasion of Afghanistan made Arab World isolate itself from the USSR and the policy pursued under Gorbachev's leadership also contributed for the same. The relationship between Moscow and Iraq was primarily based on commercial interests rather than strategic, Iraq continued to get military armaments from the Soviet Union and the US was continuously targeting Iraq for the same reason (Fukuyama 1980: 35, 46).

In the aftermath of Afghanistan invasion, where Soviet forces were essentially fighting against the Islamic resistance forces, Ayatollah Khomeini himself noted:

“We are fighting against international communism to the same degree that we are fighting against the Western world devourers led by America, Israel and Zionism. My dear friends, you should know that the danger from the communist powers is not less than America.... Once again I strongly condemn the dastardly occupation of Afghanistan by the plunderers and occupiers of the aggressive East. I hope that the Muslim and noble people of Afghanistan will as soon as possible achieve true victory and independence and be released from the grip of those so-called supporters of the working class”. (Freedman 1991)

The Soviet military invasion of Afghanistan in December 1979 was a response to the growing regional conflict but it also paralyzed the Soviet Union and its capacity to help its regional ally against the western sponsored aggression. Soviet Union was unable to

help Iraq (as it could have), during the Iran-Iraq war because it was already engaged in Afghanistan (Imam 1991: 102).

After almost five decades, when the diplomatic relations were discontinued between the USSR and Saudi Arabia, marked a new beginning with initiative taken by Riyadh in early 1980s. In December 1982, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia initiated for a channel of communication with Moscow via London, which was meant to convey messages (including top level) to provide information related to international and regional problems, and primarily, for the settlement of Arab-Israeli conflict (MFA, Russia).

Unlike Iran and Syria, Saudi Arabia was accepted as a sworn enemy of the USSR in the West Asia because of its strong inclination towards the US. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia believed to be posing a direct threat to economic, internal and as well as to regional security interests of the Soviet Union (now Russia). Saudi Arabia is also suspected by the Soviets for promoting Wahhabism in the Arab world. Russia is trying to improve relationships with Saudi Arabia even after its pro-West orientation, suspicion of aiding Afghan Mujahideen during Afghanistan invasion of the Soviets and assisting the Chechen rebels as well in the 1990s. Their relation remained cooled off most of the time during Cold War period (Katz 2010: 12).

Russia clearly understands the importance of a country, which has holiest Muslim sites in its territory, Saudi Arabia. A country with rich natural resources and possesses the capacity to threaten the interests of so-called superpowers in the Middle East region, portray itself as Sunni Islamic leader of the Arab nations. Russia cannot deny Saudi Arabia in its foreign policy toward the Middle East, as Russia itself having 20 percent Muslims in its total population. The Hajj and visiting Mecca is obligatory for all able Muslims. Saudi Arabia is also a competitor to Russia in the energy market and close ally of the US in the region, which makes it more difficult for Russia to establish close ties. The Soviet Union continuous efforts to establish diplomatic relation with Saudi Arabia were proved to be unsuccessful (Freedman 1991; Trenin 2010; Katz 2010).

In late 1980s, with the dissolution of USSR, reapproachment was made to establish friendly relation between these two, while leaving behind the dark memories of the past. For Russian perception, Israel has been developed with the Western characteristics and having greater international influence and potential. This influence of Israel is positive for Russia in terms of Russian interests in the Middle East and the West but not actually as Israel is being allied to the US. Immigrants from Russia and former Soviet nations (i.e. 1.25 million) influence the policy making of Russia towards Israel, for instance these immigrants still embrace the Russian culture and language.

MIKHAIL GORBACHEV AND THE UNION OF SOVIET SOCIALIST REPUBLICS

Soviet statesman, Mikhail Gorbachev had served as General Secretary of the communist party of Soviet Union from 1985-1991 before becoming the eighth president of the state in 1988. Soviet Union was facing internal economic crisis and threats to the security interests, Gorbachev realized the need of reducing the confrontation with Western capitalist powers to lower the heavy defence expenditures of the Union. This imperative of relieving the pressure on the Soviet economy was the foundation of the New Thinking policy which was characterized by a wide range of reforms on the levels of foreign policy and internal restructuring of the economy.

New Thinking was meant to re-examine the actions, methods, and principles of leadership on the scientific basis. Gorbachev had given priority to the interests of all humanity over individuals, and even national interests of the USSR (Gorbachev 2000: 59). The Soviet approach to foreign policy was also changed dramatically with the introduction of the New Thinking, approach to foreign policy was also changed, and more importance was given to 'global interdependence and mutuality of security'. The USSR under Gorbachev leadership stressed more on finding the peaceful solution of conflicts, through negotiation or mediation without any external intervention, for greater international security. The legitimate interests of each nation should be respected by all the international actors including USSR (Smolansky 1988: 1; Holloway 1989: 71).

In the beginning, these major changes in Soviet foreign policy aroused suspicion in the West and US, but later appreciated widely. The Soviet initiative for international peace and mutual cooperation was a historical step to ease the decade's long tensions between the two camps of the international politics (Holloway 1989: 69). The dissolution of the USSR and emergence of the Russian Federation as a successor state also marked the end of Cold War and confrontation between two different ideological camps.

THE NEW THINKING AND ITS IMPACT ON FOREIGN POLICY

Mikhail Gorbachev's 'New Thinking' was disparate from the Marxist-Leninist ideology of the international politics and emphasized on shared moral and ethical principles to find solution of the international conflicts. The Stalinism was radically rejected by the New Thinking, and Gorbachev initiated for the de-Stalinization of the Soviet society. Gorbachev had also challenged and denied the monopoly of the Communist Party over truth in the Soviet Union (Allison 1988: 20). He emphasized upon using 'soft power' (political, economic, media etc.) as a tool to find the solution of international conflicts, which included negotiation and mediation as well (Gorbachev 2000: 191, 194). The New Thinking and its appeasement policy towards the West made the Soviet to lose its control over Eastern Europe and ultimately to the end of Cold War.

The New Thinking was not predefined and constantly evolved over the period of time. First, preference was given to end the Cold War, and milieu of mistrust, hostilities and confrontation through the political and theoretical analysis of changes in global politics. Second, on December 7, 1988, in his speech at UN (General Assembly), importance was given to the co-development of all nations, universal interests of humanity, and principles of a new world order. Lastly, it acknowledged that a new form of human civilization has emerged and which believes in disarmament and increased interdependence between the nations (Holloway 1989: 66; Gorbachev 2000 254; Kumar 2018: 213).

The USSR was trying to establish friendly relations with the West, and the prominent developing countries in the Third World (Smolansky 1988: 1). The reforms introduced by him for the Soviet foreign policy were quite different from Khrushchev, and Brezhnev

eras because he was bringing in new people (i.e. Eduard Shevardnadze as foreign minister) in the office along with their innovative ideas and concepts (Checkel 1993: 281). Gorbachev was not just supporting but encouraged the idea that the disputed questions and conflicts should be resolved through political means and that to without any external interference except for the mediation. He also advocated for the right of self-determination and freedom for every country in international politics to decide their own socioeconomic conditions (Gorbachev 2000: 182).

He believed that Perestroika was an urgent necessity to cope up with the stagnation and decline of the Soviet economy and technological development. Gorbachev also called it a revolution and that it will change the ideology and moral values of the people in the Soviet Union. In 1986, the 'restructuration' of the society and 'acceleration' of the Soviet economy were clearly dominating the Soviet politics. At the same time (April 1986), the Chernobyl disaster was a huge setback for the nuclear industries of the Soviet Union and raised a question on its reliability. The nuclear disaster shook the country and for the same reason Gorbachev took the initiative for arms control between the two superpowers. Later that year in October 1986, the Reykjavik summit came as a success when it almost convinced the both superpowers (the US and the Soviet Union) for arms control (Wallace et. al. 1996: 458). Under the leadership of Gorbachev, the Soviet foreign policy was based on a new economic, political, scientific, technical, social and international factors. The nuclear disaster, ecological threat, and the problems of developing countries in the Third World were also some major concerns for the Soviet foreign policy. The creation of a universal system of global security, through combine political, military, economic, and humanitarian crisis was also an initiative of the Soviet Union (Gorbachev 2000: 192).

Under the New Thinking of Gorbachev, war as a mean to achieve political, economic, ideological and any other goals, was denied. The proper treatment of 'prisoners of war', non-proliferation of nuclear and conventional weapons, and ban on the use of chemical weapons was supported by Gorbachev (Gorbachev 2000: 174). Ironically, at this period of time WMD (weapons of mass destruction) was supposed to be a token of security for

every nation against external aggression and to create and maintain their hegemony in international politics.

Gorbachev supported the idea of interdependence of the nations and their common interests, and also manifested respect for diversity among countries. Due to the New Thinking, it was believed that the USSR is no longer threatened by the outside world and can freely focus on its domestic problems. This thinking turned out to be beneficial for the Soviet Union, the defense share in the budget was reduced and made some efforts to attract technological and financial assistance from outside world and especially from the West. These assistance from the West was necessary in order to continue with *Perestroika* (Smolansky 1988: 2).

Hiroshima and Nagasaki are clear example of the disaster caused by the use of nuclear weapons, which can put all human life on earth on the verge of extinction. “*The day of judgement, instead of being a Biblical allegory, could become a reality, a tragedy made by human hands*” (Gorbachev 2000: 190; Mandel 1989). Historically, warfare was always believed and used as a rational instrument to achieve ones political means but that can never justify the war with nuclear or conventional weapons, which overall can affect the whole international community, does not matter even if a country remains neutral. The use of strength has always failed to bring peace and stability to a country, and there is not even a single example since World War II where this policy might have succeeded. At the end, even the closest allies (i.e. Alexander Yakovlev and Eduard Shevardnadze) of Gorbachev turned against him and also criticized the New Thinking because it failed drastically to produce the desired results for the Soviet Union (Fein 1991).

GORBACHEV'S FOREIGN POLICY AND WEST ASIA

In 1985, for the first time the Afghan war issue was raised in Politburo. It also declared in 1986 that the Soviet Union will end war in Afghanistan and withdraw its troops by February 15, 1989. The idea of regional security in Asia propounded by Gorbachev has similarities with the one he proposed for Europe ‘Common European Home’. During the period of 1986-1989, USSR also initiated a system of security and cooperation in the

Asian Pacific region. During Gorbachev period, the USSR settled its disputes and normalized its relations with Japan, China, and South Korea (Gorbachev 2000: 197-198). In 1988, Afghanistan and Pakistan acted as the guarantors and signed an accord with the US and the USSR, for the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan (Kumar 2018: 214). In 1990, Moscow along with Washington condemned the Iraqi aggression against Kuwait and supported UN resolution, meant to restore the sovereignty of Kuwait. The Soviet Union had hardly participated in military and diplomatic actions against Saddam Hussein regime but openly condemned his act of aggression, during Kuwait crisis (Wallace et. al. 1996, 460).

Under Gorbachev leadership, the Soviet policy was dedicated to find the solutions of conflicts in West Asia i.e. the Arab-Israeli conflict, and Iran-Iraq war. Gorbachev also made a request to the US to recognize the USSR as 'political equal' in West Asia, which was meant for equal participation in efforts to resolve regional conflicts. The Soviet demand for 'political equal' in West Asia was turned down by the Reagan administration (Smolansky 1988: 7). In 1991, the Soviet Union and the US chaired the Madrid conference together, to find the solution of the Middle East problem. The US and USSR relation became tense during the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, as the US was in support to use of force while USSR was in favour of peaceful political solution (through diplomatic means) of the problem (Gorbachev 2000: 204).

During the Soviet period, the economy was sustaining huge burden of economic and military assistance to its friendly states all over the world. Arms race with the US and the Western European countries has made the condition worst for the Soviets to manage their economy at. This was the time when countries allied to the Soviet Union were not able to pay their debt for the supply of military weapons. Financial economic crisis an condition at home made the Soviet leadership to change their policies and withdraw from the region in West Asia and other part of the world. Gorbachev failure to bring change into economy of the Soviet Union was the reason that the Soviet Union collapsed.

DISSOLUTION OF THE UNION OF SOVIET SOCIALIST REPUBLICS (USSR)

Although, the coup attempt was failed to remove Gorbachev from the office but it did not take long when the shift in political environment of the USSR made him weak and powerless. When the Minsk Declaration was signed by the Republicans and not allowing Gorbachev and his representatives to participate, no one from the West questioned the legitimacy of the Declaration (Gleason 1992: 142). The Ukrainian election was a crucial event during the dissolution of the USSR, which took place on December 1, 1991.

Soon after Yeltsin came into power, a chain reaction was triggered in the non-Russian states as they started to declare their independence from the Soviet Union. Till December, the Soviet Union had ceased to exist, meanwhile Gorbachev also handed over his power to Yeltn by resigning from his post (State President) on December 25 (Wallace et. al. 1996: 461). By 1991, it became clear that Gorbachev's policies had failed to acquire sufficient political support to 'rescue' the Soviet Union. In 1992, Yeltsin's federal plan was succeeded to gain political support necessary to 'rescue' the Russian Federation (Gleason 1992: 142).

On 21 December 1991, eleven Communist Party leaders in meeting (the city of Alma-Ata) agreed to the disintegration and end of the USSR (Gleason 1992: 155). Russia emerged as a successor state, and the immediate challenge which haunted Russia was to cope up with weak economic and political situation of this new state. Another major challenge was to bring positive change in its foreign policy and establish a close relation with neighbouring countries. There was an ongoing debate in Russia just after the dissolution of USSR which can be characterized as Atlanticist/Zapadniki and Eurasianist (National Patriots), the same concept has been discussed by number of authors and how it had influenced the foreign policy of Russia at the beginning of the 1990s (Dannreuther 2004, Shlapentokh 2006, Belopolsky 2009, Hunter 2010, Legvold 2012).

CONCLUSION

The historical background of Russia's policy towards West Asia has evolved through different faces, whereas during the formation of Russia's policy under Tsarist period, it

was mainly offensive and engaged in war with the imperial in the region to secure its borders and gain access to the hot water ways for transportation and economic trade. The Marxist-Leninist ideology of peaceful co-existence dominated the Soviet foreign policy for some time. With the beginning of Cold War and the hostile international situation created by the West and US made Soviet Union to make its stiff, uncompromising and dogmatic. During this period of time, Soviet Union realized the importance of the West Asian region to secure its border from external threat, promotion of economic interests through access to hot water ways, and customer of military weapons and technology. This assumption dominated the foreign policy of the Soviet Union during Cold War until Gorbachev came to power and brought new changes in Soviet foreign policy. Soviet Union was engaged in proxy war with the West and US, supporting the anti-imperialist movements, forming alliance with the new emerging countries, and promoting socialism. The Soviet allies in West were supported with huge economic aid and supply of arms to fight against the Western alliance, and Israel. The presence of NATO, huge natural resources reserves in Caspian Sea Basin, supply of Oil and Gas to Europe without any obstruction, and to neutral the effect of radical Islamism in the region were the major concern for Soviet foreign policy towards this region. But Gorbachev started to withdraw its support from the countries and with that the presence of the Soviet Union in West Asia was neutralized, which was rejuvenated by Primakov in mid 1990s, after the Soviet Union was dissolved.

CHAPTER THREE

RUSSIA'S STRATEGY IN WEST ASIA

INTRODUCTION

In contemporary international politics, strategic-military policy (having a strong ally or member of a regional/international security organisation) of a country is as important as its economic and political policies whether a country is a developing Third World country or a developed country enjoying the status of the Superpower in this multipolar global system. These countries (USA, China, Russia, India, Brazil, South Africa and so on) compete with each other to gain superpower status (i.e. economic power and military strength or both) in international community and politics to gain capacity to manipulate the same. Russian Federation is also competing with the West (NATO and the US), along with the countries from the Third World like China to gain access to the Middle East. In the Middle East, Russia's interests is not limited to merely gaining access to its rich natural resources, but extends to eliminate possible threats posed by any external power, that might involve manipulation of the regional politics.

The dissolution of the USSR in 1991 and the subsequent emergence of 15 new states in international politics signalled the end of the cold war and the rise of a bipolar world, where the USSR or the communist bloc competed with the United States or the capitalist bloc. No other state did have the ability to counter United States in world politics at this time as did the Soviet union for over four decades. The disintegration of USSR marked the beginning of a unipolar world, in which the international community accepted the assumed hegemony and supremacy of the United States.

In the 19th century, the Czarist Russia pursued its geo-strategic and economic interests in the West Asian region to counterbalance its competitors. It tried to build diplomatic and cultural ties with Syria and Palestine to rely upon and use their support in its favour. The

same policy was pursued by the post-revolution Russia under Stalin's leadership (after 1950s) to form an alliance with the regional actors and use the same against the Western aggression. However, after the collapse of the USSR, the new Russian Federation initiated an entirely different set of priorities than those of its predecessors. Russia became less interested in utilising the resources of the West Asian region as tool against the West than to generate revenue to alleviate its weak domestic economic conditions. Russia also came to lose its superpower status with the end of the Cold War and lost relevance where it had maintained substantial influence in the strategic regions of Asia, South America, and the East European countries. Under Putin's regime, the primary focus of Russia's foreign policy was shifted to provide political and diplomatic support to its key regional allies which included sales of arms, energy exports, and trade. West Asia is a fragile region and Russia does not need to do much to assert its influence, particularly in the context of a perceived retreat of the Western forces from the region.

Russia emerged as a successor state among the 15 new states after the disintegration of the Soviet Union. It inherited the same political and economic crisis like the other newly independent states of the former USSR. Immediate assistance was needed for the recovery of the Russian Federation. It was generally understood that Russian Federation had gone into deep economic and political crisis because of the reforms introduced by Mikhail Gorbachev and policies of 'Perestroika' (restructuring of the political and economic system) and 'Glasnost' (openness). It has been discussed by a number of scholars that the policies that Gorbachev adopted actually led the Soviet Union towards its disintegration.

After Mikhail Gorbachev, Boris Yeltsin was elected as the President of the Russian Federation in 1991. Yeltsin's understanding of the context made him re-analyse the domestic and foreign policies. Meanwhile, the United States had gained a certain amount of influence on both these areas of Russian policies. Yeltsin was influenced by the Atlanticist group which made him support and pursue a pro-West or pro-US policy at the beginning of his term. The pro-West or pro-US policy was also seen as a policy of 'Far Abroad', giving more emphasis on Russian identity vis-a-vis the rest of Europe. Yeltsin,

under the Atlanticist influence, tried to strengthen its relationship with the Western countries. At the same time, the Eurasianist group began to gain some political importance and it emphasised that Russia should focus more on 'Near Abroad' policy which entails engaging in closer relationships with the neighbouring countries like Central Asian countries and Former Soviet Union countries.

There are some major security policies which had been pursued during the Soviet and post-Soviet era towards West Asia region. First, Russia's security interests in the region had always been threatened by the presence of the U.S. and the NATO forces in the Caspian Sea region. Containing their eastward expansion became the priority for security concerns of Russia and its neighbouring countries in Central Asia. Second, the uninterrupted export of oil and gas to Europe is also a major point of concern for Russia as the pipeline line passes through Caucasus region and Turkey in West Asia. Third, the rise of Sunni radical Islamism in the region has come to threaten the domestic security of Russia, and the possibility cannot be denied that the Muslim world could try to influence the Islamic sentiments in Russia (which has 20 percent Muslim population). Lastly, Russia also has a number of other threats to its domestic and international interests that emerge in the West Asia region, like the existence of pro-West countries (Saudi Arabia, Israel, Egypt, and Turkey as well) and challenge to Russia for energy exports in the international market.

Russia has given preference to Iran and Turkey in its foreign policy towards West Asia. During the Cold War, Iran and Turkey had a close strategic relationship with the US while Soviets were engaged with the Arab-Israeli conflict. After the dissolution of Soviet Union, Russia pursued a strong foreign policy towards the Middle East region mainly for two reasons: security and economic. The ethnic minority problem plays a key role in the relation between Russia and Iran as both of them share common problems within their territory. Both share the same feeling that they have been marginalised and have lost their rightful position in the international arena because of the containment policy of the West. Russian economic and strategic interests have been threatened in Europe because of

NATO enlargement. At the same time, Iran has its strategic and economic interests in the Persian Gulf and Caspian Sea Basin region which are also threatened by the presence of the US and its allies. They both share the same feeling in the Northern Caucasus region and Central Asia because of the presence of the US and NATO forces (Eran 2003, Dannreuther 2004, Katz 2010).

Syria is the last remaining ally of Russia in the region after the fall of the Mubarak regime in Egypt and the United States' growing influence. Russia once also had friendly relations with Iraq under Saddam's regime. But after the US invasion of Iraq and Saddam Hussein's fall, the relations between Russia and Iraq were adversely affected. Iran, on the other hand, has never been a reliable friend for Russia as it follows a policy of non-interference of outside powers in its territory in specific and West Asia in general. Turkey, unlike Iran, is a strong economic partner for Russia in the region, but has never supported its strategic policy in West Asia. Israel is neither a friend nor a foe for Russia. Both countries share some historical linkages (as a large number of Jews migrated from Russia). The relation of Russia with Israel is neutralised by the US alliance with Israel in the region. Lastly, Saudi Arabia is a sworn enemy of Russia and a strong strategic partner of the United States. There has been a number of instances where Saudi Arabia was believed to have been involved in creating domestic instability in Russia through the influence of Wahhabism and by spreading religious sentiments.

Though Russia had to cope up with its domestic problems after the disintegration, it remained mostly undisturbed from the outside world until Putin came to power. Yeltsin was not successful in stabilising the situation at home and pursued a weak policy abroad. There was a long ongoing debate in Russia to define its policy for the outside world which was known as Westernisers/Atlanticist debate. The debate defined the foundation of Russia's foreign policy after 1991 and the main concerns for Russia's leadership in general. Below is a more detailed analysis of the Yeltsin era of Russian policy-making.

YELTSIN LEGACY

In July 1991, Boris Yeltsin became the first democratically elected president of the new state. Russia, by this time, had already lost its position as a world superpower that it had enjoyed for decades. The condition of the country, politically, militarily, and economically, was chaotic and weak. Yeltsin gave priority to the weak domestic conditions and aimed at tackling the economic and political instabilities. Meanwhile, the outbreak of war with the Chechen Republic made it increasingly difficult for the Russian leadership to focus on the domestic situation. In matters of the foreign policy, the stress was put on maintaining good relations with the United States, Europe, and the newly independent countries of the former Soviet Union (Rumer 2000, Freedman 2001).

In order to maintain friendly relations with the West and the US, Russia followed a West-oriented policy in the beginning and tried to isolate itself from any obligation (taking responsibility) towards West Asia, Central Asia, Africa and Afghanistan which would ultimately only burden the economy and create an obstacle in pursuing rapprochement with the West. In Yeltsin's leadership, Russia experienced a reduced presence in the West Asian region, except in the case of Turkey and Iran (Freedman 2010). Though Yeltsin had a little interest in this region (Freedman 1998), the policy pursued by him was pragmatic in nature. His foreign policy was largely pro-US and pro-West. It which was driven by domestic considerations and opposition to the ideological approach of the former Soviet Union (Freedman 2001). Yet the domestic problems of Russia was preventing Kremlin to formulate a clear policy towards West Asia. Yeltsin, politically weak and of poor physical health, was unable to cope up with the domestic situation of Russia during the period of political and economic openness.

After disintegration, instead of becoming a true democracy, Russia dived into deep crisis: corruption, hyperinflation, war with Chechnya, the ever-increasing gap among classes (rich and poor), and revival of personal power politics (Shevtsova and Kramer 2013: 30). As a result of these contradictory interests, Russia was driven to a limited presence in the West Asian region during the two consecutive terms of Boris Yeltsin (Rumer 2000). Yevgeny Primakov, the skilled Arabist and former Foreign Intelligence Service director,

served as foreign minister of the Russian Federation, from 1996 to 1998. He was in support of a tough and more anti-Western posture for Russia as compared to the supporters of Yeltsin. Yeltsin's presidency came to an end on September 1998, but before that, Yeltsin also appointed Primakov as the prime minister of Russia due to the parliamentary pressure (Hoffman 1998).

In the late 1980s, with the dissolution of USSR, re-approachment was initiated to establish friendly relation with Israel leaving behind the dark memories. Immigrants from Russia and former Soviet nations (about 1.25 million) have a major influence on the policy-making of Russia towards Israel. For instance, these immigrants still embrace the Russian culture and language (Eran 2003). The Russian Jewish community, whether residing in Israel, former Soviet states or Russia itself, form an organised community which Russia has tried to use as an instrument to promote its political interests in the West, particularly the U.S. and Israel (Dannreuther 2004, Magen 2013).

The Russian-Israeli relation can be characterised mainly as one of political and economic cooperation. Israel still has limited interest in political, economic and security cooperation with Russia, inspite of the large-scale immigration of Jewish people from Russia. Under President Yeltsin, Russia gave up its political of the Middle East to the United States. Iran and Syria are the biggest impediments to Russian-Israeli friendly relationship. The sale of military weapons and nuclear technology to Iran is a bigger concern for Israel, and so on in terms of Syria. (Dannreuther 2004: 23). Russian Foreign Minister Kozyrev failed to utilise the opportunity to play an active role in Oslo Accord (1993-1995) and later when the peace agreement was signed between Israel and Jordan in Aqaba (Eran 2003). Russia's aspiration of becoming a superpower after 1995 further dimmed the possibility of close relationship with Israel. Israel soon realised the importance of a good economic relationship with Russia which would help in slowing down the supply of military weapons to its enemies. Russia also realised the importance of playing a leading role in Israel-Palestine peace process and allying with the anti-West regimes in the region to challenge the presence of the West and the US (Katz 2010: 9).

Russian-Syrian relations gained some importance during the 1990s. Bilateral relation was partly restored after an interruption in 1992-1994. Moscow's new Middle Eastern diplomacy was largely shaped by regional and global developments. It however needed some time to reestablish its relation with Syria. In November 1997, Russia pursued Syria and Iran to terminate their support for Hezbollah and Hamas, after the Lebanese crisis. The expansion of NATO during 1999-2004, further alienated Russia from its neighborhood (Eran 2003; Dannreuther 2004; Blank 2014). Threat perception and tension had increased from the former Soviet States and in the Northern Caucasus region, which would have a direct impact on the Muslim population in Russia (Katz 2010).

Transfer of major conventional weapons took place during the period of 1996-2000 when Russia had Syria as the only reliable strategic partner in the region after Egypt. During this period, Syria was the leading partner for Russia in the region, receiving the largest share for the military, which amounted for US\$ 784 million in total. It was not a mere exception that United Arab Emirates (UAE) was the second largest importer of Russian arms in the region (US\$ 336 million) after France (US\$ 1714 million) followed by Egypt (US\$ 143). In case of Turkey, the so called pro-West state and a NATO member, it was clear that it was heavily dependent on military imports from the West and United States (US\$ 3295 million from the US alone, and US\$ 1939 million from the West, especially Germany). Meanwhile, the share of Russian military arms received by Turkey was just worth US\$ 100 million, nothing compared to that of the West and US, as it has been already mentioned above. There is no data available that shows that Saudi Arabia was even receiving any arms from Russia, while the United States and the UK together had supplied military arms and technologies that was worth of US\$ 7831 million (from United States US\$ 5821 million and UK US\$ 2010 million), between 1996-2000. Israel did not demonstrate any interest in the Russian military arms and technology, as it had been receiving military arms worth of US\$ 2076 million from the United States and US\$ 765 million from Germany (Sipri 2001: 326).

DEBATE: WESTERNISERS (ZAPADNIKI) / EURASIANIST

The collapse of the USSR had left no option for Russian foreign policy makers but to support the West and the United States. During the Cold War and even before, the Russian identity was largely influenced and shaped by the Western culture, politics, and geographical linkages. It had started to identify itself more as European than Asian. This was one reason that after the dissolution of USSR, the new state (the Russian Federation) had preferred to maintain close relationships with the West. In the beginning, the foreign policy of Russia excluded the Eastern States or the states in Near Abroad, with whom Russia had enjoyed a historic partnership (Buszynski 1996:1-2).

The debate over the character of Russian foreign policy reached its peak between 1992 and 1995 when the decision had to be made whether Russia should reflect European or Eurasian character in foreign policy formation. Meanwhile, the dominance of the Westernisers was still prevailing on Russia's foreign policy (Dannreuther 2004). The major shift in Russia's foreign policy came in the mid-1990s when the identity constructed by Atlanticists (Westerniser) approach had fundamentally failed to deliver the desired results. Now, if Russia wanted to be Eurasian, it had to re-engage with the states in Near Abroad or with the Eastern States which it had abandoned in the early post-Soviet period.

The debate between these two camps, Westernisers/Liberals (also referred to as Atlanticist or *Zapadniki*) and Eurasianists/National Patriots, had solid bases to defend and support their approaches. The Westernisers or *Zapadniki* were focused on joining the West because they identified themselves with Western values, and desired Russia to join the global system of international relations and world economy. Under Gorbachev's policy of 'new political thinking,' the Westernisers gained their ground and emphasised on international accommodation by Russia in the early 1990s. The Westernisers urged to keep a good political relationship with the potential threats rather than arming against them. In Yeltsin's government, these modern Atlanticists gained key positions, for example, Foreign Minister Andrei Kozyrev, Prime Minister Yegor Gaidar, Minister of Communications Mikhail Poltoranin, Secretary of State Gennady Burbulis, and Deputy

Foreign Ministers Georgy Kunadze, Vitaly Churkin, and Fedor Shelov-Kovedyayev (Hunter 2010: 108).

President Yeltsin and Kozyrev (First post-Soviet Foreign Minister) wanted to separate themselves from their predecessors and their policies. The values inspired by Gorbachev's 'new thinking,' the vision of human values and common security, could be the basis to serve Russian policy. It could be seen clearly that Kozyrev emphasized the West as they share a strong common interest that called for integration and cooperation. During this time, Russia was looking for an opportunity for broader political relation with UNSC partners and gaining access to international economic institutions like the International Monetary Fund and World Bank. The sanction imposed by the United Nations and the West on old allies of Russia, like Serbia, Iraq, and Libya, were also supported by Russia (Belopolsky 2009: 16).

In the early period of the post-Soviet foreign policy, there was an opposition raised by the group led by Sergei Stankevich who believed that the Russian foreign policymakers had forgotten about national interest and blindly followed the West. This bloc named Eurasianist or Derzhavniki wanted to follow a different approach in Russian foreign policy as compared to the Atlanticist. Many believed that Russia is a bridge between Europe and Asia, connecting each other. Some others emphasised the uniqueness of Russia and the need to pay a sufficient amount of attention to the East. Eurasianist were not anti-Western but wanted Russia to defend its national interest, which could also lead to some discomfort within the Western lobby and the United States (Hunter 2010). Eurasianists criticised the government for denying the importance of countries in the East and 'Near Abroad' as well as countries like India, China, Iran, Saudi Arabia and South Korea, and for giving more than necessary importance to the West for which Russia had paid a great price in terms of its autonomy, international standing, and its national interests.

Ruslan Khasbulatov, speaker of the Russian Duma in 1993, admonished:

“We [the Russians] must always bear in mind that the struggle for political and economic influence is continuing in the world. There remains a complex hierarchy of relations conditioned by the real power of this or that country, even if the struggle may have taken a more civilised as well as a more complex form than before.” (Hunter 2010: 108).

As the Eurasianist group started gaining its ground and opposition losing its support, by 1993 legislative elections, when increased support was given to Vladimir Zhirinovsky of Liberal Democratic Party of Russia (LDPR), many associations withdrew from pro-Western policy and joined Eurasianist group. Most of the elites wanted Russia to maintain its great power status as a Eurasian state different from the West and this Eurasianist foreign policy was soon reflected in its foreign policy. For example, this can be seen in Yeltsin’s Presidential visit to India in 1993 where he commented that the time had gone when Russia was giving more importance to its relationship with the West. Eurasianists believed that Russia is at least culturally equal to the West if not superior (Hunter 2010: 109). Russia criticised the West for taking advantage of its weakness, providing insufficient financial support, and excluding Russia from a number of important Western associations. Later the importance was given to the countries Russia had enjoyed friendly relation in the past.

On 5th January 1996, Kremlin announced the appointment of Yevgeny Primakov as the new Foreign Minister of Russia. Primakov as a Eurasianist believed that Russia, like any great power, needs to follow a diverse foreign policy and cultivate close ties with other countries like India, Japan, China and countries in the Middle East including the West (Mankoff 2009).

YEVGENY PRIMAKOV AND WEST ASIA

Yevgeny Primakov, former Foreign Minister and Prime Minister of Russia under Yeltsin, has been in support for a strong foreign policy of Moscow towards the Middle East. Primakov was a big supporter of Eurasianist approach and emphasised on multipolarity. He was in support of counter balancing the hegemony of the United States in international politics through counter military alliances with countries in Europe and Asia

(like China and India) (Hunter 2010: 109) Primakov was also the director of foreign intelligence. He remained a lifelong influence, even in Kremlin's era, and brought Russian interests in the Middle East to the forefront. Putin, after coming into power in 2000, has continued with the same legacy (Casula and Katz 2018: 299). Later in September 1998, Primakov was replaced with Igor Ivanov by the then President Boris Yeltsin because of his Eurasianist approach in foreign policy and emphasis on the Middle East region. Even after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Primakov still believed Russia as a superpower in global politics, geopolitical location of the Middle East was also acknowledged as a contributing factor to achieving the same (Trenin 2016; Hamid 2011).

In the mid-1990s, it was becoming clear to Russia that its great power status in international politics was under threat. Russia was treated as a junior partner of the United States rather than as a great power which was contrary to Russian expectations. It has always been the policy of the United States not to give Russia a geopolitically important role. Russia was not getting any economic benefits from the cooperation with the United States and the West. The approach of Westernisers was challenged as it failed to perform on international politics, and Russia was losing more as compared to its gains. The clash of Russian interests with the United States in the Balkans, Caspian basin and the Caucasus increased the tension between the two. The eastward expansion of North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) and cancellation of Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty (ABM Treaty) led the situation into further crisis (Hunter 2010). The declining power of Russia and weak economic, political and military position forced Russian political leaders to rethink a new approach to achieve its objectives.

The share of industry in the Russian economy declined (6.3 percent of GDP) during the period of 1993-1998. The fall in oil manufacturing and declining value of oil in the international market had a negative effect on its economy. In 1993, agriculture and industry that had accounted for 42.6 percent of the GDP. This came down to only 35 percent in 1998. In 1999, in terms of manufacturing output, tobacco, food, and beverages accounted for 25 percent. Coal accounted for 15 percent; and iron, steel, metal products

and non-ferrous metals stood at 20 percent of total manufacturing output at that time. At that time, the more advanced sectors of Russia accounted for 3 percent only, which included electrical, professional, and scientific equipment (Rivlin 2005).

In 1998, the Russian economy was at the lowest point as the ruble also collapsed in the international market. In the very next year, in 1999, financial and economic reforms introduced in Russia. Along with the higher oil prices, the economy of Russia was turning around on track. It was the beginning of a political change in Russia when Vladimir Putin was appointed as prime minister (1999) and more importantly the president in 2000. Huge Soviet-Russian military industry played a vital role in its economic recovery. During the Soviet period, Russia was exporting arms primarily for political reasons and to gain influence over a concerned country. This also included large government subsidies for which the Russian economy had to pay a heavy price. Soon after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the local demand for its military equipment collapsed. Subsequently, its influence also began to fade. The arms export now was done primarily for economic reasons; to finance the military industries which were close to shut-down. This was also beneficial in terms of employment, technological advancement, maintaining the markets and keeping the influence abroad (Rivlin 2005).

In the 1990s, Russian foreign policy was dominated by economic aspects, more importantly, by international trade and debt, balance of payments, currency stability and priority to the integration in the world trade system. For the same reason, Russia started looking for a market that was preoccupied with the West like China and Iran, in the Middle East (beginning of nuclear cooperation which was abandoned by the West following the Iranian revolution and arms deal).

The broader shift in the foreign policy of Russia could be seen in the mid-1990s when Russia started to engage with the 'challenger' states and other countries as an extension to the 'Near abroad' policy, for example, Islamic Republic of Iran, Iraq and Peoples Republic of China. (i) The active engagement policy of Russia with these states was central to the shift. (ii) The alignment diversification in Russia's foreign policy was

visible and symbolised the evolution of foreign policy and strategic reorientation over a long period of time. (iii) Analysis of foreign policy of Russia also demonstrates that it has close linkages with the regional security concerns, self-perception, institutional arrangements, and geopolitical aspirations of a state like Russia, adjusting to its declining power and status in the international arena. In 2000, Vladimir Putin succeeded Yeltsin and came to power, while the power was inherited with a weak and deeply traumatized domestic condition of Russia. The development policy of Yeltsin was a main reason behind the deepening domestic crisis in Russia. Russian citizens were disillusioned by the democratic prospects portrayed in the early 1990s and wanted stability above anything else (Shevtsova and Kramer 2013: 32). Hence, Putin promised to fulfil the citizen's desires and restore of Russia's status as an influential global power.

TABLE: 3.1
Military Expenditure by Country, 1991-2000
 (Figures are in US \$m., 1998)

STATE	1991	1993	1995	1997	1998	1999	2000
RUSSIA	..	70900	43400	42200	30600	37900	43900
IRAN	3811	4568	4588	5821	5737	5432	7144
IRAQ							
ISRAEL	7636	7298	7478	8119	8489	8453	8912
SAUDI ARABIA	28611	17468	13301	17514	20828	18674	19082
SYRIA	4991	3661	3976	3796	3996	4105	4469
TURKEY	6150	7154	7185	8380	8781	9696	10535

Source: SIPRI Yearbook 2001.

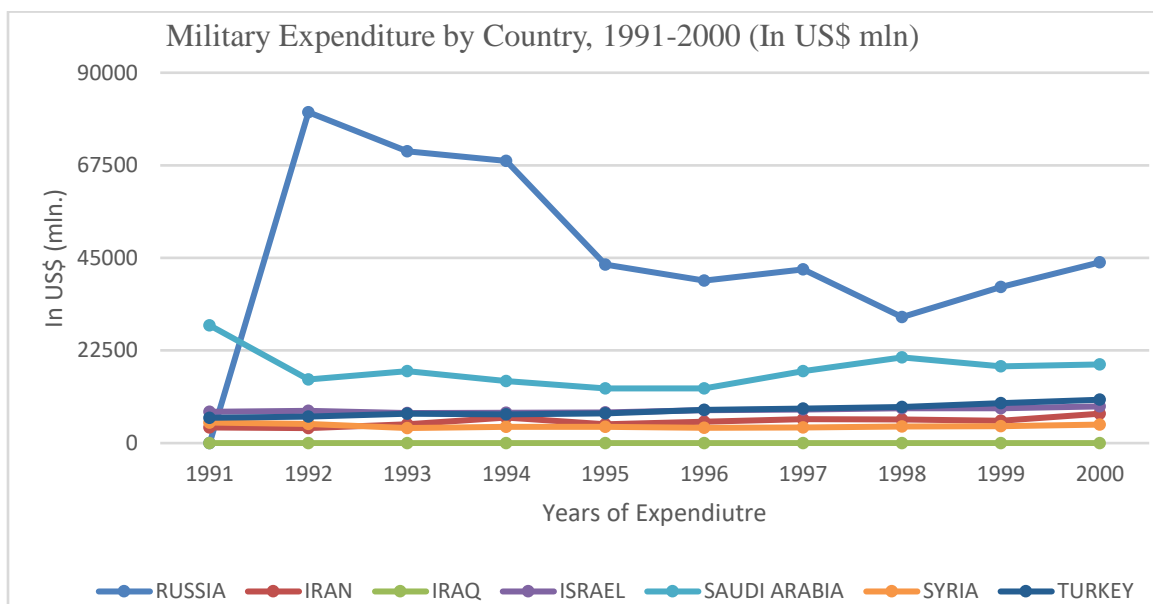
TABLE: 3.1.1
Military Expenditure by Country, 1991-1999

(In % of GDP)

STATE	1991	1993	1995	1997	1998	1999
RUSSIA	..	5.3	4.1	4.2	3.2	3.8
IRAN	2.5	2.4	2.5	3.1	3.1	2.7
IRAQ	..	..	..	..	..	..
ISRAEL	11.0	9.4	8.4	8.4	8.4	8.1
SAUDI ARABIA	22.6	13.9	10.3	12.0	16.2	13.2
SYRIA	10.4	7.2	7.1	5.7	5.6	5.6
TURKEY	3.7	3.8	3.9	4.1	4.4	5.4

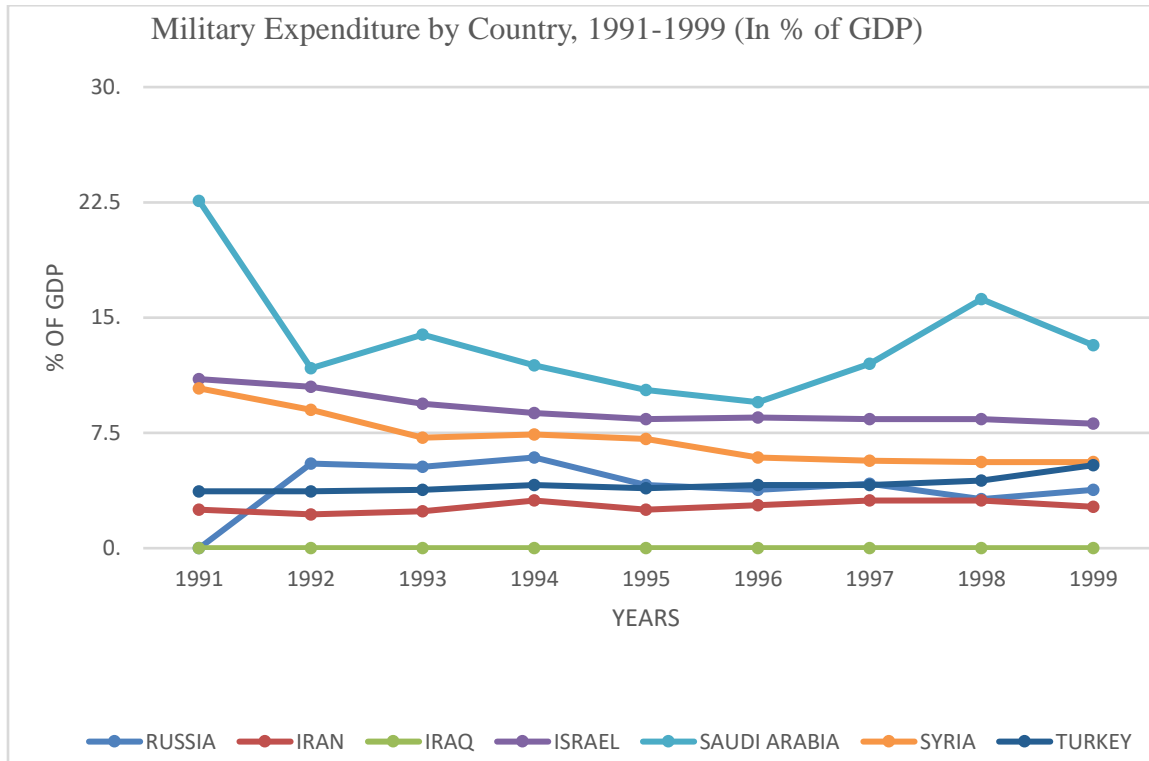
Source: SIPRI Yearbook 2001.

GRAPH 3.1



Source: SIPRI Yearbook 2001.

GRAPH 3.1.1



Source: SIPRI Yearbook 2001.

As Russia experienced a major fall in government expenditure on military research and development sector, it directly affected the arms export which declined to the lower level by 1996. During this period, it introduced some changes in internal as well as external policies. Military expenditure was continuously being decreased to ease the pressure on the economy. By the end of 2000, the government expenditure on military R&D substantially increased. Though it surpassed the 1996 figure, it still remains half of that of 1991. Percentage of the share in GDP has also been decreasing. From 5.5 percent in 1992 it has come down to the 3.2 percent in 1998. Though the share slightly increased in 1998 (3.8 percent), it still was lower than the share in 1992 (5.5 percent). The unilateral withdrawal of Russia from the 1995 Gore-Chernomyrdin agreement might be the reason that government resumed its military policy and increased the expenditure on military R&D. As the table 3.2.1 suggests, the military expenditure of the country like Saudi Arabia was declining till 1996 though the percentage of share in GDP was still above 10 percent. Later, in 1999, Saudi Arabia increased its military expenditure which actually amounted for 18674 US\$ million and 13.2 percent share of the GDP. Hence, the data

shows that the Saudi Arabia was the largest importer of military weapons and technology during this period and a major customer of arms for the West and the United States. For Israel, the percentage of share in GDP may have been decreasing but the actual currency value (US\$) was increasing. The case of Turkey was quite similar to Israel where the share and actual amount increased during this period of time. For Syria, the share of GDP for military expenditure decreased but the value of expenditure was not much affected. Though Iran was not spending much for its military, still the percentage of share in GDP for military expenditure was constantly maintained. The situation in case of Iraq cannot be explained due to lack of appropriate data.

VLADIMIR PUTIN AND FOREIGN POLICY OF RUSSIA

On 31st December 1999 Yeltsin resigned from the post of President and named his Prime Minister Vladimir Putin as the acting President. Putin won the 26 March 2000 elections and got officially elected as the new President. Putin neither participated in any debates nor any election events during the election campaign, but his image dominated the Russian media. His campaign focused on two issues: war in Chechnya and broader instability within Russia. His campaign advanced with an infamous slogan *mochit v sortire* that means “wipe them out in the outhouse” referring particularly to the ongoing Chechen conflict and including international terrorism. Putin won the election with a narrow margin (52.94 percent of the vote). Some analysts suggest that a huge chunk of some 2.2 million votes was the product of fraud (Dawisha 2014; Gorham 2005: 188, 190).

Under the leadership of Putin, Russia has pursued a policy of establishing relations with all the West Asian countries, whether a traditional ally or an adversary. This foreign policy seems to be influenced by domestic policy. Kremlin tries to conceal these domestic demands, if not entirely eliminating or rejecting the same (Lo 2015). In terms of foreign policy, Russia was became more anti-West and anti-American under the leadership of Putin. From the beginning of his term, Putin has instituted a “vertical integration of power” which has centralised the presidential and federal authorities, and curtailed the press freedom in Russia (Dawisha 2014).

THE NATIONAL SECURITY CONCEPT AND MILITARY DOCTRINE

On 10 January 2000, Putin (as an interim president) adopted the National Security Concept. The concept was actually meant for the

“attempts to create an international relations structure based on domination by developed Western countries in the international community, under U.S. leadership, and designed for unilateral solutions (primarily by the use of military force) to key issues in world politics in circumvention of the foundational rules of international law” (Putin 2000).

Later, on April 21st, Putin also signed the decree to adopt Russia’s Military Doctrine. This new document was the replacement for the earlier National Security Concept (17 December, 1997) and the Military Doctrine (2 November 1993). The new National Security Concept came as a response to the changing geopolitics, geostrategic situations, continuous threat perception from outside world, and assessment of Russia’s overall capabilities in the contemporary international politics (Bakshi 2000: 1267). In the context of Russia, the National Security Concept can be defined as

“a political document, which reflects a total combination of officially accepted views as regards specific goals and the appropriate state strategy aimed at ensuring individual, public and state security against political, economic, social, military, man-made, environmental, information and other internal and external threats (with due account taken of available resources and possibilities). The concept formulates the most important state-policy guidelines and principles, constituting a foundation for the elaboration of concrete programmes and organizational documents in the field of ensuring the Russian Federation’s national security” (Bakshi 2000: 1268).

The document further states that, *“A number of states are stepping up efforts to weaken Russia politically, economically, militarily, and in other ways”*. It describes NATO expansion as one among major threats *“in the international sphere”*. In May 2000, shortly after the beginning of Putin’s presidential term, Russia outlined a foreign policy which was distinct from the Yeltsin period. The West and the US were held responsible by Putin for the problems in his country during the period of the 1990s.

Under Vladimir Putin, the foreign policy-making process was increasingly centralised and coordinated. In contrast to Yeltsin, Putin's approach in relation to Russia's foreign policy can be considered to be more cohesive and balanced. Governance was initially characterised by chaotic dealings between openly competing institutions and agencies. But the bureaucratic atmosphere gradually became one of calm and relative compliance. Putin sought to delineate between corporate and state interests. Consequently, there was a strong nexus between the formulation and implementation of the policy. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs was provided greater authority to manage the actions of various ministries. Russia hoped to improve relations with Iran and China, while Putin also tried and took possible actions to subordinate the private interests to the national interests.

The increased coordination of the Putin period reflected broader trends in Russian relations with 'challenger' states. The following section examines how the evolution of the institutional context influenced the making of foreign policy towards 'challenger' states. On the one hand Russia had broader strategic objectives which could be achieved through a relationship with these states in 'Near Abroad' or countries like Iran. On the other hand, it also had a negative effect on the Russia policy and status, as Russian government was regularly criticised by the West and U.S for being involved in providing nuclear technology assistance to Iran, without knowing the consequences that it could increase the capability of Iran to develop a nuclear weapon.

After the 9/11 attack on the World Trade Centre and Pentagon, Putin was the first to call the U.S. President George W. Bush and express his concerns. He also offered his full support to American military action in Afghanistan against Taliban and Al Qaeda, as it was assumed that Osama bin Laden, mastermind of the terrorist attack, had its base in Afghanistan (Shlapentokh 2009). America soon declared 'War on Terror,' and sent its troops in Afghanistan. Russia provided useful intelligence to the United States, and raised no objection when the U.S. bases were established in Central Asian states of Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. Russia had its own reason to cooperate with the United States though it knew that Iran would not favour such action. It had its problem in Uzbekistan because of

the Islamic Movement gaining prominence and posing a threat to Russian interests in the region (Freedman 2010).

The 9/11 attack changed the scenario and the perception of the Russian Federation about Middle-East. It is a region dominated by Islamic majority and now the Western countries along with the United States saw them with suspicion. It also made a negative impact on Russia-Iran relationship too as Iran is an Islamic state and acted as the protector of Islam all over the World. Russian President came to realise that the United States was not as big a threat to Russian interest as other forces like Islamic extremism. After the attack the perception of America began to change and the growing sympathy of the Russian public towards America made it possible for Putin to overcome the earlier obstacles and cooperate with America on an international level. Also, Russia softened its opposition to the three Baltic States joining NATO. Meanwhile, Russia was beginning to get comfortable with American expansion into ballistic missile defense program (Katz 2002).

A MULTIVECTOR APPROACH

The National Security Concept refers to a “multipolar” world corresponding to a policy originally advocated and promoted by Yevgeny Primakov in the 1990s and promoted by Kremlin and, Russia’s role as “one of the influential centres” in it. In addition, threats to Russia’s national security, according to the National Security Concept, were\

“manifested in attempts by other states to counteract its strengthening as one of the centers of influence in a multipolar world, to hinder realization of its national interests and to weaken its position in Europe, the Middle East, Transcaucasia, Central Asia and the Asia-Pacific Region.”

This new approach also entailed demanding recognition of Russia’s legitimate privileged interests in its so-called near-abroad, loosely defined as *Russkiy Mir* (Russian world) throughout the countries of the former Soviet Union. Kremlin aimed to position Russia in opposition to the West (Borshchevskaya 2016).

In December 2002, Russian Foreign Minister (Igor Ivanov) defined the multi-vector policy of Russia in an interview

“It appears this is the year when we finalized a multi-vector policy, one in which different geographical directions and priorities supplement, rather than contradict, each other.” In December 2003, Alexander Yakovenko (director of Foreign Affairs Ministry’s Information and Press Department) wrote on Kremlin’s official ‘Russiyskaya Gazeta’: “Today, not one significant international problem is being solved without Russia.” (Russian MFA 31 December 2003).

On October 23rd 2002, Armed Chechen Militants seized a theatre in Moscow; the event came to be known as the ‘Nord Ost Siege’ or ‘the Dubravko theatre Siege.’ Later, on September 1st 2004, an armed gunman stormed into the School No. 1 Beslan, North Ossetia and took 1100 hostages, mostly children. Three days after the attack (Beslan, North Ossetia), on September 4th, Putin gave a speech signaling a tougher foreign policy posture:

“We stopped paying the required attention to defence and security issues and we allowed corruption to undermine our judicial and law enforcement system. Furthermore, our country, formerly protected by the most powerful defence system along the length of its external frontiers [,] overnight found itself defenceless both from the east and the west...We showed ourselves [to be] weak. And the weak get beaten. Some would like to hear from us a “juicy piece of the pie.” Others help them. They help, reasoning that Russia still remains one of the world’s major nuclear power[s], and as such still represents a threat to them. And so they reason that this threat should be removed. Terrorism, of course, is an instrument to achieve these aims...I am convinced that in reality, we have no choice at all...What we are dealing with

are not isolated acts intended to frighten us, not isolated terrorist attacks. What we are facing is direct intervention of international terrorism directed against Russia.” (Putin 2004)

Putin followed the multi-vector foreign policy since 2000 or the beginning of his term as the President. Russian foreign policy was initially focused on forming a strong alliance with the United States and on developing a relationship with the European countries. This first period of Russian foreign policy was referred to as Russia’s ‘European Choice’. During this period, Russia supported the US policy of ‘War on Terror’ after the 9/11 attack until it invaded Iraq in 2003. Second, by mid-2000s, Russia started to keep distance from the West and the United States because of intervention in Iraq and military activities in Afghanistan. In 2008, Russia was also at war with Georgia for five days. Meanwhile, the relation between Russia and the United States were on ‘reset.’ Russia demanded that the USAID (United States Agency for International Development Assistance) cease all activity in Russia and withdraw financial aid if any (Nunn-Lugar Cooperative Threat Reduction Program) (Trenin 2013).

The Global economic crisis of 2008 exposed the weaknesses of the liberal democratic capitalist economy of the West. There was a withdrawal of the United States and NATO forces from Iraq and Afghanistan. Iran continued to engage in its nuclear program even after the sanctions imposed by the Western countries. Korea was doing the nuclear test and was firing its missiles. The Arab spring in the Middle East was the beginning of a chain reaction which started from Tunisia in 2011. The rise of China in the international arena and the Asia-Pacific as a new centre of international trade and world politics is important. The oil and gas prices, which went down drastically during the global economic crisis, also began to stabilise. The shale revolution of the United States had made the country energy independent till 2030 and left Russia with no option but to divert its focus from the West to Asia. In August 2012, Russian accession to the WTO (World Trade Organisation) turned out to be a major turn in its economic policy (Trenin 2013).

Putin sought to restore Russia as a Great power and as a challenger to the US in the context of renewed “Zero-Sum anti-Westernism” with more stress on arms and energy (Oil and gas) sales as well as high technology goods such as nuclear reactors (Freedman 2001). Renewed presence in the Middle East entailed cooperation with both anti and pro-American actors there. It demanded support for Iran’s nuclear program, waiver of Syrian debt of \$ 13 billion. Russia expanded bilateral relations with Turkey, Egypt, Israel and Saudi Arabia. On December 11th 2013, Deputy Prime Minister Dmitry Rogozin said that Russia’s arms sales were the most important element of its relation with other countries (Borshchevskaya 2016).

The policies pursued by Moscow towards the Middle East under Putin’s leadership can be said to have three main objectives: multipolarity, Near Abroad policy, and the economic interests of Russia. The Iranian nuclear project not only threatens national security of the Gulf States, along with Saudi Arabia, but also the status of Russia in the Middle East region. Russia’s continuous support for the Shiite’s regime in the region against all the Sunni nations makes it difficult to establish a friendly relation with Saudi Arabia, a leading Sunni state in the Middle East. The success of Russia in its strategic policy has influenced pro-US countries in the region like Israel, Turkey, and Saudi Arabia to make a deal with Russia and ease the influence of US over the Middle East (Katz 2010; Magen & Lindenstrauss 2013; Blank 2014).

Putin’s Middle East policy priorities can be described as protection of sovereignty, even though it has entered into some obligations through the entities such as the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and United Nations, economic gain primarily through arms and energy trade, and expansion of Russian influence at the expense of the West (Borshchevskaya 2016).

PUTIN ERA: BILATERALISM AND MULTILATERALISM IN WEST ASIA

The primary focus of Russia's foreign policy towards the Middle East has been on Iran, which is crucial in terms of economic recovery and political status. Russia would have fulfilled three purposes: first, a powerful friend on its side would contribute to its international profile; Second, Iran would provide an upper hand over the United States to Russia and also put an end to the American attempts to diminish the Russian influence in the region. On the other hand, Iran also looks for a partner who could counterbalance the United States in the region and can also contribute to the reconstruction of Iran (economic and military) after Iran-Iraq War (Belopolsky 2009: 23; Hunter 2010; Blank 2014: 10, 15).

After Putin came into power, Russian foreign policy that Russia has been to build a stronger Russian and Iranian relationship and strengthen the nuclear cooperation between the two. The first action Putin took in 2000 was scrapping the Gore-Chernomyrdin agreement of 1995 under which Russia had to cede its exports of weapons to Iran by the end of December 1999. After Russia withdrew from the 1995 agreement, it was clear that Russia wanted to continue its relationship with Iran and also to sell its sophisticated military weapons. It was quite similar to the policies pursued by Yeltsin towards the end of his term as President, but, under Putin, the policies were more strengthened and well-coordinated. Later on, the Russian government moved its focus to near abroad, and with the extension of the same, it freely started to demonstrate its interest in having a close relationship with Iran. United States was not happy with this improving relationship and stopped its financial support to Russia (Dannreuther 2004).

When the dualistic policy of the U.S. and the West was realised by Russia, it tried to move further towards Iran in close economic relation as well as nuclear cooperation. The improving relations between Russia and Iran became a concern for the West, especially the United States. It started pressurising Russia to end its relationship with Iran and its export of nuclear technology and assistance along with military arms and weapons.

There are some key regional strategic interests involved in the West Asian region for Russia. Certain key factors drive their foreign policy towards West Asia as Dmitry Trenin and Alesksey Malashenko put it.

“the principal challenge for Moscow is stabilizing the still weak post-Soviet states, while finding an acceptable modus vivendi with the increasingly turbulent Muslim world beyond the former Soviet territory, other factors complicate Russia’s task, from the 2003 Iraq war and its efforts to the Israeli-Palestinian situation to the developments in and around Iran” (Katz 2010).

It was clear to Putin that Iran could play a crucial role for Russia as a strategic ally in West Asia, and could be used as a bargaining chip to get closer to the West and United States. Russia could gain huge profit through nuclear cooperation, selling military weapons and economic relation in oil and gas field. Strategically, Iran was an important state in the region and shared same concerns with Russia regarding the United States expansion in the region and NATO’s eastward expansion in Europe. Also, the presence of the United States in Caspian Sea basin and Caucasus region was becoming a problem. Russia always had its interests in the Caspian region as it was a rich area of oil resources. Tehran was unhappy with the decision of Russia to exploit the Caspian region along the border of Russia with the help of the West as Iranian-American relation was still hostile and America did not want Iran to be a part of this. Russia did not intend to share Caspian resources with four other states which could had negative effects on Russia-Iran relations since Iran claimed to have 20 percent share of resources in the Caspian region which border with Iran (Hunter 2010). As a result, the Russian government had also backed off from its opposition to Baku-Ceyhan pipeline as the Caspian oil resources appeared far enough for Russia to meet the national interests (Zimmitskaya and Geldern 2011: 13).

Russia eventually changed its position regarding the equal share of Caspian’s resources and stated that the Caspian’s resources belonged to all five states which shared their borders with the region. But now Russia adopted a new position and stated that everything should be divided on the basis of national territoriality related to seabed and

beneath it. It believed that the division should be made based on “modified median line” so that all the states get roughly the same share and control on the seabed as per the percentage of the Caspian Sea’s total coastline shared by the concerned states in the region. Eventually, on this basis, Russia also signed agreements with both Kazakhstan and Azerbaijan, immediate neighbours of Russia in the region (Joyner and Walters 2006: 190).

Russian and Iranian observers expressed their suspicion about the relationship between Russia and Iran. The debated as to what extent this relationship would be beneficiary for both the countries. Some of the Iranian observers also expressed the feeling that the relationship with the United States would be more beneficial for Iran as compared to relationship with Russia. Iran’s conservative leaders opposed the Iranian-American rapprochement, but were also against Russia as they saw it as neither trustworthy nor reliable reflected in its continuous change in position over Caspian region and friendly relation with Israel and Iraq. Russia also had some doubts regarding export of arms to Iran as it could be used against Russia one day. It feared that if Iran and America get closer, then Russia could lose its importance for Iran and lose a reliable and useful ally in the region (Katz 2001). Still, after all this, Russia-Iran relationship continued to grow.

The relationship between Russia and Syria was relaunched when Putin came to power in 2000 and President Bashar al- Assad took office. It was mainly because of Russian military base on Tartus. It was the only Russian military outpost outside Russian territory after Putin decided to close down Russian military bases in Vietnam and Cuba. Its military base in Tartus served as a symbol of longstanding diplomatic and military ties between Russia and Syria and continued to boost their low-cost diplomatic relationship (Kreutz 2010, Trenin 2010).

Turkey’s geopolitical location in the Middle East and its pro-West (NATO member) policies make it a competitive entity for Russia’s strategic interests in the region. There is enough Turkish influence on Russia as well as on the former Soviet States. Most of the Muslim population speaks Turkish dialects. In 1997, Viktor Chernomyrdin’s visit to

Ankara, first in the last 25 years, made it clear that Russia was looking for economic interdependence in spite of the geopolitical rivalry with Turkey. Russia, with the support of Iran and China, had been trying to contain Turkey in the Caspian Sea region, while Turkey was determined to stop Russia from drilling gas near Cyprus and Nabucco pipeline project (Trenin 2010). Russia had also intervened in a dispute between Turkey and Cyprus over gas finds in the eastern Mediterranean. Russia sent its navy in support of Cyprus and seeking an airbase for the same at Paphos (Blank 2014). Turkey is also looking for its expansion in the Caucasus region. Turkey challenges Russia in Southern Caucasus as it is actively involved in a relationship with Iran and Syria (so-called Russia's ally in the region) and it has been active in the formation of the Azeri-Georgian axis against Russia (Magen & Lindenstrauss 2013).

During the first visit of Bashar al-Assad to Russia, a major agreement took place. It was the settlement of Soviet debts on Syria, and in the process, Russia agreed to give up 73 percent of its total Syrian debt (US \$7.8 billion). In return of this friendly act of Russia, Syria also offered its newly built seaports in Latakia and Tartus to Russia (Magen 2013). It was mainly because Russia had enjoyed close military ties with Syria during Cold War and having military base in Tartus, which is one and only Russian military outpost outside Russia after Putin decided to close down Russian military bases in Vietnam and Cuba. Russia's military base in Tartus served as a symbol of longstanding diplomatic and military ties between Russia and Syria and continued to boost their low-cost diplomatic relationship (Kreutz 2010, Trenin 2010).

There are certain strategic interests involved in Syria for Russia. The geographical location of Syria in the Middle East, independence from the West or the United States, having a secular government distant from the radical Islamic ideology make Syria a natural ally for Russia. Syria has never tried to influence Islamic sentiments in Russia or oppose Russia's actions against the Chechen rebels. The Syrian President also stated that "the Arab World pins great hopes on strengthening Moscow's hand in the world." On the other hand, Russia does not want to be involved in a dispute between Syria and Israel regarding the ownership of the Golan Heights (officially annexed by Israel in 1981). At

the same time, Russia continues to get closer to Israel, which makes Syria, Hamas, and Hezbollah feel uncomfortable about Russian (Katz 2010). Still, Syria is an important ally for Russia. One important reason is that through the Mediterranean Sea Russia would be able to get access to the Indian Ocean and its Southern neighbourhood and South Asia (Kreutz 2010).

Unlike Egypt and Syria, Saudi Arabia is seen as a sworn enemy of Russia in the Middle East region, posing a direct threat to its internal (promoting Wahhabism) and regional security interests along with economic interests. After the 9/11 attack on the United States and the support provided by Russia against radical Sunni Islamists in the Middle East, some doubt has emerged in Saudi Arabia. Russia has been trying to improve relationship with Saudi Arabia inspite of its pro-West alliance. It also aided Afghan Mujahideen, while Russia also suspects that Riyadh was assisting Chechen rebels in the 1990s (Katz 2010; Magen 2013).

The Putin administration ensured that the ministerial interests should be aligned with the broader objectives of Russia. Meanwhile, his approach towards the challenger state was becoming more proactive in nature. Ministry of Foreign Affairs continued its pragmatic view regarding the Russia-Iran nuclear cooperation. But Ivanov defended Russia by stating that it could choose its partner as it feels comfortable with (Belopolsky 2009). Russia demonstrated through its policy that it was neither subordinate to the United States and nor to Iran. For example, the visit of Ali Shamkhani (Iranian defence minister) and Ariel Sharon (Israeli prime minister) to Moscow coincide with each other, while Shamkhani had to visit later as Russia denied to postpone the visit of Sharon (Felgenhauer 2001). Russia made several attempts to strengthen relationship with Iran in the field of arms sale, military-technology and nuclear cooperation, and it was for this reason, the Iranian ambassador made an announcement in Moscow that President Putin would visit Tehran in May 2002.

Until the incident of 9/11 attack, the new leadership of Vladimir Putin pursued an anti-US and European foreign policy and one that was more nationalist in nature. The Kosovo

Crisis and the failure of the ABM treaty (Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty) with the United States made Russia revoke the Gore-Chernomyrdin agreement in November 2000. The Russian military-industrial complex appreciated the step of Russia to withdraw from the Gore-Chernomyrdin agreement of 1995. It opened the space for exports of military weapons to Iran. At the same time, the Russian Defence Ministry expressed its desire to deepen its relationship with Iran in the defense sector. As a result Iran became the third largest importer of Russian military weapons and technologies in 2001. Russia also announced that it would finish the construction of Bushehr nuclear power plant in Iran and expressed the willingness to cooperate with the Iranian government for building more nuclear power plants (Sychova 2000). Putin was also in support of a strong relationship with Iran. In May 2000 he initiated increased economic relations with Iran through export of nuclear technologies and materials (Kozyrev 2000).

Russian engaged in construction activity of nuclear power reactor in Iran. Mehdi Safari (Iranian ambassador to Russia) announced that the construction of the plant is 40 percent complete and would be operational by 2002. Iran also criticised United States actions against Iranian nuclear research program as it increased the cost of construction of a nuclear power reactor and also delayed the construction. America also accused Russia of supplying tritium gas and laser enrichment technology to Iranian nuclear reactor, both essential for the development of nuclear weapons. United States had the suspicion that Iran could use these technologies for military purposes behind the shadow of its nuclear research program for peaceful purposes (Gertz 2000). This issue was also discussed between the presidents of the U.S. and Russia in Okinawa during G-8 meeting. Russia defended itself by saying that the Russian government was not aware of this contract because the company did not even seek permission from the government. After all this, America still had its reason to doubt Russia-Iran relation fearing that data could be removed from record and Iran could be involved in the development of nuclear weapons (Pincus 2000; Miller 2000).

The Duma was more interested in a close relationship with Iran and Iraq. From time to time it also expressed its opinion on the nature of policy pursued by the Russian

government. It supported a closer relationship with Iran and expressed its opposition to the United States. Vladimir Zhirinovskiy and other Duma deputies supported the 2001 decision of Russian military-political leadership to renew their military-technical cooperation with Iran (Belopolsky 2009).

In March 2001, Iranian president Khatami's visit to Moscow was marked as a beginning of a new era in Russian-Iranian relationship. The United States was, however, not feeling comfortable with the ever-growing relationship between Moscow and Tehran. Russia and Iran also signed a document for 'The Treaty on Foundations of Relations and Principles of Cooperation' during the Khatami visit (Hunter 2010). The United States accused Iran of developing nuclear weapons with the help of Russia. In response, Russia and Iran expressed that Iran has been using its nuclear technology of Russia for peaceful purposes as it was signatory to the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) which inspects the nuclear power reactor sites on a regular basis found no objection to its nuclear research program. Thus, nothing could deny Iran from getting nuclear technology from Russia or any other nuclear country.

Iran defended its nuclear enrichment program as it had signed the NPT and under Article IV, it could use nuclear energy for civilian and medical purposes (Khan 2010). Later it was also clarified by Russia that the military arms and weapons which it had been selling to Iran meant only for a defensive purpose. Meanwhile, it was also stated that the United States had no right to intervene in bilateral relations of Russia and Iran or to direct them to what extent they could cooperate with each other in nuclear and defence military sphere (Boese 2001).

After 9/11, Russian Federation under Putin administration also changed its perception. After all the discussions, Russia preferred relationship with United States over Middle-East, especially Iran. It also provided the opportunity for Russia to penetrate in Middle-East and expand its relationship with other major states which could be more beneficial for Russian economic interests in the region. As a result, Russian foreign policy took a major shift and pursued a policy of balancing America and Iran without affecting its

economic interest involved in nuclear cooperation with Iran. The December 2002 incident also contributed to the same. It was found in a series of satellite images that Iran had been involved in the construction of two new nuclear reactors in Arak and Natanz. While Arak was a heavy water plant and other was meant for uranium centrifuge to enrich U-235 (Freedman 2010). The group of opposition in Iran later revealed this information.

In February 2002, an agreement was signed between Russia and Iran according to which Russia agreed to supply fuel to Iran and to take back the spent fuel. Later, In July 2002, a ten-year project also was launched between these two in which they showed their interest in expanding their relationship to the fields of industries, business, and scientific-technical. The construction of nuclear-energy facilities worth \$8.5 billion was also included in the project. Priority had to be given to block 1 and 2 of Bushehr nuclear power reactor and two new nuclear power reactors in Ahvaz. Later, this project drew the attention of the international community and led to immense criticism, especially from the United States (Aras and Ozbay 2006). The revelation of Iran's secret nuclear reactor was the failure of Western intelligence which shook them. This crisis was contained temporarily, after a series of negotiations between America, European powers (particularly Germany, France, and Britain), IAEA and Iran (Bahgat 2006).

On one hand, America continued to pressurise Russia to cede the Iranian nuclear weapon program, and on the other, Russia wanted IAEA to inspect all Iranian nuclear program. In June 2003 talks took place between Bush and Putin in St. Petersburg. This talk made it clear that both countries had the same position on Iranian nuclear weapon program though Russia was still engaged in nuclear cooperation with Iran and was exporting nuclear fuel and other nuclear technology. The United States made two demands from Russia in June 2003: firstly, the U.S. wanted Russia to end its nuclear cooperation with Iran or at minimum permitted Russia to supply nuclear fuel on the condition that Iran sends all used fuel back to Russia. Secondly, it pressurised Iran to sign a protocol which permitted the unannounced visit of International Atomic Energy Agency to all nuclear facilities of Iran (Freedman 2010).

Russia halted the construction of Bushehr nuclear power plant until Iran agreed to send back all used nuclear fuel to Moscow. But it did not support the issue of signing the protocol. It believed that it should be Iran's discretion whether it wants to sign or not and can't be pressurised for the same (Isachenko 2003). The analyses which can be drawn from above-discussed incidents are that Russia was pursuing a dualistic policy to balance the United States and Iran. Russia had to ease the concerns of the West or the U.S. and also wanted to continue its nuclear cooperation with Iran as it involved its economic interests. So Russia wanted to ensure that Iran would not create any obstacle to a closer relationship between Russia and the West or the U.S.. It aimed at gaining their confidence without arousing suspicion of the Iranian government.

In September 2003, at Vienna, IAEA gave a deadline to Iran of October 31 for providing full information regarding its nuclear research program and a warning not to get involved in a secret nuclear activity or the construction of nuclear weapons. Also, it wanted Iran to stop its uranium enrichment program. Iranian delegation walked out from the meeting after tough wording was used to convey the message and now it became Russia's responsibility to hold the situation. Later, Deputy Foreign Minister of Russia Sergei Kisylak tried to smoothen the situation by saying that Iran should not see October 31st as deadline but as 'an ultimatum'. A new dispute erupted later in September when it had to be decided as to who would pay for the return of spent nuclear fuel. Iran wanted Russia to pay, but it refused. The situation was further complicated by the action of the United States against a Russian arms firm. US announced a sanction on export of laser-guided artillery shells to Iran. As the situation of the American forces weaken in Iraq because of the eruption of Guerrilla warfare, it moved towards United Nations to get more troops and monetary aid to rebuild Iraq. The problem of Iraq also affected the status of Bush in American politics. A sharp decrease in Bush polls could be seen at the time. It also weakened the position of Bush to pressurise Putin for ceasing its construction of a nuclear power plant in Bushehr (Freedman 2010).

With time, international pressure on Russia to cooperate with the West began to grow. Russia became more conscious regarding nuclear cooperation with Iran. Also, Iranian leadership faced accusations of the West and United States of being involved in illegal activity and violating the NPT framework. Russia was worried about Iranian nuclear activity because it was concealed from Russia even after their decade long cooperation. Later in 2003 Iran signed the supplementary protocol to an agreement with IAEA for warranties and Russia played an important role in this (Dunaeva 2013).

In 2004, a new question was raised in Russia as to when it would finish the construction of Bushehr nuclear power plant. At the same time, the trade between Russia and Iran was increased and it reached the height of \$2 billion per year. On the one hand, the Caspian Sea dispute was still hot in Russia-Iran relationship; on the other, IAEA clashes with Iran increased. United States pressurised Russia to halt the construction of Bushehr nuclear power plant in Iran which would ultimately halt the efforts of Iran towards development of nuclear weapons. Later on, Putin tried to threaten Iran by stating that, “Russia will halt its work at Bushehr if Iran refuses to behave in an open manner and fails to comply with IAEA’s demands” (Freedman 2006).

Putin had to face many problems at the same time. He had to normalise the situation in Chechnya and “Orange Revolution” in Ukraine (2004) that broke out because of the influence of the West over the region. This also became a serious matter of concern for CIS (Commonwealth of Independent States) countries. Putin decided to demonstrate both Russia’s and his importance in world affairs through a penetration in the Middle East and by strengthening its relationship with Iran. In this process, Russia soon invited Iran to join the SCO (Shanghai Cooperation Organization) as an observer, and also to join Caspian Sea security organization (Freedman 2006). Iran had a huge pressure to join these organizations from the EU and the U.S. as well. It could not refuse the invitation and ultimately had no choice but to join. It provided Russia with an opportunity to strengthen its ties further with Iran and achieve the trust of Iranian leadership without directly pressurising it.

Putin took some important steps to further centralise the Russian government for better coordination and rapid economic recovery. Russia also expanded its nuclear cooperation with Iran under Putin's leadership. Agreements were signed for construction of new power reactors in Iran (new Units of Bushehr nuclear power plant). The advanced military armaments deal also took place between Russia and Iran (S300 missile defense system) to deepen the relationship between the two. The West and the United States criticised Putin's policy for its ever-expanding nuclear cooperation with Iran. The economic and strategic interests of the Western countries in the Middle East region were threatened because of the expansion of the relationship between Russia and Iran. Russia was using Iran as a bargaining chip for relationship with West. The rich natural resources of Iran were also a major concern of the West and made them critical of Russia-Iran relationship. The high revenues through oil export enabled Russia to confront West and United States regarding its relations with Iran. The strong strategic policy of Russia was largely determined by the domestic economic stability and oil prices in the international market. Russia could be more exposed to external pressure than ever if oil revenues decline. Russian non-oil economy is not strong enough to hold the pressure of strategic policy abroad (Rivlin 2005).

As it has been discussed above, Putin wanted to strengthen its relationship with Iran. He continued the nuclear cooperation and expected to conclude the nuclear fuel agreement. The final agreement was signed in February 2005 for supply of nuclear fuel to Iranian nuclear power reactor in Bushehr. Iran also agreed to send used nuclear fuel back to Moscow. It eased the concerns of the U.S. and EU, and provided space for Putin to continue its nuclear cooperation without creating much suspicion. This agreement was the result of the pledge taken by Bush and Putin to cooperate on the issue of nuclear proliferation. Iran was still pursuing its hostile attitude towards the United States, which aggravated even more when Hassan Rowhani (chief nuclear negotiator of Iran) stated that

"Iran would never cease enriching uranium permanently, and if the United States sought sanctions at the UN Security Council, the security and stability of the region would become a problem. Rowhani also stated that Iran was

not happy with the pace of negotiations with the EU-3, and threatened to end them if there was no progress” (Freedman 2006).

The United States tried to ease the tension when it agreed to join the EU and agreed to offer economic assistance if Iran gave up its nuclear research program. The United States and EU-3 received a major setback when Mahmud Ahmadinejad was elected as the new President of the Islamic Republic of Iran (IRI) who was a hardliner and had anti-Western feelings. The U.S. and EU-3 were expecting Hashemi Rafsanjani to be elected as the new president of Iran. This would have made it easy for them to negotiate as it was assumed that Rafsanjani had a pro-Western thinking. Ahmadinejad was anti-U.S. and European Countries, and clearly rejected the presented proposal in August 2005, and also called it a “joke.” The proposal rejected by Ahmadinejad government was meant to establish a long-term relationship between EU and Iran, not only in security and economic sphere, but also to provide Iran access to international technologies for its light water nuclear reactors. Under the agreement, Iran had to agree that it would not withdraw from NPT and would also allow IAEA to inspect its sites of nuclear activities (Iran Report: October 2005).

Russia was more concerned about the Iranian nuclear crisis. It tried to normalise the situation aggravated by an ever-increasing pressure from the West and the U.S. which could eventually lead Russian-Iranian relationship into deep crisis. For this reason, Russia also tried to convince Iranian leaders to accept the proposal of EU-3, stop its uranium enrichment activity, and to renew its cooperation with the International Atomic Energy Agency (RIA Novosti 2005). Later on, the increased pressure from the European countries resulted in a warning given by France (President Jacques Chirac) to halt its insensitive nuclear activities or be ready for the harsh action taken by the United Nations Security Council. Russia opposed such action. Nevertheless, Iran continued its anti-Western and hostile policy under Ahmadinejad and aggressively targeted the U.S. and Israel in the United Nations. It accused both of killing their troops in Iraq. It also declared that it wouldn't stop its nuclear research program. As a result of this hot debate in the UN, the IAEA resolution was passed with 22-1 votes. Iran was found to be incompatible

with the IAEA safeguards agreement as its nuclear activity was not purely peaceful in nature (Freedman 2006).

Though, on one hand, Russia did not want Iran to acquire nuclear weapons, on the other hand it also did not want the West to impose harsh economic sanctions on Iran, its closest ally and reliable customer. Iran was not only buying the Bushehr nuclear reactor, but also providing future prospects to build more nuclear reactors and sell its military arms and weapons. The sanctions were not imposed on Iran at the time, but the United States was still willing to take action and was seeking support from Russia. It is in this context that we see the visit of Condoleezza Rice (United States Secretary of State) to Moscow. Russia wanted to resolve the issue through IAEA without referring the matter to UNSC (Katz 2006).

Iranian Parliament too was against the inspection of Iranian nuclear sites by IAEA and wanted to refer the matter to the United Nations Security Council. Russia tried to approach Iranian leadership, but Iran did not consider the proposal to stop the activity of uranium enrichment in Isfahan. When Russia failed to do so, it finally decided to move towards EU-3 and the United States to impose some sanctions on Iran. By the end of the year 2005 Russia began to show its intentions that it might refer the matter to UNSC and by the beginning of 2006 it also cooperated with EU-3 and the U.S. in their decision to impose the sanctions on Iran. Russia had agreed before in October 2005 to help Iran in launching a remote-sensing satellite and also had agreed to sell S-300, an advanced air defense system which was worth \$1 billion. But as the situation escalated, Russia had to rethink about its previous proposal. Iran also realized the situation and soon changed its attitude towards Russian proposal for uranium enrichment in Russia. However, Iran wanted to refine the proposal for establishing uranium enrichment facility in Iran, with the help of Russia. Russia could not accept this as U.S. and EU3 would not allow it to establish a uranium enrichment facility in Iran (Hunter 2010: 114).

These were the main reasons why Russia had to change its policy and cooperate with United States and others. Initially, Russian administration tried hard to defend Iranian

nuclear activities in IAEA and United Nations Security Council. But when Iran started to neglect Russia and started acting without consulting Russia, then it started cooperating with the IAEA and others to refer this matter in UNSC (Katz 2006).

To avoid the possibility of threat of an Iranian nuclear bomb, a number of agreements were signed between Russia and Iran on the issue of sending back all used nuclear fuel to Russia. It had been stuck before as both countries denied to bear expenses for transportation. Russia tried to solve the Iranian nuclear crisis while U.S. and Israel were looking for military action on Iran. In 2006 the Duma also criticised the Western step of referring Iranian nuclear file to Security Council and called the proposed sanctions on Iran as destructive. Russia was looking to consolidate its relation with Iran, and the policy pursued by the Russian government for consolidating relations with Iran was encouraging, coordinated and proactive. Russia tried to solve the problem with diplomatic means and assured the international community that it would not provide uranium enrichment technologies to Iran. Later, in the International Uranium Enrichment Center (city of Angarsk), Iran was also invited to participate in a workshop. Iran wanted all the facilities necessary for the nuclear cycle to be located within Iranian territory. Iranian leadership didn't want to accept the proposals and they wanted to delay it by any means possible (Dunaeva 2013).

All this time, the threat of the Iranian nuclear program continued to exist for Israel. Russia never denied the importance of Israel as it fought numerous wars with the Soviet allies in the region and also defeated them every time. Most of the Arab countries, if not all, were allied to the Soviet Union during the Cold War period and received huge economic and military assistance against joint Western powers and Israel. However, the very foundation of Israel was largely dependent on Russian immigrants and even during the Second World War USSR had helped to save Jews and had assisted them in the formation of the State of Israel. The Soviet Union was also among the first countries that recognised Israel as a state after its foundation. Immigrants from USSR, Russia and the former Soviet States are an integral part of Israel. Russia also realised the importance of

playing a leading role in Israel-Palestine peace process and forming alliances with the regimes which are anti-West in nature (Katz 2010).

In 2005 Bashar al-Assad visited Russia for the first time and it further improved relations between these two countries. The American war on Iraq (2003) made Russia rethink its policy towards West Asia, basically to secure its economic and security interests laying in this region. It also sorted out its debt issues with Syria while giving up US \$ 9.8 billion debt (73 percent of the total Soviet debt). In return, Syria offered Russia new seaports in Tartus and Latakia. However, it took a long time to conclude these between Russia and Syrian (during Assad visit to Russia) and the supply of MIG-29s and MIG-31s fighter jets were getting further delayed. Russia also did not supply the older generation aerial defence systems to Syria (Kreutz 2010; Magen 2013).

In 2004-2005, Russia's policy towards the Middle East took a major turn and it started supporting Arab nations. It took a pro-Palestine stance and criticised Israeli activities in West Bank and Gaza Strip. During the war in 2006, Russia extended its support to Syria, backed it in the international arena and provided military aid which indirectly reached Hezbollah (Magen 2013, Blank 2014). Russia also criticised Israel for using 'disproportionate use of force' during the invasion of Lebanon in 2006 (Trenin 2010). However, Russia still managed to have a balanced relationship with Israel and continued to support the Arab World and their demand of finding a solution to the Israel-Palestine conflict. Israel criticises Russia for supporting a terrorist group in its neighborhood. But Russia doesn't consider Hezbollah and Hamas as terrorist organisations.

Meanwhile, the revelation of two nuclear reactors in Iran raised suspicion about its nuclear program. This pressurised Russia to halt its nuclear cooperation and cede its export of dual-use nuclear technology to Iran. Russia was defended its position by saying that it had nothing to do with the two nuclear reactors and that Iran never informed the Russian administration about its secret activity (Dinmore 2002).

Saudi Arabia is seen as a competitor of Russia in the field of energy resources and is a known foe of Iran in the region. This makes it difficult for Russia to establish close ties with Saudi Arabia which is a close ally of the United States in the region. The ongoing Iranian nuclear cooperation proved to be an obstacle in the relation between Russia and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA). But it was becoming necessary for Russia to have friendly relations with Saudi Arabia not just because of Muslim sentiments but also for economic interests, as they both are leading oil and gas producers competing with each other rather than cooperating for greater mutual benefits. The economy of Russia is largely affected because of Middle Eastern countries that are US allies and their production of natural gas and oil (Katz 2010). Observer status in OIC shows that Russia is taking Saudi Arabia with seriousness.

There were also downturns in a Russian-Iranian relationship. After 9/11 incident, the disclosure of Arak and Natanz nuclear facility and the secretly built Qom facility arouse suspicion about Iran. On the other hand, Iran had a suspicion that Russia was cooperating with the West to impose sanctions on Iran and to create an obstacle in its nuclear research program. It was the time when both countries halted their relationship. Russia had interests in Iran because of certain reasons: its strategic location and for economic interests. In this regard, Russia exported nuclear fuels and technologies to Iran. US understandably objected Russia's involvement and its export of nuclear facilities to Iran. It had put forth various sanctions on Russia and Iran to resist the development of the Nuclear weapon. Iran cooperated with Russia because it had continuous threats from Iraq and considered the presence of the U.S. in Afghanistan and Israel as a major threat to its security.

Iranian President Ahmadinejad had the support of Ayatollah Khomeini (supreme religious leader of Iran). Even after rejecting the proposal, he made an announcement to resume work at Isfahan (uranium conversion plant) and produce nuclear fuel through uranium transformation. This is the reason why the EU had to stop talking further with

Iran on this matter and also referred this matter to the IAEA (Benhold 2005). Russia knew if the matter of Iranian nuclear research program would get referred to the UNSC, it would also leave a negative impact on Russia-Iran relationship, and Russia might lose its important ally in the process. After 2006, what new changes came into Russia-Iran relationship will be discussed in the following section. As the situation of the Iranian nuclear crisis was becoming more serious, Russia also had to change its policy. It brought major changes in 15 years old relationship with Iran (Alexander and Hoeing 2008).

Russia and China both expressed the same view and opposed the economic sanctions to be imposed on Iran. They both disagree with the EU-3 and U.S. and believed that this could not be a permanent solution of this problem and might also lead this situation further into crisis. In 2006, P5+1 and the United States offered a new package of proposals to Iran on the precondition that Iran stops its uranium enrichment activity. It allowed Iran to conduct uranium enrichment in future but in a limited manner. The United Nations Security Council resolution 1696 passed in July 2006 provided an option for Iran to negotiate till October but it had to stop uranium enrichment activity first (Reardon 2012).

By the end of 2006 there were around 1500 workers, 20,000 people, and 300 Russian firms actively engaged in the construction work of the Bushehr nuclear power plant in Iran. It highlights the importance of nuclear cooperation between Russia and Iran. It created huge job opportunities for Russians as well. There was a rise of demand in the world for nuclear energy and Russia wanted to control a bigger share of this demand. This is the reason why Russia-Iranian nuclear cooperation was seen as an example all over the world. Russia also wanted to prove its capabilities of nuclear energy in Iran. Russian-Iranian nuclear cooperation was also a matter of prestige for Russia as a reliable and experienced service provider of nuclear energy. Gluhov also mentioned that the construction projects of nuclear power plant abroad provided major job opportunities for around 300,000-400,000 Russians. This a significant reason why the Russian

administration had also been paying its attention towards nuclear companies of Russia involved in exports of nuclear technology and related materials to other countries (Aras and Ozbay 2006).

The chief negotiator of Iran Ali Larijani's meeting with EU-3 in New York at the United Nations was seen as a breakthrough. He showed Iran's intention to halt uranium enrichment activity if UNSC sanctions were removed. Larijani could also negotiate with Condoleezza Rice (U.S. Secretary of State). But this deal did not succeed as the supreme leader of Iran Khomeini rejected this proposal. Just after the deal failed, UNSCR 1737 was passed against Iran imposing a ban on ballistic-missile and civilian nuclear cooperation. Also some financial sanctions linked to the nuclear research program were imposed (United Nations Security Council Resolution 1737/2007).

The Bushehr nuclear power reactor was not included in the resolution. Russia continued to finish the construction of the reactor and also supplied low enriched fuel to Tehran for the operation of the reactor. On one hand, deadline was set through a resolution to suspend all activities related to uranium enrichment by February 2007, and on the other hand Iran continued its activity against the resolution 38. IAEA inspectors were banned by Iran in Natanz nuclear site and also started to install centrifuges in Natanz fuel enrichment plant. As Iran crossed the deadline fixed by the UNSCR 1737, UNSC passed a new resolution 1747 in February 2007. The UNSCR 1747 further extended financial sanctions on Iran and imposed more conditions on Iranian nuclear activities. It put a ban on Iranian arms exports. The imports were, however, not affected. This time Iran was given a deadline of 60 days to respond to the resolution. Iran still followed the same attitude. Therefore, more restrictions were applied to safeguards and inspections. Iran also denied to accept the revised Code 3.1 (initially accepted by Iran in 2003) of the Subsidiary Agreement and stuck to the original one under which a country had to provide information about its new nuclear facilities (when nuclear reactor is at the designing

stage) to the IAEA in 180 days before receiving materials for nuclear facilities (Cordesman and Kleiber 2012).

The issue was became critical because the Iranian leadership did not pay any attention to the UNSCR 1747. The deadline also passed in May 2007. Meanwhile, Iran engaged in uranium enrichment activity on an industrial scale with the use of more than 1000 centrifuges at fuel enrichment plant in Natanz. It increased the level of production by 3.5%. Later Iran and EU came together to discuss the possibility of negotiation, and in this discussion it was assured the sanctions would not be imposed further if Iran would not expand its uranium enrichment activity further. It was confirmed by IAEA officials in mid-May 2007 that in Natanz uranium enrichment plant around 3,000 centrifuges were operating in Iran (Cordesman and Kleiber 2012).

Although Russia had been cooperating with the United States and EU-3 to impose UNSC economic sanctions on Iran, both Russia and Iran had maintained their trust in each other and the relationship remained stable. The main motive of Russia to maintain strong relations with Iran was because it could not afford to lose its bargaining chip in a relationship with the West. In October 2007 Putin's visit to Iran also clarified that it wanted to maintain its good relations with Iran inspite of a certain disagreement on the situation of nuclear crisis. This visit only lasted for 24 hours because of a rumor of Putin's assassination. This visit of Putin failed to normalise the situation because Russia wanted to complete Bushehr power plant and could not deliver air defence system to Iran as it had promised (due to the U.S. and Israeli pressure on Russian government) (Hunter 2010). After this Russia finally delivered enriched uranium to Iran (December 2007-January 2008) as it was needed to start the Bushehr nuclear power plant (Katz 2012).

The UNSC Resolution 1803 was passed in 2008, which was followed by the Chapter VII of the UN Charter. It was similar to the sanctions imposed on Iraq. It got passed with 14

votes in favour and one abstention (United Nations Security Council Resolution 1803: 2008) It also had the same conditions for Iran like abandoning nuclear research work (suspend uranium enrichment) and cooperating with the IAEA framework. It was for the second time, when land, air, and maritime sanctions were imposed on a country after Iraq. Imports and exports were regularly inspected and member nations were suggested not to supply technology of dual-use to Iran. The review report of the Iranian nuclear activity was to be submitted by the Director General of IAEA in UNSC after 90 days showing whether Iran had met with the conditions or not (Mousavian 2012). Russia stepped back in this condition as it did not want to pay a bigger price for supporting the Iranian nuclear research program.

In May 2008, Dmitry Medvedev was elected as a new President of the Russian Federation. During the same time there was also a major shift in the U.S. foreign policy when Barak Obama was elected as the new president. He took some important steps like change in policy towards anti-missile sites located in Central Europe. Russia showed indications to that it too might cooperate with them to impose strict sanctions against Iran. While Russia was playing a diplomatic role in case of Iranian nuclear crisis, it was cooperating with the West to impose sanction on Iran. At the same time Russia tried to convince them not to impose strict economic or political sanction on it. To put it clearly, Russia was helping Iran and trying to save its economic interest involved in Russian-Iranian nuclear cooperation. The reason Russia gave for not imposing a harsh sanction on Iran was that it did not believe that sanctions could ever lead to the permanent solution (Katz 2012).

The Russian foreign minister's arguments with Tehran in early 2008 can be taken as an example. Russia tried to convince Iran by saying that the new UNSC resolution had not included any new economic sanctions. It had worked to soften the sanction of the resolution. However, Tehran was still not impressed by this argument and criticised Russia for not using veto power in UNSC to block the resolution and for its cooperation

with the West. In September 2008, when a new UNSCR 1835 drafted by Russia was passed, it further increased the pressure on Iran to suspend its nuclear activity. Russia still argued the same thing that the resolution did not contain any new sanctions to be imposed on Iran (S/RES/1835(2008)). Iran hoped that after Georgia crisis of August 2008, Russian-American relations would have been diluted and Russia would go against America in UNSC to help Iran, which turned out to be merely a false assumption of Iran (Mousavian 2012).

Russian-Saudi relation had began to improve post-2003 with a series of high profile visits. Two visits of Crown Prince Abdallah to Moscow in 2003 and Putin's visit in 2007 (Katz 2010) are examples. In 2007, during President Putin's visit to Riyadh, agreements of cooperation were discussed including the issue of joint security ventures. Russian concerns about the involvement of Saudi Arabia in the reconstruction of Chechnya were discussed (Magen 2013; Katz 2015). As it has been discussed already, close relations of Russia with countries like Iran and Syria have created doubt in Riyadh leadership.

Since 2007 Russia, along with United States, EU and other members of United Nations has been seeking Israeli-Palestinian peace, while at the same time keeping friendly relations with Fatah in Palestine and with Hamas and Hezbollah in Lebanon. As a result, Russia expelled the Israeli diplomats. In late 2008-early 2009, Operation Cast Lead of Israel was launched against Hamas in Gaza, and by 2010, according to Israeli's intelligence community, Hamas had acquired Russian anti-air missiles (i.e., SA-7 and SA-14) which were used against Israel. Russia halted the supply of military weapons to the region and refused to deliver S-300 anti-aircraft missiles to Iran and Syria. Russia wants to keep these cards (Hamas and Hezbollah) in its hands so that it can play a key role in Israel-Palestinian peace process and make sure its voice is heard (Blank 2014).

Russia and Iran both have a common security interest in the Caspian Sea basin, and because of US connection in this region, there is a mutual concern for both countries. In 2008, Vladimir Putin at G8 Summit publicly commented that there should be some check on Iran's nuclear ambitions by the international community. During this time, changes came as Medvedev was elected as the new President of Russia from 2008 to 2012. In this section the changes he brought in terms of Russian foreign policy towards the Iranian nuclear research program shall be elucidated. Russia moved further towards the West and U.S. as Iran was not ready to accept the proposal. Russia had also started cooperating with IAEA and others on the Iranian nuclear crisis. Soon Russia also joined with other IAEA members on whether the matter should be referred to the United Nations Security Council or not. Iran was not happy with the Russian action and was feeling betrayed and unhappy. It announced the withdrawal of Iran from the additional protocol of IAEA. Even though Russia started to cooperate with the U.S. and EU-3 regarding the Iranian nuclear problem at the UNSC, still it was not ready to support a UNSC resolution on the mere suspicion that Iran might be secretly involved in development of nuclear weapon (Alexander and Hoenig 2008).

This was believed by a number of western scholars that Putin, as a Prime Minister, was still practicing real presidential powers and shaped Russian policy at home and abroad (Kreutz 2010; Magen 2013). Later it became clear that it cannot afford a direct confrontation with the West and US. The only remaining option for Russia was to wage a 'proxy war' with the help of friendly regimes in the West Asian region. The main focus of Russia's foreign policy towards West Asia during this period was to establish close relationships with the local regional powers capable of opposing the presence of the West and US in the region (Hamid 2011).

Javier Solana (EU high representative for common foreign and security policy) pursued Iranian authority for the negotiations on Iranian nuclear crisis in 2006 and later in 2008. On this basis Iran would get diplomatic and economic help if it was ready to abandon its

nuclear research program. The reason why Iran did not consider these incentives was because they could not meet the demands and expectations of Iranian authority. The UNSC also imposed economic sanctions and other regulations on Iran for the same reason. A number of resolutions were passed, like, resolution 1737 of December 2006, resolution 1747 of March 2007, resolution 1803 of March 2008 and resolution 1929 of June 2010. This further increased the pressure on Iranian economy and other activity related to the development of nuclear weapon. The European Union (EU) also imposed some sanctions on Iran to pressurise it into abandoning secret nuclear research activity in its territory. The option of negotiations always remained open by EU for Iran known as 5+1 or EU-3+3 (Bahgat 2013).

Tourism also played a crucial role in developing close ties between Russia and Israel; for instance, from 2008 onwards Visa had been abolished for Russian tourists visiting Israel (Trenin 2010). Israel also showed interest in mutual trade relation with Russia. For instance, Israel started export of technology, food, agriculture and medical equipment and knowledge to Russia. The joint venture for the manufacture of unmanned aerial vehicle or security industry was also signed between Russia and Israel. High profile visit to Russia from Israel also took place during this period, while Russia under Putin regime also encouraged Israel for investment in Russia (Magen & Karasova 2015; Katz 2015).

Russia still tries to maintain a balance between Israel and the rest of the Arab nations and to not jeopardise its position in the Middle East. Ultimately friendly relation with Israeli opponents create doubt in Israeli leadership and create an obstacle in the relation between Russia and Israel (Katz 2015). Russia wants to draw Israel away from the United States' influence and offer itself as an alternative. After the Arab Spring Russia is lost its key strategic allies in the region. It became more important for Russia to seek new regional architecture. The challenge posed by Turkey and the emerging Sunni bloc has left Russia with no other option but to go with Israel and the newly formed regimes in the region

after the Arab Spring. In the Israel-Palestinian peace process Russia is looking for an opportunity to play a leading role (Trenin 2010; Magen & Naumkin 2013).

In early 2005, Iran criticised Russia for the delay in the construction of the Bushehr nuclear power reactor which had already been delayed for ten years. Firstly, the deadline for the completion of the construction was delayed up to 2004, then up to 2005, which was then delayed up to 2007. Finally in 2010, it was announced by Russia that the construction of the Bushehr nuclear power plant would be completed and would be made operational by September 2010. In October 2009, Iranian authority also announced that the construction of the Bushehr nuclear power was 95 percent complete (Hunter 2010). In the meantime, both Russia and Iran accused the United States and European Union for the sanctions imposed on Russian industries which created obstacles and delayed the construction work. Iran always claimed that its nuclear activities had nothing to do with its military defence and expressed their desire to make the Middle East region a nuclear weapon-free zone.

Russian officials were expecting that the Bushehr nuclear power plant would become functional by the end of 2008 while Iranian officials were expecting the same by mid-2008. Later in late 2008, the Russian government and nuclear-power-industry sources stated that the operation would begin in 2009. The reason given by Russia was that the German equipment was not integrating with that of the Russians. Both the countries had opposite perceptions about the period of completion of the nuclear power plant. Iranian nuclear minister statement of November 2008 also clarifies the same,

“They have promised (to complete) it by next year. We hope that they will not fail to carry it out. They have promised several times but they did not carry it out for some reason. Maybe they have their own reasons” (Katz 2012).

Russia and the U.S. cooperated on the matter of supplying nuclear fuel to Iran. Later Russia also supported the new resolution 1929 passed by UNSC in June 2010. According to the experts, the perspectives of Russia and America about Iranian nuclear program had become similar to each other and they began to share the same concerns after the disclosure of secret uranium enrichment facility in Qom in September 2009. In the same year, Ahmadinejad was re-elected as President of Iran. Russia congratulated Ahmadinejad, but his policies hereafter arose suspicion in the Russian government. Senator Mikhail Margelov, in his statement, clarified the fear Russia had in mind about the possibility of 'color revolution' in Iran which could bring an anti-Russian and pro-American regime into power. This would create an obstacle to economic interests of Russia in Iran. In 2009, Ahmadinejad also showed his intentions and claimed for compensation from Russia on the basis that the Soviet Union had occupied the northern half of Iran during Second World War along with some other accusations. It was assumed as an action to create distance from Russia and gain support of America. Russia was still in support of Ahmadinejad (i.e., Green movement), but the negative attitude of Iran made Russia extend cooperation to the U.S. on the Iranian nuclear issue. Also, Obama's administration was looking for greater help from Russia in this matter.

As a result, in June 2010, on one hand, Russia cooperated with the West in UNSCR 1929 to further increase in the sanctions on Iran and on the other, it denied the supply S-300 air defense missile system. Russia tried to strengthen relationship when the presidents of both countries met in a meeting of the Third Caspian Summit in November 2010 and later in Shanghai Cooperation Organization meeting in June 2011 (Dunaeva 2013). According to the experts, START (Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty) had vastly contributed to this change of behavior in Russia. The Arab Spring (started from Tunisia in January 2011 as Jasmine revolution) in the Middle East for the promotion of democracy was a major change which influenced the policy of Russia towards the Middle East, especially Iran. In the meanwhile, there were talks held between P5+1 and Iran at the end of 2010 and early 2011 (Reardon 2012).

In December 2008 Iran was expecting the plant not to be operational until 2010. In September 2011 the Bushehr nuclear power plant had finally become operational. Russia had been providing continuous support to Syria on a number of issues like the Syrian nuclear project, involvement in Lebanon, supporting terrorist organisations or arming Hezbollah and cooperation with Iran (Trenin 2010). Even after the speech of Putin in the G8 Summit of 2008, it agreed for open support of the West against Iranian nuclear program. Meanwhile, Russia also called for an arrangement to keep Iranian nuclear ambition in check and to have routine inspection by the international community. Despite this, the Russian economic advisor stated that Iran being a neighbour, it was crucial to establish friendly relations and agreed to provide support even for the development of civil nuclear energy. The Western countries raised objection regarding Russian and Iranian nuclear cooperation at the NPT conference held at United Nations headquarters in May 2010. In 2011, while chairing the Non-Aligned movement conference, Egypt proposed that the Middle East should be a nuclear weapon-free zone (MENWFZ) and should follow the 1995 review conference of NPT proposal regarding the same. This proposal was accepted and welcomed by the West including the United States (Fitzpatrick 2012).

The continuously expanding area of nuclear infrastructure in Iran and Iranian scientists' claims to have developed indigenous capabilities to develop nuclear weapons make it certain that Iran is a nuclear country though does not possess a single nuclear weapon. The IAEA's failure to find hard evidence of Iran's development of nuclear weapon does not mean that there is no such effort. Iran's efforts to build a complete fuel cycle are seen as suspicious activity by Western countries in the development of its civil nuclear energy program. But still, the nuclear research program is in progress and is becoming a major threat for the immediate neighbours and other states allied to the US, and for regional and as well as international peace and stability.

Yakhont P-800 naval cruise missiles were supplied to Syria in December 2011 that are capable of posing a threat to Israel and NATO forces in the Mediterranean Sea. The 2011 Arab Spring was seen as a mobilised effort of the West to replace regimes allied to Moscow with ones allied to the West. Russia has been blocking all Western/Arab backed efforts against Assad's regime in Syria at the UNSC. Russia has been providing arms to prevent the downfall of the Assad regime and also collaborating with Middle East countries who oppose the downfall of the Assad regime for fear of its replacement, which could be worse (Iran, Iraq under the Shi'a, Egypt under Sisi, Algeria, Israel). On the other hand, Russia has been cooperating with Europe and America in their efforts for anti-WMD against Iran and Syria so that they perceive Russia as their partner even with all differences. In the end, Russia attempting to isolate Saudi Arabia and its Gulf Arab allies (supporting Islamic State, IS) from the West. Russia's support to Assad regime serve the Western interest in the region as democratisation will only lead to hostile Sunni Islamist forces in the region and not stability (Magen 2013; Blank 2014; Katz 2015).

Russia saw these democratic uprising West Asia as inspired by the West especially the U.S. Both Putin and Medvedev felt cautious about the changes because of the involved interests as well as their declining relationship with the strong allies. On February 2011, Salehi (the head of Iran's Atomic Energy Organization) officially declared, *"If they are ready to supply the fuel rods for the Tehran Research Reactor, we would stop the entire process of 20% enrichment."* Russia was surprised with the step taken by Iran when Iranian ambassador to Moscow (Mahmoud Reza Sajjadi) stated that Iran had filed a complaint in International Court of Arbitration against Russia for cancellation of the contract to supply S-300 missile. In August 2011, some centrifuges were also transferred under the monitoring of IAEA to Fordow facility. After the resolution was adopted, Iran experienced a sharp decline in value of its currency (20 percent) by September 2011 and later in October 2011. Both Russia and China criticised IAEA for its report and its accusation of Russia for creating an obstacle in serious talk with Iran. Later in December same year, a bill was signed by Obama to imposesanction on economic institutions involved in business with Iran, the reason why Russia had sought to strengthen the

regime of Ahmadinejad and Khatami in Iran. Iran started to cooperate with the West (P5+1) and IAEA on different levels, but as the charge of the nuclear file had gone into hands of Jalili, there was no further improvement in the situation by the end of the year (Mousavian 2012).

In the beginning, the relationship between Iran and the United States and European countries were tense as Iran was continuing its anti-Western policy. The Russian-Iranian nuclear cooperation was also not stable as the Bushehr nuclear reactor had started working in September 2011 and Russia had control over the operation of the plant. In January 2012, the first nuclear fuel rod was tested successfully by Iran for the Tehran Research Reactor. It also started to enrich 20 percent uranium in Fordow as it had told IAEA (Mousavian 2012). In January 2012, IAEA director-general (Yukiya Amano) also made a statement about the Iranian nuclear research program and said that he believed Iran was developing a nuclear capability to create nuclear bombs.

The Arab Spring in the Middle East and the Syrian Crisis greatly affected the bilateral relationship between Russia and Iran. Central Asia, Caucasian and Syria were the centres of collaboration for both countries. Russia continued to support Iran on the civilian nuclear research program and strengthened the relationship because of the U.S. missile defense shield and Islamic extremism in Russian territory. The United States appreciated the sanctions imposed by the EU on Iran and also stated to increase the pressure further through new sanctions. It also issued an Executive Order for the same in February 2012. Later, in March, under the pressure of EU sanctions, SWIFT (The Society for Worldwide Interbank Financial Telecommunication) also largely cut off the transaction of Iran through its network due to which the business of 30 Iranian banks and subsidiaries were largely affected.

The problems of Chechnya and Dagestan brought Russia close to Iran because as an Islamic country it could easily influence religious sentiments and pose a threat to Russian interests in the region. Russia always had the feeling that Chechnya had been influenced by Saudi Arabia and trained by Pakistan, while Turkey and the U.S. had been giving diplomatic support (Talukdar 2014: 2; Casula and Katz 2018: 299). On 7th May 2012, Putin was re-elected as President of the Russian Federation succeeding Dmitry Medvedev. The scenario had changed dramatically in Russian-Iranian relationship as the relationship began declining due to the sanctions imposed by the West on Iran. Russia did not want to counter United States or European Countries directly. But it also was not ready to lose Iran. In May 2012, IAEA again reported about Iranian enrichment activity which had increased by 3.5 percent violating the UNSC resolution and NPT treaty. Parchin military site was identified and assumed to have served as the base of Iranian nuclear activity. But Iran was not in the mood to allow IAEA officials to visit and inspect the site.

Iran was also concerned about the declining economy and was ready to cooperate with the EU and the United States. In July 2012, EU banned the oil imports from Iran to pressurise Iran. It also froze assets in Europe and Iranian central bank. Through this action of the European Union, it was intended to target the financial support of Iran (Mousavian 2012). EU wanted Iran to limit the uranium enrichment to 5 percent only with the threat of imposing harsh sanctions. The talks that took place in Moscow failed because of different perspectives about Iranian nuclear activity. Russia had been defending Iran as always, at the same time EU was in favour of imposing sanctions and pressurising Iran to suspend nuclear activity.

In August 2012, the UN, the United States and Israel together expressed their concerns on the return of Mohsen Fakhrizadeh who had been actively involved in the development of Iranian military warheads. The IAEA report also stated that the uranium enrichment centrifuges had been doubled compared to the previous data in Fordow facility (near

Qom). The Parchin nuclear site was yet to be inspected. In January 2013 Ali Akbar Salehi (Iranian foreign minister) announced that Iran wanted to restart the negotiations with P5+1 on nuclear crisis through the mediation of Cairo. The meeting had to take place in Cairo. Henry Kissinger (former US Secretary of State) also believed in serious negotiation with Iran while being concerned about the behaviour of Iran. Through this strategy, it was trying to gain time for its nuclear program through negotiations with the West, without accepting the recommendations. Ayatollah Khamenei stated on March 2013 that Iran was not opposed to talking with the United States (Bahgat 2013). Iran informed IAEA about the installation of upgraded uranium enrichment centrifuges (IR2M) in Natanz, which would enrich uranium two to three times faster, by February. Iran had already started installing the advanced centrifuges in Natanz. IAEA also reported the rapid improvement in the nuclear activity of Iran.

In August 2013 Hassan Rouhani was elected as the new president of Iran replacing Ahmadinejad. Rouhani, being pro-West, served as the chief nuclear negotiator, and suspended certain nuclear activities of Iran that had been the main concern for the EU and the US thus trying to ease the tension between the West and Iran. The expanding nuclear infrastructure of Iran increased the tension in the West and wanted to increase the pressure through sanctions. Russia and China opposed the action and created division. United States was planning to block the oil export of Iran as it was already cut off by half through international sanctions. Hassan Rouhani made it clear that Iran would not cede its nuclear activity as it was not involved in the development of the nuclear weapon. Options were open for negotiations with the International Community. Iran also announced in September that Russia was ready to hand over the Bushehr nuclear power plant as it had been operating at full capacity. The United States President Barak Obama stressed the diplomatic solution of the Iranian nuclear crisis but did not deny the possibility of use of force. Iran rejected the proposal of the West to clear the sensitive nuclear material from the territory of Iran.

In November 2013, Iran signed an agreement with IAEA and expressed its intention to share information regarding Heavy Water Production Plant in Arak and Gchine uranium sites. The agreement between P3+3 and Iran had reached some understanding. It agreed to halt the Iranian nuclear research program within six months (Kerr 2014). Some important points of the deal on which both parties agreed are mentioned below:

1. Iran had committed to halting its uranium enrichment activity to 5 percent.
2. The stockpile of uranium was to be neutralized by 20 percent.
3. It was proposed under the deal that the expansion of uranium enrichment activity should be halt by Iran.
4. The activity in Arak reactor should be halt and the access should be given to IAEA inspectors to inspect the nuclear site on daily bases, for example, Natanz and Fordow sites (United Nations Security Council Resolution 2105/2013).

In return for these steps taken by Iran, the international community revoked some sanctions and no new sanctions were to be imposed if it fulfilled the proposed demands. Under the agreements between P3+3 and Iran, it was agreed that the sanction imposed on gold and precious metals would be revoked and the auto sector, as well as petrochemical exports, would be in flow again. Russia did not oppose the agreement because of the continuous fear that the United States can deploy its missile defence in Romania and Poland, close to Russian borders. The common concerns shared by both countries had enabled them to have a close relationship. Russia was the only country which could support and counterbalance the United States in this region. The policy of Russia of non-interference in the internal matter of a country and diplomatic solutions of problems had made Russia a more reliable country for Iran to maintain a close relationship with (Talukdar 2014).

Egypt tried to forge positive relations with the Russian Federation, without any intention of posing Islamic threat to the internal security of Russia or competing with it in terms of energy sources. Trade relation between Egypt and Russia stands beyond US\$ 2 billion

per annum, tourism also played an important role in that (Trenin 2010: 10). Though Russia preferred Mubarak's regime in Egypt, it did not come to the aid or recuse of the collapsing regime during the Arab Spring. After the change of regime in Egypt, Russia again tried to establish a friendly relationship with the new Muslim regime (Magen 2013: 41).

Before the breakout of Arab Spring in the Middle East, Putin was trying to establish a relation with almost all the governments in the region, whether they were pro-West (Saudi Arabia or other Gulf Arab Countries, Israel, Egypt under Sisi, etc.) or anti-West (Syria, Iran, Algeria, and Libya). Russia was uncomfortable with the downfall of Mubarak's regime in Egypt as it was a longstanding ally in the Middle East region. Moscow saw Arab Spring as one backed by the West and the United States to change the anti-West regime with the pro-West instead. This act of the West was seen to target Russia and give rise to similar Muslim forces (Magen 2013; Katz 2015: 3-4).

Iraq went through a crisis since the US invasion (2003). It is a reason why Iraq was not able to pursue its foreign policy towards Russia during Putin's leadership. Even Putin morally supported the action taken by the United States under the banner of "War on Terror" after the 9/11 terrorist attack. As it was moving towards stability, a new problem was knocking on the door. The Islamic State (ISIS), including humanitarian crisis, the Kurdish question, and uncertainty in foreign relations became major challenges. The same situation was with Russia after the Arab Spring. The regime friendly to Russia lost power or was overthrown (Mishra 2018: 72). Russia had supplied Iraq ten Mi-28NE attack helicopters, Pantsir-S1 gun missile, Mi-35 helicopters, and four Su-25 fighter jets (Roy and Roy 2018: 265).

The relation of Russia and Egypt, after the collapse of Mubarak's regime, were cooled-off. The new government under Sisi took initiative to improve relations with Moscow and

Russia too responded positively. Putin’s visit in 2015 to Egypt made it clear that Russia still wanted friendly relations with Egypt. He also declared to help Egypt in building ‘a whole new nuclear power industry’, the first nuclear plant in Al-Dabaa. The importance of the Suez Canal region has increased for Russia for commercial purposes. The bilateral trade between Egypt and Russia has increased by half last year amounting to \$4.5 billion. Cross border tourism has also flourished between the two countries. Egypt provides support for combating terrorism in the region and denies the Saudi strategy in the region of ‘Sunni triangle’ against ‘Shi’a crescent’ (Dick Cheney during her visit in 2006 to Riyadh). The military deal for MIG-29 fighter jets, helicopters, Kornet anti-tank missiles, and air defence system also took place between Egypt and Russia. Egypt has been waiting to join the groups like BRICS (Askary 2015). As the United State has started to withdraw from Egypt, Russia is planning to resume its military cooperation. Russia has not found any success in military cooperation with Saudi Arabia in the region (Roy and Roy 2018: 265).

TABLE 3.2
Military Expenditure by Country, 2005-2014
(Figures are in US \$m., 2011)

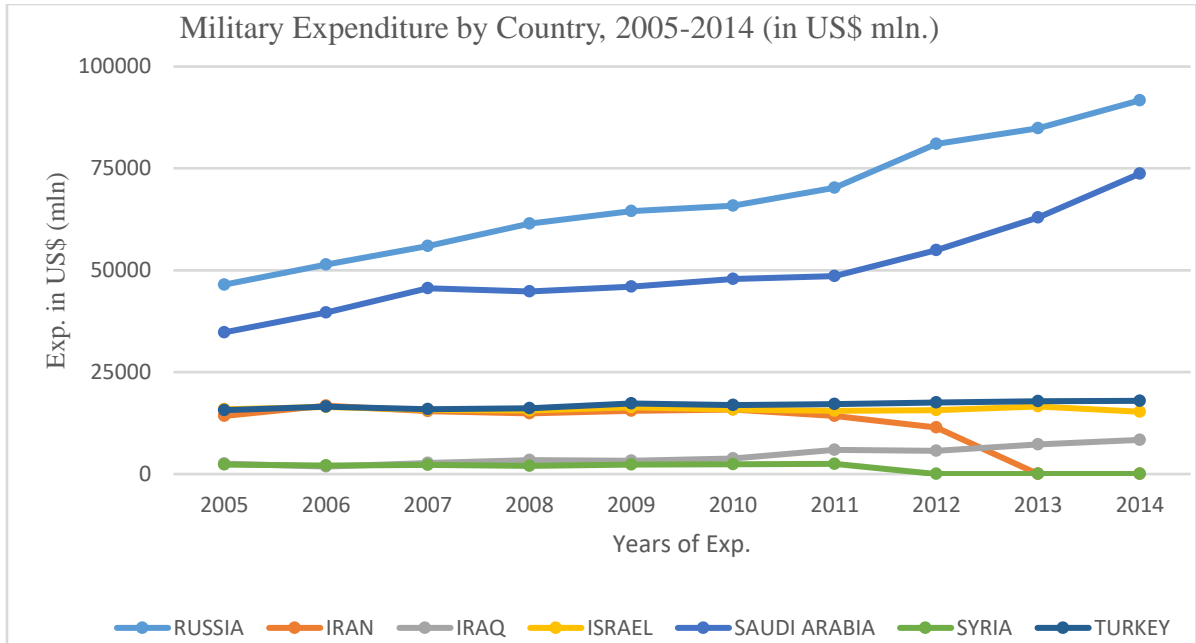
STATE	2005	2007	2009	2011	2012	2013	2014	2014*
RUSSIA	46477	55954	64503	70237	80996	84841	91694	84462
IRAN	14255	15444	15535	14278	11453	..	..	..
IRAQ	2546	2729	3231	5905	5688	7281	8381	9516
ISRAEL	15906	15759	16382	15481	15636	16581	15283	15908
SAUDI ARABIA	34762	45613	46004	48531	54913	62933	73717	80762
SYRIA	2339	2236	2301	2495	..	..	..	..
TURKEY	15669	15925	17276	17130	17538	17898	17964	22618

TABLE: 3.2.1
Military Expenditure by Country, 2005-2014
(Figures in % of GDP)

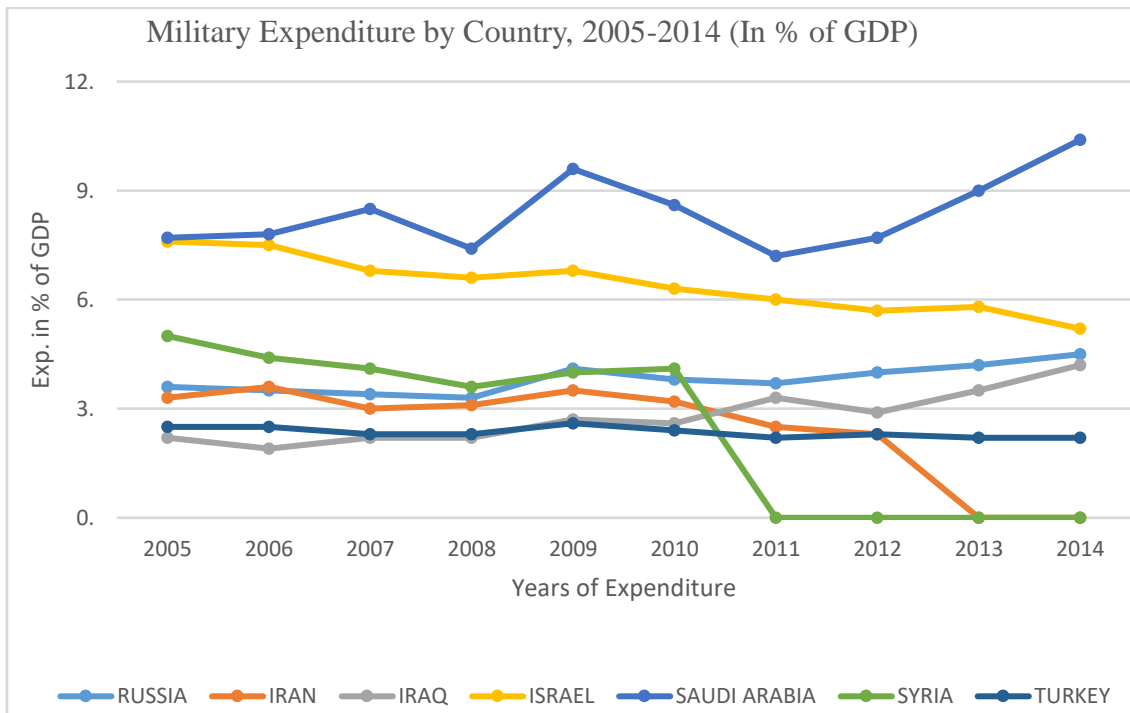
STATE	2005	2007	2009	2011	2012	2013	2014
RUSSIA	3.6	3.4	4.1	3.7	4.0	4.2	4.5
IRAN	3.3	3.0	3.5	2.5	2.3	..	..
IRAQ	2.2	2.2	2.7	3.3	2.9	3.5	4.2
ISRAEL	7.6	6.8	6.8	6.0	5.7	5.8	5.2
SAUDI ARABIA	7.7	8.5	9.6	7.2	7.7	9.0	10.4
SYRIA	5.0	4.1	4.0	..	..	..	..
TURKEY	2.5	2.3	2.6	2.2	2.3	2.2	2.2

Source: SIPRI Yearbook 2015: 386-387.
 US\$ prices and value of exchange in 2011.
 * current US\$ m. for 2014

GRAPH: 3.2



GRAPH: 3.2.1



Source: SIPRI Yearbook 2015

Russia was spending US\$ 84.5 billion on military R&D, which was almost double of the total military expenditure in 2005 or US\$ 46.4 billion. In case of Russia, the share of military expenditure in GDP was 3.6 percent, however it has increased to 4.5 percent in 2014. Meanwhile, the Russian government's expenditure on military R&D holds 4.8 percent of the total military expenditure of the world, followed by Saudi Arabia with 4.5 percent of the world share. In 2014, the military expenditure of Saudi Arabia amounted to US\$ 80.4 billion which was changed by 112 percent during the period of 2005-2014. In terms of GDP, for Saudi Arabia, the share of military expenditure has increased from 7.7 percent in 2005 to 10.4 percent by 2014. Turkey also made it to the top 15 countries in terms of military expenditure with a total of US\$ 22.6 billion spent in 2014. For Turkey, the share of military expenditure has also increased by 15 percent during the period of 2005 to 2014. However, the share of Turkish government expenditure for military R&D in GDP has marked a decrease from 2.4 percent (2005) to 2.2 percent in 2014. Turkey held the fifteenth position in the world with 1.3 percent share in comparison to the total military expenditure done by all countries throughout the world by 2014 (SIPRI 2015: 352).

In 2006, the sanctions were lifted and President of Iran (Rouhani) called for lesser dependence of Iran on oil exports and more focus on reforming the economy. It proved to be difficult for Iran because of the economic dependency on oil. Since 2015, sanctions and continuous low oil prices in the international market have enabled to generate sufficient revenue for its economy. Revenue from oil was reduced to US\$ 18 billion only though it was producing enough oil (2.8 million BPD.). By the end of 2016, revenue from oil for Iran had touched US\$ 24.7 billion and expected to reach US\$ 41 billion by the end of March 2017. Putin had also visited Iran in 2015 and discussed the joint actions against the Islamic State in Syria. The arms trade between the countries and their political-economic ties were also part of the discussion (Ningthoujam 2018: 50).

Alaeddin Boroujerdi (Iranian Chairman for the Committee for Foreign Policy and National Security) passed a statement regarding military cooperation between Russia and Iran and stated that, “*The cooperation between Russia and Iran carries on, our armed forces continue to buy MI-17 helicopters from the Russian Federation, we also got the S300 from Russia*”. Iran possesses 50 Russian helicopters, out of which, the MI-17 is the latest one. Iran also expressed its interest in coastal defense missile system (armed with Yakhont anti-ship missile), S-400 Triumph (anti-aircraft missile), fighter jets of Russia. In 2016, Viktor Ozerov (head of the defense and security committee) visited Iran and negotiated US\$ 10 billion deal with Iran, which includes T-90 tanks, aircraft and artillery systems (Roy and Roy 2018: 265).

CONCLUSION

In the early 1990s, Russia’s policy towards West Asia was inactive because of the pro-West policy of Yeltsin. After a long debate between Atlanticist and Eurasianist, Eurasianists started to gain some power in domestic politics of Russia and created some influence over foreign policy. Primakov initiated the active involvement of Russia in the West, and the export of nuclear energy and military weapons to the regional countries was resumed. Russia’s major strategic interests in the region include construction of nuclear reactors in Iran, its own military presence in Syria, exploitation of natural resources available in the Caspian Sea region, containment of NATO, combating the threat of radical Islamism in the post-Soviet countries along its borders, cooperation with regional countries for stability of oil and gas prices in the international market, and smooth transportation of gas through pipelines.

With the active involvement in West Asia, Russia is gaining some superpower status in the international politics. The military campaign against Georgia, Ukraine and now Syria has cleared its intentions that Russia still possess the capability to manipulate the international politics.

Along with all these policies, Russia, under Putin’s leadership, has gone through 2008 economic crisis, Georgian War (2008), Arab Spring in West Asia, Ukraine Crisis, and the

sanctions imposed by the West after Ukraine War and Iranian nuclear crisis. Russia remained actively engaged in West Asia and launched its military and airstrike campaign in support of Assad against the Islamic State in Syria. The variegated policy of Russia in the region and the success in the Syrian crisis has offered some new opportunities for Russia in West Asia.

CHAPTER FOUR

RUSSIA-WEST ASIA ECONOMIC RELATION

INTRODUCTION

After 1991, Russia became an independent nation-state, largely dependent on the income from export of oil, gas and arms which was subjected to the highly volatile fluctuations of prices in the international energy market. In the early 1990s, thousands of skilled workers fled from Russia and immigrated to Israel, US and Germany. Under the government of Boris Yeltsin, newly enriched oligarchs, for their financial support, gained an excessive all-around influence in Russia. Meanwhile, Russia did not want to spoil its improving relations with the US but the financial aid and help provided by the West were not sufficient enough for the recovery of the Russian economy and its political stability. The Gore-Chernomyrdin agreement (1995) was the result of the same but soon Russia had also realized the strategic interests of the US and started to withdraw from the support it was having from the West and US. Russia under Putin's leadership relaunched its former Soviet policy to establish bilateral relations with the countries in West Asia region like Iran and Syria. They became more beneficial for Russia in terms of economic recovery and for improving its status in the international community after the dissolution of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR). The Gore-Chernomyrdin agreement was abrogated by the Putin Administration in 2000, since then the relationship between Russia and Iran continuously improved, creating suspicion in Western nations about the possible intentions of Russia with which it might have provided nuclear technology to Iran and other military weapons and armaments.

At present, Russian Federation is one of the largest exporters of armaments and ammunition in the world. The objective behind Russia's sale and export of weapons has shifted from a predominant ideological motive during the Soviet era to that of profit-making in today's era. The export web of Russia has widened beyond arms. Oil, gas and raw materials (including nuclear materials) constitute a significant share of Russia's

export items. Since Russia is the largest producer of oil outside the Middle East and it continues to increase its sale of arms and nuclear materials in the Middle East, the role of Russia in international energy market needs to be examined closely. The West specifically the US continues to view the increasing presence of Russia in the Middle East from the prism of suspicion and considers that it threatens the peace in this region (the Iranian nuclear crisis can be cited as a clear example). This in turn serves as a factor in wedging further cracks in relations between the West and Russia.

The major importer of Russia's arms and other raw materials in the Middle East are Syria, Iran and Iraq. Egypt is also joining hands with Russia for nuclear materials for an alternative energy source (Nuclear Power Plant in Dabba), which secure huge revenue to Russian economy after arms sales. But now Russia is facing challenges in the open market because of the increased competitors in the International markets of arms and nuclear energy. So far Russia finds the Middle East region as a prospective and reliable region as most of the countries have anti-West sentiments, largely affected by the continuous intervention by the West in the region. This chapter will highlight the benefits of Russia's economic interaction with the Middle East countries like Turkey, Israel, Iran, Syria, Iraq and Saudi Arabia and its areas of economic cooperation (especially in the field of nuclear power, military equipments, oil and gas) with them.

PUTIN AND ECONOMIC RELATIONS WITH WEST ASIA

The election of Vladimir Putin as the President in 2000 marked the beginning of political change in Russia. To take control of Russia's economy, Putin started to strike the oligarchs, tycoons and whoever opposed his policy of domestic reforms, and especially those who controlled the oil industry, the media and the banks. The oil prices rose sharply after 1999, enabling Putin to pay for the higher living standards and funds, which his predecessor didn't have. In the process, he also consolidated his grip over the domestic stake holders, the government machineries and also closed down Minatom (the Ministry of Atomic Energy) (Rivlin 2005).

MAJOR RUSSIAN FIRMS

The economic policy of Russia cannot be understood without the examination of its major companies in the field of oil and gas exports like Gazprom, Rosneft, Lukoil and Novatek and their role in acquiring huge revenue for the state. Russian defence industry is the second largest arms exporter after the US and major customers of its military weapons are located in the Middle East or in Asia itself (Syria, Iraq, Turkey, Egypt, Iran, and India even Saudi Arabia is joining the queue). The use of nuclear technology for energy is becoming more famous in the Asian region and there is a huge demand for Russian nuclear technology in the Middle East as well as in another region of the World, while Rosatom (Rosatom State Nuclear Energy Cooperation, known as Minatom until 2008) is a major player in this field, engaged in Iran, Egypt, and Turkey as well.

GAZPROM

Gazprom group is one of the largest firm in Russia, actively engages in exploration, extraction and production of Gas and Oil, including refined products and electric power and heat energy. In terms of exploration, Gazprom is on top globally with 17 percent shares of global reserves and 72 percent of gas reserves in Russia. In terms of production of natural gas, Gazprom has maintained the top position globally while producing the 11 percent share of global gas production and 66 percent share in terms of Russian federation. The Gazprom group is also on top of the global list in terms of length of gas pipelines network (171.4 thousand km, length of trunk pipelines in Russia) and capacity of gas transportation system (622.6 bcm, GTS network in Russia). The storage capacity of the firm is 73.6 bcm in aggregate, which includes 26 UGSFs (Underground Storage Facilities) in Russia and 5 bcm accessible active capacity in UGSFs in Europe. It shares almost half of the total gas processing in Russia (top in Russian gas processing) and 18 percent share of total Russian oil and stable gas condensate refining. Gazprom is in leading position in Russia for generation of power which accounted upto 15 percent share in total Russian electric power generation, including 81 power stations, producing 39.8 GW of power in aggregate. Gazprom is on top for export of gas to the European market (33.1 percent share of total gas export to Europe), Russia (214.9 bcm) and Former Soviet Union countries (33.2 bcm) (Gazprom Annual Report 2016).

Gazprom was founded in 1993, since then it has grown into one of the global energy market leaders. Its main operations are located in Asia-Pacific market, Central Asia, Africa and Latin America, and leader in gas export to West European market. Gazprom is trading with Turkey in the Middle East region through trunk pipeline gas sales, sales of refined hydrocarbon product and, oil and gas condensate sales. In Egypt, it is supplying refined hydrocarbon products and LNG (Liquefied Natural Gas). In Iraq, it is operational in hydrocarbons prospecting and exploration as well as in oil production. It also supplying refined hydrocarbon products to Iraq. It is actively engaged in hydrocarbons prospecting and exploration in Halabja and Shakal block of Iraq, and production of oil in Badra field as well (Gazprom Annual Report 2016).

Gazprom fulfills the demand of refined hydrocarbon products for Israel, Saudi Arabia and Syria as well. On 30 November 2016, Russia convinced the OPEC (Organisation of the Petroleum Exporting Countries) member countries to reduce their total oil output by 1.2 million bpd (barrel per day) to 32.5 million bpd from January 1, 2017. Whereas, Russia's supply cut accounted for 300 thousand bpd, while Non-OPEC oil producers also agreed to cut 600 thousand bpd in total output of crude oil. The continuous cooperation and contribution of OPEC members will eventually contribute to stabilisation of the oil prices in international market, in near future (Gazprom Annual Report 2016). The gas produced by PJSC Gazprom's subsidiaries is mostly sold at prices fixed by the Government of Russia.

NOVATEK

Novatek is one of the largest independent natural gas producers in Russia. The Company is engaged in the exploration, production, processing, transportation and marketing of natural gas, LNG and liquid hydrocarbons. In December 2016, the biggest deal was signed between Rosneftgaz and Qatar Investment Authority, and sold its 19.5 percent stake in Rosneft which was worth 11.37 billion US dollars in total. While Rosneft was considered to be a crown jewel of hydrocarbons for Russia. The deal can be translated as the privatization of one fifth portion of Rosneft. QIA (Qatar Investment Authority) has

also bought 25 percent stake in Pulkovo airport of St. Peterburg, and US\$ 500 million stake in VTB bank. In 2017, there was reporting that QIA and the Russian Direct Investment Fund might sign a deal of US\$ 2 billion for new oil extraction projects in Russia. The rationale behind this deal is that Russia wants new oil fields as the majority of existing oil fields have already crossed their production limit (Roy and Roy 2018: 261-262).

NUCLEAR ENERGY EXPORT

Nuclear energy export of Russia also a major source of revenue for the Russian economy. Though, Russia was initially engaged with Iranian nuclear programme and signed an agreement to finish the construction of Bushehr Nuclear Power Plant, beginning from 1995. Later in 2000, Russia also unilaterally abrogated the Gore-Chernomyrdin agreement and freed itself from the Western obligations to control the export of arms, nuclear energy and related technologies to foreign countries (Borchevskaya 2016: 25). Russia has been continuously expanding its area of cooperation with other countries as well, in terms of nuclear energy exports, i.e. Turkey, Egypt and new nuclear energy projects for Iran. Rosatom (formerly known as Minatom) is a leading firm of Russian nuclear energy export to the foreign customers (Roy and Roy 2018: 262).

ROSATOM

With ever increasing demand of nuclear energy in today's world, Russia's Rosatom is also competing with other countries to utilize the opportunity and gaining more economic benefits through exporting nuclear energy for peaceful purposes. The firm was formerly known as Minatom, is renamed as Rosatom post 2008. Rosatom is dealing all around the world to export nuclear technology for energy and other medical purposes or peaceful uses of nuclear energy. It is active in West Asia for construction of Nuclear Power Plants for various countries, and expanding its area through signing new contracts with other countries as well in the region.

In West Asia especially, Rosatom is engaged in the construction of Iranian nuclear power plant in Bushehr region, while both countries are willing to expand their contract for

building new power plant in other regions of Iran as well. There is an ongoing process of political negotiations between Russia and Egypt for construction of a nuclear power plant in El-Dabba region of Egypt. At the same time, Russia and Turkey have finalized the contract for building Akkuyu nuclear power plant in Turkey (Talukdar 2014).

ROSOBORON EXPORT AND EXPORT OF MILITARY WEAPONS

Military Industrial Complex is also known as Rosoboronexport, responsible for military arms export for Russia. Russia is the leading military arms exporter to West Asia, even Saudi Arabia has showed its interest and negotiating for Russia’s latest S-400 air defense missile technology import. Iraq, and Syria are among the largest arms importers of Russia in West Asian region.

Arms industry can play a crucial role for the recovery of Russia’s economy after the sanction was imposed. The defence industry of Russia provides 20 percent jobs to Russian about three million people in total. Putin has also clarified that the defence industry of Russia serves both, the defence sector of the state and export, which makes it an essential part of Russian economy. Alexey Khlebnikov (senior editor of Russia Direct), “*Russia wants to restore its Soviet-era position in the arms market, which drastically declined with the collapse of the USSR*”. West Asia offers perfect opportunity for Russia to export its arms, largest importer of arms in the world. In 2015, West Asia accounted for 36 percent of the total arms export.

TABLE: 4.1
THE VOLUME OF FOREIGN TRADE OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION BY COUNTRY (2000-2005)
EXPORTS (US\$ in millions)

	2000	2003	2004	2005	TOTAL <i>(Country)</i>
Total Export (world)	89269	133655.70	181633.83	241219.40	
ISRAEL	1045	1454.07	1437.41	1537.89	5474.373
IRAN	633	1312.55	1910.20	1927.22	5782.97
IRAQ	*	167.54	205.81	107.16	480.51
SAUDI ARABIA	*	209.59	138.17	229.51	577.27
SYRIA	95.5	208.82	321.87	439.57	1065.76
TURKEY	3098	4807.46	7444.69	10857.38	26207.53
TOTAL (Years)	4871.5	8160.03	11458.15	15098.73	

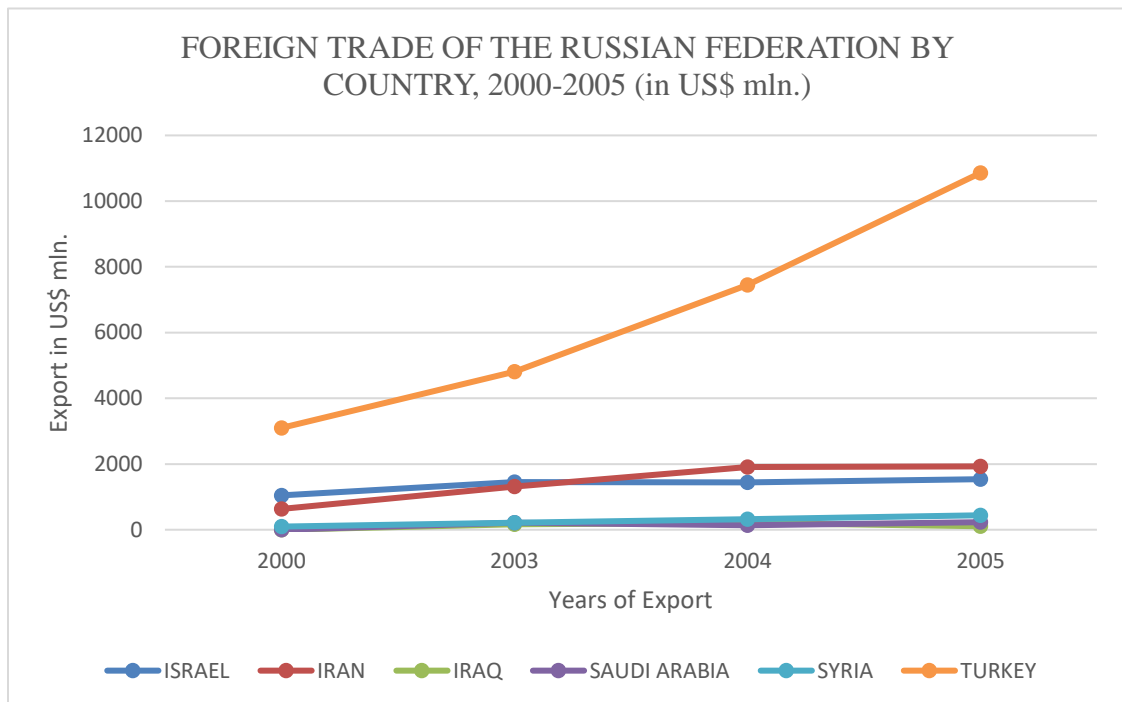
TABLE: 4.1.1

IMPORTS (US\$ in millions)

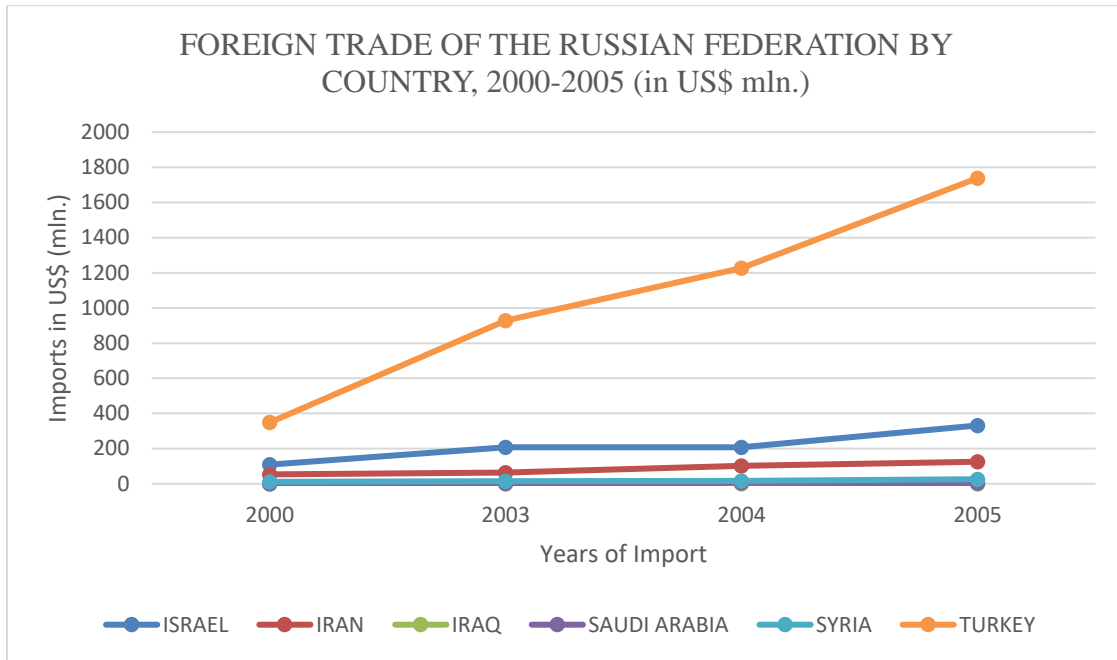
	2000	2003	2004	2005	TOTAL
<i>Total Imports (world)</i>	22276	57346.52	75580.69	98576.72	<i>Country</i>
ISRAEL	109	207.22	208.29	331.68	856.19
IRAN	53.6	63.00	102.21	125.23	344.04
IRAQ	*	0	.01	.01	0.01
SAUDI ARABIA	*	2.18	5.51	4.69	12.38
SYRIA	11.2	14.01	17.27	26.02	68.50
TURKEY	349	927.98	1227.03	1738.26	4242.27
TOTAL (years)	522.8	1214.39	1560.32	2225.89	

Source: <http://stat.customs.ru/apex/f?p=201:7:1678029183890439::NO> (Russia Federal Customs Service: Customs Statistics of Foreign Trade).

GRAPH: 4.1 (EXPORT OF RUSSIA)



GRAPH: 4.1.1 (IMPORTS)



Source: <http://stat.customs.ru/apex/f?p=201:7:1678029183890439::NO> (Russia Federal Customs Service: Customs Statistics of Foreign Trade).

The data for the total import and export took place during the period of 2000-2005 between Russia and the countries in West Asia. With the available data it can be clearly explained that Turkey was the major trading partner with Russia. The graph also indicates the difference of trade with Turkey in comparison with other countries in the region. Similarly, from 2000 to 2005, the total trade (including import and export) took place between Russia and Turkey was above US\$ 30.4 billion, making Turkey the largest economic partner in the world. In 2005, Russia's export to Turkey jumped over US\$ 10 billion in total. At the same time, the economic relation of Russia with Israel was still in decent position with some positive improvements in import and export. In the period of 2000-2005, the trade in total (both import and export) combined had crossed US\$ 6 billion between Russia and Israel. The position of Iran in the region as an economic partner is quite similar to Israel, trade in total was close to US\$ 6 billion including both import and export, from 2000 to 2005. Whereas, Russia's export for Iran was increased from US\$ 633 million in 2000 to US\$ 1.9 billion in 2005. The trade in total with Syria is also more than US\$ 1 billion. In case of Saudi Arabia, export was very low and amounted

total for US\$ 229 million in 2005. Export to Syria showed some improvement and increased from US\$ 95.5 million in 2000 to US\$ 439.57 million in 2005.

TABLE: 4.2
THE VOLUME OF FOREIGN TRADE OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION BY COUNTRY (2006-2010)
EXPORTS (in million US\$)

	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	TOTAL (Country)
Total Export (world)	301449.98	351928.19	467911.93	301666.53	397067.52	
ISRAEL	1550.94	2037.39	2034.06	1046.48	1763.51	8432.38
IRAN	1900.14	2950.28	3308.45	2846.23	3379.65	14384.75
IRAQ	113.48	51.82	102.33	64.32	107.54	439.49
SAUDI ARABIA	272.67	426.41	465.99	333.49	297.66	1796.22
SYRIA	6047.27	1022.74	1940.48	1142.29	1115.76	11268.54
TURKEY	14307.96	18379.23	27666.04	16395.22	20366.53	97114.98
<i>TOTAL(Years)</i>	24192.46	24867.87	35517.35	21828.03	27030.65	

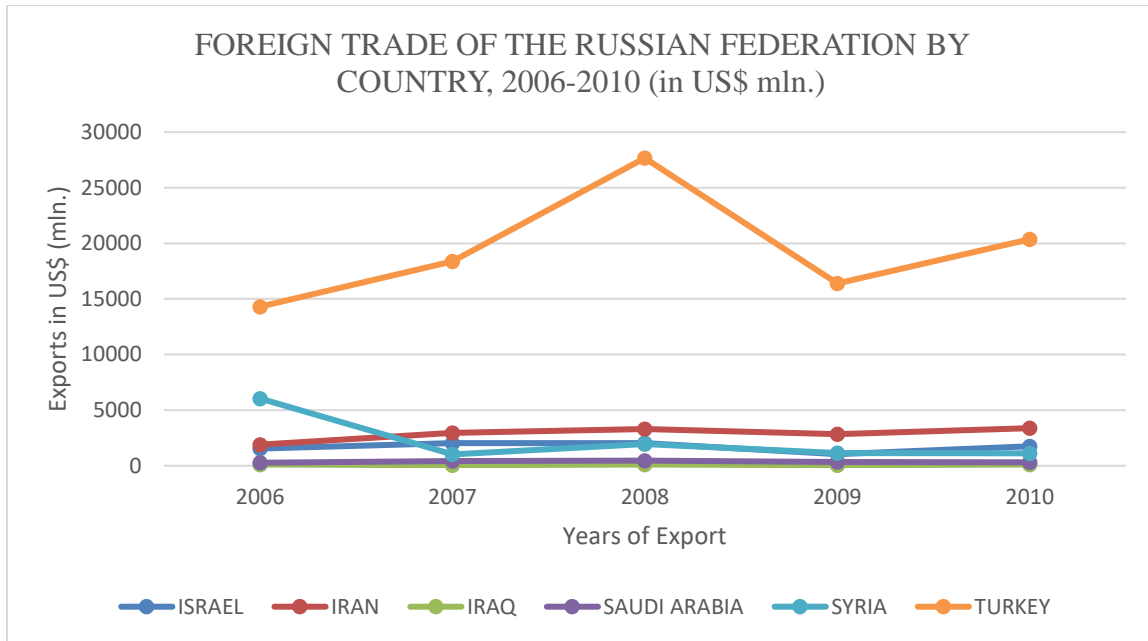
TABLE: 4.2.1

IMPORTS (in million US\$)

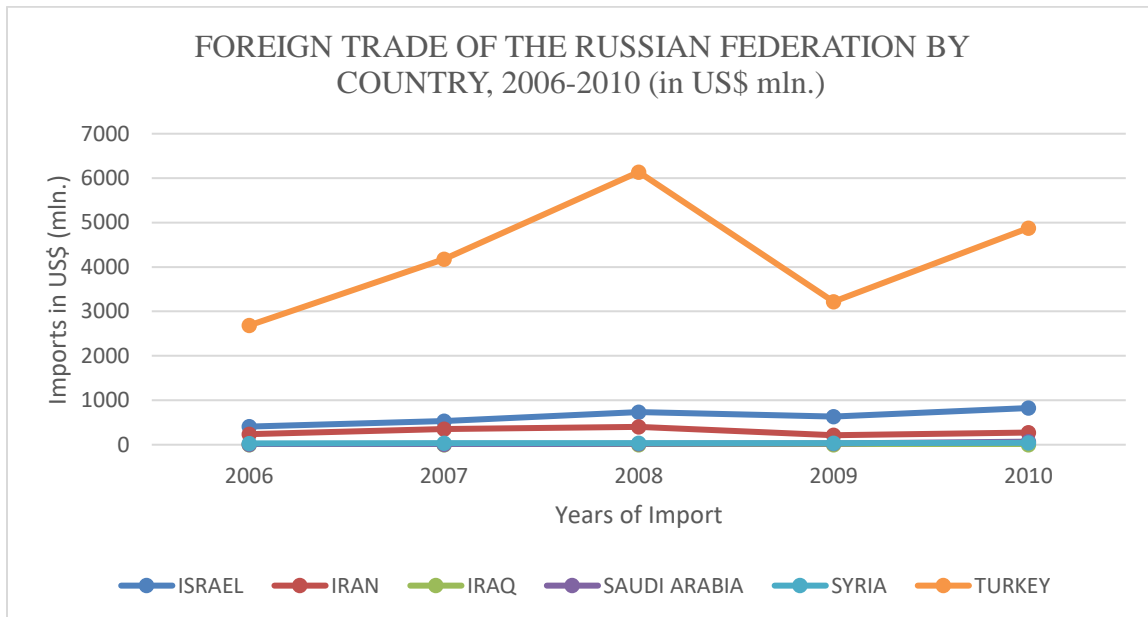
	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	TOTAL (Country)
Total Imports (world)	137703.25	199746.21	267040.10	167347.99	228911.65	
ISRAEL	407.92	530.55	734.25	636.33	825.12	3134.17
IRAN	237.94	349.65	401.48	213.60	271.58	1474.25
IRAQ	.01	0	.09	-	-	0.10
SAUDI ARABIA	6.38	10.48	22.75	28.35	68.75	136.71
SYRIA	30.02	37.99	38.97	38.66	42.46	188.10
TURKEY	2685.03	4176.81	6137.74	3221.91	4879.01	21100.50
<i>TOTAL (Years)</i>	3367.30	5105.48	7335.28	3288.92	4990.22	

Source: <http://stat.customs.ru/apex/f?p=201:7:1678029183890439::NO> (Russia Federal Customs Service: Customs Statistics of Foreign Trade).

GRAPH: 4.2 (EXPORTS)



GRAPH: 4.2.1 (IMPORT)



Source: <http://stat.customs.ru/apex/f?p=201:7:1678029183890439::NO> (Russia Federal Customs Service: Customs Statistics of Foreign Trade).

The tables and graphs (4.2, and 4.2.1) explain that the export and import between Russia and Turkey was continuously increasing since 2000, and Russia's export to Turkey had gone double from 2005 (US\$ 10 billion) to 2010 (US\$ 20 billion). In the given period (2006-2010), Russia had exported worth of US\$ 97 billion materials to Turkey. At the

same time, Russia's imports from Turkey was US\$ 20 billion in total from 2006 to 2010, both (import and export) combined had crossed the US\$ 100 billion (approx. US\$ 118 billion) mark by 2010. In 2008, Russia was engaged in war with Georgia, and at the same time the world financial crisis hit the economy and trade of Russia. That might be the reasons that Russia's trade with foreign countries including West Asian had declined for example, Turkey (US\$ 27 billion in 2008 to US\$ 16 billion in 2009), Israel (US\$ 2 billion in 2008 to US\$ 1 billion in 2009), Syria (US\$ 1.9 billion to US\$ 1.1 billion in 2008 and 2009, respectively), and so on, with other countries. Similarly, the import was also affected and declined with these countries. Still, in case of Iraq the US forces were present in the country, assisting Iraq to form a new stable government after Saddam Hussein. In 2008 the total trade for a year was the highest for Russia, above US\$ 42 billion in total. The country wise trade for Russia, after Turkey, Iran, Syria, and Israel were the major trading partner and accounted for US\$ 15.7 billion, US\$ 11.2 billion, and US\$ 11.5 billion, respectively. Whereas the Russian export to Syria in the given period of time was higher compared to Israel.

TABLE: 4.3
THE VOLUME OF FOREIGN TRADE OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION BY COUNTRY (2011-2015)
EXPORTS (in million US\$)

	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	TOTAL (Country)
Total Export (world)	516480.89	524735.39	527266.36	497358.69	343542.75	
ISRAEL	1762.26	1624.16	2084.81	2291.41	1539.51	9302.15
IRAN	3403.08	1902.11	1168.61	1326.93	1016.90	8817.63
IRAQ	99.54	285.70	376.85	1758.51	1806.91	4327.51
SAUDI ARABIA	643.09	1088.62	789.10	897.54	770.69	4189.04
SYRIA	1942.14	625.52	360.22	587.15	307.27	3822.30
TURKEY	25409.15	27438.96	25476.11	24954.37	19291.29	122569.88
TOTAL (Years)	33259.26	32965.07	30255.70	31815.91	24732.57	

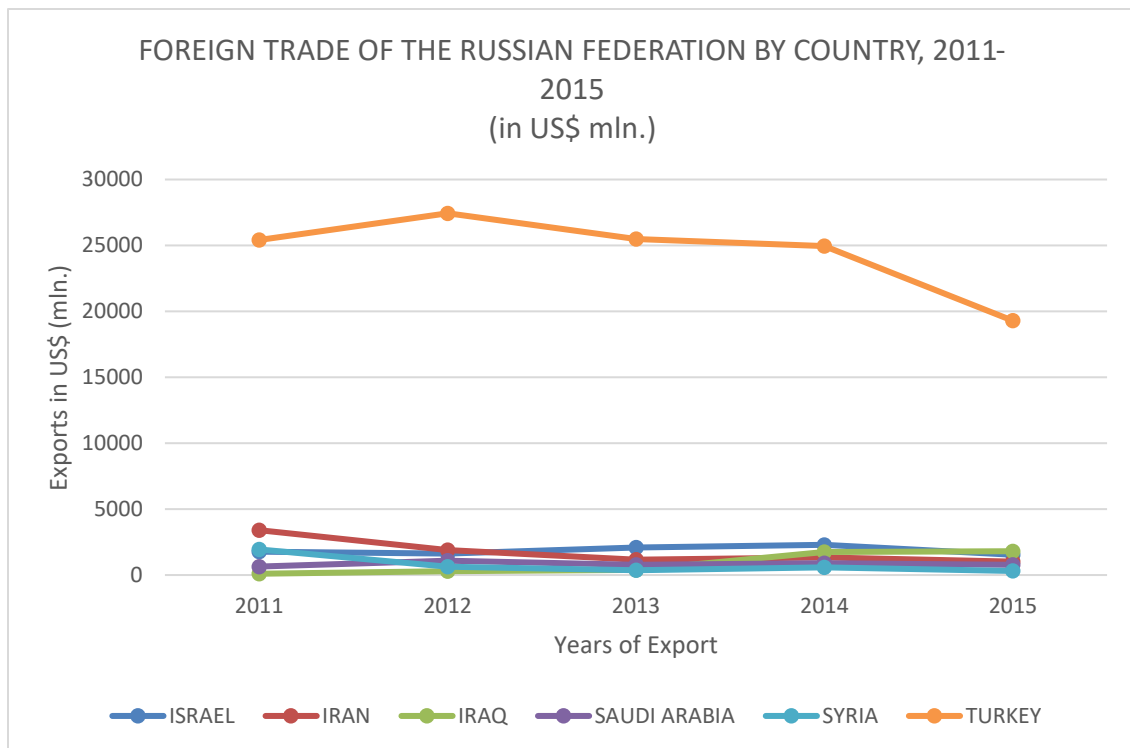
TABLE 4.3.1

IMPORTS (in million US\$)

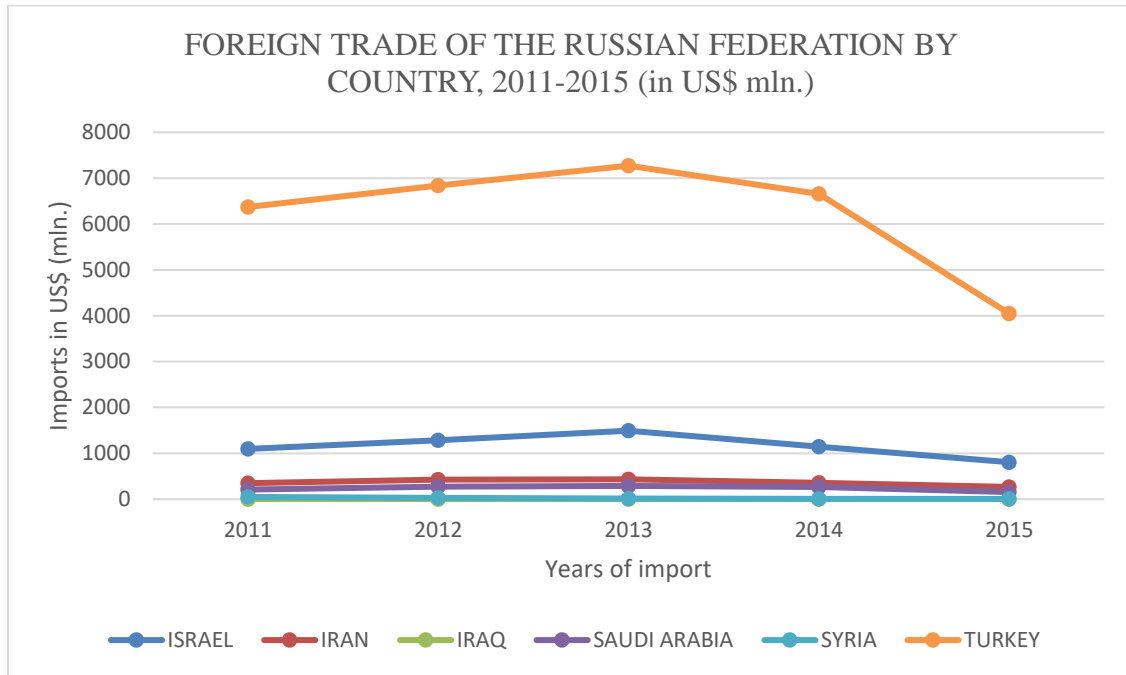
	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	TOTAL (Country)
Total Import (world)	305604.50	317263.24	314967.02	287062.70	182718.67	
ISRAEL	1094.69	1285.57	1492.85	1141.66	806.25	5821.02
IRAN	351.55	428.53	432.92	355.12	267.21	1835.33
IRAQ	.09	.06	1.70	.01	.12	1.98
SAUDI ARABIA	208.87	270.15	288.62	267.12	155.36	1190.12
SYRIA	48.90	30.82	16.20	7.13	5.25	108.30
TURKEY	6374.44	6839.18	7272.77	6654.67	4049.32	31190.38
TOTAL (Years)	8078.54	8854.31	9505.06	8425.71	5283.51	

Source: <http://stat.customs.ru/apex/f?p=201:7:1678029183890439::NO> (Russia Federal Customs Service: Customs Statistics of Foreign Trade).

GRAPH: 4.3 (EXPORT)



GRAPH: 4.3.1 (IMPORT)



Source: <http://stat.customs.ru/apex/f?p=201:7:1678029183890439::NO> (Russia Federal Customs Service: Customs Statistics of Foreign Trade).

Tables (4.3, and 4.3.1) along with graphs highlighting the trade data for Russia during the period of 2011-2015. For the first time since 2000, data is being available for Iraq except the import was still not in place. The overall world trade was increasing for Russia but on an average it showed some declination in the West Asian region, which was the result of the outbreak of Arab Spring in the region, creating a challenge to the regimes and stability in West Asia. The trade was steadily improving as the data in the previous table also suggest the same. Furthermore, the sanctions imposed on Russia after the Ukraine crisis also affected the economic policy of Russia abroad. Although, import and export with Israel were not affected much compared to other countries, where the regimes were under threat and facing mass mobilization of public on street protesting for their democratic right and change of regime. The total trade with Turkey was still dominating other countries with US\$ 153 billion from the period of 2011-2015. Although, the export and import both were declining since 2011 for majority of countries, but post Ukraine crisis there was drastic change in the behavior. The trade was declined to more than half,

for some cases, of what it was in the beginning of the period. Even there was a sharp decline in trade with major economic partner in the region, Turkey. Where the export for Russia was declined to US\$ 19 billion (US\$ 24.9 billion in 2014) in 2015 from the US\$ 25 billion in the beginning of this period, 2011. This was the similar situation with import for Russia, where as the import from Syria in 2015 amounted for US\$ 5 million only, and for Iraq it was mostly under US\$ 1 million in total. This has somehow been changing now and the latest data on the same will reflect the clear picture of the same.

TABLE: 4.4
THE VOLUME OF FOREIGN TRADE OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION BY COUNTRY (2016-2018)
EXPORTS (in million US\$)

	2016	2017	2018	TOTAL <i>(Country)</i>
Total Exports <i>(world)</i>	285674.01	357766.84	449563.60	
ISRAEL	1466.37	1667.35	1954.11	5087.83
IRAN	1881.54	1314.90	1205.73	4402.17
IRAQ	916.95	1402.61	765.46	3085.02
SAUDI ARABIA	350.94	770.68	762.72	1884.34
SYRIA	182.25	279.87	400	862.12
TURKEY	13581.84	18697.80	21313.29	53592.93
TOTAL <i>(Years)</i>	18379.89	24133.21	26401.31	

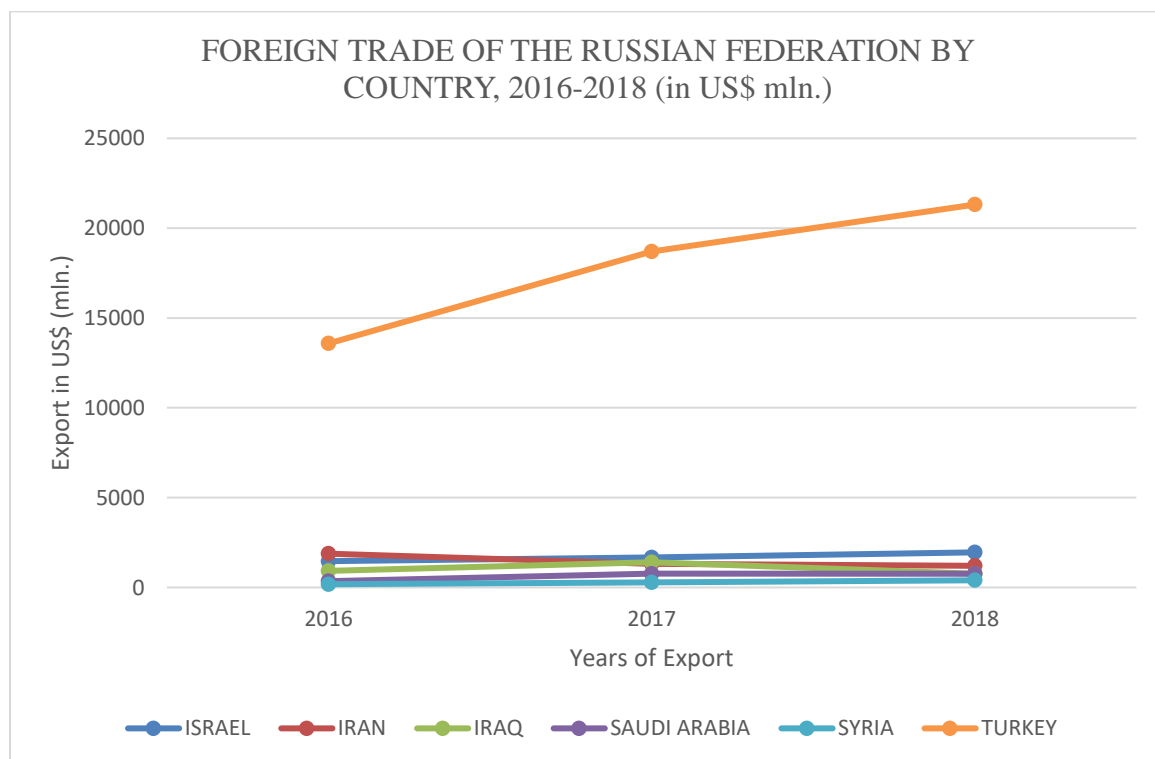
TABLE 4.4.1 (IMPORT)

IMPORTS (in million US\$)

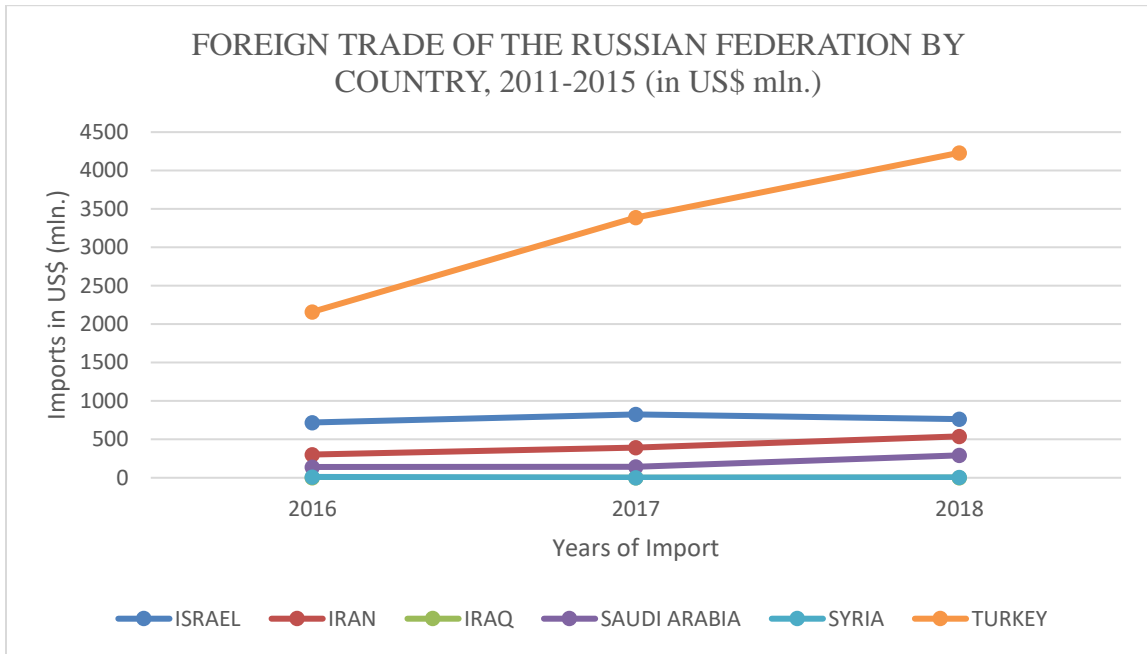
	2016	2017	2018	TOTAL (Country)
Total Imports (world)	182267.08	227464.24	238493.46	
ISRAEL	719.91	824.86	764.94	2309.71
IRAN	302.72	392.21	539.30	1234.23
IRAQ	0	.04	.02	0.06
SAUDI ARABIA	140.67	144.51	292.13	577.31
SYRIA	11.04	2.91	4.24	18.19
TURKEY	2160.96	3387.97	4231.38	9780.31
TOTAL (Years)	3335.32	4752.50	5832.01	

Source: <http://stat.customs.ru/apex/f?p=201:7:1678029183890439::NO> (Russia Federal Customs Service: Customs Statistics of Foreign Trade).

GRAPH: 4.4 (EXPORT)



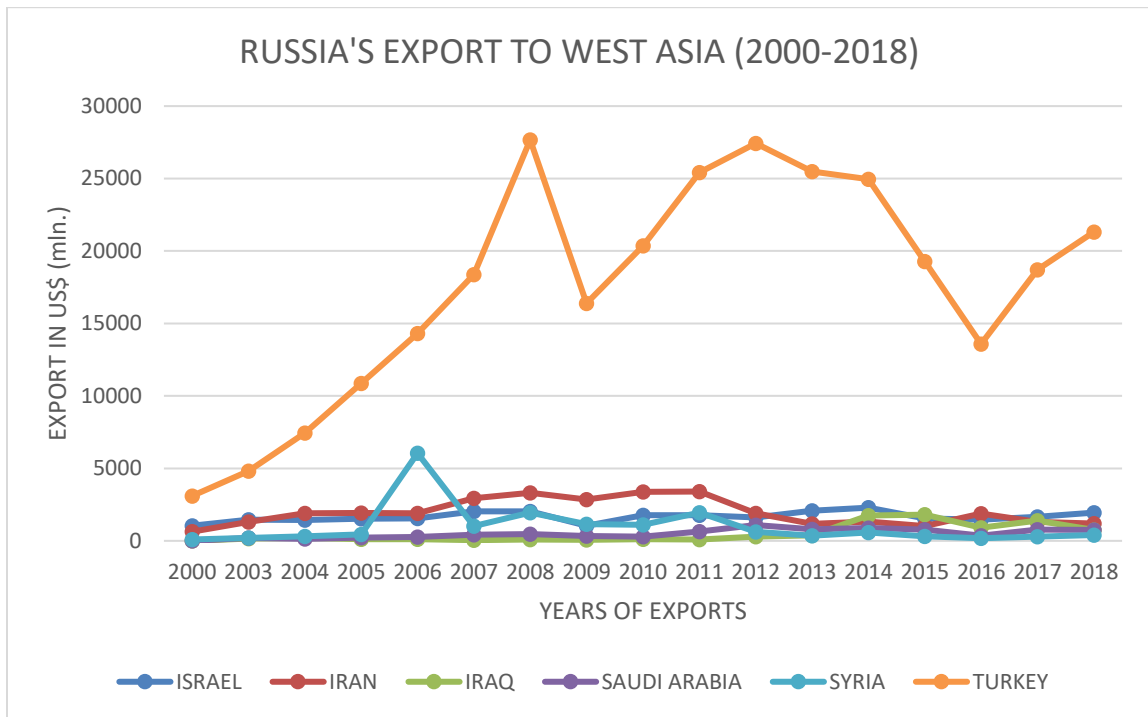
GRAPH: 4.4.1 (IMPORT)



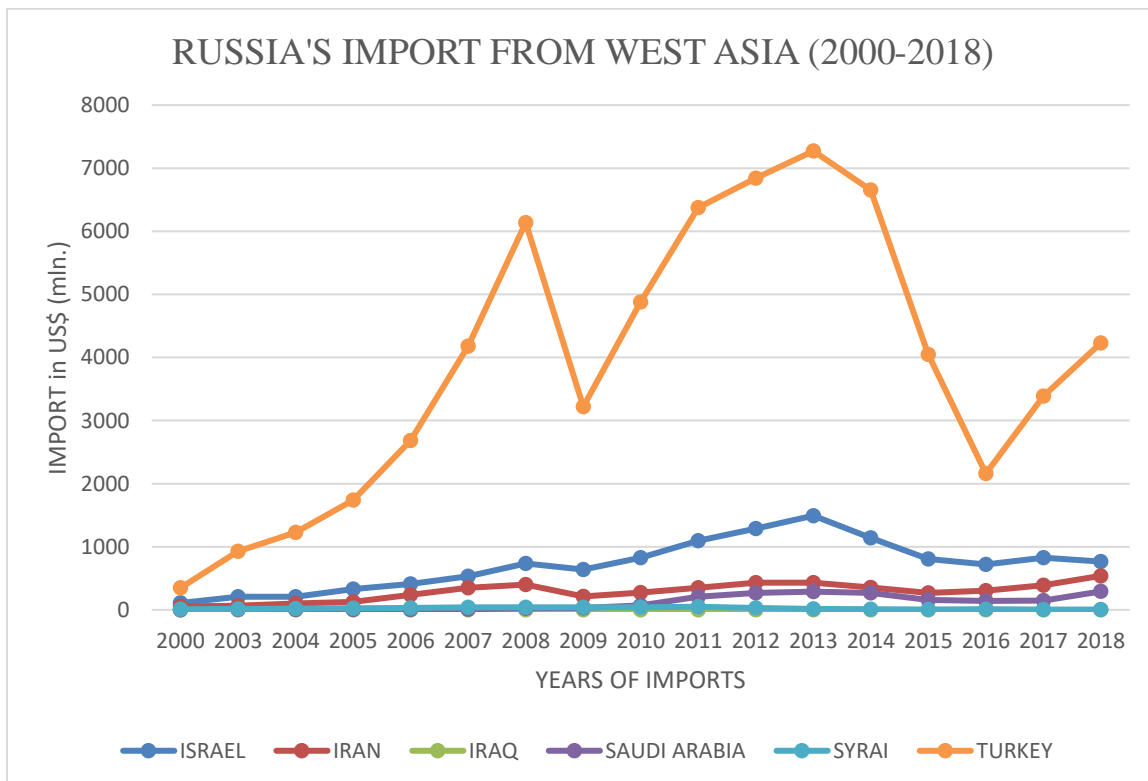
Source: <http://stat.customs.ru/apex/f?p=201:7:1678029183890439::NO> (Russia Federal Customs Service: Customs Statistics of Foreign Trade).

The table of trade for the period of 2016-2018, reflects some improvement in trade relation with the countries in the region. This period brought some stability in the trade relation but still the sanctions and crisis of Islamic State were haunting the interests of Russia in the region. The trade with Turkey had furthermore decreased in 2014, although made some recovery later. This was the case with other countries as well, where the situation started to change after. The graph covering the whole period will reflect the clear picture of trade, where data misses sometime. Furthermore, the data will help to explain the situation better.

GRAPH: 4.5 (EXPORT)



GRAPH: 4.5.1 (IMPORT)



Source: <http://stat.customs.ru/apex/f?p=201:7:1678029183890439::NO> (Russia Federal Customs Service: Customs Statistics of Foreign Trade).

It also explains that Saudi Arabia has not gained much importance as an economic partner for Russia and that to apply on Iraq as well because both countries are under direct influence of the West and the US. Russia is developing its relation with Saudi Arabia slowly and steady, and probably soon Saudi Arabia will be on the list as an economic partner and that too in terms of arms trade, for example Saudi Arabia has already shown its interest in latest air defense system of Russia also known as S-400. Whereas, Turkey has started to receive its consignment of S-400 and the West has been planning to take aggressive actions against Turkey including sanctions.

The data available on official site of Russia, Federal State Statistics Services, explain the share of commodity in percentage, however that does not include the major sources of revenue for Russian economy for example Gas, Oil, Nuclear energy and related technologies export, and export of military arms and ammunition. Which helps to explain the share of commodities which dominate its trade in export and import, for instance Mineral products has the largest share in exports which comprise 59.2 percent or 169 billion US dollars of the total export of Russia in 2016. Mineral products have been dominating Russian exports for more than a decade as the data is available from 2000-2016, which has gone to highest 71.5 percent in 2013 and stands at US\$ 376 billion in total. Metals, precious stones and other articles stand at second, which are followed by the machinery, equipments and transports means accounted for 13.3 percent (US \$38 billion) and 8.5 percent (US \$24.3 billion) in 2016, respectively (<http://www.gks.ru>, Federal State Statistics Service).

In data further helps to explain that machinery, equipment and transports hold the largest share 47.4 percent (US \$86.3 billion) in 2016. The share of chemical products, rubber are 18.5 percent (US \$33.8 billion), food products and agricultural raw materials accounts for 13.7 percent (US \$ 24.9 billion) in 2016, which stands on second and third positions in terms of import for 2016, respectively. Further, details of other commodities share in imports and exports with percentage and actual prices in international market for the period of 2000-2016. As mentioned before, this data does not include exports or imports of natural resources and other commodities account for the biggest share in revenue

through trade for the Russian Federation. It does not reflect the clear picture of trade taking place between Russia and countries in West Asia, which has been highlighted in details with the help of appropriate data available on official sources (<http://www.gks.ru>, Federal State Statistics Service).

ECONOMIC POLICY: BILATERALISM AND MULTILATERALISM

Putin took some key steps to centralize the Russian government further, for better coordination and rapid economic recovery of Russia. Russia also expanded its nuclear cooperation with Iran under Putin's leadership; agreements were signed for construction new power reactors in Iran (new units of Bushehr nuclear power plant). The advanced military armaments deal also took place between Russia and Iran (S300 missile defence system), to strengthen the relation between these two states.

The Kosovo Crisis and the failure of Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty with the US made Russia to change its policy. In November 2000, Russia abandoned the Gore-Chernomyrdin agreement of 1995 and more importance was given to the Iranian nuclear program. The Russian military-industrial complex also appreciated this step, and simultaneously provided space for military weapons exports to Iran. Meanwhile, Russian Defence Ministry stressed upon expanding its relation with Iran, and as a result, Iran became third largest importer of Russian arms and technologies by 2001. Russia gave an assurance to Iran that it will complete the construction of Bushehr nuclear power plant (BNPP), and also expressed its desire to cooperate with Iran for future nuclear power plant projects (Sychova 2000). From the beginning, Putin has always desired to establish strong relations with Iran, and increased its economic relations by exporting nuclear technologies and related materials in May 2000 (Kozyrev 2000).

Mehdi Safari, the Iranian ambassador to Russia announced that the construction of the BNPP has completed 40 percent, and will reach to the operational level by 2002. Iran has always criticized US for its actions against Iranian nuclear program and delays in the construction of nuclear power plant. On the other hand, America is continuously targeting Russia from the beginning, when Russia started nuclear cooperation with Iran, and for the supply of tritium gas and laser enrichment technology to Iran. The US remains suspicious

about Iranian nuclear intentions that it can always use these technologies (tritium gas and laser enrichment technology) to develop a nuclear weapon (Gertz 2000).

During the Khatami visit to Russia in March 2001 a document was signed, “The Treaty on Foundations of Relations and Principles of Cooperation”, which also marked the beginning of new era in Russia and Iran relations (Hunter 2010). Post 9/11 attack, Russia changed its perception and preferred its relations with the US over Iran in West Asia. Russian cooperation with the US also provided an opportunity for Moscow, to penetrate deep into West Asia and expand its relation with other countries in the region. This approach was supposed to be more beneficial for the Russian economic interests in the West Asian region. For the same reason, Russia pursued a balance policy toward US, without committing any harm to its economic interests associated with Iran and nuclear cooperation (Freedman 2010).

In 2002, Russia and Iran agreed on a ten-year project to further expand their relations in business, industries, and technical-scientific cooperation. This project also included the construction of nuclear-energy facilities (worth US \$ 8.5 billion). Still the priority was given to finish the construction of BNPP (block 1 and 2) and two new nuclear power reactors in Ahvaz. Later, this project drew the attention of the International community and immense criticism, especially from the US (Aras and Ozbay 2006).

In 2004, Iran raised the question about the time when Russia will end the construction of Bushehr nuclear power plant. At the same time, Russian-Iranian economic relation was touching new height 2 billion US dollars per year (Freedman 2006). Later, in International Uranium Enrichment Center (city of Angarsk), Iran was also invited by Russia to participate in a workshop (Dunaeva 2013). In early 2005, Iran began criticizing Russia for the delay in the construction of the BNPP, as it had already been delayed by ten years. Russia was delaying the deadline without providing proper reason i.e. first it was delayed from 2004 to 2005 then to 2007. In 2010, Russia declared that it will finish the construction of BNPP and make it operational by September 2010. In October 2009,

Iranian authority announced that the construction of the Bushehr nuclear power plant is 95 percent complete (Hunter 2010).

Though neither Russia want Iran to poses a nuclear weapon, and nor it support the sanctions on Iran because Russia will lose closest ally and significant customer in the region. Russia has seen future prospects in Iranian nuclear program and huge opportunities to build new nuclear power reactors for Iran, and export of military arms and technologies. That is the reason that Russia always wanted to resolve the matter through IAEA, and never supported the idea to refer the matter to the United Nations Security Council (Katz 2006).

In October 2005, Russia agreed to help Iran to launch a remote-sensing satellite and deal of advance air defence system (S-300) worth of US 1 billion dollars, but later the situation turned against the deal. Russia turned down the demand to build a uranium enrichment facility in Iran due to fear of the US and EU-3 aggression (Hunter 2010: 114).

At the end of 2006, there were around 1500 workers, 20,000 people and 300 Russian firms were actively engaged in the construction work of the Bushehr nuclear power plant in Iran, which could also describe the importance of nuclear cooperation between Russia and Iran as it had created huge job opportunities for the Russians. Russia had its huge economic interests in Iranian nuclear cooperation, as there was a rise of demand in the world for the nuclear energy and Russia wanted to control a bigger share of the demand, this is the reason why Russia-Iranian nuclear cooperation was seen as an example all over the world, and Russia also wanted to prove its capabilities of nuclear energy in Iran. Russian-Iranian nuclear cooperation was also a matter of prestige for Russia, as a reliable and experienced service provider of nuclear energy. Gluhov also mentioned that the construction projects of nuclear power plant in abroad had provided job opportunities for 300,000-400,000 Russians in total, thus a significant reason that the Russian Administration had also been paying its attention towards nuclear companies of Russia involved in exports of nuclear technology and other material to other countries (Aras and Ozbay 2006).

In September 2011, the Bushehr nuclear power plant finally became operational, while Russia also supported the new resolution 1929 passed by UNSC in June 2010, and denied to supply S-300 air defence missile system. Iran was also concerned about declining economy and ready to cooperate with the EU and the US, while also compromised on a nuclear issue related to secret activity as Iran offered for the inspections of nuclear sites by the IAEA and other European countries officials, whenever the matter concerns. In July 2012, EU banned the oil imports from Iran, as a matter of fact, to pressurize Iran, even in exchange for other materials the export of oil was banned, it also freeze assets in Europe and Iranian central bank. Through this action of European Union, it was intended to target the financial support of Iran (Mousavian 2012).

An arms deal also took place between Russia and Syria, which resulted in supplying MIG-29s, MIG-31s fighter jets and aerial defence system of older generations to Syria. In future the supply of advanced S-300 surface-to-air missiles and Iskander-2 surface-to-surface missiles are still under process to decide, apart from the Kornet-E anti-tank missiles and the Pantsyr-S1 aerial defence system, Syria has never received any advanced military technology weapons from Russia. Even after Medvedev came to power in 2008, it was Prime Minister Putin who actually took part in shaping domestic and international policies of Russia. In the beginning, it was basically the commercial interest of Russia involved in a relationship with Syria and other Middle Eastern states, in 2008 bilateral trade between Syria and Russia reached almost \$2 billion. In November 2009, Stroytransgaz (Russian firm) launched its largest project in Syria, a gas processing plant near Homs. In May 2010, President Medvedev's visit to Damascus was a step to bolster relation and cooperation between the two nations (Kreutz 2010; Magen 2013).

Turkey's geopolitical location in the Middle East and pro-West (NATO member) policies make it a competitive entity with Russian interests in the region. There is enough Turkish influence over Russia as well as on the former Soviet States, most of the Muslim population speaks Turkish dialects. In 1997, Viktor Chernomyrdin visit to Ankara in last 25 years made it clear that Russia is looking for economic-interdependence even after the geopolitical rivalry with Turkey. The main objective of the Prime Minister's visit was to

conclude a massive natural gas deal (i.e. Blue Stream), the underwater pipeline in the Black Sea to convey natural gas to Turkey. Turkey was also looking for partners to meet the demand of energy resources for its growing population (Eran 2003; Dannreuther 2004).

During the peak years (1995-1996) the cost of trade between Russia and Turkey was around \$10 billion US dollars annually. In 1998, a new agreement was signed between Moscow and Ankara to supply Russian natural gas, worth \$20 billion and in 1998 only, even after the economic crisis in Russia, the Russian-Turkish trade stood at \$3.5 billion. It was primarily energy and textile trade between these two countries. The trade relationship between Russia and Turkey has improved rapidly, for example from \$2.2 billion to \$33.8 billion US dollars during the period of 1995-2008 (Katz 2010). On the other hand, unlike the first Chechen war, Turkey was not providing any formal or informal support to the Chechen rebels during the Second Chechen war. Turkey is a major trading partner for Russia because of common economic interests, their trade has increased from \$10 billion to \$25 billion per annum. Russia also sells military weapons to Turkey, and because of Russia's achievements in the Middle East even the US allies in the region like Israel, Turkey and even Saudi Arabia are encouraged to make deal with Russia (Eran 2003; Dannreuther 2004; Blank 2014).

The military cooperation between Russia and Turkey indicates that they have moved beyond their so-called mortal-regional rivalry. While Russian government company is dedicated to building the nuclear reactor for Turkey. Turkey is also a customer of Russian oil and natural gas while Turkey is looking for an alternative (Nabucco pipeline) to surpass Russia transportation to Europe through Turkey. Russia with the support of Iran and China trying to contain Turkey in the Caspian Sea region (Trenin 2010). The Southern Stream project and the East Siberia-Pacific Ocean project are clear examples of a Russian strategy to convey natural gas to Europe through Black Sea and oil to China, respectively. In November 2011, Russia also inaugurated Northern Route project to convey gas to Europe. Russia needs Turkish support in its strategic and economic interests in the Middle East region, like membership in OIC, backing the Islamic rebels in

Northern Caucasus region and as a partner of Georgia, Turkey opposes the invasion of Russia in Georgia. Even on Syrian crisis issue Russia (pro-Assad) and Turkey have been standing against each other (Katz 2010; Magen 2013).

Turkey also seemed to be changing its perception about the expansionist policy of Russia, especially in the Middle East region. First, Russia has become the major trading partner of Turkey, as a key energy supplier. Second, the ever-increasing tension between the Western powers (including the US) and Russia regarding the Ukrainian crisis has created an opportunity for Turkey to substitute Russia and become the main energy supplier to European countries. Meanwhile, Russia coping with the imposed sanctions from the West and the US has been looking for alternative trading partners in Asia, and Turkey, Iran and China are top on that list (Demitas 2014).

The Russian ambassador Andrey Karlov (Turkey) told the 'Hurriyet Daily News', that Turkey and its companies could play a major role in the reconstruction of Crimea and invest in the field of tourism and agriculture. Though, Turkey had voted and criticised Russia for the annexation of the region, the way Russia had treated its Kin (the Crimean Tatars, 15 percent of total population) (Frolov 2014).

Turkey is determined to stop Russia from drilling the gas near Cyprus and Nabucco pipeline project concern Russia as it bypasses Russia and conveys gas through Central Asia to Europe (Trenin 2010). Russia had also intervened in a dispute between Turkey and Cyprus over gas finds in the eastern Mediterranean, Russia sent its navy in support of Cyprus and seeking an airbase for the same at Paphos (Blank 2014). Turkey is also looking for its expansion in Caucasus region as well as NATO and Russia competing with the same for their strategic and economic interests. Turkey is challenging Russia in Southern Caucasus as it is actively involved in a relationship with Iran and Syria so-called Russia's ally in the region and participating in the formation of the Azeri-Georgian axis against Russia (Magen 2013).

Energy is a main economic asset for Russia which includes the export of oil, gas, and nuclear energy. For the same reason, Russia has to compete with the leading energy (oil and gas) exporting countries in the World and especially in the Middle East with Saudi Arabia and Iraq. Russia is having an upper hand over these countries because of regional instability and consistent terrorist threats to their oil installations in the region, as a result, there is increased interest in non-Middle Eastern oil supplies in the West most importantly. The privatization process has largely affected the oil industries in Russia and Putin government is determined to bring it under increasing state control. This policy will help Russia to gain the ability to cooperate or oppose OPEC (if needed), which it was lacking in the past because of the clashing of interests between state and private sector (Rivlin 2005).

Tourism also played a crucial role to develop close ties between Russia and Israel, for instance, from 2008 onwards the Visa had also been abolished for Russian tourists visiting Israel (Trenin 2010). In response to the Russian action, Israel also showed its interest in the mutual trade relationship with Russia, for instance, Israel started the export of technology, food, agriculture and medical equipment and knowledge to Russia. The joint venture for the manufacture of unmanned aerial vehicle or security industry was also signed between Russia and Israel. High profile visit to Russia from Israel also took place during this period while Russia under Putin regime also encouraged Israel for investment in Russia (Magen 2013; Katz 2015).

Russia still tries to maintain a balance between Israel and rest of the Arab nations, not to jeopardize its position in the Middle East region. Ultimately the friendly relation with Israeli opponents create doubt in Israeli leadership and create an obstacle in the relationship between Russia and Israel (Katz 2015). Russia wants to draw Israel away from the US influence and offer itself as an alternative. After the Arab Spring took place in the Middle East region and Russia is losing its key strategic allies in the region, it is becoming more important for Russia to seek new regional architecture. The challenge posed by Turkey and the emerging Sunni bloc has left Russia with no other option instead of going with Israel and newly formed regimes in the region after the Arab

Spring. On the Israel-Palestinian peace process, Russia is looking for an opportunity to play a leading role to solve the problem (Trenin 2010; Magen and Lindenstrauss 2013).

NEW ECONOMIC POLICY OF RUSSIA

After the Ukrainian crisis, the Western powers and US is continuously trying to target Russian Federation and policies of Putin. Since 2014, number of sanctions are imposed on Russia, which have weakened its economy further. Sanctions imposed on Russia are meant to block economic relations with other countries, while the major source of revenue for Russian economy is export of oil, gas, nuclear energy (nuclear power plants), and military arms and technologies. Export of other items are not much beneficial for Russia as compared to the export of energy resources, which accounts for the largest share in revenue for Russia.

The lower oil prices in the international energy market is adding more problem for Russia. In 2015, the economic growth of Russia shrunk to 4.5 percent, making it difficult for Russia to cope up. The real disposable income of Russia has fallen by 12.3 percent, and due to this reason poverty and unemployment has increased. These are the reasons behind active involvement of Russia in the Middle East, and especially for military, hydrocarbons, agriculture, and nuclear sectors, which can help Russia and its economy to survive through sanctions and poor condition of international energy market. The Middle East is still open for investments and cooperation for economic benefits (Roy and Roy 2018: 261).

However, Russia had earlier denied to deliver S-300OMU-1 surface to air missile but in 2016, Russia supplied four S-300PMU-2 to Iran, which was worth US\$ 1 billion. In March 2017, a number of economic deals were also signed between Russia and Iran during the Presidential visit of Hassan Rouhani to Moscow. Both the countries agreed to expand their area of cooperation in trade and industries, which includes the economic agreements in different sectors i.e. oil and gas, agriculture, power generation, promotion of tourism, development of infrastructure for ICT (information and communication technology), and formation of a free trade zone with the help of Eurasian Economic

Union. In 2016, the bilateral trade between Russia and Iran had also increased by 70 percent. Despite the fact that Iran is a potential rival of Russia in international energy market for oil and gas, Russia has stressed upon cooperation with Iran for its own economic benefits, and not to have confrontation with the same. This cooperation between these two countries was enabled because the Russian authorities have ignored this fact that, in near future Iran will have capability to replace Russia in the gas market. In August 2016, Russia has also showed its interest in the Iranian energy projects and buy some stakes as well, during the Baku Summit. Later, the leaders of both the countries made an announcement for the joint development of hydrocarbon reserves in the Caspian region, and close cooperation and management in the area of oil and gas. This announcement had also included that the existing pipeline will be used for the mutual benefits by Russia and Iran. Russia and Iran agreed to a future plan that Russia will supply its natural gas to the northern provinces of Iran via Azerbaijan. Iran in return was supposed to provide its liquid natural gas to the Russian companies situated in the Persian Gulf region. But until March 2017, no visible steps are taken by Iran to make a progress in this plan (Roy and Roy 2018: 262).

In the field of hydrocarbons (oil and gas), Iraq is receiving huge investment from the Russian companies. Russia has also expressed its desire to build the Turkish stream pipeline. This project of the Turkish pipeline will eventually help Russia to bypass Ukraine and continuous supply of gas to Europe through Turkey. In a way, the Turkish stream pipeline will serve as a substitute for the South stream pipeline of Russia, blocked by Bulgaria as a result of the Ukrainian crisis. Although there is a mere possibility that Russia may succeed in convincing Saudi Arabia (pro-West) to make a cut in OPEC production of oil, which will stabilize oil prices in energy market and economy of Russia (Roy and Roy 2018: 262).

During the period of 2015-2016, economic trade of Russia with the West Asian countries has declined. However, West Asian region still remain significant for economic interests of Russia, as it provides enough opportunities for the Russian industries in oil, gas, petrochemicals, military industrial complex, agriculture, and space. Russia's trade with

West Asia was US\$ 37 billion in the year of 2015, and 7 percent of the total Russian trade (US\$ 526.5 billion) in that year. In 2016, Russian trade was experiencing a declination in the overall trade with the West Asian region countries, and in total it shared only 6 percent (US\$ 28.6 billion) in the overall trade of Russia (US\$ 468 billion). As a matter of fact, major economic partner countries for Russia are still from the European Union and other countries in the West. Major economic partners for Russia in the West Asian region are i.e. Turkey, Israel, Egypt, Iran, Iraq and the United Arab Emirate. Russia exports 16 percent of its precious metals and stones to UAE and Israel. The countries in West Asia are major importers of Russia's grain, for example Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Israel remained the largest importers of wheat, rye, and barley by 2016. In case of Syria, major ally in the region, Russia's trade has declined from US\$ 312 million (2015) to US\$ 193 million by 2016. This is the similar case with Saudi Arabia where Russia's trade has dropped from US\$ 926 million in 2015 to US\$ 492 million by 2016. However, Russia's trade with Kuwait, Bahrain, and Oman are performing better compared to other countries in the region. Though, Bahrain is not a major economic partner for Russia in the region but still during the period of 2015-2016 it showed an increase in trade from US\$ 12.193 million-53.6 million (Roy and Roy 2018: 263).

CONCLUSION

The economic policy of Russia towards West Asia has not turned out beneficial, because of continuous instability in region, presence of US and the West and their influence on majority of key regional countries. Hence, the economic interests of Russia in this region is mainly dependent on export of military weapons and technology, nuclear energy, cooperation in exploration and production of oil and gas with regional partners, and limited export of oil and gas (Turkey). The West Asian countries are competitors for Russia in international energy market, because majority of countries in West Asia has the energy based economy. The American influence on countries like Saudi Arabia and other Gulf States make it difficult for Russia to compete or cooperate with these countries. The sanctions and economic crisis have created an obstruction for Russia's economic policy towards West Asia. Whereas, this region offers a vast market for military weapons and technology export but access to the same is controlled by the West and US. The Western

policies are always the same creating challenge for Russia time to time and making it difficult to recover from the crisis, for example regime change under Arab Spring, manipulation of oil prices in the international market, sanctions on Iranian nuclear program, sanctions after Ukraine crisis, and the rise of Islamic State in Iraq and Syria which sought to be linked with al-Qaeda.

CHAPTER FIVE

ARAB SPRING AND ITS IMPACT ON RUSSIA'S POLICY

INTRODUCTION

The Arab Spring or the Arab uprising was termed so because of its translation into mass protest against the government by the people. The collective demand was not to bring in democracy, replacing monarchies that existed in most of the countries since achievement of independence in the early 1950s and 1960s; but to avail the basic facilities for themselves. Arab Uprising had started with a surprising event of a street vendor who set himself on fire in front of the town hall on December 17, 2010. This incident of self-immolation by Mohamed Bouazizi took place in a town named Sidi Bouzid in Tunisia. The name of the vendor and the incident if seen in isolation would not appear to be of importance, but it sparked a chain of reactions in West Asia and North Africa which led to mass protests across the region and caused change of regimes. Firstly, President of Tunisia fled the country in early 2011 and then the same phenomenon resonated in the neighbouring countries in West Asia, where monarchies or autocratic regimes existed for decades. Political crises erupted in Libya, Egypt, Yemen, Syria, and countries in the Gulf region where the threat of challenging and toppling of regimes had never been so tangible.

This event has been interpreted widely, but it is clear that its roots lie in the public protests on the streets against the governments for failing to provide basic facilities like food, job and health services, etc. However, after this incident in West Asian politics became the centre of attraction for many, and raised concerns of the international community- including media, international organizations, international NGOs, governments and leaders of other countries.

The West and the US have tried to interpret this event as the people of concerned countries raising their voices against autocratic and authoritarian regimes and to put an end on the atrocities done by their governments for long period of time and bringing in

democracy, which could meet their demands of providing basic facilities for the general population. The Arab Spring not only changed the government in Tunisia but in Egypt, Libya, and Yemen and now Syria, last remaining strategic ally of Russia in this region. There have been negative effects of the Arab Spring in this region like widespread Jihadist terrorism, and has also given rise to extremist fundamentalism in West Asia. It has also contributed to the resurgence of ISIS (The Islamic State of Iraq and the Greater Syria) also known as ISIL (The Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant) terrorist organization in West Asia, alongside ever-increasing refugee problem in the European Union.

The countries in West Asia have begun to interfere in the internal affairs of their neighbours. Saudi Arabia and its ally have been countering the ISIS, intends to remove Assad from power; do not support the involvement of Russia and its support to the Assad regime (Kostyuk 2016). The Arab Spring in West Asia has been seen as a mobilized effort of the West to replace regimes allied to Moscow with ones allied to the West. Russia's strategy to deal with the Arab Spring in West Asia has been by attempting to block all Western/Arab backed efforts against Assad's regime in Syria at the UN Security Council (Katz 2015). Russia has been providing arms, to prevent the downfall of the Assad regime and has also collaborated with other West Asian countries opposing the downfall of Assad's regime for fear of its replacement, which could be worse (Iran and Iraq under the Shi'a regime, Egypt under Sisi, Algeria, Israel). On the other hand, Russia has been cooperating with Europe and America in their efforts of anti-WMD against Iran and Syria, so that they perceive Russia as their partner considering all differences. Conclusively, Russia has been attempting to isolate Saudi Arabia and its Gulf Arab allies (supporting Islamic State, IS) from the West. Russia's support to Assad regime actually does serve the Western interest in the region as democratization will lead to the rise of hostile Sunni Islamist forces in the region resulting in instability (Magen 2013, Blank 2014).

Before the breakout of the Arab Spring in the Middle East, Putin was trying to establish friendly relations with almost all the governments in the region, whether they were pro-West (Saudi Arabia or other Gulf Arab Countries, Israel, Egypt under Sisi, etc.) or anti-

West (Syria, Iran, Algeria and Libya including Iran and Iraq as well). Russia was uncomfortable with the downfall of Mubarak's regime in Egypt as it was a longstanding ally to Moscow in the West Asian region. Moscow saw Arab Spring to be backed by the West and US in order to replace the anti-West regime with a pro-West one. This act of the West was seen to target Russia and give rise to similar Muslim forces in Russia (Magen 2013, Katz 2015).

In the end, Assad's regime in West Asia is the last remaining ally after Egypt and Iran. The failure of Russia to support the regime will largely affect the status of Russia on the global as well as on regional level. It has become a testing ground for Russia's weaponry and the performance of the same would also help Russia to find new customers in the region for Russian military exports, particularly in the Gulf region. In 2015, the West Asian countries shared 36 per cent out of total military export of Russia after Asia (i.e., 42 per cent). Geographically Syria is surrounded by the other allies of Moscow in the region, starting from Iran, Iraq, the Kurds (North and East), Egypt in Southwest, covering the area stretching between the Caspian Sea, Persian Gulf, Mediterranean Sea and Red Sea (Trenin 2016).

PERSPECTIVE OF ARAB SPRING

After the breakout of Arab Spring or Arab Uprising in West Asia, a number of scholars have tried to highlight this event through different perspectives. It is clear to the international community that there exist a number of facts responsible for the initiation of this event in the West Asian region. One could say, as portrayed popularly by the media, that it was an attempt to change the regime (mostly the autocratic regime) with the demand for democracy by the people of these countries in West Asia, starting with Tunisia.

DEMOCRATIC PEACE THEORY

The classical argument of democratic peace was proposed by the liberals in the context of international politics. There are two key pre-suppositions related to this theory; First, it created the possibility to limit certain negative aspects in the situation of international

anarchy, i.e., war. Second, there exists a difference of behaviour among states in the global system, and internal political regime has greater influence over the behaviour of a state, while the position of the state in the international system is not so important. Kenneth Waltz has also passed a similar argument “*The essential element of the reductionist approach, therefore, is that the total is known by studying its parts*” (Waltz 1979: 66). The democratic peace theory is quite relevant in this context and explains the situation better. It explains that it was the people’s anger and dissatisfaction with their regimes, that led the protests for change, ushering democracy, which could bring in peace within the country and the region as a whole. On a larger perspective, the explanations to such uprising may be precipitated as Western propaganda; however, the mass protests led by the people of the Arab world clarifies that it is a protest against the authoritarian regimes, in order to replace them with democratic political system. The western perspective of this theory suggests that promoting democracy in such authoritarian regimes could actually bring peace to the people of the concerned country as well as for the region.

NATO is a clear example of the “community of security,” formed by liberal democracies of Western European and North American countries to maintain peace in international politics (Deutsch 1957). The assumption still prevails that the democratic society is averse to wars and conflicts as compared to the autocratic, monarchic, and other forms of governments and political systems existing or ever existed in this part of the world. The most preferred form of government for a state to govern and guide is believed to be a democratic system, which is assumed to be peaceful. It is believed to oppose aggression against other states in a system. The normative cultural model also shares some similarities with this assumption; that wars between non-democratic and democratic regimes take place very often compared to the democratic regimes (peaceful solution) on both sides. In the internal political process, autocratic regime and their leaders often use violence to resolve the conflicts. Similarly, the autocratic regime constantly anticipates aggression from other states. The resolution of conflicts among democratic and non-democratic regimes is not so efficient and the counter parts often resort to aggressive behaviour (Russett 1993: 35).

The theory also suggests that if there will be more democracies in the region or international system, the more peaceful that region or international system will be. The promotion of democracy makes sense in West Asia (Middle East), for it has remained unstable and hostile for a long period of time in the absence of democracy especially. The question pertaining to whether the region will become peaceful once these states adopt a democratic system of government, still persists. Further, on the adoption of a liberal democratic process the states in this region will stress more upon seeking peaceful solutions to their conflict without any military confrontation or war. By looking at the phenomena all around the world, it does not seem relevant acquiring and spending on latest military technology for national security for West Asia as well as other democratic governments in the race. In the presence of a peaceful democracy nations need not be blindfolded by superior military technologies for the betterment of human civilization. Some social scientists have commented or worked in support of this theory (Reiss 1991; Weart 1998; Fukuyama 1992). There are other arguments as well, related to the democratic peace theory, but its gist reflects that a democratic form of government is mainly peaceful.

DEPENDENCY THEORY

This theory is driven by the world system theory, where ‘core’ or major power in the world system exploits the ‘periphery’ or less developed states. The supremacy, as well as hegemony of the superpower, is dependent on the exploitation of developing or underdeveloped countries, in the present scenario. The dependency theory came as a response to the theory of modernization, in the 1950s (Matunhu 2011: 68; Herath 2008: 820). The dependency theory described as “a situation in which the economy of certain countries is conditioned by the development and expansion of another economy to which the former is subjected” (Dos Santos 1970: 231). There is enough possibility that Western philosophers might not be convinced with the case of West Asia. Majority of countries in the region are allied to the US and Western Europe, and a number of these West Asian countries are rich in natural resources, for instance, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Iraq, Iran (till 1979) and others. Oil and Gas are essential instruments for industrialization and

development of any country in the world and especially for the developing nations in the Third World or the countries in the Global South. The economically well of nations of Europe and US also require access to the rich petroleum resources of West Asia.

This could be the reason for the US and Western Powers to create their influence over the region with time, ever since oil was discovered in the region. The control over the resources of the region also provides the West and US with the capacity to manipulate the international system. Price of oil in the international market can have a huge effect on the economy of any country, including Russia. Regional countries therefore find it difficult to oppose the presence of US and the West in their territory and even in the region. The interests of the West are secured by military alliance with the regional countries and the presence of their forces in the region. The same way, it was assumed that the Western powers and the US wanted to replace authoritarian regimes in the region, unfriendly to nature of their interests in the region. During the Soviet period, Russia was present in the region and maintained a balance of power, while thereafter for a couple of decades (the 1980s and 1990s) the region was ignored by them. The West and US have utilized that opportunity very well and gained full control over the region except for some opposition.

CRITICAL THEORY

The Frankfurt School advanced the Critical theory, which stands for, how to emancipate human beings from social institution and practices that oppress them. According to the Frankfurt School theorists, critical theory is renowned from traditional theory and seeks humans “emancipation from slavery and liberating ... influence and works to create a world which satisfies the needs and powers of human beings” (Horkheimer 1972: 246).

The Historical Materialism of Marx was also an example cited by critics on the existing system in the society. Historical Materialism defines that the ‘haves’ exploit ‘have nots’ in the society and take away surplus production of their labour. In the context of West Asia, the Shahs or the monarchs have all the powers and governed by the religious book, not democratic in any real sense. People in this region do not have the power to choose their own leader and government of their choice; the top religious leader, or the family of

the King possess all political powers. These political powers are passed down the generations of the family by law, and therefore are hereditary in real sense. Although there is presence of political parties, the form of government is not democratic in real sense. The emergence of economic crisis, poor condition of common citizens, and states' decision of war, has gathered popular criticisms against their governments. There existed a mass aspiration for replacement of the governments for better ones where people would hold power to manipulate the politics and foreign relations.

According to the Russian perspective, the change of regime was the Western strategy to decrease the influence of Russia in the region. The change of regime mostly took place in those countries which were pro-Russian or harboured a close relationship with Russia. A change in regime actually is meant to weaken Russia's position in the region. Russia has always held the West responsible for the outbreak of Arab Spring in the region and for losing its friendly relationship to the states of West Asia in the process.

ARAB SPRING AND ITS IMPACT ON WEST ASIA

The beginning of Arab spring from Tunisia has largely transformed the situation in the West Asian region over the period of time. After the initial outbreak in Tunisia, the protests engulfed other regimes as well. The Gulf countries took precautions and liberalized their policies for the same, therefore shielding their population from the harsh neighbouring political climate. The nature of the Arab Spring had created a challenge for the entire region, threatening the regimes with a sense of insecurity due to the mass mobilization of the people on the streets. The same thing was happening in nearly dozens of countries at the same time along with bountiful international media attention. Popular protests had broken all the barriers of social structure in the society and people from any social class, religion, ethnicity, and political ideology were joining together for the cause of overthrowing the regimes. The interaction between people of different countries was enhanced to the level that the border became nominal entities and triggered protests from one Arab country to another. The role of external actors was also increased which largely shaped the protest of a country.

The regime of Mubarak could not survive the magnitude of protests and urged public to refrain from the use violence. Mubarak agreed to the transfer of power, and himself left the supreme position (Haass 2017). The Gulf countries had also failed to rescue Mubarak's regime (Jordan, Palestine, UAE, and Saudi Arabia). Even with regional support to the regime, Mubarak was unable to survive through the protests, and the regional allies lost their longtime friend. The regimes which were feeling safe for the time being, also realized after Mubarak that they are also vulnerable to the situation. The wave of protest had spread so fast that it was impossible to ascertain the next target. The failure of regimes (Mubarak and Ben Ali) taught them a lesson that none of them was ready to surrender their power easily (Lynch 2014).

The Gulf States started to make concessions for their citizens, to deny the American pressure. The anti-revolutionary narrative was dominating the media, praising limited reforms of the regime, people were informed about the risks of chaos and conflict, and the challengers were demonized. Gulf countries possess the leverage of oil, and due to high oil prices in the international market, were in a strong position and easily steered out of trouble. This was the case with the wealthiest countries in the Gulf region, but such was not the case with other countries and their regimes with lack of strong oil economy to offer lavish life to their citizens through subsidies, high salaries, and bonuses. The youths of the Gulf States were attracted by new and enhanced scholarship schemes which helped them steer away from protest movements. They did not just spend at home but also provided a huge amount of economic aid to their neighbouring countries (Egypt, Qatar, UAE etc.) so that the protest can be avoided (Lynch 2014).

Countries like Syria and Libya did not have that much of leverage and financial help. The Gulf media demonstrated their support for the protesters, intensifying the situation. The Arab uprising was then shaping regional politics, and the countries naturally opposed to one another reflected their differences in supporting the protesters in their respective countries. The same way Gulf countries were targeting their opponents through support, and at the same time defending their allies to create a challenge for their adversaries, for international support. The international support assisted the protesters in violence against

their adversaries, simultaneously downplaying the similar violence against their allies. This was meant to mould the direction of the popular uprising, and for instance, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Turkey possibly cooperated in the Libyan intervention. The policy of international support was also tried by the Gulf countries in the case of Syria, to break the Iranian influence (Haass 2017).

CIVIL WAR IN SYRIA AND THE RISE OF ISLAMIC STATE

The Syrian crisis is very much complex to explain since its initiation. It has already been discussed in the above section, that the Gulf countries under the shadow of international support assisted protestors as a tool of violence against their adversaries. This may be true to some extent, but due to Arab uprising, the protest and the protesters were omnipresent, and Syria failed to cope with the same at the first stage. Later, understandably, it was possible that the tactics used by the Assad regime failed to neutralize the protest, and further intensified it to take the shape of a civil war.

Syria was Iran's only Arab ally and the core of the "Resistance Bloc." The threat to the Assad regime can create an imbalance of power in the region and may prove to be negative for Iran. The adversaries of Iran and Syria have made attempts to intensify the situation of the Syrian uprising. The insurgency and act of violence by the protesters was the main reason that the Syrian uprising was converted into crisis. On the other hand, Iran has been trying to salvage the Assad regime. The Syrian crisis is an example of the beginning of the new regional war, where Russia, Iran, and Syria are on one side and US and its regional allies on the other (Gulf States) (Lynch 2014).

Assad regime used violence as an instrument to suppress the popular protests of its citizens, which included arrests, personal intimidation, torture and surveillance. Security forces of Syria used force to crack down the possibility of protest and infiltrated the protesting sites, including mosques and public squares. Suspects were arrested at regular intervals, and surveillance was becoming more intensified day by day. The activists were beaten; tortured and public gatherings were prohibited and often broken up by force. Due to this violence under the Assad regime, there were almost tens of thousands of people

who lost their lives. The “shabiha” gangs of plainclothes were believed to be the main culprit, intensifying the protest (Lynch 2014).

Prime Minister of Turkey, Erdogan, and emir of Qatar, both had enjoyed friendly relation with Assad regime. The uprising in the region changed everything, and for Turkey, attack on Jisr al-Shughur in June 2011 was considered as a crucial event. Turkey has relatively maintained open border policy for refugees, but this policy allowed the opposition to take advantage and transport goods and people, including weapons and jihadists (Yahya 2015: 45).

In the case of Homs, the visit of the US Ambassador (Robert Ford) was criticized by Assad; while the protesters opposing Assad cheered for the arrival of Ambassador to their support. Other Western diplomats also travelled to Homs, and displayed their support for the protesters against the regime of Assad in Syria. In response to the visits, Assad used military assault against the protesters, crushing the protests with brutality. The protest continued to grow, and thousands were killed in the process by the military forces of Syria. The military action of Assad turned out to be one of the bloodiest days in the Syrian uprising. As expected the United Nations Security Council also condemned the atrocities over the protesters by the regime. There existed continuous fear that this may lead to military intervention of the West as had already happened in the case of Libya.

The Obama administration during this period of time was under immense domestic and international pressure, forcing for strong action against the Assad regime in Syria. At the same time, the Gulf States were already supporting the protesters against Assad regime. The Hama massacres were believed to be a direct challenge to the credibility of the US. All situations collectively pointed out to the probability of Assad losing his control over Syria. The Arab and the Western media amplified this narrative at every opportunity that the Assad regime would not survive for long. Still, the consensus was not acquired by Washington for military intervention in Syria. The Syrians and the regional consensus also rejected the possibility of intervention by the US. Diplomacy was used by regional powers and the West to pressurize Assad to halt its violence against people. Ambassadors

were withdrawn by Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, and Kuwait. On August 18, 2011, after coordinating with European and Arab allies, Obama released a statement that:

“The future of Syria must be determined by its people, but President Bashar al-Assad is standing in their way . . . for the sake of the Syrian people, the time has come for President Assad to step aside.”(Haass 2017).

This statement of America also failed, and Assad did not sacrifice his power. The statement also set a course of future action for the US; and the possibility of a military intervention in the near future was also not denied (Haass 2017).

It was the failure of diplomacy, which made the opposition of Assad seek support of the insurgency. The West and the regional partners were in support of the United Nations Security Council resolution against Assad to pressurize him to leave through legitimate actions. In November 2011, Syria was suspended from the Arab League by Qatar. Later next year, in January Qatar also sought the support of Arab league for UN Security Council mandate. It was January 2012, when the Security Council resolution would have been passed, but Russia and China used their veto powers to stop the same. Russia defended its position, maintaining that in the case of Libya, NATO was supposed to provide protection against atrocities of the regime, but it pursued an open-ended license to change the regime. Qatar felt deeply frustrated with the UN and started looking for other alternatives for intervention in Syria against the Assad regime. This was also the case with other regional states for losing their faiths in diplomatic solutions of the problem.

In February 2012, Bab Amr (neighbourhood of Homs) was devastated with heavy weaponry and massive assault was launched on civilians. It was galvanized with the death of a well-known war correspondent, Marie Colvin. The international media flooded with news and Security Council was left with no option but to use military action against Syria. The heavy civilian casualties in this event made the situation vulnerable to the militarization of the conflict. There are four major organizational developments which have designed the next stage of the Syrian crisis:

“The emergence of Local Coordination Councils and the creation of the National Coordination Committee in June, the announcement of the Free Syrian Army on July 29, and the creation of the Syrian National Council on August 23. These four aspects of the rebellion often disagreed over strategy and priorities.” (Lynch 2016: 119)

By June, the Local Coordination Councils were formed for security and substance by the Syrian government as violence increased. The LCCs were meant for the humanitarian relief, political representation and to maintain contact with international organization and media for the information related to the status of local-level conflicts. In July, the Free Syrian Army was created by Riyadh al-Asa’ad, providing an organizational framework for the local armed groups. It was indulged to provide training and weapons to the people aspiring to join the army. These activities of the Free Syrian Army were portrayed as a response to the Syrian regime violence against civilians. Most of the Syrians were opposed to the concept of the Free Syrian Army and believed in peaceful tactics to find the solution of the conflict (Lynch 2016).

In late August, the Syrian National Council was created in Istanbul, similar to the Libyan NTC. Just like NTC in Libya, it also served as an instrument to receive recognition and support from the international community (Haass 2017). These groups were indulging in regional political struggles and using money, media, and political assets for their own benefits. The Syrian Muslim Brothers (sponsored by Qatar, and Turkey) also emerged during this period of time. In June, the National Coordination Committee (NCC) was formed, which proved to be a political challenge for the Syrian National Council. Haytham al-Manaa (based in Paris) brought together the leftist movements, majority of secular Syrians, and three political parties of Kurd. NCC was in favour of unearthing a gradual solution to the conflict through conversation with Assad for a political settlement. The NCC opposed the use of violence and intervention for the resolution of the conflict (Lynch 2016: 121).

When the Arab League (in Baghdad) was deciding on the intervention in Syria, the Prime Minister of Iraq, Nuri al-Maliki, objected to such an action. Although, the objection of

the Iraqi Prime Minister was simply directed by its dependence over Iran. At the same time, Arabs were expecting military intervention of the US. Many Arabs rejected the possibility of Western intervention who beheld the condition of Iraq after the invasion of 2003 (Haass 2017).

The April 1 onwards the Arab (especially Gulf countries) policy was changed and the rebels did not just receive administrative support and humanitarian relief but military aid as well. International funds were used by the Syrian opposition to buy weapons and initiate regional struggle to gain some influence in Syria. The US also created some pressure on the Gulf States to suspend its program of arming rebels. For the same Mustafa Alani (UAE-based analyst) told the Guardian, *“The decision to arm the rebels has been taken in principle, but it has not yet been implemented, and It soon would be.”* The United Nations reported that Saudi Arabia and Qatar should stop arming Syrian rebels, and put an end to undermining the UN efforts to bring peace and end crisis in the region. It was suspected that these weapons were smuggled into Syria through Saudi allies in Lebanon. Sergei Lavrov, the Russian Foreign Minister, also stated a warning that *“the rebels would not be able to defeat Assad’s forces even if they were armed to the teeth”* (The Guardian 5 April 2012). Iraq also opposed the program to arm the rebels in Syria. The US also expressed its concerns about extremist or jihadi groups, getting their hands on weapons supplied to Syrian rebels.

On 10 April 2012, United Nations Special Envoy led by Kofi Annan arrived with the peace plan for the Middle East. With his peace plan, immediate ceasefire was called and began the process of political transition through negotiations. He also warned that the failure of negotiations may prove to be a catastrophic to both Syria and the region. The negotiations of the peace plan failed to deliver the appropriate results and left the region with one last alternative, full-scale war (Lynch 2014).

The same thing happened in the case of Syria, when the rebels began to respond to the brutality of the Assad regime with the use of arms. Funds arrived in huge amounts from the different sources for the armed rebels along with the supply of sophisticated weapons,

intensifying the insurgency. Assad's supporters also came to support the regime, when situations got out of control. Hezbollah and Iran were also playing an active role in the conflict through indirect assistance to Assad's regime. It was then, the Islamic State who also come to the surface and forced the US and the Western powers to initiate their major air campaigns (Wezeman 2015: 48). The main targets of these air campaigns were primarily the Islamic State, and the factions of other jihadist groups of rebels were secondary. It was the time when Russia also marked its presence in the conflict and started its campaign to defend Assad's regime from the Islamic State and the jihadist groups of rebels. The local balance of power was superseded by the international balance of power, and which was proved to be more destructive for the region, then one could ever expect.

During the period of 2012-2013, the insurgencies increased, and eventually laid foundation for the emergence of the Islamic State in the region. The conflict has decisively changed the morphology and societal conditions of Iraq and created a major refugee crisis. A majority of the Syrians fled from Aleppo and other regions to evade the ongoing violence. Shi'ite forces entered into a battleground on decisive moments to rescue Assad's regime. Simultaneously, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and Turkey supported their preferred clients of the jihadist groups to wage war against Assad with huge amount of weaponry, funds and donations. Later, the US started another secret program, arming the Syrian rebels; which was well coordinated with the Europeans and regional Arab partners. The rebel groups received the US funding and weaponry through Jordan, kept under a close a watch of CIA, not to provide a free hand to the rebels (Entous 2015). In October, the CIA had extended its program and providing training to the rebels in Jordan with the help of US paramilitary specialists. By the end of the year, the international and regional media hoses started reporting widely about the existence of 'secret' training camps in Jordan.

Turkish policy towards the Syrian crisis was shaped primarily by the Kurdish issue. On 28 May 2013, in Turkey, protesters aggregated in Gezi Park (Central Istanbul) to protest against the local commercial development; which was the first instance of Turkey

encountering the wave of Arab Spring. Forceful repression of the protest, and making a powerful presidency by rewriting the constitution resulted in the polarization of Turkish politics. In 2015, the Kurdish political party in Turkey gained electoral success and the ever-growing power of Kurdish armed groups in Syria, made Erdogan launch its offensive thrust against Kurds (Haass 2017).

In the beginning, it was mostly the civilians dying because of the military actions of regime forces. The situation changed with the militarization of the rebels, and killings of regime soldiers in huge numbers and intensive fight in the areas of Aleppo (Damascus). This would not be the case if the funding agencies did not want their money back. Civilians, as usual, were the prime victims of the war, but the destruction was collateral and both the parties conceived equal damage in the battlefield. The Syrian Observatory of Human Rights confirmed in December 2013, that, in the ongoing conflict, fifty thousand on the regime's side and thirty thousand on the side of the rebel fighters lost their lives. By June 2015, the documented data for deaths was increased, i.e., forty thousand rebel fighter and thirty thousand aligned foreign fighters compared to fifty thousand regime soldiers, and thirty-two thousand irregular soldiers aligned to the regime lost their lives. The insurgents occupied more and more territory and inflicted huge damage on the forces aligned to the regime, but all these events did not seriously threaten Assad's survival. Whenever the crucial areas were threatened, Iran, Hezbollah, and Iraqi Shi'ite militia came to rescue Assad and its regime soldiers, and finally, Russia also marked its presence by September 2015 (Lynch 2016).

Insurgents used the social media skillfully to highlight their power and ideology, to attract new recruit from foreign countries and support for their cause. The attention-grabbing videos served as an instruments for political competition among the Islamic State jihadi groups to promote their interests, ideologies, and strategic visions. The radicalization of the groups receiving the aid became a great concern for the regional countries. In October 2015, Joseph Biden (Vice President of the United States) publicly criticized the Gulf States and Turkey for supporting and funding the insurgents in Syria.

Aleppo came to the limelight for being the battleground of an intense conflict. However, the region was more easily accessible to the Turkish journalist compared to the Syrian ones. The rebels were also divided in the conflict, due to their external sponsors and bore contradictions with one another. On August 6, the news of chemical weapons attack on Damascus (Near East Ghouta) flooded the regional and international media channels, and reports suggested that fourteen hundred people were killed in the incident. As a result, the use of chemical weapon crossed the line set by the Obama administration, calling for direct military intervention in Syria. The Obama Administration initiated campaigns to gain regional and international support for military actions in retaliation of chemical weapon attack on civilians by the Syrian regime. The regional power, waiting curiously for this opportunity, pledged full support to the US and ensured active participation in the campaign. Obama, with the liberal ideology, called for a limited military strike (Haass 2017).

Meanwhile, the Obama Administration was busy working on acquiring regional and international support for its military campaign in Syria. At the same time, David Cameron, the British Prime Minister, failed to obtain parliamentary support to join the American coalition in its military campaign. At the very last moment, Obama also introspected his decision for air strike and suggested for the Congressional approval and national consent before entering into another war.

It was Russia who suggested for the inspection of chemical weapon arsenal of Syria by the international inspectors, and under the pressure of Russia Assad also agreed to such inspection, whereas Israel and Saudi Arabia felt disappointed with this decision and projected their intention to go to a War with Syria alone. From January 2014, the United Nations initiated a new talk in Geneva, to find a solution to the ongoing conflict in the West Asian region, where it received nominal success. This new talk was only meant to keep the diplomatic options open for a solution of the conflict in a peaceful manner. At the same time, the factions of the rebel groups, in general, were not interested in any kind of deal, and turned against one another, while their commander threatened the opposition faction for participating in a talk to make a deal.

The international inspectors removed most of the chemical weapons belonging to Assad's regime. The Gulf States and Turkey were frustrated with the US when it aborted the decision of airstrike on Syria and started to pour more support for the radicalization of jihadist groups in the region. Meanwhile, Iran and Hezbollah were demonstrating their continuous support for Assad's regime against advanced military challenges.

The emergence of the ISIS in this region was believed to be linked with three main theories. First, the theory explains that the emergence of Islamic State was closely connected with the action of Assad regime when it released the jihadist prisoners with the intention of it combating and crushing the rebellion in the country. The second theory, demonstrates that the emergence of ISIS in Syria was the result of an anti-Assad campaign launched by the Gulf States and Turkey. To topple the Assad regime they aided and supported the radical jihadist groups of Islamic State with advanced military weapons. The third theory highlights the connection of Islamic State with the peak of inclination within Islamism, so was the case with the rise of jihadism or Al-Qaeda. The analysis of successes and failures of Al-Qaeda can provide enough raw materials for the understanding of Islamism and its inclination (Lynch 2014). Over the period of time, the widespread networks of the jihadist groups in online communities and collective protests served as the foundation for the Islamic State in the region. The Islamic State and its skeletal ideology are not confined to one specific region, and happen to be a global phenomenon.

Assad's link with the emergence of ISIS is not entirely verifiable, as for instance, releasing the prisoners in late 2011 also freed the jihadist, but the primary concern for Assad, during that period of time, was to fight against the rebels and not Islamic State. Though, the act of releasing the prisoners was a contributing factor to the rise of ISIS, but it cannot be compared with the insurgencies taking place from Iraq. However, the Islamic State was not Assad's proxy but still served its interests by targeting the rebel jihadist groups in Syria. Aid from the Gulf States and Turkey also cannot solely be blamed for the outbreak, as it was Assad's policy of violence against protesters and later rebels,

which provided an opportunity for the Islamic State to flourish in the region with the support of the locals. Although the insurgency was Islamized, radical and dependent on its sponsors; was not centralized, and that left a space for the groups to claim their respective radical and well organized ways, independent from the sponsors outside. For instance, one should blame the failure of Arab Spring as the main cause for the rise of Islamic State in the region. The insurgency from Iraq that was not resolved in time, and the sponsored insurgency in Syria form the factors to blame. The military intervention and the campaign of the counterterrorism of US for over a decade in West Asia be held equally responsible for the rise of Islamic State in the region.

The prisoners released by Assad's regime do not seem problematic, but still, some of those jihadists also played key roles in the formation of rebel fighting groups. These rebel groups did not just include the ISIS figures but also the non-ISIS Islamist figures, i.e., Hassan Abboud (the founder of Ahrar al-Sham) and Zahran Alloush (the commander of Jaysh al-Islam). It was not Syria, but the Iraqi state, which was more vulnerable to the emergence of the radical jihadist groups like the Islamic State. However, later the outbreak of the civil war in Syria made it convenient for the Islamic State to claim some importance.

IRAQ AND THE ISLAMIC STATE

The rise of the Islamic State in Iraq was another huge setback for the country. However, it has not fully recovered from the instability due to the invasion of the US after 9/11 terrorist attack. It does not stop here, and the problem of the autonomous Kurdish region and humanitarian crisis in the country has enabled Iraq to pursue its foreign policy. Iraq does not stand a chance against Islamic State, as the US already demolished its forces since 2003, and the economy has gone more deeply into crisis (Mishra 2018: 73). Thus, it leaves only one option for Iraq; that is to seek support from the West and the US. The US and European forces have taken the lead to fight against ISIS in Iraq. At the same time, Russia, along with Iran, is fighting the Islamic State in Syria to save the remaining ally and regime of Assad (Ningthoujam 2018: 50).

In June 2014, the Sunni jihadist group seized Mosul, the major city of Iraq, and declared the emergence of Islamic State in the region. The rise of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria changed the regional politics of civil war in Syria, and therefore, the international perspective was also changed regarding the 'Arab Spring.' Since the formation of the ISIS in this region, this terrorist group has gained control over enormous territories in Iraq and Syria. In the process of gaining control over the territories, Islamic State resorted to social media for circulation of the videos of execution, to stir up an air of fear in the opposition and promoting their ideology to receive global and regional support for their cause. The States in the region, opposed to the regime in Syria and Iraq also supported and aided the Islamic State, and supplied a huge amount of advanced weaponry to these jihadist groups to continue their struggle against the regime. All these cases combined, made the US return and get militarily engaged in the conflict against the Islamic State. This was similar to the case of Russia, which entered in September 2015, launching an airstrike campaign on the prime bases of Islamic State in Syria, to rescue the regime of Assad against Sunni radical forces.

Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, the Jordanian jihadist, was the first leader of Al-Qaeda, fighting against the forces of the US in Iraq war. He was infamous for his acts of brutality, beheadings, and insurgency while running a training camp for jihadist in Afghanistan before moving into Iraq. In 2006, he was killed during an operation of the US Special Forces. After the death of Zarqawi, his successors (Abu Ayub al-Masri and Abu Omar al-Baghdadi) carried forward the terrorist organization (Al-Qaeda) and formed the Islamic State of Iraq. The purpose behind the declaration of Islamic State was to claim its hegemony over other terrorist organizations and jihadist groups in the world. The Islamic State pursued an aggressive policy to control the territories, claimed after defeating the military forces of Iraq. Its harsh policies attracted resistance from local people, especially from the tribal leaders, local politicians, major national jihadist groups, and from the Sunni ranks as well.

The Islamic State defeated the alliance of the US and Iraqi Sunni initially, but later the local Iraqi Sunni forces with the help of the US regained control over their lost territories. In 2010, during the raid of the US military forces both, Masri and Baghdadi were killed.

Iran was able to gain control over the politics of Iraq with the help of the locals (Shi'a people), and Shi'a political party (ISCI- the Islamic Supreme Council for Iraq) in Iraq. Iran also preferred maintaining a friendly relation with the Kurdish and Sunni politicians in Iraq, to protect its interests in the country. Iran also created obstacle in the policy pursued by the US in Iraq during the Iraq war. In the case of Iraq, the Sunni majority states in the Gulf region, including Saudi Arabia were in avoidance of confrontation with Iran, while keeping some distance from the crisis. In Iraqi politics, Sunni people were not enjoying appropriate representation, whereas the Syrian crisis had provided them with the base to protest for their basic rights. The Iraqi protesters portrayed as inspired by the Syrian uprising, and connecting the Iraqi revolution with the Sunni sect in Syria.

By the end of 2012, the Iraqi Security Force raided the home of Rafi al-Issawi (Deputy Prime Minister) which transformed the peaceful protest of Sunnis into a violent one. The massive expansion of the protests covered the whole of Anbar Province (Fallujah to Ramadi). The outbreak of the popular protests in Iraq provided an opportunity to the marginalized Sunni people to gain some political representation, for instance, the rise of IS of Iraq. In early 2013, many protesters lost their lives (the case of Fallujah and Mosul) in the process; as the protest was increasingly becoming violent over the period of time. On 23 April 2013, Iraqi Security Forces launched a campaign to crush the protests with the use of violence in Hawija, close to Kirkuk. The Sunni protesters also used violence in response and marked the beginning of the sectarian conflict in Iraq. Without making any concession for the protesters, the Iraqi military reciprocated with an intense fight in Ramadi, and executed bombardment over Fallujah. This act of aggression turned the Iraqi Sunnis against the government and triggered a chain reaction in Mosul. The last hope of political negotiation was also diminished when the Sunni leaders chose to motivate insurgency against the sectarian and corrupt Iraqi government.

As the insurgency was gaining momentum in Iraq, the Sunni faction also hoped to utilize the same against Assad. A huge amount of money, weapons, and foreign fighters were pouring into Syria, and the borders between the two countries were non-existing for the jihadist soldiers. Meanwhile, Iraq was serving as a safe haven for the sectarian fighters, whereas the fighters were existing on both sides, Iraq and Syria. The weaponry seized or abandoned in one front—for instance, weapons supplied by the US were captured by the insurgents when Mosul was taken over from Iraqi army—could now be mobilized other theatres of war. Prime Minister Maliki observed such connections. Thus, his warnings against the supply of armaments to the Syrian insurgent factions were not only concerned with Iranian policy. Maliki, at the same time, expressed his concern regarding close linkages between Sunni insurgents and local Iraqi jihadist, which can turn harmful for Iraq in the future. Still, he failed to recognize his own contribution to the escalation of the situation and converting into crisis.

The Kurdish Regional Government (KRG) in Iraq reached the point where it was very likely and possible to declare independence from Iraq. Parallel to it, the Kurdish Democratic Unity Party (PYD) in Syria, rose as the favoured partner for the US, during the latter's air campaigns against the IS. The emergence of Kurdish elements had increased concerns of Turkey as it has traditionally been an open and vocal opponent of Kurdish nationalism. So even when the US coordinated and depended upon Kurd forces in Iraq and Syria against the onslaught of Islamic State, Turkey carried out military operations against those very Kurd groups (Haass 2017).

To create a counter-balance in opposition to Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki, Erdogan's government-aligned with Saudi Arabia and other powers in the support of al-Iraqiya coalition led by Ayad Allawi. Subsequently, Allawi's failure in defeating Maliki in 2010, led the Turkish government to shift its strategy of harbouring its own clients, especially in northern Iraq. Very soon Baghdad was rocked by the emergence of a new Iraqi Sunni militant movement which had direct connections with the Syrian war. In early 2014, the imperative of developing an effective proxy war force-induced Turkey to form an Islamist military coalition in northern Syria. The al-Nusra was further identified as a

separate terrorist organization, not bearing any connection with the coalition (al-Qaeda) (Lund 2015: 21), and receiving support from Salafi-jihadist faction (Ahrar-al-Sham).

RUSSIA'S POLICY TOWARDS WEST ASIA POST ARAB UPRISING

Russia has lost or is on the verge of losing its friendly regime in the region due to Arab Spring in West Asia beginning from Tunisia in 2011. It started like a chain reaction in the region, sparked by mass protests in the Arab world against their governments, whether in gulf countries, North African or in West Asia. Sooner or later, almost every regime in the Arab world faced protests from their citizens and struggled to cope up with the same. In the case of Egypt, Hosni Mubarak had also faced protests by its people; he resigned from the presidential post and was also sentenced by an Egyptian court for his crime against protesters and misuse of power. Syria, the closest ally of Russia in the region, was not also isolate from this event and soon Assad regime also faced similar protests by its people, which turned into a crisis.

The rise of Islamic terrorist group (ISIS) in Syria and Iraq has created a situation of crisis in West Asia. Russia had no option but to rescue the Assad regime in the region against the ISIS group, and for the same reason, Russia had to launch military operation in Syria on September 2015. NATO and the US forces on the other hand were engaged in fighting the terrorist group in Iraq. According to the experts, START (Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty) had vastly contributed to change in behaviour of Russia, and the Arab Spring (started from Tunisia in January 2011, as Jasmine revolution) in West Asia, for the promotion of democracy was the major change which influenced the policy of Russia towards the Middle East especially Iran. Meanwhile, there were talks held between P5+1 and Iran, at the end of 2010 and early 2011 (Reardon 2012).

The Arab Spring in the Middle-East also contributed to suspicion of Russia regarding Iran, as the democratization was assumed to be initiated by the West to influence the regime. Russia was expecting another revolution in Iran and the possibility of closeness between the US and Iran. Iran also asked for compensation from Russia, as during the Second World War the Soviet Union had occupied the northern half of Iranian territory.

Russia was also accused of not completing the construction of BNPP in time and for trying to earn more profit from Iran.

After the Arab Spring in West Asia, the suspicion of losing Iran was also getting high. The possibility of re-establishment of US and Iran relationship was becoming likely, for example, Russia had already lost its close allies in West Asia like Iraq (Saddam Hussein), Libya (Muammar Qaddafi), and continuous threat to Assad's regime in Syria (Roy & Roy, 2018). The West and the US criticized Iran for its increasing its capability of uranium enrichment (20 per cent). The demand for laser uranium enrichment technology and supply of tritium gas from Russia confirmed the suspicion of the West and US about the intentions of the Iranian nuclear program for military purposes.

SANCTIONS: ITS IMPACT ON RUSSIA

The ever-growing sanctions on Russia have weakened its economy and domestic situation. The Western powers and the US have put sanctions on Russia for its aggression in Ukraine and annexation of Crimea. In April 2014, the US revoked existing licenses and denied a pending one to block the export of advanced military equipment, services, and dual-use technology to damage the military capabilities of Russia. Later, the commerce department denied licenses to 13 specific Russian companies and damaging Russia's economy with new sanctions in July 2014 (Sipri 2015: 64).

The Russian economy witnessed a gradual decline from 2013 to 2016. The phase started with the decline of oil prices which was reduced from 100\$ in 2014 to 30\$ in 2015. Putin's attempt to handle this slowdown resulted in a negotiation with the OPEC in 2017, when OPEC nations agreed upon cutting down production. With inflation at 13%, Russia's GDP came down by 4%. With the depreciating value of Rouble by 37.4% in 2015, the oil prices fell by 50% resulting in an increased budget deficit. Consequently in 2015 unemployment increased to 5.6%. The state capital supported the banks. According to the World Bank, there was a slight growth of 1.1% in 2017, because of a rise of gas and oil price and low-cost credit. Poverty marginally increased from 13.4% in 2015 to 14.2% in 2016. The Russian economy was strongly affected by Western sanctions,

especially after incorporating Crimea. With the declining investments, the European states initiated the lookout for other sources of energy. Despite their efforts, there is a tendency that after imposing sanctions, European companies might lose the Russian market to Chinese enterprises. Meanwhile, Russia has already established its trade with East Asian Companies (Chenoy and Kumar 2017: 176-177).

In 2016, the IMF highlighted a 1% decline of the GDP. While there was 13% inflation in 2015, the actual wages reduced by 9.5%. In early 2016, the exchange value of Rouble was reduced to a half of what it was in 2014. Compared to 2008, it was the worst. Although the economy stabilized after a year the low oil and gas prices with Western sanctions did not let the Russian economy grow for three consecutive years. Considering this the American President decided to lift few sanctions on Russia. In the context of International Trade, Russia has a trade surplus with countries like Japan, Turkey, Netherlands and Italy. Russia has a trade deficit with China, US and Italy. As far as Russian exports are concerned, in 2016, its top destinations were Germany, Netherlands, China and Italy. Russia's 70% of export to other countries comprise of oil and mineral fuels. The major import goods in Russia constitute of machinery, pharmaceutical products, electrical and motor vehicles products. As a trading partner, the European Union holds the biggest investor for Russia. By becoming a member of WTO, Russia's trade and investment received a boost in 2012. Since the sanctions, Russia is now seeking new partners in the East with countries like Japan, Korea and other South-East Asian countries. Amongst them, China and India are the two major importers of defense products from Russia (Chenoy and Kumar 2017: 177-178).

The sanctions were primarily introduced by the US, Australia, Canada, Japan, and the EU; freezing assets, restricting the supply of specific items and travels ban. These sanctions made Russia look for an alternative for trade relations. In 2015, the 'stress test' of the EU countries, in case if Russia stops exporting its Gas to Europe. European countries have started looking for an alternative for Gas import. Price of Oil in the international market has been substantially low due to instability in West Asia (ISIS) and overproduction of Oil by pro-US countries in the region since the oil crisis of 2014.

MAJOR SHIFT IN RUSSIA'S POLICY

There has been a major shift in Russia's policy after all these events took place in international politics. The Syrian Crisis, Iranian nuclear crisis, Ukraine crisis, 2014 Oil crisis, sanctions by EU, US and other countries, low oil prices in the international market, enlargement of NATO in its neighbouring countries and return of Putin for the third time, has contributed largely for the major shift in Russia's policy abroad.

The direct military involvement of Russia in the Syrian crisis has clarified that Russia still possesses the power to manipulate international politics outside of the Soviet Union. Russia has been shifting its focus on Asia and new emerging economies of the third world and withdrawing from the West or European countries. Russia has been more energetic than ever to establish a relationship with almost all countries in the West Asian region, even with the pro-US (i.e., Saudi Arabia) countries. More emphases have been given to the regional organizations for economic cooperation, and to extend its relationship with the fastest-growing economies in the World. Russia has been trying to strengthen its relation with Iran, Israel, Iraq, and Egypt; the attempts to create a friendly relation with Gulf Cooperation Countries (GCC) and restore its ties with a major trading partner for Russia in the region, Turkey (Roy & Roy 2018).

Russia has been cooperating with the US to tackle terrorism (ISIS) in West Asia, for instance, Syria's chemical has been taken out with Russia's proposal to Assad, while successfully avoiding airstrike of US on Syria. The relation between Russia and Turkey has been diluted after a SU-24 fighter jet had been shot down by Turkey. At the same time Russia has been coordinating with Saudi Arabia to cut the production of OPEC and Qatar has been provided with an opportunity to buy a stake in Rosneft (Roy & Roy 2018).

The vision of "shaping a fair and sustainable world order" has been a driving factor for the political interests of Russia, which can be identified as a priority for Russia policy abroad.

“The Russian Federation’s foreign policy is aimed at creating a stable and sustainable system of international relations based on the generally accepted norms of international law and principles of equal rights, mutual respect and non-interference in domestic affairs of States, so as to ensure solid and equal security for each and every member of the global community.”(Roy & Roy 2018).

Russia’s main priority in the present time is to stabilize the economy which had been largely affected by the sanctions imposed on Russia and its energy companies, after the Ukrainian crisis and the Iranian nuclear crisis. The strategic perspective of Russia for being involved in West Asia is due to the growing threat of radical Islamist group in the region and securing its strategic space as well (Roy & Roy 2018).

Russia has been conducting the ministerial meeting (i.e., Russian- Arab Cooperation Forum) and strategic dialogues with the Arab States in the Gulf Cooperation Council, to expand its relations in the West Asian region. Russia has also gained the observer status in OIC (the Organization of Islamic Cooperation) which could eventually help Russia to penetrate and establish a close relationship with countries in the larger Islamic world. For the time being, Russia is taking step cautiously towards Israel-Palestine conflict, by offering its support for Palestine while maintaining good relation with Israel alongside (Roy & Roy 2018).

NEW OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES FOR RUSSIA

Russia has found new opportunities as it has been following variegated policies towards West Asia and is putting emphasis on establishing friendly relation with each and every country in West Asia, excluding the pro-US or neutral countries. Ever-increasing relation with Saudi Arabia can help Russia to penetrate into the region to establish a relation with Gulf countries as well, which remained alienated from Russia for a long time because of the influence of the US over the regimes. Saudi Arabia, as a leader of OPEC Organization, can also help Russia acquire membership, a long-awaited desire for Russia. It can further help Russia to stabilize oil prices in the international energy market which will eventually stabilize the economy of Russia and increase the value of Rouble in the international currency market (Roy & Roy 2018).

The US has been manipulating regional politics in West Asia for decades, and now, these countries are also getting aware of US intentions in the region. The United States have fought a number of wars in this region (i.e., Iraq, Afghanistan) and gained distrust among the local people, enraging enraging towards the US as well as European Countries (presence of NATO forces). The withdrawal of the US from the region has provided Russia with a great opportunity to utilize the weakened position of the US by winning the trust of local people and their regimes with friendly approach (Roy & Roy 2018).

There is greater shift in Russia's policy towards West Asia to establish close ties with the countries in the region, which can help Russia to manage its isolation, expand its economic ties with the countries where it has market advantages, cooperation in oil, gas and nuclear energy; and, last but not the least, gaining access for Russian arms sales. For this cause, Russia has been focusing on countries like Iran, Saudi Arabia, UAE, Israel, Egypt, Tunisia, Algeria, Jordan, and Morocco (Roy & Roy 2018). Russia saw these democratic uprisings in West Asia, inspired by the West especially the US, while both Putin and Medvedev felt cautious about the changes because of their involved interests as well as a declining relationship with the strong allies, after the revolution or change in regime.

Meanwhile the active military intervention in the Syrian crisis has provided new opportunities to Russia; first, except in the case of Libya and Iraq, it has demonstrated successfully that it possesses the capability to protect its ally and to deny the change of regime with force. Second, Russia has made a comeback in international politics through the Syrian crisis, whereas it had gone into isolation after the Ukrainian crisis. Third, the Syrian crisis has helped Russia to regain its lost image of a superpower in international politics. Lastly, Russia has gained access to Hmeinin airbase in Syria. Meanwhile, Russia's capacity to defend West Asian airspace has increased with the latest SAM-400 missile system. Russian naval base in Tartus now fully secured with the deployment of S-300 anti-aircraft missile systems. Russia's success in the Syrian crisis has further increased its relation with Iran (Roy & Roy 2018: 266). After the success in the Syrian

crisis, the demand for Russia's weaponry has increased in the entire region, that includes Iran, Syria, Turkey, and Saudi Arabia (demand for S-400). The news had already created tension in the West that when Turkey received its consignment of air defence missile systems S-400 from Russia. Saudi Arabia has also joined hands with Russia to receive S-400 whereas Iran has already received S-300, which was delayed due to the sanctions imposed on Iran; while, future demand for the supply of Su-30SM fighters jets have been placed (Connolly and Sendstad 2017: 18). The access for Russia into the West Asian market was not possible before, and the US and European powers were dominating the regional demand for arms over the region.

CONCLUSION

Russia's policy towards the West Asian region has gained some importance after the success of the military involvement of Russia in the Syrian crisis. The Syrian crisis and performance of the military might of Russia have opened up new markets for military weapons in West Asia and another part of the World. Even Saudi Arabia has changed its attitude towards Russia and has openly been negotiating the deal for advanced military weapons of Russia. At the same time, Russia has neutralized the threat of radical Islamism in the region by crushing the Islamic State. The military cooperation with Syria and Iran has also improved. Turkey has also initiated for military cooperation with Russia and the supply of S-400, has aroused tension in the West and the US, planning to impose sanctions on Turkey. All factors combined proved to be beneficial for the economic interests as well as for strategic interests of Russia in the region. With the increased influence in the region of West Asia, Russia has the opportunity to regain its superpower status in the contemporary era.

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSION

As the topic of this research thesis suggests ‘Russia’s policy towards West Asia opportunities and Challenges 2000-2015’ which includes the analysis of Russia’s policy towards West Asia. This topic would not be so intriguing, if Russia did not get involved into Syrian crisis. This research thesis focused on the opportunities and challenges Russia faced in the West Asian region, during the Soviet period and after. The rise of radical Islam in West Asia and the overall current international situation concerning religious conflicts, regional differences and impact of external factors are some of the focal point of the global politics that made this topic significant for research. In case of West Asia, the region has been unstable for a long period of time due to regional and external factors involved in the regional politics. Though, the West and US realised the importance of this region much before Russia and established its influence through military alliances and political cooperation in the region, nevertheless Russia managed to ensure its significant presence. Rich hydrocarbon reserves and the geostrategic location of West Asia makes the region important for the Western powers as well as for Russia and China.

Following are some of the key factors of Russia’s policy during Tsarist and Soviet period were discussed in the second chapter, which played a crucial role in shaping Russia’s policies towards West Asian countries.

- The sense of insecurity was at its peak during Tsarist period onwards which made Russia to adopt offensive policy towards Ottoman Empire & other emerging powers to secure its borders.
- Black sea was of a great importance to Russia from economic perspective, as it was needed for transportation as well as connecting Soviet and its ally to the world. Therefore, the maintenance of stable and friendly relation with Turkey was in the interest of Russia. Through Montreux Convention there were limitations placed on non-Black Sea navies to use that passage. It ultimately served Russia’s

interest in the region and secured its borders from external aggression or the West European imperialist powers.

- The territory occupied by the Soviet Union in the northern part of Iran, during Second World War, was later forced to withdraw under the pressure of the West and US, in 1946. However, Russia still managed to keep its access to the Turkish Straits.
- There was a tussle between Soviet Union and the Western powers to gain access to the rich natural resources and geostrategic location in the region, whereas the Tsarist policy continued to dominate. The presence of NATO and US forces in the Caspian Sea basin threatened the economic and strategic interests of Russia in the region.
- There were some opportunities for the Soviet Union in the region to contain NATO from eastward expansion, forming military alliances, economic cooperation, new markets for military arms and technology export, and neutralising the threat of radical Islamism, and shared exploitation of rich hydrocarbons reserves available in Caspian Sea basin.
- The challenges Soviet Union faced was, presence of NATO, US, and pro-West regional countries leading to competition in international energy market with regional countries (Saudi Arabia and Gulf States), rise of radical Islamism, support to Arab faction against Israeli aggression, lack of military superiority over the West and US.

These are some of the factors contributed in the shift in Russia's policy towards West Asia during Soviet as well as post-Soviet era. As a response of the countries in West Asian region and Western powers 'Gore-Chernomyrdin agreement' was signed in 1995, which restricted Russia's policy towards Iran. Some of the major points discussed in chapter third and fifth highlight the strategic interests of Russia before and after Arab uprising took place in this region. Major reaction of the West that influenced Russia's policy can be summarized as follows.

- Before US launched its policy of 'War on Terror' after 9/11 attack, Russia had friendly relation with Iraq under Saddam Hussein regime. As a result of the US invasion regime was changed and Russia lost its friendly ally in the region.
- During Russia's war with Georgia Saudi attitude to influence the Islamic sentiments of Chechen rebels against Russia. Arab Spring and change of regimes in the West Asia, mostly, in countries friendly to Moscow, was considered as Western strategy by Russia to decrease its influence in the region.
- Manipulation of Iranian nuclear programme and manoeuvre of the crisis disabled Russia to continue its nuclear cooperation with Iran. Ukraine crisis followed by the sanctions imposed by the West and US to weaken Russia's economy and capability to actively engage in the West Asia region.
- The rise of Islamic State in the region and promotion of radical Islamism by the West and Gulf countries, against friendly regime of Moscow.
- The rising demand of advanced military weapons of Russia in the region, including Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Iran and Iraq, aroused tension in the West.

Hence the major challenges cropped up for Russia in West Asia post-Arab spring.

- After the Arab uprising, mostly the regimes friendly to Russia were changed with ones contradicting Russia's interest, which has further increased the challenge for Russia to find new regional alliances.
- The incessant military superiority of the West and US, and presence of pro-West regional actors in West Asia has created new challenges for Russia in the region.
- Global financial crisis, low oil prices in international market, Iranian nuclear crisis, followed by Ukrainian crisis and the sanctions imposed on Russia has weakened its economy and restricted Russia from to pursue its economic and strategic foreign policy particularly towards West Asia and abroad in general.

- Presence of Saudi Arabia (so called pro-West country) in the region, and promotion of radical Islamism during Syrian crisis has created an insecurity complex for Russia in the region and at home. At the same time, the West with the help of Saudi Arabia possess the capability to manipulate the oil prices in international market.
- Promotion and funding of radical Islamism, during the Syrian crisis, by Saudi Arabia and Gulf States aroused tension for internal security in Russia. This sense of insecurity led Russia to military intervention in the region against Islamic State and saving Assad's regime.
- The West and US have restricted Russia's energy, military export with sanctions imposed on Russian major firms, making Russia to find an alternative market for energy export.
- As, Iran has claimed to breach the stockpile limit of uranium enrichment, it has become difficult for Russia to support Iranian nuclear programme and continue its nuclear cooperation.

The final chapter discussed the future prospects for Russia in the region. The major points of the future prospects for Russia in West Asia:

- The success of Russia's military campaign in Syrian crisis against Islamic State has increased the number of clients demanding for its advance military weapons in West Asia and other parts of the world.
- Russia with the defeat of Islamic State in the West Asian region has earned some respect and added to its superpower reputation, which have the potential to compete with the West and US in regional as well as international politics.
- The sanctions imposed by the European countries was meant to create a blockage for Russia to interact with the outside world, but Russia has found new regions for economic and military cooperation.

- Russia from export of military weapons and technology, and economic relations. The global financial crisis and low oil prices in the international market has weakened Russia's economy and capability to involve actively in the international politics.
- Russia is continuously pursuing and succeed to some extent by convincing Saudi Arabia and other OPEC countries to cut down their oil production to stabilise the oil prices in international market.
- Saudi Arabia has also demonstrated its interest in latest military weapons and technology of Russia, is an opening to largest arms importer in the region. This can be easily understand with the data provided for military expenditure in the region.
- With the new alliances in the region now Russia can find it a bit easy to counter balance the West and US in the region. Whereas the regional aggression against US and NATO military intervention in the region is also going in support for Russia.
- Iran and Russia have fought together against Islamic State in Syria, which has strengthened the relationship between Russia and Iran, including Syria. This will help Russia to exploit the rich natural reserves in Caspian Sea basin.
- The ever increasing military cooperation with Turkey will help Russia to gain access to Black Sea and flow of gas to Europe via Turkey surpassing the Eastern European countries and ally of the Western powers.

The performance of Russia's military capacity in the Syrian crisis has opened up new opportunities for Russia in the West Asian region. First, Russia can stand by its ally and defend them successfully against outside aggression. Second, it has successfully utilized the opportunity and made a comeback in the international arena, after the Ukrainian crisis. Third, it has come closer to re-establish its superpower image in international politics. Fourth, Russia has gained access to the airbase in Syria, Hmeinin. The latest (S-

400) defense system has provided Russia the capacity to defend West Asia airspace. It has secured its naval base in Tartus with S-300 anti-aircraft missile system. The relation with other countries has also improved especially with Iran.

Consequently, while answering the research questions it was found that Russia's military involvement in the region has opened up new gates to neutralise threats and challenges in West Asia. Russia is gaining support of the regional countries as well as the capacity to counterbalance the West in the region.

There are some security threats from existing pro-West countries in the region like Saudi Arabia and Turkey, which is so called promoter radical Islamism in the region (Islamic State). As Russia has changed its policy of neutrality towards Saudi Arabia, cooperation in economic and military sphere became evident.

Major limitations in completing this research was lack of personally conducted survey, interviews and field work. However, the data used for the research was based on the official Russian Government website, IAEA, UNSC, SIPRI year book which are authentic research. To an extent the language barrier was also a problem to access the primary data available on Russian government official websites and other sources to accommodate the Russia perspective in this research thesis. However, this could be resolved extensively with the help available empirical data and theoretical interpretation of Arab Spring from Russian perspective.

In the context of the Syrian Crisis, the first hypothesis has been justified, where the radical Sunni Islamism was playing an important role to topple the government-allied to Russia (Assad regime). The sectarian faction has created an intraregional conflict among the West Asian countries. Whereas, Saudi Arabia and the other Gulf States were busy promoting the radical jihadist in Syria and Iraq, and even supported them with huge economic and military aid via Turkey and Iraq. The constant threat of radical Islamism to the internal security of Russia and post-Soviet Islamist countries was the reason for the active military intervention of Russia in the Syrian crisis. With the success of the military

intervention in Syria, Russia was able to neutralize the ever-increasing threat of radical Sunni Islamism in the region.

The second hypothesis, which establishes that Russia pursues a variegated policy towards the West Asian region, is tested with the ever-growing military cooperation with Syria and Iran. In the case of Syria, Russia responded to the invitation of Assad's regime and launched its military intervention with the coalition of Iran. In this case, the military cooperation between Russia and Iran improved and got strengthened with the new arms deals. Turkey has still maintained a cordial economic relationship with Russia and also expressed its interest in the latest S-400 air defense missile system, which was also delivered in July 2019. It has further opened a new market for Russian military weapons and technology, which will translate into huge revenue for its weakened economy, due to sanctions imposed after the Ukraine crisis. The Saudi cooperation with Russia in oil and defense sector has been a remarkable event in the history of Russia and Saudi relations as Saudi Arabia has shown its interest in S-400 and also agreed to cut the oil production of OPEC countries. Hence the prospect of Russia's policy in the West Asian region is yet to mature. With the defeat of Islamic State in the region, where Russia and Iran joined together to rescue Assad's regime in Syria has also strengthen the relationship of Russia with Iran in the region.

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