

RUSSIA'S INVOLVEMENT IN THE SYRIAN CRISIS: IMPLICATIONS FOR THE GLOBAL ORDER

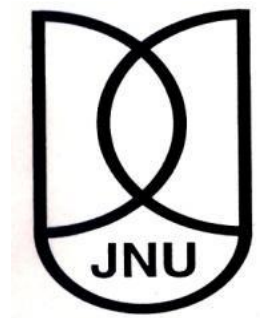
*Thesis submitted to Jawaharlal Nehru University
for award of the degree of*

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

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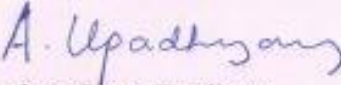
DECLARATION

I declare that the thesis entitled "**Russia's Involvement in the Syrian Crisis: Implications for the Global Order**" submitted by me in fulfillment of the requirements 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 other degree of this University or any other University.


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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The completion of this thesis has been possible due to the invaluable contribution of several people whose help and support have been a continuous source of inspiration for me in this journey.

I offer utmost gratitude to my supervisor Prof. Ajay Kumar Patnaik who took over as my guide in 2018. Without his support and guidance, it could not have been possible for me to complete my Ph.D. His calm and composite attitude, commitment towards good quality of research work, thoughtful insights and unconditional support have been consistently motivated me for successfully submitting my thesis.

I can't forget the contribution of Prof. Arun Mohanty whose untimely demise has left a void that can never be filled. I will always remember his guidance and his memory will continuously inspire me in the years to come.

I also extend my heartfelt thanks to all the faculty members of the Centre for Russian and Central Asian Studies who have helped me in better understanding of several concepts related to my research topics.

I would also like to thank staff of the Central Library and of my centre specifically Amit Kumar for helping me at several stages of my research journey.

I would not have been able to complete my thesis without love and emotional support of my family members. It's their trust, encouragement and motivation that have helped me in inching towards the final stage of my research. Mommy and Baba have been with me in every step of this journey strengthening my willpower to do more. It was due to the unflinching support and unwavering faith of my husband Sourav that I could handle myself on those tough stages of this journey and finally complete my thesis.

And most importantly my faith in almighty and blessings of my parents has guided me towards the accomplishment of my goal being a continuous source of inspiration.

Sangita Mohanty

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ABBREVIATION

GAR	Global Assessment Report
UNO	United Nation Organisation
UNSC	United Security Council
USA	United States of America
ISIS	Islamic State of Iraq and Syria
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organisation
CAST	Centre for Analysis of Strategies and Technologies
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
PKK	Kurdistan Workers Party
IRGC	Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps
EU	European Union
BRICS	Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa
AIIB	Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank
ADB	Asian Development Bank
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
R2P	Responsibility To Protect
UNICEF	United Nations International Children's Fund
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
SAA	Syrian Arab Army
ISIL	Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant
GCC	Gulf Cooperation Council
PYD	Democratic Union Party
YPG	Kurdish People's Protection Units
OES	Operation Euphrates Shield
OOB	Operation Olive Branch
SDF	Syrian Democratic Forces
IRGC-QF	The Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps' Quds Force

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CHAPTER- I
INTRODUCTION

The sphere of International Politics is filled with many pestering old wounds, new happenings and a series of events, bringing new concepts and unique theories through which new developments get verified and tested. They invite numerous debates, discussions and analyses with a wide range of perspectives to understand contemporary international politics. It is for the scholars, research analysts, political scientists and thinkers to reach out to each and every possible facet of the issues and come out with new findings. Similarly, the Syrian crisis has also been perceived and critically analysed from different angles in various papers. Here in this thesis Syrian crisis has been studied from the perspective of Russian involvement in it and how this has impacted the Global order. The concept of World Order or the Global Order is not new in World Politics. Though it has developed so many other dynamics along with, it can be simply be understood by referring to the centres of power or the existence of active major powers in the field of International politics. From the bipolar structure to the unipolar one and then moving forward to the multipolar world, the Global Order has never been on such a consistent move for a long time. This has been analysed extensively in the dedicated chapters.

THEORIES:

Understanding Realism briefly:

The failure of the League of Nations and the beginning of World War II brought Liberalism under severe criticism. Since the principles of cooperation and peaceful order based International System which the Liberals strongly emphasise got a setback due to changing international situation. Realism as a new theoretical approach emerged in the field of International Relations. Scholars like Hans Morgenthau and his work 'Politics among Nations (1948)', E.H Car in his book 'Twenty Years Crisis (1939)', John Herz, Martin Wight, Nicholas Spykman, Raymond Aron, George Kennan, Walter Lippmann and Reinhold Niebuhr etc have hugely contributed to the Realist school of thought. As per Realism, International politics can be defined as a continuous struggle for securing more and more power. In International politics conflict is of a permanent character. Classical Realism is greatly influenced by the works of scholars like Thucydides, Nicole Machiavelli and Thomas Hobbes, according to whom on the basis of human nature we can understand International conflicts. Human nature can be defined as egoist, self-centred and power seeker. So by referring to human behavior one can understand International conflict. State is just

an expansion of human being at an International level. So since anarchy prevails at the International level (absence of an International authority), states who are considered as principal actors suffer from 'security dilemma'. It means states who are important players in the field of International Politics become worried about their security and can't become sure about their security guarantee. Therefore, states concentrate on maximizing their power taking it as the best available alternative to ensure their security in an anarchic International System. Neo-realism, otherwise understood as 'structural realism', was first developed by Kenneth Waltz in his work 'Theory of International Politics (1979)'. It is also termed by many scholars as 'realist', to bring continuity between the two strands and avoid differences. But in this analysis we are not going into detail of the differences and focus on the basic principles to fit the context (McKeown 2019).

As the International System is characterised by anarchy, there is no presence of Global government at the International level. Kenneth Waltz has expressed it as, 'International Politics is politics in the absence of government', (Waltz 1979, 89). Since there is no highest authority, there is no guarantee of security, no assurance of survival and thus no stability in this system at the International level. There is no hierarchy as it exists at the domestic level, rather there is anarchy. There is also no hierarchy in the International system as compared to the domestic political system which is formally organized into a top to bottom system. In this sense Waltz has emphasized, 'domestic systems are centralized and hierarchic...international systems are decentralized and anarchic', (Waltz 1979).

This makes it clear that in the International system there is no obedience and command to follow as there is no super authority and subordinate system. Munro has his own understanding regarding the anarchic structure of the International system and he believes that the anarchic condition means there is no World government to adjudicate disputes among the International players or states. And in World Politics there is no equal distribution of power, rather unequal distribution of power defines the World political system. Further, we can see that in the field of International Politics powerful states want to impose a particular order that suits their own interest and will enable them to fulfill their own interest. Munro has further analysed Waltz and his key factors. Waltz believes that in International Politics polarity is an important factor which can't be ignored and in this system the domination of powers

in the International sphere determines whether the system is unipolar or bipolar or multipolar. The Unipolar World order which prevailed after the disintegration of the USSR is considered 'to be the most unstable and dangerous configuration', as it has encouraged the superpower to go for foreign adventures without any fear and restrictions. (Munro 2013).

However, Neorealists believe that state behaviour at the International system is not based on human nature but the International system is structurally anarchic.

(Neo) Realist principles:

States are considered as the principal actors in the field of International politics. International System can be defined as anarchic in the absence of a central authority. States suffer from Security dilemma and thus keep on maximizing their power as in order to ensure their survival. Neorealists do not consider that there is any difference in the nature of the state or their functioning at the domestic level. Whether the states are democratic or authoritarian it has no impact upon their behaviour at the international level because due to the anarchic nature of the International structure, states behave in an equal manner and resort to the option of power maximization. Then another important principle is the distribution capabilities. It means, if one country enhances its power by acquiring new weapons and advanced technology and then another state can be expected to go for the same or find any other options such as creating alliances in order to strengthen its position and maximize its power (Bieler and Morton 2018).

The Concept of Sovereignty:

Before entering into a deep analysis of safeguarding sovereignty and protecting territorial integrity in the context of the Syrian crisis, it is required to get a basic understanding of the concept of sovereignty in International Politics. Since the concept of Sovereignty is very vast and it has got various dimensions that have evolved over times, in this analysis we will be very specific and context oriented in its use.

Sovereignty is not new in International Politics. A sovereign state is one which exercises complete freedom both internally and externally. In its domestic sphere it is free to manage its own affairs and does not require permission from outside. Similarly, a sovereign country has got complete independence while diplomatically conducting its relationships with other countries in the sphere of International Relations. Brahm (2004) has defined sovereignty 'as possession of absolute authority

within a bounded territorial space with internal and external dimensions. Internally, a sovereign government is a fixed authority with a settled population that possesses a monopoly on the use of force. It is the supreme authority within its territory. Externally, sovereignty is the entry ticket into the society of states. Recognition on the part of other states helps to ensure territorial integrity and is the entree into participating in diplomacy and international organizations on an equal footing with other states'. Along with the internal freedom it is also important for a state at the International level to ensure that there is equality among all sovereign states to strengthen security. In the field of International Relations State Sovereignty has been conceptualised as 'Supreme legitimate authority with in a territory', (Philpott 1995) and 'International state system has been defined as relations between similar sovereign units', (Kenneth Waltz 2010).

Development of Modern Sovereignty and Treaty of Westphalia:

Sovereignty has been a contested concept since its inception. Emergence of various institutions like supranational organizations and other International and World Institutions has raised questions on the relevance of the concept of Sovereignty. Development of new principles and norms like Responsibility to Protect and Humanitarian Intervention etc have further created a suspicious zone around the viability and significance of the Westphalian sovereign state system. Though the concept of Sovereignty is not new and it has been there in the field of politics since ancient times under different denominations but it has got all its recognition and significant position in its modern form of development.

The Westphalian concept of state sovereignty has been through many phases of criticism and controversial analyses by many scholars. Irrespective of several limitations and challenges on the way, the concept of Sovereignty has got a pivotal place in the field of International Relations and discourse of International law. And it has also been defended by many Realist scholars who want to prevent any outside interference in the domestic sphere of states (Basu 2019).

There were a series of debates and discussions on the nature, meaning and functionality of the state sovereignty especially in the post-Cold War period. Even claims were made that state sovereignty was in decline and was showing diminishing effect due to the impact of emerging phenomena at the International sphere such as

International governance, human rights¹ and fragmentation of states etc. Despite all these challenges, State still continues to be holding primary position in International law and state sovereignty is considered as one of the cornerstones in the field of International legal order (Werner 2004).

Croxtton (1999) has noted that, ‘Sovereignty has been central to our understanding of the state system and is the fundamental principle enunciated in the charter of the United Nations....’. The concept of state sovereignty leads its path towards the peace of Westphalia. The treaty of Westphalia which is widely popular as a peace treaty was signed in the year 1648 after few years of negotiation. Treaty of Westphalia is in fact a series of treaties which includes the Treaty of Munster and Treaty of Osnabruck. It is a peace treaty which was signed to bring an end to the long running Thirty Years War². As it was signed in the city of Westphalia so it got the nomenclature after the name of the place. Along with ending the Thirty Years War, the Westphalian peace treaty introduced an all new system in Europe which changed the erstwhile political order. Though there were several aspects for which the treaty was known for but one of the most important factors was its emphasis on the equality among sovereign states and their coexistence. It not only gave recognition to state’s sovereignty but also explained its significance by establishing the norm of non-interference in the domestic affairs of other states.

As this thesis talks about the implications of the Russian involvement in the Syrian issue on the Global Order, it is imperative to make it clear that Russia and USA dominate the regional scene as major players. So it is required to go into the detail of it and find out what role especially Russia plays in Syria and how far it has positioned itself as a challenging competitor to USA. The Syrian issue can also be categorized and studied at three different levels. They are domestic level, regional level and at the International level. The thesis attempts to understand the crisis and its implications on these levels.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE:

¹*Human rights* are exclusively explained in the UNO and specifically in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR 1948). It includes a range of civil and political rights such as *right* to life, liberty, freedom of speech and expression, freedom of privacy and *right* to work etc. It also includes several socio-economic and cultural rights comprising health and social security, education, freedom from slavery and torture and many more. Further, everybody is required to get entitled to these rights without any kind of discriminations (Amnesty International 2017).

² The Thirty Year’s War was fought in Europe and it continued from 1618 to 1648. The war initially was fought among the catholic and protestant states of the Roman Empire. Later, it involved other great powers and oriented towards who would governing Europe etc (Onion et.al 2009).

Taking into account the requirements of the study and context of the topic, the literature reviewed have been put under the following themes: Origin of the Syrian crisis; Russia's involvement in the Syrian crisis; Role of external powers and their significance; and, Implications for the global order.

ORIGIN OF THE SYRIAN CRISIS:

Under this theme the factors that are directly or indirectly linked to the origin of the Syrian crisis have been discussed.

According to some scholars and analysts Syrian crisis is an offshoot of the Arab Spring. The crisis is said to begin under the influence of the Arab Spring that started in Tunisia in 2011 and then engulfed the entire Arab world and its neighbouring countries. Manfreda (2014) has termed it as a 'Tunisia effect', which started with the self-immolation of a street vendor triggering anti-government uprisings across the West Asia and these uprisings made the Syrians to go for possible changes and reforms. On the other hand, Dimou (2011) emphasised that under the influence of Arab Spring, demonstrations took place in some cities i.e Damascus, Dara and Bania etc demanding greater freedom, better standard of living and respect for human rights but it is said that it was responded disproportionately by the security forces. As per some analysts, in the beginning people could be seen on the street with certain demands. As the Bashar al Assad government did not seem to be responding adequately to these demands, there were protests for major socio-economic and political transformation.

But Haran (2016) provides a completely different argument on the role of Arab Spring in Syria, its influence and the differences that Syrian crisis had compared to other countries of the Arab World. While the above authors have tried to bring out the similarities between the causes of Arab Spring and the Syrian crisis by emphasising on the socio, economic and political factors, Haran has given contradictory argument on the same factors. For him, other Arab countries like Tunisia and Egypt had political instability and major socio-economic problems. Syrian economy by the end of 2010 had not experienced any serious problems and on political front, Bashar al Assad government had tried to ensure political stability in the country. Assad was a liberaliser and was quite popular amongst all. However, while many have held Assad responsible for the Syrian crisis, Haran has tried to show the softer side of him, while putting blame on the external forces for all the violence and instability in the region. For him Arab Spring in Syria was viewed as an opportunity to get rid of the Assad

regime and it was the foreign hard core extremists who had made the situation more violent and their movement was organised by foreign sponsors.

Countering Haran's argument, Housan (2013) gives his analysis of how Arab spring is related to the Syrian Uprising and what similarities they have with those in other Arab countries. While Haran defends Assad's position and his moves, Housan argues that Assad's rule and internal factors led to the escalation of the uprising. According to him, it is the repressive rule of the regime and its violent response to the uprising that led to the transformation of peaceful Syrian uprising to Syrian Spring. The Writer has also argued that it was the plan and programme of the Assad's regime to stop the peaceful protests, which was dangerous as it radicalised the rebels. The regime used this radicalisation to delegitimize the demands. For him Arab Spring could trigger the uprising but it was the killing of few children who wrote graffiti against Assad that led to escalation and violent demonstrations. Further, Ertl (2016) believes that Syrian uprising which snowballed into a prolong civil war and caused the killings of more than 250,000 people, resembles the happenings in Egypt, Libya and Tunisia which resulted in ousting of the regimes of long serving dictators like Mubarak, Gaddafi and Ben Ali.

From the above analysis it can be said that there is no unanimity in the opinion about the Arab Spring and its influence on Syria. While some authors hold external factors responsible for the crisis, few deviate and concentrate on the internal factors. Given the subsequent war and civil war, there is a need to explore more about the Arab Spring and its linkages with the Syrian crisis to reach at a clear cause. It is the Syrian civil war that has continued for around a decade making the situation in Syria worse for human existence. Every day there is violence, killings and migration of Syrians to other European countries creating numerous problems.

Stevenson (2017) has argued that Assad is heavily responsible for the internal problems in Syria. According to him Assad wants to control the Syrian state in order to impose 'a classic hereditary tyranny' with the help of external powers and use of force. While Assad's soldiers are fighting as the government front, the rebel groups with different factions from ISIS to Jabhat Al Nushra, Ahrar ash-Sham and radical conservative militias, presents the opposition front. Stevenson termed the original Syrian uprising as libertarian, anti-hierarchical and revolutionary but it got bloody because of the extreme brutality of the regime. But Gilsinan (2015) has given a contradictory argument. He argued that Syrian uprising was a kind of shock and

taking the opportunity of the situation, the opposition tried to fish in the troubled water by taking up arms. The author does not go absolutely against Assad and does not hold him completely responsible. Rather he also portrays the softer side of Assad. Gilsinan cites the International Crisis Group report of 2011 to show Assad was responding to the protest by setting free the political prisoners and giving instructions to the officials, 'to pay greater attention to the citizen complaints'. He has also mentions conspiracy theories advanced by some like Dominic Tierney of The Atlantic who has argued that it was Assad who intentionally released the prisoners in order to radicalize them so that the rebellion can be delegitimized. But this has also been countered by many. Nasser (2013) has argued that Syrian uprising has resulted from the need of political, social and economic reform that the people of Syria were in need. They wanted freedom from oppression, rule of law instead of corruption and democracy rather than dictatorship.

In the above arguments there is no unanimity amongst the scholars regarding the Syrian civil war. While some refer to internal factors, others hold external factors responsible for it. So there is a requirement of further analysis on this front to get clear idea about it.

RUSSIA'S INVOLVEMENT IN SYRIAN CRISIS:

Under this theme there is an overall analysis of Russia's involvement in Syrian crisis, reasons for Russian intervention in Syria, strategic importance of Syria for Russia, concern of national security, necessity of saving Assad's regime, fighting terrorism, projection of power and military might and other social, economic and political perspectives. Theoretically, realist and neorealist perspectives have been used to verify Russia's role in Syria and to find out on which grounds its operations have been carried out in so far as Syria is concerned. It helps in understanding Russia's role in Syria.

One of the many reasons of Russia's intervention in Syria was to protect the regime of Bashar al Assad. Chance (2016) argues that Russia intervened into Syria to protect Assad because of its own specific national interests ranging from economic interest to military and strategic interests. Fighting with the Islamic state with the cooperation of Assad's legitimate government has also influenced Russia's action. Guarding of its arms supply to Syria also had its influence on the Russian authority to go for the protection of Assad. But Robins-Early (2016) based his argument on the Western

perception. A common question that is quite often asked is why and for what Putin left the battle in Ukraine in the midway and turned towards Syria to act as a saviour for Bashar Al Assad whose regime seemed to be on the verge of collapse. Will McCants of the Brookings Institution said to the World Post, 'They are framing it as a war against ISIS as a way to justify their increased military involvement', while the primary reason being to strengthen Assad and its regime. On the same point, Shroder (2015) argued that Russia believed it would be able to get rid of the ISIS by coming to the side of the Syrian government. Chappell (2015) is of the opinion that Russia's direct intervention into Syria happened on the request of Assad who wrote a letter asking for Russian support to fight terrorism and the operations were carried out in cooperation with the Syrian government. In this respect Valentina Matviyenko's, Federation Council Speaker, said, 'Russia chose to involve itself in Syria after receiving a request from legitimate Syrian authorities'. In this situation, 'we could not refuse Syrian President Bashar Assad and continue watching how people die, how women and children die, how historical and cultural sites are being destroyed'.

Countering the analysis of Chappell, questions were raised by Slim (2016) on Russia's intention of protecting Assad. According to him, Assad at the time was not having that kind of bonhomie with Kremlin. Before 2015 Assad was not responding properly to Russia's expectation and wishes. In 2012 Russian Prime Minister talked about the relationship with Assad was 'good working one' but not privileged relation as was during his father, Hafez Al Assad. Fisher (2015) says that during the beginning of the Syrian crisis, Assad was acting like more of an Iranian proxy and less of Russia.

Since we found different perspectives regarding Russia's support for Assad's regime and it is also not clear enough from the above literature that Russia intervened in Syria only to protect Assad or it has some other motives. There is a need to explore more on this facet in order to fill the gap in the existing literature. It can't be ignored that one factor behind Russia's intervention in Syria is to fight the ISIS and other radical extremist forces. Since Moscow is also facing the threat of extremism it served as one ground for intervention. But there are other interlinked factors that are required to be addressed.

Taub (2015) has argued that Putin's strategy of intervening Syria is based on his fear of threat from the Islamic extremism which is thriving in Syria. Initially Putin was concerned about Arab Spring and the happening in Libya. As per Putin's

understanding Western intervention in Libya and overthrowing of the regime led to a power vacuum in the country and this was taken as an opportunity by the extremist forces to take complete control of the country and spread chaos. Putin had learned lessons from Libya and holds the Western policy responsible for the rise of extremism. As per the author's argument, Putin's concern about the threat of radicalism and extremist forces goes far beyond his concerns about political and economic interests. He feared that Libya may repeat in Syria and then these same forces may threaten Moscow. Given the situations in Iraq and Libya, Putin even prefers dictatorial regimes than democratic governments which bring violence and extremism. In this context Myers (2015) writes, Putin was articulating in his mind the dark association for democracy and rise of radicalism, between election and the chaos that would inevitably result. Reflexively, instinctively, he imagined the uprising in Libya another step towards a revolution being orchestrated for Moscow.

While Russia confronted Islamic insurgency in the North Caucasus and finally won the battle against it, but it has been reported that hundreds of residents of North Caucasus left the region for joining the ISIS in Syria (World Report, 2016). Further, the ISIS has declared objective to liberate Chechnya and Caucasus creates a kind of security apprehension for Russia to get worried about (Stewart, 2014).

Gusovsky (2015) has argued on the same concern about the rising the number of Russians joining Islamic State since 2015. He has quoted Ian Brzezinski, a senior fellow at Atlantic Council, 'Islamic extremism has been a major concern for Vladimir Putin, despite his government's defense doctrines stating US and NATO as Russia's greatest threat, I have always felt that Putin regards Islamic Extremism to be the most immediate threat'. But Czuperski (2015) has given a contrary view that though Vladimir Putin claimed that the purpose of his mission in Syria was to fight ISIS, the reality is that Russia wanted to strengthen Assad's regime. He also stressed on Russia's military targets on non-ISIS areas.

We find different arguments on the factor of ISIS as the cause behind the Russian intervention in Syria. But as we know Russia is also facing the problems of extremism and considers it as a security issue, there is a need to explore more on the factor to bring more clarity.

Power projection has been one of major reasons for Russia's intervention in Syria. Cockburn (2016) has analysed that Syrian war has given an opportunity for Russia to show the world that Russia has regained its power to be counted with and is no less

important than its competitors. Russia's involvement has brought in so much strength and power to it that, now USA has also considered it as an unavoidable partner in finding a resolution of the Syrian quagmire. It is the Syrian conflict that has compelled USA to sit on a negotiating table at the UN meet with its so called Cold War rival Russia to arrive at a political solution. . USA came to negotiate with Russia in fighting with the terrorists in a combined effort. Spaulding (2015) has argued that Russia has intervened in Syria with the primary intention of projecting its military power to an unprecedented degree, which will otherwise help in curbing the influence of the US in the West Asia region. He stressed on Russia's claim of fighting against the ISIS and the carrying out of such a major military campaign which is considered as the biggest since 1979 operation in Afghanistan. As per his analysis, Russia used the ISIS factor as a pretext to escape from international criticism and pursue its larger strategic objectives in Syria without any possible complexities. The author has termed Russia's intervention in Syria a disguised one and called it 'Russian doctrine of reflexive control', which means the use of disinformation to alter an opponent's perception of events and lead the adversary to respond in a manner that ultimately favours Russia. He also argues that Russia's airbase in the Mediterranean poses a direct threat to NATO's southern flank. The recent US attack in Syria and Russia's bold response to it indicates more happenings in the Syrian platform. When the US has started changing its policy to be active militarily in Syria, this served as a signal for Russia which sent its warship towards the Mediterranean. These developments hinted at the possibility of two big powers bracing for a major escalation which will further clear their present status in the Global politics.

Yan (2013) has emphasized that the economic interest of a country invariably shapes and guides its foreign policy to a large extent, thereby becoming a determinant of foreign policy. Thus, Russian intervention in Syria is no less guided and backed by its economic interest. Though it is not the only factor but it is the most important one. Russia has a big market in Syria in weapons and other military assets. Jeffery Mankoff from Russia and Eurasia Programme of the Centre for Strategic and International studies, talked about Russian defence dealing with Syria which was likely to be exceeding \$4 billion including signing a deal on combat training jet worth \$5million.

Supporting the same argument, Falcon Bjorn (2016) has made a point that Russia wanted to gain something in economic terms by getting involved in the Syrian

conflict. Since there were certain economic sanctions on Russia by the West backed by USA, by being a stakeholder or partner in the resolution process Russia wanted to get the sanctions lifted which would otherwise help its economy. Shuster (2015) is also quite similar with Bjorn's argument. But he has something different to underline. The fact is that Russia wanted to exit from Ukraine due to its economic slowdown, which was due also to the Western sanctions imposed as a result of Russia's Crimean accession. But Russia did not want its exit to take place as a response to the sanction. In such a circumstance, the Syrian crisis provided an opportunity to get the things done in a way that will not undermine Russia's image. According to the author, there were plan-A and Plan-B of Russia in its Syrian operation. As per the Plan-A, Russia wanted to make the West lift its economic sanction because it would help the West in fighting the ISIS in Syria by forming a coalition front, which would help in solving the refugee problem. But it failed and thus Russia went ahead with the Plan-B, which was intervening militarily. Here it is pertinent to quote Andrei Klimov, the Deputy Chairman of Foreign Affairs Committee of Russian Upper House, 'Key aim of campaign in Syria is to convince the West that it can't defeat the ISIS without Russia's help and for this they should lift sanctions'. Considering the importance of the economic interest of Russia in Syria and its essentialities, the research necessitates further analysis.

The alliance with Syria is very much essential in so far as Russia's strategic interest in the Mediterranean is concerned and even in the West Asia region Syria can be considered as most important asset for Russia to enhance its influence. Strategically, Russia is trying to save its only warm water naval base Tartus in the Mediterranean to retain its military capability for any future course of action. Latakia province which is in the northern Syria is also important for Russia as the place houses an Air base which has also been militarily guarded by the Russian troops and its weapons (Doud 2015).

Gardner (2012) has provided a contradictory explanation about the strategic status of Tartus. At one point Tartus was considered as the only foothold for Russia in the Mediterranean, where nuclear submarines can be ducked and receive Russian shipments to Syria. The port was endowed with a good road and rail network. As Vice Admiral Viktor Chikrov put it, 'the base is essential to us: it has been operating and will continue to operate', further, 'Russia's greatest strategic and geopolitical interest in Syria, is the use of a deep warm water port at Tartus'; but Ruslan Aliev,

head of the Centre for Analysis of Strategies and Technologies (CAST), Stated to BBC, 'it (Tartus) is just a point on the map to replenish food and water and carry out some occasional repairs. There are a maximum of 50 Russian soldiers and specialist technicians'; 'it is just a symbolic place after the collapse of the Soviet Union (1991), showing we still have somewhere to send our ships. From a strategic point of view, it is insignificant'. Orenstein and Romer (2015) have argued that one reason to save Assad is Russia's dependence on energy (oil and natural gas) investment and trade. As Russian economy is mostly dependent upon its revenue received from energy export, it becomes essential for Russia to save its economy by protecting its energy export spectrum. However, the strategic and geopolitical interest of Russia carries a lot of significance, which should be given adequate space in the research analysis which would help in bridging the gaps in the reviewed literature.

ROLE OF THE EXTERNAL POWERS AND THEIR SIGNIFICANCE:

Syrian crisis can't be understood properly without analyzing the big powers' involvement which is considered as the most important factor that has made the crisis a complex one. Under this theme there is an attempt to understand the importance of regional powers and other key international actors who have played significant roles in the Syrian crisis. The Syrian crisis has become an international issue because of the big power dynamics. It's pertinent to enquire about, what interests USA and Russia have in Syria? What policy they are following and why are they in rival camps?

Issa (2016) has based his arguments on a cost and benefit analysis about US involvement in Syria. According to him, USA has not directly intervened in Syria to fight a war against the Assad's regime, even during the chemical weapon attack issue. Because of no reasonable national interest, it can't intervene on the ground morality only. Thus, USA is fighting in Syria on the pretext of fighting against the ISIS. For the US, Syria does not hold great strategic interest and the war do not pose any threat to it. Rather the author considers Syrian war as a benefit to US as all its adversaries are fighting against each other. But there is also the cost side and this is also the reason that explains US presence in Syria. First reason is the terrorism which could spill into Europe and the US and the second being Russia. The author considers Russia's intervention in Syria is not meant for the well-being of the Syrians but due to its troubled relationship with the US. Russia's military campaign in Syria was to show its military muscle and reassert its global power status. In West Asia, Russia is considered as a major foreign player and a great power whose action has constrained America's manoeuvrability. Issa has argued that Washington has vested interest in Syria and through its powerful military might it has been able to maintain a monopoly on the use of force and leadership role in global security. But Russia's direct military operation in Syria which is considered its first ever operation outside its geographical area since the disintegration of USSR, is a precedent in the post-Cold War era and is considered as a challenge to America's leadership in Middle East. Explaining how the US is not interested to be at war with Russia in Syria is reflected in the statement of Giorgio Cafiero, the founder of Gulf State Analytics, who stated, 'A host of factors have contributed to the White House's reluctance to wage direct military action against the Syrian Arab Army. These include the dangerous risks of a Russian response', (Murdoc, 2016).

On the US and Russian role in Syria, Massaro (2016) has argued that the US has indirectly contributed to whatever influence Russia is having in Syria. It is because America's shift in its policy from West Asia to Asia Pivot and other alternatives that created power vacuum, which was filled by Russia. On the similar lines, Ravinovich (2016) has said that due to the discovery of other natural resources in USA and policy shift to Pivot to Asia and lack of interest in the West Asia, USA created space that indirectly helped Putin to infuse Moscow's influence. When the US stronghold started loosening, Russia tightened its own taking the opportunity. Putin came with an alternative measure to eliminate the chemical weapon of Assad when Assad was on the radar of US. He also became successful in his effort which resulted into a diplomatic victory for Russia and enhanced its prestige internationally. The author has credited Putin as the diplomatic winner in Syria.

If Syrian crisis has been such a major International issue, so many factors have contributed to its complexities. While involvement of big powers like Russia and the US has created a Cold War like situation in Syria, making it a proxy war, another critical dimension of the issue has been the role of the regional powers. Regional powers like Iran, Turkey and Saudi Arabia and others have been fighting in Syria along with their key supporters (US and Russia).

While giving insights into the role of regional players Calabrese (2012) has argued that it is the unstable situation in Syria that has allowed the external elements to intervene in the Syria. Different players have different objectives. He argues that Iran being a strong supporter of Assad's regime provides all kinds of military and financial facilities in fighting against the opposition. Iran's primary objective in Syria is to secure the transit route for sending arms to Hezbollah which is fighting in Lebanon and prevent Syria to go against its interest. Iran has defended Assad's action in Syria and also formed a Syria-Russia and Iran axis which is opposed to Saudi Arabia, Turkey and US axis. Saudi Arabia who is with the US has its own political and sectarian objectives. Saudi Arabia supports the US stand for the removal of Assad's regime, so that it can have its hold over the region and fulfill its greater ambition. Turkey is worried about the Kurdish factor. Since Kurds are fighting in Turkey to have their separate state and they are also fighting against the ISIS in Syria, it has been tough for Turkey to go bold in its action. Popp (2012) is of the opinion that Turkey's involvement in Syrian matter has been moved by its national interest that is to secure its business interest in Syria, to fight with the Kurdish Workers Party

(PKK) which Turkey considers a terrorist organization and to free itself from refugee problem.

Black (2015) has also analysed different interests of different regional players in Syria. He has argued that along with US and Russia, regional powers like Iran, Saudi Arabia and Turkey also have firm holding in Syria. Iran has provided solid support to Assad's establishment both militarily and politically. Along with that it has also played combat role through its Lebanese ally Hezbollah. As per Black, Tehran's priority was to fight terrorism in Syria and secure Assad's regime which is in its favour. USA has some reservations in working with Tehran and it has been excluded from two Geneva conferences on Syria. But Iran has a good relationship with Russia. On Saudi Arabia he has emphasized on the fact that Saudis are providing support to the rebel groups which are fighting against the government forces. Riyadh wants the Assad regime to go, a stand which is also supported by its Gulf neighbor Qatar. On Turkey, the author has argued that Erdogan, Turkey's president, holds Bashar al Assad responsible for killing of more than 3,00,000 people. Turkey considers Assad's rule as dictatorial and thus insists on its removal. While Turkey provides support to the Islamist rebels, its priority is to fight the Kurds.

Kane (2013) in his argument has touched upon another dimension called Saudi-Iran rivalry in Syria. For him, Iran sees Syria as a crucial foothold in the Arab world to fulfill its interests and thus during the Civil war Iran has supplied all kinds of support to Syria. Along with this, Iran has also deployed its Iranian Revolutionary Guards (IRGs) troops to support Assad. Further, on Iran-Saudi rivalry, Kane has emphasized that both the powers are fighting in Syria for retaining their own sphere of influence. While Saudi Arabia wants the down fall of the Assad's regime so that it can install a Sunni Arab regime to suit its own interest, Iran wants just the opposite. While Saudi Arabia supports the US action in Syria, Tehran supports Russia. According to the author, both Saudi Arabia and Iran are fighting for regional hegemony. Since regional players are also playing significant role in the Syrian crisis, they are also a party to the solution of the crisis. Thus, there is a need to understand their engagement in Syria and their significance.

IMPLICATIONS FOR THE GLOBAL ORDER:

World Politics has always been required to be analysed on the basis of a particular Order. The period after the end of the World war II, the time of Cold War, the immediate post Cold War phase and finally the post Cold War period presenting the

current World status has been defined by International scholars within particular frameworks. With the change in distribution of power equation the Order has changed accordingly. Under this theme there is an analysis of the implications for the Global Order in the context of Syrian crisis.

Doctorow (2015) has argued that the Unipolar world is ending. Referring to the concept of a unipolar vision consolidated in the “End of History” by Francis Fukuyama (which gave the United States of America the super power status and a power position with no challenge to its political, economic and military might), he has brought in counter arguments that go against the American unipolarity. The military interventions (Afghanistan, Iraq and Libya) which were carried out by the US claiming the superior military might has all been unsuccessful resulting in chaos and misery followed by withdrawal of forces. He also talks about the debate going on America itself on the relative decline of the US, meaning end of the phase of its World domination. Many scholars and theoreticians from American political establishment have acknowledged the fading American empire. The author has argued that there is going to be bipolar power structure with US, EU on the one hand and Russia, China being on the other hand. He has brought out the strength of BRICS that has started challenging American domination politically and economically. He has also referred to Vladimir Putins challenge to the US principle of exceptionalism that justifies American hegemony. For him the World Order is moving towards a bipolar one.

Byrant (2015) has also argued that America’s supremacy is not intact, rather it has been declining. He has referred to different events where America has succumbed to the failure. As per him, America started facing challenges from 2001 terror attack, then in Afghanistan and Iraq, in financial crisis of 2008, then in Ukraine from Russia and now in Syria. The US does not have the appetite to play the role of a police man as it has been doing and it does not want to bear the cost in both financial and human terms. He argued that the disorder in the World politics is because of America’s inactivity and the US does not want to impose its leadership in a messy world. While talking about other powers, the author has argued that not only America’s enemies but also its allies also have started ignoring White House. Despite of the accusation of the use of chemical weapon by Bashar al Assad, America could do nothing significant like direct military intervention. Putin’s invasion of Crimea and giving asylum to whistle-blower Edward Snowden challenges America’s might. As per author’s

analysis, America has a weak hand, and in the words of Thomas Friedman, America has “empty holster”. The dependability factor is no longer there with America since Israel and America do not enjoy the same bonhomie as once enjoyed by them and Israel’s unwillingness on US-Iran nuclear deal is a testimony of the fact that all is not good between them. Again America and its West Asia allies are also not in good terms. According to the author, while Russia’s relationships with the West Asia powers are warming up, America’s standing in the West Asia has unquestionably waned.

Arguing on the declining domination of US, Murray and Herrington (2014) have brought in the concept of relative decline, absolute decline and the hegemonic decline. They have tried to prove the existence of US supremacy, bringing the variance in its declining dominance. Similarly, Juneau (2014) has given a counter argument strongly defending America’s hegemony and supremacy. According to him, whatever happened in Syria particularly in the chemical weapon-use case where a deal was signed for the elimination of chemical weapon is termed by many as America’s weakness. But this is not the case at all. He said that America’s power is not decreasing in the West Asia, rather it is slightly increasing due to US military domination.

If decline of the US unipolarity or its hegemonic domination is considered as one side of the coin, then the other side of the coin has to be devoted to the rise of multipolarity.

Khouri (2015) has talked about rise of other powers particularly, the West Asian powers who have changed their attitude and policy and are now playing major role in regional politics instead of being only proxies of the great powers. He has given the example of Arab Spring of 2011 which reduced the influence of US in West Asia and gave regional powers the opportunity to resurge and have their own say. He has argued that it was after the Arab uprisings when the superpowers reduced their military presence in the region. Instead, it was Saudi Arabia and other the Gulf powers, who bombed the Islamic forces in Libya, moved their forces to other regions and even assisted rebel forces in Syria to overthrow the Syrian government. While Iran and Hezbollah rose to the extent of supporting Assad going against the US will, Turkey and Qatar assisted Islamist rebels in Syria. Rise of Iran, being able to come to a negotiation table with US on nuclear deal, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Egypt and Israel’s no strong relation with US and softer attitude towards Russia and protecting their

national interest has changed the erstwhile situation of the region, which was once the hub of the US.

Strengthening of BRICS, establishment of institutions like AIIB and ADB to imitate the US modelled economy, change in West Asia power politics, changing global situation, the rise of Russia and toned down attitude of the US following a number of failures from Iraq to Ukraine, have brought in more clarity to a declining US hegemony and a strengthening multipolar order. But as US is still a superpower with strong military and a strong dollar, there is a need to explore more ground to arrive at such a conclusion.

With the new developments taking place in the World politics, scholars have started talking about the resurgence of Russia with its expanding global foot print. Starting from 2008 Georgia war to the accession of Crimea, Russia has shown the World that it has started regaining its status and power. But in case of Syria, Russia not only projected its capability along with diplomatic victory but also brought its rival USA to the negotiating table. Joshua (2017) has argued that Russia has maintained its relevance on the World stage. Vladimir Putin, despite economic stress, has managed to get the support of its public at home for its activities in Syria. Putin has promised to make Russia great again and by certain criteria he is delivering. On the same line, Hille (2017) has made his analysis by emphasising on Russia's achievements in Syria. As per him, Moscow has proved its might by saving Assad, who was going against the will of the West. By tilting the military balance in his favour and with initial political triumph, Russia has grown its influence while America's influence has waned. Hill cites a former Russian ambassador, in whose opinion Obama administration's policy in West Asia has failed. To emphasise it further, the Hill has quoted Nikolai Kozhanov, "Moscow's appetite is growing according to their achievements on the ground". In this respect, Renad Mansour, a fellow at Carnegie West Asia Center said, "Russia has gained considerable leverage in Syria and the West Asia more generally, as Putin has outplayed Obama," (Sputnik 2016).

Massaro (2016) has countered the above arguments by quoting Nikolay Kozhanov, a Russian expert on Iran and West Asia. Kozhanov said, "Some believe that US is more focused on East Asia than West Asia. Russian influence could increase. Gulf Nations are looking for an alternative to the US due to its perception that it is on its way out. This perception is very wrong but dominates the region"; "Putin's ability to achieve greater Russian influence should not be overstated, Russia will definitely not replace

the US in the West Asia - they don't have the capacity political or economical to do it, their abilities are quite limited". "Though Russia's new found expansionism is undeniable, on a large scale its military power is severely limited compared to the US. Russia simply does not have America's ability to project power around the World. It can't be a great power if it can project power only in the immediate neighbourhood". The author has tried to say that though Russian has been successful in making effort to rebuild its power and prestige of Soviet times but it has not been able to challenge US domination which still prevails.

While few scholars took note of Russia's success in political and military events in Syria and presented it as a basis to claim Russia's resurgence, on the other hand other scholars counter this argument. In the above arguments we found relevant analysis about the Russian resurgence but still there is a lot to be explored.

In International politics if any principle provides a protective shield to a nation it is the concept of external sovereignty. It means a country is independent in its external affairs. To start with Laski, "The modern state is a sovereign state. It is, therefore independent in the face of other communities. It may infuse its will towards them with a substance which need not be affected by the will of any external power", (Pooja 2017). Here, the purpose of mentioning about state sovereignty is that, in the context of the Syrian crisis there has been a violation of the principle of sovereignty.

The concept of sovereignty is of two types (Internal and external sovereignty). External sovereignty means a country is free to maintain its external affairs. The state is subject to no other authority and is independent of any compulsion on the part of other state (Pooja 2017). On the recent attack of the USA on the Syrian Airbase, Williams (2017) has argued taking a note of the violation of the international law and sovereignty. While responding to an alleged chemical weapon strike by the Bashar al Assad's government (still not clear if Assad regime was involved) in Idlib city, USA attacked the Syrian Shayrat airbase with cruise missiles which is considered by many as a violation of the International law and undermining of the principle of sovereignty of a sovereign and independent state. In this respect so many official statements have been made by both the big powers Russia and USA. While denouncing the air strike, Vladimir Putin (2017) the president of Russia termed it, "as aggression against a sovereign state in violation of the norms of International law". Following this attack, the relationship between US and Russia went down since Russia has claimed itself as a protector of the Assad government and supports the Syrian government in its fight

against the ISIS. Russian Defence Ministry (2017) emphasized the need, “to protect the most sensitive objects of the Syrian infrastructure, a system of measures to bolster and increase the effectiveness of the Syrian armed forces' air defense systems will be implemented”. Russia has also announced of suspending an agreement of 2015 regarding the minimization of the risks of in-flight incidents between Russia and US led coalition aircraft. Further, Kremlin spokesperson Dmitry Peskov (2017) has said, “The risk of a direct collision between US and Russia in Syria had significantly increased since the US military strike. It was indisputable that the US airstrike on Syria was carried out for the benefits of the ISIS and other terrorist organizations”. There is the possibility of a big conflict between Russia and the US on the Syrian airstrike which is termed as a violation of the principle of sovereignty. Russia’s Foreign Ministry’s Maria Zakharova (2017) said, “US actions further destroy US Russia relations. If earlier it was explained using the need to fight against terrorism, now it’s an obvious act of aggression against the sovereign state of Syria. The author has talked about the ongoing negative developments between the two big powers expecting a deterioration of relation.

The attack on an air base in Syria, which took place in April 2017, has revived international debate on the principle of sovereignty, International law being violated frequently and illegal intervention of an independent and sovereign state in respect of Syria. Iran Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Bahram Ghasemi (2017) said’ “Unilateral action is dangerous, destructive and violates principles of international law”. Chappell (2015) has argued that 2015 military campaign of Russia in Syria has been conducted on the request of a legitimate government of Syria and Russia has conducted its activities within the prescribed international law and imitations, respecting countries sovereignty. US activities in Syria have been termed as illegitimate following its support to the rebel forces which are fighting the Assad regime. On Russia’s involvement in Syria, its Federation Council speaker Valentina Matviyenko (2015) said, “Russia chose to involve in Syria after receiving a request from legitimate Syrian authorities...., further he added, in this situation, we could not refuse Syrian President Bashar Assad and continue watching how people die, how women and children die, how historical and cultural sites are being destroyed”.

Since the issue is a developing one, there is a need to explore more on the concept of sovereignty keeping an eye on the actions of the US and Russia and decisions of the International institutions. It is clear that in the context of the Syrian crisis there has

been violation of the principle of sovereignty. From this perspective, not only long-held principles are at stake, but the Syrian crisis is also a milestone in the evolving new World Order, where unipolarity is questioned and contested. There is a link between the two since a unipolar Order would threaten sovereignty of many states who are not under US hegemony.

If Syrian crisis has been such a major International issue, so many factors have contributed to its complexities. While involvement of big powers like Russia and the US has created a Cold War like situation in Syria, making it a proxy war, another critical dimension of the issue has been the role of the regional powers. Regional powers like Iran, Turkey and Saudi Arabia and others have been fighting in Syria along with their key supporters (US and Russia).

We find different arguments on the factors behind the Russian intervention in Syria. As we know Russia is facing the problems of extremism and considers it as a security issue, there is a need to explore more on the factor to bring more clarity. Though Russia has advanced this argument, some experts have also argued that Russia wants to secure its energy and defence market in Syria. As Russian economy is mostly dependent upon its revenue received from energy and arms export, it has become essential for Russia to save its economy by protecting these markets. However, the strategic and geopolitical interest of Russia carries a lot of significance, which should be given adequate space in the research analysis which would help in bridging the gaps in the reviewed literature.

Thus the research focuses on the geopolitical and security interests of Russia, though many scholars have written about the economic interests. Fighting extremism and terrorism has emerged as the most important security issue for Russia. It is prepared to undertake external measures to counter such threats rather than focusing purely on internal steps to deal with the menace. The study also brings out with clarity how Russia has strongly placed itself at the global level by emerging as strong powers with regional allies in the course of its involvement in Syrian crisis. This research seeks to comprehensively analyse the issues highlighted above and create a better understanding about Russia's role in Syria.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY:

Given the requirements and necessities of the topic and the perspective of research questions, several primary sources like United Nations documents, policy papers and

reports of various agencies and research organisations have been used. Interviews and speeches of policy-framing individuals and leaders are used to draw inferences. Secondary sources like books written by experts and researchers, working papers and articles from journal/periodicals, conference papers, news paper articles, media briefings and monographs have been used to substantiate statement and arguments. The research hypotheses are verified primarily by adopting inductive reasoning for emphasising the particular for a general understanding, employing qualitative methods of research. Different qualitative and quantitative methods of research would be employed to derive statements out of factual accounts from several sources. A comparative analysis would be taken where ever essential to substantiate arguments and expanding previous literature, both in concept study and establishing assumptions.

DEFINITION, RATIONALE AND SCOPE OF THE STUDY:

The developing Syrian conflict and Russia's involvement in it has provided enough space to go for a study like this which will explore various aspects of the issue. Given the importance of Russia in the Syrian episode and its role as a stakeholder and a party to move towards a peaceful political solution, Russia has occupied the center stage. Russia's interest and its activities on the Syria have displayed the capability and outreach it can make. The world has started discussing about Russia's resurgence and its comeback on the stage of World politics as it was once enjoying during the Soviet era. The power projection that Russia is showing on the distant Syrian land has itself served as a rationale in proceeding for the study which will open up other facets of the issue. The scope of the study will range from Russian activism in Syria along with its vested interest and other push factors. It will also bring in the USA-Russia competitive aspect for power and space in Syria, which will have some implication on the world order.

The unfolding of happenings in Syria which includes so many fronts but most importantly the two international actors i.e. Russia and America have made many authors and writers to revisit the Cold War period and analyse the matter in that context. Though the time and space are not the same but there are certain changes in the power equation which provides a strong basis to go for an analysis of the World Order which usually keeps on changing with the changes in International events.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES:

The study began with the following research objectives:

- To examine the reasons behind the Syrian crisis.
- To explore why did Russia intervene in Syrian crisis.
- To find out whether there has been a resurgence of Russia.
- To study if there has been any decline in USA's hegemony in West Asia and find out why did this happen.
- To study the role of regional powers
- To examine how the principles of sovereignty been challenged in Syria.
- To find out what implications the Syrian crisis has on the Global Order.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS:

The following research questions have been answered in the thesis:

- What are the reasons behind the Syrian Crisis?
- Why did Russia intervene in the Syrian crisis?
- Has there been a resurgence of Russia?
- Is there any decline in American hegemony in West Asia? If yes, then why?
- What are the objectives and role of regional powers in the Syrian crisis?
- How has the principle of sovereignty been challenged in Syria?
- What are the implications of the Syrian crisis on the Global Order?

HYPOTHESES:

1. Syrian crisis has shown a declining trend of US hegemony in the West Asia along with a resurgent Russia, having implications on the Global Order.
2. Russia's involvement in the Syrian crisis is based on its objective of reasserting its global status by strengthening its position in West Asia
3. While Russia has respected and protected Syria's sovereignty, the West is trying to violate it, undermining the International law.

CHAPTERISATION

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The Introductory chapter provides a detailed understanding of the Syrian conflict and Russia's involvement in it. With a broad overview it tries to bring in the background story and the historical aspect which are helpful in understanding Russian perspective in a better way.

CHAPTER II

GENESIS OF THE SYRIAN CRISIS: A BACKGROUND STUDY

The second chapter analyses the Syrian crisis and looks for the reasons of it. It also focuses on the Syrian Civil war, Arab spring and other related links to get a broad and comprehensive understanding of the issue. .

CHAPTER III

RUSSIA IN SYRIAN CRISIS

The third chapter intensively examines and searches for the push factors and the reasons that made Russia to jump into a conflict zone like Syria. Several factors are explained confirming to the (neo) realist principles. Apart from the Russian official reasoning, other important factors like the economic, strategic and geopolitical reasons have discussed in this chapter to give a comprehensive understanding on the engagement of Russia in the Syrian crisis.

CHAPTER IV

EXTERNAL POWERS AND THEIR ROLE.

The fourth chapter has a definite approach in order to get into the details of the involvement of external powers in Syria which includes USA, Russia in particular and other regional players like Iran, Turkey and Saudi Arabia etc.

CHAPTER V

IMPLICATIONS OF THE SYRIAN CRISIS FOR THE GLOBAL ORDER

This chapter is mainly devoted to the analysis of the implications of the Syrian crisis on the Global Order in so far as changes in the power equation and rebalancing is concerned. It verifies factors such as decline of US unipolarity, resurgence of Russia, rise of a multipolar World Order and the concept of sovereignty.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

The concluding chapter will have an evaluative approach in order to find out the validity of the hypothesis framed at the initial period of the research. It will also include suggestions and way forward that will help in fulfilling the required necessities of the work to make it a comprehensive one.

CHAPTER- II

GENESIS OF THE SYRIAN CRISIS: A BACKGROUND STUDY

BACKGROUND:

It becomes quite important to get into the detail of the Syrian crisis and get the answers to certain questions which are very essential to understand the issue in a particular and a general way. This chapter helps us to get an idea of how the crisis took place. What are the reasons for the eruption of this crisis? How did a small issue turn into a civil war and then a matter of regional and global importance? In the process, Arab spring and Assad factor, civil war, non-state actors, ISIS factor and concept of sovereignty are discussed. While talking about the Syrian crisis and how it started, we find different viewpoints about it and in this paper it has been tried to take into account all possible analyses to move for a more comprehensive and logical view.

As many divisive forces cropped up with the intent of fighting the Bashar Al Assad regime, demands became stronger for overthrowing the government. In this atmosphere Syria slipped in to a bloody civil war which made the Syrian issue more complicated. Multiple fightings continued between the opponents and the government, and between several rebel groups simultaneously. While the civil war was simmering in Syria active involvement of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) made the situation more violent. Among many divisive forces if any group that concerns the most is the terrorist group of Islamic State. This Jihadist force entered into Syria in 2013 and carried out violent activities with the intention of creating an Islamic empire and a Caliphate based on the radical Islamic fundamentalist principles. They started taking control of the major cities in Syria along the Northern border, in order to gain complete control over the movement of rebel forces into Syria. ISIS started their fighting on two fronts. While on one front they went on countering the local militias and the rebel groups, on the other front they came down heavily on the government establishment to defeat Assad and thus take control of Syria (Birke 2013).

Given all these negative developments unfolding in Syria, the civil war took a turn with the request of Bashar Al Assad to Russia for military intervention in order to support the government. Syria's request and Russia's timely and immediate response changed the dynamics of the whole Syrian issue. In this respect the presidency of the Syrian Arab Republic clearly stated that the Russian air campaign was carried out following a request of the Syrian state furnished by a letter of President Bashar Al Assad to President Vladimir Putin. Thus, in its opinion, Russian initiative in this

regard falls within the frame work of combating terrorism (al- Freih. et al 2015). Russian air planes entered into Syrian air space targeting the ISIS strongholds in Syrian cities and this act of Russia brought in criticisms from around the globe. This also provided a number of perspectives and discourses that need to be verified and analysed.

If we look deeper into the Syrian issue, we can find that it is not only limited to Syria and the West Asia but also has wide range of implications at the regional and international levels. Involvement of big powers, particularly the two erstwhile Cold War rivals, USA and Russia (USSR), in the Syrian issue has made it an important happening in the International Politics which has its implications for the global order. Given the role that Russia is playing in Syria, whether it is in fighting against the ISIS or to save Assad, it can be clearly said that Russia is more successful in its operation in Syria than the US. Russia's hold is becoming stronger in West Asia through its Syrian power politics and there are many speculations and analyses by various scholars on the declining hegemonic superiority that US was enjoying in the region in the past. While at one hand scholars talk about Russia's resurgence, on the other hand they refer to the declining role of the US. America's global standing has been diminished and according to regularly held polls, Americans recognize that America's international status has waned (Byrant 2015).

Russia's victory in the accession of Crimea, despite US enabled efforts to stop it, has initiated the debate about Russia's emergence as a major player in the global politics. Further, the diplomatic success that Russia achieved in saving Assad from being punished for the alleged use of chemical weapon has enhanced its status and role as a major stake holder in Syria. In this respect, considering Vladimir Putin's role in the chemical weapon case, scholars have appreciated his statesmanship quality (Walkom 2013). Syrian crisis has its significance from various respects. Russia's military campaign, its role in finding a political solution of the crisis and its support for the legitimate government, has given enough reasons for having a detailed analysis of its involvement in the crisis.

Since the resurgence of Russia and other powers have its implications on the structure of the World Order, it is important to examine the changes. In Syrian crisis there are some developments that need to be counted upon in analysing the status of the current Global Order. Further, regional powers like Iraq, Iran, Saudi Arabia and Turkey have played an important role in Syria. The role of other powers like China has its

importance in the analysis of the changing power equation in the international politics, besides the activities of the US and Russia. The following section analyses the genesis of Syrian crisis, how it developed and different facets of Russia's involvement in it. It also looks at Syria's importance for Russia, the role of external powers (focusing on US and Russia power struggle) and the consequent implications for the Global Order.

In order to have an understanding of how the Syrian problem developed into the Syrian crisis, it is imperative to move gradually, passing through several stages of development and analyse each stage that has contributed to its evolution from the beginning to the current stage. Syrian situation did not develop into a conflict and a crisis in one day or all of a sudden. It took enough time to unveil its different layers one by one.

Civil War in Syria:

Civil war in Syria is not a simple happening. It is a result of circumstances that evolved in the form of small events. Unrest in the Syrian state started with some pro-democracy protests. Arab Spring is also said to have had its impact and influence on it. In Syria small scale agitations and demonstrations with the objective of bringing certain reforms soon transformed in to a large scale escalation. Though it started in 2011 with a non-violent background, with the blooming complexities it turned into a bloody civil war. The character and objective of the Syrian conflict has multi-dimensional aspects that need to be look into.

What began as a protest against President Assad's regime in 2011 quickly escalated into a full-scale war between the Syrian government - backed by Russia and Iran - and anti-government rebel groups - backed by the United States, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and other regional actors. In the Syrian civil war several fronts were fighting for different causes and with the continuation of the war for a decade have contributed to its complicated nature. While Bashar al- Assad has been playing a major role on behalf of the Syrian government and has been able to have its own front with the support of its external allies, in opposition there are several rebel groups who kept on confronting Assad's regime, challenging its ruling and legitimacy. So basically, in Syria we find Assad as government front fighting to protect its regime, defectors and other rebel groups forming opposition front wanting to remove Assad and fulfil their other needs, ISIS getting involved in the war significantly in order to

pursue their own objective and establish Islamic State and finally the external actors like US, Russia, Iran, Turkey and other regional and extra regional powers to have their sort of influence and realise national interests. It is perhaps the involvement of all these actors that has resulted into prolonging of the crisis. On this UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres has termed the Syrian civil war as a ‘living nightmare’ which has endured for more than a decade (UN News 2021).

Arab Spring that began in Tunisia and spread to other Middle Eastern and North African countries started off with the self-immolation incident of a street vendor in December 2010. It was believed that by doing this he protested against rampant corruption. This incident sparked other protests and reform movements which resulted in stepping down of several leaders of MENA countries along with compelling others to respond to the demands by bringing reforms. Similar situation started surfacing in Syria and from a simple protest the incident snowballed into uprisings and finally a prolong Civil War. Though initially the demonstrators were asking for certain reforms such as more freedom to the people, action against corruption and release of political prisoners etc and Assad’s regime responded by giving assurance to fulfill them but it could not become successful. Eventually, these protests started getting violent and there were clashes between government forces and other opposition fronts which continued to spread other areas of Syria creating more instability in the country. Free Syrian Army (FSA) emerged as an opposition front and it was mainly comprised of the defectors from the Syrian armed forces. In the process of confrontation though the FSA got help from Turkey where they also found shelter but could not hold for a long time and became weaker due to lack of coordination, scarce resources to strengthen their fighting and lack of organizational unity. Stressing on the role of FSA Lister has written that, ‘Initially established with the grand objective of representing a nationwide resistance organization formed to protect peaceful protesters and to initiate military operations against the Assad regime, the FSA has struggled to live up to these goals’ (Lister 2016). However, while civil war was spreading its influence in different parts of Syria and the Syrian government was facing numerous challenges on several fronts, starting from fighting with the rebels to protecting its own territory from slipping into the hands of the opposition, certain rebel groups forming coalition started proclaiming themselves as legitimate stakeholders in Syria. Among these rebel groups Syrian National Coalition

(SNC) emerged to be a group which not only claimed having the legitimacy to stand as an alternative to the Assad government but also strengthened its position by getting the support of the external powers. Though SNC seemed to have emerged as an alternative government of Syria in exile and got the backing of countries like USA, GCC, Turkey and others, it could not withstand with the test of the time. Even National Coalition (NC) which later emerged as the successor of the SNC failed to provide required support to the opposition parties both in military and diplomatic terms. Eventually, several rebel groups in the opposition also did not consider the NC and it seemed to have left with little consideration to continue as a leading coalition antigovernment front against Assad and its regime. With the decreasing significance of the coalition and proliferation of other rebel groups FSA fighters went into the camp of the Islamist brigades and became successful in different operations against the regime (Laub 2021).

Factors responsible for Syrian crisis:

It is quite clear that Syrian uprising which later developed into a pro long and messy civil war has got a significant bearing of the Arab Spring. But it is also important to know the conditions that prevailed in Syria before the arrival of the Arab Spring and kind of made its way really clear for a smooth landing. These internal and basic factors would help in understanding the background in a limpid manner.

Socio-economic factor:

While exploring the internal factors that have contributed to the process of bringing Arab Spring to Syria irrespective of its intensity of influence upon the whole uprising, it is quite imperative to go through the socio economic status of the people. Since the uprising was initiated by the common people who were demanding reforms regarding so many aspects of their life, socio-economic factor is worth analysing.

Bonfatti in his analysis has expressed concern about the socio-economic dynamics being overlooked by many scholars in their works regarding Syrian uprising. While putting emphasis on this aspect, he has referred to the argument of the Lebanese Marxist philosopher Gilbert Achcar that Syrian uprising is rooted deeply in various social and economic conditions along with other factors. To highlight the importance of this factor, Bonfatti has put it more emphatically that the roots of the revolution in Syria is to be found in the deteriorating socio-economic condition in Syria. To

substantiate his arguments, Bonfatti has even held the neo-liberalisation³ and privatization responsible for the deteriorating socio-economic condition of the people. Though foreign investments were pouring in and Gross Domestic Production (GDP) also registered growth (Private sector growth rose to 61% in the year 2007 from 52% in 2000), these could not get reflected in the overall social indicators. There was increase in the poverty rate in 2007 and around seven million people were considered as poor most of whom belonged to the rural area. Distribution of wealth was lopsided. Despite the growth in GDP, the share of agriculture sector declined from 7.8% to 2.2% in five years i.e. from 2005 to 2010 (Bonfatti 2017). Another reason that has also affected the socio-economic status of the people was the four years of drought which plagued the country.

Though Syrian economy was not on the verge of collapse before the uprising and was under control but it was not flourishing. However, the objective here is to find out whether the socio-economic condition of the people in any way contributed to the discontent which later helped in the development of the uprising. As per the Poverty Assessment Report of the UNDP (2005) in between 2003 and 2004, two million people were extremely poor which constituted around 11.4% of the total population. UNDP report has also mentioned about the inequality in Syria. As per the report from 1997 to 2004, inequality in Syria has risen from 0.33 to 0.37 in Gini index (Abu-Ismaïl et.al 2011). Though macroeconomic indicators were not a matter of worry and no sharp fall in the GDP could be seen, issues like rising level of unemployment, increasing poverty, inequality in income, decline in the house hold expenditure of the people and disparity found in the living standards of the people of different regions were really disturbing. In this respect Khan and Itany (2013) have stated that, “the economic seeds for the uprising were clearly evident in Syria and were essentially the same as those seen in other Arab transition countries”. Femia and Werrell (2012) from the Centre for Climate and Security, define Syrian social unrest as a response to

³ Neoliberalism is a policy that can be applied both in the field of politics and economics. It aims to transfer all the controls of economic factors such as ownership etc from the public sector to the private sector. It ensures there is free market arrangement, limits on government expenditure and deregulation. It is also known as *lassiez faire* economics, a school of thought that seeks minimalistic government interference in the economic affairs of both individual and society. It is also understood as encouraging measures of austerity and cutting spending especially meant for social programmes (Kenton 2020).

the political change that took place in Tunisia in the background of rising economic hardship and inequality.

Climate as a factor:

Before Syria entered into a complex conflict all was not well inside Syria, which had its own issues with which it was struggling through before the arrival of the Arab Spring. In so far as the internal factors are concerned, the socio-economic conditions can be considered to be among the most important of the Syrian problem. Amongst several internal factors that one and the other way can be held responsible for driving the Arab Spring to Syria, climate as a factor has also played its role though in an indirect manner. Climate change, rain fall irregularities, water shortages, drought, crop failure and stress on natural resources have altogether intensified the agony of the Syrian people. It has not only reduced their standard of living but also pushed them towards poverty.

From 2006 to 2010 there was drought in Syria in which agriculture sector got severely affected resulting in loss of livelihood of the farmers, halting of farm activities and death of livestock. Situation got so much out of control that farmers started abandoning their farmlands and went on searching for other alternatives to ensure their survival. In this respect Polk (2013) has given an estimate, published in the Center for Climate and Security, that about 800,000 farmers lost their livelihood, about 200,000 abandoned their lands, crop failure accounting around 75% and death of 85% of livestock due to scarcity of food. From this account it is understood that a significant number of Syrians were really reeling under poverty and dissatisfaction. Citing environmental factor as a reason for the uprising, Augustyn and others have stressed on the fact that, 'Environmental crisis also played a role in Syria's uprising. Between 2006 and 2010, Syria experienced the worst drought in the country's modern history. Hundreds of thousands of farming families were reduced to poverty, causing a mass migration of rural people to urban shanty towns' (Augustyn et al. 2020).

Femia and Werrell have also given an account of the impact of the drought which made millions of Syrians suffer a lot. The cost that Syrians and its economy bore was huge. As per Global Assessment Report on Disaster Risk Reduction (GAR), about one million Syrians became extremely food insecure by 2011 due to four years of continuous droughts. UN has also reported about the increase in the numbers of Syrian people moving towards extreme poverty which could be no less than two to

three million. Exodus of farmers and migration of other agriculturally dependent people from rural areas to cities continued which shows the intensity of the impact of the droughts. Femia and Werrell have also gone further and talked about the extra burden that Syria has been bearing in terms of taking the responsibility of the Iraqi Refugees who fled to Syria after American invasion of Iraq (2003) (Femia and Werrell 2012).

While analysing the internal factors which somehow helped in the background preparation of the Arab Spring, climate as a factor can't be held directly responsible for the uprising and bringing the revolution up to the surface. But it has definitely been a multiplier of agony and distress for the Syrians. It has caused huge economic loss by putting strains on the agricultural productivity of the farmers and others (Femia et.al 2013). So it is understood from here that the people of Syria were having dissatisfaction due to continuous droughts and their subsequent impact.

Arab Spring as a factor:

One of the basic reasons for the eruption of the Syrian crisis has been credited to the Arab Spring. It has been claimed by many researchers and analysts that like many countries in the Arab World, Arab Spring had its influence in Syria which made the people come to the street and demand certain pro-democratic reforms. Gradually these demonstrations took the shape of violence and the situation got further worsened driving the country towards a civil war. The Arab Spring first erupted in Tunisia and then it spread to other countries of the Arab World and its adjacent regions in West Asia (Hussain 2013). Syria could not escape from it. But in order to understand how the Arab Spring got a foothold in Syria, it is needed to know about the basics of the Arab Spring. What was the purpose of this movement? And how the movement was a bit different in Syria from the other parts of the world?

Arab Spring which is otherwise known as the Arab Awakening was a kind of movement and a revolution against the dictatorial, autocratic and violent regimes of the Arab World. It started in North Africa and then moved towards other adjoining countries of West Asia. Countries like Tunisia, Morocco, Algeria, Egypt, Libya, Yemen and later Syria came under its influence. Since the movement had its genesis in the Arab World and the movement first engulfed some Arab countries, it got the connotation of Arab Spring. One of the most important reasons for this movement was a kind of dissatisfaction of the people with the ruling establishments and they wanted to overthrow the regimes. People were taking to the streets undertaking

demonstrations, rallies and campaigns on social media. Though the process of the revolt was same but it yielded different outcomes in different countries. At some places governments responded and brought in certain reforms accepting the demands of the protesters, while at others the authority resorted to the use of force and violence. For example, in Tunisia Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali and in Egypt Hosni Mubarak were compelled to quit their position, in Libya Muammar Gaddafi was killed, and in some other places like Algeria and Morocco demonstrations and protests brought in some democratic changes. But in case of Syria it was different. Compared to other countries, Arab Spring in Syria was quite long and got a bit more complicated. In Syria small demonstrations had already begun in the month of January 2011 and in the coming days protests became more violent. Like in other countries of the Arab World, some pro-democracy protests were seen in Deraa a southern city of Syria and then it spread to other regions (Zuber and Moussa 2018).

On 6th March 2011 some teenagers wrote some anti-government slogans on the walls as a result of which they were arrested by the security forces. This time situation got out of control and violence erupted as a consequence of the conflict between the demonstrators and the government forces. Some demonstrators also lost their lives and thereafter huge demands came pouring in for the removal of the Assad government. Ruling establishment started using force to disperse the demonstrators and protests got more intensified. A series of violent activities, protests and continuous fighting slipped the country into Civil war. These growing violent activities evoked strict response from ruling government in response to the protests and nationwide demonstrations, which started demanding the resignation of the President Bashar al- Assad. Soon the opposition against the government became quite stronger, spreading into many divisive groups who eventually turned into armed rebels. In no time violence escalated in most of the places in Syria and armed groups were formed. These groups positioned themselves in the opposition and by 2012 started taking control of the major cities and towns starting from Aleppo to the capital Damascus. According to the UN, by 2013 casualties had reached 90,000 which further accelerated to about 250,000 in 2015 (Rogers et al. 2016).

In these confrontations hundreds were killed and thousands were imprisoned. The forces engaged in fighting got factionalised and fought with pro and Anti-Assad approach. Syrian crisis took a new turn when there was the involvement of the external actors (Aljazeera 2016). . The Syrian conflict is not confined to the internal

factors only. Rather, involvement of strong external elements contributes to the seriousness of the matter. Role of international powers, presence of various armed rebel groups forming brigades with their own prepared demand lists and strong holds, some terrorist organisations like ISIS etc have added to the complexity of the Syrian conflict (Marks 2018).

Sectarianism as a factor:

Whether sectarianism had played its role in the Syrian crisis is a question worth asking. Though there has been a lot of contrasting views about its contribution and importance in the unfolding of the crisis, still it is worth mentioning that this factor has definitely been found in Syria during the crisis and thus can't be ignored altogether. During the civil war it became quite clear that Syrian society was not absolutely united and had some sorts of divisions on religious lines. Though majority of the Syrian Muslims are Sunnis but the ruling establishment and its major sectors are occupied by the Alawi sect which is considered having close association with the Shias. Zuber and Moussa have gone further to put more light on the issue. As per them, the sectarian factor exists in Syria. While Shia majority countries like Iraq, Iran and Hezbollah of Lebanon extended their support to the Syrian President Bashar Hafez al-Assad, who belongs to the Alwai sect. On the other hand, Sunni majority countries like Saudi Arabia, Turkey and Qatar are extended their support to the opposition front. Stressing on this factor of sectarianism, Zuber and Moussa have expressed, 'Sectarianism is a special feature which occurred during the civil war, (Zuber and Moussa 2018).

Osseiran (2018) has given a different analysis of Sectarianism which shows how all the blame can't be put upon the sectarian factor which may result in overlooking of the other factors that might have also contributed to the Syrian crisis, though it has played its role in certain cases. In this regard Fabrice Balanche, a visiting fellow at the Stanford University's Hoover Institution in his interview to Osseiran, states that, 'Syrian conflict is not only sectarian. It should not only be taken as a war between the Shiites and Sunnis', (Osseiran, 2018). Further he has also stressed upon how all Sunnis are not against the Assad government and even in the early days of demonstrations some of the Sunni businessmen didn't support the demonstrators assuming that it would affect the Syrian economy. And even some Sunni bourgeoisie wanted the Assad government to check the opposition.

Though analyst like Bonfatti (2018) has minimised the role of sectarian division in the Syrian revolution and insisted upon other factors, especially the socio-economic one being at the root of Syrian uprising, but in his analysis he has also mentioned about the military sectarian complex. What Bonfatti has talked about is the military sectarian complex, which is all about the close association that has developed between Assad's family members and his military arrangements which was dominated by the Alawites. And this military complex is somewhere responsible for creating stratification in the society. For Bonfatti it was the sectarian distinction which made it easy for the Alawite elite to gain control over both political and military spectrum of the state. So this strengthening of relationship of the Alawites with Assad has also been a reason of marginalization of the Sunni Muslims.

While talking about how Sectarian footprints were seen in the Syrian crisis, Fabrice Balanche talked about the early eruption of the crisis in different areas dominated by Shia and Sunnis. While protests were quite intense in Sunni dominated area in Daraa, the nearby area called Suwayda was not affected much because of the Druze community's loyalty to the Assad regime. Similarly, in Homes and Latakia, which are the neighbourhoods of Alawite, there was hardly any protest against the government. It was largely the areas dominated by the Sunnis which became the hotbeds of revolution and most importantly it was the Sunni Arab community in which the revolt was confined within, Balanche stressed (Osseiran 2018).

Agha and Malley have also emphasized on the same factor as Osseiran. There is no doubt that there exists some kind of tension between the Sunnis and Shias. But it has not always been the case that Sunnis have acted against the Shias and the vice versa in so far as the violence in Arab uprisings and in the Middle East is concerned. 'The fierce battles for the Iraqi city of Mosul or the Syrian city of Raqqa pitted Sunni against Sunni. *ISIS* attacks in Egypt, Somalia, Libya, Nigeria, and elsewhere almost always have Sunnis as prey....In Tunisia, Egypt and Libya, Arab uprisings involved Sunni on Sunni battles', (Agha and Malley 2019).

Since Assad belongs to the Alawite sect and Sunni-Alawite issue is considered as a subset of the Sunni- Shia conflict, it has got its importance in the Syrian crisis. But there are some other happenings which need to be given required attention to really get deep into the sectarian aspect. As it has already been argued and stated above by scholars, the responsibility of the Syrian tragedy can't be put entirely upon the sectarian aspect of the issue for there also exist other social and political reasons. It

means the role of Sectarianism should not be seen in isolation in the Syrian episode. To stretch it a bit forward, we can consider the fact that though Assad belongs to a minority sect but he has also got the cooperation of other sects. Had he been limited in his support base and not got the support of other sects out, he could not have been able to run the government for such a long time. Agha and Malley (2019) have clearly mentioned about how different sects have responded or behaved differently which does not absolutely follow the sectarian trend. To emphasize the validity of their argument they have talked about the reason behind Iran and Hezbollah coming in support of the Assad's regime, which is not due to utterly sectarian feeling but for political and strategic objectives.

ISIS as a factor:

ISIS which is known as the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria is also otherwise known as Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant and Daesh in Arabic. It is a jihadist group particularly belonging to the Sunni Muslims. It is based on the principle of violent ideology and its objective is to establish an Islamic State imposing religious authority and superiority over all Muslims. In Syria ISIS came to play its role taking the opportunity of the Syrian civil war. It is this terrorist factor that has complicated the nature and changed the dynamics of the entire Syrian crisis. Al-Qaeda a terrorist organisation was eyeing on the situation in Syria and taking the opportunity of chaos entered in to the scene. Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, who was operating in Iraq claiming himself as the leader of al-Qaeda of the Iraq branch, made some of its operatives to recruit fighters in Syria who eventually fought under the banner of ISIS. In 2012 Jabhat al-Nusra landed up in Syria proclaiming itself as a Syrian franchise of al-Qaeda and started adding more recruits from Syria and from outside. Along with this there was also a call from Ayman al-Zawahiri, the al-Qaeda chief, to all the sunnis to join anti regime fight in Syria as a jihad. In 2013 Islamic State emerged in Syria having its affiliation with al-Qaeda in Iraq and in few months it brought areas around eastern Syria and western Iraq under its control (Laub 2021).

Since the IS started fighting against Assad's regime joining the rebellion, it secured a safe haven for itself as well as access to smooth supply of weapons. By taking the benefit of US withdrawal from Iraq it spread its influence in western Iraq and exploited the sectarian factor of Sunni and Shia conflict. In 2013 it gained control over territory in Syria and came to be known as ISIL (Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant). Within few months of its successful operation in Syria and Iraq the group

started proclaiming to establish a caliphate and was well known as ‘the Islamic State’ (BBC 2018). While in Iraq IS was fighting against the Iraqi forces in Syria it confronted both the Syrian government and several rebel factions fighting in the Syrian civil war. In 2014 it forced the Iraqi forces out of major western cities and brought significant portion of territory under its control which encouraged it to create a caliphate. In Syria Islamic State resorted to extreme violence and brutality which resulted in to a great cause of concern not only for the Syrian government but also for the major players like US, Russia and others. It is also one of the major factors that compelled even the rivals like US and Russia to think and act on a common platform with the objective of wiping out the terrorist threat which could have been a persistent threat to their security (Britannica 2019).

ISSUE OF SYRIAN SOVEREIGNTY AND TERRITORIAL INTEGRITY:

Here the concept of sovereignty is analysed in the context of the Syrian crisis. Since Syria is a sovereign and independent nation and has got equal protection rights as per the International norms and the UN rules enshrined in its Charter, any kind of breach in its sovereign status is a matter of serious concern. While Syrian government considers Russia’s involvement as a support and help done on an invitation and with the consent of the ruling government on the other hand, it sees American intervention and its airstrikes as an attack upon its sovereignty and violation of international law. In the following analysis it will be discussed how the West led by the USA has violated the Syrian sovereignty and its territorial integrity while Russia has made several efforts to safeguard this. It has been verified through different findings and theories to check whether Russia has really been successful in safeguarding the sovereignty of Syria and ensuring security of its territorial integrity. We will also look into the difference in the approach of both Russia and the West led by United States of America (USA) towards Syria in so far as the sovereignty aspect is concerned.

Russia and Syrian Sovereignty:

Russia has helped in safeguarding Syrian sovereignty and its territorial integrity. Vladimir Putin has assured Syrian President Bashar al-Assad that Russia would continue to support Syria in defending its sovereignty. In this respect Putin has emphasized on the fact that, ‘Russia would continue to render every assistance to

Syria in the protection of state sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity, in the promotion of a political settlement process, as well as in efforts to restore the national economy', (Williams 2017). While congratulating on the occasion of the 75th anniversary of the diplomatic relationship between Russia and Syria, Putin came up with his supporting and confidence-building assurance for Syria. As has been quoted by Tass news agency, Putin said that, "I would like to confirm that Russia will continue to support Syria's government and people in their efforts to protect the country's sovereignty and territorial integrity, ensure security and post-war reconstruction", stated by Putin (Tass 2019).

Russia had limited its support to diplomatic assistance, supply of military equipments, arms and ammunition and other military services like providing training to the Syrian Military in the initial stages of the Civil war. But when the opposition rebel forces and the Free Syrian Army made the Syrian Military forces retreat and the situation got worsened with the increasing possibility of the security of Damascus getting breached by the opposition forces, Assad asked Russia to intervene. In the words of Oligie, 'Bashar al-Assad .. officially invited Russia that same month to intervene in the civil war to help combat Islamist terrorist groups, especially ISIS', (Oligie 2019). Russia has come forward in support of Syria and in favour of Assad's regime because it wanted to protect Syrian sovereignty and its statehood. Even in its public declaration regarding Moscow's intervention in Syria and more clearly, its direct military involvement in the Syrian crisis, Russian President Vladimir Putin has quite vociferously defended his move. It was as a measure taken to preserve the territorial integrity of Syria. And Russia as a sovereign nation has always emphasized on the principle of 'gosudarstvennost' which means statehood. Putin while discussing on the role of Russian troops in Syria stated that, 'their chief goal was to protect Syria's statehood...and they had successfully protected gosudarstvennost in Syria', (Partlett 2017).

Has USA violated Syrian sovereignty?

USA has been accused of violating the international principle of respecting the sovereignty of Syria. USA has also been criticized of intervening into Syria and its internal affairs without following standard International procedure, that is, without the permission of the Sovereign authority of the state. Deployment of troops in a foreign land without the consent of the ruling authority leads to violation of the principle on Sovereignty. The Deputy Foreign Minister of Russia, Sergei Ryabkov, while giving

his statements to its state-owned TASS news agency stated, 'If we are talking from the position of the foreign minister, we - of course - cannot but be concerned over the fact that the US carries out such actions without coordination with the legitimate government of the Syrian Arab Republic'. He further added, 'I stress that officially Damascus already gave a similar political assessment, and we fully agree with it', (DW 2016).

"It is impossible for us to be not worried that such an action by the United States of America is being carried out without the agreement of the legal government of Syria...It is a violation of sovereignty", as the state news agency Tass quoted Deputy foreign minister of Russia Sergei Ryabkov's comments on the matter of US action on the increase of Russian forces in Syria (Grove 2016).

While questioning the legality of the allied strikes by the West in Syria, Thakur (2018) has expressed his concern on 'the principle of sovereignty' being under threat again. In his analysis he has considered the principle of state sovereignty as the most essential principle upon which the Westphalian global order is based. In this respect he has also mentioned about the role of moral policing played by the West and its allies. Since states are expected to function domestically conforming to certain International standards, there are also demands that international use of force by the states should have the backing of the international law. Considering the air strikes upon Syria, Thakur has even questioned Britain, France and United States, who behaved arbitrarily inside the borders of other countries without being authorized by the International community.

USA launched airstrikes on Syria in April 2017 along with its allies like UK and France. Though this action of the Western countries has been interpreted by different analysts in different ways and even defended on various grounds, there is no doubt that this specific action can't be considered as absolutely right. As per the International norms, these strikes can be considered as illegal. Lemnitzer (2018), though trying to justify this act citing the use of new norms like humanitarian intervention and stopping the use of chemical weapons, has still termed it as unauthorised and ignorance of International law because there was no permission taken from the UN. Though new developments like Responsibility to protect and limited use of force concepts are invoked by analysts like Lemnitzer, they nevertheless maintain that the principle was not intended to go without the approval

of the Security Council of the UN and have accepted that there has been a technical break in the UN Charter in the Syrian context (Lemnitzer 2018).

USA strike in Syria and violation of International law:

For any country being an actor at the International level, protection of its sovereignty and prevention and prohibition of activities that may pose threat towards it become an essential task. Despite new challenges that keep coming on the way of state sovereignty, modern states based on the Westphalian Order try their best to keep their sovereignty intact. Starting from America which is considered as the strongest democracy in the world to the small West Asian country like Syria which is still experimenting with different reforms, the attitude and approach towards sovereignty is quite similar. It's because, for the states securing their survival, freedom and independence both at the internal and external level remain an uncompromising factor. Giving vivid importance on the principle of Sovereignty in one of his speeches at the UN General Assembly, the then President of America Donald Trump stated, 'If you want democracy, hold on to your sovereignty,' and further in the context of not giving recognition and not accepting the legitimacy of the International Criminal Court, he stated, 'We will never surrender America's sovereignty to an unelected, unaccountable global bureaucracy', (Papazoglou 2019). From this statement we can see how protective a country is towards its own sovereignty which it does not want to compromise in any manner. The same is also expected from others. Commenting on this action of the United States and its impact on the situation in Syria President Vladimir Putin stated that, 'Through its actions, the US makes the already catastrophic humanitarian situation in Syria even worse and brings suffering to civilians. In fact, the US panders to the terrorists who have been tormenting the Syrian people for seven years, leading to a wave of refugees fleeing this country and the region', (Putin 2018).

While analysing the violation of sovereignty in the context of Syrian crisis, we come across with various new norms and standards developed at the International level. Since the Westphalian state system emerged it has been challenged on various grounds and even its very character has been put to numerous tests. Newly developed International principles like Humanitarian Intervention and Responsibility to protect etc seem to have come on the way of state sovereignty. Similar situation has arisen in Syria where state sovereignty has been set aside. Since in this section we are

enquiring about the violation of Syrian state sovereignty, therefore it is essential to find out the legality of the US-led air strikes in Syria. In this respect Milanovic has called the strikes conducted by the US, UK and France against Syria as ‘manifestly illegal’ ‘as the strikes conducted by the US alone’, without the approval of the United Nations (Milanovic 2018).

In order to get a clear understanding that US strike at Syria has violated the International law, it is required to get into the details of the existing International legal system which speaks about the grounds and other essentialities for such acts. We need to find out on what basis such attacks can take place and what procedural requirements are needed to meet such actions. Though USA considered its attack on Syrian airbase as a measure intended to teach a lesson to Assad’s regime and send a strong signal in order to check his moves, this act has been criticised by many scholars and critics. They have even termed it as illegal as it has not followed International principles. In his Interview to DW Stefan Talmon, an expert in the field of International Law, has explained, in what condition a military attack can take place at the International level and what is the correct way to proceed in this direction. As per his view, any air attack targeted at another state must have secured a mandate from the United Nations Security Council and approval of all five permanent members (P5) is essential to get a go ahead for the act to be undertaken. There is also another option available on the ground of self-defence. And this option can be exercised in case there is no authorization available from the UN. Even Talmon believes that US airstrike on Syria was ‘a violation of International Law’ (Dick 2017).

Since we are discussing about the violation of the Syrian sovereignty as a cause and effect relationship with the US-led airstrike on Syria, this leads us towards a more detailed understanding of the US action and its repercussions. Those who are trying to justify American action in Syria are primarily referring to the pretexts such as Humanitarian Intervention and the Responsibility to Protect etc. But there are many arguments, debates and discussions where the legality of these new norms and the reasons cited by the USA for the attack has faced tough criticism. Even if we consider the fact that US attack on Syria was meant to punish Assad’s regime and stop any possible chemical weapons related violations, the action can’t be justified within the existing framework of International Law. Because no country is allowed to use force illegally in the form of unilateral action in order to punish the other state for the violation of International law. It does not sound logical that in order to make someone

respect established International principles, one can resort to unlawful method. There are other prescribed ways which are legally solid and can't be questioned. In this context, Martin believes that unlawful use of force 'represents nothing more than vigilante Justice' which would result in doing 'more harm than good to the International legal order' (Martin 2013).

While evaluating US action on Syria we need to verify every aspect associated with the event so that it helps in clearing doubts. When US launched its air strike upon Syria, the use of chemical weapons was cited as a reason for the action. Therefore, it is necessary to understand America's act from the perspective of the use of chemical weapon. United Nations Security Council Resolution 2118 (2013) speaks about the use of chemical weapons in Syria. As per the resolution if it is found that any chemical weapon is being deployed in Syria it would lead to imposition of measures under the framework of chapter-VII of the UN charter. Since no specific measure has been defined in the resolution and nothing has been mentioned about taking military action, US resorted to this resolution as a basis for unilateral action (Dick 2017).

Emphasising on the importance of complying with the UN Charter, Talmon cited the example of Iraq war (2003). 'Unilateral measures always bear the threat of an escalation of violence, even a World War. That is why UN Charter security mechanisms have been integrated'. Teflon further stated the need to focus on the importance for getting an approval from the UN (Dick 2017). Since UN has been seriously involved in finding a political solution of the Syrian crisis and several resolutions have been taken to reach at a solution, it has also been a part of the process and is expected to play a significant role in uniting the International community and help in resolving the issue. As it is equally important to end the Syrian civil war, bring peace and stability in the region and protect the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Syria, UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres stated that, 'This is the path that will lead to a solution that meets the legitimate aspirations of all Syrians, creates the conditions necessary for refugees to return in safety and dignity, and respect Syria's sovereignty, territorial integrity and independence' (UN News 2021).

There is not an iota of doubt that use of chemical weapon against humanity is considered as a grave violation of International law and it should not be allowed at any cost. Therefore, at the International level we have complete arrangement regarding the use, stockpiling and supply etc. As it has already been mentioned in the

preceding paragraphs, US airstrikes on Syria was illegal and America violated the Syrian sovereignty by defying the existing legal norms towards which all its members must abide by. Therefore, in order to validate this argument and make it more firm, we need to find out the prevailing legal standards that would help us to confirm the illegality of the strike. In this respect we can refer to Articles of the UN charter which speak out vividly regarding the use of force at the International level.

But all these preconditions don't seem to fit in case of Syria. Neither Syria has committed such attack on any other state nor there is authorization from the UN Security Council permitting the use of force. Since Russia and China have opposed the authorization, it is very clear that the permission has not been achieved as we know that for any authorization at the UN level needs the approval of its permanent five members and if a single member vetoes the proposal then it gets rejected. Even these two powers did not even accept the limited use of power in Syria. This was because there was the possibility of this phrase 'limited use of power' getting misused as it had happened in case of Libya. When there were uprisings in Libya and Muammar Gaddafi's regime was in trouble, the US and NATO intervened in Libya under the pretext of limited use of power with the permission of the UN to establish a no fly Zone in order to rescue the civilians. But in reality it was more than the limited use of power and it seemed like as if the purpose of intervention was to overthrow the regime of Gaddafi. Despite getting authorization for the limited use of force in Libya, the act of the US and NATO was not in tune with the approval and this led to deliberate violation of the UN authority. To some extent this also contributed to weakening trust in the United Nations and its noble objective. Fearing that similar kind of situation might occur in Syria, Russia was quite suspicious about the intention of the US, and thus did not support even the limited use of force (Martin 2013). Expressing deep concern on what was happening in Syria and showing its commitment towards state sovereignty, UN Security Council in its Presidential address stated that 'Security Council reaffirms its strong commitment to the sovereignty, independence, and territorial integrity of Syria', and emphasized on the fact that 'the only solution to the current crisis in Syria is through an inclusive and Syrian-led political process' (UNO 2011).

Humanitarian Intervention and Responsibility to Protect:

When it comes to avoid the authorization of the UN and take the benefit of exceptional cases, the ground of Humanitarian Intervention is invoked. This option can be used when population of a particular state are suppressed, tortured and get subjected to violent and inhuman practices by its own state. In this regard we can refer to Kosovo conflict⁴ in which for the first time Humanitarian Intervention was used as a reason to justify air attack in a state. To put it more clearly, in the year 1999 NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organisation) conducted an air strike against Serbia without getting approval from the UN. Though initially some states were in support of this move, it was rejected by a majority of states as there is no International law which approves unilateral humanitarian intervention without getting an authorization for the attack from the UN. While criticising such attacks, Stefan Talmon explained that, ‘Kosovo Intervention violated International Law’, (Dick 2017). There are also scholars who argue and justify US action on the ground of Humanitarian Intervention and the Responsibility to Protect. They further even try to justify NATO’s intervention and air campaign in Kosovo in 1999 and argued that Syrian intervention should be taken in the same light. Contrary to this there are scholars who find it absolutely illegal. Martin believes that ‘the principle of humanitarian intervention and R2P are not yet established law’ and ‘Kosovo intervention is generally recognized as having been Unlawful’ (Martin 2013).

Use of chemical weapon and the legality of the US strike:

In a response to alleged use of chemical weapons by the Syrian government against its own people, USA conducted its first unilateral airstrikes upon Syria. On 7th April 2017, while hosting Chinese President Xi Jinping⁵, then US President Donald Trump ordered missile attack which was carried out by launching 59 Tomahawk missiles

⁴ Kosovo Conflict took place between the ruling Serbs and the ethnic Albanians. It continued from 1998 to 1999. The war took place in the Serbian province of Kosovo. While Ethnic Albanians were living in the Kosovo region, the Serves were attempting to take control of that region. Though the Albanians were ethnically were in majority in Kosovo but it was Slobodan Milosevic the Serbian President who was not recognizing their rights and even tried to impose Serbian culture replacing Albanian’s. In 1990s tension cropped up between the Albanians and the Serbs and this tension escalated into an armed conflict. In 1998 the Albanians formed Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) and both KLA and Serbian security forces got indulged in armed conflict. Serbia and Yugoslavia tried to control the tension and suppress the KLA. But finally there was an International intervention. In 1999 NATO resorted to airstrikes targeting Serbia. In 2008 Kosovo declared its independence from Serbia (Harris 2017).

⁵ Xi Jinping is the President of People’s Republic of China and currently serving as the General Secretary of the Chinese Communist Party and the Chairman of the Central Military Commission (Times of India 2021).

from US Naval Ships. They were targeted at the Shayrat⁶ airbase believed to be the place from where chemical attack was designed. The US attack was also intended to strike at the runways and aircraft in order to destabilise the Syrian Air force. It was also claimed by the US officials that the attack ‘severely damaged Shayrat airfield’ and has also affected Syrian government capacity in the field of chemical weapons usage (Sevastopulo et al. 2017). While giving an official confirmation on the air attack against Syria US President Donald Trump stated that, ‘I ordered a targeted military strike on the airfield in Syria from where the chemical attack was launched. It is in this vital national security interest of the United States to prevent and deter the spread and use of deadly chemical weapons. There can be no dispute that Syria used banned chemical weapons, violated its obligations under the Chemical Weapons Convention, and ignored the urging of the U.N. Security Council’ (Donald Trump 2017). This action of the United States received severe criticism from various sources and specifically from Syria and Russia. Though the US claimed that it had given a notice to Russia regarding the strike and tried to minimize the casualties considering the location of both the Russian and Syrian forces on the place of attack, but the act was condemned by Russia as ‘Violation of International Law’ and Russian President Vladimir Putin termed this as ‘an aggression against a sovereign state.... under a farfetched pretext’ (Sevastopulo et al. 2017). It was quite obvious on the part of Syria to criticize the attack as it has been claiming no indulgence in the use of chemical weapon attack.

Russia’s response to the US attack on Syria:

After the US airstrikes against Syria, Russia came in full support of Syria and condemned the US act in strong words. Russian President Vladimir Putin in his statement stated that, ‘On April 14, the United States, supported by its allies, launched an airstrike against military and civilian targets in the Syrian Arab Republic. An act of aggression against a sovereign state that is on the frontline in the fight against terrorism was committed without a mandate from the UN Security Council and in violation of the UN Charter and norms and principles of international law’, Putin (2018). Russia not only criticized the action as a ‘disgraceful act’ but also halted its military cooperation with the US in Syria. Showing the importance of Russia and

⁶ Shayrat is an important airbase of Syria

Syria relationship, President Vladimir Putin's spokesperson Peskov also emphasized on the possibility of the impact this military attack could inflict upon US-Russia relationship and could lead to a 'significant blow' to the ties of both the countries. He also denied the possession of any chemical weapon by the Syrian Army and its use against its own people. Bashar al Assad while reacting to US missile attack on Syria indicated that the attack which the US claimed a response to the misuse of chemical weapons by Syria in the Idlib Province and against its own people is nothing but 'a false propaganda campaign'. In an official statement it was mentioned that the strike would not deter Syria's commitment and its spirit in its fight against terrorism on the soil of Syria and the attack shows, 'shortsightedness and political and military blindness to reality' (MacFarquhar 2017).

Other countries on chemical weapon use by Syria:

Iran, who has been supporting Syria along with Russia, strongly condemned the American strike while focusing on the fact that this may lead to strengthening of the terrorist activities in Syria. Iran's Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Behram Ghasemi expressed his concern regarding the use of chemical weapon during Iran-Iraq war and Iran being a victim of the chemical weapon attack during the war. Though he condemned the use of the chemical weapons against anyone and anywhere in the world, he emphasised on the fact that nothing has been proved regarding the involvement of Syrian government in the chemical weapon attack. But Ghasemi was quite vociferous in his expression against the unilateral action of USA which he termed as 'dangerous, destructive and violation of International Law' (MacFarquhar 2017).

UK, France, Germany, Israel, Turkey and Saudi Arabia joined the US club and supported American action against Syria. Michael Fallon, Britain's Defence Secretary in his interview came in support of the attack and defended the US action claiming that it was intended to prevent the regime from using the harmful gas in an inappropriate manner. In a joint statement Germany and France held President Bashar al- Assad as solely responsible for the action. Turkey supported the US air attack and held Syria responsible for the use of chemical weapon. Ibrahim Kalin, the spokesperson of President Recep Tayyip Erdogan of Turkey considered American airstrike against Syria as a 'positive response to war crime in Syria' (MacFarquhar 2017).

While analysing the legality vs. illegality question of the US strikes in Syria, Behmer who was trying to justify Trump's overall action on Syria, however stated that 'Trump's action were arguably illegal violations of International law because it was an act of aggression, it was not done in self-defence, it was not approved by the United Nation and it was not in line with the principles of *Jus in Bello* (the law in the war)' (Behmer 2019). Many commentators have criticised the US air strike on al-Shayrat as an unjustifiable act of aggression by the United States against Syria violating Article VII of the United Nations Charter. Criticising the action of the United States, Russian President Vladimir Putin asked Washington to bear the responsibility of this act in future and stated that, 'The current escalation around Syria is destructive for the entire system of international relations. History will set things right, and Washington already bears the heavy responsibility for the bloody outrage in Yugoslavia, Iraq and Libya' (Putin 2018).

Since state sovereignty has been facing so many challenges with developments of new norms such as Humanitarian Intervention and Responsibility to Protect etc, the idea or status of sovereignty no longer seems to be absolutely intact. The above new principles have not yet received complete recognition in International laws because they are still regarded as customary laws. Even though these are regarded as 'not established law', still these principles have been used in the past as pretexts to intervene in sovereign countries; Kosovo and Libya serves as instances where state sovereignty has been compromised. Syrian sovereignty can also get further compromised on several other pretexts. By accusing a state of fighting alongside or siding with terrorism, more inroads can be made in future to intervene in a sovereign country like Syria. While analysing the legality of the US intervention in Syria and its airstrikes against the country, there has emerged another new dimension that is the legality vs. the legitimacy issue. Despite use of many pretexts to legitimise the action, US attack on Syria has been regarded by many analysts and scholars as illegal and violation of the International laws. Now things have started getting more complicated because we find debates and discussions regarding the legitimacy of the American strike regardless of the fact that it had not followed legal procedures while going for attacks against Syria.

IMPACT OF THE SYRIAN CRISIS:

Impact on the economic and social life of the Syrian people:

IMF in its report on the impact of the Syrian crisis has very clearly stated that ‘Syria’s people are battling the crippling effects of the conflict, including widespread unemployment and poverty, homelessness, food and medicine shortages, and destruction of public services and infrastructure. Children have been profoundly affected by the war’, (IMF 2016).

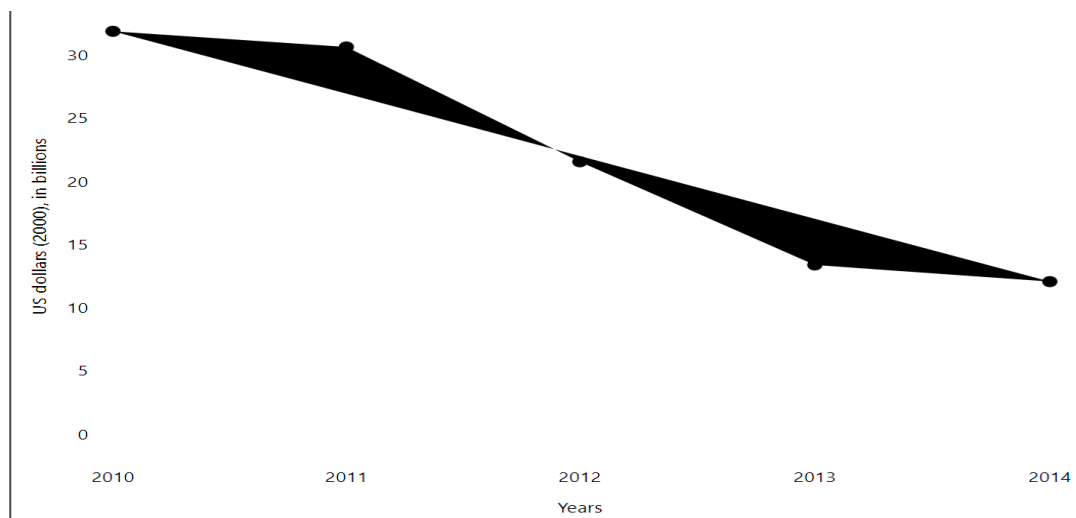
War has never been good for the humanity. Wars have always proved catastrophic for the socio-economic life of people who live in the conflict situation. Syrian crisis has severely affected the economy and the social life of the Syrian people. Syrian GDP has been severely affected and has shrunk to an unexpectedly low level. Continuation of the conflict for such a long time has various implications for the Syrian people and for the whole country. The crisis has not only obstructed the country from progressing towards the direction of growth and development, rather it has impacted the life of the people in a negative manner. Country’s GDP has fallen sharply, budget deficit has increased, poverty has further deepened, and children are deprived of education, nutrition and health facilities. A collapsing economy has led to the impoverishment of the people and dwindling value of the currency. Living standard of the people has fallen. The crisis has taken the lives of many Syrians and millions have left their country in order to live as refugees in bordering countries. In their statements on the impact of the Syrian crisis, Council members of the UNICEF noted, ‘A deepening economic crisis is placing adequate nutrition out of reach for millions of families. The year 2019 saw the highest number of food-insecure people in the country’s history’ and ‘the war’s ripple effect on Syria’s neighbours including Jordan, Lebanon, Iraq, Egypt and Turkey - is affecting host and refugee communities alike, and straining economies and services, and straining emotions, patience and generosity’, (UNICEF 2020).

With the starting of the uprising and its continuation the declining trend of the Syrian economy also began gradually. Though initially the fall started slow but gradually with the passing years and increasing intensity of the uprising, the economy had to face worrisome impact. It started with a 2.3% decline in real GDP with inflation rate being about 5% and fiscal deficit touching 9% of the GDP following certain measures like increase in expenditure on military, state subsidies and decreasing tax revenue (Khan and Itany 2013). In a working paper of IMF, it was found that, ‘the devastating civil war has set the country back decades in terms of economic, social and human development. Syria’s GDP by 2014 reduced to less than half of what it was before the

war started and it could take two decades or more for Syria to return to its pre-conflict GDP levels; and that while reconstructing damaged physical infrastructure will be a monumental task, rebuilding Syria’s human and social capital will be an even greater and lasting challenge’, (Gobat and Kostial 2016).

Figure: 1

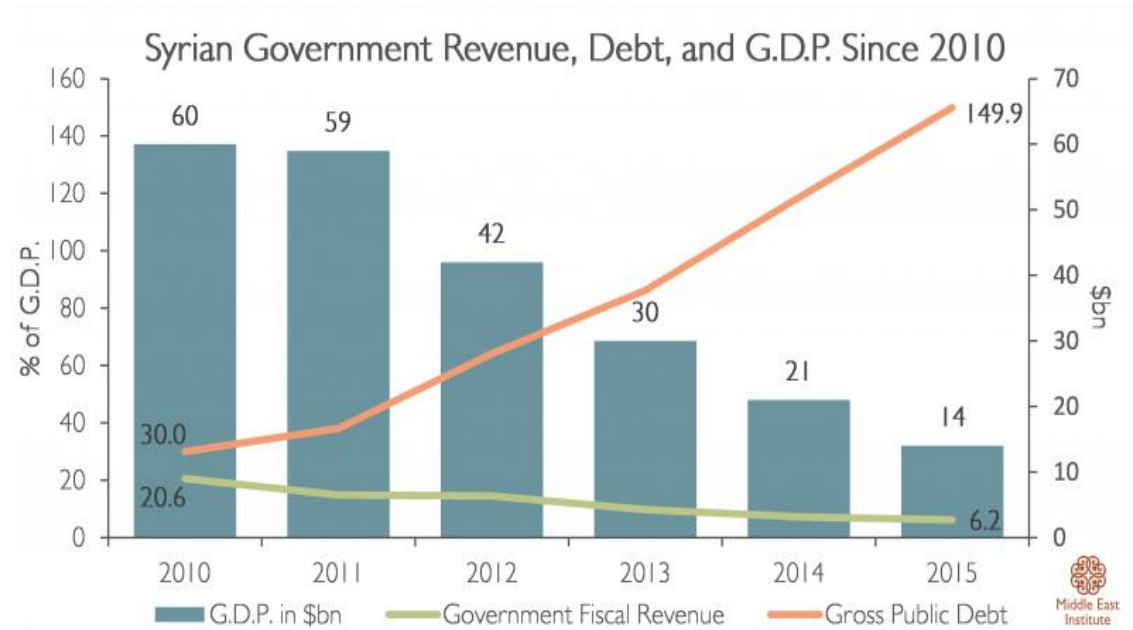
Syria’s GDP, 2010-2014



(Sources: Syrian Center for Policy Research and OAND, <https://www.vox.com/2015/11/12/9714152/syria-charts>)

In Figure (1) it can be seen that in just four years that is from 2010 to 2014 how Syria has faced a declining trend which has intensified in the later years. About 80% of the Syrian people are living in poverty due to the impact of the war. Joblessness has affected the standard of living of the people and unemployment level had reached 40% in the year 2019. Purchasing power of the people has greatly reduced. Price of essential commodities has mounted to an uncomfortable level and in such a situation people are not even able to maintain the daily needs from their earning. As observed by Hubbard, ‘The war has throttled Syria’s economy, reducing it to a third the size it was before the war and taking a toll thought to be in the hundreds of billions of dollars’, (Hubbard 2020).

Figure: 2

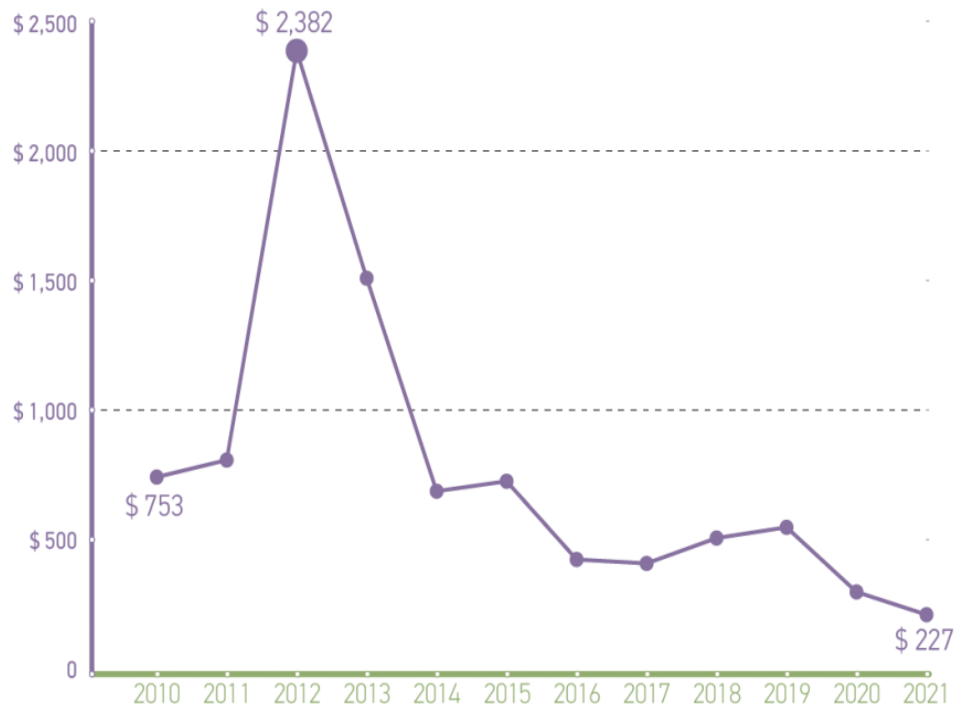


(Source: IMF, <https://www.mei.edu/publications/debt-ridden-and-broke-syrian-regimes-colossal-reconstruction-challenge>).

In the above graph (Figure: 2) Syria's overall economic picture is given. It shows the declining rate of all economic indicators from 2010 to 2015. Syria's GDP performance, and its Fiscal Revenue have declined to worrying levels. At the same time, the country's Gross Public Debt have shown a steep rise. As per UN reports, Syrian government registered a 95% short fall in its Fiscal Revenue collection between 2010 to 2015 financial year. And, because of the war the economy has been impacted negatively resulting in a loss in its GDP. While Syrian government was struggling to manage a war ravaged economy in 2015, it had to bear with a budgetary deficit of 86.3% along with carrying a burden of 150% of debt of its GDP (Schneider 2017).

Figure: 3

Syria's per-capita budget declines by 70% since 2010

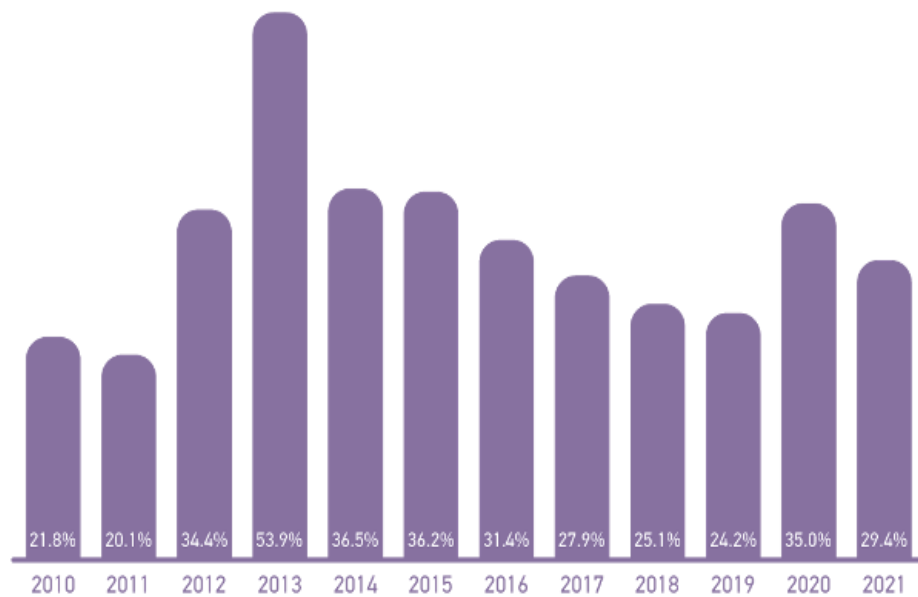


(Source: Atlantic Council, <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/menasource/2021-budget-reveals-the-depth-of-syrias-economic-woes/>)

Syrian currency 'Pound' depreciated sharply and this resulted in slowing down of other economic activities, which had an overall impact on Syrian economic performance. Syrian budget for 2021 is considered as the smallest ever since 2011 when the crisis began. A substantial contraction is seen in Syrian government spending which has seen a decline by 70% since 2010 (as cited in Figure: 3). Due to the economic slowdown, Syria's per capita expenditure has been reduced, implying the severity of economic scenario. The extent of budgetary deficit of Syrian government can be seen from the percentage increase it has experienced since 2010. In the Figure (No: 4), Syria's official budgetary deficit is given from 2010 to 2021, which has increased from 21.8% in 2010 to 29.4% in 2021. From a general understanding we can see that government expenditure would be three times lesser in 2021 (about 11.7 million expenditures in 2020) compared to 2010 spending (about 21.4 million). Government revenue generation has been shrinking continuously which has resulted in a decline in Syrian budgetary spending. Revenue has lowered to 83%

from its 2010 level. Christou and Shaar have found that, ‘the projected revenues for the 2021 budget currently sit at around 6 trillion Syrian pounds (\$2.1 billion), creating a budget deficit of 2.5 trillion Syrian pounds (\$902 million)’ (Christou and Shaar 2020).

Figure: 4
Official Budget Deficit of Syria since 2011

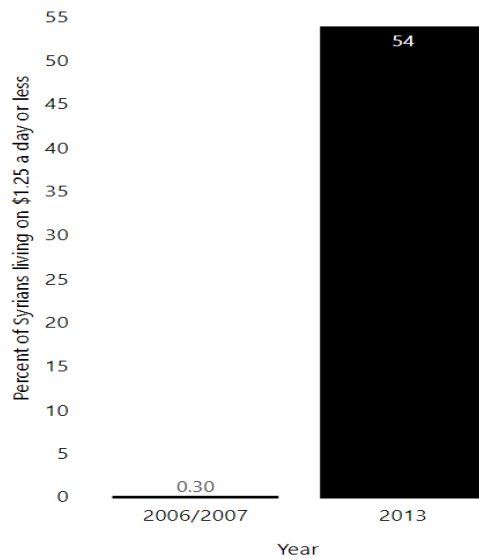


(Source: Atlantic Council, <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/menasource/2021-budget-reveals-the-depth-of-syrias-economic-woes/>)

From 2010 to 2021 is quite a long span for a civil war to continue. Syrian civil war had already started showing signs of its devastation within a few years of its unfolding. Huge economic loss had already been incurred, 80 percent of people had slipped into poverty and about three million Syrian people had already lost their job due to the conflict. The Guardian of UK quoted a report of UN where it is mentioned that, ‘As huge swatches of the community have lost the opportunity to work and earn an income, just over 4 in 5 Syrians now live in poverty’, and ‘As it has become a country of poor people, 30% of the population have descended into abject poverty where households struggle to meet the basic food needs to sustain bare life’, (The Guardian 2015).

Figure: 5

Percentage of people in extreme poverty in Syria



(Source: UN Development Program and UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, <https://www.vox.com/2015/11/12/9714152/syria-charts>)

Impact on Children:

Syrian crisis which has continued for more than 10 years has affected the life of children undermining their right to life to a great extent. While throwing light upon the condition of children in war ravaged Syria, UNICEF's Executive Director Henrietta Fore (2021) stressed on the fact that 'Generation of children growing up knowing nothing but war'. They are living in an atmosphere of violence, displacement, fear and insecurity of life, food and every essential service. As per UNICEF alarming situation is prevailing in Syria, nearly half million children are suffering from malnourishment, millions of children are still displaced, high rise in food insecurity has increased the difficulty of the people to afford food on a daily basis. People are leaving their places in search of safety. Since schools are destroyed and damaged, about 2.45 million children are not able to access education in their schools. 'Every Syrian Child has been impacted by the violence, displacement, severed family ties and lack of vital access to vital services caused by massive physical devastation' and COVID-19 Pandemic has only deepened this crisis with a reported case of 48,000 in late March 2021' has been reported by UNICEF (2020). Grave child rights violations have been observed in Syria and in other places where Syrian people are living as refugees. Various concerns regarding the protection of

children have been reported which shows the intensity of the children getting victimized due to the Syrian crisis. Alleged association of the children in various armed groups and their recruitment, detention by various rebel groups has been a cause of concern. Many children have been killed, abused, injured and made to suffer inhuman sufferings. Even amongst the Syrian refugees the children have become the most vulnerable getting exposed to unhealthy and inhuman condition. Due to the continuous flow of Syrian refugees in to its neighbouring countries like Jordan, Egypt, Lebanon, Iraq and Turkey, it has been seen that by 2019 as many as one million children specifically the newly born were suffering from the harsh realities of displacement. It's because of the number of refugees having gone beyond the managing capacity of the host countries, who claim of exhaustion of their resources. Yassin and others in their work have specifically highlighted the impact of the Syrian war upon the children and their vulnerability factor and have observed that, 'By the beginning of 2018, over five million Syrian refugees were displaced to Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, and Lebanon as the result of the war in Syria'. UNHCR's data on refugees currently residing in the above four countries showed that the large majority of refugees, approximately 63%, originate from four governorates in Syria: Aleppo (17.2%), Homs (17.5%), Dara'a (16.7%), and Rural Damascus (12.2%)', (Yassin 2019).

War has impacted even the life expectancy of the people and brought it down to 1967 level. The war situation has completely broken the health care system in Syria. Most of the hospitals have become dysfunctional and some that are running do so despite being partially damaged. Shortage of medical equipments, medicines and other health care services are falling short. Due to the unhygienic and unhealthy conditions many people in Syria are suffering from different health issues like cholera and polio, which were eradicated earlier by 1999 in Syria but have again broken out due to lack of timely treatment. Along with health services, war has also deprived Syrian children from accessing to education. Due to continuous war situation and violence more than half of children in Syria are not able to get enrolled in school and those who are in school are also not getting it in a complete sense. While 49.20% are enrolled in schools, 50.80% are out of getting this essential service which is not good for the future of the country (Beauchamp 2015). As per the document of the World Bank it has been reported that the enrolment rate of the children in schools has reduced to 61% in 2018 from 82% in 2010 (World Bank 2019).

Refugee Crisis:

When the Syrian Civil War engulfed the whole country it's the Syrian people who became the worst victim of the War. Devastation, destructions and violence became the scene not for a short time but for a prolonged period of more than 10 years. Human capital was seriously impacted. Loss of everything to live a normal life was the result. Scarcity of essential items, a collapsing economy, and broken health facilities, lack of access to education and above all absence of a peaceful environment multiplied the plight of the Syrian people. Getting no other alternative and in search of a safe place to live Syrian people started leaving their place and continued to enter in to other neighbouring countries as refugees. The escalation of the conflict got so intense that millions of Syrians kept leaving their homes and the country, increasing the percentage of refugee. As per the report of the UNHCR (2021), 'More than 70 percent of Syrian refugees live in poverty and a World Bank - UNHCR report estimates that an additional one million Syrian refugees, along with 4.4 million members of their host communities in Jordan, Lebanon and Iraq, were pushed into poverty in the immediate aftermath of the pandemic'. IMF has termed the Syrian crisis as 'a humanitarian disaster' and in just one year of crisis that is from 2010 to 2011 the population of Syria reduced by 20% (IMF 2016).

As per the UNHCR, the number of refugees from Syria in its neighbouring countries was about 5.6 million. But if it includes those who are not registered, then the number increases to more than 6 million. Here only three neighbouring countries are talked about such as Egypt, Jordan and Lebanon. It is clearly mentioned in the World Bank report that, 'According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), there are about 5.6 million registered refugees from Syria in neighboring countries. However, referring to the unregistered refugees in just three countries of Egypt, Jordan and Lebanon, would raise the aggregate number to more than 7 million' (UNHCR, 2019).

Focusing on the impact of the Syrian war on the socio-economic life of the Syrian people, World Bank in its regional assessment has found that Syrian conflict disconnected the trade and transit routes through which bilateral trade and other commercial transactions were taking place. The crisis not only destabilised the entire region of West Asia but also resulted in 'largest displacement crisis since the World War-II'. And the impact was so huge that even the neighbouring countries also had to

face economic losses, less flow in to the labour market and increase in the rate of poverty (World Bank 2021).

UN Secretary General Mr. Guterres expressed his deep concern on the ongoing situation in Syria and the kind of troubles the Syrian people have been facing throughout such a long period of time. While replying to the journalists on the current situation in Syria, he stressed on the fact that, 'It is impossible to fully fathom the extent of the devastation in Syria, but its people have endured some of the greatest crimes the world has witnessed this century' and on this he also emphasised on the need to provide humanitarian assistance to the people who are living under persistent risk, he further stated, 'More humanitarian access is needed. Intensified cross-line and cross-border deliveries are essential to reach everyone in need everywhere. This is why I have repeatedly urged the Security Council to achieve consensus on this crucial matter' (UN News 2021). The impact of the civil war has been so intense that it seems to be a tough challenge before the whole International community, UN, the Syrian government and the Syrian people themselves to get back to the normal life and restore stability.

CHPATER-III

RUSSIA IN SYRIAN CRISIS

Syrian crisis has not only provided an opportunity for Russia to emerge as a key player but also a platform to pursue its ambitions, secure its national interests and reassert its influence. Russian involvement in the Syrian crisis has helped it in creating an image not only as a regional power but still possessing the capability of being considered as major global power. Given the kind of role Russia has played in Syria and the success it has been able to achieve in its plan and operations in the Syrian campaign, it becomes essential to look into its involvement the Syria and understand its significance as a major power player.

Russia in Syrian civil war:

Before the direct involvement of Russia in a turbulent Syrian affair, it was the Syrian government which was fighting all alone, although with the indirect help of its allies. The uprising had already begun in 2011 and Syria was struggling through the civil war, losing most of its important cities to the rebel forces. Though Russia had not set its foot militarily in the war ravaged Syrian ground but it backed the Syrian government with all its support and assistance in the form of military weaponry and other essential shipments. The Syrian Arab Army (SAA), which received support from the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) of Iran and kept fighting with the rebel groups and the terrorist organizations like ISIS (Islamic State of Iraq and Syria) also known as ISIL (Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant), had lost its control over some of its cities like Raqqa, Hassakeh, Deraa, Deir Az Zor and Aleppo etc. In March 2015 Assad's government also lost another important province named Idlib, located in the North West of Syria, to a terrorist organization called Jeish al-Fattah (a coalition of armed groups). As the civil war progressed, the Syrian government lost more and more provinces to the opposition and many areas like Hama and Homs were on the verge of getting overtaken by the rebels. In such a critical situation, Russia made its official entry in to Syrian civil war when Bashar al Assad's government was under tremendous pressure and facing an imminent threat of losing its authority (Petkova 2020).

It was on 30th September 2015 that Russia began its formal entry into Syrian crisis which changed the dynamics of the civil war in many ways. As soon as it entered the Syrian sky it came in with airstrikes against the targeted locations occupied by the terrorist organizations. Russia's Air operation in Syria in 2015 was its biggest ever operation in West Asia in decades (Williams 2017). It's not that Russian activities in

Syria and especially military interventions happened all of a sudden without any formal procedure. Following the request of the Syrian President Bashar al-Assad for military assistance, Russia responded positively and prior to the intervention President Assad had already written a letter in this respect to Vladimir Putin. In this regard, an official statement was issued from Presidency media office that “Any increase in Russian military support to Syria happened and is happening as a result of a request from the Syrian state”. It also further clarified that the request that Syria made was according to the International laws governing the ties between two states which aimed “to realise the interests of their nations and guarantee the integrity of their lands”, (Perry and Stonestreet 2015).

With the approval of its Parliament, Russia proceeded with the deployment of its military which was executed through specifically Air operations. Though there were so many other objectives behind the entry and a properly planned strategy, but the immediate reason that was declared by Russia was to fight terrorism and there by protect Assad’s regime from ISIS. It started airstrikes at some targeted places claiming those to be occupied by the terrorists. Though there were different motives, the immediate objective was fighting terrorism. ‘Over the past decades, we have accumulated significant experience of cooperation in various areas’, Putin said, adding that ‘today, Russia and Syria are allies in the fight against international terrorism and extremism’, and he further emphasized, ‘I am confident that through joint efforts, we will defeat terrorist forces on Syrian soil’, (Tass 2019).

WHY DID RUSSIA INTERVENE IN SYRIA?

Russia’s intervention in Syria can be understood in this analysis. There are several reasons behind Russian involvement in Syria. The most significant reason being the protection of National interest. In Syria Russia has several vested interests which will be explored in the following analysis.

To protect Assad’s regime:

Russia-Syria relationship is not new and they have been close to each other during the time of the Soviet Union. It was during the Cold War that Russia had developed close relationship with Syria. By then Syria was ruled by Bashar Al Assad’s father Hafez al-Assad. The relationship between both the countries rose to another level of closeness with the ratification of a treaty between Hafez al-Assad and the erstwhile

USSR in 1971. As a result of this treaty Soviet Union got the permission from Syria to use its Tartus port as a naval base which is still used by Russia. Russia was supplying military weapons to Syria, whose importance for Russia was significant because the port Tartus was located in the Mediterranean. The installation of this naval facility in the Mediterranean became another strong point in bringing both Russia and Syria closer to each other. As a result of an agreement with Hafez al-Assad, Soviet Union established its naval facility in Tartus to maintain its continuous presence in the region which Russia considers quite vital for its interest not only in Syria but also in the whole region of West Asia. Though after the dissolution of the Soviet Union and consequent gradual withdrawal of the Soviet fleet from the Mediterranean Sea the importance of the Syrian base for Russia started to decline for the time being. But Russia didn't miss the opportunity in making this base more active given the situation of the Syrian crisis. After a long gap of getting poorly equipped, Tatus naval base was resupplied with all facilities from Russia making it fully operational and ready for any situation. For Russia, Syria is an important ally since strengthening its relationships with Syria could help Moscow pursue its interests in the West Asian region along with maintaining its presence (A. Ahmed 2018). There is a possibility that removal of Assad may create obstructions for fulfilling Russian interests in Syria and in the region.

In the context of protecting Assad and retaining Russia's presence at Tartus, Synovitz argues, 'Russian vetoes of UN Security Council resolutions against Assad's crackdown on dissent, as well as Russian weapons sales to the regime, make it likely that an opposition government replacing Assad would try to strip away Russia's rights to use Tartus', (Synovitz 2010). Russia considers Syria as an important ally to sustain its presence in West Asia. And for this, continuation of Assad's regime is essential for Moscow. Russia has its specific interests in Syria and in the West Asian region as a whole which can be fulfilled with the help of a trusted ally like Assad. Tass has reported Putin's statement where he stressed that, 'We believe that boosting Russian-Syrian ties is in our common interest and will help secure regional and global peace and stability,' (Tass 2019).

When Assad's existence was threatened and the West led by USA was bent upon the removal of Bashar al-Assad's regime, it was Russia which took the threat seriously and immediately acted to save the regime because saving Assad's regime was protecting Russia's own interests. Since Russia and Syria are allies and both share a

long term relationship, it is a concern for Russia that its ally could succumb to the pressure of the West. So in order to save its image as an ally and prevent the victory of the West over Syria, Moscow threw all its might to protect Assad. And if ISIS had achieved a victory over Damascus then, it would have been a great success for terrorism in the West Asian region as whole. Therefore, it was essential to save Assad and his regime. Stressing on the importance of Russia's help to Assad and its worth, Simmons believes that, 'Russian military involvement has succeeded in at least temporarily stabilizing the situation, allowing the Assad regime to win back territory that had been taken by the rebels' (Simmons 2017). 'Russia's repeated use of its veto has effectively protected Assad from serious intervention with a UN mandate', as expressed by Lemnitzer (2018). Had Assad's regime been toppled down, it would have definitely dealt a blow to Russian interests in region because Libya, another former West Asian ally of Russia, was no more of any help after the regime change there. In 2011, with the help of the West, Muammar Gaddafi was dethroned and his regime was put to an end for which Vladimir Putin (then Prime Minister of Russia) even criticised Dmitry Medvedev, the then President of Russia, for not objecting to the move (Petkova 2020).

Russia was in good terms with Libyan leader Gaddafi for a long time and this relationship was benefiting Russia economically, since Russia was gaining a substantial amount from arms sale with Libya under Gaddafi and there was also a plan for a trade deal worth billions waiting to get executed in the near future. But the fall of Muammar Gaddafi was not only disappointing for Russia from trade point of view but also in terms of changing geopolitical situation in West Asia. In this scenario, another alternative for Russia was Assad in Syria, who as a potential ally in the Arab region would help Moscow in strengthening its foothold and pursue its national interests. According to Margot Light, a Professor at London School of Economics and a critic of Russian policy, 'They were thinking not in the interests of Syria, but in their own interests' (Jones 2017). Further by protecting Assad, Russia also wanted to prove that at times of need Russia has always been with its ally. Confirming to this Simmons (2017) stated, 'The intention was to preserve the credibility of the image of Russia as a reliable friend'. From the neorealist perspective it is quite obvious that a state seeks to protect its national interest and gives it utmost priority.

To fight terrorism as a security concern:

From the security point of view West Asian region occupies an important place in Russian strategy. One of the most serious security issues that Russia has been concerned with is the threat of terrorism. In so far as the Arab spring was concerned, Russia looked at it from a different angle. Being more protective about its future and to avoid such kind of situations in coming time, Russia was worried about its security and took each step in the direction of ensuring its security and survival.

In so far as the security factor is concerned, terrorism has been a cause of worry for Russia. It has the potential of breaching the security shield of the country. Since Russia in the past has experienced terrorist and extremist challenges in its North Caucasus region, the growing terrorist activities in Syria may encourage the same in this already volatile area. Therefore, from security aspect Russia wanted not only to fight terrorism in Syria but to eliminate them. If we analyse intensively it can't be ignored that Russia's another important objective behind Syrian intervention was to fight terrorism in Syria. When it comes to the issue of terrorism, Russia's readiness to fight extremism or ISIS not only signifies its concern for protecting its ally but also ensuring its own security. Oligie has mentioned the same stating, 'Russia thinks it fit to fight terrorism in Syria so as to prevent the reemergence of terrorism in its North Caucasus region'. He also added that, 'Bashar al-Assad ... officially invited Russia that same month to intervene in the civil war to help combat Islamist terrorist groups, especially ISIS', (Oligie 2019).

Though there are several reasons behind Russian intervention in Syria but it cannot be set aside that Russia's justification for the getting militarily involved in the Syrian civil war was to eliminate the terrorist threat. Though the move was not absolutely based on the terrorist cause but it cannot be repudiated Moscow has suffered a lot due to terrorism and it considers terrorism and extremism as a security threat.

Russia's direct military intervention took place in Syria at a time when Islamic State of Iraq and Syria had taken control over Palmyra a Syrian city and Jabhat al-Nusra an extremist group was indulged in anti-regime activities the north western Syria. By this time Islamic State had brought substantial number of cities and territories under its control and it seemed if this trend continued for long and the terrorist groups are not stopped then it would have led to absolute defeat of the Assad's regime. Since Russia was keeping an eye on the situations in Syria, it could easily perceive the need to intervene timely and save the regime from the wrath of the terrorist activities. By

2014 ISIS had already established its hold over several cities and crushed Syrian forces along with some of the opposition rebels. Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi the self-proclaimed leader of the Islamic State of Iraq had shifted its focus from Iraq to Syria and declared to establish a caliphate over large portions of territories from both Iraq and Syria. By declaring himself the leader of the caliphate, he spearheaded the fight under the name of Islamic State and promoted it as a movement. In 2015 before Palmyra Al Nusra front had captured Idlib and in the month of May Palmyra was seized by the IS. For Moscow there was enough reason to realise that Al Nusra might come near Latakia which is considered as important place for Russia from the strategic point of view and even ISIS threat to Damascus could not be neglected. It was on these prevailing conditions Kremlin decided to intervene in Syria though on the request of Syrian President Bashar al Assad. It landed at the Khmeimim airbase located in the Latakia province. With this Russia launched its first military operation beyond the borders of the erstwhile Soviet Union since the end of the cold war (Borshchevskaya2020).

However, for Russians it was the security concern that led to its intervention in Syria. It is believed that Russia was not ready for such a massive and long scale of military operation in Syria. And therefore it took kind of four years to take such a decision to get militarily involved. But it was the need of the hour and the necessity of the situation that made Russia to act. Even Russia has been stressing on the importance of political solution to the crisis. So it was the seeming defeat of the Syrian government that led Russia come to its rescue from the terrorists and from imminent fall of the regime. It was not only the fact that Moscow was doing all this only to save its ally rather as per the neo realist principle security concern was considered quite essential by Russia because of the exponential growth of the ISIS in Syria and in the Middle East region. In this respect Valery Gerasimov, the Chief of General Staff of Russian Armed force in his briefings emphasised on the concern arising due to intensification of the terrorist and extremist activities specifically in North Africa, Middle East and Central Asia which has posed threat not only for Russia but also for the whole World. Primarily focussing on the ISIS activities in Syria and Russian timely intervention Mr. Gerasimov stated that, 'In 2015, when the Russian Aerospace Forces started their operation, the Syrian government controlled some 10% of the territory. With support of the Russian Aerospace Forces, most part of

the country was liberated and the government regained control over such key settlements as Palmyra, Aleppo, Uqayribat, Deir ez-Zor and Abu Kamal', (Gerasimov 2018).

For Russia it was clear that fall of Syrian government which was fighting against the ISIS and defeat of Assad's regime would lead to victory of terrorism and extremism posing threat to Russian security. If it we deeply look into it for a while, it can be understood that for Moscow both saving Assad's regime and fighting terrorism complement each other and supports Russia's justification of its intervention in Syria. Saving Assad would mean joining the fight against terrorism and in order to defeat terrorism Russia stood in support of Syrian government which was struggling to control the ISIS as well as other rebel groups in the opposition front.

From Russian point of view survival of the Assad's regime was quite essential because it would have led to unexpected consequences for Moscow. Since Kremlin considers Assad's regime a legitimate one and has been sharing long term relationship with it, there was this ground to justify its intervention. But from the perspective of fighting against the terrorist threat has been given importance here. Though Syrian conflict has so many other grounds to get defined but in this context the conflict is between the Syrian government and terrorism. Thus when Russia entered in to Syria it perceived the conflict as the fight between terrorist forces and a secular state. And with this Russia could resemble its own struggle to control the Muslim separatist in Chechnya and its war in Afghanistan to get rid of the Mujahedeen. With this the situation in Libya where ISIS could thrive because of the western induced military operation led to overthrow of Gaddafi and in the absence of a long survived regime nothing could get restored that resulted into chaos and instability in the country. It is believed that absence of 'accurate intelligence' and well defined strategy in the post military campaign bears the responsibility of such condition in Libya. It is because of the western led military operation lacking a post war strategy gave the rebel groups and the Islamic State benefit of opportunity to exploit the situation. Since downfall of Gaddafi resulted into political instability, economic collapse, tribal warfare, human rights issues, for IS it was easy to maneuver. Merrick in his analysis has argued that, 'The bloody collapse of Libya - which triggered a refugee crisis and aided the rise of ISIS - is blamed today on David

Cameron's blunders when he intervened to overthrow Colonel Gaddafi', (Merrick 2016). I have also been further stressed that, 'After Gaddafi was toppled, Libya descended into violence, with rival governments and the formation of hundreds of militias, while so-called Islamic State, also known as ISIL and Daesh, has gained a foothold', (DNA 2016).

Concerning terrorism in Syria Russia was worried of a security threat from the ISIS in Syria. Somehow Moscow was linking the growth of extremism and terrorist activities in Syria with its domestic condition. Since Russia's Muslim population is largest in Europe and proximity with Muslim populated areas in Caucasus and Central Asia Russia apprehends similar kind of threat in its own land. The experiences it has in the past such as the Islamic rebellion in Chechnya, other terrorist attacks and extremist links in the Middle East from Russia have made it to envision a threat perception. Charap has quoted President Vladimir Putin who stated on containing the ISIS in the Syrian soil that, 'take the initiative and fight and destroy the terrorists in the territory they have already captured rather than waiting for them to arrive on our soil', and General Gerasimov stated, 'ISIS would have continued to gather momentum and would have spread to adjacent countries. We would have had to confront that force on our own territory. They would be operating in the Caucasus, Central Asia, and the Volga region [of Russia]', (Charap et al. 2019). Though many have been suspicious about Russia's move on this particular context but Moscow has quite confidently explained the terrorist threat as a security threat to itself.

As stressed by Phillips (2020) 'The presence of Chechens and other Islamists from Southern Caucasus was deeply unsettling to Russia. Rebel advances presented a risk to Russian bases in Latakia and Tartous, threatening Russia's warm water port on the Mediterranean. Rebels also threatened Iran's corridor through Iraq and Syria to Lebanon that was supplying Hezbollah with sophisticated missiles to attack Israel'. Thus, if we talk from the regional point of view, then Russia considers security threat to the West Asia region as a potential threat to its own security. Because of its close proximity with the region, Russia does not want instability in this sphere. 'Middle East is closer to Russia than it is to us [in the UK], or the USA - so they find unrest there a security threat', stated Margot Light (Jones 2017).

Another aspect which is associated with Russian intervention in Syria and can't be ignored altogether is the fear of 'Colour Revolution'. Moscow had also some apprehensions about the possibility of similar kind of anti-government uprisings in its own region. (Petkova 2020).

Strategic and Geopolitical Reason:

In so far as the geopolitics is concerned, Russia has emerged being a major player in Syria. It helped Basher al Assad in every manner. Russia secured Assad's regime which was on the verge of collapse. With all its might, starting from financial support to military help, from diplomatic assistance to being a front line saviour, Russia has been a rescuer for Syria. It not only provided ground and air support to a falling government but also infused enough strength and confidence in the Syrian government by bringing it even to the table of negotiation. Looking at the kind of different negotiations, engagement and platforms Russia is presenting itself, it is quite clear that Russia has been trying to expand its reach in the Middle East. Whether it is about talking to Kurds to bring them a solution or to get involved in Afghan Peace talk, Russia is trying its hands to be a negotiator. Though after the fall of Soviet Union in 1991 Russia lost its super power status, lost its erstwhile strength and still struggles on many fronts like economy and population issues etc, today there is no doubt that Russia has been trying to emerge as a major power. And it is also evident from many recent events that Russia can't be ignored. Russia has been projecting military might and presenting its diplomatic capability on many fronts. Despite getting confronted with many domestic challenges along with Western sanctions, Russia is showing signs of resurging and reasserting its influence (TRT World 2017). 'President Putin's alliance with his Syrian counterpart is based not just upon history but hard geopolitics' as Marcus (2020) emphasised.

One of the many reasons that have made Russia to intervene in Syria is the geopolitical gain. Following the Ukrainian crisis and consequent occupation of Crimea by Russia, the Western-led sanctions had significantly impacted Russian economy. Russia wanted these sanctions to get revoked by the Western countries as soon as possible. So Russia was in search of such kind of opportunity where it could really get to negotiate with the West and get rid of these sanctions. Since the Western countries led by USA were deeply involved in the Syrian crisis, for Russia it was a chance to deal with the West and bring it to the negotiation table (Petkova 2020). As

it is believed by the (neo) realists that international actors do not compromise with their national interest and gives utmost importance to this it is quite obvious on the part of Russia to look out for fulfilling its national interests. Since Ukraine and Crimean incident was still fresh in Russian memory as the economic sanctions were still imposed from the part of the West, Moscow must have it in mind that Syrian intervention would add leverage in dealing with the West. It is also believed that Russia also wanted to cooperate with USA in Syria and interested in addressing the fundamental differences between the two.

The intention behind Russia militarily intervening Syria was to protect its geostrategic, geo political and geo economic advantages and strengthen its sphere of influence. Since for Russia considers Eastern Europe and Middle East very important from point of view of strategic importance, establishing its sphere of influence there in, was one of the important reasons behind directly getting involved in the Syrian civil war.

“Like previous Russian leaders dating back to centuries such as Peter the Great, the involvement of Russia in the Syrian civil war is President Putin’s deliberate action to reclaim and protect Russia’s strategic interests inclusive of the country’s regional economic zone as well as geopolitical and defence interests, knowing that his country has the particular natural geopolitical disadvantage of lack of considerable access to the sea for its naval forces, especially on the western side’ stressed by Oligie (2019).

Russia considers Syria as strategically important. Syria is situated at the centre of the Middle East. The western side of the country shares its coastline with the Mediterranean Sea which makes it strategically very important. Other Middle Eastern countries with who Syria shares its border are Iraq, Jordan, Israel, Turkey, Lebanon and Cyprus (which shares maritime border with Syria). Tartus port of Syria has been serving as naval base for Russia since 1971. Its access to the Mediterranean Sea has enhanced its importance. In so far as military strategy is concerned Russia considers Mediterranean as vital for its strategic interest. This permanent naval base is important for Russia because it serves as single surviving facility for Russia in the Middle East in so far as the military interest is concerned. It is considered as last of such kind facility outside the geographical boundary of the former Soviet Union where Russian warships avail services and Russian navy gets direct access to the Mediterranean Sea. The naval base is not only indispensable for Russia from military

uses but also from economic and strategic interests. It is said that Russia's support for Assad and its intervention in Syria is not only limited to protect only Assad and his regime but also to preserve and protect its own strategic interests. The naval presence in the Mediterranean is also somehow connected with its economic interests. As Oligie (2019) believes that 'Its provision of diplomatic and military supports for Bashar al-Assad respectively in the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) and in the fight against the Syrian opposition is intended to protect its military asset in Syria's port of Tartus which is near to the oil terminal of the Baku-Tiflis-Ceyhan pipeline from where huge amounts of oil are being shipped to Western Europe. This signals Russia's possible exercise of influence over energy export from the Middle East to Europe in the future'. Tartus as a deep water port has been used by Russia since the time of Soviet Union. Soviet Navy has used it for its submarines, dockings, loading fuels and other supply works. Since Soviet Union was a major weapon exporter to Syria, Tartus was used to receive imported arms supplies. Rabinovich believes that, 'Moscow attaches great strategic importance to the Russian naval base in Tartus and the airfield it acquired on the Syrian coast near Latakia' (Rabinovich 2016).

Russia is also operating Syria's Hmeimim Air Base which has come to its help in its operation in Syria. Moscow also sees Assad's forces fighting terrorism as a help to Russia in combating terrorism which has been a security issue for Russia. Because these Islamist and Jihadist activities may spread their influence in the Central Asian region with which Russia shares its borders (Jones 2017).

Since Soviet Union wound up its similar base in Egypt, it started focusing on the Tartus base by upgrading its capability. Even after the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, Tartus still remained as a base for Russia. During the Soviet period Russia (erstwhile USSR) and Syria had significant arms trade. After 1991 Syria had to pay a substantial amount to Russia but this issue was resolved in 2005 when a deal was signed between Russia and Damascus in which Russia wrote off its Soviet period debt of Russia. And in return Russia will continue to enjoy its right of maintain a Naval base in the Tartus Port. This also was in the interest of Syria as it could import more weapons on the same route without any hurdle and would continue having a

healthy relationship with Russia. From the logistics point of view Tartus facilitates both Russia and Syria (Synovitz 2010).

Nonetheless, the Port is considered as a transportation center for both the countries as it is used to receive shipments from Russia in the form of new purchases and send back the items for repair purpose which includes weapons used in war and helicopters etc. Along with maritime utility the Port has an undisturbed access to road, highway and other inland network connection in Syria with a railway facility connecting to even the Latakia Port in the North. Tartus Naval base helps in meeting the strategic interests of Russia and also fulfilling its geopolitical objectives. By accessing to the Port and maintaining a base here Russia gets access to the Eastern Mediterranean Sea. Russia maintains its Black Sea Fleet in the Sevastopol which is quite essential for it and all NATO members are also prevented from providing any kind of permission to establish military bases of foreign country in their territory (Martins 2010). In this situation Tartus Naval base has its own significance for Russia. If Moscow wants to stretch beyond the Black Sea then it has to take through the route of Bosphorus already militarised by Turkey. And as it is known that Turkey being a NATO member is restricted by its conditions and charter so it may not allow Moscow of accessing that route. Synovitz emphatically put forth his view that, ‘Tartus also strengthens Russia's great-power aspirations and increases its influence in regional diplomacy’ (Synovitz 2012).

Given the importance of the bases, Russia has deployed anti-aircraft missile system S-400 at the Hmeimem air base and also has been planning for an upgradation of the Tartus base. In Grinstead’s opinion, ‘Russia sees the security of these two military bases as a top priority and is willing to put its own forces on the line to safeguard them’ (Grinstead 2019). As per a bilateral agreement between Kremlin and Damascus signed in 2015 Russia is to place its group of Aerospace Forces in Latakia along with enhancing the naval facility in Tartus. Commenting upon the objective of this deployment of Russia in Syria’s Tartus and Latakia, McDermott has viewed that ‘the intent to increase the number of bases confirms Moscow’s long-term commitment to use Syria as the cornerstone of its overall Middle East strategy’, (McDermott 2020). Further, in the context of analysing the intention of these deployment, Anatoly Ivanov a Naval Expert from Moscow, stated, ‘From the coast of Syria, there is an opportunity

to control not only the eastern part, but the entire Mediterranean Sea’, and added further that, ‘If our powerful group can be in Syria on an ongoing basis, then this will significantly expand its potential and save money on its maintenance. The United States has in the Mediterranean Sea not only the ships of its 6th Fleet, but also an extensive ship repair base and training centers of the Navy. For Russia, the Mediterranean Sea is much closer not only geographically, but also geopolitically. Therefore, to use the opportunity to establish [itself] more densely in Syria seems to be a reasonable measure’, (Dorsey 2020). (Rabinovich 2016) emphasise, ‘Moscow attaches great strategic importance to the Russian naval base in Tartus and the airfield it acquired on the Syrian coast near Latakia’.

Map 1

Russian bases in Tartus and Latakia



(Source: VOA News, <https://www.voanews.com/middle-east/syrian-forces-again-used-chemical-weapons-us-says>)

Economic Interest:

Economically, Russia also considers Syria important. Starting from energy resources to arms deal, Russia has been deeply involved in Syria. Considering the commercial aspect Russia can't ignore Syria. In the field of arms export, Syria provides a large market for Russian arms. In so far as the supply of arms and weaponry is considered, their relationship as supplier (Russia) and consumer (Syria) is quite important for both the countries. After Bashar al-Assad came to power arms trade reached to a significant level. As per the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, between 2007 to 2012 Syria purchased 78% of its weapons from Russia and, according to the congressional Research Service, between 2007 to 2010 Russian arms supply to Syria was valued at \$4.7 billion (Borshchevskaya 2013).

Since Russia's GDP gets a significant contribution from its arms trade, it's quite natural for Russia not to take any risk of losing this leverage. Being a leading exporter of arms sales in the International market Russia values and considers the importance of its customers cum allies and does not want to lose them so easily. More importantly as Russian economy is not a diversified one like other major economies in the World such as China and Russia and hugely dependent upon energy and arms sector, it does not want to accept any loss on the contribution from these fields. In so far as Syria is concerned, for Russia it is an important consumer and the trade relationship is not new between these two countries rather it has been there since the time of cold war. Though more frequency and intensity came in to their trade relationships after both Vladimir Putin and Bashar al-Assad came to power in 2000. Of the total arms trade Russia controls in the International market

Another important sector where Russia has its interest and is depended upon is the energy sector. While Russia's dependence on the energy sector and importance of gas pipeline project has been taken as a factor by many scholars to prove it as logical reason behind Russian intervention in Syria, it has also countered by scholars as overhyped one. But since we are discussing the economic factor which analyses Russia's economic investments and future prospects in Syria, it is imperative to explore in to it.

In so far as the economic interest of Russia is concerned there is another aspect we can consider that is the energy and infrastructure sector. In this respect proposal for the construction of a gas pipe line project comes to the purview. Though the project has not been realised yet or any such developments in this regard has not taken place but it is needed to get mentioned given the kind of attention it has grabbed. That is plan for the construction of a gas pipeline project worth US \$ 10 billion. The pipe line would pass through Iran, Iraq and Syria and if really realised would make Syria the hub of production and assembly before reaching the market via Lebanon and Baniyas, Syria. It is also said that an agreement in this regard had already been signed by Syria, Iran and Iraq in 2011. 'This pipeline proposal, was rejected by the Assad government in the interests of its Russian ally, would run from Qatar's North Field through Syrian territory to Turkey for further exportation into the EU. This gas pipeline narrative further focusses on Russia's preference for the Islamic Pipeline when compared with the Qatari-proposed project, given Russia's more favourable links with Iran when compared with Qatar. This could be instrumental for Russia to control gas exports to Europe from the region, where Russia is the primary supplier of solid fuels, crude oil and natural gas to lucrative EU markets' as believed by Maher and Pieper (2020).

Russia to reassert its influence:

Within a year of its intervention in Syria, Russia was able to give a befitting reply to the opposition forces in there. Russian military forces along with its Iranian ally and Syrian Armed forces started gaining control over the city of Eastern Aleppo and within few months were successful in forcing the rebel forces to surrender and flee from the city. This not only boosted Russia's confidence but also proved that Russia could play a significant role in the Syrian crisis. Following the continuous retreat of the rebel brigades for which Russia is credited with and emergence of new platform like Astana Peace format where Russia had an essential role to play further strengthened its position. (Petkova 2020).

In 2017 Astana platform was launched as a peace initiative to reach out for a solution to the Syrian crisis. It comprised of almost all the major parties who were involved in Syria. Starting from the opposition armed forces to the Syrian government and other external powers such as Russia, Iran and Turkey were part of it. Surprisingly, there

were no Western countries including USA and no other Arab country in this, which implied that Russia was the leading negotiator in this matter. With the help of this initiative attempts were made by the parties to establish de-escalation zones which would help in bringing military operations to a pause mode. This helped the Syrian government to concentrate on its operations on specific fronts rather than being dispersed on many sites which resulted into taking control of areas which were held by the opposition forces (Petkova 2020).

Russia with its systematic moves was successful in protecting Assad's regime and to a great extent helped to clear its path for future by silencing those forces which were posing challenges to the legitimacy and continuity of the current Syrian leadership. Russia's increasing involvement in Syria and growing importance of its leadership role to resolve several issues in the Syrian crisis seem to have helped Moscow enhance its influence not only in Syria and the region but also beyond. We can see how countries are trying to mend their relationships with Russia. Turkey again joined Russia in its initiatives though initially it was strongly on the side of the West. It is also being seen that West Asian countries have been in touch with Moscow and keeping their diplomatic engagement intact. Leonid Isaev a senior lecturer from Higher School of Economics in his interview stated, 'It's clear for everybody now that Russia is a superpower now and it is playing a crucial role in the Middle East', though he talked about its economic and political resources (Petkova 2020).

If we look at recent events that have taken place in the field of International politics concerning Russia we can find that the context has started changing. Russia wants to reestablish itself as a major power to be reckoned with. It is quite visible from the kind of competition going on in Syria. In the context of Syrian crisis Russia has represented itself as strong competitor before the USA. Russia has played effectively in the conflict situation of Syria. It has involved itself in such a way that it seems nothing can be done without taking the help of Russia. Given the role it has played in Syria it seems that Russia wants to establish its influence in West Asia and shape its image in the region. It can't be denied that Russia wanted to prove its capability in Syria and showcase its military and strategic strength in the regional geopolitics (A. Ahmed 2018).

After the disintegration of the Soviet Union in 1991, Russia entered into a new phase of instability in every field. Politically, socially and economically the impact was quite significant. In the immediate post-Soviet period, Russia's influence in its

adjoining areas started waning increasingly. What made Russia more worried was the incorporation of its erstwhile Soviet allies, particularly states from the Eastern Europe, into NATO. This action led to widening of gaps between Russia and states of former Soviet Republics. Along with this also took place another expansion that was the European Union expansion into Eastern Europe. But after all this negative developments Russia did not sit quietly. It kept working on its vision of getting back to its position of a global power. It started by defending its areas of close proximity, aiming to spread its influence beyond the region of Asia and Europe. When Russia entered into Syria, 'saving Assad's regime was not an end in itself, rather a means of self-assertion and another step towards the goal of becoming a global superpower', emphasised Bishara (Bishara 2015)

It was in 2000 when Vladimir Putin became the President of Russia that he articulated a greater vision for Russia's future. In order to get Russia back to its status and position Putin charted a new course for Russia. He started working on military expansion and investment in advance technology in order to give a boost to Russian preparedness. Syrian Crisis came as an opportunity for Russia to showcase its power and test its capabilities in a war like situation which would definitely boost the confidence of the Russian Armed forces. In this respect we can refer to an interview to BBC News given by the director of the Sustainable Security Programme at the Oxford Research Group, Richard Reeve, who stated that, 'this gives the military real war experience - for their own confidence - and it sends a message to the rest of the world that Russia is a capable, modern military ', and this is also intended to realize Putin's vision of making Russia again a great power (Jones 2017). Another scholar said, "Russia's military intervention has also ensured Moscow becomes an indispensable participant in any peace talks on Syria, buttressing its claim of re-establishing itself as a major player not only in West Asia, but globally", (Unikrishnan 2016).

Russia's campaign in Syria was not merely to help Assad out of trouble nor to only get limited in the West Asian region but to pursue an objective larger than that. Russia has been trying to regain its status and strength since long. In Crimea 2014, it did not even hesitate to challenge the US and finally integrated the peninsula despite enough efforts on the part of America to prevent Russia from becoming successful in Ukraine. But Russia accomplished what it aimed and this infused a strong boost of confidence in Russia's aspiration to go for something bigger. In this situation Syria

brought in an opportunity for which Russia has been waiting for since long. Russia played its role with all its might and to a great extent proved its capability.

Russia's strategy behind its intervention in Syria was not only to save Assad and its regime but something more than that. There is no doubt that Assad is Russia's important ally and by saving the regime Moscow not only protected Assad but its long cherished ambition to reassert its influence not only in West Asia but beyond the region. Though Russia has not the same power and strength as it once had during the Soviet period but it can't be denied that Russia still has the desire and potential to be considered as a major power and a great power. When opportunity is there Russia has acted without any delay to realize its aspiration of establishing itself as an important power along with others. In Syrian conflict also, Russia moved in the direction of achieving its goal to position itself as a global power. Russia has used the Syrian theatre to its fullest in displaying its aspiration of assert itself as a global player. In this respect, Frolovskiy has noted that 'Projecting the effects of Russia's Syria campaign beyond the Middle East was always the Kremlin's goal' (Frolovskiy 2019). Russia being and a strategic player in Syria and in the West Asia region took it as an opportunity when the US decided to withdraw its troops from the Northern part of Syria. For Russia it was a time to advance on its objective of emerging as an indispensable player in the Syrian crisis and enhance its status at the global platform. Russia used the Syrian theatre to showcase its ambition and power projection in order to convince others that Russia is not to be ignored and still possesses the capability of being considered as a great power. Syrian conflict also helped and became instrumental through which Russia could claim itself as a Global power. In certain respect, for Moscow withdrawal of the US was considered as a victory for Russia since it would get more liberty in advancing its own strategy. Russia was also interested to be in better term with other European powers which could help it shaping the political settlement in Syria (Frolovskiy 2019).

While Russia was trying to gain more control over the Syrian developments and maximize its influence, withdrawal of troops by USA from Syria was taken by Russia as an opportunity to enrich its political capital. During the time of Ukraine crisis though Russia tried with all possible means to leverage in terms of gaining political capital but successful accession of Crimea was not without any loss. It was accompanied by a number of financial and diplomatic sanctions which had a substantial impact upon Russian economy and negatively impacted its political

capital. Russia always wanted to stand at an equal footing with USA, its erstwhile Cold War rival and an all-time competitor. Whenever there has been any opportunity to spread its influence and pursue its ambition of establishing itself as major power, Russia has not turned its back. We have already seen it in case of Ukraine where Russia proved that it is still capable of protecting its sphere of influence. Russia does not want to get limited as regional power and its ambition to reassert its influence as global power can't be ignored. In the context of the Ukraine crisis, Barak Obama, the then President of USA, called Russia a 'regional power' and said 'its threatening behaviour in its neighborhood shows its weakness and not strength'. But Vladimir Putin 'disagreed' with this statement and simultaneously expressed the view that 'USA is not either unique or exceptional' (Moscow Times 2016; Frivolovsky 2019). Russia's intervention in Syria was not without risk. Considering the kind of experiences, it has had in the past specifically in case of Afghanistan, launching a new campaign was never an easy decision for Russia. As powerful heavy weights like USA and other Western powers were already on the ground. Russia must have learnt some lessons from its Afghanistan campaign where it had suffered losses on many fronts economically and militarily. Although risky but Russia acted with caution and was hopeful of earning some positive outcomes. In this respect Frivolovsky has noted, 'Although it was a gamble to intervene, the possible benefits eventually outweighed the risks in the eyes of the Kremlin's strategists' (Frivolovsky 2019). Russia was clear in its plan that fighting Islamic State, defeating them and being a part of the political solution would surely help it to move in the direction of realizing its ambition to be a global power. Though Syrian theatre was kind of a gamble to enter into as it was not easy to predict what would come on the way but to some extent Russia has been successful in its campaign. There is no doubt that Russia played quite well as a power broker and got the chance to get engaged with all the parties involved. However, it had not intended to only play the role of a fixer. Kremlin went ahead in its campaign and subsequently utilised the conflict for flexing its muscle in order to showcase its strength.

To undermine US influence:

In recent past US-Russia relationship has been through certain ups and downs. After a long gap of Cold War rivalry, both the powers seem to be locking horn with each other. The issue of Ukraine and Russian integration of Crimea symbolises the

emerging tension between the erstwhile Cold War rivals. The consequent financial sanctions, diplomatic and international pressure that came from the US-led Western countries pushed Russia to struggle through a difficult phase. In this situation Syria provided an opportunity for Russia. It is also believed that another reason behind Russian involvement in Syria was to make USA remove its restrictions and sanctions (A. Ahmed 2018).

By getting into the Syrian crisis, Russia has used Syria as a theatre to project itself as a competitor to its Cold War rival USA. By taking the opportunity of the situation, Russia has strategically tried to befriend the US allies in the region to gain an upper hand in the competition. On the one hand Moscow has evolved as a power broker and on the other hand it has prioritized its objective by emphasising on the security of the Syrian regime. Along with other objectives, undermining US influence has also been a part of its policy in Syria which can't be ignored. Since it would have been quite difficult for Russia to deal with the crisis in Syria, it has chosen Iran as a key associate in the campaign. Thus, it can be denied that another reason of Russia to intervene in Syria was to check American dominance in West Asia (Brockwehl 2018).

To strengthen its position in West Asia:

Though after the fall of the Soviet Union Russia longer have the same influence in the West Asia (Middle East) region but through its consistent efforts it has been successful to reassert its influence to a great extent. Russia has been a staunch supporter of protection of state sovereignty of its allies in the region along with emphasising on the stability of the regimes. By enhancing its engagements with the states in the region Russia has moved to strengthen its influence. And in this direction Russia has also in many ways challenged the US hegemonic stand in the region. Be it in the diplomatic activities or trade, Moscow made efforts to get back to its pre-Soviet position. In the form of diplomatic engagements, having arms deals and cooperation and collaboration in energy resources, in every sphere Moscow has left its impression. Moreover, Russia wants to get recognition of a great power. By playing its role in Syria it wants to achieve its objectives in the West Asia and beyond. (Brockwehl 2018)

Russia have multiple interests in Syria. Though all are not directly related with Syria but through its presence Moscow can accomplish most of its pursued objectives. It wanted to reassert its influence on the global platform and for this Russia wanted to

emerge as a major player in West Asia and got directly involved in the Syrian crisis. It went ahead and conducted its first ever military campaign since the end of the Cold War outside the 'near abroad' (former Soviet republics) . Maintenance of regional influence has also been there in its priority list. It is because securing a strong position in the West Asian region, Russia can secure its position in the Global stage. 'Russia's involvement in the Middle East is also partly so that they have a say in major world events' stressed Margot Light in his interview to BBC News (Jones 2017).

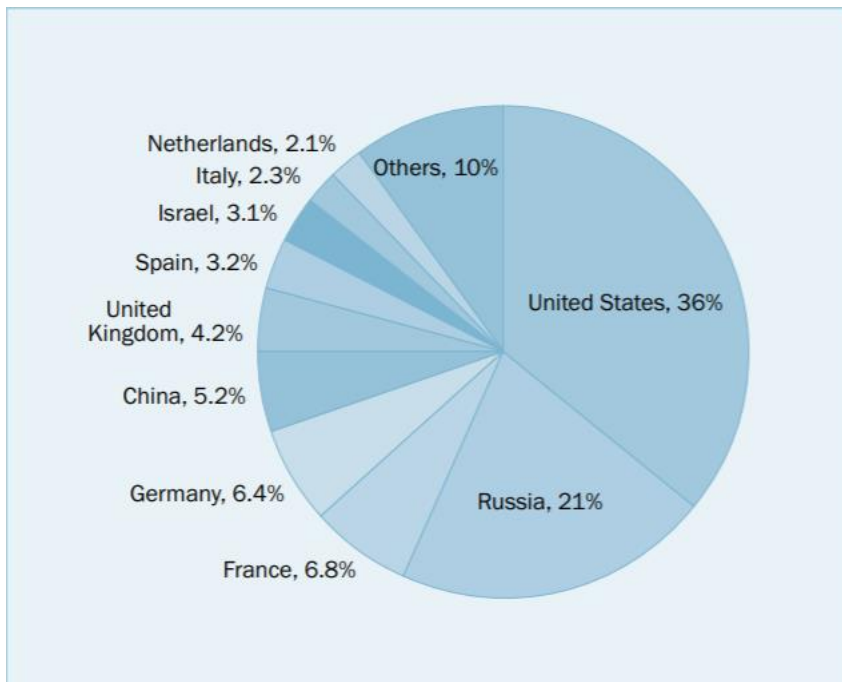
President Putin wants Russia to remain an indispensable power in the Middle East in order to continue to influence decision-making for the entire region, as this serves Russia's geopolitical and geostrategic interests. The armed revolution in the Middle East triggered by the Arab Spring and calling for democracy poses a serious threat to these national interests of Russia. As it has already been discussed that how the neorealists believe that states keep on protecting their national interests and give importance to this objective. Given that Syria under Bashar al-Assad is probably Russia's only surviving stronghold in the post-Cold War era, through which it can expand its influence in the Middle East and thus remain vitally important in decision-making for the region, Russia had to intervene in the Syrian civil war so as to prevent the largely Sunni-dominated anti-Russia opposition from seizing power as doing so would jeopardize Russia's national interests. What is more significant to Russia in its relations with Syria and for which it strongly stands by the Bashar al-Assad regime in Syria's civil war are its wider strategic interests in the political geography around Syria, and the fear of the adverse impact the overthrow of the Assad-led Shi'i Alawite rule in Syria by rebellious groups of Sunni Muslims supported by their western and Gulf States allies will have on Russia's position in the Middle East (Oligie 2019).

Russia's Syrian campaign was quite ambitious. Initially it was difficult to calculate what would be the outcome of this campaign. Though inflicted with challenges and risks there was also the possibility of something positive that Russia could get out of it. However, a successful Russian intervention is linked with saving Assad's regime, preventing United States of America from pursuing its objective of a regime change by removing Assad, compelling Washington to take Russia seriously and sit with it at the negotiation table which would give Russia an equal status with US. This would help Russia to project both at domestic and international level that it is a great power. However, Russia has been successful on many fronts though not on all (Kofman et.al 2018).

As we are talking about West Asia and the Russian influence there in, it is also necessary to consider Moscow’s arms export to this region. Russia play leading role in exporting major share of their arms with this region. If we talk about the share in global arms export, USA and Russia stand as the first and second highest major exporter of arms. In between 2009 to 2013, and from 2014 to 2018, Russia increased its export of Arms to the West Asian region by 19 percent. A substantial portion of this is shared with Egypt and Iraq. From 2014 to 2018, Russia’s arms export to Egypt accounted for 46 per cent while to Iraq it was 36 percent. If we talk about increase in the deliveries to Iraq and Egypt, then between 2009 to 2013 and between 2014 to 2018 it increased by 780 percent in case of Iraq and 150 percent in case of Egypt (Wezeman 2019).

Figure 6

Global share of major arms exports by the 10 largest exporters, 2014–18



(Source: SIPRI Arms Transfers Database, Mar. 2019)

A Neorealist perspective of Russia’s Syria campaign:

When Russia entered into Syrian battle field, Assad was losing on all fronts. Russia’s immediate goal was to protect the regime and ensure its survival. So in order to

protect Assad and prevent government forces from being defeated Russia had to stop the opposition from gaining upper hand in the fighting. Since a prolonged fighting could bring something unexpected, further weakening the Syrian government position and make it impossible to defeat the opposition. Russian intervention in Syria could be understood if explored from the Neorealist perspective. Moscow's involvement in the Syrian crisis, its military engagements, strong support for Assad's regime, competition with its age old rival US and the West and its overall role as a player and influencer are all directed to fulfil its national interests.

We have attempted to study Russia's intervention in Syria from the Neorealist framework. As per the understanding of the Neorealists, the structure of International relation is anarchical. It means at the international level there is no International government and in the absence of a Global or World authority the sovereign states who are considered as principal actors in International Politics have to rely on 'selfhelp' in order to ensure their 'Survival'. States have to find out their own ways to secure their existence and protect their national interests.

Russia's Syrian campaign can also be understood from this perspective. Russia's involvement in Syria and measures taken by it concerning Syria is motivated and highly guided by its national interest which confirms to Neorealist principles. Though Russia's direct military intervention in Syria took place following the request of Bashar al-Assad, at the same time Assad's regime in Syria is considered as instrumental in strengthening Moscow's foothold in the Middle East/ West Asian region. Therefore, by protecting Assad-led Syria, Russia not only saves its ally but also secures its multiple interests in the region. By exploring into Russia's interests in Syria we can find the answer to the question: why did Russia enter into Syria?

Moscow has been with Assad from very beginning of the crisis. When problems in Syria started erupting and anti-government protests and uprisings developed into a civil war creating more complications for Assad's regime, Russia was providing all kinds of assistance without being involved directly. The help was however limited to diplomatic negotiation and sending weapons and other assistance. But at a point when Bashar al- Assad regime was on the verge of collapse under the pressure of various opposition rebel forces of Syria and Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), Russia finally decided to directly intervene and rushed in with its military intervention to rescue Assad on 30th September 2015. However, Russia's immediate objective at the time of intervention was to prevent the Assad government from falling apart. Russia

was clear that if Assad was safe, it would be beneficial for Russia in the long term. He would be helpful in protecting the National interest of Russia not only in Syria but also in the region as a whole. Though saving Assad was the primary objective behind intervening in Syria but Russia declared that the cause of intervention was to fight terrorism and ISIS which had enough potential to threaten the security of Russia, thus hampering its National interest. Putin even declared the objective behind its intervention in Syria at the UN assembly as, 'We think it as an enormous mistake to refuse to cooperate with the Syrian government and its armed forces, which are valiantly fighting terrorism face to face. We should finally acknowledge that no one but President Assad's armed forces and Kurdish militias are truly fighting the Islamic State and other terrorist organizations in Syria', (Kofman et al. 2018).

For the Neorealists, national interest is an important factor for the states. It is this National interest that determines the behaviour of the state in the International sphere and can be considered as a guiding principle in so far as the state's actions are concerned. National interest has a broad meaning as per the Neorealist understanding. It covers a wide range of factors which includes survival factor, security, power and relative capabilities or distribution of capabilities etc. National interest can further get simplified if we refer to Waltz's take on this. He believes that in the International system, for the states the primary concern remains to maintain its 'relative position' since 'anarchical' condition prevails in this system. The relative position of the states is mostly determined by their strength which includes its interests such as strategic, military and economic etc. States give so much importance to their relative position that they keep on maximizing their strength by resorting to different options such as building upon the strength by focusing on military and economic interest, forging alliances and helping allies (Afridi and Jibrán 2018).

Moscow's intervention in Syria confirms to the Nonrealist principles. Russia has been involved in Syria because it will help Russia in protecting its National interest. In Syria its interests are fulfilled directly and through Syria also Moscow will fulfil its other objectives not only in the West Asian region but also beyond it. Since Russia has its interest in Syria, saving those will help Moscow in improving its relative position. It can also be said that by safeguarding its National interests Moscow is also resorting to 'self-help'. By creating alliances, protecting and helping its allies, and securing its National interest, Russia is shaping its relative position and enhancing its strength at the international level.

CHAPTER-IV

EXTERNAL POWERS AND THEIR ROLE

The local protest which just erupted with few people developed in to a large scale civil war in few months of the crisis. The entire country slipped in to a civil war having unprecedented implications to come in the future. While internally many factions emerged as anti-government forces confronting Assad's forces, there were also some absolute loyalists to the regime who supported and fought for the protection of the regime. In this scenario things started the whole dynamics of the event got changed with the entry of external powers. Syrian crisis is not at all limited to the borders of Syria. It has become a theatre in which regional and external powers have been playing substantial roles. Though there are many smaller and larger parties involved in this continuous conflict but there are some key players who are absolutely involved in the civil war and playing it seriously. When Syrian conflict began it was not thought of becoming so prolong but with the passage of time and the involvement of external powers the crisis is nowhere to end. While International power heavyweights like USA and Russia have emerged as key competitors, they have their allies like Iran, Turkey, Saudi Arabia and other regional powers to cope them. We can see both competition and cooperation among the powers to protect their interests both at the regional and global level. Miller has expressed that, 'As we've watched the horror and tragedy of the Syrian civil war unfold over the course of the last seven years, the stage has been set now for some time, I suspect, for an expanding role by outsiders' (Miller 2018). There is definitely no doubt that the external powers are still there determining the happenings in Syria.

Since the Syrian civil war went beyond the expectation and continued to deepen its intensity, it did not get limited to the domestic sphere or regional boundaries of Syria and the Middle East. Rather the so far domestic actors, like the Assad's regime and the pro government forces and the rebels forming anti-government forces, who were fighting on their own strength till now, started asking for the support of their external partners. In this way major powers started entering into Syria and gradually got completely involved in the Syrian civil war. It can also be said that involvement of the external powers got so much intense that with the unfolding of the crisis it started getting clearer that it was mostly the outside powers upon whose role Syria's future would be decided upon. In this way Syria turned into a geopolitical battlefield where major powers competed with each other not only as mere sponsors but as major stakeholders.

With increasing number of losses of its fighters and weakening of fighting capability of the Armed Forces Syrian government started relying upon its external allies most important being Russia and Iran. Iran was quick to come to the help of the regime since for Iran it had its own priorities in hand that is to secure supply routes to Hezbollah of Lebanon. And for protecting the regime Iran has also incurred losses in terms of casualties and money. Along with Iran next to jump into the battlefield in order to rescue its long term partner was Russia. At times of need Russia came up with critical diplomatic assistance by vetoing resolution at the UNSC against the Syrian government. For Moscow the action was justified on the ground that it could prevent a similar kind of happening in Syria which earlier in 2011 had happened in Libya by NATO's intervention that resulted in chaos and instability in the region. Finally, in 2015 Russia got directly involved in Syria by providing military support to the regime as a result of which Assad's regime could really have a control over the burgeoning rebels and the opposition groups. As the Syrian government was getting support from its external allies similarly, the opposition fronts were also accessing all possible assistance from their partners overtly or covertly. Countries like US, France and United Kingdom have been even accused of providing training and weapons secretly to the rebel groups fighting against Assad's regime. In this respect Laub has expressed that even, 'Qatar and Saudi Arabia in 2015 enabled the formation of the Army of Conquest, which comprised an array of opposition and extremist groups', Laub (2021).

In this chapter there we have analysed of roles played by different external powers especially focusing on the key actors. External players through their measures and policies have tried to manage the outcome of this crisis in the best possible manner to pursue their national interests. Since the bordering and nearby countries are likely to have spillover impact of the Syrian uprising, Turkey and Iraq's involvement is quite normal to perceive. Next to the bordering countries comes the West Asia (Middle East), where the regional powers come to play their role and get enough benefit to the extent they can by vying for regional aspiration. In the following section we have Saudi Arabia and Iran who have projected their capacity by supporting the confronting blocs (USA and Russia). Then the extra regional powers, particularly the Cold War rivals USA and Russia, have come to play a competitive role in Syria with their own objectives and national interests. While spearheads include the West which includes the US and other powers of Europe, Russia forms the other front with its

own supporting group and countries. Since the interest of different actors differ from each other, as do their strategies in the war field of Syria, they form different camps to advance their own perspectives. Generally, we can identify the confronting factions into two camps i.e. one in support of Assad and the other in opposition of Assad. While Russia with staunch support of Iran and cooperation from the Hezbollah has created the strongest force supporting the cause of Assad and is quite clear in its approach. On the other side are forces led by the US especially. This includes Turkey, Saudi Arabia, other countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) and some NATO members. This camp is against the Basher al- Assad regime and supporting the rebel forces forming the opposition camp (Martin 2013).

These external forces in collaboration with the already divided internal factions in Syria, come to play their role in furtherance their own objectives. These established links between the external and internal forces make the nature of the Syrian civil war more complicated and quite difficult to resolve. While external powers such as the US-led West, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and the countries of the GCC are in cooperation with the internal forces such as Free Syrian Army and National Coalition etc, Russian led camp get the support of Assad's regime and its supports and the army.

Russia as a major power in Syria:

Since a whole chapter (Chapter-III) has been dedicated to Russia's role in Syria and a detail analysis has been given that comprises its priorities, strategy and interests in Syria, in this section there will be a brief description about its power play in Syria.

Above everything else, one policy that Russia has been emphasising directly and indirectly about its involvement in Syria is the Assad factor. From the time Russia took the Syrian civil war seriously it has consistently been working on its objective of saving its ally in Syria. Though several factors have been considered and taken into account in order to justify Putin's intervention in Syria and its long stay there but protecting Bashar al-Assad and preventing its regime to fall down has been the most prominent one. Moscow has been consistent in its approach of saving its Syrian ally and for this it provided all kinds of help to Damascus. Under its military support, Russia sent its military forces to Syria to train as well as join the fighting in support of Syrian government and supplied all required logistics necessary from the war point of view. By using its diplomatic channels Russia garnered support from its other regional and extra regional allies in order to ensure that Assad is not dethroned and

does not succumb to the pressure of the opposition. By using the UN platform and vetoing sanctions, which was proposed by US and its Western supporters to remove Assad, Moscow proved that it was ready to rescue its ally even at the International level. When there was a situation in Syria in which Damascus came very close to its defeat and loss of power, position and sovereignty and territory, Moscow rushed in to Syria to rescue Assad. Though Russian intervention in Syria was carried out on the declaration that the measure was taken to stop terrorism and particularly ISIS, but it can be understood that behind 2015 military intervention one of the most important objectives was saving Assad. Both USA and Russia blame each other and negate each other's claim about reasons behind intervention in Syria (Pearson and Sanders IV 2019).

For Russia Syria is an important ally. It would serve Russia's interest if Assad stays in power. It is because Russia wants to maintain its stand and enhance its influence in the West Asia region. And for this a trustworthy supporter is a requirement and after that fall of Gaddafi in Libya, Assad seems to be a source of that support in the region. Along with this, the strategic interest of Moscow such as maintaining the Tartus Naval base and Latakia air base carries its own importance that cannot be compromised. Being deeply involved in the Syrian crisis, Russia seems to have emerged again as a major power without which the Syrian crisis could not reach at any end and without the help of it any settlement seems possible. If we see the peace process like the one in Astana which was launched in 2017, it was sponsored by Moscow and included major parties including the Syrian government, Iran and Turkey. Through this process Russia emerged as a peace broker and tried to bring peace by halting military activities. It is this process through which Moscow showed its capability to bring different rival parties to the negotiating table and establish a de-escalation zone. Despite having some sort of divergent interests in the region and in Syria, Moscow was able to unite these parties at one place. Both Iran and Turkey share a relation that can be termed friendly. While Iran is a supporter of Shia Muslims and Assad's Alawite Community which also belongs to the same sect, Turkey supports the Syrian opposition and anti-Assad rebel forces (though it later joined Assad owing to Russia's persuasion). But credit goes to Moscow which could manage such a peace negotiation among these three countries. This step also somehow helped Moscow in consolidating its operation to certain selective places, since several Anti-Assad groups stopped fighting and became a part of the peace

process. So somehow Russia was able to blunt the forces of the so called moderate opposition who could emerge as a legitimate front with the backing of the West (Vidal and Redondo 2018).

In the West Asia region, Russia has been sharing a long standing relationship with Syria. Though it started with an arms supply in 1950s, it was elevated to a strategic alliance by the then President Hafez al-Assad through grant of a naval base called Tartus to the Soviet Union. After Hafez Assad his son Bashar al-Assad emerged as a successor and maintained this relationship with Russia despite the fact that Russian power and influence was on decline. When Syrian civil war was going on and Assad's forces were confronted with tough challenges by a formidable coalition of rebels and oppositions, Russia adopted its dual approach. At one hand Russia was supporting Assad with military assistance and supply of modern weaponry, meeting the requirement of the Assad government. On the other hand, at international forums like the UNSC, Moscow along with China has blocked though veto any punitive measures that were targeted against Syria. This acted as a life line for securing Assad's survival since the same strategy was used by the West in Libya and the West became successful in playing its power game by removing Gaddafi. Russia has been very cooperative even with the the UN special envoys in Syria. On the chemical weapons use case also Russia has effectively used its diplomatic machinery which led to the dismantling of Syria's chemical weapon programme in a peaceful manner. This act of Russia sent a message that even serious international issues can be resolved by using diplomatic channels (Gupta 2016).

Since Russia played a leading role in Syria and no one could repudiate the kind of importance it has earned in the Syria, now Moscow seems to be an indispensable power to be reckoned with. However, Syrian crisis not only elevated the image of Moscow in the West Asia region but beyond the region. Though initially there were some differences with Turkey, at a later period Turkey also re-engaged with Moscow and both the countries cooperated with each other and coordinated in their fight against the Islamic State (ISIS). The kind of success Russia got in its Syrian campaign encouraged other powers to mend their ties with Moscow. It was seen that officials of West Asian countries such as Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Qatar, Sudan and Israel paid visits to Moscow in the last few years. Putin has also used its Syrian campaign to showcase Russia's strength and military might to the whole world. Putin got an opportunity to test its latest weapons and provid a war like ground experience

to his military forces that will enhance the confidence of its soldiers. It is also said that Russia tested about 600 new weapons in Syria. In this context, Petkova has quoted a senior faculty at Higher School of Economics, Leonid Isaev, who said, 'It is clear for everybody now that [Russia] is a super power and [it is] playing a crucial role in the Middle East' (Petkova 2020).

Russia's role in Syria has been quite instrumental in saving Assad and his regime from possible demise. Russia's policy and its measures in Syria are meant to secure its own national interests in Syria. By preventing the forcible departure of Bashar al-Assad from Syrian government, Vladimir Putin not only helped Russia's old ally but also made arrangements that would help Moscow in maintaining its influence in the whole region of West Asia. Russia's vetoing the Security Council resolutions that was brought against Syria was meant to stop the West from repeating Libya like intervention in 2011. From Russian understanding, Libyan intervention and the establishment of a no-fly Zone was planned to ensure that Gaddafi regime is removed. Russia did not want to lose another ally again by the Western-led regime change strategy. Though there are several reasons behind Russian intervention in Syria and Moscow's supply of all kind of assistance for the survival of Assad's regime, there are some aspects that need to be focused. Since Radical Islamist forces and their terrorist activities have always been a cause of security concern for Russia, Syrian government under Assad seemed as a better alternative and a bulwark against the terrorist threats. And if position of Assad is strengthened and maintained then for Moscow it will offer security on that ground. Further, given the kind of role Russia has been playing in the Syrian crisis and growing significance of its presence in the processes, that are directed towards finding a solution of the Syrian civil war, it has been named as a 'geopolitical interlocutor' and 'problem fixer' by many scholars. It can be said that since the direct military intervention of Russia in 2015 and its close association with Syrian policy initiatives and priorities, the West has accepted Russia as a major power. Though initially there were consistent efforts to undermine the importance of Moscow in the region by questioning its objectives and putting pressure on its supportive allies, it did not happen. Moritz Pieper of Salford University in his speech published in 'The Conversation' has stressed on the fact that, 'Since September 2015, Assad's fate has been tied even closer to Russian policy planning and has forced the West to talk to Russia as a "Great Power", one

considered as much a shaper of the rules of International politics as the US', (Pieper 2018)

Turkey in Syria:

Turkey relationship with Syria has not been that great from the very beginning. Both the countries have been opposite to each other and had contradictory views regarding many issues. Even during the Cold War both were in the rival blocs. In the past years there have been many issues on which some troubles were experienced in the relationship between both the countries. On important issues relating to border, water dispute and Kurdish identity, there were certain controversies in which both Syria and Turkey were locking their horns since a long time. Sharing of Euphrates River, construction of dams on the river resulting in limited water flow to Syria and loss of agricultural productivity etc had affected Syrian economy. Apart from all these contradictions on the part of both these countries there were something more to happen. Before 1998 and in 1980s Hafez al-Assad's support to PKK (Kurdistan Workers Party), which Turkey considers as a terrorist organisation, embittered the relationship between the two countries. Some ups and downs could also be seen in the interaction between both these countries through what can be termed as tensed phase to normal to friendly phases. Following the Adana Agreement signed in 1998 the relationship between the two countries seemed to get oriented towards resolving the past issues. On the part of Syria also certain measures, such as recognition of PKK (Kurdistan Workers' Party) as terrorist organization, were taken which accelerated growth of normal relationship with Turkey. However, there were still certain reservations between Turkey and Syria regarding the dispute over the Hatay province which though has been claimed by Syria but is still administered by Turkey. On the other hand as per its foreign policy objective, Turkey tried to mend its ties with Syria and in this direction Turkey extended its cooperation with Syria specifically under its 'Zero problems towards neighbours' and 'maximum cooperation with neighbours' policies (Davutoglu 2010). As a result of all these initiatives relations got little better and even growth was seen in the trade transaction between the two countries around 2010. But the arrival of the Arab Spring had its negative impact upon all these efforts and things again started changing.

Turkey wanted to minimize the impact of the Syrian crisis on its own country and preserve its interest. Irrespective of what Turkey desires, the Syrian Civil war has led

to the destabilization of the region of which Turkey forms a part. This conflict and consequent instability has resulted in loss of bilateral trade because of the sensitivity of the situation along the border area and the ongoing cross border fighting. Along with this, the influx of millions of Syrian refugees into Turkey has also raised the cause of concern for the Country. Above all the Kurdish factor has dragged Turkey directly into the conflict.

Turkey through the Syrian Crisis:

Since Turkey has been an important player in the Syrian crisis, it is necessary to understand how Turkey has played through the crisis and what has been its basic policies and priorities.

In the beginning, when Syrian was under the influence of the Arab Spring and the uprisings were taking the turn to develop into a civil war and consequently a crisis, Turkey initially played the role of a peace broker with the Syrian President Bashar al-Assad though it failed in its attempt for a peace settlement between the Syrian regime and the opposition. Turkey has been a staunch supporter of the opposition and the rebel forces and wanted protection of the opposition but when it didn't happen Turkey's diplomacy was strongly dented. After seeing failure in its effort towards a settlement that Turkey thought would be beneficial for it at the domestic level as well as at the regional level, it started shifting its policy and pursued anti-Assad approach by supporting the opposition and aiding and assisting them in their operation. It encouraged the Free Syrian Army against Assad with military and financial assistance. After 2016 Turkey launched its offensive in the Northwestern part of Syria to vacate the ISIL (Islamic State in Iraq and Levant) and the Kurdish minority (Considered by Turkey as being supporters of a terrorist organization) and secure the area alongside its border. After the combat operation was concluded in 2017, Turkish military did not leave the place but rather stayed in the Northern Syria to maintain a buffer zone and also support the rebel forces. In the year 2018 Assad's forces with the help of Russia and Iran's military forces was successful in reclaiming the rebel held areas in the south-west of the country and opposition forces were prevented from flourishing there. As a result of this, northern Syria under the Turkish military control remained as the only safe haven for the rebels and the anti-Assad forces. It can be seen that though Turkey has continuously changed its priorities in Syria responding to the changing situations, it has been consistent on its policy of supporting and aiding

the opposition from the beginning to till date. With the emergence of Kurdish threat and the Islamic State, Turkey changed the orientation of its policy and moved to negotiate with Assad and Russia. Towards the end of 2018 and in the beginning of 2019 Turkey started moving towards the Southeast of Syria to deal with the Kurdish rebel forces (Yapp n.d).

Turkey's Refugee Concern:

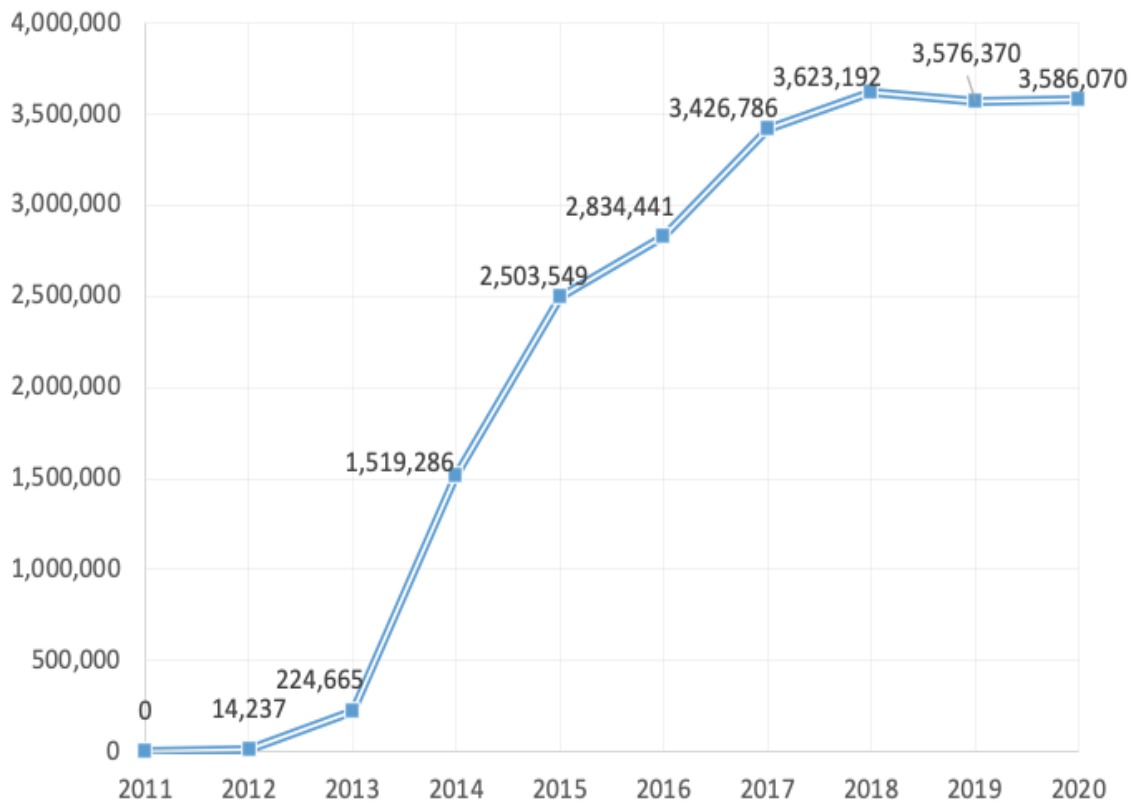
Initially, when the Syrian Civil war began on 15 March 2011 and in few years the war started showing its negative impact upon the socio economic sector affecting the Syrian people, refugee crisis emerged as one of the most worrisome factors. The refugee crisis is considered 'as the largest refugee and displacement crisis of our time, affecting millions of people and spilling into surrounding countries. It also a protracted crisis, which is an ongoing complex crisis of five years or more', as mentioned by Reid in World Vision Report (Reid 2021). For Turkey refugee crisis was a huge problem and it became difficult for Turkey to manage the refugees it received. The number in the influx of refugee started multiplying every year. Though in 2012 Turkey made it clear that it can't not allow more than 100,000 refugees through its border but the number went beyond the limit and increased nine times of its fixed limits, that was roughly 8, 81,000 in 2015 - 'the flow was neither limited nor temporary' (Makovsky 2019).

But towards 2016 Turkey started changed its attitude and started preventing the influx of more refugees. Turkey started closing its official borders and did not allow the Syrians to enter into its country. However, people with urgent medical emergencies were allowed to enter the border to certain extent. As per Gerry Simpson, a Human Rights researcher, 'Turkey's border closure is forcing pregnant women, children, the elderly, the sick, and the injured to run the gauntlet of Turkish border officials to escape the horrors of Syria's war', (HRW2015). Since the Refugee crisis rose manifold into an unprecedented level, in 2015 Turkey took more stern measures such as cancellation of the Visa waiver to the Syrian people specifically on air and sea travel, and installing security barriers alongside the border (UNHCR 2016). While analysing the cost of the Syrian Civil war and its impact especially upon Turkey, its Foreign Ministry has been quoted saying that, 'As of today in the Country 13.4 million Syrians are in need of Humanitarian aid. 2.4 million children lack education. 5.9 million people are homeless. The Covid-19 outbreak has further

increased the victimhood of the Civilian population’ and in the statement it was also mentioned that about half a million Syrian people have lost their lives, over one million have been injured and about 12 million people have suffered from displacement including international and internal (Hamit 2021). For UNHCR the primary concern in Turkey became the Syrian refugee and its increasing inflow crossing the Turkish border. What made the situation more sensitive was that, ‘half of the refugees from the Syrian Arab Republic (Syria) are children’ as per UNHCR (2015).

Figure 7

The Accelerating Curve of Syrian Migration to Turkey



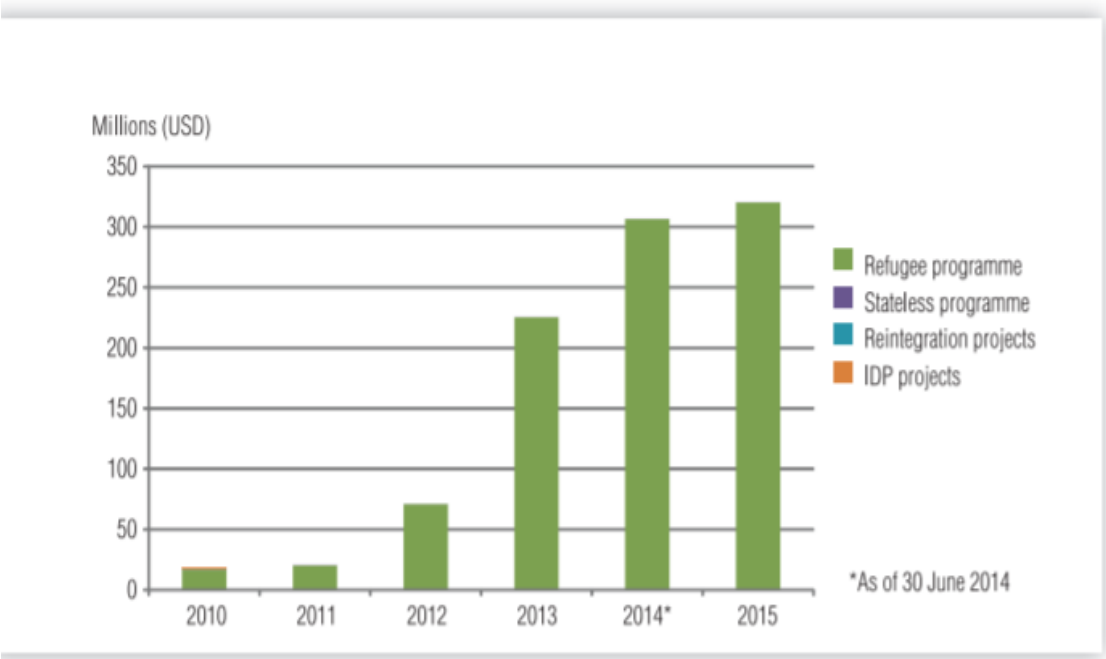
(Source: The Directorate General of Migration Management, <https://en.goc.gov.tr/temporary-protection27>; and <https://voxeu.org/article/precarious-lives-syrian-refugees-turkey-corona-times>)

In the above figure it can be seen how the flow of refugees to Turkey has accelerated over the years and from 2011 to 2020 how the curve has been continuously upward,

intensifying the concern of the Refugee crisis particularly in Turkey. So for Turkey managing Refugee crisis became a cumbersome task and its immediate task was how to deal with the situation. However, the challenges before Turkey concerning the refugees were arranging their accommodation since their number was huge, prevent more influx of new Syrians and finally their resettlement back in their own country (Tekin-Kru 2020).

It can be said that Turkey's refugee issue was very intense and it became so huge that it went beyond the managing capacity of the Turkish government. Since the influx of the Syrian refugee was spiking and Turkey was using various options to prevent such inflows such as closing the border and trying to create a buffer zone in order to create a space for the returnee refugees in Syria – Turkish border. In order to support the refugees and provide them all humanitarian assistance and support UNHCR has taken a number of measures which was extremely essential at that point of time. From 2010 to 2015 UNHCR has increased its budgetary contribution to assist Turkey financially, specifically to meet the needs of the refugees hosted by Turkey from other countries specifically from Syria and Iraq. The financial contribution was raised to USD 17.7 million to USD 320.16 million in 2015. In figure - 8 and Table – 1 UNHCR's budgetary support to Turkey symbolises the significance of the refugee crisis Syrian crisis has generated. And UNHCR has taken necessary steps in this regard in order to make the refugees avail possible humanitarian amenities through its several programmes (UNHCR 2015).

Figure: 8 UNHCR’s budgetary contribution from 2010 to 2015.



Source: <https://www.unhcr.org/5461e60c52.pdf>

Table: 1**UNHCR's financial help to Turkey under several heads and Programmes.****2015 budget for Turkey | USD**

Budget breakdown	PILLAR 1 Refugee programme	PILLAR 2 Stateless programme	Total
2014 revised budget (as of 30 June 2014)	306,509,430	44,000	306,553,430
Favourable protection environment			
International and regional instruments	0	70,000	70,000
Law and policy	718,727	0	718,727
Administrative institutions and practice	9,470,737	0	9,470,737
Access to legal assistance and remedies	424,485	0	424,485
Access to territory and refoulement risk reduced	1,024,448	0	1,024,448
Public attitude towards people of concern	2,324,269	0	2,324,269
Subtotal	13,962,667	70,000	14,032,667
Fair protection processes and documentation			
Reception conditions	25,115,051	0	25,115,051
Registration and profiling	9,870,968	0	9,870,968
Status determination procedures	1,133,212	0	1,133,212
Individual documentation	671,963	0	671,963
Subtotal	46,791,195	0	46,791,195
Security from violence and exploitation			
Prevention and response to SGBV	1,258,691	0	1,258,691
Freedom of movement and detention risk reduced	352,485	0	352,485
Protection of children	2,433,896	0	2,433,896
Subtotal	4,045,072	0	4,045,072
Basic needs and essential services			
Health	15,440,089	0	15,440,089
Shelter and infrastructure	16,671,963	0	16,671,963
Basic and domestic items	149,400,537	0	149,400,537
Services for people with specific needs	3,339,054	0	3,339,054
Education	14,413,095	0	14,413,095
Subtotal	199,264,739	0	199,264,739
Community empowerment and self-reliance			
Community mobilization	3,378,206	0	3,378,206
Coexistence with local communities	10,918,201	0	10,918,201
Self-reliance and livelihood activities	5,292,172	0	5,292,172
Subtotal	19,588,579	0	19,588,579
Durable solutions			
Comprehensive solutions strategy	176,242	0	176,242
Voluntary return	2,028,206	0	2,028,206
Reintegration	334,000	0	334,000
Resettlement	6,155,139	0	6,155,139
Subtotal	8,693,587	0	8,693,587
Leadership, coordination and partnerships			
Coordination and partnerships	1,879,110	0	1,879,110
Donor relations and resource mobilization	731,963	0	731,963
Subtotal	2,611,073	0	2,611,073
Logistics and operations support			
Logistics and supply	21,737,472	0	21,737,472
Operations management, coordination and support	3,397,577	0	3,397,577
Subtotal	25,135,049	0	25,135,049
2015 total budget	320,091,960	70,000	320,161,960

Source: <https://www.unhcr.org/5461e60c52.pdf>

Removal of Assad:

Initially it seemed Turkey was supporting the protests since it considered them as peaceful political protests. Turkey viewed these protests as peaceful agitations having the goal of democratic reforms and new changes in the country. Turkey wanted the Bashar al-Assad government to respond to the demands and deal with the situation

positively. It wanted the reformist policies to get accepted by the regime. Turkey claims to have advised the Syrian regime to take measures in order to ensure political stability in the country but Syria acted differently and in alliance with Iran started taking coercive measures. After sometimes Turkey started directly supporting the Syrian opposition forces and allowed the rebel forces to enter into its border and helped them in operating from there with all support from it. Gradually, Syria entered in to a civil war and Turkey started prioritizing on its objective of regime change in Syria. Toppling Assad's government stood on the top of the agenda of Turkey. For the rebel forces Ankara soon emerged as a strong external supporter against the Syrian regime. Ankara provided them with all kind of support such as operational base along the border within its territory, arms and ammunition for upgrading their fighting capability and financial assistance (Tol 2019).

However, Turkey's priority of removal of Assad soon changed and we can say that Turkey was compelled to quit its idea to overthrow of Bashar al-Assad's regime. The situation in Syria was changing every now and then. Along with the regional players the intervention of the extra regional players and their dominance had already altered the power play in Syria. The significant role of two Cold War superpowers - Russia and USA - and another important regional actor like Iran were in full control of the Syrian civil war and this made Turkey to think otherwise and accept the importance of Assad. Finally, a statement came from the Deputy Prime minister of Turkey, Mehmet Simsek, who stated, 'Turkey can no longer insist on a resolution of the conflict in Syria without the involvement of President Bashar al-Assad, as the situation on the ground has changed dramatically', and further narrated that 'the suffering of Syrian people and the tragedies, clearly the blame is squarely on Assad. But we have to be pragmatic, realistic. The facts on the ground have changed dramatically, so Turkey can no longer insist on a settlement without Assad, it's not realistic', (Tattersall 2017). Turkey realised that without the involvement and cooperation of Assad there can be no settlement for a peaceful and united Syria. So after 2016 Turkey kind of could not proceed with its previous strategy and finally shifted towards focusing on bringing peace and protecting territorial integrity of Syria and this happened due to the growing influence of Russia and Iran in Syria and importance of their position. For Turkey America's indifference towards the matter also somehow discouraged Turkey and finding no other alternative Turkey started considering Assad's importance.

Though Turkey shifted its priorities and policies and didn't stick to the fall of Assad's regime as its immediate objective, it still continued its support for the opposition group. Turkey strongly even supported the opposition in the Astana process. For Turkey, Astana process is quite essential because it is the only medium through which peace can get restored in Syria and peace in Syria means peace in Turkey. It is because through the Astana process Turkey can find a solution to its Refugee crisis. If peace is established, then the Syrian refugees can get back to their land and Turkey's problem will be resolved. As the Geneva dialogue could not progress due to the lack of unequivocal support from the participating parties and difference of opinion regarding the inclusion of PKK into the peace process, Astana Process seemed the only hope for Turkey to end the civil war and its attendant consequences of refugee influx.

Daesh Factor:

Another most significant reason for Turkey's intervention in Syrian civil war was the threat of ISIS (Daesh). Even the major external powers fighting in Syria, like USA and Russia, have used the factor of fighting with terrorism and more specifically the Islamic State as their cause of intervention. One of Turkey's priorities and objectives has been to fight and defeat the Daesh element and eliminate this security threat. After failing in its objective and attempts both militarily by supporting the opposition forces and diplomatically, Turkey threw all its efforts upon this factor to strengthen its stand in Syria and emerge as a player in the Syrian theatre of power play. US political and military support for the PYD/YPG (Kurdish Groups) with the objective of fighting the Islamic states was against the interest of the Turkey, since for Ankara these groups are terrorist organizations. Turkey was not ready to negotiate and form alliance with these groups. Furthermore, the increasing influence of the Daesh in Syria and particularly its increasing threat to Turkey's security made it to concentrate on defeating the Daesh and prevent them from entering into Turkey's border.

Turkey realized that Daesh was a serious threat to its security when the terrorists attacked one of its cities called Kilis by firing rockets which resulted in death of several Turkey citizens. It can be reiterated here that the reasons behind Turkey's reversal of its policy of non-intervention in Syria was influenced by two primary happenings at that time. Increasing incidents of attacks by the Islamic States on the Central Station in Ankara (at Suruc) and Ataturk Airport (Istanbul) and, most

importantly, the possibility of creation of a proto-Kurdish state in Syria and Iraq. These twin threats from ISIS and Kurds were hugely responsible for changing the decision of Ankara in favour of intervention in Syrian conflict. Immediately thereafter Turkey started targeting Daesh and for this Turkey launched its special operation called Operation Euphrates Shield (OES) which can be considered as the first military intervention of Turkey in the Syrian Civil War. The objective of this OES (also known as Jarablus offensive) was to free Northern Syria from the control of the IS and Party of the Democratic Union (PYD). The operation was backed by the Charter of the UN Article 51 which speaks about right to self-defence of the nation and the United Nations Security Council resolutions such as 1373, 2170 and 2178 in which global responsibility to fight terrorism has been put upon the shoulder of the countries. After OES was launched in 2016 to get rid of Daesh from Turkish border and also prevent the PYD/YPG from merging Ayn el-Arab with Afrin (both Kurdish populated areas). After the OES, Operation Olive Branch (OOB) was launched in 2018 to eradicate the Daesh and PYD/YPG from the Western Euphrates (Vidal and Redondo 2018).

Kurdish Factor:

Apart from the issue of Islamic State, for Turkey the most significant security threat has been the Kurdish factor. Even behind Ankara's decision to integrate with the US-led coalition formed in 2015 to fight the Islamic State was largely based on its necessity to deal with the Kurdish forces in Syria. Turkey from the very beginning of the crisis has not been ready to recognize the Kurdish section of Syria as a partner of any negotiation and has avoided the demand for the creation of a self-ruled area by the Kurds in the northern Syria which is in close proximity with its border. For Turkey to give autonomy to the Kurdish state means compromising with the security of the nation. It is because of Turkey that the PYD (Democratic Union Party) and its affiliates and the YPG (the People's Protection Units) a branch of PKK (the Kurdistan Workers Party), are considered as separatist organisations spreading terrorist activities in Turkey for about three decades. Turkey believes that if the Kurds becomes successful in establishing a self-ruled state in Syria and Iraq then it will act a safe zone for the Kurds from where they could continue their anti-Turkish activities. It is for this national security reason that Turkey's policy in Syria has been hugely influenced by the Kurdish question. Moreover, Turkey did not want any instability in

its region like in Syria. So it wanted to prevent the spillover of the impact of the Syrian conflict into its territory. Turkey had been rejecting the demand of the PKK (Kurdistan Workers Party) for autonomy at home for a long time. When the Syrian Kurds rose their head in Syria and got the cooperation from the global players like the USA and Russia, as they were also fighting against the ISIS which is considered as a common threat, Turkey reoriented its policy and instead of asking for the complete elimination of the Kurds in Syria it limited its desire to check the dominance of Kurds in northern Syria. Commenting upon Turkey's shifting position, Ataman and Ozdemir commented, 'However, when Syria fell under the control of the PYD/YPG and their cooperation with global powers lasted, the regional balance changed to the disadvantage of Turkey. As a result, Ankara changed its perspective, and shifted its opposition from being against the very existence of the PYD/YPG to the rejection of its domination over northern Syria' (Ataman and Ozdemir 2018).

It is indeed important to understand why there is animosity between Turkey and the Kurds before delving into the Ankara's conflict with the Syrian Kurds. After the end of the World War-I in 1918, the Kurds got scattered into Iraq, Iran, Turkey and Syria without getting any specific place for their settlement and autonomy. So Kurds after getting rejected and subjected to repression started forming a militant group called Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) and kept on demanding a separate Kurdish State with autonomy within Turkey. In 1980s the conflict between the two parties got violent and it is said that the PKK started attacking Turkish security forces. Following these kind of activities Turkey, USA and EU started considering this group as a terrorist organization. Since PKK has its affiliates in other countries like Syria, Iraq and Iran, the Syrian crisis brought an opportunity for the Kurds to get united and reiterate their demand for autonomy within Syria. With the help of US assistance YPG could bring a third portion of the Syrian territory under its control. A US State Department Official threw light upon the fact and said that, "if Turkey takes "disproportionate" action during the incursion, President Trump may "impose significant costs.", as quoted by Cagaptay (2019). Despite all these speculations, US withdrew its forces and showed green light to Turkey for its operations.

In October 2019 USA withdrew thousands of its troops from the Turkey-Syrian border from where Kurdish soldiers had taken shelter and fighting against the Islamic state. The Kurds of that particular region had got the support of the USA and US troops deployed there were supporting them by assisting in their fight against the IS.

But the withdrawal of these forces went against the interest of the Kurds who were in coalition with the United States. Immediately after the US removal of the forces Turkey banked on this opportunity as it was waiting for this. Since Turkey wanted to get rid of the Syrian Kurds to avoid any security issue in future, on this Ankara and Us had their own reservations. When troops left the place Turkey launched its military operation targeting the Kurds who it considers as terrorist organisation. Though Turkish justification behind this move was to create a buffer zone for the refugees who would return from Turkey, it received condemnation from various sources. Though USA sanctioned some Turkish officials in response to this attack and threatened to impose some tariff bans but later it did not act seriously and the tariffs pattern remained unchanged (Laub 2021).

In the Syrian Civil War, the Kurds of that country who are known as YPG (People's Protection Unit) an affiliate of the PKK which wanted to bring the northeastern territory of Syria under their control so that they can create a settlement for themselves alongside the border with Turkey. With new developments in the Syrian Crisis, the YPG spearheaded the campaign with SDF (both Kurdish and non-Kurdish militias) and joined the US-led coalition against the Islamic State. Though YPG has denied its link with the PKK, but Ankara has strongly argued that this is an affiliate of PKK and as a terror group poses a potential security threat to Turkey. Underling Ankara's perspective, Weise pointed out, 'Ankara therefore saw a threat to its own security in the quasi-autonomous Kurdish state on its doorstep, dubbing it a "terror corridor" where the PKK could hide or easily attack from' (Weise 2019).

However, the Kurdish factor has not only influenced Turkey's policy at home but also its relationships with USA and Russia. Though both the countries share many ties and the most important bonding factor is that both USA and Turkey are NATO members still some differences persist between the two. However, though being a NATO member Turkey relies on USA, but in the context of Syrian crisis many ups and downs have been seen in the relations between the two countries. Despite being NATO members and old allies, the Syrian Civil war has made the relations look a little ambiguous and the relationship between the two deteriorated. The major cause of difference between Washington and Ankara has been the Kurdish factor in Syria. Despite being a NATO ally and having other links with USA, Kurdish issue was a bone of contention between the two countries. USA supported the YPG and provided it all necessary assistance with the supply of logistics and financial aid since it was

considered as a major ally to defeat the Islamic State. But Turkey could not accept it and this strained the relationship between the two countries. Therefore, lack of any cooperation from its NATO ally pushed Turkey to move close to Russia in order to protect its vital security interests. Given the kind of importance and reputation Russia has garnered being a power broker in the Syrian crisis it seemed quite realistic for Turkey to join Russia. Moscow and Ankara share many joint interests. For example, Russia has helped Turkey build nuclear reactors (WION 2020).

Even the major operations (Euphrates Shield in 2016 and Olive Branch in 2018) that Turkey has launched against the Kurds were also supported by Moscow. In this respect Issaev believes that, “The seeds of the operation “Olive Branch” were planted last summer, during talks between Russian Defence Minister Sergei Shoigu and Turkish Chief-of-Staff Hulusi Akar in Istanbul. As result of these talks, Moscow gave consent to the partial use of Syria’s airspace by the Turkish air forces, paving the way for Turkey’s offensive on Afrin” (Issaev 2018). There have been many circumstances where Turkey has warned the US not to support the YPG. It is not only the relationship between Turkey and USA that has had some bitter experiences and rough time but disappointment has been shown by Turkey for its other NATO allies. Ankara has been quite straight forward while criticising its own NATO allies when it comes to the Kurdish issue. Recep Tayyip Erdogan, the President of Turkey condemned French President Emanuel Macron for having arranged a meeting with the Kurds and trying to initiate a negotiation between the SDF (Syrian Democratic Force) and Turkey. As Turkey has been quite adamant on its position particularly on the Kurdish issue and considers YPG as a terrorist organization and a threat to its National security, its relation with NATO allies has been tense when it comes to mediate with them (Smith 2018).

It was in the last month of 2018 that USA decided to withdraw its forces from Syria. And for Turkey this was taken as an opportunity to go ahead with its plan of the creation of a safe zone which will stretch over 32 kilometres on the east of the Euphrates from the Turkish border. Ankara’s objective behind creation of this safe zone is to evict the Kurdish militias who have been occupying this area for quite some time. Turkey has been demanding to create this zone for a long time because of two reasons. Firstly, it will help Turkey to create a security barrier from the YPG controlled area, and secondly, since Turkey has been grappling with the Refugee crisis and the capacity of giving shelter as a host country

has reached its limit, this zone will serve as a shelter to settle millions of Syrian refugees living in Turkey. The Syrian Kurds also known as YPG (the People Protection Units) had been denuded of autonomy. Their importance grew and they were considered as a stakeholder when USA allied with the Kurds to join the fighting against the Islamic State. But USA was also under continuous pressure from Turkey who had been demanding to withdraw its support to the Kurds so that it can deal with the Kurds and prevent them from pursuing their agenda. When the US withdrew its forces it declared that since the cause of the intervention was to eliminate the ISIS, the task is done and ISIS has been defeated; so withdrew its forces from north-eastern Syria (DW 2019).

USA in Syria:

When the Syrian uprising began in 2011 in few years it developed into a long Civil war. The conflict started smouldering between President Bashar al-Assad with his loyal forces on the one side and the rebel groups along with defectors from Syrian army forming the opposition. After some years the nature of the conflict got complicated with the involvement of the regional and extra-regional powers. Assad's regime through military operation of its Syrian Army confronted the rebels and the opposition groups, while the opposition was trying to dethrone Assad. From the beginning the US has been in support of the opposition groups and other rebel forces that were against Assad's regime. US has been providing all assistance to the rebel groups from the inception of the Civil war and it was only after the Jihad factor came to the surface USA tried to distance itself. Though USA wanted a political solution of the Syrian civil war by demanding the removal of Assad, subsequent developments didn't turn out as per its desire. Russia along with Iran came in full support of Assad and provided all types of assistance such as diplomatic, military and even directly getting involved through military intervention in 2015.

A month after the first protests in Syria Washington imposes sanctions on several Syrian officials. The measures also extended to President Bashar al-Assad. On August 18, US President Barack Obama and Western allies for the first time explicitly call on Assad to stand down. The US ambassador leaves Syria for "security reasons". And Damascus reciprocated by recalling its ambassador from Washington. USA accused Syrian government of carrying out a chemical attack near Damascus

which allegedly killed several people. Despite having promised to act with force if Syria crossed the chemical weapons “red line”, Obama at the last minute pulls back from punitive strikes on regime infrastructure. And for this USA had to face criticisms of which declining US capability and its ability is also concerned. Obama agreed to a deal with Moscow, which by that time already got involved in the Syrian civil war and had been providing all kind of assistance to Assad being a strong supporter though not directly got into Syria, that is meant to dismantle Syria’s chemical weapons arsenal. Given the growing hold of the ISIS, the USA and its Arab allies launched air raids in Syria against the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL or ISIS) group. It is said that the biggest contributor to the coalition, Washington deployed 2,000 soldiers. Later in 2017 forces fire a barrage of cruise missiles at Syria’s Shayrat airbase on the pretext of launch site of a chemical attack that killed 88 people in the Idlib province of Syria which is considered as an attack on a sovereign state. It was the first direct US action against Assad’s government and President Donald Trump’s most significant military decision since taking office in January 2017. On April 14, 2018, the USA with the support of France and the UK launched a series of missile attacks targeting Syria, after an alleged government chemical attack on the then rebel-held town of Douma, in which some 40 people were killed (Weise 2019).

With the backing of the USA the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), a Kurdish-Syrian Arab alliance was created. Dominated by the Kurdish People’s Protection Units (YPG) militia, it received US training and aid in the form of arms, air support and intelligence. The SDF later overruns ISIL in northeastern Syria, driving out the jihadists from their last patch of territory in the village of Baghouz in March 2019. What surprised all was the withdrawal of troops by USA from Syria though it had several other reasons. On December 19, 2018 USA withdrew that all of the 2,000 US troops in Syria declaring that its objective that was to defeat had been achieved. Following a suicide attack claimed by ISIL killing four US servicemen and others at a restaurant in Syria’s northern city of Manbij which US considered as the deadliest attack against US forces since they deployed. Turkish and USA officials agreed to jointly manage a buffer zone between the Turkish border and areas in Syria controlled by the YPG, which Istanbul considers a “terrorist” threat. It has already been discussed in the earlier paragraphs about how did USA got ready for this move as

Turkish operation was against the Kurds and the Kurds had joined the USA's coalition to fight against the ISIS. But under the pressure from Ankara USA proceeded with this action. After several warnings from Turkey, Washington announced that US forces would withdraw from the border areas to make way for a "long-planned operation" by Turkish forces. In this respect President Recep Tayyip Erdogan confirmed that Turkish action against Kurdish fighters in Syria was imminent. America's withdrawal decision provided a free hand for Russia to seize the opportunity and further strengthen its position in Syria and in the Middle East region as a whole (Aljazeera 2019).

Role of Iran in Syrian crisis:

Amongst the players who are actively involved in the Syrian civil war and have influenced the unfolding of the happenings through the crisis, Iran is also considered as a key player. Since the Syrian uprising took place and the civil war began to spread all over Syria, Iran entered into the conflict zone very soon. Tehran was most probably the first supportive ally of Syria to get directly involved in the civil war militarily. Iran came in full support of Assad regime just one year after the Syrian agitation took place in around 2012. With extensive military assistance, weapons and training, Iran helped Syria in dealing with the opposition forces. Iran didn't even delay in deploying its advanced military force IRGC (The Islamic Revolutionary Guard Force) in support of Assad. In later years it increased fighter strength by including other militias across the region (Shiite militia) and most importantly Hezbollah to its side. In Syrian civil war, Iran has fought in order to save its ally the Bashar al-Assad's regime from being toppled down. Tehran from the very beginning of the crisis has not left any doubt about its priorities and what matters to it the most. Similarly, Iran has also been clear in choosing its rivals specifically when it comes to fighting against the opposition forces and the Islamic State. To have its influence in West Asia, Iran has been working since a long time. Every regional player in the region wants to have a strong position in order to strengthen its survival. Thus, Iran has already given importance to West Asia as a strategic need. From this perspective, Syria is an important ally and by helping it Iran will ensure self-help. Securing a strong position in Syria would allow Tehran to deal strongly with its regional rivals like Israel and Saudi Arabia and have a safe option to send weapons to Hezbollah in Lebanon through Syria (Pearson and Sanders IV 2019).

Iran's support for Bashar al-Assad's regime came in the form of military, economic and diplomatic help. It cannot be denied that Iran's assistance became crucial for Assad's regime to sustain in the difficult times of the initial years of the Syrian civil war. But it was not that easy for Iran, especially when faced with a rival like the USA which is trying to prevent Iran from cooperating with Assad. Despite several sanctions by the USA and its Western allies such as the European Union, Tehran did not fall back and consistently continued to provide training to the Syrian army which helped them to give a befitting reply to anti-Assad forces. Since Iran is a Shia majority Islamic Country it has shown its loyalty towards Assad as he belongs to the Alawite sect, a variant of Shia Muslims. So Iran has also taken the help of Shia militia especially the Hezbollah who the US considers as belonging to 'IRGC-QF (the Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps' Quds Force) in Iraq. And as per the US, these groups are engaged in anti-Western activities in Iraq and other places. In 2009 USA's State Department classified the Hezbollah (Kataeb Hezbollah) as a terrorist group and claimed that these groups are associated with jihadist ideologies and target US projects and campaigns in order to make them unsuccessful, which could result in depreciating America's influence in the region (West Asia). USA has claimed that Iran is providing all support, i.e. funding and weapons etc to these groups in Syria and Iraq to harm American interests. And in Syria this group has been recruited to help Assad against the opposition. Abdulla and Hussein have noted that, 'The group's goals, however, have since broadened to include resisting the presence of U.S. troops in both Iraq and Syria and propping up the Assad regime' (Abdulla and Hussein 2021). Robin Wright while giving his speech, at the Woodrow Wilson Center, on the outside powers in Syria stated, 'Syria, from Iran's perspective, is, in many ways, a tool-an instrument - to protect the Shiites of Lebanon. It is an intermediary, geographically, and it is a tool, politically. There is very little invested in Bashar Assad. There is a lot invested in Syria as a property for the Iranians. And that's why they will invest so much' (Wright 2018).

Though there are several arguments regarding Iran's priorities in Syria, it can't be denied that the sectarian aspect has influenced Tehran's policy in Syria. It can also be said that besides sectarian factor, Iran is also interested in having its influence in the West Asian region. Tehran is also said to have its own strategy in Syria and it's not there only to save Assad but to stay there for a long period and create a space for its own in the future projects in Syria. Both Iran and Syria despite having divergent

interests on several issues have been able to have an enduring alliance in the region. In so far as the strategic interests are concerned, both the countries have managed to get united at a regional level. Iran also considers Syria as a channel to supply its weapons and other assistance to Lebanon's Hezbollah. For Iran, Syria acts like a conduit for sending all its support to the Hezbollah of Lebanon so that Tehran can manage its Israel policy. It is needless to state that the kind of importance Hezbollah has for Iran in Syria. By using Hezbollah along with its own force, Iran has been able to give a tough challenge to the anti-Assad forces in Syria (Wastnidge 2018). For example, Iran condemned Ankara's actions when Turkey was launching its operations in Syria against the Daesh and the Kurds. As stated by a senior researcher at the Center for Security studies in Zurich, Mauro Gilli, 'Iran asking Turkey to respect Syria's territorial integrity is instrumental to Iran's interests' (trtworld 2019).

CHAPTER -V

**IMPLICATIONS OF THE SYRIAN CRISIS FOR THE GLOBAL
ORDER**

An Understanding of the Global Order:

Global order or World Order is a fundamental concept found in the field of International Relations, through which new global developments and changes in the power equations amongst the International actors are analysed and verified. Global order defines the status of the environment of the International Politics. When we talk about global order it indicates three models such as unipolar, bipolar and multi-polar. After the second World War global order switched from multi-polar order to bipolar model. After the disintegration of the Soviet Union unipolar order replaced the bipolar global order. Again in the beginning of the 21st century talks about multi-polar global order started attracting the attention in debates and discussions. The change in the global order within 20th century, stemming from the shifts in the balance of power, had distinct impacts such as world wars, nuclear armament and cold war, ideological clashes on the international relations made these shifts an attractive issue to analyse for researchers. Currently, the global order seems to be on the way of a new evolution from unipolar system, which rests on the dominance of the USA for almost three decades, into multipolar system in which the power is shared by more countries. However, the existence of such a shift is still under debate since no definite event like the WWII or the dissolution of the USSR can be identified as the breaking point which can be the cause of this shift. Therefore, the researchers have to scrutinize various ongoing economic, social, political and military developments in the international arena so as to find out whether such a shift in the global order is real or just a speculation (Uzuntas 2018).

In order to have a broad idea about the World order, it is needed to travel back to history where we could find how it has been continuing in International Politics. When the Second World War came to an end the multi-polar system which was prevailing during that time with several power centers got substituted with a bipolar system. From this very time through the entire period of cold war United States of America (USA) and Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) dominated the scene of the global politics and emerged as two superpowers. During the cold war period both the powers got into two rival blocs named as east and west. They made other powers rally around them and engaged in proxy wars in different places of the World spreading their military, political, economic and social might and control. During this particular period when global order was based on a bipolar model system and these

two countries were positioned at the two centers of power, there was a kind of competition between the two to balance each other's share of power. But after the demise of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War again a new change was witnessed in the status of the global order. Numerous debates, analysis, assumptions and predictions were made regarding the future of global order. Scholars and International Political analysts came up with their own theory and countered each other's prediction. While Fukuyama talked about the spread of liberal democracy throughout the whole world, Huntington came up with his concept of 'clash of civilizations'. As per his argument international politics would witness a conflict between the West and the non-Western civilizations. But Krauthammer developed his assumption that 'unipolar moment theory' in which he emphasised that United States of America would emerge as the super power setting the global order into the unipolar model. And his assumption also became true to a great extent particularly after the end of the cold war and disintegration of the Soviet Union. And this happened in West Asian region, North Africa and other parts of the World where America had established its own domination and influence and had no other competent power to challenge its authority (Oezel 20156).

However, Syrian crisis has presented such a situation where we could discuss the implications on the global order. In Syria we could see the power competition between USA and Russia and other regional and extra regional powers. Russia has been playing in Syria as a superpower being equal with USA. Even at several stages it was seen that USA has withdrawn and has not played at its best in Syria. Though at the initial stage there were several attempts taken by the USA to inflict a regime change in Syria, it was Russia who didn't let it happen and was victorious in this respect. Seeing the growing significance of Moscow in Syria and rise of other regional powers in West Asia, hegemonic hold of USA in the region seemed dwindling. And this strengthened the claim of a multipolar global order which goes against the unipolar world order where USA dominates as the sole superpower in the global politics.

After a decade of enjoying unchallenged and absolute superpower status, things started changing with new developments in the political environment of global politics. Globalisation changed the entire scenario of International relations. Despite USA's dominance in the World politics globalisation interconnected the whole World economically, politically, culturally and in almost every field. Consent of the

international players became a point which could not get easily overridden. In the beginning of the 21st century USA experienced a number of limitations on its powers and influence in World politics. On the economic front it started having several issues with a rising Chinese economy which USA considered a challenge to its growth. Though Charles Krauthammer theory of a ‘unipolar moment’, which argues that the superpower that is USA who is at the center of world power is unchallenged one, continued for a long time enduring American hegemony. The neorealists believe that unbalanced power in a unipolar system gives rise to the emergence of new great powers and a balance of power politics restoring the system of multipolarity. The financial crisis of 2008 exposing the weakness of USA’s economic vulnerability revealed that its hegemonic status is not that intact any longer. The ‘war weariness’ which was felt by America in Afghanistan and Iraq is still bothering it and that is may be one of several reasons that USA is playing being restricted in the Middle East especially in Syria. In Syria we could see how Russia is challenging USA (Sears 2016).

Decline of USA’s hegemony in the context of Syrian Crisis:

In last few decades’ debate and discussions have surfaced around the theme of US hegemonic continuity and its relative decline. The changing atmosphere of the global politics and new developments has encouraged scholars to look into the kind of impacts and implications these changes have on the global order. Since new developments keep coming up in the field of International Politics with different geopolitical events and shifts in power equation among major powers at regional and global level, it certainly necessitates an enquiry about status of the Global Order.

It has been experienced in different stages of developments in the past that the US hegemony has been questioned and challenged. In the last couple of decades’ American foreign policy seemed to have faced setbacks in achieving its desired objectives. A series of failures in Iran, Iraq, Afghanistan, North Korea and now Syria have raised questions on the hegemonic status of the USA in the World Politics. A rising China with its exponential trade growth and assertive foreign policy, Iran’s aggressiveness and attitude of defiance towards the West, rise of Turkey and its growing closeness with Russia in West Asia and finally Russia’s resurgence and reassertion of its influence in the West Asian region and most specifically in Syria, have served as a manifestation of the increasing challenges to US hegemony.

After the disintegration of the Soviet Union in 1991, USA emerged as the sole superpower and continued to establish and retain its hegemony for more than a decade. With superior military facility and advanced economy, America continued to be an International hegemon in the World Politics and for quite a period it seemed like it was impossible to challenge its hegemonic position anywhere in the world. Even today America still holds the number one position in its military capability. Along with military and economic superiority, USA had been having considerable political clout at the international level as a result of which its domination at different International forums and multilateral organisations could be established. On the basis of these strengths America had been successfully fulfilling its national interests and promoting its ideology. In the name of promoting liberal principles and democracy, USA could interfere anywhere in the world and bring changes in there to suit its own needs. But in recent cases of Iran, Afghanistan, North Korea, Iraq, Ukraine and now in Syria, American strategy seems to have not yielded its desired goals. Given the uncertain happenings in world politics and complexities of the situation current developments do seem to be in favour of America's unquestionable status. The US No more seems like shaping the global politics which it once used to do.

Case of Iran:

Iran-US rivalry is not new. USA has put its all possible efforts to induce a regime change in Iran. Despite several phases of economic sanctions by the US and its allies, Tehran has not bowed down. Even UN resolutions led by USA have not done anything significant in the direction of changing Iran's attitude. Rather it has been seen that Iran has become more determined in pursuing its objectives despite several obstructions and challenges posed by the US. From nuclear weapon point of view both the countries have always been on countering each other. While Washington has been quite suspicious about the nuclear weapon programme of Tehran and has been constantly trying to prevent it from acquiring nuclear weapons, Iran has not bowed down to the pressure and rather still progressing with its programme. In 2018 the relationship of both the countries nosedived owing to the pull out of the US from the nuclear deal. The main objective behind this move was to put maximum pressure on Iran by imposing various sanctions so that Tehran can be compelled to negotiate on the nuclear deal on American terms. But much to the surprise to everyone, Iran responded with resistance and did not accept the proposal. Iran despite being a regional power has been provoking the US and challenging its power on a number of

issues and on different occasions. In 2019 these provocations continued. From shutting down of American drone in the Gulf region to carrying out multiple attacks on the oil tankers while passing through the strait of Hormuz and purported attacks on the oil facilities of Saudi Arabia which reportedly cut down the oil supplies to the Kingdom for some time are some of instances for which Iran has been blamed for deliberate acts of provocation (Chandran 2013).

Since USA and Saudi Arabia are allies and share their partnerships on several matters, this attack of Iran seems to have challenged that partnership because the US had been taking care of the protection of the Saudi Arabian Kingdom. However, in response to this challenge Washington did not undertake any substantial measure to check Iran, rather was satisfied with some measure of sanctions. This action of USA has raised many questions about America's ability to take any strong action in response to Tehran's moves. This might be the cause of America's lack of interest in initiating a new war against Iran. But if that is the case, then we need to find why despite having military supremacy and advanced technology Washington shows reluctance to respond militarily and engage in another war with Iran. The answer perhaps can be found in America's military operations in Afghanistan, Iraq and Libya where no definite success could be achieved by USA. And in the case of West Asia region, America might get stuck in another war which would be difficult to handle or get out of. From these experiences it can be surmised that America's inability in shaping outcomes of its war strategy in several places has deterred it from getting into another new war. This can be taken as limitations on US power. In North Korea, America's helplessness could also be seen. Despite knowing the fact that North Korea possesses nuclear weapons, the US has not dared to open any military front against Pyongyang. While addressing the nation in his New Year's speech, North Korean President Kim Jong-un emphatically focused on the development of 'state of the art weapons system' and strategic weapons system. Targeting the US, he stated that, 'in the future, the more the US stalls for time and hesitates in the settlement of DPRK-US relations, the more helpless it will find itself before the might of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, which is growing stronger beyond prediction, and the deeper it will fall into an impasse'(BBC 2020).

Scholars even consider American foreign policy in Iraq and Afghanistan as bigger failure as compared to the that in the case of Iran and North Korea. Since Iran and North Korea are comparatively big powers

possessing nuclear weapon capabilities, Iraq and Afghanistan do not have that and even in these countries USA has not been able to bring stability after invasion. Many analysts and critics have raised questions about USA's invasion of Syria where the capability of Washington has been questioned regarding its role in bringing any solution to the conflict there. If America has not been able to do something substantial in Iraq, Iran, North Korea and Afghanistan, then how it's going to secure Syria's future and bring stability to the region of the Middle East. In this regard Chandran has raised the question that if Iraq and Afghanistan are not better today than they were before the American invasion then why did the US decide to strike Syria. He has also further stressed that, 'the era of American hegemony is on the decline' and Syria is a weak and relatively minor power for the US to invade militarily, 'Syria stands no chance against the US' (Chandran 2013). But even in Syrian context America could not score more points in the power play.

Case of Afghanistan:

Another place where USA's ability in shaping the outcomes of regional or global politics seems to have receded is the case of Afghanistan. If we talk about America's invasion of Afghanistan, it can be said that initially the US was moving as per its strategy to launch war against terrorism, eliminate Al-Qaeda and most importantly destroy the Taliban regime. Following the 9/11 terrorist attack, the US had prioritised its targets and carried out its operation commonly known as 'war on terror' against terrorism. The objective with which US began intervening in Afghanistan in October 2001 seemed to have changed its course while passing through all these years. However, the process became so long that USA got stuck into it and finally started negotiating with the Taliban. In order to arrive at a settlement, America was ready to have a direct negotiation with the Taliban by accepting certain conditions that were placed in the draft. USA was ready to pull out its troops from Afghanistan on the condition that the Taliban would not allow any other International terrorist organisations to use its soil. Though this peace process could not get concluded by the Trump administration due to the killing of an American soldier by Taliban attack but this process of negotiation resumed after some times. The Afghan experience clearly shows how helpless the US looks while handling its campaign there. Despite having superior military might and enhanced capability in conventional warfare, USA had to invite Taliban to the negotiation table. It is said that though USA is capable of waging

war and invading any country but it has not been able to accomplish its objectives. By looking at several invasions in the past it is seen that America has failed in bringing its war to an end in countries it has invaded in the recent past. Though in some cases it was successful in toppling the regime but unsuccessful in bringing stability to the region. Looking at the history of American invasion, its prolong continuation and inability in reaching at a solution, Johny has argued that, ‘The U.S., history shows, is good at the former but fares poorly in the latter. It is now left with no other option but to reach an agreement with the Taliban for a face-saving exit. That would leave Kabul’s fragile, faction-ridden government exposed to the Taliban insurgency, just like the Mohammed Najibullah government was left to the Afghan Mujahideen in 1989 after the Soviet withdrawal’, (Johny 2020).

Issues within NATO members:

North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) from the beginning has been quite instrumental for the USA to establish a strong military setup and also maintain western military dominance. Though its inception took place during the cold war period in 1949 and it was meant specifically to counter the Soviet Union, it continued to serve the interest of the Western countries, which were a part of it, under the leadership of the United States of America. In the post-cold war period with the help of NATO’s military strength and unity of its members America continued to maintain its superpower status and hegemonic leadership in the world. While a strong and united NATO is associated with the might of Washington, any crack in it or any skirmishes in the relationship among its members can also be related to the declining power of the USA in a relative manner. In some recent developments it has been seen that the alliance has been experiencing lack of consensus among its members on various issues. Most surprisingly even former President of America Mr. Donald Trump has been accused of being an admirer of Moscow having favourable view towards Putin and being critical to NATO. Even for France and Germany Russia still remains an important power to get engaged with and the Central Europeans still have reservations. On the other hand, Turkey being a NATO ally and having the second largest military among its NATO members has come closer to Russia and has taken an independent stand in the context of the Syrian crisis (Hindustan Times 2019).

In Syria the growing differences between USA and Turkey unfolds the weakness of the alliance that these two NATO allies are having. Contradictions between these two countries became quite conspicuous specifically on the Kurdish issue. Since USA in

its coalition had included the Kurdish minority of Syria in the fight against the ISIS and its troops were deployed in the North Eastern Syria, already under the Kurdish control, Turkey started invading the region. However, before the invasion Turkey had already asked for US withdrawal of its deployed forces so that Turkey can go ahead with its air attacks targeting the Kurds. Both the parties were on the opposite sides in so far as the Kurds matter is concerned. While USA was in support of the Kurds because it needed them in order to use them as a force against the ISIS. Turkey had been putting pressure on Washington to pull out its forces and stop supporting Kurds. Meanwhile Turkey started imposing its control in some of the towns of the border areas and began its negotiation with Russia over a deal. The deal was all about to create a buffer zone between Turkey and the Kurdish controlled area of Syria and this would ensure that Turkey's security remains intact and the area was also to be guarded by the combined forces of Ankara and Moscow (Johny 2020).

The cracks in the ties of Ankara and Washington widened further with another surprising move by Turkey. 'The purchase of air defence system has put extra strain on US-Turkey relations, which have also been complicated by the conflict in Syria' (Aljazeera 2021). Turkey purchased S-400 missile defence system from Moscow. Since Russia is taken as a primary rival of NATO and America's strong opponent, there was strong objection from the West on this issue. Getting frustrated on this deal USA responded by suspending Turkey from the F-35 stealth fighter programme and along with this slapped few sanctions on it in order to pressurize Ankara to withdraw from its deal with Russia. However, the deal of purchasing S-400 missile defence system was reached between Russian President Vladimir Putin and Turkey's President Erdogan in 2017, which is worth more than \$2 billion. But USA has accused that this particular purchase has been deliberately done in order to target NATO alliance and spy on its F-35 system. Ignoring the US warnings against the purchase, Turkey went ahead and accepted the missile batteries in 2019. US worries on this deal could be seen from the kind of response it showed towards Ankara. On the report disclosing the fact that Turkey had already began testing S-400 off the Black Sea coast, reactions started flowing from US. In this respect Jonathan Hoffman, the Chief Spokesman of Pentagon, stated, 'We Object to Turkey's purchase of the system and are deeply concerned with reports that Turkey is bringing it into operation,...it should not be activated. Doing so risks serious consequences for our security relationship...' Further, spokeswoman of the US State Department, Morgan

Ortagus, expressed that, ‘The United States has expressed to the Government of Turkey, at the most senior levels, that the acquisition of Russian military systems such as the S-400 is unacceptable,’ (Macias 2020).

It has already been discussed earlier, how the Kurdish matter has increased the sensitivity of the relationship between US and Turkey. To a certain extent it can be said that both the matter that is US support for the Kurds and Turkey’s getting closer to Russia and further deepening the tie by purchasing S-400 missile system, are linked with each other. Ankara recognize YPG as a terrorist group and an affiliate of PKK (Kurdistan Workers’ Party), which has been continuously found indulging in waging war against Ankara, and has already been declared by the US and EU as terrorist organization in the past. But in Syria, the US support for the YPG has been quite unacceptable for Turkey and cause of disturbances between the two NATO allies. Hulusi Akara, Turkey’s Minister of Defence, in an interview to Hurriyet, emphasized on the fact that, ‘The most sensitive issue in our relations with the US is the country’s support to the YPG, the PKK’s arm in Syria’ and added, ‘We can find a solution for the S-400 in our negotiations with the US but we expect them to see the facts about the YPG. If we cannot find a solution, we cannot go anywhere in relations with the US’, (Aljazeera 2021).

From the above explanations it can be said that by getting stuck in prolong wars, inability to bring any solution to end those wars and incapability to establish stability in those disturbed areas it has invaded, reflects that America’s unquestioned dominance and superpower status has been going through a declining phase. On this Johnny has explained, ‘. When new economic powers (China, for example) are on the rise and an old military power (Russia) is making a comeback. The relative decline in America’s power coupled with the rise of new and old powers point to a structural churning in the post-Cold War order’ (Johnny 2020).

Syrian issue and implications for Global Order:

Withdrawal of USA from Syria was considered as retreat of USA and due to this also it was for that period of time not considered as a major player (The Economist 2020).

Resurgence of Russia:

The kind of victory Russia has achieved in the Syrian civil war and the consequent influence it has garnered in the entire region of West Asia has helped Russia in its resurgence. Russia was not that active in the region after the demise of the Soviet

Union. However, the Syrian crisis came with an opportunity for Russia to make a comeback and re-establish its position.

After the demise of the Soviet Union and until the beginning of Putin's era, Russia was trying to rebuild its economy and political system and was very much inclined towards strengthening the nation domestically. It was not in a position to challenge US policies anywhere in the World and it did not even indulge in those activities. However, when Putin came to power things started changing and strategy was prepared to make Russia stand again with all pride and strength. Being one of the two erstwhile Cold War superpowers and having UNSC veto, Russia under the leadership of Vladimir Putin started working on fulfilling its vision of making Russia a great power again. It is not that from the beginning Putin went against the West. Rather it was seen that in the early period of his career Putin was dealing with the West in friendly terms. After 9/11 attack both Washington and Moscow relations seemed to have advanced to another level of friendship and Russia was probably the first major global player who offered support to America on the war on terror. Putin even went to the extent of allowing USA to establish bases in Central Asia though for a temporary period and even gave consent to the US Air force to fly over Russian airspace during their operations in Afghanistan. However, this bonhomie in the relationship between two erstwhile Cold War superpowers did not last long. Putin had objected to US invasion of Iraq and specifically Moscow could not tolerate American interference in Ukraine's matter which is considered as the natural sphere of influence of Russia. The sharp differences and breaks of this short period of seemingly closeness between USA and Russia came to the surface when in Munich Conference (held in 2007) Vladimir Putin criticized the 'unipolar world order and talked about the beginning of a new Cold War' and stated, 'US has overstepped its borders in all spheres - economic, political and humanitarian'. At Munich he emphasised on the need to restructure the global security architecture (Joy 2019).

After completing his two terms when Vladimir Putin after a four-year break came again to serve his nation as president it seemed like he was more determined to work in the direction of making Russia a major power in sphere of Global politics. He followed a hawkish foreign policy and anti-Western perspective became more profound getting reflected in his measures. Putin's Ukraine campaign in 2014 and integrating Crimea with Russia shows that Russia is prepared to protect its national interest. However, Russia's action in Ukraine was not meant to fulfil the territorial

ambition but to protect Sevastopol in Crimea where Russia's Black Sea Fleet was based. More than anything else, what mattered most for Russia was NATO's expansion into Russia's sphere of influence. Russia considered it as a threat to its own security. From strategic, economic, political and cultural point of view, Ukraine was important to Russia and in no circumstances Russia was ready to let Ukraine go under the control of the West. As per many analysts, the conflict in Ukraine was considered as a new geopolitical rivalry between the West and Russia. In this respect Jonathan Masters believes that, 'for many analysts, the conflict marked a clear shift in the global security environment from a unipolar period of U.S. dominance to one defined by renewed competition between great powers', (Masters 2020).

In Syria, Putin did not let the West to do according to its whims and fancy. By offering complete support to the troubled Bashar al-Assad regime and being directly involved in the Syrian civil war, Putin became successful in channelising the course of the war in its favour. With the withdrawal decision of the US under Trump from Syria by calling back its troops itself created an opportunity for Russia to play freely and seize the opportunity to consolidate its influence in the region. 'With President Trump in a hurry to give up on Syria, Assad has largely regained control, reinforcing Moscow's influence not just in Damascus, but also in larger Middle East' as underlined by Joy (2019).

Given the importance of Russia in the Syrian crisis and its growing influence in West Asia, it can be said that any settlement in Syria can't be reached without the involvement of Moscow and this signifies how Russia has been able to re-establish its power and position in a region that it once had lost after the disintegration of the Soviet Union. But whatever is Russia doing in Syria and in West Asia (Middle East), it shows Putin's vision of making Russia great again. 'It's part of this determination, by Putin mostly, to show that Russia is a strong power that has to be reckoned with', Margot Light noted in her interview to BBC News (Jones 2017).

In determining Syria's future, Russia has played a pivotal role. Even Russia's policy initiatives in Syria will help it in determining the strategic landscape of West Asia. With the growing Russian influence in West Asia other powers of this region have started considering embarking upon a new path that will lead towards Moscow. In recent past it has been seen how the countries in the region have taken efforts in building their own rapport with Moscow. Since Iran has enhanced its influence in the West Asian region significantly and is playing a leading role, Russia's relationship

with Iran is considered as another defining factor in strengthening its foothold in the region. Even former president Obama's policies in West Asia were regarded as betrayal by its long standing Sunni allies. Following Obama's policies in the region, Washington's position and standing in the West Asian region came to a historic low. This was also taken as an opportunity by Russia to intensify its operations in the region. Moscow took the World by surprise when it began getting militarily involved in Syria. From then onwards, Russia has been playing a pivotal role in Syria and has been even considered as indispensable to a solution to this crisis.

The growing importance that Russia has earned in the region can be understood by looking at the kind of bond it shares with the countries in the region. Prominent countries of the region like Iran, Turkey, Egypt and Israel have courted Russia by giving importance to its growing significance. President of Egypt Abdel Fattah Al-Sisi has paid several visits to Russia of which two recent visits took place in 2015 and 2018. Both countries have progressed in their relationship by strengthening coordination in many fields. In economy, defence and nuclear energy, Russia and Egypt have cooperated with each other and further bolstered their strategic partnership. When Russia intervened in Syria, the support by Egypt was publicly expressed (SIS 2018). Israel has also been in frequent contact with Moscow since Russia's intervention took place in Syria. Israel Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu paid frequent visits to Moscow to have talks with Putin on Syrian issue. Because of Iran's growing influence in the Syrian crisis, Israel was quite apprehensive about its own security and had engaged with Moscow which has become an integral part of the Syrian imbroglio given its role as a staunch supporter of the regime. On his visit to Moscow, Netanyahu while acknowledging Russian efforts in Syria lauded Moscow's moves against the ISIS by stating, 'Russia has made a very important contribution' and 'naturally, we do not want this terrorism to be replaced by the radical Shiite Islamic terrorism led by Iran' (Maynes 2017).

Turkey's involvement has already been discussed in this chapter extensively to show how despite being a NATO member and wanting to acquire EU membership, Ankara's relationship with Washington has experienced a conflicting phase in Syria. Erdogan made a visit to Russia in 2016 following an alleged coup d'état and both the countries tried to re-establish their economic relationship. Following these

developments, Russia could persuade Turkey to give up its idea of regime change in Syria and concentrated on the fight against the ISIS.

Challenges to the US in Syria:

The way Syrian crisis has unfolded over the years since 2011, the increasing involvement of Russia from indirect support to direct intervention and becoming an unavoidable major power for any future solution, have definitely elevated Moscow's position. Though the US has its superior armed forces and an advanced economy, it can't be repudiated that in the context of the Syrian crisis Moscow has posed many challenges before Washington.

USA was initially not taking Russia seriously. It had not expected that Moscow would be able to play such a significant role in Syria and USA would be compelled to negotiate with it as an equal power in Syria. When USA was searching for more options and using all available help to strengthen its fight against the ISIS, it had to deal differently with Russia. US envoys who were there on the mission in Syria accepted that Russian presence in Syria was legal and stated that Russia's interests in Syria would be taken care of. They also assured that the US forces would leave and funds for the reconstruction of Syria would be secured. But there was a condition that was Russia would help in removing Iran from Syria, which Russia completely rejected, believed this to be Western strategy to isolate Russia by eliminating Iran. For Russia, it was Washington's strategy to contain Moscow's influence and challenging its status of a great power. On the contrary, it is Russia that has challenged the US in Syria on many fronts. Barabandi has put it succinctly by stating, 'Kremlin's refusal to accept the Security Council's decision to allow the entry of humanitarian aid into Syria through non-regime border points is an example of how the Russians express their superiority and challenge the United States' (Barabandi 2020).

Syrian crisis has definitely had its impact upon the great powers who are playing the power games in the Syrian ground. With the changing situation in Syria, the US which many still believe by many to be the sole superpower on many counts, surprisingly does not seem to be a dominant player amongst other external powers. Lack of any profound success in its strategy in Syria, withdrawal of forces and loosening of its alliances especially with Turkey indicate that the US is not probably the dominating actor here in Syria. Adding to this, Trump also did not want to get

stuck in a turbulent part and desired an easy exit and this attitude also led to decline of US power in Syria. In these circumstances, Vladimir Putin emerged as a Central player in Syria. He not only saved Assad by using air power but also played an important role in regaining the territories that had already been under the control of the rebels. Unlike American invasion in Iraq and Afghanistan, the involvement of Russia shows that it really intends to be a part of the process that will lead to end the Syrian crisis. Looking at the initiatives and measures Moscow has taken in Syria, it can be said that Putin has done his best in proving that Russia is a reliable partner of Syria. Additionally, from Russia's perspective, Syria is not only an ally but a medium through which Putin can strengthen his foothold in the wider region as well (Marcus 2020).

By being successful in its effort to save its ally Russia has given a tough competition to the US and even has brought victory for itself. Andrew Parasiliti, the Director of RAND, Center for Global Risk and Security, while explaining about the major role played by Moscow in Syria narrated that 'Russia is challenging US role' in Syria. While America was trying to dethrone Assad and impose a regime change in Syria, Russia was trying to save its ally and ensure the continuity of the regime. As Putin was apprehending that a Libya-like situation might occur in Syria, he tried his best to make sure that Assad's survival is maintained. It could have led to the destabilization of the entire region that might go against the interest of Russia. Parasiliti has expressed in his words that, 'When Assad was on the ropes, Russia stepped up with a substantial military power to keep him in power. The Iranians too, but it was the Russian initiative and Russian air power which has been instrumental in Assad's ability to hang on' (Salter 2018).

Bringing Turkey closer to Russia:

Though Turkey is a NATO ally and has been closer to USA but in the Syrian crisis things turned out differently. Russia-Turkey relationship has got an upgradation given Russian upper hand in Syria. On the issue of the Kurds, Turkey has got more cooperation from Russia than the USA. In its fight against the Islamic State, USA considered YPG as a major ally who it can't sacrifice for Turkey. But this made it clear to Turkey that only Russia could come to the help of Turkey. This shifting of Turkey from USA to Russia also signifies the unavoidable importance of Russia in Syria. Talbot (2019) believes that Ankara got closer to Russia because 'Russia has

emerged as a major power broker in the Syrian Conflict'. Turkey's operations against the Kurds which is a vital issue of national security would not have been possible had Turkey not got the timely support of Russia. In this respect Issaev has argued, 'The Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), the US-backed alliance of Kurdish and Arab fighters in Syria, also knew that it would be impossible for Turkey to start the operation "Olive Branch" without coordinating with Moscow' (Issaev 2018).

It could be better perceived by Ankara that without the help of Moscow Turkey cannot accomplish its objectives in Syria. Washington though helped Turkey by withdrawing its forces so that Turkey can target the Syrian Kurds who pose a security threat to its nation. But still Turkey had realised that it could not overlook Moscow given Russia's increasing importance in the region. Though Russia helped Turkey in Syria, it didn't compromise with the interests of Assad's regime. So Russia played well by protecting the interest of Turkey and at the same time ensured that the measure didn't go against the interest of the Bashar al-Assad. Russia was committed to bring all the occupied areas under Assad's control by freeing them from the rebel strong hold, which also included the north-east region of Syria that was under Kurdish control. Sergei Lavrov, Russian Foreign Minister, made it clear that north-east Syria should also come under the control of Assad once it is free of terrorists and then the Kurds who possess the area should find a settlement with the Damascus. It can be seen that Kremlin has not taken any harsh steps against Kurds and has not even considered the PYD and YPG as terrorist outfits unlike Turkey (Talbot 2019).

Looking at the cooperation between Turkey and Moscow in Syria, the West believed that both the countries are closer to each other than the relation that West shares with Turkey. This perception of the West got further strengthened when Turkey despite being a NATO ally purchased S-400, a sophisticated missile system from Russia. This purchase signalled that both Moscow and Turkey can share common interest in Syria and both can cooperate and coordinate with each other. In Syria, the Kurdish factor contributed in cementing the ties between Ankara and Moscow. Cooperation between the two countries got more refined and structured in the Russian-led platforms of negotiations, like Astana and Sochi talks after 2016. It can be seen that particularly Syria-oriented policies not only moved both the countries to find ways to cooperate on issues of common concern but also reshaped their relationships with one another. While on the Kurdish question Ankara was moving away from USA, on the other hand it is the same factor that acted as a binding element between Russia and

Turkey. Stressing on this issue, Dalay has opined, ‘Whereas differences between the U.S. and Turkey over the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), particularly in northeastern Syria, drove them apart, Russian acquiescence to Turkey’s military operations against the SDF in northwestern Syria brought them closer’, (Dalay 2020).

USA and Russia:

Here USA Russia relationship is analysed in the context of Syrian crisis, where we can see a new phase of their competition and rivalry. Since Russia wanted to strengthen its position in the West Asia Region and was looking for opportunities to pursue an assertive foreign policy, Syrian crisis provided the same. Russia had already started its preparation few years back. Russia wanted to develop a positive relationship with all possible West Asia countries with which it could. The idea was that it can get cooperation from them at times of need, especially in its efforts to emerge as a major player in the region. In the case of Iran’s nuclear deal negotiation, Russia emerged as another important power along with all P-5 members and helped Iran get a fair deal while USA and France’s approach was to push Iran very hard. Russia has been trying not to miss its chance of developing its ties with the countries with who the US has started having strained relationships. Russia, when the occasion arose, rushed to offer diplomatic help to countries like Egypt and Saudi Arabia and also offered them trade options when their relationships with the US was going through some troubles. Even with Israel and Palestine, the policy of Russia has been to try and maintain balance between the interests of both the countries (Rabinovich 2018).

Syria emerged as a platform where Russia-USA competition again came to be seen in a different manner. Russia was in full support of the Bashar al-Assad’s regime and tried all its might to save the regime from removal. Before direct intervention in Syria in 2015, Russia was the strongest international supporter of Syrian government and was providing all possible help to the ruling regime. While the US all along was trying to overthrow Assad out of power and inflict a regime change, Russia was putting all its efforts to ensure survival of the regime. It was with this objective that Moscow blocked the United Nation Security Council resolution which was brought in by the West against Syria to launch military intervention for the removal of the Assad. Russia became the rescuer for Syria and helped the Syrian government in shifting its chemical weapons and prevented US raids against it. This act of Russia somehow elevated its reputation as an important mediator in the region. ‘Moscow’s

true objective was to gain enough influence to re-engage with it as an equal' (Frolovskiy 2019).

USA and Russia are on opposite blocks in Syria and vying for the fulfilment of their own interests which gives feeling of a Cold War like situation. Despite several efforts, the US failed to inflict a regime change in Syria and here all credit goes to Russia which was determined to ensure that Assad's regime is intact and for this Russia tried all alternatives. However, America knows that it cannot ignore Russia in Syria. Given the growing significance of Russian influence in Syria, Washington also has been compelled to negotiate with Moscow and continue its coordination and negotiations with it by high level visits and other diplomatic channels. John Kerry, then US Secretary of State's visited Russia four to five times to have talks with his counterparts Sergey Lavrov to intensify their coordination and cooperation in their common war against Islamic State and Jabhat-al-Nusra, an affiliate of al Qaeda. 'Russia's role is now widely regarded as being constructive and helpful rather than destabilising' (Gupta 2016).

CHAPTER-VI
CONCLUSION

A thorough and detailed analysis of the Russian involvement in Syrian crisis and its implications for the global order has been made by examining various sources such as primary sources, secondary sources and interviews given in several forums. This concluding chapter has examined and verified the hypotheses, which have been given in the Introduction chapter. While they have been explored and analysed extensively throughout the five chapters, this concluding chapter will specifically look at every individual hypothesis one by one with concluding remarks at the end.

Soon after the end of the Cold War and the disintegration of the Soviet Union in 1991, it was the United States of America, which became the sole superpower and along with this the structure of world order changed. After the World War II and throughout period of the Cold War the structure of the World was based on the bipolar model, which was determined by the distribution of power amongst the actors of the International politics which according the Realists are the sovereign states and the principal players. During the time of Cold War, USA and Soviet Union emerged as two superpowers with a seemingly equal power holding in every field. On every parameter that makes a state in International Politics a superpower, both Soviet Union and USA were equally exceptional. With strong economy, well equipped military with advanced weapons system, technological advancement, strong ideological base, powerful and loyal allies and most importantly the nuclear power status made these two countries the superpowers and thus the structure of the world politics came into the shape of a bipolar model. Both the powers were on a parallel level confronting each other and competing with each other. After half a century of continuity of this Global Order, there was another turn in global political environment and with the end of the Cold War it was USA which emerged as the only super power having unchallenged power and leading capacities.

Along with this unipolar world order, USA continued for a decade establishing its international hegemony and got recognised as 'International hegemon'. With military superiority, huge investment in military technology, a strong economy and 'substantial political clout at the international level' America enjoyed its supremacy for a quite a long time. However, all is not always well with the USA and its status. With the beginning of the 21st century, this absolute hegemonic status of USA did not remain intact; rather it started getting depreciated with the rise of other challenges. 9/11 terrorist attack, globalisation and consequent interdependence, foreign policy failures in Iraq, Afghanistan, rise of powers such as Russia, China and others in the

Global South have led to the decline of the hegemonic status of USA. China has emerged as a strong competitor for USA. A resurgent Russia, which has been actively involved in the Syrian crisis and especially in West Asia, has added another chapter to the already debated matter of the declining hegemony of USA, further strengthening the concept of a multipolar global order. Since the thesis focuses on Syrian crisis, our hypotheses were accordingly formulated. The chapters in the thesis have discussed at various levelsthe assertions made in the hypotheses and in the conclusion part of the research we have attempted to discuss the validity or otherwise of the hypotheses.

The First Hypothesis is: ***Syrian crisis has shown a declining trend of US hegemony in the West Asia along with a resurgent Russia, having implications on the Global Order.***

Through the discussion on the Syrian crisis and on the West Asian region, we noticed the declining hegemonic status of the US, especially with regard to the happenings in the West Asian region and particularly from the perspective of the events that are taking place in Syria. Though it can't be denied that USA still enjoys the superpower status from the point of view of superior military preparedness, advanced technological developments and highest investment in its defence spending, but it is not having the same clout and influence in the region once it had. West Asia is not anymore considered as a bastion for America and its power play because new players have become quite stronger and trying to establish their control in order to strengthen their foothold in the region. Russia, Iran and Turkey are the major powers in the region that are enhancing their power and trying to get more and more control of the situation. In Iraq and Afghanistan, American foreign policy has been considered as failure and 'strategic blunder' because it got stuck in there for a long time and could not bring stability in the region. It was probably these foreign policy mistakes that Obama administration found out and started planning on bringing America out of these quagmires in the form of Afghanistan and Iraq.

Similarly, the way USA has been engaged in Syria, it does not seem like it has achieved what it wanted to achieve. Though from the beginning Washington was trying hard to change the regime of Bashar al-Assad by overthrowing his government, it did not achieve that objective. Despite several measures taken in this regard such as

taking the help of its allies, moving resolutions in the UNSC and even undertaking several air strikes inside Syria, USA finally had to change its approach and shift its target and goal under compulsions. Further, USA has also not been able to prove that it was the Bashar al-Assad government that was responsible for the chemical attacks in Syria. Though it was the American government along with its Western allies which claimed that Bashar al-Assad had conducted chemical attacks on its own people, it failed to bring any evidence to that effect. Assad still remains the legitimate head of the state and has got control of the situation though with the help of its allies like Russia and Iran. Further, after imposition of several restrictions and sanctions, Iran has pursued its own objectives and strategy in Syria. Iran has not been so easy to handle for USA. After applying all possible action plans and programmes America was not able to bring a regime change in Tehran. Though much was done on the part of USA to bring Iran's nuclear programme under control and prevent it from further developing the programme, Tehran has played a significant role in Syrian civil war and does not seem to have bothered with these restrictions. Rather it has emerged as a strong player in the West Asian region and a major stakeholder. Turkey's strained relationship with USA particularly on the Kurdish issue and its closeness with Russia can't be considered well for America. Despite being a NATO member Turkey proceeded with its S-400 missile system purchase agreement with Russia. And not surprisingly this action could not get digested by USA. Even after warning from USA officials on withdrawing from the deal, Turkey still remained firm on its decision. Thus Russia-Turkey closeness during the war in Syria could be considered as weakness of US policy though it latter tried to reach at a solution.

Given the importance of Russia in the Syrian crisis and its growing influence in West Asia, it can be said that any settlement in Syria can't be reached without the involvement of Moscow and this signifies how Russia has been able to re-establish its power and position in a region that it once had lost after the disintegration of the Soviet Union. Whatever is Russia doing in Syria and in West Asia shows Putin's vision of making Russia great again. In Syria, Putin did not let the West to act according to its own geopolitical objectives. By offering complete support to the troubled Bashar al-Assad regime and being directly involved in the Syrian civil war, Putin became successful in setting the course of the war in Assad's favour. With the decision to withdraw from Syria taken by the Trump administration by calling back its troops itself created an opportunity for Russia to play freely and seize the

opportunity to consolidate its influence in the region. Following this, Assad has largely regained control, reinforcing Moscow's influence not just in Damascus, but also in larger West Asian region. While countries in the West Asian region have given several visits to Moscow through the course of the Syrian civil war in order to mend their relationships with Russia, their rapport with USA seemed to have lost the same bonhomie that it once used to have in the past. Since Russia's resurgence as a major power has already been started showing in the field of International Politics, in Syria with significant achievements it has been seemed quite convincing that Moscow can no longer be ignored.

The Second Hypothesis of the thesis is:

Russia's involvement in the Syrian crisis is based on its objective of reasserting its global status by strengthening its position in West Asia.

This hypothesis about Russia's involvement in Syrian crisis and its objective of reasserting its global status by specifically strengthening its position in West Asia has been extensively analysed in the chapter-3 and it has been proved through the exploration of the materials and events. The hypothesis is quite supportive of the analysis given in the chapters.

Russia was successful in protecting Assad's regime and to a great extent helped to clear its path for future by silencing those forces which were posing challenges to the legitimacy and continuity of the Syrian leadership. Russia's increasing involvement in Syria and growing importance of its leadership in the Syrian crisis seems to have helped Moscow enhance its influence not only in Syria and the region but also beyond it. The way we can see how countries are trying to strengthen their relationships with Russia signifies the growing importance of Moscow in the region. Turkey again joined Russia in its initiatives though initially it was strongly on the side of the West. It is also being seen that West Asian countries have been in touch with Moscow and keeping their diplomatic engagement intact. In fact, its role in the Syrian crisis and its links with other powers in the region has helped Russia to be seen again as a major power.

Russia wants to re-establish itself as a major power to be reckoned with. It is quite visible from the kind of competition going on in Syria. In the context of Syrian crisis, Russia has represented itself as a strong competitor to the USA. Russia has played effectively in the conflict situations unfolding in Syria. It has involved itself in such a way that it seems no resolution of the crisis can be done without taking the help of

Russia. Given the role it has played in Syria it seems that Russia wants to establish its influence in West Asia and shape its image in the region. It can't be denied that Russia wanted to prove its capability in Syria and showcase its military and strategic strength in the regional geopolitics. When Vladimir Putin became the President of Russia he articulated a greater vision for Russia's future. In order to get Russia back to its former status and position, Putin charted a new course for Russia. He started working on military expansion and investment in advance technology in order to give a boost to Russian preparedness. Syrian Crisis came as an opportunity for Russia to showcase its power and test its capabilities in a war like situation, which has given a boost to the confidence of the Russian Armed forces. In this respect we can state that the Syrian war gives the Russian military real war experience and it sends a message to the rest of the world that Russia has a capable, modern military that can face any major power. This is also intended to realize Putin's vision of making Russia again a great power. Russia's successful military intervention has also ensured that Moscow becomes an indispensable party in any peace talks on Syria, which enhances Russia's image as a global player beyond Syria and West Asia.

Russia's strategy behind its intervention in Syria was not only to save Assad and its regime but something more than that. There is no doubt that Assad is Russia's important ally. But by saving the regime Moscow protected Assad and secured its long cherished ambition to reassert its influence not only in West Asia but beyond the region. Though Russia has not the same power and strength as it once had during the Soviet period but it can't be denied that Russia still has the desire and potential to be considered as a major power and a great power. When opportunity was there Russia acted without any hesitation to realize its aspiration of establishing itself as an important power along with others. In Syrian conflict also, Russia moved in the direction of achieving its goal to position itself as a global power. Russia has used the Syrian theatre to its fullest in displaying its aspiration of asserting itself as a global player.

Russia being a strategic player in Syria and in the West Asia region took it as an opportunity when the US decided to withdraw its troops from the Northern part of Syria. For Russia it was a time to advance on its objective of emerging as an indispensable player in the Syrian crisis and enhance its status at the global platform. Russia used the Syrian theatre to showcase its ambition and power projection in order

to convince others that Russia is not to be ignored and still possesses the capability of being considered as a great power. It could also be seen that despite several attempts when USA failed to overthrow the regime of President Bashar al Assad, it was absolutely due to the counter attempts by Russia which compelled Washington to leave that plan. Credit would definitely go to Russia which not only made USA to do away with its regime change plan but also made it essential to consider Moscow as an equally important ally to be considered in the matters of Syrian crisis. Since Russia emerged as a successful broker in so far as the peace initiatives are concerned, the way out of the Syrian crisis did not seem to work without its cooperation and coordination. It was on the issue of fighting the ISIS both Russia and U.S.A coped with each other and it was also expected on the part of USA to seek Russia's help so that they can heavily come upon the ISIS and get rid of it which is considered as a common enemy. Syrian conflict also helped and became instrumental through which Russia could claim itself as a global power. In certain respect, for Moscow withdrawal of the US was considered as a victory for Russia since it would get more liberty in advancing its own strategy. Russia was also interested to be in better term with other European powers, which could help it shaping the political settlement in Syria.

The Third Hypothesis is: ***While Russia has respected and protected Syria's sovereignty, the West is trying to violate it, undermining the International law.***

This hypothesis is all about Syrian sovereignty and the thesis has tried to verify whether there has been a violation of the state sovereignty of Syria by the illegal intervention of the United States of America and its activities there in. The thesis also talks about Russia coming to the protection of Syrian sovereignty. In so far as the analysis in the dedicated chapter two of the thesis is concerned, these support the hypothesis. By launching attacks upon Syria and conducting airstrikes during the course of the civil war, USA has no doubt violated the principle of state sovereignty which has been protected and guaranteed by International laws and the UN charter. America's intervention in Syria took place without getting any consent from the Syrian government and the air strikes conducted by USA and its Western allies were executed without following the International norms and regulations. Though new norms, like humanitarian intervention and responsibility to protect, have been evoked to justify these interventions, but the act has been termed as unauthorised and

violative of International law because there was no approval taken from the UN. Though these new norms later came to justify interventions on humanitarian grounds and to avoid any question of legality and International regulations, it has been quite clear that such violations of sovereignty can't go unrestricted without the approval and permission of the United Nations Security Council. Further, the absolute legality of these new norms have been questioned a number of times since they are not established laws and can't override the established laws of the UN Charter.

US action in Syria has attracted the attention of many experts of International laws who have also criticized it by terming it illegal and violation of state sovereignty. Any air attack targeted at another state must have secured a mandate from the United Nations Security Council and approval of all five permanent members is essential to get a go ahead for the act to be undertaken. Even there is no question of the use of the ground of self defense because neither Syria has attacked USA nor Washington has complained about any threat from Syria towards its security. And this option can be exercised in case when there is no authorization available from the UN. We are considering this matter because no approval has been asked and provided in this regard. So even if we consider the possible actions which can be taken place without taking the permission of the United Nations, this does not come to any help because the ground of self defense has not been used and there is also no ground of its usage in these circumstances. But since America had no such issue and Syria had not been cited as a danger for America, and there was not even a single attack from Syria towards USA, this ground could not even come to any use. Therefore, the approval from the UNSC was a most which was not taken by the USA accelerating its moves against Syria. Therefore, it is perceived that US airstrike on Syria was a violation of International Law.

Even if we consider the fact that US attack on Syria was meant to punish Assad's regime and prevent any possible chemical weapons related violations, the action can't be justified within the existing framework of International Law. Because no country is allowed to use force illegally in the form of unilateral action in order to punish the other state for the violation of International law. It does not make any sense that in order to respect established International principles; one can resort to unlawful methods. There are other prescribed ways which can't be questioned. In this context, it is believed that unlawful use of force 'represents nothing more than vigilante

Justice' which would result in doing 'more harm than good to the International legal order'.

It has also been made clear by looking at the UN resolutions in this respect. When the US launched its air strike upon Syria, the use of chemical weapons was cited as a reason for the action. Therefore, it is necessary to understand America's act from the perspective of the use of chemical weapon. United Nations Security Council Resolution 2118 (2013) speaks about the use of chemical weapons in Syria. As per the resolution if it is found that any chemical weapon is being deployed in Syria it would lead to imposition of measures under the framework of the UN charter. Since no specific measure has been defined in the resolution and nothing has been mentioned about taking military action, US resorted to unilateral action leading to the violation of International law.

There is not an iota of doubt that use of chemical weapon against humanity is considered as a grave violation of International law and it should not be allowed at any cost. Therefore, at the International level we have specific legal framework regarding the use, stockpiling and supply of the chemical weapons under Chemical Weapons Control Convention etc. US airstrikes on Syria was illegal and America violated the Syrian sovereignty by defying the existing legal norms.

Since Russia and China have opposed the authorization, it is very clear that the permission had not materialised, since any authorization at the UN level needs the approval of its permanent five members and if a single member vetoes the proposal then it gets rejected. Even these two powers did not even accept the 'limited use of power' in Syria. This was because there was the possibility of this phrase 'limited use of power' getting misused as it had happened in case of Libya. When there were uprisings in Libya and Muammar Gaddafi's regime was in trouble, the US and NATO intervened in Libya under the pretext of limited use of power with the permission of the UN to establish a no fly Zone in order to rescue the civilians. But in reality it was more than the limited use of power and it seemed like as if the purpose of intervention was to overthrow the regime of Gaddafi. Despite getting authorization for the limited use of force in Libya, the act of the US and NATO was not in tune with the approval and this led to deliberate violation of the UN authority. To some extent this also contributed to the weakening of trust in the United Nations and its noble objective. Fearing that similar kind of situation might occur in Syria, Russia was quite

suspicious about the intention of the US, and thus did not support even the limited use of force.

While USA has violated the principle of state sovereignty in case of Syria, it was Russia which has protected Syrian sovereignty by respecting its territorial integrity. Vladimir Putin has assured Syrian President Bashar al-Assad that Russia would continue to support Syria in defending its sovereignty. In this respect Putin has emphasized that Russia would continue to render every assistance to Syria in the protection of 'state sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity', Russia had extended its support like diplomatic assistance, supply of military equipments, arms and ammunition and other military services like providing training to the Syrian Military in the initial stages of the Civil war. But when the opposition rebel forces and the Free Syrian Army made the Syrian Military forces retreat and the situation got worsened with the increasing possibility of the security of Damascus getting breached by the opposition forces, Assad requested Russia to intervene and help Syria protect its sovereignty and territorial integrity. Bashar al-Assad had officially invited Russia to combat Islamist terrorist groups, especially ISIS. Russia also made it clear in the beginning that the objective behind the intervention was to eliminate the terrorists thriving in Syria and possessing a potential threat to Russian security. Though there were definitely several reasons but the immediate reason cited by Moscow was the ISIS threat. But most importantly Russia entered into Syria with the permission of the legitimate Syrian government and acted in cooperation with the ruling regime by giving respect to its sovereignty while USA acted just opposite to it. Neither USA entered into Syria with such permission nor did it cooperate with the legitimate government. Rather Washington seemed to have shared some bonds with the opposition fronts and some rebel groups and most importantly acted against the Syrian government. Though later USA changed its approach being compelled under the situations and growing influence of Russia but through its illegal strikes and attacks against a sovereign country without any authentic evidence, made it clear that at these specific points USA has not abided by law.

In summary, we can conclude, though Syrian crisis has been quite devastating in terms of loss that the Syrian people have incurred throughout the civil war but it has brought in some new developments in the field of global politics. While for Russia it served as an opportunity to prove its capability and reassert its influence in the West Asian region and regain its status as a major power in global politics, it also showed

the relative declining of US hegemonic status in the West Asian region. Along with these changes in the power equation, Syrian crisis also revealed its implications for the global order with rise of new powers and strengthening of major powers inching towards a more multipolar global order. However, we still need to explore more in order to get more accurate and clear understanding of the new developments in the global political environment.

Map 2

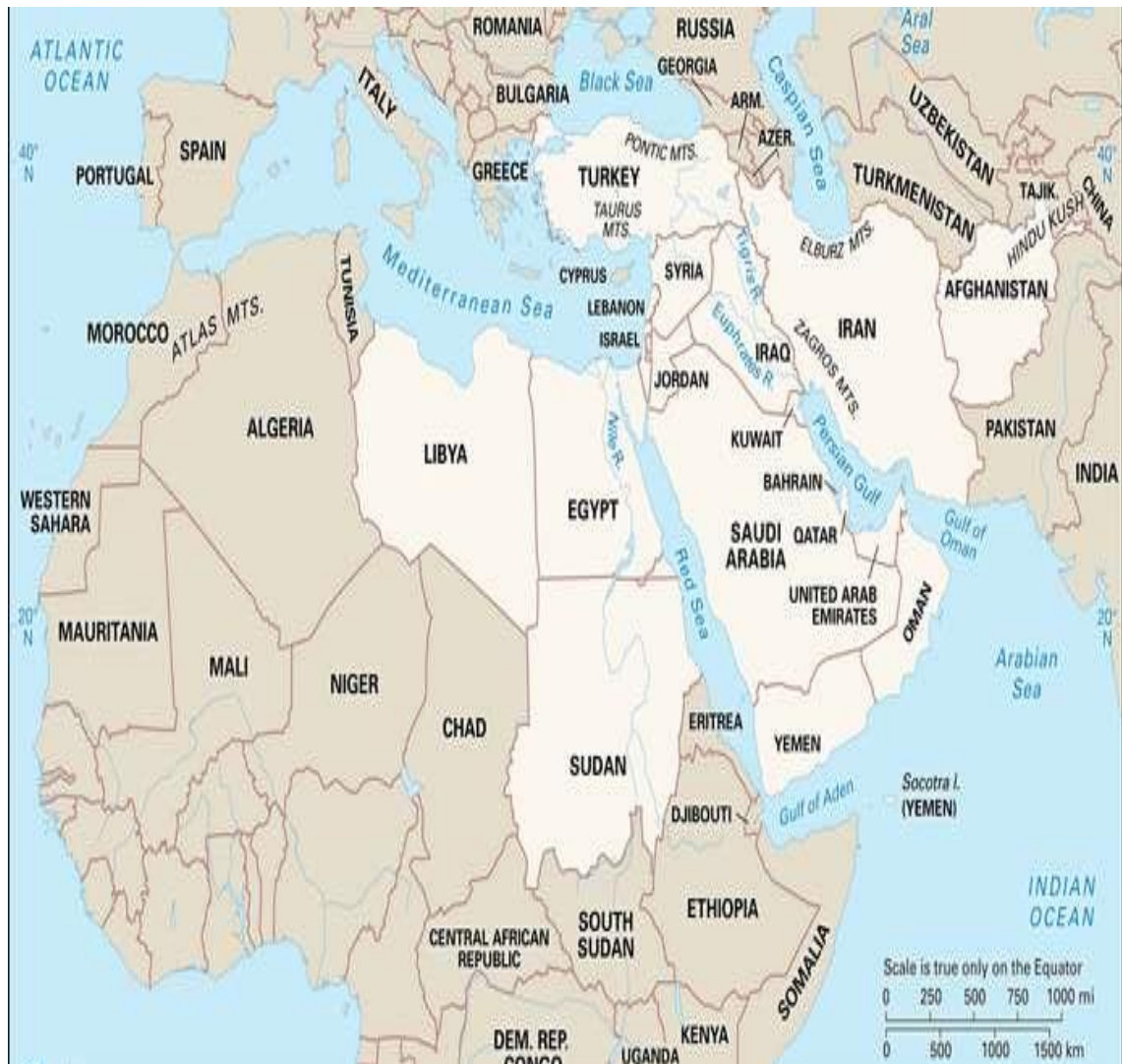
Political Map of Syria (Syrian Arab Republic)



(Source: Nations online, <https://www.nationsonline.org/oneworld/map/syria-map.htm>)

Map 3

Political Map of the Middle East



(Source: Encyclopedia Britannica, Inc., <https://www.britannica.com/place/Middle-East>)

Map 4

Political Map of West Asia



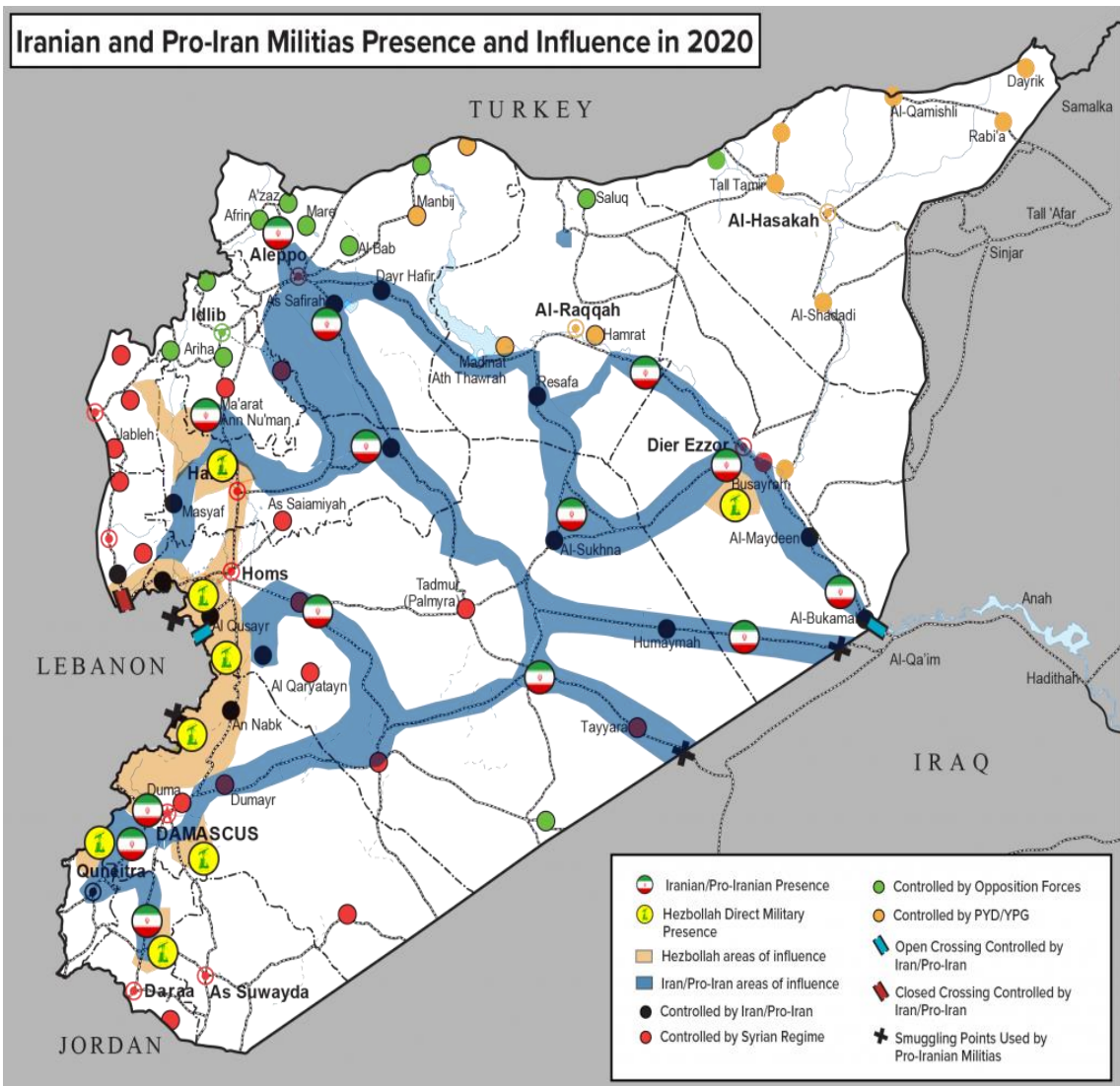
(Source:

UNO.ORG,

<https://www.un.org/Depts/Cartographic/map/profile/westasia.pdf>)

Map 5

Iran's Military Presence in Syria



(Source: Atlantic Council, <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/menasource/factbox-iranian-influence-and-presence-in-syria/>)

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