

GEO-POLITICAL INTERESTS OF US AND RUSSIA IN THE MIDDLE EAST IN POST ARAB SPRING



Researcher

Supervisor

ABIDA RAFIQUE

Reg. No. 3-SS/PHDIR/F14

DR HUSNUL AMIN

Associate Professor
Department of Politics & I.R, IIUI

**Department of Politics and International Relations
Faculty of Social Sciences
INTERNATIONAL ISLAMIC UNIVERSITY,
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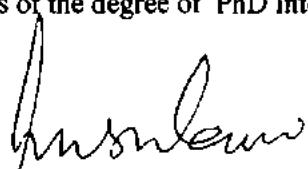
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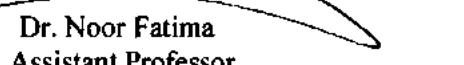
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Supervisor:



Prof. Dr. Husnul Amin
Professor
Department of International Relations
National Defense University, Islamabad

Internal Examiner:


Dr. Noor Fatima
Assistant Professor
Department of Politics and International Relations,
International Islamic University, Islamabad

External Examiner:


Prof. Dr. Saif-ur-Rehman
Institute of Strategic Studies
Islamabad

External Examiner:


Prof. Dr. Lubna Abid Ali

Professor
National Defense University, Islamabad

Incharge
Politics and International Relations
International Islamic University Islamabad

Chair
Politics and International Relations
International Islamic University Islamabad

Dean
Faculty of Social Sciences,
International Islamic University Islamabad

Dedication

*I dedicate this PhD thesis to my beloved late
grandfather for their kindness,
unparalleled inspiration, prayers and
guidelines for selecting the IR field
Thank you for enabling me to achieve this feat*

Abstract

This research aims to explore the geopolitical interest of the US and Russia in the Middle East during the post-Arab spring era. The Arab Spring has reshaped the Middle East's geopolitics by engaging the world's leading powers, both directly and indirectly, in the developments unfolding in the region. In the Middle East, relations among the regional powers continue to dominate global concerns about security. A power transition amongst the regional players is now underway from which new power centres are emerging. These emerging powers are testing regional geopolitical realities to assert themselves in the region. This study seeks to examine the geopolitical effects of the "Arab Spring" events on the area in this regard: Since the Arab Spring, Russia had valuable assets for asserting its strategic aura in the region, the primary one being its steadfast attachment to respect of national identities and state order in the Middle East. The identity discourse and its rejection of interventionism appeal to many. Russia's stance concerning the Syrian crisis can be one aspect. The understanding of the conflict also highlights the influence of Russia in the Middle East on Moscow's foreign policy in the area. Furthermore, the conflict in Syria enables a new non-western relationship to be established, in which Russia hopes to exercise its political leadership. This study explored how the US and Russia create an equilibrium situation to balance the region's strategic balance of power or bandwagoning.

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Abbreviations

AI	Ansar al Islam
AAMB	Al Aqsa Martyrs Brigade
AQI	Al-Qaida Iraq
AQ	Al Qaida
BRICS	Brazil, Russia, India, China,
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
CENTCOM	Central Command
GCC	Gulf Cooperation Council
GNA	Government of National Accord
GLONASS	Global Navigation Satellite System
GECF	Gas Exporting Countries Forum
ISIS	Islamic State of Iraq/Syria
ISG	Islamic State Group
JCPOA	The Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action
KH	Kata'ib Hizballah
LAS	Line of Actual Control
NMD	National Ministry of Defense
NSC	National Security Council
OPEC	Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries
PIF	Public Investment Fund
PIJ	Palestinian Islamic Jihad
PMTO	Material-technical support point

PKK	The Kurdistan Worker's Party
QIA	Qatar Investment Authority
OIC	Organization of Islamic Countries
RAND	Research and development
RIC	Russia, India China
RDIF	Russian Direct Investment Fund
SDF	Syrian Democratic Forces
SCO	Shanghai Corporation Organization
UNO	United Nations Organization
U.S	United States
UAE	United Arab Emirates
VNSA	Violent Non-State Actor
WB	World Bank

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.0 Introduction

Many issues in contemporary world politics are somehow related to the social, political, religious, economic, and cultural debates in the Middle East. For a student of politics and international relations, it is of paramount interest to study and examine the issues that have influenced the fragile relationship between global powers such as the US and Russia, which has a rivalry throughout the Cold War period and it did not end with Cold War and continues until now. With this backdrop, some dramatic changes took place in the Middle East, connecting to Arab Spring in the recent past. American influence has been more observed since 2009 Russia's presence in the Middle East. This change has raised concern around the globe and triggered much debate over its causes. (Yuri, 2017)

Definition of the Middle East is a highly contested subject. Many authors have defined it differently. The difficulty in the definition of the Middle East has been complicated since World War II (Koch & Stivachtis, 2019). It was believed during the Cold War that the term the Middle East, for the first time, was used by the British when they named Egypt the Middle East Command. During the time, China was near Western Europe, as Britain moreover had troops in Beijing. Keeping such proof in sight, the

British forces in Egypt held on somewhere within the centre of closeness to Britain. In this way, it got widespread in the long run as the term was a descriptive one for the British.

All kinds of state, market, and civil society actors remain unclear, the response to how the region has been created in the back-and-forth. The Middle East remains an open question of reconstructing or deconstructing. In explaining the Middle East, we can use the new word neologism in the Middle East, reflecting contemporary political agreements without denying the term contestation, situated in Asia, Africa, Europe, the Indian Ocean, and the Mediterranean Sea. In the past, the Middle East remained a centre of strategic attention and involvement of significant powers and empires. Today, as well as the region occupies a unique geostrategic position. In a religious context, the region is crucial because it is the birthplace of many religions, such as the spiritual centre of Christianity, Judaism, and Islam. And it also holds many religious places for Christians, Jews, and Muslims. It is also the birthplace of civilisation. At the beginning of the twentieth century, it changed to Middle East's fate due to its oil assets and natural gas discovery that stipulated other powers' desire and involvement (Koch & Stivachtis, 2019).

As the saying goes, "Geography is politics, and politics is geography," which can be easily comprehended by understanding politics and geography in the context of the Middle East. Today, the regional stability of the Middle East relies on a geopolitical basis, with an average of 4.7 land boundaries per state through seventeen states and forty-six borders. After World War II, the region underwent significant shifts in the newly formed Arab Middle East, which prompted a complexification of the state

system. The imperial legacy is usually most associated with the present political boundaries through the British and French. It may exemplify imperialism as an unbreakable rule that can be analysed via the Sykes-Picot agreement. It's believed that the colonial powers have directly shaped the political borders of the Middle East. Regardless of the region's existing human, social, or cultural geography, the boundaries were drawn for the Middle Eastern states. Thus, the international and individual interests of the significant powers heavily influenced its current political boundaries. Etymologically, back to colonial influence, the term "Middle East" can be located. As a result of legitimate regional dynamics, most Arab countries are also old political entities in one form and including ancient societies (Siddiqui, 2014).

Middle Eastern regions signify its geographical, strategic, and economic importance, further enhanced by significant crude oil stocks since Saudi Arabia emerged as a leading regional power in the late 1940s. The Persian Gulf became a centre point of global tension; later, tensions started between Saudi Arabia and Iran in the post-1979 era. Around 1945, Saudi Arabia, Iraq, UAE, and Kuwait possessed large amounts of oil as mass production, beginning a new era of tension. It compelled a new initiative to form an organization that comprises Middle Eastern countries such as OPE, which included oil assets of Saudi Arabia and included Ira, which has the highest oil reserve in the world. The Middle East region has been a major theatre of global politics that exceeds its geographical limits. (Koch & Stivachtis, 2019).

This study concerns the Middle East geopolitical context using a background of analysing power relations in international relations as the influence of geography, and geographic factors play a vital role in a nation's strength. A nation's survival chances

depend on its location, shape, climate, depth, population, human resources and size, social and political organisations, natural resources, and industrial capacity. So, when it comes to geostrategic importance, it can be briefly explained by the development index, means of internal and external transportation, central land and sea, and trade routes. Russia and Iran can exemplify the just-stated relationships as two land powers. In contrast, land and maritime powers like China and Turkey have been blessed with more geopolitically advantageous territories. Turkey has a strategic significance as a land bridge between Europe and Asia (Rashed, 2019).

Similarly, serving as a bridge between Asia, the Mediterranean, Europe, and Africa, Egypt's central location in the heart of the Middle East explains its geostrategic power. Morocco has substantial maritime assets in the outer part of the region; due to its location constraints, it has an advantage. On the other hand, Iran has limited capacity to project power, but it is protected from foreign invasions because of its mountainous terrain. Historically, countries face profound political turmoil when neighbouring countries are more influential. Following the post-uprising civil war, Iran's increasing role can be explained after the US invasion of Iraq and the downfall of Syria's government (Rashed, 2019).

The Middle East is important given its political, economic, and geographical location. In the current globalized world, the Middle East is a more fragmented region, so it has attracted global players' attention to the area. Despite sharing a common language, religion, and culture, it lacks shared trade and linkage among them and beyond. Due to separate geographical units, data shows that the Middle East is spending twice on the defence budget compared to South Asia. For instance, Saudi Arabia, UAE, and Oman

are more spenders globally on defence. Even those countries scarce in resources also spent high on security, such as Syria, Jordon, Lebanon, etc. As a result, the Middle East has become the most significant arms global market. The favourable geography of the Middle East has stated its good position to attract significant powers. It is well-positioned at the crossroads of the central sea. Easy access to Europe, Africa, and Near Egypt plays a vital role in its strategic position in emerging economies. Despite having narrow coastal strips, none of the countries is landlocked to connect to the other countries except Algeria, which shares thousands of kilometres of coastlines to link it with European markets. The Middle East is divided on history and policy as it has inherited an unfavourable and disruptive legacy. The fall of the Ottoman Empire created new political boundaries; it remained the same today; with time on after the Second World War, many problems and lack of substantial constituency and civil wars continued.

1.0.1 The Middle East and Powers Matrix

When continued the Middle East's policy, it has played a more divisive role than anything else because its natural geographical advantages, like discoveries of oil and resources, led to a rift in the region (Malik & Awadallah, 2011, pp. 9-15). Shaking off the bureaucratic power because of politics and policy has challenged a neo-realism definition.

Politics in the Middle East has long been liquid, from crusades to colonialism leading to the present. In the region, political players have competed for influence. Since the oil discovery in the area, with economic gains, politics has become diverse. Extremism,

revolutions, and non-state actors have more recently added fuel. The established hostility between central regional powers and the Middle East seems like a political powder barrel waiting to explode. Furthermore, foreign forces have had an almost constant intervention, including the United States and Russia, as more evident during the Cold War. A couple of these events, including others, have transformed the region's politics into one of the world's most troublesome jigsaw puzzles (Haertz, 2014).

Throughout the Cold War, the Middle East was the centre point of the Arab-Israel conflict from 1955 to 1983. In the Middle East Soviet Union's interest during the Cold War can be analysed in three points (a) naval and military bases in the Middle East and securing positions of geostrategic sense; (b) its ideological expansion and domination in Eurasia, the Communist Movement's evolution, and; (c) sidelining anti-Israel nationalists like Middle Eastern regimes. For protracted encroachment in the Middle East, the Soviets perceived to achieve long-term hegemony ambitions to avoid rising clashes to the level of superpower rivalries. Whereas the US at the same time, during that time, was the opposite where the Soviets intended integration of the Middle East and power during the Cold War, the US followed a containment policy the Cold War to inhibit expanding the Soviet sphere of influence deny Soviet access to the Middle East. This led to US access to oil by Israel's guardianship and an attempt to broker Arab-Israel peace initiatives (Ashley, 2012).

By establishing naval and military bases throughout the region, the central strategic plan of the Soviet Union was counteracting the American strategic advantage in Eurasia, which might be increased her position likewise to geostrategic strength throughout the region establishing naval and military bases.

Soviet development in Syria and Egypt had created a robust and productive ground, beginning in 1955. But despite all these, the Soviets were able to make foot firm in Arab patriotism, including enmity with Egypt and the Arab world. They led countries against each other in the Middle East. This triggered an arms race in the Middle East in 1955 to support Abdel Nasser's regime to protect Syria and its Soviet bases. The Six-Day, a Soviet response to the Suez crisis, continued by giving political support to enable the Soviets to earn substantial strategic dividends. Thus, the Soviet Union supported these to serve strategic interests in the form of naval and air facilities (Ashley, 2012). Hence, in the Middle East, the Soviet strategy throughout the Cold War was establishing an arms trade and aid in exchange for influence rather than more ideological expansion. And Soviets somehow was successful in adopting this strategy before 1973; in the Middle East, arms sale in the form of breaching the domination held by the US and bypassing the Baghdad Pact, and making the desires of Arab states in the Arab Israeli conflict fuel the war and was able to make themselves crucial (Ibid). Thus, the Soviets gained a similar effect in expanding their influence despite having little success in humanising and localising communism (ideological expansion). Soviet achieved to show support and force, the Israeli attacks as in 1970 founding of some 20,000 air and naval personnel in Egypt which stopped, safeguarding her Arab supporters leads restocking of Arab military capabilities after the routing of the 1967 war, which helped to raise Soviet status in the Arab World. For arms trade to the Arab world before 1972, which allowed the Soviet Union to look like the only protector of the Arab states between Israel and the West, the Soviet Union exercised this effectively (Ibid).

Thus, during the Cold War, US enactment in the Middle East seemed noticeably positive because its interest was mainly positioned on infuriating the plan of the Soviet Union, leading to Soviet failure. However, as a viable regional peacekeeper, the United States likewise found achievement in its power. American success or strategy can be measured in two ways in the Middle East; for example, before the Cold War, US interests remained relevant and enduring distress in the region: dependable on Arab oil can be analyzed while on oil embargo during 1973, as oil was critical not simply concerning US energy security but also because low prices were necessary to accept Europe's post-WWII economies and support the economics of the Third World. Its united Arab world perceived as was against the United States and its protection of Israel. This policy would have intensified the European long-term trades economy, quickly turned out to shift the balance in America's "favour as US strategy to controlling its position from the 'no peace, no war' situation between Israel and the Arabs towards insisting on Israeli concerns to make a settlement possible for the US. Throughout the Cold War, the US central interests were to reserve Saudi oil to contain Iran (Ibid).

The Soviet Union was diplomatically isolated during Cold War and strategically powerless due to the US containment strategy, which ultimately led to Soviet failure to maintain her influence, including resolving strategic insecurities in the region and the US literally, with its allies, led in the Arab world. Regardless of initial successes, the Soviet strategy failed for two reasons: Despite Soviet provisos of arms and aid, it neither was able to client states of the Arab world nor perpetually align the client's interests with those of the Soviets because of performing a war maker, through unconditional aid, arms race etc. which had deviated interests. And the author believed for the second

reason; it could be unable to function in peacemaking initiatives. Contrary to US influence over Israel and approached the peaceful resolution of the Arab-Israel conflict, apparently which the Soviets ignored. Like the Soviets, even the US supported these countries through an arms race with Soviet clients such as Egypt. Preserving oil and eliminating Soviet influence paved an edge for America as a crucial patron. The US was also unsuccessful because it lost Iran and its success in the Arab world; on the other side, the US could contain the Soviets rather than strike conflict (Ibid). In postmodern history, the Middle East has been surrounded by foreign strife. Since the early eighteenth century, major European nations have attempted to control their natural resources and vie to dominate the Middle East and its geostrategic location. Nearly two centuries later, both regional and superpowers compete for territorial dominance. The wave of profound crises is evidenced by a popular rebellion in the Middle East in the 2010s calling for regime change. In many countries, this has resulted in civil conflicts and regional conflicts. This was primarily due to the Middle East's vast riches and strategic location. Geostrategic locations are important in the essential dynamics of their surroundings, as evidenced by Iran and Turkey deploying aid to influence the post-uprising era. (Dina Rashed, 2019). This was evident in late 2010 and early 2011 when the Arab Spring erupted in many anti-government protests and revolutions across the Middle East.

The roots of their Arab Spring drive, comparative achievement, and end are still hotly debated among foreign observers in Arab governments. As a result, the Arab Spring paved the door for world powers to offer the Middle East a chance to smudge its geography (Seria, 2015).

Therefore, the Middle East's geostrategic location is also a central point of attention that why it always has an interest in significant power dynamics. In terms of resources, it's a hub of natural resources, oil, fossil fuels, etc. It can be analyzed by the Joint Arab Economic Report 2015 that only 5.2 percent of the global population in Arab countries constitute an oil reserve of the world 55.2 percent. Natural gas reserves are 27.5 percent of the world. Even internal fiscal disparities with its overall wealth is another issue the region suffers. Even its few resources are expanded to North African countries and are mostly primarily concentrated in the Arab Gulf. Due to resource differences exists the oil-rich camp between non-oil union-oil-rich oil-rich countries. Ranking wise on global indicators 2016-2017, Global Competitiveness Report illustrated Qatar and UAE as the region's economic achievers, ranking 16 and 18, respectively, compared to non-oil rich countries, which graded 56 like Israel Turkey. Saudi Arabia is on 29 ranks and is in position 79 Iran. Egypt on 115 levels and Yemen ranked 138 last at ranking. And these countries can reflect a vital part of the productive economy. Despite surplus resources in the Middle East, income disparity is highest in this region as studies show income inequality in the region growing on the topmost 10 percent portions ranges 61 percent including full 1 per cent portion surpassing 25 percent equating to 20 percent in the US. Regardless of high inequality in the Middle East, economic opportunities are minimal and reserved in the hands of few. The most significant 20 corporations were not registered on the stock exchange for each country, Morocco, Oman, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Lebanon, Egypt, Kuwait, and the United Arab Emirates. These disparities explain that ordinary people lack access to resources and other enterprises. Conferring to the report by Transparency International, these inequalities lead to corruption, and

among them are primarily top government officials, etc. And these practices led to instability, encouraging the practice of socially prohibited choices as a legitimate way (Rashed, 2019).

Consequently, Arab Spring initially brought changes in governments in Tunisia and Libya, Egypt, and Yemen. Moreover, in Libya, Yemen opened the way to civil wars, particularly in Syria. Moreover, in the region, this essential wave-initiated civil conflict and misperception. Thus, the adverse effects of Arab Spring derived in the form of uncontrolled terrorism, non-state actors, the rise of radical fundamentalism and the creation of the Islamic State (Iraq and Syria) (ISIS), refugees crises migrating to Europe, also the transmission of violence to Europe from the Middle East, etc. (Seria, 2015).

During this crisis, regional and international intervention have been limited to the degree before the uprisings; the region was less volatile. Muslim Brotherhood was supported by Turkey and Qatar, whereas Saudi Arabia supported Salafi Groups in Egypt. It rises the Islamists to the peak of power due to the support of such groups. Then this won't last in Egypt when President Morsi's régime collapsed, which has shaped its upcoming foreign political involvement. As in the Egyptian case, the Tunisian case did not develop a parallel strength, making Tunisia's rule less acceptable for the Islamist quest. As soon as Morsi was ousted, the Tunisia labour union arose as a most vital organization that arbitrated through the country's shift. Likewise, the mass protest had a more overwhelming influence on states and society. Although, such as, in Yemen, external involvement was indirect, through supporting militant groups, the economic assistance soon moved to direct military involvement in Libya. Though in

Libya, the Gaddafi regime was alleged as prolonged and violent, characterised by ethnic partitions where the demographic arrangement needed strong institutions. In reality, the primary player's quest for the region's oil resources fueled the state's future disintegration.

Thus, two governments in the east and west parts of the country have ultimately supported the change, which is unsuccessful in producing a united rule; local militias, such as in the Syrian conflict, petro-dollars as regional powers deviated on their support for them.

Due to the absence of strong civil and state institutions, other countries like Gulf governments, Turkey, and Iran opened the door to play their roles. The exciting thing is that Turkey was initially backed by Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and the UAE and enabled them the foreign channel fighters through its borders. Thus, to provide support from arms and logistical support, including a steady stream of soldiers, to the Assad regime. At the same time, Iran holds its influence on the Syrian government and Lebanon which has made' strong Hezbollah.

Regardless of influence over politics in Yemen, Saudi ought a complete shift of his regime, helped Yemen as Saleh was able to mobilise substantial areas around. The petrodollars of Saudi Arabia and UAE sustained the mobilisation against former Yemini President Saleh for long months in Yemen. Arab Spring movement came initially for regime change, which also affected neighbourhoods led by KSA, including GCC, and quickly spread around. The author expressed this had happened due to Iranian influence in the Bahraini movement, which led to GCC countries' intervention. Thus, from the interference from the regional and international powers. Due to its

strategic location, the Tunisian case secured its domestic politics, which was confronted by a militia movement from Libya. The Yemen and Oman border can be analysed, where such edges often facilitate arms and human power (Rashed, 2019).

However, the Arab Spring's initial five years were viewed by many as marking a change in the balancing in the region or bandwagoning because of Russia's involvement. Since the post-Cold War period observed under Russian foreign policy, many countries in the Middle East were less influenced. Yet, a twister of Arab revolts carried a strong image and enlarged impact (Tanter, 1999).

It seems that the twentieth century in Middle Eastern politics marked to carry about the growth of national armies after the decades of the independence movement. It has led federal troops in state-building processes and became a challenge to the state institutions of force in the post-uprising. In this regard, armed militias typically target national standing armies to protect social groups and stop them as they believe they could redesign a novel geopolitical map of the region. It can be seen in how political militias got support from solid patrons such as on Syrian Crises. The US has spent about \$1 billion until 2015, as per the US military spending report. In contrast, Iran spends \$100 million and \$200 million per year on Hezbollah and Syria, from \$12 million to \$26 million until 2015 (Tanter, 1999).

Interestingly, the US dominance enjoyed the utmost of the area's assets, meanwhile at a time of political instability when the uprising erupted internationally, even during the phase. For decades, including intelligence cooperation with Tunisia, Morocco, and Yemen, Egypt and the GCCs were close associates of the US.

While Russia supports two of its traditional allies, Syria and Libya, due to the Russian military base in Latakia and Tartus, Syria maintained some military relations with Moscow. But in the Libyan case, the US and allies justified attacks in terms of nuclearization and held control over it. In the past communist inclining Arab nations encouraged getting used to the US because of the slow moves towards market economy; likewise, fizzled US intercession in Iraq drove a fruitless experience. For example, to provide aid to most troubled Arab economies, the GCC countries remained a source of financial assistance to most troubled Arab economies, such as Egypt, whose military helped counter Iran's encroachment. Hence, the uprising in the Middle East brought many changes, such as upset stable relations, disparity among old allies, and excavated complaints about the status quo, which were less noticeable. These events intensified Iran and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia's rivalry, but they also affected the US-led alliances and empowered the Russian role in the region (Rashed, 2019).

Post-September 11 era led the USA to gain an edge over the entire world, including international organizations that were subsequently exploited up to the maximum level, which enabled the US to take every step, whether it is right or wrong, to avenge this great tragedy to safe and maximise its long interests. Especially in the Middle East region and other parts of the world, it has been a great tragedy. The US had become a world giant so prominent in the Middle East's political, economic, and cultural aspects that it gets back to those who turned attacking the West. Thus, in contemporary politics, where US-Russia escalating tensions have reminded remembrances of a past were most viewed as a part of history during the Cold War era. Nowadays, there are still competing

interests that have been found between the two countries in the Middle East to a greater extent (Tanter, 1999).

Keeping in view the Cold War incident of the 1979 Iranian revolution and after the US hostage crises, America dedicated to the Israel-first policy and redefined her relations in the region. But every presidency during its rule set up its foreign policy goals. The Obama administration made significant adjustments in foreign policy toward the Middle East. Many, including the Republican Party, view Obama's policy as reactive and negative by engaging with friends and foes to put diplomacy first and adjust to the difficulties of the altering global landscape. The net of supporting unpopular regimes was Obama's policy toward the Middle East. For example, reforms were fortified in the Mashriq and Maghreb, whereas Gulf countries were ignored where counter-terrorism cooperation and energy security concerns could have more to be involved. However, the Obama period and its policy towards the Middle East had a fundamental problem as ownership of the Arab uprisings was considered an effort to control Egypt and Syria for the democratic shifts keeping in view Iran, assumed by US re-engagement in the Middle East. Thus, US policy's impact is yet to be determined whether this relationship will have advantageous or not in the long term. Still, the Arab uprising's stable partners will benefit the US to achieve its goal (Mason, November 21, 2012).

Whereas, since the collapse of the Soviet Union, in the Middle East, Russian purpose redirected a sense of dignity to the Russians, which they felt lacked the interest to be remembered as the leader who brought back Russian power. Therefore, drastic changes have been witnessed in the Middle East due to the Russian presence post-Arab Spring. In contrast, the US presence has dramatically affected the region, which was already

evident since 9/11 in Afghanistan and Iraq in the US-led War on Terrorism and beyond. Under the US-led war on terrorism, the activities of the extra-regional players are becoming more visible, which are less obvious yet persistent. With the persistence of this involvement, the demands on US political and military assets might be increased and make the management of the Islamic world's security environment more difficult in years to come.

Moreover, stretching from Western Africa to the Southern Philippines and throughout the global diaspora communities includes the Islamic World as a group of countries; thus, defining the Middle East is vague. Therefore, the US and Russia's interests in the Middle East are significant to find out influencing strategy toward the Muslim world by exploring the region. Accordingly, increasing involvement and growing interests of the US and Russia in the Middle East direct towards a new dimension to explore whether and how it will be looked at soon.

The contemporary Middle East remains a hotbed of activities as the new global security threats arise as historical issues continue to foster controversies that resurface with renewed intensity and are the central points of international attention. In the Middle East, existing problems were from the Arab-Israeli conflict, the Sunni-Shia divide, and leading events, including the region's barrier, which has been altered by the Arab Spring. In addition, civil wars in Syria and Yemen have to tremble the area, whereas the re-building of Iraq is an aspect, and Iran's nuclearization is the focus of attention. International problems are another facto fundamentalism, terrorism, civil wars, and internal conflicts, which have jeopardised regional stability and revived superpowers' rivalries, making the area a veritable crucible (Ettinger, 2019).

Hence containing the seeds for many creative destructions, the Middle East is going through a critical situation by facing internal and external threats keeping in view Arab Spring, 2011, as its geography plays a pivotal role when it presents opportunities concerning status-quo and change because of its natural geostrategic location. Therefore, the Middle East presents a change and a conflict (Malik & Awadallah, p27). In the cause of time, new ones are bound to emerge. Moreover, old alliances fracturing in Syria, Iran and Russia, Iraq, Lebanon, Yemen, and Turkey's linkage are significant concerns and threats to the U.S and its allies. Thus, such events emphasised the region's conflict, increasing militia and irregular army destruction of nation-states (Rashed, 2019).

Thus the major goal of this study is to have a thorough understanding of the geopolitical goals of the US and Russia in the Middle East during the post-Arab Spring era. Geertz's (2017) idea of "thick description," which refers to getting a central objective in a detailed description that helps the interviewer infer findings in depth, was used by the researcher to gain in-depth knowledge. To accomplish this, qualitative research techniques are employed to fully comprehend the problem. The right technique was used in this study's semi-structured interview data collecting. This research might have been completed using a variety of other ways, but the study called for greater flexibility and openness. As a result, a semi-structured interview format was adopted.

1.1 Rationale of the study

The Middle East has become a nucleus of major world and regional powers. This research focuses on an in-depth study of Russia's and the US's role in the region,

specifically in the post-Arab Spring situation. Given the global status of the USA as a prominent actor in world politics, a researcher's key view cannot ignore her presence in contemporary affairs. Likewise, the Middle East has its significance in terms of its resources, diversity, historicity, religions, and then the presence of an ongoing rift between Russia and the US. However, the growing tension between Moscow and Washington has been relatively widely discussed by academia globally. This research filled the gap in existing literature concerning that Russia's presence could upset the geopolitical status quo in the region of the Middle East and also its focuses on comparative study to analyses both US and Russia in the Middle East.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

During post Arab Spring period, the Middle East has become a central configuring point of conjunction for the US and Russia. In this scenario, several geopolitical and security factors explain the Russian military presence in the Middle East. Thus Arab Spring led Russia to engage directly in the region with the context of Syria. In this backdrop of argument the study analyzed that whether Russia's presence in the Middle East would upset the geopolitical settings of the region or it could lead to balancing or bandwagoning

1.3 Objectives of the study

The study objectives are: to highlight the potentials of change or transformation in the Middle East that have aided the conflict's fuel, to comprehend the objectives, interests,

and policies of Russia and the U.S in the Middle East during and post Arab Spring, to examine the challenges and opportunities Russia presents for U.S regional security strategy, to study the challenges in the Middle East due to Russian presence and US impact in the region, and to explore significant changes in their military posture and regional security strategy.

1.4 Research questions

The central research questions of the study:

- 1- What geopolitical and security factors explain US & Russian military presence in the Middle East region?
- 2- How the US & Russian military presence will lead to balancing or Bandwagoning, given the regional geopolitical settings in the Middle East?

The relevant research questions of the study:

1. How would the US regional security strategy be impacted by Russian interests, goals, and methods in the Middle East after the Arab Spring?
2. Whether the US & Russian pressure lead to the political and geostrategic competing environment of the region?

1.5 Significance of the study

In the wake of post 9/11 developments, the political shift has brought an abrupt move in foreign policies of the countries around the globe, especially in the Muslim world which led towards Arab Spring. Due to this it led towards regime change in various

countries. Under these circumstances, the Middle East holds a stigma for the safe haven of extremism, conservatism, and authoritarian regimes. Keeping this background in view, Russia, involved herself to such an extent that it attracted other powers' interests, especially which contradicts the US interests. This research adds a new understanding through comparative study of the following: in which context and how the US and Russia are maintaining their relations simultaneously with the other countries in the Middle East, also factors that contribute to Russia's presence specifically in the post-Arab Spring period. The study would be necessary for researchers, academicians, those interested in Middle Eastern politics, and policymakers.

1.6 Delimitations of the study

As in the Middle East, numerous international players prevail. Though, the emphasis of the current study was on the Geo-political interests of US and Russia's in the Middle East in Arab Spring by taking a case study of Russia concerning Syria. The study does not focus on the entire Middle East but only on Syria, taken as a case study since the Arab Spring when Russian presence was evitable. Likewise, it also focuses on the Middle East, more on recent trends which are happening post Arab Spring until the announcement of the US withdrawal of troops in 2019. Due to geographical barriers, the US, Russia, and Syria direct interviews wouldn't be possible. Also, as the available data on given research was quite limited, relevant data was taken for analysis.

1.7 Literature Review

This research focused on the Middle East, the US, and growing Russian involvement in the post-Arab spring period. Many scholars and experts have already discussed this subject; however, this study aims to find gaps in the existing literature that the researcher is carrying out. Alexander Shumilin (2016) stated that many changes had occurred in Moscow's approach to the Middle East. Since a confrontation with the West, they created zone influence like economic interest (1990) and current realistic view. Currently, Russia serves through political and military manoeuvres in its confrontation with the Middle East in the Middle East. Also, it has become a promising market for weapons in the Middle East, which can be seen in the Syrian case. Russia does not want to influence the region; likewise, it did during the Cold War. But Russia is now in a zone confrontation with the US. And in the Syrian crisis, Russia seems to be an intra-Syrian negotiator and can maintain its presence in Syria to safeguard its military bases, Tartus, etc. Russia is taking advantage of USA failures and stumbles; therefore, Russia's role is more Syrian settlements and the ability to strike a balance between Tehran and Riyadh in the Middle East. In the context of Russia and the US, the author did not explain whether they are balancing or bandwagoning the given condition in the Middle East, which shows a gap in existing research.

Ariel Cohen (2012) describes the reasons, since the 19th century, when Russia has been actively engaged in the Middle East. The disintegration of the Soviet Union disrupts his policy for a brief time. But Russia has followed a more assertive course in the Middle East by contradicting the US policy in supporting radical regimes, supplying them with arms sales. The Arab Spring has brought implications for both Russia and the US, as

Russia believes that we and her allies are supporting Islamist victories in the Middle East. This has minimised Russian influence based on strong relations with the Middle East. This has also increased hostile acts against the US as many non-state transnational and local actors got opportunities to influence. And Russian policy is viewed in this regard as anti-American policies by supporting the Assad Regime and Iran. In this article, the author explained Russian influence in the Middle East and stated that it is more challenging for the US to support rogue states. However, the report was unable to address how their presence affects the geo-equilibrium of the Middle East and only addresses their rivalries by supporting opposed regimes like in the Cold War.

Vance Serchuk (2019) argues that it is viewed that Russia's return as a great-power rival to Washington is as surprising as it is confusing in the Middle East. The US allies now are in a high-level consultation with Russia for regional development while Russia is more engaged in arms supply. The USA and its allies perceived Russia as a power broker in the Middle East. And also believed that Russia was applying the same Cold War tactics and in direct competition with the United States. In this article, the author failed to discuss Moscow and the American involvement affecting the region rather than relating Russia's presence in the Middle East to Cold War strategies.

Robert. G. Rabel (2020) conversed that Russia's presence can be seen as Syria's desire to reclaim a paramount global role in the Middle East. Russia has virtually made a focal point for American allies trying to protect their national interest. By going against U.S allies through sectarianism and instability, Russia wants to show its presence in the region.

James Sladden et al. (2017) emphasised that the Russian strategy in the Middle East could be analyzed into two different approaches through its economic, military, or diplomatic resources, which can be seen through time, space of her actions in terms of preemptive or mitigating and also in the short term approach as an opportunistic. Thus, Russia does not set up fixed states and goals in the Middle East and would like to expand beyond Syria to maximise shorter-term goals and a flexible approach. Therefore, Russia's current actions and interests can be viewed as an emerging strategy in the Middle East. Broader foreign policy principles and behaviours would guide it. In this article, the also author explained foreign policy concerning the Russian method in the Middle East but couldn't relate it to the geostrategic impacts that lead toward balancing or bandwagoning.

John McLaughlin (2015) explained the role of the United States as a significant power, Russia, and Europe. Their strategies and policies in the Middle East are no more challenging as the Middle East is in flux and turmoil themselves struggle through power transitions. Because currently, everything is seen to be unclear who is allied with whom and what will happen next. As in the Middle East, not all Russian interests are colliding with the U.S.A as both want to culminate shared threats that can come from Islamic extremists. Also, its expanded relations with Riyadh and Israel are the more vital ally of the United States. And Russian growing involvement and support for Syria also influenced the Syrian conflict. Russia is building on a traditional alliance relationship in regional issues and recognizes all the changes underway in the Middle East. This article has somehow linked the occurrence of Russian involvement in the region by a

different perspective that the Russian influence in the area is not affecting nor balancing and or bandwagoning the part, and it's still unpredictable about her current status. Meanwhile, Russia maintains relations with U.S allies and rough states declared by the United States.

History provides a sobering lesson about ruling bargains and political rifts in the Middle East, which was argued by Mehran Kamrava & Nader Hashmi (2014) in their study *Beyond the Arab Spring: The Evolving Ruling Bargain in the Middle East* that the through the region during 2011 demands for a new rule for which it assumed that the Arab Spring uprising signified the regime change. This volume has been separated into parts. The first parts addressed the Arab Spring context and explained the main thing of governance across the Middle East: elites and the rise and fall of the ruling bargain, for example, fear and growing importance that ended in the 2000s started in the 1960s and 1970s. But this book's second half discusses more on the Green Movement and discussed Tahrir Square revolutions, and other events related to Iran and Egypt but ends with the Syrian and Libyan situation and future. In this book, the author also explained the historical context leading to the Arab Spring but didn't mention the role of significant powers thought the period in reshaping Middle Eastern history and the factors leading to current crises in the Middle East.

In his analysis, Toby Dodge (May 2012) explained that the causes behind the Arab Spring were their ruling elites and their inability to face the challenges. The event which had broken the ruling elite was the removals of Ben Ali and Mubarak. Army chief of staff Tunis Rachid Ammar (2013) refused the public to fire them, and a similar goes for Cairo Field Marshal Mohamed Hussein Tantawi. It led to leaving the armed

forces in both countries unbroken and influenced the shape of the transition. Through NATO's massive forces, the country's forces were overcome, leading to a turmoil that removed Gaddafi. Similarly, Yemen's main head was removed, and former ruling elites were overthrown who dominated the political landscape (Dodge, 2012, p. 6).

This author explained how the major powers played a role in overthrowing regimes in the Middle East but didn't explain their involvement would lead to major powers' competition and challenging geopolitics of the Middle East.

Ilan Goldenberg & Julie Smith (2015), in their article *U.S-Russia competition in the Middle East, is back* specified that in the Middle East, in the past few years, US and Russia rivalry all over the globe has been described progressively. Stating Russia's threat to its neighbours, challenging NATO, and weakening the transatlantic are also her significant ongoing efforts. And Russia's presence has received less attention than its intervention in Syria. A different approach compared with the Cold War, Moscow views as it's near abroad and is in the early stages of executing a long-term strategy in the Middle East. Russia aims to streamline the regional order and weaken long-lasting US dealings in the Middle East. It means its strategy in the EU in Europe is trying to undercut NATO. But the author also explains the level of cooperation where US-Russian interests align and tries to balance the interests like the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (Kelsey Davenport, 2020) aims to increase the safety and security of the region. The Middle East serves a great interest in the US, and sharing responsibilities with other major powers could reduce the US burden in terms of politically, financially,

and militarily. Unfortunately, Russia's presence in Syria also raised concerns, and Russian move in the Middle East is still unpredictable (Goldenberg & Smith, 2015). In her opinion article, Olga Oliker (2019) narrated that Moscow is a power broker in the Middle East and more effectively engaged in the region that Putin can analyze and held a meeting with Erdogan. This meeting soon took place when a US-brokered ceasefire in the northeast of Syria got expired. During this meeting, they mutually agreed on areas such as the People's protection unit and dealing with the Kurds, a buffer zone near Turkey where a joint venture takes place to begin petrol in that area. RAs can be analyzed in her strategy in the Middle East; Russia adopted a pragmatic approach to maintain good relations with all countries in terms of cooperation, which is not as similar to the US as it has divided its relations with foes and friends. Even where cooperation is not possible, Russia agrees and lets them do what they want to do and keep along with others' cooperation in different matters. At the same time, Russia is maintaining its relations with Syria and Iran and on the other side with Israel and Saudi Arabia (Oliker, 2019). The author explained that in the Middle East, the current status of Moscow is neutral and trying to make a soft image in the region, which the US was previously unable to do. But didn't explain with the narrative that this study demonstrates that Russian presence is challenging, balancing, or bandwagoning was given the geopolitical settings of the Middle East.

Litwak, R. S. (2014), in his contribution *Regime Change U.S strategy through the prism of 9/11Russia*, argued that in the Middle East, the US is still hostile as to the impact that heightening pressures between the U.S and Russia had restored a glimpse of past which were long gone when Washington and Moscow competed for impact within the Middle

East amid the Cold War. But these days, investigators say there are still competing interfaces, but not sufficient to fuel a recharged cold war front. (Litwak, 2014)

Adam Robert (2018), in his article *The Fate of the Arab Spring: Ten Propositions* explaining the Arab Spring is a tremendous challenge in contemporary times with the context of its development in the wake of the empire in the post-Cold War era, where social and political movements have played an influential role in the Middle East. Arab Spring led to regime changes in many countries and public demands for reforms that could trigger other parts of the region. Like the constitutional change in Tunisia, civil wars in Yemen and Syria, and reforms in Egypt, Morocco, Jordon, and Bahrain. The author further explained civil resistance paved to social disorder and the inability of regimes to control (Robert, 2018).

In his article, Hassanein Ali (2020) explained that after the Arab Spring, the Arab world had witnessed two interconnected phenomena. At the earliest, we analyze the crises of the nation-states in terms of disintegration; many states experienced failures (Libya, Syria, Yemen), and other states suffered from internal weaknesses. And after these, all crises gaps were filled by the violent non-state actors (VNSAS. There is always a possibility when a crisis such as groups, militias, and sectarian groups emerge, challenging the existing system as the state is already weak or no governing body exists. As a lack of governance and control, such groups established solid roots and flourished. Many VNSAs became a challenge for peace-led initiatives and dialogue in the Middle East (Ali, 2020). This article discussed the context of nation-building and crises, the

collapse of regimes, and violent non-state actors. Still, it didn't explain the powers behind bringing a change in the region.

Mehmet Akif Koç(2019) explained in his article that the among the two superpowers, the Middle East looked like an attraction point of the era; during the Cold War, the proxy conflict was established between Washington and Moscow through the pursuit of allies. Soviet policy post-WWII was twofold: one those to protect its southern borders by installing pro-Soviet regimes. Second, it was of Western challenge powers both internationally and regionally and promoted the rising anti-colonialism from the public. Throughout the Cold War for Soviet policymakers, the Middle East continued to be the centre of attention. But the USSR made relations with those regional states who served the Soviet interests and strategy in the region, which was a reliable assumption of confrontation during the Cold War. Even main allies of Moscow, Cairo, Libya, Iraq, Algeria, and Algeria appeared under the severe circumstances of the Cold War. But soon after the end of the Cold War, when the Soviet Union collapsed at the end, it lost its position in the region. And it assumed that the end of the Cold War era was the failure as a superpower status of the Soviet Union started because of its exit from the Middle East. But once again, in the Middle East, Russia has re-emerged as a player and aims to restore its prominent power position outside of the former USSR; under President Putin's rule because its involvement in Syria was assessed as a challenging critical ground for Russia to return to the global stage (Koç, 2019).

The new approach to action gave Russia the opportunity during the beginning of the Arab Spring. In this context, the change in the regional balance of power needs to

understand that Russia, to make a new domain of influence, set out to discover new territories by using overt or covert actions in various regional issues as expanding its impression through intervention in the Eastern Mediterranean. In this regard, despite pressure, Russia is selective with most regional actors in cooperation, both before and after the Syrian crisis. It has shown Russia's foreign policy remained a non-ideological and practical approach as the main characteristic in the Middle East while engaging. Russia seems to challenge the systemic uni-polarity and US power as it tried to be done during the Cold War, and similar to the current context, it reflects in the Middle East, with the context of the Syrian civil war, Arab Spring's influence on the balance of power, that offered Russia the opportunity to influence in the region and also to globally that Russia raised as an influential power globally. Moscow has to preserve its presence in the Middle East first between the US and Russia. It has slowly changed the region from a ground of ideological and political hatred from a Western zone of influence to broader regional interests. (Litsas, 2018) In this article, the author explains Russia's broader goals than the Cold War Era and assumes that it has created a balance of power through its presence in the Middle East. But the author failed to understand that the Soviet and Russian comparison is a different explanation and tried to relate it with the New Cold War era dimension instead of about geopolitical settings of the region, whether it's balancing or bandwagoning.

Spyridon N. Litsas (2018) discussed that it was perceived as similar to various revolts in the Middle East that Washington gave Russia the push from the region because Russia's approaches in Arab Springs reflected more controversy. As the Arab Spring was a prospect for Russia to follow her hinge to the Middle East, Putin invited President

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Mohamed Morsi, Egypt, to Moscow despite the Muslim Brotherhood being recognised as a terrorist group on the list. It reflected to support its old allies that Russia was ready, along with the result of the Arab Spring. It is also accepted realistically and can be analyzed during the Libya situation. It is assumed that Russia is gradually changing the whole zone from a Western zone of influence both ways ideologically. Through political resentment between US and Russia, it has to preserve its involvement or presence in the Middle East for larger interests in the region. (Spyridon N. Litsas, 2018, pp. 70-73). Hence this author has explained Russian influence in the Middle East, but for that, it has to preserve its presence by supporting old allies keeping behind the old ideological expansionist policy. But the author left a gap to be filled that how it affects the geopolitical setting of the Middle East.

In his article, Stephen Blank (2018) mentioned that Russia's presence and involvement in the Syria conflict would lead to kinetic clashes with the United States. But it isn't easy to understand Russian intentions in the Middle East. Russia looks beyond Syria, which reflects its greater interest in the region. It is essential what Russia is looking at, and the United States will forge its coherent strategy accordingly in the Middle East. Russia wants to remain a great power and maintain it through possible actions like the Syrian case. In contrast, for the ideological promotion of democracy, the US is more interested. (Blank, 2018). The literature review identifies a critical gap in the present understanding of Russia's actions and involvement in terms of Russian strategy in the region, Russian interests and objectives in Syria and its nature of engagement, and geopolitical factors explained to define whether Russian presence is balancing or bandwagoning, given the geopolitical situation of the region. Similarly, after the Arab

Spring period, the Middle Eastern region has become a central configuring point of conjunction for the U.S and Russia. In this scenario, several geopolitical and security factors explain the Russian military presence in the Middle East. But limited resources directly mentioned the fact of Russia in the region that would upset the geopolitical settings of the region, and it is still under discussion.

1.8 Research Methodology

This research has opted for qualitative methods of analysis. More specifically, the thematic analysis examines the current status of Russian involvement in the Middle East concerning its current interests and future goals. For qualitative data, semi-structured interviews are conducted. The interviews have enabled access to deep insights and themes. A qualitative method aims for descriptive analyses through in-depth issues such as interviews. The survey is a non-experimental and descriptive research method. It is formatted in in-depth interviews by developing questionnaires. Qualitative research delivers an in-depth understanding of the issue by communicating directly and visiting their workplace or residence. Their opinions can be put into words by their stories (Creswell, 2012, p. 4). Qualitative research will allow researcher to "empower individuals to share their perspectives, and understand friend or foe regional context concerning Russian involvement" (Creswell, 2012, p. 40). Thematic analysis is a technique for classifying, examining and recording designs (themes) within data (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 79). This technique gives a better understanding of an issue or impression (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Due to limited resources direct observation was not possible due to time limitation and also for the safety purpose.

1.8.1 Population

This study followed the method for data collection is in-depth interviews and direct observation. As thematic analysis used in this research, the data is collected was using the interview method. The interviews were conducted with academicians, researchers, journalists, and government officials. However, the current researcher couldn't collect data from all potential interviews in Syria, Russia, and the United States. Therefore, this study consulted only key policymakers, experts, academia, journalists, researchers, and professionals from both Russian and the US area studies, and experts as this study deal with the geopolitical interests of the US and Russia in the Middle East during the Post Arab Spring.

1.8.2 Sampling

As qualitative research aims to bring descriptive understanding and analyze specific issues, the purposive sampling method has been used to interview concerned informants. The interview panel is divided equally between the US and Russian key policymakers, experts, academia, professionals etc. The division is twofold: First, the relevant vital experts directly related to the defined period under study were interviewed. In the second category, 20 opinion-makers were interviewed.

Interviews were conducted to comprehend the geopolitical interest of the US and Russia in the Middle East Post Arab Spring Period. In addition, the interviewer's relevant background and understanding of the issue were mainly focused on exploring the current Russian status in the Middle East, as relevant data is not available in secondary

sources (Smith et al., 2009, p. 56). Therefore, each person's knowledge was their understanding of the issue. The researcher conducted the interviews with a semi-structured interview type. The interview duration was almost last 30 minutes and for descriptive discussion lasted for an hour.

1.8.3 Instrumentation

To research the subject questions, the interviews conducted by the experts belonged to Pakistan, GCC, and Middle Eastern experts from Thailand, Malaysia and USA. Furthermore, open-ended questions were asked, and themes were developed from the interview data. Thematic analysis has been taken to analyze qualitative data because it refers to a broad set of techniques useful for understanding and analyzing the text.

1.8.4 Data Collection- Qualitative Interviews

Together secondary and primary data have been followed in this research. The secondary data has been considered from books, journals, and published articles. In addition, official websites of the relevant topic and governments also studied and tried to communicate for interviews. Moreover, official reports, statements and, strategy papers, regional print media also remained a source of information.

This study relies on primary data because of the lack of current literature on the subject research area (2009, 46). Therefore, in a semi-structured method with structured and unstructured interview styles. Unstructured interviews are a more flexible style of an interview where the interviewer is free to discuss. To understand deeply about the issue, this study opted for an unstructured and structured interview style. For this research

specific list of questions was formulated to cover during the conversation. Therefore, both unstructured and semi-structured interviews have been considered for primary data.

Interviews were conducted by emails, telephonic calls, and personal visits. Some were recorded and later transcribed. During the interview, notes were taken, and interpretation was discussed with the respondent for re-confirmation to avoid misunderstanding. The duration of the interviews continued from 30 minutes to 60 minutes.

1.8.5 Data Analysis

In this study, a thematic method of analysis was applied. Both inductive and deductive methods were used, and descriptive & explanatory issues were raised to analyze the subject matter. However, the study chooses interviews to collect primary data due to a lack of secondary data. An essential source comprises the official explanations, govt. Key policymakers gave procedures, declarations, and online interviews in open, press releases, reports, surveys and Govt. official websites.

For primary data, both unstructured and semi-structured interviews style are considered. For secondary data, this research for background information is primarily derived from the different books, newspapers and articles published in various journals and magazines. In addition, different libraries have been visited, such as the National Library of Islamabad, Library of International Islamic University Islamabad, Quaid-e-Azam University's Library, National Defence University's Library, and National

Library Islamabad, and Allama Iqbal Open University's Library, Chulalongkorn University, Thailand, Thammasat University. In addition, Thailand and Mahidol University, Thailand, were visited for research purposes.

1.9 Theoretical Framework

Social speculations have continuously been connected to clarify inter-state relations and state behaviour. Political thinking explained how a state founded its relations with other states and made decisions regarding political issues.

The study is guided and informed by a major variant of international relations theory: i.e., neo-realism. It is a variant in international politics that is utilised in this research. Theories, concepts, and paradigms are adapted according to the situation. Therefore, their significance and interpretation are relative and contextual. Hence, this study followed the realist school of thought in a wider outline of theories.

Neo-realism, also known as political realism structural realism, is a theory of international relations first outlined by Kenneth Waltz in his book (1979), Theory of International Politics. Neorealism holds that the nature of the worldwide structure is characterised by its disorder, ordering values, and dispersion of capabilities (Art, R.J, 2009).

The anarchic ordering principle of international structure is decentralised, which means there is no formal central authority. Each imperial state formally rises in this framework. These states act agreeing to the rationale of self-help, meaning states look for their claim intrigued and will not subordinate they are intrigued to the interface of

other states. States are accepted, at least, to need to guarantee their claim survival as typically a prerequisite to seeking after other objectives. This driving constrain of survival is the important figure affecting their behaviour and, in turn, guarantees states create hostile military capabilities for foreign intercessions and implies extending their relative control. Because states can never be certain of other states' future eagerly, there's a need to believe between states, which needs them to protect against relative misfortunes of control, which might empower other states to debilitate their survival. Based on instability, this need has a belief called the security dilemma. (Hans, 2011) This study has followed the Neo-Realist assumptions as a theoretical framework. On the bases of the above approach, the researcher has developed a diagram to explain the problem, which is explained in chapter 2.

1.10 Organization of the study

This study comprehended five chapters. The first chapter provided a brief introduction and background of the research, a problem statement, and research questions and objectives. It has also deliberated on the existing literature regarding the research topic and highlighted key gaps in existing academic work, which provided a need to carry out this research. The chapter also developed the methodology, which is narrative research embedded in a qualitative research tradition. Methods for data collection and analysis are also delineated. Chapter 2 consists of the main theoretical threads and lays a theoretical foundation for the current research. A neo-realism theory was found to support the research argument and thus was constructed rather a being a natural product. The chapter shows that structural realism has focused more on state structure and state behaviour in different situations as there is an

anarchic situation in world politics. Due to the anarchic nature of the states, which assumes and leads to engaging the state more in military development, power-seeking and influencing in power politics lead to changing dynamics. Furthermore, a theory supported the argument that Russia's presence has balanced the geopolitical settings of the Middle East. This chapter has justified Russia's current engagements and its involvement in the Middle East concerning Syria. The chapter explains that the Middle East geopolitics has changed since the Russian presence was witnessed in the post Arab Spring period. Chapter 3 explains more in the US context of the Middle Eastern policy explaining how the US define its policies towards the Middle East post Arab Spring period. Chapter 4 Russia-Middle East policies with a brief historical background and post Arab Spring period as the predecessors' policies helped to reshape the current one. Chapter 5 provides a thematic data analysis of the themes generated from the interview data. The key respondents included people from academia, experts, key policymakers, and researchers. The respondents explained their understanding of the issue, which slightly differs from the existing literature. The study explained the interviewers' context of understanding and explanation of the issue and how it relates to and differs from the literature. Chapter six, which is the last chapter in this thesis, comprises of conclusion and provides the future narrative of the US and Russia's involvement in the Middle East.

CHAPTER 2

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.0 Introduction

The study titled geopolitical interest of US and Russia in the Middle East Post Arab Spring has been widely discussed by the academia in Pakistan and globally. The recognized notion has been established from one of an American-emulated Western democratic means as the Middle East to an unfinished agenda of the Sykes-Picot Agreement, which has current political limits. However, the growing involvement of Russia and other players also compelled a rethink of American grand strategy in the context of the Middle East.

Keeping this background context, the study considered neo-realism's main International Relations theory and practical application. In this chapter, the study begins with an overview of neorealism to explain its significance. The second part explained more about assumptions in practices. The researcher outlines a theoretical model's logical understanding in the last section. This research followed the Neo-Realism of International Relations theory.

2.1 An Overview of Neo-Realism

Neo-realism is also called Structural Realism. It has been followed in this study. It had played a huge role in influencing the establishment of US policy in the Middle East and explaining the nature of the Russian context in the region. The proponent of this theory

is Kenneth Waltz, a renowned US political scientist who published the revolutionary book *Theory of International Politics* in 1979. This book has contributed a new dimension to international relations, and for this known reason, Waltz is considered a founder of this theory (Waltz, 2008).

Different events occur in different ways, but why these events changed was answered by many theories as theories explained those actions (Kurki & Smith, 2013). The dramatic increase in several theories was due to international relations seen over the last two decades. Additionally, not the traditional theories but new theories were brought with a new perspective that dealt with those questions related to intra- and inter-state behaviour. However, the theoretical formation of neo-realism was started with the efforts of Waltz, who converted the theory from traditional realism to structural realism (Goodin & Klingemann, 1998).

The realists believe that the most important element of international politics is power. Therefore, great powers focused on their power economically and militarily interlinked. For them, the most important thing was not only to have the element of power, but they also tried that no other state could shift its balance of power in this system of international politics. Hence, it assumed that if there was anything that could be equal to international politics, that was nothing but power politics (Dunne, Kurki & Smith, 2013).

The central claim of Waltz was that the system of international politics was confined only to two things that were states, and their interaction among them was fundamentally inadequate. But on the other hand, another need of the time was the analysis and consequences of both the behaviours and interactions of a nation-state. Therefore, this

structural explanation was developed by Waltz in two important ways. First, by explaining the theory of balance of power, which explained the strategy of dominant alliances that was the avoidance of power multitude, and the second was a description of system outcomes. Based on this thing, Waltz developed by defining the structure as the parallel force that produced a gap between intention and outcome and drew an analogy related to two theories: the theory of balance of power and the theory of perfect competition (Goodin & Klingemann, 1998).

2.1.1 Neo-Realism: Basic assumptions

A simple explanation was given to a question: why do states compete with each other for power? The explanation of neorealism was based on five assumptions. All these assumptions are not about the states which gain power at the expense of each other. Yet, in the international system, when they interact, they portray a world of continuous security competition.

In international relations, Neorealist adopts a structural approach, in that they begin by watching how the worldwide framework works and continue to examine its behaviour. Waltz stated about the anarchic nature of states that there's no extreme deciding body that keeps everything together and executes rules. He said that states could only depend on themselves to defend their interests in a self-help system. A realist believes national security needs self-help as one nation's security can mean another nation's insecurity. In the case of the UN or NATO, they intervene only if it suits their purpose or self-interests. States must help themselves through the buildup of military assets or alliance and security treaties. (Kenneth N. Waltz, 2008). The first assumption about the

international system was related to the great powers as they were the main actors of world politics, which preferred to operate in an anarchic system. It did not mean that this international system was associated with anarchy or disorder. Hence, anarchy stands for an ordering principle, which means that there is no centralized authority in this system that could stand over states. (Dunne, Kurki & Smith, 2013)

From this backdrop, Waltz undertakes that though anarchy influences all kinds of global behaviour, there are definite designs and groups of factual circumstances that direct the formation of some unclear appearance of way. On the other hand, hierarchy is the opposite of anarchy, which includes the ordering standard of domestic politics. Hierarchy explains that influential states take benefit of vulnerable countries that have happened through many centuries as strategies adopted through hegemonic order, a sphere of influence or power projection, tributary system, or any other means it varies. In contemporary times, other states resist power as the US, the sole superpower, regards them as subordinate to her. Therefore, a voluntary system of relations between states is what the hierarchy summarised. But, by the systemic constant of international anarchy, one which is still fully influenced. As Waltz explains, the hierarchy is affected by the suspicion that states sense threatened by each other, which is regarded as a condition similar to international anarchy and leads to a place where the larger states balance while others bandwagon. It explores states' dilemmas in choosing between balancing a more powerful state or bandwagoning with it (Haddad, 2015).

The second assumption is that all states have the offensive military ability in this international system. Consequently, each state being a part of the system has enough

power to impose some harm on its neighbor, but the capability of this power varies from state to state, which could change over time.

The third assumption is that states are unclear about the intentions of other states, which means there is uncertainty. Therefore, states set an ultimate goal to calculate where the next states stand or the determination other states have so that they could change the balance of power. But on the other hand, states also make sure that other states are satisfied with the power they have and that they may not be going to use force to change this power status. This can be understood through the behaviour of policymakers in their speeches, as sometimes they reveal their state of intentions. Still, on the other hand, sometimes the policymakers also use lies in their speeches or propaganda, which sometimes makes it difficult to understand their future intentions. However, some states can understand the intentions of some states, but it does not mean that in the future, the same behaviour will be observed by those states again. So, states keep an eye on the countries to understand where they stand and what they will do in the future.

For an anarchic nature of the states to outlive, they utilize inner efforts such as moving to extend financial capability, creating intelligent procedures and expanding military quality called internal balancing and when states take outside measures to extend their security by shaping partners and where states cheerful with their put within the framework are known as status quo called external balancing, while referred to as "pragmatic states" and seek for hegemony, thus restoring the balance are generally those seeking to change the balance of power in their favour.

The fourth assumption is that as states want to maintain their survival, states have the intention to maintain their integrity to maintain their domestic political order.

The fifth approach keeps that states are rational actors, which clarifies that states make comprehensive policies and strategies for their survival. Although, there can be miscalculations over time because now states live in a complicated world and can miss perceived information. States as unitary rational actors are analyzed in three elements; one includes goals-oriented states, and the second says states have reliable goals. The third includes realists' states assume states make strategies to achieve their goals according to their preferences. It explains states, as rational unitary actors, how to make decisions. War is inevitable as an unavoidable part of world affairs, and countries do not want war but are always in a state of potential war. State as rational actors goes to war when they assume more chance of victory. States do not go to war when there is the possibility of losing than achieving, but it varies. (Kurki & Smith, 2013)

In this regard, the supremacy of any state or alliances of states can be roughly balanced by the power of another state or an alliance of states, and neither side could be certain about her conquest and the motivation where chances of war are reduced. In the present case, the multipolar system is prevailing in the Middle East as there are more than two major alliances. In addition, the US and Russia are involved, including engaging regional powers. Thus, by flexible shifting alliance, countries do not choose alliance partners based on political or ideological connections, which are quite obvious in the Middle East case but on the bases of what needs to be done is guarantee balance. Therefore, while balancing decreases the opportunity of war in a short time, it cannot prevent war from ever happening, for which always there is a possibility (Bendel, 1994).

On the other hand, benevolent hegemony, also called benign hegemony, cannot be ignored. It talks about that the existence of a dominant power must lead to counterbalancing efforts in the long run, which means that uni-polarity cannot last. The principle of realism makes security survival always justify by any means such as killing thousands of innocents etc. This is how policymakers can be exemplified when the US bombed Syria and killed many civilians, and the US considered the attack to be justified and moral (Ibid).

The last assumption is that it is impossible that there can be any international cooperation because of being part of an anarchic system except for hegemonic stability, but this will be only possible when there is a unipolar structure, where one state has the regulating authority of international system as it has the economic and military capabilities (Bieler & Morton, 2016).

2.2 Theoretical Model

The Middle East is currently a hub of connectivity of major powers where flexible alliances can be seen vibrantly in the background of Russian and US involvement in the Middle East. Since Russia's involvement in Syria, China economically supports the Middle East and Iran, which also backed Assad and regional foes supporting the US in the region like Israel and Saudi Arabia (Connor, 2018). In the case of Russian presence in the Middle East and its involvement, studies show Russia is balancing given the geopolitical settings in the region's internal and external balancing. But external environment extremely influences her influence more than the internal as U.SA has a strong footprint and dominance in the Middle East. So Russia's presence is different and makes a new shift compared to the US as she is the sole superpower that has been

present for a long time back in the Middle East. In contrast, Russia is re-emerging to regain its superpower status soon after Arab Spring.

Keeping such perspective in the backdrop, the Model of the study has focused on how the geopolitical interests of the US and Russia in the Middle East Post Arab Spring are balanced in the region. This would be understood by taking the example of Russia did not want to miss any opportunity to challenge the established policy of the U.S.A in the Middle East. The background of setting up an informal alliance began in 2003 when France, Germany, China, and Russia all opposed the US invasion of Iraq in diplomatic arenas in United Nations as an example that relates to flexible shifting alliances balancing geopolitical settings in the Middle East. At the same time, Prime Minister Vladimir Putin preserved the lines of the foreign policy of Yeltsin. The stability in the Caucasus was essential for Russia to make its oil and gas transport uninterrupted to European and Asian markets. Although it was regarded that U.S-Russia would be a confrontation similar to in Cold War as a big game, he continued with Yeltsin's policy to challenge the presence of the US in the Middle East. On one side, it was a challenge, but on the other side, these challenges became a point of strengthening relations between Russia and other Middle Eastern countries such as Syria, Iraq and Libya and Moscow's apparent unwillingness to work with the western powers currently (Litsas, 2018). For example, during clashes between Hezbollah-Israel in 2006, a separate line was drawn by Moscow from Western World. Russia again appeared as a game-changer under the Vladimir Putin Period in the Middle East, aiming to restore its position as a great power. The first military intervention in Syria after the Arab Spring is an attempt that Russia is returning to the global stage by making the ground of the Middle East a

tester. This has led Russia to re-think its foreign policy in the second half of 2010 for an assertion of a major free control within the north of the Eurasian landmass, specifically bordering East and Central Asia, Europe, the Center East, and North America. Trenin, 2019).

Also, Russia maintains its relations with all those countries that are United States allies, such as promoting relations with Egypt, especially with Kurds both in Syria and Iraq, establishing relations with Saudi Arabia, to expand ties with Iran so it could get benefit from lifting the sanctions and also at the same time tie its relations with Israel. (Ibid.) On the other hand, its geopolitical and geo-economics position in the east of the country is still weak with her border issue with China, where Putin put a great effort to reach a final resolution and also partnership with Beijing but avoiding confrontation with any it and where it reflects that Russia is establishing a bilateral alliance with different players in the Middle East to balance her presence with the US. Also, as part of the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU). As analyzed, Russia, by other means, preserve balance relations with many countries as a dominant player in Shanghai Cooperation, BRICS and RIC (Russia, India, China) (Ibid). Russian new foreign policy is a dynamic balance seen in the Middle East with its military operation in Syria in 2015 and the establishment of a new military base in Syria. As Russia can maintain productive contacts with all the significant forces in the region, including Iran and Israel, these two players play opposite roles.

Therefore, in this research, the term normality refers as informal or unfixed or keep changing alliances or rivalries, and stability refers to fixed, formal and stable alliances or rivalries.

2.3 Bandwagoning or Balancing: A theoretical explanation

This study, however, explores the Russian presence in the Middle East, whether balancing or bandwagoning the geopolitical settings of the region, which is being analyzed through the prism of Waltz's explanation of both terms. According to this research, the study explained both terms but elaborated and explained the relevant, suitable term.

As in International Relations, a broadly agreed idea specifies that the key to determining security policies is the distribution of resources and power among states. For this reason, how Russia, in terms of lack of resources and power to influence the geopolitical settings of the Middle East, would be analyzed either by balancing or bandwagoning. For Bandwagoning, Waltz explains that Small states desire bandwagoning by threatening great powers than balancing them; supporting this argument, Walt (1987, p. 25) further specified that states are more likely to bandwagon the weaker the state. Countries near a state with great aggressive abilities (far from potential allies) may be forced onto the bandwagon. Whereas, Balancing, Waltz expressed that it happens when states adjust their national and worldwide arrangements to compete with one another.

According to these circumstances, both terms were discussed in estimating Russia's presence in the Middle East Post Arab Spring period lies in balancing or Bandwagoning given the geopolitical settings of the Middle East. Therefore, to look into a dimension, Russia's presence would be explained by balancing the geopolitical settings of the Middle East, which is explained in Kenneth Waltz (1979).

Security dilemma States lead due to the unintentionally strengthening distrust that balancing and bandwagoning produce when one takes action that it accepts to be self-justifying but which is seen by their others as hostile, which creates distrust and competition among countries. This situation directs toward balancing and bandwagoning. As countries look for their interest in pursuing the power to ensure their survival, states behave this way because they act as rational actors (Gunasekara, 2015). Keeping in the backdrop of if, states are rational actors where they pursue their national interests, and states define their national interests differently as it varies to state-to-state level. The important thing is that defining national interest may sometimes lead to rivalry as others usually misperceive their actions and such moves against the other in correcting the perceived imbalance between them. Thus, such a complex situation when countries are involved in balancing and bandwagoning might remarkably result in normality and solidity globally, relating to the Balance of Power Theory. As explained below:

Strong countries will both internally and externally balance against their professed enemy in command to maximise their control in the international system (anarchic) and anticipate any conceivable threats against them.

It is yet another theoretical supposition related to neorealism while discussing different approaches between distinct clusters and the nature of countries. The global system is turning towards multipolar, and by engaging many powers, hence with the engagement of two powers, it becomes a bipolar world and stable like during Cold War (Hamsa, Haddad, 2017).

2.3.1 Explaining ‘Balancing’ in the framework of the Middle East

While discussing the neo-realist school of thought, Waltz stated that the states critically reduce the freedom of action through disseminating assets and influence among states. However, in understanding the procedures that small countries utilise in arrange to dodge both outside and inner dangers to their security, IR theories discussed a few strategies that weak states practice to avoid both external and internal threats to their security (2014) so; this can be understood by their domestic-level factors which help address foreign policies of small/weak powers, rather than examining them using structural/systemic factors (Elman, 1995). The terms alliance and alignment are used interchangeably by Walt in his book. He describes an alliance as formal or informal security cooperation arrangements *between two or more sovereign states*.

Furthermore, he explains that commitments can include both informal and formal treaties because sometimes secret alliances or commitments where states cooperate are unwilling to sign the treaty and sometimes may be willing to cooperate in a formal treaty. But such commitments hardly revealed what actual pledge was decided between the parties. Due to such things, when states face external threats, they may either balance or bandwagon. To counter the threat of a powerful state or states by banding together with others who share the same intention, states formed alliances. To gain allies, states use political tools as they are important for shaping alliances agreements. Waltz explains these tools as bribery and penetration. He refers to bribery as foreign economic and military assistance and penetration as one state's political system by another manipulated secretly or indirectly. As for bribery, he explains that it gives substantial influence over the beneficiary as states provide arms or economic aid to

others. And forming in the context of foreign aid exchange, there are many historical examples of formal and informal alliances. Providing such aids, whether in the form of economic or arms, creates allies slowly and has a powerful effect on the beneficiary state's behaviour. Explaining second tools penetration, also called political penetration, includes diplomats attempting to have a closer tie, change national policies seeks cross-national lobbying organization or foreign propaganda to influence public opinion. Such tools can sometimes influence or pressure the state into allying or become an outlet for forming alliances (Dar, 2018).

Did Russia have any formal and informal alliance to balance against the prevailing threats in the Middle East? Did the alliance of NAM/ASTANA/Geneva talks/BRICS constitute a strong effort to balance against the threats? Or collective security ventures? Unlike Waltz, Walt explicitly states what constitutes an alliance. Walt (1987, p. 12) defines it as *a formal or informal security cooperation relationship, which assumes some level of commitment and exchange of benefits*. In this description, bilateral or collective meetings mentioned above could be defined as an alliance to support this argument.

Most of the time, comparatively weak power protect themselves from power with greater resources and alliances and form alliances against strong powers according to the situation. There were two reasons why states balance power Mearsheimer described that states to restrict potential hegemon which is too strong compared to her, and there is a need to control as weak power/state survival is at risk. And the second reason is the new fellows are more likely to impact the coalition by joining the weaker side, which

can be seen in Russian informal alliances with many countries in the Middle East as Russia is much weaker than the US in resources and power compared to Cold War. To 'balance' states that let countries ally against prevalent dangers, it assists vulnerable countries to rescue signal to be in greater powers block because aligning with the strong side makes the small states defenceless to the designs of its allies (Gunasekara, 2015). But as we see its unipolar world and the US as a sole power, Russia cannot be regarded with its capabilities as the US, but its presence in the Middle East showed its re-emergence directed towards multi-polarity (Harrison, 2018). As a result, aligning with the weaker side rather than with stronger state coalitions is a better strategy for tiny states to protect their interests, as Russia does in the Middle East.

What are some feasible assumptions on Russia's balance? States favour alignment with the weaker side in a balancing universe. In a balancing world, countries adopting positions with the weaker side demonstrate that Waltz's description of the classical balance of power idea misses the point that states balance against the threat and power. The two dominant conceptions are Russia balancing against power in the context of the United States and Russia balancing against a threat, both of which help to address the major question of "how is Russia's presence in the Middle East balancing?" Without addressing the goal of forging such an alliance, the answers to the preceding questions will remain unanswered.

Thus, the first conception of Russian presence in the Middle East may be studied, with Russian presence balancing the geopolitical context of the Middle East and US dominance. The ASTANA process is unlike any other in alliance-building, and it is evident that the US aims to partition the Middle East into zones of influence. The

formation of such pacts or alliances was supposed to split the region into opposing camps, denying other nations, particularly new ones, the chance to follow their agendas. As a result, anti-government groups and those fighting against President Bashar al-side Assad have agreed to a six-month cease-fire.

Also, all aircraft should be prohibited from flying over certain locations, which should be declared no-fly zones. In this context, a major policy of weak power is the transition from informal to the official alliance. As Alliances are important for two reasons: the continent is a viable strategy to prevent the great power domination of a particular region. In this regard, ASTANA, where Russia step considered as balancing to minimise the role of the US in Syria and gradually in the Middle East, which was also the aim of other members, but it is also didn't work out due to US influence as Russia and other participating countries were deciding to compel back US forces from Syria nearby areas which later himself declared to send back troops voluntarily in 2019.

The 16th Summit of the Non-Aligned Movement, held in Tehran, Iran, was another example of creating an alliance from August 26 to 31, 2012. Leaders from 120 countries attended the meeting. Since the fall of the Soviet Union, the Non-Aligned Movement has sought a new direction. It was founded to avoid taking sides during the Cold War. Iran also intended to draught a new peace deal to end the Syrian civil war. Russia's balanced attitude as a member of the NAM reveals that this was a response intended to restrain America's power expansion in Syria, portraying it as a joint goal of NAM members.

Russia and China issued a joint statement on Syria but did not explicitly reject US engagement. (Butchard, 2020, pp.137) where the US influence cannot be ignored. Syria

is slightly more than 1.5 times the size of Pennsylvania. It has a population of 19,398,448 (July 2020 est.) people and an area of 187,437 sq km. Arab Spring has changed the face of the Middle East, which initially aimed to bring a change of regime changes that also threatened the Syrian regime. In 2012, international pressure on Assad's administration increased as the Arab League, the EU, Turkey, and the United States increased economic sanctions against the Syrian regime, demonstrating the United States' strong relationships in the Middle East.

In December 2012, more than 130 nations recognized the Syrian National Coalition as the sole genuine representative of the Syrian people, and Assad won the election. However, in September 2015, Russia launched a military intervention on behalf of Assad's regime, allowing domestic and foreign government-aligned forces to retake territory from opposition forces, including the country's second-largest city, Aleppo, in December 2016, effectively turning the conflict in the regime's favour (CIA fact file).

The second reason is that Russia is projecting Syria as a counterbalance to stronger countries to defend against external threats.

Syria's decision to join with Russia reflects the country's resolve to win collective demands in the face of the world power struggle. Collectivism is a strategy for small governments to defend themselves against a threat. In an unregulated and self-help system, this notion emphasises the significance of providing more stability. States in a collective system are expected to accept certain laws and conventions that ensure stability and band together when necessary to stand up to aggressive countries and their actions. (Gunasekara, 2015).

Therefore, during the Cold War period, all countries aligned with the US or Soviets for strategic reasons. Such regional alliances were seen largely as instruments for battling and containing each other in the blocs' formal alliances. But it soon collapsed after the disintegration of the Soviet Union. In this case, the current presence of both the US and Russia would be seen as not forming a fixed or solid alliance based on an informal or liquid alliance (Little, 2014). States like Israel, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, UAE, and Egypt, which tilted towards the United States, Iran and Syria, and non-state actors Hezbollah and Hamas, are on one side, a pragmatic front with Russia is on the other. According to Walt (1990), the third rationale for state balancing is that the more aggressive a state's perceived goals are, the more likely others are to align against it. The most enlightening aspect is driven by the Russian presence in Syria's effort to limit the US's growing interests in the Middle East region. It was not "so much about peace and tranquility in the Middle Eastern region, as it was about limiting the presence of US in the region". The strategic culture in the Middle East has changed significantly since the Arab Spring. The power balance in the region has shifted due to the United States regime change in the Middle East and Russia's intervention in Syria.

As a result, traditional contesting grounds like transit and bilateral agreements and great power presence in the Middle East have come to be viewed militarily within a global framework (Bukarambe, 1985).

Syria's actions were motivated by apprehensions about increased regional military presence and apprehensions about a growing US military presence, especially in the aftermath of the Arab Spring. In some ways, Syria's decision to join with Russia was an attempt by the country to buy some protection from a hypothetical US attack in the

form of regime change. As a result, Russia has decided to remain in Syria, defending its base and establishing a new military installation, which has been long overdue. In addition, it prompted Russia to reach out to other Middle Eastern players to avert further escalation of naval power in the region. States approach another power for various reasons, many of which are based on external strategic situations and situations. Walt says (1988, p. 279) that nations virtually always attempt to mitigate the threat through a combination of external and internal activities when confronted with a clear external threat.

2.3.2 Internal Balancing and External Balancing of Russia

Russia's presence can be seen balancing the geopolitical setting of the Middle East. But before that, we need to define in which context Russia is balancing it. As there are two types of balancing one is called internal balancing, and another is external balancing. One thing is needed to understand is that Russia is economically weak as compared to the US, which is not equal in strength so, given the first factor of internal balancing, which focused that to increase a state's power by growing its economic resources and military strength so that it can rely on autonomous capabilities in the face of a potential hegemon and compete more effectively in the international system.

The Russian surge for an increasing economic resources is quite weak and challenging due to the US dominance in the Middle East. Still, meanwhile, Russia is influencing OPEC and is considered an important member. Russia's bases in Syria, Latakia, Tartus, and Palmyra could be an example of its future military preparedness. While balancing also describes anarchic nature and more independent actions of states, it can be analyzed by individual Russian actions in Syria, Iraq, Egypt, and Israel, where it follows

its policy rather guided one. But yet, Russia is struggling to achieve that status it had lost during the Cold War, but it is a challenging factor in the future due to its current movement and actions.

Explaining its second type, external balancing, involves *strengthening and enlarging one's alliances and interstate cooperation to prevent a hegemon or counter a rising power.*

As Russia is in Syria fears losing its military bases due to the US's long-standing engagement in the Middle East and safeguarding its interests and threat from non-state actors, a common threat of domestic politics, including international actors. Therefore, Russia is putting aside its secondary disagreements to join a balancing informal bilateral alliance with Israel and Saudi Arabia to protect collective interests and defeat a shared enemy. The fact that states form coalitions in opposition to a stronger state is seen as a dangerous source to evaluate. And Russia is developing this balancing measure of providing security by uniting against the United States as a potential hegemon that threatens the wellbeing and survival of lesser states in the region.

2.4 Flexible shifting of informal alliances: Responsibility of being individual

Many countries have formed alliances to expand their borders using tribal networks and colonial backing. Aside from their positive function in both war and peacetime, alliances can sometimes have negative aspects, such as limiting a country's diplomatic flexibility. Because of their guaranteed protection from more powerful partners, lesser states may exploit their affiliation as a diplomatic tool or an excuse to act irresponsibly.

Great powers may also use their alliance to compel or constrain their less powerful partners' behaviour. For example, in the Middle East, Russia, along with Syria and Iran, use their alliance as diplomatic influence and to safeguard Syria from the US and its allies or any prevailing threat and whereas the US and its allies have been seen using force to restrict their actions most of the time. In the context of the Middle East, it has been observed that Russia being an individual power similar to other regional powers such as Iran, Saudi, and the US, all act individually and take their roles according to their interests (Seely, 2014).

2.5 'Normality' and 'Stability' in the Middle East

The term normality and stability explained in Neo-Realism as normality depicted a situation of continuous change and vulnerability. Normality is widely used in this research for the regional order of the Middle East. As a result, social structures that shape the behaviours of separated persons arrive faster than those capable of forming because there isn't enough time to build a long-term strategy. In contrast, stability uses as in the context of fixed alliances of existing players as a tool of support to each other.

However, this research used alternate terms to explain these relations. For normality, alternate terms used as informal, unstable, flexible/changing alliances and stability mention fixed, stable, solid, and traditional alliances.

However, each shift created new opportunities, and this opportunity created new threats. These fears and threats led to defensive responses. Some of the common fears are being left out, missing the train, and falling out of a fast vehicle. The same happened with the leaders of different regions. A coalition is built on fear rather than a shared identity or a common goal when it is formed. These one-time occurrences led to

temporary partnerships being limited to a single rise. In normality, informal alliances always alter the landscape; therefore, rivalries become stable. Normality has taken the role of stability, but not completely. There is enough room to focus on regional conflicts like Syria, Yemen, and Libya to find the answer to why some countries went for stable or informal alliances and some continued to. But also the ups and downs that characterized relations between Turkey and Russia and, on the one hand, Saudi-Egypt relations, on the other hand, whether confined to the Middle East or also prevailed in Europe side. In Narrating, an example of Europe is a secondary partner because it is never seen as an informal or formal ally but as a trade partner or one who can intervene in humanitarian crises.

2.6 Formal –Informal or Counter Alliances: Self-building

The involvement of Russia was more apparent in the Middle East and Syria soon after the Arab Spring when the peaceful mobilization of people started, which later led to an act of revolution. This local conflict evolved into a regional and then a global conflict. For some, Syria received support also from stable alliances as things are different from all angles; like Assad is surviving to prevent the regional rivals, Iran is taking control, whereas global player Russia sees to increase its power projection. Keeping in view such background, fixed alliances are currently unavoidable, as if after coming into conflict, all such alliances could dissolve. In the Syrian case, if the Syrian regime collapsed, all those who have such an interest in toppling down the Assad regime would have informal alliances to achieve their interests.

Local groups would be another example of this informal alliance as they used to fight together in the same province. If they were supposed to be indifferent provinces, those

groups would confront one another. The same is the case with foreign countries as USA and other European countries supported to that groups who had linked to the Syrian free army, but after 2015 they supported Kurdish militias. Same Saudi Arabia and Qatar did and supported the rebel groups. In this case, Syria is the best example of this informal nature of rivalries. The main local actors changed the definition of threat, whether because of instrumental calculation or events on the battlefield. For example, until 2015, ISIS was not confronted by the Assad regime, but in a move, it broadened its support not only inside but outside the country.

To improve the domestic and international reputation, the YPG-SDF forces stepped up against ISIS. France, Turkey and US also maintained that there was no solution but the leaving of Assad only. With lower intensity, this pattern was also seen in Iraq. To Expel ISIS from Mosul, an operation was launched, and all forces coordinated this operation. The end of 2016 brought itself the end of the operation. Such informal alliances reflected three dynamics: assumption of local actors, strategic directing of the international actors, and negative-sum game making the regional powers ready for losses provided by their rivals.

This can also be obvious from analyzing France and Germany, who all opposed the US invasion of Iraq in 2003 in the diplomatic arena in the UN, an example of an informal alliance.

2.7 Iran-Saudi Arabia regional dominance: Sphere of influence

The concept of proxy war was used to describe the conflict in Yemen. In this context, local actors were used by Saudis and Iranians in regional conflicts. This confrontation led to the fear of Saudis as Iran had already declared four Arab capital were under their

control; for Saudis, it seemed that Iran itself was involved in bringing this conflict to Saudi Arabia as a Minority of Shia also lives there. In this way, Iran can be seen as a threat to the regime.

As for Iranians, they wanted to be treated as a great regional power. Both countries are now involved in Yemen's conflict instead of one another but with a different level of involvement. The Iranians financed the Houthis and Zaidi group, a Shia branch; on the other side, Saudis are involved in this region because of Operation Decisive Strom.

When Houthis ousted the government of Abdrabbuh Mansour Hadi, it became the reason for conflict in 2014; although an alliance between Houthis and the previous president, another side Saudi Arabia, appeared to be in control of the situation, as evidenced by the Gulf Cooperation Council's approval of a military action intended at restoring Hadi's administration. This conflict was additional added value to the conflict in Yemen as the presence of Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) was there already. Other nations, including Sudan, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Kuwait, Qatar, and Bahrain, joined the Saudi-led campaign. According to some sources, the Emirates downscaled in mid-2016 but did not perceive any threat from the Houthis, although the UAE is concerned about the instability in the south.

To bring Iran to an isolated corner of the world, the coalition of 40 countries was made by Saudis. But the absence of allied countries brought problems for Saudis as Algeria also declined to join this coalition. But Syria did not come and made its profile lower in Yemen. Russia declined, and the United States, although it was the supporter of Hadi, also criticised the condition of operations, but U.S urgency in Yemen remained in the fight against AQAP and the ISIS cells.

2.8 Russia and Turkey in the Middle East: 'Informal' Rivalries

Russia and Turkey also have set an example of informal rivalries. Both countries supported rival groups in Syria. On the 24th of November 2015, a warplane of Russia was downed by Turkey, which almost was entered in airspace; after that, Ankara called a meeting of NATO. However, Russia announced that it militarily would not react, but it could apply sanctions in strategic sections. "Kurdish policy" was also modified, which permitted to open new office PYD to supply YPG-SDF with arms. Kremlin did more as it launched a brutal communication campaign through which Erdogan was accused of funding ISIS; upon this, their relations were managed by this rivalry in Syria. Russia has been a tourist place for the middle class of Russia and remained a trade partner for Turkey, and has signed different projects in the nuclear field.

Additionally, both countries sought their interests to safeguard; both situations took a turn brought by a coup d'état on the 15th of July 2016. This interpretation suggested that Ankara had to turn toward Russia as there was limited support from western allies. Erdogan issued the official apology, and Russia responded to it by lifting its sanctions. The things that changed from 2015 to 2016, First, Turkey's Prime Minister, Ahmet Davutoglu, resigned; second, violence between state security forces and the PKK escalated, prompting Turkey to sever all ties with Russia. In the north of Syria, YPG-SDF militias made great advances in three Kurdish regions and controlled many borders between Turkey and Assad, gaining ground by rebels in the rest of Russia. This settlement came from the strength of Russia. As Turkey felt that its allies were withdrawing them, and if not supported by Russia, it's better to save what is the most fundamental. This new bond between Turkey and Russia described the relations as a

'marriage of convenience', which meant that these relations were not permanent but needed time and were based on temporary interests or informal alliance. Keeping in view such behaviour, any concern or catastrophes would happen this relation can dissolve if any of the two parties considered it unnecessary.

2.9 Saudi Arabia and Egypt: An Informal Alliance

Five years of the theoretical alliance took a sharp turn in 2011 during Arab Spring when Saudis pleaded with Mubarak to hold on the election. When the election of Mohamed Morsi held this step, the relations between Saudi Arabia and Egypt cooled. And during this time, Qatar increased its influence in the region. But after the removal of Morse in 2013, Saudi regained its influence in the region, and Qatar withdrew itself to support Egypt financially. Although both did not agree on Syria's matter, they showed the world that they were allied again. The third change was very important as king Suleiman, and his son rose to power. It loosened its stance toward the Muslim Brotherhood because the Saudis were planning to form ties with them, which posed a threat to Egypt; the brotherhood always remained a threat gradually, cooling the relations. And at the United Nations forum, Egypt sided with Russia, which enhanced the situation more, and Saudi responded that it suspended the oil supply. Because of this, a special visit was made by Trek Al-Molla Saudis took the energy minister, and this visit was intensifying. These five years assisted the United States in seeing two tendencies in creating regional alliances. First, it showed that these alliances are vulnerable to changes in their domestic politics. Second, the expectations and interests differ, leading to misunderstandings and tensions (Haddad, 2015).

2.10 Arab Spring and Regional Players in the Middle East: Informal Alliances vs Informal Rivalry

The Muslim countries and other regional players played an important role in the geographical shifts of this region; not only geopolitical but also the relationship between Morocco and Algiers is another important element to turn up their relations. The outbreak of the Arab spring changed the outlook of the Middle East, which made a reason for defence or increased Gulf countries' relations to deepen their influence in Tunisia and Libya. However, a more active role was played by Morocco and Algiers in the Middle East. After its involvement in the operation done in Yemen, it could be seen how Morocco aligned itself with Saudi, but Algeria presented a political solution to this region. On the other hand, Algeria came close to Iran, although it tried not to present itself as the direct opposition to Saudis. (*Ibid*). This allowed Egyptian and Saudi Arabia to increase the price of crude in September 2016. These shifts continued to have a quest for Western Sahara. In November 2016, Morocco managed to ally itself with the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries and boycotted the Malabo summit between African and Arab states.

On the other hand, Morocco took this as the rapprochement between Cairo and Algiers and added other decisions. For example, in July 2016, Egypt refused to join the 28 countries calling for the removal of (SADR) and hosted a Polisario front delegation at the Arab-African parliamentary convention the following year. This reintroduced the formal with the informal rivalry. The formal relationship was between Algiers and Rabat, but the informal one was between Algerian diplomats.

2.11 The United States and its Regional Allies: Constant Change of Policies

The US alliance with four countries played a role in reshaping its policy. These four countries are Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Turkey, and Israel. These countries handled internal crises that could not go down well because of the US criticisms. As many observed that the commitment to closing the Iranian nuclear program was not valued, which was perceived by the US and allies that Iran could have financed by the groups which are a threat to Israel and Saudi Arabia, while for Turkey, a collaboration that exists between Kurds and the United States was also threat as it could end in the hands of PKK. Due to such reasons, the old allies of the US waited for a shift after the election as Trump assured Israel that the US could move its embassy to Jerusalem; for the same reason, a commitment was hoped that in Egypt, the Muslim brotherhood would be added into a terrorist group, Turkey sees the arrival of Trump as the facilitator of how the safe zones will be set in Syria (Lecha, 2017).

2.12 Greater Uncertainty and Greater Instability: Formal Alliances and Informal Alliances

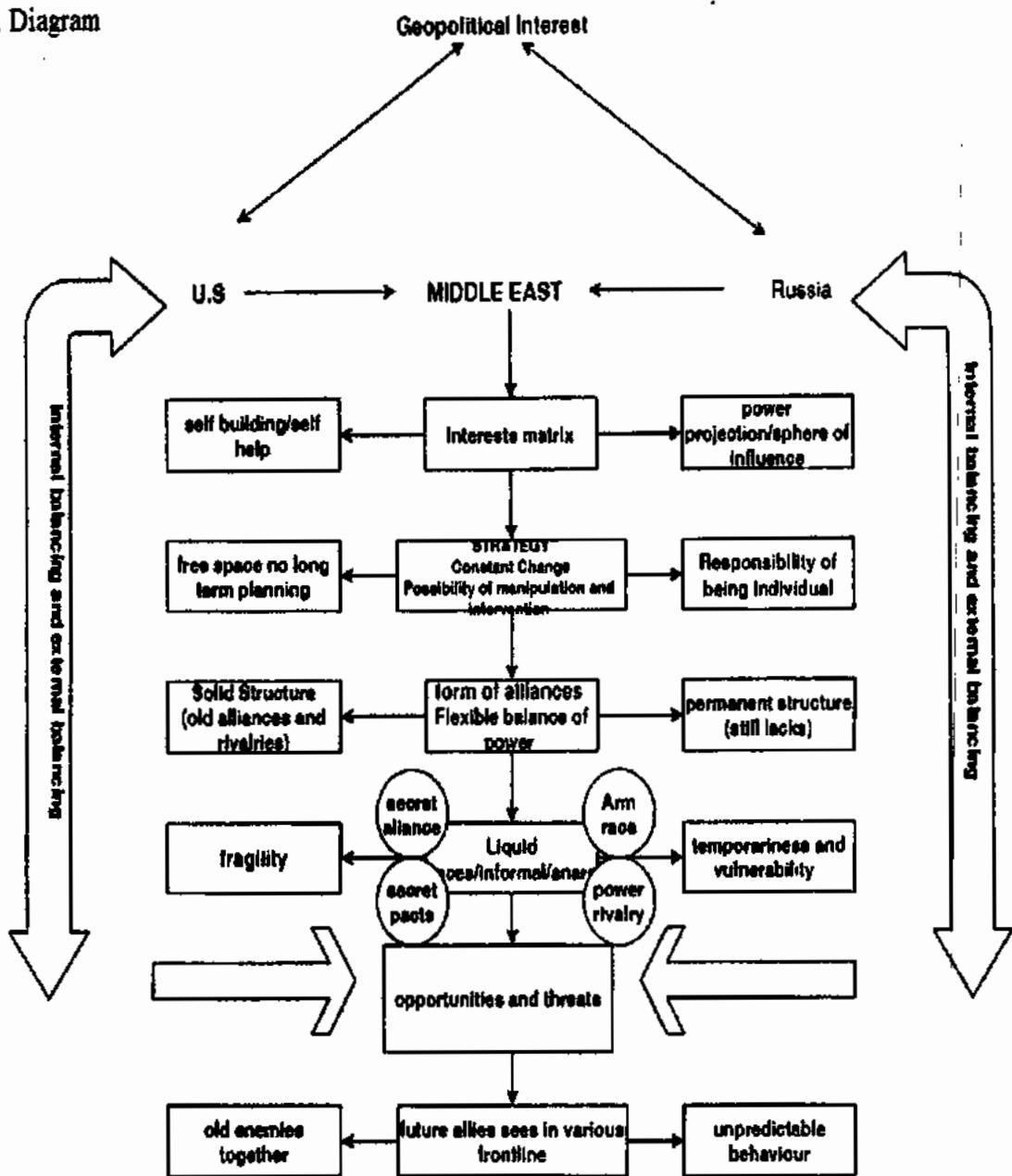
These stated alliances explained formal and informal rivalries among its allies. It was seen that formal shared with informal both in alliances and rivalries. In the past, used to be friends countries turned into rivals tomorrow. It shows a temporary disagreement. So the nature of alliances has changed, and it took place into three levels: local, regional, and international. That was only an exercise in which different actors participated to

confuse the issues. The participants were regional organizations, militia groups, states and many others. The traditional or fixed blocs still required some regional powers, but others wanted to preserve their autonomy by adopting new circumstances informally. But the behaviour of all such states showed neither only nor main mastic infect informal nature of different alliances in the Middle East was a big reason for instability and made it a less predictable region. Alliances and rivalries remained increasingly informal nature. Key players joined forces on one issue and became rivals elsewhere. The camps were also changed; that was how the picture looked in early 2017. Some countries are still aligned, like Qatar and Turkey. However, they remained in a confrontation like Saudi Arabia and Iran, so Being part of this game, global players did not always remain in the dominant position (Lecha, 2017).

Diagram 2.1 explains the U.S and Russian involvement in the Middle East and Russia presented at present, balancing the geopolitical settings of the region.

Diagram 2.1

2.1 Diagram



Note: The author herself creates a theoretical model

- Arrows indicate Causative Relationship
- Bidirectional arrows show two ways relationship
- Band double arrow reflects rejoin (alliances, cooperation, defence and protection) and change of direction (keep changing interests).

2.13 CONCLUSION

Weak states opt for balancing or bandwagoning; mostly, their decision depends on their security environment, circumstances, and threat levels. The Middle East has become a hub of power play of the global players. Under such a complex situation, these countries seek power from where they get material support; similar to Syria's case sought to align with Russia in particular defence and military capability. Keeping in view, Syria and Russia enjoy historical ties as Russian military and naval bases are based in Syria, and partially, Syria and Russia enjoy relations even after the Cold war and later Arab Spring period led to strengthening traditional ties. And due to the nature of the conflict, Russia was the only trusted ally that Syria could rely on as the US presence and regime change during Arab Spring were threatening Assad's case. Therefore, as a former rival of the US, Russia would be a viable strategy to align with and counter-threat. Syria feared regime change, and Russia sought her interests to secure naval and military bases. As a result, both serve their interests, as there are no guarantees that small governments will be safe in international politics. As a result, Syria and Russia may ally to face collective security reactions from the US and its allies. As part of the emerging uncertainties, Russia chose the balancing strategy through bilateral and multilateral rapprochements such as BRICS, ASTANA, etc. It will help her and other players seeking their self-interests to secure from external threats.

CHAPTER 3

US MIDDLE EASTERN POLICY

3. Introduction

To analyze the current status of the US and Russia's geopolitical interests in the Middle East region, it is necessary to look at their previous policies, key events, and some of their key interventions. Because historical experience plays a vital role in shaping future relations, this chapter will analyze the historical links and ties with the facts that's how the US and Russia experienced their relations during different Explaining the Middle East's geopolitical relevance is one of the periods of history. The Middle East region's geopolitical prominence grows due to its enormous energy resources and proximity to the Caucasus frontiers. Geopolitics is described as "the study of the role of geography on power relations in international relations" (Deudney, 2006). As a result, demographic characteristics such as size, location, form, depth, climate, population and human resources, natural resources, industrial capability, social and political structures, and a nation's strength and chances of survival are heavily influenced by geographic variables.

Other considerations include the development and scope of a nation's external transportation system and its strategic position and military potential concerning key land and sea commerce routes. Russia and Iran are both land powers, whereas China

and Turkey, being both land and sea powers, have more geopolitically advantageous territories. However, their limited access to coastal waterways constrained land powers' capacity to project influence. Turkey's strategic importance as a land bridge between Europe and Asia cannot be overstated. (Rashed, 2019).

As far as showcasing many components, some of which are resources that attracted the Middle East as an important region. The major oil companies emerged with economic and political interests in the regions of the Middle East, which explains the geopolitics of oil very well from the 1920s onwards. Therefore, geopolitics covers mainly strategic issues such as resources, political and economic development and politics. It is interesting to study political systems not simply as a system but as a relay for territories with strategic stakes to explain policies geopolitics consider the fact. The major aspect is that this world region cannot be immune to major strategic issues and major conflicts unless we discuss geopolitics in the Middle East. The Middle East has long been a strategic advantage for the United States (Koch & Stivachtis, 2019).

Defining the geopolitics of the Middle East is not easy. Some people talk about the Balkans and the Ottoman Empire, but the Middle East can also be defined by the Anglo-Saxon definition of the Middle East, opposite to the Near East. However, many people describe it from their own point of view, and the meaning has evolved over time.

It begins in the west with Egypt and stretches eastward to Iran. For some, this also encompasses Turkey and Yemen's south. But the geopolitical concept is more important than defining the Middle East. From the 19th century forward, there was a vital stake in the fight against Russian expansionism towards the south, as history shows. This expansionism was primarily motivated by its resources, which were used to steer a

military policy of the time, as described by Alfred Mahan in a 1992 article published in the National Review (*Ibid*).

The Middle East is home to approximately 500 million people in the twentieth century. Its demography plays an important role. Most people speak Arabic and share a common culture and civilization. Out of twenty countries, three are not Arab—Israel, Turkey and Iran. Even though many speak Arabic in Israel, its main language is Hebrew with a Jewish population. The same goes for Iran and Turkey. They are different. The Muslim World expands beyond the Middle East, and other Muslim countries are outside the Middle East (Karasik, 2018).

It fostered treaty negotiations that divided the Ottoman Empire into several successor states controlled by one or both of the victorious Western colonial powers during the First World War and following the empire's demise. These territories would rise to become modern Middle Eastern nation-states under Western domination. But unfortunately, the colonial powers imposed the nation-states model on the Middle East without considering the mixed ground realities or local identities that make up the region's tremendous diversity. (Yamahata, 2018, pp.1-5).

In the midst of World War I, the Arabs revolted against the Ottomans with Britain's support, embracing Arab nationalism. They were unconcerned about defending the Ottomans from European armies claiming to support Arab freedom and bring justice to their homelands.

The Ottomans had little effect on the Arab Muslims when they declared jihad in 1914. But unfortunately, the Europeans did not keep their promises, and, in 1916, a Sykes-Picot Agreement redrew the Middle East map, depriving the Arabs of their dream of

independence. And the European power was dominant in the region. This had splintered the country into small states with arbitrary borders and disparate geographic and cultural characteristics. Not only that, but they've also redrawn the map of natural resources, such as vital waterways, and divided them into ethnic groupings and religious sects. This devastated the Middle East with a destroyed economy, cultures demonised, resources plundered, local orders were dismantled, and corrupt politics (Amirahmadi, 2015).

However, by World War II, the Europeans had converted their colonies into artificial and competing nation-states, which were ruled by local dictators cultivated by the Europeans after the fall of the European colonial system.

As a result, the imagined border structure, consisting mostly of straight lines, had no historical or geographical sense. The motivation was political, intending to sow the seeds of future conflicts through a divide-and-rule tactic. These events and the change from colonialism to neocolonialism served local rulers and external powers. And left Middle East conflict-ridden countries with civil wars, poverty and political turmoil with power struggles. The left-over issue and conflicts seeded at that time last till today, such as inter-ethnic, inter-state and inter-sectarian created flux (Amirahmadi, 2015). The situation became worse, and the region became increasingly uncontrollable due to the great powers' interventions, and During World War II, there were liberation movements in Algeria, Egypt, Libya, Somalia, Sudan, and Iran.

From 1958 to 1961, Egypt and Syria were united in the United Arab Republic, when Pan-Arabism became a major political force, leading to the Suez Crisis and the end of Britain's standing as a world power (Ibid).

Another major phase that created more trouble in the region was the Cold War period when the Europeans left the region and the US and the Soviet Union filled the vacuum. Both came into direct conflict as soon as World War II ended, and Britain left Asia. During the Cold War, the Arab World was split between pro-Western Arab monarchs like Jordan, Saudi Arabia, pre-1958 Iraq, non-Arab Iran, and pan-Arab and Islamic socialist governments like Egypt, Syria, Algeria, Libya, North Yemen, and post-1958 Iraq. When the Cold War separated the Middle East along an East-West line, oil was developing as the most important global energy resource, and local economies were increasingly reliant on oil rent.

At the time, the founding of the State of Israel and the first significant Arab-Israeli conflict that followed was a major regional event. As oil masters, the United Governments, Israel, and Arab states took the lead. The collapse of the Soviet Union and the United States emerging as the single superpower in the Middle East marked the beginning of ideology-centred geopolitics and the end of the Cold War (Amir ahmadi, 2015).

The foreign policy of Russia was developed according to the national objectives and challenges, which later were affected by economic, ethnic, geopolitical, ideological and ideological factors. Moreover, a standpoint was cultivated by Russia that attaining the status of superpower was critical to continuing its security and economic existence. However, based on strategic goals, Russia considered the international political system as an alignment that could be tailored to its own ambitions. Therefore, its foreign policy was designed to endorse these goals with the changing conditions and consider its limits (Magen, 2013).

Meanwhile, the Cold War was categorised by the bipolar system. The USSR considered herself the head of one pole that competed with the other pole headed by the United States and its allies economically, militarily, and ideologically. However, the first decade of Russia's foreign policy was shaped against the breakup of the Soviet Union, and it was seen that it attempted to forge its nation based on the Western democratic model. Yet, in practice, Russia played a secondary role in the international arena; on the other hand, the USA, who was the winner of the Cold War, exerted great influence around the World. Nevertheless, former USSR nations which joined the EU and NATO were direct damage to undermine it regarding all the issues of its development, including democracy, political conduct and democracy. Though, after the election of Vladimir Putin, it became a national objective to rehabilitate the state's status, recreate the glory of the past and acquire the ability to shape the global agenda, and the public of Russia supported this objective with Putin's policy. This policy was old, but it was in new clothing. The first ten years of Putin's politics were characterized by defiance against the West's show of strength by adopting assertive tactics formulated to promote its political strategy. Alongside, another effort was also made by Russia to establish its cooperation with other states in the international arena, but this initial phase was irregular as there were no economic, military and political tools were present.

Nonetheless, the improvement of the economic capabilities of Russia also increased its energy sources which resulted in bolstering its confidence in establishing its relations along with independent moves, including the Middle East. The ups and downs were part of Russian relations with other Western countries. Meanwhile, the first five years after the breakup of the Soviet Union followed cooling-off relations with the United

States rather than establishing positive relations with this state. Nevertheless, during the crisis of 2008, Russia occupied the territory of Georgia and established an independent state, South Ossetia, which prevented the last state from joining NATO. After coming into power, Barack Obama signalled a setback in relations between Russia and USA. In their first term of office, Barack Obama was seen as a president who had a weak policy toward Russia. The economic crisis of 2009 brought mass devastation to Russia; it lost its confidence. That year, Obama presented an incentive to establish relations between the USA and other nations. Indirectly, this effort offered an opportunity for Russia to reset its relations with the US. This "reset" policy was made to decrease the tensions and maintain the strategic weapons system, so Russia viewed this policy as an opportunity for cooperation. Hence, the following principles were part of the American initiative, an important concession of America to place missiles in Eastern Europe; America showed a willingness to reduce strategic arms, recognize Russia's special status, and combine Russia into many NATO and other international political activities. Although this initiative of the USA consisted of gains and losses and was a big achievement for the USA, an important role was played by Russia in understanding this initiative, like the sanctions against Iran. And for Russia, it was a success as Russia had not enough influence; despite that, it afforded this opportunity to promote its status. During the NATO conference of 2010 in Lisbon, the conflict ended between Russia and NATO was made official (Magen, 2013).

The result of this initiative was that it developed cooperation in certain projects. For example, cooperation was made against the war on terror in Afghanistan. Yet Russia didn't put itself in the important activities for Russia and Western nations. It also

refrained from all those activities to expand its influence in the former Soviet Union's areas and let Russia strengthen its influence. However, a New START agreement was signed in 2010 to reduce Strategic weapons and make the limit of nuclear warheads to 2,200 and 650 deployed nuclear warheads and reduce its platforms to 800. Moreover, it did not mean that all requests of Russia were granted, but many of its liking issues were also not resolved. For example, this New START agreement limited warheads to a maximized number, but Russia needed this at that time. The other issues where the policy for Russia was unchanged consisted of integration into the Middle East and the anti-defence program, so it remained a controversial issue. It was more exposed in 2011 after the announcement of President Medvedev he wanted to position the missile systems of Russia opposite to the systems of NATO's missile systems. His statement made it clearer that Russia didn't want to leave its strategic objectives. Seemingly, after the advantage of American policy, it would again advance its goals with new vigour. In the following two years, new ways of development were made to reshape its role in the international arena so Russia could play a key role. However, this discussion was initiated by the Russian government in different international forums like Yaroslavl Global Forums. Such discussions from the Russian side were based on the opinion that it could not cope with the economic and political challenges as a great gap has grown between Russia and the West. But the ideas presented by Russia were not taken as; therefore, this was a piece of evidence that Russia was at crossroads. Domestically, it faced civil discontent, and it was possible that this movement could not disappear easily but would emerge again in the second presidency of Putin.

On the other hand, the relations between Russia and western states could not further improve as the West was demanding more for greater democratization. Nevertheless, the happening of all this occurred at that time when Russia was concerned with international terrorism, the spread of weapons, and expanded US confrontations. Infect a clear conflict between Russia and the West as both had their own ambitions. Moreover, the USA made a new policy in the Middle East, which formulated that a New Defensive Strategy (NDS) will be made to shift its strategic effort away from the Middle East and bring it near the areas of Asia and the Pacific. Yet the implementation in the former Soviet Union brought tension for Russia as it was endeavouring to neutralize this program. The expression of this endeavour was seen in the initiative of the Euro-Asian program, which made it clear that Russia was indecisive about its position.

On the one hand, it became part of the West, and on the other hand, it confronted the West and its allies. Further, since the election of Putin, it has persevered that there are many domestic and foreign challenges; the future of Russia is based on its proper status of Russia in the international arena, so it has become a superpower; in other words. However, at the same time, Russia needed Western cooperation as only economic development is not enough for its continuity but the format of the "reset" policy without surrendering its superpower aspirations (Magen, 2013).

Consequently, the Middle East has been surrounded by international conflicts for most of its modern history. During the early nineteenth century, in an attempt to control its natural resource and geostrategic location, the European powers competed to colonies the Middle East's territories. As a result, both super and regional powers competed for

territorial influence, and the region found itself embattled in another round of intense crises almost two centuries later. The Arab uprising called the Arab Spring soon transformed into civil and regional wars in many areas, which was the once stable region that became an arena for violence in the aftermath of the popular uprisings of the 2010s (Rashed, 2019).

Hence, the interstate wars, civil wars, insurgencies, revolutions, coups, invasions by foreign powers, and ethnic and sectarian strife could be seen in the history of the Middle East as a recurring phenomenon, and the history is thus littered with violent conflicts. The peace process was an example during a war between Arabs and Israel in 1967. Due to the diverse physical conditions in the Middle East, various political players can be seen in a violent fight or even attempt to destroy the state's authority and its allies. Even in long-standing rivalries like Iran vs Iraq, or more recent rivalries like Iran vs the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, rivalry for regional hegemony is a reality of life in the international system, and it is especially visible in this part of the World. States fund violent groups to change or sustain the status quo in the hegemonic rivalry. Keeping all of the above in mind, it has aided the emergence of violent non-state actors in the region since 2001. (Dallas-Feeney, 2019).

Russia has always been a factor in Middle Eastern geopolitics, though with a different role than in the past. The Russian presence dates back centuries, beginning with its proximity to the Mediterranean and its desire to reach warm seas in the eighteenth century.

Then, in the nineteenth century, it was tasked with defending orthodox Christians living in Ottoman territory. Following the fall of colonial powers in the aftermath of WWII,

Russia courted emerging Arab governments, and it has been a significant armaments supplier to numerous countries in the region (Rumer and Weiss, 2018). The Middle East is currently a hub of interconnection for major countries, with informal alliances visible in the context of Russia's and the United States' presence in the region. Since Russia participated in Syria, China has helped Assad economically, as has Iran, backing him. On the other side, regional adversaries such as Israel and Saudi Arabia have backed the US in the region (Connor, 2018).

3.1 Post Cold War Era's Changing Dynamics of the Middle East: The Persian Gulf War

Even though the long-running Iran-Iraq War was scheduled to end in August 1988 with a United Nations-assisted deal, by the mid-1990s, the two countries still couldn't agree on a permanent truce. When their foreign ministers met in Geneva for possibilities for a ceasefire agreement out of nowhere, they suddenly found that Saddam Hussein was put up to dismantle that agreement and reclaim territory that had been under his control for a long period. In early August 1990, Saddam Hussein, the Iraqi president, authorized the invasion and occupation of Kuwait. Fearing this, two-thirds of the Arab League's 21 members denounced Iraq's attack, and Arab powers like Saudi Arabia and Egypt sought mediation from the United States and other Western countries. According to the US State Department, this is the first full-fledged international crisis since the Cold War.

To counter Iraqi antagonism, the Bush administration built a global alliance consisting of NATO allies and Middle Eastern countries such as Saudi Arabia, Syria, and Egypt (The Department of State). The world's reaction to the invasion of Saddam Hussein was negative. A resolution (# 660) was passed by the United Nations Security Council (UNSC), which asked that Iraq remove its forces unconditionally and return to their locations on August 1, 1990. On the other hand, it was unclear what kind of response the US would give and whether the US was interested in fighting a war to restore Kuwait's sovereignty. However, Congress was divided at the time, and the Senate voted 52-47 to sanction the use of force against Iraq; a vote of 77-23 was achieved, which was much closer to the 77-23 vote in 2003. President George H. W. Bush saw an opportunity to create a "New World Order" in which adherence to international principles was the wave of the future and territorial expansion was the past product. Bush backed war at the time, but he wanted a coalition that would operate with UN permission rather than just an American intervention. UNSCR 678 was issued in 1990, giving Saddam Hussein "one final opportunity to withdraw its forces from Kuwait," with all authorized members having the right to employ all necessary means to compel Saddam Hussein and his forces if Iraqi forces remained in Kuwait. On July 17, 1991, "Operation Desert Storm" began, with practically every country in the alliance supporting Iraq while Jordan remained neutral. However, America fought with the help of 31 countries' armed forces, and Saudi Arabia, Japan, South Korea, and Germany were the primary backers of the war effort. In the end, it was found by the general accountability office of US Congress that in Desert Storm and Desert Shield, no US taxpayer funds were used, but they were financed by allied contributions (Conahan,

1991, p. 12). However, the zero-sum world came to an end when the Warsaw Pact disbanded on July 1, 1991, the Desert Storm Operation ended on February 28, 1991, and Saddam Hussein remained president on March 1.

On the other hand, Bush and his national security advisors said they would not remove Saddam Hussein from power and instead tried to eliminate him, extending the war's ground to occupy the ground, violating the guidelines and have paid a high price in terms of human and political expenses as a result of being obliged to occupy Baghdad, and the United States was conceivably occupying power in a very hostile region (n.m 1998, pp. 3). However, it was later discovered that the assessment was not entirely accurate. Perhaps the fall of Iraqi President Saddam Hussein was described as America's ultimate power and world influence and the apex of American military superiority. As a result of this influence, new American bases were established in countries such as Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and Kuwait, and these bases were eventually utilized to establish the "no-fly zone" to defend Iraqi Kurds. With its Shia majority and President Bush's popularity, Bush intended to leverage his popularity and the United States' high standing to solve the Arab-Israeli conflict (Blair, 2016). Officials in the coalition planned it to be a "limited" war fought at the lowest possible cost, but it has had long-term consequences throughout the Middle East. The US kept patrolling the skies and enforcing a no-fly zone over Iraq, and in 2002, it sponsored a new UN resolution calling for the return of weapons inspectors to Iraq. Without UN consent, the Bush Administration ordered Saddam Hussein to stand down along with his army and depart Iraq within 48 hours, which he refused, prompting a US-led invasion. Saddam Hussein was apprehended and executed by US forces on December 13, 2003, and the

US maintained a larger presence in Iraq until December 2011 and the Arab Spring period (Simon, 2008).

3.1.1 The US-Israel and the Peace Process

For more than 40 years, it was a consistent feature of the policy of the United States to support the presence of Israel in the Middle East. Their relationship was also portrayed as unwavering, but it was also associated with periods of tensions and blatant disagreements. For example, during the Desert Storm campaign, Bush urged Israel's President, Yitzhak Shamir, not to respond if the Iraqis attacked, and it was a straightforward and polite request, but the Secretary of Defense rejected it, making it impossible for Israeli fighters to hit Iraqi targets. In contrast, the United States deployed the Patriot missile defence system to protect the cities of Israel from the Scud missile attacks on Iraq, which caused two deaths and 1,000 injured.

Nonetheless, as evidenced by a study conducted by Secretary of State James Baker from 30 October to 4 November 1991, Israel was kept out of conflict by the United States. Participants included Israel, the United States, the Soviet Union, Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, and Palestine. This was the first time in history that all these states sat together at a table, and also it was the last time when USSR sat for his last time with anybody as the Soviet Union became dissolved on 26 December 1991. However, this Madrid conference could not get any noteworthy achievements, but it led both Israel and Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) towards mutual recognition that was not present in Madrid. Furthermore, there were also more talks between PLO and Israel in Norway, and these talks also led both states to further negotiations. But the Bush

administration was not part of any secondary negotiations. Nevertheless, Israel and Palestinian peace became a presidential priority after the elections of 1992 when Bill Clinton defeated Bush.

After nine months, when Clinton had taken oath for his office, the Chairman of PLO, Yasser Arafat and Yitzhak, the prime minister of Israel, both shook hands with the new president of the US on the lawn of the White House. The Oslo Accord was negotiated without the assistance of the United States, but it was just a two-party procedure at the outset. The Oslo principles were adopted as the basis for a solution to the conflict between Israel and Palestine. Yet, after his exile from Tunisia, Arafat returned to the West Bank to take control of the new "Palestinian Authority" (PA), but these Oslo Accords did not discuss four major issues. These issues were final borders, the status of Jerusalem, the destiny of the Palestinian refugees and the fate of Israeli settlements. Although President Clinton played an active role, the hopes expressed on the White House lawn day could not last long. The assassination of Rubin by a Jewish extremist on 4 November 1995 and the bombing by Hamas were those two factors that caused the peace process and brought it to a halt. However, Arafat and Ehud Barak, the prime minister of Israel, were brought together by the efforts of Clinton in 2000, this process made them closer to each other than ever before so they could reach some agreement, and after that, Clinton developed his own peace process. After that, when George W. Bush took his office, these two sides met in Egypt in which they reached a final agreement which was based on his proposal to Clinton, but these negotiations were also cut short because of the election of Ariel Sharon as the prime minister of Israel who

had a different point of view about the peace process, so the same four issues remained between them (Ibid).

3.1.2 Al-Qaida from Afghanistan to the Middle East: US invasion

One of the major events of the Desert Storm Operation was the Israel/Palestinian peace process. Although many viewed American presence differently from Saudi Arabian perspective, it has saved the kingdom, but for others, it has allowed the US to strengthen its foot in the Middle East.

On the other hand, Bin Laden, who fought against the Soviet Union in Afghanistan, during those with the help of the US, founded the organization Al-Qaeda in 1988. Later, the US claimed that this organization was linked with the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and on US military installation in Dhahran on June 25 1996, but US agencies were aware of Bin Laden's presence and the danger he presented earlier. Nevertheless, it became international news when Al-Qaeda blew up the embassies of the US in Kenya and Tanzania on August 7 1998. Yet, in retaliation, the US launched a cruise missile against Al-Qaeda in Sudan and against the training camp of Al-Qaeda in Khost, Afghanistan (Cristol, November 14, 2018).

Another event precedent to 9/11 incidence occurred was the chemical weapon facility that a pharmaceutical company blew up; due to these attacks, this strike was heavily panned. Bin Laden was neither silenced nor stopped by US missile strikes, but Al-Qaeda troops drove a boat to the US Cole in Yemen and detonated a hazardous device, killing 17 sailors. However, the FBI investigator was John O' Neil, one of those 3,000 people murdered on September 11 2001, by Al-Qaeda. From the US viewpoint, though,

hijacking was a regular tactic that terrorist groups used for decades, but this was the innovation by Al-Qaeda as the morning of "9/11" 19 hijackers' planes boarded with the intent of hijacking. Before this, the hijacking was used to make concessions or demands, but it was used for the suicide bombs, and they collided two planes into the World Trade Center, causing both the building and the next building to collapse.

The plane collided with the Pentagon; passengers seized control, and the plane fell into an empty field. Nevertheless, the fatwa of Bin Laden, which was made on February 23 1998, stated that "the killing of all Americans and its allies is the duty of every individual which can be done in any state where they are or where it is possible. Though, the response of the US was not rapid as after three days, "authorization for the use of force" (AUMF) was given to US president by its congress, which authorized the president to use force against Al-Qaeda so it could not expand its influence in other states in future as well. Therefore, this statement was used since the deployment of US forces in different locations like Djibouti, Georgia, Kenya, Somalia, Yemen, and the Philippines (Cristol, November 14 2018).

The Authorization for the use of Military Force (AUMF) gave three presidents considerable powers, though it was originally written for the invasion of Afghanistan and to investigate Al-Qaeda and Osama bin Laden. Although the US administration claimed that Osama bin Laden was behind the attacks, it also gave the Taliban administration of Afghanistan one more chance to hand him over to the US, prompting the US to invade Afghanistan on October 7, 2001, overthrowing the Taliban regime on December 17, 2001. The war in Afghanistan made clear by the Bush administration that whether you are with the US or not? That any nation who are not "with the US"

will also be regarded as a hostile regime by the United States but the harbouring of terrorists by the Taliban was beyond dispute as the case in Iraq for administrators was more controversial (Cristol, November 14 2018).

3.2 A Second US Invasion of Iraq

The US invaded Afghanistan, and the War on Terror began with leading diverse engagements of the US around the globe. After invading Afghanistan, the US administration stated that in Iraq, Saddam Hussein was developing Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD), for which a report was made by the Secretary of State Colin Powell to the Security Council of the UN "and presented that regime of Saddam Hussein covered their efforts to produce weapons of mass destruction", and he said that he had pictures to prove it but later after US invasion on Iraq proved that US report on WMD program was invalid. The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) was correct that Iraq has no active nuclear programme. As a result, Powell labelled that address a "major intelligence failure" and vowed to protect US interests. Yet, the Bush Administration continued with its war planning and despite the efforts which Powell's efforts, UNSC refused to authorise them to use force. Bush proceeded with a coalition of willingness made up of different states like the United States, Poland, Australia, and the United Kingdom. This coalition launched airstrikes along with ground invasion also on Mar 20 2003, which had ended Saddam Hussein's regime and finally, Iraq had become a top step of invasion by the U.S. Later on, the American coalition named Ambassador L. Paul Bremer as the administrator of the "Coalition Provisional Authority" (CPA), and he made swift decisions. He split the Iraqi army and destroyed Saddam Hussein's Baath Party's Iraqi society. Due to differences in the policy and

opinion within the Baath Party, which led to the whole bureaucracy being fired by CPA, no one could maintain this critical infrastructure, and the US took the authority to handle the affairs.

Nevertheless, many Baath party members and former army soldiers joined militias, and later all these officials joined the so-called Islamic State (Sly, 2015, p.5). The CPA drafted the constitution with little participation from Iraqis, and important positions were awarded to Republican Party elites. Though the US military received orders of law and order, they were not trained who loot and destroy the Iraqi institutions. However, one incident changed the complete perception of US forces in Iraq, when on Apr 28 2004, photographs were aired of the Iraqi prisoners who were tortured by American forces at Abu Ghraib and the same place was used by the Saddam regime to torture his own prisoners (Cristol, Nov 14, 2018).

The law-and-order situation paved the way for sectarian tensions, and As a result, numerous militia organizations seized control of several Baghdad towns and neighbourhoods. Although certain organizations supported the occupation and the coalition faced rebellion, it responded brutally, further alienating the Iraqi people. However, it resulted in winners, and Kurds who collaborated closely with Americans could achieve de facto independence. Despite this, Iran, America's long-time adversary, emerged victoriously.

Although Iran and the United States have been at war since the kidnapping of 52 Americans at the American embassy in Tehran in 1979, Iran has a long history of supporting terrorist groups and has harassed American ships in the Persian Gulf for decades. Nevertheless, the major concerns of America were terrorism and regional

aggression, but the important one was the nuclear program of Iran. Though Iran claimed that its nuclear program was for peaceful purposes, it was believed by very few, which resulted in the tightening of the economic sanctions on Iran since 1979 (Cristol, Nov 14, 2018).

After Bush, when Obama took his position, he further tightened the pressure on Iran and convinced other countries to join this sanctions regime. As a result of secret conversations held in Oman in 2003, it became evident that Iran's need for a nuclear programme was extremely real. Yet there were 150,000 and 13,000 troops to its West and East, respectively, and they started a war against a state which did not have WMDs. Meanwhile, the Oman talks led to the explicit talks in 2011, which changed the geopolitical situation of Iran and minimized the numbers of troops to 3,400 and 9,800 to its West and East, respectively, till 2015. Yet, two factors brought Iran to the table: the endless efforts of the US in Afghanistan and Iraq and, on the other hand, Iran suffering the weight of sanctions. After long discussions among Iranian Foreign Minister Muhammad Javad Zarif, John Kerry (the US Secretary of State) and its allies that were Russian, Chinese, British and French brought all of them to an agreement. However, after the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, the "Iran Deal" lifted the United Nations (UN) and European Union (EU) sanctions on Iran, and it also lifted sanctions on the US that were nuclear-related. This all happened in exchange for of inspections the site of the Iranian nuclear program and its technology, and it seemed that it delayed the question of nuclear Iran though it was not stopped entirely (Cristol, Nov 14, 2018).

3.3 The Arab Spring and Civil Wars in the Middle East

The WMD negotiations of the Bush administration with Libya were held on 19 December 2003, when they agreed to sign an agreement. Gaddafi committed to eliminating his WMD projects, stopping supporting his terrorism, and settling his accounts linked to the 1988 Pan Am Flight 103 attack in exchange for the United States lifting all sanctions and welcoming Libya into the community of nations. But the US Administration claimed that Libya stood beside this agreement, and a year later, American president Barack Obama took a decision which he backed towards the surprising end of the 42 years of Gadhafi in Libya. However, America had become a list of tyrants' friends throughout the Middle East and worldwide. Despite this, Morocco, which the Alawite Dynasty ruled, was the first country to recognize the independence of the United States.

Nevertheless, the United States had relations with the al-Thani of Qatar, al-Khalifas of Bahrain, Al-Sauds and the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan. Much of this support stemmed from the Cold War, a necessary evil in the global struggle against communism. However, the Shah of Iran's support for the Middle East issue differed considerably. Support from Arab tyrants, on the other hand, was for a variety of reasons, including ensuring the free flow of oil, maintaining peace and stability with Israel, and balancing its position against Iran. Unexpectedly, the US stated that it wants to protect liberal values and its self-interest. On 17 December 2010, a Tunisian food vendor set himself on fire, igniting protests across the Arab world. This sparked the Arab Spring, and Obama, on the other hand, had to decide whether to support democratic goals or those of America's longtime friends by defending his goals. Hence, protests began in

states like Tunisia, Syria, Egypt, and Bahrain. Gaddafi had no intention of holding elections, so he brutally intimidated the protests in Benghazi that killed over 100 unarmed protesters. Nevertheless, France and the United Kingdom took the lead in the air operation and avoided another war. Obama vowed to air support, which his officials later described as "leading from behind" (Cristol, 14 November 2018).

In Libya, on 24 April 2011, an operation was conducted by the US and its allies, which directly targeted the Gaddafi home and killed his son, and after fewer months, he was dragged to death by an angry mob. Though Gaddafi was not one of its close friends, even close friends could not escape from this protest movement. Hosni Mubarak, who was in power since 1980, has appeared as the United States would support its longtime ally, but Obama sent Frank Wisner, a retired diplomat that Obama wanted to step down. Yet, Muhammad Morsi, from the Muslim Brotherhood, won the first election in 2012. Still, again it goes against the will of the US. Therefore, on 3 July 2013, Marshal Abdel Fattah el-Sisi established his military dictatorship in Egypt. Still, following the policies of his predecessor, Bush, on 9 January 2005, when Hamas won their first and only election in the Gaza Strip, Obama forced elections in Egypt regardless of the repercussions (Cristol, 14 November 2018).

On 15 March 2011, the Middle East's widespread unrest moved to Syria. In other parts of the Middle East, regime change led to anti-Assad riots in Syria and Libya, Egypt, and Tunisia. However, it was claimed by the US on 21 August 2013, the forces of Assad used chemical weapons, and ten days later, a statement was released by the White House that "I (Obama) had taken this decision that now military action will be taken by the United States against the targets in Syrian regime and I am sure that the United

States can hold this regime accountable for the chemical weapons which they have used, it will deter them this kind of behaviour and along with degrading its capacity to carry it out. This statement cleared one thing that a "red line" has been drawn. Hence, one more time, Syria used chemical weapons on 11 April 2014, but the US response was nothing, and it was now clear that the United States was not interested in intervening in Syria while the Russian presence was there. Instead, it called for an agreement in which the removal of Syria's chemical weapons was arranged with Russian President Vladimir Putin, as Russia was Assad's key ally.

Nevertheless, only one friend of Russia was Syria in the region, and traditional allies remained intact even in the post-Cold War Era. Yet, Moscow's sole military outpost and naval base in the Middle East was located in Tartus, on the Syrian coast. However, it was an ideal opportunity for Putin to station in Syria, and as the United States announced its troop pullout from the region, tensions rose in the Middle East. As a result, Moscow intervened on behalf of the Assad administration, allowing the establishment of a permanent air base in Hmeimim and on the other hand, the US, which had planned to stay out of Syria, saw a threat from a new terrorist regime in the region and moved its forces into Syria to monitor Russia's movements in the region (Cristol, 14 November 2018).

Along with the abovementioned issues, the rise of The Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), which initially began with the offshoots of al-Qaeda, had declared ISIS a different group than of Al-Qaeda and began a new thrill in the region by attacking different cities. Because of these actions, it took over the large strips of the territory of both Iraq and Syria by the end of 2014. This had led to a fear apparently, in Kurdish

allies of America and the government of Iraq, which we supported. These fears and videos released by ISIS led to a justification for the US invasion of the Middle East and Syria. However, this had led the US to deploy two thousand troops in Iraq to safeguard its interests in 2017 (Cristol, 2018).

The present activism of Russia in the Middle East is based on its historical experience. For two centuries, it was seen that the foreign policy of Russia was focused on displacing the Ottoman Empire, and World War I was also joined by Russia because of the Turkish Straits. Its active involvement in the Middle East started in 1950, resulting in an intense rivalry with the United States. Many Russian clients during the Cold War period, including Algeria, Yemen, Egypt, Syria and Iraq. The Soviet Union supported Israel while establishing it as a state. Very soon after, it became disappointed and started to back the Arab states that were foes of Israel. The active role of Russia in Syria was started in 2015. The Russian military is fighting in an Arab country for the first time, particularly from the air and water. The Russian industry plays an immense role in marketing defence armaments in the Middle East and Africa. For decades, the very important arms customers are Iraq, Algeria, and Egypt, and they hope that the good performance of these arms will boost their prestige in the region. Another major interest is also the part of Russian foreign policy. Russia has a great interest in reaching out to the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) countries as it is also an oil supplier Country and grain supplier to Egypt. Tourism is also promoted as many tourists visit Turkey and Egypt every year (Trenin, 2019).

3.4 The US foreign policy in the Middle East

The American foreign policy can be analyzed from her perspective that the fundamental obligation of the American government is to ensure the safety of the people of the state. However, the US believed current policies did not fulfil this obligation. The focus was on planning those problems that threatened the safety and prosperity of the people and the ways to tackle these problems by ensuring the security and more needed to safeguard the US. Yet, any other secondary considerations like promoting democracy, humanitarian activities and the expansion of American Values were not allowed to overstep into considerations although they had great importance. However, this exercise was considered only to accomplish the "fundamental purpose" to assure them the reliability, which was founded upon the dignity of an individual. The United States is still regarded as significant as it was 65 years ago. As a result of this goal, three realities emerged: the determination to preserve fundamental components of individual freedom, the development of conditions in which the democratic system might survive and grow, and the commitment to fight and defend the way of life. These objectives are defined according to the current situation of the US Grand Strategy in the Middle East and can be restated keeping in view future perspectives. To secure America's land and people, give them protection through the democratic way of life, maintain a free market economic system based on the free flow of people and goods around the world, protect the rules-based international order, and strengthen alliances so that they can assist in the face of common threats. However, these objectives are important for securing the people and the state of America (Kagan et al., 2006).

The US define protecting its homeland as a foremost important priority, same as other countries. Still, any threat perceived to hit the soil of US land would be disastrous to another country as per Bush's Preemption Doctrine. Thus, the good aim of the US strategy is not to provide the people of America the physical safety within the United States, but it's more than that; it's an ideology, a way of life, and a set of shared values that their society has embraced. Nowadays, rhetoric has been created in people's minds that America no longer shares common values, even that one upon which the foundation of the state had established. However, over time the current era accepted those values that were pronounced all men are equal, gifted with unalienable rights by their God, which are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. According to the Declaration of Independence, governments are established to secure these rights while promoting the general welfare and securing the blessings of liberty for themselves and their posterity. However, these ideas have brought Americans together (Kagan et al., 2006).

Individual liberty and its use to support society's common values are very important, and NSC-68 explained it as the individual is very important for society. It regarded the person as a goal, requiring only the kind of self-discipline and self-restraint that allowed the other rights and ideals to coexist. Same as the freedom of every individual has its equivalent. Negative responsibility would be varying others' freedom, and positive responsibility would be the constructive use of one's freedom to build a society (Kagan et al., 2006).

However, the value of an individual's liberty lies in the principal source of one's strength. Therefore, this idea of freedom is derived from three motivations: amazing diversity, the free society's tolerance and lawfulness; as a result, this would-be

explanation of free men's strength will form the free democratic system. Yet, free society took such attempts and created an environment where individuals realized their powers. Further, it also explained why societies tolerated those who destroyed the freedom of society.

However, NSC-68 followed the argument of fear and misperception as great for its logical and necessary conclusion. As a free society welcomed diversity, there was no fear. On the contrary, it derived its strength from its hospitality because it was a free market of ideas and trade secured in the faith that freemen had the best wares and had better choices to realize and use their powers. Senator Joseph McCarthy's speech in February 1950, in which he initiated his fear-mongering campaign against those who might be indicted for disloyalty to the United States, reflected that such a campaign against people would destroy America like the Soviet Union's military force. Therefore, it was warned to rely on the tools of domestic destruction to defend against a foreign threat. However, the belief on which the foundation of America was based was remembered and used through turmoil, which protected their heterogeneous and quarrelsome.

Additionally, hostile diversity was taken as the strength of Americans. Unfortunately, though, this idea of America used to celebrate not in the homeland but abroad. Therefore, their aim was not to make all people in their image but to create such an image and world order in which people that could also live with peace as others used to live according to their values. As a result, NSC-68 stated that we should confine our demands to their challengers and, on the other side, rivals to contributions with other states based on equality and respect for others' rights. As a result, there should be

cooperation to construct a universal society founded on the idea of agreement. However, it was also highlighted when the world shrinks and a lack of order among states. As a result, this fact should remind them that they should not assume global leadership. It also necessitated that people make an effort and face all of the risks that came with it for justice and order to be consistent with the values of freedom and democracy. (Keiswetter, 2012).

As a result, there must be some realistic standards of success and a framework for a global civilization that is not rigid but comprises groups with the ability and resources to wage war, as the seed of conflict will unavoidably be present. To acknowledge this would be to admit the impossibility of a final solution, while failing to acknowledge it would be catastrophic to the world because it would be without a solution. As a result of this examination of basic values, a clear set of needs arose to guide the approach to dealing with the many crises encountered as America will not compromise on its values to safeguard its physical safety because threats to values came beyond their shores, so that it would be defeated there without bargaining the American idea at home. Therefore, the US would lead to protect its people with their interests and will also mobilize its support for all those who will have common values and interests with it. Further, America will not aim to make people and other states in its image but will not support those states who will have any aim to destroy their values or security. Yet, the grand strategy of the US would achieve set goals according to the new circumstances, but it will not be applied for the solution of all problems all the time. Therefore, Americans will also have to understand the situations and all current crises by identifying that they are interconnectedness but not standardising all conflicts under a

single preamble. Most importantly, America will use all cultural, economic and social power to achieve these goals not they will be preferred by one another, but all could be balanced with the current circumstances; therefore, Americans will not anguish of succeeding in a long and problematic struggle even though gaffes, disappointments and uncertainties (Kagan et al., 2006).

The disintegration of the Soviet Union in the 1990s, which led to the end of the Cold War, had brought many changes in US foreign policy, including policy toward the Middle East. We launched Operation Desert Shield in the region as its first large-scale military intervention. During the ten years between this operation and 9/11, the United States laid the groundwork for its current Middle East policy. Following the demise of the Soviet Union, the US military established a doctrine emphasising unipolarity and the country's lone superpower status. The fundamental goal of America's post-Cold War military efforts was to avoid the emergence of a regional hegemon or vacuum. Paul Wolfowitz, who was then the Pentagon's Under Secretary of Policy, developed the US foreign policy at the time. The goal was to prevent any regional hegemon from forming anywhere in Eurasia. (Haddad, 2015).

Furthermore, the White House decided to conduct a full-scale war against the Taliban and al-Qaeda in Afghanistan and proclaim its intentions to extinguish Jihadism after 9/11. However, the Bush administration (2001-2009) agreed that it was vital for the security of the US to end the despotic regimes of Saddam Hussein and the Taliban and generate a change a paradigm through the implementation of the implementation regime change. On the other hand, the Bush administration introduced the post-Kantian approach (the rightness or wrongness of actions depends not on their consequences but

on whether they fulfil our duty), which reduced America's economy. This strategy forced the next president of the US to change his stance on the strategic commitment of the state from 2009-to 2017 (Renin, 2016).

The above-explained strategic objectives in the Middle East are discussed broadly in the context of the Middle East. As a result, these goals must be derived from a sophisticated evaluation of the character of the United States' adversaries and the threat they pose. It was not right to go from acknowledging that the threat was external to assuming that it could be countered by closing its border, as many people in the US claimed. It should also be determined how much control of human movement across borders is required and what options the opponent would have in response. However, it did not mean that defeating ISIS and Al Qaeda would be the solution to all threats to American security without enunciating what the defeat would have to involve. It should also be considered how the groupings of ISIS and Al-Qaeda would continue to threaten Europe and United States as if their defeat would be confined solely to the safe heavens as now it holds in the Middle East. As a result, the next step in this planning process should be to re-evaluate the adversaries and their risks to the global order and the security of both the United States and the European Union. Then any regional end states and objectives might be defined, and acts conducted inside societies and nations may meet overall needs, protect people, and maintain their values and way of life (Renin, 2016).

The important aspect keeping in view the present context, is that the US has developed the approach to defeat ISIS and Al-Qaeda and non-state actors considering those challenges that Russia and Iran have posed. Further, it was determined that an end state

was required to achieve the core interests of American security as it was defined above that Europe and America would ensure the safety, values and interest by controlling such threats posed by Al-Qaeda and ISIS with the help of law enforcement agencies to bring peace (Kagan et al., 2006).

The group defined the subcomponents of the end state that was Europe centred due to the disruption of the European Union and NATO alliance. As a result, Europe has become a net exporter of security, both locally and globally. However, the military alliance in Europe, NATO, was never displaced or weakened by other organisations like the EU or by the loss of member states. Yet, maintaining the integration of the European Union to the main economic and military American security strategy did not require a political superstructure in and of itself. As a result, the current point, spearheaded by French President Francois Hollande in the aftermath of the November 2015 Paris attacks, to replace NATO with the European Union has severely harmed American and European interests. Indeed, such development would smite the seven decades-old unions linking Europe through Canada, as NATO was the clearest affirmation of Europe's commitment to pursuing common security and aspirations. As a result, a weakening of NATO would have catastrophic consequences for the West's security.

On the other hand, if Europe rents apart by non-state actors' attacks, refugees flow, pressure from Russia, and the rise of racist and protectionist right-wing groups would damage America's social, political, and economic interests. Similarly, it would bring their values down, encourage their enemies, and ultimately bring the world order to collapse. Therefore, it was vital for America to help the European Union serve it in its

original form, which must work at least in the current situation of the conflict (Kagan et al., 2006).

3.4.2 The Reconceptualization of the US-Middle East Policy

In defining the Middle East, the US foreign policy experts processed the Middle East post War on Terror period /9/11 incidence, which justified America to invade the Middle East as per Bush doctrine. And led to a series of unilateral military invasions in the region and resulted in a re-conceptualization of the Middle East among the US foreign policymakers. According to the CIA World Factbook, which stated the same customary definition of the Middle East, Egypt, for example, is not included in its definition, even though it is commonly thought to be part of this region (whereas the Caucasus is not). Instead, it encompasses the Arabian Peninsula, Iran, the Caucasus, Turkey, and the land between (CIA World Factbook, 2019).

Therefore, the Greater Middle East Initiative concept appeared as a US strategy toward the Middle East in April 2004, which explained that the Middle East is a vast region from Morocco to Pakistan. According to the Brookings Institute, this amounted to including all of North Africa, the whole traditional Middle East, and parts of South Asia. Initially, it was to promote region-wide democratisation in the Middle East by expanding the Middle East by definition because it would set the stage for the US' theatre-wide strategy, including the "Arab Spring" regime change events and the region's expansion. Then, in reaction to Lebanon's "Israeli" invasion in July 2006, Bush's Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice invented the term "New Middle East,"

which was the next step in the US' reassessment of the area. And what we're seeing today is the growing— the birth pains of a new Middle East, she says.

And whatever we do, we must ensure that we are moving ahead in the new Middle East rather than returning to the old one. Analysts interpreted this comment to mean that the US was working on a new Middle East political structure and vested interest in the outcome. As a result, one can see a well-thought-out US strategy for the region. The US determined the extent of its politically transformational actions by merging the two re-conceptualizations of the Middle East and then set about working with its allies (in this case, 'Israel') to change the facts on the ground and bring about its intended changes (the New Middle East). So, the New Greater Middle East is intended as being drastically different from the old one. For this New Greater Middle East Initiative, the US had a specific vision in mind to recourse to the strategy of geopolitical manufacturing to achieve. The realities on the ground can be easily comprehended to steer into a new regional reality that the US sees its mission as altering. The regime change played an integral role in reaching its objective, which was the major aspect of the US grand strategy in the Middle East to serve her interest. In the immediate aftermath of 9/11, General Wesley Clark, the former Supreme Allied Commander of Europe for NATO and the commander who oversaw the War on Yugoslavia, recounts shocking details that prove the US decided to implement regime change against many Muslim governments, which he published in his memoirs in 2007. In his memories, he narrated a senior general told him after two weeks of 9/11 the decision had already been made that we were going to attack Iraq, which would be a strategy towards the Middle East, starting with Iraq and ending with Iran. The nature of attack and destabilisation

would be different for each country somewhere with regime change and, in some countries, different experiences (Kagan et al. 1, 2006).

The next stage in US foreign policy strategy was the formation of the Axis of Evil to foster regional regime change in the Middle East. This expanded axis of evil was declared as Iran, North Korea, Iraq, and regime change in Syria was also on the main agenda. John Bolton was the Under Secretary of State at the time.

The United States Central Command (CENTCOM), a branch of the Department of Defense entrusted with managing military operations in parts of the Greater Middle East, might be seen as an extended Axis of Evil because it serves a military-political purpose for decision-makers (Haddad, 2017).

3.5 The Obama's Foreign Policy towards the Middle East

The Obama foreign policy towards the Middle East can be defined as a variable engagement and a pragmatic one, balancing strategic interests and values. His strategy varied from state to state while keeping it acceptable to the rest of the world to maintain the US's great power status. His foreign policy towards the Middle East was the same as his predecessors in that the US was not in a state of war against Islam but more decisive with a promise to settle the Arab-Israel conflict. Along with all these in the region, promoting ideological narrative in the form of democratization was a central feature of the administration. Obama personally has stated that you're going to get into difficulty if you start imposing blanket policies on the nuances of the current international scenario. (Elliot, 2013).

The US strategic interests in the Middle East during the Obama and pre-Obama periods could be stated as follows: one could be generalised as a 'pact of silence and the second as 'loud actions'. Silence in the context of the US (and others in the West) staying silent on tyranny for decades, delaying a democratic change in some cases, in exchange for energy security, support in the fight against terrorism, control over migration flows, and the renunciation of mass weapons, the United States' ties with its Middle Eastern allies. This strategy existed pre-Obama period as a method exemplified before in Egypt and Libya when the regimes changed. But, on the other hand, with the context of louder action which speaks itself that directed in the region state to state in the form of reforms, favoured regimes and regime change to influence the region as a result of the intervention in Libya and the redefining of new partners in Syria (Elliot, 2013).

The reforms in the shape of democratic change could mean a regime favourable to US interests, such as in Egypt and Libya, as Obama loudly called for the stepping down of Mubarak and forming a new regime in Libya. Furthermore, through influencing UN decisions for their ends, a Syrian operation today appears unlikely to be approved. Obama's role in removing certain dictators has demonstrated that his foreign policy is no longer always favouring the status quo. The US has proven to be a less reliable friend for the authoritarian regimes with which it has maintained the pact of silence. However, if Egypt and Libya become autonomous, the covenant of silence may be broken, putting US strategic interests in peril. Another key interest in keeping the old legacy intact for the US in the region was the Arab-Israel conflict, keeping those regimes who could accept Israel's dominance in the region (Elliot, 2013).

3.5.1 The Trump Administration's Middle East Foreign Policy

The Trump administration reversed the policies adopted by Obama in the region. It includes the final decision of Obama on admitting the Syrian refugees from the civil war was 110,000 who, according to the High commissioner of U.N., had fled since 2011. Nevertheless, the Trump administration reduced this number to zero. Hence, they were not only Syrian but citizens from Iran, Libya, Sudan, Iraq, Yemen and Somalia were also banned from entering the United States. However, another policy reverse was taken by Trump that the U.S. would withdraw from JCPOA, as Iran assessed it was compliant with the JCPOA, according to the U.S. intelligence committee and the IAEA, and it was called the worst deal ever negotiated; thus, Iran opted to withdraw from the agreement (Delk 2018, p.3). In addition, the Trump administration reversed course in Israel, moving the embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, ushering in the post-Cold War era in the Middle East with overwhelming approval. Although this region had never been peaceful, the alliance against Saddam Hussein brought together disparate parties and fostered hopes for future collaboration. Overall, the US had never been absent from the Middle East, but 30 years of involvement and a 17-year war in which the US was involved left the US with unresolved and numerous problems.

In the Middle East, the United States took different approaches. Still, all of them functioned within a collective set of norms and recognized practices as stated by the US. Yet, the Presidential campaign of Donald J. Trump and his actions marked a modification from the past pattern. During his campaign, Trump announced policies that would be isolationist and aggressive. On the one hand, he opposed the war on Iraq; on the other hand, he did not consider it a mistake of taking Iraq's oil. However, he

stated that it did not only support the torture of terrorists but also called to kill the families of terrorists' destruction. Therefore, he supported the use of torture.

When two weeks were left in his campaign, Trump tweeted, "Saudi Arabia must pay. The United States has spent billions of dollars on our defence, and we would be lost without them!" On the other hand, every suggestion was not new, as every candidate before him had promised to move America's embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem. But, unlike his predecessors, President Trump took a different approach, and he visited Saudi Arabia on May 20 2017, on his first abroad trip after taking office. However, after this visit, the president hit a different tone vis-à-vis Saudi Arabia. Yet, this new fold relationship might be attributed to the close ties between the son in law of Trump, who was also senior advisor Jared Kushner and Muhammad Bin Salman (MBS), who can be considered a sort of reformer as well. But on the other hand, MBS oversaw the proxy war with Iranian-backed Houthi rebels, which resulted in the deaths of over 10,000 people.

In the Yemen conflict, Saudis were backed by the United States; according to Strategic and International Studies assessments, most aid was aerial targeting, intelligence sharing, and refuelling of Saudi and UAE aircraft. However, support from Saudi Arabia in Yemen has been controversial. There was little likelihood that American foot soldiers would enter Yemen. Moreover, US support was hardly a novel Trump policy innovation. Yet, Saudi troops crossed the path on Mar 14 2011, to suppress an insurrection by the Shia community. Obama did not openly engage in the protests against the Sunni al-Khalifa rulers, but he voiced his support for the al-Khalifa.

However, the Trump administration went one step farther and relaxed human rights restrictions on the sale of arms to Bahrain. In addition, during the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) crisis in 2017, Saudi Arabia was supported by the Trump administration. These crises started when some hackers posted a false statement that was completely pro-Iranian. The Qatari Amir's statement was published on the Qatar News Agency's website.

In response to these words, Saudi Arabia imposed a blockade on Qatar on Jun 5, 2017, later supported by Bahrain, the United Arab Emirates, and Egypt. Yet, the very next day of this incident, there was a tweet by Trump who announced his support for the Saudi position that Qatar is supporting terrorism. However, it was decided that countries would take a hard line on funding to bring terrorism to an end. This statement was a surprise both for Qataris and the American defence establishment. There was an Al- Udeid base in the Middle East, the largest base of America in this region and the base of security cooperation between Qatar and America (Cristol, Nov 14, 2018).

Many policies of the Obama era in the region had been overturned by the Trump administration, as the final decision of Obama on admitting the Syrian refugees from the civil war was 110,000 who, according to the High commissioner of U.N., had fled since 2011. Nevertheless, the Trump administration reduced this number to zero. Hence, they were not only Syrian but citizens from Iran, Libya, Sudan, Iraq, Yemen and Somalia were also banned from entering the United States. However, another policy reverse was taken by Trump that the US would withdraw from JCPOA, as the US intelligence committee assessed it and IAEA that Iran was completely in acquiescence with JCPOA and declared it the worst deal that was ever negotiated,

therefore decided to withdraw from this agreement (Delk, 2018, p.3). Additionally, another reverse was taken in Israel. The Trump administration moved the embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, began the post-Cold War era in the Middle East, and had widespread support. Yet, this region had never been quiet, but the alliance against Saddam Hussein united the dissimilar actors and raised hope for future cooperation. The United States had never been absent from the Middle East, but intervention for 30 years and the 17 years of war in which the US was involved left the US with unresolved and countless problems (Cristol, Nov 14, 2018).

The US foreign policy strategy based on its current military doctrine, which is based on full-spectrum operations, includes both offensive and defensive and civil-military actions within interdependent joined forces for the seizure, defence and use of territories. Lethal and non-lethal assumes coordinated action by US military doctrine, including all kinds of the operating environment. The latest US military doctrine also decides the state's war with global terrorism and threats from Islamic religious fundamentalism, drug trafficking, forming anti-US blocs against U.S. interests, global militarisation, etc. (Pietkiewicz, 2018). It reflects that the US is also aware of Russia's presence in forming a bloc in the region, which threatens US hegemonic goals in the long run.

CHAPTER 4

RUSSIA'S MIDDLE EASTERN POLICY

4. INTRODUCTION

The Russian policy towards the Middle East shows broader foreign policy objectives of Russia in the Middle East; it seems that Putin in the Middle East wants to establish its status quo as a major power, to regain its position back. Therefore, the other important and major objectives of Russian foreign policy are: to diminish extremism as it might expand in Russia and its neighbourhood, which can enhance the potential for Muslim radicalism, to support a friendly regime in the Middle East that can build its development of military presence in this region, long-term geopolitical relationships with them and to expand the presence of Russia in the markets of Arms, oil, food and nuclear Markets, to attract the richer countries of Persian Gulf for the investment into Russia and to support the energy prices with the help of coordinating policies in the Persian Gulf.

Those countries which are allies of the United States want to promote relations with Egypt, especially with Kurds both in Syria and Iraq, also to establish relations with Saudi Arabia, and expand ties with Iran so that they benefit by lifting the sanctions against Iran and they also want cordial relations with Israel. In the Middle East, the main driver of Kremlin policy is more geopolitical. In this context, domestic stability

cannot be ignored as it is also important for the geopolitics of Russia. The state of Russia also consists of many Muslim states. Infect 12 per cent of the population are Muslims from Chechnya to Bashkortostan. In the non-Muslim areas, thousands of Muslim immigrants are also greening this region, and they are mostly coming from Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Kyrgyzstan. These are the reasons which paved the way for the spread of radical Ideology (Dmitry Trenin, 2019).

The first president of Russia, Boris Yeltsin, openly challenged the policy of the United States from 1990-to 1991 and continued its traditional policy toward the Middle East without following any violent line toward any regional development. Essentially, Russia did not want to miss any opportunity that could challenge the established policy of the US. Therefore, Russia participated in both agreements signed between Israel and Palestine and the second was signed between Israel and Jordon in 1993 and 1994, respectively. Yet, in 1994 Russia called to lift the international sanction on Iraq and Libya; a diplomatic act enraged the US and positioned Russia among anti-western Arab regimes (Felkay 2002, 82). During that period, Russia attempted to play a stabilizing role between Palestine and Israel. It was also noted that in 1996 and 1997, Russian Foreign Minister Evgenii Primakov visited both governments, demonstrating to the rest of the world that Russia is committed to bringing peace to the region. On the second visit of the Russian foreign minister, he conveyed messages between the Israeli Premier Benjamin Netanyahu and the president of Syria, President Hafez Al-Assad and who had to the side of Russia that it could also influence Syria while shaping Syrian foreign policy (Feldman 1998). In addition, both Syria and Iran were approached by Russia during the Lebanese 'crisis of 1997 and asked them they terminate their provision for

Hezbollah. However, Russia sealed a deal worth \$2 billion with Syria and allowed it to make its policies stable toward Lebanon (Feldman 1998). This policy of Yeltsin was the first step toward a foreign policy to get it back to normality. It is regarded as the mild-smart policy of Russia; on the one hand, it tried to influence the Middle East with its policies; on the other hand, it attrited US at every given prospect. It was not easy for Russia to invoke the 6th navy of the US as for Kremlin, it was a big task to face the consequences of its socio-economic failure, but it maintained its influence over the region such as the Caucasus. For Yeltsin's Middle East is the best place to exercise a non-costly foreign policy. Yet Russia tried to act in almost all the events occurring in the region after the Cold War to let the nations realize that even after the collapse of the Soviet, Russia is still playing an active role. Russia was in that position where it could achieve ambitious foreign policy, so it had to go again for the Potemkin deception. It also disapproved certain US sanctions like economic sanctions on Iraq at the platform Middle East to distinguish itself to the international community. Thus, Russian such steps could direct toward balancing the geopolitical setting of the Middle East (Litsas, Nov 23 2018).

According to the foreign policy literature of Russia, it was acknowledged that the region of the Middle East initially was less important than Asia and Europe for the national strategy of the Kremlin. Moreover, it was apparent in the Russia Ministry of Foreign Affairs Foreign Policy Concept Papers in 2003 and 2006. This region was listed near the end of the section "Regional Priorities" in both editions, illustrating the Middle East's lower priority in Moscow's worldview. However, Russia saw very limited opportunities to protect the vital national interests of Russia in the Middle East. Yet, it

was concluded by the study by RAND 2009 that the foreign policy of Russia was driven by international prestige and regional stability in the Middle East. Indeed, Russia was moved by the policy or vision for the Middle East but with a certainty that it would play in the Middle East as a global power. There were three drivers, but additional was also added to understand the foreign policy of Russia that shaped its approach in the region. First, the foreign policy of Russia was viewed as secular and non-ideological toward the Middle East. Russia believed that it could speak to all parties except those related to Islamic State. Therefore, it was described as "staying remote from the local problems" by professor Irina Zvyagelckaya that Russia made it possible to maintain balanced relations with different states and non-strong-stats which sometimes were also used as the front-line confrontation with one another as Russia participated in both workshops, which made it clear that their foreign policy was guided by the opportunisms or by short term pragmatism and not by long term strategy or regional plans. Yet, it was also assessed that Russia acted on each opportunity while prioritising its concerns and interests. However, Russia examined long term objectives in the region; it was described that it might be possible it would not have long term plans, but it has long term interest in the region, as it preferred to approach regional stability. So far, its interest was not in conflict with the short term option, as it could not immerse the region as the United States did. However, if Russia would not have security concerns, there would be international terrorism against Russia and its neighbouring states. According to a report, since 2014, about 3,200 Russians travelled to Syria and Iraq, but the leaders of Moscow showed their worry that the returnees were radicalised by Islamic State propaganda. In 2003, a joint RAND and Moscow Center workshop

was held in which both US and Russians participated, and they highlighted the concerns of Russia about Islamic radicalism and terrorism. Indeed, according to the Russian view, this threat was grown over time, particularly after the consequences of conflicts in the Middle East. Thus far, the component of the policy of Russia was the support against both external and internal interventions and insurgency, respectively, for the existing state structure. However, any change meant a constitution or state apparatus, not any uprisings. Therefore, Russia held that the West is responsible for the current situation and maintained that all western interventions have been catastrophic, especially in Iraq and Libya. In contrast, Russia maintained that it supported the principle of state sovereignty and opposed outside intervention. However, this view was aligned with the concerns of Russian leaders about "colour revolutions" in the US and the reluctance of Moscow to accept any unfavourable changes in the status quo. Meanwhile, Russia associated the status quo with the reduced terrorist threats in the Middle East, increased transactional opportunities, and reduced sociocultural influence. Indeed, Russia being latched on to disorder presented itself as the alternative for the Middle Eastern Leaders. Besides, it created a contradictory position in the region as it might present itself as conservative power and a disruptive power as it intervened in Ukraine to destabilise parts of Europe. Meanwhile, Russia's actions also undermined its narrative about the sovereignty of state with the stance of non-intervention as it worked with Iran, which intervened in the region and relations were also cultivated with the opposition of Libya. However, a rich source of material has been identified by Russia to criticise the West along with cultivated sympathetic region audience to convey a substitute message in the post-Arab Spring Environment (Sladden, 2017).

4.1 An Analysis of Putin's 20 years long Middle East foreign policy

To understand the current nature of Russia's presence in the Middle East, it is essential to look through the lens of drafting a foreign policy perspective. Thus, the Prime Minister of Russia, Vladimir Putin, preserved the lines of the foreign policy of Yeltsin. Meanwhile, it had to tackle the regional crises of the Middle East as Putin had to face the fear of Islamist take over in Chechnya and other neighbouring countries. Simultaneously, the other challenges for Russia were to face the Taliban and Al-Qaeda in Afghanistan; as Oded Eran describes Putin's early days: as related to the Middle East, the top objective of Russia that emerged was the political stabilisation to prevent the spillover of military crises in this region, in the central Asian region and inside-outside of Russia and its 'near abroad' (Eran 2003, 159), however, Putin was experienced in security issues and knew about the open links of communication between terrorist groups, for this reason, the Middle East was used as the corridor. The stability in the Caucasus was essential for Russia to make its oil and gas transport uninterrupted to European and Asian markets. Although it was regarded that the US and Russia's resentment was a big game, he continued with Yeltsin's policy to challenge the presence of the US in the Middle East. On one side, it was a challenge, but on another side, these challenges became a point of strengthening relations between Russia and other Middle Eastern countries like Syria, Iraq and Libya, and Moscow's apparent unwillingness to work with the western power was also expressed (Litsas, Nov 23, 2018). For example, during clashes between Hezbollah-Israel in 2006, a separate line was drawn by Moscow from Western World. Instead of any support to Jerusalem, open channels were maintained with Hassan Nasrallah, leader of Hezbollah (Katz and Pollak, 2015). In

general, Putin attempted not to irritate the US in his early days to buy time and heal as many wounds as possible in the crippled post-Yeltsin Russian bureaucracy. However, 9/11 and its post-event allowed Putin to change his stance on foreign policy to move it towards the Middle East and various regions of strategic significance.

Furthermore, the White House decided to wage a full-scale war against the Taliban and al-Qaeda in Afghanistan and disclose its intentions to extinguish Jihadism after 9/11. During the Bush administration (2001-2009), however, it was deemed that ending the totalitarian regimes of Saddam Hussein and the Taliban was critical for US security and generating a paradigm shift through regime transition. On the other hand, the Bush administration introduced the post-Kantian approach (the rightness or wrongness of actions depends not on their consequences but on whether they fulfil our duty), which reduced America's economy. This strategy forced the next president of the US to change his stance on the strategic commitment of the state (2009-2017). As a result, the American electorate became exhausted with the US military engagement in the Middle East, forcing Obama's administration to issue a new strategy. The US only continued its socio-political developments in the Middle East. Yet, despite the importance of sea routes in the Mediterranean, it was unwilling to be involved in the region's challenges. While politics was loathing for the US, Russia took full advantage of the United States' reorientation. Following 9/11, Putin struck a compromise between the need to encourage the international system and confront the US agenda in the region by aligning himself with western powers against non-state entities. Following the sad events of 9/11, Russia offered the US assistance in conducting military operations in Afghanistan and permission to utilise military bases in Tajikistan and Uzbekistan for aerial attacks

against the Taliban (US Department of State Archive 2001–2003). However, in the fall of 2002, Russia not only attacked US policy on Iraq but also fought regime change in Iraq in different international forums and provided political assistance to Saddam Hussain before and during Iraq's 2003 war (Kramer, 2006, Kanet, 2010, 212).

Addressing Russia Grand Strategy in the Middle East, it can be analyzed that despite their originally amicable connection, the United States and Russia's relationship deteriorated after the Sept 11, 2001 attacks, and the Iraq War represented a turning point in what turned into the worst relationship between Moscow and Washington since the Cold War. Russia insistently has presented hostile behaviour toward the United States, resulting in numerous crises from that point onwards. Given recent events in US-Russian relations, it's vital to acknowledge that Moscow has a grand strategy focused on expanding multipolarity and that it's willing to use limited military action to achieve its goals, in particular President Barack Obama's decision to abandon the Bush Administration's proposal to deploy a national missile defence (NMD) system in Eastern Europe (Saltzman, 15, September 2012).

Yet distance became clearer between Washington and Moscow against the Middle East and more evident, which revealed the true intentions of Russia regarding the presence of Russia in the region. Though it was not like before, with the arrival of Obama, Russia abandoned its stance and adopted an offensive approach to expand its influence and undermine the US presence. Russians are experts in Potemkin diplomacy, and she was not willing anymore to bandwagon with the US. For Russia, the most important thing was what others think about their power not to match your orotundity with actions. However, before the summit between the US and Russia in 2009, Dmitry Medvedev,

who was close to Vladimir Putin, emphasised the need for equality and mutual benefit as Russia and the US had to play their role in world affairs for nuclear security and strategic stability (Oldberg 2010, pp. 36–37). Nevertheless, it was a signal to the international system that not only Russia returned to the international arena but also read to equal the United States in international affairs (Sladden, 2017).

A startup of Russian presence can be analyzed in September 2015 when a series of airstrikes were launched by Russia that marked the beginning of the sustained military intervention. This move also surprised the Western community. The nature and scale of the actions of Russia encouraged us to focus on the question: what is going to be important in the understanding of wider interests and actions in this region? There was less literature on Russia's relations with countries in the Middle East except Russia. At the end of 2016, it was observed that the focus of Russia in the region left an important question about its strategy in the region as this perspective identified the important elements of Russia's interests. Therefore, a good reason was there to understand the strategy of Russia so it could avoid any surprises in the future. Knowing when and where Russia would commit its economic and military intervention will also allow time and space to mitigate actions. However, for many western observers, the regional engagement of Russia does not look like a strategy but might be taken as its actions for a short time and opportunistic. The view is divided into three parts: the first dealt with Russian foreign policy ideas, the second examined the nature of Russia's current engagement in the Middle East, and the third dealt with Russia's foreign policy features. Western observers believe that Russia is keen on broad principles compared to regional or global strategies and seeks to advance short-term economic, military and political

gains. Therefore, there applied the opportunity-dependent approach, which means that when resources and opportunities are scarce to advance the actions of Russia, transactions will be decreased. On the other hand, it would accelerate when they would be flush. However, this short term and transactional approach will constitute the long term strategies of any of the major actors in the Middle East (Sladden et al., 2017). Thus, on a global scale, Russia's presence cannot be ignored in a region of the Middle East that depicted its regaining power in the Cold War era in the Middle East as a superpower is geographically close to Russia. At the start of the first Gulf War, it was understood that Russia had withdrawn from the Middle East, which marked its decline as a superpower projection. However, under Vladimir Putin's leadership, Russia has resurfaced as a key player in the Middle East to restore its status as a great power. The first military intervention in Syria is an attempt that Russia is returning to the global stage by making the ground of the Middle East a tester. Counting in the foreign policy scope Vladimir Putin has been in power for 20 years. During his power, it witnessed many changes in Russia's foreign policy, and it is still unpredictable what will be next coming ahead by keeping in view present dynamics as Putin has an influential personality and say in foreign policy, which may impact and influence later. (Dmitri Renin, 2016).

The Putin Era is more or less focused on the future rather than what has and has not been achieved in the last 20 years. The analyses of the Putin era focused on several factors in terms of foreign policy. In 1999, Putin's foreign policy had two key goals: to preserve Russia's unity and to reclaim the country's lost status as a great power. Russia has dedicated the 21st century to itself for turning it into a century as a global

geopolitical and military player. But these goals are yet to be achieved as the centralisation of power and great-power status will take time since reestablishing herself after the Cold War. But with, Russia's aim to reclaim its global power status could be seen as challenging, and it clashes with the US hegemonic interests (Dmitri Renin, 2016).

The Russian foreign policy legacy is broad and wide, changing since its formation during the Putin era. For obtaining NATO membership in 2000, Putin was quite active but later shifted his policy and became an important ally of the United States in 2001 and gave the order to provide any assistance to American troops in Afghanistan. Also, for common economic space, it shows the interest in building a greater Europe (Trenin, 2019). Putin's policy will be clear in the years to come, much as still five years left of his presidency. But we can examine his current foreign policy; the question arises of how it will influence the future.

During Putin's era, a study showed that Russia had restored sovereignty. So to free it from external financial dependence, the country's transition boom in the newly constituted country was accompanied by the rapid rise of oil prices in the 2000s. The mid of 2000s created a basis for a coordinated energy policy as a significant part of Russia's nationalisation. Also, later in the 2010s with the reforms of the armed forces became an effective instrument of her foreign policy interest. Power verticals provide Putin with a mechanism to exert political will, and stable support from the majority of the population safeguarded system stability within a country.

In the Russian context, great power is essentially a military-political concept. The 21st century effectively disciplined the status of great power. It means now Russia can resist

foreign pressure and is politically independent to make and reshape foreign policies whenever required.

By integrating with the western system, Russia's foreign elite forgot US influence was greater than Russia, which can be seen in an attempt to secure autonomous status with the Euro-Atlantic system in the 1990s-2000s turned out to be a failure, even in Eurasia, unable to build its power. This prompted Russia to rethink its foreign policy in the second half of 2010, looking for a balancing point in a rapidly changing global environment for the affirmation of a major independent power in the north of the Eurasian continent, directly bordering East and Central Asia, Europe, the Middle East, and North America (Mandelbaum, n.d.).

Being guided by its national interest, Russia is now interacting with all its neighbours. Foreign policy under Putin gained relevance for the first time, bringing it on par with the previously dominating eastern vector, as seen by Russia's fight with the US and subsequent failure with the EU. The growth of Asia as the global centre of the international economy and politics could explain this astonishing shift in Russian foreign policy. On the other hand, its geopolitical and geo-economics position in the east of the country is still weak with its border issue with China, where Putin put a great effort to reach a final resolution and partnership with Beijing. Hence, Putin Era is more or less interacting with all countries, including India as it's a traditional strategic partner and ASEAN as a large growing market in 2009, economic integration as part of the Eurasian Economic Union, a great Asian power comparable to China, also for the import of technology and investment making terms with Japan and South Korea, ASEAN as a great Asian power comparable to China, also for the import of technology

and investment making terms with Japan and South Korea, ASEAN as a large growing market and in 2009 economic integration as part of the Eurasian Economic (EAEU). As we can see in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), the BRICS, and the RIC, Russia is capable of maintaining a balance with more powerful and sophisticated countries as a dominant player (Russia, India, China) (Trenin, 2019).

The Russian new foreign policy is dynamic, seen in the Middle East with its military operations in Syria in 2015. Russia can maintain fruitful relations with all of the region's major players, including Iran and Israel, where these two players mutual rivals. Russia's deployment of forces in Syria is not much, with relatively low cost and low volume with limited losses. Since the collapse of the USSR, Russia's re-emergence has been seen as a great player in the region. Such actions show Russia more focusing on her foreign policy interests rather than a rational approach by leaving behind the traditional approach of ideological expansion. And on the bases of regional realities, knowledge of the region and its capability had led Russia to play its role in the Middle East (Ibid).

The Russian presence in the Middle East shed an impact and returned it to the global arena, which changed the view of regional players in the region, where it showed a visible change in foreign policy, which is different from the USSR. However, Russia is not expanding its model to the rest of the world; rather, she makes her position balanced for her interest. Apart from exporting oil resources, guns, nuclear technology, and food, Russia serves military and diplomatic roles in the Middle East, providing political cover for many states. Therefore, Russia is now maintaining its ties beyond Europe and Asia, as we see in the Middle East, Africa, and Latin America (Baldon, 2016).

The Russian foreign policy is here to pursue a tactical gain rather than experiencing a strategic defeat. Therefore, she opted for coordinated actions in numerous domains and at different levels.

Russia sees a predictable future with Europe in terms of economics, scientific, cultural and humanitarian ties, while US geopolitics and defence will remain at the forefront. As the world is moving towards a multipolar system because of geopolitical and geo-economics, Russian efforts are also changing the existing order world, be these not favourable. Her place in this global order needs to be justified with clear goals and strategies. Because long-term goals and strategies are a key part of long-term foreign policy, it will more or less likely trigger an arms race seen in the Middle East viz-a-viz the US. It will be a greater challenge for Russia if the US changes its policies and strategies in the Middle East. Russia's foreign policy also indicates not to have a confrontation with the US to safeguard its vital interest in the Middle East. The Russian interference in the Ukrainian crisis and NATO's expansions portrayed a hardliner image of Russia toward the Western interest (Renin, 2016).

4.2 International Players and Russia's Engagement in the Middle East

Russia has been trying to influence her presence since the Iraq War, but sanctions and lack of acceptance as a global power couldn't allow her to make a remarkable footprint in the Middle East. But the Middle East attracted Russia when the wave of uprisings, the Arab Spring that rolled across the Arab World in early 2011 by "numerous invisible threads." The US and many other European countries view the Arab Spring differently. The Arab uprisings seemed more complex and threatening, leading to a chaotic

rupturing of a stagnant and weak socio-political order, long-term unrest, extremism, and perhaps more interstate wars (Lund, 2019, p.17).

Under the UN Security Council Resolution 1973, Russia abstained in the March 2011 vote, which empowered member states to "take all necessary measures to protect civilians" in Libya. As soon as the text passed, Western powers started a mass movement to overthrow Gaddafi with the help of Gulf Arab nations; among leading countries, the United Kingdom, Qatar, and France's principles played a major role. During this process, Russia remained neutral and did not participate in hostilities. Following Gaddafi's demise in October 2011, Libya became a failed state with no functioning government and a shattered country, sparking proxy wars between local militias and extremists. Russian calculation played a role in getting a soft corner through friendly gestures in the Middle East to fill the void (Lund, 2019, pp. 18-20). However, after eight years, the regime of Saddam Hussein was toppled by the United States in Iraq, on the other president of Iraq faced rebellion in its regime. After all such events, Russia decided to draw its line in Syria as its interests in this state were clear and longstanding (Sladden, 2017).

In 2012, Putin safely regained the presidency, enabling more influence in the Middle East as Moscow's quest for national security-related goals rose to the top by undermining economic gains. This converted the Russian Middle East policy into "a pro-status quo, anti-colour revolution policy (Lund, 2019, p. 20). Russian relations with the Middle East are not new, but they have followed an unusual trajectory since the demise of the Soviet Union. But post Arab Spring has revived its relations with the Middle East, which can be seen in its relations with Israel, which is growing and has

good relations with the US, which is quite a big shift from Russian relations during the Cold War era. But yet, Russia-Israel trade and economic relations are minimal but diplomatic relations are growing (Rumer and Weiss, 2019).

The post-Arab Spring period era was seen as a big transition in ending the long period of adversity between Russia with all such countries that have rational rivalries and re-look Russia's relations with all of those. Hence, Russia's and Turkey's relations could be observed by highlighting the revival of Russia's foreign policy, which was revised in 2015 when Turkey drew the Russian warplane, and both relations worsened. The intervention in Syria also further damaged the interests of Turkey with its neighbour. As President Tayyip Erdogan in Turkey stays in power, her relations with Middle Eastern countries and Russia would be more like rivals. As far the economic relations are concerned, it has also been affected because of these geopolitical clashes earlier (Trenin, 2019). But Russia and Turkey's relations keep changing according to their interests, but currently, it has been seen more as a kind of informal alliance as both interests differ in the region but avoid confrontation.

The relations between Iran and Russia are also not openly welcoming nor rejecting. Russia seems more neutral in dealing with all countries, including Iran, as witnessed when Russia supported the west's stance of imposing sanctions on Tehran and Russia remained silent. But normality and informal alliances can be seen as Russia is a big supplier of Arms to Iran despite the weapons sale ban UN-mandated, which will expire in October 2020. History shows that both enjoyed constructive relations; they do not consider Hezbollah and Hamas terrorist organizations. Because of Russia's presence in Syria, Iran's entrance became easy as an influencer (Meyer, 2019).

In the evolution of the region's international dynamics, China has played the role of a far more silent partner in the Middle East. For her plan for One Belt Road initiatives, China could see the Middle East as a cross-continental network of infrastructure projects like the crossroads of Asia, Africa, and Europe. And possible interest where Russia sees mutual collaboration by China in Syria is the Ports of Tartous and Latakia, where major Chinese investment would be possible. In the Lebanese port of Tripoli, China has already established a financial presence at Israel's Haifa port farther south on the Mediterranean, which shows China's vital interest in the Middle East (Connor, 2019).

The Middle East is an important region and a power hub of many players' interests: the US, China, EU, etc. Russia is pushing its interests and playing a more assertive role that can stretch beyond its borders as it regains its regional power aspirations. Due to its enormous holdings in global energy markets, Russia is rebuilding its relations with several Middle Eastern countries, particularly the GCC countries, due to its interest in oil and gas. The Russian economy depends on domestic political stability and the ability to fund continued foreign policy and military oil and gas operations (Rumer and Weiss, 2019).

Russia's relations with Saudi Arabia seemed like a test case since both did not enjoy diplomatic relations during the Cold War period. When the Soviet Union intervened in Afghanistan, Saudis played a part as the main supporters of the Mujahidin and supported the US block. At the end of the confrontation, they were concerned about the Saudi lobbies performing their duties as the financial supporter of Wahhabi Ideology. In the economic field, both are competitors of oil in the market. According to some

Russians, the downfall of the Soviet Union was also triggered by the falling prices of oil in the market. Although Russia and the Saudis enjoy relations despite the Saudi-US alliance, they have a policy of avoiding confrontation even though Russia's presence is obvious in Syria in establishing their relations, and Iran is the biggest factor in rapprochement. On the other hand, Russia may establish relations by arming the Gulf and other Middle Eastern countries (Trenin, 2019).

Analyzing Egypt and Russia's relations, it can be stated that between 1950 and 1972, both enjoyed warm relations, and strong ties were established between these two states. The relations further strengthened with the arrival of General el-Sisi. It was perceived that he was the only leader of Egypt that could bring stability to this nation. Russians were also supplying arms to Egypt. The incident bombing at the airport of Sharm-el-Sheikh could not even bring the cooling of relations as they were satisfied that the airport administration of Egypt had taken security measures. Since 1950, there has been only one country in the Middle East, with Russia consistently maintaining its relations: Syria. Although relations became distant, it is still friendly. The incident that erupted in Syria brought Russia on its back to destabilise the influence of the Arab spring. Russia is trying its best to make Syria the foothold in the region as it is located among other allies of Russia – Kurds, Iran, and Iraq. So, it could bring a new axis of friends to the region. Even discussing Russia's and Iraq's ties with each other, as in the past, Iraq was an independent client as compared to other countries, but Russia's normality can be seen that it has not involved safeguarding the regime of Saddam Hussain as many views that even though by engaging there may later help her to establish its relations as the expander of arms and energy to the community of Shia dominated regions. In the

same way, it is also expanding its relationship with Iraqi and Syrian Kurds, who want to have their autonomous state in this region (Ibid).

On the other hand, Russia and Israel currently enjoy close relations as Putin is also Israel's biggest supporter and friend despite Israel being a traditional ally of the US. Compared to the Soviet policy, during Cold War, Russia brought the fundamental reverse in its relationship with Israel. Although they never came eye to eye in the matters of Hamas, Hezbollah, and Iran, they share a view of relations in real influential politics. The relations mentioned above prove this thing that the allies of Russia in the Middle East are not permanent as the US has in the form of Israel, but the relations of Russia are temporary and conditional, which only pave the way for Russian interests in this region. Russia does not want to make the same mistakes it has made in the past by siding with one side or another in any war. With time, it has also reduced the supply of arms to Iran and Syria as an engagement of Russia in a tradeoff (Trenin, 2019). The current actions of Russia's many views could vague its economic, diplomatic and business interests in the Middle East. Therefore, it was necessary to understand the nature and limitations of Russian engagement in the Middle East (Sladden, 2017).

Russia encouraged interaction with other states, including non-state actors; most of its relationships were transactional in the Middle East. So far, Russia did not go to such a degree to engage itself in ideological matters as western powers initially did in the Middle East. However, this transactional nature of relations was not only on Russia's side, but many other states of the Middle East could do except Syria and Iran. Yet, after the convergence of interests, Russia was able to make deals; it did not mean that these alliances were longstanding, but it was in contrast to that nation's alliances, which relied

on the United States and considered it the regional security guarantor. Most notably, this transactional relationship also included the relationship of Russia with Iran while both states supported the Syrian government, so their relations were characterized by mistrust and political differences.

On the other hand, Russia backed the war on Iran and supported sanctions on Iran. Somehow, both Russia and Iran disagreed on the operation in Syria, which also included the use of Iranian bases. While Russia and Iran benefitted from the improved ties in past years, the relationship was complex, considering this region's lack of shared vision. Another example of transactional relations was between Russia and Saudi Arabia regarding the oil production agreement, as Moscow and Riyadh hit a deal to lower the oil price in 2016 though having different views on the threat by Tehran and the future of Syria (Sladden, 2017).

It was observed that the relationships were not transactional in the Middle East but limited by some "instrumental obstacles." However, these obstacles emerged from geopolitical realities, resulting from Russia's non-ideological and translational approach to regional relations. On the other hand, Russia wanted to establish its relations with all the states and non-state actors in the region. With this approach, Russia has achieved some success. For example, it managed its relations with the Gulf States and Israel and deepened its military cooperation with Iran.

Additionally, this approach created a collection of policy contradictions that constrained the behaviour of Russia. For example, Russia wanted to establish its relationship with Iran and Israel, but after the pressure from Israel, it halted its deal of S-300 antiaircraft missile to Iran. However, Russia's pursuit of a non-ideological and

rational approach limited its relations more than it could in the Middle East (Sladden, 2017).

Different governments of the Middle East were initially suspicious about Russia's intentions, which had some concerns despite Russia viewing balancing keeping because of the United States, especially when it was seen that leaders of this region failed in achieving the desired results outcome from the United States. However, countries cannot measure the true intentions of leaders in the region as the region's governments used political and economic deals to signal to the United States that they have another option in the region. For example, an arms deal of \$3.5 billion was signed between Cairo and Moscow later; it halted military aid. Russia was silent even in the overthrowing of President Mohammad Morsi by the military of Egypt with the support of the US (Sladden, 2017).

Despite these ups and downs, later in 2006, there was an announcement that paratroopers from Russia and Egypt participated in joint military exercises. Meanwhile, many leaders from the Middle East seek to maximise their benefits with the broadest options on a given issue, but they did not endanger their relations with the United States just for a deal with Moscow. Russia was well aware of this balance as it did not attempt to have a confrontation with the United States in the region. Moreover, it did not seek to challenge the power and influence of the United States in the region. However, states of the Middle East are not formal allies of Russia but powerful entities that maximize the options and benefits that were open to them (Sladden, 2017).

4.3 Russia's –Middle East Economic and Trade Relations

The Middle East is experiencing a key move in its worldview, and Russia is also adapting its national interests to fit the current reality. For Russia, economic interests are one of the consistent objectives in the Middle East for which it needs to protect and promote these in the region. The Middle East accounted for a limited percentage of total exports of Russia, which was not critical for the economy of Russia that considered the economic activities of Russia to achieve its monetary gain more as economic opportunities in the region provided Russia to expand its influence. However, the interaction between Russia and states of the Middle East has grown, and the Gulf States made the high-cost investment and have the financial largesse as the domestic economy of Russia craves for it. Yet, Russia has entered into co-investment deals with Kuwait, UAE, Qatar and Saudi Arabia through the Russian Direct Investment Fund (RDIF). This investment stretched a variety of enterprises, infrastructure and agriculture. It is important to note that three deals of this investment were announced. West imposed sanctions on Russia in 2014, but these wealth funds did not disrupt sanctions as the Gulf States were unwilling to constrain such sanctions against Russia. However, all such investments and economic activities in the Middle East were part of the effort of Russia to build a "sanction-proof" economy (Sladden, 2017).

It is primarily viewed that the Middle East could serve Russia as an important place to achieve its economic goals. Russia's corporate and economic interests in the Middle East have expanded beyond nuclear energy to include oil and gas. However, state-owned companies of Russia like Gazprom and Rosatom maintained their vital energy interests in which oil and gas filed, consumer markets and customers of nuclear energy

infrastructure in Iran, Iraq, eastern Mediterranean, and Turkey were also included. Likewise, the Rosatom Company of Russia increased its activity in the Middle East and constructed different reactors in different countries like Iran, Jordan, Egypt and Turkey. In the meantime, many regional offices have emerged in Dubai to take advantage of the UAE and Saudi Arabia, both of which have plans to escalate their nuclear energy issues. Yet, the instability in the global energy markets, as Russia has increased its dependence on petro-revenues which made its economic slowdown put Moscow under the tremendous pressure of the West to seek gain in the energy markets of the Middle East. Though, the pragmatic approach of Russia toward the Gulf States, especially Saudi Arabia, was based on the desire of increasing global oil prices. Rather than increase the oil price, Russia seeks to stabilise it to sustain the expenditures on oil. For this purpose, Russia tried to set the production levels and price measures with the Organization of Petroleum and Exporting Countries. However, the unstable relations of Russia with Turkey put it at risk as to the largest energy consumer. Additionally, the end of any rift between Turkey and Russia as the normalisation of relations as Turkey shot down the Su-24 fighter jet in 2015 could be attributed to the need of Moscow to maintain its largest regional energy market, which declined Turkey and US relations. So to create that kind of relationship, Turkey and Russia would serve better in Syria (Sladden, 2017).

By 2017, the Crimean issue and other sanctions created problems. They put pressure on the Russian budget as its economy also had losses because of the low oil prices in international markets. However, these circumstances pointed out some reliable sources of income which brought a new perception of business opportunities in this region

which later increased the activity of Russia in the Middle East. On the other hand, the Russian economy, which had many challenges after cooperating with the states of the Middle East, later developed its importance for the given reasons. In the 2000s, an improvement in trade relations between Russia and many other states of the Middle East. The trade balance favoured Russia from that time, making this state an attractive market that could attract other states for its goods. The vital trade goods were military equipment, oil and gas, agricultural and military etc. (Kozhanov, 2018).

However, the Russian corporations' essential items also opened new opportunities for the producers who intended to trade in the Middle East, which expanded their network. In addition, there was the diversification of trade to different states of the Middle East. It is used to supply ferrous metals, metallurgical products, paper, wood and other cereals and fertilisers. However, the main exports of the United Arab Emirates (UAE) were precious metals, equipment, and metallurgical products. Nevertheless, oil, Sulphur, and petrochemical products were used to supply to Morocco, and this kind of export was also beneficial for the government's economic strategy (Sladden, 2017).

Moreover, the Russian exports of oil and gas are not remarkable; however, there was potential in the Middle East for its natural gas. Hence, it was seen that the total Russian trade investment was not sufficient, but still, this region had the potential for different sectors like agriculture, space and military equipment. As the exports of 16 per cent, precious stones and metals were exported from Russia and sold to UAE and Israel. However, the leading destination for wheat export was the Middle East, and the principal buyers were Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Israel. Apart from this, there were also

some tiny enterprises whose destination for export was only the market of the Middle East (Pagano, 2017).

However, for many states of the Middle East, the import of arms could serve better interest to achieve the Russian goals. The total arms sale of Russian arms remained unknown, and according to an estimation, it was from 8.2 to 37.5 per cent, but over time, this growth of arms trade has increased in the last years. The deals between Russia and the Middle Eastern states during 2012-15 outweighed Russia's loss in Libya. Russia also promoted the space industry in the Middle East, and it produced the GLONASS satellite navigation system. As Russia was expanding its business in the Middle East, its nuclear sphere was also set up in this region. After that, it became a top priority of Russian business in 2012-17. Therefore, in 2014, different packages were signed with Iran to build eight new nuclear reactors designed for the first two reactors at the Bushehr power plant. Before this plant, a power generating block was also built by Russian engineers in Iran in 2013.

Nevertheless, this cooperation from the Russian side also offset the adverse effects of the sanctions war with the West. Therefore, additional importance was given to the states of the Middle East in agriculture, which aimed to replace Europe's products and many countries like Israel, Egypt, and Iran increased their level of food production that was bought from Russia. Additionally, it was also perceived by the Russian leaders that joint projects and economic cooperation with the states of the Middle East could create new incentives to make access easy, as, before this, its availability was limited by the Western sanctions. To further evade these sanctions, Russia allowed Egypt and Iran to use their currency as their national currency instead of the Euro and the US dollar.

Russia also invited these countries to establish a free trade zone with Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) (Sladden, 2017).

By 2014-17, the potential source of investment was the financial and economic problems experienced by Russia, and later it determined its interest in the Middle East.

By 2017, different contracts were signed between Russia and Middle Eastern states such as Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and UAE through the Russian Direct Investment Fund (RDIF), which later signed an agreement with the Public Investment Fund (PIF) of Saudi Arabia. PIF expected that it would invest \$10 billion in the economy of Russia. By 2015, an agreement was also signed by RDIF with the investment authority of Saudi Arabia. According to an estimation by the Russian Parliament Speaker by 2017, Saudi Arabia has spent up to \$600 billion in Russia due to these deals.

Moreover, Russia also showed its interest in further investment by Saudi Arabia, participating in developing Russian Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG). New forums will be set up to research and design the equipment for oil and gas. On the other hand, Qatar, which was the leading Gulf investor in the economy of Russia in 2017, estimated that it had \$2.5 billion in assets in Russia (Kozhanov, 2018).

The oil and gas resources were the source of influence in the region. Still, many analysts underestimated these corporations, but it was not accurate as Russian authorities, and these energy corporations were mutually dependent on one another. As a result, there was a need to safeguard these firms, which may force foreign policy to change. By 2011 when the civil war began in Syria, an agreement was signed by Soyuzneftegaz that was attached to the exploration and development of oil and gas beside the Syrian coast.

Thus, the Russian economic interests face difficulties due to the instability in the region. Activities of this company were kept on hold due to the effects of war, but the administration learned the lesson that they could resume their activities after the war was over. According to some sources of Russian media, there were not only Soyuzneftegaz which had an eye on the oil fields of Syria but Euro Polis was connected to Yevgeny Prigozhin, who was a Russian businessman, was seen to sign an agreement to assist the Aids regime by liberating it from the influence of local radicals and Islamists and in exchange Euro Polis could get different contracts in the Syrian oil sector.

However, it was not only Syria but Libya which had a significant effect on the foreign policy of Russia, as there had been a cooperation agreement between Russia and Libya in 2017, which was signed by Rosneft and the National Oil Corporation of Libya. Yet, all these efforts were to mitigate the oil prices as with the access to the resources of this region; there were more chances for Russia to strengthen its position in the global market. Therefore, these were the significant factors for Russia to continue its activities in Iraq and Iran. As these were the oil companies of Russia that turned to Iran when sanctions were lifted from Iran, Russia had another intention in Iran that this area could provide direct access to China to export oil. By 2016, Iranian industry Lukoil took part in two hydrocarbon projects in the province of Kazakhstan. By 2016, European company Litasco also became the buyer of Iranian oil as, before this, they had signed the nuclear deal with Iran through the form of P5+1.

By 2017, a program was launched, long due starting from the 2010s. Through this program, Russia would supply its machinery and investment in return for oil. This

program was to benefit Iran to avoid the sanctions imposed by the EU and the US, but this program was postponed after the adopting JCPOA. Later, it was started again, but this time it was expected to compensate for financial crises in Iran and improve the economic relations with Iran that had been hampered in the last few years. In November 2017, Russia had a plan to sell oil to other states as it received 1 million barrels of oil from Iran.

Additionally, it was expected to receive 5 million tons of oil from Iran, and Russia would supply goods worth \$45 billion to Iran. At the same time, there were other exporters of hydrocarbon in the Middle East that were challenging the position of Russia in the primary energy markets of the world. On the other hand, Iran has never hidden its intention to supply gas to the EU, and by 2015 another move was made by Saudi Arabia as it entered the European oil market. However, that was the primary destination of Russian exports. Therefore, under such circumstances, Russia tried to protect its interests through a plan of action in the region.

Although many Middle Eastern states were seen as rivals in these energy markets, Russia opted for normality instead of confrontation in the region. However, the Kremlin adhered to staying in touch with its opponent and keeping them close. Consequently, Russia did not ignore its rivals and opponents in the region but tried to establish its relations so that the hydrocarbon flow might ensure for Moscow. For example, Qatar was the main rival of Russia in the gas market; Russia decided to buy a stake from the Qatar Investment Authority (QI). This deal was dangerous as it could influence the decision-making process. For Russia, on the other hand, this deal was in favour of the

Kremlin as, through this deal, it could access different oil and gas projects planned by Qatar.

However, it was not clear that the actions of Russia in the Middle East created some challenges for Western business as Russia supported all those projects that were to export the flow of gas from European markets. As a result, during the Baku meeting, Putin requested cooperation in the oil and gas sector. Especially the use of shared pipelines and the development of Caspian hydrocarbon resources were discussed with the presidents of Iran and Azerbaijan. As a result, a strategy was formed to ensure that natural gas could be supplied to Iran via Azerbaijan. Furthermore, through the peace pipeline project, it was ensured that Russian Companies could channel Iranian gas into making its supply to another region instead to reach Europe.

Additionally, to develop the hydrocarbon resources of the Middle East, Russian companies showed their interest to form energy groups that would work with foreign businesses. For example, in 2016, it was announced by Gazprom Neft that it had worked with an international group to develop the Badra oilfield in Iraq, and it was argued that it was a better way to enter the Iranian market. Thus, in this way, Russia created many opportunities for corporations from Russia and the West so that Iran could not remain the only destination for investment in the future, and Russian companies could ready their development in other places as well. For instance, Russia's potential investment areas were Libya, Egypt, and post-war Syria. Other countries targeted were Israel and GCC countries; between 2015 and 2017, there was \$1.5 billion in investment in Egypt's oil and gas sector (Sladden, 2017).

Relations with OPEC, which was ignored since the post-Cold War era, showed that Russia had developed back. Moscow became a member of OPEC+ in 2006, and the non-OPEC member and OPEC Members decided that they would lower the production of oil to raise the price of oil in the international market. But Russia continued steadfast to the principles of this agreement, and this deal was further extended to 2018, although there was strong opposition to this deal. Many views it as due to the elections process, it was extended and later, Putin, with his extension, also sustained this agreement. Russia-OPEC relations all vary on circumstances of oil prices and conditions. Historically, Russia-OPEC relations differ based on the conditions, but currently, as a need of time and growing influence, it formulated relations with member and non-member states. Russia's economic interests were waiting for a new turn till 2020 for a new deal; despite conflicts in the Middle East, Russia maintained cordial relations with Qatar and Saudi Arabia.

It was viewed that in the post-Arab spring period, Russia would penetrate the gas market of the Middle East in the context of economic drivers. Therefore, in 2009, the government policy paper 'The Energy Strategy of Russia until 2030' was adopted by Russia. As it's believed that it will decrease the dependence of Russia on the patrons of Europe but would create a trade network for Eurasia under the control of Russia, it would play an essential role in the region as Russia addresses the regional issue already trying to strengthen its position in the region.

This approach will benefit Russia in two ways: conflict would be Russia could stay away from Saudi Arabia and Qatar and can maintain relations with both countries to preserve its economic interests for the long run. In conclusion, this can be more clear

that there were simultaneous visits by Qatar leadership Mohammad al-Thani and Saudi Arabia Prince Mohammad bin Salman back-to-back in 2017. And later, Saudi Arabia showed interest in buying a share in Russia's Eurasia drilling company, including the development of the Arctic LNG project in Russia by Saudi investments, as a result of the above-discussed meetings (Ministry of Energy of the Russian Federation, 2019).

In the gas sector for Russia, Iran was taken as a key country in May 2017, as Iran was one of those states which have a central role where Gazprom showed interest by investing in LNG plant as a short term plan which differs from previous agreements which were planned for longer terms. Regarding its oil and gas companies, therefore, its ultimate goal was to preserve its exports to the Middle East which seems to be long-term planning to stay in the Middle East.

For this reason, Russia maintained all good terms with other countries to influence world politics. Due to the current instability in the region, there was a need for developing the gas industry in the Middle East, where Russia has the potential to play an important role, which the Gulf monarchies have welcomed. As was later noted, Bahrain was invited to join Gazprom to increase its LNG production collaboration in 2017, with the participation of Bahrain and Russia. Such economic formal bilateral agreements will increase its access to the Middle East resources via exchange deals or by providing them with additional gas resources. However, keeping in view the US dominance and traditional allies in the Middle East, Russia's position in the global market was challenged. In the Middle East, each country pursues its interests. Against this backdrop, Russia is adopting neutrality or normality to surge for coordinating partners, including Algeria, Qatar, Iran etc. To have more influence in the region, the

Gas Exporting Countries Forum (GECF) idea was endorsed in the late 2000s, but it could work out due to some differences. For example, Iran served the Russian interest on the gas pipeline, which can serve Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan to sell gas in Europe. Still, sanctions on Iran have led it to be isolated from the rest of the world, and the global market is heavily affected and influenced by US vested interests (Ibid).

4.5 Russia- Middle East Military Relations

The Russian involvement in the Middle East can be analyzed from three standpoints: the Russian strategy in the Middle East, Russia's regional strategy work as it was proposed, and whether Russia lacked a Middle East strategy. It was also argued that Russia did not have a central and long-term strategy for the Middle East. This approach to Russian strategy was motivated by its short-term objectives rather than long-term objectives.

Russia made a determined effort to regain its role in the Middle East as a supplier for Arab governments as it was a "big prize for Russia to grab" it from the United States. This opportunity arose with its withdrawal from the region after the announcement of the "pivot to Asia" and seem gap left by the US to influence the happenings of Arab Spring. However, the recent arms sales from the US to Saudi Arabia were delayed due to arms sales to the Gulf States that were also delayed due to the concerns over qualitative military control of Israel. Therefore, such delays in supplies showed the less reliability of the United States on Arab countries. In contrast, Russia became a no-strings-attached supporter of weapons through the state arms exporter. In addition,

Russia has another benefit as it did not suffer from the same bureaucratic delay as the US (Sladden, 2017).

Russia was able to deliver its weapons much more quickly, which was demonstrated in the provision of its attack of helicopters to Iraq. Furthermore, the non-ideological approach of Russia provided that it could also provide arms to a diversified group of states simultaneously. For example, Moscow could sell its arms to Iran and Bahrain simultaneously. However, it had deep concerns about Iranian political activity within the borders of Bahrain, which resulted in the rise in the arms sale to the states of the Middle East since 2011 and accounted the 36 per cent of its defence deliveries in 2015. However, the dependence of the Gulf Monarchies for their regime survival led them to have a massive arsenal which made the Gulf States the largest consumers of arms and a suitable market for Moscow. Yet, Russia also observed the concerns of the rulers of the Middle East about the insufficient support of the US and its allies and perceptions of US reluctance to challenge the military involvement of Russia in Syria. Additionally, this dissatisfaction with the region created opportunities for Russia's influence, and the US is observing Russia's action (Sladden, 2017).

An annual report published by Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) stated that over the last decade, Russia's share of global arms exports has decreased by around a fifth, from 27 per cent to 21 per cent, while the United States' share has climbed from 30 per cent to 36 per cent, expanding the gap between the two biggest arms exporters.

Russia is focused on the Middle East, the world's second-largest and fastest-growing arms market, as a strategy to boost exports and reverse its downward trend (Khlebnikov, 2019).

Also, as per the SIPRI report, in March 2019 that between 2009 and 2013, Russian exports of large armaments to the Middle East climbed by 19%. Egypt and Iraq were the most important beneficiaries of Russian arms exports to the Middle East in 2014–18, accounting for 46 and 36 per cent of Russian arms exports to the area, respectively.

Between 2009 and 2013, deliveries to Iraq surged by 780 cents 2009, and in 2013, the number of people travelling to Egypt increased by 150 per cent (SIPRI fact sheet, 2019).

By understanding above mentioned SIPRI report, it's understood that by contrast, because of continuous wars (such as those in Syria, Yemen, and Libya), the fragile security environment, and the possibility of military antagonism among state and non-state actors throughout the Middle East, the suitability and demand for guns is projected to increase. As a result, the Middle East appeals to all the major arms exporters. The competition is violent; however, Russia isn't the only country that sees the Middle East as a source of growth and a lucrative arms market. The US's long-standing influence cannot be ignored, as 54% comes from the US. Only 10% of the armaments imported by Middle Eastern countries come from Russia. However, the Russian market is growing to outreach to regional arms importers as compared to the US, Russia's presence in the market is quite limited (Ibid).

4.6 US-Russia Intersecting Threats in the Middle East

The non-state actors and other groups which posed the most genuine threat to the United States and Europe were Al Qaeda and ISIS. Even These organizations did not represent a direct danger to the United States or destroy the region's military. However, the actions of such states turned the people of the West against one another, which made them suspicious about being feared by their neighbours, limited their freedom and disrupted their ordinary lives (Kagan et al. I, 2006).

Though, the success of these military organizations was based solely on their strength, which was the result of the international order collapsing as a result of the United States' withdrawal from supporting it, Partly as a consequence of a coordinated campaign by Iran, China, and Russia to disrupt the global system, which was constructed to support their ideals and replace America's beliefs with their own, and partly as a result of irresponsible apathy (Kagan et al. I, 2006).

Different countries like Iran, Russia, and China were all afraid of these non-state actors as they fought in their ways against these groups. Although these three states did not share common values or interests, nor did they have any alliance or confrontation with one another not, they had any conspiracy to disturb the world order. However, the destruction of these organizations was required to meet the challenges and strengthen the states. Likewise, during World War Two (WWII), it was easy to confront an alliance of Axis powers first from the intellectual standpoint and then the challenge to navigate the complex forces which were established by a cast of disparate and adversarial characters who unknowingly assisted one another in achieving the same goal. Thus, the United States could not understand the tasks of ISIS and Al-Qaeda, and on the other

hand, Iran, Russia and China could not make any design or strategy to deal with these organizations. In fact there would not be any solution for which all will be agreed on one solution to all problems. Therefore, American strategy will examine those parts that will address the global challenge so that each state on its part could advance the solutions to the possible extent. Yet, no state faced any task of outstanding strategic design as problematic, multifaceted and unnerving as this one (Kagan et al. 1, 2006). Because of the region's open borders and lack of government, violent non-state actors (VNSAs) wield significant and decisive power in the region's political events. However, the current circumstance and character of the struggle are eroding the state's influence. Along with VNSAs, the region is influenced by a background 'industry' of hundreds of other organizations that operate as significant elements in the path and speed of political change. Some VNSAs are anti-terrorist organizations, while others are freedom fighters. Many, including Hamas and Hezbollah, Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ), Al Aqsa Martyrs Brigade (AAMB), Al Qaida, ISIS, Ansar al Islam (A.I.), Kata'ib Hezbollah (K.H.), and others, have been designated as foreign terrorist organizations by the U.S. State Department for at least ten years.

In addition to the group's violent operations, they frequently operate as a strategic partner to other larger groups organized as mass movements. Some of these networks collaborate to achieve their objectives—hundreds of more VNSAs formed due to the Iraq, Syria, Yemen, and Libya conflicts. In the last 5 to 10 years, two significant factions developed in Iraq. Jaysh Rijal al-Tariqa al-Naqshbandia and the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group. These organizations differ in size, capability, and political ideology, but they all play/have played critical roles in their respective political/military domains.

In addition, new VNSA groups, like ISIS, are forming in Egypt. In Egypt, groups like Hasm and Liwa al Thawra are still tiny and young, becoming more active with attacks on government officials and military targets. (Dallas-Feeney, 2019).

These groups take advantage of religious believers, and each organization translates them differently into political and violent action to justify their acts. There are four major groups that we are emphasising as a source of concern in the Middle East, and these groups are capable of competing with both rivals' VNSAs and external forces.

These major groups are Hamas, Hezbollah, Al Qaeda and ISIS. Thus, this study will briefly explain who supports whom and where Russia and U.S. interests intersect (Dallas-Feeney, 2019).

4.6.1 Al-Qaida and ISIS: From Afghanistan to the Middle East

In 1988, Al-Qaeda was founded with the help of the United States. Several private armed groups were formed to expel the Soviets from Afghanistan from 1979-to 1989. These once supported by US groups now turned terrorists, and some were responsible for the 9/11 attacks. This tragic incident also led to the US invasion of Afghanistan (Al Qaida, Sep 9, 2019).

As per the western perspective, Al-Qaida had four major goals to achieve: in the Middle East to end the US occurrence, deal with the Israel factor, expand its networks, and oppose pro-western regimes in the region. Therefore, when the group formerly known as Monotheism and Jihad united with Al Qaeda in 2004, it drastically strengthened its presence in the Middle East. It had various names but was generally known as Al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) and was founded by Abu Mosab al Zarqawi in 2014; it split into the

Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) as an independent organization and formed a variety of affiliates in the Middle East including AQ in the Islamic Maghreb (2007), AQ in the Arabian Peninsula (2009) and Jabhat al Nusra (2011) (Kagan,2016).

The US believed that to endanger the international systems upon which American safety and freedom depend on ISIS activities and al Qaeda, which are influenced by the policies of Russia, Iran, and China, as the US government's primary objective is to protect the American people and its homeland, its values by all means. To counter these elements, coalition partners currently lack (Kagan,2016).

Al-Qaida is a militant group with pan-Islamist agenda. While it has many branches and off-shoots like discussed earlier AQI, etc., they have alliances with other militant groups. ISIS was a separate entity and was initially a top competitor of ISIS in the Middle East. Some of its members are the ex-members of Al Qaida and other militant groups. Russia and the US use these militants groups to achieve their geo-strategic interests (Ibid).

ISIS was founded in April 2013 as an autonomous group from al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) as a major terrorist organization battling government forces in Syria and Iraq. It is thought to have thousands of fighters, including many foreign fighters, although the exact number is unknown. It is led by Abu Bakr-al-Baghdadi, who joined the insurgency that erupted in Iraq shortly after the US-led invasion in 2003. He rose to prominence as the leader of Al-Qaida in Iraq in 2010 and then founded ISIS as an independent militant organization. In May 2013, ISIS took control of the Syrian city of Raqqa, the first province to fall under the control of the rebel group, which was a success of their significant military success, and also in January 2014, in the western

province of Anbar, by taking control of the most city of Fallujah, which was a success of their considerable military success. As a result, it has a major presence in several towns around the Turkish and Syrian borders. It has seized major swaths of the provincial capital, Ramadi, and maintains significant control over these areas. (An article on BBC NEWS suggests that ... ("Syria Iraq," 2014)

According to the American national security objectives described in the portion of the US foreign policy objectives, ISIS posed several risks and was capable of conducting a campaign of attacks on the United States and its allies. These groups are not only threats to western powers but harm regionally as well. For example, it destroyed three states (Syria, Iraq, and Yemen) and led to humanitarian and refugee crises. As America believes, such groups may affect the geopolitical dimensions of the Middle East (ISPI, 2019).

The turning point is that the US called back its 2,000 forces from Syria to fight against ISIS. This decision was taken when the American coalition forces ousted the Islamic States from the last shared territory of Syria. But now, these off-shoots started guerilla attacks, targeting western powers' allied run camps as per the statements by Iraqi and American intelligence officers (Schmitt et al., 2019). Thus, changing foreign policy dynamics both by America and Russia is evident. Both react according to the situation and support those groups who benefit from their interests to maintain global power status (Ibid).

The wave of Arab Spring has changed the geopolitical landscape of the contemporary Middle East, bringing up turmoil in the form of weak regime change, and this vacuum

has been filled by violent non-state actors VNSAs. In the past, the Iran-Iraq War and the Iranian Revolution of 1979 changed the geopolitical settings of the Middle East. The study also finds that the decisive roles of these groups would lead to an analysis that each power used them according to their power play which shows their hegemonic goals. Thus, keeping these groups alive would continue civil wars in the regions, not bringing stability for regimes to control. Thus, the Western powers will fill this gap and maintain their power and control of the Middle East (Ibid).

4.7 US-Russia's Diverging Interests in the Middle East: The Hamas Factor

Hamas was established in 1987 and had its ideological roots in Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood, which had been active in the Gaza Strip since the 1950s and is committed to establishing a Palestinian homeland. Hamas is a Palestinian political resistance organization that portrays itself as the defender of the people of Gaza, which is located on the east bank of the Mediterranean Sea and borders Egypt. It also has an armed wing called the Izz El-Deen al-Qassam Brigades. In 2006, Palestinians chose the organization, which defeated Fatah in the Legislative Authority elections, and it assumed control of the Gaza Strip in 2007 (Dallas-Feeney, 2019).

Since its origin and until recently, the organization has consistently focused on two main concerns: Inspired by Islam as a nationalist movement and consisting of Gaza and the West Bank, it seeks an independent Palestinian state. As per the US-Israel perspective, Hamas will employ violence against Israeli troops and civilians if needed

to force Israel to engage in what they see as fair and balanced negotiations for the formation of a Palestinian state. However, Hamas claims to be pursuing these objectives on behalf of all Palestinians living in the Territories and refugees from the 1948 war who live beyond the Territories. Hamas has waged four military wars against Israel since 2006, despite winning national elections in the Palestinian Territories and establishing effective control of the Palestinian Authority (Dallas-Feeney, 2019). Hamas and its allies have maintained their resistance to the Israeli occupation of the Palestinian Territories despite all these hurdles. The main thing Hamas wants is to maintain intra-Palestinian unity after success in the 2006 Palestinian national elections. Hamas could not afford ideological purists and was not eager to be because broad public support is critical to achieving its political objectives (Brown, 2009, 2012; Lybarger, 2007). Thus, keeping all this background and U.S. perspective, it's necessary to analyze where Russia stand with Hamas and how U.S. and Russian interests intersect? Russian-Hamas relations are not new, and they have maintained cordial relations in the past. However, the United States and the European Union have designated Hamas as a terrorist organization.

Meanwhile, Russia has maintained tight connections with Hamas since winning elections and assuming control of Gaza in 2006. Russia has defended Hamas because it is an elected representative of a large segment of the Palestinian population, and Hamas represents the Palestinian government in the Palestinian Legislative Council. Not only that, but Russia has worked for years to help the Gaza-based organization and Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas's Fatah party reach an agreement, hosting many rounds of talks. The leadership in Gaza understands that the Russian-Israeli alliance has

grown stronger than ever before, following Russia's engagement in Syria in 2015 and establishing an operations coordination room for Russian and Israeli soldiers to prevent crises on the ground (Dallas-Feeney, 2019).

But interestingly, Russia also enjoyed cordial relations with Israel and even knowing, at the same time, Russia maintained relations with Hamas and Israel, none of the countries had any concern (Abu Amer, 2019); here lie the geopolitical interests of countries that hamper to negotiate and balance the relations among each other which Russia is doing maintains liquid relations with all the countries. Hamas believes Russian relations with Israel will prevent military and political attacks against Gaza. On the contrary, Russia is now in Syria, and it would be helpful for Hamas to forge its relations with Syria, which broke down in 2012. At the same time, Russia sees Hamas as an influential role player in the Palestinian cause. In addition, President Vladimir Putin wants to restore its Soviet empire and believes that Hamas are one of the gates of a return to the Middle East. And the U.S. believes that can be a reason Russia has not consented to classify Hamas as a terrorist organization, as the United States and the European Union have, so assisting the movement in finding a balance in international attitudes toward it and avoiding being singled out by regional and international powers (Dallas-Feeney, May 28 2019).

It means that Hamas is increasing its ties with Russia to withstand pressure from international and regional forces such as the United States and Israel, which is a constant. Still, it is being forced to yield due to the obstacles it may face shortly. However, the movement is compelled to concede in light of the problems it may encounter in the next future; the formation of these new connections with Russia needs

the movement to show flexibility in its political positions that do not violate its national constants (Ibid).

4.7.1 The US-Russia Divergence of Interest: The Hezbollah Factor

During Israel's occupation of Lebanon in the early 1980s, Hezbollah is thought to have emerged with the support of Iran. The organization, however, is an ideological one that dates back to Lebanon's Shia Islamic revival in the 1960s and 1970s. As a result, Hezbollah rebuffed calls to disband after Israel's withdrawal in 2000 instead of strengthening its military wing, the Islamic Resistance.

In some aspects, it now outperforms the Lebanese army, which employed its vast weaponry against Israel in the 2006 war. Moreover, this group has effectively earned cabinet veto power and has evolved into a crucial power broker in Lebanon's political system.

Hezbollah is in the news because it is suspected of carrying out several bombings and attacks against Jewish and Israeli targets. As a result, it has been labelled a terrorist organization by Western powers, Israel, Gulf Arab countries, and the Arab League.

Despite charges from local, regional, and western forces, Hezbollah enjoys widespread support. (Dallas-Feeney, 2019).

Hezbollah is thought to have formed in response to Palestinian terrorist attacks in South Lebanon in 1982 when Shia leaders seeking a violent response broke away from the main Amal movement. Still, many contend that its precise origins are difficult to establish. According to the West, Hezbollah has received backing from Iran's Revolutionary Guards stationed in the Bekaa Valley. And he's accused of planning the

bombings of the US embassy and US Marine barracks in 1983, which killed 258 Americans and 58 French service members and prompted the withdrawal of Western peacekeeping forces from Lebanon, as well as attacks on the Israeli military and its allies, the South Lebanon Army (SLA), and foreign countries. Hezbollah declared its existence in 1985 based on Islamic principles and stated that people are free to choose their type of government. Thus, its growing relations with Iran and Syria is a major concern for the US and its allies in the region. These two countries contributed to this movement to grow and sustain military and politically to use power against the western powers (Dallas-Feeney, 2019). Hezbollah is acknowledged as a highly effective military and most powerful political organization in Lebanon today, more than 35 years after its creation. It has established itself as a major political force in the Middle East regional politics (International Crisis Group 2005). For years, American specialists have proposed bringing Lebanon into their sphere of influence by placing it under Moscow's air defence umbrella and selling weaponry to Beirut, something Russia has contested, as some analysts have stated. According to the US, Moscow's expansion of its Syrian air defence umbrella could tip the balance of forces in the Arab-Israeli and Iranian-Israeli conflicts, posing a challenge to the US shortly. At the same time, Russian arms sales to Lebanon would likely have no impact on the region's balance of power, where American interests and stakes are already dominant. Washington and its allies believed Lebanon would be another challenge where the Russian interests overlap. Lebanon is the only Arab country other than Syria where pro-Soviet leaders maintained power from the 1970s. After the Beirut Spring in 2005, nearly all of Lebanon's most powerful elite, both pro-and anti-Russia, remained in place (Melamedov, 2020).

The US restricted its aid to Lebanon from 2005 to 2006 in fear of provoking any escalations at Lebanese-Israel borders, and weapons could be in the hands of Hezbollah and not empower non-state actors. But these restrictions were challenged during the visit of Russian Defense Minister Elias Mur to Moscow, and the Russians offered to sell T-54/T-55 tanks for around \$500 million. Not only that, but the Kremlin also offered ten MiG-29 jet fighters for free, though it is unlikely to happen because of US sway. In early 2010, Russia made another attempt, offering six Mi-24 helicopters, thirty T-72 heavy battle tanks, thirty 130-mm artillery systems, and large ammunition. In favouring these, a formal agreement on military-technical cooperation was also signed on February 25 2010, but it also couldn't work out (Dallas-Feeney, May 28 2019). Russia recognises Hezbollah as a political wing which Sergey Lavrov, Russia's foreign minister, said in early 2006 that the issue of Hezbollah's legalization is irrelevant. It's a Lebanese political and legal group. It has representatives in both the legislature and the executive branch, and Hezbollah is a Shiite organization in Lebanon.

During the Russian intervention in Syria, it was believed that the Kremlin and Hezbollah collaborated substantially in Syria from the US perspective. Because the long-standing of the US in the region influenced the Russian movement in the Middle East, as many Russian experts, an arms deal with Russia and Lebanon was halted because of the US pressure in 2018 (Melamedov, 2020).

4.8 US-Russia Arms Trade and Militarization of the Middle East

According to SIPRI Factsheet (2019), which emphasized in 2014-18, the number of international transfers of significant weaponry in the Middle East was 7.8% greater than in prior years, according to global trends and specific difficulties associated with arms sales. From 2014 to 2018, the United States, Russia, France, Germany, and China were the top five exporters, while Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and Algeria were the top importers in the Middle East. As a result, compared to other regions of the world, the flow of weaponry to the Middle East surged by 87% between 2009-13 and 2014-2018.

Among other reasons, the increase in arms sales was due to other players' growing involvement in the region, such as Iran, Turkey, and Russia. Other domestic conflicts arise due to non-state actors supported by each country to safeguard their interests. Since 2015 Yemen War has been ongoing, which let hostile relations among each country, such as Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and UAE on the other side.

In 2014–18, it became the world's greatest armaments importer. Saudi Arabia raised its arms purchases by 192 per cent between 2009 and 2014. The United States was the leading provider of arms, 68 per cent including combat aircraft equipped with other guided weapons and cruise missiles. And till 2023, the US. planned deliveries of other lethal weapons with the help of her allies. In 2014-18, the UAE was the world's seventh-largest armaments importer, and US. 64 per cent of US. and its allies accounted for arms imported by the UAE. Some of the armoured vehicles were afterwards supplied by the UAE to paramilitaries in Yemen. Similarly, it goes with Qatar, whose arms imports were also increased by 225 per cent from 2009 to 2018 from the US and Russia

including their allies. Due to the arms embargo on Iran, the arms imports were 0.9 in the Middle East from 2014 to 2018.

The trends in arms imports by the governments of these countries varied noticeably, although the conflict was fumed in both Iraq and Syria in 2014–18. And Iraq was the 8th largest arms importer in 2014–18, mainly from the U.S. and Russia, and in Syria, despite Russia's presence in Syria and support, Syria ranked 60th. And in Iraq, between 2009–13 and 2009–18, arms imports increased by 139 per cent. Important things indicate between the two periods that Syria's arms imports decreased even though Russia supplied high-value air defence systems and anti-ship missiles. But, in 2018 first high volume arms export to Syria was marked by Russia, which delivered three long-range air defence systems. (SIPRI Fact Sheet, March 2019).

During the Cold War and in the struggle against radicalizing forces such as Al Qaeda, Hamas, Hezbollah, and other violent Islamists and the governments of Iran and Syria as security partners, the United States relied on friendly Arab regimes and Israel. As some friendly regimes have faced disorders under such situations, the US government's ability to influence events has become more complex, such as non-state actors taking positions to regional governments as an opposition like Al Qaida, which the US is most concerned about including Iran and Islamist parties take over. The Syrian regime is also a major concern for the US, which Iran is backing, Russia and non-state allies, especially during the Arab Spring.

Numerous players' and non-state actors' presence weakened security conditions and challenges in the Middle East, leading to uprisings, unrests, lack of national security bodies. Moreover, each player wants to control the area, cities/borders, etc. It creates

regional threats and leads toward transactional threats, including a contemporary situation that is quite a wage and will affect the region's future consequences, such as post-withdrawal of US troops from Iraq and other places.

But the situation depends on the post-US troop's withdrawal of American forces and post-withdrawal policies, which is quite uncertain and based on the circumstances and against the US interests. Like the growing involvement of Iran and Russia. Along with depends on economic limitations, additional military intervention to deal with instabilities or achieving interests and also to deal with the new events happening in the Middle East. Considering these conditions, Congress may think about arrangement instruments: keeping, starting or ending—giving military and financial guide, participating in arms deals, new sanctions, forcing or facilitating monetary authorizations, arranging economic alliance, and supporting regimes. The situation in the Middle East is as yet uncertain and depends upon circumstances and situations that long guided the US Middle East strategy (Blanchard, 2012, pp.5-7).

On the other hand, Moscow prioritizes modernising its military forces, seeing military might as critical to attaining major geopolitical goals and gaining global influence. Russia is modernizing its land, air, naval, and missile forces to promote stability on its terms and assert its standing as a great power, which has quite changed the Cold War stance style as re-emergence as a global power. The Russian Navy will carry out activities in the Middle East to achieve her interest. Some key philosophers believe that Syria helped Russia showcase its military modernization and other conventional weapons to exhibit power projection (Defense Intelligence Agency, 2017).

4.9 Conclusion

The tragic incident of 9/11 reshaped the geopolitical conditions to stay in the Middle East for a long time because of the Middle East and the US invasion of Iraq. However, the US has never been completely absent from the Middle East. Both America and the Middle East have innumerable unresolved, and perhaps unsolvable, problems resulting from 30 years of interventions and more than 17 years of conflict and have become hubs of non-state actors due to lack of government autonomy. Thus, this also led other players to intervene and seek their interests in the region, including Russia in the post-Arab spring era, which was considered a game-changer and for more engagements to regain her previous position back as a major power. Russia's presence was obvious in Syria to safeguard her interests, discussed in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 5

A CASE STUDY OF SYRIA

5. Introduction

Throughout the early 21st century, the Middle East has remained a source of continued armed conflicts and instability. In the late 2010s, a full-fledged systemic catastrophe erupted in the Middle East, resulting in an influx of concerns like civil conflicts, foreign power interventions, regime change, terrorism, and extremism in the region. Internal upheavals, heavily trans-nationalized and internationalized civil wars, and seemingly intractable regional rivalries arose due to this new wave of instability, setting the stage for region-wide destabilization and the disintegration of several states at the same time, causing more regional security crises. Russia has played an active role in the Middle East in the last five years, so it would be helpful to commit to strategic cooperation by assessing its objectives and strategies. In the Middle East, in terms of security, Russia has a big footprint. Despite selling weapons worth billions of dollars, it has little trade in non-military areas. It has become the arms supplier to the countries that the United States refused to. It seems that all such efforts are made to balance the security interests of Russia. An important dynamic is working there as for Russia; international relations are a zero-sum game. If this prism is used, it will benefit the US, which would be worse

for Russia to manage all leftover issues and hostility by the United States in the region (Cohen, 2017).

This chapter emphasizes the Russian geopolitical interests in the Middle East. As discussed previously, how both are strategically involved and how do they view the Middle East, and where do their interests interact and or divert concerning foreign policy goals. In addition, this chapter will examine the causes for Russia's intervention in the Middle East, particularly in the light of its participation in Syria, which appears to be a significant shift in Russian foreign policy.

5.1 Russia in the Middle East: Arab Spring (2011-2015)

Since 2012, Russia changed its policy toward the Middle East as before she had neglected to consider the region an important one. As a result, its diplomacy has transformed to develop its relations with the Middle Eastern countries. It can be divided into two phases: during the Arab Spring (2012-2015) and after the Arab Spring.

The Arab authoritarian regimes turned vulnerable in December 2010 after a young man attempted self-immolation in Tunisia. Mohammad Bouazizi's death facilitated labour activists' mobilization and social media and led to massive and peaceful demonstrations. President Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali fled to Saudi Arabia as the protesters overtook the security forces. The Tunisian army declined to join him in the fight, posing a threat to his safety. A single-party government that reigned for fifty-five years, from 1956 to 2011, with only two presidents, disbanded in less than a month. And within weeks, similar protests erupted across the region, stating economic grievances, as media statistics shows. Another setback was when three presidents had fallen: Ben Ali in

Tunisia, Hosni Mubarak in Egypt, and Ali Abdullah Salih in Yemen by the end of 2011. And in Libya, Gaddafi has also lost power. Each of these countries shifted to rewriting the game's rules as a regime change in the Middle East (Angrist and Riener, 2017). The post-political chaos in the Middle East created delays in political development, such as the election of new representative assemblies in Tunisia, Egypt, and Libya, which took on the work of drafting new constitutions. In Yemen, complex negotiations amongst stakeholders took place under the aegis of the Gulf Cooperation Council. In Syria, President Bashar al-Assad faced opposition, but his regime was able to survive thanks to popular support. But most of the countries' single-party rule ended up with this mass Arab Spring. With the support of Saudi and Emirati forces, Bahrain was able to save its government. In the years after that, it responded to resistance with arrests, detention, trials, and occasional bloodshed. These events weakened their power, and rebellion was not easily tackled with limited resources and forming and maintaining the new government was also a challenge. Saudi Arabia played a key part in all of this, sending troops to Bahrain to assist President Saleh in his ouster from power in Yemen and providing diplomatic and financial support to Jordan. In Morocco regime agreed to bring changes to the prevailing system but with no regime change and form of government. The Muslim Brotherhood was banned in Egypt and established a new repetition of military-led authoritarian rule. Libya and Yemen deteriorated into violent conflict due to their poor state structures and profound domestic political conflicts, along with international meddling. Arab Spring also affected Iran with the subject of the Green Movement. In mid-2011, the Syrian civil war resulted in a major migration of refugees to Turkey, which burdened it with huge refugee flows while also dealing

with the dynamics of the Syrian civil war (Angrist, 2017). Thus, Arab Spring revived the regime change in the Middle East but with leftover issues and conflicts. Extremist entities, like ISIS and al-Qaeda, were able to recruit people and win and control territory due to these events. The Arab Spring period led to the considerate return of Russia to the Middle East. Yet, Russia used ground to expand and to involve in the regional affairs of the regional powers. During this time, as Arab Spring was at its peak and due to the intense situation, it was difficult to build relations with the countries in the region, so Russia tried to stay out of the Middle East's domestic issues and play a neutral position in the ongoing wars.

Nonetheless, this time catapulted Iran-Russia ties to unprecedented heights and laid the groundwork for political discourse with Egypt. Though Russia was in favour of establishing its ties with the states that had already good relations with Russia at the start of his period, it later revised its policy. It broadened its access to all those countries that had difficulty with Russia by developing constructive dialogue (Kozhanov, 2018).

It can be seen in an example of Qatar, Russia appointed a new ambassador in November 2013. However, a dispute over a diplomatic bag at Doha airport in 2011 when Russia withdrew its Ambassador. On the other hand, Russia decided to move on and not react to this issue, and this decision boosted the relations between Russia and Qatar. Since that time, Qatar has become the largest foreign investor for the economy of Russia. However, a strategy was used by Kremlin to welcome all the authorities of the region and also tried to bring the regional powers for discussion on important issues. As a result, Russia continued to cooperate with the Arab countries of the Persian Gulf. In

November 2011, Russia convened ministerial sessions to continue its all-encompassing discussions with the Gulf monarchies. In February 2013, the government launched the Arab-Russian cooperation; it was made to discuss the economic and political problems by the Russian high officials and representatives of Arab countries. Additionally, special attention was given to the regional organization so that strong links with the League of Arab States (LAS) and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) could be developed (OIC). On the other hand, Russia had multiple motives. First, a key aspect of its policy was strengthening ties with Middle Eastern states with which it had long-standing ties. So it could avoid its complete isolation created by the rising tensions with the West. For example, Moscow ensured the neutral position of Israel over the Russian-Ukrainian dispute through its dialogue with Tel Aviv and promised to guarantee that the issue of the Iranian nuclear program would be settled in a way that no threat would be left to Israel. Second, Kremlin was also concerned about those forces that were painting Russia's image as it is a big threat and enemy of Islam and Islamic states, which could also provoke the political groups within OIC and LAS, which later would establish their ties with radical Islamists in Central Asia and the Caucasus. Therefore, Russia tried its best to develop its engagement over the common interest to demonstrate that Russia is not their enemy or the Muslim world and continued to express its backing for the solution of the Palestine-Israel conflict through peaceful settlement and dialogues. Third, the above interests also showed the United States and European Union that Russia played an important role in settling the existing disputes. Different conflicts provided such prospects for Russia to determine this. However, since 2012, Russia worked a lot to have a successful dialogue between Iran and the West over the nuclear

program issue, which persuaded the West to admit the position of Russia in this region. Yet, the role of Moscow was seen by some U.S analysts in the Iranian nuclear plan, which guaranteed the success of this process. Thus, Russia enjoys its relations with all the countries by avoiding confrontation, as stated by Bauman's theory of liquid alliance. (Ibid).

The Russian involvement can be broadly seen from the 2013 to 2015 period. During this time, Russia started to be involved in the domestic affairs of the Middle Eastern countries, which was beyond its diplomatic moves. It paved the way to culminate the military intervention in Syria in September 2015. However, Russia's advances towards the Middle East in 2014-2015 were initially a reaction to rising issues rather than an attempt to influence the course of events in the region. Russia is not; firstly, it was the impression that Putin would escalate his confrontation with the West to reclaim his status as a global power. Therefore, the key driver for Russia to support the Assad regime was the part of this establishment.

On the other hand, Russia wanted to demonstrate before the US that it is a defensive power in the region, and it could stir up distress if their opinion were not considered.

Subsequently, in 2013, Russia accomplished that task which was seen as impossible and stopped what was appeared as an inevitable military operation against the Syrian regime by the West. In August 2013, it was reported by international media that chemical weapons were being used in the neighbourhood of Damascus. Still, neither side took responsibility for this action which was later accused by the Western powers with their allies in the Middle East. Hence, they used this suspicion to their pretext to intervene in the conflict. However, the British government's failure to gain

Parliamentary permission and the Obama administration's hesitancy provided Russia enough time to propose its option. During the Syrian war, Russia, for the first time, used its clout to influence the course of events in a way that suited its interests. Yet, this strong stance of Russia over this issue influenced its relations in the Middle East and proved its positive attitude towards the protection of its neighbours. Therefore, once again, they became interested in Russia as offset by the US's decision to limit its involvement in the Middle East, particularly in the Syrian Civil war. The US observed the situation in the region and the Russian move (Kozhanov, 2018).

5.2 Arab Spring as a Turning Point for Russian Presence

Officially, Russia's increased influence and contacts in the Middle East were connected with the disputes of the US since 2012. Consequently, tensions increased in the region, and Russia made efforts to change its shift of international significance from West to non-European countries. On 4 December 2014, Putin addressed to Russian Federal Assembly and declared that it would be one of the top priorities of Russian diplomacy to establish its relations and develop cooperation with the countries of the Middle East. On 27 February 2015, Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov stated that looking to Asia was a good idea that reflected its long-standing interests in the twenty-first century. Still, the situation was more complicated in actuality. Russia appears to have targeted the Middle East in its foreign policy to strengthen ties with these countries. To influence US conduct and, as a result, to lessen the impact of continuous confrontations between Russia and the West on Russia's economy, security, and international relations.

However, there were major variations between the scenario and the current one and the efforts undertaken to deepen its relationships with the Middle East. The depth of the differences between the EU and the US determined this kind of disparity, as it was unparalleled after the collapse of the USSR. Another aspect that influenced the degree of change in Russian policy toward the Middle East was President Putin's personality. However, the current leadership believes that because their country stands between Europe and Asia, it should broaden its diplomacy, which has been focused solely on the West since the demise of the Soviet Union. Although inevitably, Russia's approach dragged it toward the Middle East as before Putin, the vision of Boris Yeltsin (1991-1999) and Medvedev (2008-2012) was different from Putin, as both prior leaderships considered this region as secondary importance.

Nonetheless, this distinction was evident during the 2011 Libyan crisis. Furthermore, Putin referred to the United States and the European Union as the "new crusaders." At the same time, Medvedev expressed satisfaction with the capture of Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi, and such reactions by both leaders resulted in the breakup of Putin and Medvedev's relationship. Therefore, in 2012, it was not surprising that Putin returned to the Middle East after returning to the presidency, which Medvedev ignored. Yet, after two months of his presidency, Putin met with Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and showed his interest in developing its relations with Iran and called this state its traditional partner.

Meanwhile, it was clear that Putin in 2012 was not the same as Putin in 2000 and 2004 since he was more authoritative this time. Due to Russia's economic and political losses in Libya and Iraq, which resulted from the fall of Moscow's friendly regimes because

of the pressure from the West. Therefore, the domestic political behaviour was also favouring changes in the Russian policy towards the Middle East. As there was discontent for the Medvedev government, and from 2012, more aggressive propaganda appealed to the population's sentiments and proved successful. Therefore, the successor of Medvedev was seen as the protector of the national interests and who would cement its dealings with non-Western states, which have improved, and Putin has given them what they sought.

However, relations with Iran improved, Assad was more visible in Syria and relations were reconciled with Egypt. These all attempts of Putin have symbolized a return to the traditional state of affairs. It was also supposed as a return to the glory of the Soviet Union.

Also, many times like on 22 April 2015, during an interview with Russian media, Lavrov openly alleged the U.S. was responsible for creating ISIS and Al-Qaeda as the United States supported Mujahedeen during the Afghan conflict in the 1980s invasion of Iraq in the 2000s. On the other hand, authorities maintained to believe that military intervention in Syria was the only option. They were also confident in the statement that this deployment not only affected the development of the events in the region but also challenged the Western powers. Although this also presented the failure of Obama to organize any military operation against the Assad regime in 2003, Russian authorities did not take it as the indecisiveness of US authorities. Still, it was imagined that Russia might offset any plans of the US in the Middle East due to her presence in Syria.

Finally, Putin had the reason to develop strong relations was encouraged by the emergence of the Arab Spring. Initially, it was taken very lightly, and Russia ignored

this uprising as it brought minor structural change; with the fall of Hosni Mubarak, the president of Egypt even could not wake up Russian authorities, but Russia took notice and woke up after the death of Gaddafi in October 2011. Therefore, the US regime change in the Middle East has accused Russia that the US and its allies created instability because of the improper implementation of democratic values in other countries. Initially, the U.S. tried to make (as an ideological change was not the Russian policy like in Soviet-era). However, Russia considers "Arab Spring" an opportunity to be more deeply involved in the situation to balance the political situation and safeguard its interest (Ibid).

Russia's proactive engagement in Syria signified its return to the Middle East as a major power that was diminished at the end of the Cold War. The US influence in the Middle East grew significantly after 9/11. In light of this, Russia emerged as one of the two primary extra-regional stakeholders in the Syrian issue in the mid-2010s.

Many see Russia's position in the Middle East as distinct from either a return to its Soviet-era involvement or regional geopolitical rivalry with other external countries. Civil wars and instability in the region posed a vacuum making some sense of Russian intervention. Hence, Post Arab Spring, Russian foreign policy in the Middle East can be divided into regional context and the grand strategy of Russia's activities. Initially, it was perceived that the Russian grand strategy was an endeavour to resurrect the Soviet position in the Middle East and create influence with other external countries to persuade them to follow her lead in the region. However, Russia's Middle East policy, both before and after the onset of the Syrian conflict, is currently under question; it has nothing to do with the ideological approach of selective engagement with the low pace

with regional actors by ignoring confrontation (Stepanova, 2016) and not playing a mediator role her current approach is more liquid alliance approach explained by Zygmunt Bauman's Liquid Modernity Theory (Lecha, 2017). Russia maintains balance relations equally with pro and anti-U.S allies such as Egypt, and Saudi Arabia, including developing ties with Israel and, on the other side, working relations with Iran. Analyzing the Russian 'grand strategy' viewpoint does not mean that Russia only wants to restrict itself to Syria, but Russia could expand beyond. Other aspects of Russian practical actions from where we analyze Russia's current nature of drive-in Syria as it is reluctant to engage in direct military involvement and also her connections with the major non-state actors' networks which prevail in the region due to civil unrest and interestingly Russia not in a direct brink of war with the west as it avoids confrontation despite the US as its traditional rival in the Middle East. Therefore, such compelling interests put Russia at the forefront of international politics despite having sanctions and limited resources. Different growing terrorist activities in Europe also coerce the United States to talk to Russia more about issues rather than confrontations (Stepanova, 2016). According to Zygmunt Bauman's 'Liquid Alliance', social structures that form the behaviours of individuals that apart come more swiftly than those that we're able to form. There is no time to develop a consistent strategy for a longer time (Lecha, 2017). On 15 March 2011, the Arab Spring spread across the Middle East and reached Syria. As perceived same goes with the regime change in other Middle Eastern countries, it will affect Syria, but the regime is sustained due to mass public support and Russian intervention. Finally, on 21 August 2013, in response to a chemical attack by Assad's

forces, according to Obama said, "I have concluded that the United States should take military action against Syrian regime objectives..."

I am optimistic that we will be able to hold the Assad government accountable for its use of chemical weapons, deter future use, and weaken their ability to carry it out. After this threatening statement again, the US claimed the Asaad regime used chemical weapons (and Russians supported it). Still, in return, the US was remained silent and didn't take any action in Syria. Finally, due to Russian intervention, the US agreed to remove chemical weapons, and the agreement took place (Stivachtis, 2018, p.57). Russia's launched the military campaign in support of the central government in Syria at the end of September 2015, which became evident as earlier in 2013, Moscow made a surprise diplomatic intervention to help broker a chemical weapons disarmament agreement. (Stepanova, 2016).

To alter the course of the war, Russia provided air support to Syria for its military operations to maintain Assad's rule and regain control of Aleppo, Syria's major city. As it was against the tradition of Russia to engage directly in matters of war, it is now completely tangled in the conflict of Syria. This activity of Russia reflects its involvement in expanding its naval and air bases in the cities of Syria. This projection is a significant power play in the Middle East. These Russian bases are seen as a challenge for the US and its allies in the Middle East. Because Russia supported the Syrian regime by providing its Naval and air support, as Russians claim that if it is not devoted to continuing its rule, it can commit to the Syrian government. Although there are ceasefire arrangements with Turkey and Iran and discussion has been started with other parties in Syria, Russia's participation in the bombing in Aleppo brought a great

humanitarian loss meantime. Still, the picture is unclear that it would be uncertain about extracting Russia from Syria without any risk of collapse in the host regime. The stability that was disturbed after this conflict also required Russian assistance for the stability of this region. The long-term price of the intervention of Russia is also worthwhile as it will have an impact on the foreign policy of Russia towards the Middle East. Russian involvement in Syria makes her more exposed to the Middle East (Sladden et al., 2017).

On the ground, the air campaign accomplished the majority of its initial objectives in the course of its first several months from the military balance by assisting the government in surviving and expanding the territory under Russian intervention control, as well as deterring other powers, notably the US, from intervening in Syria through the use of advanced technologies. At the earliest Russian involvement in the Middle East was perceived as a regional challenge balance and would-be confrontation with the US due to Russian control over Syria. But later, the events showed Russia did not want a confrontation and escalation of the conflict in the region but to more playing a neutral soft player in the region equally cooperate with all the countries in the region (Stepanova, 2016).

Before, it was presumed that multiple conflicting regional interests would occur if there were any external military engagement in this region. It would exacerbate linked threats in geometrical progressions, such as Turkey-Russia. But it has proved that no escalation and direct rivalry is inevitable with all players accepting the US with Iran. Even Russia in Syria reacts and changes its policy according to the environment, such as withdrawing its forces from Syria by scaling down. It also shows that she uses

VNSAs to achieve her goals rather than invest her human resources. Consequently, Russia's full-fledged military campaign in Syria lasted only from October 2015 to mid-March 2016, and the US was silently watching her every move during that time. Russians performed admirably in Syria because they spent less on people and money and strove to avoid civilian losses and not engage Russian forces on the ground rather than engaging Assad forces and other groups (Stepanova, 2016).

As a result, Russian grand policy toward the Middle East was interpreted as a desire to reclaim its Cold War standing as an alternative regional hegemon but not on investing large scale, rather knocking the world by her presence. But on the hand, Russia also has limitations to achieving a global role and challenges it could face, such as: especially in a deep economic crisis and collapse of oil prices, exacerbated in part by Western-imposed sanctions, severely or even decisively constraining any further or systematic expansion of its role and involvement beyond Eurasia, and generally dictate a preference for broad and increasingly diversified multilateralism, keeping Russia's fundamental financial/economic interests in mind. Moreover, Russia appeared more capable militarily in Syria. Thus, the Russian liquid alliance in the region balances Russian policies in the Middle East. The second challenge is that Russia could face its security, political and geo-economic interests in the region it belongs to. Because of its regional domination, the struggle will affect its domestic economy and security (Stepanova, 2016).

Syria is Russia's only Middle East presence and its longest-standing ally in the region. It has a Russian naval facility in Tartus for Russia to safeguard its bases; for this reason, Syria could serve best as a bargaining chip with the US when interests intersect.

According to Putin, in 2005, Syria was a country with which Russia and the US had a special and friendly connection during the Soviet Union and the post-Soviet era. Russia's forgiveness of 73 per cent of Damascus' \$13.4 billion debt indicates how high-level of relations with Syria have in the same year in 2005. Moreover, Russia's presence in Syria is due to its bases, which helped stop the Israeli attack in 2006. However, two years later, Trump's strikes on Syria, which were based on a similar premise, drew no retaliation, implying that Putin was most likely bluffing.

Nonetheless, the Kremlin's unproven gestures underscored Russia's new commitment to the Middle East. Moreover, Russia's involvement in the region eventually led to interference in Syria's civil war. (Erenler, 2012).

The Russian response to the revolt in Syria would be different from other Middle Eastern countries since Russia has a high-profile stance and expresses strong support for the Assad regime. It can be evident when Russia vetoed U.N. sanctions against Syria, claiming that Syria needed dialogue rather than penalties. Moreover, Moscow has dispatched warships to its Tartus base despite risking relations with the U.S. and its allies, signalling its determination to keep Assad in power. But it didn't try to escalate the tensions with the rest as it aimed to send a message of its power. Russia's sustainability lies until Assad is in power, a major concern and future stake. By analysis and study, Russian relations with different regimes in the Middle East are not consistent and do not have a stable policy with each of them. It fluctuates by maintaining its relations with all (Erenler, 2012).

Due to Russian bases Syria was always the friend within the Middle East. In the Middle East, Russia's only military presence was a modest supply depot and naval station in

Tartus on the Syrian coast. Russian intervention came at the time when it noticed the power vacuum left by America's apparent withdrawal from the region. The Syrian Civil War offered Putin a great opportunity. As a result, Russia took advantage of the chance to establish a new permanent air station in Hmeimim, south-east of Latakia, and intervene on Assad's behalf. As the US changed its policy to stay in Syria and stated that due to a new terrorist threat had emerged in the region, the United States of America drew closer to Syria. (Stivachtis, 2018, p.57). In September 2013, the US-Russian agreement on the Syrian settlement failed to lead to the widely publicized agreement between the United States and Russia to eliminate chemical weapons in Syria. In September 2016, US Secretary of State John Kerry and his Russian counterpart Sergey Lavrov laboured over a peace proposal quickly abandoned just weeks after it was signed. It was perceived that the Russian presence in Syria would create tension between U.S. and Moscow. But the US also have a 'water alliance in the Middle East can be understood to comply with such an agreement; the US is accused of failing to apply the necessary pressure on anti-Assad opposition groups (non-state actors) to ensure that they adhere to the conditions of the ceasefire deal as accused by the Russian side. The moderate Syrian opposition, including the United States, has been unable to distinguish itself from more radical factions aligned with the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS) and al-Qaeda. However, Russia perceived the refusal of the U.S. military to collaborate with their Russian colleagues in any way (Kortunov, 2019). Thus, the Russian policy towards Syria could be generalized as at a meantime supporting regimes and also non-state actors to safeguard its interests in Syria Russia does not want regime change as Assad serves its best interest and its policy rather of

taking a constructive role in the restructuring of the Middle East, it maintains a submissive posture. On the other side, Russian foreign policy shifts depending on the perceived importance of each regime to Moscow's goals.., but it hasn't taken a comprehensive look at what's going on in the region (Erenler, 2012), which depicted a situation of change and vulnerability (Lecha,2017).

Its informal alliance policy shows a lack of willingness to alter the political situation by pursuing a reactive agenda. Instead, Russia chose a foreign policy of separating itself from the Middle East by undermining the environment and avoiding a confrontation. After the withdrawal of U.S. forces, it could serve best for the Russian interest to regain its Cold War status (Erenler, 2012). However, each shift created new opportunities, and this opportunity created new threats. These fears and threats led to defensive responses (Lecha, 2017).

Both Qatar and Saudi Arabia were forced to acknowledge the United States as a major actor in the Middle East, although relations between the two countries later deteriorated. With the Syrian conflict, the involvement of Russia got deeper; its involvement with Russian-speaking troops against anti-Assad groups expanded over time. Additionally, in 2013, Jihadists from Russia and other post-Soviet republics took part in the Syrian conflict. Consequently, it was proved that the decision of Russia to send troops to Syria was its intention to prevent the Western forces along with it; there was another concern that the fall of this regime could lead instability to in the post-Soviet space regime safeguarding its bases. Thus, in late 2015, the deployment of military forces of Russia was the effect of a best between a 'bad' and a 'very bad' situation. However, the events

in Iraq and Libya, where nothing was acquired after the old administrations were completely demolished, spurred Russia's leadership (Kozhanov, 2018).

The military involvement of Russia in matters of Syria made it overconfident to leave its effects on the Middle East's Western and local establishments; it was, for example, acknowledged at the time that no country had enough power to resolve this issue, and the solution was only possible through negotiations. Yet, Kremlin believed that there was a diplomatic solution to this problem with its allies. Therefore, Russia was confident to fight against the opposition of the Assad regime in Syria that could weaken them on the battleground. At the same time, the Moscow periodical asked the patrons of opposition in the Middle East between peace and military offensive. Yet, after the failure of the ceasefire agreement between Russia and the United States, Russia intensified its bombing of Aleppo in September and October 2016 (Kozhanov, 2018).

To safeguard Syria, Russia used the tactics of military intervention to save Syria from destruction, the similar fate of Iraq and Libya. However, Russia did not fight the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) throughout its Military Presence in Syria, instead focusing on the opposition, which was a great threat to the regime and by doing this, kept Assad in power and Western power in limit so it could be flat-footed. Further, in 2016, confidence in Russia bolstered more after the fall of Aleppo; as a result, Russia was able to shape the course of events in the region. Consequently, the policy of Russia has further undergone another transformation, and since 2016 it has become more preemptive rather than reactive. Nevertheless, engineering tests were applied in Russia's region. The first test was held in Libya, where political and General Khalifa Haftar, one of the country's most powerful warlords, received military assistance.

Therefore, Moscow helped him damage the UN-led Libyan agreement of 2015, which aimed to launch the reconciliation process. As a result, by 2018, the Eastern part of Libya was under the control of Haftar along with its fight against the Government of National Accord (GNA) that had the back of the United Nations became successful. Nevertheless, the support of Russia for Haftar and its activities in Syria undoubtedly demonstrated the readiness of Russia to affect the domestic dynamics in the states of the Middle East, especially for those who were closed political and geographically, but it was just it was not made any effect (Kozhanov, 2018).

Despite regional instability, as a study shows, Russia's Presence across the Middle East was due to its multi-dimension strategy to safeguard her interests for defending and advancing substantially enhanced arsenals, capabilities, and already stepped regional Presence (Blank, 2018).

Such involvement cannot be ignored and is highly seen by engaging herself in multidimensional strategy. It is not the only case Russia growing ties with Turkey economically, politically and militarily have also boosted Russian presence in the Middle East by Turkey buying S-400 air defences from Russia (Blank, 2018). Thus, Russia's multidimensional strategy can be understood by its military doctrine, presence, economic interests, and political gains mentioned below.

5.4 Russia Military Doctrine (2014) and Syria: Post Arab Spring Period

Understanding the changing the military doctrine of any state also involves changing the model of its national security. Because the strategies for response to outer and internal dangers portrayed in the military tenet reflect the key international objectives of the state improvement and its pledge to involve a specific goal in worldwide security design, that is why it is imperative to consider and research the instrument of changing the military regulation relying upon the changing reality and those conditions that add to the state in the usage of the arrangement for its vital turn of events. What is implied here is, most importantly, the political instruments and accessible resources, all these things required to implement the military doctrine in reality.

The base of Russia's current military doctrine was built up following the collapse of the Soviet Union. It was made sure about in Berlin on May 29, 1987, with the marks of the tops of the communist nations as the "Military Doctrine of Warsaw Pact nations. This all-encompassing the current Soviet Union military-political philosophy (Pietkiewicz, 2018).

The Russian judgment of the idea of present-day conflict has established based on this narrative that Russia sees battles as frequently unannounced, with minimal political rewards, and occurring in many domains, including space and outer space. And war escalates from one place to the global one, which is more destructive, rapid and leads to a decisive one.

The current Russian military doctrine was last modified in December 2014, with a few additional components added to the 2010 military doctrine. The new components broadly reflect Russia's intention and strategies in present and future. This doctrine has been much advanced since the post-Cold War era. It focused on the military necessity on domestic and external levels, and the military's duty to inflict unacceptable damage on any foe was also described. In this military concept, strategic deterrence is all components of measures that can be availed. A country's acts include political, diplomatic, economic, ideological, moral, spiritual, informational, scientific, technological, military, and other activities, which are also applied in strategic stability. In this military doctrine, the geographical expansion of The Middle East, the Black Sea, the Mediterranean Sea, the Arctic, the Far East, and the Baltic Sea were all part of Russia's plan. As a result, Russia's policy in the Middle East is firmly focused on the Syrian Civil War. Russia's post-Soviet foreign policymakers have understood the need of preserving the country's geopolitical advantages. And interests are valuable for political stability in the Levant, including securing the excess to mild Mediterranean or Black Sea waters from Tartus naval base. It demonstrates Putin's desire to maintain good relations with Bashar al-administration Assad while combating Islamic terrorism and other Western-backed insurgency militias at the same time. Russia's atomic powers' modernization objectives include changing Soviet-legacy frameworks with modern technology, keeping up harsh equality, improving the survival and productivity of the US nuclear weapons stockpile, and maintaining standing on the global stage. Russia's nuclear modernization programme includes strategic and non-strategic nuclear weapons (Defense Intelligence Agency, 2017).

Due to this military doctrine announced at the start of the Arab Spring, there is an opinion that expeditionary operations are part of Russia's foreign policy and strategy where it is capable of intervening in a foreign conflict, which is true in the case of Syria. Russia utilized both naval and air forces in Syria to justify its presence and gain a foothold for a prolonged stay. Some key philosophers believe that Syria helped Russia showcase its military modernization and other conventional weapons to exhibit power projection. (Ibid) It can be visible by launching Russian new capabilities such as forward-staged long-range Tu-22M3 BACKFIRE and Tu-95MS BEAR H heavy bombers. Syria has received some of the world's most advanced air and air defence systems. and Naval Forces in the Caspian Sea and the Mediterranean Sea use Kalibr land-attack cruise missiles. (Defense Intelligence Agency, 2017).

The development of new ballistic missile systems is extremely important to Russia. By 2022, the Russian military has projected that the SRF will be fully rearmed with modern (post-Soviet) missile systems. The SRF should be fully armed with modern (post-Soviet) missile systems completed in 2018–2020. In addition, Russia has said that it will shortly begin testing the Sarmat, a massive, liquid-propellant ICBM in development to replace the SS-18. Russia wants to start deploying the Sarmat missiles as soon as possible. Russia has said that it will shortly begin testing the Sarmat, a massive, liquid-propellant ICBM in development to replace the SS-18. (Pietkiewicz, 2018).

According to the SIPRI report, SIPRI has not calculated total military expenditure in the Middle East since 2015 due to a lack of data for Qatar, Syria, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), and Yemen. (Arab Spring). Combining all-out military spending, the

total amount of money spent in 2019 in the 11 nations for which data is available was \$147 billion. And the Middle East's leading military spender is U.SA through her allies, such as Saudi Arabia, rank 5th and Israel, rank 15th among the top 15 global spenders in 2019. With an estimated total of \$61.9 billion in 2019, Saudi Arabia is the region's biggest spender.

However, with the Yemen war, the situation changed military spending decreased by 16 per cent in 2019. And Israel's military spending has been increasing day by day since 2010, increasing to 20 per cent. On the Russian counterpart, we see Turkey co-supporting Russia in the Middle East, safeguarding its interest and Turkish from 2010-to 19. Turkish military spending reached \$20.4 billion, increasing day by day. As a result, 62% of worldwide military spending by the United States, China, India, Russia, and Saudi Arabia were the top five spenders in 2019. Russia's military spending from 2010 to 2019 increased to 4.5 per cent, which is worth Russia 65.1 billion (SIPRI Military Expenditure Database, 2019). Many Russian items are available on the worldwide armaments market. It sees prospects, which vary from Su-35, Su-30, MiG-29 fighter aircraft, Yak-130 combat trainers, and a range of Mil and Kamov helicopters are major items in the aircraft sector; hence, almost every type of traditional military equipment is available. From small arms to long-range air defence systems and submarines being exported by Russia. For this purpose, Syria and the Middle East played a crucial role to serve Russian interests in arms sales, which can be analyzed by when President Putin stated Mosco's desire to improve contract finance options and extend contributions for joint creation and collective effort to safeguard equipment in client" nations, and enhance post- arm sale support in equipment examining and

maintenance. And Syria serves its best interest to project power through arms sale of its combat operations to attract others in the region. (Defense Intelligence Agency, 2017).

5.5 Russia Military Presence in Syria: Post Arab Spring Period

Relations between Russia and the Middle East dates from the early post-World War II period and led to an initiative was a small village near Tartus in 1971 that served as a limited-capacity Soviet naval military base. For Russia, Post Arab Spring period had allowed improving its relations with the Syria and advancement of its military involvement. Apart from the naval base, it's another basis that gave Russia an edge as its de facto controls of the vital harbour of Latakia and the airbase at Hmeymin that has introduced the S-400 missile Triumf system. And to safeguard its bases, the Spetsnaz Russian elite forces took part in major operations against ISIS. Thus, post Arab Spring period benefited Russia to forge an Assad alliance and maintain ties with Iran. Therefore, both in short- and long-term ways, the Syrian civil war led to an opportunity for Moscow. This enabled Putin's objective to build influence in the region as Russia re-emerged as a strong global player (Stivachtis, 2018, p.57).

To safeguard Russian bases, it deployed S-300 air defence systems to Syria, meaningfully preventing the movement of the Israeli air force's freedom in early 2018. When Russia expressed dislike toward Israeli airstrikes against Iran and Hezbollah in Syria and justified her deployment of an air defence system to Syria as a result on September 17, 2018, during an Israeli operation, the Russian Ilyushin IL-20 military aircraft was shot down by Syrian force, an accident. Experts believe that these events

showed the Russian military that the Kremlin dictated the rules in Syria and its presence in the Middle East was to embrace her presence (Melamedov, 2020).

After a long break since the post-Cold War Era, Russia and the U.S. are on the frontline in the Middle East. For centuries, Russia fought with Turkey, England, and France to connect the Mediterranean, defending fellow Christians under the Ottoman rule and securing a footing in the Holy Land. Throughout the Cold War era, it was a major force in the Middle East in terms of supporting it with development projects and weapons, etc. However, since then, the U.S. and Russia hardly have had a presence in the Middle East for nearly two years (Eugene B. Rumer, 2019).

Russia assisted its air force and ground troops in Syria in 2015. Due to involvement, Assad's regime has changed the course of the Syrian Civil war. Moreover, it has forged a new relationship with the Middle East after its success in Syria. It was viewed as a reliable partner for many in the Middle East when the other side, the U.S., cut off its ties with Hosni in Egypt after three decades of relations (Rumer and Weiss, 2019).

This chapter will further explain and analyze Russian and U.S. military competition/posture in the Middle East and their geostrategic environment. By keeping in view Post Arab Spring vantage in the Middle East, which can be analyzed current Russian military posture and its scope of presence compelling U.S. reasons for doing so today by its strategic ability, has seized an ascending position in the Middle East extending to Syria and beyond. Russian military positions it as a major factor in the Middle East and beyond. It appears to be a larger strategy due to Russia's actions and tactical adaption in the region. After the involvement of Russia in Syria, which has produced a winning military-political strategy in the Middle East. Since the intervention

in Syria, this strategy has direct expanded its regional position. Thus the Russian military posture has multi-fold directions in the Middle East to create momentum and U.S. as a major player (Blank, 2018).

Russia signed agreements with Syria on military and restructuring the government. In \$14 million, debt was exempted by Russia to the Syrian government to the Soviet Union. In 2008 it increased to \$20 billion for similar projects, including military equipment. Post Arab Spring situation wasn't favourable for Russia to go for more economic development and arms sale became the main market to sell their products. Although the correct figure of Russian arms deals allowed for the Middle East remains obscure, and yearly gauges extend from 8.2 per cent to 37.5 per cent (comparable to approximately \$1.2–\$5.5 billion) of Russian add up to arms trades, which is substantially increasing gradually (Kozhanov, 2018).

5.5.1 Russian Military Bases in Syria: Post Arab Spring Period

Russian presence in Syria has different dimensions and many perceived that Russia is supporting anti-American regimes; along with this, many believe Russia is following Cold War tactics, and it's a beginning of a New-Cold War Era as the U.S. and Russia both are on the frontline. In the Middle East (Global security organization, 2019). The study will analyze the nature of Russian military involvement in Syria through its military bases in Syria.

In 1948, Joseph Stalin recognized Israel. Israeli-Arab war broke out, and Israel became a right-wing state orienteed towards the West. Soviet-supported on the other side Syria, Egypt, Libyan regimes, Iraq against Israel as Israel became a strong ally of the

US-supplied them with the weapons in the Middle East leading towards arm race. A demonstration of soviet weapons against western was visible during the two major Arab-Israeli wars in 1967 and 1973, which was on a larger scale. As comparable to Egypt, USSR moreover sent military advisors and teaches to Syria. Unlike Egypt, Syria never ceased its battle against Israel and did not broke ties with the Soviet Union after the crumbling of the USSR till the present time. In Syria in 2012, during civil war times, Russia set to support the Syrian regime openly and in a practical step in 2013 to prevent the US from initiating military actions against Bashar al Assad. The Russian presence was clearer and more direct in 2015 when the situation became worst in the region, especially in Syria. In this case, the Russian military base served her as a supply point in Tartus as the main entry point. Hmeimim airbase, where Russia currently holds its air force these bases served on April 06, 2015, and helped the Air Force of Syria from the US clash. Thus, Russian forces are only deployed in its bases.

In contrast, it collaborates with the Syrian Arab Army to take further actions, which is evident when these two collaborations captured Palmyra from ISIS. To expand further, they set to establish a base there. But again, later in December, ISIS captured Palmyra (believed that the US supported ISIS to mitigate Russia's expansion and make her know that U.S. dominance still prevails). Still, in 2017 through Russia and Syria forces, the Palmyra area was again back in control. Thus, due to Kurdish sovereignty over Rojaza, where Russia supports the current Syrian regime and all those who even opposed the Syrian regime and Syrian Democratic Forces. Groups also get support from the U.S. and Coalition to jeopardize Russian and other influencing parties not to engage full scale and control their movement. Turkey also opposed the Kurdish faction and is now

engaged in Syria. Thus, each party's presence in Syria safeguards its interest (Global security organization, 2019).

In Afrin city, the Russian plan to stay in Syria included its planning to found a base in Manjbi province controlled by Kurdish, which Russia later denied to help defend ceasefires. It served merely as a 'reconciliation centre'. The Manji area is isolated from the rest of Rojava or Northern Syria through Turkish militaries and their joint allied fighters. Therefore, Russia maintains its relations with all segments by avoiding a direct clash and escalating the conflict, which is visible in the Kurdish Force case, where Turkish interests clash between the US and Russia. Thus, Russia will keep its military involvement in Syria as long as military and budgetary circumstance allows her. The war in Syria is progressing and will not cease at any time. (Global security organization, 2019) Thus military aspect plays a vital role for Russia to attract the regional and external power to re-gain back old global power image, and at present for preventing hostility by domination and by projecting presence through battling the run of conflicts from local emergencies to atomic war, anticipating control and utilizing drive in case vital to intervene in clashes over the globe which is visible in Syria.

Despite economic challenges, which are the biggest constrain to achieving such status presently, to counter this, Russia is looking for other ways to challenge the opponents and re-empower its great power desire (Defense Intelligence Agency, 20017), which Russia is doing by balancing her relations with porous countries and also with the rough states by stationing in Syria and making sure to affirm her visibility through military development through naval and military bases.

5.5.1.1 Tartus Naval Base in Syria

The Tartus naval base was not only important in the Mediterranean; it became the essential base for keeping up and refilling Soviet/Russian submarines, dock, fuel tanks, a few garrison huts, and an 80,000-ton coasting dock were the facilities being provided from this base. In the 1960s, the Soviets made military and political gains in most world regions during the Cold War era. In the Middle East, the Soviets continued strong ties with Syria by transferring military weapons, one of the US's priority areas. The Soviet Union kept a military presence at Tartus since the 1970s and maintained close relations with Syria (news, 26.12.2017).

Relations also went through ups and downs throughout the Cold War times. In 1976 Syria's intercession within the Lebanese Civil War against radical Muslim strengths strained Soviet Syrian relations and suspended deliveries of military equipment for more than a year. Including Soviet falling, its military involvement and- discontinuing military exercises reacted as a result. During the fighting in Lebanon, Syria in 1977s denied offices at Tartus to Soviet naval ships may have been an exhibit of President Assad's despondency over Moscow's overwhelming given strategies and realization for Syria as Soviet only client in the region. After the Lebanese ceasefire, Egypt and Saudi Arabia sought to maintain better ties, and these countries had limited ties with the Soviets as US influence was predominated during Cold War.

Despite all Cold War realities, the Syrians had never been in a direct conflict with Russia and tried to avoid risking their military relations like Egypt. The geostrategic location of Tartus base is quite important, but its development is well behind its potential as the seaside city of Tartus and nearby places are greater in economic and

natural resources; out of three, only two ports are recognized for agricultural production and also have natural sights beneficial for tourism, but till now many hindrances couldn't be helped to put into actions. (Global security organization, 2019)

Russian naval and military bases were one of the major connections which made Syria an important country for her. An important part of this alliance was enduring Soviet naval port at Tartus (Goldmanis, 2016) following the disintegration of the Soviet Union, and since 1970 military presence of Russia was there at Tartus and enjoyed cordial relations (news, 26.12.2017). In the Post-Cold War era, Russia's naval operations in the Mediterranean Sea were finished, but the base has remained there. Tartus naval base embrace four medium-sized vessels only if both of its 100 m (330 ft) floating piers inside of the northern breakwater are operational, which varies in length from the 129m; this base isn't competent of facilitating any of the Russian Navy's current major warships (Goldmanis, 2016). In 2017, in Syria, Tartus naval base and airbase at Hmeimim, Russia has announced plans to dramatically expand its naval facility by further 49 years. It created space to keep 11 warships, including nuclear vessels, significantly enlarged Mediterranean naval capability. Later, Sergei Shoigu, Defense Minister of Russia, announced an expansion plan. As he stated:

Last week the Commander-in-Chief (Russian President Vladimir Putin) approved the structure and the bases in Tartus and in Hmeimim (air base) We have begun forming a permanent presence there (news, 26.12.2017)

Furthermore, according to the Duma database, this assertion has been substantial for 49 years. It is naturally expanded for the ensuing 25-year periods, in case not one or the other party informs in composing, through discretionary channels, at slightest one year

sometime recently the expiry of the following period, of its deliberate to end it (Global security org, 2019).

It is the 72nd point of logistics of the Russian Navy outside the Russian Federation in Tartus, which inhabits the northern part of the Syrian port of Tartus as this is only Russia's naval base. The disappearance of most of the Russian Naval Forces from Tartus Port, Syria, was reported by the US surveillance and image International in 2019 due to possible future threats. And in base, one Kilo-class submarine remained only most probably withdrawn to sea and used for bombing land within and outside Syria. At the end of August 2019, the ship repair complex of the Black Sea Fleet begun worked at the material and technical support point (PMTO) of the Russian Navy in Tartus, which aims to deliver little maintenances to ships and submarines of the permanent operational connection of the Russian Navy in the Mediterranean Sea the agency. Furthermore, in Tartus, the most modern machine equipment was bought and set up there. Typically, on rotational bases, the shift of each floating workshop duration was six months. In 2017, after 49 years, Russia and Syria signed an agreement on deploying a Russian PMT in Tartus. All nuclear power plants along with 11 ships have been equipped at Tartus. According to the document, it was also planned to expand the ship repair capabilities of the base. On 28 July 2019, in Tartus, a parade was held on the occasion of Navy Day in which the diesel-electric submarine Stary Oskol, the frigate Admiral Grigorovich, the patrol ship Pytlivy, and the small missile ships Veliky ustyug and Uglich, floating ship repair workshop, marine rescue tug, anti-sabotage and patrol boats from the permanent Russian compound. (Global security org, 2019)

Thus, the modernization of the Tartus base and expansion was long overdue according to the Russian navy commanders, and post Arab Spring led to missing plans. Also, a naval airbase in Syria altogether boosts Russia's operational capability within the locale since the warships are based as they can come to the Red Sea through the Suez Canal and the Atlantic through the Strait of Gibraltar (Global security organization, 2016).

5.5.1.2 Khmeimim Air Base in Syria

Khmeimim airbase is situated southeast of Latakia in Hmeimim and with Bassel Al Assad International airport in Syria, shares some airfields facilities currently operated by Russia in Syria. In 2015, August a treaty was signed to regulate them into legal status and later became operational on 30 September 2015. In Syria, Russia decided to change the Khmeimim base into a component of its enduring military reliant base at the end of 2017. During Post Arab Spring period, this base served as a strategic centre of Russia's military intervention in the Syrian civil war. The US revealed the existence of Russia's strategic base in Syria, which many predicts could be a concern for the increase in the clash. Under this treaty, it is negotiated that Russia can use Hmeimim airport without paying any tax and time limit. And as envisaged by Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations grants Russia's staff and their family members jurisdictional insusceptibility and other rights. The task is divided between Russia and Syria. For example, as Russia is taking care of air defence and internal matters of the base, the Syrian army is taking care of the base premises. The treaty was revised by signing a protocol treaty on 18 January 2017.

Along with the Khmeimim, it also announced set about forming a permanent grouping at a naval facility in Tartus; in 2017 December, Putin accepted the structure and the personnel strength of the Hmeymim Tartus and its bases. (Tyler Rogoway, 6 January 2018). As 50 km Via Tartus harbour (31 mi) away supplies were flown in from Russia or shipped to the Hmeymim base. The base is conveyed to be capable of handling Antonov An-124 Ruslan and Ilyushin Il-76M transport aircraft; the deployed aircraft comprised Sukhoi Su-24Ms, Sukhoi Su-25s, and Sukhoi Su-34s, reconnaissance aircraft Il-20M as well as T-90 tanks, BTR-82 vehicles, artillery, with Mil Mi-24, Mi-28, Ka-52 gunships and Mil Mi-8 support helicopters. A defensive missile system was installed, allowing Russia to defend the air space from Southern Turkey to Northern Israel after the 24 November 2015 shootdown of a Su-24M, an S-400. At the end of February 2016, at Geneva Peace Talks, in reaction to developments, the airbase, a truce coordination centre, had been established whose purpose was to coordinate activities of warring parties and “render maximum assistance, to all parties participating in recent ceasefire agreements; the centre will not support ISIL, Al-Nusara, and terrorist groups so designated by the UN Security Council. (*Nissenbaum, Dion; Jones, Rory, 17 April 2018*) Therefore, Russian personnel or ground troops will only be stationed in its military bases and would be intervening in other escalated matters that affect its bases in Syria. Many were concerned about the escalation of conflict within the region and Syria.

5.6 Russia's Economic-Military Presence in Syria

Russian economic-military dimension can be seen in the Middle East as its influence in settling down energy prices and reducing OPEC with Saudi Arabia. It aims to bring Iran into the Eurasian Economic Union by strengthening economic ties with Iran. Many views have outset U.S. role in the region by having Turco-Russian relations and cooperation with Turkey and Iran can be seen in Syria Civil War, varied Russian investment and energy deals within the region by maintaining its ties with Israel and North Africa which lead to being in future naval airbase there (Blank, 2018). Thus apparently, this has shown that Russia is fully engaged in the Middle East with greater plans. Helsinki summit is one of the examples of this kind where the Russian role can be seen as a vital interest in the region. Russian re-emergence is quite different from the past policies not to engage in intra-Arab or Arab –Iranian rivalries (Stephan Blank, 2018) and have a "liquid alliance" (Zygmunt Bauman's). This has shed Russia's soft power touch while maintaining its relation in the Middle East (Lecha, 2017). Though, many problems were erupted for Russia both in Syria as the uprising of Arab Spring, which created economic problems across the whole region and political chaos created problems for the grain exporters of Russia. However, it was a big market for their produces. Yet, the military-economic interest of Russia in Syria is more visible due to pre-existing arms sales.

In the war against Assad's opponents, Russia has made substantial gains in Syria. To strengthen its naval base, Tartous has utilized success to restate its situation inside the eastern Mediterranean by increasing naval forces and investing \$500 million. In Latakia, Russia strengthened its airbase, which can be used against the Syrian

opposition when needed. Near the Levant, Russia makes a huge military to safeguard her interest. It's presumed that Moscow can use such gains in the future, including against the U.S. and its allies. That Russian military troops can analyze this is also expanding pressure on the 500 U.S. troops who stay in northeastern Syria, fearing constant dangers of an improvised clash. Similarly, in 2018, in the region, an assault happened on U.S. positions, led by Russia's militaries such as the Wagner Group, which has brought about a counterattack by U.S. powers that claimed more than 200 casualties. Such small incidents may divert to big confrontations and have U.S. consequences (Dunne, 2020).

5.7. Russia- Syria and US Triangular Relations

Over the past two decades, in the Middle Eastern region, the US has over-extended its military aspect compared to Russia. Therefore, the Russian status quo approach is quite different from the US to achieve her objectives: stability, not promoting democracy like the US, which is quite apparent of US policy destabilizing the entire region given the example of Iran-US tension recently (Rumer and Weiss, 2019).

The US strategy moved in two ways; first, it tried to foster the societies against communism during Cold War and second took them to reject terrorism. The Russian strategy has three components; first, it challenges the pro-western instinct in the Middle East. The second is to assure that any revolution in the Middle East is not to inspire the citizens of Russia or its Allies. These movements can halt Russian progress and create a threat to Russia. Third, Russia has developed its relations with the security

establishments by showing its spirit to the Syrian government through atrocities (Alterman, 2017).

So broadly, the US is playing its role in the Middle East to have its victory by seeking economic and political stability. On the other hand, Russia seems to play for a tie. But Russia cannot win as it is “outgunned, outmanned, outnumbered, and out-planned.” But Russia can play as a spoiler by using its limited sources as a strength. The United States, with its allies, has invested trillions of dollars in the region, but Russian influence and narrow security measures can affect the trajectory of the Middle East. As the United States has given its efforts not only for economic but for political purposes to create irrepressible governments in this region which not only create the multilateral system but also obstruct the interests of multi states of the Middle East and the United States with its allies who have worked a lot with its financial funding and military personnel.

(Ibid)

Based on tactical Objectives, the USA and Russia can overlap with one another’s goals in the Middle East. As Russia and the US, both do not want to have the control of Islamic State Group (ISG). But on a strategic level, more divergence can be seen. As Russian forces always feel reluctant to attack this group. According to them, the existence of this group legitimizes the role of the Syrian government and Supports Russian elements. Moreover, Russia seeks to develop this multilateral effort that will promote resilient societies and as a threat to the stability of Russia. Hence, differences between the US and Russia are fundamental in the Middle East. (Ibid)

During the era of the Bush administration, US policies in the Arab world were ill-advised and led to other forms of issues. At the forum of the UN assembly, Americans

were blamed by Russian officials for being inconsistent and cynical. On the other hand, Russians are conservatives and support the existing states even though they are arbitrary. They are also not in favour of regime change, especially those persuaded abroad and favour the political systems that open gradually. Russia is only pursuing its interests without any design and model for the Middle East. Barack Obama's policy, as compared to other leaders, is seen with prudence by Russians, especially in the use of force in the Middle East. Russia observes that the United States is trying to dominate the world by maintaining its influence. Although Russia is also competing with the United States in the Middle East, Russia never wants to replace the US in this region (Trenin, 2019).

5.8 Russian Foreign Policy 'Constant Mobility and Change': Post Arab Spring Period

There is always a constant mobility condition and changes in Bauman's views on relationships, identities, and international economics within current society. (Palese, 2013), Russian strategy and policy in the Middle East can be analysed in the Syrian case. The Russian foreign policy's main feature is that it escapes risks and instabilities because of its adaptive changing conditions. As maintaining the Russian traditional power approach and sovereignty, it has adopted a policy of non-intervention. It can be called wait and see policy to observe the changes in international policy and act according to responsive policy. Russia is selective in responding to events after they begin to start; instead of bringing a new direction to issues, Russia has fruitful relations

that require a flexible foreign policy. Since the end of the Cold War, Russia's refraining from confrontation with the West would be another important characteristic of its foreign policy despite US and Russian interests differing from each other's and avoiding hostility. During Cold War, Russia lost its influence in the region; thus, a new Russian foreign policy stopped following the old policy in the Arab Spring and avoided conflicts with the West following the water alliance policy, which would help regain influence (Erenler, 2012). The reality in which nations consider exceedingly what is temporary instead of permanent, the quick instead of long term; and respects utility as earlier to any other esteem (Palese, 2013).

Russia has changed its strategy from the traditional approach adopted during the Cold War, which is currently more a part of the solution, not a part of the problem. This can be explained more in the context of the Middle East, which Russia didn't want to replace regimes in term so of ideological rather than bring change in its approach to the region likewise, the change in approach in international policies and issues split democracy and authoritarians also change order and conflict (Kortunov, 2019).

Similarly, the Russian 'Informal Alliance' policy shows its balance relationship with the Middle Eastern countries. At that time, Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el-SISI preserved ties with Russia and grew diplomatic relations with Saudi Arabia. Israel worked to build stronger links with Moscow throughout the U.S.–Israel disagreement between the Netanyahu and Obama presidencies.

But including Israel and Egypt in the Middle Eastern region, the Trump administration's different pattern of relations was quickly set about establishing with the important countries. And take some visible actions to alarm Russia in the region in 2017, April

by the U.S. presence, for instance, in Shayrat, at a Syrian airbase, the U.S. bombing was a reaction to a chemical weapons attack and to check the level of Russia's pledge to its backing of Assad's regime (Stivachtis, 2018). During Operation Northern Shield (December 2018–January 2019), Russia remained neutral when the Israel Defense Forces demolished Hezbollah channels that traversed the Lebanese-Israeli border into northern Israel (Melamedov, 2020).

5.9 Russia and Regional Power Balance: Challenges for Russia Post Arab Spring Period

Moscow and Cairo relished a more closed political-military relationship during the Nasser years until President Anwar Sadat expelled Soviet military consultants in 1972; it was believed it was suspected to join the United States bloc during the Cold War. But presently post, Arab Spring has allowed them to revive relations.

Military ties have been moving forward since 2014, counting joint works out and assertions that would permit the two countries to utilize each other's discussed space and bases. It was accepted that Russia could consider making another military base in Egypt.

Furthermore, Moscow has been looking for arms assertions with Egypt to reinforce the political-military relationship advance, counting a \$2 billion venture was done to buy Russian SU-35 warriors. The closeness towards Egypt and its presence create concerns from the US Under the Countering America's Adversaries through Sanctions Act, the

proposed arms bargain has brought a danger of U.S. sanctions intended to restrain a Russian military to the limit and further expansionism.

Similarly, in Libya, Russia has kept up active participation with Cairo to reinforce the offer of Common Khalifa Haftar to back his position as in restriction to the government in Tripoli, which both the UN and the US are now recognizing. It was assumed that in 2017 Russia allegedly deployed aircraft to establish her presence in Egypt. Also, later in late 2019, due to Russia's involvement, the US. increase was seen in Haftar's forces. But later to growing US pressure, Haftar backup. But despite all hurdles, Russia avoids confrontation and proves determined and consistent. Thus, it shows that Russia's angle is seemingly to strengthen e as a global player image and gain economic interests, particularly its impact on global energy. Therefore, Russia preserved its interest and tried to convince its image as a power broker as a diplomatic end to the conflict.

5.10 ASTANA Process: Russia and Syria in the Post Arab Spring Period

For many years, Russia rolled by in the Syrian crisis, assisting with military, economic and political help. In contrast, Turkey helped the opposition Syrian and gave a secure safe house for its political and military authority, whereas Iran and Turkey were seen as adversaries. But Russia's relations with Turkey during all these times were also ups and downs, such as when Turkey shot down Russia's fighter jet near its border with Syria in 2015. In 2016, relations improved when both Iran and Russia condemned the coup attempt in Turkey.

Thus keeping in the backdrop such reconciliation in 2016, recovered more than 2,000 square kilometres from the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL, also known as

ISIS) and the Syria Democratic Forces (SDF) on the western bank of the Euphrates near the Turkish border by Turkey as in August 2016 first military operation inside Syria termed Euphrates Shield was in a large scale, wherein Turkish troops and Turkey-backed Syrian opposition factions. Later, the fall of Aleppo allowed common interests in Syria to identify by Moscow and Istanbul, which can be visible in January 2017 in the form of the Astana process, later joined by Iran (Kabalan, 2019)

Accordingly, these events led Russia to reconsider its approach to Syria, including the Middle East. The initiation of the Astana process in January 2017 was an example of it that centred its vitality and peacemaking abilities on building amalgamation of regional players through peace talks on Syria in Kazakhstan's capital and bringing Turkey and Iran meanwhile, at negotiating table, which helped Russia to grow major Arab countries interested in the new arrangement. However, the U.S. was also part of this negotiation and saw a positive reaction from the U.S. without conflict (Kortunov, 2019).

The basic aim behind of Astana process was to reduce armed violence in Syria. Thus, this would not mean that the Astana process on Syria's future has replaced the UN-led Geneva dialogue. The difference could serve as the Astana process enabled regional players to be a meeting point. On the other hand, Geneva has assembled primarily global actors and select regional ones. To have more clarity or narrow the gap between these two processes, in January 2018, in the Russian resort city of Sochi, the Syrian National Dialogue Congress was held. While working primarily with regional rather than with global partners, it reflected the boundaries of what Russia could do in Syria and beyond. To bring peace, Russia required resources that neither Turkey nor Iran had. Analyzing other countries, including Qatar and Yemen, the Gulf States have too many

internal problems where we see China's role as a donor of post-war Syria, which is unlikely to happen shortly nor other states are interested in investing in development sectors by keeping in view the current crises in the Middle East. Bringing all countries on one platform would not be possible but could be arranged in bilateral or multilateral forums such as in October 2018, the Russian- Turkish-French-German summit in Istanbul forum was held as Russian presence in Syria is perceived as a power broker in the region in the context of Syria where it actively engaged and on a favoured position. But the Middle East and Syrian status are still fragile and unsustainable. As VNSAs create more problems and countries use them for their interests, they threaten sustainability in the longer-term (Kortunov, 2019).

But changing nature of the Syrian conflict and U.S. move also cannot be ignored as the U.S. withdrawal of troops from Syria came in April after these initiatives where all troika emerged to expel U.S. troops and also sidelining groups from Syria—before U.S. policy was different such as the former Secretary of State Rex Tillerson had outlined to keep U.S. troops after the defeat of ISIL in Syria to curb Iranian influence. Thus, sudden foreign policy switches and changing strategies could also be seen from each power involved in the Middle East and Syria. Therefore, Astana Process all went in vain after the declaration of U.S. troops from Syria. It was suggested to reactivate Adana Accord in 1998 to avoid enduring military existence and permit Syrian territories the former to pursue PKK fighters inside. (Kabalan, 2019).

5.11 Challenges for Russia in the Middle East: Future Prospects

The study showed that the US has a long-established strong foot in the Middle East and Russia quite late after Arab Spring. However, it will take longer to fit herself in the Middle East as many regimes are pro-American, and Russia will face setbacks from those regimes.

The Media in today's world is powerful, especially in the case of Russia, to project power and influence in the Middle East. But sustainability will be an issue for Russia's regional presence that needs consideration. And throughout the Middle East, this depends on how long Russia sustain a Syria-type action, including power projection. Moreover, the prolonged clash in Syria retains Russia financially engaged in the Levantine movement. Therefore, Russia's strategy and action need to be analyzed to expand its presence. Additionally, in terms of influence, reliability and legitimacy, Russia's engagements should be measured in the Middle East.

It was certainly, concerning the sustainability of Russia's 2024 thrust into the Middle East. Key issues would be analyzed with limited resources to sustain a large military would be another issue of sustainability for Russia's presence in the Middle East. Along with this, reliability and consistency would benefit the region and how the world perceived Russia's influence in the Middle East. And the US would be challenged concerning its policy change anytime by analyzing Russia's future influence in the region and need to view a diverse set of metrics. About actual control over infrastructure remains uncertain because of the multiple layers of uses as energy contracts present in the region. But all of this will be determined by the market force and geopolitics of the Middle East (Karasik, 2018). Due to Russia's liquid alliance (Lecha, 2017), its relations

with the OPEC countries will exist and sustain in the future but again depends on Pro American Arab regimes how they will respond to all these joint ventures, mediation, and interests by balancing the US at the same time. Russia aims to safeguard its hub-based strategy by utilizing ports, airbases and berths. It is conceivable that Russia's maritime engagements off the coast of Syria may not be effectively rehashed off the other Mediterranean or Gulf of Aden/Gulf of Oman shores (Karasik, 2018).

Subsequently, Russian presence could be more concrete in the coming years till 2025 by using proxies to influence the conflict and terrorist groups. Dropping oil expenses has led to building bilateral energy relations with Moscow's regional powers, which gave a favourable geopolitical environment for Russian presence in the region. Russian presence in the Middle East depends on the environment and the US shift in its policy towards the Middle East; these factors will be among the most significant elements influencing Russia's future in the region (Karasik, 2018).

During the meeting of the G20, President Donald Trump said to Putin that as there is much killing in Syria, there should be some solution to sort it out. For the last five years, Russia has been playing a very active role in Syria, but it can be better understood after looking at the strategy and objectives in this region. Compared to China's strategy, the Russian strategy will be more impressive to understand. China relies on the resources of the Middle East as it fulfils its sixty per cent of energy needs in this region. China has only ambition to expand its economic ties, but Russia, on the other hand, is also concerned with the security matters of the region. As the Chinese are concerned only with economic ties, they are always welcomed by the host states.

On the other hand, Russia has security concerns in the Middle East. It sells weapons worth billions of dollars. Although China works alongside the US, Russia wants to maintain the balance of security concerns against the US. It was a crucial time when Obama said that Assad must go, but Russia bolstered this Government by deploying S-400 missiles to Syria and S-300 to Iran (Alterman, 2017). Before saying that Russia's presence in the region is because of the United States. Russia has more other judgments in the region as it has threats by the terrorist groups that strengthen this regime. For Russia, international relations are a zero-sum game. If there were any hostility toward the US, it would benefit Russia, and the reverse of it could also happen. The influence of Russia started to expand in the region at that time when the US had a remarkable run in the Middle East. It happened because of the collapse of the Soviet Union, and Russia had to take time to have its run in the region. Even after 2010, it could be able to take any initiative to establish its relations with Syria (Alterman, 2017).

During the era of President George W. Bush, the US policies in the Middle East were misguided and resulted in utter failure. At the forum of the UN, assembly Americans were blamed by Russian officials for being inconsistent and sceptical. On the other hand, Russians are conservatives and support the existing states even though they are arbitrary. They are also do not favour regime change, especially those persuaded abroad and favour the gradually opening political systems. Russia is only pursuing its interests without any design and model for the Middle East. Compared to other leaders, Russia sees Barack Obama's policy with prudence, especially the use of force in the Middle East. Russia observes that the United States is trying to dominate the world by maintaining its influence. In the Middle Eastern region, although Russia is also

competing with the US, Russia has not yet planned to replace the US in this region (Trenin, 2019).

The mistakes made by the US did not determine the Russian policy in the Middle East, but the corrections in their policies could limit the moves of Russia in the Middle East. Compared to Henry, Donald Trump's election as the president was more challenging for the policy of Russia in the region. Obviously, Trump was more in favour of force than Obama, and Trump used force as a tool to show its power directly to show Russia its presence still exists, for example, the strikes on Shayarat airbase in 2017. However, this move of airstrikes also showed Assad that if full protection was not given to Syria and proved that the incident of al-Shayarat was not a game changer and the strategy of Iranian and Russian allies had not changed. Through this political and military pressure, Russia tried to persuade its regional sponsor that it could adopt the Russian vision. However, Russia was reluctant to change its policy in the region after the incident of al-Shayari. The first phase showed its potential for policy change as there were concerns US, but later nothing happened. Not much involvement, but the use of force by Trump in the Syrian issue showed that he had more concerns about Russia compared to his predecessors in Syria. Therefore, Russia saw itself as the major player in the Middle East. However, Russia's economic and financial capabilities could not match the US as there is a decrease in economic activities in Russia. For instance, the failure of investment agreements between Russia and Iran and its result was seen when the trade volume fell by 30 per cent annually between 2011- and 2014, and by 2016 it fell from \$3.8 billion to \$1.3 billion. The other reason which worsened the situation was the low prices of oil and international sanctions by America and its allies which influenced its

role in the Middle East. Yet, it will create difficulties for the energy companies of Russia and later, it would limit the long-term projects in the region. However, they decided that Lukoil would pull out itself from Luksar in 2017 as it was a joint venture to explore the gas reserves in the Rub el Khali. Many experts claimed that sanctions would limit the access of Lukoil to have foreign loans that were necessary to run its business (Kozhanov, 2018).

The strategy of Russia is to keep a balance between different powers, as it had the intention of closer relations with Iran with other regional states, especially Israel and GCC countries. In 2015, Russia had a stress test when it had not to veto the UN's resolution on Yemen and impose a ban to export weapons to Iran. On the other hand, the success in Syria by the military of Russia affected the foreign policy of other countries. However, this confidence and smart play in the region irritated Russia's partner in the region, as the Russian foreign minister announced in 2016 that long-range bombers had been deployed at the Iranian airbase so it could do more intensified actions for Syria. When Kremlin recognized that Russia had its bombers in Iran, it ignored the Iranian authorities, who wished not to draw attention to this arrangement. (Ibid)

The authorities of Saudi Arabia also challenged the influence of Russia and Qatar between 20012-2016, and both these states took tangible steps to counter the influence of Russia in the region. Additionally, many joint efforts were made by Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Turkey to help the opposition of Assad so that it could feel lonely in the region and gave a message to the regime of Assad that alone it could not support the Syrian regime on the battleground. These were the opposition and challenged Russia faced domestically. Furthermore, Saudi Arabia and Iran are looking for influence in the

region. Finally, as Egypt and Israel took their relations as leverage for their relations with the US, they maintained with Russia. However, it is unclear what kind of substantial Russia would be as there was suspicion about the change of policy when after the conflict was over with the West. The most important policy change was the actual change of relations between Russia and the US that will affect the stance of Russia regarding the Middle East (Kozhanov, 2018).

Over the past five years of Arab Spring with its failure, civil wars in Syria and Yemen, agreement with Iran and state failure in Libya. These events created many opportunities, but they also created multiple challenges for Russia's foreign policy. First, Russia seeks to promote itself as a reliable ally in the region. Second, an outsider power, Russia wants to diversify its foreign policy by seeking a good relationship with all these states. Third, the regional profile of Russia got a reputation for military operations in Syria. Moscow has engaged in a risky strategy in the following ways first, by defeating the enemies of Assad. They are also considered opposition to Assad second when they agreed to soften the relations signed the cease-fire; third, a wide alliance of Iran, Russia, the United States and Syria was also put together to defeat the Islamic state. Between 2015-and 2016, step one had achieved, and step two was in the pipeline project that directs to step three. Fourth, the navy and aerospace forces performed their duties very actively compared to other forces and brought minimal casualties. In this context, they established their relations with Kurds, continued to court Egypt, and managed how they could remain on a footing with Saudi Arabia and Qatar (Trenin, 2019).

5.12. CONCLUSION

The Russian presence in the Middle East is viewed as either it will remain content in the region with limited objectives or will extend its footpath. If analyzed in the Middle East, Iran and Russia's interests diverge as Russia does not want to indulge herself in any confrontation, whereas the Iranian case is different. It will create another direction, if prolonged, with the US, then it can be seen how Russia can manage. Whether it's a real power broker in the region, Russia has to intervene in different issues if it has a security concern (Rumer and Weiss, October 24, 2019). Russia's aims are not changing as it still wants control of Assad's stabilized Syria and international recognition of his present decree and influence in the region for the long term. At the same time, it does not want to preserve a considerable military pledge in Syria or go for the military base, which might be certain in the future (Oliker, 2019).

CHAPTER 6

DISCUSSIONS AND FINDINGS

6. Methods and Methodological Considerations

This chapter presents the results of the data analysis as how some analyst interviewed by the researcher viewed the situation that how Russian policies are perceived by others. The main source of data utilized consists of interviews with individual respondents. The first section details thematic analyses and their rationale in this study. The second section includes qualitative findings on the coherence of the respondents. The researcher analyzed the data into generative themes described individually in the qualitative phase. And last part presents a discussion of the results found in the respondent narratives. The findings are results are embedded in the literature.

6.1 The Rationale for using a Qualitative Method

The main aim of this study is to get an in-depth understanding of the geopolitical interests of the US and Russia in the Middle East in the post-Arab Spring period. To obtain in-depth knowledge, the researcher utilized Geertz's (2017) concept of "thick description," which means that to get a central objective in a detailed description that

helps the interviewer conclude findings in depth. For this purpose, qualitative methods are used to get an in-depth understanding of the issue. This study applied the appropriate method for data collection in semi-structured interviews. Even though many other methods could carry out this project, this research required more openness and flexibility. Therefore, semi-structured interview pattern has been used. Respondents' knowledge about geography and personal experiences of the issue was also considered while taking interviews. It has often been considered a core difference between qualitative and quantitative methods to treat the variability. Also, this seems appropriate in incorporating subjective bias in their analysis as some theorists claim that quantitative methods tend to see variation as "noise" and contexts as "fog". Keeping given the study, a qualitative approach fits the purpose of this study well, as the analytical focus is on how the Russian presence is viewed and understood and the nature and scope of variation in the phenomenon

6.2 The Target Group and Respondents

Relevant area experts were contacted for interviews to learn about them and their experiences regarding Russian presence in the Middle East. These respondents contrast to informants who are used when you need them to give you information about a certain topic. (Holter, 1996; Kruuse, 1998) The respondents were selected from academia, journalism, research, and young scholars. The reason for approaching these respondents for data was based on the lack of information in the current literature on this research topic. The information available was not sufficient and had gaps. The interviews were conducted through emails, telephonic calls, and face to face interactions. Relevant area

experts on the Middle East are few in Pakistan, and few taken outside Pakistan. The interviewees consisted of thirty-five persons and were considered due to practical and methodological concerns.

6.3 Data Collection – Qualitative Interviews

Therefore, the interviews and the themes were completed, but their ordering varied between different interviews (Kvale, 1996; Fog, 2004). Each interview started with the basic supporting question, which helped to understand connecting factors leading to finding an answer to the central question. The first part of the question narrated the US and Russian interests in the post Arab Spring period. It included strategies, foreign policies, and on-ground status. The second part included both the US and Russian presence in geopolitical and security.

With prior permission, some interviews were cell phone recorded. Body language sometimes is crucial for understanding the meaning of an utterance by the researcher. The length of the interview lasted from 1 to 2 hours. The respondents decided if they wanted to be interviewed in Urdu or English.

6.4 Transcriptions and Note Taking

For data analyses, notes and data included interview transcriptions and notes taken during or after the interview. To ensure the transcripts represented the written text, the interviews were transcribed exact and word-for-word. After the first reading, I checked the transcriptions against the tape-recorded material and made changes if this was

necessary. Furthermore, all interviews were transcribed following the first two days after the interview. As a result, it was easier to remember the context of the statements, such as mockery and particular body language. Many scholars argue that the transformation from oral to written text represents a (re-) construction rather than a direct copy (Kvale 1996; Fog 2004).

It is noteworthy that the Middle East experts are a very small group, and many wanted to respond without declaring their actual identity. Therefore, we have kept their identities anonymous.

6.5 Data Analysis and Interpretation

This study adopted a thematic analysis method or theme-centred approach (Thagaard, 2003) or category-based analysis (Holter, 1996). Therefore, a specific theme-centred analysis called thematic analysis is being applied as Braun and Clarke (2006) described. They have provided a six-phase guide, which the researcher used in the current study (Braun & Clarke, 2006). It can be either inductive or theory-driven. (Thagaard, Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2009).

The analysis identifies the dialectical relationship between theoretical perspective and data analysis in this context. Inspired by the ambition to see what qualitative research might add to the quantitative research literature on cross-cultural adjustment, the starting point is a theoretical one. At the same time, the focus is on the respondents' understanding, and the study thus builds on principles from inductive research. And the semantic approach is also considered by Braun & Clarke (2006), that the themes identified from the "explicit or surface meanings of the data". It is quite important for

this study, where the respondents said actual data is used for the future prediction of the study. And for this sake, coding is necessary to understand its main essence better. The initial codes were inductive and deductive in this study, which originated from my theoretical understanding and the respondent. But few were done by own understanding to clarify the concept. (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Coding and re-coding were made to finalize the themes as this study follows Braun and Clarke's thematic analyses pattern for more abstracts codes to generate. And after finalizing, the main theme analysis followed to integrate codes into themes. A theme can be defined as that small information that concludes in a meaningful way to explain the codes themselves and the theme. Finally, five themes were obtained which describe the respondents' understanding of the topic.

6.6 Themes Generated from Interviews

This section discusses a narrative of the themes the researcher assembled from the data analysis to answer the central and sub-research questions. The themes were grouped into three main sections specific to the research questions.

At first, all the interviews were critically analyzed, and some major themes were identified through textual analysis. After completing the textual analysis, the researcher moved forward to identify further the factors influencing the region. The researcher explained that she is conducting research regarding the "Geopolitical interests of US and Russia in the Middle East in the post-Arab Spring Period" and is searching for relevant experts to share their opinions and experiences. The list was also attached with the interview questions in the annex.

Altogether, 12 telephonic interviews were conducted with the journalists, academicians, and eight interviews were conducted face to face. Therefore, the present analysis is based on 35 interviews.

6.7 Outcomes in Relation to Central Research Question: Discussion

The themes under Geopolitical and security factors answered the central research question that sought to explore the common experiences of the US & Russia's military presence in the Middle East and its influence on the region. In analyzing the data, the researcher found the patterns overlapping. Therefore, the data led me to combine the questions: Will the US and Russian military presence in the Middle East lead to "Balancing or Bandwagoning" given the region's geopolitical settings? To respond to the central question, the researcher also formulated sub-questions mentioned below in themes identified while outcomes concerning the research questions.

THEME 1: What are the Geopolitical and security factors that explain the US & Russia's military presence in the Middle East?

The central research question of this dissertation was asked through a careful thematic analysis (geopolitical and security factors) of the interviews with 35 respondents. The following themes emerged from the data analysis: what are geopolitical and security factors that explain the US & Russia's military presence in the Middle East? From this there are 6main themes emerged for analyses along with sub-themes:

- 1 Objective and policies of US and Russia in the Middle East Post Arab Spring Period,
2. Challenges and opportunities for Russia processes for the US regional security strategy in the Middle East and 3. Major changes in their (US & Russia) military posture and regional strategy in the Middle East post Arab Spring.

THEME 2: Will the US and Russian military presence in the Middle East lead to "Balancing or Bandwagoning" given the region's geopolitical settings?

Continuing with the connection to the central connection third theme, it originated two sub-themes—3A Russian presence in Syria and American influence in the region 5. Russian and US competition in the Middle East impacts the geostrategic environment of the Middle East. 3B Sunni-Shia display posture and US and Russia to influence in the region

Therefore, most respondent's forward more or less the same themes in their interviews on the Geopolitical interests of the US and Russia in the Middle East Post Arab Spring Period.

MAIN THEME 1: Foreign policy objectives and policies of the US and Russia in the Middle East post Arab Spring period

The themes under objectives and policies of the US and Russia in the Middle East Post Arab Spring Period answered the central research question that sought to explore the geopolitical and security factors that explain US & Russia's military presence in the

Middle East? In addition, this also explains the US and Russia's military postures pre- and post-Arab Spring concerning Syria.

SUB-THEME 1.1. Russia's military posture

Concerning Russia's foreign policy objectives in the Middle East post Arab Spring Period, the respondent expressed that Russia has no vital interest in the context of economic gains in the Middle East but primarily a military interest which will influence its power capabilities to regain back during Soviet time to be acknowledged as a great power. Russian interest in the Middle East in the military context is to safeguard its bases in the Mediterranean in Syria.

Most respondents responded that there is no vital interest except to protect its naval bases in Syria so that it can keep its influence and dominance and want to chip away American influence.

These findings are supported by other findings in the literature as well. In 1971, the Soviet Union was allowed to open its naval military base in Tartus under an agreement with President Hafez al-Asad, establishing Russian footprints today and in the future. A Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation was signed in 1980 between Syria and the Soviet Union, promising 20 years of cooperation with an extension of five years if both parties remained in an agreement which lasts till now to safeguard Russian interests in Syria. (Hadad, 2017) Thus the respondents believed Russia's posture and interest in the Middle East region are military to secure its bases.

And this is also explained by many respondents that Russia is a hard power copying the American model of an arms race and military training and presenting it as a soft power

tool as a mediator between different issues like Israel and Iran. And at the same time, maintaining relations with all countries avoiding confrontations.

In Russia's military presence in Syria, most of the respondents clarified that Russia gave a tough time to the US in Syria to safeguard its naval bases. Still, the rest of the region was highly dominated by the US. Regarding the power capabilities of Russia, they believed that, on the other hand, Russia has one Naval base in Syria's coastal city of Tartus. She does not have the resources and political clout to expand its bases there. The study also supports these views, which shows that Russia is consistently updating its military influence in Syria by establishing a new airbase. A treaty between Russia and Syria regulates the legal status of the base, signed in August 2015. At the end of 2017, Russia turned the Khmeimim base into an element of its permanent military depending stationed in Syria, showing its longer plan to stay in the Middle East (News, November 2015).

SUB THEME 1.2: Russia' Revivalist approach' in the form of normality or informal policy

In this context, most respondents viewed that the Middle East and Russian interests in the Middle East have "filled a void left by the US". As Arab Spring which had toppled down the regimes in the Middle East, "opened a window for Russia" to set up its footprint back as Putin's foreign policy wanted to regain its "empire status back", which can be said as a "revival approach" of Soviet policy and Russia present a soft posture to "rebuild" Middle East and help them in need meanwhile by "easy-going" strategy in the Middle East.

And Russian policy in the Middle East can be seen as Russia shares its policy objectives in the Middle East with the US in the post Arab spring events. That is to preserve the Sykes-Picot agreement in the region that the victors of World War 1 imposed," and the secondary goal is to ensure that OPEC does not become a threat to its energy interests.

But this factor is independent of Arab Spring.

These views are also discussed in the literature, which talks about the Russian revivalist approach, which keeps changing according to the situation. For example, from 2011-to 2012 was, the vigilant return of Russia to the Middle East. Russia's economic interests were present before the Arab Spring. The post-Arab Spring developments paved the way for Russia to expand its military footprint in the region. Yet, Russia used ground to expand and be involved in the area's regional affairs. During this time, there was an intense situation while establishing its relations with the states in the region; therefore, Russia tried to refrain from its involvement in the domestic affairs of the Middle East and played the role of the neutral state in the ongoing conflicts.

Nevertheless, this period brought Iran and Russian relations to a new level and created the foundation for a political dialogue with Egypt. Though Russia was in favour of establishing its ties with the states that had already good relations with Russia at the start of this period, it later revised its policy. It broadened its access to all those countries that had difficulty with Russia by developing constructive dialogue (Ibid).

1. SUB THEME 1.3: US' informal policy or alliances' in the Middle East

According to the theme it suggested about the Change in US policy, a few respondents discussed that during Arab Spring, Americans appreciated Arab Spring due to the threat

of Islamist takeover that has ended Arab Spring (regime change) and ended up accepting traditional allies. In addition, and connection to these, it also discussed the difference between Obama's and Trump's foreign policy; the respondent identified the difference that Obama's policy was re-drawing of Middle East and promoting a wider Middle East policy. And other respondents mentioned that the Obama era was considered normality in the foreign policy of the US towards the Middle East, as Obama had a weak policy and which opened a way for Russia to enter the Middle East, which can be analyzed when Obama policy was of disengagement of its troops in 2012 soon after the withdrawal of forces from Iraq.

Concerning Trump's foreign policy objectives in the Middle East Post Arab Spring, few respondents believe that under the Trump administration, the US wants to maintain its influence in the region without paying trillions as the US is the sole superpower; Trump Administration giving aid very little but still hold strong footprints in the Middle East because of its hegemonic role. And more precisely, Trump's policy is unclear and keeps changing more observing based rather than action-based. Furthermore, it added that the US change of policy during Arab Spring from an unfavored regime changed to accepting traditional allies such as all Royals were a strong ally of US which it didn't want to lose as if democracy will come it will lose all traditional allies which serve US interests in the context of Iran strategic interests collide as the US thought if democracy comes, it may be more in favour of Iran.

Thus the literature also supports the narrative as mentioned above in previous chapters, as the strategy of Russia had different elements in the region. Russia tried to establish

its relations with all regional players by using a more rational approach. In the start, the strategy of balancing these relations was not effective. Still, it had managed to convince the other partners of the Middle East to cooperate in those fields where they could enjoy agreements rather than disagreements. In the Middle East, Russia appeared as a neutral candidate as a mediator for the states like Syria, Saudi Arabia, Israel, Iran, Egypt and Iran. The important element was the flexibility of Russian dialogue in this region (Kozhanov, 2018).

SUB THEME 1.4: The US 'Deliberate Policy'

The study also highlights that the US broader policy in the Middle East post-Arab Spring period was deliberate; therefore, the majority of respondents explained that the US established its look in a different way called a deliberate policy that the 'Era of democracy is over and we are moving from the Middle East, and Trump approach is to replace the US from the Middle East and intentionally gave space to Russia to fill a void. Furthermore, it explained that the US foreign policy in the Middle East is more or less is oil reserve control, Israel's security to be ensured and unity among the Muslim world's rising economies already being destroyed by the US, such as Iraq and Libya.

While discussing non-state actors and the US policy in the Middle East, the respondent specified that we formulated ISIS. To preserve US interests, it initiated Turkey's border civil war. Still, later ISIS went out of control by the US and to control them, Kurds were used against them, and later the US withdrew from there. In addition to US strategy in the Middle East, the respondent stated that the US aims to preserve the Sykes-Picot

agreement in the region. Its strategy has undermined the Arab Spring uprising by replacing its Islamic character with a more secular outlook. So that the uprisings are controllable even if some leaders may fall while the replacements should carry the same thoughts as US ones.

With the context as mentioned above, US foreign policy in the Middle East Post Arab Spring, the literature also reinforced that US acts on the situation which keeps changing as Neo-Realism also gave space to normality according to a situation rather of formulating or 'consistent strategy long term strategy' (Lecha, 2017) which was obvious, from a US declaration of withdrawing ground troops from Syria.

SUB THEME 1.5: US military posture post Arab Spring

By discussing with the respondents on US military posture post Arab Spring they see the sudden appearance of Russia in the Middle East as the US military posture largely remains unchanged in the Middle East. Its bases in Qatar, Oman, Iraq, Turkey, Saudi Arabia and the Mediterranean provide a strong base to project power and influence in the Middle East. The US is not contemplating any substantial change to its military posture post Arab spring because it has the required bases and political support from regimes to undermine people's uprising.

Also, most of the respondents believe that with US military capabilities compared to Russia, there is no question of 'balancing' between the US and Russia in the Middle East. Because balancing is done between two equal powers. US influence in the region is unmatched against Russia. So, Russia will bandwagon US as and when required by

US or Russia. It has shown Russia, along with the small countries Syria, Iran, Turkey and others, trying to balance the geopolitical settings as these small states are trying to join Russia, which is less in power than the US balance the region.

MAIN THEME 2: the US— Russia, and other powers in the Middle East

As literature also supported this argument that other major player's presence, including former fixed allies in the Middle East, are presents which are also expressed by the majority of respondents that the US and its allies will go along as superpowers will never allow their allies to join other blocks at any cost, but with the current context every country is securing own interest in the Middle East but depends on Russia if its influence increases in the region then power politics will increase. And concerning the US involvement in the Middle East concerning Arab Spring, the respondent explained that the goal of the US in the Middle East is security and survival and maintaining the strength of Israel that was the major U.S focus during Arab Spring and couldn't emphasise much on Arab Spring.

Additionally, Russia's present situation in the Middle East was also the main concern. The respondents observed that Russia behaving as a changing informal alliance' in the Middle East that there is no Russian Alliance in the Middle East. She knows her limitations in the region. The outreach of regional countries to Russia is not equal to an alliance. It is infecting US policy of seducing Russia by activating its instruments. The regimes in the region have either European orientation or American because of the history of these puppet regimes. In Russia and other major power relations, the respondent believes that by keeping regional hegemony aside, Russia cooperates with

China and Iran despite ignoring Iran-US sanctions as Iran's interests also assert influence, including Saudi Arabia in the Middle East.

These explanations were also supported in literature that, on the other hand, there were several motivations for Russia. First, the important part of its strategy was to develop its relations with the states of the Middle East with whom it had intense relations so it could avoid its complete isolation created by the rising tensions with the West. For example, Moscow ensured the neutral position of Israel over the Russian- Ukrainian dispute through its dialogue with Tel Aviv and promised to guarantee that the issue of the Iranian nuclear program would be settled in a way that no threat would be left to Israel. Second, Kremlin was also concerned about those forces that were painting Russia's image as is big threat and enemy of Islam and Islamic states, which could also provoke the political groups within OIC and LAS, which later would establish their ties with radical Islamists in Central Asia and the Caucasus. Therefore, Russia tried its best to develop its engagement over the common interest to demonstrate that Russia has maintained to state that it is not their enemy or the enemy of the Muslim world. Furthermore, through dialogue and negotiations, it has expressed its support for a peaceful solution to the Palestine-Israel conflict. Third, the foregoing interests revealed that, compared to the United States and the European Union, Russia played a significant role in resolving regional problems, with various crises providing opportunities for Russia to do so. However, since 2012, Russia has made significant efforts to facilitate a constructive dialogue between Iran and the West on the nuclear programme, which persuaded the West to admit the position of Russia in this region. Yet, the role of

Moscow was seen by some US analysts in the Iranian nuclear plan, which guaranteed the success of this process. However, Qatar and Saudi Arabia, which are opponents of Syria, also appreciated the red line of Russia and its defending strategy (Kozhanov, 2018).

SUB THEME: 2.1 Geopolitical factor- changing dynamic of the Middle East

As post Arab Spring Period led to Russia's presence in the Middle East obvious, which can be understood in Syria; many see it as a changing dynamic in the Middle East, but the respondent sees that if Russia adopted the same policy as it followed in Syria which gave a tough time to the US initially, then there might be a chance of a New Cold War but if regional power asserts then the American hegemony can be counter, but this is not currently visible or changing dynamics of Middle East. Furthermore, if power balance prevails in the Middle East, direct conflict is rare, but proxies have more opportunities to conflict for superpower interests are conflicting.

For instance, a far regional dynamic which is also being concerned due to the Russian presence, the respondent explained that the regional powers are bandwagoning with Russia and US, but in the case of the Syrian conflict, Iran, Iraq, Jordan, Turkey all are safeguarding their interests, such as Turkey case he is a strong member of NATO but went against to safeguard their national interest.

These arguments were also supported in the literature that Russia prominently increased its engagement from early 2005 in the Middle East. And in the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), Russia gained observer status soon after it visited multiple countries, the United Arab Emirates, Israel, Jordan, Qatar, Turkey, Iran and Egypt, as it was regarded as a vibrant step as at the same time maintaining relations with Israel and other rivals build a significant change in Russian policy.

And more or less, its policy described toward the Middle East is secular –non-ideological and has a fair relation with all the countries in the region (James Sladden "et al. 1, 2017)

MAIN THEME 3: US and Russia challenges and opportunities: A case study of Syria (Russian presence in Syria and American influence in the region)

Regarding Russian presence, which can't be measured by challenging the US, as discussed by the respondent, even if Russia uses all resources for its power projection, it still can't match USA power capabilities. Moreover, it will take years to have a power balance as the US has already established its footprint since long.

But from, the Trump administration sees Russian presence in the Middle East as keeping aside challenges the US can face; the respondent believes that the US ignored Russian presence earlier in Syria, which has opened the ways for Russia to enter in Gulf countries (GCC) countries, as the US thought Russian presence would not change the equilibrium. Also, the US sees that Russian manifestation hypothetical cannot be taken as a challenge to US presence in the Middle East; this further added that even not a

single country in the Middle East is reluctant to have its relations with the US if America wants to negotiate with Assad than all will come running.

It indicates that rivalries and alliances are based on interests in the Middle as a study shows that Russian neutral and informal alliances depicted positive behaviour. By the following normality, it has developed a good relation with regional and external players but challenged US regional dominance in the case of Syria and the US yet looking for an opportunity to intervene as it's already doing where it needed.

Russia's presence in the Middle East is perceived as more self-centred than benefiting others. The interviewer states that the Russian engagement in Syria and the region is not development centric.

In terms of Russia's interest in Syria, it is mentioned that Russia aims to preserve the current regime in Syria, but its main theatre of activities is in Syria, where it has teamed up with the US to preserve the Assad regime.

Thus, these views are also supported in the literature that the US sees the Russian presence in the region primarily in Syria to safeguard its interest rather than the region's development. Therefore, Russia saw itself as the major player in the Middle East. However, Russia's economic and financial capabilities could not match with the US as there is a decrease in the economic activities of Russia but primarily more military-led activities. For instance, the failure of investment agreements between Russia and Iran and the result of it was seen when the trade volume fell by 30 per cent annually between 2011- 2014, and by 2016 it fell from \$3.8 billion to \$1.3 billion (Kozhanov, 2018) as discussed in US chapters.

SUB THEME: 3.1 U.S perspective on Russian presence.

Initially, the respondent perceived the Russian presence in Syria as the Russian entry into Syria is intensified and became an international conflict directed toward power politics and looking for alliances. But the US sees Russian presence as not as challenging as the USA co-existing with Russia's involvement in the Middle East, not containing it like in the Cold War era. Further added that the US enjoys more deep influence in the Middle East than Russia. So there is not much of a challenge that Russia can pose against the US because its levers of influence are much weaker as American influence is unmatchable in the Middle East. Moreover, she has several bases in the region to operate while the Russian presence is very weak in the region. Thus, its influence could have also diminished if the US had regained more influence.

The US relations with other countries would impact the geostrategic environment of the Middle East or not. While discussing, a few respondents explained that during the Obama period, US relations with Israel and other Middle Eastern countries were getting closer and were in initial steps, but on the contrary, under the Trump administration, relations are stronger than before. On the other hand, the Russian presence is perceived differently. It depicted that Russia wants to play other hidden interests (trade, gas) as a bargaining chip on the table and does not want to fully challenge the US in the Middle East.

As far as Russian involvement in the context of power capabilities was discussed, respondents believe that the Russian presence in the Middle East was not strong enough even pre-and-post-9/11 era, as the Middle East was a playground for American strategic dominance. And also explained in terms of opportunities, one can observe that the US

cooperated to preserve Assad Regime in Syria with Russia as its military assistance has been vital for Assad to survive. The US has offered no resistance to Russian interference. There are joint military agreements between US and Russia in Syria that signifies cooperation. And they see as there is no U.S-Russia competition in the Middle East. The US is a predominant power in the region, and the Russian role therein is under US approval.

But the study shows in the literature that Russian presence has changed geopolitical settings as many players got a chance to enter the Middle East through their informal alliance, which safeguarded their mutual interests, such as Iran (Ibid).

Sub Theme. 3.2 Sunni-Shia Posture, U.S and Russia to Influence in the Region.

It's perceived as a sectarian rivalry in the Middle East. However, a few respondents said that the sectarian issue is not working in reality. If we see Iran, it should have to support Syria as it is a Shia majority country, but it safeguards its interest in fighting for supremacy. Furthermore, if we see all countries in the Middle East, such as Bahrain, with 65 per cent Shia and the rest are Sunni similar of Yemen's majority are Shia. Still, in the past, Saudi Arabia supported the regime in Yemen. Even Saudi Arabia supports its own Shia majority lives near the border connecting to Yemen. In contrast, Iran supports Shia in Iraq to have supported her being a Shia majority country in the Middle East, but now, its involvement is weak due to the US influence.

Concerning how the US viewed these sectarian issues in the Middle East, most respondents stated further that the US is not worried about Iranian movements in the region because rhetoric aside, practically, Iran has helped America stabilize Iraq and Afghanistan. Iraq, more so. The US uses Iranian threaten (Shia Crescent) to keep Sunni Gulf countries in check and within its orbit. Not only the Gulf, but it also keeps Israelis in check and dependent upon American military aid. Beyond Rhetoric, Iran has never actually threatened US interests in the region. And it's the US that manipulates sectarian politics in the region to advance its interests. Russia has no role in that. The US uses the sectarian card to isolate Iran in the region, support Israeli mainstreaming in the region and execute profitable arms sales to Gulf countries.

Thus the literature also narrated that both Iran and Saudi block have their regional influence interests to maintain in the regional and where both Russia and US manipulate these by sectarian cards, their involvement is no more than to achieve their interests by any means.

6.8 Conclusion

Although Russia has played a significant role in balancing geopolitical settings of the Middle East, keeping in view her presence in Syria; however, it takes a considerable time to directly affect the US hegemonic goals because it has yet to settle its footprints in the Middle East. Russia's presence currently in the Middle East is like a neutral actor, not that of a confrontationist. It thrives on building informal alliances, which keep changing according to the situation. The most important policy change was the actual

change of relations between Russia and the US that will affect the stance of Russia regarding the Middle East.

Due to Russian informal alliances in the Middle East, including its strong presence in Syria, strengthening military bases, re-aproachment with Iran simultaneously, and strengthening ties with Israel and Egypt, she maintained relations with GCC countries. She got a positive response from the weak states to align with. Thus, Russia's policies in the Middle East affect the geopolitical settings of the Middle East as its policies keep changing and forging informal alliances and moving with the pace of time, which is also seen similar to the US as it observes Russian moves in the Middle East. While analyzing Russia's presence in the Middle East, we cannot ignore the US' long-standing position in the region, but as Russia is not directly challenging the US dominance and it keeps avoiding confrontation with the US and other players in the region; it will be upsetting for the US to take any direct action against Russia. The US presence and dominance can be seen in the whole region except Syria. At the same time, Russia's presence has a hold-in Syria only. Russia's strategy on a broader aspect plays a vital role in the informal alliance, which will help for a greater influence, including dialogue with the US. Russia's standing in the Middle East provides small states with an opportunity to balance Russia against the threat. The study also finds that Russia is currently focusing more on enhancing its influence to regain its power like in the past. The study also finds that Russia used ground to expand and get involved in the internal affairs of the regional powers. During this time, there was an intense situation while establishing its relations with the states in the region. Russia tried to refrain from its involvement in the domestic affairs of the Middle East and played the role of a neutral

state in the ongoing conflicts. During the earlier phase of post Arab Spring period, Russia was in favour of establishing its ties with the states which had already good relations with Russia, but later it revised its policy and broadened its access to all those countries which had difficulty with Russia by developing constructive dialogue.

Regarding Russia vital part of its strategy was to develop its relations with the states of the Middle East with whom it had intense relations so it could avoid its complete isolation, which was created by the rising tensions with the West. For example, Moscow ensured the neutral position of Israel through its conversation with Tel Aviv over the Russian-Ukraine problem and committed to ensuring that the issue of Iran's nuclear programme would be resolved in such a way that no threat would be threatened have remained for Israel. This study also found that Russia tried its best to develop its engagement over the common interests to demonstrate that Russia is not an enemy of the Muslim world and continued backing the solution of the Palestine-Israel conflict through peaceful settlement and dialogues. Thus, Russia acts like flowing water that flows and shapes according to the situation. The change in Russia's policy was also due to domestic circumstances such as economic and political losses and the fall of Moscow's friendly regimes, which shows the domestic political behaviour was also in favour of changes in the Russian policy towards the Middle East.

Another reason which worsened the situation was the low prices of oil and international sanctions by America and its allies which influenced its role in the Middle East. Yet, it will create difficulties for the energy companies of Russia and later, it would limit the long term projects in the region.

Due to the consistently changing policies of both the US and Russia, it would be premature to say anything about the challenge that Russia and US have in dominating the region. The study also finds that Russia's involvement in the region is more militarily and security-oriented. Most of the time, Russia avoids ground operations, but they get air support from their local allies in military advice, technical support, and intelligence as Russia uses Syrian forces to work on the ground by providing them with weapons and arms facilities. The further study explored that communication channels have opened for all parties in the Middle East due to informal alliances. They have no permanent friends and foes in this region, and their adversaries and friends change over time. And it's considered that 'Better attack the bad guy in its nest than be a sitting duck for it', so the Syrian operation is a down payment of Russia for any future engagement. These are the observations that Kremlin has learned through its involvement in the Syrian war and how it paves the way for further engagement in other regions. (Trenin, 2019). The Russian involvement in Syria has set the ground for Russia how to act in other parts of the region. The study also finds that, consequently, the policy of Russia has further undergone another transformation, and since 2016, it has become more preemptive rather than reactive.

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION

Due to long ongoing conflicts, the contemporary Middle East is in the grip of political chaos, failed states, popular revolts, religious extremism, foreign rivalries, inter-state conflicts, and military interventions. This research has shown that most European powers attempt to control their natural resources and compete for colonization of the Middle East. This trend has been on since the early nineteenth century due to its geostrategic location. For almost two centuries in the Middle East, regional and superpowers have competed for territorial influence and control. The situation stays the same even in the post Arab Spring period. This has led to civil and regional wars leaving the area plundered, tumbledown, social systems collapsed and brutalized, and people compelled to migrate. Conditions of despair prevail, and extremist groups thrive. Rivals' struggle for self-preservation and alliances led Russia to fill a void and available options to forge relations.

The geostrategic location plays an extensive role in political dynamics after the Russian presence, which has attracted external powers to engage in the Middle East to mobilize their resource to influence the post-uprising era (Dina Rashed, 2019). Russia and Middle East countries' historical relations can be seen during the Cold War was more on power block fronts. It is quite interesting that they did not have any historical enmity.

But their relations always faced challenges due to different factors in different periods and had cold and warm relations in every era.

Since the disintegration of the Soviet Union and the post-Cold War era, Russia's role and involvement in the Middle East was minimal, and the US being a sole power, played a vital role in the Middle East. And the Middle Eastern countries were inclined toward the US. But during this era, their relations were based on diplomatic formalities and no significant development was seen.

The US presence was further enhanced soon after the 9/11 incident. In this context, the Russian motivation for an active engagement in the Middle East was almost unknown in the pre- Arab Spring period. The relations between the US and Russia were confrontational. In 2002, Russia criticized the US over its Iraq policies, even though it criticized her at various international forums like the United Nations (UN). The Russians extended political support to Saddam Hussein during Iraq War, but the US showed its long footing and killed Saddam, and Russia sidelined to avoid direct military confrontation.

The Arab Spring turned out to be a game-changer. It brought back Russia once again in the territory of the Middle East, especially in Syria, which has near to balancing the geopolitical settings of the Middle East. This study shows that Russia maintains balancing relations equally with the pro-US countries and anti-US states (Iran, Iraq, Syria, Israel, Saudi Arabia). Russia forges relations with these countries to avoid confrontation with the US. For example, Russia's relations with Saudi Arabia and UAE are crucial from an economic and security perspective in the Middle East. This study also shows that the US presence is still evident and stronger in the Middle East, and the

growing involvement of Russia has also concerned the US occasionally. The US respond to it when it feels threatened. Thus, there is a possibility to bring back the US into the picture if the situation is against the US's greater interests that Russia is managing with a balancing approach in the Middle East. The Russian presence could be best understood through her present nature of engagement. Thus, the beginning of the Arab Spring has inaugurated a new approach into action as it allowed Russia to step into the Middle East. The Russian approach is considered more pragmatic as it comprehends the regional balance of power change.

The Russian presence in the Middle East is currently mainly more on balancing relations with the Arab Gulf States will also help Russia overcome western sanctions and enable her to meet energy needs. The presence of external powers (Turkey and Iran) enabled Russia to access ports, naval, and air bases through agreements (both secret and open). This study also shows that Russia is now seeking bases outside Syria, and due to her cordial relations with Iran, it has access to the Hamedan airbase in Iran. Thus, the projection of power and influence enabled Russia to show military power through arms sales in the Middle East while cutting NATO's access to the Black Sea. The Russian domestic engagements and her greater Middle East plan could be analyzed by the use of all instruments of power, diplomacy, information, arms sales, energy deals, direct force, and the continued exploitation of every ethnic and religious cleavage that served the Russian purpose of her presence in broader geostrategic terms. This helps to understand that Russia has come back as a great power in world affairs. Also, her presence could be seen either to exploit or create regional crises or to mediate the

conflict in the Middle East in a broader strategy. Though Russia's pragmatic approach is moving to discover new areas of interest to create a new sphere of influence, neorealists also believed that states are rational actors, making comprehensive policies and strategies for their survival.

Regarding Russia's foreign policy goals in the Middle East following the Arab Spring, the study find out that Russia has primarily a military interest that will influence its power capabilities to reclaim back during Soviet time to be recognised as a great power. Russia has no vital interest in the context of economic gains in the Middle East. In a military sense, Russia is interested in the Middle East to protect its Syrian bases along the Mediterranean Sea.

Other findings in the literature also lend support to these conclusions. A deal with President Hafez al-Asad in 1971 permitted the Soviet Union to open its naval military facility in Tartus, leaving Russian footprints for the present and the future. In an effort to protect Russian interests in Syria, Syria and the Soviet Union signed a Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation in 1980 that pledged 20 years of cooperation with an option for a further five years if both parties continued to be in agreement. This agreement has remained in effect to this day. (Hadad, 2017) So, according to the responses, Russia is interested in the Middle East and has a military strategy in place to protect its bases there.

The study also finds that Syria has no other critical interests save defending its naval bases there in order to maintain its influence and supremacy and erode American influence. Additionally, several respondents noted that Russia is a hard power that mimics the American model of an arms race and military training while also portraying

itself as a soft power tool that can mediate between various concerns, such as Israel and Iran. Keeping good relations with all nations while avoiding conflict is also important. Regarding Russia's military involvement in Syria, the majority of respondents made it clear that Russia made it difficult for the US to protect its naval ports in Syria. However, the US dominated the remainder of the region to a great extent. Regarding Russia's military prowess, they held the opinion that the country only possesses one naval facility, which is located in Tartus, a seaside city in Syria. She lacks the financial and political strength to increase its bases there.

These opinions are also supported by the study, which demonstrates that by constructing a new airbase, Russia continuously updates its military presence in Syria. The base's legal status is governed by a pact that Russia and Syria signed in August 2015. At the conclusion of 2017, Russia made the Khmeimim base a permanent military installation stationed in

The Russian presence in Syria will remain on her political agenda in the coming years as it serves to achieve her regional dominance, but to stay relevant, Russia will look for more new ways in the region. As in Syria, Russian permanent military bases play a more balancing role in the geopolitical settings in the Mediterranean by stationing there and deploying air-defence capabilities to Syria, which depicted her long term presence in the region. It seems more challenging in the future if Russia expands its presence into the Alliances' naval underbelly in the Mediterranean Sea, which Russia seems to expand its military and naval presence in the Red Sea. The Russian future goals and

strategy are framed on other regional players' circumstances, actions, and reactions, including the US. As Russia is economically weak compared to the US, to stay relevant, Russia has to balance her relations with pro-US regimes and at the same time with anti-US regimes, which will serve her longer presence in the region. Thus, the Russian presence in Syria turned to preserved that it had a carte blanche in the region. A multipolar system is prevailing in the Middle East. There are more than two major alliances, including the US, Russia and other regional powers. The parameters of shifting alliance countries do not choose alliance partners based on political or ideological lines but balance. Balancing reduces the possibility of war in the short run, but it cannot prevent war forever. (Thomas Richard Bendel, 1994)

The Middle East in future seems to be more in turmoil and will remain a hub of western and regional power political alliances. Each state will forge relations based on its interests, leading to forming blocs. This approach will be adopted to avoid confrontation, which will lead to balancing in the geopolitical settings of the Middle East. Moreover, these powers will have more intervention in aiding or militarizing armed groups to serve their interests, and less political stability is evitable due to growing interference in political matters.

Therefore, it was also clarified from a separate study that the Russian role will be like leading and influencer as a balancer more of seeking new engagements, advancing military and economic cooperation, as a guarantor of the regional environment by adopting a neutral approach but based on circumstances viz a viz to the US. History has taught us that whenever the US announced any incentive or resolution of the current

crises in the Middle East, many joined the US alliance and left Russia. This trend seems to prevail in future as well.

Consequently, this study shows that Russia's slow and steady policy is directing her longer stay in the Middle East to safeguard her interests and reemerge as a global power influencer. As geopolitical and geo-economics transactions occur throughout the Middle East, Russia's relentless drive south is now ever presented and improved unless it directly threatens the region's US interests.

This dissertation also concluded that Russia should not ignore US involvement and its challenges. Russia achieved success in Syria and brought a strategic strength that led to a long term strategy in the Middle East. However, Russia should make some critical policy choices to stay more relevant and strengthen to rebuild its status as a power in the region, which has already served through her presence in Syria as one of the aspects includes arms deals that have the potential to adhesive involvement of Russia and shaped the relation between Russia and other regional actors.

In more general terms, this study showed that Russia sees the United States as being largely focused on maintaining its global dominance as others are increasingly challenging it. At the same time, America is silently observing Russia's influence and presence in the Middle East, but it does not seek to replace the United States, for example, as an ally to Israel or the Gulf states, both of the scarcity of resources and the lack of superpower ambitions.

This research would benefit from further research to explore more engagement of international players with regional actors. Furthermore, this study would be helpful for researchers, academicians, and policymakers to understand the current status of Russia

in the Middle East and its interests in the region. Furthermore, this research will open future research on US and Russia's geopolitical interest in the Middle East post Arab till the US withdrawal from the region and development.

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Appendix I

List of Respondents

Mr. Abdus Sabur	IR Expert
Mr. Ahmed Qureshi	Journalist, Expert on the Middle East
Dr. Amna Mehmood	Assoc. Professor IIUI
Mr. Azhar Khan	Lecturer and IR Expert
Mr. Majid Mehmood	Researcher and Expert on the Middle East
Mr. Masood Khattak	Lecturer and IR Expert
Dr. Manzoor Khan Afridi	Assoc. Prof and IR Expert IIUI
Mr. Nickholoas Ferriman	Lecturer and Expert on the Middle East
Mr. Naveed Ahmed	International Journalist and Expert on the Middle East
Dr. Qandeel Abbas	Assoc. Professor, QAU and Expert on the Middle East
Ms. Maryam Iftekhar	Researcher

Appendix II

Interview Questionnaire

Personal profile

Name:

Designation:

Experience/field:

Organization:

Questions:

- Q1. What are the objectives, interests and policies of Russia in Middle East post Arab Spring period? (BRIEF AND GENERAL-foreign policy)
- Q2. What are the objectives, interests and policies of U.S in Middle East post Arab Spring period? (Foreign policy)
- Q3. What are the challenges and opportunities the Russia processes for U.S regional security strategy in Middle East?
- Q4. What are the major changes in their (U.S & Russia) military posture and regional strategy in the Middle East post Arab Spring? (US: Obama period ii Post Obama)
- Q5. How you foresee Russian presence in Syria and American influence in the region?
- Q6. Is Russian involvement in Syria served a connecting bridge that interests other major players in the ME?
- Q7. Will Russian and U.S competition in Middle East impact geo-strategic environment of Middle East?
- Q8. Is Sunni-Shia conflict play an effective role in Syria for U.S and Russia to safeguard their interest in the region?

CENTRAL QUESTION

- Q8. (A) What are geopolitical and security factors that explain U.S & Russia military presence in Middle East?
- (b). Will the U.S and Russian military presence in Middle East lead to “Balancing or Bandwagoning” given the region geopolitical settings?
(When faced with a security threat, states will join forces with each other to contain the threat **balancing**. While **bandwagoning**, when states join forces with the threat, mainly to increase their own power bandwagoning)

