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# **Soviet and Contemporary Russian Foreign Policy Comparative Perspective**

**Analyzed Through Three Case-Studies: Egypt, Syria, and Iran**

**Simon Tsipis**

# **Soviet and Contemporary Russian Foreign Policy Comparative Perspective**

**Analyzed Through Three Case-Studies: Egypt, Syria, and Iran**

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## INTRODUCTION

Academics, policy analysts and politicians try to understand the sources of contemporary Russia's conduct in foreign affairs, especially since Russia's military intervention in Ukraine, in Syria and Libya. What drivers determine the Russian conduct, is there a code of conduct that makes Russia's behavior more predictable? Do material and political structures inform the processing of interests, are legacies of the Soviet past or systematic imperatives of international relations at work? What is the explanatory power of conventional theories in International Relations for understanding interest formation and behavioral patterns? Three lines of comparison will be conducted – a comparison of the Soviet and post-Soviet Russian eras, a comparison of three country cases and a comparison of theoretical approaches. The study builds upon research, which has been conducted on the Soviet and Russian policy towards the Middle East, especially over the last five decades. It discusses the assumptions and validity of explanations and proposes which claims pass the test of time, and which have to be revised.

The purpose of the study is not primarily to produce new empirical material, but to assess the explanatory reach of interpretations, to assess the coherence of arguments and the extent of their corroboration by empirical evidence. The study does not intend to historically reconstruct the Soviet and Russian conduct in empirical detail, but to elicit shaping forces of policy formation. It is a study on foreign policy by the Soviet and Russian state, not on relationships, i.e. the interaction with and reaction by their Arab counterparts. It neither deals with the international relations per se, i.e. the patterns of actor's interplay or structures or political power configurations in the Middle East. To put it simply, the goal was to explain "how the Russian decision-makers tick."

The structure of the study may seem unusual at first glance; it follows the main purpose: testing the explanatory reach of conventional approaches. The chapters thus introduce the key propositions made by preeminent IR scholars in the field and subsequently discuss their coherence and validity and contextualize their explanatory



power. Theories are not innocent, but shape perceptions – both of epistemic communities, of the public and political decision-makers. The Soviet and Russian policy-making cannot just be analyzed through the application of paradigms, but it is itself deeply informed by prevailing paradigms. The object under study is thus influenced by the paradigms of the observers. As we will show, the actors enact paradigms, following, roughly speaking, “realist” or “constructivist” frames themselves. The academic study of Soviet and Russian foreign policy is thus interwoven with the framing by the actors themselves – mutually reinforcing feedback loops emerge. The object under study displays intentions in action which are shaped by self-images and world views. The Soviet behavior can thus be studied with “realist” terms, while it is in itself shaped by “realist” assumptions.

To distinct between the observer’s perspective and the perspective of the observed has been a challenging task. Do scholars construct the object of study or does the object of study - the actors - adopt and enact constructions by scholars, re-confirming thus scholarly paradigms? The author of this dissertation is well aware of the “ecological fallacy” problem involved – inferences about the nature of the Soviet or Russian conduct deduced from inferences about the “group” of actors in general (“the Communists”, “the Bolsheviks”, “the Soviets”, “the realists”, “the imperialists”, “the superpowers”) to which they belong. The attempted solution has been to scrutinize whether the actors under study provide evidence for the enactment of paradigms themselves.

What are the main similarities and distinctions in Russian foreign policy conduct before and after the dissolution of the Soviet Union? This question will be addressed through comparative analysis between the Soviet and contemporary Russian foreign policy towards three case-studies – Egypt, Iran, and Syria. Our study is aimed to compare the foreign policies of the Soviet Union with contemporary Russia in order to detect policy features and behavioral patterns and to validate or re-assess, through empirical analysis, theoretical assumptions about foreign policy sources of conduct and to identify similarities and distinctions between the two periods and political regimes. This analysis contributes

to a more comprehensive understanding of how the change of regime in Russia influenced its foreign policy in the Middle East.

The Middle East is a region of vast significance. It has been inhabited as early as in ancient times. The area has a long-standing strategic and economic significance along with being the cradle of the world's most ancient monotheistic religions. Various ancient empires and modern superpowers sought to conquer the Middle East, led by hegemonic ambitions, while the means they have been utilizing varied in their extremity. The Soviet policy in the Middle East over the years has been motivated by a mixture of considerations, including strategic, geopolitical, economic, and ideological ones. Presence in and control over Middle East political affairs was sought in order to maintain superpower prestige and status. In addition, the Middle East, became an arena for Cold War confrontation between the Soviet Union and the United States. Although the Soviet motives in the Middle East were similar to those of any other previous and present superpowers, the Soviet perception of its role in the region was infused with the conviction that the Soviet Union is a Middle Eastern state by right of history and geography, with an unchallengeable claim to a voice in regional affairs.<sup>1</sup>

The collapse of the Soviet Union and the disappearance of its structural role as a decisive power in the Middle East was definitely one of the most crucial events of the twentieth century. Yet, the Soviet military bloc, the Socialist system in Eastern Europe and the Soviet allies' political camp in the Middle East, Africa and South America left their political and strategic imprint beyond the existence of the Soviet Union. On the background of Soviet past conduct, contemporary Russia's foreign policy in the Middle East, recently expressed in its unprecedented military and political intervention in Syrian civil war in 2014, continue to rise many questions.

During the Cold War, the Soviets played a vital role in the Middle East, especially between the 1950s and the 1970s. Several scholars agree that a recognition of the role

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<sup>1</sup>SAS, S.N., 1990. *Gorbachev's new International outlook and the Eastern Mediterranean*. 91-12308. Air University. United States Air Force. Maxwell Air Force base. Alabama: Air Force College.

of external powers, accurately analyzed, can provide the basis for a more measured account of the current affairs in the region.<sup>2</sup> The Soviet Union willingly offered diplomatic, economic, and military assistance to the Arab states and many Arab leaders demonstrated their readiness to establish political, military, commercial, financial and cultural relations with the Soviet Union.

Communism, as a doctrine and a system of social economic organization, had won some support in the Arab society.<sup>3</sup> An often-overlooked factor is the geographical proximity between the USSR and the Middle East. Yet, even the leaders who pioneered an orientation towards the Soviet Union, including Gamal Abd Al-Nasser, the Ba'athists, and other Arab nationalists, were not particularly sympathetic to communism, and some were indeed fierce anti-communists. The Soviets tolerated the repression of their comrade Arab communists, which leads us to conclude that Soviet ends in the Middle East were more extensive than merely ideological and doctrinal. For all the differences in outlook and policy between Ba'athists and the Soviet Union, these two regimes maintained close collaboration since the mid-1950s.<sup>4</sup> The Arab states saw the USSR as a counterweight to the traditional imperial powers, Britain and France, and the new actor which was to replace these powers, the United States.<sup>5</sup> Indeed, Soviet decisive and extensive support to such Arab nations as Syria and Egypt in their local conflicts proved to be essential for those regional actors and was capable to alter regional affairs.<sup>6</sup> However, what were the sources of such behavior from the Soviet perspective?

From a geopolitical point of view, the strategic importance of the Middle East to the USSR arises from the region's proximity to Soviet borders and to its function as a land bridge, linking the European, African and Asian continents.<sup>7</sup> Central Asia and Trans-Caucasus were seen by the Soviets and continue to be seen by contemporary Russia as

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<sup>2</sup> AKDER, G.D., 2013. Theories of Revolutions and Arab Uprisings: The Lessons from the Middle East. *Ortadoğu Etütleri*, 4(2), pp. 85-86-110.

<sup>3</sup> SAYEGH, F., 1959. Arab Nationalism and Soviet-American Relations. *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 324, pp. 103-110.

<sup>4</sup> HALLIDAY, F., 1987. Gorbachev and the "Arab syndrome" : Soviet policy in the Middle East. *World policy journal.*, 43, pp. 415-442.

<sup>5</sup> KHALIDI, R., 1985. Arab views of the Soviet role in the Middle East. *Middle East journal.*, 394, pp. 716-732., 717

<sup>6</sup> Ibid. 717

<sup>7</sup> SAS, S.N., 1990. *Gorbachev's new International outlook and the Eastern Mediterranean*. 91-12308. Air University. United States Air Force. Maxwell Air Force base. Alabama: Air Force College.

the Russia's "soft underbelly".<sup>8</sup> In addition, the region contains vast reserves of world's petroleum and vital maritime routes through which these reserves are transported.<sup>9</sup> Besides, the warm waters of the Mediterranean, the exit for the Russia's Black Sea fleet, and access to both the Atlantic and the Indian oceans lie through the Mediterranean.

The Soviet foreign policy in the Middle East was not always unambiguous. Certain schools of thought on Soviet foreign policy argue that its aims in the Middle East were purely defensive, to secure its flanks and maintain a buffer belt, composed of the Middle East states, and to preempt any hostile acts towards Russia through these countries. Indeed, at the inception of the Second World War, these strategic considerations received credibility and were expressed by Soviet policy especially towards Iran. Other scholars consider Soviet goals as offensive - to dominate the Middle East in order to deny its oil, strategic communication routes, and other assets to the United States and its allies. According to this view, whereas the means of conduct varied through time, the main strategic goal remained the same.<sup>10</sup>

We recognize that Soviet aggressive penetration policy, based on ideological, military and economic instruments, provided the Soviets with political influence and military strategic assets, such as naval bases, military stationing, and air force overflight rights.<sup>11</sup> However, such extensive material aid and military assistance became a double-edged sword. It produced the dilemma of choosing between risky intervention on behalf of an Arab clients in their local military adventures, or abstention at the cost of losing influence, prestige, and credibility.

Throughout the Cold War period, Soviet policy went through variations. We attempt to cover the most prominent periods under the Soviet leaders, beginning with Josef Stalin, proceeding with Khrushchev and Brezhnev. As Gorbachev's term neared, a significant

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<sup>8</sup> FREEDMAN, R.O., 2001. Russian policy toward the Middle East: The Yeltsin legacy and the Putin challenge. *The Middle East Journal*, 55(1), pp. 58-90.

<sup>9</sup> SAS, S.N., 1990. *Gorbachev's new International outlook and the Eastern Mediterranean*. 91-12308. Air University. United States Air Force. Maxwell Air Force base. Alabama: Air Force College.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

change in Soviet foreign policy began to appear. The differences encompassed both internal and external issues thus attracting the world's attention to a unique phenomenon since the Communist Revolution of 1917.<sup>12</sup> Towards the end of the Soviet era the Middle East began to lose priority and took a back seat in Kremlin's decision-making. In 1986, Gorbachev hardly mentioned the region in his five and a half-hour address to the 27-th congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU).<sup>13</sup> Western observers contend that the Soviet foreign policy in the Middle East during Gorbachev's reign was characterized by oscillation between escalation and absolute disinterest.<sup>14</sup>

Western analysis tends to fall into three schools of thought. The first analyzes the Middle East in terms of the U.S.- Soviet relationship. The second focuses primarily on Soviet relations with regional actors and considers the USSR's global concerns only indirectly.<sup>15</sup> The third analyses Soviet foreign policy from the point of perceptions or misperceptions by the Soviets themselves. According to the latter view, a deep miscomprehension between the Soviets and the Americans regarding the concepts of co-existence and the détente led to multiple points of tension. In the Middle East, the Soviets assumed that neither a regional war nor their own role in bringing one about would affect the détente between the two superpowers.<sup>16</sup>

*Perestroika* and *Glasnost* have changed the Soviet Union dramatically, including Soviet foreign policy in the Middle East, bringing about the end of the Cold War and thus the end of Soviet support to its former allies in this region. As a result of the USSR's dissolution in December 1991, the secular and 'republican' Arab regimes lost the support of a superpower which was equal in status only to the United States. The decline in Soviet

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> HERRMANN, R., 1987. Soviet Policy and the Arab-Israeli Conflict: Actions, Patterns, and Interpretations. *Political Science Quarterly*, **102**(3), pp. 417-440.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid. 417-440

<sup>15</sup> SPECHLER, D.R., 1986. The U.S.S.R. and Third-World Conflicts: Domestic Debate and Soviet Policy in the Middle East, 1967-1973. *World Politics*, **38**(3), pp. 435-461.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid. 435-461.

involvement was evident under Gorbachev and was expressed most vividly during the years 1985-1991 in regard to Syria and Egypt.<sup>17</sup>

Under the presidency of Boris Yeltsin, post-Soviet Russia sunk into multiple conflicts on its periphery. Most significant encounter was met by Russia in Chechnya. It is evident that most severe challenge for Russia stemmed from former Soviet Muslim republics. We cover this feature in more detail in our chapter on the 'Islamic factor' in contemporary Russian foreign policy. Surprisingly for many, Yeltsin's successor Vladimir Putin managed to find a solution for Chechnya, to halt a dissolution of the Russian state, and eventually reversing a reactive or disinterest conduct to a pro-active approach in Russian foreign policy, most vividly expressed in Moscow's intervention in Syria in 2014.

### **Main hypotheses**

The foreign policy and international relations literature propose a combination of possible motives, which generate several objectives Russia pursues. One is to play the tactical game of power wisely, securing Russia's influence and chipping away at the rival's ability to achieve strategic advantages and produce a threat. The "petroleum significance" means being alert to the possibility that should a conflict really erupt, it would be advantageous in denying energy resources to the West. A defensive as well as an expansionist Russia would see the utility of protecting and enhancing its political and strategic leverage. There may be many different Russian motives, but the main question asked is what are its main priorities - an imperial and expansionist drive or a defensive and reactive stance?<sup>18</sup> Henry Kissinger assumed that Moscow would not pay the price of confrontation or military intervention to protect its image in the Middle East.<sup>19</sup> Nevertheless, the case of the Afghanistan invasion in 1979 and Russia's intervention in the Syrian conflict since 2014 prove that much more decisive measures can be taken once the end is worth the risk. Many scholars furthermore assume that post-Soviet

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<sup>17</sup> POLSKY, Y., 2002. Arab Views of Soviet Policy in the Era of Glasnost, 1985-1991. *Middle East Journal*, **56**, pp. 642-660.

<sup>18</sup> HERRMANN, R., 1987. Soviet Policy and the Arab-Israeli Conflict: Actions, Patterns, and Interpretations. *Political Science Quarterly*, **102**(3), pp. 417-440, 428

<sup>19</sup> Ibid. 417-440

Russian policy towards the Middle East seeks to regain its political recognition as a decisive world power.<sup>20</sup>

When we elaborate on the Soviet period, we clearly observe that the realist school of thought is capable to provide us with most plausible explanations for the Soviet conduct. However, for later Soviet and contemporary Russian foreign policy, seemingly constructivists are able to significantly supplement our understanding of late Soviet and post-Cold War Russian conduct.

We approach our analysis from a variety of propositions. We elaborate on features such as capabilities, analyzing on what part capabilities played in Soviet and continue to play in Russian strategic thinking. We further compare Soviet with contemporary Russian sources of conduct from the perspective of strategic military presence in the Mediterranean seeking to acquire military bases and naval ports from the perspective of strategic strongholds as drivers of Moscow's conduct in the Middle East. We also approach the comparative analysis of Russian foreign policy from such intrinsic features as 'probing' and the feature of the 'operational code'.

The aim of our study is to realize whether the Soviet and post-Soviet Russian conduct follows a similar logic, which would support a realist perspective (capabilities and balance of power are the leading considerations in Soviet and contemporary Russian decision-making) or whether constructivists provide a better explanation (differences over time only explainable by what Russians make of the situation at hand). We expect that our analysis of the distinctions and similarities between Soviet and post-Soviet Russian foreign conduct will provide an insight into sustainable patterns of Russian conduct and the novelty in its foreign performance. This comparative analysis might assist us to determine whether Soviet and contemporary Russian conduct demonstrates a long-term strategic or rather a situational, contextual, pragmatic, reactive approach. As an outcome of the aforementioned goals, eventually we will be able to discover as to what extent

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<sup>20</sup> SAS, S.N., 1990. *Gorbachev's new International outlook and the Eastern Mediterranean*. 91-12308. Air University. United States Air Force. Maxwell Air Force base. Alabama: Air Force College.

contemporary Russian foreign policy conduct is a consequent derivative from previous Soviet strategic behavior.

We assume that the power of inertia remains a strong variable in contemporary Russian strategic perception of world affairs. We find that the inertia perspective is a highly credible possibility. Past Soviet patterns of behavior are visible in current Russian foreign policy undertakings as will be demonstrated in current study. The tendency to evoke old patterns of behavior by a state which literally went through process of collapse and regime change is a long-time recognized feature by many scholars of foreign policy and international relations theory. It is proposed that foreign policy is an undertaking of a course of action, that duly constituted officials of national society pursue in order to preserve or alter a situation in the international system in such a way, that is consistent with a goal or goals decided upon by them or their predecessors. Other authors contend that the fulfillment of *previous* commitments is one of the main characteristics of foreign policy.<sup>21</sup> In the following study we seek to determine whether we are witnessing an extension of Soviet policy by contemporary Russia or whether there are completely new patterns of behavior discernable.

The thesis is divided into chapters, each dedicated to one proposition. In each chapter we propose to analyze and compare the Soviet with contemporary Russian foreign policy conduct from different perspectives in order to make the distinctions between Soviet and contemporary Russian foreign policy more clear. Every proposition will begin with a short introduction to the topic under elaboration. Next, a short theoretical background for every proposition will follow, supplying us with theoretical perspectives through which we analyze our proposition. Empirical analysis which describes the Soviet foreign policy conduct from a given perspective will be followed by examples of contemporary Russian conduct. In a concluding note we will present to the reader our

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<sup>21</sup> SPROUT, HAROLD,, SPROUT, MARGARET,, ROSENAU, JAMES N.,, DAVIS, VINCENT,, EAST,MAURICE A.,, 1972. *The Analysis of international politics; essays in honor of Harold and Margaret Sprout*. New York: Free Press.. (71)



main findings and highlight main distinctions between Soviet and contemporary Russian foreign policy conduct, as well as emphasize main similarities in its foreign behavior.

### **Case-study selection**

The research question will be addressed by elaboration on three case-study states: Iran, Syria, and Egypt. Egypt is the largest Arab country that has played a central role in leading the Arabs as a coherent group to achieve both nationalist, anti-imperialist and pan-Arab goals which were congruent with Soviet revolutionary anti-capitalist appeals during the Cold War. The degree of the Soviet influence in Egypt varied throughout the decades following the Second World War. Furthermore, its geographic location in the Middle East, availability of warm water ports, and inherently unstable relation with Israel, made Egypt a perfect 'target' for the Soviet's endeavor to spread its influence throughout the region. Hence, it must be emphasized that mutual relations were based on pragmatic ends of both parties. The Soviets recognized Egypt's geographic importance, and they knew that in order to fulfill their commitments in the area, they needed a solid base for deployment of their military capabilities by cooperating with Egypt.<sup>22</sup> This in turn required extensive aid and assistance, both military and economic which culminated in Soviet direct participation in local conflicts on behalf of Egypt. Paradoxically, we observe the same pattern of behavior of contemporary Russia with Syria in 2014.

Syria is located in a geographical area of importance to the Soviets due to its proximity to its borders and the presence of significant strategic naval ports there. Syria also became a champion of Soviet Marxist-Leninist ideology in different time-periods and on a variety of scales. Syria was and remains the most radical of the Arab countries, which enabled the Soviets their strongest foothold in the Middle East. Following the Camp David agreements, Syria became Soviet most reliable ally in the Middle East.<sup>23</sup> Recent

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<sup>22</sup> SAS, S.N., 1990. *Gorbachev's new International outlook and the Eastern Mediterranean*. 91-12308. Air University. United States Air Force. Maxwell Air Force base. Alabama: Air Force College.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

Russian involvement in Syria emphasizes that such state of affairs between the two states remains valid.

The Iranian-Russian connection is interesting in particular. Iran is considered a key regional power.<sup>24</sup> Early immediate Iranian relations with the Bolsheviks were promising. However, following the WWII the Soviet-Iranian relations significantly deteriorated. After the Iranian Islamic revolution, these relations improved. Moscow assisted Iran in its war with Iraq.<sup>25</sup> Iranian direction gained special significance during Soviet war in Afghanistan. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia reoriented its foreign policy towards Iran. Besides the fact that Iran directly bordered with Soviet Union, close tactical alliance with Iran - a major purchaser of Russian nuclear reactors and military equipment - was developed.<sup>26</sup> As long as the rivalry between Iran, Saudi Arabia and Israel endures, it makes Tehran a promising customer for Russian arms exports.<sup>27</sup> Recent Iranian nuclear ambitions make the Russian connection even more salient and Moscow indeed became a central player in Iranian-Western negotiations, varied by moments of friction and cooperation. However, as we demonstrate, Iran's ambitions towards the former Soviet Central Asian region alert Russia and impacts significantly upon its foreign policy towards Tehran.

### **Research methods and sources**

A comparative method of research can significantly further our understanding of foreign policy.<sup>28</sup> The comparative method of analysis allows us to determine the extension of the impact of past Soviet patterns of behavior on current Russian conduct in the region. The Russian foreign policy towards our three case-studies is the dependent variable.

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<sup>24</sup> SAUNDERS, P.J., 2016. Why Iran-Saudi fallout will be costly for Moscow. *AIMonitor: the Pulse of the Middle East*, (January 12),.

<sup>25</sup> HERRMANN, R., 1987. Soviet Policy and the Arab-Israeli Conflict: Actions, Patterns, and Interpretations. *Political Science Quarterly*, **102**(3), pp. 417-440.

<sup>26</sup> FREEDMAN, R.O., 2001. Russian policy toward the Middle East: The Yeltsin legacy and the Putin challenge. *The Middle East Journal*, **55**(1), pp. 58-90.

<sup>27</sup> SAUNDERS, P.J., 2016. Why Iran-Saudi fallout will be costly for Moscow. *AIMonitor: the Pulse of the Middle East*, (January 12),.

<sup>28</sup> GARRISON, J.A., KAARBO, J., FOYLE, D., SCHAFER, M. and STERN, E.K., 2003. Foreign Policy Analysis in 20/20: A Symposium. *International Studies Review*, **5**(2), pp. 155-202.

We analyze sources of Soviet and contemporary Russian foreign policy conduct mainly through realist and constructivist theoretical paradigms, which comprise our main theoretical background. Other perspectives or concepts we apply pertain to the impact of religion, of operational codes, of military facilities as a source of foreign policy, to the role of capabilities and a "probing the limits" approach.

Prominent researchers argue that the goal of comparative analysis is not to account for all the variability, but to explain enough of it to enlarge our understanding of the key dynamics at work in the examined situation. Foreign policy phenomena are too complex to aspire to a full accounting of all the dynamics at work in a situation. It is enough to compare them carefully and draw conclusions about the central tendencies they depict.<sup>29</sup> Cross-national and longitudinal comparisons of foreign policy behaviors increase the scholar's ability to distinguish between the common and the unusual elements that contribute to a particular government's external behavior. Foreign policy comparative analysis can lead to the identification of important deviant cases – that is, those having unusual features. It contributes to a better understanding and distinction between unique intrinsic features pertaining to a specific nation and general patterns of conduct common to a handful of different regimes.<sup>30</sup>

We draw on empirical examples, using content analysis techniques. Our qualitative analysis is based on empirical, comparative methods, which include prime and secondary sources, field research and interviews with relevant stakeholders, decision-makers and events' participants, press releases, dissertations and academic writings.

Of particular interest is the Soviet and contemporary Russian literature on foreign policy towards the Middle East, especially the literature of Soviet times, the writings of former ambassadors, diplomats and politicians, as well as an analysis of the works of other Soviet, contemporary Russian, Israeli, Egyptian, Iranian and Western experts and scholars. Special emphasis was addressed to Soviet literature of the Cold War period.

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<sup>29</sup> SMITH, STEVE, HADFIELD, AMELIA., DUNNE, TIMOTHY, 2016. *Foreign policy: theories, actors, cases*. ix

<sup>30</sup> EAST, MAURICE A., SALMORE, STEPHEN A., HERMANN, CHARLES F., 1978. *Why nations act: theoretical perspectives for comparative foreign policy studies*. Beverly Hills; London: Sage Publications. 12

During our research we have conducted six interviews with scholars specializing on Soviet and contemporary Russian foreign policy as well as with event's participants. Research material, which was elaborated during our study, covered four languages: English, German, Russian, and Hebrew. This dissertation contributes both methodologically and substance-wise to the analysis of past Soviet and contemporary Russian foreign policy and presents new and fresh views and approaches to the field of Foreign Policy and International Relations.

The novelty of our research is contained in the attempt to compare two different time-periods and two different regime-types of the same state with the attempt to expose what impact a regime change had on state's strategic perceptions and foreign policy behavior; what political features, previously insignificant, became salient to the scale of influencing its foreign policy decision-making; which sources of conduct remained unaltered; and how explicit is the power of continuity and the force-of-inertia in contemporary Russian foreign strategic conduct.

## CHAPTER 1. REALISM

### **Soviet and contemporary Russian foreign policy sources of conduct analyzed through the paradigm of political Realism**

#### **Introduction**

To what extent can the Soviet and contemporary Russian foreign policy towards the Middle East be explained by general assumptions derived from the school of realism? Anarchy prevailed in the international system throughout Soviet times and particularly during the Cold War and it still seems to persist in the post-Cold War world order – most international institutions are weak, conventions are often disregarded and common norms are eroding.

In this chapter we propose to analyze Soviet and contemporary Russian foreign policy through the paradigm of political Realism. Realism it is not a single theory subject to empirical confirmation or disconfirmation. Neoclassical realism, neorealism, and classical realism are heirs to a philosophical tradition dating to the writings of Thucydides and Sun Tzu in the fifth century B.C. What unites all self-described realists is the profoundly pessimistic view of the human condition, a skeptical attitude toward schemes for pacific international order; and the recognition that ethics and morality are products of power and material interests, not the other way around.<sup>1</sup> As Realism's core principle states, politics is a perpetual struggle among self-interested groups under condition of general scarcity and uncertainty. The scarce commodities might be material capabilities, or they might be social resources, such as prestige and status. Groups face pervasive uncertainty about one another's present and future intentions. Power is therefore a necessary requirement for any groups to secure its goals, whether those goals are universal domination or simply self-preservation.<sup>2</sup> According to the realist paradigm,

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<sup>1</sup> LOBELL, STEVEN E., RIPSAN, NORRIN M., TALIAFERRO, JEFFREY W., 2010. *Neoclassical realism, the state, and foreign policy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 14

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* 14-15

states strive to win wars and to maximize power. Following the offensive version of neo-realism, growing power alters a state's perceptions of its interests. Applied to the Soviet and later Russian foreign policies one could thus surmise that their respective capabilities drove or are still driving their intentions.

The Hobbesian view of realism concentrates on the human nature and the instincts of preservation (survival) and security, distrust of the surrounding environment, egoism, strive for power, influence, and control. He proclaims such state of affairs as perpetual war of "every man against every man" and calls it "the existential tragedy" - human institutions collapse and people expect the worst from each other.<sup>3</sup> The result is the lust for power arising from greed and ambition."<sup>4</sup> Other opinions, however, allow that states seek not only mere survival and domination, but are also led by strive for wealth, development, advantage, peaceful coexistence, prosperity, sovereignty, autonomy and independence. They may also act out of a sense of pride and emotions.<sup>5</sup>

But to what extent are these sweeping claims of realism necessary and sufficient conditions for explaining the sources of Soviet and Russian conduct? What is the empirical evidence that corroborates respective assumptions? We attempt to analyze different periods of Soviet and Russian foreign policy with realist concepts such as "appeasement", "bandwagoning", and "balancing". The search for prestige provides us with additional perspectives on contemporary Russia's foreign behavior.

Post-Cold War debates among realists concentrate on the question whether post-Soviet Russia is either a saturated state or not, and whether it will make a bid for hegemony or domination and thus challenge the system in an offensive manner. Neoclassical realists contend that material power capabilities shape foreign policy. This argument might explain why the Soviet Union or post-Soviet Russia militarily intervened in a given conflict - capabilities allegedly informed behavior.

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<sup>3</sup> HOBBS, T., *Leviathan*. Oxford: Clarendon Press. xix

<sup>4</sup> KEOHANE, R.O., 2002. *Power and governance in a partially globalized world*. London; New York, N.Y.: Routledge.64-65

<sup>5</sup> BURCHILL, S.E.A., 2015. *Theories of International Relations*. Hampshire, UK: Palgrave Macmillan. 43

While it might be argued that the Soviet Union largely behaved according to the predictions of offensive realism - striving for hegemony - contemporary Russia seems to have adopted a behavior more compliant with defensive realism, i.e., striving to secure its possessions or to preserve what is left from the Soviet Union in order not to further break apart as did the Soviet Union. Another realist claim holds that the multipolar world system in itself is much less peaceful and stable than the bipolar order was. In such a system, striving for hegemony is, according to the offensive realist reading, the preferred strategy.

Some realists argue that a state's position in the world system determines its national interests. Strictly egoistic self-interest interests in turn would drive a state's foreign policy. Interests could be defined through security concerns, the projection of a political ideology or even normative principles. The status quo of international relations shapes its perceptions while behavior based on these perceptions reinforces structural prerequisites. In the following chapter we aim to demonstrate that the early post-revolutionary Soviet foreign policy was largely driven by "pure" realist concepts while in late Soviet years a shift towards constructivist notions occurred. Post-Soviet contemporary Russian foreign policy seems to be characterized by a "new" realism, including elements of a constructivist conduct.

The argument that power is often sought by leaders for their own personal power-worship provides us with additional clues on contemporary Russian foreign policy under President Vladimir Putin. Power enables to coerce and dominate and allows to attain security, prosperity, and identity.

### **Theoretical analysis**

Realism is the foundational school of thought about international politics.<sup>6</sup> Realism sees the international system as characterized by rivalry and competition among states.

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<sup>6</sup> SMITH, STEVE, HADFIELD, AMELIA., DUNNE, TIMOTHY, 2016. *Foreign policy: theories, actors, cases*.32

It focuses on a given state's quest for power and security in an anarchic international setting. According to realism, in an anarchic self-help system, the most that is possible in cooperation between rival states is tacit rules which reflect balances of power and interest but does not have independent effects on a state's behavior and policy outcomes. A state's conduct is never determined by normative considerations.<sup>7</sup>

The behavior of sovereign states is largely determined by power resources and power differences. Those who have extensive power capabilities, usually termed as superpowers, exercise influence over those who have little or no power. Norms, values or even rudimentary notions of morality have but little effect on the behavior of states. In self-help structure, relations between states are manifestly one-sided. The great powers may intervene in the affairs of other states, embark on war, and acquire new territories. The smaller states and those with little power try to get out of their way. The great powers determine and define international order, the small, subordinate states comply. The powerful do as they wish, the weak do as they must.<sup>8</sup>

The opus "*The Twenty Years' Crisis. 1919-1939*" by Edward Hallett Carr (1892-1982), declared the dominance of realism in International Relations.<sup>9</sup> Rationality and state-centrism (*statism*) are frequently identified as core realist premises. The core of realism lies in the conjunction of egoism and anarchy and the resulting imperatives of power politics.<sup>10</sup> During the Cold War, realism became the orthodoxy in academic writing as it seemed self-evident that states, mainly their military force, were the main features of the international system.<sup>11</sup> Throughout the Cold War a mixed patterns of cooperation and balancing or the mixture of realist and liberal strategies to obtain security occurred.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> MILLER, BENJAMIN, 2007. *States, nations, and the great powers: the sources of the regional war and peace*. Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press. 48-49

<sup>8</sup> EFRAT, MOSHE., BERCOVITCH, JACOB., 1991. *Superpowers and client states in the Middle East: the imbalance of influence*. London; New York: Routledge.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>9</sup> CARR, Edward Hallett, 1939, *The Twenty Years' Crisis, 1919–1939. An Introduction to the Study of International Relations*. Macmillan, London; BURCHILL, S.E.A., 2015. *Theories of International Relations*. Hampshire, UK: Palgrave Macmillan.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.33

<sup>11</sup> HILL, CHRISTOPHER, 2003. *The changing politics of foreign policy*. Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire; New York: Palgrave Macmillan. 6

<sup>12</sup> FORTMANN, M., WIRTZ, J.J. and PAUL, T.V., 2004. *Balance of Power : Theory and Practice in the 21st Century*. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press. 12



Critics of realism accuse realist paradigm for concentrating more on the immediate strategic threats and outcomes without giving proper attention to long-term perspectives.<sup>13</sup>

Offensive realism theory explains why great powers seek hegemony. As state gains in relative power, its grand strategic interests expand. It has two distinct variants. First, state's interests expand as their relative power increases because capabilities drive intentions. Moreover, an increase in a state's relative power not only causes expansion of its external interests, but also results in the broadening of the state's perception of its interests and security requirements. Second variant claims that the best solution to insecurity is for a state to maximize its relative power because the most promising route to security is for a state to increase its control over the international environment through the steady expansion of its political interests abroad.<sup>14</sup> Great powers engage in calculated bids of expansion and look for opportunities to weaken potential adversaries, with the ultimate goal of attaining regional or global hegemony.<sup>15</sup>

Offensive realism is, however, challenged by the power transition approach,<sup>16</sup> which holds that non-hegemonic powers do not try to check the hegemon if their economic and political institutions have much in common.<sup>17</sup> Accordingly, a satisfied Russia could have accommodated itself too, instead of challenging the balance of power.<sup>18</sup>

For structural realists, in anarchical system, security is the highest end. Only if survival is ensured, can states safely seek other goals such as tranquility, profit, and power.<sup>19</sup> As opposed to structural realists, the systemic neoclassical and the classical realists focus on states, both view anarchy as a permissive condition, rather than as an

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid. 86

<sup>14</sup> FORTMANN, M., WIRTZ, J.J. and PAUL, T.V., 2004. *Balance of Power: Theory and Practice in the 21st Century*. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press. 109-110

<sup>15</sup> LOBELL, STEVEN E., RIPSAN, NORRIN M., TALIAFERRO, JEFFREY W., 2010. *Neoclassical realism, the state, and foreign policy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 18

<sup>16</sup> FORTMANN, M., WIRTZ, J.J. and PAUL, T.V., 2004. *Balance of Power: Theory and Practice in the 21st Century*. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press. 64

<sup>17</sup> Ibid. 65

<sup>18</sup> Ibid. 70

<sup>19</sup> HYDE-PRICE, ADRIAN., UNIVERSITY OF BIRMINGHAM., INSTITUTE FOR GERMAN STUDIES., 1999. *Interests, institutions and identity: towards a new model of foreign policy analysis*. University of Birmingham, Institute for German Studies. 13-14

independent causal force.<sup>20</sup> In the short run, anarchy gives states considerable latitude in defining their security interests, and the relative distribution of power sets parameters for strategy. Over the long run, however, regimes or leaders which consistently fail to respond to the system's incentives put their state's very survival at risk. Thus, while the international system may socialize states to respond properly to its constraints over time, as neorealists argue, it cannot alone explain the shorter-term policy choices that states make, which can have dramatic consequences for both national security and the structure of the international system.<sup>21</sup>

Separating domestic and international considerations is necessary in order to theorize about when one or the other will predominate in the decision-making process as well as to assess their relative importance. Neoclassical realists point that domestic considerations will predominate in cartelized states, while international considerations are more likely to prevail in unitary or democratic states. Much of the neoclassical realist agenda, blames distinct domestic political pressures for preventing 'appropriate' responses to external circumstances.<sup>22</sup> Contrary to neoclassical realism, for structural realists, people and domestic institutions matter because they determine how much power states will have, and how it will be used,<sup>23</sup> without going too deep to the reasons, domestic variables, and personal traits of the leaders who practice these power features. Structural realism is designed to explain international outcomes rather than foreign policy. It assumes that foreign policy is externally driven.<sup>24</sup>

Neoclassical realists agree that states construct their foreign security policies primarily with an eye to the threats and opportunities that arise in the international system, which shape each state's range of policy options.<sup>25</sup> Neoclassical realists also share with neorealists the view that country's foreign policy is primarily formed by its place in the

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<sup>20</sup> LOBELL, STEVEN E., RIPSAN, NORRIN M., TALIAFERRO, JEFFREY W., 2010. *Neoclassical realism, the state, and foreign policy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 7

<sup>21</sup> Ibid. 7-8

<sup>22</sup> Ibid. 253

<sup>23</sup> BARKIN, J.S., 2011. *Realist constructivism: rethinking international relations theory*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 21-22

<sup>24</sup> RIPSAN, NORRIN M., TALIAFERRO, JEFFREY W., LOBELL, STEVEN E., 2016. *Neoclassical realist theory of international politics*. New York, N.Y.: Oxford university press. 18-19

<sup>25</sup> Ibid. 19

international system and in particular by its relative material power capabilities.<sup>26</sup> However, neoclassical realists also argue that the impact of such power capabilities is indirect and complex, because systemic pressures must be translated through intervening variables at the unit level.<sup>27</sup> This translation through intervening variables process is what neoclassic realists call the “transmission belt” between domestic and systemic variables. The “transmission belt” notion centers on the “effective” connection between systemic incentives and constraints, and a state’s military, diplomatic and economic actions and decisions states select for employment. Over the long term, international political outcomes generally mirror the actual distribution of power among states, whereas, in short term, the policies states pursue are rarely objectively efficient or predictable based purely upon systemic analysis, without domestic, unit variable’s assessment.<sup>28</sup>

In our comparative analysis of sources of the Soviet and Russian foreign policy conduct, foreign policy comprises a dependent variable. The same posture is taken by neoclassical realism, which also considers state’s foreign policy as a dependent variable.<sup>29</sup> Apart of systemic variables, neoclassical realism considers domestic variables as independent variable. In our case, the independent variable is the regime change that occurred in Russia, which is a domestic variable, and had an impact on Russian foreign policy which we seek to discover. This is one reason why the following analysis will lean towards the neoclassical realist paradigm. Neoclassical realism locates properties at both the structural and unit-level factors, which help it to explain sources of state external behavior.<sup>30</sup> Scholars on Russian foreign policy confirm that structural realism alone may not be able to provide us with a sufficient explanation on variations or changes in Russia’s foreign policy behavior in comparison to Soviet Union’s one.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> SMITH, STEVE, HADFIELD, AMELIA., DUNNE, TIMOTHY, 2016. *Foreign policy: theories, actors, cases*.92

<sup>27</sup> HYDE-PRICE, ADRIAN., UNIVERSITY OF BIRMINGHAM., INSTITUTE FOR GERMAN STUDIES., 1999. *Interests, institutions and identity: towards a new model of foreign policy analysis*. University of Birmingham, Institute for German Studies. 40

<sup>28</sup> LOBELL, STEVEN E., RIPSAN, NORRIN M., TALIAFERRO, JEFFREY W., 2010. *Neoclassical realism, the state, and foreign policy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 4

<sup>29</sup> Ibid. 20

<sup>30</sup> Ibid. 21

<sup>31</sup> PURSIANEN, C., 2000. *Russian foreign policy and international relations theory*. Aldershot: Ashgate. 173-174

Realism claims that attaining hegemony is or should be the ultimate aim of a state's grand strategy. Dominance or hegemony is the logical outcome of a strategy that seeks to maximize a state's relative power or influence. In this variation of realistic thought, the only way for a state to break the security dilemma and thus to attain lasting security is through becoming the most powerful state in the international system. As Mearsheimer puts it: "States quickly understand that the best way to ensure their survival is to be the most powerful state in the system." Therefore, according to this (presumably U.S.-inspired) logic, a state becomes a hegemon either by eliminating its rivals or by adopting strategies that subjugate or subordinate them.<sup>32</sup>

There are three reasons why hegemony might be the preferred strategy for state that possess sufficient resources. First, this view depicts a multipolar international system as inherently less peaceful and stable than a bipolar or unipolar one. Second, a hegemon gains security when the distribution of power is skewed decisively in his favor, because others will be deterred from attacking him. Third, hegemony is the best grand strategic response to a state's uncertainty about other's intentions and about others present and future capabilities. States allegedly strive for superiority as a hedge against miscalculating both the present and future distribution of power between them and their rivals.<sup>33</sup> While actually only very few states might be in a position to strive for superiority (by definition only one can be superior in this social Darwinist battle), we will try to put these offensive propositions to test in the Soviet and Russian cases.

Policy of appeasement refers to the granting of concessions to a great power threatening to gain ascendance over others in the international system. Historically, such concessions have been offered in hopes that the power, aspiring to dominance, will be satiated and cease making demands of aggregating power. Yet, appeasement is the least likely way a great power would buy time in the hopes of accruing wealth and power for

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<sup>32</sup> FORTMANN, M., WIRTZ, J.J. and PAUL, T.V., 2004. *Balance of Power: Theory and Practice in the 21st Century*. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press. 110

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.* 110

the future, because appeasement eventually could eliminate the state's ability to act independently in the face of the insatiable and more powerful hegemon.<sup>34</sup>

Threatened states might bandwagon instead - weaker states ally themselves with the strong, either because they recognize that it would be futile to resist or because they expect to profit from their alliance with the potential hegemon. Bandwagoning states implicitly give up the quest for more power.<sup>35</sup>

If a great power cannot hope to tilt the distribution of power in its favor through either external or internal balancing, it may find it wiser to try to ally with the dominant power. Joining a weaker coalition would not be rational if there is no hope that doing so would deter the rising power.<sup>36</sup>

Incorporating both an economic element and a time element into the logic of the strategy helps us to make sense of why bandwagoning would ever appeal to a great power. Since economic ties can deliver benefits to both parties, the weaker power might hope to survive in the short run by allying with the hegemonic power and add to its current economic base as well. If current economic gains can be converted into military power in the future, the bandwagoning state might improve its power potential so that it could reassert its autonomy in future.<sup>37</sup> Gorbachev and later Yeltsin may have tried to bandwagon with the West, mainly the United States, in order to minimize losses or to halt or postpone decline. But a bandwagoning state might lose its sovereignty,<sup>38</sup> And this may explain why President Putin aimed to cease bandwagoning with the West.

The central theoretical conclusion of structural realism is that under conditions of anarchy states balance rather than bandwagon. In hierarchic, as opposed to anarchic political orders, actors tend to "jump on the bandwagon" of the leading candidate or recent victor, because "losing to the winner" does not place their security in jeopardy.

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid. 84-85

<sup>35</sup> Ibid. 55

<sup>36</sup> Ibid. 82

<sup>37</sup> Ibid. 83

<sup>38</sup> Ibid. 227

Bandwagoners attempt to increase their gains or to reduce their losses by siding with the stronger party.<sup>39</sup>

### *Balance of power theory*

Balance of power or the distribution of capabilities among states exercises crucial effects on the occurrence of wars as a result of the lack of an effective overall authority. Yet, in contrast to the inadvertent nature of security dilemma, wars derived from imbalance of power are usually intended. Such wars are wars of profit or wars of opportunity and are made in accordance with cost-benefit calculations, namely, when the expected benefits of fighting outweigh the expected cost of fighting.<sup>40</sup>

Balance of power is a system or patterns of relations created consciously and maintained continuously by the great powers.<sup>41</sup> Realists claim that the most important goal of each state in international system is to avoid hegemony, which would put an end to the multistate system.<sup>42</sup> As long as the states will seek to balance each other, the nature of the system will persist as it is, and no state will be capable to change the system's structure.<sup>43</sup> It is through the foreign policy domain that states balance each other.<sup>44</sup> Thus, balance of power as a theory purports to explain the foreign policy behaviors of states.<sup>45</sup>

A variety of approaches is derived from the balance-of-power perspective. We familiar with scholarship that proposes to approach this topic from the 'balance of threat'<sup>46</sup> perspective, 'balance of power', 'balance of interests' and 'balance of identity'<sup>47</sup>. Vladimir Putin for instance occasionally refers to it as 'balance of forces' (*Balans Sil*) rather than

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<sup>39</sup> BURCHILL, S.E.A., 2015. *Theories of International Relations*. Hampshire, UK: Palgrave Macmillan.37-38

<sup>40</sup> MILLER, BENJAMIN, 2007. *States, nations, and the great powers: the sources of the regional war and peace*. Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press. 28

<sup>41</sup> LOBELL, STEVEN E., RIPSAN, NORRIN M., TALIAFERRO, JEFFREY W., 2010. *Neoclassical realism, the state, and foreign policy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 205

<sup>42</sup> FORTMANN, M., WIRTZ, J.J. and PAUL, T.V., 2004. *Balance of Power: Theory and Practice in the 21st Century*. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press. 32

<sup>43</sup> BARKIN, J.S., 2011. *Realist constructivism: rethinking international relations theory*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 130-131

<sup>44</sup> Ibid. 130-131

<sup>45</sup> FORTMANN, M., WIRTZ, J.J. and PAUL, T.V., 2004. *Balance of Power: Theory and Practice in the 21st Century*. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press. 31

<sup>46</sup> Ibid. 8

<sup>47</sup> Ibid. 22

'balance of power' in more Western interpretation. Some argue that the hard-balancing during the Cold War was replaced by a soft-balancing in the post-Cold War era due to the world structure largely being transformed from bipolar, to unipolar. Others propose that contemporary Russia, notwithstanding its setbacks following the collapse of the Soviet Union, still might aspire to balance the US or other rising superpowers like China, because it became an axiom, that any superpower must either expand and balance other superpowers or cease to exist. To put it simply, no superpower can retain a given *status quo*. Hegemons cannot be status-quo powers because they want to maintain their predominance and they fear the emergence of new rivals who could challenge their preeminence. A paradox of hegemony is that hegemons invariably believe their dominance is tenuous.<sup>48</sup> The aforementioned claim, that post-Soviet Russia will still strive to balance the US is confirmed by Vladimir Putin's claim that he agrees with those who consider a bipolar system, in a state of balance-of-power, as a far more stable than unipolarity.<sup>49</sup>

The analysis of Soviet foreign policy supplies us with evidence that during the Cold War, one of the main goals of Soviet foreign policy towards Syria and Egypt was to balance the power of US in the Mediterranean. Iran also was approached as a balancing factor against the US in the Persian Gulf and the Indian Ocean.<sup>50</sup>

Neorealist balance of power theory proposes that states generally balance against other powerful states by forging alliances with weaker states or by arms race.<sup>51</sup> Scholars of Soviet foreign policy name the Cold War balance-of-power system structure as one of the main causes for Moscow's pursuit to ally with and assist to Syria and Egypt.<sup>52</sup> Strive for global hegemony was leading factor for Moscow's support for its allies in the Middle East. Zero-sum-game was the leading imperative for Moscow. It was less important what

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid. 110

<sup>49</sup> RIPSAN, NORRIN M., TALIAFERRO, JEFFREY W., LOBELL, STEVEN E., 2016. *Neoclassical realist theory of international politics*. New York, N.Y.: Oxford university press. 147-148

<sup>50</sup> From an interview conducted by the author with Prof. Galia Golan on 01.05.2019

<sup>51</sup> LOBELL, STEVEN E., RIPSAN, NORRIN M., TALIAFERRO, JEFFREY W., 2010. *Neoclassical realism, the state, and foreign policy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 196

<sup>52</sup> From an interview conducted by the author with Prof. Galia Golan on 01.05.2019

Moscow gets from assisting the Arabs in the Middle East; rather it was much more important what the other side of the confrontation, the United States, does not get.<sup>53</sup>

In the immediate post-Cold War system structure, a great deal of scholars somewhat dwarfed the balance-of-power theory's explanatory value, pointing that none of the states was attempting to balance the US after the Soviet Union has collapsed.<sup>54</sup> Some even turned to constructivism for explanation.<sup>55</sup> Others argue that in post-Cold War structure, the superpower's balance of power logic must be infused with ideological component if it is to be followed by bloc comprising allies.<sup>56</sup>

Studies have concluded that the balancing strategy was valid for the Soviets, as well as for the US, when its strategic balance reached parity with the Soviet Union by the mid-1960's.<sup>57</sup> It is highly probable development that great powers will intervene in peripheral disputes to prevent cumulative, potentially significant losses, if the costs of non-intervention exceed the costs of interference.<sup>58</sup> Intervention by a stronger power in third state's internal affairs are often viewed from balance of power perspective as a goal to prevent or resist intervention to this very third state by another power. By intervening in one state's affairs, including if being invited by that country, the balancing power achieves both ends, prevents intervention by its superpower rival and forestalls its influence in that country.<sup>59</sup> Another finding contends that the intervention of powerful states on the periphery can be either in order to restore balance of power, maintain existing balance, or lead to the collapse of the balance.<sup>60</sup> In addition, exercising foreign policy means of conduct in terms of balance of power could come as a response to

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<sup>53</sup> From personal interview conducted by the author with Ambassador Zvi Magen on 14.04.2019

<sup>54</sup> FORTMANN, M., WIRTZ, J.J. and PAUL, T.V., 2004. *Balance of Power: Theory and Practice in the 21st Century*. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press. 72-73

<sup>55</sup> Ibid. 370

<sup>56</sup> LOBELL, STEVEN E., RIPSAN, NORRIN M., TALIAFERRO, JEFFREY W., 2010. *Neoclassical realism, the state, and foreign policy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 250

<sup>57</sup> FORTMANN, M., WIRTZ, J.J. and PAUL, T.V., 2004. *Balance of Power: Theory and Practice in the 21st Century*. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press. 41

<sup>58</sup> Ibid. 133

<sup>59</sup> BULL, HEDLEY., HURRELL, ANDREW., 2012. *The Anarchical Society; A Study of Order in World Politics*. Columbia University Press. 138

<sup>60</sup> MCGOWAN, PAT, SHAPIRO, HOWARD B., SAGE., 1973. *The comparative study of foreign policy: a survey of scientific findings*. Beverly Hills; London: SAGE Publications. 210



aggression,<sup>61</sup> both political, military, or moral. Contemporary Russian foreign policy can be approached from this perspective in two ways. First, Russian intervention in Syria in 2014 can be considered as a response to multiple events conducted by the West towards Russia in case it considers it as an act of aggression (Yugoslavia, Georgia, Ukraine, the Baltics). Second, in case contemporary Russia perceived non-intervention in Syrian conflict in 2014, same as in the Egyptian conflicts with Israel during 1967-1973, as more costly in the long-run than intervening on their behalf in the short-run.

Balance of power also implies that the balancing great power would be willing to cooperate with third state despite differences in domestic regimes and ideologies.<sup>62</sup> This proposition serves as one explanation why the Soviets tolerated the suppression of their comrades-communists by their client-state's regimes in Egypt and Syria. Maintaining coalition is a paramount feature in balancing strategy.<sup>63</sup> In addition, realists argue that competing superpowers should invest in the economies of its allies, for the main long-run goal is to balance a rival power.<sup>64</sup>

Others propose that the peculiarities of the Cold War structure could not and did not promise any balance of power perspectives due to continuous arms race and alliance building which prevented to reach a state of balance at all. Any third state which was drawn into the sphere of influence of an opposing bloc of a hegemony-oriented actor was to become firmly tied to that bloc<sup>65</sup> which itself would constantly make a state of balance of power an unattainable goal. An actual balance of power was impossible under such conditions, because one of the essential actors, the Soviet Union, became too strong and the other actors were no longer able to force it to play according to the prevailing rules of the game, which was one of the critical conditions for the functioning of the balance of

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<sup>61</sup> BURCHILL, S.E.A., 2015. *Theories of International Relations*. Hampshire, UK: Palgrave Macmillan. 307

<sup>62</sup> MILLER, BENJAMIN, 2007. *States, nations, and the great powers: the sources of the regional war and peace*. Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press. 50-52

<sup>63</sup> FORTMANN, M., WIRTZ, J.J. and PAUL, T.V., 2004. *Balance of Power: Theory and Practice in the 21st Century*. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press. 35

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.* 87-88

<sup>65</sup> PURSIANEN, C., 2000. *Russian foreign policy and international relations theory*. Aldershot: Ashgate. 106

power system.<sup>66</sup> Some opine that the balance-of-power theory significantly limits the extent of foreign policy studies, calling this theory narrow and inflexible.<sup>67</sup>

Authors notice that today, the Middle East region represents a scene for traditional hard balancing, reflected by enduring rivalries.<sup>68</sup> In post-Cold War on the regional level, hard-balancing continues, especially in regions experiencing high levels of protracted local conflicts.<sup>69</sup>

In order to embark on the theory of balance of power, we need to elaborate on the power factor for what it is in itself. The intrigue related to the factor of power is explained in terms of that it is a characteristic aspect of all politics, domestic as well as international and that frequently its basic manifestations do not appear as what they actually are – a manifestations of a struggle for power. Rather, the element of power as the immediate goal of the policy pursued is explained and justified in ethnical, legal or biological terms. That is to say: the true nature of the policy is concealed by ideological justification and rationalization. The deeper the individual is involved in the power struggle, the less likely he is to see the power struggle for what it is.<sup>70</sup>

The concept of power is a common thread in the analysis of foreign policy. According to Thucydides, “The key to international politics is the differential growth of power within the state system.”<sup>71</sup> All actions imply the existence of power, both as a means and as a context. As means, power only exists in relation to some object or some other party. Power as a context impinges on foreign policy through its unavoidability; if decision makers behave as if the power of others - or their own lack of it - is not relevant, they will soon suffer some unpleasant shocks. Conversely, if they become over-confident about their power positions, or interpret it too narrowly, they risk the usual outcome of hubris -

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid. 106

<sup>67</sup> FORTMANN, M., WIRTZ, J.J. and PAUL, T.V., 2004. *Balance of Power : Theory and Practice in the 21st Century*. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press. 13

<sup>68</sup> Ibid. 14

<sup>69</sup> Ibid. 4

<sup>70</sup> MORGENTHAU, H.J., 1967. *Politics among nations; the struggle for power and peace*. New York: Knopf. 101

<sup>71</sup> SPROUT, HAROLD,, SPROUT, MARGARET,, ROSENAU, JAMES N.,, DAVIS, VINCENT,, EAST,MAURICE A.,, 1972. *The Analysis of international politics; essays in honor of Harold and Margaret Sprout*. New York: Free Press. 167

a hostile coalition and probable failure.<sup>72</sup> In a state of balance of power structure, the presence and possession of power has to be constantly demonstrated, an occurrence that is continuously present in Soviet and later post-Soviet Russian behavior as we demonstrate further. This need for constant demonstration of power appears as one of the sources of Soviet and later Russian foreign policy conduct.

It is also important to point our reader's attention to the distinction between the two notions of power when discussing realism - military and political power. Political power is ultimately about persuasion, about convincing rather than forcing, coercion or destroying.<sup>73</sup> A pre-condition for political influence might be military power, too, because it can balance or deter the opponent and reassure allies. By deterring threats to allies, it can prevent the exploitation of local disputes and it can discourage the accommodation or appeasement of threatening forces. It can therefore affect policy choices as well as constrain military threats. Military power is not sufficient by itself, much depends on its availability, its relevance, its flexibility, how it is used and how it is perceived.<sup>74</sup>

### **Russian foreign policy from Realist perspective**

The Bolsheviks came to power believing that the capitalist world was uniformly hostile, and that imperialism was dedicated to the destruction of socialism. After the Bolsheviks established the first Communist state, Leninist scripture referred to irreconcilability of capitalism and socialism (Communism – original) and the inevitability of clash between both. But it was Stalin in the late 1920s and 1930s who developed the theory of “capitalist encirclement,” partially out of a genuine sense of [in]security, but primarily to justify the suffering and sacrifice demanded of the Soviet people by his decision to industrialize, collectivize and radically transform Soviet institutions and

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<sup>72</sup> SMITH, STEVE, HADFIELD, AMELIA., DUNNE, TIMOTHY, 2016. *Foreign policy: theories, actors, cases*.133

<sup>73</sup> BARKIN, J.S., 2011. *Realist constructivism: rethinking international relations theory*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 19

<sup>74</sup> CHUBIN, SHAHRAM., PLASCOV, AVI., LITWAK, ROBERT.,INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTE FOR STRATEGIC STUDIES., 1981. *Security in the Persian Gulf*. Montclair, N.J.: Published for the International Institute for Strategic Studies by Allanheld, Osmun. 113

society.<sup>75</sup> These were the two distinct Communist doctrines on war: the Leninist theory of imperialism, with its focus on permanent state of war between capitalist countries and eventual ultimate clash between Socialism and Capitalism, and the theory of capitalist encirclement.<sup>76</sup>

World affairs were viewed by the Soviet Union in strict Realist terms, at least during the period we analyze. In Kosygin's words, "Revolutionary ideas expressed in words don't mean anything unless they are backed by real power."<sup>77</sup> This statement echoes with Hobbesian famous dictum that "Covenants, without sword are but words and of no strength to secure a man at all."<sup>78</sup> Both these perspectives were echoed in Vladimir Putin's words in 2015 regarding Russia's perception on Moscow's conduct in Syria, when he said that the Syrian conflict can be settled only by military means.<sup>79</sup> It is fully understandable, why early Soviet conduct was largely characterized by 'pure' realist thinking. As scholars of ideology underline, the establishment of Socialism cannot be achieved except by means of revolution and struggle.<sup>80</sup>

Some observers argue that Soviet intentions and foreign policy ends must be strictly seen from a military capabilities' perspective, the main Soviet goal was to seek military superiority.<sup>81</sup> Stalin largely viewed politics in military terms.<sup>82</sup> In the traditional Leninist-Stalinist perspective, the very notion of non-hierarchical power relations was anathema. *Which* protagonist would emerge as the winner and *which* as the loser, was the central question of politics from a Leninist perspective. *Kto-kogo*, the famous 'who-whom' summarizes this view of politics as a zero-sum game.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> RUBINSTEIN, A.Z., 1981. *Soviet foreign policy since World War II : imperial and global*. Cambridge, Mass.: Winthrop Publishers. 68

<sup>76</sup> Ibid. 68

<sup>77</sup> HAYKAL, M.H., 1978. *The Sphinx and the Commissar: The Rise and Fall of Soviet Influence in the Middle East*. HarperCollins Publishers. P. 187

<sup>78</sup> HOBBS, T., *Leviathan*. Oxford: Clarendon Press. xix

<sup>79</sup> MEDICK, V., et al, 2015, October 13, 2015. Russia's Superpower Play: Putin Bets Big on Aggressive Syria Policy. *Spiegel Online*.

<sup>80</sup> HAIM, S.G., 1962. *Arab nationalism: An anthology*. University of California Press.235

<sup>81</sup> RUBINSTEIN, A.Z., 1981. *Soviet foreign policy since World War II : imperial and global*. Cambridge, Mass.: Winthrop Publishers. 286-287

<sup>82</sup> ZIMMERMAN, W., *Soviet Perspectives on International Relations, 1956-1967*. 2. printing edn. Princeton: Princeton University Press. 114

<sup>83</sup> Ibid. 126

Soviet commentary during the years of Nikita Khrushchev's reign (1953-64) followed the traditional Bolshevik wisdom in describing international relations as a rigid hierarchy too, secured by the actual distribution of power. As Kremlin's thinkers and ideologists argued, "Great powers [are always] engaged in a constant struggle for territories and markets."<sup>84</sup> Khrushchev sincerely believed that capitalism only understands strength,<sup>85</sup> and therefore pushed for a more assertive and aggressive foreign policy.<sup>86</sup>

In post-Soviet times Russia's vulnerable frontiers, the restlessness of nationalities massed in territorial blocs along its frontiers, the suspicion mixed with contempt of rival powers, all could easily combine to threaten the Russian leadership with the prospect of a disintegration of the state. To put the dilemma boldly, Russia had, accordingly, to be a great power in order to remain a power at all.<sup>87</sup> Remaining being a power could entail an almost endless, perpetual demonstration of force along its frontiers, in the periphery, and overseas.

Brezhnev's posturing tended to stress Soviet strength rather than Soviet threat, too.<sup>88</sup> The responsibility of the Soviet Union in international politics made it thus necessary to relentlessly and systematically resort to acts of force in order to remind the rest of the world of "who is who".<sup>89</sup> As some put it, "the military potential of the Soviet Union influenced its foreign policy directly and fatally."<sup>90</sup>

From the perspective of the official Soviet ideology, power – especially its military component – had long been considered as the principal means of ensuring the survival of an encircled state and as the prerequisite through which the regime can pursue its domestic and external aims.<sup>91</sup> Some explanations for an inherent Russian offensive

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<sup>84</sup> Ibid. 127

<sup>85</sup> ХРУЩЕВ, С., 1994. *Никита Хрущев: кризисы и ракеты: взгляд изнутри*. Новости. 97

<sup>86</sup> ISRAËLIAN,VIKTOR LEVONOVICH,, 2003. *On the battlefields of the cold war : a Soviet ambassador's confession*. University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press. 68

<sup>87</sup> BARRY, DONALD D., RIEBER, ALFRED J., RUBINSTEIN,ALVIN Z., 1991. *Perestroika at the crossroads*. Armonk, N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe. 8

<sup>88</sup> SMART, C., 1995. *The imagery of Soviet foreign policy and the collapse of the Russian empire*. Westport, Conn.: Praeger. 105

<sup>89</sup> ISRAËLIAN,VIKTOR LEVONOVICH,, 2003. *On the battlefields of the cold war : a Soviet ambassador's confession*. University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press. 322

<sup>90</sup> Ibid. 400

<sup>91</sup> SONNENFELDT, H. and HYLAND, W.G., 1979. Soviet perspectives on security: Introduction. 2

realistic thinking discern deep, pre-Soviet roots for this predilection. Whereas Russia emerged in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries in the minds of two 'seas', the steppe and the forest, bereft of natural boundaries, Russians faced threats and opportunities on every frontier. The only way to secure themselves against depredation at the hands of Mongols, Cossacks, Poles, Lithuanians, Teutonic Knights, Swedes, and Turks was through preemptive invasion and control, which in turn reinforced the despotic system inherited from Orthodox, the Tatar yoke, or the Moscovy. However, it is this very geographic stretch and heterogenous "nationality problem", that has allegedly helped to push Soviet domestic and foreign policy to extreme lengths over the decades. Where Western powers may have seen a great continental empire as a source of strength, the Soviets saw as source of disloyalty and weakness. What Stalin and later Brezhnev (in Afghanistan) saw as a solution – the need to control disloyal allies even beyond the national borders - only exacerbated the problem.<sup>92</sup> This view coincides with the argument that Lenin underlined the inevitability of war with imperialism (an offensive realist perspective) while Stalin was obsessed with a capitalist encirclement (defensive realist perspective).

Russia's fears and grievances may stem from the traumatic experience of major invasions into Russia – most prominently Napoleon's and Hitler's - threatening the very existence of the Russian state. A speech made by Stalin in 1931 expresses deep rooted Russian fears: "Those who fall behind, get beaten," Stalin proclaimed. "But we do not want to be beaten. No, we refuse to be beaten! One feature of the history of old Russia, was the continuous beatings she suffered for falling behind, for her backwardness. She was beaten by the Mongol Khans. She was beaten by the Turkish beys. She was beaten by the Polish and Lithuanian gentry. She was beaten by the British and French capitalists. She was beaten by the Japanese barons. All beat her – for her backwardness; for military backwardness, for cultural backwardness, for political backwardness, for industrial backwardness...Such is the jungle law of capitalism. If you are backward, you are weak

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<sup>92</sup> BARRY, DONALD D., RIEBER, ALFRED J., RUBINSTEIN,ALVIN Z., 1991. *Perestroika at the crossroads*. Armonk, N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe. 338-339

– therefore you are wrong; hence, you can be beaten and enslaved. If you are mighty – therefore you are right; hence, we must be wary of you. That is why we must no longer lag behind.”<sup>93</sup> It is remarkable that this speech did not mention Russia’s own violent colonial, partially imperialist conquer of Siberia, the Caucasus, Central Asia or Crimea.

Many scholars argue that military power has always been the condition *sine qua non* of the Soviet state, and the offensive was “the linchpin of Soviet strategy”<sup>94</sup> or that the military dominated in forming Moscow’s foreign conduct.<sup>95</sup>

Observers of the Soviet era emphasize that the political and military leadership shared a common outlook on Soviet security. This outlook positively valued military power and held that overwhelming military strength pays dividends beyond deterrence alone. This view implied a tendency not to regard military expenditures as a burdensome social cost, as is generally the case in the West. Accordingly, the Soviet Union could not feel secure until those that threatened it posed little danger. Deterrence would be best served by the ability to fight and win wars – nuclear or otherwise. Most of the participants in Soviet politico-military decision-making shared this outlook.<sup>96</sup>

There is ample evidence that Soviet leaders believed in the utility of military force and even of war and labored constantly to perfect the fusion of policy and force in a formal strategy. The practical effect of the Soviet leader’s obsession with absolute security resulted in disregard for the security concerns of other parties.<sup>97</sup> Some authors additionally contend that Soviet militarism derived not merely from a mere aggrandizement of Soviet power, but from its historic alienation from the international order.<sup>98</sup> Furthermore, the reality of power politics may have provided a convenient rationalization for the “instinctive desires” of Soviet leaders – the expansion of the socialist

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<sup>93</sup> ALEXANDER, A.J., 1978. *Decision-making in Soviet weapons procurement*. International Institute for Strategic Studies. 2

<sup>94</sup> BARRY, DONALD D., RIEBER, ALFRED J., RUBINSTEIN, ALVIN Z., 1991. *Perestroika at the crossroads*. Armonk, N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe. 352

<sup>95</sup> CURANOVIĆ, A., 2014. *The religious factor in Russia’s foreign policy*. London; New York: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group. 56

<sup>96</sup> ALEXANDER, A.J., 1978. *Decision-making in Soviet weapons procurement*. International Institute for Strategic Studies. 42

<sup>97</sup> LEGVOLD, R., 1979. The concept of power and security in soviet history. *Adelphi Papers*, 19(151), pp. 5-12. 5

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.* 10

or anti-imperialist camp.<sup>99</sup> The Soviet geopolitical strategy, which is rooted in Leninism, has always been aimed at changing the *status quo* of international relations by striving for a shift in the correlation of forces in favor of the Soviet Union.<sup>100</sup>

The principal vehicle of USSR's power projection was military hardware, at times supplemented by military bases. The presence of the Soviet Union in regions of interest was a demonstration of its strength, but also an indicator of its potential weakness – the Soviet Union became vulnerable.<sup>101</sup> As some Cold War scholars contend, the Soviet Union tried to compensate its weakness through periodically increasing tension or through subversive activity.<sup>102</sup>

One of the priorities of the Soviet Union in dealing with the United States was to gain recognition as an equal partner, that is as one of the two world superpowers, and hence a country with a legitimate claim to have its say in the solution of international problems. A central motive behind the Soviet military buildup was thus status-seeking. An aggressive Soviet behavior and constant power projection may also conceal certain Russian cultural insecurity and feeling of inferiority. A sense of backwardness seemed to be anxiously seeking the mere appearance of equality.<sup>103</sup>

Realist interpreters portrayed the Soviet policymaking mostly as "opportunistic" gain maximizers. Geopolitical considerations motivated the Soviet behavior in the developing world, couched in the language of a conflict among rival classes. Decisions were made on the basis of calculated interests. Yet, the group-interests' approach, assuming a limited pluralism of competing group interests, saw policy outputs as a result of factional infighting.<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> LABEDZ, L., 1979. Ideology and soviet foreign policy. *Adelphi Papers*, 19(151), pp. 37-45. 37

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.* 41

<sup>101</sup> WINDSOR, P., 1979. The Soviet Union in the international system of the 1980s. *Adelphi Papers*, 19(152), pp. 2-10. 2-3

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.* 4

<sup>103</sup> SMART, C., 1995. *The imagery of Soviet foreign policy and the collapse of the Russian empire*. Westport, Conn.: Praeger. 3-4

<sup>104</sup> RAMET, P., 1986. *Soviet Policy Toward Syria, 1976-1986: Factionalism and the Limits of Influence*. Kennan Institute for Advanced Russian Studies. 1



In regard to the Middle East region, one can surmise whether the USSR's ultimate aim in the Middle East was the similar to what it was over a century before – the exertion of the political, economic, and cultural influence in the Eastern Mediterranean and the Persian Gulf. This aim has been present in the minds of Soviet leaders ever since the October revolution, but they have often changed their views on the means by which it could be best attained.<sup>105</sup> The Soviets have applied various tactics towards Middle Eastern countries, including ideological, military, economic and diplomatic methods. The usage of specific methods altered throughout the years and in regard to a given country.<sup>106</sup> During the Cold War, the means advocated by the Soviet government amounted to the abandonment of earlier methods of exporting communist revolutions in favor of the moral and material support for all forces, including representatives of the otherwise rejected bourgeoisie, propertied classes, and the clergy, that served the imagined “movement for national liberation” directed against the West.<sup>107</sup> The USSR and later Russia obviously saw direct trade-offs between security, power projection and status seeking.<sup>108</sup> A more radical view holds that the Soviet goal in the Middle East was an offensive one, i.e., to dominate the Middle East and - in case of a major conflict with the West - to deny oil supply, strategic communication routes and other assets to the United States and its allies.<sup>109</sup>

In conclusion one could say that realist world views deeply informed the Soviet and Russian foreign policy conduct. Features of realism are clearly discernable as we will demonstrate in our following empirical and comparative analysis.

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<sup>105</sup> WHEELER, G., 1961. Russia and the Arab World. *The World Today*, 17(7), pp. 307-318. 311

<sup>106</sup> SAS, S.N., 1990. *Gorbachev's New International Outlook and the Eastern Mediterranean*, . 6

<sup>107</sup> WHEELER, G., 1961. Russia and the Arab World. *The World Today*, 17(7), pp. 307-318. 311

<sup>108</sup> PRESTRE, P.L., 1997. *Role quests in the post-cold war era foreign policies in transition*. Montreal, Que: McGill-Queen's University Press. 258-259

<sup>109</sup> SAS, S.N., 1990. *Gorbachev's New International Outlook and the Eastern Mediterranean*, . 6

## **Empirical analysis. Soviet foreign policy in the Middle East analyzed from Realist perspective**

Soviet early, post-World War II objective in the Middle East was to weaken and expel Western, principally British, presence in the region. Achievement of this goal was seen by means of expansion into Soviet periphery, Iran in particular. Stalin's early post-war posture was to indicate that Soviet Middle East interests would be pursued in an aggressive and expansionist manner.<sup>110</sup> Iran was to be forced to comply with Soviet's security perceptions. Soviet foreign policy towards Iran between 1917 and 1960 was practiced in traditional Soviet power-politics terms expressed by the Red Army's presence on the territory of the target state.<sup>111</sup>

Features of power-politics in terms of realism through diplomatic pressure were also applied. The Soviet post-war mechanism of coercion was not limited only to military means of conduct. Diplomatic pressure was exercised as well by literally squeezing oil concessions from Iran. A combination of military and diplomatic means of conduct was expressed in form of reinforcing Red Army's presence, and following Tehran's refusal to the oil concessions' demand, by approaching the Soviet military through northern part of Iran, up to the Iraqi and Turkish borders. Penetration tactics were applied as well by threatening the Iranian leadership with civil riots with the help of the Tudeh' party.<sup>112</sup> Soviet central aim in Iran always has been either to dominate Iran completely or to see the Iranian government in "friendly" hands.<sup>113</sup> Stalin commented on Soviet infiltration and cultivation of local communists in following terms: "Today's war is not as in the past. Whoever occupies a territory also imposes on it his own societal system. Today, one imposes its system as far as one's army can reach. It cannot be otherwise."<sup>114</sup>

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<sup>110</sup> GOLAN, G., 1990. *Soviet policies in the Middle East : from World War Two to Gorbachev*. Cambridge [England]; New York: Cambridge University Press. 29

<sup>111</sup> GHOREICHI, AHMAD., 1965. *Soviet foreign policy in Iran 1917-1960*. 184

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.* 201-204

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.* 293

<sup>114</sup> RUBINSTEIN, A.Z., 1981. *Soviet foreign policy since World War II : imperial and global*. Cambridge, Mass.: Winthrop Publishers. 44

This policy towards Iran may be classified under offensive and defensive realist headings. From the offensive perspective, Moscow saw that its borders must be demilitarized, its neighbors must be compliant states only, and that it must have unrestricted access to its neighbor's territory. In essence, this perspective presumed that Soviet security tended to be equated with regional hegemony and this was taken to mean the exclusion of any rival state on its borders.<sup>115</sup> From defensive realist perspective, obsessed by the fear of capitalist encirclement, Moscow pursued toward Iran a policy of bluster, menace, and threat. Stalin perceived that states adjacent to Soviet borders, must remain under Moscow's control.<sup>116</sup>

Early Soviet foreign policy was characterized by traditional balance-of-power considerations and alignment against the main enemies of the moment. This policy was primarily reactive.<sup>117</sup> "Machiavelli, not Marx, inspired Stalin's foreign policy thinking."<sup>118</sup> Stalin sought not to overwhelm the West by force, but to undermine its power and prestige. The goal was to ensure Soviet security by a permanent military presence, unquestioned political control, ideological conformity, and economic exploitation; his aim was a strategic territorial control,<sup>119</sup> and was highly characterized by and expressed in realist terms and power politics. In Stalin's perception, having achieved significant military force to deter or ward off potential invaders, Soviet Union could manipulate the external balance of power. Although this was an 'evolution' of Bolshevik concept to a more traditional understanding of security, this approach inevitably left its mark on general Soviet perception of national security.<sup>120</sup>

Khrushchev sought to undo the damage done by Stalin and his policy of bullying Tehran by pressing it for granting territorial and political concessions. However, the power-politics style of Soviet conduct remained. Khrushchev was courting Iran basically

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<sup>115</sup> CHUBIN, S., 1980. *Soviet policy towards Iran and the Gulf*. London: International Institute for Strategic Studies. 3

<sup>116</sup> ČUBĪN, ŠĀHRĀM., ZABIH, SEPEHR., SEABURY, PAUL., 1974. *The foreign relations of Iran : a developing state in a zone of Great Power conflict*. Berkeley [etc.]; London: University of California Press. 51

<sup>117</sup> RUBINSTEIN, A.Z., 1981. *Soviet foreign policy since World War II : imperial and global*. Cambridge, Mass.: Winthrop Publishers. 12

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.* 13

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.* 67

<sup>120</sup> SONNENFELDT, H. and HYLAND, W.G., 1979. Soviet perspectives on security: Introduction. 5-6

with the same aim as his predecessor – to frustrate the US policy of containment and prevent encirclement. Moscow lacked the wherewithal for much else. Iran found itself in the middle between the superpowers' struggle for supremacy.<sup>121</sup> Observers recognize that the extent to which Iran was prepared to give his reassurance to assuage Soviet sensitivity or accommodate Soviet interests, at least partially, was dependent on the global balance of power.<sup>122</sup>

From 1953 to 1985 the projection of Soviet power into the Third World was instrumental in globalizing the US-Soviet rivalry and derailing the erratic moves toward détente that were made after the Cuban missile crisis and then during the interregnum between the signing of the SALT-I treaty in Moscow in May 1972 and the end of the Arab-Israeli war of October 1973.<sup>123</sup> In general, Soviets were in favor of power-politics. They supported Iran when in 1951 Muhamad Mossadegh nationalized the British-owned oil industry and were delighted when in 1978 Ayatollah Khomeini and his Islamic followers seized the United States embassy and terminated the American presence in Iran.<sup>124</sup>

Largely, Soviet foreign policy towards Iran varied depending upon the global constellation of power at any given time.<sup>125</sup> Other authors confirm that the aim to balance the US was maintained as one of the central Soviet foreign policy ends throughout its existence; this pattern came in form of bilateral treaties of friendship, of neutrality or non-aggression. With Iran, the Soviets signed three such treaties. One of goals that the Soviets achieved by the terms of these treaties was that they tied their southern neighbor to Soviet interests and forced it into predetermined line of conduct and pledged to defend its interests.<sup>126</sup>

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<sup>121</sup> BARRY, DONALD D., RIEBER, ALFRED J., RUBINSTEIN, ALVIN Z., 1991. *Perestroika at the crossroads*. Armonk, N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe. 303-304

<sup>122</sup> CHUBIN, S., 1980. *Soviet policy towards Iran and the Gulf*. London: International Institute for Strategic Studies. 10

<sup>123</sup> BARRY, DONALD D., RIEBER, ALFRED J., RUBINSTEIN, ALVIN Z., 1991. *Perestroika at the crossroads*. Armonk, N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe. 303-304

<sup>124</sup> DMITRICHIN, VASILII, COX, FREDERICK J., 1987. *The Soviet Union and the Middle East : a documentary record of Afghanistan, Iran and Turkey, 1917-1985*. Princeton (N.J.): The Kingston Press. iv

<sup>125</sup> GOLAN, G., 1998. *Russia and Iran: a strategic partnership?* London: The Royal Institute of International Affairs. 1-2

<sup>126</sup> DMITRICHIN, VASILII, COX, FREDERICK J., 1987. *The Soviet Union and the Middle East : a documentary record of Afghanistan, Iran and Turkey, 1917-1985*. Princeton (N.J.): The Kingston Press. ii

One of the main changes in Soviet foreign policy perspectives, brought by Khrushchev while succeeding Stalin was the renewing of the Communist concept of world development, an assumption that followed Khrushchev's perception that the world balance of power was inevitably shifting in favor of world Communism. The transformation of Fidel Castro's regime in Cuba, from an anti-imperialist national liberation [front], into a [pure] socialist regime, was viewed by the Kremlin as a prototype of this very process.<sup>127</sup> At the beginning of the 1960s, the assertion of superiority became more specific and less contingent. It was claimed that "changes have obtained for socialism preponderance in power over capitalism in the scales of the planet." Statements appeared, claiming the preponderance of military power for the socialist camp: "The superiority of the forces of socialism over those of imperialism; of the forces of peace over those of war, was becoming ever more marked (visible) in the world arena." The overall view in Moscow was that a new international order was forming, in which the rules of the international game would be determined by the Socialist camp, and the world 'power pyramid' would be capped by the Soviet Union. "In contemporary conditions," Kremlin claimed, "the pre-conditions are created so that socialism is in a position to determine, in growing measure, the character, methods, and trends of international relations."<sup>128</sup>

Already in the mid-1950's, Soviet's strategic thinking was dominated by the issue of relations (balance) with Western powers, mainly the United States. The Soviets wished to be able to negotiate and to achieve parity with the US, a goal for which they (the Soviets) constantly strove. To be recognized by the rest of the world as America's political and military equal.<sup>129</sup>

In our view, Moscow's attempts were aimed less towards the solution of the 1956 Suez Canal crisis, rather more with the goal to forestall the fall of Cairo into the hands of its Western rivals. Non-intervention rhetoric was the means to this end. After the Suez

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<sup>127</sup> ISRAËLIAN, VIKTOR LEVONOVICH., 2003. *On the battlefields of the cold war : a Soviet ambassador's confession*. University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press. 66-67

<sup>128</sup> ZIMMERMAN, W., *Soviet Perspectives on International Relations, 1956-1967*. 2. printing edn. Princeton: Princeton University Press. 181-182

<sup>129</sup> HAYKAL, M.H., 1978. *The Sphinx and the Commissar: The Rise and Fall of Soviet Influence in the Middle East*. HarperCollins Publishers. P. 276

Canal events, Soviet official Nikolai Bulganin told the Egyptian ambassador, “If Suez could change the balance of power in the world to the extent it has done, much time is going to be saved in the onward march of the liberation movement.”<sup>130</sup>

Following the outcome of the Suez events, the Soviets discovered, to their surprise,<sup>131</sup> their ability to produce leverage to balance the Western powers without direct military actions. Consequently, Egypt was approached by the Soviets with unprecedented willingness for assistance and cooperation.<sup>132</sup> Moscow's conclusions were reinforced by the coup d'état in Iraq in July 1958, which eventually ended the Baghdad Pact, and encouraged Moscow to push for further rapprochement with the Arab states by means of material and political assistance. Khrushchev did not conceal his fascination with the events and their outcome.<sup>133</sup> In his words in a meeting with Nasser, “We are now involved in a game that is being played at a very high speed, and in which everyone has to act quickly, without being able to judge what the other players are going to do. It is like playing chess in the dark. We are in a power struggle.”<sup>134</sup> The main Moscow's concern at that time was the Western ‘crushing strategic supremacy.’<sup>135</sup>

This was the reason, why Khrushchev became an adamant propagandist of the principle of ‘peaceful coexistence’ of two social systems – communist and capitalist. As the balance of power shifted to the communist [type of] world, the communist regime would be established without bloodshed. Hence, Khrushchev’s famous statement, “We will bury you!” (i.e., the capitalist world), was not so much a threat, but a statement of the inevitable.<sup>136</sup> Pure realism did not leave the agenda in Soviet perspective, even if the ‘peaceful coexistence’ concept sounded promising. For instance, after the coup in Iraq in 1958, the Soviets were resolute to intervene on behalf of Baghdad in case the US would

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<sup>130</sup> HAYKAL, M.H., 1978. *The Sphinx and the Commissar: The Rise and Fall of Soviet Influence in the Middle East*. HarperCollins Publishers. P. 75

<sup>131</sup> Ibid. 167-168

<sup>132</sup> Ibid. 81

<sup>133</sup> Ibid. 94-97

<sup>134</sup> Ibid. 98

<sup>135</sup> RUBINSTEIN, A.Z., 1977. *Red star on the Nile : The Soviet-Egyptian influence relationship since the June war*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press. 33

<sup>136</sup> ISRAËLIAN,VIKTOR LEVONOVICH,, 2003. *On the battlefields of the cold war : a Soviet ambassador's confession*. University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press. 66-67

invade Iraq. Khrushchev promised other Arab leaders that Moscow would demonstrate its determination in case of Western offensive.<sup>137</sup> Observers are confident that Khrushchev's term was largely characterized by pure realist thinking.<sup>138</sup>

Western scholars point that between 1965-67 Soviet foreign policy was determined in Western realist terms of 'National Interest'. In mid-1960s, Soviet statesmen gave Hans Morgenthau's concept of National Interest a generally sympathetic reception, faulting him only for his failure to bear in mind the internal class-based politics.<sup>139</sup> Khrushchev tended to treat political power and a resort to violence as synonyms. In late 1950s' Soviet political thinkers regarded Clausewitz's and Lenin's dictum that 'war is the continuation of politics by other means' as entirely valid approach.<sup>140</sup>

The departure from realism in Soviet political thinking began in the early 1960s. Khrushchev's main instrument in preventing the imperialists from interfering with the progress of national liberation movements and the advance of communist control in the underdeveloped countries was his emphasis on Soviet ICBM missiles.<sup>141</sup> However, Soviet expectations about [military] power were more inclined to aims of political manipulation and less oriented for controlling third parties.<sup>142</sup> From one hand, the Soviets extensively assisted and trained not only Third World forces, but anti-imperial, liberation fronts' militants, promoting the perception that power and force comprise central means of engagement in fighting with capitalism and imperialism. From the other hand, Moscow continuously urged Third World states' and liberation movement leaders not to resort to violence, probably due to Moscow's concern not to be compelled and be drawn into local conflicts to save its stooges.<sup>143</sup>

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<sup>137</sup> HAYKAL, M.H., 1978. *The Sphinx and the Commissar: The Rise and Fall of Soviet Influence in the Middle East*. HarperCollins Publishers. P. 99

<sup>138</sup> ZIMMERMAN, W., *Soviet Perspectives on International Relations, 1956-1967*. 2. printing edn. Princeton: Princeton University Press. 97

<sup>139</sup> Ibid. 105

<sup>140</sup> Ibid. 177-178

<sup>141</sup> Ibid. 179

<sup>142</sup> Ibid. 179

<sup>143</sup> From an interview conducted by the author with Prof. Galia Golan on 01.05.2019

The answer to the question, why the beginning of the 1960s marked Moscow's departure from realism, is supplied by argument that the atomic bomb had separated war and revolution. At the same time, and in several ways, peace took priority over accession to power. The revolution was in no way abandoned. To the "new" Soviet way of thinking, peace – the absence of violence between states – was a necessary and desirable prerequisite to revolution. In other words, peace, in Kremlin's view, became an 'instrument' to promote and eventually spread the Socialist Revolution around the world. This view was emphasized by Khrushchev's speech about the détente, regarding it as the opportunity to "promote socialist revolution by peaceful means." Securing peace thus became a more immediate task. The Soviets thereafter referred to the distribution of power as a capacity to achieve peace.<sup>144</sup> This argument might support other multiple debates which stress that the Soviets did not want Egypt and Syria to launch a war against Israel, neither in 1967 nor in 1973, urging the Egyptians not to provoke Israel on the Suez during 1968-1972. It also conforms with our earlier point, that USSR and USA viewed the notions 'détente' and 'peaceful coexistence' virtually in different terms. The realist political thinking did not go anywhere, it just transformed, in Moscow's view, into 'peaceful realism'. Some even claim that under Khrushchev, the concept of international politics became a non-zero-sum game.<sup>145</sup>

The main goal for Moscow remained to balance the Western powers in the Mediterranean, whereas the regional states, Egypt and Syria, perceived Soviet presence as a gesture of their protection by the Soviet superpower. However, Moscow's weak performance during the Suez crisis, when the USSR sent its vessels to the region when the US Sixth Fleet was already departing, left an impression of disappointment on Egypt's President Nasser. Moscow's failure during this political fragment to satisfy the expectation which it had fostered, seriously undermined its credibility in the Middle East.<sup>146</sup> Following Hungarian and Suez crises of 1956, Kremlin learned that Soviet control of world affairs

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<sup>144</sup> ZIMMERMAN, W., *Soviet Perspectives on International Relations, 1956-1967*. 2. printing edn. Princeton: Princeton University Press. 182

<sup>145</sup> *Ibid.* 270

<sup>146</sup> DRAGNICH, S.G., 1974. *The Soviet Union's Quest for Access to Naval Facilities in Egypt Prior to the June War of 1967*. AD 786 318. Arlington, Virginia: Center of Naval Analyses. United States Navy. 14-16



could be reserved *only* if backed by the Red Army. Military force, not ideology, is the effective cement for cohesion. Another lesson learned by Kremlin was, that an authority once weakened, cannot easily be reimposed.<sup>147</sup>

The main purposes initially underlying Soviet courtship of key Third World countries in early 1960s were: to undermine the Western system of alliances and international economic order; counteract US forces operating in strategically important areas; protect clients threatened by their pro-Western rivals; enable Moscow to project military power more expeditiously into politically promising situations; and to establish a political and economic presence in areas that had previously been outside the realm of Soviet capabilities.<sup>148</sup> Others contend that during the 1960s, under Khrushchev, Moscow was seeking Western confirmation of Soviet hegemony which was, in Moscow's view, entitled to it by its power capabilities.<sup>149</sup>

The sense of power conferred on the Soviet Union by the steady shift in the military balance with the West, increased the Soviet "appetite" for tangible and intangible pay-offs. As in the past, this appetite had its offensive elements. For the first time since the revolution, Soviet aspiration was being buttressed by its growing power. In this respect, the late 1960s differed from the optimistic phase of Khrushchev's term in office. While he was fascinated by modern weaponry, he saw the most potent sources of growing Soviet influence in the [very] nature of the Soviet system, and the supplied confluence of revolutionary currents. His successors seemed less sanguine on these counts and relied more on the cumulative impact of raw power. It was not so much that they intended to use this power directly, although they plainly did not exclude that possibility; the Soviet leaders rather believed that power would pay political dividends. Indeed, they believed that the USSR was entitled to these dividends, that it was entitled to be treated and

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<sup>147</sup> RUBINSTEIN, A.Z., 1981. *Soviet foreign policy since World War II : imperial and global*. Cambridge, Mass.: Winthrop Publishers. 77

<sup>148</sup> Ibid. 221

<sup>149</sup> SONNENFELDT, H. and HYLAND, W.G., 1979. *Soviet perspectives on security: Introduction*. 15

respected as a super-power, and that this role should be given formal recognition through treaties and understandings with the West.<sup>150</sup>

It is opined that the Soviet policy in the Middle East began with the “minimalistic”, purely defensive approach, the highest priority went to protecting Soviet borders and preserving the Soviet homeland from outside attack. That has often been interpreted as the need to maintain a security belt or a buffer zone just beyond Soviet borders, that is, the maintenance of friendly regimes and denial of hostile forces in areas just beyond the Soviet frontiers as was demonstrated by its policy with Iran. However, what began as a continental approach, accompanied by a conventional force doctrine eventually became both a power projection and overseas thrust, accompanied by a doctrine of nuclear deterrence suited to continental as well as global aspirations.<sup>151</sup> In other words, defensive realism transformed into offensive thrust. The Middle East became a central scene for this transition, as the Soviet Union sought to expand its reach.<sup>152</sup> Soviet attitude towards the Arab world in the early 1960s was explicitly characterized by political realism.<sup>153</sup>

However, the initial Bolshevik perception of international relations in terms of power and its rigid hierarchical structure was undermined by Khrushchev.<sup>154</sup> Khrushchev represented a phenomenon in conventional Russian imperialist thinking, he was convinced that threatening works, however one must know its limits. Hence, Khrushchev’s term was characterized by constant brinkmanship politics with the West,<sup>155</sup> with an attempt not to escalate and slide into direct confrontation. In fact, historical evidence point that the situation in the Middle East up to Khrushchev’s ouster from power, except the Suez Canal crisis, was relatively quiet, compared to the late 1960s and mid-1970s. Others point that the major difference between Khrushchev and Brezhnev periods is that while Khrushchev reluctantly acceded to the needs created by the ‘objective

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<sup>150</sup> Ibid. 15

<sup>151</sup> GOLAN, G., 1990. *Soviet policies in the Middle East : from World War Two to Gorbachev*. Cambridge [England]; New York: Cambridge University Press. 1

<sup>152</sup> GOLAN, G., 1979. Soviet power and policies in the third world: The Middle East. *Adelphi Papers*, 19(152), pp. 47-54. 47

<sup>153</sup> WHEELER, G., 1961. Russia and the Arab World. *The World Today*, 17(7), pp. 307-318. 316

<sup>154</sup> ZIMMERMAN, W., *Soviet Perspectives on International Relations, 1956-1967*. 2. printing edn. Princeton: Princeton University Press. 157

<sup>155</sup> ХРУЩЕВ, С., 1994. *Никита Хрущев: кризисы и ракеты: взгляд изнутри*. Новости. 322

situation' (China, Berlin, Cuba), under Brezhnev, the political leadership accepted the military doctrinal point of view and took steps to close the gap between Soviet objectives and power capabilities.<sup>156</sup>

In the mid-1960s, the Soviet 'forward deployment' navy military doctrine was aimed to balance the growing US capabilities in the high seas. Following the loss of their navy basing rights in Albania, Moscow was compelled to produce balancing against the US fleet in the Mediterranean by courting Egypt with the aim to achieve stationing rights for its fleet.<sup>157</sup> We cover this part in more detail in our chapter on military facilities. Many opine that the increasing presence of Soviet navy in the Indian Ocean and the Mediterranean since 1967 has created a new political situation and shifted the balance of power that formed since the WWII. Impressive Soviet fleet became new power factor in the political configuration of the region.<sup>158</sup>

The amount of military assistance, naval and otherwise, which the USSR gave Egypt, for such a long time, has been commonly viewed in terms of a superpower struggle for influence in the Middle East and subsequent military aid can legitimately be viewed in this context. But the extent and characteristics of Soviet military aid, make sense only if it served goals of much higher priority than those assumed by the 'simple' influence theory. By 1967, Soviet military assistance to Egypt had long since passed the point of diminishing returns from the standpoint of furthering Soviet influence in the Middle East. Egypt, itself, was taking much more than it was giving.<sup>159</sup> This policy was driven by balance of power perception and in our view can be best explained by this theory. There were Soviet sufficient strategic, rather than tactic interests involved to justify the military

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<sup>156</sup> ALEXANDER, A.J., 1978. *Decision-making in Soviet weapons procurement*. International Institute for Strategic Studies. 5

<sup>157</sup> DRAGNICH, S.G., 1974. *The Soviet Union's Quest for Access to Naval Facilities in Egypt Prior to the June War of 1967*. AD 786 318. Arlington, Virginia: Center of Naval Analyses. United States Navy. 20

<sup>158</sup> ČUBĪN, SĀHRĀM., ZABIH, SEPEHR., SEABURY, PAUL., 1974. *The foreign relations of Iran : a developing state in a zone of Great Power conflict*. Berkeley [etc.]; London: University of California Press. 267-268

<sup>159</sup> DRAGNICH, S.G., 1974. *The Soviet Union's Quest for Access to Naval Facilities in Egypt Prior to the June War of 1967*. AD 786 318. Arlington, Virginia: Center of Naval Analyses. United States Navy. 51

assistance program which had evolved by that time towards Egypt.<sup>160</sup> The sole aim of this extensive military aid was to balance the United States.

Only through power means of foreign policy Moscow saw its fortunes vis-à-vis the Arabs improving. The June War was a watershed in Soviet-Egyptian relations, presenting Kremlin with the desired achievements.<sup>161</sup> Through supplying and resupplying Egypt in its wars with Israel, Soviets sought not only Egypt's and Syrian compliance, but to restore and reinforce Soviet positions in the whole of the Middle East.<sup>162</sup> As Kosygin said to President Aref of Iraq and Boumedienne of Algeria, which visited Moscow as delegates of the 'Front of Confrontation' on 17<sup>th</sup> of July 1967, following Egypt's defeat, "Ending the state of war with Israel is not important. What is, is gaining time to consolidate the Arabs' military forces and the progressive regimes,"<sup>163</sup> apparently for the next battle with Israel.

Other scholars consent that the main Soviet aim in the Middle East was to balance the power of the US. The Arab defeat in 1967 led Brezhnev to up the Soviet stakes. To have equivocated after 1967, would mean leaving the region to US hegemony.<sup>164</sup> Moscow was unquestionably pursuing great power ambitions and challenging the U.S. for influence and domination of the Middle East region.<sup>165</sup> Observers note that the following Czech crisis of 1968 indicates that in the continued dispute among Soviet leaders between the "soft" conciliative and the hardline realist postures in international affairs, the latter stance prevailed.<sup>166</sup>

The Egyptian-Israeli conflict was rapidly acquiring a global dimension, a development that Washington wished to minimize. The balance between the Arabs and Israel, virtually was the balance between the Soviets and the Americans. The Cold War

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<sup>160</sup> Ibid. 51-52

<sup>161</sup> RUBINSTEIN, A.Z., 1977. *Red star on the Nile : The Soviet-Egyptian influence relationship since the June war*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press. 7-9

<sup>162</sup> RUBINSTEIN, A.Z., 1977. *Red star on the Nile : The Soviet-Egyptian influence relationship since the June war*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press. 17

<sup>163</sup> HAYKAL, M.H., 1978. *The Sphinx and the Commissar: The Rise and Fall of Soviet Influence in the Middle East*. HarperCollins Publishers. P. 187

<sup>164</sup> BARRY, DONALD D., RIEBER, ALFRED J., RUBINSTEIN, ALVIN Z., 1991. *Perestroika at the crossroads*. Armonk, N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe. 305

<sup>165</sup> KATZ, M.N., 2008. Comparing Putin's and Brezhnev's policies toward the Middle East. *Society*, **45**(2), pp. 177-180. 177

<sup>166</sup> CIA. DIRECTORATE OF INTELLIGENCE, 1968. *Politics in The Soviet Politburo and the Czech Crisis*. 0032/68. CIA. Central Intelligence Agency. 1

and the Soviet-American global confrontation was dictating the Arab-Israeli conflict pace and extent. In words of the US President Nixon in January 1970, he was in favor of “balance of power between the fighting states being kept.”<sup>167</sup> Same opinion about Moscow's goals was proposed by the Western analysts who argued that “for the Soviets, improving their military positions took precedence over the conflict resolution attempts.”<sup>168</sup> In words of the Israeli Prime Minister Golda Meir, “The Soviets would not move out of Egypt by anything Israel did or did not do.”<sup>169</sup> Conflict resolution was secondary, balancing the US was the prime Kremlin's goal. The amount of assistance that Egypt received from the Soviets surpassed the amounts required for mere standoff with Israel.<sup>170</sup> Egyptian accounts also possess that the main Moscow's goal by assisting the Arabs was to prevent US regional build-up.<sup>171</sup> Kremlin exercised pure power politics, using power means in achieving its political goals. In Sadat's words, “It seemed as if the Soviets were pushing me into a battle.”<sup>172</sup> By late-September, early-October of 1973, the Soviets were fully aware of the imminence of the second Arab-Israeli war.<sup>173</sup>

Accounts of October 1973 war reaffirm that Kremlin calculated that only with military assistance, its goals can be reached on the Arab-Israeli theater.<sup>174</sup> Neither Moscow, nor Cairo in practice, between 1967 and 1973, did not seriously consider any peaceful resolution of the Arab-Israeli conflict for time being. Seemingly, only military solution was at stake.<sup>175</sup> Other authors confirm that not that they (the Soviets) had strong objections in principle to another war; their main concern was that Egypt would not launch itself into one prematurely. The apparent Moscow's efforts to ‘restrain’ Cairo from

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<sup>167</sup> RUBINSTEIN, A.Z., 1977. *Red star on the Nile : the Soviet-Egyptian influence relationship since the June war*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press. 115-116, 232, 268-270

<sup>168</sup> GINOR, ISABELLA,,REMEZ, GIDEON,, 2017. *The Soviet-Israeli War, 1967-1973 : the USSR's military intervention in the Egyptian-Israeli conflict*. 205-206

<sup>169</sup> GINOR, ISABELLA,,REMEZ, GIDEON,, 2017. *The Soviet-Israeli War, 1967-1973 : the USSR's military intervention in the Egyptian-Israeli conflict*. 231

<sup>170</sup> Ibid. 355

<sup>171</sup> RUBINSTEIN, A.Z., 1977. *Red star on the Nile : The Soviet-Egyptian influence relationship since the June war*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press. 186

<sup>172</sup> HAYKAL, M.H., 1978. *The Sphinx and the Commissar: The Rise and Fall of Soviet Influence in the Middle East*. HarperCollins Publishers. P. 254

<sup>173</sup> RUBINSTEIN, A.Z., 1977. *Red star on the Nile : The Soviet-Egyptian influence relationship since the June war*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press. 254-255

<sup>174</sup> GINOR, ISABELLA,,REMEZ, GIDEON,, 2017. *The Soviet-Israeli War, 1967-1973 : the USSR's military intervention in the Egyptian-Israeli conflict*. xv

<sup>175</sup> Ibid. xvi

attacking Israel was nothing more than because the Egyptian army was not ready yet. On the other hand, the Soviets actually exhorted their advisers on the ground to more aggressive and decisive actions.<sup>176</sup>

The outcomes of the October war, to some accounts brought the Soviets a munificent dividends that reinforced its most optimistic assessments of the shift in the balance of power. Its main accomplishments were evident in the advantages that have come as a windfall in its strategic rivalry with the United States.<sup>177</sup> The Egyptian connection has been Moscow's costliest in the Third World, however also its most valuable. Despite the frustration, the risks and the disappointments attending relations with Cairo, Moscow generally encouraged Egyptian leaders to follow Kremlin's strategic objectives in the Middle East. By giving Egyptian leaders the military option and protecting them from the consequences of flawed policies, the Soviet Union was the beneficiary of the Arab Nationalism that weakened America's position and alliances in a region of strategic importance.<sup>178</sup> Soviet Foreign Minister Gromyko perceived the Middle East as the sole world region where the bloc alignments (balance of power) was still fluid, and that it would remain an arena for superpower confrontation for long.<sup>179</sup>

During most of the wars between Israel and the Arabs, the USSR threatened to use its military force to help its allies. During the Suez Crisis, it stood behind Egypt; during the June 1967 War it defended Syria; during the 1973 it stood behind both of them. Twice, Soviet Union sent its troops to take a direct part in active fighting 'on the ground': once in 1970 during the War of Attrition to assist Egypt to cope with Israel's air superiority; and again in 1983 following Israel's destruction of Syria's air defense array in Lebanon.<sup>180</sup> It is argued that the main causes for Soviet aspiration to assist its Arab allies in the Middle East was the balance of power competition between the superpowers, expressed by its

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<sup>176</sup> Ibid. xvii

<sup>177</sup> RUBINSTEIN, A.Z., 1977. *Red star on the Nile : The Soviet-Egyptian influence relationship since the June war*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press. 284

<sup>178</sup> RUBINSTEIN, A.Z., 1977. *Red star on the Nile : The Soviet-Egyptian influence relationship since the June war*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press. 330

<sup>179</sup> GINOR, ISABELLA, REMEZ, GIDEON, 2017. *The Soviet-Israeli War, 1967-1973 : the USSR's military intervention in the Egyptian-Israeli conflict*. 357-358

<sup>180</sup> ADAMSKY, D., 2006. *Mivtsa' Kaykaz : ha-hit'arvut ha-Sovyetit v'ha-hafta'ah ha-Yisre'elit be-Milhemet ha-hatashah*. Tel Aviv: Ma'arakhot. 7

presence in the Mediterranean. The political defeat of the USSR in Cuba in 1962 conveyed strategic inferiority of the Soviets vis-à-vis the United States. Khrushchev's successor, Leonid Brezhnev strived to get to 'strategic equality, or to reach a balance, or even preponderance, with the United States. These goals of the 'new' Soviet leadership pushed Moscow for [even] more assertive behavior in the Mediterranean.<sup>181</sup> Brezhnev sought to reverse Soviet military weakness and political misfortune demonstrated on a global scale during the Cuban missile crisis.<sup>182</sup>

While Khrushchev's approach to the Middle East rested on coexistence with the West, while recognizing the latter's supremacy in the region, Brezhnev's era gave way to aggressive policy, especially in the 1964-70s' period. Brezhnev strove to make Soviet Union dominant in the Middle East. Amid some of the Soviet setbacks in Africa and Indonesia, Soviet leaders were seeking to make up on these setbacks with their policies in the Middle East.<sup>183</sup> If early post-Stalinist Soviet foreign policy was characterized by non-containment and mutual coexistence on equal terms, Brezhnev's early era was characterized by pursuit after regional domination. Other accounts contend that it is from the beginning, that Soviet leaders were seeking dominant positions vis-à-vis the West. Moscow was almost never satisfied with mere presence in the region. Merely achieving foothold has never been an end in itself.<sup>184</sup> Kremlin's political thinking was characterized by hard-balancing patterns of behavior. Both blocs were seeking to enlist as many local allies as possible, with the attempt to balance each other's power.

Consequently, in the early 1970 Soviet foreign policy underwent a significant change in orientation. Soviet military involvement in the Third World sharply escalated, became much more frequent, direct and larger in scale. Despite the potential risk of such policy, Soviets came to rely far more heavily on force to influence the outcome of Third

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<sup>181</sup> Ibid. 17

<sup>182</sup> GOLAN, G., 1990. *Soviet policies in the Middle East : from World War Two to Gorbachev*. Cambridge [England]; New York: Cambridge University Press. 12

<sup>183</sup> KHASAN, H., 1998. Russia's Middle Eastern Policy. *The Indian Journal of Political Science*, 59(1/4), pp. 84-105. 88

<sup>184</sup> SAS, S.N., 1990. *Gorbachev's New International Outlook and the Eastern Mediterranean*, . 38

World conflicts than in the years before 1970. And this change in Soviet policy was most evident in the Middle East, especially between the June 1967 and October 1973 wars.<sup>185</sup>

Same policy was with Syria. Military means of foreign policy was prime method of gaining influence in the Third World. Under Brezhnev, Soviet regime perceived that the shift in the 'correlation of forces' could be achieved only by military means of either aid or intervention. Syria in this respect became the central target following the diplomatic loss of Egypt to the Western camp.<sup>186</sup>

Syria remained Moscow's only solid and loyal ally in the Middle East after October 1973 by being the sole channel through which the USSR has been able to resist the monopolization of the political process by the United States.<sup>187</sup> To balance Washington in the Middle East after losing Cairo became Moscow's political obsession. It courted Syria by supplying it with arms and other aid.<sup>188</sup> Other analysts reiterate that the 1970s' were characterized by Egypt's rapprochement with the West, leaving Syria as the key state for Soviet regional policy. During the Brezhnev era Syria received all the support it needed, for it was viewed as the leader of the anti-imperialist Arab front. Unlimited support was also given because of the widely-held notion that Soviet military superiority<sup>189</sup> over the West constituted the key to its political advances.<sup>190</sup>

Even the détente was viewed by Moscow in political realist terms. The Soviets knew that in order to be capable of balancing the US they were in need of technological advantage. For the holders of competitive view of the US in the CPSU the possibility of obtaining technology and capital was the chief rationale for the détente. This goal, on its turn led to finding a political solution to the Middle East region's affairs, because these conflicts were producing tension between the US and the Soviet Union, which created a

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<sup>185</sup> SPECHLER, D.R., 1986. The USSR and Third-World Conflicts: Domestic Debate and Soviet Policy in the Middle East, 1967–1973. *World Politics*, 38(3), pp. 435-461. 435

<sup>186</sup> SAS, S.N., 1990. *Gorbachev's New International Outlook and the Eastern Mediterranean*, . 48

<sup>187</sup> KARSH, E., 2014. *The Soviet Union and Syria the Asad years*. London; New York: Routledge. 97

<sup>188</sup> CIA. DIRECTORATE OF INTELLIGENCE, 1976. *Relations between Syria and the USSR*. 0507/76. CIA Central Intelligence Agency.

<sup>189</sup> IN SAS, S.N., 1990. *Gorbachev's New International Outlook and the Eastern Mediterranean*, . 34 - **BUT FROM** – David Holloway, "Gorbachev's new thinking" *Foreign Affairs*, 68, Vol 1:66-81, 1989, p.67

<sup>190</sup> SAS, S.N., 1990. *Gorbachev's New International Outlook and the Eastern Mediterranean*, . 34



poor climate for developing economic relationship. Therefore, since the economic relations were potentially beneficial for both countries, it was expected that these relations would ultimately sustain, even on the backdrop of superpower competition in the Middle East.<sup>191</sup> This perception led Kremlin to assume that even if Moscow would play a role in bringing a regional conflict, this would not affect neither the détente, nor further cooperation between the superpowers. Brezhnev's "divisibility of détente" approach, allowed him to distinguish policies between superpower level and regional level.<sup>192</sup>

Soviet Ministry of Defense held even more antagonistic view of the United States, holding that the US was unalterably hostile and threatening to the Soviet Union because of its economic and military power and aggressive intentions. This image stressed that the US must be actively countered and restrained, both military and politically. Highest priority must therefore be given to expansion of Soviet military power and political influence on a global scale. The détente, according to this view, is an American scheme to distract Soviet citizens and officials and to lure them into lowering their guard. Reducing of international tension was an illusory objective. Tension would always persist because of America's inevitable enmity to the USSR. Advocates of this image contended that it would not be tragic if events in the Middle East disrupt or prevent the détente. Hence, it was argued that there was little reason to restrain the Arabs or demand that they seek a peaceful resolution of their conflict with Israel. A settlement was desirable only if it was likely to weaken American influence in the Middle East.<sup>193</sup>

The generally accepted view was that the Soviet Union's aim was to spread its influence. Kremlin perceived that it could practice its power without risking any significant crises. However, the invasion of Afghanistan in the late 1970s' came to indicate a much greater Soviet willingness to take risks.<sup>194</sup> As some put it, the growth of the Soviet Union's

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<sup>191</sup> SPECHLER, D.R., 1986. The USSR and Third-World Conflicts: Domestic Debate and Soviet Policy in the Middle East, 1967–1973. *World Politics*, **38**(3), pp. 435-461. 449

<sup>192</sup> GOLAN, GALIA.,ROYAL INSTITUTE OF INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS., 1992. *Moscow and the Middle East : new thinking on regional conflict*. London: Pinter. 4-5

<sup>193</sup> SPECHLER, D.R., 1986. The USSR and Third-World Conflicts: Domestic Debate and Soviet Policy in the Middle East, 1967–1973. *World Politics*, **38**(3), pp. 435-461. 449-450

<sup>194</sup> CHUBIN, S., 1980. *Soviet policy towards Iran and the Gulf*. London:International Institute for Strategic Studies. 31

military power and its thirst for a status as a co-equal global power with the West, has defined a widening arc of 'legitimate' interest. The Soviets became convinced that it is only the military instrument that can decisively affect events.<sup>195</sup>

The reason for such Moscow's considerations regarding the Middle East in the 1970s was the perception that the conventional and strategic military balance was in favor of the USSR. Soviet leader's increasing preparedness to use military means to undermine or contain American influence, had major impact on Soviet policy in that time.<sup>196</sup> Others contend that Soviet position during this period in the region was determined by its military and political resources, not by American good will.<sup>197</sup> During the 1970s, political ascendancy of the heavy, military-oriented industry factions, led by Brezhnev, together with the decentralization of authority and lack of major political movements, further amplified the forces favoring military expenditures.<sup>198</sup>

The post-October war Soviet policy changed little and was still practiced in realist style power-politics manner. When the Israeli-Egyptian negotiations were under way, Soviet Foreign Minister Gromyko declared that "Our course must be to prevent any separate accord. We must get the entire Arab world from Syria to Saudi Arabia up on its hind legs."<sup>199</sup> A demonstrative and symbolic use of force, to remind neighbors of their vulnerability, or serve as notice of its concerns was a standard diplomatic practice of the Soviet Union. In January 1976, the Soviet Union conducted military maneuvers in its south, which were a hint to Iran. Similarly, the presence of 2,100 tanks in 12 divisions in the trans-Caucasus military district was connected with Iran's military build-up. The maneuvers included 2,000 tanks and about 130,000 troops and the rehearsals of

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<sup>195</sup> Ibid. 43-44

<sup>196</sup> SPECHLER, D.R., 1986. The USSR and Third-World Conflicts: Domestic Debate and Soviet Policy in the Middle East, 1967–1973. *World Politics*, **38**(3), pp. 435-461. 458

<sup>197</sup> HERRMANN, R., 1987. Soviet Policy and the Arab-Israeli Conflict: Actions, Patterns, and Interpretations. *Political Science Quarterly*, **102**(3), pp. 417-440. 432

<sup>198</sup> ALEXANDER, A.J., 1978. *Decision-making in Soviet weapons procurement*. International Institute for Strategic Studies. 2

<sup>199</sup> GINOR, ISABELLA,,REMEZ, GIDEON,, 2017. *The Soviet-Israeli War, 1967-1973 : the USSR's military intervention in the Egyptian-Israeli conflict*. 359

penetration operations on the USSR-Iran-Turkey border were demonstratively practiced.<sup>200</sup>

Late 1970s and early 80s were characterized by Moscow's pursuit after influence in the major areas of the world, especially in the regions lying south of the USSR - Afghanistan and Iran - a quest that was driven by an imperial-minded foreign policy. These states became targets of opportunistic Soviet foreign policy. Readiness to commit military resources to the Third World clients showed no signs of flagging.<sup>201</sup> As we observed earlier, imperialist tendencies result from realist perception of world affairs. Underlying Soviet willingness to accept the higher costs of an imperial policy was a belief in what might be called incrementalism: the view that modest gains, systematically garnered, can undermine the geopolitical foundations of an adversary and bring benefits, which over time can produce qualitative changes in the diplomatic environment within which the USSR operated and in the [global] balance of power itself. For Soviet leaders, the nuclear age has not rendered obsolete the time-honored principle of strengthening one's position by undermining the alliances and alignments of the adversary.<sup>202</sup>

The Soviet leadership [sincerely] believed in the utility of force as a means of preserving or promoting strategic interests. The Kremlin was not unduly worried about international public opinion. It was of course willing to utilize diplomacy and negotiations to achieve its goals, but as Moscow had demonstrated in Eastern Europe in 1953, 1956, 1968 and with the same patterns of action in the Third World, it projected an equal readiness to use force. Its 1979 military intervention in Afghanistan again comes as evidence of such behavior.<sup>203</sup> Soviet leaders respect[ed] power and correlated power with diplomacy. What motivated Moscow is a restless search for strategic advantages – an imperial ambition that is the other side of the obsessiveness with security. From the Sea of Japan and the Indian Ocean to the oil fields of the Persian Gulf, the Soviets were slowly

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<sup>200</sup> CHUBIN, S., 1980. *Soviet policy towards Iran and the Gulf*. London: International Institute for Strategic Studies. 20-21

<sup>201</sup> RUBINSTEIN, A.Z., 1981. *Soviet foreign policy since World War II : imperial and global*. Cambridge, Mass.: Winthrop Publishers. 272

<sup>202</sup> RUBINSTEIN, A.Z., 1981. *Soviet foreign policy since World War II : imperial and global*. Cambridge, Mass.: Winthrop Publishers. 272

<sup>203</sup> *Ibid.* 287

but carefully trying to change the balance of power in their favor, and this was a strategic decision of considerable importance. In addition, the Soviets had a different set of values which fed its all-pervasive political and strategic rivalry with the West.<sup>204</sup>

Competition and confrontation were seen as the dominant elements in relations with the United States. Any devolution of power from Moscow was perceived with consternation placing high premium on support for “liberation movements” in Soviet foreign policy in the Third World. Expansion and struggle against imperialism in the Third World was seen as the main goal. The Soviet military power, as a means of foreign policy, was in no way to be downgraded. Some in Kremlin saw the détente in strictly political terms and called for not to supplement political détente with military détente. Their main concern was that the détente not being pushed too far.<sup>205</sup>

Among other Soviet leaders, Brezhnev was especially in favor of military means of conduct. He was unusually close to the Soviet military.<sup>206</sup> Scholars of the Soviet epoch underline that Brezhnev perceived power-politics as most effective and this argument is confirmed by evidence. Indeed, foreign policy legacy of the late Brezhnev years is characterized by an extraordinary Soviet [military] activism, beginning with the joint Soviet-Cuban intervention in Angola in 1975, continued through the second joint Soviet-Cuban involvement on behalf of Ethiopia in 1977-78, Moscow's support for Vietnam's invasion of Cambodia in 1978, culminating with the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in December 1979.<sup>207</sup> Most of regional wars that the Soviets were involved in, in the Middle East, on which we elaborate in our study, also occurred on Brezhnev's shift in office.

As of mid-80s', Soviet foreign policy began to shift to less militaristic stance.<sup>208</sup> Contrary to Brezhnev's interest in the Third World and expression of a strong interventionist position to block the West, as was expressed at the Twenty-Sixth CPSU

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<sup>204</sup> Ibid. 287

<sup>205</sup> CIA. DIRECTORATE OF INTELLIGENCE, 1978. *The Foreign Policy Views of Mikhail Suslov*. CIA/RP 78-10259CX. National Foreign Assessment Center.

<sup>206</sup> MARSHALL, A., 1979. Sources of Soviet power: The military potential in the 1980s. *Adelphi Papers*, 19(152), pp. 11-17. 12

<sup>207</sup> FUKUYAMA, F., 1986. Gorbachev and the Third World. *Foreign Affairs*, 64(4), pp. 715-731. 717

<sup>208</sup> HERRMANN, R.K., 1992. Soviet behavior in regional conflicts: Old questions, new strategies, and important lessons. *World Politics*, 44(3), pp. 432-465. 444

Congress in 1981, marking a peak of Soviet power-politics, a year later, in September 1982, the Soviet leader retreated from the interventionist position, calling upon both NATO and the Warsaw Pact to refrain from activity in the Third World. The call was for more restrained and less ambitious policy.<sup>209</sup>

Under Chernenko, Moscow was attempting to broaden its power base in the Arab world, thus utilizing Syria's appeal for extended Soviet aid.<sup>210</sup> Moscow's generosity in the aftermath of the Lebanese war was directly related to its anxiety to recover its regional standing following the Israeli action in Lebanon. However, gradually, as of 1984, Soviet assistance indicated Moscow's diminishing willingness to take risks on Syria's behalf.<sup>211</sup>

Before Gorbachev, Moscow almost uncritically provided its major clients with military instruments for the pursuit of national ambitions.<sup>212</sup> Soviet policy toward the Third World, up to Gorbachev's accession to power remained heavily mortgaged to "class struggle" thinking, military instrumentalities, and support for indigent Marxist dependents and radical Middle East clients. Gorbachev has imposed a new set of priorities, which included: reassertion of an effective role for the Soviet Union by operating on more realistic (pragmatic), less ideological grounds; supporting communist allies; selectively preserving Marxist-Leninist footholds in the Third World gained under Brezhnev; cautiously backing some revolutionary movements; and reducing financial outlays that have no economic or serious political return and seeking to increase economic gains.<sup>213</sup>

Under Gorbachev, Soviet military doctrine was to change with a significant reduction of the strategic importance of the Middle East region altogether.<sup>214</sup> Gorbachev's term was characterized by a separation from the military posture in its foreign policy conduct toward closer control over military expenditures.<sup>215</sup> Some of late Soviet

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<sup>209</sup> GOLAN, G., 1990. *Soviet policies in the Middle East : from World War Two to Gorbachev*. Cambridge [England]; New York: Cambridge University Press. 26

<sup>210</sup> KARSH, E., 2014. *The Soviet Union and Syria the Asad years*. London; New York: Routledge. 6

<sup>211</sup> Ibid. 82-83

<sup>212</sup> BARRY, DONALD D., RIEBER, ALFRED J., RUBINSTEIN, ALVIN Z., 1991. *Perestroika at the crossroads*. Armonk, N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe. 303-304

<sup>213</sup> CIA. DIRECTORATE OF INTELLIGENCE, 1999. *Gorbachev's Foreign Policy*. 23484. CIA. Central Intelligence Agency. 3171

<sup>214</sup> GOLAN, G., 1990. *Soviet policies in the Middle East : from World War Two to Gorbachev*. Cambridge [England]; New York: Cambridge University Press. 15

<sup>215</sup> MARSHALL, A., 1979. Sources of Soviet power: The military potential in the 1980s. *Adelphi Papers*, 19(152), pp. 11-17. 12

commentators stressed openly that all the efforts Moscow invested in the Third World were aimed to balance the United States. Analysts of Soviet behavior begun to reveal the true nature of past Soviet engagements with the Third World. The linkage between Soviet foreign policy and its aid to the Third World, and Soviet-American relations appeared clearer. The writings of Soviet Professor Dashichev, which was a landmark of the *Glasnost*, underscored the balance of power rather than 'class struggle' as an analytical tool. Dashichev denounced Stalin for his [rude] hegemonistic, great-power ambitions which repeatedly jeopardized the political equilibrium between the two superpowers and blamed him for the 'conflicts and frictions that developed with their socialist countries.'<sup>216</sup>

However, a retreat from an activist Third World policy and power projection did not mean an abandonment of all interests abroad, particularly in area adjacent to the Soviet borders. Nor did greater flexibility and pragmatism meant the absence of any concern over balancing the West. Scholars point that towards the 1980s, Soviet foreign policy in the Middle East could be explained in terms of competition and cooperation at the same time. Balancing the power of the West did not need to entail expansionism or aggressiveness. It is perceived that it often accorded priority to low-risk, non-confrontational postures.<sup>217</sup>

In military terms, Gorbachev inherited a very strong empire which had achieved strategic parity with the US and was determined to become involved in global competition by means of participation in military conflicts either by proxies or by its own forces.<sup>218</sup> The main changes in Soviet foreign policy brought by Gorbachev was the deemphasis on the military instrument and encouragement of negotiated solutions to regional conflicts. However, this notwithstanding, Gorbachev's course continued to embody certain elements that have characterized Soviet foreign policy since the mid-1950s, such as

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<sup>216</sup> BARRY, DONALD D., RIEBER, ALFRED J., RUBINSTEIN, ALVIN Z., 1991. *Perestroika at the crossroads*. Armonk, N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe. 311-312

<sup>217</sup> GOLAN, G., 1990. *Soviet policies in the Middle East : from World War Two to Gorbachev*. Cambridge [England]; New York: Cambridge University Press. 289

<sup>218</sup> SAS, S.N., 1990. *Gorbachev's New International Outlook and the Eastern Mediterranean*, . 48

comprehensive activism, salience of arms transfers as foreign policy instrument, and competitive rivalry.<sup>219</sup>

The shift away from heavy reliance on fostering the military instrument as a means of achieving political goals was the most significant difference between Gorbachev's Third World policy and his predecessors. Afghanistan was the watershed in addition to commitments in other regions such as Syria. As Gorbachev himself said in 1988, "Any armed conflict, including an internal one, can poison the atmosphere of entire region and create a situation of anxiety and alarm for a country's neighbors...That is why we are against any armed conflicts."<sup>220</sup> We observe that such statements, along with consequential withdraw of Soviet forces from Afghanistan a year after, point to the departure from political realism in Soviet foreign policy thinking.

Scholars propose that Gorbachev and his like-minded associates chose the idealistic New Thinking over competing foreign policy programs because it offered a new global mission that would enhance Soviet international status while preserving a distinctive national identity. In the early 1980s, the Soviet Union possessed all the elements of power, including sizeable nuclear arsenal, huge conventional forces, and a territorial empire in Eastern Europe, but still was not accepted as a diplomatic or political equal by the United States and other advanced Western industrial powers. By recognizing that military power alone did not confer political influence or acceptance, Gorbachev and his advisors sought to attain a new status for the Soviet Union in form of moral and political leader of a new international order, shaped according to the principles of the New Thinking. This new identity, based on "soft power," would have allowed the Soviet Union, later Russia, to achieve the status of a great power without first attaining a level of economic and technological development comparable to that of the United States. It was, what some authors call, an attempt to make 'a shortcut to greatness.'<sup>221</sup> The co-called

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<sup>219</sup> BARRY, DONALD D., RIEBER, ALFRED J., RUBINSTEIN,ALVIN Z., 1991. *Perestroika at the crossroads*. Armonk, N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe. 309

<sup>220</sup> Ibid. 309-310

<sup>221</sup> LARSON, D.W. and SHEVCHENKO, A., 2003. Shortcut to greatness: The new thinking and the revolution in Soviet foreign policy. *International Organization*, 57(1), pp. 77-109. 78

“détente plus” strategy favored reducing defense spending and overseas commitments somewhat until the Soviet Union has recovered its power and then resume expansion.<sup>222</sup> Shevardnadze proved a staunch advocate of Gorbachev’s policy of ‘mutual sufficiency’, arguing that the USSR could no longer afford to engage in a race for military superiority.<sup>223</sup>

Gorbachev’s departure from realism was followed by altering balance-of-power thinking replacing it with balance-of-interests perception, which proclaimed voluntary agreements between states.<sup>224</sup> Attempts to describe Gorbachev’s foreign policy characteristics provide a mixed picture. Moscow did not abandon its traditional allies in regional conflicts, and it did not surrender its right to provide arms. At the same time its approach to regional conflicts changed. The pattern in Soviet behavior did not reveal a wave of isolationism and retreat into the fortress, nor did it suggest a hasty rush to disengage. The retrenchment that was evident appeared to reflect a search for compromise.<sup>225</sup>

Moscow's foreign policy towards Egypt during this period supplies us with evidence of departure from political realism. One significant difference of Gorbachev’s foreign policy towards Egypt, in opposition to his predecessors, was his reliance on diplomatic, political and economic means of conduct, rather than on means of military force and coercion. Instead of supplying arms, Gorbachev was more after building relations by supplying economic and material aid, despite severely deteriorating economics of the USSR itself. It is along these constructivist lines that Moscow under Gorbachev was pursuing its relations with Egypt.<sup>226</sup> As Gorbachev himself claimed, “The meaning of our international efforts and one of the key tenets of the New Thinking is to impart the rivalry

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<sup>222</sup> Ibid. 82

<sup>223</sup> WEBER, J. and SOMMER, P., 1997. *Eduard Shevardnadze and the End of the Cold War*. 0704-0188. Washington DC. USA: National Defense University. National War College. 3

<sup>224</sup> LARSON, D.W. and SHEVCHENKO, A., 2003. Shortcut to greatness: The new thinking and the revolution in Soviet foreign policy. *International Organization*, **57**(1), pp. 77-109. 97

<sup>225</sup> HERRMANN, R.K., 1992. Soviet behavior in regional conflicts: Old questions, new strategies, and important lessons. *World Politics*, **44**(3), pp. 432-465. 457

<sup>226</sup> NSA, 2011. *Moscow's Realignment with Cairo: A Look at Gorbachev's New Political Thinking*. 63852. NSA National Security Agency report. 4-5



between various socioeconomic and political systems the quality of sensible competition in conditions of respect for freedom of choice and a balance of interests.”<sup>227</sup>

The conservatives inside Kremlin tried to force Gorbachev to preserve Soviet positions in the Middle East, meaning, to put more emphasis on power rather than other political elements that the USSR under Gorbachev projected.<sup>228</sup> The military saw Gorbachev’s policy as endangering Soviet power potential. His behavior during the 1991 Gulf crisis added to their concerns that the United States would shift the NATO towards Soviet Unions’ southern (Iranian) direction.<sup>229</sup>

Analysis of Soviet foreign policy in the 1980s provides us with clues to the fundamentals on which future Russian policy is to be conducted. Observers predict that it either will become more interested in projecting its growing military power in order to influence the course of events, or will adhere to a cautious, essentially status-quo policy, reacting to opportunities rather than forcing the pace of desired change.<sup>230</sup> Some opine that in the 1980s, the USSR military power and international influence were greater than ever before in the Soviet history.<sup>231</sup> However, during Gorbachev era, the Soviet Union reassessed the Third World diplomatic and political opportunities available in these regions. Even before the advent of the “New Thinking”, the Soviet leadership appeared dissatisfied with both the risks to be run and the resources to be committed in the name of preserving the Third World client network acquired in the late 1970’s, which were considered as the heyday years of the Soviet Third World activism. Accordingly, Soviet clients have been assigned a lower ideological status and Soviet complaints about the client’s use of aid have become routine. Nevertheless, the negative diagnosis hardly meant Soviet passivity in the Third World. Aid to most radical clients remained at high levels and Soviet success in blocking a UN Security Council call for arms embargo on

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<sup>227</sup> Ibid. 7

<sup>228</sup> GOLAN, GALIA.,ROYAL INSTITUTE OF INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS., 1992. *Moscow and the Middle East : new thinking on regional conflict*. London: Pinter. 60-61

<sup>229</sup> Ibid. 58-59

<sup>230</sup> RUBINSTEIN, A.Z., 1981. *Soviet foreign policy since World War II : imperial and global*. Cambridge, Mass.: Winthrop Publishers. 141

<sup>231</sup> Ibid. 145-146

Iran has been a further source of potential influence in this respect. The communist regimes, which were under acute insurgent pressure, still enjoyed aid which have steadily increased. As the Soviet Union “opened a second front” in the Third World, another shift was made towards its clients. A closer relations were pursued with many states that previously were written off as ‘American lackeys’ through protecting them from being overthrown.<sup>232</sup>

Some explain Gorbachev’s departure from reliance on military force in promotion of Moscow’s policies by proposing that during Gorbachev’s tenure, no such opportunity in the Third World appeared that might have tempted him to undertake significant new military commitments; apparently no major conflict, endangering Soviet vital interests, nor foreign regime’s invitation to participate in local conflict in its defense were issued during early Gorbachev’s years.<sup>233</sup>

Gorbachev’s *Comprehensive Activism* approach was an attempt to develop comprehensive relations with virtually all Third World countries, irrespective of ideological and political difference. In this respect, Gorbachev has put a special emphasis on developing or reviving USSR’s relations with Egypt and Iran. However, whereas pre-Gorbachev Soviet regimes were essentially reactive and consisted of being receptive to regimes who were seeking relations with the Soviet Union, so was Gorbachev. As in the past, when a shared interest in countering American policy was the cohesive that bound politically disparate regimes to the Soviet Union, so during Gorbachev’s tenure strategic denial still played a far more significant role than ideological affinity in determining Soviet policy and commitments.<sup>234</sup>

The shift in Soviet foreign policy that occurred under Gorbachev was far from being a new trend. First signs of shift from power-politics towards more constructivist approach was already beginning to take root in late 1960s - early 1970s. The Soviet leadership

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<sup>232</sup> SESTANOVICH, S., 1988. Gorbachev’s foreign policy: A diplomacy of decline. *Probs.Communist*, **37**, pp. 1. 12

<sup>233</sup> BARRY, DONALD D., RIEBER, ALFRED J., RUBINSTEIN,ALVIN Z., 1991. *Perestroika at the crossroads*. Armonk, N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe. 311

<sup>234</sup> *Ibid.* 319-320

under Khrushchev and Brezhnev did not focus commitments primarily on radical, Marxist-Leninist regimes. If by the 1970s Third World Soviet allies were heavily subsidized because they suited Soviet strategic purposes, since 1975 'no Soviet largesse was in evidence.' New Thinking notwithstanding, Gorbachev's aid policies to Third World and Syria in particular, did not indicate that economic considerations have yet taken command in the Soviet approach over the strategic. There has been no diminished commitment to the 'forward deployment' policy of Khrushchev and Brezhnev. What differed Gorbachev was only his search for more effective, less military threatening, and [hopefully] more cost-efficient ways of sustaining pro-Soviet regimes in the Third World.<sup>235</sup>

Others opine that the large-scale Soviet reforms, the 'New Thinking', 'Perestroika' and 'Glasnost' notwithstanding, Gorbachev still saw the world in bipolar terms, and until the USSR comes to terms with the fact that it was no longer the global equal to the United States, it would have no alternative but to continue its unique reliance on force and coercion as its foreign policy tools.<sup>236</sup> This opinion is reinforced by others who argue that Gorbachev's "new" policy in the Middle East statements notwithstanding, in August 1988 US intelligence revealed that the Soviets had significantly expanded the Syrian port of Tartus for serving the Soviet Mediterranean fleet. Similar improvements were made in Syrian port of Latakia following Soviet loss of naval facilities in Egypt in the 1970s. These actions in themselves appeared to be a deviation from the general 'pull back from power projection' characteristics of Soviet military policy since the early 1980s, and Gorbachev's New Thinking policy.<sup>237</sup> Fukuyama thus concludes that there was no evidence that the Soviets have cut back on their overall military and economic assistance to the Third World in the period since Brezhnev's death. The economic constraints mentioned in Soviet statements and writings did not affect the actual behavior 'on the ground'.<sup>238</sup>

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<sup>235</sup> Ibid. 319-320

<sup>236</sup> Ibid. 329

<sup>237</sup> GOLAN, G., 1990. *Soviet policies in the Middle East : from World War Two to Gorbachev*. Cambridge [England]; New York: Cambridge University Press. 279-280

<sup>238</sup> FUKUYAMA, F., 1986. *Moscow's Post-Brezhnev Reassessment of the Third World.*, 62

Under Gorbachev, the Soviet willingness to end local conflicts in the Middle East did not necessarily mean the abandonment of competition with the United States. The interests in ending regional conflicts reflected the efforts to cultivate favorable relations with a maximum number of states, regardless the nature of their regimes and to eliminate pretexts for American military interventions or presence, and to seek measures, of cooperative nature, for the reduction of international and regional tensions, which were in tandem with Gorbachev's preoccupation with the Perestroika.<sup>239</sup> Seemingly, Gorbachev was seeking legitimation of his New Thinking policies in form of cooperative behavior, however without significant departure from 'old school' Cold War power politics.

However, as internal social and economic distress sapped the state's international strength, and the USSR could no longer pose any significant competition to the West, Gorbachev began to broadcast the message that strength no longer mattered.<sup>240</sup> Was it a sincere approach or a smart tactic? Later, long after his retirement, Gorbachev stated that "Almost all the conflicts of the past decades, have seen attempts to solve them by force, or at least by threats of force. The emerged 'military force mentality' had to be overcome."<sup>241</sup>

Despite these observations, analysts point that Gorbachev and his Foreign Minister Shevardnadze pursued Soviet interests in the Middle East more vigorously and imaginatively than their predecessors.<sup>242</sup> For instance, amid the New Thinking agenda, during Gorbachev, Syria remained the linchpin of the Soviet positions in the Middle East and Moscow continued to provide it with modern weapons systems, albeit not always at the pace and price the Arabs wanted. Although Gorbachev lamented in 1987 for the billions spent on Syria, Soviet arms sales to the Middle East were on pace to reverse a four-year downward trend.<sup>243</sup>

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<sup>239</sup> GOLAN, G., 1990. *Soviet policies in the Middle East : from World War Two to Gorbachev*. Cambridge [England]; New York: Cambridge University Press. 289

<sup>240</sup> SMART, C., 1995. *The imagery of Soviet foreign policy and the collapse of the Russian empire*. Westport, Conn.: Praeger. 128

<sup>241</sup> MEMRI, 2016. *Mikhail Gorbachev: Russia Must Return to a Path of Real Democracy*. The Middle East Media Research Institute.

<sup>242</sup> CIA. DIRECTORATE OF INTELLIGENCE, 1987. *Gorbachev's Policy Toward the Middle East*. SOV M 87-20082. Washington DC: Central Intelligence Agency.

<sup>243</sup> Ibid.

Some observers then wonder, why the 'new' strategic course under Gorbachev? It is proposed that the announced "new" Soviet political direction was a result of reevaluation of past failures by far from all the parties of the Soviet regime. Only a handful of the Soviet elites understood their past policies and recognized the failures of past leaders. The other part of Soviet political establishment on the contrary, perceived that they did not try 'hard enough' and lacked the willpower, and that they did not use force massively and quickly enough. This conclusion is reinforced by the fact that Shevardnadze was criticized for having 'lost' Eastern Europe. Conservatives, who understood international affairs in Cold War terms and perceived US intentions as hostile, were in favor of 'peace through force' policy and saw Shevardnadze's cooperation with the West as a sign of weakness. Shevardnadze was criticized for his willingness to defend Western interests in the Gulf and the conservatives questioned him the wisdom of not deterring such large-scale American actions. The hardliners were confident that Gorbachev is squandering Soviet credibility, power posture and influence. Although the conservatives did not prevail, they succeeded in limiting Gorbachev's ability to participate with the United States in the efforts against Iraq.<sup>244</sup>

Some stress that up to the 1980s, the Soviets remained dependent on military strength and that major changes in future Soviet [Russian] policy is an unlikely development.<sup>245</sup> That the military power is the chief instrument of Soviet policy has become a familiar assertion, although, from the Soviet viewpoint, military power is but one element in the changing 'correlation of forces' (balance of power). Yet there is little question that military power has acquired an increasing weight in the Soviet definition of what constitutes changes in this correlation: The Soviet Union is regarded as a major power *because* of its military strength and this must affect both the Soviet Union's perception of what are its dues and how other countries see its power in relation to their own efforts to achieve security. It is anticipated that there is little expectation of any general decline in the military emphasis. The attitude of present and future leadership is

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<sup>244</sup> HERRMANN, R.K., 1992. Soviet behavior in regional conflicts: Old questions, new strategies, and important lessons. *World Politics*, 44(3), pp. 432-465. 459-460

<sup>245</sup> BERTRAM, C., 1980. *Prospects of Soviet Power in the 1980s*. Springer. 2

likely to favor a strong military posture, and the Soviet military will be able to point to sufficient insecurity in the world justifying its demands. In addition, it will not be easy for any Soviet leadership to overcome the inertia of the military-industrial-bureaucratic complex which supports, and will continue so, this trend.<sup>246</sup>

Soviet anxiety to assert its global reach, irrespective of whether real interests are at stake or not, will probably continue, and here its underlying weakness will probably still impel it to rely on the military instruments of influence and coercion. Analysts predicted that it will perhaps concern itself intermittently with developments in the Middle East, however, without any coherent strategy, without any identifiable long-term aim, but with a degree of opportunism equal to its undifferentiated ambitions. In this sense the fragmentation of the world order already represents[ed] a success for the Russians, providing it greater local opportunities and imposing fewer constraints than did the earlier periods of super-power détente.<sup>247</sup>

Observers who questioned the enigma of Soviet behavior in the Middle East conclude that 'only more aggressive Soviet behavior would give us the evidence we need in order to estimate the limits of its capabilities'.<sup>248</sup> The Russian intervention in Syria in 2014 thus might have provided the desired evidence for the estimation of Russian incentives and future goals in the region.

### **Analyzing contemporary Russian foreign policy from Realist perspective**

We observe that Gorbachev's foreign policy is more in compliance with policy of appeasement towards the West, referred as the US, which implies to the granting of concessions to a great power threatening to gain ascendance over others in the international system. This policy is often embarked in hopes that the power, aspiring to dominance, will be satiated and cease making demands of aggregating power, although

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<sup>246</sup> BERTRAM, C., 1980. *Prospects of Soviet Power in the 1980s*. Springer. 3

<sup>247</sup> WINDSOR, P., 1979. The Soviet Union in the international system of the 1980s. *Adelphi Papers*, 19(152), pp. 2-10. 9-10

<sup>248</sup> HERRMANN, R., 1987. Soviet Policy and the Arab-Israeli Conflict: Actions, Patterns, and Interpretations. *Political Science Quarterly*, 102(3), pp. 417-440. 438

realists are highly skeptical of efficiency of such policy, arguing that a power could never be satisfied short of attaining complete dominance.<sup>249</sup> We refer Gorbachev's immediate successor Boris Yeltsin's foreign policy closer to a policy of bandwagoning with the West. By bandwagoning, weaker states ally themselves with the strong, either because they recognize that it would be futile to resist the stronger state, or because they expect to profit from their alliance with the potential hegemon as it conquers others. Offensive realists rule out bandwagoning by great powers,<sup>250</sup> thus leaving the option of adoption of bandwagoning policy to states which ceased to be regarded and/or to possess status and capabilities which correspond to a superpower. Bandwagoning states also implicitly give up the quest for more power.<sup>251</sup>

Incorporating both an economic element and a time element into the logic of the strategy helps us make sense of why bandwagoning would ever appeal to a great power. Since economic ties can deliver benefits to both parties, the weaker power might hope to survive in the short run by allying with the hegemonic power and add to its current economic base as well. If current economic gains can be converted to military power in the future, the bandwagoning state might improve its power potential so that it could reassert its autonomy at some point of time.<sup>252</sup> Soviet policy under Gorbachev can in part be explained by this approach. By trying to bandwagon with the West, mainly the United States, the USSR under Gorbachev and later Yeltsin, tried to minimize its losses and halt, or postpone its decline. Bandwagoners assume that "jumping on the bandwagon" of the leading candidate or a recent victor is a more favorable policy because losing to the winner does not place their security in jeopardy. By siding with the stronger party, bandwagoners attempt either to increase their gains, or reduce their losses.<sup>253</sup>

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<sup>249</sup> FORTMANN, M., WIRTZ, J.J. and PAUL, T.V., 2004. *Balance of Power: Theory and Practice in the 21st Century*. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press. 84

<sup>250</sup> FORTMANN, M., WIRTZ, J.J. and PAUL, T.V., 2004. *Balance of Power: Theory and Practice in the 21st Century*. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press. 55

<sup>251</sup> *Ibid.* 55

<sup>252</sup> *Ibid.* 83

<sup>253</sup> BURCHILL, S.E.A., 2015. *Theories of International Relations*. Hampshire, UK: Palgrave Macmillan.37-38

Some in fact predicted that Russia was likely to bandwagon with the United States due to its decline after the Cold War.<sup>254</sup> This assessment proved to be valid, but only in the short-run during the immediate post-Soviet transition period full of economic and social crises and peripheral conflicts. After Vladimir Putin became Russian President, it seems that Russia gradually departed from bandwagoning with the West, while heading towards counter-balancing.<sup>255</sup>

For stronger states, bandwagoning materially increases the probability of hegemony and thus the possibility, that the bandwagoning state might lose its sovereignty.<sup>256</sup> This argument adds to our assumption that President Putin, following his rise to power, was clearly aimed to cease bandwagoning with the West, and the 'loss of sovereignty' argument, repeatedly reiterated and stressed by Putin ('sovereign democracy') comes as one indication for his predecessor's policy of bandwagoning and Putin's return to balancing.

What does this say about Putin's foreign policy in the Middle East? Certain observers contend that it appears to be far more successful than Brezhnev's in 1982 or Soviet foreign policy toward the Middle East at any time during the Cold War. Under Putin, Russia is gaining influence at America's expense. While Moscow now has friendly relations with nearly all Middle Eastern governments, Washington does not. This puts Russia in a better position than the US to serve as a mediator in the Middle East politics. Some even argue that Moscow today is like Washington was following Moscow's breaking of relations with the Jewish state in 1967, that is, regarded by most Arab states as the primary mediator between them and Israel.<sup>257</sup> Only today, Moscow is perceived as main mediator between the West and the Muslim states.

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<sup>254</sup> FORTMANN, M., WIRTZ, J.J. and PAUL, T.V., 2004. *Balance of Power: Theory and Practice in the 21st Century*. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press. 95

<sup>255</sup> FORTMANN, M., WIRTZ, J.J. and PAUL, T.V., 2004. *Balance of Power: Theory and Practice in the 21st Century*. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press. 95

<sup>256</sup> Ibid. 227

<sup>257</sup> KATZ, M.N., 2008. Comparing Putin's and Brezhnev's policies toward the Middle East. *Society*, **45**(2), pp. 177-180. 180



The contrast between Brezhnev and Putin regimes is described in following terms: During the late Brezhnev era, Middle East actors, that Moscow was on good terms with, were ones that Washington was on bad terms with and vice-versa. While Washington was closely allied with Israel during this period, Moscow had hostile relations with it. Similarly, while Moscow was closely aligned with Syria and the PLO during same period, Washington had hostile relations with them. Egypt went from having close relations with Moscow and hostile ones with Washington in the Nasser and early Sadat years, to having close relations with Washington and poor ones with Moscow in the later Sadat years and under Mubarak. In civil war-torn Lebanon, Moscow largely supported the policy of its ally Syria while Washington mainly (if not completely - original) supported the policy of its ally Israel. Jordan had civil but distant relations with Moscow; it was mainly allied with Washington during this period.<sup>258</sup>

As opposed to the aforementioned period, under Putin, as of 2008, Moscow had either very good, or reasonably good relations with all the major actors in the Arab–Israeli arena. Moscow’s closest ally, as before, is Syria. But Moscow also has reasonably good relations with Jordan, which Putin visited in 2007; Egypt, which he visited in 2005; and even Israel, which he also visited in 2005. While Israel is unhappy about Russian arms deliveries to Syria and its ties with Iran, these have not prevented Russian–Israeli trading relations or their cooperation in the security domain. In addition, while Putin’s administration has maintained close ties with Palestinian Fatah (a transformed Palestinian PLO), it has also sought good relations with Hamas after the latter’s victory in the 2006 Palestinian parliamentary elections. Two high-level Hamas delegations have visited Moscow, though neither met with Putin. In Lebanon, Moscow has sought good relations with the Lebanese Government, but also with Syria’s and Iranian ally Hizballah. In short, by 2008, Washington has both allies and adversaries in the Arab–Israeli arena, whereas Moscow is friendly with everyone there.<sup>259</sup>

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<sup>258</sup> KATZ, M.N., 2008. Comparing Putin’s and Brezhnev’s policies toward the Middle East. *Society*, **45**(2), pp. 177-180. 178

<sup>259</sup> *Ibid.* 178

## *The 'new' Russian Realism*

Russian foreign policy between 2000 and 2006 is characterized as the 'new realism.'<sup>260</sup> In 2002 Russian Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov proclaimed that the newly established Russian Federation is qualitatively different from all of its predecessors. Ivanov further argued that Russia did not and implicitly does not see itself as heir to the Soviet policy in pursuing a foreign policy dictated by the requirements of world inter-class struggle.<sup>261</sup> Following the immediate collapse of the Soviet state, some wondered what would replace the Soviet statecraft? Would it become the "traditional" Russian (read Czarist - original) agenda, peering at the world through imperial, geopolitical lens? Or, will Russia "invent" a substantially new *weltanschauung* in line with Russia's economic paralysis, or rather in pace with Gorbachev's "common European home" and "interdependent world"? (term and italic original). Or will Russia grope for a time in confusion as to its proper role in the world?<sup>262</sup> Social Identity theory predicts that post-Soviet Russian leaders would first mobilize their efforts to compete with Western powers, by increasing [its] military expenditures.<sup>263</sup>

In the post-Soviet period, contemporary Russian leadership revealed an increasing tendency to show strength and resolve, especially during Vladimir Putin's tenure. In part it was a consequence of its limited real leverage abroad with the Soviet army marching back home and Soviet economic assistance to its clients dwindling to a trickle. This left the leadership all the more dependent on past patterns of determinate, coercive and occasionally even threatening behavior.<sup>264</sup> The early post-Gorbachev foreign policy under Boris Yeltsin's began to signal some patterns of resolve and determination observed in his reaction to Western attempts to pose sanctions and punitive measures against Iraq

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<sup>260</sup> SAKWA, R., 2008. 'New Cold War' or twenty years' crisis? Russia and international politics. *International affairs*, **84**(2), pp. 241-267. 241

<sup>261</sup> BLANK, STEPHEN J., STANY ZJEDNOCZONE., CONSUMER PRODUCT SAFETY COMMISSION., ARMY WAR COLLEGE., STRATEGIC STUDIES INSTITUTE., 2015. *Perspectives on Russian foreign policy*. Lavergne; Carlisle Barracks: CPSC] ; Strategic Studies Institute. 25-26

<sup>262</sup> BARRY, DONALD D., RIEBER, ALFRED J., RUBINSTEIN, ALVIN Z., 1991. *Perestroika at the crossroads*. Armonk, N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe. 332-333

<sup>263</sup> LARSON, D.W. and SHEVCHENKO, A., 2003. Shortcut to greatness: The new thinking and the revolution in Soviet foreign policy. *International Organization*, **57**(1), pp. 77-109. 91

<sup>264</sup> SMART, C., 1995. *The imagery of Soviet foreign policy and the collapse of the Russian empire*. Westport, Conn.: Praeger. 153

during mid- late-1990s.<sup>265</sup> However, Saddam's eventual fall convinced Moscow that utilizing diplomacy and international institutions, without any enforcement of these appeals by any coercive actions, will not consolidate Russia's interests. Later Russia's behavior in 2008 during its war with Georgia, in 2014 in its intervention in Ukraine, and Syrian involvement in 2015 might point on the shift occurred in Kremlin's perception of post-Cold War world affairs in more realistic terms.

Some argue that the 'new' Russian realism resulted from growing isolation and politician weakening of Russia which pushes its leadership in two almost opposite directions one of which is that the result for disrespect for post-Cold War Russia and its interests stems from its military weakness. On this backdrop, many in Kremlin called for the necessity to reinvigorate the military and the reunification of the former USSR with possible direct or indirect use of force.<sup>266</sup> It is also noted that contrary to the Western post-Cold War doctrines, contemporary Russia still puts significant emphasis on the nuclear factor, considered somewhat obsolete amid modern challenges. As some put it, 'in an ironic twist of history, Russia is moving exactly [to] the opposite direction. While nuclear deterrence is experiencing a deep and profound crisis, Russia is taking openly deterrence as its official policy.' It is believed that contemporary Russia needs the robust nuclear potential for treating the growing psychological complex of weakness, vulnerability and humiliation on the part of the Russians - a complex, which, as is known from history, could be more dangerous than military superiority.<sup>267</sup> In other words, Moscow still perceives power (militarization) as a solution to its inferiority.

One expression of Moscow's contemporary tendency towards the 'new' realism is observed through its policy towards its southern neighbors, Iran in particular. Russia's consistent effort to rebuild Russian military capability and its capacity for projecting effective power in its post-Soviet Central Asia for potential future cooperation with Iran is

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<sup>265</sup> FELDMAN, SHAI., SHAPIR, YIFTAH., 2001. *The Middle East military balance, 2000-2001*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press. 60

<sup>266</sup> COULOUMBIS, THEODORE A., DOKOS, THANOS P., HALKI INTERNATIONAL SEMINARS ON SECURITY AND CONFIDENCE BUILDING IN THE MEDITERRANEAN AND SOUTH EASTERN EUROPE, 1995. *Arms control and security in the Middle East and the CIS republics*. Athens, Greece: Hellenic Foundation for Defense and Foreign Policy. 209

<sup>267</sup> *Ibid.* 218, 220

evident. Russia buys back former Soviet defense industrial facilities in post-Soviet republics in exchange for latter's debts. Moscow gradually expands Caspian naval flotilla, augments military capabilities for rapid power projection into Central Asia, constructs integrated military alliances with Central Asia states through the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) and the Caspian naval force (CASFOR), and consistently promoting the idea that the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) should become a military alliance.<sup>268</sup>

Balance of power patterns of strategic thinking in Russia are also distinguished here. At the core of Russia's multipolar vision is the hostile message that US dominance must be weakened and the influence of Russia and other US opponents, such as Iran must be expanded.<sup>269</sup> According to the Russian Academy of Science's polls, the immediate post-Soviet attitude towards the West was largely positive among the majority of Russian citizens. However, gradually the attitude became more hostile. What made the difference was the war in Yugoslavia and NATO's aggressive actions towards the Serbians and other Slavic minorities, resulting in the rise of an opinion that the factor of power must be emphasized in dealing with the West. The early 1990s' published Military Doctrine of Russian Federation, which stressed non-military means and tactics in future conflict resolutions, was put in a doubt.<sup>270</sup> What initially seemed as more benevolent and constructivist approach during Gorbachev, began to shift towards realism after Yugoslavia and was reinforced further by Western conduct in Iraq and Libya. In this respect, Iran is described by RAN's study as one of the countries with which contemporary Russia must develop close relations to counter Western threats and militarism.<sup>271</sup>

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<sup>268</sup> BLANK, STEPHEN J., STANY ZJEDNOCZONE., CONSUMER PRODUCT SAFETY COMMISSION., ARMY WAR COLLEGE., STRATEGIC STUDIES INSTITUTE., 2015. *Perspectives on Russian foreign policy*. Lavergne; Carlisle Barracks: CPSC] ; Strategic Studies Institute. 43-44

<sup>269</sup> Ibid. 197

<sup>270</sup> OSIPOV, G. V., INSTITUT SOTSIAL'NO-POLITICHESKIKH ISSLEDOVANIĬ (ROSSIĬSKAĬA AKADEMIĬA NAUK), 2000. *Rossĭa v poiskakh strategii--obshchestvo i vlast' : sotsial'naĭa i sotsial'no-politicheskaĭa situatsĭia v Rossii v 1999 godu*. Moskva: Int. sotsial'no-politicheskikh issledovaniĭ RAN. 91

<sup>271</sup> Ibid. 363-364

Notwithstanding some opinions that most noticeable changes in post-Cold War Russia was the abandonment of the excessive militarization of its national economy,<sup>272</sup> others contend that military potential and access to strategic resources largely determine the general course of Russian policy.<sup>273</sup> Russia uses its growing oil and energy industry to increase its state's power and international political leverage. With these aims in mind, Moscow broadens its relations, economic and military ties with states that oppose the US interests, such as Syria, Iran and Venezuela.<sup>274</sup> Others admit that when looked at through the lens of political realism, Russia's strategic cooperation with Iran stems from its desire to contain and balance the USA.<sup>275</sup> Russia's harsh resistance to punitive measures against Iran in 2000–2006 largely confirm realist's expectations.<sup>276</sup>

Vladimir Putin's comments also come to declare his return to old Cold War rhetoric and political thinking. According to the Russian President, "What preserved peace under the conditions of the Cold War was the balance of forces."<sup>277</sup> With his rise to power, Putin ordered a massive restructuring of the Russian armed forces committed to restore its past 'old Soviet glory'. Putin argues that "It's time to make up for all those years during which the army and the navy were chronically underfinanced. We must not tempt anyone with our weakness. New regional and local wars are being sparked before our eyes. There are attempts to provoke such conflicts in the immediate vicinity of Russia's borders." According to some observers, Putin's plans represent the largest Russian military investment since the days of the Cold War. Further, Putin drew an analogy with Stalinist times, stating in front of Russian Security Council, that "We should carry out the same powerful, all-embracing leap forward in modernization of the defense industry as the one

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<sup>272</sup> BLANK, STEPHEN J., STANY ZJEDNOCZONE., CONSUMER PRODUCT SAFETY COMMISSION., ARMY WAR COLLEGE., STRATEGIC STUDIES INSTITUTE., 2015. *Perspectives on Russian foreign policy*. Lavergne; Carlisle Barracks: CPSC] ; Strategic Studies Institute. 34

<sup>273</sup> CURANOVIC, A., 2014. *The religious factor in Russia's foreign policy*. London; New York: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group. 249

<sup>274</sup> SCHOEN, DOUGLAS E., KAYLAN, MELIK., 2014. *The Russia-China axis : the new cold war and America's crisis of leadership*. 27

<sup>275</sup> OMElicheva, M.Y., 2012. Russia's foreign policy toward Iran: a critical geopolitics perspective. *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies*, 14(3), pp. 331-344. 335

<sup>276</sup> Ibid. 336

<sup>277</sup> SCHOEN, DOUGLAS E., KAYLAN, MELIK., 2014. *The Russia-China axis : the new cold war and America's crisis of leadership*.

carried out in the 1930s”.<sup>278</sup> According to one assessment, Putin’s worldview perceives that power, rather than ideals, drives human events.<sup>279</sup>

Much of Russian elite see international politics strictly in terms of struggle for power between competitive states where values and their invocation are merely cloaks for hard power designs. Essentially, this is a bastardized version of Otto Bismarck’s realism that harks back to conservative German thought of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries as embodied by people like Fredrich Nietzsche, Carl Schmitt, etc. As some put it, ironically, as with much of Russian social theory of late 1800s’, there is much that is originally German more than intrinsically Russian in it, except possibly for its intransigent absolutism and extreme nihilism that there is nothing beyond this struggle for power in international relations. Thus, scholars on Russia argue, that Russia is a pillar of the “high church of realism” in international affairs. Its realism is of particularly atavistic and even nihilistic kind that believes in nothing but power. Therefore, its thinking and behavior antedate the theories of realism in world politics that appeared after the World War II and are a throwback to 19<sup>th</sup> century realpolitik of a particularly brutal kind.<sup>280</sup>

Western observers depict contemporary Russia in hard realist terms. They argue that from Russia’s political elite’s point of view, the world is primarily one of struggle of all against all, of fierce competition for markets and resources. Cooperation emerges not out of good will but competition, whose point is to determine the conditions on which future cooperation may be possible. “There is no room for emotion or for values in this competition. Russia is strategically alone, but only needs itself as it is self-sufficient. Other major powers are its rivals and smaller powers the objects and purpose of these struggles. Russia’s key comparative advantages, at least for the foreseeable future, are oil and gas, and its nuclear weapons are the most important guarantors of its security.”<sup>281</sup>

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<sup>278</sup> Ibid. 115

<sup>279</sup> Ibid. 270-271

<sup>280</sup> BLANK, STEPHEN J., STANY ZJEDNOCZONE., CONSUMER PRODUCT SAFETY COMMISSION., ARMY WAR COLLEGE., STRATEGIC STUDIES INSTITUTE., 2015. *Perspectives on Russian foreign policy*. Lavergne; Carlisle Barracks: CPSC] ; Strategic Studies Institute. 35

<sup>281</sup> Ibid. 35-37

Such views lead to Moscow's rigid perceptions about world politics. Western analysts infer that for contemporary Russia, *realpolitik* is the only reliable policy. Everyone is a potential competitor. Partnership is guided by self-interest and only national interest, which in Russia means the interest of the ruling corporation, guides Russia's foreign policy. According to such a view, Russian foreign policy elite is utterly cynical, manipulative, exceptionally venal, and obsessed with power. While its utter cynicism may go beyond even the Soviet system, the pervasive moral nihilism that is so strong, that a Soviet legacy is deeply visible here, as well as the late 19<sup>th</sup> century origin of such views.<sup>282</sup>

It is opined that the Russian ultimate goal of advancing the great power status and capacity of the state is entirely traditional in nature. Equally traditional is the fact of the state's penchant for militarism. The legacy of state militarism that the Czars fostered continues to inhibit defense reforms in Russia.<sup>283</sup> It is observed that Russian contemporary political elites, largely composed of security 'human capital' termed *Siloviki* make Russian foreign policy extremely aggressive, and military conflicts, invasions, assassinations, blackmail and coercion became "normal" attributes of Russia's external conduct.<sup>284</sup> As one analysis observes, "An atmosphere of tension and suspicion towards foreign interests is crucial to the administrative expansion of the *Siloviki*, and they will resist [any] attempts to dispel it."<sup>285</sup>

In the long-run, it is argued that there is no depreciation of the military instrument in Russian policy. The new arms buildup also suggests a recurrence of what the Russian historian S.F. Platonov called the pattern of the Russian history, namely that the breakdown of the old system of rule is ultimately followed by the reconstructions of a new form of state power, often based on key elements of the old, and most importantly some years later featuring a new army as the true incarnation of that new state's power.<sup>286</sup>

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<sup>282</sup> Ibid. 37

<sup>283</sup> Ibid. 37-38

<sup>284</sup> Ibid. 39-40

<sup>285</sup> Ibid. 49

<sup>286</sup> BLANK, STEPHEN J., STANY ZJEDNOCZONE., CONSUMER PRODUCT SAFETY COMMISSION., ARMY WAR COLLEGE., STRATEGIC STUDIES INSTITUTE., 2015. *Perspectives on Russian foreign policy*. Lavergne; Carlisle Barracks: CPSC] ; Strategic Studies Institute. 44-45

Russia's political agenda represents a constitutive part of a plan designated to reclaim its great power status on the international arena.<sup>287</sup>

Some of former Putin's advisers classify current regime in Russia as a hard authoritarianism.<sup>288</sup> Other Russian political scientists bluntly state that contemporary Russian strategic political thinking is essentially imperialistic.<sup>289</sup> The ideological ground on which Russia's thinkers attempt to base its foreign policy, describes contemporary Russia as a continuation and reincarnation of past Russian imperial heritage.<sup>290</sup> In this respect, against the background of our previous argument that imperialism, political realism and militarism in practice are congenial features, or as others claim an embodiment of the one and the same political context,<sup>291</sup> one concludes that political realism is a deeply inherent feature in Russian political thinking. Russia's militaristic posture since the Second World War is continuously evoked for the purpose of justifying its pursuit to maintain its influence in its own region and around the world.<sup>292</sup>

Western military analysts describe Russia's military presence in Syria as the largest deployment since the Cold War and that it is less for the defense of the Syrian leadership, but for power projection on a global scale.<sup>293</sup> "We deploy weapons in order to advance a political solution," said Russian analyst, Isayev.<sup>294</sup> One of more prominent adherents to political realism was Evgeniy Primakov who advocated the return to the zero-sum-game perception of world affairs after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Primakov was strong adherent of balancing the West in best Cold War traditions and this political approach sought to use the concept of multilateralism,<sup>295</sup> as opposed to American

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<sup>287</sup> Ibid. 51-52

<sup>288</sup> Ibid. 65

<sup>289</sup> Ibid. 88

<sup>290</sup> CURANOVIĆ, A., 2014. *The religious factor in Russia's foreign policy*. London; New York: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group. 110-111

<sup>291</sup> WALTZ, KENNETH NEAL., 2010. *Theory of international politics*. Long Grove (Illinois, Estados Unidos: Waveland Press.. 27-28

<sup>292</sup> AMIDROR, Y., 2016. Tip of the Iceberg: Russian Use of Power in Syria. *BESA Center Perspectives, Paper*, (371),.

<sup>293</sup> SCHOEN, DOUGLAS E., KAYLAN, MELIK., 2014. *The Russia-China axis : the new cold war and America's crisis of leadership*. 60

<sup>294</sup> SCHEPP, M., 2015, 11/14/2015. The Russian President's Strategy for Syria. *Spiegel Online*.

<sup>295</sup> SAKWA, R., 2008. 'New Cold War' or twenty years' crisis? Russia and international politics. *International affairs*, **84**(2), pp. 241-267. 242



unilateralism,<sup>296</sup> to sustain and manage a competitive worldview.<sup>297</sup> Primakov called to adopt ‘multipolarity’, a code word for balancing the US in Cold War terms. Primakov sought to use multipolarity and multilateralism concepts as instruments of sustaining and managing a competitive view of the world - a traditional realist approach.<sup>298</sup>

Contemporary Russian realist approach is reflected not only in its foreign, strategic, military or diplomatic policies. The energy resources, which compose Russia’s strategic interests, is also approached from realist perspective. “The Russian Energy Strategy for 2030” report, adopted in 2009, implies that Russian foreign policy in this field is supposed to be relatively aggressive and expansionist and include active intervention in the energy sectors of other countries, both hydrocarbon producers and consumers, and the establishment of Russia’s control over most of Eurasia’s gas and oil transportation infrastructure. Any attempt to limit the access of Moscow’s energy-exporting corporations will inevitably cause harsh retaliatory measures.<sup>299</sup> This corporate interest is perceived by many as a new feature in Russian foreign policy that was not observed during the Soviet time. Contemporary Russia’s foreign policy is relatively aggressive and expansionist to ensure the safety and profitability of Russian gas and oil corporations, a feature that became an integral part of Russia’s ‘new’ realism.<sup>300</sup>

Syria became an explicit expression of Russian ‘new’ realist approach to world affairs. The fall of Aleppo in December 2016 bolstered Russia’s confidence in its ability to shape events on a regional scale. Moscow became more proactive rather than reactive. It managed to maintain Syrian President Assad in power and activated its efforts in Libya by providing political support and military assistance to local warlords.<sup>301</sup> Russia continuously leans on its military means to produce leverage that can affect the behavior of the US and EU and mitigate the negative effects on Russia’s economy, security and

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<sup>296</sup> OMELICHEVA, M.Y., 2012. Russia's foreign policy toward Iran: a critical geopolitics perspective. *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies*, **14**(3), pp. 331-344. 336

<sup>297</sup> SAKWA, R., 2008. ‘New Cold War’ or twenty years’ crisis? Russia and international politics. *International affairs*, **84**(2), pp. 241-267. 242

<sup>298</sup> Ibid. 242

<sup>299</sup> KOZHANOV, N.A., 2012. Russia’s Relations with Iran: Dialog without Commitments. *The Washington Institute for Near East Policy*, **June 2012**(Policy Focus 120),. 23

<sup>300</sup> KOZHANOV, N., 2018. *Russian policy across the Middle East: motivations and methods*. Chatham House. 22

<sup>301</sup> Ibid. 7

international relations resulting from the ongoing confrontation between Moscow and the West.<sup>302</sup>

Military and naval bases in the Mediterranean, world recognition as a decisive superpower, and Cold War confrontation were the main causes for extensive Soviet courtship, support and assistance to Egypt and Syria in the 1960s and the 1970s. Moscow's foreign policy decision-making during Soviet Union was approached in power categories. Superpower status was to be continuously expressed, demonstrated and reasserted by Moscow. Scholars on Soviet foreign policy conclude that today, contemporary Russia in principle pursues the same goal. The main change appears to be on tactical level, not strategic.<sup>303</sup> Putin's central goal is to return Soviet superpower status, and if possible, to go beyond it and become the number one world superpower. Interventions, such as in Syria, became one of the main instruments of this grand design.<sup>304</sup>

According to one opinion, the Russian 'new' realism does not mean giving up aspirations to global influence but does mean the pursuit of a far more conscious attempt to match ambitions to resources, accompanied by modifications to the type of influence that the country seeks. The 'new' realism has not given up the notion of Russia as a 'great power', but the definition of what it means to be a great power has changed, as has that of the way it should behave.<sup>305</sup> The adoption of a seven-year \$200 billion Russian forces' rearmament plan in early 2007, which includes the purchase of a new generation of missiles, planes and aircraft-carriers, certainly suggests a new self-confidence. Moreover, it is argued that notwithstanding Russia's post-Cold War 'integration' attempts, it does not entail the repudiation of the entirely new realist agenda.<sup>306</sup> Others contend that Putin returned to office in 2012 with deep disappointment from what he perceives as a failed

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<sup>302</sup> Ibid. 8

<sup>303</sup> From personal interview conducted by the author with Prof. Roi Ya'acov on 20.06.2019

<sup>304</sup> Ibid.

<sup>305</sup> SAKWA, R., 2008. 'New Cold War' or twenty years' crisis? Russia and international politics. *International affairs*, **84**(2), pp. 241-267. 245

<sup>306</sup> Ibid. 251

attempt to 'reset' US-Russian relations. The intervention in Syria signals vindictive sentiments from Moscow's side.<sup>307</sup>

The use of energy supplies and blackmail of its consumers as a political tool is also a feature of Putin's 'new' realism.<sup>308</sup> It is further observed that if the objective of the "Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation" report from June 2000 was a 'positive perception' of Russia in world affairs, the 2008 report version spoke of 'objective perception' of Russia as a 'democratic state committed to a socially oriented market economy and an independent foreign policy', echoing the principle of Putin's 'sovereign democracy' approach. In field of national security, Kremlin's disapproval of unilateral actions, which destabilize the international situation and ignore the principles of international law, was underlined in particular.<sup>309</sup> The "Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation", released in February 2010, emphasized the possibility of using armed forces outside Russian borders to protect Russia's national interests and citizens and to maintain international peace and security. Another part of the report required establishment and training of special units of the armed forces to strengthen the economic interests of Russia, which are connected with Russia's ambition to protect its energy infrastructure and future resources' deposits.<sup>310</sup>

Most vividly, Russian 'new' realism was demonstrated in its conduct in Syria. Russia indeed succeeded in taking the leading role in the Syrian conflict resolution process, but only after it demonstrated its determination through extensive use of military force.<sup>311</sup> After the Ukrainian and Georgian conflicts, the situation in Syria was an opportunity for Russia to showcase to the Western World, especially the US, its ability to project hard power and successfully defend its geopolitical interests.<sup>312</sup> In Putin's words, following his meeting with Bashar al-Assad in October 2015, in Moscow, "The military and

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<sup>307</sup> KOZHANOV, N., 2018. *Russian policy across the Middle East: motivations and methods*. Chatham House. 9

<sup>308</sup> TICHÝ, L., 2014. Security and Foreign Policy of Dmitry Medvedev in the Period 2008–2012. *The Journal of Slavic Military Studies*, 27(4), pp. 533-552. 533

<sup>309</sup> Ibid. 536

<sup>310</sup> Ibid. 543-544

<sup>311</sup> MAGEN, Z., DEKEL, U. and FAINBERG, S., 2016. How Deep are the Cracks in the Russian-Iranian Coalition in Syria? *INSS Insight*, January 3, 2016(783),.3

<sup>312</sup> ANTONYAN, T.M., 2017. Russia and Iran in the Syrian Crisis: Similar Aspirations, Different Approaches. *Israel Journal of Foreign Affairs*, 11(3), pp. 337-348.341

political issues are tightly linked.”<sup>313</sup> On another occasion, in an interview Putin said, “Our task is to stabilize the legitimate government and to create conditions for a political compromise...by military means, of course.”<sup>314</sup> By the end of 2015 Putin doubled his air fleet in Syria, bringing the number of combat aircraft to 70. At the same time the number of navy vessels increased to 10.<sup>315</sup> “Putin intervenes from a position of strength,” said Julie Smith, former security advisor to US Vice President Joe Biden. “By inserting himself into Syria, he has more influence over us, simply because we have to deal with him.”<sup>316</sup>

Russian analysts suggest that Kremlin prefers a military narrative for Syria because it puts Russia and the US on an equal footing. A foreign conduct in terms of balance-of-power is clearly visible here. A military [realist] narrative makes Syria a story of two Great Powers fighting for dominance in an important part of the world. This is why the military narrative is so important for Kremlin. It relishes the story of a “great power game”. As some put it, Moscow does not want a war, but it does want Russians to stick to a war mentality. Participation in war is closely coincides with the ‘great [hi]story of Russia.’<sup>317</sup>

Others propose that the Russian position on Syria is only one aspect of Russia’s substantial military build-up and assertive foreign policy. According to this view, Putin’s policy is committed at making Russia again a strong militarily state, therefore, its foreign policy goals and ambitions are largely supported by military means.<sup>318</sup> Following the Russian diplomatic success in 2013 (saving Assad from the West), Moscow believes that not only flexibility, but stubbornness can bring positive results.<sup>319</sup> Whenever Putin raises

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<sup>313</sup> MACFARQUHAR, N., 2015, Oct. 21, 2015. Assad Makes Unannounced Trip to Moscow to Discuss Syria With Putin. *The New York Times*.

<sup>314</sup> MEDICK, V., et al, 2015, October 13, 2015. Russia’s Superpower Play: Putin Bets Big on Aggressive Syria Policy. *Spiegel Online*.

<sup>315</sup> MIGNEWS, 2016-last update, Obama prav: Rossia uv’azaet v Siriyskoy try’asine (Obama is right: Russia is bogged down in Syrian quagmire). Available: <http://bit.ly/2vulAVP> [3 February, 2016].

<sup>316</sup> MEDICK, V., et al, 2015, October 13, 2015. Russia’s Superpower Play: Putin Bets Big on Aggressive Syria Policy. *Spiegel Online*.

<sup>317</sup> TRUDOLYUBOV, M., 2018. *In Syria, Moscow is defending a narrative, not a country*. Washington: Wilson Center. The Russian File.

<sup>318</sup> DE HAAS, M., 2016, February 17, 2016. Rusland en het Syrische conflict: op ramkoers met de NAVO? (Russia and the Syrian conflict: on a collision course with NATO?). *Friessch Dagblad*.

<sup>319</sup> KOZHANOV, N., 2014. Russian-Syrian Dialogue: Myths and Realities. *The Journal of the Middle East and Africa*, 5(1), pp. 1-22.

the Syrian issue on the sidelines of meetings with the leading world powers, he becomes more persuasive and eloquent (self-over-confident) than his opponents.<sup>320</sup>

However, the constructivist approach is not totally abandoned by Moscow amid the conflict in Syria. The war in Syria has created opportunities for the Russians to demonstrate their diplomatic skills and mediation abilities in order to establish themselves as an influential international force. In many ways, Russia has not yet recovered from the fall of the Soviet Union and the subsequent political and economic turmoil. Under these circumstances, the prospect of a confrontation or arms race with a superpower like the United States still presents risks to the Russian economy. As a result, Kremlin prefers to settle all international disputes using diplomatic leverage and international institutions - most prominently the UN Security Council - as the “cheapest” method of exercising influence and reminding others of Moscow’s role in the world. For example, Russia persistently supports the activities of such world institutions as the International Atomic Energy Agency, protecting it from attempts to undermine its role and voicing concerns about unilateral measures that contradict or supersede its decisions. Under these conditions, the creation of an international forum representing all forces involved in the Syrian conflict neatly fits into this Russian strategy.<sup>321</sup> In our chapter on Constructivism, we elaborate on a proposition, that during the late Soviet years, the regime in Moscow also extensively utilized world institutions, but its aim was to conceal its political and military weakness and decline. Against this backdrop, contemporary Russia’s turning to world institutions can also be analyzed from the perspective of an attempt to conceal its weaknesses through international institutions.

Russian analysts consider it perfectly logical that Moscow is defending Assad, because if it allowed him to fall, it would not only be seen as a sign of Russian weakness by the West, but also by the regional Middle East actors, and Moscow wants to maintain its position in the region. At some point though, the Syrian dictator will have to go, and that is also clear to Vladimir Putin. Before that happens however, a political compromise

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<sup>320</sup> Ibid. 18

<sup>321</sup> Ibid. 19

will have to be found for Syria between Russia and United States on equal grounds.<sup>322</sup> Against the perception, that Russian seeks to balance the power of the US through its engagement in Syria, Bashar al-Assad admitted that what Moscow wants in Syria is to achieve “balance in the world”. Assad said that, “It is not [only] about Syria, rather it is about the future of the world, and that Russians want to be a great power, to have their own say in the future of this world.”<sup>323</sup> Others contend that so far, such Russian realist approach proved to be successful.<sup>324</sup>

Seemingly, in Moscow's perception, only through exercising military means of foreign policy, can it achieve the desired goal in reaching equal political footing with the United States. Russia did not hesitate to intensify the bombings of the besieged Aleppo in September and October 2016 when the implementation of the previous US–Russian ceasefire failed. Russia believed that it needs to intensify its military efforts on the ground in order to make the US more disposed to accept Moscow’s view of the situation.<sup>325</sup> For the same reason Russia intensified its bomb shelling of the Idlib city, where most of the remaining anti-Assad opposition forces gathered in 2019,<sup>326</sup> seeing that the West is not in consent with the resolution of the Syrian conflict on Russia’s terms. Russian military campaign in Syria is much more than a mere desire to save Assad. Backed by advanced weapon systems, including newest aircraft, missiles launched from the Caspian basin, and deployment of Russia's advanced S-400 air defense systems, Moscow sends message to the world that Russia still a military force to be reckoned with.<sup>327</sup>

## Discussion and conclusion

From the very beginning of the post-revolutionary years of Soviet Russia, its foreign policy is mainly described in terms of realist school of political thought. We provide

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<sup>322</sup> MEDICK, V., et al, 2015, October 13, 2015. Russia's Superpower Play: Putin Bets Big on Aggressive Syria Policy. *Spiegel Online*.

<sup>323</sup> ROSE, C. and CBS, 2015-last update, **Syrian President Bashar Al Assad on 60 Minutes**. Available: <https://cbsn.ws/2SoJPyl> [July/14, 2016].

<sup>324</sup> AMIDROR, Y., 2016. Tip of the Iceberg: Russian Use of Power in Syria. *BESA Center Perspectives, Paper*, (371),.

<sup>325</sup> KOZHANOV, N., 2018. *Russian policy across the Middle East: motivations and methods*. Chatham House. 6-7

<sup>326</sup> AL-KHALIDI, S., 2020, 18 August. **Russian jets bomb opposition-held Idlib: witnesses**. *Reuters*.

<sup>327</sup> DW, 2016. *What does Russia want from its campaign in Syria?* Deutsche Welle (DW).

insights to the origins of the inherent obsession with power and the understanding of world affairs in terms of force. Each new embodiment of the Russian state, from Czarist, through the Soviet Union, to contemporary post-Cold War Russia, could not pass without extensive usage of means of force. Leninist theory of an inevitable collusion (war) between capitalism and socialism, and Stalin's theory of the hostile capitalist encirclement left no room for non-antagonistic worldviews. Such concepts as power politics, balance-of-power, and zero-sum-game were highly characteristics for the Soviet behavior during the Cold War era.

The balance of power approach is capable to provide us a great deal of explanations and prospects regarding Soviet and later post-Soviet Russia's foreign policies towards our Middle East cases. Soviet attempts to balance the West go as far back as immediately following the October Revolution of 1917. The immediate rapprochement with Iran was induced by the Bolsheviks to weaken the British. Later, Moscow sought to balance Western attempts to incircle the USSR by Western military alliances, NATO, SEATO and the Baghdad Pact. In the Middle East, by utilizing its relations with Egypt, Syria and Iran, Moscow tried to balance this Western tactic of alliance building. Observers conclude that Moscow did succeed, on a significant scale, to balance the US in the Middle East through its power means of foreign policy.

Other foreign policy means of conduct, such as the call for 'non-intervention', 'non-aggression', and 'protection of sovereignty', were and still are widely exercised by both the Soviet Union and contemporary Russia, to balance the opposite Western bloc. Treaties of friendship and cooperation, signed with our case-study states, also represent balancing foreign policy means of conduct. The early arms deals with Egypt in 1955 and Syria in 1954 were all aimed to balance the US in the region. Merely achieving foothold in the Middle East was never the central goal for the Soviets, it was to balance the West through solid regional presence. Soviet military force was seen by the Kremlin as a key political instrument to balance the West. We demonstrate the way the aid to the 'liberation fronts' and the 'anti-imperialist' movements in Third World was perceived by Moscow from balance-of-power perspective. Moscow sought to bring the outcomes of the June 1967

war to the extent similar to those produced by the Suez Canal crisis. It is also proposed that the Arab-Israeli stalemate after the June 1967 and before the October 1973 wars, was 'artificially' preserved by the Soviets and the US. Both superpowers strove to balance each other through their client-states.

In the late Soviet years, mainly under Mikhail Gorbachev, some constructivist perceptions began to appear in Soviet foreign policy thinking and decision-making which co-existed with rigid realism. Later however, the constructivist political thinking was largely abandoned. Contemporary Russian foreign policy under Vladimir Putin is already termed by some analysts as the 'new' realism. This notwithstanding, we observe that constructivist features such as ideas, also present in Putin's foreign policy. The most explicit examples are the 'sovereign democracy' thesis, 'multilateralism' and 'multivectorism'. These are after all ideas, which became political concepts, and which were imbedded into contemporary Russian 'new realist' approach towards post-Cold War international relations. Constructivist scholarship terms such constructivist ideas which co-exist with general realist approaches to world politics as 'descriptive interference', or as 'causal' or 'principal ideas'.<sup>328</sup>

We suggest that under Mikhail Gorbachev, Soviet foreign policy largely was characterized by a policy of appeasement with its stronger rival, the United States. The late Gorbachev policy and the following policy under Boris Yeltsin can be labelled as a policy of bandwagoning with the West. Vladimir Putin's policy was aimed to cease bandwagoning and return to balancing.

When we analyze the early Stalinist and the following Khrushchev's policies, we demonstrate that practically all these were performed under rigid realist thinking. It was perceived that for USSR to survive, it must necessarily remain a superpower. This perception is one of the most rigid and deeply imbedded, it survived the regime transition and remained strong in contemporary Russia. The analysis of past Soviet prospects on

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<sup>328</sup> GOLDSTEIN, JUDITH., KEOHANE, ROBERT O., 1993. *Ideas and foreign policy: beliefs, institutions, and political change*. edited by Judith Goldstein and Robert O. Keohane. Ithaca: Cornell University Press..40-41



power, military capabilities, and their utilization in its foreign policy conduct, provide us with a great deal of clues on contemporary Russia's foreign policy conduct. The Soviet legacy has a significant impact on contemporary Russian strategic thinking. The treatment of military hardware as the principal vehicle of Soviet foreign policy; the need for perpetual demonstration of force, including through interventions; the compensation for domestic weakness by increasing tension, all provide significant analytical prospects for analyzing causes for Russia's adherence to realism.

The Iranian case offers explicit evidence for early, post-WWII Soviet power politics expressed by Stalin's policy of expansion, penetration, subversion and occupation of Iranian territory with extensive usage of the Red Army. As some prominent scholars neatly put it, "Machiavelli, not Carl Marx, inspired Stalin's foreign policy." Eventually, Soviet policy in the Middle East was not characterized by the spread of Marxism-Leninism but should be conceived in pure 'cold' traditional Czarist imperial terms. To shift the world's balance of power in favor of the Soviet Union was Stalin's post-war strategic aim.

Egypt also provides us with evidence of Moscow's power politics during Soviet Union. The adopted 'forward deployment' policy concept – to expand the reach of Soviet strategic flanks in order to meet the opponent on high lands and seas – beared explicit offensive realist features. Land, air, and naval forces' development programs were given preference accordingly. Bases and stationing rights were sought in Egypt and Syria. In addition, Khrushchev's perception that the world balance of power is shifting towards the Socialist Camp, brought back the Communist concept of future world development, which held power politics as its pillar. Morgenthau and Clausewitz received sympathetic reception among Kremlin's decision-makers. The events over the Suez and in Hungary in 1956 reassured Moscow of the efficiency of the use of military means of conduct. In the 1960s, Moscow assumed that its hegemony in essential parts of the world could only be achieved through demonstration, presence and practice of its military might.

The revanche for the June 1967 debacle was seen by Moscow only in military and offensive terms. No negotiated settlement was seriously considered in Kremlin and its

policy with the Arabs was designed accordingly. The outcome of the October 1973' Arab's assault was seen in absolute positive terms by Moscow, reminding the West of the always present 'war option'. Moscow saw it as the most effective foreign policy instrument. Soviet leaders constantly correlated power with diplomacy. The 'peace-through-force' concept dominated Moscow's political thinking.

The nuclear capabilities and the Soviet growing conventional forces offered Moscow greater flexibility. Moscow sent its troops twice to the Middle East to directly participate in regional wars. Multiple times Moscow sent hundreds, if not thousands of its military personnel and vast quantities of military hardware to our case-study states for the same goal. The Soviet aim was to balance the US and dominate the Middle East region. However, Moscow was keen to assure that its active support for warring Arabs would not damage the détente. The détente was also perceived in realist terms. Brezhnev's concept of 'divisibility of détente' allowed him to exercise Soviet military power without anxiety. Afghanistan in 1979 became an explicit expression of such an approach. The main perception in the Kremlin was that Soviet position is determined by its military might and not by the goodwill of the United States.

In the mid 1980' the Soviet power-politics approach began to toddle. Moscow was seen cutting its losses in the Third World. Pragmatism was gradually replacing Stalinism. Syria in this perspective was seen as the last bulwark of steadfastness, urged by Kremlin hardliners to be continuously supported. Moscow was abandoning the aim to lead the communist, socialist, anti-imperialist, liberation, and working-class fronts and movements, concentrating on itself and its socialist bloc's national interests and security. Defensive realism was substituting offensive realism. Domestic variables were becoming more salient. Gorbachev's deemphasis on the military instrument was most significant shift of the 'Perestroika' and the 'New Thinking' agendas. Gradually, defensive realism was replaced by 'mutual sufficiency' approach and the balance-of-power approach was replaced by balance-of-interests perspective. Military aid to its allies, under Gorbachev, was substituted by economic and technological aid.

However, some opinions sound that the 'Perestroika' and the 'New Thinking' were nothing more than a myth to buy time and that no significant departure from political realism was in sight. Iran demonstrates that realist inclinations still were present in Moscow's decision-making. Syria also supplied evidence in 1988 of continuing Moscow's interest in a regional buildup. The past 'forward deployment' policy maintained, only the means of conduct varied. Amid these observations, Soviet foreign policy analysts predicted that post-Cold War Russia will either continue the policy of conciliation and accommodation or turn towards projection of its growing military capabilities. Others agreed that Soviet dependence on military power unlikely to be significantly altered in the future.

Indeed, such predictions turned to be correct. The post-Cold War effect of international fragmentation represents even greater regional opportunities and fewer constraints for exercising power for contemporary Russia. Iraq, although out of scope of our analysis, nevertheless became the first sign of post-Soviet Russia's assertive adherence to projection of its power, although only diplomatically. UN sanctions against Iraq were rejected and forceful measures were vetoed. The eventual fall of Iraq however, convinced Moscow that without military means, a sole institutional approach will not bring the desired results. Events in Yugoslavia came to reaffirm Kremlin. Military power, including nuclear deterrence, became the [only] feature to conceal post-Soviet Russia's indecisiveness, weakness, economic backwardness, vulnerability, and humiliation. Extensive support for dictatorial regimes, close cooperation with Iran on defense issues, military cooperation and arms sales to Egypt, intervention in Syria, and even support for Venezuelan regime come to reassert this proposition.

A handful of scholars became convinced that what characterizes contemporary Russia's foreign policy is the 'new' realism - an insight that Russia's most valuable national asset is military combined with natural resources; that the main goal of its foreign policy must be to secure and expand its reach towards new sources of these resources; expand and secure the infrastructure for their transportation; and control strategic routes, including land and sea-lines, pipelines, straits and canals; to remain leaning on *realpolitik*

and force, simultaneously recognizing interdependence and international economic integration. The 'unique' human capital that occupies Kremlin's decision-making, almost solely composed of security, intelligence, and military alumni, what is been termed as the *Siloviki*, leaves no place for any other worldviews other than realism. In Russian perspective, power, force, and military might, is endowed with the unique feature for reincarnation of the Russian statehood.

Scholars hold that Russia's interests are quite consistent in respect with balance-of-power political thought, from the early days of Czarist Russia, through the Soviet Union, to post-Soviet Russia. Vladimir Putin's improvement of relations with past Western Middle East allies usually comes at the expense of the American positions in the region, reflecting a lasting balance-of-power patterns of political behavior.

## CHAPTER 2. CONSTRUCTIVISM

### Soviet and contemporary Russian foreign policy analysis through a Constructivist perspective

#### Introduction

*That human affairs can be directed and modified by human action and human thought, is a postulate so fundamental that its rejection seems scarcely compatible with existence as a human being.*<sup>1</sup>

Edward Carr

Although it seems as if the Realist school of political thought is capable to provide us with the most plausible explanations for the Soviet foreign behavior, Constructivism becomes a particularly significant explanatory approach when we attempt to explain the late 1980s and early 1990s' in the Soviet foreign policy towards the Middle East. In addition, it is intriguing how features of political constructivism co-exist with political realism in contemporary Russian foreign policy-making. The main argument advanced here is that the Soviet Union's and Russia's foreign policy conduct was informed by changes of its image of self and of the role of ideology and systemic rivalry in international relations and thus of a direct and indirect military stand-up.

In this chapter, we attempt to analyze the Soviet and contemporary Russian foreign policy using theories of political constructivism. By comparing both periods analyzed, we then attempt to discover when and why a constructivist approach towards foreign policy was more evident than the realist ones. What caused the shift in Soviet political thinking, how was it expressed in its foreign policy, and to what extent does constructivism persist in Russia's contemporary, post-Cold War foreign policy.

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<sup>1</sup> CARR, EDWARD HALLETT, COX, MICHAEL, 2001. *The twenty years' crisis, 1919-1939: an introduction to the study of international relations*. Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire; New York: Palgrave. 87

Constructivism systematizes the issues that the traditional interpretive study of history and the study of Soviet and Russian foreign policy-thinking or ideology have widely dealt with and attempts to offer more clear and explicit arguments about the relationship between behavior and normative frameworks. In this sense, constructivism can easily work as a link between theoretical and empirical levels in the study of Russian foreign policy.<sup>2</sup>

Materialism alone cannot provide us with a comprehensive explanation of the constitution of the world and international relations which occur in it. Constructivist variables, which we list and on which we elaborate in the current chapter, define how the actors of international relations exercise their material features of interaction and what meaning they endow to them. Because reality is socially constructed and constructivism studies social phenomena, it is considered as fundamental for political analysis. With the help of a constructivist approach, we are able to understand how actors define their 'selves', from which all other features, including national interest, meaning of power, and the effect of capabilities possessed by the actors, are deduced. Constructivism centers on social processes which in turn highly define its interaction with other states through its foreign policy and are constituted through social communication and experience. It is society that makes actors who they are.

According to the constructivist paradigm, variations in and implementation of one's foreign policy is acquired through and depends on processes of socialization. Norms of engagement in international relations, as well as social identities, which drive in large part an actor's behavior, are constituted and institutionalized in the process of social interaction between actors. Agents and structures are accordingly mutually constituted.

Ideas create images about the world and determine the tracks for actions that on their turn are pushed by interests. Ideas shape foreign policies. In absence of innovation, old ideas determine 'new' policies. Under high uncertainty, old ideas guide actions. When existing ideas are being discredited, new ideas might go as far as changing a state's

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<sup>2</sup> PURSIAINEN, C., 2000. *Russian foreign policy and international relations theory*. Aldershot: Ashgate. 173-174

national interests. Values are a vital constructivist variable. Old values, that in the past were perceived as self-evident, may, following dramatic, systemic changes within a state, receive a completely different meaning and political force. The distortion or destruction of values greatly impacts an actor's identity. The system of fundamental beliefs is invoked by state's decision-makers in times of dramatic challenges faced by the nation. Old beliefs are often highly tenacious. Constructivist perspectives are essential for understanding as to what extent old Soviet-era ideas, concepts, values, and old former system of beliefs impact upon contemporary's Russian foreign conduct.

In the post-Cold War structure of international relations, many theories and paradigms, features of which were present and were valid for explaining Soviet foreign policy during the Cold War, allegedly are no longer relevant for explaining the contemporary Russian behavior. The constructivist approach offers a wide scope of explanations for Soviet and post-Cold War Russian foreign policy conduct. Under Mikhail Gorbachev we discern how new ideas determined new political agendas. 'Perestroika', 'New Thinking', and 'Glasnost' are the most vivid examples. These ideas became so strong, that they eventually found "materialistic" expressions (the withdrawal from Afghanistan, the unification of Germany, the withdrawal of Soviet forces from Eastern Europe). Values and norms took precedence over power politics in the years of the Soviet Union's sundown.

Constructivist features are also present in contemporary Russian political thinking. Such ideas and concepts as 'Sovereign Democracy', 'Multilateralism', and 'Multivectorism' have a significant impact on the Russian foreign policy conduct. Many of contemporary Russia's foreign policy decisions can be analyzed through these constructivist concepts.

### **Theoretical overview**

It is proposed that constructivism, unlike realism or liberalism, is not a theory of politics *per se*, but rather a social theory on international politics, that is: war, cooperation,

international community etc.. Constructivism can illuminate important features of international politics that were previously enigmatic and have crucial practical implications for international theory and empirical research.<sup>3</sup>

Constructivism represents the first real opportunity to generate a synthetic theory of International Relations since E.H. Carr has laid its foundations just before World War II. If a persuasive case can be made that normative and causal collective understandings are real, insofar as they have consequences for the physical and social worlds, it will be much easier to claim that both, an understanding of world politics and the progress of the discipline, may depend on the construction of a socio-cognitive synthesis that draws on the material, subjective, and intersubjective dimensions of the world.<sup>4</sup>

According to the constructivist approach, human agency is in a state of perpetual 'doing' (leading, acting, building, destroying). Humans compose states (agents), while the structure is seen as a given state of things, within which a perpetual process of building occurs. The system constrains the agents. However, this does not mean that human action is simply determined by a system's conditions. The key features of agents are intentionality and meaning. Structure, whether observable patterns or underlying principles, is separated from an agent, but it still motivates social action. The effort to overcome the tension between these terms is characteristic of constructivism. The disagreement is on how the overcoming should be done.<sup>5</sup>

Apart from the claim that it is through constructivist practices, agents constitute the structure of the system they live in, constructivism is also about the transformation and institutionalization of new ideas and knowledge as social practice.<sup>6</sup> Constructivism emphasizes the importance of both international and domestic levels and analyses the links between these two. According to constructivists, large-scale historical changes

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<sup>3</sup> EMANUEL ADLER, 2004. *Communitarian International Relations: The Epistemic Foundations of International Relations*. London: Routledge Ltd. 92

<sup>4</sup> Ibid. 92-93

<sup>5</sup> KUBÁLKOVÁ, V., 2015. *Foreign policy in a constructed world*.22

<sup>6</sup> EMANUEL ADLER, 2004. *Communitarian International Relations: The Epistemic Foundations of International Relations*. London: Routledge Ltd. 12



cannot be explained in terms of 'one or even several causal factors but through an analysis of conjunctures.'<sup>7</sup>

As in neoclassical realism, constructivism recognized the 'bridging' elements between the actor and the structure, and also terms it as a "transmission belt". However, in analyzing foreign policy, constructivism puts an emphasis on Foreign Policy Analysis (FPA) and claims to put it together with the study of International Politics.<sup>8</sup> The domestic level of analysis occupies a central place in the constructivist approach, arguing that national interests usually emanate from actor's, often private, organizational interests (bureaucracies) and material benefits. Thus, constructivism often treats the rational, self-interested actors, whose interaction must be modelled, not as states, but as individual members of a government. Conventional constructivists, however, will seek to analyze where these interests come from, rather than what or who they are. Constructivism perceives a state's foreign policy in terms of *defining* rather than *defending* national interests, as in the case of realism. Material facts, resource endowments, or military capabilities still matter, but, according to constructivists, it is the social context that gives meaning to them.<sup>9</sup>

To constructivists, there is no clear dividing line between ideas and the physical material world, and to speak of the two in opposition creates a false dichotomy.<sup>10</sup> It is thus claimed that materialism and idealism are not in opposition to each other. Politics require agency and agency in turn requires both ideas and materiality. Agency requires ideas because without such a feature as motivation, as a derivative from ideas, there would be no agency, but only inertia and reaction. Material, rational behavior cannot be totally detached from ideas and discourses that constitute identities and interests.<sup>11</sup> Alexander

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<sup>7</sup> PURSIAINEN, C., 2000. *Russian foreign policy and international relations theory*. Aldershot: Ashgate. 147

<sup>8</sup> KUBÁLKOVÁ, V., 2015. *Foreign policy in a constructed world*.15

<sup>9</sup> SMITH, STEVE, HADFIELD, AMELIA., DUNNE, TIMOTHY, 2016. *Foreign policy: theories, actors, cases*.74,75

<sup>10</sup> BARKIN, J.S., 2011. *Realist constructivism: rethinking international relations theory*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.31-32

<sup>11</sup> Ibid. 36

Wendt's constitutive theory demonstrates how the ideational (from the term 'idea' as opposed to 'ideal') constitutes the meaning of the material forces on the world.<sup>12</sup>

Constructivism speaks variously of ideas, norms, constructive rules, and the social constructions of identity and interests. Social construction of international politics means that 'social relations' make and construct people into the kinds of beings that we are. Ideas and understandings in this context can refer to a number of things, including norms, identities, and discursive patterns. They may be explicit, that is recognized as such by those who hold them, or implicit, not self-consciously recognized by some or all who are part of the intersubjectivity.<sup>13</sup> Additional constructivist variables include norms, identities, culture, prestige, reputation, and recognition by others.<sup>14</sup> Constructivists seek to understand how actors define their 'selves' and how this informs their interests.<sup>15</sup> Such constructivist features as historical contingency,<sup>16</sup> also might enrich our study of the sources of contemporary Russian foreign policy conduct.

The effect of cognition on decision-maker also one salient element of constructivism which we see as useful when analyzing foreign policy at the domestic level. Cognition is a collective term for the psychological processes involved in the acquisition, organization, and use of knowledge. Analysis through cognition tries to distinguish the rational from the emotional and the impulsive aspect of mentality. This analysis includes perception, memory, attention, problem-solving, language, thinking, and imagery.<sup>17</sup>

Most evidently, the constructivist approach provides us with clues for change in late Soviet foreign policies under Mikhail Gorbachev and his 'Perestroika' and 'New Thinking' concepts. We assume that these concepts originated from Gorbachev's strive

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<sup>12</sup> KUBÁLKOVÁ, V., 2015. *Foreign policy in a constructed world*.48

<sup>13</sup> BARKIN, J.S., 2011. *Realist constructivism: rethinking international relations theory*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 26-27

<sup>14</sup> KATZENSTEIN, P.J., 1996. *The Culture of national security: norms and identity in world politics*. New York: Columbia University Press. 2, 14

<sup>15</sup> BURCHILL, S.E.A., 2015. *Theories of International Relations*. Hampshire, UK: Palgrave Macmillan. 225

<sup>16</sup> BARKIN, J.S., 2011. *Realist constructivism: rethinking international relations theory*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 156

<sup>17</sup> COTTAM, MARTHA L., 1986. *Foreign policy decision making: the influence of cognition*. Boulder, Colo: Westview.6

for a change and will for progress for both the Soviet state and humanity in general. Agents, in the context of social theory, are defined as “purposeful actors whose actions help to reproduce or to transform the society in which they live. In other words, they are defined as people and as the component units of social structure.<sup>18</sup> According to constructivists, ideas of progress in international relations are based not only on what such theories say or propose, but primarily on what political actors do. Progress occurs through the redefinition of identities and interests of the actors themselves.<sup>19</sup>

Constructivists argue that actor’s identities are constituted by the institutionalized norms, values and ideas of the social environment in which they act.<sup>20</sup> It is claimed that international regimes are social institutions that mitigate conflict in a decentralized international society of states. Analysis of actor’s identities is often consequential for the definition of actor interests. Cultural-institutional context do not merely constrain actors by changing the incentives that shape their behavior. They do not simply regulate behavior. They also help to constitute the very actors whose conduct they seek to regulate.<sup>21</sup> From this perspective, it can be argued that the Soviet system constituted the personalities of its leaders. A leader such as Vladimir Putin would be thus the “product” of the very system he is leading. Our argument corresponds with the ‘communities of practice’ approach, which claims that it is within communities of practice that collective meaning emerges, discourses become established, identities are fixed, learning takes place, and new political agendas arise.<sup>22</sup>

The concept of “culture” comprises beliefs, ideas, understanding, perceptions, and identities - referred to as “knowledge”, in addition to norms, rules, and institutions.<sup>23</sup> The cultural structure is part of the formation of conflicts. Both, cooperative and conflictual

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<sup>18</sup> BARKIN, J.S., 2011. *Realist constructivism: rethinking international relations theory*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 101

<sup>19</sup> EMANUEL ADLER, 2004. *Communitarian International Relations: The Epistemic Foundations of International Relations*. London: Routledge Ltd. 102

<sup>20</sup> BURCHILL, S.E.A., 2015. *Theories of International Relations*. Hampshire, UK: Palgrave Macmillan. 226

<sup>21</sup> KATZENSTEIN, P.J., 1996. *The Culture of national security: norms and identity in world politics*. New York: Columbia University Press. 22

<sup>22</sup> EMANUEL ADLER, 2004. *Communitarian International Relations: The Epistemic Foundations of International Relations*. London: Routledge Ltd. 15-16

<sup>23</sup> LAPID, YOSEF, KRATOCHWIL, FRIEDRICH, 1996. *The Return of culture and identity in international relations theory*. Londres: Lynne Rienner.. 49-50

cultural structures exist only in virtue of state actors having certain ideational properties. Structure of the states' system contains both material and cultural elements. Constructivists give priority to cultural over material elements on the grounds that actors act on the basis of the meanings that objects have for them, and meanings are socially constructed.<sup>24</sup>

Constructivists claim that national interests which form state's foreign policies, are constituted by social identities of states and individuals. Identities inform interests and in turn – actions. In Wendt's words: "Identities are the basis of interests."<sup>25</sup>

It is argued that beliefs that have relatively short-term consequences are less resistant to change, whereas beliefs with longer-term consequences tend to persist. In foreign policy, the long-term beliefs are the ones which are impervious to new information. Long-term beliefs are grounded on images (perceptions) that are very difficult to change. Long-term belief in the other's hostility is easy to confirm and difficult to disprove - almost regardless of the objective circumstances.<sup>26</sup> Such an approach to beliefs may provide a great deal of explanation for patterns of contemporary Russian foreign policies which withstood regime transition and proved to be highly tenacious. Other authors, however, claim that the mere existence of certain beliefs does not mean that they necessarily effect a state's policy.<sup>27</sup>

Abstract or emotionally laden beliefs and values that make up the core of a culture are more resistant to change. Ordinarily such change takes place slowly and incrementally. Occasionally more rapid change in core beliefs and values occurs, but only after they have been thoroughly discredited and the society is under great strain.<sup>28</sup> This and similar points stand at the core of our argument regarding the significant shift from realist political thinking of Soviet leaders towards constructivist views, which

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid. 49-50

<sup>25</sup> BURCHILL, S.E.A., 2015. *Theories of International Relations*. Hampshire, UK: Palgrave Macmillan. 225

<sup>26</sup> SMITH, STEVE, HADFIELD, AMELIA., DUNNE, TIMOTHY, 2016. *Foreign policy: theories, actors, cases*. 106

<sup>27</sup> GOLDSTEIN, JUDITH., KEOHANE, ROBERT O., 1993. *Ideas and foreign policy: beliefs, institutions, and political change*. edited by Judith Goldstein and Robert O. Keohane. edited by Judith Goldstein and Robert O. Keohane. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.. 11

<sup>28</sup> KATZENSTEIN, P.J., 1996. *The Culture of national security: norms and identity in world politics*. New York: Columbia University Press. 326

characterized late Soviet regime. Deeply rooted beliefs, that are highly resistant to change, also stand at the core of contemporary Russia's mixture of a 'new' realism with constructivism, as we demonstrate later.

According to Weberian maxim, material and ideal interests, rather than ideas, directly govern people's conduct. Other expressions, however, propose that "world images", that have been created by ideas, like switchmen, determine the tracks along which action is pushed by the dynamic of interests.<sup>29</sup> The constructivist argument additionally claims that ideas need to be activated by events.<sup>30</sup> Ideas are for constructivists important determinants of government policies, they influence policy by embodying principles or causal beliefs, which in their turn provide road maps that increase an actors' clarity about goals or ends-means relationships. Ideas affect outcomes of strategic situations in which there is no unique equilibrium and when ideas become embedded in political institutions.<sup>31</sup> For other authors ideas are just hooks, used by elites, seizing popular ideas to propagate and legitimize their interests, and that the ideas themselves do not play a causal role. These interests may be strictly material, matching the argument that all individuals are wealth-maximizers, but they also may encompass broader utility functions, in which such values as status and power also have significant weight. However, ideas do matter for policies, even when human beings are only pursuing their self-serving goals.<sup>32</sup>

What is important for our analysis is that once ideas become institutionalized, they continue to guide action in absence of innovation.<sup>33</sup> In other words, once a policy choice leads to the creation of enforcing organizational and normative structures, that policy *idea* can affect the incentives of political entrepreneurs long after the interests of its proponents have changed.<sup>34</sup> Stalin's personal power does not explain the persistence of his ideas and

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<sup>29</sup> EMANUEL ADLER, 2004. *Communitarian International Relations: The Epistemic Foundations of International Relations*. London: Routledge Ltd. 91

<sup>30</sup> SMITH, STEVE, HADFIELD, AMELIA., DUNNE, TIMOTHY, 2016. *Foreign policy: theories, actors, cases*. 252

<sup>31</sup> GOLDSTEIN, JUDITH., KEOHANE, ROBERT O., 1993. *Ideas and foreign policy: beliefs, institutions, and political change*. edited by Judith Goldstein and Robert O. Keohane. edited by Judith Goldstein and Robert O. Keohane. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.. 3

<sup>32</sup> Ibid. 4

<sup>33</sup> Ibid. 5

<sup>34</sup> GOLDSTEIN, JUDITH., KEOHANE, ROBERT O., 1993. *Ideas and foreign policy: beliefs, institutions, and political change*. edited by Judith Goldstein and Robert O. Keohane. edited by Judith Goldstein and Robert O. Keohane. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.. 12

policies long after his death.<sup>35</sup> This comes to prove that deeply embedded ideas remain long after their source ceases to exist. Ideas are themselves a powerful feature in politics - this proposition can assist us in understanding to what extent contemporary Russian foreign policy patterns are affected by the persistence of older Soviet institutionalized ideas.

Ideas help to order the world. With the passage of time and especially with the rise to political power of individuals, groups, or new leaders who have internalized new ideas, and who probably came to power *because* they adopted these ideas, a new collective identity may become firmly established.<sup>36</sup> This argument particularly pertains to leaders such as Gorbachev and Putin, who, armed with new crosscutting ideas, rose to power, each one at a different point in time, both however amid a general need for order in both domestic and external domains. Their new ideas reestablished national identities, and identities stand in the core of constitution of national interests.<sup>37</sup>

Consequently, by ordering the world, ideas may shape agendas, which can then profoundly shape outcomes.<sup>38</sup> Ideas affect strategic interactions between a variety of possible alternatives for action. In general, policy almost always varies because of the choice of some ideas over others. Ideas *thus* contribute to policy outcomes.<sup>39</sup> The explanatory power of ideas is especially evident for contemporary Russian foreign policy following the collapse of the Soviet Union and the transitory period. Claims such as that ideas serve the purpose of guiding behavior under conditions of uncertainty by stipulating causal patterns or by providing compelling ethical or moral motivations for action,<sup>40</sup> are suitable for application for the post-Soviet behavior. New ideas may lead to a significant change in the very constitution of interests. This change may come about when an

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid. 88

<sup>36</sup> EMANUEL ADLER, 2004. *Communitarian International Relations: The Epistemic Foundations of International Relations*. London: Routledge Ltd. 220

<sup>37</sup> PURSIAINEN, C., 2000. *Russian foreign policy and international relations theory*. Aldershot: Ashgate. 149

<sup>38</sup> GOLDSTEIN, JUDITH., KEOHANE, ROBERT O., 1993. *Ideas and foreign policy: beliefs, institutions, and political change*. edited by Judith Goldstein and Robert O. Keohane. edited by Judith Goldstein and Robert O. Keohane. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.. 11-12

<sup>39</sup> Ibid. 12

<sup>40</sup> Ibid. 16

existing set of ideas is discredited by events or when new ideas are simply so compelling that they capture the attention of a wide array of actors.<sup>41</sup>

Some authors distinguish between ideas themselves, calling them “causal ideas” and “principled” ones - causal ideas respond directly to uncertainty by reducing it; principled ideas enable people to behave decisively despite causal uncertainty. Principled ideas can shift the focus of attention to moral issues and away from purely instrumental ones focused on material interests and power.<sup>42</sup> We resort to the notion of principled ideas when we argue that both the Soviet aid and support for Egypt and Syria in the 1960s’ and early 1970s’, the amount of which greatly outrun the situational necessity, as well as contemporary Russia’s support of Assad’s regime in Syria in 2014, in large part stem from principled ideational perceptions, i.e. principled ideas.

All interests involve beliefs and therefore ideas.<sup>43</sup> Economic depression, wars, the decline of a political party, and the overthrow of a government may all cause ideas to become important because all these events constitute exogenous shocks that undermine the existing order. At such moments, radical shifts in the political agenda may occur because of the common acceptance of some new normative or causal sets of beliefs. Ideas are important even though actions based on their premises may lead to no gain or added efficiency. Whereas a functional approach leads analysts to look to the purpose to which ideas are put, this first path suggests that the uncertainties that confront political actors can lead to reliance on beliefs as guides to action even if those ideas do not lead to benefits for society at large.<sup>44</sup>

Ideas have a lasting influence on politics through their incorporation into the terms of political debate; but the impact of some set of ideas may be mediated by the operation of institutions in which the ideas are embedded. Once ideas have influenced organizational design, their influence will be reflected in the incentives of those in the

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<sup>41</sup> GOLDSTEIN, JUDITH., KEOHANE, ROBERT O., 1993. *Ideas and foreign policy: beliefs, institutions, and political change*. edited by Judith Goldstein and Robert O. Keohane. Ithaca: Cornell University Press..16

<sup>42</sup> Ibid. 16

<sup>43</sup> Ibid. 22

<sup>44</sup> Ibid. 17

organization and those whose interests are served by it. In general, when institutions intervene, the impact of ideas may be prolonged for decades or even generations. In this sense, ideas can have an impact even when no one genuinely believes in them as principled or causal statements. Thus, ideas which were constitutionalized at some point in time, continue to influence politics, even after the interests that promoted this idea fade away. In such a situation, it is no longer possible to understand policy outcomes on the basis of contemporary configurations of interest and power alone.<sup>45</sup>

However, ideas will not be maintained at any cost, and when ideas cease to perform certain necessary functions, they are likely to be replaced by new ideas.<sup>46</sup> We demonstrate this point in our comparative study where old ideas were replaced by new ones, significantly altering and determining the Soviet or Russian state's foreign policy.

Some neorealists use ideas and strategic culture as intervening variables between the distribution of capabilities and foreign policy behavior. They stress that prevailing ideas can intervene through several different means including state leaders (as in the case of Gorbachev or Putin), institutions, and broader cultural state's preferences. The international environment sets the broad parameters on a state's behavior. Changes in the distribution of power will encourage strategic adjustment in the form of more or less expansive grand strategy. Policy makers will choose to frame, adjust, and modify strategic choices to reflect culturally acceptable preferences to maintain domestic political support. State leaders will choose decisions and strategic ideas which will culturally and ideationally resonate better with the general public in order to gain domestic legitimacy.<sup>47</sup> While rationalists see people making decisions using a strategic logic, based on what will maximize their individual interests, constructivists, by contrast, see people making decisions using a social logic, based on social norms and the expectations of others.<sup>48</sup> It

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<sup>45</sup> GOLDSTEIN, JUDITH., KEOHANE, ROBERT O., 1993. *Ideas and foreign policy: beliefs, institutions, and political change*. edited by Judith Goldstein and Robert O. Keohane. edited by Judith Goldstein and Robert O. Keohane. Ithaca: Cornell University Press. 20-21

<sup>46</sup> Ibid. 109

<sup>47</sup> RIPSAN, NORRIN M., TALIAFERRO, JEFFREY W., LOBELL, STEVEN E., 2016. *Neoclassical realist theory of international politics*. New York, N.Y.: Oxford university press. 69-70

<sup>48</sup> BARKIN, J.S., 2011. *Realist constructivism: rethinking international relations theory*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 50



might be argued that this is what distinguishes Gorbachev from his predecessors (Khrushchev, Brezhnev) and successors (Putin). A strategic logic vs. a social one.

### **Constructivist views in Soviet political thinking**

Following our examination of some of the constructivist approaches that correspond with our analysis, we will attempt to discover points of transformation or interplay between realism and constructivism in Soviet and contemporary Russian political thinking and determine to what extent, and during which of the periods analyzed, constructivism, as an analytical approach, is capable of explaining Soviet and contemporary Russian foreign policy.

Historically, the territorial expanse and its imperial control over non-Russian people imbued Russia's elites with a sense of a great power status, especially after defeating Napoleon's invasion and co-shaping the European distribution of powers after the Congress of Vienna (1815). Russia nevertheless lagged behind the West in many respects. According to Social Identity theory, Russian leaders would first mobilize their efforts to compete with Western powers, by increasing its military expenditures, invest in technology, industry and education. When social competition proved insufficient to narrow the gap, the theory suggests that Russia would turn to a strategy of social creativity, either by viewing its backwardness as an advantage or by finding new areas in which to excel.<sup>49</sup> According to this approach, Gorbachev and his assistants chose the 'social creativity' path, when they realized that the USSR cannot surpass the West, nor effectively compete with it. Such an approach combines the status-seeking with efforts at preserving distinctiveness, thus expecting Gorbachev and his "new thinkers" not to be content with simply joining the club of 'civilized' states, but to put forward norms and ideas that would underscore the Soviet uniqueness, moral superiority, and originality. One variable of

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<sup>49</sup> LARSON, D.W. and SHEVCHENKO, A., 2003. Shortcut to greatness: The new thinking and the revolution in Soviet foreign policy. *International Organization*, 57(1), pp. 77-109. 91

social creativity approach includes presenting the Soviet states as a creator of principles underlying a new world order.<sup>50</sup>

Fukuyama contends that features of constructivist approach already occurred as early as the seizure of power by the Bolsheviks in 1917. Debates of this sort were hardly new within the Communist movement, they have occurred continually throughout the history in both the Bolshevik movement and the Comintern. The types of “debates” that occurred in the Soviet literature were generally of a tactical nature, concerning issues such as the role of armed struggle in promoting revolutionary change or the opportunities for revolution, and the speed at which a new government can implement socialist transformations given a particular country’s level of socioeconomic development.<sup>51</sup>

The end of the Cold War allowed the constructivists to propose a wide range of explanations in the IR field, because it was apparent that you could get a meaningful change in the system without any significant material change. Something ideational had to occur within the system.<sup>52</sup> The fact that a Soviet nuclear superpower was literally defeated without a single shot, let alone a “hot” war, gave high credence to the constructivist’s approach. Constructivism emerged as a major ontological and epistemological approach to the study of international relations following the end of the Cold War and the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Scholars judge it to be a major empirical anomaly for neorealism, especially for the balance-of-power theory. Since then, proponents of constructivism and related ideational or structural theories have claimed that those theories offer superior explanations for observable political behavior than do materialist alternatives, such as structural realism and neoliberalism.<sup>53</sup>

The new cooperative relationship between the USSR and the West developed in four stages: 1)The breakdown of the consensus about identity commitments inside the USSR, resulting from the giving up of an aggressive posture and bolstered by the

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid. 95

<sup>51</sup> FUKUYAMA, F., 1986. *Moscow's Post-Brezhnev Reassessment of the Third World.*, 6

<sup>52</sup> HUDSON, V.M., 2007. *Foreign policy analysis: classic and contemporary theory.* Lanham u.a.: Rowman & Littlefield.12

<sup>53</sup> RIPSAN, NORRIN M., TALIAFERRO, JEFFREY W., LOBELL, STEVEN E., 2016. *Neoclassical realist theory of international politics.* New York, N.Y.: Oxford university press.157

reassurance from the West that it would not attack the Soviet Union. 2) The changed ideas led to rethinking of the Soviet identity, the discovery of “new selves” and the recognition of how much the ‘new’ selves impacted upon the old competitive structure. 3) The “altercasting,” that is the presentation of the Soviet Union in such a way as to change the identity of the United States as well, i.e. by altering the US’s need to perceive the Soviets as a threat. 4) Finally, the establishment of a firm intersubjective basis between the United States and the USSR for their understanding of their changed relationship. According to constructivists, structural conditions did not force this self-awareness on the Soviet’s part. The Soviet behavior rather changed because they redefined their interests as a result of having looked at their existing desires and beliefs self-critically - although some experts opined that the existence of this new cooperative behavior might not last long.<sup>54</sup>

The collapse of the Soviet state-system became possible after the breakdown of the ‘social consensus’, the essence of which was the critical examination of old ideas about self and others and of the structures of interaction by which these ideas had been sustained. This stage led to the recognition of the crucial role that Soviet ‘aggressive practices had played in sustaining the Cold War conflict. The ‘*New Thinking*’ Soviet policy had alternatives and was probably not inevitable. According to this view, it was a special network of experts that shared these new ideas, often transnationally influenced, and who gradually gained access to Soviet foreign policy decision-makers. Two main perspectives existed in collaboration with each other, the ‘realpolitik’ and the ‘idealist’, whereas the former was dominant on the Soviet political scene in the 1970s and the latter in the 1980s. Gorbachev remained ‘open to both arguments, subsequently siding with the idealists.’<sup>55</sup>

### **Sources of Soviet foreign policy in Third World from constructivist perspective**

Signs of a transformation of views and thinking patterns of Soviet state on international relations became apparent already during the last years of Khrushchev’s

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<sup>54</sup> KUBÁLKOVÁ, V., 2015. *Foreign policy in a constructed world*. 117-118

<sup>55</sup> PURSIAINEN, C., 2000. *Russian foreign policy and international relations theory*. Aldershot: Ashgate. 152

term in power. In particular, among the IR specialists, scientists and political leadership, more sophisticated research in areas of high political priority for the Soviet regime was suggested.<sup>56</sup> Such transformation stemmed from the recognition that Leninism became irrelevant for international politics in the atomic age.<sup>57</sup> Another radical, and controversial, departure from conventional Soviet thinking in the 1960s involved the explicit repudiation of the Clausewitzian dictum and core elements of Leninism that 'war is the continuation of politics by other means.'<sup>58</sup>

In early Soviet view states did not occupy an unchallenged place as the paramount actors in contemporary international relations. The 'historical' agents of societies, were considered classes, not states.<sup>59</sup> The original Marxist-Leninist ideology treated the two opposed systems as actors, rather than states-as-actors.<sup>60</sup> In comparison with traditional Marxist frame, dating from the achievement of socialism in one country, states, in Soviet perception, received role of actors, contrary to classes as actors. From the adaptation of Soviet observers to operate in a horizontal, international, and political arena, gradually, states, in Soviet thinking, took the leading role as the prime actors of international relations. This was the reason for Brzezinski's conclusion in 1960, that "the interplay between nation-states in Soviet thinking is merely one and often only a formal aspect of international affairs." From that point onwards, the Soviets, however, 'upgraded' the role of the state. This development in Soviet political thought was a phenomenon primarily associated with the last years of Khrushchev in power and the years following his removal. What followed this development is the general pattern of gradual ideological erosion,<sup>61</sup> and along with it, a modification of realist thinking.

Leonid Brezhnev did not completely proceed with what seemed as late Khrushchevian moderate politics. It was a combination between dialog and expansion.

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<sup>56</sup> ZIMMERMAN, W., *Soviet Perspectives on International Relations, 1956-1967*. 2. printing edn. Princeton: Princeton University Press. 62

<sup>57</sup> Ibid. 63

<sup>58</sup> Ibid. 67

<sup>59</sup> Ibid. 79-80

<sup>60</sup> Ibid. 83

<sup>61</sup> Ibid. 79-80

On the one hand there were series of moves which culminated in the signing of the nuclear non-proliferation treaty and the Politburo decisions to enter high-level talks with the United States on nuclear arms limitation. On the other hand, there was a steady intensification of ideological and class struggle between the Soviet and Western camps. Under Brezhnev, the major issues dividing the dogmatic-orthodox from the moderate-reformist wings of the leadership in the post-Khrushchev period tended to converge.<sup>62</sup>

Brezhnev's period can be characterized as associated with the goal of preventing a Third World War between the United States and the Soviet Union, in contrast to Khrushchev's "fetishization" of modern weaponry. The Soviet Union, not the Socialist Camp as a whole – and this is an important point – was considered from Moscow's perspective as the one who deterred the imperialists from unleashing a Third World War. This change in terminology seemed to indicate a greater separation of the ideological from the international-political realms,<sup>63</sup> marking the beginning of a departure from conventional orthodoxy. In 1968, Soviet foreign minister Gromyko's reports pictured a steady decline in the influence of traditional military strength in world politics – a trend which, he said, was the "essence of the new phenomena of the present stage."<sup>64</sup> During Khrushchev's tenure, the Soviets began their departure from the rigid terms of Lenin's alleged anti-imperialism and Stalin's hierarchically structured international system.<sup>65</sup> However, this was still far from an explicit adoption of non-realistic thinking as was expressed by their successor, Mikhail Gorbachev.

Sometime prior to Brezhnev's death in November 1982, a number of high Politburo and Party Secretary-level leaders began to take up a line which had been developed in other, less authoritative theoretical writings on the Third World, particularly since the late 1970's, but which was not present in either the 25<sup>th</sup> or the 26<sup>th</sup> CPSU Congress reports.

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<sup>62</sup> CIA. DIRECTORATE OF INTELLIGENCE, 1968. *Politics in The Soviet Politburo and the Czech Crisis*. 0032/68. CIA. Central Intelligence Agency. 4

<sup>63</sup> ZIMMERMAN, W., *Soviet Perspectives on International Relations, 1956-1967*. 2. printing edn. Princeton: Princeton University Press. 99-100

<sup>64</sup> CIA. DIRECTORATE OF INTELLIGENCE, 1968. *Politics in The Soviet Politburo and the Czech Crisis*. 0032/68. CIA. Central Intelligence Agency. 9

<sup>65</sup> ZIMMERMAN, W., *Soviet Perspectives on International Relations, 1956-1967*. 2. printing edn. Princeton: Princeton University Press. 157

It asserted that the Soviet Union can help its friends and allies in the Third World not so much by direct economic aid as by improving its own economy and making the “real” or “developed” socialism of the USSR the most attractive model for the Third World to follow.<sup>66</sup>

Brezhnev was aware of the problematic relationship between détente and the Third World. He proposed a “code of conduct” governing superpower behavior in the Third World. He renounced the notion of “spheres of influence” or rules of conduct that would favor the Western “imperialism”. However, the fact that Brezhnev felt compelled to propose such a set of rules suggested a recognition on his part that the Third World had become a major problem in US-Soviet relations, which needed to be addressed.<sup>67</sup> Brezhnev’s successor Andropov took Brezhnev’s recognition of the dangers posed by Moscow’s activities in the Third World further in his 1983’ Central Committee Plenum speech, where he explicitly stressed the danger of a nuclear confrontation between both superpowers indicating that this could be caused by “activities of the entire communist movement” in the Third World.<sup>68</sup> What followed was a recognition and extensive criticism of multiple errors in Soviet foreign policy in the Third World during the Brezhnev period.<sup>69</sup> The revision went further, admitting that Soviet activism had contributed to the continuation of regional conflicts as well as harmed the détente, arguing that Soviet arms supplies to the Third World played a detrimental role.<sup>70</sup>

Some Western scholars held that up to the early 1980s, Soviet foreign policy was characterized by the ideological confrontation with the West. Gradually towards the 1980s, the Soviet strategic views and goals transformed, becoming less ideological, but driven by a pragmatic *realpolitik*. The point of departure for the change was the Soviet war in Afghanistan, which changed many perceptions and perspectives in the Kremlin. Some authors opine that this was the point that marks the difference between the early

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<sup>66</sup> FUKUYAMA, F., 1986. *Moscow's Post-Brezhnev Reassessment of the Third World.*, 16

<sup>67</sup> Ibid. 25

<sup>68</sup> Ibid. 25

<sup>69</sup> Ibid. 43

<sup>70</sup> GOLAN, G., 1990. *Soviet policies in the Middle East : from World War Two to Gorbachev.* Cambridge [England]; New York: Cambridge University Press. 260-261

and mid-Soviet Cold War foreign policy thinking and the late Soviet and post-Soviet contemporary Russian perception. Soviet Cold War confrontational thinking transformed into more pragmatic views.<sup>71</sup> Since the death of Leonid Brezhnev in November 1982, a wide-ranging reassessment took place in Soviet policy decision-making circles concerning the Third World.<sup>72</sup>

Andropov's early emphasis on anti-imperialism, after succeeding Brezhnev in late 1982, was also transforming. He stressed the complexity of Third World state's struggle and the difficulties of their 'revolutionary' development. His policy was much more moderate than that of his predecessors. He stressed that the economic development, just as the entire social progress, can be only the result of the work of their (Third World) peoples and of a correct policy of their leadership.<sup>73</sup> The second major theme which emerged in Soviet pronouncements during the early 1980's had to do with how worsening relations with the United States and other Western countries increased the risk of all-out war and imposed constraints in Moscow's ability to help its allies in the Third World. This line first began to appear already during Brezhnev's term, and in fact seemed to have been taken up by him in the years before his death.<sup>74</sup>

The Middle East that Gorbachev encountered after he came to power in March 1985 was different from that which his predecessors had dealt with. Two main trends almost immediately rose in importance. The first trend was growing reliance on diplomatic means. The 1973 October War showed that no single side could win a decisive victory and that the price of war was too high.<sup>75</sup> The second trend was the increasing need for economic improvements of which all the countries of the region could gain. Economic considerations became exceedingly important and mitigated rivalries. It seems that it was

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<sup>71</sup> From personal interview conducted by the author with Prof. Mordehai Kedar on 22.04.2019

<sup>72</sup> FUKUYAMA, F., 1986. Gorbachev and the Third World. *Foreign Affairs*, **64**(4), pp. 715-731. 715

<sup>73</sup> FUKUYAMA, F., 1986. *Moscow's Post-Brezhnev Reassessment of the Third World.*, 18

<sup>74</sup> Ibid. 23

<sup>75</sup> SAS, S.N., 1990. *Gorbachev's New International Outlook and the Eastern Mediterranean.*, . 84

obvious that war could put an end to economic gains and halt future progress, thus challenging the survivability of a leaderships.<sup>76</sup>

There is considerable empirical evidence that a high-level reassessment of the Third World has in fact taken place in the Soviet Union since the late Brezhnev era, in which all three of these issues have been raised by different Soviet spokesman. What is less clear is the relationship of these theoretical discussions to actual Soviet policy and behavior 'on the ground'. It is true that the first half of the 1980's has not witnessed a major Soviet intervention in the Third World on the scale of Angola, Ethiopia, or Afghanistan, and indeed some observers have interpreted this as a sign of deliberate restraint on the part of the Soviet leadership. However, according to other explanations Moscow's relative quiescence since Afghanistan can be explained by the lack of similar opportunities during the 1980's. In terms of other measures, such as military aid, Soviet involvement in the Third World has actually increased between 1980 and 1985.<sup>77</sup>

The main aspects of the novelty of Gorbachev's approach towards Soviet Third World foreign policy were deemphasizing of the military instrument; acceptance of linkages in US-Soviet relations; an encouragement of negotiated solutions to regional conflicts; a movement toward reducing the costs of carrying on an imperial policy; and *Glasnost* in foreign policy deliberations.<sup>78</sup> Beyond the military aspects, foreign policy thinkers in Moscow advocated the removal of the superpowers from regional conflicts altogether. If this was done, regional conflicts would be greatly restricted in scope and danger, and their persistence possibly checked. Under Gorbachev, the zero-sum-game balance largely was coming to an end through withdrawing the great power's participation in local conflicts.<sup>79</sup> Gorbachev gradually adopted the policy of 'linkage', or what he called

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<sup>76</sup> Ibid. 84

<sup>77</sup> FUKUYAMA, F., 1986. *Moscow's Post-Brezhnev Reassessment of the Third World.*, 4

<sup>78</sup> BARRY, DONALD D., RIEBER, ALFRED J., RUBINSTEIN, ALVIN Z., 1991. *Perestroika at the crossroads*. Armonk, N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe. 309

<sup>79</sup> GOLAN, GALIA., ROYAL INSTITUTE OF INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS., 1992. *Moscow and the Middle East : new thinking on regional conflict*. London: Pinter. 5



policy of 'interdependence', which was already taking root during his immediate predecessors, as the basis for a non-ideological foreign policy.<sup>80</sup>

Other authors consent that between 1985 and 1991, the foundation of Soviet foreign policy changed from a Marxist-Leninist view of inevitable conflict between capitalism and socialism, to an idealist vision of cooperation between states in solving global problems. Mikhail Gorbachev fundamentally altered Soviet foreign policy theory and practice by adopting the ideals of the New Thinking, including global interdependence, universal human values, the balance of interests, and freedom of choice. For many observers, the most striking aspect of this new identity was Gorbachev's and his comrades' determination to discard Soviet traditional *realpolitik* without substituting it with any moderate, reformed version of realism. The Soviet new identity was shaped by a set of ideas, that were the essence of the New Thinking.<sup>81</sup> The timing implies a much sharper shift towards constructivism and a departure from realism in Soviet strategic thinking.

Some observers point, that the post-Cold War 'New Thinking' was merely an instrument of pragmatism rather than of constructivism. Others argue that Gorbachev's adoption of the New Thinking was caused by Soviet geopolitical overextension and economic decline, which provided incentives to reduce their overseas involvement. Ideational theorists, on the other hand, maintain that material pressures did not uniquely determine Gorbachev's foreign policy posture. These scholars give an important causal role to a variety of ideational variables including cognitive learning, political entrepreneurship, transnational networks, and socialization into Western norms and values.<sup>82</sup>

Gorbachev and his like-minded associates chose the idealistic New Thinking over competing foreign policy programs because it offered a new global mission that would

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<sup>80</sup> GOLAN, G., 1990. *Soviet policies in the Middle East : from World War Two to Gorbachev*. Cambridge [England]; New York: Cambridge University Press. 28

<sup>81</sup> LARSON, D.W. and SHEVCHENKO, A., 2003. Shortcut to greatness: The new thinking and the revolution in Soviet foreign policy. *International Organization*, **57**(1), pp. 77-109. 77-78

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.* 78

enhance Soviet international status while preserving a distinctive national identity. In the early 1980s, the Soviet Union possessed all the elements of power, including a sizeable nuclear arsenal, huge conventional forces, and a territorial empire in Eastern Europe, but still was not accepted as a diplomatic or political equal by the United States and other advanced Western industrial powers. By recognizing that military power alone did not confer political influence or acceptance, Gorbachev and his advisors sought to attain a new status for the Soviet Union as the moral and political leader of a new international order, shaped according to the principles of the New Thinking. This new identity, based on “soft power,” would have allowed the Soviet Union, later Russia, to achieve the status of a great power without first attaining a level of economic and technological development comparable to that of the United States - an attempt to make ‘a shortcut to greatness.’<sup>83</sup> An alternative reading calls Gorbachev a “détente plus” strategy, which favored reduced defense spending and overseas commitments for the time until the Soviet Union has recovered its power and then might have resumed expansion.<sup>84</sup>

The new thinkers no longer saw the West as a political-ideological or geostrategic adversary. While differing on many specific aspects, the new thinkers rejected the inevitability of conflict between Capitalism and Socialism and the class-based nature of international relations. The New Thinking approach argued that the world was complex and interdependent. States had to cooperate in solving global problems such as the growing gap between rich and poor nations, underdevelopment and poverty, nuclear war, ecological disasters, pollution and terrorism; and that universal values should have priority over class interests.<sup>85</sup> The Gorbachev ‘revolution’ in political thinking was so profound, that it constituted a change in Soviet identity. Soviet constructivists attributed the New Thinking to the influence of a Westernizing policy. However, the constructivist

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<sup>83</sup> LARSON, D.W. and SHEVCHENKO, A., 2003. Shortcut to greatness: The new thinking and the revolution in Soviet foreign policy. *International Organization*, 57(1), pp. 77-109. 78

<sup>84</sup> Ibid. 82

<sup>85</sup> Ibid. 84

interpretations have not sufficiently recognized the Soviet's need for a unique identity that would maintain its status as a great superpower.<sup>86</sup>

Gorbachev and his foreign minister Shevardnadze promoted principles that would underline a new international system in which states would submerge their ideological differences in order to cooperate in solving global problems. The new thinkers were not only “norm-takers” but also norm entrepreneurs. The appeal and the winning quality of the New Thinking was that it allowed the Soviet Union to establish a distinctive identity as a leader in constructing a new world order.<sup>87</sup>

Finally, because persuading others to accept the new Soviet identity required maintaining consistency between words and deeds, Gorbachev would have been under pressure to follow the New Thinking principles in his foreign policy. Furthermore, being committed to a ‘soft power’ strategy, Social Identity theory for instance expected Gorbachev to avoid hard *quid pro quo* bargaining, such as for example requesting geopolitical concessions from the West, which would have undercut the image he was trying to establish.<sup>88</sup> In February 1986, Gorbachev argued: “Security could only be obtained by political means and must be mutual.”<sup>89</sup> In December 1988 in his UN address, the Soviet leader advocated overturning the principles of deterrence, spheres of influence, and the balance of power that had ordered the world for at least four decades.<sup>90</sup>

Social Identity theory claims that status concerns may overwhelm material calculations. One group may accept lower material benefits to improve its position relative to the other group. In the same vein, Gorbachev was expected to discount the importance of traditional material symbols of Soviet power, such as control over Third World satellite regimes, willing to sacrifice them for an improved image and status.<sup>91</sup> This approach had direct consequences for Soviet foreign policy towards our case-studies. Gorbachev's New

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<sup>86</sup> Ibid. 87-88

<sup>87</sup> Ibid. 88

<sup>88</sup> LARSON, D.W. and SHEVCHENKO, A., 2003. Shortcut to greatness: The new thinking and the revolution in Soviet foreign policy. *International Organization*, **57**(1), pp. 77-109. 96

<sup>89</sup> Ibid. 97

<sup>90</sup> Ibid. 99

<sup>91</sup> Ibid. 96

Thinking was premised on the belief that international influence was no longer based on military power but rather on the 'power of example'.<sup>92</sup>

Gorbachev's move to compromise was evident in three areas. The first relates to the direct use of Soviet force. Moscow had withdrawn its troops from hot conflict zones. Soviet policy had not ignored the importance of leverage but had redefined how to acquire meaningful political influence in complicated regional settings.<sup>93</sup> The second relates to the fact that Soviet policy began to abandon the self-serving, but ultimately misleading, Cold War and imperialist stereotypes that had been used to define regional situations. The abandonment of old stereotypes eroded the perceived symbolic Soviet interests in regional conflicts and led to a new focus on the much less compelling intrinsic concerns at stake.<sup>94</sup>

Finally, Soviet policy recognized a large range of acceptable outcomes in regional struggles. This was partly a function of the decline in simplistic bipolar thinking. Gorbachev's policy aimed to achieve favorable terms of settlement rather than unequivocal victory. Consequently, the United Nations and regional organizations played a more prominent role in Soviet initiatives that pertain to conflicts in areas in which Moscow had recently exercised dominant influence – indication of Moscow's growing leaning on international institutions rather than military capabilities. In cases where American power had traditionally prevailed, Moscow took a different track. Rather than trying to eliminate American influence, it tried to work with Washington. In sensitive situations like Persian Gulf, Moscow endorsed the American military role it traditionally condemned, but it made this compromise in a new strategic context in which the United States accepted the Soviet Union as a legitimate participant.<sup>95</sup>

Gorbachev's approach meant more cautious Soviet attitude towards assistance to revolutionary violence. In time, this appearance has built pressure on intransigent forces

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<sup>92</sup> Ibid. 103

<sup>93</sup> HERRMANN, R.K., 1992. Soviet behavior in regional conflicts: Old questions, new strategies, and important lessons. *World Politics*, **44**(3), pp. 432-465. 458

<sup>94</sup> Ibid. 458

<sup>95</sup> Ibid. 458-459

in the Third World to seek negotiated solutions to their demands. It also weakened the position of elements in the Soviet party-propaganda-academic nexus who have constituted the bastion of resistance to accommodation with the West. And in dwelling on the “compelling necessity of the principle of freedom of choice” in the Third World and condemning denial of that right “no matter what the pretext”, as Gorbachev did in his UN speech, it legitimized standards easily applicable to the Soviet Union itself.<sup>96</sup>

Gorbachev’s most prominent new thinker, Shevardnadze, sought to put the military under Party’s control, in other words, under civilian political management of the CPSU. Under latent pronouncements he was stressing that the military must be put under a tight supervision. His next step was a decision of the 19<sup>th</sup> Party Conference for establishing institutional mechanisms that will supervise on the use of military force outside the Soviet borders and on military-industrial activities,<sup>97</sup> marking a clear departure from political realism. What followed was the necessity of introducing a legislative procedure whereby all the agencies engaged in military and military-industrial activities would be supervised by superior body elected by the people. This would concern both, questions of use of military force beyond the nation’s boundaries, plans for defense development, and openness of defense budgets.<sup>98</sup> The policy that Gorbachev’s regime led and the new mission he had designed for his country on the world arena left no room for the Communist Party’s monopoly on power.<sup>99</sup>

In Shevardnadze’s words, “Over more than 40 years after the World War II there has been many so-called little wars, however none of the events, where force was employed, gave any permanent political or other results. War and armed conflicts in the nuclear age objectively losing the function of instruments of rational policy. War cannot be rational means of policy. Although the arm-race might be a means of policy, as paradoxical as it may seem, indeed it can bleed the enemy’s economic and social base white, therefore this very conclusion leads us to the understanding that we in no way aid

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<sup>96</sup> CIA. DIRECTORATE OF INTELLIGENCE, 1999. Gorbachev's Foreign Policy. 23484. CIA. Central Intelligence Agency.3175

<sup>97</sup> Ibid. 3176

<sup>98</sup> Ibid. 3176

<sup>99</sup> SMART, C., 1995. *The imagery of Soviet foreign policy and the collapse of the Russian empire*. Westport, Conn.: Praeger. 144

in strengthening our security with it."<sup>100</sup> As with the other reforms, known in the West as the reconstruction (Perestroika), openness (Glasnost), and acceleration (Uskorenie), new political thinking was intended to reinforce Gorbachev's overall reform policies. Distinct from the domestic reforms, foreign policy reforms were comprised of a more flexible and sophisticated diplomacy, grounded in pragmatism and enshrouded by a new theoretical approach. Western analysts argue that with this new approach, the USSR was not seeking a diminished role in world affairs. On the contrary, it was seeking to establish what one writer has termed "a strategy of retrenchment," an inherently superpower stance that is designed to emphasize the universal values of the world community, in an effort to downplay superpower differences. This retrenchment strategy comprised a uniquely Soviet phenomenon - permitting the Soviet Union to take a "breathing space."<sup>101</sup>

In December 1988, in United Nations Assembly, Gorbachev spoke of progress, interdependence, and security.<sup>102</sup> Gorbachev emphasized that, "Today we have entered an era when progress will be based on the interests of all mankind. Consciousness of this, requires that world policy should be determined by the priority of the values of all mankind. These values include democratization (consensus of mankind), self-determination, balance of interests, disarmament (cessation of the threat of force), freedom of choice (unity in diversity), de-ideologization of interstate relations, political dialogue, and an increased role by the United Nations in solving international issues such as development, Third World debt crisis, ecological threats, and regional conflicts.<sup>103</sup> In this respect, it is remarkable to note how Gorbachev replaced the term 'balance of power' with the 'balance of interest' concept. He contrasted militarism and the balance-of-power doctrine with 'balance-of-interests' which implied voluntary agreements between states.<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>100</sup> CIA. DIRECTORATE OF INTELLIGENCE, 1999. Gorbachev's Foreign Policy. 23484. CIA. Central Intelligence Agency.3177-8

<sup>101</sup> NSA, 2011. *Moscow's Realignment with Cairo: A Look at Gorbachev's New Political Thinking*. 63852. NSA National Security Agency report. 5

<sup>102</sup> Ibid. 6

<sup>103</sup> Ibid. 6

<sup>104</sup> LARSON, D.W. and SHEVCHENKO, A., 2003. Shortcut to greatness: The new thinking and the revolution in Soviet foreign policy. *International Organization*, 57(1), pp. 77-109. 97

According to Gorbachev, this balance of interests' approach connoted more than just being ready for compromise.<sup>105</sup> Beyond new and less rigid bargaining style and tactics, a more fundamental possibility rose that some traditional Soviet [Third World] interests can be *sacrificed* (italic added). For example, in discussing the need to make concessions, Soviet ambassador Aleksandr Bovin has claimed that even the most vital international interests are essentially arbitrary: "Compromise is the air without which constructive policy will choke. Of course, each partner has a limit for concessions determined by the supreme interests of state security and commitments to allies. But to a significant extent this limit is subjective. It is determined not by interests "in itself", but by precisely how a given interests are understood and formulated." Viewed in this way, state security and commitments to allies lose their status as near absolutes.<sup>106</sup>

The most striking characteristic of Gorbachev's New Thinking policy was the Soviet Union's attempt to redefine its role as that of virtually neutral great power acting in concert with the United States and the Western democracies to achieve some stability in the Middle East region.<sup>107</sup> In 1986, Gorbachev instructed Soviet foreign diplomats and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs staff to gradually put an end to confrontational diplomacy and to bring the Cold War to an end.<sup>108</sup> Part of the concept of Gorbachev's new political thinking was to disengage from severe and debilitating competition among the superpowers.<sup>109</sup> In 1987 Yevgeny Primakov remarked the following: "Comparatively recently we considered peaceful coexistence as a respite that would be cut short by those who would again try to strangle the USSR – the leader of the victorious Socialism. This situation also insistently dictated the requirement for an increase in military effectiveness, ones again as virtually the only means of ensuring the country's security.... Today

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<sup>105</sup> SESTANOVICH, S., 1988. Gorbachev's foreign policy: A diplomacy of decline. *Probs.Communist*, **37**, pp. 1. 6

<sup>106</sup> SESTANOVICH, S., 1988. Gorbachev's foreign policy: A diplomacy of decline. *Probs.Communist*, **37**, pp. 1. 6

<sup>107</sup> GOLAN, GALIA.,ROYAL INSTITUTE OF INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS., 1992. *Moscow and the Middle East : new thinking on regional conflict*. London: Pinter. 73

<sup>108</sup> ISRAËLIAN,VIKTOR LEVONOVICH., 2003. *On the battlefields of the cold war : a Soviet ambassador's confession*. University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press. 363-365

<sup>109</sup> NSA, 2011. *Moscow's Realignment with Cairo: A Look at Gorbachev's New Political Thinking*. 63852. NSA National Security Agency report. 7

[however] such assessments and interpretations are clearly insufficient and inaccurate.”<sup>110</sup>

In 1987 at the United Nations General Assembly session, Shevardnadze made an extraordinary statement that ‘the Soviet Union seeks a world in which peace would be insured “exclusively” by the UN and its Security Council,’<sup>111</sup> invoking by this institutional means of conduct, contrary to means of force and coercion. Accordingly, Gorbachev moved toward an activist foreign policy that downgraded the invocation of military power. His approach generally relied on political initiatives, not on military intimidation. This approach tried to depolarize regional politics, emphasizing contact with all politically significant elements in the region and such policy insisted on calculation of economic costs. Overall, the New Thinking policy attempted to synchronize regional policies with the requirements of Perestroika and a reasoned view of Soviet security interests.<sup>112</sup>

Capitalizing on Gorbachev’s incorporation on the New Thinking in the Party line, and on the political support of such Gorbachev’s reformers as Yakovlev and Shevardnadze, reform-minded officials and policy analysts have called into question the ideological propositions and historical record that inspired and sanctified previous Soviet confrontational foreign policy behavior. Shevardnadze himself has publicly rejected the core rationale for zero-sum action stating that peaceful coexistence is merely a “specific form of class struggle.” He has argued that on the contrary, peaceful coexistence, and with it “mutually advantageous cooperation between states with different sociopolitical systems” – is even a “higher universal principle” than class struggle.<sup>113</sup> In 1989 Gorbachev [already] was denying that the United States possessed a preemptive threat and no longer endorsed classical doctrine of deterrence. Gorbachev denied the efficacy of purely military solutions to security problems and has embraced what was termed as the ‘defensive defense’ concept.<sup>114</sup> Others attribute it as Gorbachev’s policy of ‘defensive

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<sup>110</sup> SESTANOVICH, S., 1988. Gorbachev's foreign policy: A diplomacy of decline. *Probs.Communist*, **37**, pp. 1. 5

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.* 7

<sup>112</sup> CIA. DIRECTORATE OF INTELLIGENCE, 1999. Gorbachev's Foreign Policy. 23484. CIA. Central Intelligence Agency.3156

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.* 3157

<sup>114</sup> BARRY, DONALD D., RIEBER, ALFRED J., RUBINSTEIN,ALVIN Z., 1991. *Perestroika at the crossroads*. Armonk, N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe. 352



sufficiency'.<sup>115</sup> A vague term, open to varied interpretations, conveying the idea that the primary, if not sole function of the Soviet armed forces was to defend the Soviet state or, at most, the Socialist Bloc. Thus, if deterrence were not to be sought in the sphere of the super-power confrontation, power was not to be projected into the Third World, dictating a more pragmatic approach to foreign policy. Soviet diplomats were instructed by Foreign Minister Shevardnadze that common sense, not ideology, was to dictate policy. The non-ideological approach, which eschewed the 1970s' effort to build Marxist-Leninist parties in the Third World and supported only countries with socialist orientation, was now officially embedded in CPSU Party program. The new program, approved by the 1986 CPSU Congress called for the development of favorable relations with capitalist countries in the Third World.<sup>116</sup>

In late 1988 a new foreign policy stance under Shevardnadze's lead took ground when he noted that an effective Foreign Ministry had to negotiate simultaneously with three key players in foreign policy process: international partners; the Soviet public; and the Parliament. In 1989, Shevardnadze was publicly laying the groundwork for renegotiation of some of the commitments made to the USSR's friends around the world.<sup>117</sup> Generally speaking, Gorbachev's attempts were aimed to forge a new understanding (perception) of Russian greatness. While Russia's 'great power' identity has retained its imperial, territorial and other geopolitical connotations, it has also acquired new functional aspects expressed by shift in understanding of the meaning of power. This meaning has changed from being viewed in exclusively military terms, to embracing economic, financial, technological and intellectual instruments of influence.<sup>118</sup>

Gorbachev's New Thinking affected the way USSR exerted its influence and attempted to achieve its global objectives. Traditional Soviet penetrating methods -

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<sup>115</sup> GOLAN, GALIA., ROYAL INSTITUTE OF INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS., 1992. *Moscow and the Middle East : new thinking on regional conflict*. London: Pinter. 4

<sup>116</sup> GOLAN, G., 1990. *Soviet policies in the Middle East : from World War Two to Gorbachev*. Cambridge [England]; New York: Cambridge University Press. 259

<sup>117</sup> WEBER, J. and SOMMER, P., 1997. *Eduard Shevardnadze and the End of the Cold War*. 0704-0188. Washington DC. USA: National Defense University. National War College. 5

<sup>118</sup> OMELICHEVA, M.Y., 2012. Russia's foreign policy toward Iran: a critical geopolitics perspective. *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies*, 14(3), pp. 331-344. 334-335

ideology, diplomacy, military and economic aid, were modified by Gorbachev.<sup>119</sup> Gorbachev vigorously toiled to refashion his country's international image.<sup>120</sup> One of the more striking examples was Gorbachev's 1985 address to French parliamentarians, when he insisted that the Soviet Union rejected any "Metternich-like policy of balance of power; of pitting one state against the other, knocking together blocks and counter-blocks, creating axes and triangles." The core of the proposed new system was a non-military means of maintaining peace.<sup>121</sup>

*Soviet foreign policy analyzed through constructivist perspective. The Syrian case*

Under Gorbachev, Soviet military doctrine was to be altered, with a significant reduction of the strategic importance of the Middle East region altogether.<sup>122</sup> The new doctrine would thus take the Soviet armed forces out of regional conflicts. Brezhnev's old "divisibility of détente" view, which allowed to distinguish policies between superpower level and regional level, was discarded. Such concrete factors as the effect of regional developments on the maintenance of arms limitation agreements between the United States and the Soviet Union (policy of linkage), were to be seriously considered under Gorbachev.<sup>123</sup>

The impact of the new foreign policy imperatives on Middle East policy meant a willful Soviet retreat from the region. In a world rapidly heading toward globalization, hence toward interdependence, Gorbachev favored the de-ideologization of foreign policy, and to substitute a careful balance of national interests for zero-sum-game competition. Thus, the Soviet Union no longer needed to compete with the West in the Middle East, and the issue of securing its southern frontiers lost its strategic significance. In practice, the new policy disengaged the USSR from the Arab-Israel conflict. During his

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<sup>119</sup> SAS, S.N., 1990. *Gorbachev's New International Outlook and the Eastern Mediterranean*, . 52

<sup>120</sup> SMART, C., 1995. *The imagery of Soviet foreign policy and the collapse of the Russian empire*. Westport, Conn.: Praeger. 119

<sup>121</sup> Ibid. 126

<sup>122</sup> GOLAN, G., 1990. *Soviet policies in the Middle East : from World War Two to Gorbachev*. Cambridge [England]; New York: Cambridge University Press. 15

<sup>123</sup> GOLAN, GALIA.,ROYAL INSTITUTE OF INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS., 1992. *Moscow and the Middle East : new thinking on regional conflict*. London: Pinter. 4-5

visit to Moscow in April 1985, the Syrian president Hafiz al-Assad felt the new political mood in the Kremlin. Assad's fears were confirmed in another visit two years later, when Gorbachev told him that the Soviet Union was 'out' of the arms race between Arabs and Israel. The Soviet leader advised his Syrian counterpart to abandon the goal of achieving strategic parity with Israel, and to settle for reasonable defensive sufficiency.<sup>124</sup> During Assad's visit to Moscow in 1987, Gorbachev made it clear that the Soviet's would pursue relations with Israel and urged Assad to think of settling the Arab-Israeli dispute through negotiations. Assad's desire for a strategic parity with Israel suffered a setback.<sup>125</sup>

Arms sales to Syria were now to be reconsidered under Gorbachev's new policy of 'reasonable defensive sufficiency.' Moscow would thereafter supply Syria the sufficient weapons and quantities in accordance with Syria's defensive needs only. This approach was in accordance with Gorbachev proclamation in April 1987 that 'the reliance on military force has completely lost its credibility as a way of solving the Middle East conflict.' This was reiterated by Eduard Shevardnadze when he claimed in 1989 that 'more arms does not mean more security.' Soviet Defense Minister, Dmitriy Yazov also commented on the futility of the Middle East arms buildup by stating that 'military capabilities in this region are much bigger than the economic and demographic weight of the Middle East on the international level'.<sup>126</sup> The decline of ideological messianism was now in full swing. Gorbachev became convinced that the Stalinist-Brezhnevist model of governance had failed.<sup>127</sup>

Under the mounting pressure from the new thinkers for more active approach to departure from power politics, Gorbachev had to literally abandon the notion of 'national liberation struggle', 'fronts of resistance', and 'anti-imperialist forces' in the Third World. At the CPSU's Twenty-Seventh Congress in February 1986, he stated that "We are in favor of stepping up a collective search for ways to solve conflict situations in the Near

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<sup>124</sup> KHASAN, H., 1998. Russia's Middle Eastern Policy. *The Indian Journal of Political Science*, 59(1/4), pp. 84-105. 90

<sup>125</sup> SAS, S.N., 1990. *Gorbachev's New International Outlook and the Eastern Mediterranean*, . 74

<sup>126</sup> GOLAN, GALIA., ROYAL INSTITUTE OF INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS., 1992. *Moscow and the Middle East : new thinking on regional conflict*. London: Pinter. 27-28

<sup>127</sup> KHASAN, H., 1998. Russia's Middle Eastern Policy. *The Indian Journal of Political Science*, 59(1/4), pp. 84-105. 90

and the Middle East.”<sup>128</sup> In Vladivostok the same year (1986) Gorbachev promised however, that he would not abandon Soviet clients.<sup>129</sup> This latter claim notwithstanding, following April’s US air attack on Libya, Gorbachev invited the Syrians (and the Libyans) to Moscow in late May and publicly warned them of the dangers of continued support for terrorist activities, while making it clear to the guests, that it was not about to have relations with the United States compromised because of Tripoli or Damascus’ actions.<sup>130</sup> The same reverse in approach towards Afghanistan followed.<sup>131</sup> On another occasion Gorbachev in fact contended that it was a mistake for the USSR to have supported repressive Third World Marxist regimes.<sup>132</sup> In a conversation between a leading Egyptian journalist and a member of the Central Committee of the CPSU, the Soviet official admitted that 85 percent of his country’s foreign policy concerns are focused on improving relations with the US, while the Middle East received only one percent of Soviet attention.<sup>133</sup>

The ideological tool, which had been used as a key means of penetrating Third World countries, was addressed in a new light. Marxist-Leninist Communism in its rigid form had been dissipated by *Glasnost* and *Perestroika*. Facing the fact that support of radical regimes had increased confrontations with the US and stood contrary to the desire for worldwide peace and solution of problems through understanding of the other side’s security problems, led to a new approach. Specifically, it raised the issue of whether or not Kremlin should continue to support indigenous Marxist-Leninist groups.<sup>134</sup>

The defusing of the Third World was exerted through resolve of the existing regional conflicts; restraint on arms transfers to clients; retrenchment of commitments, especially to clients who cannot manage on their own; avoidance of new commitments in

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<sup>128</sup> BARRY, DONALD D., RIEBER, ALFRED J., RUBINSTEIN, ALVIN Z., 1991. *Perestroika at the crossroads*. Armonk, N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe. 307

<sup>129</sup> HERRMANN, R.K., 1992. Soviet behavior in regional conflicts: Old questions, new strategies, and important lessons. *World Politics*, **44**(3), pp. 432-465. 453

<sup>130</sup> BARRY, DONALD D., RIEBER, ALFRED J., RUBINSTEIN, ALVIN Z., 1991. *Perestroika at the crossroads*. Armonk, N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe. 308

<sup>131</sup> HERRMANN, R.K., 1992. Soviet behavior in regional conflicts: Old questions, new strategies, and important lessons. *World Politics*, **44**(3), pp. 432-465. 453

<sup>132</sup> CIA. DIRECTORATE OF INTELLIGENCE, 1999. Gorbachev’s Foreign Policy. 23484. CIA. Central Intelligence Agency. 3159

<sup>133</sup> KHASAN, H., 1998. Russia’s Middle Eastern Policy. *The Indian Journal of Political Science*, **59**(1/4), pp. 84-105. 90

<sup>134</sup> SAS, S.N., 1990. *Gorbachev’s New International Outlook and the Eastern Mediterranean*, . 53

areas peripheral to Soviet security; and explicit manifestation of the “new political thinking” in analysis of the USSR’s policies in the Third World.<sup>135</sup> If Soviet leaders learned that the Cold War was based on exaggerated threat perception, they were also to learn that Third World assets were unnecessary and of declining importance during Gorbachev term. Their value was always derivative of their place in the bipolar struggle. Thus, even if the cost of sustaining control over these assets was constant, Soviet policy would be inclined to change. Some scholars propose that Moscow might have not retreated in the face of American pressure but was predisposed to seek mutual disengagement.<sup>136</sup>

The growing legitimacy that Egyptian President Mubarak was gaining within the Arab world weakened Syria's positions. Moscow's gradual improvement of relations with Egypt evoked serious opposition from Damascus. To offset this, the Soviet's signed a new arms deal with Syria in 1988.<sup>137</sup> Nevertheless, it seems that this arms deal was the swan song. Moscow rejected Syria's request for SS-23 missiles; the INF treaty provided a good excuse. Assad, a shrewd and pragmatic politician, understood that he was paying the price for his ties with the Soviet Union by becoming isolated. Worse yet, he was losing his priority in the eyes of the Soviets too.<sup>138</sup>

Syrian importance was gradually diminishing in Soviet foreign policy-making under Gorbachev.<sup>139</sup> Gorbachev’s aim was to win the favor of the United States at the expense of deteriorating relations with Syria.<sup>140</sup> In February 1989 Shevardnadze called for a balanced reduction of armed forces and conventional weapons between the Arabs and Israel. The balance in this situation should have meant an equitable reduction that takes into consideration the qualitative edge as well as quantitative superiority which should lead to a quantitative as well as qualitative symmetry in the military capabilities of the individual states in order to realize security at a lower level of armaments in an

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<sup>135</sup> BARRY, DONALD D., RIEBER, ALFRED J., RUBINSTEIN,ALVIN Z., 1991. *Perestroika at the crossroads*. Armonk, N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe. 323

<sup>136</sup> HERRMANN, R.K., 1992. Soviet behavior in regional conflicts: Old questions, new strategies, and important lessons. *World Politics*, 44(3), pp. 432-465. 464

<sup>137</sup> SAS, S.N., 1990. *Gorbachev's New International Outlook and the Eastern Mediterranean*, . 74

<sup>138</sup> Ibid. 75

<sup>139</sup> Ibid. 35

<sup>140</sup> FREEDMAN, R.O., 1995. Israeli-Russian relations since the collapse of the Soviet Union. *The Middle East Journal*, , pp. 233-247. 234

atmosphere of political dialogue and relations.<sup>141</sup> On 18 October 1991, US Secretary of State James Baker announced that the United States and the Soviet Union have formally invited Arab and Israeli leaders to convene in Madrid for direct bilateral talks.<sup>142</sup> On January 1992, a multilateral round of Middle East peace talks began in Moscow, sponsored by USA, Russia, Egypt and Saudi Arabia.<sup>143</sup>

The following immediate Soviet conduct was in total compliance with its New Thinking approach. Moscow's response and initial behavior following the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait intended upon demonstrating that the Soviet Union was serious about belonging to the world community of responsible, law-abiding and cooperative nations. The Soviet leadership left the old ideological and zero-sum-game considerations behind and joined the American-led coalitions against Iraq – a 'progressive' Third World state with whom Moscow had a treaty of alignment. And if this was not enough, the Soviets expressly welcomed the decision of the Arab heads of state to join the coalition force in the Gulf, allowing Soviet's own ally, Syria, to enter into cooperation with the United States.<sup>144</sup>

Soviet agreement to the UN Security Council on the military coalition force engagement to stop Iraq when it invaded Kuwait, in Shevardnadze's view was a signal to the West to end the old era of East-West polarization.<sup>145</sup> These tendencies in Soviet policies already began some time before Gorbachev. His predecessor, Chernenko, sought to widen Moscow's Middle East horizons beyond the pro-Soviet "radical" camp, in which Syria took a leading part. Under Chernenko Moscow resumed full diplomatic relations with Egypt in 1984, Andrey Gromyko conferred with Yasser Arafat in Berlin on 7 October 1984, at the UN General Assembly, and Iraqi Foreign Minister visited Moscow on October 1984.<sup>146</sup> Past times' dimensions of a client-patron relations were replaced by

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<sup>141</sup> COULOUMBIS, THEODORE A., DOKOS, THANOS P., HALKI INTERNATIONAL SEMINARS ON SECURITY AND CONFIDENCE BUILDING IN THE MEDITERRANEAN AND SOUTH EASTERN EUROPE, 1995. *Arms control and security in the Middle East and the CIS republics*. Athens, Greece: Hellenic Foundation for Defense and Foreign Policy. 136

<sup>142</sup> Ibid. 167

<sup>143</sup> Ibid. 167

<sup>144</sup> GOLAN, GALIA., ROYAL INSTITUTE OF INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS., 1992. *Moscow and the Middle East : new thinking on regional conflict*. London: Pinter. 54

<sup>145</sup> WEBER, J. and SOMMER, P., 1997. *Eduard Shevardnadze and the End of the Cold War*. 0704-0188. Washington DC. USA: National Defense University. National War College. 4

<sup>146</sup> SAS, S.N., 1990. *Gorbachev's New International Outlook and the Eastern Mediterranean*, . 36-37

an attitude of mutual understanding, that do not undermine local countries. Some contend that new opportunities, amidst Gorbachev's New Thinking foreign policy, opened up for the Soviets in the region.<sup>147</sup>

When In the spring of 1989 Syria was already deeply engaged in war in Lebanon, Moscow was far from aiding Syrian efforts. Instead of assisting Damascus, Moscow joined the international efforts to achieve a ceasefire which also included the demand for withdrawal of all foreign (read – Syrian) forces from Lebanon. This Soviet behavior was hardly anticipated by Damascus. Furthermore, Moscow was engaged in rather dynamic diplomatic efforts to end the hostilities in Lebanon, working on multiple directions, including warning to cease supplying both warring parties, Syria and Iraq - both Moscow's allies. Moscow expressed an open support for the Arab League in its efforts to bring a ceasefire against the will of Syria and went as far as preventing Syria's planned ground offensive on Beirut and urging it to limit its forces in Be'qa Valley in Eastern Lebanon. These unprecedented Soviet moves against Syrian interests notwithstanding, by September 1989 Soviet position became closer to that of Syria, expressed by Soviet Foreign Ministry's statement in 1990 justifying Syrian intervention as a response 'to the request of the general Lebanese government'. However, this and previous Moscow's positions were in full accord with the United States. The most significant aspect of Moscow's involvement in Lebanon was the 'new' Soviet activism which was in [full] concert with the West and against Syrian interests.<sup>148</sup> Such Soviet conduct comes in great contrast with Russia's policy towards Syria in 2014, when Moscow fully supported Syria contrary to any Western interests.

Working towards conflict resolution became a 'new', more active Soviet tactic. By achieving resolution to a conflict with Soviet participation, Moscow hoped to be able to stem its regional retreat, to shore up what assets it had and ensure its continued presence by being part of an internationally recognized agreements. The main Soviet objective

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<sup>147</sup> Ibid. 90

<sup>148</sup> GOLAN, GALIA.,ROYAL INSTITUTE OF INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS., 1992. *Moscow and the Middle East : new thinking on regional conflict*. London: Pinter. 30-31

shifted from confronting or balancing US power in the region to making sure that the Middle East conflict resolution would be achieved with Moscow's direct participation. The Soviets sought to hold the key to moderating the Arabs.<sup>149</sup> With regard to Syria, it seems that for the first time Moscow accomplished its goals by in fact not increasing but reducing the aid.<sup>150</sup> Others argue that Gorbachev's approach was rational. It has enabled the USSR to find the 'golden mean' and enhance the Soviet status in the Arab world. It was still able to influence the Arab radical front, but it also was totally accepted by the moderate front.<sup>151</sup>

### *Iranian case analysis*

According to Gorbachev's New Thinking approach to the Middle East, most of the region's conflicts seemed to lose importance. What is left was the Middle East northern borders (Russia's south, Iran – added) that were in direct proximity to Soviet heartland. With the end of superpower competition, there was little political strategic gain to be sought. What remained of Soviet interests in the region might be obtained without conflict, for these were defensive interests more directly associated with the northern tier of the Middle East states bordering with the Soviet Union.<sup>152</sup>

It is proposed that the Iran-Iraqi war in the 1980s gave Moscow an opportunity to improve Soviet leverage in the Persian Gulf. The Soviet Union could add to its new logistic advantages acquired by the invasion of Afghanistan, by either backing Iraq and bringing down the revolutionary government in Tehran, or by coming to the Iran's defense in exchange for more Soviet access to and influence in Gulf affairs. However, rather than exploiting the Iran-Iraq war, Moscow called on both sides to cease hostilities,<sup>153</sup> thus missing both opportunities. This was complemented by Gorbachev's rise to power in 1985

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<sup>149</sup> GOLAN, G., 1990. *Soviet policies in the Middle East : from World War Two to Gorbachev*. Cambridge [England]; New York: Cambridge University Press. 262-263

<sup>150</sup> SAS, S.N., 1990. *Gorbachev's New International Outlook and the Eastern Mediterranean*, . 90

<sup>151</sup> Ibid. 90

<sup>152</sup> GOLAN, GALIA., ROYAL INSTITUTE OF INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS., 1992. *Moscow and the Middle East : new thinking on regional conflict*. London: Pinter. 10

<sup>153</sup> HERRMANN, R.K., 1992. Soviet behavior in regional conflicts: Old questions, new strategies, and important lessons. *World Politics*, **44**(3), pp. 432-465. 446



when he reviewed the Soviet's Middle East policy. Shevardnadze's tour of the Arab and Islamic world coincided with Moscow's military pullbacks.<sup>154</sup>

Gradually however, Moscow began to tilt towards Iran in the Iran-Iraqi confrontation. Moscow refrained from responding on Iran mining the Gulf or its attacks on foreign naval vessels there. Moscow also refused to support UN sanctions against Iran for the implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 598 to end the war. Moscow came with a suggestion to create an international flotilla to replace foreign vessels in the Gulf. This step could be interpreted by both, the New Thinking approach – reviving international bodies and collective solutions to regional problems, and a continuation of Cold War zero-sum approach to remove the American and West European naval forces from the Gulf. The paradox of Moscow's actions became the competition vis-à-vis the United States for who will *end* a war,<sup>155</sup> and not who will begin one. Soviet relations with Iran began to improve.

Ending the war in Afghanistan followed the same logic. Gorbachev's willingness to surrender advanced positions in the Middle East that guarded the vulnerable Soviet frontiers, represented the most extraordinary reversal in orthodox Russian foreign policy patterns of conduct since Peter-I. Although the evacuation from Afghanistan was a strategic retreat, it was seen as a strategic gain from New Thinking perspective. It was a part of a larger endeavor to reestablish 'normal' relations with its neighbors, and first and foremost to repair Moscow's relations with Iran along the exposed southern perimeter.<sup>156</sup> The Kremlin under Gorbachev was signaling to its major clients that military instruments will not be uncritically provided for the pursuit of national ambitions and demonstrated readiness to work more closely with the United States to curb and even end long-festering regional conflicts in the Middle East and the Persian Gulf.<sup>157</sup>

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<sup>154</sup> Ibid. 446-447

<sup>155</sup> GOLAN, GALIA., ROYAL INSTITUTE OF INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS., 1992. *Moscow and the Middle East : new thinking on regional conflict*. London: Pinter. 50

<sup>156</sup> BARRY, DONALD D., RIEBER, ALFRED J., RUBINSTEIN, ALVIN Z., 1991. *Perestroika at the crossroads*. Armonk, N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe. 24-25

<sup>157</sup> Ibid. 303-304

The Soviet relations with Iran however left some room for questions as to Gorbachev's abandonment of zero-sum competition with the United States. Signs of gradual amelioration in relations with Tehran began in 1986. The exchange of visits followed and commercial accords, including arms shipments resulted. Most important for the Soviet Union was the Iranian promise to reopen the pipeline from Iran to the USSR.<sup>158</sup> During this period Moscow established relations with a number of Arab Gulf states and took advantage of Kuwait's request for naval protection in 1987 to set a precedent for Soviet involvement. In 1988 Gorbachev revived Moscow's interest in a multilateral international approach to Gulf security.<sup>159</sup> The Soviets mediated to end the Iran-Iraqi war by offering their Tashkent-type meeting. Moscow had no interest in a decisive victory by neither side. Soviet policy of ending regional conflicts accelerated after the withdrawal of its forces from Afghanistan and became the dominant Soviet position thereafter.<sup>160</sup>

During 1989-1999, Gorbachev and later Boris Yeltsin pursued rapprochement with Iran. Tensions eased after four turning points in the late 1980s: the end of the Iran-Iraqi war in 1989; the death of Khomeini in mid-1989; the withdrawal of the USSR from Afghanistan in late 1980s; and the collapse of Communism in Eastern Europe at the end of 1989. These shifts ushered the friendliest decade ever in Russia-Iranian relations.<sup>161</sup> President Yeltsin tended to follow the US virtually on all issues concerning the Middle East. The Russian President appeared anxious to curry favor in the West, and at first, patterned his foreign policy on US foreign policy initiatives. Russia supplied two warships to help enforce the UN blockade of Iraq during the Gulf war. The only exception to this pattern of Russian support for US Middle East policy was Iran – an enemy of the United States with whom Moscow was seeking close cooperation. Until November 1992, Moscow did not seem to work out its policy toward the Middle East. It was an area of less than central concern to Moscow which was preoccupied with its near abroad and with

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<sup>158</sup> GOLAN, GALIA., ROYAL INSTITUTE OF INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS., 1992. *Moscow and the Middle East : new thinking on regional conflict*. London: Pinter. 49-50

<sup>159</sup> HERRMANN, R.K., 1992. Soviet behavior in regional conflicts: Old questions, new strategies, and important lessons. *World Politics*, 44(3), pp. 432-465. 449-450

<sup>160</sup> GOLAN, G., 1990. *Soviet policies in the Middle East : from World War Two to Gorbachev*. Cambridge [England]; New York: Cambridge University Press. 288

<sup>161</sup> KATZ, M.N., 2010. Iran and Russia, ". *The Iran Primer: Power, Politics, and US Policy*, 186. 3

relations with the United States and Europe. Russian-Iranian relations were holding almost solely on arms and technical trade.<sup>162</sup>

Later however, Moscow began selling weapons more actively to Tehran and promised to complete the unfinished Bushehr nuclear reactor. After years of trying to export its Islamic ideology, Tehran opted not to side with its 'fellow' Muslims during Moscow's first war against Chechen rebels between 1994-1996. Iran pointedly expressed support for Russia's territorial integrity in the face of secessionist movements - the same problem that was faced by the Iranian theocracy.<sup>163</sup> In the mid-1990s, Russia and Iran also worked together to end the 1992-1997 civil war in Tajikistan between Moscow's former communist allies and a democratic-Islamist alliance. Iran supported a truce that favored Moscow's allies. Moscow and Tehran also both supported Afghan forces opposing Taliban in Afghanistan.<sup>164</sup> Mutual, internal issues took precedence over more broadly defined confrontation with the West.

### *The Egyptian case*

Under Gorbachev, USSR pursued improved relations with Egypt – a non-socialist developing Arab country. Gorbachev strongly advocated an expanded role for the United Nation and activated Soviet diplomacy in it and toward other international institutions. In 1988 Gorbachev sought to reduce the USSR's military presence in its Third World client-states. And while positioning the USSR rhetorically on the side of the Third World with respect to the debt issue, Gorbachev supported a negotiated solution and avoided the most inflammatory sort of rhetoric.<sup>165</sup>

The reappearance of Egypt back into the Arab camp began concurrently with the Soviet Union's own initiatives vis-a-vis Egypt. In May 1984, the last Soviet ambassador to Egypt, Vladimir Polyakov, who had been asked to leave in 1981, visited Cairo. Shortly

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<sup>162</sup> FREEDMAN, R.O., 1995. Israeli-Russian relations since the collapse of the Soviet Union. *The Middle East Journal*, , pp. 233-247. 235-236

<sup>163</sup> KATZ, M.N., 2010. Iran and Russia, ". *The Iran Primer: Power, Politics, and US Policy*, **186**. 2

<sup>164</sup> Ibid. 3

<sup>165</sup> CIA. DIRECTORATE OF INTELLIGENCE, 1999. Gorbachev's Foreign Policy. 23484. CIA. Central Intelligence Agency.3172-3

thereafter, full diplomatic ties were restored. In September 1984, Jordan resumed its ties with Egypt, and three years later nine other countries did the same (United Arab Emirates, Iraq, Kuwait, Morocco, Yemen Arab Republic, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, Mauritania, and Qatar - original). Egypt was again reemerging as the traditional leader in the Arab world, without having to renounce the Camp David Accords. The consequences this produced for Gorbachev's new political thinking and overall Soviet Middle East strategy were staggering and promising, as was witnessed by Soviet Foreign Minister Shevardnadze's 11-day tour to the region in February 1989.<sup>166</sup> The Soviets realized that through Egypt, as in past, they can reach the 'rest' of the Arab world, thus making the recommencement of close and friendly relationship with Cairo a necessity.

Seeking to make the best of the situation, Moscow acknowledged the inevitability of Egypt's rejoining the Arab mainstream. This shift led to an improvement in Soviet-Egyptian economic relations. In early 1987, the Soviet's agreed to eliminate the obstacle of the Egyptian debt. They agreed in principle to Egypt's conditions, which included generous terms for the following 19 years. This agreement was coupled with a cultural protocol, a long-term trade pact, and a reopening of Soviet consulates in Alexandria and Port Said.<sup>167</sup> Another step to decrease the gap between Moscow and Cairo was to try and support the Israeli-Palestinian conflict resolution, although with careful measures not to abandon strong support for the PLO. Besides, a growing normalization and shift towards Israel could produce even graver consequences for USSR from the Arab World direction, risking being perceived by the Arabs as nothing more than a betrayal. However, the improvement in Egyptian-Syrian relations, as a result of Syria's unhappiness with its isolated position in the region, that has brought Assad closer than ever to Mubarak, was attributed by some to Gorbachev's flexible policy towards Egypt.<sup>168</sup>

Gorbachev was faced with declining Soviet influence in the region and the necessity to modify traditional Soviet tools of influence, giving each of them the proper

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<sup>166</sup> NSA, 2011. *Moscow's Realignment with Cairo: A Look at Gorbachev's New Political Thinking*. 63852. NSA National Security Agency report. 3-4

<sup>167</sup> SAS, S.N., 1990. *Gorbachev's New International Outlook and the Eastern Mediterranean*, . 61

<sup>168</sup> SAS, S.N., 1990. *Gorbachev's New International Outlook and the Eastern Mediterranean*, . 62

weight it deserved. Gorbachev's new outlook emphasized diplomatic means and global peace policy.<sup>169</sup> His main efforts were directed at straightening out past disagreements and putting Soviet diplomacy on a rational line that would appeal to moderate the Arab countries.<sup>170</sup> Moscow worked out an agreement with Cairo over Egypt's repayment of its debt. With trade between the two countries increasing, it was conceivable that Moscow would begin sending replacement and spare parts for Egypt's inventory of Soviet military equipment and could possibly begin selling sophisticated weaponry. Suffice it to say that Gorbachev was attempting to regain the relationship with Egypt once enjoyed by his predecessors. This was evident by his sending of Foreign Minister Shevardnadze to Cairo in February 1989, the first such visit in 14 years. During his visit to Egypt, Shevardnadze commented that, "As the first week of our stay in the Near East draws to an end, we can see that through joint efforts Soviet-Egyptian relations have normalized completely and been brought onto an even path, and ahead of us are clear horizons." The Soviet ambassador to Egypt, Gennadiy Zhuravlev, reinforcing Shevardnadze's remarks, observed that, "Shevardnadze's visit had been a sign of the full normalization of economic and industrial relations between the two countries."<sup>171</sup>

Instead of supplying arms however, Gorbachev was more after building relations by supplying economic and material aid, despite severely deteriorating Soviet economy. As exemplified with Egypt, just over a year after Gorbachev came to power, a *Pravda* commentary noted that, "An integral part of Moscow's diplomacy vis-a-vis Egypt is to help meet its need for industrial growth." It is along these lines that Moscow under Gorbachev was pursuing its relations with Egypt.<sup>172</sup> In May 1988, Egypt's Foreign Minister Abd al-Majid traveled to Moscow to sign a five-year economic and trade agreement which

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<sup>169</sup> Ibid. 85

<sup>170</sup> Ibid. 85

<sup>171</sup> NSA, 2011. *Moscow's Realignment with Cairo: A Look at Gorbachev's New Political Thinking*. 63852. NSA National Security Agency report. 4

<sup>172</sup> NSA, 2011. *Moscow's Realignment with Cairo: A Look at Gorbachev's New Political Thinking*. 63852. NSA National Security Agency report. 4-5

reaffirmed an increased Soviet investment in Egypt, which included help in developing Egypt's heavy industries (ferrous and nonferrous metallurgy - original).<sup>173</sup>

Shevardnadze's visit to Cairo, which followed immediately after the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Afghanistan and possibly timed to emphasize the moderation of the new Soviet policy vis-a-vis the Islamic nations, is telling evidence of Moscow's earnestness in establishing a presence in the region.<sup>174</sup> During his visit Shevardnadze stated that Moscow seeks to take an active part in Arab-Israeli conflict resolution.<sup>175</sup> Egypt was considered crucial to Gorbachev's larger plans in the region.<sup>176</sup> Soviet-Egyptian relations under Gorbachev have improved greatly and set the stage for active Soviet participation in the Middle East process with Cairo's acquiescence. Others opine that these mutual improvements between Gorbachev and Mubarak, mostly stemmed from pure political pragmatism.<sup>177</sup>

For Moscow it seemed that the military tool of penetrating the Third World had reached the limit of its effectiveness. It was inflicting damage on the Soviet internal economy, and it was undermining the USSR's external influence on major issues. Specifically, in the Third World, the military tool had proved beneficial only in more radical countries (Vietnam, Libya, Cuba, Angola, Syria), but it had been a liability with respect to moderate countries like Egypt.<sup>178</sup> Hence, Gorbachev gradually shifted his attention from Syria to Egypt, expressing his reformist views on future Soviet Third World foreign policy shift from radical states to much more moderate ones. His perception was that Egypt's role in the Middle East was much higher than the role of Syria.<sup>179</sup>

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<sup>173</sup> Ibid. 5

<sup>174</sup> Ibid. 6

<sup>175</sup> Ibid. 6

<sup>176</sup> Ibid. 8

<sup>177</sup> SAS, S.N., 1990. *Gorbachev's New International Outlook and the Eastern Mediterranean*, . 67

<sup>178</sup> Ibid. 49

<sup>179</sup> Ibid. 73

## Contemporary Russian foreign policy from constructivist perspective

In the post-Cold War era, the structure of international relations is characterized by increasingly complex interdependencies and an increased number of fluctuations and discontinuities, as well as by increasing complexity and uncertainty as perceived by the actors.<sup>180</sup>

During the Cold War, it could be argued that the constraints of the bipolar rivalry dwarfed the domestic idiosyncrasies of nations. However, in the post-Cold War era such a luxury no longer exists. Such constructivist features as national identity and culture shape the domestic motivations and imperatives that now seem as more important than international balance-of-power considerations in foreign policy-making. One simply cannot ignore the political socialization leaders receive in their national culture. This socialization, filled with history, cultural elements, failures and success, forms much of the basic architecture of political system of beliefs.<sup>181</sup>

The post-Soviet contemporary Russian foreign policy is highly distinguished by the extensive presence of new and unique ideas. Vladimir Putin's 'sovereign democracy' doctrine provided contemporary Russia with an ideological foundation for its renewed perception of self, whereas the 'multi-vectoral' politics has become a practical manifestation of the new identity in Russia's foreign policy. The meaning of sovereign democracy has not been limited to demands for non-interference in Russian affairs by Western states and international organizations. It also denotes Russia's claims to an immutable right to have its own distinct values and perspectives on foreign policy and international relations. Together with the principle of 'multi-vectoral' foreign policy, sovereign democracy implies Russia's desire to be recognized and treated as an equal

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<sup>180</sup> EMANUEL ADLER, 2004. *Communitarian International Relations: The Epistemic Foundations of International Relations*. London: Routledge Ltd. 43

<sup>181</sup> HUDSON, V.M., 2007. *Foreign policy analysis: classic and contemporary theory*. Lanham u.a.: Rowman & Littlefield.103

participant of the decision-making processes in global affairs, where no single perspective, actor, strategic interest or geographical area prevails.<sup>182</sup>

Observers of contemporary Russian politics contend that translated into foreign policy, Russia's identity as a sovereign great power furnishes legitimate global and regional interests, bestows strategic independence, and imparts shared responsibility for maintaining security at global and regional levels. The functional and synthetic approach to this identity has enabled the diversification of Russia's foreign policy instruments and justified the need for a strategic oscillation between integrationist and protectionist approaches in its foreign policy behavior.<sup>183</sup>

Russia has developed a functional and synthetic approach which allows it to advance 'great power' claims on the basis of Russian pre-eminence in selected areas of global politics, in which it has a comparative advantage, such as gas and oil, energy transportation infrastructure, the nuclear sector and even counter-terrorism.<sup>184</sup> According to some opinions, the pursuit of economic interests in contemporary Russian context, serves more than the narrow goal of profit-making. The concept encourages Russia to take advantage of its abundant energy, pipelines and nuclear resources to become richer and, at the same time, use economic instruments to project itself as a great power in international affairs. The identity of a sovereign great power also underwrites the principle of 'multi-vectorism', that is, Russia's own uncontested and utterly pragmatic 'third way' of foreign policy behavior grounded in its desire to avoid confrontation with the West and retain its strategic independence. It is thus argued that for contemporary Russian leadership, only by making decisions on a case-by-case basis in light of Russian immediate interests and context, that is short-term strategic accounts, Moscow can selectively cooperate with, distance itself from, or resist other international players.<sup>185</sup>

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<sup>182</sup> OMELICHEVA, M.Y., 2012. Russia's foreign policy toward Iran: a critical geopolitics perspective. *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies*, 14(3), pp. 331-344. 335

<sup>183</sup> OMELICHEVA, M.Y., 2012. Russia's foreign policy toward Iran: a critical geopolitics perspective. *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies*, 14(3), pp. 331-344. 335

<sup>184</sup> Ibid. 335

<sup>185</sup> Ibid. 335



However, Moscow's foreign policy drawbacks are also evident. A series of events that occurred in 2003–2004 highlighted the weaknesses of Russia's foreign policy and its ineptitude to resist and contain American unilateralism. In 2004, three former Soviet Baltic states became members of NATO and two Russia's neighbors, Georgia and Ukraine, leaned significantly towards the West. Washington's backing was indispensable to the success of these transformations.<sup>186</sup> A question that arises is, do these events point to the failure of Gorbachev's constructivist approach from post-Soviet Russian perspective?

According to the critical geopolitics' perspective, Russia's post-Cold War foreign policy in the Middle East has not followed neatly some pre-determined geopolitical or geo-economic logic. Like other states, Russia has developed its own 'geopolitical code' grounded in its domestic and international experiences and interwoven with its identity as a 'great power' state. Throughout the 1990s, Russia faced the uncomfortable realities of great power in decline, both domestically and internationally. Once in power, Putin's primary task was to close the gap between Russia's ambitious self-image and how it had been perceived and treated by other states and international organizations. The Russian government began experimenting with the traditional geopolitical and geo-economic considerations in its foreign policy relations at the same time trying to consolidate power and resources inside its state.<sup>187</sup>

In many ways, Russia has not yet recovered from the fall of the Soviet Union and subsequent political and economic turmoil. Under these circumstances, the prospect of a confrontation or arms race with a superpower like the United States would be dangerous for the Russian economy. As a result, Russian authorities now prefer to settle all international disputes using diplomatic leverage and international institutes, most prominently the UN Security Council, as the "cheapest" method of exercising influence and reminding others of Moscow's role in the world.<sup>188</sup> Another conclusion that can be

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<sup>186</sup> OMELICHEVA, M.Y., 2012. Russia's foreign policy toward Iran: a critical geopolitics perspective. *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies*, 14(3), pp. 331-344. 336

<sup>187</sup> Ibid. 338

<sup>188</sup> KOZHANOV, N.A., 2012. Russia's Relations with Iran: Dialog without Commitments. *The Washington Institute for Near East Policy*, June 2012(Policy Focus 120),. 8

deduced from contemporary Russia's periodical, selective use of international institutions for solving issues of friction, is that the adoption of constructivist and institutional approach to its foreign policies is aimed to conceal some of its weaknesses. Moscow seeks to check more powerful US through institutions as did its Soviet predecessor in its final years.

In 1998 for instance, Boris Yeltsin acknowledged Russia's economic weakness, noting that "Today's global centers of attraction stand because of their economic rather than military might." He went on to say that Russia had not inherited a solid economic foundation from the Soviet Union, and that "redressing this abnormality is both a domestic and foreign political task." The implications of Russian economic weakness were made clear in a 14 February 1998 when Moscow was unable to get the newly independent states of Central Asia and Transcaucasia to follow Moscow's lead on Caspian Sea oil policy. Seemingly, in post-Cold War world, pressure can be used effectively only by those who have both intellectual, economic, political and military strength. Trying to exert pressure without having strength in its full scope, makes one look ridiculous. Putin recognized Russia's economic weakness. In his "State of the Federation" address on 8 July 2000, while calling for major economic reforms, he noted that despite "favorable external economic conditions" (high oil prices - original), Russia's economy was still weak and its growth was precarious.<sup>189</sup>

At the beginning, President Putin continued the path chosen by Yeltsin in his last year in office. Russia faced major challenges in the Middle East. Giving his emphasis on Russia's economic development, Putin, realizing Russia's weakness, chose the path of economic cooperation rather than geopolitical confrontation with the West, while promoting his foreign policy in the region.<sup>190</sup> Not always practically, but at least verbally, contemporary Russia tries to demonstrate its approach to world affairs in constructivist terms. For example, in an interview to Lebanese newspaper, the Russian ambassador to Lebanon, Oleg Peresyarkin outlined the role of Russia in the Middle East affairs in

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<sup>189</sup> FREEDMAN, R.O., 2001. Russian policy toward the Middle East: The Yeltsin legacy and the Putin challenge. *The Middle East Journal*, 55(1), pp. 58-90. 65

<sup>190</sup> *Ibid.* 88

following terms: “As a broker of peace we provide advice and help in solving problems. We do have a role to play, but the Russian Federation today is not the Soviet Union of yesterday. In our current approach we eschew the use of pressure; instead, we emphasize on understanding and persuasion.”<sup>191</sup>

Consequently, as of 2008, Moscow had either very good or reasonably good relations with all the major actors in the Middle East region. Moscow’s closest ally in the region, as before, remains Syria. But Moscow also has reasonably good relations with Jordan, which Putin visited in 2007; Egypt, which he visited in 2005; and Israel, which he also visited in 2005. By 2008, Moscow almost has no enemies in the Middle East whereas Washington has both allies and adversaries.<sup>192</sup>

Scholars point that at the beginning of his tenure, Putin sincerely believed in constructivist approach to foreign affairs and possibility for Moscow to come to terms with the West. He was clearly aware of the counterproductive nature of Primakov’s ‘competitive pragmatism’ as well as the great gap between rhetoric and reality. Putin’s overriding purpose from the very first days of his presidency was the normalization of Russian foreign policy. Russia was to be treated as neither supplicant nor potential disruptor, but as just one more ‘normal’ great power. Seemingly, this approach was adopted by Putin from Yeltsin’s appeals that Russia is a ‘normal great power’ and insistence that Russia would achieve its interests ‘not through confrontation, but through cooperation’.<sup>193</sup> A constructivist approach, at first glance.

Russia’s self-perceptions have changed from a frustrated ‘great power’, whose aspirations to greatness could not pass the reality check throughout the 1990s, to the strengthened ‘great power’ position in the early 2000s. Today, observers argue, Russia views itself as a sovereign great power, which has fully rebounded after the hardships of

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<sup>191</sup> KHASAN, H., 1998. Russia’s Middle Eastern Policy. *The Indian Journal of Political Science*, **59**(1/4), pp. 84-105. 99

<sup>192</sup> KATZ, M.N., 2008. Comparing Putin’s and Brezhnev’s policies toward the Middle East. *Society*, **45**(2), pp. 177-180. 178

<sup>193</sup> SAKWA, R., 2008. ‘New Cold War’ or twenty years’ crisis? Russia and international politics. *International affairs*, **84**(2), pp. 241-267. 243

transition and entered a new epoch of Russia's 'substantial influence upon the development of a new architecture of international relations'.<sup>194</sup>

### Discussion and conclusion

It is the Soviet regime that constituted the very leaders which determined its foreign policy. These leaders were the product of the construction of the regime they led. This assumption is valid for both periods under study. Contemporary Russian President Vladimir Putin and an essential part of his personality are constructed by the very state system he is leading. This is only one example of the power of social construction that is held in the main of the constructivist approach.

Powerful and deeply imbedded and inherited beliefs, values and ideas determine a state's foreign policy long after this very state radically changes its structure, or its regime undergoes through fundamental alternation. However, the integral 'core' of the state remains, and these values, ideas, and beliefs, while remaining institutionalized, continue setting the agenda and determine a state's foreign policy for a considerable time.

In this chapter on constructivism, we put special emphasis on ideas which materialize themselves. New, institutionalized ideas are expressed through foreign policy. One explicit example is the *Perestroika* which began as an idea and eventually led to the withdrawal of Soviet forces from Afghanistan.

Constructivism claims that norms, rules, and sense of community were not strange to either the Soviet Union or for contemporary Russia. The more obvious question is, what are the rules and norms that were and still are dominant in the Soviet and post-Soviet Russian perspective; how these norms and rules influenced the foreign policy; and to what extent these rules and norms were altered following the dissolution of the Soviet

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<sup>194</sup> OMELICHEVA, M.Y., 2012. Russia's foreign policy toward Iran: a critical geopolitics perspective. *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies*, 14(3), pp. 331-344. 341

Union? The redefinition of Soviet identity led to the reconstitution of Russia's national interests. This leads us to assume that state's foreign policy is a reflection of its identity.

It is noted that amid the realist logic of the Cold War era, constructivist views and approaches were already evident during Khrushchev tenure. Under Brezhnev, realism and constructivism coexisted to a certain degree, supplementing and substituting one another. As Gorbachev's turn approached, foreign policies began to be altered under much higher influence of constructivist approach. The Third World was called to achieve its development and self-sufficiency less through direct Soviet aid and participation, but through viewing USSR as an explicit example how state can develop under Socialism. Moscow recognized that the Third World became a 'problem' on the way to US-Soviet relations' improvement. Foreign policy towards our three case-study states was to be reviewed.

The Soviet foreign policy was most fundamentally altered under Gorbachev's New Thinking. Gorbachev sought to alter the Soviet Union's status; however, it could not pass without changing Soviet identity. There was a need to reinvent Soviet identity simultaneously maintaining USSR's superpower status, turning out to be an unbearable mission.

Largely, the Third World was sacrificed by Gorbachev's New Thinking for the sake of alternation of the USSR's identity. However, by relinquishing the influence in the Third World, superpower status is hard to be preserved. Soviet previous values were significantly varied. The failure of Socialism in its attempts to propose an alternative to Capitalism was recognized. Soviet highly militarized foreign policy was criticized. Departure from realism was evident. Gorbachev sought to substitute balance-of-power approach with balance-of-interests perspective. Zero-sum-game approach was to be abandoned completely. Disengagement from Arab-Israeli conflict meant reduction of attention paid by Moscow to its allies, mostly Syria. De-ideologization and de-militarization of politics were the leading agendas of Mikhail Gorbachev. Moscow's foreign policy towards the Middle East was significantly downgraded under his term. Perestroika and

the New Thinking were more than myths, the Soviet participation and assistance to the Third World under Gorbachev remained changed, the rigid form of Marxist-Leninist communism was dismantled. Two of our case-study states – Syria and Egypt – represent the only assets left from an erstwhile ‘magnificent’ Soviet presence in the Middle East.

One of the most significant “merits” of Gorbachev was confronting the old idea that the Soviet Union should never pull back from its possessions. On the backdrop of retreat from Eastern Europe, Afghanistan and the Middle East, Iran presents us with the most striking contrast with the Soviet conduct. Gorbachev, and his immediate successor Boris Yeltsin were pushing towards dialogue, replacing military means of securing Soviet southern borders with accommodation to Iran and an exposure of Soviet frontiers. Domestic issues took precedence in Soviet strategic thinking over Cold War confrontation. Reevaluation of past mistakes and emphasis on international norms and rules of conduct were evident throughout Gorbachev’s term.

Syria presents another example of Moscow’s departure from ‘traditional’ power means of Soviet foreign policy, reluctantly adding Syria in its war in Lebanon and occasionally even acting in direct opposition to Syrian interests. Evidence suggest that such Soviet actions were in full concert with the West.

Soviet policy towards Egypt also went through significant alternations. Whereas following the Camp David accords, USSR sought to isolate Egypt from the Arab mainstream, now Gorbachev advocated Egypt’s return to the Arab camp, downgrading the Arab radical bloc, which Moscow itself so stubbornly supported in the late 1970s. The most striking distinction between past Soviet means of foreign conduct and Gorbachev’s was that contrary to past reliance on military and raw power, the ‘New Thinking’ approach heavily relied on diplomacy and institutions. USSR’s policy towards Syria was seriously deviated towards moderate Arab camp, leader of which was gradually becoming Egypt, a country that only a decade ago was perceived by some of the prominent Soviet foreign policy advisers and decision-makers as Western stooge and traitor. Conflict resolution

became new Soviet approach under Gorbachev. This idea stemmed from the USSR's attempt to conceal its weakness, its regional retreat, and setbacks on world arena.

Although contemporary Russian foreign policy is described by many as a 'new realism', we still observe a handful of constructivist variables which impregnate post-Soviet foreign policy. New strategic ideas and perceptions stand out in particular, such as for instance the concept of 'sovereign democracy', denoting the uniqueness of Russian values, identity, and cultural elements.

'Multi-vectoral' politics or the ideas of 'multi-vectorism' and 'multi-lateralism' also received resilience in contemporary Russia's new approach to its foreign policy. It represents an idea of Russia choosing its own "third way" - being an independent, pragmatic, and uncontestable superpower.

## CHAPTER 3. CAPABILITIES AS SOURCE OF FOREIGN POLICY

### Do Russia's capabilities drive its intentions? Comparing the Soviet and Russian periods

Scholars of international relations contemplate constantly about the sources of foreign policy conduct and degree to which they can be generalized. The main argument we try to explore in this chapter is that contrary to the Soviet Union, contemporary Russia's foreign policy is largely driven by its material, mostly military capabilities. The deficit of a technologically advanced economic base (except arms), of an ideological cause to project, and limited capacities to practice soft power tactics, puts post-Soviet Russia's military capability to the forefront of its foreign policy conduct. Russia's intervention in Syria in 2014 can be analyzed from this perspective, according to which Russia's military capabilities not only allowed it to intervene in Syria and save Assad, but that the show of military capabilities became a driver in its own right. It is a domestic policy aim to expand and further invest in and develop the country's military capabilities.

The Soviet foreign policy towards the Middle East was also driven by Moscow's material capabilities, although its ideological base and Cold War rhetoric supplies us with additional arguments for the analysis of the Soviet sources of conduct.

Superpower dominance may result from superior capabilities. It is most likely to take root in regions where this power has clear-cut advantages in the balance of capabilities relative to other powers. Such regions are usually proximate to one of the great powers and fall within its direct, exclusive sphere of influence and interests.<sup>1</sup> It is the balance of great power interests combined with their relative capabilities that determine the pattern of their regional involvement.<sup>2</sup> To put it plainly – their capabilities drive their intentions.

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<sup>1</sup> MILLER, BENJAMIN, 2007. *States, nations, and the great powers: the sources of the regional war and peace*. Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press. 209

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* 62



Neorealist theory on the dynamics of the distribution of capabilities argues that the balance of power can be either changed, when some states acquire greater capabilities, whereas other states lose them and thus fall from the top rank, followed by the rise of the others, or it can persist. The system endures even as the status and identity of its members changes,<sup>3</sup> relatively to their capabilities. This is an interesting claim which may let us surmise that although the Soviet regime went through change, which altered its identity, the bipolar system and its Cold War structure could or would change only little, should Russia be capable to maintain its capabilities. Another argument that reinforces this claim is that states differ according to their capabilities, not their functions.<sup>4</sup> Neoclassic realists argue that the bipolar system has lasted "because no third state has been able to develop capabilities comparable to those of the United States and the Soviet Union".<sup>5</sup>

Structural realists like Waltz and Mearsheimer argue that material factors determine the relative power capabilities of states, and that this provides the key to understanding international politics. Mearsheimer has explicitly taken issue with constructivists and insisted that "...state behavior is largely shaped by the material structure of the international system. The distribution of material capabilities among states is the key factor for understanding world politics. For realists, some level of security competition among great powers is inevitable because of the material structure of the international system."<sup>6</sup>

Others contend, that material resources not only facilitate the reproduction of institutional activities, but they may also provide incentives for outside members to choose an identity. It is held that the choice of an identity is 'often guided by instrumental reasoning, based on the potential resources available for identifying oneself. Thus, economically and technologically weak states associate positive images of material

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<sup>3</sup> PURSIAINEN, C., 2000. *Russian foreign policy and international relations theory*. Aldershot: Ashgate. 107

<sup>4</sup> BURCHILL, S.E.A., 2015. *Theories of International Relations*. Hampshire, UK: Palgrave Macmillan.37

<sup>5</sup> PURSIAINEN, C., 2000. *Russian foreign policy and international relations theory*. Aldershot: Ashgate. 107

<sup>6</sup> HYDE-PRICE, ADRIAN., UNIVERSITY OF BIRMINGHAM., INSTITUTE FOR GERMAN STUDIES., 1999. *Interests, institutions and identity: towards a new model of foreign policy analysis*. University of Birmingham, Institute for German Studies. 34

progress with 'successful' or powerful states or regions. As it is emphasized, "power can be a magnet; in a community formed around a group of strong powers, weaker members will expect to share the security and other benefits associated with the stronger ones."<sup>7</sup>

State's foreign policies, let alone foreign expenditures, are directly related to their material capabilities and economic resources.<sup>8</sup> According to the offensive version of realism, the reasons why great powers seek hegemony are twofold. The first variation claims, that as a state gains in relative power, its grand strategic interests expand. This offensive realism variation advances two explanations for this phenomenon. First, state's interests expand as their relative power increases because capabilities drive intentions. Moreover, an increase in a state's relative power not only causes an expansion of its external interests, but also results in the broadening of the state's perception of its interests and security requirements. Second, a state's interests expand as its power increases, because the anarchic nature of international politics makes every state insecure. The best solution to insecurity is for a state to maximize its relative power because the most promising route to security is for a state to increase its control over the international environment through the steady expansion of its political interests abroad.<sup>9</sup>

Another claim that adds credibility to our proposition that capabilities drive intentions is that foreign conflict behavior of a developed state is likely to be greater than that of an underdeveloped one, because the greater the development, the greater the need for interaction - social, economic, political and otherwise - with other states. At the same time, the greater the number and variety of shared issues, the more friction and controversy can arise.<sup>10</sup> Greater development implies greater capabilities for interaction, including militarily ones. Hence, greater capabilities lead to greater interaction by means of force.<sup>11</sup> It is also proposed that foreign policy aims of large states will increase as

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<sup>7</sup> EMANUEL ADLER, 2004. *Communitarian International Relations: The Epistemic Foundations of International Relations*. London: Routledge Ltd. 194-195

<sup>8</sup> ROSENAU, JAMES N., 1974. *Comparing foreign policies: theories, findings, and methods*. [Beverly Hills, Calif.: Sage Publications; [distributed by] Halsted Press, New York. 176

<sup>9</sup> FORTMANN, M., WIRTZ, J.J. and PAUL, T.V., 2004. *Balance of Power: Theory and Practice in the 21st Century*. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press. 109-110

<sup>10</sup> ROSENAU, JAMES N., 1974. *Comparing foreign policies: theories, findings, and methods*. [Beverly Hills, Calif.: Sage Publications; [distributed by] Halsted Press, New York. 122

<sup>11</sup> Ibid. 277

additional capabilities are developed. In fact, large nations have a tendency to become more assertive in foreign affairs as their capabilities grow.<sup>12</sup> Militarism can rise from or lead to growing military capabilities, which in their turn might lead to imperialist ambitions.

In addition, it is argued that the defense expenditures' share in GNP as a measure, is a worthwhile variable for the study of foreign policy. However, the expenditures' measurement may in some cases be perceived more as domestically determined rather than by foreign policy, particularly when defense expenditures seem to detract from domestic issues and when the beneficiaries of high defense expenditures are politically active in nation's politics. Nevertheless, defense expenditures also have great impact on international politics. It seems reasonable to assume that the magnitude of defense expenditures would at least indicate the relative militancy of nation's foreign policy, or its willingness to go to war over some issues.<sup>13</sup> Greater military capabilities will cause militancy and drive foreign policies accordingly. States that possess military capabilities would want to exercise them. Others argue that a nation that is militaristic is likely to want to give its militarism an aggressive outlet which can only mean an attitude of belligerency and an act of hostility toward some other nation.<sup>14</sup> If and as soon as a nation possesses military capabilities enough to engage in foreign ventures, it will do so. As some argue, whereas voluntarism and determination are an inherent part of the human experience, it is a truism that for powerful states foreign policy lies closer to the latter than to the former.<sup>15</sup> The size of the military establishment is one measure of a nation's aggressive tendencies.<sup>16</sup> Others contemplate that the level of military capability has a direct influence on its usage by the state which possesses it. When capabilities are numerous and varied, violent behavior is more common.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> HUDSON, V.M., 2007. *Foreign policy analysis: classic and contemporary theory*. Lanham u.a.: Rowman & Littlefield. 145

<sup>13</sup> ROSENAU, JAMES N., 1974. *Comparing foreign policies: theories, findings, and methods*. [Beverly Hills, Calif.: Sage Publications; [distributed by] Halsted Press, New York. 176

<sup>14</sup> COTTAM RICHARD WALTER, 1977. *Foreign policy motivation: a general theory and a case study*. Pittsburgh [etc.]; London: University of Pittsburgh Press; Feffer and Simons... 22

<sup>15</sup> HILL, CHRISTOPHER, 2003. *The changing politics of foreign policy*. Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire; New York: Palgrave Macmillan. 294

<sup>16</sup> MCGOWAN, PAT, SHAPIRO, HOWARD B., SAGE., 1973. *The comparative study of foreign policy: a survey of scientific findings*. Beverly Hills; London: SAGE Publications. 83

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.* 97

Adherents of a constructivist approach find that although it is culture which endows states with capabilities' advantages, these capability advantages determine state's foreign policy. The core of this argument is that culture dictates the utilization manner of states' capabilities. However, often there is great slippage between professed ends and the actual use of means. People will come to value ends for which their cultural equipment is well suited.<sup>18</sup> Others propose that the definition of such constructivist feature as national role is also largely defined by nation's capabilities.<sup>19</sup> Others argue that state's role, which shapes behavior and guides leaders, is a product of state's capabilities. Hence, roles, shaped by its capabilities, guide the state on which policies are admissible and which are inadmissible.<sup>20</sup>

Any understanding of how states approach the problem of deciding on the best means of implementing their foreign policy must remember two dicta: first, that the instruments are themselves dependent on underlying capabilities which are in turn a function of the resources at the disposal of the society in question; second, decision makers do not choose instruments as a surgeon selects his scalpels, rather, the nature of the available instrument tends to shape their policy choices in the first place.<sup>21</sup> Resources are a critical factor in determining state's choices in foreign policy. However, what really makes possible the pursuit of an effective foreign policy, is capabilities, which in turn determine the range of possible instruments at decision maker's disposal. Capabilities are resources that are made operational, but which are not yet translated into the specific instruments which may be applied in practical politics.<sup>22</sup> This argument implies that capabilities dictate both, the ends and the means to achieve these ends.

Our argument that contemporary Russia's foreign policy, analyzed through our case-studies, is to a large extent determined by its capabilities which on their turn were left to Russia by its Soviet predecessor is supported by a claim that decision-makers

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<sup>18</sup> HUDSON, V.M., 1997. *Culture & foreign policy*. Boulder, Colo.: L. Rienner Publishers. 9

<sup>19</sup> PRESTRE, P.L., 1997. *Role quests in the post-cold war era foreign policies in transition*. Montreal, Que: McGill-Queen's University Press. 8

<sup>20</sup> SMART, C., 1995. *The imagery of Soviet foreign policy and the collapse of the Russian empire*. Westport, Conn.: Praeger. 29

<sup>21</sup> SMITH, STEVE, HADFIELD, AMELIA., DUNNE, TIMOTHY, 2016. *Foreign policy: theories, actors, cases*.130

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid*.130

cannot choose on an abstract, rational basis the instruments which would best serve their immediate purpose. They are limited not only by the size and wealth of their country, that is by its basic resources, but also by the decisions of their predecessors in the office to develop (or not) a particular capability which would have made possible the preferred foreign policy instruments.<sup>23</sup>

It is impossible to understand policy outcomes without understanding a state's power. The argument suggests that policy outcomes can be explained only when the richness of power, including ideas and beliefs is understood.<sup>24</sup> It suggests that new ideas and beliefs are formulated according to power capabilities. That is, a state's foreign policy goals, constituted of ideas and beliefs, are constructed according to power variables. Others confirm that it is the relative power that sets parameters for how states, and those who act on their behalf, define their interests and pursue their particular ends.<sup>25</sup>

Another proposition suggests that a combination of mobilized resources necessary for a hegemonic bid, with the ability of national leaders to mobilize support, and an appropriate political and ideological content, result in implementation of the principle that a "state should expand when it can".<sup>26</sup>

Scholars of interventions in third countries argue, based on an analysis of US interventions in Korea (1950), Vietnam (1964) and Iraq (2001), that when a power is strong enough, it will intervene. Considerable relative capabilities of a given power give it the opportunity to act militarily, if it chooses to do so. The same relative power gave the United States the luxury of being able to define its national security interests in an exceptionally broad manner in all three cases. Relative power is permissive and absolutely necessary cause of military intervention. On this backdrop, the precise impact of structural factors becomes hazier. Neoclassical realists recognize that structural or

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<sup>23</sup> SMITH, STEVE, HADFIELD, AMELIA., DUNNE, TIMOTHY, 2016. *Foreign policy: theories, actors, cases*.131

<sup>24</sup> GOLDSTEIN, JUDITH., KEOHANE, ROBERT O., 1993. *Ideas and foreign policy: beliefs, institutions, and political change*. edited by Judith Goldstein and Robert O. Keohane. Ithaca: Cornell University Press..12

<sup>25</sup> LOBELL, STEVEN E., RIPSAN, NORRIN M., TALIAFERRO, JEFFREY W., 2010. *Neoclassical realism, the state, and foreign policy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 28

<sup>26</sup> Ibid. 40

systemic imperatives are often ambiguous.<sup>27</sup> Others contend that material capabilities preexist the distribution of power into which they are aggregated. Actors have capabilities first. They utilize them according to their specific cultural variables.<sup>28</sup>

Neoclassical realists propose that one should begin its enquiry of determining the scope and ambition of a country's foreign policy by identifying a country's relative material power capabilities.<sup>29</sup> According to neoclassic realism, clear opportunities require evidence of state's improving balance of capabilities vis-à-vis other states, yielding it an unchecked advantage in a specific theater. This can occur inter-alia due to the rapid improvement of the state's economic and military capabilities. In general, according to neoclassical realism, opportunities involve three components: 1) evidence that relative capabilities favor the state in question; 2) evidence that other consequential parties lack the political resolve to resist the state's moves in the theater in question; 3) and evidence that a favorable balance of capabilities and resolve will not persist indefinitely, making it important to act as soon as possible.<sup>30</sup> Elite's calculations and perceptions of relative power play a key intervening role between systemic imperatives and the formulation of one's foreign policies.<sup>31</sup>

As far back as Clausewitz, it is proclaimed that political object[s] must always be accommodated to the nature of the means, and although changes in these means may involve modification in the political objective, the latter retains a prior right to consideration. Policy, therefore, is interwoven with the whole action of war, and must exercise a continuous influence upon it, as far as the nature of the forces liberated by it will permit.<sup>32</sup> Means drive political objectives. As Immanuel Kant neatly noted in his *'Perpetual Peace'* opus, "He who once has power in his hands will not allow the people

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid. 149-150

<sup>28</sup> LAPID, YOSEF, KRATOCHWIL, FRIEDRICH, 1996. *The Return of culture and identity in international relations theory*. Londres: Lynne Rienner.. 50

<sup>29</sup> RIPSAN, NORRIN M., TALIAFERRO, JEFFREY W., LOBELL, STEVEN E., 2016. *Neoclassical realist theory of international politics*. New York, N.Y.: Oxford university press.<sup>34</sup>

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.47

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.143

<sup>32</sup> CLAUSEWITZ, CARL VON, GRAHAM, J. J., MAUDE, FREDERICK NATUSCH, 1908. *On war*. London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co.. 23

to prescribe laws for him.”<sup>33</sup> Edward Carr consents by stating that often foreign policy of a country is limited not only by its aims, but also by its military strength.<sup>34</sup>

The argument that wars are usually intended as wars of opportunity and profit,<sup>35</sup> adds value to our proposition. These opportunities emerge *because* of the capabilities held by a given power. States make accurate cost-benefit calculations, considering their capabilities, before making a decision, namely calculating when the expected benefits of fighting outweigh the expected cost of fighting.<sup>36</sup> Capabilities also determine one’s regional level foreign policy considerations. *Capabilities* refer both to overall capabilities in all issue areas (military, economic, sociopolitical cohesiveness), and to power-projection capabilities with regard to specific regions, influenced by geographical proximity.<sup>37</sup>

Power is sought to obtain capacity to coerce and dominate.<sup>38</sup> Simultaneously, military power is effective, even an indispensable arm of foreign policy and one which is peculiarly limited, being vulnerable to ways of acting which are more subtle and far-reaching in their ability to shape political and social structures.<sup>39</sup> This claim reiterates that the ‘way’ the power variable is practiced is extensively determined by one’s cultural features.

States will expand as long as their resources allow, since greater relative capabilities increase the probability of success of expansion. This structural realpolitik model would therefore predict that as a state consolidates and mobilizes resource, it will

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<sup>33</sup> KANT, I., 1724-1804, 1948. *Perpetual peace*. United States. 49

<sup>34</sup> CARR, EDWARD HALLETT, COX, MICHAEL, 2001. *The twenty years' crisis, 1919-1939: an introduction to the study of international relations*. Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire; New York: Palgrave. 102-103

<sup>35</sup> MILLER, BENJAMIN, 2007. *States, nations, and the great powers: the sources of the regional war and peace*. Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press. 28

<sup>36</sup> MILLER, BENJAMIN, 2007. *States, nations, and the great powers: the sources of the regional war and peace*. Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press. 28

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.* 208

<sup>38</sup> HILL, CHRISTOPHER, 2003. *The changing politics of foreign policy*. Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire; New York: Palgrave Macmillan. 130-131

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.* 148

adopt increasingly coercive strategies. As the relative capabilities decline, the state turns to less offensively coercive, more statically defensive strategies.<sup>40</sup>

According to Wendt, material structures can have *sui generis* effect on collective identity formation. Within a conflictual intersubjective context, actors will tend to infer intentions from their capabilities.<sup>41</sup> Kant contends that, “possession of power inevitably corrupts the free judgment of reason.”<sup>42</sup> Other scholars distinctly argue, that ‘there is a direct relationship between goals and resources. Resource availability may influence or even determine state’s choice of international political goals. Not only are governments demand resources to adjust and to match their goals, but goals are also adjusted to match available resources governments possess.’<sup>43</sup> An unconstrained regime, both by power capabilities and accountability, has much broader scope of action and vice-versa.<sup>44</sup>

### **To what extent capabilities had an impact on Soviet foreign policy?**

As far back as the immediate post-Second World War period, Soviet policy under Stalin went through significant change. Whilst possessing significant capabilities, its ambitions grew and its risk perception decreased. An analysis of Moscow’s behavior towards Iran, immediately after the Second World War and towards Egypt and Syria in the 1970s reasserts our claim that capabilities defined Soviet foreign policy by a significant part.

Capabilities have always been an essential part of Soviet foreign policy. Beginning from Stalin, the use of military power for political ends was a striking characteristic of Soviet foreign policy. At early stage of World War II Stalin recognized the potential advantages that could be derived from advancing the Red Army as far as possible into

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<sup>40</sup> KATZENSTEIN, P.J., 1996. *The Culture of national security: norms and identity in world politics*. New York: Columbia University Press. 227-228

<sup>41</sup> LAPID, YOSEF, KRATOCHWIL, FRIEDRICH, 1996. *The Return of culture and identity in international relations theory*. Londres: Lynne Rienner.. 55

<sup>42</sup> BURCHILL, S.E.A., 2015. *Theories of International Relations*. Hampshire, UK: Palgrave Macmillan.188

<sup>43</sup> EAST, MAURICE A., SALMORE, STEPHEN A., HERMANN,CHARLES F., 1978. *Why nations act: theoretical perspectives for comparative foreign policy studies*. Beverly Hills; London: Sage Publications. 128

<sup>44</sup> Ibid. 194-195



areas of Soviet interests, from Eastern Europe, to Asia and to the Far East.<sup>45</sup> The Soviets largely used their military measures and military power for political purposes.<sup>46</sup> The more Moscow grew stronger, the vision of its world-wide aims enabled it to react less to dangers and more to opportunities.<sup>47</sup> Other authors, however, opine that opportunities and temptations drove Soviet intentions and capabilities.<sup>48</sup>

Soviet victory in WWII established an enduring conception of security that in its fundamental elements was essentially traditional. The Soviet Union was a state which had to stand guard over its frontiers and territorial integrity. To do so, it needed military forces to deter or ward off potential invaders.<sup>49</sup> Others contend that the growth of the Soviet Union's military power significantly widened the arc of Soviet's interests.<sup>50</sup> Possessing significant military force, the post-World War II Soviet Union could afford itself to invade and occupy proximate countries without any significant repercussions, and Iran was a test case. Stalin occupied northern Iran, refused to withdraw in early 1946, reinforced local communists, and denied access to Iranian forces.<sup>51</sup> On April 1946, the Soviet government agreed to evacuate the Iranian province of Azerbaijan blackmailing Tehran by demanding in return for Iranian concessions, including the formation of a joint-stock Soviet-Iranian oil company and a degree of autonomy for the part of Azerbaijan province bordering with the Soviet Union.<sup>52</sup> Stalin was anxious to further develop Soviet capabilities in the Middle East by demanding from Turkey concessions for unlimited pass through the straits.<sup>53</sup>

To establish political and military presence in areas that had previously been outside the realm of Soviet capabilities and ability to project military power more expeditiously into politically promising situations was one of the essential purposes of

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<sup>45</sup> ADOMEIT, H., 1984. *Soviet risk-taking and crisis behavior: a theoretical and empirical analysis*. London: Allen & Unwin.. 73

<sup>46</sup> Ibid. 246

<sup>47</sup> Ibid. 193-194

<sup>48</sup> LABEDZ, L., 1979. Ideology and soviet foreign policy. *Adelphi Papers*, 19(151), pp. 37-45. 43

<sup>49</sup> SONNENFELDT, H. and HYLAND, W.G., 1979. Soviet perspectives on security: Introduction. 5-6

<sup>50</sup> CHUBIN, S., 1980. *Soviet policy towards Iran and the Gulf*. London: International Institute for Strategic Studies. 43

<sup>51</sup> RUBINSTEIN, A.Z., 1981. *Soviet foreign policy since World War II : imperial and global*. Cambridge, Mass.: Winthrop Publishers. 43-44

<sup>52</sup> Ibid. 42

<sup>53</sup> Ibid. 216

early post World War II Soviet foreign policy, initially underlaying the emerging Soviet courtship of key Third World countries.<sup>54</sup> Eventually, with capabilities came incentives. Scholars of Soviet foreign policy argue that its policies were, in wide extent, a result of its capabilities and opportunities.<sup>55</sup>

The major difference between Khrushchev and Brezhnev periods was that while Khrushchev reluctantly acceded to the needs created by the situation at hand (China, Berlin, Cuba), under Brezhnev, the political leadership took steps to close the gap between Soviet objectives and capabilities, siding itself closer to the military doctrinal views.<sup>56</sup>

Although some claim that the Soviet military intervention in Afghanistan in December 1979 may have heralded a change in the USSR's Third World policy,<sup>57</sup> we suggest that such policy might have stemmed from Soviet capabilities, gained at the beginning of the 1970s. Improved capabilities enabled Soviets to supply the Egyptian army and invoke the October Arab offensive on Israel in 1973. There is no reason to assume that up to the invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 these capabilities somewhat diminished.

Other observers of Soviet foreign conduct confirm that Soviet foreign policies and intentions must be viewed from its capabilities' perspectives. It is argued that one should not estimate Soviet intentions, only its capabilities and consider Soviet capabilities to be larger than they are needed, or believed to be needed, for [mere] deterrence; one should assume that Soviet intentions are to seek military superiority.<sup>58</sup> Others consider that often a superpower status is described as a state-of-being exclusively acquired through actor's objective capabilities.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid. 221

<sup>55</sup> Ibid. 284

<sup>56</sup> ALEXANDER, A.J., 1978. *Decision-making in Soviet weapons procurement*. International Institute for Strategic Studies. 5

<sup>57</sup> RUBINSTEIN, A.Z., 1981. *Soviet foreign policy since World War II : imperial and global*. Cambridge, Mass.: Winthrop Publishers. 259

<sup>58</sup> Ibid. 286-287

<sup>59</sup> ZIMMERMAN, W., *Soviet Perspectives on International Relations, 1956-1967*. 2. printing edn. Princeton: Princeton University Press. 122

That the military power is the chief instrument of Soviet policy has become a familiar assertion. From the Soviet viewpoint, military power is but one element in the changing 'correlation of forces' (*sootnoshenie sil'* – added). Yet there is little question that military power has acquired increasing weight in the Soviet definition of what constitutes changes in this correlation. The Soviet Union is regarded as a major power *because* of its military strength and this must affect the Soviet Union's perception of what its dues are. Observers of Russian foreign policy anticipate that there is little expectation of any general decline in the military emphasis. The attitude of present and future leadership is likely to favor a strong military posture, and the Soviet military will be able to point to sufficient insecurity in the world justifying its demands.<sup>60</sup>

In the 1980s, some analysts claimed that the Soviet Union will continue to rely almost solely on its military capabilities for the foreseeable future due to apparent lack of other options to assert its superpower posture and global reach.<sup>61</sup> The accumulation of its military force and the extension of its reach beyond the Eurasian landmass notwithstanding, the Soviet Union did not succeed to overcome some of its weaknesses and foreign policy flaws (Cuba). At the same time, the sense of power conferred on the Soviet Union, increased the Soviet appetite for tangible and intangible pay-offs. This appetite had its defensive as well as offensive elements. Gradually, however, Kremlin's aspirations, buttressed by its growing power, expanded. If Khrushchev was inclined more towards underlying the benefits of the Soviet system, supplied by a confluence of revolutionary currents, his successor, Brezhnev, relied more on the cumulative impact of raw power. With power came ambitions. Post-Khrushchev leaders believed that power pays political dividends. They were convinced that Soviet Union being a superpower, is intitled to great dividends, to be treated and respected as a superpower, and recognized as such by the United States.<sup>62</sup> A chain of conflictful behavior followed (Middle East 1967-

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<sup>60</sup> BERTRAM, C., 1980. *Prospects of Soviet Power in the 1980s*. Springer. 3

<sup>61</sup> WINDSOR, P., 1979. The Soviet Union in the international system of the 1980s. *Adelphi Papers*, 19(152), pp. 2-10. 9-10

<sup>62</sup> SONNENFELDT, H. and HYLAND, W.G., 1979. Soviet perspectives on security: Introduction. 15

1973, Czechoslovakia 1968, Afghanistan 1979) with apparent and significant emphasis on military capabilities.

Against this backdrop, although the safety of the homeland was the principal consideration in Soviet strategic perspective following the end of the WWII, as the Soviet power grew, so did the definition of its security.<sup>63</sup> A purely defensive approach was gradually replaced by the growing priority of protecting Soviet state from beyond its borders, on the periphery. That has often been interpreted as the need to maintain a security belt or a buffer zone, that is, through maintenance of friendly regimes and denial of hostile forces in areas just beyond the border. The Middle East in this perspective played a central role. However, what began as a continental approach, accompanied by a conventional force military doctrine, eventually became overseas thrust and global power projection.<sup>64</sup> There are however alternative opinions, arguing that from the Middle Eastern perspective, the Soviet Union appeared to be manifestly unequal to the United States in power, capability, reach, and willingness to intervene in the region in spite of its much greater proximity to it. From the Arab viewpoint the US proved far more willing to take risks than the USSR, and Israel on the whole has received more consistent American backing than did Arab actors from the Soviets.<sup>65</sup>

#### *Analyzing the “capabilities argument” with the Egyptian case*

The Cuban missile crisis, in which some of the Kremlin’s military shortcomings were revealed demonstrated Moscow’s military weakness at a global level, in contrast to the already apparent American capability to intervene in any number of far-flung theatres of action. This led to the need for expansion and development of the Soviet fleet and its

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<sup>63</sup> Ibid. 15-16

<sup>64</sup> GOLAN, G., 1990. *Soviet policies in the Middle East : from World War Two to Gorbachev*. Cambridge [England]; New York: Cambridge University Press. 1

<sup>65</sup> KHALIDI, R., 1985. Arab views of the Soviet role in the Middle East. *Middle East Journal*, 39(4), pp. 716-732. 720

forward deployment capabilities' presence in the world seas in an effort to gain Soviet flexibility and increase its [military] options.<sup>66</sup>

Until the early 1970s, the Soviet Union lacked the capability to project military power in a decisive fashion outside the Eurasian land mass, a shortcoming that hampered the conduct of a forward policy in the Third World. The development of a long-range air transport capability, the construction of an ocean fleet and a large versatile merchant navy have changed this situation.<sup>67</sup>

The naval doctrine of 'forward deployment', developed by Moscow's military strategist Admiral Sergey Gorshkov in the 1960s proclaimed the necessity to be able to project Soviet military might across the globe and strategic waters, Mediterranean in particular. He argued that the 'speed to react' is the key in future strategic encounter, and in order to briefly shift and maneuver troops, navy, and air force, Moscow needs to develop its navy air force and fleet capabilities,<sup>68</sup> which resulted in extensive military navy buildup which culminated towards the 1970s with solid submarine and air force carriers' fleet.

In addition, the possession of advanced missile systems by the Soviets and their consequent delivery to the Arabs between the two wars of 1967 and 1973 indicates Moscow's overconfident behavior vis-à-vis the United States and the Israelis. Observers of the two Arab-Israeli wars stress, that the Kremlin was assertive to assist Egypt in its confrontation with Israel and the decisions in Kremlin to help Egyptian military, following the June 1967 debacle, were undertaken [even] before Nasser's visits to Moscow, some of which in doubt if occurred at all. The generous Soviet assistance to Egypt in 1971-1972 almost has nothing to do with the 'depth bombings' of Egypt's positions by Israel, indicating that many decisions were taken by Kremlin long before the October 1973

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<sup>66</sup> GOLAN, G., 1990. *Soviet policies in the Middle East : from World War Two to Gorbachev*. Cambridge [England]; New York: Cambridge University Press. 12

<sup>67</sup> RUBINSTEIN, A.Z., 1981. *Soviet foreign policy since World War II : imperial and global*. Cambridge, Mass.: Winthrop Publishers. 176

<sup>68</sup> ADAMSKY, D., 2006. *Mivtsa' Kaykaz : ha-hit'arvut ha-Sovyetit v'ha-hafta'ah ha-Yisre'elit be-Milhemet ha-hatashah*. Tel Aviv: Ma'arakhot. 18-19

events. In spite of the expulsion of integral Soviet formations in 1972 from Egypt, which as one argument points, was agreed by the two sides beforehand, the Soviet advisers, attached to Egyptian units, continued to play a vital role in preparations for the crossing of the Canal.<sup>69</sup> Later, during the hostilities, Moscow messaged to Tel-Aviv that it is ready to intervene directly against the Israeli forces, in case they cross the Canal in Egyptian direction.<sup>70</sup>

Evgeniy Primakov, in his meeting with the Israelis in Vienna in October 1971, confidently expressed that USA under no circumstances would get involved in an open US-Soviet confrontation over the Middle East, suggesting by this that even in an event of direct collision between Soviet and Israeli forces, the USA would not step in.<sup>71</sup> We propose that such self-confidence, resulting from material capabilities, drove Moscow to push further in assisting Egypt, which eventually precipitated the 1973' October Arab offensive. A Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation which Moscow signed with Cairo on May 27, 1971 proclaimed mutual military assistance in a case of aggression – an unambiguous military commitment, which demonstrates the scale to which Moscow was willing to bound itself.<sup>72</sup>

Israeli Deputy Prime Minister Yigal Alon contended that the Soviets were very well aware of their military-technological capabilities, and in particular regarding their inability to move large amounts of troops to vast distances, lacking an aircraft and major military fleet, contrary to the USA. Second reason was that the Soviets usually did not intervene in states and regions, with which it does not have a terrestrial sequence, that is, continuous territorial sequence to move its troops by ground. This factor was profoundly ingrained in Soviet military perception following the Second World War. Since the end of the war, the Soviets strictly limited their military interventions only to Eastern Europe and

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<sup>69</sup> GINOR, ISABELLA,,REMEZ, GIDEON,, 2017. *The Soviet-Israeli War, 1967-1973 : the USSR's military intervention in the Egyptian-Israeli conflict.* xv

<sup>70</sup> Ibid. 12

<sup>71</sup> Ibid. 250

<sup>72</sup> RUBINSTEIN, A.Z., 1981. *Soviet foreign policy since World War II : imperial and global.* Cambridge, Mass.: Winthrop Publishers. 244

the Warsaw Pact zone of states.<sup>73</sup> According to Alon these were the capabilities that dictated Moscow's foreign policy. Yigal Alon was confident that capabilities will determine Soviet conduct. Israeli intelligence consent with minister's opinion when it released its report pointing that the lack of the necessary capabilities of the Soviets to move large army units around long distances, let alone by water, would significantly constrain Soviet involvement in direct fighting against Israel on behalf of the Arabs.<sup>74</sup>

The Soviet foreign conduct underwent significant change in the early 1970s. This occurrence was especially evident in the Middle East. Most apparent change was observed in the use of its military foreign policy component. Force became more frequent means to influence the outcomes of Third World conflicts. Soviet military involvement sharply escalated in the Third World and became much more direct and larger in scale. Despite the potential risk of such a policy, Soviets came to rely far more heavily on force than in the years before 1970.<sup>75</sup> One way to analyze why this change occurred might be through asking whether its military capabilities significantly improved during these years.

Indeed, observers indicate that in the 1970s, a rise in Soviet capabilities was observed and it enabled to project military power and enhanced its prestige and attractiveness among the Third World clients and contributed to the globalization of its rivalry with the United States.<sup>76</sup> Military power was the arm of Soviet diplomacy in the Middle East. In the mid-1950s Moscow could frustrate the Western powers and their diplomacy by sending arms to anti-Western Third World leaders; in the 1960s it could enable prized clients to engage in overseas adventures, such as Nasser's intervention in Yemen between 1962 and 1967 and avoid lasting defeats of its clients by rearming the Egyptian and Syrian armies after their trouncing by Israel in June 1967. But, in the 1970s, it could intervene directly (boots on the ground) to protect clients from defeat and provide

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<sup>73</sup> ADAMSKY, D., 2006. *Mivtsa' Kaykaz : ha-hit'arvut ha-Sovyetit yeha-hafta'ah ha-Yisre'elit be-Milhemet ha-hatashah*. Tel Aviv: Ma'arakhot. 72

<sup>74</sup> Ibid. 92-93

<sup>75</sup> SPECHLER, D.R., 1986. The USSR and Third-World Conflicts: Domestic Debate and Soviet Policy in the Middle East, 1967–1973. *World Politics*, **38**(3), pp. 435-461. 435

<sup>76</sup> RUBINSTEIN, A.Z., 1981. *Soviet foreign policy since World War II : imperial and global*. Cambridge, Mass.: Winthrop Publishers. 170

decisive assistance to produce political and military outcomes regarded as congenial to the spread of Soviet influence.<sup>77</sup> Lack of sufficient capabilities until the early 1970s limited Soviet foreign expeditions and power projection only to the Eurasian land mass, a shortcoming that hampered the conduct of a more decisive policy in the Third World. The development of a long-range air transport capability, the construction of an ocean fleet and a large versatile merchant navy have changed this situation. Enhanced production of weaponry provided the Kremlin with the military clout it needed for interventions. Scholars on Soviet conduct are confident that Soviet military capabilities became indispensable for Kremlin's policy enabling it to significantly increase its role in the Third World.<sup>78</sup> Soviet political ascendancy of the heavy, military-oriented industry factions, led by Party General Secretary Leonid Brezhnev, amplified Soviet tendencies for military expenditures.<sup>79</sup> As Soviet capabilities grew, propensity for their exploitation increased as well.

The SALT agreements indicated no less than a world recognition of the achieved Soviet-American parity in 1971. It was argued that this could on its turn result in more assertive self-confidence and induce greater propensity for Soviet risk-taking. A gross strategic parity with the United States seemed to have been attained, with an "instinctive tendency to take greater gambles in the pursuit of Soviet objectives to be expected." Capabilities indeed induced Soviet intentions. Another axiom connected with military power is the assumption that advantages in the distribution of power strengthen a superpowers' determination and resolve in international crises. Some propositions for instance argued that the greater the Soviet military parity with the West, the lower the Soviet perceptions of risk in East-West conflicts. In other words, parity induces confidence.<sup>80</sup>

The most visible change in Soviet foreign policy began to occur from February 1973 when Moscow began delivering some types of strategic weaponry to Egypt and Syria. Before that, Kremlin emphasized more diplomatic means for the Arab-Israeli

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<sup>77</sup> Ibid. 176

<sup>78</sup> Ibid. 176

<sup>79</sup> ALEXANDER, A.J., 1978. *Decision-making in Soviet weapons procurement*. International Institute for Strategic Studies. 2

<sup>80</sup> ADOMEIT, H., 1984. *Soviet risk-taking and crisis behavior: a theoretical and empirical analysis*. London: Allen & Unwin.. 59



conflict resolution.<sup>81</sup> The SCUD missile systems, along with great amounts of ammunition and other arms, changed the picture significantly.<sup>82</sup> Some of these weapons were for the first time delivered to outsider of the Warsaw Pact, were put under full operational control of the Arabs, and were considered by Cairo as strategic against Israel.<sup>83</sup> This change in Soviet policy towards Egypt and Syria in their confrontation with Israel played a critical role in precipitating the October war.<sup>84</sup>

The Soviet's regional capabilities did not suffer any significant damage, even amid apparent Sadat's expulsion of the Soviet military personnel. Even his threats to withhold Egypt's military and navy facilities from Moscow, did not materialize. The Soviets were not faced with loss of their political-military position in the Arab world. That position in fact, was quite strong and did not have to be salvaged by a major policy reversal.<sup>85</sup> Soviet capabilities were in shape to exacerbate the situation.

The significant increase of Soviet military technological capabilities, such as air- and sea- lift capabilities and the conventional and strategic military balance in favor of the USSR, made the difference in Kremlin's perceptions.<sup>86</sup> We claim that this evolution<sup>87</sup> in Soviet Third World foreign policy in the early 1970s stemmed from shift in possession of military capabilities.

Some authors, however, question the "capabilities explanation" in analyzing Soviet foreign policy. Scholars of Gorbachev's policies argue that power alone cannot predict behavior. This claim is based on the assumption that the Soviets would not use all their military power at their disposal to affect the outcomes in the Middle East, for the region was not on their highest priority. The Middle East took a back seat in Gorbachev's

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<sup>81</sup> SPECHLER, D.R., 1986. The USSR and Third-World Conflicts: Domestic Debate and Soviet Policy in the Middle East, 1967–1973. *World Politics*, **38**(3), pp. 435-461. 436, 459

<sup>82</sup> FREEDMAN, R.O., 1985. Patterns of Soviet Policy toward the Middle East. *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, **482**(1), pp. 40-64. 52

<sup>83</sup> SPECHLER, D.R., 1986. The USSR and Third-World Conflicts: Domestic Debate and Soviet Policy in the Middle East, 1967–1973. *World Politics*, **38**(3), pp. 435-461. 438

<sup>84</sup> Ibid. 439

<sup>85</sup> Ibid. 443-444

<sup>86</sup> Ibid. 458

<sup>87</sup> Ibid. 461

considerations when Soviet military capabilities still were significant.<sup>88</sup> However, the diminishing positions of Moscow in the Middle East during Gorbachev's tenure might have been induced by USSR turning into a superpower in eclipse, with limited and diminishing diplomatic and ideological, rather than military means of power projection. The opposition to Communist ideology was evident during Soviet engagement in the Middle East region among many Arab nationalist movements, turning into a limiting factor for Soviet opportunities. The oil wealth of some Arab states also gave the Arabs much more flexibility in buying arms. Soviet Union was hardly considered as a viable economic outlet for Arab rich states' investments. USSR was also hardly considered as a better source of advanced technologies. Combined with the overstretched Soviet policies in Afghanistan, Vietnam, and Cuba, the relatively modest level of Soviet efforts becomes easy to explain.<sup>89</sup> Attenuation of Soviet capabilities impeded further Soviet regional advancement. This claim notwithstanding, it is still perceived that the USSR's position in the Middle East was determined by its military and political resources, not by American good will.<sup>90</sup>

### **Contemporary Russia: matching ambitions to capabilities**

Today Russia is pursuing a "resource-acquisition foreign policy", as opposed to a "missionary foreign policy", which was based on ideas, that the United States and the Soviet Union pursued during the Cold War. In this view, the more resources a power acquires or is able to acquire, the more assertive its behavior becomes, leading to further-extended resource acquisition goals.<sup>91</sup> This proposition conforms with our assessment that Russia's contemporary behavior is largely being driven by the resources it has or able to acquire rather than by any ideological or conceptual ends. The more resources Russia obtains, the more assertive its policy becomes. Even if this argument implies such resources as gas and oil, these essential natural resources entail material resources

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<sup>88</sup> HERRMANN, R., 1987. Soviet Policy and the Arab-Israeli Conflict: Actions, Patterns, and Interpretations. *Political Science Quarterly*, **102**(3), pp. 417-440. 424

<sup>89</sup> Ibid. 425

<sup>90</sup> Ibid. 432

<sup>91</sup> SCHOEN, DOUGLAS E., KAYLAN, MELIK., 2014. *The Russia-China axis : the new cold war and America's crisis of leadership*. 128

which on its turn can be transformed to state's capabilities, including military. We argue in this part of our enquiry that these growing capabilities drive contemporary Russia's foreign policies. Observers wrote in 2012 that the level of Russia's confidence about its resurgence in global affairs has increased in the last decade,<sup>92</sup> amid growing capabilities to acquire resources. And, as we witness in Russian policy in Syria and towards Iran, military capabilities, as means of foreign policy, play central role in acquiring resources.

The "new" realism of contemporary Russia does not mean giving up aspirations to global influence, but it does mean the pursuit of a far more conscious attempt to match ambitions to resources, accompanied by modifications to the type of influence that the country is seeking.<sup>93</sup> In Putin's view, Russia's broad aim is no longer to set itself up as an alternative to the West but to act as the champion of its own and other's autonomy and sovereignty.<sup>94</sup> By realizing Russia's goals, we are able to infer a great deal of Russia's capabilities, if we analyze it according to the assumption that capabilities drive foreign policies.

During the late 1990s and early 2000s, post-Soviet Russia's political performance was disastrous in a variety of theaters, both on its domestic scene in Chechnya, on the East European scene in Yugoslavia, and in the Middle East during the Gulf war. Russia's deteriorated capabilities were the main cause for these political setbacks.<sup>95</sup> Some distinguished Russian political scholars argued that Russia needs to substantially moderate its global post-Soviet ambitions, especially when it cannot pay for them.<sup>96</sup> The most acute Russia's post-Soviet concern was the ability of its leaders to make Russia's political posture - whether conciliation or menace – credible.<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> OMElicheva, M.Y., 2012. Russia's foreign policy toward Iran: a critical geopolitics perspective. *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies*, 14(3), pp. 331-344. 334

<sup>93</sup> SAKWA, R., 2008. 'New Cold War' or twenty years' crisis? Russia and international politics. *International affairs*, 84(2), pp. 241-267. 245

<sup>94</sup> Ibid. 245-246

<sup>95</sup> FREEDMAN, R.O., 2001. Russian policy toward the Middle East: The Yeltsin legacy and the Putin challenge. *The Middle East Journal*, 55(1), pp. 58-90. 63-64

<sup>96</sup> BLANK, STEPHEN J., STANY ZJEDNOCZONE., CONSUMER PRODUCT SAFETY COMMISSION., ARMY WAR COLLEGE., STRATEGIC STUDIES INSTITUTE., 2015. *Perspectives on Russian foreign policy*. Lavergne; Carlisle Barracks: CPSC] ; Strategic Studies Institute. 100

<sup>97</sup> SMART, C., 1995. *The imagery of Soviet foreign policy and the collapse of the Russian empire*. Westport, Conn.: Praeger. 59

Some authors, however, argue that in the post-Cold War system, capabilities do no longer matter, but the will does.<sup>98</sup> As one observer claims, “Moscow’s greatest weapon today is not its super-jets, submarines and commando forces. It is its ability to irritate, provoke, and surprise.”<sup>99</sup> ‘On paper’, Russia might have been in no position for breaking into the Middle East as it did in Syria in 2014, but after the interference in Ukraine, the annexation of Crimea, and the Syrian chemical weapons debacle, Putin’s will only grew restive.<sup>100</sup> Others confirm that Russia’s extraordinary efforts in Syria must be analyzed through a broader prism of its performance in Georgia in 2008, in Ukraine in 2014, and the Baltics.<sup>101</sup> Will and resolve are also an expression of moral capabilities.

### *Capabilities thesis. Analyzed through the Syrian case*

A quarter century after its withdrawal from Afghanistan, Russia is again at war in a Muslim country outside of the perimeter of its historical empire. Moscow’s intervention in Syria, however, is very different from its past usage of military power, marked by overland invasions and occupations. It is also happening in a regional environment which is new: a Middle East where outside powers, including the United States, are playing a much less dominant role than ever in the last 100 years; and non-state actors like ISIS are threatening to upend the system of states created after the fall of the Ottoman Empire.<sup>102</sup>

Syria has become, at least for now, Russia’s first US-style war. Russian military aircraft are bombing the enemy from high above, plus the Russian navy is launching cruise missiles from a thousand miles away. The enemy, again at least for now, has no chance to hit back at the Russians on the battlefield. The division of labor within the Moscow-led coalition provides for the ground troops in Syria to be furnished by Damascus, Tehran, and Hezbollah. Russian military personnel in Syria - other than

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<sup>98</sup> IBISH, H., 2015, Oct. 19, 2015. Putin’s Partition Plan for Syria. *The New York Times*.

<sup>99</sup> MEDICK, V., et al, 2015, October 13, 2015. Russia’s Superpower Play: Putin Bets Big on Aggressive Syria Policy. *Spiegel Online*.

<sup>100</sup> IBISH, H., 2015, Oct. 19, 2015. Putin’s Partition Plan for Syria. *The New York Times*.

<sup>101</sup> AMIDROR, Y., 2016. Tip of the Iceberg: Russian Use of Power in Syria. *BESA Center Perspectives, Paper, (371)*.

<sup>102</sup> TRENIN, D., 2015. Putin’s Syria Gambit aims at something bigger than Syria. *Carnegie Moscow Center, October, 13*.

advisers or technicians - have the mission of supporting and if needed protecting the Russian Air Force contingent and the naval facility in Tartus. Conceivably, Russia may employ Special Forces (*Spetsnaz*), airborne or marine units for securing, capturing or rescuing critical assets. However, Putin is adamant that a full-scale involvement in the Syrian war is to be avoided, and regular Russian ground forces - or Chechen forces (*Kadirovzy*) - do not appear to be part of the plan.<sup>103</sup> Being able to exercise such variety of military capabilities drove Moscow to get involved in a conflict, that eventually had brought its Soviet predecessor to its knees few decades ago. And these capabilities considerably contributed to Moscow's self-confidence that it can intervene in another continent, in an entirely local conflict, which possessed no direct threat to Russia whatsoever, hitting simultaneously Assad's opposition forces and US-backed militias.<sup>104</sup>

It is notable that Russia did not hesitate to intensify the bombings of besieged Aleppo in September and October 2016 when the implementation of the previous US–Russia ceasefire agreement failed. Russia believed that it needs to intensify its military efforts on the ground in order to make the US more inclined to accept Moscow's view of the situation.<sup>105</sup> For the same reason Russia intensified its bomb shelling of the Idlib city, where most of the remaining opposition forces concentrated in 2019, once again seeing that the West is not in consent with the settlement of the Syrian conflict on Russia's terms.

The Russians are determined to reacquire some of the status once enjoyed by the Soviet Union of yore. They believe Western carelessness is to blame for the rise of Islamic State and are using the Syrian theater to demonstrate their strategic capabilities.<sup>106</sup> According to Israeli analysts, Russia took full advantage of the opportunity in its path. It turned the Syrian battlefield into a testing ground for its new weapons systems.<sup>107</sup> By firing cruise missiles from ships in the Caspian Sea when it had planes stationed 150 kilometers (about 90 miles) away from its targets and using strategic bombers and deploying the S-

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<sup>103</sup> TRENIN, D., 2015. Putin's Syria Gambit aims at something bigger than Syria. *Carnegie Moscow Center*, October, 13.

<sup>104</sup> KRAMER, A.E. and BERNARD, A., 2015, Oct. 5, 2015. Russian Soldiers to Join Fight in Syria. *The New York Times*.

<sup>105</sup> KOZHANOV, N., 2018. *Russian policy across the Middle East: motivations and methods*. Chatham House. 6-7

<sup>106</sup> AMIDROR, Y., 2016. Tip of the Iceberg: Russian Use of Power in Syria. *BESA Center Perspectives, Paper*, (371),.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid.

400 air defense system, despite the lack of any airborne threat to Russia's forces in Syria, these excessive measures were taken by Moscow to demonstrate its capabilities.<sup>108</sup>

## Conclusion

A variety of scholars stress the impact of a state's capabilities on its foreign policy thinking, decision-making and performance. Neorealists in particular stress the capabilities' variable in understanding international politics. International insecurity induces states to increase their power means. Powerful capabilities on their turn cause extension of interests and expansion of ambitions. Greater military capabilities will have direct impact on state's foreign policy. Actors tend to infer intentions from their capabilities.

A significant change in Soviet foreign policy could be already observed in early 1970s induced by the Soviet's increased military and technical capabilities such as SCUD missile systems; air- and sea- lift improved capacity; and world recognition of a Soviet-American parity, expressed by SALT agreements. Such Moscow's undertaking as active assistance to Egypt and Syria on the eve and during the October 1973 war and the invasion of Afghanistan in 1979, present additional value to confirm our proposition.

Seemingly, contemporary Russian foreign policies are driven by its capabilities as well. However, whereas Russia's capabilities somewhat deteriorated following the collapse of the Soviet Union, ambitions and intentions remained. It is argued thus, that today Kremlin is occupied not as much by growing ambitions buttressed by its capabilities, but rather by matching its ambitions to capabilities it possesses. Hence, we propose that with Russia's growing capabilities, its foreign policy appetite will grow accordingly.

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<sup>108</sup> Ibid.

## CHAPTER 4. MILITARY FACILITIES THESIS

### Introduction

This part of our enquiry dedicated to the proposition that military stationing rights, navy bases, air force bases and overflight rights constitute one of the most significant sources of Soviet and later Russian foreign policy conduct towards our case-study states. The main argument in this part is that pursuit after military bases and rights to station its navy and air force in the Mediterranean became an integral part of Moscow's courtship after Egypt, Iran, and Syria. This situation did not change much following the collapse of the Soviet Union and received an explicit expression in present Moscow's decision to intervene in Syrian civil war in 2014 and save Bashar Assad from overthrow.

Establishing military facilities and naval docking rights was recognized by our analysis as one of the principal sources of Soviet foreign policy towards our case-studies. The 1960s and the 1970s are especially salient in this regard. At the height of the Cold War the Soviet naval strategy sought to obtain permanent stationing rights for large Soviet vessels far from Soviet shores. A variety of states were pursued by Moscow to grant it stationing rights on their shores, from Algeria and Albania to Syria and Egypt. Only with the latter two, the Soviets managed to achieve the desired goal.

The Mediterranean basin always received special attention in Kremlin's strategic military thinking. Proximity to Soviet borders, exit route to two major strategic oceans: Atlantic and Indian, and attempts to prevent US fleet from threatening, let alone targeting Soviet frontiers, compelled Moscow to seek for military facilities being ready to pay almost any price, including participating in direct fighting on behalf of local states and aggravating Cold War confrontation, bringing it almost to the brink of a nuclear war. Large-scale military and political assistance to Egypt, strong support for Syria, supply and resupply of arms and military personnel to both, in their repeating wars with Israel, more so instigating some of these conflicts and directly participating in them, all seemingly stemmed from Moscow's pursuit after strong presence in the Mediterranean.

Historically, going back as far as Czarist Russia, Russian fleet was in desperate need for stationing rights in the Mediterranean. During the Cold War, the most acute concern was to have free exiting rights for its Black Sea fleet through the Bosphorus and Dardanelles waterways, controlled by Turkey, especially in case of hostilities in the Mediterranean between NATO and allies of the Warsaw Pact. Many scholars argue that the Soviet courtship of the shoring Mediterranean Arab states stemmed from Moscow's desire for naval bases. Close cooperation with Egypt began in 1955, and it was pursued with the goal to station Soviet navy vessels in Egyptian ports. Following the Suez Canal crisis of 1956, the first Soviet navy ships and submarines arrived in Alexandria. As the US-Soviet confrontation gained pace, the matter of stationing rights in the Mediterranean and the Indian Ocean became more urgent. Courting Egypt, which included Khrushchev's visit to Cairo, military and economic aid and multiple visits by Soviet admirals and military elite, did not bring the desired results. Permanent, long-term and large-scale stationing rights for the Soviet navy in Egyptian ports were not obtained.

Tensions between the Arabs and Israel, some features of which in fact originated from the Soviet conduct, served the Soviet penetration efforts. Only following the June 1967 war and its outcomes did Moscow succeed to obtain wide stationing rights in both Egypt and Syria – a connection that raises many analytical perspectives and controversies up to this day. Significant data on military aid to Egypt and Syria following the 1967 events confirm the assessment that the June 1967 war was a focal point after which the long-sought Soviet goal for military basin rights was achieved. This achievement, however, proved to be a two-way venture. The following 'War of Attrition', initiated by the Egyptian regime, drew the Soviets into a prolonged conflict they arguably did not wish to be part of. However, stationing rights prevailed, and Moscow reciprocated by sending its troops and arms to Cairo and it took a direct part in Arab-Israeli hostilities. Alvin Rubinstein, along with some prominent Israeli scholars such as Galia Golan, Dima Adamski, Isabella Ginor and Gideon Remez, in addition to foreign intelligence assessments, interviews and memoirs of Soviet event's participants, provide us with rich material for the analysis of 'military facilities' thesis.



Variety of studies that we introduce in this part, repeatedly claim that the June 1967 war between Egypt, Syria and Israel, in particular was provoked by Moscow in order for the Arabs to be compelled for a large-scale Soviet assistance that would include stationing rights for its navy and ground forces. The following October 1973 war seemingly became a result of either Soviet misperception, or Arab's overreaction, or both, however, as it appears, stemmed from the same Moscow's pursuit after military bases. Presumably, the following 1973 October war was less provoked rather openly encouraged by Kremlin.

The Soviets, in order to keep their military installations in Egypt, went as far as being ready to directly clash with Israeli forces on the Sinai shores, as indeed happened. These stationing rights were not of tactic, but of strategic essence for Moscow. From Soviet bases in Egypt, multiple supplies, support and interventions throughout the whole African continent and Asian theater were executed. The expulsion of the Soviet forces from Egypt in 1972 raised a handful of speculations and opinions. We elaborate on some of these in current part of our study. At the beginning of 1973, the Soviet assistance to Egypt regained its previous levels and beyond. Moscow maintained its presence in Egypt. It becomes clear that the extensive support for Egypt and Syria in 1973 opened the war option for the Arabs.

Contrary to the June 1967 war, alternative accounts argue that the October 1973 war was far from being neither precipitated nor sought by Kremlin. To the contrary, Egypt's total defeat in October 1973 was seen as a threat to Moscow's military presence in the Mediterranean and as a political setback. Moscow had no choice but to increase its assistance to Egypt. Indeed, Soviet support to Egypt during the October 1973 war went to great lengths and included direct participation of Soviet troops and pilots in air and ground battles with the Israelis.

Syria on its turn, with the deterioration of Soviet-Egyptian relations, first due to the expulsion of Soviet military advisers from Egypt in 1972, and later due to losing Egypt to the West in late 1970s, became a central target for Soviet courtship in its aspiration to

obtain military stationing rights in the Mediterranean. However, long before 1972, Syria already was considered by the Kremlin as an important asset for military bases. Since the mid-1970s' Syria became central Moscow's Middle East ally. Stationing rights in Syrian ports were obtained.

Iran represents another significant case for the Soviet strive for military facilities, this time in the Indian Ocean. Viewed by Moscow as the Soviet “soft underbelly”, Indian Ocean gained significant strategic importance for Moscow at the height of the Cold War. Navy facilities in Iran were seen as main strategic foothold in the region. Many scholars on Soviet foreign policy reiterate that projection of military and naval power across the Mediterranean will remain the focal point of Soviet strategic thinking and foreign policy decision-making for the visible future. We elaborate on this proposition further in more detail.

Under Gorbachev, Moscow continued to view its naval presence in the Mediterranean as an essential pillar of Soviet foreign policy strategic thinking. Post-Soviet contemporary Russia's means of foreign conduct, including arms sales and economic, technological and infrastructure assistance also stem in part from the aim to preserve (in case of Syria) and return (in case of Egypt) Moscow's military stationing rights. Syrian intervention in 2014 is seen by many as a facilities-seeking policy of Moscow. Apparently, Russia managed to obtain the widest presence in the Mediterranean through Syria, paying in return by extensive participation in its local war saving Assad and sending its troops, air force and navy for direct involvement in local conflict. Simultaneously with the war efforts, Russian technical staff actively working to upgrade Syrian naval port facilities. Putin made the expansion of Russia's sea power as one of the pillars of his strategic military doctrine.

When analyzing contemporary Russian foreign policy we found that Iran represents a rather ambiguous situation from military facilities standpoint. Providing that Russia seeks closer relations with Tehran, at the same time it reinforces its military presence in Iran's proximity, courting ex-Soviet Central Asian states to allow for stationing

rights for Russian forces, under a variety of pretexts, close to Iranian borders. On the other hand, it managed to swiftly obtain stationing rights on Iranian soil during its raids in Syria. This observation allows us to conclude that contemporary Russia sees Iran as both a threat and an opportunity for alliance.

### **Military facilities as source of Soviet foreign policy conduct**

One of the main Soviet aims in its foreign policy in the Middle East was to obtain strategic facilities for its armed forces. Moscow often used its assistance to third states including arms sales as a *quid pro quo* for strategic access. Its main purpose was and still remains military facilities, docking and overflight rights, prepositioning of equipment, and permanent presence. Servicing agreements, which included equipment supply, personnel, technicians and advisers' stationing in client states rarely had primarily commercial connotations and were part of an overall program of political strategic penetration.<sup>1</sup>

According to Soviet theoreticians, Middle East, and Egypt in particular, were exceptions in general Soviet strategic-military thinking, underlining that normally, obtaining permanent military bases on foreign soil was fundamentally opposed to Soviet policy principles. However, Middle East was considered as a “stronghold of defense against the Western expansionism and imperialism.”<sup>2</sup>

Before 1917, Russia's imperial drive for warm waters' access in the south took two main directions – through Turkey and the straits to the Mediterranean and through Iran to the Indian ocean.<sup>3</sup> In Soviet strategic thinking, after global geopolitical foreign policy considerations, the stationing of ground and naval forces and guarantee of access to

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<sup>1</sup> CHUBIN, SHAHRAM., PLASCOV, AVI., LITWAK, ROBERT., INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTE FOR STRATEGIC STUDIES., 1981. *Security in the Persian Gulf*. Montclair, N.J.: Published for the International Institute for Strategic Studies by Allanheld, Osmun. 75

<sup>2</sup> GINOR, ISABELLA., REMEZ, GIDEON., 2017. *The Soviet-Israeli War, 1967-1973 : the USSR's military intervention in the Egyptian-Israeli conflict*. 48-49

<sup>3</sup> HAYKAL, M.H., 1978. *The Sphinx and the Commissar: The Rise and Fall of Soviet Influence in the Middle East*. HarperCollins Publishers. P. 35

strategic sea routes was the strong second.<sup>4</sup> Since the 1956 war between Egypt and the coalition of Britain, France and Israel, and especially since the Six-Day War of 1967, the Middle East had been steadily growing in importance in Soviet global strategic planning.<sup>5</sup>

The gradual Soviet 'colonization' of Egypt began in the mid-1950s, following the Suez Crisis and Egypt's military 'recovery', when around 1,000 Soviet specialists were stationed in Egypt. The second stage occurred between 1967 and 1968, following Egypt's defeat in June of 1967, when Moscow sent additional 2,000 advisers. The third "wave" of Soviet Egypt's 'colonization' is attributed to a period beginning from the end of 1968, when Moscow already sent regular military units, including air defense crews. All three stages were what is believed to be called in Soviet General Staff as the operation "Kavkaz".<sup>6</sup>

The Soviet Union had a number of traditional interests in the Middle East, which even predate the Soviet era. A more specific traditional interest was the concern over the access to and from the Mediterranean Sea through the Dardanelles and the Bosphorus straits, what is often called the "bottle neck" of the Russian Black Sea fleet. These Turkish waterways constitute the exit route for the Russian Black Sea fleet to the Mediterranean and through it further to the Atlantic and the Suez Canal, whereas the latter also constitute the water route to Asia, Indian Ocean and the Russian Far East. Given Russia's lack of warm water ports, this access route to the Mediterranean was, and still remains, particularly important.<sup>7</sup>

Some opine that the Soviet political objective in the Middle East was not necessarily to establish Communist regimes but rather security for Soviet bases and facilities there and a measure of control, sufficient to prevent any threat to the continued

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid. 35

<sup>5</sup> ISRAËLIAN, VIKTOR LEVONOVICH,, 2003. *On the battlefields of the cold war : a Soviet ambassador's confession*. University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press. 159

<sup>6</sup> ADAMSKY, D., 2006. *Mivtsa' Kaykaz : ha-hit'arvut ha-Sovyeit yeha-hafta'ah ha-Yisre'elit be-Milhemet ha-hatashah*. Tel Aviv: Ma'arakhot. 22

<sup>7</sup> GOLAN, G., 1990. *Soviet policies in the Middle East : from World War Two to Gorbachev*. Cambridge [England]; New York: Cambridge University Press. 8

enjoyment of these assets.<sup>8</sup> Soviet early, post-World War II, basic objectives in the Middle East were first and foremost, to ensure some sort of Soviet presence in the region to the south of its borders. This goal was seen in form of physical presence by means of expansion across its periphery exemplified by Kremlin's policy towards Iran.<sup>9</sup>

Analysts argue that the Soviet naval policy for obtaining naval facilities is a continuity of the Czarist Russian Navy's historical experience in the Mediterranean. As the Admiral of the Soviet Navy S.G. Gorshkov himself wrote, "The long stay (in 1769-1774) of the Russian Fleet in the Mediterranean is an outstanding example of autonomous operation by a large naval formation completely cut off from its home ports, which increased the international prestige of Russia and evoked warm sympathy toward it by all the peoples of the Mediterranean Sea basin."<sup>10</sup>

The Soviets were eager to have a solid naval presence in the Mediterranean in the event of a NATO-Warsaw Pact major conflict. Similarly, the USSR's desire for bases or access rights to naval facilities in the Mediterranean becomes more understandable when one appreciates the Soviet Navy's concern that its Black Sea Fleet not be bottled up behind the Turkish straits during such a contingency.<sup>11</sup> Taking into account, that Turkey was, and still is, a NATO-member state, such proposition receives additional credibility.

In the early part of the 1960s, Soviet policy goal was to deny, reduce, or forestall Western influence in the Middle East. By the latter part of the decade, however, it adopted a more active position of gaining influence in the area. This is perhaps best symbolized by the 1971 treaty of Friendship and Cooperation with Egypt, its tangible foothold in the Arab World, and extensive Soviet naval presence in the Indian Ocean. While the opportunities that the international political environment afforded the USSR may remain the key to assessing Soviet intentions, it is indisputable that by early 1972 there had been

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid. 20

<sup>9</sup> Ibid. 29

<sup>10</sup> DRAGNICH, S.G., 1974. *The Soviet Union's Quest for Access to Naval Facilities in Egypt Prior to the June War of 1967*. AD 786 318. Arlington, Virginia: Center of Naval Analyses. United States Navy. 3

<sup>11</sup> Ibid. 20

an enormous increase in Soviet naval and airlift capabilities leading to globalization of its strategic reach.<sup>12</sup>

Analysts of late Soviet foreign policy, discern early Stalin's innate conservatism in it. His policies were expansionist but pragmatic and geared to the avoidance of war with the United States. Stalin sought to ensure Soviet security by a permanent military presence. However, his approach was by any means to avoid the direct use of Soviet forces.<sup>13</sup>

By concluding bilateral agreements with the fraternal states and its allies, Moscow assured uninterrupted presence, or in any emergency the right to station its armed forces around the world, promoting through this instrument, its other global strategic political goals.<sup>14</sup> As some contend, the importance of the Middle East region for USSR needs no elaboration. It commands key air routes and maritime communication lines and lies south of the 'soft underbelly' of the Soviet Union.<sup>15</sup> Moscow did not possess a fully controlled land-based support facilities so vital for a politically significant projection of its military power; it lacked even an equivalent of the United States's military installations in the Mediterranean, that the latter could use in a moment of crisis in West European or Middle Eastern theaters. Therefore, its naval forces had to rely on local goodwill, which was an ephemeral phenomenon in Third World politics.<sup>16</sup>

In any circumstances that the Soviet Union would be willing to commit its own forces in combat at a distance, Moscow would be quite vulnerable if it was to come to an actual conflict with the West at a distant location. The USSR's areas of weakness would be the protection of its distant battle groups, logistic and airlift forces, and air and naval facilities. This state of affairs proposed that it is more likely that the Soviet use of its forces and facilities would be political in nature, mostly as an attempt to preempt or avoid a crisis.

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<sup>12</sup> ČUBĪN, SĀHRĀM., ZABIH, SEPEHR., SEABURY, PAUL., 1974. *The foreign relations of Iran : a developing state in a zone of Great Power conflict*. Berkeley [etc.]; London: University of California Press. 83

<sup>13</sup> RUBINSTEIN, A.Z., 1981. *Soviet foreign policy since World War II : imperial and global*. Cambridge, Mass.: Winthrop Publishers. 67

<sup>14</sup> Ibid. 166-167

<sup>15</sup> Ibid. 226

<sup>16</sup> Ibid. 235

This led Western analysts to conclude that Moscow would put a strong emphasis on small military units that can be marshalled quickly.<sup>17</sup>

Soviet political interests in the Middle East have been geared to the achievement and maintenance of strategic objectives. In this respect, communist regimes would be the best insurance for the maintenance of Soviet facilities in the region. However, there were those in Kremlin who were more ideologically oriented, arguing for a pro-communist regime change even at the expense of strategic interests.<sup>18</sup>

Such debates notwithstanding, it was a clear-cut understanding that following the end of the Second World War, Moscow set about trying to build a new geopolitical order according to its own design. And an essential part of this design was the attainment of military footholds. For instance, in demanding a trusteeship over the former Italian colony of Tripolitania, Soviet Foreign Minister Molotov told the Council of Foreign Ministers in September 1945: "The Soviet Union should take the place that is due it (deserves) and therefore should have bases in the Mediterranean for its merchant fleet."<sup>19</sup> For this reason, a resolute Soviet strategic policy and military doctrine called the 'forward deployment' was developed by Moscow in the 1960s' seeking to expand Soviet fleet to distant frontiers in the Gulf and the Mediterranean.<sup>20</sup>

Additional accounts consent that Soviet political relations with its Middle East allies were largely aimed to sustain stationing rights for Soviet military. The strategic value of the region served as an impetus for aggressive Soviet penetration policy based on ideological, military and economic tactics. These tactics gave the Soviets naval basing rights and other military privileges, such as overflight.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> MARSHALL, A., 1979. Sources of Soviet power: The military potential in the 1980s. *Adelphi Papers*, **19**(152), pp. 11-17. 16

<sup>18</sup> GOLAN, G., 1979. Soviet power and policies in the third world: The Middle East. *Adelphi Papers*, **19**(152), pp. 47-54. 48

<sup>19</sup> SMART, C., 1995. *The imagery of Soviet foreign policy and the collapse of the Russian empire*. Westport, Conn.: Praeger. 54

<sup>20</sup> GOLAN, G., 1990. *Soviet policies in the Middle East : from World War Two to Gorbachev*. Cambridge [England]; New York: Cambridge University Press. 165

<sup>21</sup> SAS, S.N., 1990. *Gorbachev's New International Outlook and the Eastern Mediterranean*, . 5

### *Military facilities perspective analyzed through the Egyptian case*

Soviet's navy inability to intervene during the Spanish Civil War – even after a Soviet merchant ship was sunk – demonstrated just how illusory a credible Soviet naval presence in the Mediterranean was at that time.<sup>22</sup> Egypt's geographic location in the region and availability of warm water ports made it a perfect target for Soviet's endeavor to spread its influence throughout the region.<sup>23</sup> The Soviets recognized Egypt's geographical importance and they knew that in order to fulfill their regional commitments in the Middle East they needed a solid base for deployment of their military capabilities through rapprochement with Egypt.<sup>24</sup> The Soviet foothold in Egypt began in the 1950s'. The first solid ties were demonstrated by the five-year Treaty of Friendship signed on the 31 of October 1955. These efforts intensified with military and economic penetration designed to gain air and naval bases.<sup>25</sup>

At first, Egypt was anxious to allow the Soviets to station too many troops on its soil and permit the usage of too many facilities for their naval and air forces. In 1955, when Nasser was warned of what the Russians have done in the Eastern Europe, he remarked that this has happen because Eastern Europe had common frontiers with the Soviets, therefore Moscow could send its army there, while Egypt is far away from Russia to send its troops.<sup>26</sup> Thus, seemingly, before the 1967 the Soviets had to come with more 'convincing' pretext to make Cairo accept presence of Soviet military on its soil.

On the Twentieth Congress of CPSU in February 1956, Khrushchev claimed that "The people of the East (referring to the Arab's East – added) now have become an active and deciding part in dealing with the destinies of the world and became a new mighty factor in international relations, and although they don't belong to the Socialist world system, they [still] can build up their economies and the standard of living by obtaining

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<sup>22</sup> DRAGNICH, S.G., 1974. *The Soviet Union's Quest for Access to Naval Facilities in Egypt Prior to the June War of 1967*. AD 786 318. Arlington, Virginia: Center of Naval Analyses. United States Navy. 3

<sup>23</sup> SAS, S.N., 1990. *Gorbachev's New International Outlook and the Eastern Mediterranean*, . 24

<sup>24</sup> Ibid. 24

<sup>25</sup> Ibid. 24-25

<sup>26</sup> HAYKAL, M.H., 1978. *The Sphinx and the Commissar: The Rise and Fall of Soviet Influence in the Middle East*. HarperCollins Publishers. P. 64-65



this from the socialist countries free from any conditions of military nature.”<sup>27</sup> This claim notwithstanding, it was apparent that the Soviet were ‘frantically’ seeking stationing rights.

On August 1956, about two months before the beginning of open hostilities caused by the Suez crisis, the USSR asked permission of the government of the Arab Republic of Egypt for Soviet warships to visit its ports beginning August 15<sup>th</sup>, the day before the Suez Conference was scheduled to open in London.<sup>28</sup>

The 1956’ offensive of Western powers on Egypt came to the advantage of the Soviets and was utilized by Kremlin to the full in their pursuit after military facilities in Egypt. When, on October 29, 1956 Israel attacked Egypt, launching its offensive at the Sinai Peninsula, Shukri Kuwatly, the Syrian President called Nasser and asked whether the latter needed help. Nasser said that it would help him if Kuwatly was at that time in Moscow, which Kuwatly did. Kuwatly was immediately received by Bulganin, Khrushchev, Marshal Zhukov and other members of the Politburo to discuss the military issue of the crisis. Kuwatly urged Moscow to help Egypt, if they wanted their position in the Arab world to be secured. Marshal Zhukov, unfolded the map of Middle East and told Kuwatly that Russian army cannot be sent to Egypt through neither Turkey, nor Iran, Syria, Iraq or Israel, since it will inevitably clash with the British and French forces on its way.<sup>29</sup>

After the Suez conflict came to an end, Soviet officials approached Egypt with what looked like an incredible openness and will for cooperation. “Join us, and we can give you everything you want, from short and long-time loans, to industrialization, development projects, dams construction, agriculture and everything for free!”, the head of the Middle East department of the Soviet Ministry of Foreign Affairs told General Hafez Ismail, who was part of Egyptian delegation to Moscow in November 1957.<sup>30</sup> Following these talks, the Soviets agreed to invest \$200 million into the Egypt’s 5-year plan (*patiletka*) for

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid. 64-65

<sup>28</sup> DRAGNICH, S.G., 1974. *The Soviet Union’s Quest for Access to Naval Facilities in Egypt Prior to the June War of 1967*. AD 786 318. Arlington, Virginia: Center of Naval Analyses. United States Navy. 7

<sup>29</sup> HAYKAL, M.H., 1978. *The Sphinx and the Commissar: The Rise and Fall of Soviet Influence in the Middle East*. HarperCollins Publishers. P. 71

<sup>30</sup> Ibid. 81

general development projects. In early 1957 the first Soviet submarine already arrived at Alexandria.<sup>31</sup> In June 1957, Egypt received first three Soviet-built submarines. One week later, two Soviet destroyers and a tanker from the Black Sea Fleet made their transit through the Suez Canal. By that time, Soviet navy pilots already worked for the Suez Canal Authority.<sup>32</sup>

Towards 1959 Egypt had already nine Soviet-made submarines. On January 18, 1959, the USSR and Egypt signed an agreement for construction of a shipyard in Alexandria. The same month however, a vast repression campaign against local communists began in Egypt and Syria.<sup>33</sup> Apparently, the Arabs perceived that Moscow will not intervene on behalf of its communist comrades against the backdrop of received rights for navy facilities, and evidently, the Arabs perceived correctly. Moscow was willing to sacrifice its ideological principles for military-strategic goals. Military facilities was the main foreign policy end.

In the mid-1950s' an ambitious Soviet naval program was launched, which underlined the aspiration of Soviet access to world oceans. The main aim of this doctrine was to be able to operate in and out of any 'dot on the globe'. Besides no less ambitious 10-year plan to construct a large Soviet oceanic fleet, the USSR needed naval bases. Khrushchev however, known for his "obsession" with nuclear ballistic missiles, doubted that such a naval engagement program, in nuclear age, with air force and missile vehicles of transportation carrying nuclear warheads, worth the resources.<sup>34</sup> In general, Khrushchev was against permanently stationing Soviet forces abroad.<sup>35</sup>

In the 1960s, as a result of the Soviet-Sino rift and loss of naval base in Albania, Moscow had even higher desire for military privileges. The pursuit after naval bases was dictated by US carrier's presence in the Mediterranean carrying jets that could reach

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid. 85

<sup>32</sup> DRAGNICH, S.G., 1974. *The Soviet Union's Quest for Access to Naval Facilities in Egypt Prior to the June War of 1967*. AD 786 318. Arlington, Virginia: Center of Naval Analyses. United States Navy. 9

<sup>33</sup> Ibid. 17

<sup>34</sup> ХРУЩЕВ, С., 1994. *Никита Хрущев: кризисы и ракеты: взгляд изнутри*. Новости. 65-66

<sup>35</sup> Ibid. 240

Soviet territory and intermediate range ballistic missiles (IRBMs) stationed in Turkey and Greece.<sup>36</sup>

Against this backdrop the naval 'forwards deployment' doctrine of Soviet Admiral Sergey Gorshkov stands out in particular. Gorshkov perceived the Soviet Navy as the most effective solution to the strategic threats posed by the United States, and in particular professed a conception of manifestation of permanent presence in strategic bodies of water, particularly in the Mediterranean. Tracking the maneuvers of the US submarine fleet in the Mediterranean and the US carrier's capabilities, Gorshkov came to conclude that the 'speed to react' is the key in future strategic encounter, and in order to briefly shift and maneuver troops, navy, and air-force, Moscow needs to develop its navy air-force and aircraft fleet. These considerations, let alone the urgency of the matter, led the Soviet military elite to conclude for the need of permanent bases for its fleet in the Mediterranean. Following Albania's refusal in the mid-1960s to grant Soviet Navy stationing rights in its ports, the matter of preserving a large navy squadron in the Mediterranean became even more acute for Kremlin. The Soviet Navy was in need of supply, provision for the crews, equipment and arms storage, maintenance and repairing. The Soviets had to join additional vessels to its Mediterranean flotilla. These disadvantages damaged durable operational activity of the Soviet Navy and led Moscow to assert that Egypt was 'perfect' for its strategic goals, let alone on the backdrop of Egypt's search for a superpower auspice. This what eventually led to the extensive courting of Egypt by the Soviets, which was manifested by arms supplies, political and diplomatic support, economic assistance and multiple major infrastructure development agreements signed by the parties.<sup>37</sup>

Other observers reiterate that in the 1960s, Soviet policy in the Middle East underwent significant change as a result of a shift in Soviet interests. Moscow was seeking bases. This change was the result of the rise in importance of Soviet military-

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<sup>36</sup> RUBINSTEIN, A.Z., 1977. *Red star on the Nile : the Soviet-Egyptian influence relationship since the June war*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press. 6

<sup>37</sup> ADAMSKY, D., 2006. *Mivtsa' Kaykaz : ha-hit'arvut ha-Sovyejit v'ha-hafta'ah ha-Yisre'elit be-Milhemet ha-hatashah*. Tel Aviv: Ma'arakhot. 18-19

strategic interests in the region. One of the causes was the Cuban missile crisis, in which some of the Kremlin's military shortcomings were revealed, and in particular, the shortage of the Soviet sea-based and air-based conventional forces. More generally, this crisis demonstrated Moscow's military weakness at a global level, in contrast to the already apparent American capability to intervene in any number of far-flung theatres of action. This led to the need for expansion and development of the Soviet fleet and its forward deployment capabilities in the world seas in an effort to gain flexibility and increase its military options.<sup>38</sup>

The loss of stationing rights in Albania increased Soviet tolerance for suppression of local communists in Egypt and Syria.<sup>39</sup> The military-strategic factor became paramount in the 1960s, as the Soviet Union sought to expand its naval power and reach. Egypt was the focal point of this venture, mainly because of the relative suitability of its ports and airfields but also because of its geo-political position and the relative stability of its regime.<sup>40</sup>

After the eviction of the Soviet Union, in May 1961, from the naval base it had enjoyed since 1945 at the Albanian Vlone in the Adriatic Sea, and US deployment of Polaris submarines in the Mediterranean, Moscow was compelled to prompt friendlier relations with Egypt's Nasser in order to obtain naval facilities in Egyptian ports. This quest for tangible military privileges increasingly adsorbed Moscow and muted political differences with Egypt.<sup>41</sup> In December 1961 Admiral Gorshkov visited Cairo. His visit to Egypt at this time indicated the extent of the setback that the Soviet Navy suffered from the loss of its navy base in Albania.<sup>42</sup> Egypt remained the only alternative for Soviet navy stationing. Although Syria and Algeria would be wooed in later years for access to their naval facilities, neither offered a realistic alternative to Egypt in late 1961. Syria was too

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<sup>38</sup> GOLAN, G., 1990. *Soviet policies in the Middle East : from World War Two to Gorbachev*. Cambridge [England]; New York: Cambridge University Press. 12

<sup>39</sup> Ibid. 54-55

<sup>40</sup> GOLAN, G., 1979. Soviet power and policies in the third world: The Middle East. *Adelphi Papers*, **19**(152), pp. 47-54. 47

<sup>41</sup> RUBINSTEIN, A.Z., 1981. *Soviet foreign policy since World War II : imperial and global*. Cambridge, Mass.: Winthrop Publishers. 242

<sup>42</sup> DRAGNICH, S.G., 1974. *The Soviet Union's Quest for Access to Naval Facilities in Egypt Prior to the June War of 1967*. AD 786 318. Arlington, Virginia: Center of Naval Analyses. United States Navy. 19

unstable and, having just left the UAR, too unpredictable. Algeria had not yet become independent, and it was obvious that France would retain a naval base there once it leaves.<sup>43</sup> At some point Libya was also approached by the Soviets to be granted stationing rights, but without success.<sup>44</sup>

Although under Khrushchev in the mid-1960s, the Soviets achieved predominance in quantity of strategic nuclear intercontinental missiles (ICBM), the United States still led in submarine-launched ballistic missiles (SLBM), short-range ballistic missiles (SRBM), strategic bombers, and MIRVs (multiple warheads strategic missiles). These developments made sense from the American point of view, having the ability to put these short-range missiles on the territory of their West European allies – Turkey and Italy, something that USSR did not have, especially after the Cuban venture's failure. This state of affairs significantly enhanced the vulnerability of Moscow, a fact that led Kremlin perceive the Mediterranean as the most dangerous geostrategic area in light of the ability of the US Sixth Fleet [alone] to wreck a destructive blow on the Soviet state. These Soviet concerns exacerbated after the United States refused in 1964 to come to accords with Moscow's offer to denuclearize the Mediterranean. These developments forced Andrey Gromyko to declare that the Mediterranean is an area of crucial Soviet strategic interests and that a permanent presence of the Soviet Union in the Mediterranean is an issue of Soviet National Security.<sup>45</sup>

As Moscow's plans for an expanded fleet progressed with the building of the Mediterranean Squadron in 1964, Soviet interests in Egypt steadily grew in importance. Khrushchev visited Egypt that same year sealing the friendship. It was followed by visit of the Soviet Navy Commander Gorshkov in 1965 carrying requests for naval facilities. These were accompanied by steadily increasing supplies of arms and cancellation of a large portion of the Egyptian military debt to Moscow. This was rewarded by Egypt in

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid. 20

<sup>44</sup> GOLAN, G., 1979. Soviet power and policies in the third world: The Middle East. *Adelphi Papers*, 19(152), pp. 47-54. 47

<sup>45</sup> ADAMSKY, D., 2006. *Mivtsa' Kaykaz : ha-hit'arvut ha-Sovyetit v'ha-hafta'ah ha-Yisre'elit be-Milhemet ha-hatashah*. Tel Aviv: Ma'arakhot. 17

1966 with granting additional rights to the Soviets for usage of Egyptian ports and airfields.<sup>46</sup>

Following Khrushchev's visit to Egypt, the scale of Soviet's pursuit after Egyptian naval facilities grew to the next level. Khrushchev took different attitude to the issue, stating in his speech in Port Said that "The realization of the plan for stationing US submarines equipped with Polaris missiles in the Mediterranean can become a great threat to the security of this area. The colonialists now want to use aircraft carriers and their warships against the National Liberation movement of the peoples, to bring the policies of neutrality and non-alignment into range of their ship's guns and missiles. The imperialists want, with the aid of their aircraft carrier diplomacy, to restore reactionary regimes in the countries of Asia and Africa." By characterizing Western naval forces as a common adversary, the Soviets were trying to gain Arab acceptance of the permanent Soviet naval presence in the Mediterranean.<sup>47</sup>

1964 marked the beginning of a 'new' era of regular Soviet naval presence in the Mediterranean basin, following its first large, sustained deployment in the area in June that year. However, unlike the US Sixth Fleet, which could count on NATO facilities to make necessary repairs, the Soviet Navy still lacked such capabilities available to it in the Mediterranean.<sup>48</sup> Following another Admiral Gorshkov's visit to Egypt in March 1965, in August same year Soviet Navy paid a first 'large' visit to Port Said, consisting of two destroyers, two submarines and one submarine tugboat. Shortly, it was followed by the Soviet First Deputy Minister of Defense Grechko's visit to Egypt.<sup>49</sup>

Khrushchev's successor, Leonid Brezhnev sought to achieve strategic parity with the US, to balance its power, or even reach a preponderance. These goals of the new

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<sup>46</sup> GOLAN, G., 1990. *Soviet policies in the Middle East : from World War Two to Gorbachev*. Cambridge [England]; New York: Cambridge University Press. 56

<sup>47</sup> DRAGNICH, S.G., 1974. *The Soviet Union's Quest for Access to Naval Facilities in Egypt Prior to the June War of 1967*. AD 786 318. Arlington, Virginia: Center of Naval Analyses. United States Navy. 26-27

<sup>48</sup> DRAGNICH, S.G., 1974. *The Soviet Union's Quest for Access to Naval Facilities in Egypt Prior to the June War of 1967*. AD 786 318. Arlington, Virginia: Center of Naval Analyses. United States Navy. 27

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.* 29

Soviet leadership pushed Moscow for more assertive behavior.<sup>50</sup> Grechko, which became Minister of Defense under Brezhnev claimed that the Soviet armed forces must keep the general world situation under their permanent control, and not only by its overall superiority but also by its permanent presence in different parts of the world and in Middle East in particular.<sup>51</sup> In this respect, Egypt continued to be central target of Soviet foreign policy. However, there is no evidence of any significant success of this political venture until after June 1967.<sup>52</sup>

Because the stakes were high, the USSR proved willing to continue its considerable military assistance to Egypt, even though the odds became increasingly poor that Egypt would satisfy the Soviet need for a full access to its naval facilities in the region.<sup>53</sup>

By October 1966, the Soviets saw the situation in Middle East as worrisome. They saw the dangers threatening Egypt coming from United States' new leadership under President Johnson. Soviet analysts stressed that the Americans would be seeking for a new NATO bases near the Mediterranean due to France's withdrawal from the alliance and refusal of Italian alternative, in addition to voices of resentment which were heard from Turkish public about American presence on their soil. Therefore, the Soviets evaluated that the southern shore of the Mediterranean offered a possible strategic alternative, and this explained the enormous pressure Americans exercised on Tunisia, Morocco, Libya and Algeria. Hence, Soviets perceived that because Egypt does not fit in with this strategy, the Americans are looking for a chance to undermine Egypt's leading status in the Arab World.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> ADAMSKY, D., 2006. *Mivtsa' Kaykaz : ha-hit'arvut ha-Sovye'it yeha-hafta'ah ha-Yisre'elit be-Milhemet ha-hatashah*. Tel Aviv: Ma'arakhot, 17

<sup>51</sup> ISRAËLIAN,VIKTOR LEVONOVICH,, 1995. *Inside the Kremlin during the Yom Kippur War*. University Park, Pa.: Pennsylvania State University Press., 193

<sup>52</sup> RUBINSTEIN, A.Z., 1977. *Red star on the Nile : The Soviet-Egyptian influence relationship since the June war*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press. 7

<sup>53</sup> DRAGNICH, S.G., 1974. *The Soviet Union's Quest for Access to Naval Facilities in Egypt Prior to the June War of 1967*. AD 786 318. Arlington, Virginia: Center of Naval Analyses. United States Navy. 52

<sup>54</sup> HAYKAL, M.H., 1978. *The Sphinx and the Commissar: The Rise and Fall of Soviet Influence in the Middle East*. HarperCollins Publishers. P. 167

In May 1966 Admiral Gorshkov visited Egypt for the third time, this time as a participant of large Premier Kosygin's diplomatic delegation, indicating the prominence of the naval facilities issue in Soviet-Egyptian relations at that time.<sup>55</sup> Issues raised by Admiral Gorshkov in Egypt appears to have been of the highest order. The Soviet-Egyptian joint communique, issued following Kosygin's visit, lists Admiral Gorshkov as one of the participants in the Nasser-Kosygin talks; the only Egyptian military officer so listed was Marshal Amer - Egypt's First Vice-President and Egyptian armed forces Commander. Gorshkov's presence indicate that the Soviet Navy's access to Egyptian ports was still in contention. Foreign reports indicate that Soviet access to Egyptian ports was one of the main issues at stake in Kosygin-Nasser bargaining. The next official Soviet naval visit to Egypt occurred in August 1966.<sup>56</sup>

One is struck by the amount of military assistance, naval and otherwise, which the USSR gave Egypt, for such a long time, for so little in return. The USSR's military assistance program to Egypt before the 1967 June war and Admiral Gorshkov's visit in 1961 has been commonly viewed in terms of a superpower struggle for influence in the Middle East. But the extent and characteristics of Soviet military aid, especially in the naval sector, make sense only if it served goals of much higher priority. By 1967, Soviet military assistance to Egypt had long since passed the point of diminishing returns from the standpoint of gaining 'mere' influence in the Middle East.<sup>57</sup> In January 1967, Admiral Gorshkov paid another visit to Egypt.<sup>58</sup>

Much is made of the fact that in 1967 the Soviet government passed information about Israeli troops that were ready to attack Syria. According to Egyptian journalist Mohamed Haykal, supreme Soviet Chairman Nikolai Podgorniy and Deputy Foreign Minister Vladimir Semyonov warned Anwar Sadat, when he met them in Moscow, that Israeli troops were massing on the border with Syria and that an invasion was planned

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<sup>55</sup> DRAGNICH, S.G., 1974. *The Soviet Union's Quest for Access to Naval Facilities in Egypt Prior to the June War of 1967*. AD 786 318. Arlington, Virginia: Center of Naval Analyses. United States Navy. 31

<sup>56</sup> Ibid. 31

<sup>57</sup> DRAGNICH, S.G., 1974. *The Soviet Union's Quest for Access to Naval Facilities in Egypt Prior to the June War of 1967*. AD 786 318. Arlington, Virginia: Center of Naval Analyses. United States Navy. 51

<sup>58</sup> Ibid. 45



for May 18-22, 1967. Sadat immediately sent a diplomatic telegram to Cairo via the Egyptian embassy in Moscow.<sup>59</sup> Before and after the “state of high alert” on May 14, 1967, the USSR made a number of statements linking US Sixth Fleet moves in the Mediterranean with intention to attack the Arab states.<sup>60</sup>

Until the June 1967 War, Soviet policy in the Mediterranean was essentially defensive, being primarily concerned with undermining the US policy of encirclement.<sup>61</sup> There was a direct correlation between the accommodation of Soviet strategic interests, in the form of naval and air facilities, and Soviet willingness to equip, train and otherwise assist the Arab states. However, the rising Arab-Israeli tension, appeared to serve Soviet penetration efforts.<sup>62</sup>

In addition, Soviets had broader political interests in obtaining foothold in Egypt. From Moscow’s perspective Soviet progress in the Middle East, particularly in a politically influential state like Egypt, might facilitate Soviet moves towards other Third World states. Especially Soviet interest in obtaining bases in other areas, such as the Horn of Africa, might have been so served.<sup>63</sup>

The June 1967 Arab defeat transformed Soviet-Egyptian relationship significantly. The massive flow of Soviet aid after the war restored Egypt’s military capability and intensified interactions between the two countries on all levels. What previously had been a friendly but limited arrangement became an intimate association that cut across the national, regional, and international interests of each and drew the Soviet Union into the mainstream of Egyptian and Arab politics. It is argued however, that it was never a partnership or an alliance in the true sense of the term, even after the Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation of May 27, 1971. The relationship was of new type for both parties. For

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<sup>59</sup> PRIMAKOV, Y., 2009. *Russia and the Arabs: Behind the Scenes in the Middle East from the Cold War to the Present*. Basic Books. 109

<sup>60</sup> DRAGNICH, S.G., 1974. *The Soviet Union’s Quest for Access to Naval Facilities in Egypt Prior to the June War of 1967*. AD 786 318. Arlington, Virginia: Center of Naval Analyses. United States Navy. 47

<sup>61</sup> KHASAN, H., 1998. Russia’s Middle Eastern Policy. *The Indian Journal of Political Science*, **59**(1/4), pp. 84-105.87

<sup>62</sup> GOLAN, G., 1979. Soviet power and policies in the third world: The Middle East. *Adelphi Papers*, **19**(152), pp. 47-54. 49

<sup>63</sup> GOLAN, G., 1990. *Soviet policies in the Middle East : from World War Two to Gorbachev*. Cambridge [England]; New York: Cambridge University Press. 20

the Soviet Union, it was a pioneering venture in military-political involvement with non-communist Third World country, while providing a solid basis for the Soviet strategic presence in the area.<sup>64</sup>

Some observers are confident that it is the Soviets who instigated the 1967 June war between Israel, Egypt and Syria. Whether it occurred as a result of their ‘innocence’, ‘maliciousness’, or ‘stiffness’ is another story. What clear is that it was one of the biggest Soviet misperceptions of local, regional affairs. Moscow did not want a full-scale conflict to develop, nor was it willing to be drawn into major regional quarrel, especially when Israel being an active part of it. Things ‘just’ went out of Kremlin’s control in 1967.<sup>65</sup>

However, it is not all that simple, and it is hard to become convinced that it was pure Soviet miscalculation. Soviet Union was not a philanthropist. There is no way of knowing what Soviet aims in Egypt at any given time were. It can only be assumed that there was a multiplicity of goals, whose order of priority may vary over time and with circumstances. The best that one can do is to infer aims from behavior.<sup>66</sup> A donor may have a number of objectives in mind; the desire for immediate return may be present but not pressing. The Soviet Union gave Egypt extensive aid after the June 1967 war. Egypt quickly reciprocated with strategic dividends: naval facilities in Alexandria and the use of airfields for reconnoitering the US Sixth Fleet.<sup>67</sup>

Relations between Moscow and Cairo were good, but far from intimate until 1967. Only after the 1967’ Egypt’s catastrophe that these relations were altered and brought the Soviets the military dividends they coveted.<sup>68</sup> The Soviet leaders handled Nasser skillfully. They made no demands, exerted no pressure. True, there was no need for it: Nasser was behaving admirably from their perspective and he fully facilitated their naval operations in

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<sup>64</sup> RUBINSTEIN, A.Z., 1977. *Red star on the Nile : the Soviet-Egyptian influence relationship since the June war*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press. xi

<sup>65</sup> From personal interview conducted by the author with Ambassador Zvi Magen on 14.04.2019

<sup>66</sup> RUBINSTEIN, A.Z., 1977. *Red star on the Nile : the Soviet-Egyptian influence relationship since the June war*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press. xiii

<sup>67</sup> RUBINSTEIN, A.Z., 1977. *Red star on the Nile : the Soviet-Egyptian influence relationship since the June war*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press. xvi

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.* 7-8

the Mediterranean.<sup>69</sup> The largely held opinion that the Soviets precipitated the June 1967 Arab conflict with Israel, is reinforced by Podgorny's visit to Cairo on 21 June 1967, pressing Nasser to agree to give the USSR naval and air bases in Egypt on principles of concept of non-alignment.<sup>70</sup> In July 1967, the Soviet Union acquired military facilities it has long desired since 1961.<sup>71</sup>

Following this success, Moscow sought further to expand its stationing rights in the Mediterranean. It repeated its attempt towards Algeria requesting stationing rights in port of Mers-el-Kebir, initiated and arranged joint Soviet-Algerian naval maneuvers in 1970, but was rebuffed and failed to obtain this concession.<sup>72</sup> In late 1970s, Moscow also approached Yemeni PDRY, seeking to use Aden's ports and air bases for its strategic presence in the Indian Ocean.<sup>73</sup>

The seeming success in gaining military facilities following the June 1967 war notwithstanding, some Egyptian accounts propose that Egypt's defeat brought significant detriment for the Soviets. The Arabs accused Moscow of their defeat arguing that Kremlin did not do enough and came too late to assist Egypt. Moscow denied the charges accusing Egypt of incapability to effectively exercise military maneuvers. Nasser's policy was now to get the Soviets involved as much as possible in the Middle Eastern affairs. He wanted the Soviets to feel that the Egypt's defeat was their defeat and that their prestige was bound up with that of Egypt.<sup>74</sup> Soviets reciprocated. Marshal Matvei Zakharov, Chief of Soviet General Staff, came to Egypt with Podgorny and stayed to manage the reorganization and the reequipping of the Egyptian army. Nasser agreed that Soviet Mediterranean fleet would come to Egypt and use its ports.<sup>75</sup> It is opined that

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid. 65

<sup>70</sup> GINOR, ISABELLA,,REMEZ, GIDEON,, 2017. *The Soviet-Israeli War, 1967-1973 : the USSR's military intervention in the Egyptian-Israeli conflict.* 17

<sup>71</sup> RUBINSTEIN, A.Z., 1977. *Red star on the Nile : The Soviet-Egyptian influence relationship since the June war.* Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press. 47

<sup>72</sup> GINOR, ISABELLA,,REMEZ, GIDEON,, 2017. *The Soviet-Israeli War, 1967-1973 : the USSR's military intervention in the Egyptian-Israeli conflict.* 10

<sup>73</sup> GOLAN, G., 1990. *Soviet policies in the Middle East : from World War Two to Gorbachev.* Cambridge [England]; New York: Cambridge University Press. 229

<sup>74</sup> HAYKAL, M.H., 1978. *The Sphinx and the Commissar: The Rise and Fall of Soviet Influence in the Middle East.* HarperCollins Publishers. P. 191

<sup>75</sup> Ibid. 191-192

the June War was *the* event that drastically altered the situation, making Egypt seek to boost its military in front of the Israeli threat and the Soviets willing to assist generously. This situation produced an unprecedented opportunity for Moscow to balance the United States in the region by stationing its operational ground units, its navy vessels in Alexandria and Port Said, and its air force regiments in Egypt.<sup>76</sup>

Together with the military presence in the Mediterranean, the Soviets gained recognition as a political power in Middle East affairs. Its deployment in times of crisis could serve as a check on American freedom of action.<sup>77</sup> It is opined that the Soviet Union opted for what might be termed a 'minimalist' rather than a 'maximalist' policy, which would entail one objective and that is the maintenance of Soviet presence in the Mediterranean at not a too great cost.<sup>78</sup>

Other scholars confirm that Moscow was willing to go to great lengths to achieve military presence in Egypt. It was ready to tolerate the suppression of local communists, formation of the Arab unity in form of UAR, and subordinate ideological and political dilemmas to strategic and military objectives, but it was not only until Nasser's crushing defeat in June 1967, that the Kremlin achieved the desired foothold in Egypt and benefited enormously in its broader aim of penetrating the Arab world.<sup>79</sup> It was the Arab-Israeli conflict, that provided the Soviet Union with central vehicle for the pursuit of its interests in the region.<sup>80</sup> The acquisition of naval facilities and bases was the focal point of Moscow's policy towards Egypt.<sup>81</sup>

In order to verify the argument, that one of the main aims of Soviet policy vis-à-vis Egypt and Syria was to obtain naval facilities for its navy, we turn to Western sources, and in particular to United States Navy analytical report, which seeks to describe and

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<sup>76</sup> ADAMSKY, D., 2006. *Mivtsa' Kaykaz : ha-hit'arvut ha-Sovyetit yeha-hafta'ah ha-Yisre'elit be-Milhemet ha-hatashah*. Tel Aviv: Ma'arakhot. 19

<sup>77</sup> GOLAN, G., 1979. Soviet power and policies in the third world: The Middle East. *Adelphi Papers*, 19(152), pp. 47-54. 50

<sup>78</sup> Ibid. 51

<sup>79</sup> RUBINSTEIN, A.Z., 1981. *Soviet foreign policy since World War II : imperial and global*. Cambridge, Mass.: Winthrop Publishers. 242

<sup>80</sup> GOLAN, G., 1990. *Soviet policies in the Middle East : from World War Two to Gorbachev*. Cambridge [England]; New York: Cambridge University Press. 2

<sup>81</sup> Ibid. 58-59

explain the credibility of the argument that Moscow was eager to attain naval facilities in the Mediterranean. According to the report, the Egyptians were already aware of Soviets' pursuit after naval facilities in the Mediterranean long before the hostilities of 1967. The first clear expression of that endeavor was Admiral Gorshkov's trip to Egypt in 1961.<sup>82</sup> The report also confirms that the USSR obtained naval facilities in Egypt following the 1967 war between Egypt and Israel, which resulted in Egypt's desperate need to receive Soviet aid and re-equip its armed forces in the wake of its disastrous defeat. According to the report, amid Moscow's pursuit after these facilities, the June war brought about a whole new set of circumstances which radically affected the relative bargaining positions of the parties.<sup>83</sup>

Paradoxically [sic], the June War of 1967 brought the USSR what it has been unable to obtain through the years of its own efforts. The Soviets were able to demand and get concessions, which would have been unheard of before the June war. They capitalized on Egypt's fears of continued Israeli raids by making regular naval visits to Alexandria and Port Said in order to "deter" Israel from attacking these ports. In December 1967, the official Soviet communist paper the "*Red Star*" was able to write: "Visits of Soviet warships to the UAR have become a traditional practice."<sup>84</sup>

Although the US Navy's report was not aimed to investigate the origins of the June 1967 war, it stresses that amid the highly controversial theory that the USSR wanted Egypt to lose that conflict (consequently provoking it in the first place – added), a variety of facts point towards credibility of such claim. Specifically, it is argued that the USSR's abortive attempts before the June War to secure regular access to Egyptian naval facilities provides at least one plausible motive for such an attitude on the part of the Soviets. The high degree of Soviet naval-oriented activity vis-à-vis Egypt indicates that access to Egyptian naval facilities was a prime consideration of Soviet policy well before 1967. Making a retrospective discussion, the report notes that a series of four Admiral

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<sup>82</sup> DRAGNICH, S.G., 1974. *The Soviet Union's Quest for Access to Naval Facilities in Egypt Prior to the June War of 1967*. AD 786 318. Arlington, Virginia: Center of Naval Analyses. United States Navy. 1

<sup>83</sup> Ibid. 2

<sup>84</sup> Ibid. 49

Gorshkov's visits (1961, 1965, 1966, 1967) to Egypt were extraordinary moves on the backdrop of Admiral's relatively rare visits outside the Soviet bloc (only Indonesia in 1961 and Ethiopia in January 1967 - original).<sup>85</sup> According to report's assessment, by the time the June War approached, the Soviets were frustrated, viewing that they seemingly would never get the full cooperation they sought from Nasser's Egypt on the matter of receiving permanent bases.<sup>86</sup>

Due to the direct threat to USSR posed by the Sixth Fleet's aircraft carriers in the late 1950s and by US Polaris missile carrying submarines in the 1960s, and because existing Soviet forces were both qualitatively and quantitatively insufficient to meet this challenge, the USSR needed access to naval facilities in the Mediterranean. Indication of the importance of Egyptian naval facilities for the Soviet naval operations can be seen in the intensity and duration of the naval activity which the USSR was able to sustain in the Mediterranean after it obtained access to those facilities following Egypt's defeat in June 1967.<sup>87</sup>

Others point that Moscow contributed to the outbreak of the June 1967 war by providing false information to the Egyptians and Syrians about Israeli military preparations for an attack against Damascus. Whether the Soviet leadership wished for it or not, the June war, which resulted in a catastrophic Arab defeat, brought Brezhnev's objective of securing Soviet influence in Egypt and Syria. The latter became desperately dependent on Soviet military assistance to replenish their war losses. In return, the Soviet air force and the navy gained access to naval and aerial facilities in both countries.<sup>88</sup>

After the 1967 the number of Soviet military advisers in the Middle East increased fivefold. Therefore, through the sixties, inevitably, Soviet influence grew dramatically in Egypt and Syria. The June war, which the Soviets, according to Qalb-i-Abid helped to provoke, enabled them for the first time in history to establish a permanent fleet of some

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<sup>85</sup> DRAGNICH, S.G., 1974. *The Soviet Union's Quest for Access to Naval Facilities in Egypt Prior to the June War of 1967*. AD 786 318. Arlington, Virginia: Center of Naval Analyses. United States Navy. 50

<sup>86</sup> Ibid. 53

<sup>87</sup> Ibid. 51-52

<sup>88</sup> KHASAN, H., 1998. Russia's Middle Eastern Policy. *The Indian Journal of Political Science*, 59(1/4), pp. 84-105. 88

fifty warships in the Mediterranean. In the summer of 1967, the Soviet position in the Arab Middle East was stronger than ever before in history. Alexandria had become available as a base for Soviet warships, therefore the Soviet long-time dream of establishing of a warm water ports in the Mediterranean appeared to be accomplished. The Middle East had been referred to as 'the concourse of the continents', standing at the juncture of Asia, Africa, and Europe, linking between them all by a narrow water and land ways.<sup>89</sup> It was perhaps the best time for the Soviet leaders to achieve the cherished dreams of their Czars and Czarinas to 'capture the Middle East.'<sup>90</sup>

Primakov however argues that the June war severely damaged Moscow's stand in the Middle East. The attitude towards socialism became hostile.<sup>91</sup> The question whether the Soviets were ready to sacrifice Socialism for the sake of maintaining military facilities in Egypt deserves more profound analysis. Primakov refutes the thesis that Kremlin encouraged the Arabs to attack Israel, calling it a myth in his memoirs.<sup>92</sup>

Some Israeli scholars hold a different opinion. The Soviet warning to Egypt about supposed Israeli troop concentrations on the Syrian border in May 1967 has long been considered a blunder that precipitated a war which the USSR neither desired nor expected. New evidence from Soviet and Warsaw Pact documents, as well as memoirs of event's participants, contradict this accepted theory. It is perceived that the Soviet warning was deliberate disinformation, part of a plan approved at the highest level of Soviet leadership to elicit Egyptian action that would provoke an Israeli strike. Soviet military intervention against the "aggressor" was intended to follow and was prepared well in advance.<sup>93</sup> Both intelligence agencies, the GRU and the KGB, which supplied the information would face consequences due to disastrous result of the Israeli attack. However, both heads of both these agencies received promotion. KGB Chairman Yuri

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<sup>89</sup> QALB-I-ABID, S. and ABID, M., Egypt's Union with Syria, its Impact and the June 1967 War. 220

<sup>90</sup> Ibid. 221

<sup>91</sup> PRIMAKOV, Y., 2009. *Russia and the Arabs: Behind the Scenes in the Middle East from the Cold War to the Present*. Basic Books. 101

<sup>92</sup> Ibid. 109

<sup>93</sup> GINOR, I., 2003. The Cold War's Longest Cover-Up: How and Why the USSR Instigated the 1967 War. *MERIA Journal*, 7(3), pp. 34. 34

Andropov and Defense Minister Andrei Grechko were promoted to Politburo candidate membership status near the end of June 1967.<sup>94</sup> Other arguments stress the deliberate and complex military moves which predated and paralleled the political-diplomatic efforts designed to manipulate Egypt into provoking Israel to launch a first strike, following which the USSR would intervene to support the Arab side against the aggression.<sup>95</sup> One evidence points that in 1967, before the actual beginning of the war, Soviet submarines with nuclear missiles were cruising in the Mediterranean, and probably the Red Sea as well, with the intention to make a second nuclear strike in case Israel would use its nuclear arms against Egypt.<sup>96</sup> This argument adds to the probability that Moscow knew in advance and was ready to react in case conflict would erupt.

Other analyses claim that the Soviets did not want Egypt to attack Israel *first* (emphasis original) and refused to support Cairo in case it would attack Israel, stating that “If you attack first, you would be the aggressor, and we will not support an aggressor.”<sup>97</sup> This assumption confirms the proposition that the Soviets were seeking Egypt’s need for Moscow’s aid, in order to obtain military facilities in the country. If Egypt would attack first, such a goal might become unattainable.

After Egypt’s’ defeat in 1967, it’s desperation and weakness was conducive to total dependence on the Soviet Union, and Soviet leaders lost little time in exploiting the situation. This dependence led to a final agreement between the two countries which was signed by Nasser in March 1968. The agreement enabled the Soviets to exploit Egypt’s ports and the Cairo West air base to the full.<sup>98</sup>

Up to 1968, the Soviets managed to build a significant technical-military presence in Egypt including navy ports, docks and shipyard, airfields and military bases. To some observers it seems as if Egypt became a plain ‘Soviet colony state’. These facilities,

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<sup>94</sup> Ibid. 37

<sup>95</sup> Ibid. 44

<sup>96</sup> From an interview conducted personally by the author with I.Ginor and G.Remez on 10.06.2019

<sup>97</sup> GINOR, I., 2003. The Cold War’s Longest Cover-Up: How and Why the USSR Instigated the 1967 War. *MERIA Journal*, 7(3), pp. 34. 42-43

<sup>98</sup> SAS, S.N., 1990. *Gorbachev’s New International Outlook and the Eastern Mediterranean*, . 25



technicians, advisers and equipment first and foremost served Soviet [regional] interests, rather than Egypt's. Main Soviet objectives in Egypt were conducting surveillance after American Navy presence in the Mediterranean; collecting intelligence on enemy's movements; to ensure the ability to destroy enemy's targets; to prevent from the enemy to collect intelligence and destroy Soviet targets. Protection of ally's forces - Egypt and Syria - were secondary. By 1969, the extent of construction of infrastructure and military installations and equipment that was deployed by the Soviets in Egypt indicated that Moscow was planning a long-term stationing of a much larger contingent.<sup>99</sup> The provision of the Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation gave reason to anticipate a further expansion of the Soviet military presence in Egypt.<sup>100</sup>

More arms were supplied to Egypt in return for more bases and facilities. The presence of Soviet military units, air-force and navy, substantially improved Moscow's position in the Middle East. The stationing and maintaining of significant military presence in Egypt was part of a global strategic military-political Soviet doctrine, and did not infer from narrowly focused, regional conflicts or local interests.<sup>101</sup> Others argue that although in June 1967 Moscow misperceived the situation which led to the war, Egypt's disastrous showing proved a boon for Moscow, paving the way for the extensive privileges that the Soviet military had sought for long. However, the following War of Attrition against Israel backfired at Moscow. Kremlin was forced to up its stakes committing 20,000 combat troops to man its missile sites and reinforce Egyptian air defense. In return, Moscow was granted with extensive rights for usage of Egypt's facilities for its navy and air-force. As soon as these privileges marked the highest point of Soviet presence in an Arab country,<sup>102</sup> Moscow was not interested in further expansion of the Arab-Israeli conflict.<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> ADAMSKY, D., 2006. *Mivtsa' Kaykaz : ha-hit'arvut ha-Sovye'it yeha-hafta'ah ha-Yisre'elit be-Milhemet ha-hatashah*. Tel Aviv: Ma'arakhot. 21-22

<sup>100</sup> RUBINSTEIN, A.Z., 1977. *Red star on the Nile : The Soviet-Egyptian influence relationship since the June war*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press. 148

<sup>101</sup> ADAMSKY, D., 2006. *Mivtsa' Kaykaz : ha-hit'arvut ha-Sovye'it yeha-hafta'ah ha-Yisre'elit be-Milhemet ha-hatashah*. Tel Aviv: Ma'arakhot. 23-24

<sup>102</sup> RUBINSTEIN, A.Z., 1981. *Soviet foreign policy since World War II : imperial and global*. Cambridge, Mass.: Winthrop Publishers. 243-244

<sup>103</sup> RUBINSTEIN, A.Z., 1977. *Red star on the Nile : The Soviet-Egyptian influence relationship since the June war*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press. 122-123

To acquire strategic advantages in the Middle East relative to its geopolitical rivalry with the United States was the main Soviet foreign policy goal since the 1960s. The policy was not aimed to turn Egypt into a socialist communist state,<sup>104</sup> nor to align it with the socialist bloc under Soviet auspice.<sup>105</sup> According to Israeli leader Moshe Dayan, Soviet's aim was to achieve complete influence in the Middle East using Egypt's dependence on its arms and protection. US Naval Command insisted that the Soviets were after the "control of the Mediterranean."<sup>106</sup> Soviet media depicted its presence in the Mediterranean for the need to defend the USSR.<sup>107</sup> From the late 1960s and the 1970s, Soviet foreign policy concentrated around the need to preserve and secure its military gains made in the form of bases and naval facilities it had obtained up until then.<sup>108</sup>

Soviet officials messaged to Israeli leadership in 1971 that Soviet presence and its military facilities in no way would be removed from Egypt.<sup>109</sup> Egypt became the 'warehouse of Soviet arms' for the whole region, including the African continent. It was perceived as a 'front depot' for further Soviet engagements in variety of theaters of conflicts. Soviet arms and support in conflicts in Africa, Middle East and Asia were supplied from Egypt. Weapons used in Nigeria civil war came from Soviet stocks in Egypt. Cairo's both airports became the centers of Soviet air traffic, daily receiving multiple flights, military and civil, from Africa and backwards. Among Soviet KGB operatives, Egypt was often called, a "Soviet republic".<sup>110</sup>

### *The myth of expulsion from Egypt*

When in 1972 the Soviet military had to relinquish the Egyptian six airfields, that it exclusively preserved since the early 1970, no longer could Soviet planes reconnoiter the

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<sup>104</sup> Ibid. 340

<sup>105</sup> GINOR, ISABELLA,,REMEZ, GIDEON,, 2017. *The Soviet-Israeli War, 1967-1973 : the USSR's military intervention in the Egyptian-Israeli conflict.* 25-27

<sup>106</sup> Ibid. 30-31

<sup>107</sup> Ibid. 166

<sup>108</sup> GOLAN, G., 1990. *Soviet policies in the Middle East : from World War Two to Gorbachev.* Cambridge [England]; New York: Cambridge University Press. 19-20

<sup>109</sup> GINOR, ISABELLA,,REMEZ, GIDEON,, 2017. *The Soviet-Israeli War, 1967-1973 : the USSR's military intervention in the Egyptian-Israeli conflict.* 238

<sup>110</sup> ADAMSKY, D., 2006. *Mivtsa' Kaykaz : ha-hit'arvut ha-Sovyetit v'ha-hafta'ah ha-Yisre'elit be-Milhemet ha-hatashah.* Tel Aviv: Ma'arakhot. 25

US Sixth Fleet from Egyptian soli. This setback cut deeply into Moscow's strategic dividends, but the Soviets quickly absorbed it by keeping more ships on station and by satellite reconnaissance. There was however still one strategic advantage left to Moscow in the new circumscribed conditions. Its alternative access to the Syrian ports.<sup>111</sup> However, putting the Syrian option aside for a moment, it is argued that superpowers do not readily relinquish strategic real estate. Soviet prime goal in the Middle East and as some argue the consequent tension between Israel and the Arabs was its desire for the use of Egyptian ports for its fleet.<sup>112</sup> In one of his speeches, President Sadat announced that in March 1968, Egypt and the USSR had concluded a five-year formal agreement on the Soviet Navy's access to "facilities in the Mediterranean." Sadat threatened that he will not renew the agreement.<sup>113</sup>

One of the reasons that Soviet-Egyptian relations gradually deteriorated following the 1967 defeat, reaching its climax in July 1972 with the expulsion of the Soviet military advisers from Egypt, was repeated quarrels between the War Minister General Mohammed Sadiq and the senior Soviet military men, which included Admiral Gorshkov's demand for special facilities for Russian warships at Mersa Matruh and Berenice in the Red Sea and the Soviet attempt virtually to take over Cairo West airport for their exclusive use.<sup>114</sup> There was a looming division among the Soviet establishment, particularly between politicians and the military on the issue of further assistance to the Egyptians after the expulsion of Soviet military personnel. The military urged that the position in the Middle East must be maintained at all costs because of its military significance, the importance of the sea routes, docking and overflight rights. Marshal Grechko in particular argued repeatedly to the Politburo that there was a need for stepping up the military aid to Egypt. He urged to let the Arabs have sufficient amounts of arms and 'let them risk a

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<sup>111</sup> RUBINSTEIN, A.Z., 1977. *Red star on the Nile : The Soviet-Egyptian influence relationship since the June war*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press. 191

<sup>112</sup> Ibid. 235-236

<sup>113</sup> DRAGNICH, S.G., 1974. *The Soviet Union's Quest for Access to Naval Facilities in Egypt Prior to the June War of 1967*. AD 786 318. Arlington, Virginia: Center of Naval Analyses. United States Navy. 53-54

<sup>114</sup> HAYKAL, M.H., 1978. *The Sphinx and the Commissar: The Rise and Fall of Soviet Influence in the Middle East*. HarperCollins Publishers. P. 238

battle'. His arguments prevailed and Egypt began to receive large quantities of equipment including some that Moscow was reluctant to send Cairo before.<sup>115</sup>

The holders of antagonistic views in the Politburo, which consisted of hardline bureaucrats, the *apparatchiki*, and the military,<sup>116</sup> following the expulsion of Soviet advisers from Egypt in 1972 began to pressure Soviet leadership to keep the Arab assistance firm. In their view, the expulsion had dealt a major blow to the USSR. It had deeply embarrassed and humiliated the Soviets, demonstrating to the entire world the fragility of the Soviet positions in the Middle East. It had deprived the USSR not only of the uniquely important strategic facilities, vital to the Soviet Union's presence in the Mediterranean, but also to its operations in Africa and the Persian Gulf.<sup>117</sup> This reaffirms the previous claim that the Egyptian facilities were much more than a mere presence in Egypt and the Mediterranean. These facilities were the 'ground' base of the larger Soviet conduct on the whole Middle Eastern and the African continent. These views were reflected in Premier Kosygin's speech, honoring Egyptian Premier Sidkiy in Moscow in October 1972, when he noted that the Arabs have "the right to use any means to liberate their territories."<sup>118</sup>

One more proposed explanation for the revival of Soviet assistance to Egypt at the beginning of 1973 is the Egyptian *blackmail* explanation. Moscow's move was followed by the Egyptian threat to sever all relations with the USSR, to abrogate the treaty of friendship between the two states and to deny the Soviets the use of valuable port facilities unless they supplied Cairo with the long-sought weaponry. It is proposed that the fear of losing the entire political-military position in the Arab World, compelled the Soviets to take the decisions they did.<sup>119</sup>

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<sup>115</sup> HAYKAL, M.H., 1978. *The Sphinx and the Commissar: The Rise and Fall of Soviet Influence in the Middle East*. HarperCollins Publishers. P. 253

<sup>116</sup> SPECHLER, D.R., 1986. The USSR and Third-World Conflicts: Domestic Debate and Soviet Policy in the Middle East, 1967–1973. *World Politics*, **38**(3), pp. 435-461. 449-450

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.* 454

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.* 454

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.* 444

Moscow's calculations, at least to that point, proved to be correct. This decision reassured the Soviets that Sadat is not about to carry out his threats. Sadat eventually renewed the agreement on Soviet use of Egyptian port facilities which was about to expire in March 1973. Thus, without making any concessions or drastic changes in their foreign policy towards Egypt, the Soviets had secured their continued access to the facilities they desired. Without giving much importance to the point, whether Sadat had yielded some political points, internally or externally on this score, the Soviet position in the Arab world was far from desperate as many describe.<sup>120</sup>

When Sadat extended the Soviet privileges in December 1972, he strengthened the case of those in the Kremlin who called for continuous supply of arms to Egypt in order to retain the strategic advantages inherent in the use of Egyptian ports.<sup>121</sup> On February 1, 1973 the first Soviet military delegation since the expulsion arrived in Cairo. New large arms deal was concluded the same month between Moscow and Cairo. Soviet willingness to meet Egypt's demands for more and better materiel reflects Soviet eagerness to maintain its naval presence in Egypt. Decision to revive its extensive military assistance to Egypt in 1973 was based on the fact that the Soviet Navy's use of Egyptian naval facilities was the USSR's most valuable, if not its only, strategic regional asset in that country after July 1972.<sup>122</sup> After February 1973, the relations got back to 'normal'.<sup>123</sup>

With the acquisition of the wherewithal that opened the military option for Sadat vis-à-vis Israel, and the initiative shifting to Egypt, some opine that the Soviets would not have given their client-state the means to take the military plunge without recognizing the possibility that they might have to mount a rescue operation. Well aware of the region's insidious pulls and pressures, they could have kept a tighter control over the arms supply,

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<sup>120</sup> SPECHLER, D.R., 1986. The USSR and Third-World Conflicts: Domestic Debate and Soviet Policy in the Middle East, 1967–1973. *World Politics*, **38**(3), pp. 435-461. 444

<sup>121</sup> RUBINSTEIN, A.Z., 1977. *Red star on the Nile : The Soviet-Egyptian influence relationship since the June war*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press. 235-236

<sup>122</sup> DRAGNICH, S.G., 1974. *The Soviet Union's Quest for Access to Naval Facilities in Egypt Prior to the June War of 1967*. AD 786 318. Arlington, Virginia: Center of Naval Analyses. United States Navy. 54

<sup>123</sup> RUBINSTEIN, A.Z., 1977. *Red star on the Nile : The Soviet-Egyptian influence relationship since the June war*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press. 225

except that this would have risked the political-military presence they had taken such pains and expense to acquire.<sup>124</sup>

Other observers had found that the Soviet input has been proactive, purposeful and even aggressive in encouraging and supporting Egypt to challenge Israel, rather than a moderate and restraining influence as it was almost universally characterized. The Soviets kept fostering Arab military aspirations in order to preserve their regional standing.<sup>125</sup> Arms were the price Moscow paid for undermining the US position in the Middle East and for the rental of strategically valuable real estate. Somewhat untidily, they also opened military option for Egypt that was often uncongenial with the long-term Soviet aims.<sup>126</sup>

When the October 1973 war broke out, the Soviet Defense Minister Grechko, reportedly urged for a greater Soviet military support for Egypt and Syria. Navy Admiral Gorshkov, who was the biggest advocate of preservation of Soviet military installations in the Middle East and having an obvious interest in securing facilities for the power-projection role he had designed for the Soviet fleet, sided with Grechko.<sup>127</sup>

A possible Egyptian defeat was perceived by Kremlin as a strategic threat to Moscow's national interests, both regional and global. It was assumed that if Egypt would suffer a total defeat, which would mean a change of Egyptian leadership, Moscow would lose all its positions, first and foremost military, including its navy and air bases, which would jeopardize its regional presence.<sup>128</sup>

The resumed Soviet assistance to Egypt on the eve of the October 1973 hostilities was reasoned by Moscow's attempt not simply to retain but, actually to redeem some of

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<sup>124</sup> Ibid. 246

<sup>125</sup> GINOR, ISABELLA,,REMEZ, GIDEON,, 2017. *The Soviet-Israeli War, 1967-1973 : the USSR's military intervention in the Egyptian-Israeli conflict.* xv

<sup>126</sup> RUBINSTEIN, A.Z., 1977. *Red star on the Nile : the Soviet-Egyptian influence relationship since the June war.* Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press. 340

<sup>127</sup> GOLAN, G., 1990. *Soviet policies in the Middle East : from World War Two to Gorbachev.* Cambridge [England]; New York: Cambridge University Press. 27

<sup>128</sup> ADAMSKY, D., 2006. *Mivtsa' Kaykaz : ha-hit'arvut ha-Sovyețit veha-hafta'ah ha-Yișre'elit be-Milhemet ha-hatashah.* Tel Aviv: Ma'arakhot. 37

the Soviet positions and prestige in the Arab world by providing assistance. It is proposed, that Moscow was not in favor of military preparations for a war. However, Egypt's President Sadat perceived Moscow's renewed assistance in early 1973 as a sign of support to go to war, whereas Moscow was willing to assist only to 'save face' and regain essential strategic military facilities, previously lost after the expulsion a year before.<sup>129</sup>

Another opinion sounds that the Soviet support for the Arabs after the outbreak of the October 1973 war, both politically and by means of a massive military resupply efforts, were literally *imposed* upon the Soviets by their clients as the price for maintaining regional influence (italic original).<sup>130</sup>

To some authors it appears that the Soviets precipitated this conflict as they eventually did in 1967. Scholars on Arab-Soviet relations underline that the Soviets knew that sustained preparations for war were under way. Moscow agreed to supply the SCUD surface-to-surface missiles, which it had refused earlier. These were offensive weapons, although normally intended for tactical nuclear warheads, they were also capable of being fitted with a hefty conventional warheads.<sup>131</sup> By late-September early-October the Soviets were fully aware of the imminence of war. They did not need to receive this information from their own intelligence operatives, for they had been told this by both Sadat himself and on October 4<sup>th</sup> by Assad.<sup>132</sup> The Soviet press begun to release reports about an apparent Israeli "buildup" reminiscent of the June 1967, clearly making efforts to 'prepare' the Soviet public for a war, hinting that the blame would be laid on Israel in advance.<sup>133</sup>

Almost the same effect following the June 1967 war, was achieved following the October war. Soviet stand in the Arab world was indeed reinforced. The point has been made that for years to come, Soviet arms were indispensable, and the Soviet Union was

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<sup>129</sup> GOLAN, G., 1990. *Soviet policies in the Middle East : from World War Two to Gorbachev*. Cambridge [England]; New York: Cambridge University Press. 85

<sup>130</sup> GINOR, ISABELLA,,REMEZ, GIDEON,, 2017. *The Soviet-Israeli War, 1967-1973 : the USSR's military intervention in the Egyptian-Israeli conflict*. 302

<sup>131</sup> RUBINSTEIN, A.Z., 1977. *Red star on the Nile : The Soviet-Egyptian influence relationship since the June war*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press. 252

<sup>132</sup> Ibid. 254

<sup>133</sup> Ibid. 255

Egypt's ultimate shield from a defeat and this alone was sufficient to ensure the Soviet Union of a solid permanent foothold in the region.<sup>134</sup>

Western analysts are confident that the main aim of the Soviets in both wars was to get access to naval and military facilities in Egypt and Syria for strategic purposes. Accordingly, Moscow saw the greatest threat coming from NATO and the United States, and this allegedly guided their behavior vis-à-vis the Arabs. However, what was puzzling the US intelligence, was the growing Soviet investment, human and material, in these facilities, raising the level of Soviet determination to get involved in local wars, should they perceive that they about to lose these investments.<sup>135</sup>

1976 became the turning point. In April 1976, Sadat announced the cancellation of the agreement for the usage of Egyptian naval facilities by the Soviet fleet, and in March 1976 the cancellation of the Soviet-Egyptian Friendship and Partnership Treaty.<sup>136</sup> Observers conclude, that the Egyptian connection has been Moscow's costliest in the Third World, nonetheless, its most valuable. Despite the frustration, the risks and the disappointments attending relations with Cairo, Moscow generally encouraged Egyptian leaders to follow their own bent, and eventually, Egypt's course complemented Soviet strategic objectives in the Middle East. One of the most essential goals was Moscow's ability to advance its imperial reach,<sup>137</sup> and this could not be possible without military facilities and stationing of its naval crafts and air forces on Egyptian soil. The USSR has expressed far less displeasure with Egypt's policy than Egypt has with the Soviet one. The reasons are clear. Irrespective of the ups-and-downs in their relationship since 1972, the USSR managed to retain its presence in Egypt.<sup>138</sup>

Sadat, far from being grateful, repaid the Soviets with contumely and political rebuff. For a combination of personal, strategic, political and economic reasons, Sadat

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<sup>134</sup> Ibid. 284

<sup>135</sup> ADAMSKY, D., 2006. *Mivtsa' Kaykaz : ha-hit'arvut ha-Sovyeit yeha-hafta'ah ha-Yisre'elit be-Milhemet ha-hatashah*. Tel Aviv: Ma'arakhot. 101-103

<sup>136</sup> RUBINSTEIN, A.Z., 1977. *Red star on the Nile : The Soviet-Egyptian influence relationship since the June war*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press. 326-327

<sup>137</sup> Ibid. 330

<sup>138</sup> Ibid. 332-334



turned sharply to Washington, openly alienating the Soviet Union. Acrimony and increasing friction characterized Soviet-Egyptian relations for the next two-and-a-half years, as Sadat looked increasingly towards Washington for economic assistance and for political solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict. On March 15, 1976, Sadat unilaterally abrogated the 1971' Soviet-Egyptian treaty; a month later, he announced the cancellation of facilities rights for the Soviet Navy. In less than five years, the formerly impressive Soviet military presence in Egypt had turned into sand. And if this was not enough, Sadat's trip to Jerusalem on November 19, 1977, leaving the Soviet Union outside the bargaining process, also turned Moscow's former diplomatic and political stand into ruins.<sup>139</sup>

Following Egypt's turn to the West, Moscow soon began to lose its positions in the region and its military bases with it. To shore up what assets it had and ensure its continued presence by being part of an internationally recognized agreements, working towards conflict resolution became a 'new', more active Soviet tactic. By achieving resolution of a conflict, with Soviet participation, Moscow hoped to be able to stem its regional retreat. Soviet naval and air facilities presumably could be maintained, even as these assets became somewhat less vital, with increasing Soviet logistic and technical capabilities, and consequently reduced significance of military bases as part of overall Soviet power projection.<sup>140</sup> This notwithstanding, the biggest strategic loss, following the departure of Egypt, is still considered being Soviet military facilities.<sup>141</sup>

In 1988 Gorbachev stressed the importance of the Mediterranean region to Soviet national security: "For us the Mediterranean basin is not some remote and distant area. It is close to our southern border and passing through it is the only sea lane linking our southern ports with the world ocean. Naturally, we are interested in seeing lanes of peace

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<sup>139</sup> RUBINSTEIN, A.Z., 1981. *Soviet foreign policy since World War II : imperial and global*. Cambridge, Mass.: Winthrop Publishers. 245-246

<sup>140</sup> GOLAN, G., 1990. *Soviet policies in the Middle East : from World War Two to Gorbachev*. Cambridge [England]; New York: Cambridge University Press. 262-263

<sup>141</sup> RUBINSTEIN, A.Z., 1977. *Red star on the Nile : The Soviet-Egyptian influence relationship since the June war*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press. 199-200

and not routes of war passing there.”<sup>142</sup> However, this Gorbachev’s emphasis on Soviet presence in the Mediterranean was already underlined in different tones. Gorbachev changed the previous Soviet doctrine reducing the strategic importance of the Middle East and downgrading the military means of regional presence and power projection.<sup>143</sup>

### *The Iranian case analysis*

Foreign stationing rights on Iranian soil or in the Persian Gulf were always a sensitive point for Moscow due to Iran’s proximity to the Soviet borders and Soviet’s vulnerability in regard to the Indian Ocean. Moscow was repeatedly stressing to Iran its anxiety that foreign military bases in the Persian Gulf region were not admissible.<sup>144</sup> The immediate strategic Soviet aims in the Gulf were to end or forestall the granting of basing rights to Western powers.<sup>145</sup> Some argue that as of 1962 onwards, following the thaw in Cold War confrontation and due to advancement in missile technology, the issue of foreign bases in Iran gradually left the agenda.<sup>146</sup>

Further considerations affecting Soviet policy towards Iran were the developments in the Indian Ocean and the Arabian Peninsula. The emerging and steadily growing Soviet interests in the Indian Ocean, or what was called the USSR’s ‘soft underbelly’ was buttressed by the increase of Soviet naval capabilities towards the 1970s. Since 1968 this region has seen for the first time a considerable Soviet naval activity manifested in continuous naval presence. The increasing presence of the Soviet navy in the Indian Ocean since 1967 has undoubtedly created a new political situation in the region. As a symbol of Soviet’s global reach, it had a strong psychological effect on the littoral states of the area, as well as on its superpower rival, and the way to Indian Ocean lies through the Mediterranean and the Persian Gulf. The strikingly modern and impressive Soviet

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<sup>142</sup> NSA, 2011. *Moscow's Realignment with Cairo: A Look at Gorbachev's New Political Thinking*. 63852. NSA National Security Agency report. 2

<sup>143</sup> GOLAN, G., 1990. *Soviet policies in the Middle East : from World War Two to Gorbachev*. Cambridge [England]; New York: Cambridge University Press. 15

<sup>144</sup> CHUBIN, S., 1980. *Soviet policy towards Iran and the Gulf*. London:International Institute for Strategic Studies. 21

<sup>145</sup> Ibid. 31

<sup>146</sup> ČUBĪN, SĀHRĀM., ZABIH, SEPEHR., SEABURY, PAUL., 1974. *The foreign relations of Iran : a developing state in a zone of Great Power conflict*. Berkeley [etc.]; London: University of California Press. 69

fleet and the novelty of its massive presence in the Indian Ocean had the upsetting effect on the distribution of power prevalent in the area since the World War II, reinforced by introducing a wholly new power factor in the political configuration of the region.<sup>147</sup>

Why does Moscow need navy facilities in the Indian Ocean and the Persian Gulf? Some explain that Soviet Union's goal is to be capable of exerting strong influence on the littoral states in a flag-showing, port-calling strategic capacity. An important spin-off of the Soviet naval build-up has already affected the increase in its political influence due to its naval presence in the region. This presence enables Kremlin to participate as an interested party in any negotiations that may take place concerning the Indian Ocean. With the acquisition of mobile seaborne air support capabilities, and the acquisition of military bases in the area, its navy will be in a position to dominate many of the choke points, or key access points, such as the straits that guard entry and exits into the Indian Ocean. Through the Suez Canal the distance from the Black Sea into the Indian Ocean is significantly shorter than through the Cape-route (South Africa), from 11,000 miles to about 3,000 miles, reducing sailing time from approximately 25 days, to 7. In case of such state of affairs, the Soviet Union is able to substantially increase its naval contingent, which has varied from 5 to 15 ships since 1968.<sup>148</sup>

One of the main purposes that underlay the emerging Soviet courtship of key Third World countries was to establish a political and economic presence in areas that had previously been outside the realm of Soviet capabilities. To acquire naval and air bases that would provision the USSR's blue-water fleet; keep close tabs on and counteract US forces operating in strategically important areas; protect clients threatened by their pro-Western rivals; and enable Moscow to project military power more expeditiously into politically promising situations - became most acute issues for Moscow in the 1960s.<sup>149</sup>

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<sup>147</sup> Ibid. 267-268

<sup>148</sup> ČUBĪN, SĀHRĀM., ZABIH, SEPEHR., SEABURY, PAUL., 1974. *The foreign relations of Iran : a developing state in a zone of Great Power conflict*. Berkeley [etc.]; London: University of California Press. 269

<sup>149</sup> RUBINSTEIN, A.Z., 1981. *Soviet foreign policy since World War II : imperial and global*. Cambridge, Mass.: Winthrop Publishers. 221

Another example, which deals however with countries that are out of scope of our research but brings added value to our 'military facilities' argument, is the Soviet policy towards the Pakistani-Indian confrontation. During the undeclared war that erupted between India and Pakistan in September 1965, Moscow was instrumental in persuading the two disputants to cease hostilities and sign the Tashkent Declaration in January 1966. This was possible due to Soviet presence in the Indian Ocean. The Soviet's longer-range goal in drawing closer to Pakistan and encouraging a gradual normalization of relations between India and Pakistan was to realize its dream of a land route that would link Soviet Central Asia to India via Afghanistan and the Khyber Pass. A more prominent Soviet role on the subcontinent would provide greater support for Soviet naval activities in the Indian Ocean and the Arabian Sea. Coincidentally, between June 1967 and June 1975, the land route to India partially offset the inconveniences and expenses incurred by the closure of the Suez Canal.<sup>150</sup> The Soviets needed the Canal to remain permanently open. Moscow repeatedly pressed New Delhi to grant Moscow the desired naval privileges at Visakhapatnam, a major port on India's southeastern coast. Brezhnev's settling for Mrs. Gandhi notwithstanding, the USSR did not obtain the privileged strategic footholds it coveted.<sup>151</sup> Same approach was made by Moscow towards Iraq after the Soviet-Egyptian rift in 1972, resulting in Moscow-Baghdad Friendship treaty. Admiral Gorshkov visited Baghdad shortly. The Soviets were after Iraqi facilities in the Persian Gulf.<sup>152</sup> These Moscow's maneuvers were aimed at showing presence in the Indian Ocean, a long-sought goal for which an essential part of Soviet foreign policy in the Mediterranean was performed.

Iran always played significant role in Moscow's overall strategy to keep Persian Gulf, the Arabian Sea, and the Indian Ocean under its control due to Soviet "soft underbelly's" vulnerability from these bodies of water. Hence, stationing basin rights in Iran or near Iran were always considered as prime end. Only India, Pakistan and Iran

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<sup>150</sup> RUBINSTEIN, A.Z., 1981. *Soviet foreign policy since World War II : imperial and global*. Cambridge, Mass.: Winthrop Publishers. 222

<sup>151</sup> Ibid. 223

<sup>152</sup> GOLAN, G., 1990. *Soviet policies in the Middle East : from World War Two to Gorbachev*. Cambridge [England]; New York: Cambridge University Press. 181

consist the pull of states that can enable basin rights for Moscow. We consider that later courting of Iraq and participation in Yemeni civil war also stemmed from this strategic goal - to acquire naval facilities to secure Moscow's southern flank.

To our account, the rapprochement with Iran in late 1970s' - early 1980s' was also seen by Moscow from the military facilities perspective. Until the early 1970s, the Soviet Union lacked the capability to project military power in a decisive fashion outside the Eurasian landmass, a shortcoming that hampered the conduct of the 'forward deployment' policy in the Third World. The development of a long-range air transport capabilities, the construction of an ocean fleet and a large versatile merchant navy have changed this situation.<sup>153</sup>

There is little evidence that in pursuing the policy of attaining military facilities, Soviet leaders were concerned about the growing financial and military costs of involvement in the Middle East, or that the Kremlin made any agonizing reappraisals over any damage that may have been done to the US-Soviet détente by its local interventions. However, while Moscow demonstrated an impressive military capability and a willingness to project its power on behalf of its prospective clients, it depended for its efficiency upon landing and docking facilities from regional governments whose immediate aims were congruent with its own.<sup>154</sup> Eventually, it led to a situation where one thing led to the other. In order to protect its client-states, Moscow needed stationing rights, however, in order to obtain the latter, Moscow was compelled to commit itself to the former. This on its turn, required significant diplomatic overtures and extensive concessions from the Soviet ruling elite.

For instance, the earlier concluded friendship treaty with Iraq had negative implications for the Soviet-Iranian relations. Admiral Gorshkov's visit to Baghdad resulted in Shah's discontent who proposed the creation of a Gulf security pact benefiting the

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<sup>153</sup> RUBINSTEIN, A.Z., 1981. *Soviet foreign policy since World War II : imperial and global*. Cambridge, Mass.: Winthrop Publishers. 176

<sup>154</sup> Ibid. 234-235

West, at the expense of the Soviets.<sup>155</sup> In March 1974, Soviet Defense Minister Marshal Grechko was already in Iran attempting to come to terms with the Shah.<sup>156</sup>

In addition, it is argued that from Soviet perspective a compliant Iran could be used defensively to block a distant but emerging in the 1980s and the 1990s threat from Chinese sea-launched missiles by denying their launch vessels access to the Arabian Sea. Less narrowly defined, Soviet interests extended to get access to Iranian airspace in contingencies requiring a rapid military response. The time and distance saved by such access for airlifts to Africa and by the possible use of Iranian facilities would enhance Soviet influence and capability to intervene in a variety of theaters more operatively.<sup>157</sup>

Another argument in favor of the military facilities' thesis states that by gaining basing and overflight rights in the Gulf, Soviets gained ability to play key role in any conflict that erupts across the region. It is unlikely that the Soviet Union would be neither interested in a regional war nor assisting in bringing one, as was explicitly demonstrated in Iraq-Iranian quarrel. However, this is not to deny Soviet capability of interposing itself between two warring adversaries in the Gulf or signaling a "hands off" warning by making in-time port calls as a likely development. Thus, the naval port facilities and naval capabilities remained Moscow's political essentiality.<sup>158</sup> The Soviets exploited local conflicts for its own strategic ends to attain military presence. During Iran-Iraqi war Moscow placed its warships in the Gulf, under the pretext of protecting Soviet shipping, and responded positively to Kuwaiti's request in 1987 for Soviet protection by rechartering three Kuwaiti tankers under Soviet flag. By these moves, Soviets achieved their legitimacy of presence in the Gulf.<sup>159</sup>

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<sup>155</sup> GOLAN, G., 1990. *Soviet policies in the Middle East : from World War Two to Gorbachev*. Cambridge [England]; New York: Cambridge University Press. 181

<sup>156</sup> ALEXANDER, A.J., 1978. *Decision-making in Soviet weapons procurement*. International Institute for Strategic Studies. 5

<sup>157</sup> CHUBIN, S., 1980. *Soviet policy towards Iran and the Gulf*. London: International Institute for Strategic Studies. 3-4

<sup>158</sup> ČUBIN, SĀHRĀM., ZABIH, SEPEHR., SEABURY, PAUL., 1974. *The foreign relations of Iran : a developing state in a zone of Great Power conflict*. Berkeley [etc.]; London: University of California Press. 270

<sup>159</sup> GOLAN, GALIA., ROYAL INSTITUTE OF INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS., 1992. *Moscow and the Middle East : new thinking on regional conflict*. London: Pinter. 48

## *The case of Syria*

The need for military basing in the Mediterranean became more essential for the Soviets with the development and deployment of the US Polaris and Poseidon submarine fleet which introduced submarine-based nuclear capabilities. In the 1960s, the Soviet Union faced two maritime theaters: the Mediterranean and the Indian Ocean, whereas the route to the latter was through the former. Indian Ocean in particular was gradually becoming of paramount interest in terms of Soviet security due to the US Navy capabilities to target Soviet industrial centers from it by placing strategic weapons on sea-borne launching sites. The Suez Canal in this perspective became of supreme concern for Moscow. It was these necessities that transformed the Soviet interest in the Middle East states, especially Egypt, into primarily military-strategic ones. Egypt was the focal point of this venture, mainly because of the relative stability of its regime but also because of its geopolitical position in the region. Prior to the June 1967 War, the Soviets sought port facilities in Egypt and by the late 1960s' had undertaken the development not only of these facilities but of some six air bases as well. With the expulsion of the Soviet military advisers from Egypt in 1972, and the subsequent deterioration of Soviet-Egyptian relations, Moscow sought a strategic alternative in Syria, concentrating its efforts on gaining access to its naval ports and air-bases.<sup>160</sup>

Moscow's accounts for Syrian shores appeared long before the Soviet expulsion from Egypt. The first Soviet naval visit to Syria was made in September 1957 to Syrian port of Latakia.<sup>161</sup> The US Navy report indicates that the Soviets were aware of the possibility of losing their naval base in Albania and already then, towards the 1960s, were looking for an alternative naval facility, and in particular in Syria and Egypt.<sup>162</sup>

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<sup>160</sup> GOLAN, G., 1990. *Soviet policies in the Middle East : from World War Two to Gorbachev*. Cambridge [England]; New York: Cambridge University Press. 12-13

<sup>161</sup> DRAGNICH, S.G., 1974. *The Soviet Union's Quest for Access to Naval Facilities in Egypt Prior to the June War of 1967*. AD 786 318. Arlington, Virginia: Center of Naval Analyses. United States Navy. 10

<sup>162</sup> *Ibid.* 18

February of 1966 is described as a qualitative leap in Soviet-Syrian relations following the rise to power of the left-wing faction of the Ba'ath Party, which swiftly moved towards the Soviet Union. In the military field, the scope of Syria's defeat in June 1967 considerably enhanced the importance of Soviet military aid for the survival of the Ba'ath regime.<sup>163</sup>

The military sphere has been the most important in Soviet-Syria relations. It is here that the Soviets have made their heaviest investments and have reaped the most tangible gains, namely naval facilities in Syrian ports. In order to achieve this goal of stationing rights, Moscow relied on two parallel courses of action: supply of arms and advisers, and military intervention by regular Soviet combat units on behalf of its client.<sup>164</sup>

A variety of analysts reiterate that Syria became the alternative to Egypt for Moscow. With the rise of Sadat in Egypt, the deterioration on Soviet-Egyptian relations, and the expulsion of the Soviet advisers from Egypt, the Soviet-Syrian relationship assumed a much greater importance for Moscow.<sup>165</sup> The Soviets ostentatiously increased support for Syria in order to preserve their presence in the region.<sup>166</sup> Soviet relations with Syria had in no way been damaged by the expulsion from Egypt and in the fall of 1972, the USSR was granted bases in Syria for reconnaissance operations against US Sixth Fleet. These had virtually replaced the bases it had earlier lost in Egypt.<sup>167</sup>

Other observers confirm that the Soviets saw Syria as a sort of "second line of defense" should Egypt become unreliable.<sup>168</sup> Assad's Syria has been *the* Middle Eastern ally (italic original) for the Soviet Union since the mid-1970s, offering Moscow an important, if limited, military foothold.<sup>169</sup> Simultaneously with Soviet attempts to obtain

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<sup>163</sup> KARSH, E., 2014. *The Soviet Union and Syria the Asad years*. London; New York: Routledge. 4

<sup>164</sup> Ibid. 98

<sup>165</sup> GOLAN, G., 1990. *Soviet policies in the Middle East : from World War Two to Gorbachev*. Cambridge [England]; New York: Cambridge University Press. 146

<sup>166</sup> Ibid. 80

<sup>167</sup> SPECHLER, D.R., 1986. The USSR and Third-World Conflicts: Domestic Debate and Soviet Policy in the Middle East, 1967–1973. *World Politics*, **38**(3), pp. 435-461. 444

<sup>168</sup> HAYKAL, M.H., 1978. *The Sphinx and the Commissar: The Rise and Fall of Soviet Influence in the Middle East*. HarperCollins Publishers. P. 86

<sup>169</sup> KARSH, E., 2014. *The Soviet Union and Syria the Asad years*. London; New York: Routledge. 97



military and naval rights and bases in Iraqi port Umm Kasr,<sup>170</sup> the Soviets undertook a widening of the Syrian ports, building airfields and facilities, and increasing the number of advisers in the country. Deliveries resulting from new, large-scale arms deals, signed in July of 1972, began to arrive to Damascus in the autumn of 1972 as Moscow strove to prove that its relations with the Arab world were closer than ever despite the loss of Egypt.<sup>171</sup> In this respect, Syria represented a twofold strategic political target for Moscow: regaining its geopolitical stand and reputation and compensating the loss of its strategic presence in the region.

Since 1955, the Soviets have provided \$2.5 billion of military assistance to Syria, whereas almost 90 percent of this amount were supplied after the June 1967 war. Following the expulsion of Soviet advisers from Egypt Damascus became the focus of the Soviet military program in the Middle East.<sup>172</sup> Moscow repeatedly called for Arab unity against Israel and the West, promoting by this Moscow's wish to assist its Arab allies in return for military air and naval footholds which would enable the USSR to further expand its influence in the region and globally.<sup>173</sup> Moscow pressed Syria to permit free access to Tartus and Latakia. The Soviets were seeking to establish full control of the Syrian shore-based naval facilities.<sup>174</sup>

As part of Moscow's policy to maintain its stationing rights in Syria, the Soviets backed the Syrian assault on Lebanon in 1976 by stationing its naval vessels in proximity to Lebanese coasts as a sign of support of Syrian intervention. Later however, it began to distance itself from the Syrian operation, bogged down by the rising casualties of the invader's forces. Further, Moscow even began to criticize Syria's initiative. Some wondered for the reasons for these sudden changes in approach. Syrian Minister of Information, Ahmad Iskandar, argued that 'the loss of naval facilities in Egypt, namely the

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<sup>170</sup> GOLAN, G., 1990. *Soviet policies in the Middle East : from World War Two to Gorbachev*. Cambridge [England]; New York: Cambridge University Press. 157

<sup>171</sup> Ibid. 146

<sup>172</sup> CIA. DIRECTORATE OF INTELLIGENCE, 1976. *Relations between Syria and the USSR*. 0507/76. CIA Central Intelligence Agency.

<sup>173</sup> SAS, S.N., 1990. *Gorbachev's New International Outlook and the Eastern Mediterranean*, . 12

<sup>174</sup> CIA. DIRECTORATE OF INTELLIGENCE, 1976. *Relations between Syria and the USSR*. 0507/76. CIA Central Intelligence Agency.

Alexandria and Mersa Matruh ports, are the main reason for such Soviet behavior. They needed bases in the Mediterranean and they needed them desperately. This was their request from Syria, but it was categorically refused. Thus, the Soviets adopted a policy of attempting to achieve a naval stand through the Palestinians who were controlling some parts of the Lebanese shores.” To others however this view seems hardly plausible since the USSR would not rely on a non-state actor with doubtful control of the shores. Syria eventually agreed to give the Soviet Mediterranean naval squadron access to offshore facilities in the port of Tartus in May 1976.<sup>175</sup>

Western sources agree with the first proposition, pointing to Syrian resistance to Soviet attempts to obtain greater use of Syrian port facilities. Other reasons are: Assad’s crackdown on the Syrian Communist Party; friction between Soviet advisers and the Syrian military; Syria’s increasing inclination to look to Western rather than Soviet sources for goods and technology; and Damascus’ increasingly serious quarrel with the Iraqi government, which was also backed by the Soviets.<sup>176</sup>

All in all, it became apparent that in order to keep their [limited] access to Syrian ports, the Soviets went to great lengths. Moscow tolerated the Syrian offensive on Lebanon, amid some Soviet sluggish criticism which had no impact on Assad. Moscow tolerated the crush of leftist-Palestinian defenses by the Syrian forces, leaving the Beirut flanks open and they accepted Assad’s participation in reconciliation summit under Saudi auspices, which Moscow considered US-led, with the risk losing Syria to the Western camp. And eventually Moscow recognized the legitimacy of Syrian role in Lebanon acquiescing with the decisions made in Riyadh and later confirmed by the Cairo summit conference. And when Moscow tried to hold on to its last means of leverage over Syria, by keeping the arms embargo valid, Damascus threatened to withhold stationing rights from Moscow.<sup>177</sup> In January 1977, Syria in fact asked the Soviet Union to remove its

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<sup>175</sup> KARSH, E., 2014. *The Soviet Union and Syria the Asad years*. London; New York: Routledge. 33-34

<sup>176</sup> CIA. DIRECTORATE OF INTELLIGENCE, 1976. *Relations between Syria and the USSR*. 0507/76. CIA Central Intelligence Agency.

<sup>177</sup> KARSH, E., 2014. *The Soviet Union and Syria the Asad years*. London; New York: Routledge. 39

submarines and supporting crafts from Tartus.<sup>178</sup> Following Syria's threat to cancel the limited port services rendered to the Soviets in Tartus, the embargo was lifted as well.<sup>179</sup> After Egypt deserted to the West, Syria became the only, if not the 'last' hope for Moscow to have ground, air and naval presence in the Mediterranean. Syrian proximity to the USSR and warm-water ports enabled the Soviets their strongest foothold in the Middle East,<sup>180</sup> causing the policy of acquiescence towards Syria.

In the 1980s, analysts predicted that for the Soviet Union, the naval power projection across its near and middle-range radius will continue to present the greatest task and importance. The seas, peripheral to the Soviet borders, will remain of great importance to it. The USSR will still need to support, re-provision, re-arm and maintain its forces in the Mediterranean, and due to the major geographical constraints, especially in the Eastern Mediterranean, Moscow will seek to establish Mediterranean facilities and basing rights. Soviet Union will try to obtain access to ports and airfields in Third World countries to create an improved support system for its distant operations. The Soviets might become even bolder in their demand for stationing rights. This boldness may manifest itself in increased pressure on adjacent nations to allow the transit or [and] overflight rights for its aircraft. Further, it may make use of its [former] allies to support its other clients in local conflicts.<sup>181</sup> Analysis of post-Soviet Russian conduct makes this prediction plausible.

Other accounts contend that having obtained access to port facilities in Syrian Tartus in 1976, the Soviets never sought to expand their naval presence beyond the minimum supportive requirements for their Mediterranean squadron. This assessment is based on the fact that the Soviet air-defense crews that appeared in Syria during the October War of 1973 and during the 1982 Lebanon war, were withdrawn after the batteries were handed over to the Syrians.<sup>182</sup> Israeli accounts however express different

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<sup>178</sup> RAMET, P., 1986. *Soviet Policy Toward Syria, 1976-1986: Factionalism and the Limits of Influence*. Kennan Institute for Advanced Russian Studies. 8-10

<sup>179</sup> KARSH, E., 2014. *The Soviet Union and Syria the Asad years*. London; New York: Routledge. 39

<sup>180</sup> SAS, S.N., 1990. *Gorbachev's New International Outlook and the Eastern Mediterranean*, . 33

<sup>181</sup> MARSHALL, A., 1979. Sources of Soviet power: The military potential in the 1980s. *Adelphi Papers*, 19(152), pp. 11-17. 15-16

<sup>182</sup> KARSH, E., 2014. *The Soviet Union and Syria the Asad years*. London; New York: Routledge. 98

view. They argue that the aircraft carrier *Novosibirsk's* visit to Tartus port in June 1983 was Moscow's signal of its interest in keeping its relationship with Syria intact,<sup>183</sup> amid Syria's tension with Israel. Kremlin's interest in keeping its relationship with Syria tight, came to outweigh the fears of regional escalation.<sup>184</sup> From 1978, the Soviet Bloc had more military personnel in Syria than in any other single developing country. In fact, the Syrian contingent accounted for almost 20 percent of the total Soviet and East European deployment in Third World. By mid-1984, there were 13,000 advisers in Syria from the Socialist Bloc, of whom at least 7,000 were Russians.<sup>185</sup>

Gorbachev received the reins of the Soviet state when Syria owed the Soviet Union \$15 billion for arms purchases with no prospect of repayment. Nevertheless, Gorbachev's support for Assad continued mainly for the same reasons that attracted Moscow to him in the past – military facilities. During first Gorbachev years, Soviet naval port visits to Syria and their duration were on the rise.<sup>186</sup> Moscow continued with the previous patterns of behavior, namely to exchange arms supplies for overflight and landing rights, port facilities, bases, and prepositioning of equipment, in Syria.<sup>187</sup> Despite the differences over the arms supplies, the Soviets continued the deliveries, meeting most of Damascus's requests. There were strong forces in Moscow that wished to see the maintenance of Soviet military interests in the region.<sup>188</sup>

Notwithstanding Gorbachev's statements of 'new policy in the Middle East', in August 1988 US intelligence revealed that the Soviets had greatly expanded the Syrian port of Tartus for serving the Soviet Mediterranean fleet. Similar improvements were made in Syrian port of Latakia. These actions in themselves appeared to be a deviation

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<sup>183</sup> Ibid. 78

<sup>184</sup> Ibid. 72-73

<sup>185</sup> RAMET, P., 1986. *Soviet Policy Toward Syria, 1976-1986: Factionalism and the Limits of Influence*. Kennan Institute for Advanced Russian Studies. 3

<sup>186</sup> BARRY, DONALD D., RIEBER, ALFRED J., RUBINSTEIN, ALVIN Z., 1991. *Perestroika at the crossroads*. Armonk, N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe. 320-321

<sup>187</sup> Ibid. 321

<sup>188</sup> GOLAN, GALIA., ROYAL INSTITUTE OF INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS., 1992. *Moscow and the Middle East : new thinking on regional conflict*. London: Pinter. 31

from the general 'pull-back from power projection' characteristics of Soviet policy since the early 1980s as part of Gorbachev's New Thinking agenda.<sup>189</sup>

Soviet advocates of New Thinking indeed complained that Soviet policy towards regional conflicts was very slow to change. Moscow continued to protect its access to key naval and military points and has continued to pour, although steadily decreasing, resources into selected Third World countries. As some contend, the character of Soviet responses to different strategic situations did not change radically across the 1970s and the 1980s. Moreover, it is argued that in important ways Soviet regional leverage in 1990 was greater than it had been in the 1980s.<sup>190</sup>

### **Military facilities as a source of contemporary Russia's foreign policy conduct**

#### *Analyzed through the Egyptian case*

Contemporary Russia continually exports arms to the Middle East to secure its military basing rights.<sup>191</sup> In addition to strengthening overall defense relations with its allies and partners, Russia exports arms in order to secure basing rights for its navy. In support of its regional interests, Russia is pursuing access to ports and creation of military bases, particularly air and naval facilities, in key regions. According to Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu, Russia seeks a global power projection capability, and in particular, Russia seeks to develop the ability to effectively project its naval forces beyond its regional waters. The goal is to increase Russian Navy's regular areas of operation and presence. Moscow also pursues the aforementioned locations because they would give Russia's strategic bomber force the ability hypothetically to strike across a large percentage of the globe.<sup>192</sup>

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<sup>189</sup> GOLAN, G., 1990. *Soviet policies in the Middle East : from World War Two to Gorbachev*. Cambridge [England]; New York: Cambridge University Press. 279-280

<sup>190</sup> HERRMANN, R.K., 1992. Soviet behavior in regional conflicts: Old questions, new strategies, and important lessons. *World Politics*, 44(3), pp. 432-465. 461

<sup>191</sup> BLANK, S. and LEVITZKY, E., 2015. Geostrategic aims of the Russian arms trade in East Asia and the Middle East. *Defence studies*, 15(1), pp. 63-80. 64

<sup>192</sup> *Ibid.* 75-76

Analysts acknowledge, that contemporary Russia is attempting to return its basing rights in Egypt's ports at least to the extent it has enjoined during Soviet times. In June 2015 Russia held its first joint naval exercises with Egypt, the "Bridge of Friendship-2015". Considering the amount and classification of the navy ships participated in the drills from both sides, it seems as these exercises had more substantial meaning for the Russians, rather than for the Egyptians.<sup>193</sup>

### *The case of Iran*

In June 1992, Moscow negotiated a bilateral pact with Turkmenistan, providing for its troops to be stationed on the Turkmen-Iranian border, and it concluded a Collective Security Treaty in May 1992 with the other states of the region bordering with Iran. Further, the Collective Defense Pact, negotiated in 1995 with seven of the twelve CIS states, which included the right to intervene (for Russia into these states), if it believed its security to be threatened, was the outcome of security considerations in Kremlin regarding potential threat from the Iranian direction. Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan, which have long-standing reservations about joining CIS-wide agreements, refused to join the Pact, but Moscow kept border troops in Turkmenistan under the bilateral agreement. Azerbaijan, although being a party of the May 1995 pact and signed a bilateral agreement with Russia in May 17, 1996 on cooperation regarding border issues, as well as signing a Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation with Russia on 3 July 1997, still refused to have Russian troops on its territory bordering with Iran.<sup>194</sup> These observations indicate that Russia seeks to have military bases and stationing rights on Iranian borders, against threats stemming from Iran.

Further, we found more confirmation for this assumption. Some observe that Russia is well aware of the need to straighten its Central Asian frontiers, especially on the Iranian direction. It is argued that what we have seen is careful and consistent effort to

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<sup>193</sup> AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE, 2015-last update, **Russian and Egypt hold first ever joint naval drills.** . Available: <http://bit.ly/38pKs0Q> [May/21, 2016].

<sup>194</sup> GOLAN, GALIA.,RUSSIA AND EURASIA PROGRAMME (ROYAL INSTITUTE OF INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS), 1998. *Russia and Iran : a strategic partnership?* London: The Royal Institute of International Affairs. 9

rebuild Russian military capability and its capacity for projecting effective power throughout the CIS, and most notably Central Asia. Russia has been selling to Central Asian states its weapons at subsidized prices, providing training, buying up former Soviet defense industrial facilities on their territories in exchange for past debts, building up its military bases in Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and potentially Uzbekistan (airbase Navo'i is permitted for Russian air force emergency usage - original), building an expanded Caspian naval flotilla, augmenting military capabilities for rapid power projection into Central Asia, constructing integrated military alliances with Central Asia states through the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) and Caspian Naval Force (CASFOR), and consistently promoting the idea that the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) should become a military alliance. Russia conducted naval exercises with Kazakhstan and other states shored with the Caspian in August 2005. This Russian force development and base seeking campaigns aim to provide its forces in Central Asia with integrated ground, air, and naval capabilities. The recent Russian moves to gain new bases in Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan clearly aims at providing secure lodgments for its defense forces.<sup>195</sup>

This performance notwithstanding, a 'friendly' gestures in terms of military facilities are made by Moscow towards Iran as well. Iran hosted Russian naval task force that was making a "goodwill" call in the Straits of Hormuz, through which passes a quarter of the world's oil. Analysts opine that in case Russia and Iran together gain an upper hand in Syria, they could secure "a contiguous presence from the Mediterranean to the Persian Gulf."<sup>196</sup> During its military campaign in Syria, Russia managed to receive stationing rights at some air base facilities in Iran, although this cooperation was short-lived.<sup>197</sup> In August 2016 Iran placed its airbase in Hamadan at the disposal of the Russian Air Force.<sup>198</sup> After

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<sup>195</sup> BLANK, STEPHEN J., STANY ZJEDNOCZONE., CONSUMER PRODUCT SAFETY COMMISSION., ARMY WAR COLLEGE., STRATEGIC STUDIES INSTITUTE., 2015. *Perspectives on Russian foreign policy*. Lavergne; Carlisle Barracks: CPSC] ; Strategic Studies Institute. 43-44

<sup>196</sup> SCHOEN, DOUGLAS E., KAYLAN, MELIK., 2014. *The Russia-China axis : the new cold war and America's crisis of leadership*. 46-47

<sup>197</sup> FAGHIHI, R., 2016. *Iranian hard-liner hints Ahmadinejad not completely out of the game*. AI-Monitor.

<sup>198</sup> ANTONYAN, T.M., 2017. Russia and Iran in the Syrian Crisis: Similar Aspirations, Different Approaches. *Israel Journal of Foreign Affairs*, 11(3), pp. 337-348.343

it became known publicly, Iranian regime refused Moscow to use its airfields.<sup>199</sup> Israeli analysts argue that stationing Russian war planes on Iranian soil is of significant strategic importance for Moscow.<sup>200</sup> Others opined that unlike in Syria, Russia have scarce opportunities for maneuvering in Iran in terms of military basing rights or air facilities.<sup>201</sup>

### *The Syrian case from military facilities perspective*

If we take into account an argument that what the USSR and later Russia are seeking is to prevent external powers' intervention in the Middle East, along with the preservation of a benevolent local environment, and in particular, to have a substantial level of controlling the Bosphorus and Dardanelles straits, in order to provide an outlet for its Black Sea fleet for its global activities as well as to possess ability to block the passage for foreign warships into the Black Sea,<sup>202</sup> we might assume that Syrian Mediterranean shores are the key to this solution.

An Israeli Professor Mordehai Kedar is confident that one of the more essential Moscow's goals in Syria in the 2000s' is the naval military facilities in the Mediterranean. According to Professor Kedar, if Russia wants to retain its global superpower status, it cannot afford itself being deprived of warm water ports for its strategic navy.<sup>203</sup> Others contend that one of the critical reasons for Russia's military-technical support of Syria is maintaining access to their base in Tartus. The base is a refueling station for Russian navy ships and provides the Russian navy with the ability to operate effectively and maintain a regular presence in the Eastern Mediterranean. Furthermore, it gives Russia a greater ability to project its naval forces into the immensely important Gulf of Aden in case of necessity. The necessity of maintaining this ability has been one of the reasons, along with maintaining influence in Syria and the region, for which Russia and the Soviet Union sold weapons and military equipment to Syria for decades. As such, Russia sells

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<sup>199</sup> KOZHANOV, N., 2016. *Russia's Foothold in Iran: Why Tehran Changed its Mind*. Carnegie Moscow Center.

<sup>200</sup> KAM, E. and MAGEN, Z., 2016. Russia Stations Fighter Jets in Iran for Use in Syria. *INSS Insight*, **August 21**(847),.

<sup>201</sup> ANTONYAN, T.M., 2017. Russia and Iran in the Syrian Crisis: Similar Aspirations, Different Approaches. *Israel Journal of Foreign Affairs*, **11**(3), pp. 337-348.344

<sup>202</sup> KARSH, E., 2014. *The Soviet Union and Syria the Asad years*. London; New York: Routledge. 2

<sup>203</sup> From personal interview conducted by the author with Prof. Mordehai Kedar on 22.04.2019



weapons to Syria to be able to have basing rights in the region, as well as to support and enhance the influence that a military base in the region capable of providing.<sup>204</sup>

Sadat's rapprochement with Israel in past century left Syria as the main base for Soviet and later Russian military and intelligence operations in the region. And this would be jeopardized by the uprising against Assad's son and heir, Bashar, in 2011, which triggered Putin's direct military intervention in 2015.<sup>205</sup>

Others stress that Western analysts need to understand how the Russians see the situation in Syria. Syria is not only home to the Russian naval base in Tartus; the two countries have also agreed to return the former Soviet naval base in Latakia under Russian control. There are currently more than 600 Russian technicians working to upgrade these Soviet-era bases and military facilities in Syria.<sup>206</sup>

In general, Russia seeks to restore the naval capabilities of the Soviet Union.<sup>207</sup> And Russia's purchase of French navigation systems for its aircraft and ordering two new French-designed *Mistral*-class amphibious assault warships<sup>208</sup> only confirms this assessment. (the *Mistral* order was cancelled by France in 2014 following the events in Ukraine – added). Russia's intervention in Syria serves its regional objectives. Its preferred goal is such conflict resolution that will give it a foothold that would facilitate its long-term influence in the Middle East.<sup>209</sup> Power projection serves as one of the main drivers behind Russia's foreign policy towards Syria. Syria is of great importance to Russia as it hosts Moscow's only military base in the Middle East.<sup>210</sup>

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<sup>204</sup> BLANK, S. and LEVITZKY, E., 2015. Geostrategic aims of the Russian arms trade in East Asia and the Middle East. *Defence studies*, 15(1), pp. 63-80. 77

<sup>205</sup> GINOR, ISABELLA,,REMEZ, GIDEON,, 2017. *The Soviet-Israeli War, 1967-1973 : the USSR's military intervention in the Egyptian-Israeli conflict*. 359

<sup>206</sup> SCHOEN, DOUGLAS E.,KAYLAN, MELIK,, 2014. *The Russia-China axis : the new cold war and America's crisis of leadership*. 61

<sup>207</sup> Ibid. 108

<sup>208</sup> Ibid. 119, 130

<sup>209</sup> MAGEN, Z., DEKEL, U. and FAINBERG, S., 2016. How Deep are the Cracks in the Russian-Iranian Coalition in Syria? *INSS Insight*, January 3, 2016(783),.3

<sup>210</sup> ANTONYAN, T.M., 2017. Russia and Iran in the Syrian Crisis: Similar Aspirations, Different Approaches. *Israel Journal of Foreign Affairs*, 11(3), pp. 337-348.342

Other observers consent that there are compelling strategic reasons for Moscow to bolster Assad. Syria is Russia's most important foothold in the region, bordering the Mediterranean, Israel, Lebanon, Turkey, Jordan, and Iraq. Putin has made the expansion of Russia's sea power a pillar of his third presidential term, and Assad's fall would mean losing Russia's only military base outside the post-Soviet hemisphere - a naval resupply facility in Syria's port of Tartus. In September 2014, Putin announced plans for the massive expansion of Russia's Black Sea fleet. Keeping the base in Tartus will further project Russia's power into the Mediterranean,<sup>211</sup> and at the same time will reassure secure exit routes for its Black Sea fleet through the Turkish straits.

Syrian military facilities are a prime asset for Putin's Russia. No indication whatsoever is in sight that any of these facilities would be relinquished or withdrawn. When President Putin announced a partial withdrawal of Russian forces on March 14, 2016, claiming that "on the whole Russia achieved its goals in Syria," Russia's Tartus naval port and the Khmeimim airbase kept operating as usual, if not reinforced their activity.<sup>212</sup> Three days after Vladimir Putin announced the withdrawal of most of Russia's military contingent from Syria, ships that have kept Russian forces supplied, left the Russian Black Sea port of Novorossiysk for Russia's naval facility in Syrian Tartus.<sup>213</sup> In the two weeks since Putin's announcement, Moscow has in fact shipped more equipment and supplies to Syria than it has brought back during the same period.<sup>214</sup> The continuous supply for its and Syrian regime's forces indicates that Russia is anxious to maintain its military infrastructure in Syria.<sup>215</sup> Reuters' observers also showed that Russia is likely to have reinforced its naval force in the Mediterranean and appeared to have more war ships near the Syrian coast than at the time of Putin's declaration of the withdrawal.<sup>216</sup> From its base in Tartus Russia can continue to seek to project influence into the wider Middle East. Moscow's military deployments and procurement strategy indicates that it is committed

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<sup>211</sup> BORSHCHEVSKAYA, A., 2015. *Does Putin Have a Plan for Syria?* Washington DC: Washington Institute for Near East Policy.

<sup>212</sup> BORSHCHEVSKAYA, A., 2016. *Does Russia's Faux Withdrawal Mean a New Crisis Is Coming?* Washington DC: Washington Institute for Near East Policy.

<sup>213</sup> TSVETKOVA, M., 2016, Wed Mar 30, 2016. Exclusive: Russia, despite draw down, shipping more to Syria than removing. *Reuters*.

<sup>214</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>215</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>216</sup> *Ibid.*

to the region for the long-term.<sup>217</sup> Moscow has officially declared that Tartus to be of strategic importance and announced an ambitious plans to build a new submarine base in nearby coastal town Jableh.<sup>218</sup>

Russian analysts agree that the possibility of a loss of Russia's warm water port in Tartus, in case the regime in Damascus would fall, was definitely considered during the deliberations in Kremlin before the decision to intervene in Syria.<sup>219</sup> Apart from naval bases, it is stressed that the access to air force facilities in Syria is of significant achievement for Russia which cannot be underestimated.<sup>220</sup> By the end of 2015 Putin doubled his air fleet in Syria, bringing the number of combat aircrafts to 70. At the same time the number of navy ships increased to 10.<sup>221</sup>

The African continent is not principally different from the Middle East. As with Egypt in the Soviet past, contemporary Syrian foothold can be further used by Moscow to exercise and project its reach into the sub-Saharan Africa. Russia's importance as a supplier of armaments to these states means that it could exploit any political capital that might be gained from this activity including acquiring basing and stationing rights for its armed forces.<sup>222</sup>

It is underlined that Syria under Bashar al-Assad and his father in particular has been an important ally of Moscow for decades. Russia is therefore concerned that in the event of regime change and the possible rise of the Muslim Brotherhood in Syria, it would lose access to the port of Tartus, and the Syrian financial obligations to Russia would be annulled.<sup>223</sup> By positioning fighter and bomber aircraft, ground units and advanced air

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<sup>217</sup> MCHENRY, W. and WHITE, G., 2018. *How Russia plans to influence Syria's future*. National Interest.

<sup>218</sup> PIOTROWSKI, M.A., 2015. *Operation Alawistan: The Implications of Russia's Military Presence in Syria*. Poland: Polish Institute of International Affairs PISM.

<sup>219</sup> TRENIN, D., 2015. Putin's Syria Gambit aims at something bigger than Syria. *Carnegie Moscow Center*, October, 13.

<sup>220</sup> AMIDROR, Y., 2016. Tip of the Iceberg: Russian Use of Power in Syria. *BESA Center Perspectives, Paper*, (371),.

<sup>221</sup> MIGNEWS, 2016-last update, Obama prav: Rossia uv'azaet v Siriyskoy try'asine (Obama is right: Russia is bogged down in Syrian quagmire). Available: <http://bit.ly/2vulAVP> [3 February, 2016].

<sup>222</sup> CONNOLLY, R. and SENDSTAD, C., 2017. *Russia's Role as an Arms Exporter: The Strategic and Economic Importance of Arms Exports for Russia*. Chatham House. 21

<sup>223</sup> TICHÝ, L., 2014. Security and Foreign Policy of Dmitry Medvedev in the Period 2008–2012. *The Journal of Slavic Military Studies*, 27(4), pp. 533-552. 550

defense systems in Syria, Russia practices their use not just against the Syrian opposition forces but Western forces as well.<sup>224</sup>

*Assad's accessory to Alawite community confirms the military facilities hypothesis*

According to some Russian experts, one of Moscow's main strategical ends in its Syrian involvement is to keep the naval bases, and in order to achieve this, a friendly regime in Syria must be preserved and maintained.<sup>225</sup> Israeli experts reiterate that besides defending (saving) the regime of Bashar al-Assad, Russia made a strategic decision to intervene militarily in the civil war in Syria in order to preserve a naval foothold on the Mediterranean shores. Despite the Russian statements that its military involvement in Syria was aimed primarily at combating the Islamic State, most of Russia's attacks were designed to help the al-Assad regime gain control of essential territory in northern Syria - the Aleppo area, the Aleppo-Homs artery, and the passages to the coastal sector.<sup>226</sup> Further, as the hostilities developed and conflict resolution became more demanding, while Assad was controlling just a quarter of the country, Moscow could be trying to either shore him up or protect its longstanding alliance with the regime if the state collapses. There were speculations that if the government in Damascus crumples, its core, Alawite minority, would try to create a smaller state in its heartland along the coast.<sup>227</sup> Such supposition reinforces the argument that Moscow's assertiveness to save Assad and keep him in power stems from its interest in maintaining the Syrian coasts allied. Other confirmations of this supposition are found stating that all the Russian constructions and military buildups for its airfields, and military personnel were conducted in President al-Assad's heartland with Alawite population. According to American intelligence, Russia set up an air traffic control tower and housing for as many as 1,000 troops in Latakia. The

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<sup>224</sup> DW, 2016. *What does Russia want from its campaign in Syria?* Deutsche Welle (DW).

<sup>225</sup> ALEKSASHENKO, S., 2015. A three-sided disaster: The American, Russian, and Iranian strategic triangle in Syria. *Brookings*, .

<sup>226</sup> MAGEN, Z., DEKEL, U. and FAINBERG, S., 2016. How Deep are the Cracks in the Russian-Iranian Coalition in Syria? *INSS Insight*, **January 3, 2016**(783),.1

<sup>227</sup> MACFARQUHAR, N., 2015, Sept. 9, 2015. Russia Defends the Presence of Its Military Advisers in Syria. *The New York Times*.

reported build-up of military activity, centered in Latakia and Idlib, are provinces dominated by Alawite sect with highest support for Assad.<sup>228</sup>

Under the French mandate, which has run from 1920 until 1946, the Alawites were granted a semi-autonomous state for some 278,000 Alawite inhabitants in the West of Syria, embracing Tartus and Latakia.<sup>229</sup> When in the summer of 2015, the Syrian rebels began to advance to Assad's Alawite stronghold in the Latakia province, Russia decided to strengthen its besieged ally. The rebel forces were pressing up against a core regime territory in Latakia and the Russian military base stationed there. This is when Russia saw the need to bolster its contingent and reinforce its engagement in Syrian conflict.<sup>230</sup> Professor Kedar confirms our proposition that contemporary Russia's main interest is in Syria's shores, which are inhabited by the Alawite minority with the strongest link and support for Assad and where most of Russia's naval and air bases are located. Moscow is less interested in the depth of Syria, in its east, inhabited by the Kurds or the south which borders with Israel and inhabited by Hezbollah militants and their supporters.<sup>231</sup>

From this brief analysis it becomes clear that what Russia is after in Syria, is to safe its naval and air military bases, which are located exactly where Assad's Alawite stronghold is - the western Syrian coast-line, where Assad enjoys the most support from his Shia-sectarian Alawite population. Saving Assad, in Moscow's view, is saving its military bases, which means in general sense - presence in the Middle East. This assumption is confirmed by reports that during 2015, Russian firepower was mostly aimed at securing the larger, western part of the rumpling Syrian state that is [still] controlled by Assad, and in particular the air and naval bases near Latakia and Tartus. In addition, Russia's occasional forays were aimed into northern troubled spots like Aleppo, where Iranian and Hezbollah forces mostly concentrated in the lower part of this strip, which runs from the Lebanese border through Qalamoun, up to Damascus, and from there to

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<sup>228</sup> CRILLY, R., 2015, 05 Sep 2015. Russia 'is building military base in Syria'. *The Telegraph*.

<sup>229</sup> NOUEIHED, LIN.,WARREN, ALEX., 2013. *The battle for the Arab Spring revolution, counter-revolution and the making of a new era*. New Haven; London: Yale University Press. 214-215

<sup>230</sup> CUNNINGHAM, E., 2015, November 14, 2015. Russia's Syria intervention makes scant progress on the ground. *The Washington Post*.

<sup>231</sup> From personal interview conducted by the author with Prof. Mordehai Kedar on 22.04.2019

the port cities and coastal heartland of the Alawites - the Syrian Shiite sect loyal to President Assad.<sup>232</sup> It is apparent that what Russia is after is to maintain and protect its strategic footholds in Syria.

In addition to three air-defense batteries, which also comprise a military footholds, and one coastal missile defense stronghold, Russia has three air-force and one military base in Syria. All together compose eight Russian military installations – something that needs to be defended and preferably maintained. Russian naval facility in Tartus and Russian air-force base Khmeimim, on the outskirts of Latakia, are located in the Alawite-majority Syrian region of west Syria – Bashar al-Assad’s political and ethnic stronghold where he enjoys full support. The three air-defense and two coastal-defense Russian batteries are located in this very region as well. Two additional air-force bases are shared with Syrian forces and located slightly north of Syria – the Shayrat and the Tiyas bases.<sup>233</sup>

Israeli analysts confirm that the Russian and Iranian approach to the Syrian conflict resolution takes into account the idea that the war’s continuation will endanger their footholds in Syria, and that their interests would be preserved only by their connection with the Alawite entity. Among other things, it would be a way for Russia to keep intact its interest in the coastline and preserve the Tartus naval port.<sup>234</sup>

## **Discussion and conclusion**

Strategic foothold and military bases on foreign soil comprise one of the most essential features in any superpower’s foreign policy conduct. Neither the Soviet Union nor contemporary Russia are an exclusion of this rule. Military facilities and air and navy forces’ stationing rights in the Mediterranean compose one of the most acute issues in Soviet and contemporary Russian strategic thinking and decision-making. A handful of foreign policy sources of conduct towards our three case-studies origin from Soviet and

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<sup>232</sup> IBISH, H., 2015, Oct. 19, 2015. Putin’s Partition Plan for Syria. *The New York Times*.

<sup>233</sup> RONDELI FOUNDATION, *Russian military forces: interactive map*. Georgian Foundation for Strategic and International Studies. <https://www.gfsis.org/maps/russian-military-forces>

<sup>234</sup> SA'AR, G. and SIBONI, G., 2015. *The good, the bad and the ugly: Dividing the State of Syria*. Israel: National Security Studies INSS.

later Russia's pursuit after rights to station its forces in these countries. Seemingly, from the Soviet period to the contemporary Russian Federation, Moscow did not cease to seek new and maintain 'old' facilities and stationing rights in the Mediterranean.

We discuss in our study a long-lasting argument, which occupies a handful of scholars on Soviet foreign policy, that the June 1967 and the October 1973 wars were if not induced then at least instigated by the Soviet Union to achieve a solid and permanent military foothold in Egypt. After the loss of Egypt and the deterioration of relations with Iran, following the Iranian revolution and Moscow's invasion of Afghanistan, the Kremlin continued to court Damascus with the goal of maintaining its stationing rights. This policy continued even amid Perestroika and the New Thinking agendas. The deterioration of relations with Iran left its mark which has an impact on Russian foreign policy towards Tehran until this day. Seemingly, Moscow perceives Iran as both an opportunity and a threat, attempting to obtain stationing rights on Iranian territory, which it briefly attained during its maneuvers to save Assad, and at the same time courting its ex-Soviet republics, bordering with Iran, to obtain military strongholds close to Iranian borders. Egypt is also marked as a target of Moscow's foreign policy with the goal to acquire a permanent presence in the proximity of strategic sea routes and passes with the farsighted ambition to regain its previous Soviet privileges at the Egyptian shores.

As of 2014 Syria became the most explicit case in regard to our 'military facilities' proposition, demonstrating that Moscow's determination to keep Assad in power, in significant part stems from its goal to keep, and if able extend its military ground, naval and air presence in Syria. Assad's accessory to Alawite minority and apparent location of all Russian military facilities on the territory belonging to and controlled by Alawites, brings added value to this argument.

## **CHAPTER 5. THE FACTOR OF THE ISLAMIC RELIGION**

### **Islamic factor as source of Soviet and contemporary Russian foreign policy**

#### **Introduction**

The Islamic religion is one of the most essential variables when analyzing Soviet and post-Soviet Russian internal politics and its foreign policy. This factor is unjustly downgraded by many Soviet and Russian foreign policy studies. In this chapter we propose that the Islam became much more salient factor in contemporary post-Cold War Russia's foreign policy decision-making and strategic planning. As we demonstrate through our case-studies, the Islamic factor has a tremendous impact on contemporary Russia's foreign policy, much more than during the Soviet times. Because all three of our case-study states profess Islamic religion, we found this factor to comprise one of the sources of Russia's foreign policy conduct as opposed to Soviet Union, where this factor was largely disregarded on a decision-making level.

We begin with a general description of the impact of Islamic religion and its believers, composing significant part of the Soviet society in times of USSR. During different periods Moscow was attempting to utilize the Islamic factor in its foreign conduct, with different success and scale. Iran turned out to be the most significant case with the most substantial impact on Soviet internal as well as external conduct, due to it directly bordering with the Soviet state and its region-wide impact on the politization of Islam. Most vividly, Iran's significance appeared following the Iranian Islamic Revolution in Tehran and Soviet invasion of neighboring Afghanistan – two highly momentous events which occurred almost simultaneously.

The Soviet Union had the fifth largest Muslim population in the world. The vast number and consequential significance of Soviet Muslims in Moscow's foreign conduct was recognized already by the Bolsheviks. Extensive efforts were dedicated by the Soviet regime throughout its history to demonstrate the compatibility of Soviet Socialism and



Islam. The fast-growing Muslim population gradually became an issue for the Soviet regime. It was even surmised that by the 2000s', if the Soviet Union had not disintegrated, the Muslim population would have composed one third of the general Soviet population.

The Soviet Muslim factor was extensively utilized in Moscow's foreign policy goals with the Arab countries of the Middle East and Muslim states of the Persian Gulf. Utilization of Islam, however, appeared as a double-edged enterprise. It was perceived as either capable to contribute to Soviet efforts to advance in the Middle East and the Gulf, or to appear as a reactionary, counter-revolutionary, or even anti-Communist force. The main concern for the Soviet authorities was that Islam could provide an alternative to Marxism for the Soviet Muslims. In addition, Islamic religion, often in its fundamental expression, represented a political barrier for Soviet penetration of the Middle East and the Gulf states. Moscow sought to overcome this barrier by promoting its own version - a 'Soviet Islam'. Early Bolshevik ideologists actually planned to penetrate the neighboring Iran with the help of its own Soviet Muslim community.

Notwithstanding the political salience of Islam for the Soviet authorities, Islam was far from being tolerated. Similar to other religions, suppression of Islam was evident. A revival of the "authentic Islam" threatened the general Soviet Union's existence as a united and secular state. In this perspective, the bordering Iran was seen with growing caution, especially following the Iranian Islamic revolution, although the growing Islamic anti-Westernism was seen as beneficial.

Evgeniy Primakov had a considerable impact on dealing with the Muslim World in the Middle East which outlasted even the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Israeli scholar Mordehai Kedar confirms that Evgeniy Primakov was one of the most prominent advocates of the "Arab lobby" inside Kremlin's politics and for a long period led the Soviet foreign policy towards the Middle East.<sup>1</sup> His influence notwithstanding, different opinions appeared in Russia's post-Soviet politics.

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<sup>1</sup> From personal interview conducted by the author with Prof. Mordehai Kedar on 22.04.2019

At the eve of the collapse of the Soviet Union, Moscow had to put down ethnically motivated Muslim upheavals in Central Asia and the Caucasus. The Islamic revolution in Tehran and the remaining Soviet military contingent in Afghanistan contributed to these unrests and to growing concerns in Kremlin. The protection of the Soviet and later post-Soviet Russian borders against a disruptive penetration of Islamic fundamentalism became a burning issue. Iran was accused by Moscow of agitation among Soviet Muslim minorities and material support for demonstrations. Gradually the Islamic factor began to significantly impact Russia's domestic and foreign policies. The post-Cold War revival of fundamentalist currents of Islam in the Middle East posed threats for formerly Soviet-backed regimes such as Iraq and Syria, which were largely secular. A clear strategy had to be elaborated by Moscow on how to deal with this not completely new but growing in significance factor.

Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, contemporary Russia encountered the growing influence of Islamic religion more explicitly. Egypt turned out to be one of the sources of inspiration for Muslims living in proximity to Russia and inside Russia itself, mostly due to the Muslim Brotherhood and the training of Imams in Islamic schools there. Iran became the most considerable source of inspiration, as well as instigation, especially in post-Soviet Central Asia and in the Caucasus. Evidently, the impact of Iran became so explicit, that Moscow became compelled to adopt a policy of appeasement towards Iran amid Iran's nuclear aspirations, simultaneously with Russia's willingness to extend its relations with the West, particularly with United States and Israel.

For contemporary Russia, the radical fundamentalist Islam became an issue of its national security, something that was absent in Soviet times. In fact, it was the Islamic terrorism that had brought Vladimir Putin into office. Russia's whole post-Soviet integrity is viewed from the perspective of dealing with its domestic Islam and its external manifestations. Islam is seen by some in Kremlin as a threat for national integrity of contemporary Russia. Iran in this perspective became the main direction of Russia's foreign policy. Possessing significant leverage on a variety of conflicts in the post-Soviet periphery, in Afghanistan, and towards Russia's domestic Muslims, Iran represents

simultaneously a threat and an opportunity. Russia also seeks close cooperation with Egypt and Syria in order to achieve political support in coping with radical Islamic terrorism in its near abroad and at home. The Syrian civil war was in part utilized by Moscow with the intention to side itself with an influential Muslim bloc composed of Syria and Iran. Assisting Syria – a close Iranian ally, and supporting Iran itself, would discourage Iran from supporting any Islamic insurgence in the post-Soviet hemisphere. In addition, the Russian-Iranian partnership owes a lot to the fact that the majority of Soviet and now Russian Muslims, except for some Central Asian states, belong to the Shi'a Islam, whereas Iran is considered as a leader of the Shi'ite religion. Both oppose the Sunni.

Iranian Ayatollah's desire to export the Islamic Revolution and the post-Cold War revival of Islam, gradually made the Central Asian and Caucasian states ripe for Iranian religious and spiritual expansion and penetration - this adds to the complex of issues Moscow is compelled to consider when dealing with Iran. Tajik opposition, operating on Islamist grounds and supported by Iran became a significant challenge for Moscow when Russian troops clashed with its militants on the Tajik-Afghani border in the mid-1990s. Some opinions did not even exclude the possibility of an Iranian invasion of Central Asian and Caucasian territories in case these states become destabilized.

Egypt plays an essential role in the Islamic-Russian context. Being the homeland of the Muslim Brotherhood - a movement that is banned in Russia as a terrorist organization – Egypt's traces were revealed during Chechnyan insurgency in the 1990s. This made Egypt a Russian foreign policy target in dealing with radical fundamentalist Islamist insurrection.

Syria represents an exponential case, demonstrating in full scale the extent of contemporary Russia's problem with its homegrown Islamic threats due to the ISIS phenomenon that drew hundreds of Russian-born Muslims into its ranks. Syria became a focal point of contemporary's Russia's fighting against radical Islamism. When thousands of Russian and Soviet-born fighters went to fight Assad in Syria, the issue became even more significant. Russia fights decisively to retain Syria intact and to keep

Assad in power, provided that in case Syria falls, fundamental Islamism and Islamic terrorism would spread into the Caucasus, Central Asia and Russia itself. Simultaneously, while fighting Islamists in Syria, Russian President Vladimir Putin demonstrates convergence between Russia and Islam on the highest governmental level.

We demonstrate that notwithstanding Iranian aspiration to export the Islamic Revolution, its pursuit after nuclear weapons, its instigation of the Muslims in bordering CIS states, Russia's bitter experience with Islamic insurgence in Chechnya and ongoing multiple conflicts in Tajikistan, Azerbaijan and Armenia, to name a few, and a handful of Russian ISIS adherents who travel to participate in fighting against Assad's regime and encounter Russian forces in Syria, nonetheless, Russia treats Islam as a significant part of its own identity, its culture, history and heritage, and contributes to its spread and propagation.

### **The impact of the Islamic factor on foreign policy in Soviet Union**

When did the factor of the Islamic religion become recognized as a significant political dimension by the Soviet statesmen? We divide the factor of Islam from the Russian perspective into two layers: the first stems from its own Muslim population inside Russia itself; the second stems from the Middle East Muslim states and nations adjoining Russia.

Let us begin elaborating on the first layer. It is emphasized that Soviet Muslim population sooner or later will constitute a liability which either can be exploited by its Muslim neighbors in a variety of forms including damaging Russia's interests, or complicate Moscow's foreign policies addressed towards Muslim states.<sup>2</sup> Because the Soviet Union had the fifth largest Muslim population in the world, it played significant role in Soviet politics from the very inception of the construction of the new post-revolutionary Soviet state. Lenin and the Bolshevik's approach towards the Central Asian Muslims was

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<sup>2</sup> CHUBIN, S., 1980. *Soviet policy towards Iran and the Gulf*. London: International Institute for Strategic Studies. 39

a mixture of tolerance and oppression, however the Soviet state could not afford to fully alienate its Muslim population. If the Bolsheviks wanted to build stable relations with the neighboring Muslim countries, they had to come to terms with the Muslim population on its territories. The Soviet Muslim republics - Caucasus, Azerbaijan, and Kazakhstan - bordering with Iran, Afghanistan, and China, while USSR itself directly bordered with Turkey, Iran, and Afghanistan, made the Muslim factor more than just a domestic matter. This dimension was recognized both as a foreign policy issue and as means of conduct. Soviets extensively explored this factor in their foreign policy goals. Two main goals were targeted: to demonstrate to the Muslim World that the Soviet regime is compatible with Islam; and to cultivate and encourage the Muslims to rise against the West along with Moscow.<sup>3</sup> In large, Soviet regime's treatment of its Muslim population was characterized by vicissitudes throughout the Soviet history, as towards other minorities on its territory.<sup>4</sup>

The Soviet attitude towards its own Muslims was manipulative and instrumental. However, there is no solid evidence that Soviet Muslims had any direct or significant influence on Soviet policy making no matter how much they were used as emissaries or even channels for Soviet policies abroad.<sup>5</sup> Others however contend that Central Asian Soviet republics, especially those which had a direct border with Iran, beared a considerable influence on Soviet foreign policy towards the Middle East region.<sup>6</sup>

While early Bolsheviks used Soviet Muslims to encourage Middle East Islamic states to rise against their colonial oppressors, Stalin abandoned this policy. In post-Stalin era, Moscow revived the Islamic factor in its foreign policy performance by using it in demonstrating the success of development of Islamic minorities under the Soviet state system.<sup>7</sup> Other prominent scholars address the issue of the Soviet Islam from the demographic point of view, arguing that Moscow could not stay aloof from the Islamic

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<sup>3</sup> CHUBIN, S., 1980. *Soviet policy towards Iran and the Gulf*. London: International Institute for Strategic Studies. 37

<sup>4</sup> GOLAN, G., 1990. *Soviet policies in the Middle East : from World War Two to Gorbachev*. Cambridge [England]; New York: Cambridge University Press. 197

<sup>5</sup> Ibid. 199

<sup>6</sup> HALLIDAY, F., 1987. Gorbachev and the " Arab syndrome": Soviet policy in the Middle East. *World Policy Journal*, 4(3), pp. 415-442. 429

<sup>7</sup> GOLAN, G., 1990. *Soviet policies in the Middle East : from World War Two to Gorbachev*. Cambridge [England]; New York: Cambridge University Press. 198

factor suggesting that the Muslim population of the Soviet Union might come to amount up to 30 per cent of the whole Soviet population by the end of the 20-th century.<sup>8</sup>

Another opinion argues that the Soviets were viewing their Muslim population from both offensive as well as defensive viewpoint. According to the defensive argument, Moscow saw that its Muslim population, with its links with the Muslim states abroad, could be targeted by the West, namely the United State as domestic dimension to impact Soviet regime. The author argues that the Soviets saw the Baghdad Pact as an Islamic pact, among other things, aimed to influence Soviet Muslims, posing them against Moscow's regime.<sup>9</sup> Evgeni Primakov confirms this assumption by revealing in his memoirs that one of the aims of the Baghdad Pact, propped by the USA, was to exert influence on the Soviet Muslims, consequently with the goal to weaken the USSR from within, going as far as making out of the Soviet Muslims a “fifth column.”<sup>10</sup> Primakov describes that when a Egyptian military delegation headed by Ali Sabri went to the United States with the aim of concluding arms deals at the end of 1953, it caught the attention of the Egyptian delegates, that General George Olmsted, the head of Pentagon’s overseas military aid program, frankly accounted for the possibility of influencing the Muslims of the Soviet Union through a bloc or a union of Muslim states. The General was convinced that a Muslim Soviet “fifth column” had to be created.<sup>11</sup>

As we observe, the first layer of the Islamic factor was recognized not only by the various Russian regimes, but also by the Western decision-makers. The second layer – the Islamic states adjoining Russian borders, was most explicitly recognized and brought to the Kremlin’s attention by Soviet prominent Arabists. However, long before the issue was recognized by the Soviet decision-makers, Russia already faced the impact of the Islamic religion on its own statehood. Following casting off the Mongol yoke and further

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<sup>8</sup> EFRAT, MOSHE., BERCOVITCH, JACOB., 1991. *Superpowers and client states in the Middle East: the imbalance of influence*. London; New York: Routledge. 236

<sup>9</sup> HAYKAL, M.H., 1978. *The Sphinx and the Commissar: The Rise and Fall of Soviet Influence in the Middle East*. HarperCollins Publishers. P. 35

<sup>10</sup> PRIMAKOV, E.M., 2016. *Konfidentsial'no : Blizhnii Vostok na sŕsene i za kulisami*. 50

<sup>11</sup> PRIMAKOV, Y., 2009. *Russia and the Arabs: Behind the Scenes in the Middle East from the Cold War to the Present*. Basic Books. 21

Moscovite's territorial expansion, a Muslim population of the annexed khanates, numbering two-and-a-half million, came under the rule of the Russian Czars.<sup>12</sup> In 1854, Russian Czar Nicholas voiced that Russia is the 'holder of the frontiers of the Christendom' against its common enemy – Islam. Should Russia fail to keep the oriental Islamdom (referring to today's Central Asia and the Middle East) in line, Christendom will imminently clash with Islam.<sup>13</sup>

During the Cold War, the pan-Arabist idea, the proclaimed Arab secular nationalism, and the revolutionary Arab currents and ideas eventually failed in part under the pressure of the traditional Islamic forces.<sup>14</sup> This notwithstanding, Primakov was prominent advocate for closer rapprochement and cooperation between Moscow and the Muslim World.<sup>15</sup> In order to win the favor of Muslim leaders, the USSR presented itself as an unusually tolerant state, which respects religious freedom and "takes care of its own Muslims". As a proof for the undisturbed cooperation between Soviet Muslims and the Communist Party, representatives of the former were added to official delegations sent to Muslim countries in order to convince Muslim leaders of the commonality-of-interests linking the USSR and the Arab nations. Usually these were members of the muftiates that took part in diplomatic missions. The Muslim card was also substantially adopted by the Kremlin in dealing with a wide range of other non-Arabic countries, including China and Indonesia.<sup>16</sup>

Considerable efforts were aimed towards Iran. Central Asian Soviet republics were widely used by the Soviet regime to demonstrate Tehran the advances made and the development achieved by combining socialist system of state management and Muslim traditions.<sup>17</sup> Kazakhstan, for instance, was consistently shown to the Arab visitors and

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<sup>12</sup> CURANOVIĆ, A., 2014. *The religious factor in Russia's foreign policy*. London; New York: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group. 29

<sup>13</sup> BARRY, DONALD D., RIEBER, ALFRED J., RUBINSTEIN, ALVIN Z., 1991. *Perestroika at the crossroads*. Armonk, N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe. 356

<sup>14</sup> PRIMAKOV, Y., 2009. *Russia and the Arabs: Behind the Scenes in the Middle East from the Cold War to the Present*. Basic Books. 56

<sup>15</sup> PRIMAKOV, E.M., 2007. *Minnoe pole politiki*. Moskva: Molodaia gvardiia. 506-508, 512, 532

<sup>16</sup> CURANOVIĆ, A., 2014. *The religious factor in Russia's foreign policy*. London; New York: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group. 53-54

<sup>17</sup> GHOREICHI, AHMAD., 1965. *Soviet foreign policy in Iran 1917-1960*. 149

leaders as an example of an Islamic state, living and thriving under socialism.<sup>18</sup> Nasser, on his first visit to the USSR on April 28, 1958, was shown the Muslim Soviet republics, Uzbekistan (Tashkent) and Kazakhstan,<sup>19</sup> notwithstanding Moscow's concerns from the appeal that a unitary Arab nationalist state could exert on Soviet Muslims.<sup>20</sup> In addition, Moscow was also well aware that under the Islamic nationalistic, anti-imperialist, progressive and liberation slogans and movements, a clear counter-revolutionary, reactionary and anti-communist tendencies could sprout as well.<sup>21</sup>

This apprehension proved to be correct. Rapid modernization and the secular character of the communist system, which both acted as a solvent to Islamic traditional culture, gradually led to reassertions of Islam and appearance of its fundamentalistic currents which gradually became an alternative to Marxism. Such occurrence already posed a strategic threat to the USSR itself, since the Soviet lands, populated by the Muslim minorities, where of high strategic significance.<sup>22</sup> Additional concern for the Soviet regime, amid the significance of the southern Soviet territories, populated by the Muslim minorities and the competition between traditional Islam and Communism, was the growing salience of Islamic fundamentalism,<sup>23</sup> compelling Moscow to come to terms with this factor by practicing a policy of appeasement towards Muslim minorities, directly impacting Kremlin's foreign policy towards its Muslim neighbors in the Middle East. One estimate in the 1990s predicted that towards the year of 2000, the Russian Slavic population would become a minority and one third of the new recruits for the Soviet army forces would be Muslims.<sup>24</sup>

It is not straightforward clear however as to whether the convolutions of Soviet analyses of the nature of Islam during that time reflected concerns either over the potential

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<sup>18</sup> HAYKAL, M.H., 1978. *The Sphinx and the Commissar: The Rise and Fall of Soviet Influence in the Middle East*. HarperCollins Publishers. P. 17

<sup>19</sup> Ibid. 89

<sup>20</sup> RUBINSTEIN, A.Z., 1981. *Soviet foreign policy since World War II : imperial and global*. Cambridge, Mass.: Winthrop Publishers. 242

<sup>21</sup> ПРИМАКОВ, Е.М., 1985. *История одного сговора: ближневосточная политика США в 70-е--начале 80-х годов*. Изд-во полит. лит-ры. 250

<sup>22</sup> CHUBIN, S., 1980. *Soviet policy towards Iran and the Gulf*. London: International Institute for Strategic Studies. 1

<sup>23</sup> Ibid. 36

<sup>24</sup> Ibid. 37



influence of the Islamic revival on Soviet Muslims, or the perception of fundamentalist Islam as a direct threat to the Soviet Union itself. It is possible that Moscow was worried about the destabilizing effect of fundamentalist Islam on secular, progressive regimes in the Arab world. The Iraqi regime for instance was directly threatened by the Holy War declared by Khomeini against Saddam Hussein after the Iraqi invasion of Iran. The stirring up of Shi'ites in Syria compounded the domestic difficulties faced by Moscow's ally Hafez al-Assad. Moscow could not be sanguine about the spread of Islamic terrorism, particularly in Lebanon where it directly hit Soviets targets. Such designs clearly posed a threat to the secular, progressive regimes in Syria, Iraq and the PDRY, all supported by Moscow, as well as to Soviet direct interests in the region.<sup>25</sup>

Inside the USSR, although tolerance of Islam served their foreign policy aims, Soviet leaders could not allow this tolerance to be broadened in such a way as to undermine the basic ideology of the Soviet Union or to weaken the fabric of a multinational state. In general, a tension between Soviet Islamic clerics and the Soviet authorities remained. Since Islam does intrinsically provide a potential alternative to Marxism and since religion is the salient means of forming national identities, Islam, if revived, could have constituted a rallying point for the Central Asian peoples, the Uzbeks, Tatars, Kazakhs, Turkmen, and Tajiks to foster their national consciousness and could have thus contributed to the disintegration of the Soviet state.<sup>26</sup> This respective prediction was taken from writings of an Iranian scholar in 1980.

Indeed, this prediction most explicitly expressed itself towards the late-80s. Under Gorbachev, armed forces have been used a number of times to put down ethnically motivated revolts in Central Asia and Transcaucasian republics. Glaring examples are the massacre in Tbilisi, the capital of the Georgian SSR, in the early morning hours of 9 April 1989, and in Azerbaijan when Soviet internal security troops (MVD) and some KGB

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<sup>25</sup> GOLAN, G., 1990. *Soviet policies in the Middle East : from World War Two to Gorbachev*. Cambridge [England]; New York: Cambridge University Press. 205-207

<sup>26</sup> CHUBIN, S., 1980. *Soviet policy towards Iran and the Gulf*. London: International Institute for Strategic Studies. 37

squads violently acted to put down ethnical riots in Baku, the capital of Azerbaijan, on 20-25 January 1990.<sup>27</sup>

### *Iranian case analysis*

From the Iranian perspective, Soviet Muslims were seen by Moscow from both, defensive and offensive perspectives. From the defensive point of view, Iran could exercise influence on Soviet politics, on a variety of scales, through the Soviet Muslims bordering with Iran. From the offensive point of view, Moscow could utilize its local Muslims in its penetration efforts into Iran.<sup>28</sup> Appeals to use Soviet Muslim minorities in efforts to penetrate the Iranian politics were mostly sound in the early Bolshevik strategic concepts.<sup>29</sup>

Others point that Moscow's defensive measures towards Iran were aimed to keep its borders stable, its neighbor friendly and cooperative, and to have the capability to access nearby areas. However, simultaneously these defensive interests were interpreted by Moscow in offensive terms: stable borders meant demilitarized borders; friendly neighbors are compliant states; and access is synonymous with unrestricted rights.<sup>30</sup>

Iran was seen as a focal point in Soviet considerations in coming to terms with its own local, Soviet Muslim minorities. Since the times of Czarist Russia, Iran, 'scattered' along vast parts of Russia's southern borders, comprising various ethnic Muslim groups and minorities, composed what was termed as the 'Islamic belt' of the Russian Empire.<sup>31</sup> Soviet Muslim's susceptibility to developments in the rest of the Islamic world, mainly in neighboring Iran, and especially amid the Iranian Islamic revolution, made the co-

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<sup>27</sup> BARRY, DONALD D., RIEBER, ALFRED J., RUBINSTEIN, ALVIN Z., 1991. *Perestroika at the crossroads*. Armonk, N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe. 244

<sup>28</sup> GOLAN, G., 1998. *Russia and Iran: a strategic partnership?* London: The Royal Institute of International Affairs. 2

<sup>29</sup> GHOREICHI, AHMAD., 1965. *Soviet foreign policy in Iran 1917-1960*. 3

<sup>30</sup> CHUBIN, S., 1980. *Soviet policy towards Iran and the Gulf*. London: International Institute for Strategic Studies. 3

<sup>31</sup> GOLAN, G., 1990. *Soviet policies in the Middle East : from World War Two to Gorbachev*. Cambridge [England]; New York: Cambridge University Press. 176

existence of the Soviet rule and Soviet Muslims more uneasy.<sup>32</sup> Moscow even had to continue arming the Najibullah's regime in Kabul, after Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan, with the hope of reviving Soviet stand, following its war in Afghanistan, vis-à-vis Iran and its domestic Soviet Muslim community.<sup>33</sup> However, this notwithstanding, from the Iranian point of view, Moscow was cooperating with the West, mainly the United States, in confronting the 'political' Islam. The Iranian Ayatollahs saw the global confrontation in civilizational terms, between Christianity and Islam, and considered Moscow on the side of the former.<sup>34</sup> And such a view was not totally baseless. Many prominent scholars conclude that Moscow's attempts notwithstanding, fundamentalist Islam was usually incompatible with the Soviet Union's political conduct and strategic views, not to mention culture and social system. Soviet attempts to penetrate the lower Gulf countries met with considerable constraints stemming from the region's fundamentalist Islamic propensities and intrinsic traditionalism.<sup>35</sup> Others state bluntly that the Soviets never liked the Arabs. They perceived them as "savage" nation, lacking basic cultural attributes.<sup>36</sup>

Later Soviet's statements were even more explicitly anti-Islamic, as compared to the more equivocal formulations of the late Brezhnev period. At the 16-th Party Congress in 1981, Brezhnev argued that Islam was politically ambivalent – all depended, as he said, on the social character of the movement espousing it. Since then, the ideological formulations have exhibited even a harsher view. Some Soviet academics while writing on Iran, stressed the 'medieval' character of the Khomeini's regime, while Gorbachev himself, when speaking in Tashkent in November 1986, delivered a strong attack on Islam and stressed the need for greater antireligious education and propaganda among the Muslim youth.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> CHUBIN, S., 1980. *Soviet policy towards Iran and the Gulf*. London: International Institute for Strategic Studies. 37

<sup>33</sup> BARRY, DONALD D., RIEBER, ALFRED J., RUBINSTEIN, ALVIN Z., 1991. *Perestroika at the crossroads*. Armonk, N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe. 318

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.* 356

<sup>35</sup> RUBINSTEIN, A.Z., 1981. *Soviet foreign policy since World War II : imperial and global*. Cambridge, Mass.: Winthrop Publishers. 253

<sup>36</sup> From personal interview conducted by the author with Prof. Mordehai Kedar on 22.04.2019

<sup>37</sup> HALLIDAY, F., 1987. Gorbachev and the " Arab syndrome": Soviet policy in the Middle East. *World Policy Journal*, 4(3), pp. 415-442. 428-429

The Iranian Islamic revolution had its, although might seem as minor, effect on Soviet foreign and domestic policies. The more complicated question was the one concerning the effect of Islamic fundamentalism on Soviet Muslim population - the Soviet fear of infection and the possibility of Muslim unrest within the Soviet Union itself. Some Soviet Central Asian troops fighting in Afghanistan had to be replaced by ethnic Russian troops following the revolutionary events in Tehran, to avoid penetration of any fundamental religious tendencies which became apparent.<sup>38</sup> The reliability of some of the Soviet Muslim officers was put in a doubt,<sup>39</sup> and the southern Soviet borders became penetrable.<sup>40</sup> Moscow saw the Iranian Islamic revolution with concern that it might block communist advances, but also with the prospect that it will unseat pro-Western regimes in the region.<sup>41</sup> Moscow however misperceived the full extent of the Islamic revolution in Iran. In Kremlin it was thought that Khomeini would shortly be replaced by secular forces more amenable to external influence and it was not believed that Iran would be transformed into a strong fundamentalist Islamic regime.<sup>42</sup> According to other accounts, Moscow also misperceived the situation in Afghanistan which led to Soviet invasion into the country. The factor of Islamic religion was either neglected or absolutely misunderstood.<sup>43</sup>

Gradually becoming aware of the scale of the alternations the Iranian regime underwent, Moscow revised some of its views and approaches towards the nature of Islam.<sup>44</sup> Some consider that Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan was in part a result of such revision. Moscow strove to eliminate the remaining obstacles to the improvement of Soviet relations with Iran,<sup>45</sup> knowing that Iran's support for the Afghan mujaheddin was on

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<sup>38</sup> GOLAN, G., 1990. *Soviet policies in the Middle East : from World War Two to Gorbachev*. Cambridge [England]; New York: Cambridge University Press. 205-207

<sup>39</sup> WILSON CENTER, 1994. *Telephone Conversation between Soviet Premier Alexei N. Kosygin and Afghan Premier Nur Mohammed Taraki. March 18, 1979*. Digital Archive.

<sup>40</sup> GOLAN, G., 1990. *Soviet policies in the Middle East : from World War Two to Gorbachev*. Cambridge [England]; New York: Cambridge University Press. 205-207

<sup>41</sup> CHUBIN, S., 1980. *Soviet policy towards Iran and the Gulf*. London: International Institute for Strategic Studies. 36

<sup>42</sup> CHUBIN, S., 1980. *Soviet policy towards Iran and the Gulf*. London: International Institute for Strategic Studies. 38

<sup>43</sup> PRIMAKOV, E.M., 2007. *Minnoe pole politiki*. Moskva: Molodaia gvardiia. 205

<sup>44</sup> GOLAN, GALIA., ROYAL INSTITUTE OF INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS., 1992. *Moscow and the Middle East : new thinking on regional conflict*. London: Pinter. 48-49

<sup>45</sup> Ibid. 51

Islamic grounds.<sup>46</sup> The invasion of one Muslim country by the Soviets, was termed by Tehran as an attack on all Islam,<sup>47</sup> and Tehran's support of Afghani mujahedeen was a major issue for Moscow.<sup>48</sup> Others point that the Soviet policy of coexistence with its own Muslims broke down after the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979, which had negative consequences for the image of the Soviet state in the Muslim World and its relations with its Muslims. This conflict antagonized Soviet Muslims, particularly those living in the Caucasus. Even the muftis who were loyal to the Soviet authorities found it difficult to justify an aggression against an Islamic nation, let alone a nine-year occupation.<sup>49</sup>

It is only under Gorbachev's New Thinking that the flaws in perceptions were acknowledged. It was recognized that most of the time, Moscow's account was based on perception of immediate threat of war, which prevented the Soviet decision-makers from objective risk-assessment.<sup>50</sup> However, some improvement of relations with Iran under Gorbachev, that followed Moscow's withdrawal from Afghanistan notwithstanding, the messianic nature of Iran's fundamentalism and its effect upon Soviet Muslims continued to pose significant concerns for Moscow. These concerns proved to be accurate when Moscow had to put down riots in Azerbaijan in 1989, openly accusing Tehran in provoking them.<sup>51</sup> Tehran reciprocated by criticizing Moscow for its treatment of its Muslim minorities.<sup>52</sup> Threat of the Islamic fundamentalism to stability in Soviet Central Asia became a more immediate concern for Kremlin.<sup>53</sup> In addition, the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan was now perceived by the Soviet Muslim minorities, and especially its radical and fundamentalist adherents, as Moscow's weakness.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> CHUBIN, S., 1980. *Soviet policy towards Iran and the Gulf*. London: International Institute for Strategic Studies. 39

<sup>47</sup> GOLAN, G., 1990. *Soviet policies in the Middle East : from World War Two to Gorbachev*. Cambridge [England]; New York: Cambridge University Press. 193-194

<sup>48</sup> CIA. DIRECTORATE OF INTELLIGENCE, 1987. *USSR-Iran: prospects for a troubled relationship*. NESA 87-10001X. Washington: Central Intelligence Agency. iv

<sup>49</sup> CURANOVIĆ, A., 2014. *The religious factor in Russia's foreign policy*. London; New York: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group. 54

<sup>50</sup> HERRMANN, R.K., 1992. Soviet behavior in regional conflicts: Old questions, new strategies, and important lessons. *World Politics*, **44**(3), pp. 432-465. 463

<sup>51</sup> GOLAN, GALIA., ROYAL INSTITUTE OF INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS., 1992. *Moscow and the Middle East : new thinking on regional conflict*. London: Pinter. 52-53

<sup>52</sup> GOLAN, G., 1990. *Soviet policies in the Middle East : from World War Two to Gorbachev*. Cambridge [England]; New York: Cambridge University Press. 189

<sup>53</sup> CIA. DIRECTORATE OF INTELLIGENCE, 1987. *USSR-Iran: prospects for a troubled relationship*. NESA 87-10001X. Washington: Central Intelligence Agency. 2

<sup>54</sup> FUKUYAMA, F., 1986. Gorbachev and the Third World. *Foreign Affairs*, **64**(4), pp. 715-731. 727

Even on the background of Gorbachev's New Thinking agenda and subsequent loss in significance of Middle Eastern affairs, the southern Soviet borders retained defensive importance. The new doctrine of 'defensive sufficiency' notwithstanding, protection of the Soviet Union's southern border, including safeguarding it against a disruptive spread of Islamic fundamentalism, still gained ascendancy in Soviet foreign policy thinking.<sup>55</sup> Western analysts argued that amidst the hypothetical nuclear weapons' reduction agreements with the United States, USSR might wish to remain its nuclear capability in present level to forestall any foreign interventions on its southern borders.<sup>56</sup> Other Western assessments such as of the CIA were positive that the Soviets and the Iranians will remain on friendly grounds amid their common goal of preventing the restoration of US influence in Iran.<sup>57</sup> Another concern that rose after the Iranian Islamic revolution was that it might develop into a larger consolidation of an Islamic bloc of states or an alliance, which might prove to become too strong and independent for Soviet influence.<sup>58</sup>

The further the Soviet-Iranian relations deteriorated in 1982, the more benevolent approach and further revision towards Islam the Soviets adopted. Moscow sought stability with Tehran and refrained from any drastic moves which could appear threatening to Iran to avoid any latter's tilt back towards the West.<sup>59</sup> A policy of appeasement towards Iran was evident. Such policy was expressed by Moscow in its attitude towards Iranian minorities on its borders - Kurds and Azerbaijanis. This policy continued into Gorbachev period, gradually and imperceptibly cultivating and wrapping future outburst of Azerbaijani and other nationalist sentiments inside the Soviet Union.<sup>60</sup> The Iranian revolution enjoyed an immense and growing prestige among Soviet Muslims, particularly in the Caucasus, where Shi'a outnumbered Sunni Muslims. The Iranian anti-imperialism took on the

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<sup>55</sup> GOLAN, GALIA.,ROYAL INSTITUTE OF INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS., 1992. *Moscow and the Middle East : new thinking on regional conflict*. London: Pinter. 10

<sup>56</sup> BARRY, DONALD D., RIEBER, ALFRED J., RUBINSTEIN,ALVIN Z., 1991. *Perestroika at the crossroads*. Armonk, N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe. 352

<sup>57</sup> CIA. DIRECTORATE OF INTELLIGENCE, 1987. *USSR-Iran: prospects for a troubled relationship*. NESA 87-10001X. Washington: Central Intelligence Agency. 12

<sup>58</sup> GOLAN, G., 1990. *Soviet policies in the Middle East : from World War Two to Gorbachev*. Cambridge [England]; New York: Cambridge University Press. 189

<sup>59</sup> Ibid. 190-192

<sup>60</sup> Ibid. 192

meaning of opposing the outside oppressors, whereas for Soviet Muslims, the outside oppressors eventually were the Soviets. During Gorbachev, the dangerous combination of nationalism and Islamic fundamentalism became most evident.<sup>61</sup> His New Thinking reforms exacerbated the growing tendencies for revival of the Soviet Muslims. The combination of nationalism and Islamism induced each other. An expression of these tendencies was the Uzbek's bloody pogroms against a Turkic minority in June 1989. In January 1990 a similar attack repeated when Azeris attacked Armenians in the Armenian enclave inside Soviet Azerbaijan (Nagorno-Karabakh), and the near rebellion of the Azeris bordering with Iran. All had clear fundamentalist and separatist overtones.<sup>62</sup>

### **The role of the Islamic factor in contemporary Russian foreign policy**

Our main argument in this part is that the Islamic factor plays much more important part in contemporary Russian foreign policy considerations, than during its Soviet era. Some prominent observers conform with our suggestion that during the Soviet Union, the Islamic factor in Moscow's foreign policy-making had much lower significance than in contemporary Russia.<sup>63</sup> Muslim factor represents a new feature in contemporary Russian foreign policy towards our case-studies. While empirically covering Soviet perceptions on Islam in our analysis of the Soviet period, we intend to put a much stronger emphasis on contemporary Russian period. We demonstrate that the Islamic factor, in its radical and violent form, is perceived by contemporary Russian regime as a threat to its national security. This perception stems from the following factors: proximity of former Soviet Muslim republics to Russian borders; direct contiguity of Iran with Russia's near abroad and the Caspian basin; and significant Russian Muslim population. It leads us to propose that today the Islamic factor comprises one of the sources of Russia's foreign policy conduct.

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid. 205-209

<sup>62</sup> Ibid. 283-284

<sup>63</sup> From personal interview conducted by the author with Prof. Roi Ya'acov on 20.06.2019

Islamophobia in Russia, as an increasingly growing and strong social sentiment, is a relatively new feature. From the times of the Mongols, Islam did not essentially threaten the Russian Empire. From Moscow's viewpoint it stood lower on the 'civilizational ladder', while the enemy number one remained the West. Only in the last decade of the twentieth century, people in Russia began to speak of the threat of Islamic caliphate being established near the Russia's southern borders,<sup>64</sup> complemented by the threat stemming from Muslim fundamentalism.<sup>65</sup>

The collapse of the Soviet Union, especially the separation of Soviet Muslim republics from the Soviet state, played a major role in constructing a new Middle East strategy for Moscow, due to its borders are now directly contiguous with the region.<sup>66</sup> What before was perceived as the 'Muslim belt' of the USSR, now became the Russian border. Thus, the main Russia's foreign policy goal towards its near abroad and the Middle East became to keep these largely Muslim states stable and consistent with Russia's interests. As some put it, Russia's regional priorities have shifted dramatically since the collapse of the Soviet Union with Moscow's primary focus on Central Asia and Transcaucasia which significantly affected Russia's foreign policy towards the Middle East.<sup>67</sup> One of the most acute concerns in this respect became Iran and Iran's radical Islamic regime that might seek to spread its influence in Central Asia and the Caucasus.<sup>68</sup> On the other hand, contemporary Russia's foreign policy towards Iran, and the rest of the Middle East, is viewed through the lens of its policy towards its near abroad, mainly Central Asia and Transcaucasia.<sup>69</sup> Hence, today the Islamic factor affects contemporary Russian foreign policy both ways, inwards and outwards.

In post-Soviet Russia, the term "Soviet Islam" was replaced by the term "Russian Islam". Since the "Russian Islam" phenomenon was officially proclaimed in 2003, it

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<sup>64</sup> CURANOVIĆ, A., 2014. *The religious factor in Russia's foreign policy*. London; New York: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group. 128

<sup>65</sup> BARRY, DONALD D., RIEBER, ALFRED J., RUBINSTEIN, ALVIN Z., 1991. *Perestroika at the crossroads*. Armonk, N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe. 340

<sup>66</sup> FREEDMAN, R.O., 2001. Russian policy toward the Middle East: The Yeltsin legacy and the Putin challenge. *The Middle East Journal*, **55**(1), pp. 58-90. 60

<sup>67</sup> Ibid. 60

<sup>68</sup> Ibid. 59

<sup>69</sup> FREEDMAN, R.O., 2000. Russian-Iranian relations in the 1990s. *Middle East Review of International Affairs*, **4**(2), pp. 68. 65



became an essential feature in Russia's foreign policy towards Arab and Muslim states of the Middle East and the Gulf.<sup>70</sup> Observers write that on the backdrop of the dissolution of the Soviet Union, this Muslim factor took somewhat different meaning than in previous Soviet decision-making. The now-sovereign ex-Soviet Muslim states promote their own policy orientated towards and possibly determined by the interests and links with Muslim countries of the Middle East and Asia. The five ex-Soviet Central Asian republics were already tied in joint, cooperative, mainly economic union before the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Their Central Asian identity may well guide them in their independent sovereign foreign policy, as they seek to expand their cultural and economic links already established with Muslim countries. Moreover, as these ex-Soviet states combat with what may be perceived as Russian domination or influence through the millions of [ethnic] Russians living in the ex-Soviet Muslim republics, their (Muslim's) identification with Islam may become even stronger. With the exception of Kyrgyzstan, the Muslim republics continue to be ruled by autocratic communist bureaucrats, and the unrest caused by this in the period after the attempted coup of 1991 in Russia, saw the rallying of religious as well as democratic forces against these conservative Soviet 'nomenklatura' rulers.<sup>71</sup> However, it is also noted that 'thanks' to the deeply entrenched secularism, succeeded from the Soviet system until late 1990s, Iran, although actively seeking to fill up the ideological and spiritual (read – religious) void left after the collapse of the Soviet Union, did not achieve any significant results in post-Soviet Muslim states.<sup>72</sup> However, gradually post-Soviet Central Asia became an issue based on Islamic grounds for Kremlin's decision-makers.<sup>73</sup>

Huntington stresses that the rise of Islam in its most radical and fundamental form is one of the most prominent features of post-Cold War world politics.<sup>74</sup> Islam, which was

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<sup>70</sup> CURANOVIĆ, A., 2014. *The religious factor in Russia's foreign policy*. London; New York: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group. 122

<sup>71</sup> GOLAN, GALIA., ROYAL INSTITUTE OF INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS., 1992. *Moscow and the Middle East : new thinking on regional conflict*. London: Pinter. 80

<sup>72</sup> GOLAN, GALIA., RUSSIA AND EURASIA PROGRAMME (ROYAL INSTITUTE OF INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS), 1998. *Russia and Iran : a strategic partnership?* London: The Royal Institute of International Affairs. 10

<sup>73</sup> COULOUMBIS, THEODORE A., DOKOS, THANOS P., HALKI INTERNATIONAL SEMINARS ON SECURITY AND CONFIDENCE BUILDING IN THE MEDITERRANEAN AND SOUTH EASTERN EUROPE, 1995. *Arms control and security in the Middle East and the CIS republics*. Athens, Greece: Hellenic Foundation for Defense and Foreign Policy. 235-236

<sup>74</sup> HUNTINGTON, SAMUEL P., ROGERS D. SPOTSWOOD COLLECTION., 1996. *The clash of civilizations and the remaking of world order*. New York: Simon & Schuster. p.113-114

exploited by the West as a bulwark against the rise of socialist movements during the Cold War, with the fall of Communism acquired its 'independence' from external support and developed into a significant political and regional force by itself,<sup>75</sup> which began to target both, its former 'companion' – the West, and its former opponent – Russia. According to Russian statistics, from 1993 to 1997 Islamist terrorist activity in Russia was permanently on a significant rise.<sup>76</sup> Russian statistical appraisals from 1999 continued to underline the rise of tension in ex-Soviet Muslim states on separatist and Islamic grounds.<sup>77</sup> As of 2007, Russia's Chief of Staff presented Islam as a direct threat to Russia's national security.<sup>78</sup> In National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation report, released on 12 May 2009, the Islamic religious extremism, was recognized as a direct threat to Russian national security.<sup>79</sup> We observe how gradually the Islamic factor became an issue in Russian decision-making.

Western scholarship on post-Soviet Russia also recognizes the threat of Russia's homegrown insurgency calling it "Jihad in the North Caucasus". Russian then President Dmitri Medvedev, stated that the greatest domestic threat to Russia's security is the ongoing insurgency in the North Caucasus. During its both wars in Chechnya, besides separatism, Russia encountered what seemed as a self-proclaimed fundamentalist, Salafi-oriented, Islamist challenge, that openly proclaimed its links to al-Qaeda and whose avowed aim was the detachment of the North Caucasus from the Russian Federation,<sup>80</sup> and turning it into an Islamic sovereign entity. In other words, into an Islamic state.

The US Defense Intelligence (DIA) report on al-Qaeda's plans for the North Caucasus and Russia's Muslims, revealed that the movement calls for radical Islamic, predominantly Sunni regimes to be established and supported everywhere possible,

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<sup>75</sup> NOUEIHED, LIN.,WARREN, ALEX., 2013. *The battle for the Arab Spring revolution, counter-revolution and the making of a new era*. New Haven; London: Yale University Press. 18

<sup>76</sup> OSIPOV, G. V.,INSTITUT SOTSIAL'NO-POLITICHESKIKH ISSLEDOVANIĬ (ROSSIĬSKAĬA AKADEMIĬA NAUK), 2000. *Rossĭa v poiskakh strategii--obshchestvo i vlast' : sotsial'naia i sotsial'no-politicheskaia situatsiia v Rossii v 1999 godu*. Moskva: Int. sotsial'no-politicheskikh issledovaniĭ RAN. 81

<sup>77</sup> Ibid. 123

<sup>78</sup> BLANK, STEPHEN J., STANY ZJEDNOCZONE., CONSUMER PRODUCT SAFETY COMMISSION., ARMY WAR COLLEGE.,STRATEGIC STUDIES INSTITUTE., 2015. *Perspectives on Russian foreign policy*. Lavergne; Carlisle Barracks: CPSC] ; Strategic Studies Institute. 125-126

<sup>79</sup> CURANOVIĆ, A., 2014. *The religious factor in Russia's foreign policy*. London; New York: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group. 143

<sup>80</sup> BLANK, S.J., 2015. *Russia's homegrown insurgency : Jihad in the North Caucasus*. Lavergne: CPSC. v

including Bosnia, Albania, Chechnya, Dagestan, the entire North Caucasus, from sea to sea (from Black Sea to the Caspian – added), Central Asian republics, Tatarstan, Bashkortostan, all of Russia, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Turkey, Indonesia, Malaysia, Algeria, Morocco, Egypt, Tunisia, Sudan, and the states of the Persian Gulf. The movement planned terrorist activities to be conducted against Americans and Westerners, Israelis, Russians, Serbs, and disloyal Muslims.”<sup>81</sup> Russia thus became a main target of such terrorist Islamist organizations as al-Qaeda.

Contemporary terrorism and insurgency in ex-Soviet states is extensively based on Islamic grounds and goals which are defined entirely by the global jihadi revolutionary movement of Salafi takfirism and jihadism. Its territorial claims extend far beyond the idea of pan-Caucasus emirate, and to all of Russia’s Muslim lands, defined so broadly as to encompass all of Russia for all intents and purposes.<sup>82</sup> As the leader of the Caucasus Emirate (Emirat Kavkaz) Dokku Umarov openly stated in May 2011, “We consider the Caucasus Emirate and Russia as a single theater of war.”<sup>83</sup> Apart from Western analysts, Russian scholars confirm that the main threat to Russia’s security consists of radical Islamic currents, ideas and ideologies.<sup>84</sup> Because multiple Islamist terrorist organizations in ex-Soviet states, like the Caucasus Emirate receive funds and support from Middle East contributors,<sup>85</sup> this issue of Islamic insurgency and revival of Islamist appeals on Russia’s near abroad became significant issue in its foreign policy decision-making, including towards Middle East states some of which in fact support and contribute to the anti-Russian Islamists in Central Asia and the Caucasus.

The ongoing conflicts in the Middle East complement to Kremlin’s concerns which it sees through the prism of its near abroad former Soviet Muslim republics.<sup>86</sup> The direct threat to Russia’s integrity, stemming from instability in Central Asia and the Caucasus,

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<sup>81</sup> Ibid. 17-18

<sup>82</sup> Ibid. 3

<sup>83</sup> Ibid. 10

<sup>84</sup> OSIPOV, G. V., INSTITUT SOTSIAL'NO-POLITICHESKIKH ISSLEDOVANIĬ (ROSSIĬSKAĬA AKADEMIĬA NAUK), 2000. *Rossiiā v poiskakh strategii--obshchestvo i vlast' : sotsial'naia i sotsial'no-politicheskaia situatsiia v Rossii v 1999 godu*. Moskva: Int. sotsial'no-politicheskikh issledovaniĭ RAN. 76-77

<sup>85</sup> BLANK, S.J., 2015. *Russia's homegrown insurgency : Jihad in the North Caucasus*. Lavergne: CPSC. 21

<sup>86</sup> MONAGHAN, A., 2016, 16.11.2016. How and why Russia is moving to a war footing. *Newsweek*.

leaves its mark on Moscow's foreign policy decision-making towards Middle East states, including all three of our case-studies - Iran, Syrian and Egypt. Contemporary Russia is struggling to stabilize its restive multi-ethnic and multi-cultural southern frontiers. Against this backdrop, Russia's priority today is to confront any ethnic or religious appeals from abroad, mostly stemming from the Middle East.<sup>87</sup> To state it more directly, presence of weak, divided and collapsed states on its frontiers, entails the permeability of Russia's borders to both, military, ideological and religious penetration. From the regime's standpoint this vulnerability to both geopolitical and ideological-cultural penetration is particularly urgent when peoples of another ethnicity, religion, or culture inhabit the borders that are at risk. It is thus argued that this was one of the main reasons that Vladimir Putin, immediately following his rise to power, assertively engaged in cracking down the Islamist insurgence in Chechnya and sought to put it under Kremlin's control, since the rebellion in Chechnya simultaneously represented the rise of radical Islam inside Russia, foreign aid and penetration of external Islamists, and the threat of further disintegration of the Russian state.<sup>88</sup>

During the Cold War, notwithstanding the vast amount of Communist and Socialist parties in the Muslim states of the Middle East, the Soviets did encounter the Islamic factor and faced significant obstacles in their attempts to navigate these regime's policies in congruence with Moscow's strategic goals. The competition between Communism and Islam was significant obstacle in Soviet relations with the Middle East states.<sup>89</sup> However, following the fall of the Soviet Union, it seemed as one barrier less in Russia's rapprochement with the Islamic World. Communism can also be perceived as blocking factor which forestalled an open 'insurrection' of radical fundamentalist Islam in Soviet Union and to a lesser extent in some of the Middle East states. After the loss of social-communist ideological ground, contemporary Russia faces both, threats and

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<sup>87</sup> BLANK, STEPHEN J., STANY ZJEDNOCZONE., CONSUMER PRODUCT SAFETY COMMISSION., ARMY WAR COLLEGE., STRATEGIC STUDIES INSTITUTE., 2015. *Perspectives on Russian foreign policy*. Lavergne; Carlisle Barracks: CPSC] ; Strategic Studies Institute. 119

<sup>88</sup> Ibid. 120-122

<sup>89</sup> CHUBIN, S., 1980. *Soviet policy towards Iran and the Gulf*. London: International Institute for Strategic Studies. 31-32

opportunities in dealing with the Middle East, the former however represents a more acute and immediate problem than the latter.

The West, recognizing the salience of the Islamic factor in post-Cold War politics and its impact on contemporary Russia, attempted to utilize it against its former Cold War rival. Huntington writes that the NATO adopted a doctrine of cultivation of Islamic factors on Russia's southern flank to impose difficulties and stir troubles for Moscow.<sup>90</sup> Muslim states bordering with Russia also recognize this trend. It was envisaged by some that eventually, Soviet Muslim population will constitute a liability which can be exploited by its Muslim neighbors in damaging Russia's interests and complicate Moscow's foreign policies towards Muslim states.<sup>91</sup>

The multiple events of rebellion and insurgence on Islamic grounds in former Soviet Muslim states notwithstanding, the post-Afghanistan Soviet-Iranian relations had its points of connection which appeared in fact on Islamic grounds. The surprisingly swift military victories of Taliban forces in Afghanistan in September 1996 spurred even closer Russian-Iranian cooperation. Given that the Sunni Taliban were enemies of the Iranian-backed Shi'a forces in Afghanistan, and that the obscurantist nature of Taliban Islam embarrassed even the Iranian leadership, Iran sought to build a coalition to stop the Taliban offensive and advance. It organized a regional conference in Tehran, which Russia attended. Russia's leadership, which feared that the Taliban's influence could penetrate Central Asia or even Russia itself, 20 percent of whose population is Muslim, had an equally strong interest in blocking the Taliban.<sup>92</sup>

According to RAN's analysis published in 2000, the further goal of Chechen terrorists, following their offensive on Dagestan in August 1999, was to punch their way towards the Caspian Sea and the final abruption of the Caucasus from Russia. This however would not be the end. Following the fall of the Afghani government in 1992, the

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<sup>90</sup> HUNTINGTON, SAMUEL P., ROGERS D. SPOTSWOOD COLLECTION., 1996. *The clash of civilizations and the remaking of world order*. New York: Simon & Schuster. p.310

<sup>91</sup> CHUBIN, S., 1980. *Soviet policy towards Iran and the Gulf*. London: International Institute for Strategic Studies. 39

<sup>92</sup> FREEDMAN, R.O., 2000. Russian-Iranian relations in the 1990s. *Middle East Review of International Affairs*, 4(2), pp. 68. 71

rule of the Taliban in Afghanistan was acknowledged only by Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and the Arab Emirates. The same states generously supplied with resources, money, weapons and fighters the Chechen separatists. Russia envisaged further convergence between Afghani Taliban and Chechen terrorists which would culminate in future offensive on Bashkiria (Republic of Bashkortostan) and Tatarstan, both Russian Federal Subjects. Such an offensive, would 'strike a wedge' and further break Russia apart.<sup>93</sup>

Prominent Russian analysts on Islam, stress in particular the 'rise of Islam' in connection with Russia's contemporary and future challenges. They argue that the 'Chechen solution' with Ramzan Kadyrov's regime, under tight Putin's auspice, is a temporary solution. When the Russian Empire 'included' or 'annexed' Muslim Caucasus into its imperial hemisphere, two centuries ago, Islam was on the fall.<sup>94</sup> The radical Islamic threat to Russia, coming from the North Caucasus, is widely supported and encouraged by certain Muslim countries, including both Sunni Saudis and Shi'a Iranians. Kremlin advisers call Russian authorities to utilize its connections with Egypt and Syria in its struggle with radical Islamization of the North Caucasus.<sup>95</sup> Evgeniy Primakov in his writings distinguishes between Islamic 'fundamentalism' and Islamic 'extremism' and sees two dimensions of Islam: "positive" and "negative", urging Russian authorities to support and rapprochement with the "positive" Islam which he considers the post-revolutionary Khomeini's Iranian regime.<sup>96</sup>

On the background of the Arab Spring events, in February 2011 Dmitriy Medvedev referred to this phenomenon as a possible threat to Russia's security stemming from the rise of Islamism in the North Caucasus.<sup>97</sup> The same year, Vladimir Putin, then the Russian Prime Minister, strongly warned against any external interference in the situation in Libya, arguing that this could lead to the onset of Islamism, and its subsequent expansion in

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<sup>93</sup> OSIPOV, G. V., INSTITUT SOTSIAL'NO-POLITICHESKIKH ISSLEDOVANIĬ (ROSSIĬSKAĬA AKADEMIĬA NAUK), 2000. *Rossia v poiskakh strategii--obshchestvo i vlast' : sotsial'naia i sotsial'no-politicheskaia situatsiia v Rossii v 1999 godu*. Moskva: Int. sotsial'no-politicheskikh issledovaniĭ RAN. 97

<sup>94</sup> PRIMAKOV, E.M., 2010. *Mir bez Rossii? : k chemu vedet politicheskaia blizorukost'*. Moskva: Rossiiskaia gazeta. 165-166,168

<sup>95</sup> Ibid.167-168, 297

<sup>96</sup> GOLAN, GALIA.,RUSSIA AND EURASIA PROGRAMME (ROYAL INSTITUTE OF INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS), 1998. *Russia and Iran : a strategic partnership?* London: The Royal Institute of International Affairs. 52

<sup>97</sup> CURANOVIĆ, A., 2014. *The religious factor in Russia's foreign policy*. London; New York: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group. 215

other areas, including the North Caucasus.<sup>98</sup> Putin's most extreme concern is that the trend of the Arab Spring will ignite Central Asia and the Caucasus. His intervention in Syria in 2014 is considered to germinate from this very reason.<sup>99</sup> When amidst Russia's airstrikes in Syria, the Taliban briefly seized control of Kunduz, a provincial capital of Afghanistan, some 60 miles from the Tajik border, Kremlin reinforced its troops stationed in Tajikistan referring to it as the roadblock on the march of the jihadists to Central Asia.<sup>100</sup>

The events of the Arab Spring led to Russia's extensive concerns with the issue of Islamization and further radicalization of its own Muslim population and its ex-Soviet near abroad and receives reflection in its steps to appease foreign Muslim leaders. Positive development of these relations is largely perceived by Moscow as one of the factors directly influencing the political stability in Russia itself, as long as the majority of [world] Muslim religious leaders consider the situation concerning the rights of the Russian Muslim community as satisfactory. Moscow perceives that such state of affairs will significantly limit the spiritual and financial assistance from Muslim states tunneled to radical Islamists acting in the south of Russia. With this goal in mind, in May 2012 Russian authorities initiated and organized in Moscow an international conference of Islamic theologians from twenty-three countries.<sup>101</sup> Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs expects that Russian Muslim community would encourage close ties between Russia and Muslim countries, contribute to building a positive image of Russia, and help limit the influence of Islamic extremists in Russia.<sup>102</sup>

Moscow gives highest priority to the Islamic factor when setting its foreign policy goals and preferences and delineating its strategic interests. Moreover, it is found that Moscow's utilization of the Islamic factor for its strategic goals is rather extensive. Kremlin's vast activity can be traced in this respect. Russia expects to solve its multiple

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<sup>98</sup> TICHÝ, L., 2014. Security and Foreign Policy of Dmitry Medvedev in the Period 2008–2012. *The Journal of Slavic Military Studies*, 27(4), pp. 533-552. 547

<sup>99</sup> KATZ, M.N., 2008. Comparing Putin's and Brezhnev's policies toward the Middle East. *Society*, 45(2), pp. 177-180. 177-180

<sup>100</sup> TRENIN, D., 2015. Putin's Syria Gambit aims at something bigger than Syria. *Carnegie Moscow Center*, October, 13.

<sup>101</sup> KOZHANOV, N., 2014. Russian-Syrian Dialogue: Myths and Realities. *The Journal of the Middle East and Africa*, 5(1), pp. 1-22. 13

<sup>102</sup> CURANOVIĆ, A., 2014. *The religious factor in Russia's foreign policy*. London; New York: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group. 144

challenges stemming from Islamic terrorism; gain back its traditional status of a superpower on international arena; manifest its right to be present in the Middle East and the Gulf; increase its world influence; and reach an unlimited access to strategic natural resources and markets by closely cooperating with Muslim states.<sup>103</sup>

Islam is also invoked by Moscow for the purpose of finding its civilizational role and ideological ground following the fall of the Soviet Union and loss of its ideological basis. Russia attempts to rally Orthodox Christianity and Islam in some form of convergence to place itself as civilizations' conciliator. At the beginning of the twenty-first century, Russia uses the religious factor in its policy as an instrument for shaping a new, positive image of itself and its relations with the Muslim World.<sup>104</sup> In addition, the 'Muslim component', promoted by Moscow as part of its identity, is being exploited in contemporary Russia's foreign conduct in order to gain advantage and outrun USA and European Union in relations with the Islamic World.<sup>105</sup>

Scholars on religion acknowledge that contemporary Russia pragmatically and effectively utilizes the factor of the Islamic religion in pursuing its goals in relationship with Islamic countries. It is argued that the religion factor became an instrument of Russian foreign policy. In contemporary realities of the post-Cold War structure, many politicians see it in terms of Huntington's "clash of civilizations",<sup>106</sup> the image of states which either "fighting" or "favoring" Islam, and this view gained significance in Russia's relations with the Muslim World. Moscow tries to gain back its positive image which suffered setbacks following its invasion and consequent war in Afghanistan, its support of Serbs during the Yugoslavian War and its military campaigns in Chechnya. Following the weakening of contacts with the Islamic World in the 1990s, the administration of Vladimir Putin added dynamism to Russian policy with Muslim states. Russia gradually began to renew relations with the former allies of the USSR, namely Syria, intensified its diplomatic activity

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<sup>103</sup> Ibid. 196

<sup>104</sup> Ibid. 212

<sup>105</sup> Ibid. 210

<sup>106</sup> HUNTINGTON, SAMUEL P., ROGERS D. SPOTSWOOD COLLECTION., 1996. *The clash of civilizations and the remaking of world order*. New York: Simon & Schuster. p.20



in connection with the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and began developing bilateral cooperation with Muslim states traditionally allied with the USA. The Council of Muftis of Russian Federation attributes such dynamic development of relations to the diplomacy of Vladimir Putin, who, in the opinion of some prominent Russian muftis, with his 'historic' visits to Saudi Arabia, Jordan and Qatar, has opened a new chapter in Russia's relations with Islam.<sup>107</sup>

Indeed, it is observed that Vladimir Putin puts significant emphasis on Islam in his political agenda. In 2003, Putin stated that Russia intended to cooperate more closely with the Islamic world. Later, he declared that the Arab countries were one of the main vectors of Russian diplomacy. In 2003–08 Putin supported this statement by official visits to Egypt, Algeria, Jordan, Iran and some GCC countries.<sup>108</sup> In 2007, Putin visited Saudi Arabia, Qatar and the UAE.<sup>109</sup> During the opening ceremony of the Chechen Parliament in 2005, Vladimir Putin called Russia "the most dependable defender of Islam", and during a meeting in November 2007 in Kremlin with Muslim community leaders, the President noted that "Russian Muslims have always made a big contribution to the state's development into a great power. Today, they (Muslims) play a very positive role, taking part in the moral education of citizens [sic]."<sup>110</sup> In 2007 the Council of Muftis of Russia sent 19 Russian Muslim students to study Islam in Syria and Egypt.<sup>111</sup> Some observers however propose that Putin's emphasis on Muslims and former Soviet Muslim states, stems from his [personal] concerns for his domestic political legitimacy.<sup>112</sup>

Considering additional threats that Islam might pose for contemporary Russia, analysts underscore a destabilizing effect on global order stemming from Islamist terrorist activity, that might lead to conflicts between Muslims and believers of other religions that eventually could lead to conflicts inside highly multinational Russian state. Second

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<sup>107</sup> CURANOVIĆ, A., 2014. *The religious factor in Russia's foreign policy*. London; New York: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group. 196

<sup>108</sup> KOZHANOV, N., 2018. *Russian policy across the Middle East: motivations and methods*. Chatham House. 3-4

<sup>109</sup> Ibid. 3-4

<sup>110</sup> CURANOVIĆ, A., 2014. *The religious factor in Russia's foreign policy*. London; New York: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group. 79

<sup>111</sup> Ibid. 199

<sup>112</sup> BLANK, STEPHEN J., STANY ZJEDNOCZONE., CONSUMER PRODUCT SAFETY COMMISSION., ARMY WAR COLLEGE., STRATEGIC STUDIES INSTITUTE., 2015. *Perspectives on Russian foreign policy*. Lavergne; Carlisle Barracks: CPSC] ; Strategic Studies Institute. 152

concern is the possibility of the shift of Muslim countries towards cooperation with the USA, as in case of Saudi Arabia and Turkey, which would be serious obstacle to the multi-polar order envisioned by Russia. Social survey conducted by the Russian Levada Centre, showed that the decided majority of Russian respondents, 67 percent, declare themselves in favor of strengthening ties with Islamic countries, while 39 percent support Kremlin's policy of close cooperation with such Muslim countries as Iran. Russia perceives Muslim countries as potential allies in the formation of a new, multi-polar global order and emphasizes the importance of its close cooperation with Iran and strategic rapprochement with the Arab World.<sup>113</sup> Russian analysts support these tendencies arguing that Russia regards the Muslim World as its future most solid ally in confronting the US in post-Cold War world order. When stating that contemporary Russia's most acute challenge is the United States and its policy of unipolarity, RAN's scientists argue that one of the means to confront the US are: conclusion of military alliances with states-targets of US and NATO aggression; and further development of relations with Arab countries, Iran in particular."<sup>114</sup>

In large, the goal of rapprochement with Islam from Kremlin's perspective stems from a combination of aims: its search after new Russian identity; to pacify ex-Soviet Muslim states bordering with Russia; and to build an anti-Western alliance of states which would eventually compose a global pole. However, some Russian officials confront this line arguing that supporting Islam against the West would most probably be self-destructive for Russia, resulting in Muslim fundamentalism, separatism and terrorism in the Northern Caucasus, Central Asia, Kazakhstan, and along the Volga River, drawing Russia into bloody and hopeless military campaigns across its entire southern flank. Such opinion lists Iran and some other Muslim states among Russia's future adversaries.<sup>115</sup>

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<sup>113</sup> CURANOVIĆ, A., 2014. *The religious factor in Russia's foreign policy*. London; New York: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group. 195

<sup>114</sup> OSIPOV, G. V., INSTITUT SOTSIAL'NO-POLITICHESKIKH ISSLEDOVANIĖ (ROSSĖIJSKAĖA AKADEMIĖA NAUK), 2000. *RossĖia v poiskakh strategii--obshchestvo i vlast'*: sotsial'naĖa i sotsial'no-politicheskaĖa situatsĖia v RossĖii v 1999 godu. Moskva: Int. sotsial'no-politicheskikh issledovaniĖ RAN. 363-364

<sup>115</sup> GOLAN, GALIA., RUSSIA AND EURASIA PROGRAMME (ROYAL INSTITUTE OF INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS), 1998. *Russia and Iran : a strategic partnership?* London: The Royal Institute of International Affairs. 49

Other Russian statesmen argue that a pro-Iranian policy is essential to guarantee the southern borders of the CIS.<sup>116</sup>

*Analyzing the impact of the Islamic factor through the Egyptian case*

Although among all three of our cases, Egypt represents the least radical state from Islamic perspective, nevertheless we managed to trace some points of friction in relations between contemporary Russia and Egypt based on Islamic grounds. We however observe that such trends or issues concerning the Islamic religion were almost completely absent in relations between Egypt and the Soviet Union during previous period analyzed. Thus, we recognize that the Islamic factor represents new feature in contemporary Russian relations with and decision-making towards Egypt.

Since the mid- 1990s, soon after the outbreak of the first war in Chechnya, Islamic terrorism literally swept Russia. There were 37 terrorist attacks since Caucasus Emirate's revival. This Islamic terrorism' phenomenon, which was totally unknown to Soviet Union, exacerbated during the 2000s, following the second Chechen war. 36 attacks occurred from 2008 till 2011, with Putin already in office. One of most dangerous Russian-Islamic terrorists, Sheikh Said Abu Saad Buryatskii, an ethnic Russian and Slavic convert to Islam,<sup>117</sup> that masterminded multiple suicide bombings in Russia, including the double suicide bombing in Moscow's Metropolitan subway in March 2010, that killed 40 and wounded 101, before turning to his jihad against Russia, received his Islamic education in Egypt.<sup>118</sup> Russian security agencies also traced a connection between the Islamic studies that Russian converts underwent in Egypt and expansion of terrorist activities in ex-Soviet Ingushetia during 2008-09.<sup>119</sup> It is argued that Salafism or Salafi Islamism, was first brought to the Caucasus during the 18<sup>th</sup> and more extensively during the 19<sup>th</sup> centuries from Egypt. It is proposed that it was the *Perestroika* and *Glasnost*, that

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<sup>116</sup> Ibid. 8

<sup>117</sup> BLANK, S.J., 2015. *Russia's homegrown insurgency : Jihad in the North Caucasus*. Lavergne: CPSC. 29

<sup>118</sup> Ibid. 15

<sup>119</sup> Ibid. 29

rehabilitated these 19<sup>th</sup> century imams' and religious Salafi teachings, which led the *gazavats*<sup>120</sup> against the Russian (Soviet) rule.<sup>121</sup>

A Caucasian mufti Allahshukhur Pashazadeh compared the ousting of Hosni Mubarak in Egypt in 2011 to the removal from power of Mikhail Gorbachev in Soviet Russia,<sup>122</sup> hinting to the effect it had produced which led to collapse of the social order. For instance, In the 1990s, Moscow was planning to involve Egypt's President Hosni Mubarak in the resolution of the first Chechen war. Mubarak was perceived as a bulwark against the revival of radical Islamism. According to this opinion, as the removal of Gorbachev caused further disintegration of the Soviet Union, ousting of Mubarak released the Islamist currents. For Moscow, the overthrow of Mubarak, let alone replacing him by a leader affiliated with the Muslim Brotherhood movement was a major concern.<sup>123</sup>

When Morsi replaced Mubarak, Moscow was hesitant to improve relations with post-Arab Spring Egypt, expressing concerns of Morsi's affiliation with radical Islamist ideas and ideologies amid Moscow's own concerns about radicalization of Russian Muslims. Further it became clear that relations with Sisi who ousted Morsi were more 'convenient' producing fewer strains for Moscow.<sup>124</sup> This consent stems from common perception of the Arab Spring for both Putin and Sisi. Putin has all along seen it as a threat to both, the autocratic rule preserved by many key Russian allies and Russia itself, and as a boosting factor for the strengthening of militant Islamist movements.<sup>125</sup>

Moscow's position on the Muslim Brotherhood converges with current Egyptian President el-Sisi. In February 2003, the Russian Supreme Court banned the Muslim Brotherhood Islamic movement from operating in the Russian Federation and officially labeled it a terrorist organization. The Brotherhood had long been problematic for Russia,

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<sup>120</sup> In the context of the wars between Russia and the Muslim peoples of the Caucasus, starting as early as the late 18th century's Sheikh Mansur's resistance to Russian expansion, the word usually appears in form of *gazavat* (газават). *Ghazi* is an Arabic word, the active participle of the verb *gaza*, meaning 'to carry out a military expedition or raid'.

<sup>121</sup> BLANK, S.J., 2015. *Russia's homegrown insurgency : Jihad in the North Caucasus*. Lavergne: CPSC. 25

<sup>122</sup> CURANOVIĆ, A., 2014. *The religious factor in Russia's foreign policy*. London; New York: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group. 200

<sup>123</sup> PRIMAKOV, E.M., 2007. *Minnoe pole politiki*. Moskva: Molodaia gvardiia. 341

<sup>124</sup> BORSHCHEVSKAYA, A., 2015-last update, How to Judge Putin's Trip to Egypt . Available: <http://bit.ly/2PAnICL> [July/9, 2016].

<sup>125</sup> THE TELEGRAPH, 2014, Feb 13, 2014. Vladimir Putin backs Egypt's Sisi's 'run' for Egyptian presidency. *The Telegraph*.

with Moscow often claiming that it helped arm radical Islamists in the North Caucasus who continue to destabilize the region.<sup>126</sup>

It is argued that improving its relations with Egypt – a central player in the Middle East, can endow Russia a strategic advantage in facing the spread of radical Islamism and terrorism into the Russian territory.<sup>127</sup> Contemporary Russia assists and seeks good relations with Egypt on grounds of mutual fight against Islamic terrorism.<sup>128</sup>

### *The Syrian case analysis*

Syria, in the eyes of Russian decision-makers is considered as one of the most sensitive points from Moscow's foreign policy perspective in the Middle East and the civil war that broke out in Syria amid the 'Arab Spring' Islamic uprising compelled Russia to adopt proactive position. The possibility of spread of Islamist jihad inside Russia began to be perceived as a real and an immediate threat following the rise of the ISIS movement in the Middle East and its attempts to topple Assad.<sup>129</sup> Syria's close location to Russian borders and its sphere of national interests - the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), rose concerns of possible spillover of the conflict into Russia's hemisphere. The Muslim population of the CIS is perceived as a fertile ground for radical Islamist penetration and further destabilization of the region. The playing of the religious card by foreign jihadists with the aim to undermine Russia's control of the area is perceived by many Russia's statesmen and scholars as highly possible and immediate development. Anti-Russian statements made by some Arab clerics only made the Russians more certain that their concerns are not baseless. For instance, on October 12, 2012, in an interview with state TV channel 'Qatar-TV', one of the leading religious figures of the

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<sup>126</sup> BORSHCHEVSKAYA, A., 2015-last update, How to Judge Putin's Trip to Egypt . Available: <http://bit.ly/2PAnlCL> [July/9, 2016].

<sup>127</sup> KAM, E. and MAGEN, Z., 2015. An Integrated President Putin Visits Egypt. *INSS Insight*, (665),. 3

<sup>128</sup> RIA NOVOSTI NEWS AGENCY, MOSCOW, 2014, Mar 10, 2014. Russian senator welcomes Egypt Hamas ban. *RIA Novosti news agency, Moscow, in Russian 1221 4 Mar 14/BBC Monitoring/(c) BBC*.

<sup>129</sup> PHILLIPS, C., 2015. *Syria: The view from Moscow*. Middle East Eye.

Middle East, Yusuf al-Qaradawi, called Russia “enemy number one” of Islam and all Muslims.<sup>130</sup> Such statements rose alarms in Kremlin.

Russia's concern of the spread of Islamism is considered as one of the main causes for Moscow's intervention in Syria in 2014. Secular authoritarian governments are seen by Moscow as the sole realistic alternative to Islamic dominance.”<sup>131</sup> Russia perceives Assad’s survival as its direct success in confronting the ‘global’ Islamization of states bordering with Russia. Moscow's anti-Islamist approach compels it to side, and in extreme events literally save secular leaders of the Middle East. The apparent Turkey’s tilt in Islamic fundamentalist direction rises even more concerns in Moscow and buttresses its determination to keep Assad in power.<sup>132</sup> It is confirmed by multiple accounts that Russia’s move into Syria was dictated by its anxiety from Syria becoming a safe haven for jihadists in case Assad would fall, with a direct and immediate consequences for Russia’s near abroad and Russia itself.<sup>133</sup> Radicalization of Russia’s Muslim minorities following Assad’s fall is presented by many as the central cause for Russia’s intervention in Syria.<sup>134</sup> As some contend, “Islamic terrorism is an issue close to Mr. Putin. It helped him rise to power in the first place.”<sup>135</sup> In Putin’s words, “There are 2,000 fighters from Russia and the ex-Soviet republics, which joined the ISIS in Syria, and they represent a direct threat to Russia when they get back from Syria. Therefore, instead of waiting for them to return, we decided to ‘help’ Assad fight them on Syrian territory. This is the most important argument that encourages us and pushes us to provide assistance to Assad.”<sup>136</sup>

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<sup>130</sup> KOZHANOV, N., 2014. Russian-Syrian Dialogue: Myths and Realities. *The Journal of the Middle East and Africa*, 5(1), pp. 1-22.  
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<sup>131</sup> SCHOEN, DOUGLAS E., KAYLAN, MELIK., 2014. *The Russia-China axis : the new cold war and America's crisis of leadership*. 61-63

<sup>132</sup> SALEM, M. and AL-MONITOR, 2014-last update, Egypt caught between Russia and Saudi Arabia. Available: <http://bit.ly/35d4DgA> [July/10, 2016].

<sup>133</sup> From personal interview conducted by the author with Prof. Mordehai Kedar on 22.04.2019

<sup>134</sup> ANTONYAN, T.M., 2017. Russia and Iran in the Syrian Crisis: Similar Aspirations, Different Approaches. *Israel Journal of Foreign Affairs*, 11(3), pp. 337-348.342

<sup>135</sup> FOXALL, A., 2015, Sept. 14, 2015. Don't Trust Putin on Syria. *The New York Times*.

<sup>136</sup> ROSE, C. and CBS, 2015-last update, All Eyes on Putin. Russian President Vladimir Putin on 60 Minutes. Available: <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/vladimir-putin-russian-president-60-minutes-charlie-rose/> [March/2, 2016].

Russian Chechens comprise the second largest group of foreign nationals fighting in ISIS ranks in Syria. Most of these Chechens are closely connected to separatist movements in the Northern Caucasus.<sup>137</sup> In August 2014, Lavrov called ISIS ‘the primary threat’ to Russia in the region. The Kremlin maintains that Assad’s fall would turn Syria into another Libya, which would mean the further radicalization of the Middle East and export of Islamic radicalism to Russia, the North and South Caucasus, and Central Asia.<sup>138</sup> A large number of Russian-speaking fighters is also represented in the ranks of al-Qaeda and its affiliated group Hayat Tahrir which fights Assad forces in Syria. According to many accounts these fighters did not share common causes of fighting Assad regime with the oppositional forces. They perceived their participation in the fighting as a training ground for future jihad against their own government forces and Russia. Central Asian nationals from Azerbaijan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan comprise large portion of ISIS and al-Qaeda militants.<sup>139</sup>

Against the backdrop of Moscow's concern of potential unrest among Russia’s Muslim ethnicities amid Russia’s intervention in Syria, Putin has been very careful to stress Russia’s respect for Islam. On the eve of his air-strikes on Syria, he opened a new mosque in Moscow, country’s biggest Muslim place of worship. The event was attended by Turkey’s leader Tayyip Recep Erdogan and the Palestinian leader Mahmoud Abbas, in addition to other respected Russia’s Muslim leaders, including Chechnya’s President Ramzan Kadyrov. The message from Kremlin was that Russia is out to help good Muslims against those who use Islam for ulterior, non-Islamic goals. So far, this message has not provoked any backlash, but Islamist radicals and extremists in Russia portray the Russian intervention as a “crusade” against Islam. This message is supported by the shortsighted actions of the Russian Orthodox Church, which in its patriotic fervor was captured demonstratively blessing Russian troops before sending them to Syria.<sup>140</sup>

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<sup>137</sup> KOZHANOV, N., 2014. Russian-Syrian Dialogue: Myths and Realities. *The Journal of the Middle East and Africa*, 5(1), pp. 1-22. 14-15

<sup>138</sup> KOZHANOV, N., 2015. *No changes in Moscow’s stance on Syria*. Chatham House.

<sup>139</sup> KOZHANOV, N., 2018. *Russian policy across the Middle East: motivations and methods*. Chatham House. 13

<sup>140</sup> TRENIN, D., 2015. Putin’s Syria Gambit aims at something bigger than Syria. *Carnegie Moscow Center*, October, 13.

As Russian operation in Syria continued, Russia's security agency FSB continued to sound alarms regarding the possibility of penetration of jihadist militants from Syria into Muslim regions of southern Russia in order to destabilize the traditionally conflict-prone republics of Dagestan, Ingushetia, and Chechnya.<sup>141</sup>

Under these conditions, Syria has the potential of becoming a ground for networking between the different extremist groups, who are gradually coming to view themselves as a united front after being scattered across the region. Moreover, these extremist groups are establishing ties with international terrorist organizations and thus becoming part of a global extremist terrorist network. Neither Russian experts nor officials doubt that upon the return of these radicals to Russia, their connections, together with their battle experience, will be used against the government authorities. By 2013, the leadership of Emarat Kavkaz – Russian North Caucasian extremist group - began to actively encourage its followers to fight against Assad, considering Syria a training camp for members of the organization.<sup>142</sup> With the problem of Russian home-grown Islamic fundamentalism and ISIS openly threatening Putin and promising to “liberate Chechnya and the Caucasus,” Russia is keen in stopping the rapidly-spreading ISIS phenomenon followers wherever they exist.<sup>143</sup>

While some contend that destroying the Islamic State (ISIS) and stabilizing Bashar Assad's regime in Syria and subsequent reconciliation with Turkey and arms supply to Iran were among main goals of Moscow's extensive involvement in Syrian conflict,<sup>144</sup> others argue that most important issue influencing Russian policies in the region is its concern over the spread of radical Sunni Islamic fundamentalism in Russia, which has a large Sunni population. It is argued that the rise of ISIS and its emissaries around the world, along with large number of ISIS 'volunteers' from Russia which joined its ranks, and the horrific terrorist attacks Russia has suffered in the past, justifies Russia's fears

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<sup>141</sup> KOZHANOV, N., 2014. Russian-Syrian Dialogue: Myths and Realities. *The Journal of the Middle East and Africa*, 5(1), pp. 1-22.

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<sup>142</sup> Ibid. 15-16

<sup>143</sup> DEMIRJIAN, K., 2014, September 22, 2014. Syria is sticking point between Russia and U.S. on defeating Islamic State. *The Washington Post*.

<sup>144</sup> AMIDROR, Y., 2016. Tip of the Iceberg: Russian Use of Power in Syria. *BESA Center Perspectives, Paper*, (371),.



and strengthens its claims.<sup>145</sup> Russian observers openly state that Moscow's involvement in Syria was dictated by its concerns of the rise of Islamism in post-Soviet territories and Russia itself.<sup>146</sup>

### *The case of Iran*

We propose that for contemporary post-Cold War Russia Iran makes it a natural ally, although with much broader spectrum of interests besides the sole Cold War anti-Westernism as was during the Soviet Union.

Before such entities as the Taliban, Al Qaeda, ISIS and other Islamic fundamentalist movements appeared on the scene, the Iranian Islamic Revolution set its goal to oppose and undermine secular Arab regimes. Those who were targeted most notably were Egypt, Algeria, and Jordan. These movements found inspiration and were supported by the Islamic Republic of Iran following the 1979 Iranian Revolution. Further, Iran has challenged the legitimacy of regimes in Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Kuwait, and Iraq. Its questioning of the sovereignty of these states aimed not so much at redrawing state boundaries in the region, as was Nasser's quest, rather, it wanted to change the character and sources of legitimacy in existing states.<sup>147</sup> Others opine that Iran strongly opposed US hegemony in the region, it tried to become a regional superpower, seeking to fill the void left by the collapse of Arab nationalism and by the absence of any dominant state.<sup>148</sup>

Seemingly, from the outset of the Islamic revolution in Iran, the anti-Western stance of Iranian politics made it almost natural ally for the Soviet Union, if it was not however for the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. The impact that Afghanistan had on Moscow's rapprochement with Tehran became central. Due to growing Iranian influence in Afghanistan – a long-time historical trouble-maker for Moscow, the higher the growing

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<sup>145</sup> Ibid.

<sup>146</sup> KOZHANOV, N., 2018. *Russian policy across the Middle East: motivations and methods*. Chatham House. 6-7

<sup>147</sup> MILLER, BENJAMIN, 2007. *States, nations, and the great powers: the sources of the regional war and peace*. Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press. 151

<sup>148</sup> Ibid. 194

Tehran's leverage and influence on the situation in Afghanistan became, the closer Moscow was willing to align with Iran.<sup>149</sup>

Post-Cold War Moscow's interests in such order of affairs are dual; it experiences acute concerns regarding its own security from the Afghani direction, including the borders with its ex-Soviet neighbors, mainly Tajikistan and a possibility of a destabilization of this Central Asian state on Islamic radical grounds, and it is rather sensitive to Islamization on its own territory, thus it is highly interested in a stable Afghanistan. In this respect, it needs good relations with Tehran. It also sees Iran as a potential trouble-maker for the Western powers, mainly the USA, if one considers that one of Moscow's goals is to cause trouble to its biggest Western rival. Against this backdrop the revelations that were published in United States in 2020 that Russian military intelligence was awarding bounties to Taliban insurgents to kill US troops, becomes worth of consideration.<sup>150</sup>

In the mid-1990s, Russia cooperated with Iran to end the 1992-1997 civil war in Tajikistan between Moscow's former communist allies and a democratic-Islamist alliance. Iran supported a truce that favored Moscow. Moscow and Tehran also both supported Afghan forces opposing Taliban in Afghanistan.<sup>151</sup> According to professor Galia Golan, among our three case-studies, during Soviet Union Iran played central role and composed the most serious considerations in Kremlin's foreign policy-making. The scholar proceeds that today, Iran continues to comprise a central place in contemporary Russia's foreign policy-making under President Putin.<sup>152</sup> We however propose, that contrary to Soviet Union, contemporary Russia is compelled to endow much higher attention in its relations with Iran due to the salience the Islamic factor acquired after the Cold War.

The significance of Iran from the Islamic factor perspective in post-Soviet Russian foreign policy first appeared most explicitly during Russia's two military campaigns in

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<sup>149</sup> AMIN, T., 2007-last update, **Afghanistan: Kabul Mulls Relations with Iran**. Available: <https://www.rferl.org/a/1075333.html> [9 September, 2019].

<sup>150</sup> LEBLANC, P., 2020, 29 June. **Washington Post: Russian bounties to Taliban fighters believed to result in deaths of US troops, intelligence assessments show**. *CNN CNN Politics*.

<sup>151</sup> KATZ, M.N., 2010. Iran and Russia, ". *The Iran Primer: Power, Politics, and US Policy*, 186. 3

<sup>152</sup> From an interview conducted by the author with Prof. Galia Golan on 01.05.2019

Chechnya. Unlike the situation during the first Chechen war (1994-1996), during the second Chechen war, which erupted in August 1999, their interests came into conflict. It is observed that the reason was that during these years Iran was heading the Islamic Conference (OIC) and purported to seek the welfare of Muslim nations everywhere. During the war in Kosovo, while Iran and Russia backed different sides, the issue never seriously strained Russian-Iranian relations. Chechnya, however, was to prove to be a different situation particularly as stories of Russian soldiers massacring Chechen civilians began to leak out. As the self-proclaimed defender of Muslims throughout the world, and as the head of the Islamic Conference, Iran could not sit idly by while Russian troops slaughtered the Chechens who were overwhelmingly Muslim. Iran gradually increased its criticism of Moscow's behavior.<sup>153</sup>

During Kozyrev's period as the Russian Foreign Minister, Russian-Iranian relations rapidly developed. A significantly weakened Russia has found Iran as a useful ally in dealing with a number of very sensitive Middle Eastern, Caucasian, Transcaucasian and Central and Southwest Asian political hot spots. These included Chechnya, where Iran kept a very low profile in the first Chechen war, despite the use by the Chechen rebels of Islamic themes and slogans in their conflict with Russia; Tajikistan, where Iran helped Russia achieve a political settlement, albeit a shaky one; Afghanistan, where both Russia and Iran have stood together against the Taliban; and Azerbaijan, which neither Iran, with a sizeable Azeri population of its own, nor Russia wished to see emerge as a significant economic and military regional power. In addition, Russian nationalists called for a closer Russian-Iranian relationship as a counterbalance to Turkey, seeing it expanding its influence in both Transcaucasia and Central Asia.<sup>154</sup>

Given Iran's need for sophisticated arms, following the Gulf War and the rising tension between Tehran and the Gulf states, in particular with Saudi Arabia – Iran's central Islamic challenger, the pragmatic Iranian leader Hashemi-Rafsanjani was careful

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<sup>153</sup> FREEDMAN, R.O., 2001. Russian policy toward the Middle East: The Yeltsin legacy and the Putin challenge. *The Middle East Journal*, **55**(1), pp. 58-90.71

<sup>154</sup> *Ibid.* 67-68

not to alienate neither the Soviet Union nor what later became the Russian Federation. Thus, when Azerbaijan declared its independence from the Soviet Union in November 1991, Iran, unlike Turkey, did not recognize its independence until after the USSR itself collapsed. Similarly, despite occasional rhetoric from Iranian officials, Rafsanjani ensured that Iran kept a relatively low profile on Azerbaijan and the newly independent states of Central Asia, emphasizing cultural and economic rather than religious ties as the centerpiece of their relations. This was also due in part to the fact that after more than seventy years of Soviet rule, Islam was in a weak state in Muslim countries of the former Soviet Union; the leaders of the ex-Soviet Muslim states were all secular Muslims, and the chances for Iranian-style Islamic revolution were considerably low. Indeed, some skeptics argued that Iran was simply waiting for mosques to be built and Islam to mature before trying to bring about its Islamic revolutionary ambitions. Nonetheless, the Russian leadership basically saw Iran as acting very responsibly in Central Asia and Transcaucasia, and this was one of the factors which encouraged it to continue supplying Iran with modern weaponry.<sup>155</sup>

Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, Iran 'laid its eyes' on Azerbaijan,<sup>156</sup> which was annexed from Iran by Soviet regime after the Second World War and Russia observes with concern the growing and improving relations between Iran and the ex-Soviet Azerbaijan.<sup>157</sup> Multiple conflicts in the post-Soviet area, particularly between Armenia and Azerbaijan, and the links between the independent Azerbaijan and the Iranian Azerbaijan, are just some of many regional issues that now have direct consequences for Russia. However, it is not obvious that Iran will have any significant influence in the newly established republics of the Central Asia. A whole host of countries

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<sup>155</sup> Ibid. 67

<sup>156</sup> BARRY, DONALD D., RIEBER, ALFRED J., RUBINSTEIN, ALVIN Z., 1991. *Perestroika at the crossroads*. Armonk, N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe. 352

<sup>157</sup> SEPAHVAND, M. and JAFAROV, T., 2015. *Iran willing to take steps to improve trade with Azerbaijan*. Azerbaijan: TREND news agency.

have ambitions and opportunities that will likely prevent Iran from assuming a dominant position among these regional players.<sup>158</sup>

Contemporary Russian regime cooperates extensively with Iran on the Afghan issue knowing that due to the Islamic grounds of the matter, Moscow obviously is not capable of handling it without external, Islamic competent and authoritative help. Russia acknowledges the threat of radical Islamism stemming from the Taliban insurgence with the potential of spilling over into Russia itself.<sup>159</sup> With this aim, Russia negotiated with Tajikistan to station its troops, together with Tadjik military along the Afghan border.<sup>160</sup> This issue makes the impact on Russia's foreign policy towards Iran apparent, complemented by Moscow's previous need of Iran's mediation efforts in putting down the crisis in Tajikistan in 1992-1993.<sup>161</sup>

While knowing that the Central Asian post-Soviet territorial space, bordering directly with Russia, is one of the most sensitive issues for Moscow, we propose that Russia's policy towards Iran largely characterized by appeasement, to discourage Iran from pursuing whatever interests it might have in the Russia's proximity and in former Soviet Muslim states. In our view, Moscow chose policy of appeasement rather than policy of deterrence towards Iran mainly due to the Islamic factor. The Central Asian and the Caucasus issues compose one of the pillars of Russian foreign policy towards the Iranian Islamic Republic. From this perspective, significant part of Moscow's foreign policy conduct towards our case study states, and Iran in particular, becomes more comprehensible. Moscow recognizes that such issues as the security of its borders, Iran's influence on Tajik opposition, Afghan mujahideen, and Muslims in Central Asia, Caucasus, and Russia itself, are not dependent on a direct border between Iran, Russia and the CIS. It is in this context, because Iranian influence "knows no borders", Russia

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<sup>158</sup> COULOUMBIS, THEODORE A., DOKOS, THANOS P., HALKI INTERNATIONAL SEMINARS ON SECURITY AND CONFIDENCE BUILDING IN THE MEDITERRANEAN AND SOUTH EASTERN EUROPE, 1995. *Arms control and security in the Middle East and the CIS republics*. Athens, Greece: Hellenic Foundation for Defense and Foreign Policy. 98

<sup>159</sup> KOZHANOV, N.A., 2012. Russia's Relations with Iran: Dialog without Commitments. *The Washington Institute for Near East Policy*, June 2012(Policy Focus 120),. 12

<sup>160</sup> PRIMAKOV, E.M., 2007. *Minnoe pole politiki*. Moskva: Molodaia gvardiia. 189-191,193-194

<sup>161</sup> Ibid. 189-191,193-194

needs to contain Islam by closer relations and rapprochement with Iran, rather than by means of deterrence. Hostile Iran could cause Russia many problems should it seriously take up supporting Muslim rebels in Caucasus or Tajikistan with weapons, money, and volunteers. The dominant view thus advocates entering a relationship with Iran with the goal to discourage its potentially harmful activities.<sup>162</sup>

Other accounts confirm that the prime reason for close relationship with Teheran result from Moscow's aim to bloc Iran's influence in Russia's Muslim near abroad.<sup>163</sup> According to some Russian accounts, up to the beginning of the 2000s, this policy proved to be satisfactory for Moscow.<sup>164</sup> Vladimir Putin steadily proceeds with this policy towards Iran, going as far as protecting Iran from Western sanctions and possibility of military action against Ayatollah's nuclear program on both platforms, the UN<sup>165</sup> and the sidelines of the P5+1 agreements in 2015.<sup>166</sup> Russia sees this extensive support of Iran as a strategic goal in combating radical (Salafi jihadist) Islam, which threatens Russia,<sup>167</sup> and sees the Shi'ite Iranian-Syrian axis as an Islamic 'shield' that would protect Russia, to a greater extent, from Sunni support of Muslim rebels in Northern Caucasus.<sup>168</sup>

In this respect, Russia sees positively Iran's interference in Syrian conflict on Moscow's side. A collapse of Bashar Assad's regime in Syria is perceived by Kremlin as highly destabilizing development directly impacting Russia's stability. In Moscow's view, a possible outbreak of violence between Sunnis and Shiites in case Damascus would fall, can be contained only with Tehran's help. At the same time, the fall of the current regime in Syria would mean a strengthening of the Sunni bloc and further weakening of Shiite Iran, which could respond to its weakened position and loss of its main regional ally – Syria, through accelerating its own nuclear program or through incitement of discontent

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<sup>162</sup> GOLAN, GALIA.,RUSSIA AND EURASIA PROGRAMME (ROYAL INSTITUTE OF INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS), 1998. *Russia and Iran : a strategic partnership?* London: The Royal Institute of International Affairs. 10

<sup>163</sup> Ibid. 3

<sup>164</sup> TRENIN, DMITRIJ VITAL'EVICH., PIERRE,ANDREW J., 1997. *Russia in the world arms trade*. Washington, D.C: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. 68-69

<sup>165</sup> SCHOEN, DOUGLAS E.,KAYLAN, MELIK., 2014. *The Russia-China axis : the new cold war and America's crisis of leadership*. 15

<sup>166</sup> SAUNDERS, P.J., 2015. *Russia views Iran agreement favorably, for now*. AI-Monitor.

<sup>167</sup> MAGEN, Z., DEKEL, U. and FAINBERG, S., 2016. How Deep are the Cracks in the Russian-Iranian Coalition in Syria? *INSS Insight, January 3, 2016*(783),.2

<sup>168</sup> ALEKSASHENKO, S., 2015. A three-sided disaster: The American, Russian, and Iranian strategic triangle in Syria. *Brookings*, .

and resentment of Shiites in the Sunni Arab states which can be expected having same impact on Shi'ite Muslim minorities residing in Russia. This in turn could lead to a significant deterioration in already tense situation in Chechnya and neighboring North Caucasus republics such as Ingushetia, Dagestan, and Kabardino-Balkaria.<sup>169</sup>

Additional accounts on Russian-Iranian relations consent that the Russian-Iranian alliance is rich in irony given a long history of antagonism between the two nations that lasted until the end of the Cold War. After the Cold War, the old adversaries came to realize that they had more in common than not, which comprise both, goals as well as fears. One of main concerns that hold Russian-Iranian alliance together is the mutual interest in opposing radical Sunni movements, such as al-Qaeda and the Taliban.<sup>170</sup> Since the Soviet-Afghan war in the 1980s, Tehran and Moscow shared distrust of Western powers and their possible links with these rebel Sunni Islamist groups.<sup>171</sup> Though these organizations are best known for their opposition to the West, their historical and religious roots make them anti-Shi'a (Iran is a predominantly Shiite nation), as well as anti-Russian.<sup>172</sup> Kremlin's support and cultivation of the "Russian Islam" phenomenon, largely opposes Wahhabi movements which origins from Sunni Saudi Arabia. Further reason for long-term Russian-Iranian partnership is the mutual desire to oppose and defeat secessionist movements – in Iran these are the Kurds, and in Russia the Chechens, along with clamping down internal dissent against the regimes of both states.<sup>173</sup> Russia's most acute concern is its southern borders composed of the CIS states, which are termed as Russia's 'soft underbelly', and Russia's Muslim 'security belt'. This issue both, brings Iran closer to Russia's interests, and simultaneously complicates the relations. The revival of traditional [fundamentalist] Islam on its southern borders is far from being in Moscow's interests, as opposed to Iran, which embraces such developments. A major difference from previous period, is that this issue of ethnic and

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<sup>169</sup> TICHÝ, L., 2014. Security and Foreign Policy of Dmitry Medvedev in the Period 2008–2012. *The Journal of Slavic Military Studies*, 27(4), pp. 533-552. 550

<sup>170</sup> SCHOEN, DOUGLAS E., KAYLAN, MELIK., 2014. *The Russia-China axis : the new cold war and America's crisis of leadership*. 44-45

<sup>171</sup> THERME, C., 2017. *Russia and Iran's growing cooperation hints at a new Middle East*. France: The Conversation.

<sup>172</sup> SCHOEN, DOUGLAS E., KAYLAN, MELIK., 2014. *The Russia-China axis : the new cold war and America's crisis of leadership*. 44-45

<sup>173</sup> *Ibid.* 45

Muslim population on both sides of the border, today is able to be pursued with far less Russia's control or influence over the areas involved, namely the former Soviet republics, than before. Moreover, Russia must deal with an apparent power vacuum in areas of local conflicts, such as the Caucasus and Tajikistan.<sup>174</sup> Whereas, during Soviet times, Moscow was concerned of its Muslim population in Central Asia and the Caucasus, the scale of such concern was much lower than today and not as crucial as after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, although the Islamic factor already begun to occupy the minds of the Soviets decision-makers some time before the collapse of the Soviet state. Two main events caused this: the Soviet war in Afghanistan and the Iranian Islamic Revolution.

Other analyses point that contemporary Russia sees Iran as a threat. It is argued that today Russia perceives its post-Soviet Central Asian Muslim states as its frontier against Iran. Russia's consistent efforts to rebuild its military capacity in the southern direction and project it through the CIS, and most notably Central Asia, in part stems from this perspective. Moscow supplies extensive amounts of weaponry to the Central Asian states at subsidized prices and concludes agreements on stationing rights for the Russian troops on their territories. It provides training, rebuilds its military bases in Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and potentially Uzbekistan, augmenting military capabilities for rapid power projection into Central Asia, constructing integrated military alliances with Central Asia states through the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) and the Caspian naval force alliance (CASFOR), and consistently promoting the idea that the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) should become a military bloc. Russia has conducted naval exercises with Kazakhstan and other states shoring with the Caspian in August 2005. This Russian force development and base seeking campaigns aim to provide its forces in Central Asia with integrated ground, air, and naval (Caspian) capabilities. The recent Russian moves to gain new bases in Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan also clearly aim at providing secure lodgments for expanding its air and ground reach, especially as its military seeks to generate the capability to move forces rapidly to potential hot spots - a theme that has been rehearsed frequently in its exercises since

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<sup>174</sup> GOLAN, G., 1998. *Russia and Iran: a strategic partnership?* London: The Royal Institute of International Affairs. 3



2004.<sup>175</sup> This active militarization of Russia's southern frontiers indicate Moscow's concerns from threats coming from its post-Soviet Central Asian states and Iran. No significant strategic threat stems from this direction except of radical Islamic terrorism and other forms of violence and destabilization. All aforementioned states are overwhelmingly Muslim.

In June 1992, Moscow negotiated a bilateral pact with Turkmenistan, providing for its troops to be stationed on the Turkmen-Iranian border, and it concluded a Collective Security Treaty in May 1992 with the other states of the region bordering with Iran. The Collective Defense Pact, negotiated in 1995 with seven of the twelve CIS states, which included the right to intervene (for Russia into these states), if it believed its security to be compromised, was the outcome of security considerations in Kremlin regarding potential Iranian threat. Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan, which had long-standing reservations about joining CIS agreements, refused to join the Pact, but Moscow kept border troops in Turkmenistan under the bilateral pact. Azerbaijan, although being a party of the May 1995 pact and signed a bilateral agreement with Russia in May 17, 1996 on cooperation regarding border issues, as well as signing a Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation with Russia on 3 July 1997, still refused to have Russian troops on its territory bordering with Iran.<sup>176</sup> It can be added that Russia's continuing interest in keeping its troops in Central Asian states stems not solely from a potential threat from the Iranian direction, but also against radical Islamist tendencies in stationing countries which might pose a threat to Russia itself should they develop into serious militant insurgence. These concerns gained credence when in early 1992 Uzbek President Islam Karimov had to crack-down local political opposition movements which rebelled under radical Islamic banners. Karimov then warned Moscow and his neighboring Turkmenistan from a too-close rapprochement with Iran, siting that Tehran plays central role in Islamizing local Muslim population in

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<sup>175</sup> BLANK, STEPHEN J., STANY ZJEDNOCZONE., CONSUMER PRODUCT SAFETY COMMISSION., ARMY WAR COLLEGE., STRATEGIC STUDIES INSTITUTE., 2015. *Perspectives on Russian foreign policy*. Lavergne; Carlisle Barracks: CPSC] ; Strategic Studies Institute. 43-44

<sup>176</sup> GOLAN, GALIA., RUSSIA AND EURASIA PROGRAMME (ROYAL INSTITUTE OF INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS), 1998. *Russia and Iran : a strategic partnership?* London: The Royal Institute of International Affairs. 9

Central Asia.<sup>177</sup> The militant opposition forces in Tajikistan were also seen being backed by Iranian groups on fundamentalist Islamist grounds.<sup>178</sup> Although during Russia's encounter with Chechnya, the Iranian trace was not as explicit, at some point Moscow stepped up its criticism of Iran, listing it, along with other Muslim states, as a country suspected of aiding the Chechen rebels and Islamists.<sup>179</sup>

Some experts propose that the former Soviet Muslim states gradually modeling themselves towards the Iranian regime,<sup>180</sup> adding credibility to Russia's concerns. Others however skeptical that such post-Soviet Muslim phenomenon is capable of composing any significant political regional force being able to pose a direct threat to Russia. This argument is based on the fact that the predominance of Sunni Muslims over Shi'ites in Central Asia limits the influence of Iran and its Islamic fundamentalist ideology.<sup>181</sup>

Russia is mightily wary about what it perceives as the threat of political Islam in the Caucasus. It is therefore not in the best interest of Russia to isolate Iran. The underlying assumption is that expanding contacts with the outside world serves to further de-radicalize the foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran.<sup>182</sup> In addition, Russia perceives the Arab Spring as a proxy war between Saudi Arabia and its allies on the one hand, and Iran on the other. Saudi Arabia's allies in Central Asia and Northern Caucasus are basically Russia's enemies, but Iran's allies in Central Asia (for example, the 'Northern Alliance' - original) are also Russia's allies.<sup>183</sup>

In general, how plausible is the Iranian threat to Russia? The call of radical circles within Iran in the 1990s to spread Islam in ex-Soviet Central Asia became one of the most acute misgivings for Kremlin.<sup>184</sup> Others opine that it was the rise of the Saudi activity with Russia, that compelled Iran to launch its educational, cultural and religious projects in

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<sup>177</sup> Ibid. 10

<sup>178</sup> Ibid. 12

<sup>179</sup> FREEDMAN, R.O., 2000. Russian-Iranian relations in the 1990s. *Middle East Review of International Affairs*, 4(2), pp. 68. 75

<sup>180</sup> CURANOVIĆ, A., 2014. *The religious factor in Russia's foreign policy*. London; New York: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group. 226

<sup>181</sup> GOLAN, GALIA., ROYAL INSTITUTE OF INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS., 1992. *Moscow and the Middle East : new thinking on regional conflict*. London: Pinter. 80

<sup>182</sup> KHASAN, H., 1998. Russia's Middle Eastern Policy. *The Indian Journal of Political Science*, 59(1/4), pp. 84-105. 99

<sup>183</sup> ANTONYAN, T.M., 2017. Russia and Iran in the Syrian Crisis: Similar Aspirations, Different Approaches. *Israel Journal of Foreign Affairs*, 11(3), pp. 337-348.342

<sup>184</sup> FREEDMAN, R.O., 2000. Russian-Iranian relations in the 1990s. *Middle East Review of International Affairs*, 4(2), pp. 68. 65

Central Asia and the Caucasus.<sup>185</sup> The main perceived threat concerns, coming from the Iranian direction, that were sounded in Moscow regarding the Central Asian-Iranian border can be concluded into three main features: the radial Islamist terroristic threat; non-state military formations, trained and prepared on the Iranian-Central Asian borders for potential invasion into the CIS states with further probability of invasion into Russian territory; and the stationing of foreign military troops either on Iranian territory, or the territory of CIS without Russian consent, which would carry a threat to Russia's national security and stability.<sup>186</sup>

Among other opposition voices regarding Russia's rapprochement and deepening cooperation with Iran, in cultural, religious, strategic, military, resource and energy fields, the most vocal sounds claim that Iran is far from being an ally to Russia, rather it is a serious competitor. By promoting construction of oil and gas transportation routes to bypass Russia, Iran augments its influence on Central Asia countries, 'tearing' them away from Russia's sphere of influence. In addition, Iran is sending signals for cooperation to Ukraine, the largest and most essential post-Soviet state in Russia's proximity.<sup>187</sup> Others argue that nuclear Iran would only worsen its relations with Russia, going in their assessments as far as arguing that Iran still sees Russia as its number two enemy and seeks to take back Iranian lands once conquered by then Soviet Union.<sup>188</sup> Other arguments against cooperation with Iran, especially in arms trade and nuclear technology, claim that these deals largely stem from private commercial interests and will not contribute to Russia's strategic national interests. Arms sales to Iran arouse opposition in context of undesirability of strengthening a country that seeks to export the Islamic Revolution, and it was argued that arming Iran runs the risk of altering the balance of power in the region, perhaps leading to Iranian military domination of the Middle East.<sup>189</sup>

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<sup>185</sup> CURANOVIĆ, A., 2014. *The religious factor in Russia's foreign policy*. London; New York: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group. 200

<sup>186</sup> GOLAN, GALIA., RUSSIA AND EURASIA PROGRAMME (ROYAL INSTITUTE OF INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS), 1998. *Russia and Iran : a strategic partnership?* London: The Royal Institute of International Affairs. 9

<sup>187</sup> Ibid. 46

<sup>188</sup> Ibid. 47

<sup>189</sup> Ibid. 48

As we see, the Islamic factor plays an essential part in contemporary Russian decision-making in regard to Iran. Some prominent Russian contemporary scholars propose that in case of eruption of a major conflict in CIS countries bordering with Iran, based on religious and/or ethnical grounds, or in case of an attempt to overthrow a secular government by Islamist forces, Moscow might expect Iranian interference.<sup>190</sup> Actively camouflaged but, nevertheless, obvious problems with Muslim minorities in Russia makes it difficult for Moscow to forget that exporting the Islamic Revolution remains an official, constitutionally mandated goal of the Iranian government.<sup>191</sup>

### **Conclusion. Islamic factor as source of Soviet and Russian foreign policy**

Radical Islamism perceived by Russian authorities as an existential threat for contemporary Russia. We demonstrate the concerns expressed by contemporary Russian leaders throughout the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century from the threat posed by Islamist extremism.

Iran provides us with the strongest evidence regarding the role of Islam in Soviet and later Russian foreign policy-making. Iran, apart from governmental authorities and ministries, is ruled by highly religious spiritual leaders. During the Soviet period, the Islamic factor posed the dilemma for Soviet authorities assuming that either Iran can be penetrated with the help of Soviet Muslims or radical fundamentalist Islamic currents would pose a threat of spilling over into the territory of Soviet Union in Central Asia and the Caucasus. Post-revolutionary Iran presented a direct menace of the export of its Islamic Revolution into the USSR. Soviet concerns were justified. The immediate effect of Khomeini's policies after his rise to power in Tehran, was hostile. Afghanistan, the Iran-Iraqi war, the growing Soviet Muslim nationalism and separatism, and the multiple

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<sup>190</sup> TRENIN, DMITRIJ VITAL'EVICH., PIERRE, ANDREW J., 1997. *Russia in the world arms trade*. Washington, D.C: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. 72-73

<sup>191</sup> KOZHANOV, N.A., 2012. Russia's Relations with Iran: Dialog without Commitments. *The Washington Institute for Near East Policy*, June 2012(Policy Focus 120),. 26

conflicts that erupted in Russia's near abroad contributed to Moscow's perception of Iran as a threat.

In the late 1980s', Soviet opinions about the Islamic factor began to receive an unequivocal expression. Islam was called by some Soviet statesmen as 'medieval'. Iran's assistance to Afghani mujahedeen only exacerbated such debates in the Kremlin. The Soviet occupation of Afghanistan had greatly damaged Moscow's relations with its own local Muslims. It also damaged the relations between Moscow and the radical Arab bloc and the post-Camp David 'centrist' camp of Arab states. The withdrawal from Afghanistan on the other hand, was seen by Muslims as weakness of the Soviet regime.

The end of the Cold War is marked by the mobilization of Islamic forces almost everywhere, but especially in the Middle East. Some of the most prominent decision-makers urged to closely ally with Muslim states by adapting to the Islamic "revelation". Yet, in the long-run, Islam poses a significant threat to Russia. The Chechen "solution" for example, could prove to be temporary. The threat of radical Islam in part comes from the Iranian direction. Rapprochement with Egypt and support for Syria could thus build an anti-radical bloc in order to help Russia deal with its own radical fundamentalist Islamic threat. Islamic terrorism that swept post-Soviet Russia in the 2000s confirmed Moscow's anxiety. Many former Soviet Arab allies across the region were overthrown by Islamists following the cessation of Soviet support for their secular leaders. The 9/11 attacks and the second Chechen war had put the "Islamic factor" at the forefront of world politics. In Chechnya, for instance, Russia was faced with a direct affiliation of Chechen rebels with al-Qaeda. Al-Qaeda and the Caucasus Emirate's ideology encompass the whole of Russia as a space for future seizure under the banners of the caliphate. 'Emirat Kavkaz', being one of the leading political, ideological and terrorist groups in post-Soviet Caucasian territories, continuously promotes the idea of Islamic State in Caucasus and jihad against Russia.

At the same time, both former Cold War rivals seek to utilize the Islamic factor to undermine each other. Moscow tries to come to terms with Islam on both fronts: with its

own Muslims inside Russia and in its near abroad, and external strong Muslim states like Iran and Saudi Arabia, simultaneously fighting with Islamic terrorism in Syria and cooperating militarily with Egypt on an anti-terrorist grounds. Energy resources, which became so salient in post-Soviet Russia's strategy, and which are vastly located in Muslim states, became another factor for Moscow's rapprochement with the Muslim world. Gaining back its superpower status also became a cause for reconciliation with Islamic states of the Middle East and the Gulf. By losing Eastern Europe, South America and Africa, contemporary post-Soviet Russia sees its superpower status reinforced only by its realignment, close cooperation, and if possible, by exercising influence over regional politics of such states as Syria, Egypt and Iran.

Russia's overwhelming militarization of the Caspian Sea and its pursuit of military bases and stationing rights in the Central Asian states and the Caucasus indicate Moscow's concern with a possibility of Islamic uprisings in these areas and a potential spillover into Russia itself. All states, that Russia seeks military cooperation with in its proximity are substantially Muslim. No other threat stems from its southern direction, Iran including, except Islamic terrorism. The ISIS phenomenon and its vast and rapid advancement only reinforced concerns in Kremlin.

At large, Islamic factor presents both a threat and an opportunity for Moscow. The opportunity stems from natural resources that the region possesses and closer rapprochement with Muslim states, reinforcing Russia's superpower status. Whereas the threat stems from radical fundamentalist Islamic currents, terrorism and destabilization in its periphery and Russia itself. Contemporary radical Islamism and terrorism that Moscow faces following the collapse of the Soviet Union is not just a question of separatism or ethnic nationalism. 'Russian' fundamentalist Islam is directly affiliated with the global jihadi movement. Already in the late 1990s, Islamic fundamentalism was stressed by Russian political and sociological scientists as the main threat to Russia's security and integrity. Russian intelligence agencies acknowledge that such Russian radical Islamist movements as the Emirat Kavkaz receive funding from the Middle East. In addition, the divided and weak ex-Soviet states on Russian borders exacerbate the problem of

fundamentalist Islamic penetration. In 2011 Vladimir Putin warned that the fall of Libya will provoke an expansion of radical Islamism into the North Caucasus. The following Russian involvement in Syria was caused, in significant part, by this growing concern. The Arab Spring and the threat of radical Islam caused controversies in the dialogue between Russian authorities and some of the religious leaders of the Middle East and the Gulf.

Another opportunity that Russia is vigorously seeking to explore with the help of the “Muslim factor” is its search for post-Soviet identity. The Kremlin is actively engaged in attempts to produce a unique conciliation between the Russian Orthodox religion and Islam, seeing it as a unique embodiment of a dialogue between Christianity and Islam, and promoting itself as the leader of such a dialogue and seeing it as its ‘sacred’ mission. Contemporary Russia sees its cooperation with Islam as part of a shared anti-Westernism, anti-Americanism, and the pursuit of multipolarity. Moscow tries to achieve close relations with as many Muslim states as possible, in order to ‘isolate’ the United States. In this respect, the close cooperation with our case-studies, especially the unprecedented support for the Syrian regime and the extensive political and military support for Iran, by and large follow from this goal. In part, by rapprochement with Islam, Moscow seeks to achieve support for its global agendas which include ‘sovereign democracy’, ‘non-interference’, ‘multipolarity’, and ‘multivectorism’ on which we elaborate in more detail in other parts of our study. Some in Russia however consider such an active rapprochement with Islam as a political misperception in a long-run.

The most explicit distinction between the Soviet Union period and contemporary Russia is that now, when the Soviet ‘Islamic belt’ became a whole new region comprised of independent sovereign states, Moscow is able to exercise much less influence on these countries bordering with the Middle East. The ‘power vacuum’ in the Caucasus and in Tajikistan adds to Moscow's concerns. Gas and oil pipelines going through the Central Asian and Caucasian states became another cause of friction between Tehran and Moscow. The multiple Caspian Sea issues can be added to the host of problems Moscow now deals with, directly connected with its policy towards Iran and its ex-Soviet neighbors.

Since Chechnya is part of the Russian Federation, Moscow observes with high alert any “meddling” on Islamic grounds from the Chechen direction. All three our case-study states are being watched carefully by Moscow from the Islamist perspective, especially since all three directions, the Egyptian, Syrian and Iranian, were already traced by Russian security agencies as sources of inspiration and support, on various scales, for Central Asian and Caucasus insurgents.

The appearance of new independent ex-Soviet states on Russia’s borders, six of which are Muslim, with the prospect of being influenced directly by Egypt, Syria and Iran and indirectly by Russia’s foreign policy towards these three states, represent a new domain in Russia’s foreign policy decision-making towards these countries. Anxiety of radical Islam and terrorism adds to the complexity of Moscow’s relations with Tehran, Cairo and Damascus. Energy resources, which became the central pillar of Russia’s strategic grand design, compel Russia to find ways to converge with the Muslim states of the Middle East and the Gulf. In contrast to contemporary Russia, the Soviet “grand design” was to a much lesser degree relying on energy resources, seeing it as an instrument of its foreign policy and not as a goal in itself, thus somewhat dwarfing the Islamic factor in its foreign policy decision-making.

By siding with our case-study states, contemporary Russia seeks to moderate radical Islamic tendencies inside Russia, regain its lost status of a superpower, and outline its global post-Soviet role. In addition, by allying itself with the Muslim World, it is able to compose a global pole and pose itself as equal, significant competitor to the West. However, whether Russia is capable or [would be] permitted to lead such a coalition, remains to be seen. Opposing the US is not a new feature, however, while in past this opposition was based on ideological grounds, in present, basing the confrontation on religious or civilizational grounds represents a completely new feature of Russian post-Cold War foreign policy conduct.



## CHAPTER 6. “PROBING THE LIMITS”. OPPORTUNITY-SEEKING AS SOURCE OF SOVIET AND RUSSIAN FOREIGN POLICY

### Introduction

In this chapter we will discuss and apply the realist proposition that a country's foreign policy is significantly influenced by the limits actors are not allowed to transgress. In other words, the level of permissiveness is an essential condition that shapes one's foreign policy decision-making and action. Another power or power configuration may pose an insurmountable obstacles to one's own intentions – or not. It is not at what point one *will stop*, but rather at what point one *will be stopped*. We test the proposition that both the Soviet Union and contemporary Russia were well aware of their enabling and constraining environment – opportunity seekers and risk avoiders.

Both, Soviet and contemporary Russian foreign conduct was and still is significantly influenced by an action-reaction pattern: Moscow will test the limits until its actions are rebuffed. On multiple occasions, as will be shown later in this chapter, Moscow backs down as a result of a pushback in order not to escalate, however, it also often acts on 'probing the limits' basis.

This pattern of Soviet and Russian conduct begun with the immediate post-Second World War years. It was explicitly demonstrated by Moscow's policy towards Iran and continued to have an impact on Moscow's policy towards Egypt and Syria in their conflict with Israel. Several authors coincide that especially the Kremlin's military “expeditions” can be explained from a 'probing' perspective. Some contemporary observers conclude that contemporary Russia's intervention in Syria emanates from the same behavioral pattern – to probe and push the limits of what is allowed and how far it can go. We will discuss evidence from our case studies that corroborates this proposition and will assess the explanatory reach of this approach.

## The 'probing' perspective. Theoretical analysis

Why states intervene? This is a striking question, and while it has already been covered by an enormous amount of distinguished research literature, the current study sheds some new light on the issue. States intervene and they do it relatively often, however not always with clear, rational goals, let alone success. States often engage in costly interventions in regions peripheral to their core interests and, moreover, often inexplicably they are persistent in engaging and prolonging failed interventions. Scholars on Soviet politics often refer to the example of the Soviet bitter experience with the intervention of Afghanistan in the 1980s.<sup>1</sup> Former US Senator Henry Jackson (1912-1983) once argued that the increases in Soviet nuclear force would lead to political outcomes unfavorable to the United States, but that "The Russians have taken enormous risks when they have been in a totally inferior position; they took Czechoslovakia when they didn't even have a nuclear bomb (annexation of the Czechoslovakian Carpathian Ruthenia in June 1945); they tried to move into Cuba with missiles when they were at 7 to 1 strategic disadvantage, I think it was, 5 or 7 to 1, but it is way up there. Was it not in October of 1962? Look at the risks they took. I wonder what kind of risk they are going to take in the mid-1970's and late 1970's and the 1980's when they have a situation that is totally reversed with this enormous power and a more confident Soviet Union, in my judgment, that will be a more dangerous Soviet Union."<sup>2</sup>

The observation is remarkable for discussing Soviet and later Russian behavior. Why would the Soviets take high risks, when they were in apparent disadvantage vis-à-vis the West or even solely USA during different periods of its history? Various studies address this question with different explanations, which will be covered in the current survey. The risk-taking behavior is most plausibly explained by the Soviet and Russian strategic culture and the intrinsic Bolshevik Operational Code (see chapter 7). In current

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<sup>1</sup> RIPSAN, NORRIN M., TALIAFERRO, JEFFREY W., LOBELL, STEVEN E., 2016. *Neoclassical realist theory of international politics*. New York, N.Y.: Oxford university press.26

<sup>2</sup> JERVIS, ROBERT, PRINCETON UNIVERSITY PRESS., 2017. *Perception and misperception in international politics*. Princeton; Oxford: Princeton University Press. 79

chapter we propose another perspective to risk behavior of both the Soviet Union as well as contemporary Russia. According to our proposition, the source of such behavior is because Russia was, and still is, allowed to do it.

During the Cold War, Moscow's aim was to be able to cover with its bombers the entirety of North Africa, the whole Mediterranean, and to reinforce its capabilities to strike throughout Western and Central Europe. Scholars wonder how politically realistic any of these ambitions were. One must remember that until recently the concept of Russia seizing a territory in Europe was widely seen as an impossible outcome, given the geopolitical realities, and yet it annexed Crimea in 2014. What was believed impossible in the modern international domain nonetheless happened. The main thesis advanced here is that Russia will project its geopolitical and geostrategic power and influence wherever it finds that it can do so, regardless of what other countries perceive as realistic or possible.<sup>3</sup>

Risk-assessment scholars argue that risk-affinity is dependent on perceptions of Russia's adversary's risk-taking propensities, its properties and commitments, and on mutual expectations and beliefs about probable responses to Moscow's actions and counteractions rather than objective conditions.<sup>4</sup> Some authors introduce a threefold differentiation of international relations on a continuum ranging from full cooperation to a total war. The differentiation phases range from 'normal interaction', 'crisis', and 'war'. Correspondingly there are 'risks of crisis', 'risks of war', and 'risks of mutual annihilation'. These concepts hold that "normal" interactions will always be within the 'crisis' probability range, i.e., the "normal" may transgress into a crisis, while a crisis would be within the probability range of 'risk of war; and the situation of war will be within the probability range of risk of 'mutual annihilation'.<sup>5</sup> In more detail, the claim suggests that states will always contain elements of cooperation and political conflict. Coercion by diplomatic, economic and military-political means, short of the overt use of force, may form a part of their 'normal

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<sup>3</sup> BLANK, S. and LEVITZKY, E., 2015. Geostrategic aims of the Russian arms trade in East Asia and the Middle East. *Defence studies*, 15(1), pp. 63-80. 76

<sup>4</sup> ADOMEIT, H., 1984. *Soviet risk-taking and crisis behavior: a theoretical and empirical analysis*. London: Allen & Unwin. 3

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.* 43

interaction'. However, while there is always a risk of unfolding crisis in relations among adversaries, any increase in coercive and conflict elements will increase the probability that crisis will occur. The risk of a crisis then turns into the risk of war and a qualitatively new situation then prevails. The crisis ends with the outbreak of war, and a new risk-calculation occurs, concerned with the probable costs of fighting a war, now that the deterrence has failed. <sup>6</sup>

This short description illustrates that risk-taking is an integral element of international affairs. However, it does not necessarily lead to a brinkmanship behavior. States will always interact in some 'state of balance', trying to avoid the worst repercussions by staying within permissive frames of interaction, without being too malleable politically or strategically. However, if small or status quo countries will try to balance within these very limits, revisionist, non-status quo or superpowers, will behave on 'the brink', until they are 'showed' their limits or 'signaled' where to stop. This is what often referred to as the "red line" effect in international politics.

The concept of 'probing the limits' is one of the more intrinsic characteristics of Russian behavior. Soviet foreign policy complies to principles inherent in the Soviet military concept of the 'art of operations' (*operativnoe isskusstvo*) which presents an 'innovative' linking of politics with warfare. In other words, the concept of militarization of politics means in Soviet perception a constant succession of probing, which, like military reconnaissance, is meant to draw enemy's fire and reveal his capabilities, dispositions, and intentions.<sup>7</sup> In this perspective we find some assumptions suitable to adopt in our study.

One such proposition suggests that Soviet leaders act according to the proverb, "If you don't know the ford, don't step into the river." It assumes that Soviet decision-makers

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid. 43

<sup>7</sup> ADOMEIT, H., 1984. *Soviet risk-taking and crisis behavior: a theoretical and empirical analysis*. London: Allen & Unwin.. 53-54

do not plunge into a contest blindly, they rarely gamble, unless they feel that the odds are overwhelmingly in their favor.<sup>8</sup>

In 1971, it was assumed that the world recognition of Soviet-American parity, reflected in the SALT agreements, could induce a greater propensity for Soviet risk-taking. It was argued that now, that gross strategic parity with the United States seemed to have been attained, some 'instinctive tendency to take greater gambles in the pursuit of Soviet objectives were to be expected.' Some authors even proposed that 'the greater the Soviet military parity with the West, the lower the Soviet perceptions of the risk in East-West confrontation. In other words, parity induced confidence. However, the position that 'the strategic balance is unlikely to be the major determinant of either side's resolve', countered this claim.<sup>9</sup> Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in the late 1970s suggests that the risk-taking based on confidence is a plausible explanation for Soviet behavior.

The claim that a 'mere' confidence can induce intervention is reinforced by an argument that often state's expansionism is based on an undifferentiated interests of the decision-makers in question.<sup>10</sup> Neoclassic realists even go as far as to suggest that evidence of lack of political will by an adversary to resist one's offensive moves may present a clear opportunity for resolve and expansion. The evidence that favorable opportunities and resolve will not persist indefinitely makes it important to act as soon as possible.<sup>11</sup> In other words, lack of resistance by an adversary to one's own moves may allow a more resolute behavior of the initiator.

As an example of patterns of Russian behavior which often succumb to mere opportunities and lack of resistance, one instance describes it rather convincingly. Some scholars demonstrate that Soviets occasionally acted 'just because they could'. In August 1967, the Soviets began to send small quantities of arms to Lagos. For Washington, this

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid. 53-54

<sup>9</sup> Ibid. 59

<sup>10</sup> KATZENSTEIN, P.J., 1996. *The Culture of national security: norms and identity in world politics*. New York: Columbia University Press. 227-228

<sup>11</sup> RIPSAN, NORRIN M., TALIAFERRO, JEFFREY W., LOBELL, STEVEN E., 2016. *Neoclassical realist theory of international politics*. New York, N.Y.: Oxford university press.47

was an unexpected behavior from Moscow. Washington perceived that the Nigerian war represented a different response from its Cold War rival. This Soviet intervention in the war with the arms sales to Lagos might have called forth Washington's general Cold War response, as was assumed in case of communist-backed aggression in Vietnam or the pro-communist regimes in Congo in the early 1960s. However, such Soviet behavior was not perceived in Washington as a threat because the US experts did not see the conflict as motivated by a Soviet attempt to takeover Nigeria. This behavior in Lagos was an intrusion into a historically pro-Western country, an ex-British colony, where Soviet influence originally had been minimal.<sup>12</sup> It was caused by the absence of American reaction. This Soviet behavior, confusing and further irritating some of the American government officials, convinced them that such an expansionism, 'just because there was no resistance', might characterize further Soviet engagements. The US State Department and diplomatic corps became concerned that the same patterns used in Nigeria by the Soviets, could dictate Moscow's further penetration in the Middle East. These US officials were alarmed that a successful Soviet foothold in this part of Africa could ultimately lead to further 'Sovietization' of the region.<sup>13</sup> Others conclude that any Soviet decision for the commitment of forces to a third party appears to be based on the calculation of a resistance of the rival superpower. The calculation of possible local resistance comes second.<sup>14</sup>

### **Empirical analysis. Probing the limits perspective in Soviet foreign policy**

#### *The Egyptian case*

First signs of Soviet over-confidence and policy of probing seemingly occurred following the 1956 Suez Canal crisis. Moscow made its conclusions and it was fascinated by the outcome of the conflict. As they saw it, Western influence in a vital strategic area had been apparently shattered by a national liberation force led by non-communists.

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<sup>12</sup> AMADIFE, E.N., 1999. *Pre-theories and theories of foreign policy making*. Lanham: Univ. Press of America.33-34

<sup>13</sup> Ibid. 44

<sup>14</sup> ADOMEIT, H., 1984. *Soviet risk-taking and crisis behavior: a theoretical and empirical analysis*. London: Allen & Unwin.. 322

According to what Soviet officials shared with Nasser, they were excited by the extend of the change in the balance of power, which the Suez crisis had produced. The Soviets remained hostile to what they considered as adventurism,<sup>15</sup> but it seemed that the Suez affair altered their thinking, and therefore might have given an impetus to further adventurous actions in the Middle East. The Kremlin admitted that an “adventure” had produced a shift in the Middle East region, which could only be described as revolutionary.<sup>16</sup>

According to other observers, a shift in Soviet military doctrine was a result of a series of military events – the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968, the Soviet-Chinese clash in 1969, Soviet’s military assistance to north Vietnam in 1969, and direct participation of Soviet troops in the War of Attrition against Israel in 1968-1971. It convinced Moscow to assume that almost any regional war or local conflict would not lead to superpower’s clash, let alone nuclear war between the Soviet Union and the United States. Hence, at the end of 1960s, it was perceived by the Kremlin that it ‘could be pushed further’ with the Americans.<sup>17</sup>

Indeed, this argument is confirmed by other observers stating that Soviet foreign policy underwent a significant change in orientation in the early 1970. Soviet military involvement sharply escalated in the Third World and became much more frequent, direct and larger in scale. Despite the potential risk of such a policy, Soviets came to rely far more heavily on force to influence the outcomes in Third World conflicts than in the years before 1970. And this change was most vividly manifested in the Middle East between June 1967 and October 1973 wars.<sup>18</sup> In early 1973 a dramatic shift in Soviet Middle East policy occurred, which was not an isolated event, but the first manifestation of a redirection of the entire Soviet approach to relations with the United States and the Third

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<sup>15</sup> HAYKAL, M.Ħ., 1978. *The Sphinx and the Commissar: The Rise and Fall of Soviet Influence in the Middle East*. HarperCollins Publishers. P. 75

<sup>16</sup> Ibid. 74-75

<sup>17</sup> ADAMSKY, D., 2006. *Mivtsa’ Kaykaz : ha-hit’arvut ha-Sovyeġit veġa-hafta’ah ha-Yiġre’elit be-Milġemet ha-hatashah*. Tel Aviv: Ma’arakhot. 38

<sup>18</sup> SPECHLER, D.R., 1986. The USSR and Third-World Conflicts: Domestic Debate and Soviet Policy in the Middle East, 1967–1973. *World Politics*, **38**(3), pp. 435-461. 435

World.<sup>19</sup> The most significant shift in Soviet policy occurred by February 1973. Notwithstanding that the Soviets did not deliver any critical, let alone strategic arms to Egypt, although promised to, and notwithstanding Moscow's continuing expression of strong preference for a political solution of the Arab-Israel conflict up to the last moment of the outbreak of the war, scholars on Soviet's role in Arab-Israeli conflict indicate that between February and October 1973 the Soviets "broke all the rules" of restraint that had governed their behavior in previous years.<sup>20</sup> We propose that the main cause for such behavior and Soviet self-over-confidence was the lack of US determination and response.

According to CIA report for instance, the Soviets were already planning an Arab offensive and 'limited' canal crossing as early as in 1968 and were convinced that USA will not engage in fighting on behalf of Israel unless the pre-June 1967 borders were crossed, although the Soviets supported only a limited offensive on the Sinai to drive the Israelis back "three to four miles" from the Canal and renounced any idea of completely destroying Israel.<sup>21</sup>

One event confirms our assumption that a lack of pushback or deterrence may lead to a more resolute Soviet behavior. When Israeli air force, on July 20 1969, accidentally hit a Soviet navy vessel in the Egyptian Port Said, which was anchored in proximity to long-range artillery batteries, the Israelis sent an apology letter. Later however, it was supplemented with a warning note to the Soviet leadership, that Tel-Aviv considers Soviet presence in Egypt as foreign to the Arab-Israeli conflict, and Israel will continue bombing enemy positions, and for the Soviets not to 'accidentally get hit', better to leave. Eventually, after the warning, the Soviet vessels left the port. Israel thus concluded that Moscow can be deterred once it meets a tactical rebuff.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid. 461

<sup>20</sup> Ibid. 436, 459

<sup>21</sup> GINOR, ISABELLA,,REMEZ, GIDEON,, 2017. *The Soviet-Israeli War, 1967-1973 : the USSR's military intervention in the Egyptian-Israeli conflict.* 55

<sup>22</sup> ADAMSKY, D., 2006. *Mivtsa' Kaykaz : ha-hit'arvut ha-Sovyețit vaha-hafta'ah ha-Yișre'elit be-Milhemet ha-hatashah.* Tel Aviv: Ma'arakhot. 87-88



By analyzing Soviet behavior in other regions, Israel came to an even more profound conclusion that the Soviets almost always eschew direct military involvement, limiting its participation to equipment supply, arms and advisers' provision, with the exception of the Warsaw Pact member states. With this conclusion in mind, Tel-Aviv realized, long before the Americans, that with persuasion and decisiveness, the Soviets can be deterred.<sup>23</sup> According to one Israeli statement, 'you must manifest determination with the Soviets and in no way retreat. Any sign of retreat would project weakness and only provoke the Soviets for more assertive actions from their side'.<sup>24</sup>

Records on the Arab-Israeli conflict portray in detail the Soviet involvement in the War of Attrition, an involvement that was both clandestine from the Soviet side, and strategically unexpected from the Israeli and the American side. Analysis of multiple discussions between the Israeli government, the Ministry of Defense and the US Joint Staff reveal that the Soviets were gradually advancing their air defense systems toward the Suez shores, something that made the Israeli air force raids seemingly problematic and by the mid-1970 the situation became critical. Following repeated direct air battles between the Israeli and the Soviet crews and mounting casualties on both sides, Israel stood in front of a dilemma, whether to back down, cease its 'in-depth bombing' against Egyptian targets or proceed targeting Egyptian positions and strategic sites despite the rising tension not only between the USSR and Israel, but also between USSR and the United States. Both, the Israelis as well as the Americans were confused, how far would Moscow go in protecting Egypt and would Moscow be determined up to a point of a direct clash with Israel. The Israeli Chief of General Staff, Haim Bar-Lev became an ardent supporter of a conception that 'the Soviets will stop where we will stop them', advocating further resolve with Egypt.<sup>25</sup> Kissinger for instance assumed that Moscow would not pay the price of confrontation to protect its image in the Middle East.<sup>26</sup> Other accounts consent

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid. 89-90

<sup>24</sup> Ibid. 91

<sup>25</sup> ADAMSKY, D., 2006. *Mivtsa' Kaykaz : ha-hit'arvut ha-Sovye'it v'ha-hafta'ah ha-Yisre'elit be-Milhemet ha-hatashah*. Tel Aviv: Ma'arakhot. 165-167

<sup>26</sup> HERRMANN, R., 1987. Soviet Policy and the Arab-Israeli Conflict: Actions, Patterns, and Interpretations. *Political Science Quarterly*, **102**(3), pp. 417-440. 433

that the main reason that Moscow began its massive airlift on 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> of October 1973, to Syria and Egypt respectively, before the actual shift of the tide in favor of Israel, was American inaction.<sup>27</sup>

Western analysts consent that the Arab-Israeli conflict all along was based of the 'probing' of each other's superpower limits. Any flagging of support for its client-state from either side would directly reflect each other's global standing. From this perspective, the US saw any escalation along the Suez Canal as a Soviet probing of America's will and as a testing of the Nixon Doctrine.<sup>28</sup> Indeed, in Soviet strategic thinking, the concept of probing (*proshupivanie*) was designed to test the toughness of the opponent.<sup>29</sup>

Such probing was not limited only to military maneuvers on the ground. Diplomatic probing was also practiced. When Evgeniy Primakov met with Israeli representatives in Vienna in October 1971, Moscow expressed full confidence stating that Washington in no circumstances would get involved in a US-USSR open confrontation over the Middle East, hinting at Israel. Suggesting by this that even in an event of a direct collision between Soviet and Israeli forces, USA would not step in.<sup>30</sup> During the October 1973 hostilities, the diplomatic probing was practiced in form of a Soviet message to Israel, through the Swedes, that if Israel crosses the Canal, the Soviets would no longer consider this merely as an Arab-Israeli matter.<sup>31</sup>

Following the June 1967 defeat, and during the so-called War of Attrition, Moscow was not opposed to the resumption of the hostilities (a new war), they were waiting for the right moment. Their policy was a mixture of adventurism and prudence. The main concern was that Cairo do not launch a war prematurely before it is ready. The visible efforts to restrain Egypt from attacking Israeli positions stemmed not so from avoidance of a new conflict, rather from Egypt's lack of sufficient state of readiness. All along the

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<sup>27</sup> RUBINSTEIN, A.Z., 1977. *Red star on the Nile : the Soviet-Egyptian influence relationship since the June war*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press. 267

<sup>28</sup> Ibid. 90

<sup>29</sup> ХРУЩЕВ, С., 1994. *Никита Хрущев: кризисы и ракеты: взгляд изнутри*. Новости. 85

<sup>30</sup> GINOR, ISABELLA,,REMEZ, GIDEON,, 2017. *The Soviet-Israeli War, 1967-1973 : the USSR's military intervention in the Egyptian-Israeli conflict*. 250

<sup>31</sup> Ibid. 12

War of Attrition the Soviets were testing Egypt's capabilities and probing the possible Israeli and US response. Once the conditions were ripe, the Kremlin gave its approval for Egypt's offensive.<sup>32</sup> Other observers confirm that during the 1970s', as long as the Soviets did not face any obstacles, their regional lines of communication and military infrastructure and range of action expanded.<sup>33</sup>

Other accounts consent that the October War was the event that the Soviets were willing to avoid, and in their view, after the Caribbean crisis, it was close to bring them into a nuclear confrontation with the United States. The Soviets would play a zero-sum game to the greatest degree possible if there was no risk of superpower confrontation. If there was, the Soviets would tend to be cautious.<sup>34</sup> And apparently, according to the record of Soviet actions, Moscow was confident that an Arab offensive on Israeli forces in Sinai would not lead to a direct clash between the USSR and the United States, thus allowing the Egyptians, and hence indirectly the Syrians, to understand that Moscow would not oppose an offensive aimed at reconquering the lost territories and would provide aid and diplomatic support in time of war, simultaneously beginning to supply the Arabs with arms they were striving for. It went until the point the Egyptians obtained what they considered as necessary capabilities for an offensive, i.e., SCUD missiles, which were perceived as strategic against Israel, as well as other advanced weapons which were placed under Arab operational control.<sup>35</sup> Following the SCUD missiles' arrival, in summer 1973, Sadat declared his satisfaction and the date for the attack was finally set.<sup>36</sup> Thus, the Soviets could indirectly manage the events and could in fact control and decide the actual beginning of the October War. The American inaction provided the necessary incentive.

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid. xvii

<sup>33</sup> MARSHALL, A., 1979. Sources of Soviet power: The military potential in the 1980s. *Adelphi Papers*, 19(152), pp. 11-17. 16

<sup>34</sup> FREEDMAN, R.O., 1985. Patterns of Soviet Policy toward the Middle East. *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 482(1), pp. 40-64. 62

<sup>35</sup> SPECHLER, D.R., 1986. The USSR and Third-World Conflicts: Domestic Debate and Soviet Policy in the Middle East, 1967–1973. *World Politics*, 38(3), pp. 435-461. 438

<sup>36</sup> Ibid. 439

Another interpretation of Soviet behavior, called 'changed calculus', suggests that by early 1973 the benefits of restraint became too small when compared to perceived costs. The Soviets became pessimistic about the American behavior in the Middle East and did not expect much from the détente.<sup>37</sup>

Additional explanation for such a radical shift in Moscow's considerations regarding the Third World and the Middle East in particular suggests that a revision in the Soviet assessment of the risk of superpower confrontation in the Third World took place due to America's post-Vietnam opposition to foreign military involvement. This may have convinced some of the hardliners in the Kremlin that American influence can be contained and undermined by military means.<sup>38</sup> Primakov in his memoirs points that the Soviets indeed were planning to launch an offensive against Israel and back Sadat's forces much more profoundly in 1973, but eventually were averted by a possible strong US response.<sup>39</sup> This leads us to conclude that the prospect of probing indeed existed in Soviet military strategic and tactical thinking, and much was dependent on the probability of rebuff from the other side.

### *Policy of probing. The case of Iran*

Iran also presents us with evidence for a Soviet policy of probing. The early, post-WW II Soviet policy was characterized by an the almost unrestricted military freedom of action in USSR's periphery. What began as a policy of preservation and tightening of control on the restive minorities on the Russian perimeter after the October revolution of 1917 became a global expansion, filled up with invasions, permanent military presence, and annexations after the end of the Second World War.<sup>40</sup> Stalin's bold post-war policy was based on probing the limits, and was most vividly expressed in its south. Moscow demanded from Turkey to grant unlimited passing concessions on the straits, approached

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid. 441

<sup>38</sup> Ibid. 458

<sup>39</sup> PRIMAKOV, Y., 2009. *Russia and the Arabs: Behind the Scenes in the Middle East from the Cold War to the Present*. Basic Books. 159

<sup>40</sup> RUBINSTEIN, A.Z., 1981. *Soviet foreign policy since World War II : imperial and global*. Cambridge, Mass.: Winthrop Publishers. 166-167

its army towards the Iraqi borders, and refused to withdrawal its forces from Iranian territory, forcing Tehran to accept an autonomy puppet status on its occupied territories.<sup>41</sup> Iranian troops that sought to reenter the Iranian province of Azerbaijan, were turned back by the Red Army.<sup>42</sup> There was no one to stop Moscow. The ultimate determination of what is permissible was Moscow's prerogative.<sup>43</sup>

Gradually, the Soviet Middle East foreign policy went through a transformation from a continental, East European 'model', to a global thrust. Beginning with the minimalistic, purely defensive approach of protecting Soviet borders and preserving the Soviet homeland from outside attack by maintaining a security belt or a buffer zone just beyond Soviet borders, its power projection and an overseas thrust, accompanied by a doctrine of nuclear deterrence, became Moscow's continental as well as global aspiration.<sup>44</sup>

This tendency grew and Moscow's strategic views expanded towards the 1970s. The traditional notion of security, relating to the periphery of the USSR, received a new impetus as a result of the events in the Middle East.<sup>45</sup> On balance, Soviet interests in Iran have been pursued relentlessly, although with reference to the risks involved. In the Iran-Iraqi hostilities between 1969-75 and in the Dhofar insurgency between 1973 and 1975, the Soviet investments were limited and its policy was averse to risks. With the growth of its military power, its incipient oil dependency and the disarray in the West after the upheavals in Iran, Soviet 'probing' increased. With the revolution in Iran and the invasion of Afghanistan, the prospects for the extension of Soviet influence have improved, but also did the prospect of military confrontation with the West, which has reacted with alarm to such a prospective. However, the West's reaction still remained volatile.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid. 216

<sup>42</sup> Ibid. 43-44

<sup>43</sup> Ibid. 85

<sup>44</sup> GOLAN, G., 1990. *Soviet policies in the Middle East : from World War Two to Gorbachev*. Cambridge [England]; New York: Cambridge University Press. 1

<sup>45</sup> SONNENFELDT, H. and HYLAND, W.G., 1979. Soviet perspectives on security: Introduction. 18

<sup>46</sup> CHUBIN, SHAHRAM., PLASCOV, AVI., LITWAK, ROBERT., INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTE FOR STRATEGIC STUDIES., 1981. *Security in the Persian Gulf*. Montclair, N.J.: Published for the International Institute for Strategic Studies by Allanheld, Osmun. 129

Each step taken by the Soviets had to be weighed against the potential conflict with the principles of the détente, based on an estimate as to how much the United States would tolerate or just how far Moscow might stretch the concept. The détente was probably the biggest misperception of the Cold War period, whereas Kremlin referred to the idea that the détente was to be applied at the super-power level [only], while revolutionary activity could continue at other levels; in Washington, the détente was considered as an 'all-embracing' concept, binding the policy applicable everywhere.<sup>47</sup> At the 1976 CPSU Congress, Brezhnev reiterated this view by declaring that the détente and revolutionary activity were not contradictory and promised every kind of Soviet assistance for Third World struggles. This enthusiastic attitude was shortly translated into action by greater Soviet involvement and military interventions in the Third World.<sup>48</sup> The CPSU Political Bureau member Suslov, for instance, perceived the détente in terms of lulling the West into passivity at the benefit of the Soviet Union, sapping thus the vigor of the Western response to Soviet involvement in the Third World. He was afraid that by embracing the détente, Soviet means of expansion and struggle against imperialism in the Third World will be weakened. His main concern was that the détente should not be pushed too far thus limiting Moscow's freedom of action.<sup>49</sup> In line with this argument, it has been suggested that the Soviet military intervention in Afghanistan in December 1979 occurred because Moscow knew that the invasion would not provoke any major US reaction, while watching the latter's indolent reaction on the Iranian Shah's overthrow and almost no reaction to the hostage crisis. Therefore, Moscow thought it was a low-risk operation<sup>50</sup> and perceived that its policies could be pushed further.

The Soviets invaded Afghanistan as quickly as they did and the way they did it was due in part because of the lack of US response to events in Iran a year earlier. The fall of the Shah and the US hostage crisis were considerable motives inside Kremlin to move

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<sup>47</sup> GOLAN, G., 1990. *Soviet policies in the Middle East : from World War Two to Gorbachev*. Cambridge [England]; New York: Cambridge University Press. 21

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.* 26

<sup>49</sup> CIA. DIRECTORATE OF INTELLIGENCE, 1978. *The Foreign Policy Views of Mikhail Suslov*. CIA/RP 78-10259CX. National Foreign Assessment Center.

<sup>50</sup> FREEDMAN, R.O., 1985. Patterns of Soviet Policy toward the Middle East. *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 482(1), pp. 40-64. 47

into Afghanistan, knowing that in this situation the Americans would not respond decisively. Authors propose that in cases where the Soviets thought they could get away without an active American response, they would act.<sup>51</sup> The same stance of policy was introduced to the post-revolutionary Iran in regard to Moscow's policies in its proximity. When post-revolutionary Iranian leadership expressed discontent from Moscow's invasion of the neighboring Afghanistan, the Soviet Foreign Minister Gromyko's reaction in June 1983 was that "The USSR will act with regard to whether Iran wishes to reciprocate its actions and maintain normal relations with us or whether it has different intentions."<sup>52</sup>

Scholars on Soviet foreign policy contend that it is difficult to find Soviet strategic priorities as opposed to opportunities. Soviet power projection in the Third World must be analyzed because it is an area of *opportunity* rather than strategic priority for the Soviet Union. Soviet action in the Third World must be primarily viewed as probing how far the Soviet Union can go without being 'reprimanded'. It is proposed that 'the erstwhile revolutionary power rather yearns for a clarification of what United States' reaction would be'.<sup>53</sup> Other Sovietologists put it plainly, that Soviet intentions depend on *opportunities* and *temptations*, which are sometimes provided by fortuitous circumstances but are exploited by strategic and tactical foresight.<sup>54</sup>

Others in this context wonder, whether there were any constraints in Soviet behavior [at all]. It was obvious that the Soviets needed to maintain some sort of a dialogue with the United States in order to prevent crises from becoming too dangerous. The Middle East probably serves as a good example for future Russian behavior: The Soviet Union had shown its interest in controlling a crisis but not in preventing it; it is not necessarily opposed to a peace settlement between the Arab states and Israel, but it is opposed to a *pax Americana*. It collaborated with its rival in avoiding a war, but if the war

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid. 61

<sup>52</sup> CIA. DIRECTORATE OF INTELLIGENCE, 1987. *USSR-Iran: prospects for a troubled relationship*. NESA 87-10001X. Washington: Central Intelligence Agency. 1

<sup>53</sup> BERTRAM, C., 1980. *Prospects of Soviet Power in the 1980s*. Springer. 4

<sup>54</sup> LABEDZ, L., 1979. Ideology and soviet foreign policy. *Adelphi Papers*, 19(151), pp. 37-45. 43

in fact could have been avoided if it pursued a confrontational posture without inhibition. In this sense, the constraint itself was a guarantor of continuous antagonistic ambitions.<sup>55</sup>

### **The probing perspective as source of contemporary Russian foreign policy**

Certain authors opine, that the loss of national idea and political identity, following the collapse of the Soviet Union, might compel Russia to take higher risks in its post-Cold War foreign performance.<sup>56</sup> When during Yeltsin's tenure, Russia actively began to sell arms to Iran, seeing it as an important trading partner and a source for hard currency, Washington gravely opposed these sales. However, due to lack of any resolute reaction from Washington, Evgeniy Primakov, the Chief of the Russian Foreign Intelligence Agency under the presidency of Boris Yeltsin, pushed for a more independent Russian policy in the Middle East.<sup>57</sup> Some authors discern the same behavior in Russia's conduct towards Georgia in 2008. Russia overran Georgian forces due to lack of any resolute reaction from Washington even by supplying Georgia with advanced arms. The lack of US reaction to the events in Georgia on its turn, stemmed from a concern of further supply of arms by Russia to Iran.<sup>58</sup>

Observers of Russian conduct wrote in 2012 that the level of Russia's confidence about its resurgence in global affairs has 'increased in the last decade'.<sup>59</sup> Moscow significantly expanded its influence towards its periphery and the former Warsaw Pact members.<sup>60</sup> We opine, that this stemmed from an absence of resistance from both the European powers and the United States. It literally behaved "as far as it was allowed to

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<sup>55</sup> WINDSOR, P., 1979. The Soviet Union in the international system of the 1980s. *Adelphi Papers*, **19**(152), pp. 2-10. 10

<sup>56</sup> LABEDZ, L., 1979. Ideology and soviet foreign policy. *Adelphi Papers*, **19**(151), pp. 37-45. 42

<sup>57</sup> FREEDMAN, R.O., 2000. Russian-Iranian relations in the 1990s. *Middle East Review of International Affairs*, **4**(2), pp. 68. 69

<sup>58</sup> SCHOEN, DOUGLAS E., KAYLAN, MELIK., 2014. *The Russia-China axis : the new cold war and America's crisis of leadership*. 134

<sup>59</sup> OMElicheva, M.Y., 2012. Russia's foreign policy toward Iran: a critical geopolitics perspective. *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies*, **14**(3), pp. 331-344. 334

<sup>60</sup> BERMANT, A., 2014. *The Russian and Iranian Missile Threats: Implications for NATO Missile Defense*. Institute for National Security Studies. 36



go.” The same pattern was practiced in the Middle East. Russia could further undermine US interests in the Middle East, particularly in the weapons proliferation issue.<sup>61</sup>

Russia fully exploited the American reduction of arms exports to Egypt in 2013. Soon after the US withheld its military aid to El-Sisi’s regime, Russia quickly moved in and began making arms deals with the ‘new’ Egyptian government. In November 2013 Russia reached an agreement with Egypt for delivery of arms and equipment worth of \$3 billion.<sup>62</sup> The more the United States backed off from confrontation and engagement, the closer became the economic and military partnership and alliance between Russia, Iran and Syria.<sup>63</sup>

Russia’s gamble on Syria in 2014 proved to be successful when Washington finally acknowledged that Russia can be a “partner” in Syria.<sup>64</sup> Vladimir Putin knew that in order to become part of the solution, one must become part of the problem. Kremlin sees the West’s enthusiasm for cooperation as weakness. It leads Putin to believe that he can act as he wishes and get away with it,<sup>65</sup> enabling Russia to reinforce its support for Assad’s regime in Syria. Ultimately, the US failure to act decisively in Syria has made room for Russia to occupy spheres of influence abandoned by the United States. Vladimir Putin is an example of a world leader who views the US passivity as an invitation for opportunism, and this allows Russia to take a more active and often competing role in the Middle East region.<sup>66</sup> The Syrian intervention significantly increased Russia’s self-confidence.<sup>67</sup>

Observers of Russia’s policy in Syria are confident that it was the US’s failure to strike Damascus after Assad crossed the chemical weapons’ redline that encouraged Russia’s aggression, which eventually resulted in full scale intervention on behalf of

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<sup>61</sup> FELDMAN, SHAI, SHAPIR, YIFTAH., 2001. *The Middle East military balance, 2000-2001*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press. 61

<sup>62</sup> BLANK, S. and LEVITZKY, E., 2015. Geostrategic aims of the Russian arms trade in East Asia and the Middle East. *Defence studies*, 15(1), pp. 63-80. 71

<sup>63</sup> SCHOEN, DOUGLAS E., KAYLAN, MELIK., 2014. *The Russia-China axis : the new cold war and America's crisis of leadership*. 69

<sup>64</sup> CROOKE, A., 2015. *America Is Dramatically Changing its Syria Policy. Here's Why*. HuffPost, part of The World Post.

<sup>65</sup> FOXALL, A., 2015, Sept. 14, 2015. Don't Trust Putin on Syria. *The New York Times*.

<sup>66</sup> WELCH, S. and BAILEY, K., 2016. In pursuit of good ideas: The Syria train-and-equip program. *Washington, DC: Washington Institute for Near East Policy*, 172. 7

<sup>67</sup> GOLDSTEIN, J.L., 2018. China is Studying Russia's Syrian Gambit. *The National Interest*, (March 26, 2018),.

Assad's regime.<sup>68</sup> The West's failure to punish Russia for crossing its red lines was a significant factor in Russia's ongoing, brutal and decisive intervention in Syria.<sup>69</sup> Putin, a former KGB operative, gambled that Obama would talk but do nothing. Unless the United States accepted keeping Bashar al-Assad in power, Putin would continue to "burn Syria". Putin sent the following message to America: cease supporting anti-Assad rebels and accept Assad's domination alongside Russian supremacy over the international politics in the Middle East. Hence, one wonders what caused this Russian confidence? Apparently, it is the shredded Obama's credibility due to the many red lines crossed by Putin.<sup>70</sup> From Moscow's perspective, not only flexibility, but stubbornness could bring favorable results.<sup>71</sup>

Washington's unclear and vacillating goals in Syria have enabled the Russians - a rival with a less capable military, financial and diplomatic tools, to deal an embarrassing blow to the Obama administration in Syria.<sup>72</sup> According to some accounts, the West was embarrassed and humiliated by Russia's performance in Syria.<sup>73</sup> Syria became the arena of testing the limits with the West and if Putin saw that he can violate with no repercussions, he could probably continue doing so.<sup>74</sup> Some authors propose that amid Russia's domestic constraints, the weaker Russia gets, the more dangerous and resolute it becomes.<sup>75</sup> It is possible to assume that due to such a bold Russian behavior, at some point in time, Washington reviewed its policy with Russia, rethinking the previous approach that Putin necessarily must be cornered and made look weak.<sup>76</sup> It became assumed that the recurring confrontations with the West were one of the main factors that compelled Russia to intensify its activities in the Middle East.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> BORSHCHEVSKAYA, A., 2016. *Countering Russian and Assad Regime Responses to Safe Zones*. Washington DC: Washington Institute for Near East Policy.

<sup>69</sup> KOZHANOV, N., 2018. *Russian policy across the Middle East: motivations and methods*. Chatham House. 30

<sup>70</sup> ROGAN, T., 2016. *In the Ruins of Aleppo, Putin Is Shaping Obama's Foreign Policy Legacy*. New York: National Review.

<sup>71</sup> KOZHANOV, N., 2014. Russian-Syrian Dialogue: Myths and Realities. *The Journal of the Middle East and Africa*, 5(1), pp. 1-22. 18

<sup>72</sup> FRANKO, B., 2016. Lessons from Russia in Avoiding a Quagmire. *The National Interest*, (March 20, 2016),.

<sup>73</sup> MEDICK, V., et al, 2015, October 13, 2015. Russia's Superpower Play: Putin Bets Big on Aggressive Syria Policy. *Spiegel Online*.

<sup>74</sup> BORSHCHEVSKAYA, A., 2016. *Countering Russian and Assad Regime Responses to Safe Zones*. Washington DC: Washington Institute for Near East Policy.

<sup>75</sup> BORSHCHEVSKAYA, A., 2015. *Does Putin Have a Plan for Syria?* Washington DC: Washington Institute for Near East Policy.

<sup>76</sup> CROOKE, A., 2015. *America Is Dramatically Changing its Syria Policy. Here's Why*. HuffPost, part of The World Post.

<sup>77</sup> KOZHANOV, N., 2018. *Russian policy across the Middle East: motivations and methods*. Chatham House. 1

Even after Vladimir Putin ordered his alleged withdrawal from Syria in March 2016, following his 'mission accomplished' announcement, it was only a facade.<sup>78</sup> Russia's military presence intensified and additional resupply was brought to Syria to reinforce the Russian military contingent in the Arab country.<sup>79</sup> This indicates Putin's growing self-confidence and apparent propensity to gamble and push further the limits through his engagement in Syria. By further reinforcing Assad's army, by supplying the S-300 air defense systems to Syria, Moscow calculated that Washington is unlikely to respond in any decisive manner.<sup>80</sup>

Once the Russian military achieved the goal of saving Bashar al-Assad's regime, and transformed the character of the conflict, Moscow began to value Syria as diplomatic leverage, positioning Russia as the linchpin in negotiations about Syria's political future. Moscow also demonstrated a commitment to defend its allies and the capacity to conduct large-scale military operations. Some experts point that from their base in Syria, the Russians could continue to project influence into the wider Middle East. Moscow's military deployments and procurement strategy indicates that its commitment to the region is a long-term strategy and far from a situational reaction.<sup>81</sup>

The first step Russia took to avoid a quagmire in Syria was identifying its interests in the Syrian civil war. The main goal was to support the Assad regime. Russia preserved the regime for now and has stabilized Assad by reversing the tide against the opposition forces, effectively achieving the tactical aims it publicly set out to accomplish,<sup>82</sup> and it achieved it because nobody stopped it. Thus, many 'surprised' analyses about Russia's effectiveness and resolve are largely groundless. Russia's success in the Syrian venture was primary due to the lack of clarity of the United States' goals in Syria.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> BORSHCHEVSKAYA, A., 2016. *Does Russia's Faux Withdrawal Mean a New Crisis Is Coming?* Washington DC: Washington Institute for Near East Policy.

<sup>79</sup> TSVETKOVA, M., 2016, Wed Mar 30, 2016. Exclusive: Russia, despite draw down, shipping more to Syria than removing. *Reuters*.

<sup>80</sup> SINGH, M. and WHITE, J., 2015. *Expanded Syria Presence Would Carry Big Risks for Russia*. Washington DC: Washington Institute for Near East Policy.

<sup>81</sup> MCHENRY, W. and WHITE, G., 2018. *How Russia plans to influence Syria's future*. National Interest.

<sup>82</sup> FRANKO, B., 2016. Lessons from Russia in Avoiding a Quagmire. *The National Interest*, (March 20, 2016),.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

The apparent US military strike on the Syrian air-force base Tiyas in April 2018, following another chemical attack on civilians by Assad, was notable by its 'minimality'. Such a minimal scale of American military performance clearly showed the extent of deterrence Moscow succeeded to create. While the purpose of the US strike was to target Syrian chemical-weapons capabilities, the relatively modest scale of the strike is an indication of Russia's ability to cause Western powers to limit their action. The explicitly made threats to shoot down US missiles prior to the strike and even to target the missile-launchers, announced by Russian officials, was a part of a wider Russian posture aimed at probing and showing that Russia stands by the Assad regime, no matter what horrors it unleashes.<sup>84</sup>

As Colin H. Kahl, who was the US National Security Adviser, wrote in 2018, "Indeed, the relatively cautious nature of the strike signaled that we are deterred from taking larger action, potentially undercutting the credibility of US threat of doing more down the line, if the regime continues to use chemical weapons."<sup>85</sup> When at the outset of Russian intervention in Syria, the NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg accused Russia of a significant deployment of Russian troops and equipment in Syria and that it might escalate the conflict further, Moscow rejected the charges, insisting that all arms deliveries were kept within its traditional confines to their long-time ally Bashar al-Assad.<sup>86</sup> No response followed.

The main reason for Russia's reluctance to change its strategy after another incident in al-Shayarat was the absence of any US follow-up after the airstrike. Initially Russia prepared itself for potential changes in the US approach to Syria, including the further increase of US military pressure on Assad. However, nothing happened. Moreover, Secretary of State Rex Tillerson did not cancel his visit to Russia in April 2017. Thus, Russia continued to see itself as the main and unrestricted player in Syria.<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> LAPPIN, Y., 2018. *Minimal strike on Assad shows extent of Russian deterrence*. Israel: BESA Center for Strategic Studies.

<sup>85</sup> BAKER, P., 2018. *Mission accomplished. But what is the mission in Syria?* The New York Times.

<sup>86</sup> ATLANTIC COUNCIL, 2015-last update, NATO chief concerned by reported Russian Syria buildup. Available: <http://bit.ly/35ImTyF> [2016].

<sup>87</sup> KOZHANOV, N., 2018. *Russian policy across the Middle East: motivations and methods*. Chatham House. 26

Putin is confident in making such moves because he believes that Western policymakers will not stand by their words, a lesson learned when Washington failed to enforce its red line on chemical weapons use in Syria, welcoming Moscow's 2013 offer to disarm the regime, and tacitly accepting Assad as part of the peace process despite previous statements that he "must go".<sup>88</sup> Putin tested the West multiple times and saw once again that it will reply with little, besides angry rhetoric and symbolic moves.<sup>89</sup> Putin calculated that the Obama administration would respond to his belligerence in Syria the same way it did in Ukraine: by broadly conceding to Putin's demands and trying to get the US's Syrian allies on the ground to accept them.<sup>90</sup>

Notwithstanding that Russia is manifestly less powerful militarily, economically and diplomatically than the United States, it is no longer a matter of capabilities, it became a matter of will. On paper, Russia in no position to barge into the Middle East and throw its weight around. But after the interference in Ukraine, the annexation of Crimea, and the Syrian chemical weapons debacle, Putin correctly judged that nobody would stop him. Thus, he is willing to go all the way<sup>91</sup> through constantly probing the reaction of other confronting powers. Other authors suggest that a significant proportion of Russia's efforts are being directed against the US, because it perceives Washington being at a point of its historic weakness.<sup>92</sup> Contemporary Russia's behavior leads to the assumption that contrary to the Cold War era, when the Soviet Union sought to constantly match its ambitions to the resources it possessed, today, remaining a superpower pertains less to the ambitions-resources ratio, but more to the definition of what it means to be a great power and the way it should behave. Today, much depends on the scale and type of influence one possesses and manages to project to the outside domain.

As was in case of the Soviet Union, contemporary Russia also practices diplomatic probing. Whenever Putin raised the Syrian issue on the sidelines of conflict resolution

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<sup>88</sup> BORSHCHEVSKAYA, A. and JEFFREY, F.J., 2015. *New Syria Talks Highlight Russian Ascendance, U.S. Ambivalence*. Washington DC: Washington Institute for Near East Policy.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid.

<sup>90</sup> DIEHL, J., 2015, September 13, 2015. Putin shifts fronts in Syria and Ukraine. *The Washington Post*.

<sup>91</sup> IBISH, H., 2015, Oct. 19, 2015. Putin's Partition Plan for Syria. *The New York Times*.

<sup>92</sup> AMIDROR, Y., 2016. Tip of the Iceberg: Russian Use of Power in Syria. *BESA Center Perspectives, Paper*, (371),.

meetings with the leading world powers, observers comment that Putin becomes more persuasive and eloquent (self-over-confident) than his opponents.<sup>93</sup> By demonstrating that it could intervene in the Middle East without any US reaction, Russia effectively justifies its intervention in the first place.<sup>94</sup> Without any reaction, such an intervention seems to be legitimate. It is a causal relationship. For example, the successful Iranian nuclear deal with the P+1 powers was followed by an explicit reinforcement of Russian forces in Syria. It included the deployment of advanced aircrafts, S-300 air-defense systems which since took on a visible, direct and very important role in the warfare and expansion of its ground forces to secure areas such as the Syrian air and naval ports.<sup>95</sup>

The fall of Aleppo in December 2016 bolstered Russia's confidence in its ability to shape the development of events in the region. As a result, Russian policy in the Middle East has undergone another transformation. Since 2016 it became more proactive rather than reactive. Following its 'success' in Syria, Russia moved to support warring parties in Libya<sup>96</sup> and the dictatorial leadership in Venezuela, what clearly comes to indicate its growing self-confidence in its ability to not merely react to foreign events, but to engineer them. Syria became a test-case for Moscow in probing Western 'limits' and halting Western-fostered regime changes,<sup>97</sup> and the further its' probing remains unanswered, the further Russia will proceed 'bending'.

## Conclusion

In this chapter we demonstrate the 'probing the limits' pattern of Russian foreign policy conduct traces of which go back as far as the immediate end of the Second World War. Iran presents us with evidence of Soviet behavior in terms of probing the limits of what is permissive and [un]permissive. Same pattern of foreign behavior was evident in the Soviet conduct during the Arab-Israeli conflict. In many instances, what influenced

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<sup>93</sup> KOZHANOV, N., 2014. Russian-Syrian Dialogue: Myths and Realities. *The Journal of the Middle East and Africa*, 5(1), pp. 1-22. 18

<sup>94</sup> CORDESMAN, A.H., 2016. The Road to Hell in Iraq and Syria. *CSIS - Center for Strategic and International Studies*, (October 6, 2016),.

<sup>95</sup> AMIDROR, Y., 2016. Tip of the Iceberg: Russian Use of Power in Syria. *BESA Center Perspectives, Paper*, (371),.

<sup>96</sup> KOZHANOV, N., 2018. *Russian policy across the Middle East: motivations and methods*. Chatham House. 7

<sup>97</sup> DW, 2016. *What does Russia want from its campaign in Syria?* Deutsche Welle (DW).

Moscow's decision-making in the Middle East was the Western reaction. Lack of reaction or indecisiveness led to more impudent Moscow's behavior.

We argue that Moscow perceives the lack of decisive rebuff or a pushback as an opportunity, or even an invitation, to push further. Few events during the Arab-Israeli confrontation indicate that only after Moscow was deterred, changes in its conduct occurred. It is observed that the events in Iran in 1978-1979, and the lack of any decisive reaction from the United States, influenced Soviet decision-making and is linked to its defiant actions in the following year in Afghanistan.

We trace the same pattern of foreign behavior in contemporary Russian conduct. The Syrian case provides us with plenty of evidence of the Russian strategy of probing. Lack of any decisive reaction following Assad's first chemical attack led Russia to perceive that it can push further and that standing up for Assad would also go unanswered.

Continuing Western backing down, following the crossing of almost all the 'red lines' by Assad regime, only induced Moscow to deepen its involvement and reinforce its support for the Syrian regime amid latter's crimes. Other authors propose that the wars in Georgia, Ukraine, the annexation of Crimea and intervention in Syria all occurred *less* from Russia's political determination, but rather *more* due to West's ambivalence. Apparently, Russia's military, technical, material and economical inferiority is compensated by Moscow's "strategic impudence".

Apparently, the continuous lack of resolute reaction to Russia's assertive foreign policy might, in the long-run, allow Russian to continue adopting a high risk-taking strategy.

## CHAPTER 7. OPERATIONAL CODE

### Operational Code as source of Russian foreign policy

#### Introduction

In this part we attempt to acquaint our reader with somewhat unique feature intrinsic only to Russian political behavior recognized as the Operational Code, or as it is termed by other analysts of Soviet political conduct – “Bolshevik Operational Code.”

The “Bolshevik Operational Code” represents a unique feature in Soviet foreign as well as domestic behavior. Focusing on foreign policy, our study will elaborate the external features of this variable. Apparently, this variable is intrinsic solely to Soviet conduct. Moreover, it was strikingly absent in the coverage of pre-Bolshevik, Czarist times. It is a unique set of behavioral patterns, developed by and designed following the October 1917 Bolshevik Revolution.

In general, the “Operational Code” formulates a specific framework of fundamental beliefs about world politics and cultural peculiarities of a state’s decision-making. When we analyze the Operational Code in our enquiry, we pay attention to what is called in foreign policy decision-making scholarship as ‘categorizing’, ‘framing’, ‘abstracting’, and ‘generalizing’. Accordingly, the Soviets were relatively calculated risk-takers, however, brinkmanship was often the ‘favorite’ style of Soviet conduct. Threat and blackmailing were frequently used tactics, however all-out war was carefully avoided. Another sound attribute of the Soviet conduct was to use proxies in conflicts whenever possible to avoid unjustified risks. It appears that Russians are highly prudent risk-takers.

Significant part of Russian operational code feature stems from early, post-revolutionary Bolshevik’s perception of Soviet Russia being encircled by hostile nations. Second World War considerably supplemented the concept. Being a combination of patterns of behavior or templates of action originating from such factors as national



culture, national character, system of fundamental beliefs, and style of behavior, Russian operational code might bring additional explanatory value to the analysis of sources and motives of its foreign policy conduct. With the ‘help’ of the operational code, often subconsciously, Russian politicians, beginning with the Bolsheviks, frame, categorize, abstract, and generalize international, world affairs. We emphasize some of the most salient operational code patterns of behavior which guide Russian strategic and tactical thinking.

The analysis of the “Bolshevik Operational Code” gives us a significant clue in revealing the origins of some of the Soviet Union’s foreign policy decisions and sources of conflict behavior, including its risk-taking. It is startling how the patterns of the Soviet Operational Code still persist in contemporary Russian strategic external behavior. The goal of this part is to distinguish significant features of Russian operational code, analyze their expression during the Soviet period and discern patterns of operational code in contemporary Russian foreign policy behavior, to analyze their impact on Moscow’s foreign policy during both periods, and find out whether its impact is still present in today’s Russian behavior and to what extent.

### **Theoretical prerequisites: national character and militant attitude**

*“A nation can hope to have a strong position in the political world only if its character and practice in actual war mutually support each other in constant reciprocal action.”*

C. Clausewitz <sup>1</sup>

What is called the ‘operational code’ within international relations comes closest to the conceptualization of culture and its influence on the foreign policy of states. It is referred as the prefabricated templates of action in foreign policy and foreign policy-making. Defining the operational code involves identifying the core of beliefs of a leader or a group, as well as preferred means and style of pursuing its goals. It is the latter part

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<sup>1</sup> CLAUSEWITZ, CARL VON, GRAHAM, J. J., MAUDE, FREDERICK NATUSCH, 1908. *On war*. London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co.. 191

of the operational code definition that helps us determine what templates of action may exist within a nation with respect to its foreign policy.<sup>2</sup>

Leader's operational code is described as 'political leader's beliefs about the nature of politics and political conflicts, his views regarding the extent to which historical developments can be shaped, and his understanding of correct strategy and tactics.' The operational code is composed of two types of beliefs – the policy maker's philosophical and instrumental beliefs about political reality. Philosophical beliefs refer to political leader's 'fundamental assumptions' about the nature of politics: his orientation toward opponents, his beliefs about the role of chance in political events, and etc.; Instrumental beliefs on their turn represent the political leader's beliefs about the styles and the strategies appropriate to acting in a political world defined by the philosophical beliefs. It includes planning, acting, and risk-taking. The operational code is viewed as setting the boundaries within which the leader will act.<sup>3</sup>

The Operational Code approach attempts to formulate a general, non-situation-specific framework of fundamental beliefs about politics and the political world, which consists of philosophical beliefs and instrumental beliefs. In short, the purpose of the operational code is to use a set of beliefs that are politically important to all people to help the analyst understand how policy makers will respond to specific events. The Code is supposed to be the information processing structure that politicians use to help them organize and simplify the complexity of the political world.<sup>4</sup>

Some scholars however argue that the general difficulty with the Operational Code approach is that the term "beliefs" is not defined clearly and consistently. Some scholars even differentiate between the term, arguing that the Code refers to cognitive beliefs, that may be true or false, probable or improbable, thus excluding such strong beliefs as ethnical and ideological.<sup>5</sup> Other scholars argue that operational code beliefs 'do not

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<sup>2</sup> HUDSON, V.M., 1997. *Culture & foreign policy*. Boulder, Colo.: L. Rienner Publishers. 14

<sup>3</sup> EAST, MAURICE A., SALMORE, STEPHEN A., HERMANN, CHARLES F., 1978. *Why nations act: theoretical perspectives for comparative foreign policy studies*. Beverly Hills; London: Sage Publications. 53-55

<sup>4</sup> COTTAM, MARTHA L., 1986. *Foreign policy decision making: the influence of cognition*. Boulder, Colo: Westview.9-10

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.11

unilaterally determine the course of action' but that they should be important in the tasks of defining the situation and developing options on policy making.<sup>6</sup>

One important thing, while developing and applying the Operational Code approach, is not to equate motivation with personality, because then the operational code becomes more personally than cognitively based. In that case, the absence of cognitive psychological theoretical base is replaced by a personality theoretical base,<sup>7</sup> that is, by the personality of a particular leader in office. In the long run, the operational code is most useful as a guideline for describing some of the political beliefs of policy makers.<sup>8</sup>

For example, a survey, in search for national action templates, which was conducted in United States, involving respondents from US, Russia and Japan, analyzing which options their nation would probably consider or not consider to international conflict resolution, showed that the Russian responses were the most heterogeneous and produced few generalizable patterns, except for consensus.<sup>9</sup>

Realists for example recognize the essence of intrinsic patterns of behavior in power politics. Realists acknowledge that power can be projected not solely by material means, but also by means of national character, culture, system of beliefs, and style of conduct. They understand power politics in both social and relational context – it is not simply the ability to destroy, but the ability to affect political outcomes in a way that promotes the interests of the user of power. In Morgenthau's words "Power may comprise anything that establishes and maintains the control of man over man." What counts as power in any particular relationship, therefore, depends as much on the response of the object of power relationship, as to any specific capabilities of the user of power. "Its content and the manner of its use are determined by the political and cultural environment." As such, the analysis of power politics requires sensitivity to particular political and cultural context. This refers both to those political and cultural norms that

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid.12-13

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.16

<sup>8</sup> COTTAM, MARTHA L., 1986. *Foreign policy decision making: the influence of cognition*. Boulder, Colo: Westview.17

<sup>9</sup> HUDSON, V.M., 2007. *Foreign policy analysis: classic and contemporary theory*. Lanham u.a.: Rowman & Littlefield.120

both ends of a power relationship share, and to those that they do not.<sup>10</sup> Our chapter on 'Bolshevik Operational Code' brings significant insight into the origins of the intrinsic Soviet and contemporary Russian conduct, Russian perceptions on the notion of power and its deep embodiment in Russian and Soviet culture.

### **Framing in operational code**

#### *Framing, Categorizing, Abstracting, Generalizing*

Policy makers use analogies as a guide in problem resolutions and/or decision-making, what is called 'framing'.<sup>11</sup> Political leaders, while making decisions about the world, need to order that world, making its complexities somewhat simpler. To do so, they unconsciously strip the nuances, context and subtleties out of the problems they face in order to build simpler frames. When they look to the past to learn about the future, leaders tend to draw simple analogies without qualifying conditions, what consequently stands in the basis of framing. However, drawing arguments from complex historical past is even more challenging. Oversimplifying the definition of a given problem limits the options that policy makers are considering. People are hardwired to be conservative.<sup>12</sup>

Others, who refer to operational code feature through 'framing' approach, term it as 'categorization'.<sup>13</sup> The basic fundamental purpose of categorizing is to organize and simplify the environment. Categories must provide maximum information with least cognitive effort, and process the incoming information for the perceiver so that it assumes a sensible, structured form rather than an arbitrary or random nature.<sup>14</sup> Categories and the attributes associated with them develop through experience. Categories are formed to perform the function of providing the perceiver with a large amount of information about one's environment, with as little effort as possible. In addition, categories must suit to

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<sup>10</sup> BARKIN, J.S., 2011. *Realist constructivism: rethinking international relations theory*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 90

<sup>11</sup> SMITH, STEVE, HADFIELD, AMELIA., DUNNE, TIMOTHY, 2016. *Foreign policy: theories, actors, cases*.18

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.104

<sup>13</sup> COTTAM, MARTHA L., 1986. *Foreign policy decision making: the influence of cognition*. Boulder, Colo: Westview.23-24

<sup>14</sup> Ibid. 36

individual's particular interaction with its social or physical worlds. Categories are constituted, they are constructed. One is not born with full set of categories.<sup>15</sup> One of most interesting aspects of the judgment process occurs when judgements are made under circumstances where categories may no longer adequately structure the environment. These are situations in which differences among individuals and/or groups of individuals may be observed.<sup>16</sup>

It is important for our study to realize how did Soviet and later Russian decision-makers perceived the Arab and Muslim states in particular and the Middle East region in general. Such perception revelation would add an essential value to our analysis. We propose that the Soviets viewed our case-study states within some level of abstraction, and we argue that Soviet abstraction views have a continuing impact on contemporary Russia's perception regarding these countries. In other words, contemporary Russian decision-makers regard our case-study states in past Soviet patterns of abstraction. These paternalistic views on their turn shape state's foreign policy.

It is argued that the basic level of abstraction has important theoretical guidelines for the development of ideal-typical political categories. One of the most important points is that the categories used most often have a medium level of abstraction. This indicates that the categories used to organize the political world are not based upon abstract interpretations of political ideologies. Although such ideological terms as 'democracy', 'communism' or 'fascism', can be used in political speeches, they are probably code words rather than indicators of concepts upon which categories are built. From psychological standpoint one should not expect to find that policy makers make distinctions between states and evaluate states on the basis of an understanding of abstract ideological differences. Findings also indicate that political categories are not likely to be distinct in terms of simple non-abstract indicators such as position on single issues, geography, population size, or industrial or military capacity alone. Theoretically,

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid. 23-24

<sup>16</sup> Ibid. 26

the psychological categories that form the political world view should have basic level of abstraction.<sup>17</sup>

The 'categorization' approach is almost similar to Rosenau's 'genotype-phenotype' categorization approach.<sup>18</sup> The author does this using the term of 'categorical prototype', emphasizing that policy-maker's perception of some states is constructed into prototypes whereas other states evaluated in comparison to these prototypes. The prototype reflects the most typical combination of attributes associated with a given category. When a state is categorized it takes on the attributes associated with the category because the perceiver assumed these attributes naturally belong together. Hence, differences between the prototype and other members become less apparent.<sup>19</sup> Others distinguish categories by their special attributes, explaining that the units inside the categories might be far from similar, although belonging to the same category. At the same time, these categories have a horizontal dimension. The political world is not one giant category but is divided into several categories. Thus, the particular characteristics and combinations of the attributes will differ within each category thereby forming unique units. Along with attributes, categories contain event scripts, response alternatives, and prototypical members. Therefore, one should expect political categories to inform the policy makers of important historical analogies, major issues, a range of possible behaviors, response alternative and prototypical examples.<sup>20</sup> This comes to underscore that contemporary Russian foreign policy in the Middle East towards our three case-study states, largely is attributed and influenced by past experience and perceived in Soviet categories.

### **The Bolshevik Operational Code**

In what is called "Bolshevik Operational Code", one finds such explicit maxims on Soviet political action as: 'maximize one's power gains rather than satisfy, but avoid

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<sup>17</sup> COTTAM, MARTHA L., 1986. *Foreign policy decision making: the influence of cognition*. Boulder, Colo: Westview.38

<sup>18</sup> ROSENAU, JAMES N., 1974. *Comparing foreign policies: theories, findings, and methods*. [Beverly Hills, Calif.: Sage Publications; [distributed by] Halsted Press, New York. 272

<sup>19</sup> COTTAM, MARTHA L., 1986. *Foreign policy decision making: the influence of cognition*. Boulder, Colo: Westview.45

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*41

adventuristic actions where the outcomes are either maximum payoff or maximum loss'; 'push to the limit and pursue one's opponent even if he lets up, but be prepared to engage in strategic retreat rather than suffer large losses in strength.'<sup>21</sup> Others infer in their studies such patterns of Soviet conduct as: 'the higher the stakes, the more reluctant the USSR as a risk-taker'; 'the less risky the crisis, the more willing the USSR to pursue gains or engage in a conflict'.<sup>22</sup> There is a distinction in Soviet perspective between appetite and risk-taking. There is readiness to reap advantage if the risk is low.<sup>23</sup>

Henry Kissinger, in his "*Nuclear Weapons and Foreign Policy*" published in 1957, categorizes states into status-quo and revolutionary powers. The former accepts "good faith" and "willingness to come to an agreement" as expected outcomes of diplomacy. The latter will simply take advantage of "good faith" naivete. On status-quo powers Kissinger writes, "All their instincts will cause them to seek to integrate the revolutionary power within the legitimate framework with which they are familiar and which to them seems natural. The Soviets" he writes, "have expanded their power into multiple regions, Europe, Middle East and Asia, by coupling each act of expansion with protestation of peace, democracy, and freedom. Conciliatory American statements will, therefore, appear to the Soviets either as hypocrisy or stupidity, ignorance or propaganda. For American leaders, negotiations tend to be the end in itself. To the communists, negotiations or a conference is a means to buy time, to define the political framework of the next test of strength or to satisfy an objective intuition. While for the westerners, a treaty has legal and not only a utilitarian significance, a moral and not only a practical force, in Soviet's view a concession is merely a phase in a continuing struggle."<sup>24</sup>

Another observation contends that the Bolsheviks had not seized power by collaborating with other socialist and radical groups or by respecting legal norms and proprieties. They succeeded by showing to the proletariat that they were fighters, by

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<sup>21</sup> HUDSON, V.M., 1997. *Culture & foreign policy*. Boulder, Colo.: L. Rienner Publishers. 14

<sup>22</sup> PURSIANEN, C., 2000. *Russian foreign policy and international relations theory*. Aldershot: Ashgate. 41

<sup>23</sup> BERTRAM, C., 1980. *Prospects of Soviet Power in the 1980s*. Springer. 3

<sup>24</sup> COTTAM RICHARD WALTER, 1977. *Foreign policy motivation: a general theory and a case study*. Pittsburgh [etc.]; London: University of Pittsburgh Press; Feffer and Simons.17

seizing upon every social and political grievance, and by adopting the most radical position on practically every issue. The prize was bound to go to the audacious and uncompromising.<sup>25</sup> This argument can be also taken as Soviet 'pattern of conduct', and the way they 'did business'. It remains for the empirical part of current analysis to demonstrate its plausibility.

The term 'Operational Code', in Soviet studies refers to the cultural interpretation of Russian "national character". Such a view first was based on one's attempt to understand the Russian character and deeper view of its motives, feelings, and the moral sentiments. Some results revealed the following interesting and basic beliefs and patterns of behavior, characteristic to the early Soviet state's period: pushing the limits; engaging in pursuit of an opponent who begins to retreat or makes concessions but knowing when to stop; acting when ready; refusing to be provoked; agreeing to temporary concessions and peaceful coexistence while always keeping conflict and the ultimate victory in mind.<sup>26</sup>

Scholars recognize, that today, with the disappearance of Soviet socialist ideology, the concept of the operational code still often serves as a point of reference for scholars when they are trying to find out what has changed and what has remained unaltered in Russian foreign policy-making. Some scholars for instance conclude, that the operational code of the Bolsheviks is not altogether gone, but the opinion offers an argument that because the conditions and the context, in which the operational code 'made sense' have changed, Russian foreign policy needs 'a reassessment of this heritage, to preserve what may be useful and discard what is simply obsolete.'<sup>27</sup>

Others instruct not to pay attention to the Soviet Union's or Russia's *sui generis* character. For instance, structural realism defines ideology, identity, motives and intentions of a state simply as unimportant. Waltz has stated that the leaders of the Soviet Union may have been hoping that they can one day turn the world to Communism, and

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<sup>25</sup> JERVIS, ROBERT, PRINCETON UNIVERSITY PRESS., 2017. *Perception and misperception in international politics*. Princeton; Oxford: Princeton University Press. 263

<sup>26</sup> PURSIAINEN, C., 2000. *Russian foreign policy and international relations theory*. Aldershot: Ashgate. 63

<sup>27</sup> Ibid. 64



in this sense the Soviet Union's intentions may be extraordinary, but this does not mean that the country's behavior has been extraordinary. This argument urges us to concentrate on the 'Soviet Union's situation rather than on its motives, or on the 'outcomes of its actions, rather than on its often-disturbing behavior'.<sup>28</sup>

In a study on Soviet risk-taking and crisis behavior, it is proposed that 'the *riskier* the crisis, the *more* cautious the USSR is'. With equal confidence it can be argued that one of the ways in which such caution would be expressed, or could be measured, would be the degree to which the Soviet Union refrains from the use of force. However, this is not the case in another proposition which argues that 'the *riskier* the crisis, the *more* force the USSR tends to use (italic original). It would be very difficult to provide any example of Soviet foreign policy where this ever applied. Another, third proposition states that 'the *more* force the USSR uses, the *less* is the Soviet's perception of the crisis as being risky for the USSR'. In other words, when the USSR uses force, the crisis – as asserted in the second proposition – is objectively risky, but at the same time – as stated in the third proposition – the USSR does not perceive the crisis as such, when it increases its usage of force. What this amounts to is the claim that there is a general divergence of objective conditions of Soviet risk perceptions. Such diversity of propositions is commented by statement that Soviet scale and gradation of reaction and risk-assessment cannot be generalized to 'all crises' but needs to be analyzed each case in isolation.<sup>29</sup>

Scholars on risk-taking propose that when analyzing the Soviet risk-taking behavior, it would be essential to look more at leader's 'cognitive map', 'political culture', system of 'beliefs, values', and the operational code, rather than at 'bureaucratic politics' and 'organizational variables.'<sup>30</sup>

Regarding Soviet leader's beliefs about the control of the force of events and the acceptance of risks, the following propositions are suggested: 'It is imperative not to embark on forward operations against an opponent which are not carefully calculated in

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid. 118

<sup>29</sup> ADOMEIT, H., 1984. *Soviet risk-taking and crisis behavior: a theoretical and empirical analysis*. London: Allen & Unwin.. 52

<sup>30</sup> Ibid. 53

advance'; 'move forward only after careful preparation'.<sup>31</sup> These patterns of Soviet behavior accurately correlate with an opinion of Prof. Galia Golan, who claims that the Soviets were much more careful in their foreign conduct than the Russians today.<sup>32</sup> The next statement, that 'it is necessary not to undertake any action, that has an uncertain chance of yielding any payoffs, and at the same time coupled with large risk of severe loss if it fails', may indicate that the Soviets were not 'at all cost' gain-maximizers and uncalculatable risk-takers. Additional proposition suggests that the Soviets were not short-term gain-maximizers, and that prospects of immediate short-term gain calculations were not dominant in Soviet decision-making, rather long-range calculations were preferable.<sup>33</sup>

Another useful proposition for Soviet operational code, sounds that 'it is feasible to control the force of events and scale down the level of risk by limiting the means employed for objectives which in themselves may be quite ambitious'. Another one argues that 'it is advisable not to settle for a single probability estimate of unwanted risks that may develop in the future; rather such estimates of probability are to be subjected to sequential analysis.'<sup>34</sup> According to the former proposition, it is interesting how the Soviets thought that by limiting the means employed - that is power, either military or diplomatic, they are able to control the scale of events.

Additional accounts propose that Soviet foreign policy complies with principles inherent in the Soviet military concept of the 'art of operations' (*operativnoe isskusstvo*) which is an 'innovative linking of politics with warfare'. In other words, the militarization of politics, which Lenin was the first statemen to accomplish. In Soviet perception it means an interminable succession of probing, which like military reconnaissance are meant to draw enemy's fire and reveal his capabilities, dispositions, and intentions. Others put forward additional assumptions which we also apply in our study. For instance, a proposition that 'Soviet leaders act according to the proverb, "If you don't know the ford,

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid. 53

<sup>32</sup> From a personal interview conducted by the author with Prof. Golan on 19.04.2019

<sup>33</sup> ADOMEIT, H., 1984. *Soviet risk-taking and crisis behavior: a theoretical and empirical analysis*. London: Allen & Unwin.. 53

<sup>34</sup> Ibid. 53

don't step into the river." It proposes that Russians do not plunge into contests blindly; they rarely gamble, unless they feel the odds are overwhelmingly in their favor.<sup>35</sup> As will be demonstrated, early Soviet conduct cannot be considered as a pure adventurism, although many could not agree with such an assumption when considering the multiple military interventions during the Cold War, from East Berlin in 1953, to Afghanistan 1979. However, evidence suggest that the Soviets undertook these interventions after considerable deliberations with multiple actors on a variety of levels.

Notwithstanding the argument, that 'Soviet leaders are quite prepared to pull back when resistance on any one of sectors of engagement turns to be stronger than anticipated', taking this assumptions from the proposition that Soviet decision-making was largely influenced by Soviet military operational concepts,<sup>36</sup> appears somewhat contradictory to an opinion, that 'the Soviets would not easily give up an engagement, where major resources are already been invested or 'sunk', as other scholars argue elsewhere.

'*Never show weakness*' is another proposed pattern of Russian behavior. For instance, when putting forward arguments in favor of reduction of the value of nuclear factor in dealing with the Unites States, when the latter possessed its monopoly immediately after the WWII, one of Stalin's arguments was not to show any weakness. As Stalin put it then, "The USSR could hardly be counted among the 'weak-nerved' states that could be intimidated by the nuclear weapon," a statement he made shortly after stressing that the atomic bombs, 'are intended to intimidate only the weak-nerved.' Indeed, Stalin's most resourceful and uncompromising bargaining for maximum gain, during the Potsdam conference and thereafter, is virtually devoid of examples of retreat, and where there was retreat and compromise, Stalin was careful not to convey the impression that it had occurred as a result of a direct US military threat. This is valid even for the case still widely held to be the foremost example of Soviet retreat under direct US military pressure in the early postwar era - the Soviet retreat from Iran in March 1946. It

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<sup>35</sup> ADOMEIT, H., 1984. *Soviet risk-taking and crisis behavior: a theoretical and empirical analysis*. London: Allen & Unwin.. 53-54

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.* 54

is stressed that there undoubtedly was a diplomatic pressure. The evidence, however, for some sort of American military pressure, let alone ultimatum, are simply lacking.<sup>37</sup> The Israelis on their turn concluded from their military and political interaction with the Soviets that, “You must manifest determination with the Soviets and in no way retreat. Any sign of retreat would project weakness and only provoke the Soviets for more assertive actions from their side.”<sup>38</sup> These observations confirm the previously presented Russian patterns of conduct quite accurately.

Analysts of the Berlin crisis conclude, that while considering the fact that Soviet behavior showed great restraint in the use of violence against Western military personnel and their actions, and rejected all alternatives that would have involved even low-level military clashes between military units of the superpowers, two conclusions appear unescapable: 1) that the Soviet leaders excluded war as a means to further their objectives; 2) and that the limit, or the ‘red line’ of risk-taking was the occurrence of violence between military units of the superpowers. Since the Soviets did not want to initiate violence, the reasoning appears sound that they would also not react with violence to Western attempts to break the Berlin blockade. In the terminology of this thesis, all indications point not only to calculated risk-taking, but also to the existence of what other scholars call a ‘risk-reducing emergency strategy.’ These scholars are convinced that the Soviets tried rather hard to avoid war, by ‘the care with which they avoided measures which would have been resisted with force.’ Another conclusion states that the Soviet authorities were always ready to withdraw from a competition and risk-taking on issues about which the Western powers had felt strongly or where they threatened to take retaliatory measures.<sup>39</sup> Additional derivation, drawn by the Western powers regarding Soviet behavior, points that Soviet ‘aggression has to be stopped at an early stage; and negotiations can only be fruitful from position of strength.’ As Truman once wrote, “I had learned from my negotiations with the intransigent Russian diplomats that there was only

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<sup>37</sup> ADOMEIT, H., 1984. *Soviet risk-taking and crisis behavior: a theoretical and empirical analysis*. London: Allen & Unwin.. 135

<sup>38</sup> ADAMSKY, D., 2006. *Mivtsa' Kavkaz : ha-hit'arvut ha-Sovyēit yeha-hafta'ah ha-Yišre'elit be-Milhemet ha-hatashah*. Tel Aviv: Ma'arakhot. 91

<sup>39</sup> ADOMEIT, H., 1984. *Soviet risk-taking and crisis behavior: a theoretical and empirical analysis*. London: Allen & Unwin.. 170-171

one way to avoid a third world war, and that was to lead from a position of strength. We had to rearm ourselves and our allies and, at the same time, deal with the Russians in a manner they could never interpret as weakness.”<sup>40</sup>

Among Soviet leaders, Khrushchev for instance, was seeking to utilize crises by ‘making them target of his efforts to convert the success of Soviet technology into meaningful political gains.’ In Khrushchev’s view, the forbidding image of Soviet strategic power, together with [political] pressure, would bring the West to concede positions previously impervious to Soviet diplomatic assault.’ Other scholars who studied Soviet foreign crisis-behavior, when bringing Berlin crisis as a case-study, relate the Soviet conduct in the Suez crisis in 1956, the Turkish-Syrian crisis of 1957, pressure against European NATO member-states, and the crises of 1958 in the Middle and Far East, to the Soviet ‘political blackmail’ in Berlin.<sup>41</sup> Authors point to the policy of linkage exploited by the Soviets seeing unrelated events in world affairs as one theater of global confrontation.

The following description that is brought to describe operational principles of Soviet risk-taking and crisis behavior clearly resonates with our aforementioned point on the mental and cultural feature of power politics from the realist perspective. It is proposed that the Soviets see the operational principles of world politics in following terms: “Moderately worded notes are followed by stiff notes. Notes are followed by movements of ships, troops, or airplanes in locations close to the theater of the quarrel, and perhaps some forces are infiltrated or landed overtly. Shots are fired, followed by more-than-equal retaliation from the other side. Allied nations step into picture. And so on, through threat and counterthreat, retaliations and counterretaliation, right up to the brink of all-out war, and perhaps beyond it.”<sup>42</sup>

Some consider that it is instructive to compare the type of the Soviet Berlin crisis-behavior with that shown in other crises and in other situations where there was only a

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid. 174

<sup>41</sup> Ibid. 191

<sup>42</sup> Ibid. 315-316

risk of a superpower collision. In regard to the conflicts in the Middle East in 1956, 1967, and 1973, it indicates that the principle “do not embark on forward operations against an opponent which are not carefully calculated in advance,” which was described earlier, is only of a limited applicability, as the USSR was primarily responding to local events. Of course, there were some elements in the Soviets response which had the characteristics of a ‘forward’ or pro-active operation in the late stages of the local conflicts – as was evident in the nuclear threats made by Khrushchev, through Bulganin, the head of the Soviet government, on November 5 1956; the use by Kosygin of the hot line on 10 June 1967, threatening that unless Israel halted its military operations the Soviet Union would take ‘necessary actions, including military’; and the alert of Soviet airborne divisions (approximately 45,000 operational troops - original) between 8 and 16 October 1973, and other signs of build-up for military interventions and a strongly worded letter sent by Brezhnev to President Nixon on 24 October of the same year. But, all these examples appeared to have a primary function of bringing pressure on the United States to restrain its impulsive ally, Israel, and to demonstrate to the Soviet Union’s presumptive allies - the Arab countries - that the USSR was acting resourcefully on their behalf. To that extent, all of these moves were of limited purpose and limited risk. But even if one adopts the view that these instances are examples of Soviet pro-active conduct in conditions of international conflict, the element of careful calculations, as evident primarily in the precise timing of the threats, is nevertheless being confirmed by observers.<sup>43</sup> For instance, the Soviet intervention in Czechoslovakia in 1968 is described by some as a ‘long and carefully prepared and thoroughly considered tactical implementation of skillful, swift and effective measures.’<sup>44</sup>

Another stance of Soviet behavior proposes the following: ‘carefully prepare the ground psychologically, make every attempt to demoralize the adversary and soften his

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid. 318-319

<sup>44</sup> Ibid. 319

potential resistance by an alternation of severe pressure and holding out the prospect of compromise.’<sup>45</sup>

Another axiom inferred by the scholarship from two Berlin crises, sounds: ‘*avoid the direct use of military force. Use proxies wherever possible.*’ (italic original) In fact the use of proxies for the purpose of avoiding the direct use of Soviet military personnel and scaling down the level of risk is a common feature in Soviet foreign policy, which applies not only to East Germany during the Berlin crisis, but also to Soviet conduct in the Middle East conflicts, when using Egypt in the Yemeni war 1967, and Cuban proxies in Angola in 1975-1976.

Another important aspect of the set of axioms that is confirmed by Soviet behavior, is the principle of ‘*know when to stop*’ or ‘*retreat before superior force.*’ Such pattern of foreign policy crisis-behavior was evident especially during the Cuban crisis. Although these principles were implemented in a later stage, it was not too late to avoid direct clashes between military forces of the two superpowers.<sup>46</sup> Additional principle brought by the Soviet crisis-behavior scholarship argues the following: ‘never lose sight of the political objectives to be achieved, and in pursuing them do not let yourself be diverted by false notions of bourgeois morality’.<sup>47</sup>

All in all, the Soviet patterns of long-term assessment and consistency are striking. The different approaches of the two superpowers to changes, reflect different interests at stake as much as different philosophical perceptions.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid. 319

<sup>46</sup> Ibid. 322

<sup>47</sup> Ibid. 324

<sup>48</sup> CHUBIN, S., 1980. *Soviet policy towards Iran and the Gulf*. London: International Institute for Strategic Studies. 31-32

## **Intrinsic features of the Bolshevik Operational Code**

### *Conservatism*

The Soviet system of organizations and decision-making processes is highly distinctive by its 'conservative reaction to change.'<sup>49</sup> This argument leads us to assume that contemporary Russian foreign policy is highly influenced by conservative past Soviet perceptions and patterns of strategic thinking. Conservatism, in form of continuity, insufficient change, and flaccidity of initiative, are prominent features observed in most sectors of Soviet society – from the lowest levels to the top of country's leadership.<sup>50</sup> It is observed that the forces of conservatism in Soviet life are many and strong. They are based on cultural, organizational, structural, and other influences. Their major effect is to preserve past trends and patterns and to make the new look much like the old. The best guide to what will happen tomorrow is what happened yesterday.<sup>51</sup> According to one such opinion, Soviet conservatism and caution, together with the need to mobilize internal political support for a new policy, make it difficult for Soviet policy-makers to back away from a chosen course of action.<sup>52</sup>

### *Rigidity*

Middle East observers, after a direct interaction with Soviet soldiers and politicians conclude that the Communist Party may have left a profound impression on 'Mother Russia', but 'Mother Russia' has also left profound impression on Soviet Communism, resulting in extreme rigidity of Soviet institutions.<sup>53</sup> It is argued that Soviet foreign policy conduct often has been towards greater rigidity, an aversion to reform, and a discouragement of new approaches. Soviet politicians will seek ways of avoiding dangerous deadlocks and will not permit ideology to stand in their way if they feel they

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<sup>49</sup> ALEXANDER, A.J., 1978. *Decision-making in Soviet weapons procurement*. International Institute for Strategic Studies. 2

<sup>50</sup> Ibid. 25

<sup>51</sup> Ibid. 41

<sup>52</sup> Ibid. 44

<sup>53</sup> HAYKAL, M.H., 1978. *The Sphinx and the Commissar: The Rise and Fall of Soviet Influence in the Middle East*. HarperCollins Publishers. P. 279



have no alternative. And, as with all abstract notions, Leninist ideology lends itself to being re-interpreted and re-justified.<sup>54</sup> Indeed, it is safe to bet in international politics that things will change but not all that much, and the traditional Soviet ability to control disturbing pressures by installing resignation and submission (on its subjects), by force if necessary, should grant a degree of permanence to the [present] structure and stability of the Soviet regime.<sup>55</sup> This argument confirms our previous claim that traditionally, Russia sees the outside world and foreign regimes surrounding it or those it cooperates with, through the prism of its own domestic order and regime's survival.

### *Secrecy*

Secrecy is endemic in Soviet society. The secrecy of its foreign conduct was always jealously protected even among Soviet multiple regime institutions and levels, the Foreign Ministry, the military, the Politburo and the CPSU. Participants of some of these groups constituted their 'own' channels with multiple sources in foreign countries at the highest negotiating levels, promoting through them their own agendas, political as well as material (personal) and strategic.<sup>56</sup> These patterns of conduct are also clearly discernible in contemporary Russia.

### *Continuity*

No matter how formidable the problems the Soviet leaders may have faced, they appeared unlikely to produce any major changes in Soviet Policy. Continuity remains the catch word. It will be reflected by nationalistic, even chauvinistic traits of Russian leadership. Observers conclude that the caution in its policy and unreadiness to take incalculable risks notwithstanding, Moscow will continue to depend on military strength and expect to be able to cope with the pressure from within and pursue its interests from

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<sup>54</sup> BERTRAM, C., 1980. *Prospects of Soviet Power in the 1980s*. Springer. 2

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.* 2

<sup>56</sup> ALEXANDER, A.J., 1978. *Decision-making in Soviet weapons procurement*. International Institute for Strategic Studies. 26-27

without. It will measure its success by past achievements, not by its ability to cope with present and future challenges.<sup>57</sup>

### **Applying operational code in Soviet foreign policy analysis**

In the early days of the revolution, and for some years before it erupted, most Bolsheviks appeared to be genuinely convinced that after the revolution had taken place in Russia, similar revolutions and upheavals in adjacent countries would quickly follow.<sup>58</sup> In other words, the Bolsheviks perceived that first and foremost they had to deal with the “capitalist encirclement” in order to secure the Soviet state and the revolution. Iran presents us with an example of such policy-making. Obsessed by the fear of “capitalist encirclement,” the Soviets pursued toward Iran a policy of bluster, menace, and threat. June’s 1941 unpredicted Nazi German offensive on Soviet territory only exacerbated Soviet fears of adjacent independent states on its borders. This policy of fear and threat towards Iran paradoxically brought about the very condition Moscow feared most - Iran’s alliance with the West.<sup>59</sup> This policy of menace and threat towards neighboring Iran was the derivative of the Bolshevik concept of political foreign conduct. After the Second World War, the Soviet foreign policy towards Iran continued according to the Bolshevik patterns of behavior. The institutionalization of Stalin's cult of personality in Soviet immediate post-WWII strategic thinking only augmented this form of conduct.<sup>60</sup>

Another intrinsic pattern of Soviet conduct under Stalin was non-participation in any UN-sponsored economic and technical assistance and development programs for Third World and underdeveloped countries, justified by a variety of pretexts. This ‘legacy’ ended with Stalin’s death, but niggardliness was a characteristic of Moscow’s contributions to UN assistance programs.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> BERTRAM, C., 1980. *Prospects of Soviet Power in the 1980s*. Springer. 2

<sup>58</sup> SONNENFELDT, H. and HYLAND, W.G., 1979. Soviet perspectives on security: Introduction. 3

<sup>59</sup> ČUBĪN, SĀHRĀM., ZABIH, SEPEHR., SEABURY, PAUL., 1974. *The foreign relations of Iran : a developing state in a zone of Great Power conflict*. Berkeley [etc.]; London: University of California Press. 51-52

<sup>60</sup> SONNENFELDT, H. and HYLAND, W.G., 1979. Soviet perspectives on security: Introduction. 6-7

<sup>61</sup> RUBINSTEIN, A.Z., 1981. *Soviet foreign policy since World War II : imperial and global*. Cambridge, Mass.: Winthrop Publishers. 202

Others contend that Stalin's post-Second World War perception, that Soviet Union must possess significant military forces to deter potential invaders and, having achieved these goals, Soviet Union could try to manipulate the external [world] balance of power, was an 'evolution' from the Bolshevik concept of a more traditional understanding of state's security.<sup>62</sup>

In general, early Soviet foreign policy was highly opportunistic, maintaining great momentum in its outward expansion but content when confronted, awaiting a diminution in resistance before again reasserting itself. Soviet involvement in the Third World since 1945 appears to have been marked by similar patterns, by readiness to make causal investments in regions, mark time when necessary, and press on again when expedient.<sup>63</sup>

The Bolshevik code of conduct endured and persisted into Khrushchev's term. During the Khrushchev years, Soviet commentary generally followed the traditional Bolshevik wisdom in describing international relations under the dominance of capitalism as a rigid hierarchy secured by the actual distribution of power, with a configuration resembling a pyramid. At the apex of the pyramid stood a single dominant power. The defining characteristic of the dominant power was its geographically secured position of strategic invulnerability. The invulnerability, in turn, permitted the dominant power to choose the decisive moment of a quarrel to side with the more powerful against the weaker. As a result, the dominant power operated a curious balance-of-power system in which it acted as holder of the balance in order to preserve or secure its dominant position in the international order. In addition, there were, a number of other developed, imperialist great powers, engaged in a constant struggle for place and markets, impetus of which is derived from a kind of law of uneven development under capitalism. Meanwhile, at the base of their hierarchy, separated by a qualitative gap, were the colonies and "semi-colonies" as well as the small and weak "semi-independent" states, which in accordance

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<sup>62</sup> SONNENFELDT, H. and HYLAND, W.G., 1979. Soviet perspectives on security: Introduction. 5-6

<sup>63</sup> ČUBĪN, SĀHRĀM., ZABIH, SEPEHR., SEABURY, PAUL., 1974. *The foreign relations of Iran : a developing state in a zone of Great Power conflict*. Berkeley [etc.]; London: University of California Press. 264-265

with the polarization tendency were being forced into dependency status.<sup>64</sup> It describes the way Moscow perceived the world affairs in terms of hierarchy and persistent balance-of-power. It perceived conflict as inherent feature of international relations and designed its foreign policy conduct accordingly. By the end of Khrushchev's tenure, little seem to have been left of the Bolshevik expectation that power relationships are unidirectional, or of the traditional penchant for perceiving the international hierarchy as rigidly structured.<sup>65</sup>

Another striking intrinsic feature of Soviet conduct worth mentioning is its persistence in achieving any political goal exclusively on their terms and high sense of vindictiveness. Under Brezhnev, the Soviets still continued to perceive any concessions from the West nothing more than a weakness. They strove to fill any gap appeared as a result of either Western weakness or malfunction. When the Americans failed to come to terms with Syria in the early 1980s and Egyptian-American cooperation was gaining pace following the Camp David accords, Moscow abundantly assisted Syria, supplying it with arms and seeking to recover the Geneva Peace Conference to achieve the Arab-Israel conflict resolution on their terms.<sup>66</sup>

However, as much as Moscow was interested in improving their shaky position with Egypt and however pleased it was with Sadat's occasional gestures in late 1974, the Soviets remained wary of the Egyptian President; they rejected his requests for arms and economic aid and focused their efforts on Syria, rendering it extensive political, military and economic support.<sup>67</sup> Moscow's goal at the time was to isolate Egypt from the 'common Arab cause' and in part USSR succeeded in this occupation by encouraging Syria to ally with the PLO and Jordan, what eventually happened in March 1975, putting Kissinger's Arab-Israeli settlement efforts at stake.<sup>68</sup> We deduce from this short example that Soviets are seemingly prone to receptiveness, resentful, and vindictive[ness].

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<sup>64</sup> ZIMMERMAN, W., *Soviet Perspectives on International Relations, 1956-1967*. 2. printing edn. Princeton: Princeton University Press. 127

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.* 152

<sup>66</sup> KARSH, E., 2014. *The Soviet Union and Syria the Asad years*. London; New York: Routledge. 19-20

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.* 19-20

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.* 22-23

What then followed, was Soviet adoption of the Syrian idea that the PLO must take a much more active part in the regional Arab-Israeli resolution process. This was followed by a respective proposal to be adopted by the UN Security Council on 30 November 1975, causing a great setback for both Israel and the US. Moscow in fact appeared as a champion of the Palestinian cause on January 12-26, 1976 when the discussion did take place in the Security Council.<sup>69</sup>

Additional example is that following the 1978 coup in Afghanistan and fall of the Iranian Shah in 1979, wide opportunities opened for Moscow. However, the self-limiting nature of Soviet policies and rather modest success in exploiting these opportunities explains the emphasis on pattern of pursuing of long-term advantages, rather than on immediate short-term returns in its diplomacy (policy).<sup>70</sup>

### **Elements of the operational code in contemporary Russian foreign policy conduct**

The Bolsheviks did not see themselves at first as governing a state but as leading a revolutionary detachment, part of a movement which, if not world-wide, would be widespread.<sup>71</sup> The Soviets were convinced, that if the country and the hope of eventual widespread revolution were to survive, the regime itself had to be preserved.<sup>72</sup> In other words, the survival of other foreign socialist regimes was perceived also as a guarantee of the survival of the Soviet state itself. This is one view, which can explain the zeal and determination with which Moscow was virtually possessed to save Nasser and Assad and keep them in power in both Egypt and Syria during the 1960s and early 1970s, going to great lengths for this goal. If we consider, that the Soviet foreign conduct was largely influenced by the socialist ideology stemming from the Bolshevik revolutionary concept, it appears more clearly that the Soviet conduct during these years was largely the outcome of the authentic Bolshevik thinking and perspective of spreading of the

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid. 25

<sup>70</sup> CHUBIN, S., 1980. *Soviet policy towards Iran and the Gulf*. London: International Institute for Strategic Studies. 25

<sup>71</sup> SONNENFELDT, H. and HYLAND, W.G., 1979. *Soviet perspectives on security: Introduction*. 4

<sup>72</sup> Ibid. 4

'revolutionary' socialist concept and assuring that the regimes around it survive. If we add to this, that the Kremlin saw its own survival directly linked to the spread of the revolution outside Soviet borders,<sup>73</sup> we propose, that contemporary Russian President Vladimir Putin's pursuit to save Assad in Syria, in part stems from the same perception of Soviet "Bolshevik" obligation to save regimes and its leaders from overthrow, directly linking it to the survival of the regime in Russia.

Another Soviet Bolshevik policy characteristic is to 'embarrass' its rivals. What is described as a policy that was already utilized by the Bolsheviks, directed not so much to the peoples of Russia but to the peoples of Western Europe, later became known as "demonstrative diplomacy", or as was explained by other scholars of Russian conduct a "diplomacy designed not to promote freely accepted and mutually profitable agreements between governments, but rather to embarrass other governments and stir up opposition among their own peoples."<sup>74</sup> In this context, it is startling how contemporary Russia's interference in Syria can be explained as an aim to embarrass the United States, regionally and globally.

To the degree that the Russian elite, beginning with President Boris Yeltsin (1991-1999) consciously opted to rebuild an autocratic system of power in the traditional sense, it has also adopted both the trappings and substance of many historical policies that have characterized Russia over the years.<sup>75</sup> In the words of one American expert on Russia, "Moscow's greatest weapon is its ability to irritate, provoke, and surprise."<sup>76</sup> Among these traditional manifestations of Russian autocratic thinking and policies, lies the obsession with Russia's uniqueness or specificity (*Samobytnost'* or *Spetsifichnost'* - original). These

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<sup>73</sup> Ibid. 4

<sup>74</sup> RUBINSTEIN, A.Z., 1981. *Soviet foreign policy since World War II : imperial and global*. Cambridge, Mass.: Winthrop Publishers. 2

<sup>75</sup> BLANK, STEPHEN J., STANY ZJEDNOCZONE., CONSUMER PRODUCT SAFETY COMMISSION., ARMY WAR COLLEGE., STRATEGIC STUDIES INSTITUTE., 2015. *Perspectives on Russian foreign policy*. Lavergne; Carlisle Barracks: CPSC] ; Strategic Studies Institute. 33-34

<sup>76</sup> MEDICK, V., et al, 2015, October 13, 2015. Russia's Superpower Play: Putin Bets Big on Aggressive Syria Policy. *Spiegel Online*.

characteristics of Russian conduct are complemented by high geopolitical consistency and continuity with past Russian regimes and their patterns of behavior.<sup>77</sup>

One example is that in traditional Leninist-Stalinist perspective, the very notion of non-hierarchical power relations was anathema. There was little subtlety to the conventional Bolshevik imaginary; states, classes, individuals were either on top or at the bottom, and values were allocated accordingly. *Which* protagonist would emerge the winner and *which* the loser, was the central question of politics. ‘*Kto-kogo*’, the famous ‘who-whom’ aptly summarized this view of Soviet politics as a continuous zero-sum game in which the whole gamut of the participants’ values is at stake.<sup>78</sup>

Aleksandr Bovin, the last Soviet ambassador to Israel, made the following remark: “Do you know why Russia is so big? Because it never gave back (away) anything.” This is why post-Soviet Russia, especially under Putin, moved to reclaim its standings as a Middle East power, by backing its traditional allies such as Syria and the Palestinians, fostering new ones, like Iran, mending fences with erstwhile clients like Egypt, and not least, by maximizing its nuisance value against US hegemony. The sense of *déjà vu* for some Russian foreign policy analysts is overpowering.<sup>79</sup>

The security perception of a given nation is not a fixed or quantifiable condition, although some of its elements are concrete enough. It is in many respects a state of mind, which is affected by many stimuli, some going far back into its historical experience.<sup>80</sup> In Russia’s Foreign Minister Ivanov’s words, the Russian leader’s sense of constant insecurity is a permanent feature of its foreign policy. Russia’s contemporary leadership, like the Bolsheviks, sees itself in a state of a permanent siege with both the capitalists and other great powers. And, the vastly increased extent of Russian intelligence

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<sup>77</sup> BLANK, STEPHEN J., STANY ZJEDNOCZONE., CONSUMER PRODUCT SAFETY COMMISSION., ARMY WAR COLLEGE., STRATEGIC STUDIES INSTITUTE., 2015. *Perspectives on Russian foreign policy*. Lavergne; Carlisle Barracks: CPSC] ; Strategic Studies Institute. 33-34

<sup>78</sup> ZIMMERMAN, W., *Soviet Perspectives on International Relations, 1956-1967*. 2. printing edn. Princeton: Princeton University Press. 126

<sup>79</sup> GINOR, ISABELLA., REMEZ, GIDEON., 2017. *The Soviet-Israeli War, 1967-1973 : the USSR's military intervention in the Egyptian-Israeli conflict*. 360

<sup>80</sup> SONNENFELDT, H. and HYLAND, W.G., 1979. Soviet perspectives on security: Introduction. 1

operations against the United States, its allies, and Russia's neighbors, under the leadership of Vladimir Putin, only comes to confirm this opinion.<sup>81</sup>

One of proposed depictions of contemporary Russia's political perceptions is that "Russia is strategically alone, but only needs itself as it is a self-sufficient entity. Other major powers are its rivals and smaller powers are the objects and purpose of these struggles." Another statement sounds that everyone is a potential competitor or a partner at least for the time being, but because nobody and nothing can be trusted as they will cheat at the first instance (as will Russia too - original), legally binding contracts or agreements are necessary, but nothing guarantees that Russia will stay bound, because the others are no better and only interest guides Russia.<sup>82</sup> From this described views of the Russian political elite it is concluded that what we have is a foreign policy elite that is utterly cynical, manipulative, and exceptionally venal. While its utter cynicism may go beyond even the Soviet system, the pervasive moral nihilism is so strong, that a Soviet legacy is deeply visible here, as well as the late 19<sup>th</sup> century origins of such views.<sup>83</sup>

Other observers propose that Russia sees itself as a "sacred" or at least privileged and unique state with a special path (*Osobiy Put'* - original), not bound by the usual rules of international activity, and demands that others accept this self-evaluation as the evaluation of Russia. Russia's self-perception is as a singular entity,<sup>84</sup> a 'lonely' self-sufficient power (*Derzhava* - added), exercising unfettered power (*Derzhavnost'* - original) in its own domain. A unique, autocratic great-power.<sup>85</sup>

In this respect, Russia's military intervention in Syria (2014) is seen by many caused by an infantile or unreasonable war-fever. Some Russian experts regard the

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<sup>81</sup> BLANK, STEPHEN J., STANY ZJEDNOCZONE., CONSUMER PRODUCT SAFETY COMMISSION., ARMY WAR COLLEGE., STRATEGIC STUDIES INSTITUTE., 2015. *Perspectives on Russian foreign policy*. Lavergne; Carlisle Barracks: CPSC] ; Strategic Studies Institute. 113

<sup>82</sup> Ibid. 35-37

<sup>83</sup> Ibid. 37

<sup>84</sup> Ibid. 51-52

<sup>85</sup> Ibid. 88



Russian war in Syria in following terms: “The war is seen as a great fortune, the fulfillment of a longtime dream. We are returning to our former greatness. There is finally a ‘clarity.’”<sup>86</sup>

This view of Russian conduct leads to assume that because from intrinsic Russian perspective, it is beyond accounting to any state or institutional norms – an expression of a strong state’s interests without accounting to any moral values – what we have is projection and transfer of Russian domestic values into Russian foreign policy.<sup>87</sup> As some Russian political scientists express, “Empire, is the main category of any strategic political analysis (thinking) in the Russian language. Whenever we start to ponder a full-scale, long-term construction of the Russian state, we begin to think in imperial terms. Russians are inherently imperialists.”<sup>88</sup>

### **Concluding Operational Code perspective**

Some intriguing templates of Russian foreign behavior were derived from this brief analysis. Sense of pride seemingly mastered Soviet reaction to Egypt’s departure from Soviet orbit, followed by uncompromising behavior with an attempt to somewhat avenge. Taking political strategic defeats are accompanied with sense of insult, often personal. Sense of vindictiveness apparent as well. However, seemingly Soviets would not in any circumstances push to the brink of starting a Third World War or escalate towards direct clash between USSR and United States over local affairs and its allies. Contemporary Russian behavior in Syria points to patterns of past Soviet conduct.

It is obvious that in contemporary Russian foreign policy thinking and decision-making, “Bolshevik Operational Code” still serves as significant point of reference for Moscow’s decision-makers. “*Push the limits*”; “*come to terms, support conciliation but keep in mind basic conflict perception and strive to victory*”; “*resist severely to any encroachment from the very beginning*”; “*by altering the means employed, events can be*

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<sup>86</sup> MEDICK, V., et al, 2015, October 13, 2015. Russia’s Superpower Play: Putin Bets Big on Aggressive Syria Policy. *Spiegel Online*.

<sup>87</sup> BLANK, STEPHEN J., STANY ZJEDNOCZONE., CONSUMER PRODUCT SAFETY COMMISSION., ARMY WAR COLLEGE., STRATEGIC STUDIES INSTITUTE., 2015. *Perspectives on Russian foreign policy*. Lavergne; Carlisle Barracks: CPSCJ ; Strategic Studies Institute. 51-52

<sup>88</sup> Ibid. 88

*controlled*"; "*never show weakness*"; "*stay focused on political objectives*". Such patterns of the Operational Code behavior can be observed in Russian foreign policy towards all three our case-studies. Rapprochement with Egypt as soon as Washington 'left the scene' creating vacuum for rapprochement; abruptly reacting to attempts to overthrow Assad and 'pushing the limits' further in Syria by carefully watching US response (or lack of response); coming to terms with the West over the Iranian nuclear deal, simultaneously keeping Russian-Western relations tense through Iran by assisting it militarily. Origins of these patterns of behavior can be explained using the analysis of Russian "Bolshevik Operational Code" approach.

Apart from sources of political conduct, Operational Code provides us with stances of behavior, such as for instance Bolshevik's perception of always keeping (saving) friendly regimes, with the aim to secure 'Mother Russia' itself from 'far flank'. Saving Assad and protecting Iran from foreign attempts to overthrow the Iranian regime, from the perspective of ensuring Russia's own security becomes a plausible explanation from the operational code perspective.

During Soviet Union, the international relations were perceived by Moscow as a rigid hierarchy, operating in balance-of-power system, and Soviet conduct was designed accordingly. The concept of saving a foreign revolutionary or friendly regime stems from the very early Bolshevik perception following their seizure of power in 1917 in Russia. The main impetus was to save friendly, surrounding regimes at any cost. This might explain the eagerness that led to the Soviet foreign conduct in Hungary (1956) and Czechoslovakia (1968), Egypt (1967-1973) and Syria (2014) - to preserve friendly regimes at any cost. The main inherent perception is that saving an ally adds to the security of Russia itself.

Attempts to politically embarrass opponent; playing "chicken" or in Russian variation '*kto-kogo*', and never giving away what is achieved, even if it does not serve any significant political strategic goals any longer, is also observed in both periods analyzed. Sense of 'being alone', 'self-sufficient', 'trusting no one', and thinking in 'imperial' terms

are inherent features of Russian strategic conduct. Conservatism, rigidity, secrecy, and continuity are embedded characteristics of Russian political thinking explicitly expressed in its foreign policy during both, Soviet past and Russia's present.

Such prominent scholars as Rubinstein, Zimmerman, Sonnenfeldt and Blank offer us comprehensive evidence of the patterns of Soviet foreign policy conduct. The perception of a perpetual siege and constant insecurity were and remain permanent features of the Soviet and contemporary Russian foreign policy thinking. These mental and 'emotional' features lead to the perception of Russia as a 'singular entity', bound by only few international rules of conduct, if at all. Russia projects its domestic values onto its foreign policy. Our analysis demonstrates that the past Soviet foreign policy patterns of behavior also serve as guidance for future Russian conduct.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

### **Realism vs. Constructivism**

Contemporary Russian foreign policy conduct is often still an enigma – due to the secrecy of the decision-making process in the Kremlin, the deficiency in available prime sources, diffuse messages and the deliberate use of disinformation. Faced with these problems, which remind at times of the “Kremlinology” of the Cold War, this study addressed the search for the sources of Soviet and Russian conduct with a “behavioralist” approach: Do observable patterns of behavior, entrenched practices provide clues for deeper, regular undercurrents? We applied general approaches derived from the school of Realism and Constructivism in order to explain Soviet and contemporary Russian foreign policy towards the Middle East. The Soviet and post-Soviet Russian foreign policies were and still are deeply informed by prevailing paradigms, and no paradigm equally fits for all periods covered in this study. Behavioral patterns and dominant legitimizing strategies provide sound avenues for discerning drivers and lasting undercurrents of the Soviet and post-Soviet Russian code of conduct, although uncertainties remain as to which situational and contextual considerations as well decision-making procedures shape concrete actions.

As a result of our study, defensive and offensive realist paradigms proved to be most conducive for explaining Soviet foreign policy conduct towards Iran, Egypt and Syria. The explanatory power of these conventional approaches is, however, time and context sensitive. “Offensive realism” gains more plausibility in analyzing the immediate post-WWII Soviet foreign policy towards Iran and towards Egypt and Syria during the 1960s, whereas “defensive realism” takes the lead in late Soviet foreign conduct during the 1970s and 1980s, most vividly expressed in regard to Syria. During the most part of the existence of the Soviet regime, the “balance of power” paradigm and the perception of world affairs through it provides the most convincing explanation for Moscow's conduct in the Middle East. Signs of defensive realism began to be apparent following the June

1967 war between Egypt, Syria and Israel. After the Arab countries' debacle, Moscow adopted a more constrained approach to the Middle East affairs, vacillating between the desire to maintain the state of affairs at hand and to prevent a further escalation towards a direct confrontation with the West and to reverse it to previous state of affairs by returning Egypt's lost territories. Following the failure of its foreign policy with Egypt, Moscow adopted a more careful approach with Syria in latter's plunge in Lebanon.

Mikhail Gorbachev explicitly subscribed to a "constructivist" approach in his foreign policy. Soviet conduct under Gorbachev was led by new ideas such as the *Perestroika*, the *New Thinking*, and *Glasnost*. The late Soviet constructivist approach was manifested in the Middle East by an almost total departure from power politics, a degradation of its military means of conduct, a reduction of material assistance to its Arab allies and the adoption of much more moderate approach to regional affairs. We suggest that under Mikhail Gorbachev, Soviet foreign policy preferred a policy of appeasement with the United States.

The following post-Soviet foreign policy under Boris Yeltsin can be more appropriately explained by a policy of bandwagoning. Early post-Cold War Russia's foreign policy in the Middle East was almost in full consent with the foreign policy of the United States as reflected by its almost complete inaction and absence from the region's affairs.

A more intriguing period for analysis and explanation remains the foreign policy of Yeltsin's successor, Vladimir Putin. We observe a combination of power politics, characteristic for realism, with ideas grounded in constructivism. We witness an explicit intertwining between constructivist elements such as ideas ('sovereign democracy'; 'multi-polarity'; 'multi-vector' approach) and power politics in form of the 'new' [Russian] realism. The revival of the realist school of thought is obvious under Putin. Termed by political scholarship as the 'new realism', contemporary Russia's pragmatic conduct combines geopolitical strategic ambitions with a central role assigned to natural resources. Contemporary Russia interpretes its national interest and national security

in a rather broad terms. Seemingly, realist and constructivist thinking manages to coexist in contemporary Russia's foreign policy thinking. Russian official concepts such as 'sovereign democracy', 'multivectorism', 'multilateralism', and 'multipolarity' shape the images of self and the perception of the external environment. These overarching ideas notwithstanding, we observe that contemporary Russia under Vladimir Putin ceased to bandwagon and returned to a policy of balancing with the Western powers, mainly the United States. Most vividly the policy of balancing expresses itself in Russia's policy in regard to Iran and its nuclear ambitions amid the continuing friction between Iran and the West, as well as in regard to Syria by a direct Russia's participation in the Syrian civil conflict and protecting the Syrian regime from Western attempts to overthrow it.

Realism is still present and very persistent in Russian strategic political thought. It is capable of providing us with a great deal of plausible explanatory value for understanding sources of foreign policy conduct of both Soviet Union and contemporary Russia. Offensive, defensive and balance-of-power realist paradigms appear as most credible approaches to Russian foreign policy during both Soviet era and present Russia.

### **Capabilities as source of Russian foreign policy**

Post-Cold War debates among realists concentrate on the question whether post-Soviet Russia is either a saturated state or not, and whether it will make a bid for hegemony or domination and thus challenge the system in an offensive manner. Neoclassical realists contend that material power capabilities shape foreign policy. This argument might explain why the Soviet Union and post-Soviet Russia militarily intervene in regional conflicts. Capabilities shape behavior.

Following the offensive version of neorealism, growing power alters a state's perceptions of its interests. Applied to the Soviet and later Russian foreign policies one could thus surmise that their respective capabilities drove and continue to drive its intentions.

We found that capabilities persist being one of the integral elements of both Soviet and contemporary Russian foreign policy, however, whereas in Soviet times capabilities were acquired in order to promote a certain – at times ideologically driven - policy, in contemporary Russia a policy is promoted to acquire new capabilities. One vivid example is the policy of ‘forward deployment’ which was adopted in the mid-1960s by the Soviet regime. Soviet’s setbacks during the Cuban crisis revealed Moscow's weaknesses. It was thus urged that the USSR must develop strategic naval capabilities in order to promote its policy. Intentions drove capabilities. This led to courtship of Egypt and Syria in the mid-1960s till mid-1970s’, which eventually led to untying of a major local conflicts between the Arabs and Israel, beginning with the June 1967 war through the War of Attrition and culminating in the 1973 Arab offensive on Israeli positions in the Sinai. Gradually, the trend reversed and the acquired capabilities began driving Soviet intentions. In particular, the October 1973 conflict was seemingly induced by Soviet supply of advanced SCUD missile systems, which pushed the Egyptians towards the offensive. Later, during the Syrian conflict with Israel in the 1980s, Moscow's exercised control on the conflict by supplying or denying Syria its advanced SAM missiles which could shift regional balance in Syrian favor. The following invasion of Afghanistan, although out of scope of our study, presents an additional example of how capabilities enabled Moscow to embark on risky foreign policies.

Contemporary Russia’s intervention in Syria since 2014 presents us with evidence that the Syrian quagmire became a testing ground for Russia’s arms. Many authors interpret the Russian participation in the Syrian war as a training ground for further expansionist policies and a possible - limited of full - encounter with the Western, mostly American forces. The exploitation of vast air and naval capabilities, hundreds of miles away from the battlefield, indicates that Syria is part of Russia’s extensive arms development program, which was repeatedly announced by Vladimir Putin as his strategic goal for the next decades. The involvement in a distant theater compels Russia to develop its capabilities accordingly, which ignites massive rearmament and militarization programs.

## **The ‘probing the limits’ perspective**

Probing remains one essential characteristic of Russian conduct. We found evidence of probing during both the Soviet and Russian periods analyzed. Pushing the limits is an intrinsic element of Russian strategic thinking. Iran presents us with evidence of the probing feature in Soviet early post-WWII behavior, testing the limits of the permissible with the Western powers. The outcome of the Suez crisis of 1956 and Moscow's resolve in defending Egypt only exacerbated Moscow's strategic appetite. Lack of US decisive reaction during the Arab-Israeli conflict also served as an impetus of Moscow's further augmentation of its presence in the Mediterranean and material aid and military assistance to Egypt and Syria in the 1960s and the 1970s. The prospect of probing is also confirmed by evidence that occasionally, when the Soviet were deterred by the Israelis, they backed down.

Lack of rebuff is also perceived by contemporary Russia as an ‘invitation’ for further advice in a given theater, as is evidenced in its incrementing of its conduct in the Syrian conflict in 2014. Lack of any decisive reaction following Assad's first chemical attack led Russia to perceive that it can be pushed further and standing up for Assad would also go unanswered. Continuing absence of any decisive reaction to Moscow's moves in the Middle East, combined with Russia's internal frustration as a result of the dissolution of its Soviet predecessor, the lack of a coherent “national idea” and a strategic vision, and domestic political instability tend to lead Russia to further probing and to higher risk-taking in its foreign policies as a way of compensating for its global political shortages.

## **Military facilities as source of Russian foreign policy**

Strategic distant foothold was one of the central elements of Soviet foreign policy. It compelled Moscow to risk an escalation with the United States and to send its own troops to the Middle East in order first to obtain and then preserve these strategic privileges. The Arab-Israeli clashes between the late 1960s and early 1970s were enabled, even if unwillingly, by Moscow due to its attempts to compel the Arabs to provide



Soviets stationing rights for the purpose of augmenting its strategic positions during the Cold War balancing with the West. Soviet extensive presence and impressive investments in military infrastructure in Egypt and Syria during the Cold War point to the fact that military bases played an integral part in Soviet strategic goals in the Mediterranean.

Stationing rights and military facilities for its navy and air-force continue to play an integral part in Moscow's foreign policy decision-making. From the Soviet perspective, these facilities comprised a central part in its perception of its own survival during the Cold War confrontation. Today, Moscow seeks to preserve what is left of the Soviet strategic military infrastructure in the Middle East. Contemporary Russia lacks, however, the leverage, both political and military of the Soviet Union, to be able to gain the extent of its former stationing and docking rights in the Mediterranean or the Gulf. Russia is only able to achieve these rights in unstable regional states that are either entrenched in a bloody internal war or on the brink of becoming a failing states, such as Syria since 2014. Russia's regional performance in the Syrian conflict supplements our argument that what Russia is after in Syria is preserving its military facilities, willing for this purpose to take an active part in the internal fighting on behalf of the Assad regime.

Courting Egypt and Iran, as we demonstrate, in great part also stems from Russia's ambitions of returning its previous foothold in Egypt or at least being able to use its military infrastructure occasionally for its strategic regional ends, as is in fact already discernable towards Iran and Syria. Continuous joint military drills with the Egyptians also point to Russia's ambitions of gaining a permanent, if limited, presence in the Mediterranean, consequently enabling it to exercise influence or control over strategic maritime lines, such as the Suez Canal, the Bosphorus and the Dardanelle traits.

### **The role of the Islamic religion in Russian foreign policy**

The Islamic religion, although also present in Soviet policy-making, remains an essential feature in contemporary Russian foreign policy decision-making towards our

case-study states and gained much higher significance. Whereas the Soviet Union managed to assimilate and achieve partial congruence between Soviet Muslims and the Soviet regime, following the dissolution of the USSR politicized Islam domestically and internationally enjoyed a revival, turning into a key concern for contemporary Russian decision-makers, especially in face of domestic and international terrorism. Russia's two wars in Chechnya and violent conflicts in former Soviet Muslim republics, the rise of radical Islamism among Russian Muslims, the emergence of the ISIS phenomenon, and the Arab Spring uprisings shaped the Russian perception of a dangerous politicized Islam. Our three case-study states are all characterized by the political salience of the "Islamic factor", which heavily impacts upon Russian foreign policy decision-making. Contemporary Russia's approaches towards Egypt are informed by the aim to gain a strong ally in its struggle with Islamic terrorism. Russia intervened in Syria in order to save the regime of Bashar Assad and to avoid an overspill of Islamic radical fundamentalism into Russia's periphery and Russia itself in case of Assad's fall. Russia often adopts a policy of appeasement towards Iran, knowing that Iran and its revolutionary Islamic currents and ambitions are capable of exercising substantial influence on Russian and ex-Soviet Muslims on its periphery.

The vast gas and oil reserves, located largely in Muslim states, add to the spectrum of reasons for Russia to develop a special approach towards Islamic countries of the Middle East. The joint opposition to the United States produces a common ground for Russia's rapprochement with Islamic states as well. Contemporary Russia's post-Soviet periphery, composed of newly independent states, six of which are Muslim, compels Russia to come to terms with the political Islam on a much higher scale than during the existence of the Soviet Union. In addition, and contrary to the Soviet Union, contemporary Russia lacks its own national idea and ideological ground, thus continuously being forced to 'reinvent' itself socially and politically. On this backdrop, Moscow perceives Islam as a complementary factor in search of its own identity.

## The 'Operational Code' proposition

The Russian peculiar "Bolshevik Operational Code" and its patterns of behavior remain valid for both Soviet and contemporary Russian foreign policy analysis. This feature is capable of providing us a handful of perspectives and explanations for sources of Russian foreign policy behavior. The intrinsic code of conduct which includes such features as: sense of pride, vindictiveness, a propensity to judge events with a sense of insult, which often is explicitly reflected in its foreign policy-making, all comprise the core of what is called the operational code. Behavioral patterns such as "pushing the limits"; "always keeping the conflict option in mind"; "avoiding unjustified risk-taking with a simultaneous tendency of exploiting any opportunity that opens"; "using force as an instrument of controlling the scale of events"; and "never show weakness", all add significant insights to the understanding of Putin's Russia, invisible to conventional means of analysis.

We were able to trace the features of the "Bolshevik Operational Code" and its effects on both Soviet and contemporary Russian foreign policy-making towards Egypt, Iran and Syria. Features such as "not giving up easily and surrendering a friendly regime to external pressures" stands out in particular as a source of Soviet and Russian foreign policy. Tracing this code of conduct provides fresh insight into the Soviet's extensive attempts to save Egypt and Syria from collapse or a total defeat during the 1960s and the 1970s. The pattern is reiterated in contemporary Russian conduct regarding the Syrian regime from 2014 onwards. From a Russian perspective, inferred from its Bolshevik operational code, a permanent sense of insecurity and encirclement compels Russia to preserve friendly regimes, especially on its periphery, in order to secure its own survival.

Conservatism, rigidity, secrecy, and continuity are embedded characteristics of Russian political thinking and policy-making. Tenacity and the force of inertia are highly characteristic features for Russian conduct. Russian persistence in its strategic goals and invariability of its sources of conduct are often striking. Past achievements are perceived as the best guide for future conduct.

Although realist paradigms prevail in our interpretation of Russia's behavior, constructivist approaches to foreign policy add significant explanatory value; this pertains, for example, to the growing salience of Islam in Russia's foreign policy decision-making and its approach to the acquisition of capabilities. The search for military facilities, probing the limits, and the "Bolshevik Operational Code" represent, however, the most persistent features of Russian foreign policy conduct. They withstood the test of regime change and the collapse of the Soviet Union.

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