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RUSSIAN FOREIGN POLICY TOWARDS THE SYRIAN CRISIS DURING THE PERIOD (2011-2017)

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ABSTRACT

The Russian position in relation to the Syrian crisis was decisive since the beginning and characterized by clear and explicit determination to support the Syrian regime politically, militarily and economically. This is manifested in Russia's use of the veto several times in the Security Council against draft resolutions condemning the Syrian government, leading to direct military intervention in Syria. Hence, Russia's justification has been to save the Syrian State and its institutions and unity; as well as preventing Syria from being a safe area for terrorist and extremist organizations. In addition, it has emphasized supporting negotiation and the settlement of the crisis through political and diplomatic solutions and rejection of any foreign military intervention in Syria to avoid repeating the Libyan and Iraqi issues. Syria is experiencing one of the most serious challenges in its modern history. There have been varied regional and international reactions, especially the Russian and American ones, toward the Syrian revolution that seemed similar to other Arabic revolutions in terms of causes, motives and slogans. However, the actions and reactions between the government forces and the armed opposition in the light of overlapping regional and international parties have converted the local content and context of Syrian revolution into a regional, international crisis.

INTRODUCTION

Since mid-September 2011, Syria has been experiencing one of the most serious challenges in its modern and contemporary history. The balance future of regional powers and international alliances in the region depends on a pivotal development. Accordingly, the Syrian revolution becomes a regional, international crisis. Several reasons and local, regional and international factors have played a role in converting the local Syrian revolution against the Syrian regime into a regional, international crisis. At the internal Syrian level, these reasons and factors belong to the nature of existing political system along with the complicated social structure including various ethnic, religious

and sectarian formations, putting Syria at the heart of the ethnic and sectarian conflict. At the regional level, matters relating to the political alliances and regional security balances have helped to convert it into a regional crisis. At the international level, there have been strategic matters related to interests, influences and future of political alliances in the region that helped to convert it into a global crisis. This is represented by Russia's ability to challenge the US will and to protect its interests from the American hegemony on international and regional affairs (Lozianin, 2012).

As Syria represents the last area for Russia's hegemony in the Arabic region in line with its geo-strategic location, thus the conflict is about Russia's importance in the system of alliances and economic interests. On the other hand, the political, strategic and economic cost that might be incurred by these powers because of this severe crisis is dangerous due to creating conflict and destruction in Syria with instability in the Middle East. Consequently, it is necessary to undertake a shared international action. However, the inactivity of the UN Security Council because of Russia's use of veto power several times has prevented that. Additionally, Russia has intervened to resolve the Syrian crisis to promote its interests in the region and create a barrier to the increased American influence in the region (Al-Imarah, 2009).

RESEARCH SIGNIFICANCE

Research significance lies in studying and analyzing the Russian policy toward the Syrian crisis, as one of the most important actors in the crisis and in the international and regional politics. Besides the novelty of the topic, the period covered, increased events and various changes since the beginning of the crisis in mid-March 2011, the nature of study as well as the particularity and reality of Syrian crisis. Moreover, this crisis is receiving global and regional attention. So, the study contributes to the existing literature by providing new information in relation to Russia's role in the Syrian crisis which has many dimensions and impacts at both the regional and international levels; as well as its effects at the Arabic and Syrian levels.

Research Objectives

The current paper aims at studying and analyzing the Russian policy towards the Syrian crisis. This is achieved by analyzing developments and orientations of Russia towards the Syrian crisis and defining the interests that Russia is seeking to achieve. The study also aims to explain the means and methods used by Russia in managing the Syrian crisis.

Research problem

This study focuses on the nature of positions, dimensions and orientations of Russian policy toward the Syrian crisis and its developments; as well as changes occurring in its policies. In addition to explaining the implications of the Russian policy towards the crisis. Here, the problem lies in the difficulty of general pursuing of Moscow's policy towards the crisis; therefore, the current study seeks to reveal the real reasons for Russia's policy toward the Syrian

crisis, the nature of this policy and its impact on the future of the international system and the regional security.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

According to the nature of this paper and for scientific and practical considerations, this study employed the descriptive, analytical method and systems analysis approach. This approach has been used in an integrative framework that contributes to better understanding and analysis of Russian policy toward the Syrian crisis during the period (2011-2017).

Research hypothesis

The keenness of major powers to protect their interests, maintain their influence and strengthen their presence in the region has governed their behavior during the development of Syrian crisis, which contributed to worsen and extend this crisis.

Research organization

This paper is divided into three sections. The first section includes developments and the general orientations of the Russian policy towards the Syrian crisis. Next, section two deals with Russia's position in relation to the Syrian crisis and its development. Finally, section three presents the Russian means and methods in managing the Syrian crisis.

Section one: Developments and general orientations of the Russian policy towards the Syrian crisis

For Russia, the importance of Syria lies in its important geo-strategic location, especially its adjacency to the Mediterranean, and their bilateral relations for decades. Through their long history, the Russian-Syrian relations as with the Soviet-Syrian relations have been characterized by reliability and stability to some extent. The Soviet Union was one of the first States that acknowledged Syria's independence and established diplomatic relations with it in 1946. Their relationships have been strengthened dramatically, exceeding the limits of traditional friendship to develop strategic cooperation.

Development of the Syrian crisis

The Syrian crisis is one of the most complex crises in the Middle East for having a lot of internal complications, interventions and regional and international divisions. The Syrian crisis also represents a pivotal development on which the balances future of regional and international powers in the region depends. It is a revealing crisis regarding the structure of the new global system, and the ability of Russia and China to challenge the US will and protect their interests and influence and reduce the American hegemony for Washington's ongoing attempts to independently manage the international and regional affairs. So, it is necessary to address the Syrian crisis with its various phases (Allam, 2013).

The eruption phase

Assad has continued to implement his internal policies causing a high degree of frustration for all political forces which expected a severe reform of the political and economic situation and alleviate the suffering of the people at the living and security levels. In addition, his foreign policies were incapable of responding to the requirements of the current era with the advent of the third millennium. Thereby, this has placed him in isolation and a real siege that the Arab and international parties have participated in it. This has led to worsening the economic situation and increasing the suffering of young people in particular. Moreover, the foreign policy has been enclosed with challenges that have weakened the country making it incapable of maneuver and movement in general. This has provided a fertile environment for the eruption of the Syrian revolution (Al-Shaikh, 2012).

The confrontation phase

The beginning of Syrian revolution has been represented by the widespread protests demanding better living conditions and performing some political and economic reforms, as happened in Tunisia, Egypt and Libya that is known as the Arab spring. The Syrian regime has shown some insignificant changes. Furthermore, the regime has repeated the same claims that have already been stated by previous Arabic governments when facing revolutions, saying that there are driven foreign forces, terrorist elements within the wave of protests and that these events represent a kind of clearing with Damascus. However, protests have continued in different areas of Syria, and have been encountered by security forces, complete denial of the number of protestors and ignorance of their demands (Ahmed, 2013).

The militarization phase

The Syrian regime has insisted on using all forms of violence and force against protesters and refused to respond to local, regional and international calls to make concessions in line with conditions of this phase, and has killed and arrested Syrians. This has provoked the rapid reaction of revolutionists to militarization confrontation and react to violence by violence in response to attacking the protests that started peacefully in its first phase and demanded to transcend the sectarian divisions and chanted slogans "Syrians are one". Then, military officials separated from the government army successively. Hence, some Arabic States have announced their willingness to arm the revolutionists. This has been a significant motive for the overall militarization process of revolution against a regime that does not set any limits to the confrontation. It seemed that both sides consider what is happening on the ground as a survival conflict that should be ended by removing one of them entirely from the political scene (Idris, 2014).

The Negotiation phase

After the intensification of the Syrian crisis, its lasting for a long time and the failure of its parties, namely, the regime and the opposition, in settling it for

one of them, this required the intervention of regional and international parties to end it or alleviate its harmful consequences to civilians. The two parties have been called to negotiations, and there have been several regional and international initiatives to end the crisis. These efforts considerably embodied in the Geneva Conferences where the conference of Geneva-1 has decided a set of principles to end the Syrian crisis and resolve it peacefully.

But the Syrian regime has hesitated in responding to these decisions as it has accepted some of them and objected to others. Despite the continuation of the initiatives and calls for settlement, fighting has continued. Conference of Geneva-2 has been held after great efforts made by **Lakhdar Brahimi**, the former Arab United Nations Envoy to Syria. The regime and opposition have exchanged charges where the opposition has accused the regime of excessive violence and killing civilians; whereas the government has accused the opposition of terrorism. However, conferences have not yielded any useful results. The United Nations Envoy to Syria de Mistura has made further efforts to hold the Conference of Geneva-3, hoping to find a solution that relaxes the crisis and brings its parties to the negotiating table (Ahmed, 2014).

General orientations of Russian policy

Russia considers Syria as one of the most important countries in the Middle East, and its instability would have severe consequences in the region. Russia views Syria as a "cornerstone" in the security of the Middle East and that its instability will in turn inevitably lead to destabilizing the situation in neighboring countries and difficulties in the entire region. In addition, the fall of Assad's regime in Syria that has a distinctive geographical location and his regional alliances with Iran and the party of Hezbollah will inevitably affect the regional balance, representing a real threat to regional security in the Middle East in general (Gulf Affairs, 2015). The main orientations of Russian policy toward the Syrian crisis can be summarized as follows:

Russia's assertion that it supports the Syrian State, not Bashar Al-Assad

Russia on several occasions asserted that it does not support President Bashar Al-Assad, but instead supports the Syrian State, maintenance of its unity, avoidance of civil war as well as preventing it from being an area for terrorists and extremist organizations. The Foreign Minister, Sergey Lavrov, repeatedly emphasized that Russia does not support Assad as much as to preserve the Syrian State entity, so as not to repeat the tragedy of Libya and Iraq, stating that his country's position stems from a deep concern on the fate of the Syrian people and the Syrian State (Al-Shaikh, 2012).

Moreover, the Russian President, Vladimir Putin, in his press conference on December 21, 2012, confirmed that Russia is not preoccupied with Assad's fate and is not worried about his regime. He added that they realize that this family (Assad's family) is governing Syria 40 years ago, and that change is inevitable. But this depends on the Syrian people who will decide this at the end, emphasizing their worries about something different that is Syria's future and what will happen then? Saying that they do not want the current

opposition after receiving the power to combat those in power currently that will convert to resistance, and this will continue forever.

Russia's emphasis on renunciation of violence and the importance of a political solution through National Dialogue

Russia bases its policy towards Syria's crisis from a basic assumption that centered on considering the Syrian national dialogue as the only way to resolve the crisis in Syria. It confirms renunciation of violence and calls for the importance of dialogue, political solution and peaceful change within the legal and constitutional frameworks based on national reconciliation among the Syrian parties. Russia has confirmed that Syria is experiencing a human tragedy, and it supports the Syrian people's right to freedom and political change (Al-Shaikh, 2012).

During the meetings of the Security Council to discuss the Syrian issue, Moscow has repeatedly stressed that Syrians should undertake the settlement of their problems by themselves. On several occasions, Russian Foreign Minister, Sergey Lavrov, asserted that Russia is against UN Security Council resolution condemning Syria and that his country supports tentatively initiating the internal political dialogue between the Syrian parties (Al-Shaikh, 2012).

Russia's emphasis on respecting the national sovereignty and non-interference in the internal affairs of other States

In this regard, Russia refused the issuance of any decisions by the UN Security Council as they open the way to Western-American/ NATO's intervention in Syria as happened in Libya and other countries; as well as emphasizing on respecting the national sovereignty of the Syrian State and non-interference in the internal affairs of other States. It also rejected the call for Bashar Al-Assad's resign. Russian Foreign Minister, Sergey Lavrov, stated that Moscow would support a solution to remove President Bashar Al-Assad in case the Syrians themselves will support such a solution (Al-Shaikh, 2012).

Russia's rejection of foreign military intervention in Syria

Russia decisively emphasized on rejecting foreign interference, especially the military one, in Syria, confirming to give priority to political and diplomatic means in resolving the crisis as Moscow has foiled the persistent Western efforts to issue resolutions by the Security Council condemning the Syrian authorities for employing violence to suppress the protestors. On several occasions, the former President (Medvedev) and the current (Putin) stated that Russia would not support a Security Council resolution on Syria, along the lines of resolution on Libya and that the two resolutions (1970) and (1973) on Libya have been clearly violated and manipulated and that Moscow has no desire for having events in Syria as those of Libya (Al-Shaikh, 2012).

Russia's position in relation to the Syrian crisis and its development

Russia expressed a particular interest towards the Syrian crisis, where the Russian position since the start of protests in mid-March 2011, represented a clear support for the Syrian regime, even though it condemns its violence and repression against the protestors. Despite Russia's recognition of the Syrian people's right to expression, but it insisted on questioning the revolutionary forces in Syria in terms of their principles and goals. The Russian position has helped encourage Assad's regime to seek for security solution in dealing with the protestors; as well as working to give him a chance to political maneuvering (Abo Al-Haseen, 2012).

Russia's position concerning the parties to the crisis

Through exploring the Russian political behavior in dealing with the Arab Spring revolutions or the international ones, there is a remarkable development in Russian policy. When considering the Russian position in relation to the Arab spring events beginning in Tunisia through Egypt and Yemen and then Syria, there is an upward path in the Russian position which started as a simple attitude about events of Tunisia merely through reassurance the Russian people about the situation of tourists and Russian nationals. Then, its position toward the Egyptian revolution started late and hesitant though the Egyptian-Russian relations during the last days of Mubarak's regime considered as strategic relations (Abdulhay, 2011).

It can be said that the Russian position concerning the Syrian crisis is not a mere position, but is due to several reasons including:

The strong relations between Syria and Russia, where Syria was one of the few countries that clearly declared its support for the Russian military operation in Georgia in 2008, in addition to supporting Russian policies in Dagestan and Chechnya.

The naval military base in Syria (Tartous) is the only Russian base on the coasts of the Mediterranean. It has been established due to the Convention between the two countries dated back to 1971 whose continuity resulted in exempting Syria of debts amounted (9.8) billion dollars in 2006 (Abo Al-Qasim, 2011).

Syria is a market for Russian weapons as the value of completed and agreed upon military sales during the period (2006-2013) is about eight billion dollars (Abo Al-Qasim, 2011).

The strong relations between Syria and Iran has contributed to strengthening relations between Russia and Iran which represents a critical strategic dimension for Russia in the international conflict in the Middle East.

Based on above, it can be said that the reasons mentioned above are somewhat abstract, especially in terms of interpreting the Russian position toward the Syrian crisis with having weapon contracts between the parties or the Russian

interest in the naval base at Tartous. Such reasons are too weak to explain the intensive Russian policy in supporting the Syrian regime.

Through studying the regime, it is found that the main reasons provoking Russia to support the Syrian regime include:

Although Washington has abandoned its plans to annex Georgia and Ukraine into NATO many years ago, Russia believes that the integration of all countries of Eastern Europe and the three Baltic States, which were once part of the Soviet Union, in terms of security in NATO and economically in the European Union is only a continuation of an ongoing US effort to besiege Moscow (Alex, 2016).

Moscow is worried about America's support to streams of political Islam in the Arab world and lets them in power, fearing of their spread to its Islamic territories; yet, it has not forgotten its experiences in Afghanistan and Chechnya (Onees, 2012)

For these reasons with geo-strategic nature, Moscow has secured an international protection network for the Syrian regime because its collapse weakens it and Iran which has become an essential part of Kremlin's strategy to confront the Turkish increasing role and Washington's policies to surround it (Michelle, 2014)

Russia's perspective on the Syrian opposition

Russia considers both the regime and the opposition alike responsible for violence in Syria. It confirms that there is reciprocal violence between the two parties in an apparent contradiction with the American and European vision that regard only Bashar Al-Assad and the Syrian regime responsible for what happens in Syria. Russia has also objected to arming the Syrian opposition, justifying this by that there are regional and international parties provoke conflict by their armed support to the revolutionists. Russia proves this through the reports of international observers and the UN Secretary General Ban Ki Moon's condemnation the explosion in Daraa (Al-Shaikh, 2012).

Despite Russia's clear support of the Syrian regime, but it has maintained its relations with the Syrian opposition and sought to gather both parties to the conflict and conduct direct dialogues between the Syrian Government and the political opposition as an attempt to end the crisis. During the ministerial meeting of the Russian-Arab cooperation forum held in Moscow on 20 February 2013, Foreign Minister, Sergey Lavrov, stated that the start of a dialogue between President Bashar Al-Assad and the moderate Syrian opposition is the only way to end the crisis in Syria. He stressed that violence is a way leading to nothing (BBC Arabic, 2013). Indeed, Russia has succeeded in hosting the two delegations of regime and opposition in Moscow in two rounds of consultative meetings between the delegation of the Syrian Government and opposition delegations in the absence of Syrian national coalition forces of the revolution and the opposition. The opposition has refused to participate in the Moscow consultations unless they involve toppling of Al-Assad. The first round of consultative meetings that held on 30

April 2015 has resulted in the declaration of principles of Moscow, whilst the second round has ended with an agreement held on 6 April 2015 based on the political solution to the crisis. Moscow has announced its willingness to host the third meeting to resolve the crisis (Syrian Arabic News Agency, 2015).

Moscow has also criticized the US President Obama's decision to arm the moderate opposition and allow CIA and other US agencies to provide military support for the opposition to topple President Bashar Al-Assad. This has enhanced the capacity of resistance; thus, besides possessing anti-tank missiles, it becomes having air defence systems and portable anti-aircraft missile systems. This has been confirmed by the accompanying international team spokeswoman in Syria Sawsan Ghosheh when indicating that the Syrians revolutionists possess tanks, various heavy weapons, surface-to-air missiles and anti-tank missiles (Al-Shaikh, 2012).

The evolution of the Russian position toward the Syrian crisis

At the beginning of the Syrian crisis in mid-March 2011, the Russian Government considers that a friendly regime is facing a challenge that may lead to implications as those in Tunisia and Egypt. Obviously, Moscow is aware that Syria suffers many political, economic and social problems similar to those experienced by most States of the region represented by the regime that has spent a long time in power and failed to make changes in a society that demands more openness and democracy. During the first six months of protests, the intensification of Syrian crisis goes in parallel with the NATO military operation in Libya, and the most important matter for Moscow becomes to prevent the recurrence of "Libyan scenario" in Syria (Demir, 2013).

With intensifying protests and the evolution of the Syrian revolution towards militarization and worsening violence either by the regime or the opposition, a significant change has occurred in Russia's position. The main features of this position are as follows:

1. Russia's emphasis on the role of the third party and that from the Russian point of view, the conflict is not only between the Syrian regime and Syrian opposition. In addition, there is what is called "the third force", which is Al-Qaida organization and terrorist organizations close to it, especially ISIS Organization and Al-Nusra Front whose growing activity threatens not only Syria but also regional security of the entire region. Hence, Moscow considers that there are terrorists among the revolutionists who must be eliminated, and thousands of armed elements from Al-Qaida and others, which makes the situation complicated and violent (Al-Shaikh, 2012)
2. On another level, the Russian position has already witnessed contradictions between the governmental Presidency, on the one hand, and the Foreign Ministry, on the other hand, about the distribution of roles. However, this does not represent a strategic change in the Russian position towards the crisis as much as forming a platform for opening communication with the Syrian opposition forces, as well as with the United States and the Arab Gulf States if the military equation has changed in reality.

It can be said that the constancy of the Russian position in supporting Assad's regime affirms the Russian conviction that the situation is still under control of the regime and does not impose a change in that position. Additionally, the efforts made by the United States and others have contributed to create a kind of rapprochement between Russian and American viewpoints based on a peaceful solution to the Syrian crisis and worry about any military solution, with priority to fight terrorism (Ahmed, A. and Mossad, N., 2013).

Russian Foreign Minister, Sergey Lavrov, summarizes Russia's position toward the Syrian crisis using three maxims, which represents the past, current and future maxims of his country. The first maxim emphasizes Moscow's description of crisis as a geopolitical crisis. The second one is that it must be solved flexibly. The third maxim is that Russia does not hang on Al-Assad, but refuses the mechanism raised about toppling him before talking about any other subject (Shararah, 2012).

Accordingly, it can be said that there are several reasons behind the persistent Russian position toward the Syrian crisis including: the negative attitude of the US administration, regularity of the West in support of the rebels and the absence of active and influential Arab decision. This is along with the ability of Russia with China to stop any UN resolution against Damascus; as well as the stability of Assad's regime since the beginning of the crisis till now, despite some divisions that occurred in the Syrian army. Fragmentation of the Syrian political opposition and the emergence of jihadist militant organizations, especially close to Al-Qaida, ISIS and Al-Nusra, among the rebels, intensifying path of the Syrian revolution towards militarization (Hijazi, G., 2013).

On 30 September 2015, Russia announced the start of an air operation against ISIS Organization and terrorist groups in Syria. The Russian warplanes launched the first raids on sites belong to ISIS in Syria. Defense Ministry Spokesman, General Igor Konashinkov, said that by the decision of the Supreme Commander of Russian armed forces, Sergei Shoigu, warplanes launched an air operation to attack targeted terrorists' sites of ISIS Organization and other terrorist organizations in Syria (Russia today, 30 September 2015).

As for Putin, he said that thousands of militants from various States are fighting with ISIS organization and they will inevitably return to their countries and to Russia as well. He stressed that the only right way to combat international terrorism in Syria is to take preventive measures and elimination of militants and terrorists in the areas under their control without waiting their coming to our homes (CCN, 30 September 2015).

Based on above, the Russian position is based on a vision that both the regime and opposition are responsible for violence, and it categorically rejects any direct or indirect foreign interference on the basis of the inevitability of a peaceful solution and gathering all the parties concerned to the negotiation table. It is a radically different position from the Western one which considers Bashar Al-Assad to be the only responsible for the violence and massacres in

Syria; as well as losing the hope in a peaceful solution; therefore, it has tended towards military support for the opposition to overthrow Assad. The Russian vision might agree with its Western counterpart on the need to stop spilling more blood of the Syrian people; however, the difference between them seems obvious in how to achieve this between the two parties (Al-Lubad, 2013).

It is evident that since the beginning of the Syrian revolution, Russia has taken the persistent position in supporting the Syrian regime politically, militarily and economically, and it has not been excited about any other Arabic revolutions and warned early on the arrival of Islamists to power. It is clear that the issue of Islamists forms a concern for Russia, but it has succeeded in imposing international policy towards Syria, and has managed to be the geo-strategically most prominent player in the unwillingness of the West, the United States and Turkey in direct intervention in Syria (Trenin, 2013).

This is manifested in revealing the astonishment of many politicians and military personnel concerning the Russian military intervention in the crisis. Most of the viewers of crisis implications believed that the statements and Russian initiatives that preceded this intervention at levels of bilateral meetings in Moscow or international and regional collective meetings were just within the political maneuvers and propaganda of Russia. The Russian military intervention in Syria is the most crucial military juncture experienced by the Syrian crisis since its eruption (Al-Tosah, 2015).

Russia's means in managing the Syrian crisis

Russia is seeking with its internal capacities and international importance to prove its existence and status in the international arena in order to achieve its strategic objectives by relying on a number of the most available and effective means. In this regard, Russia, according to its capabilities, has adopted a set of political and military means in dealing with the Syrian crisis.

Political means

Despite similarities in Chinese and Russian attitudes towards the Syrian crisis, the Russian Foreign Ministry was the most active party internationally exceeding the activity of Syrian Foreign Ministry itself. Hence, Moscow has adopted a variety of political means granting it effective movement throughout the development of the crisis.

Activating veto power and objecting to UN resolutions that allow for Western intervention in Syria

Russia has used veto power on the General Assembly resolution on Syria issued on 3 August 2012, which has been ratified by 133 Member States, while 33 States have abstained and 12 of them, including Russia, have objected to it. This resolution has been drafted by Saudi Arabia. It contained "condemning the use of violence by the Syrian Government and calling for hastening the process of political transition of power". The Russian Foreign Ministry said that Russia would not support the draft resolution on Syria in the

General Assembly which places the entire responsibility for events in Syria on the Syrian authorities only and does not implement the demands of the international community on the Syrian opposition. Russia has described this resolution as unilateral, unbalanced, urging opposition to continue armed struggle with the Syrian Government and circumventing the Security Council resolutions. In addition, introducing the draft resolution and voting on it in the General Assembly. Meanwhile, the issue is under consideration of the Security Council, is incompatible with the Charter of the United Nations (General Assembly, Islam times, 3 August 2012).

Russia also voted against the resolutions of the United Nations Human Rights Council on Syria on April 29, August 23, 2011, and 1 June 2012, about a massacre of Hula in Syria, on the pretext of refusing to use legal mechanisms to intervene in the internal affairs and achieve political goals which conflict with the rules of international legitimacy and the Charter of the United Nations, which is based on the principle of respect for State sovereignty and its territorial integrity from the Russian point of view. Moscow has also opposed referring the Syrian nuclear file to the Security Council at the meeting of the Board of Governors of the International Atomic Energy Agency in June 2011. However, this resolution has been voted by the majority of Western countries in an attempt to put pressure on Syria (Al-Shaikh, 2012).

Urging to solve the Syrian crisis peacefully

Russia's diplomacy has had a main role in forming Kofi Annan's plan for settlement in Syria. During Sergey Lavrov's meeting with Arab Foreign Ministers in Cairo on March 10, 2012, five principles of peaceful settlement of the crisis have been approved in a resolution issued by the Board of International security on March 21, 2012, forming a work plan of Kofi Annan, United Nations Envoy and Arabic League to Syria, which consists of six points (Kofi Annan, 2012):

1. Commitment to cooperation with the Envoy in a political process involving all Syrian people to meet their legitimate aspirations and calming their fears.
2. Commitment to stop fighting and find urgently an effective stop of armed violence in all its forms by all parties under the sponsorships of the United Nations to protect civilians and to stabilize the country.
3. Ensure the timely delivery of humanitarian assistance to all areas affected by the fighting.
4. Ensure the freedom of journalists' movement throughout the country, and follow the policy free of discriminate between them regarding visas.
5. Recruit international observers to follow Annan's plan.
6. Respect for freedom of assembly and the right to peaceful protest guaranteed by law.

Moscow has expressed its keenness to ensure the success of Annan's plan, even after his resignation and appointment of Lakhdar Brahimi. It has accused Al-Qaeda elements in Syria by attempting to foil it through the attacks and explosions targeting authority and civilian, as well as international observers.

Russia also stressed the importance of keeping international observers as an important condition for the success of Annan's plan, and opposed ending their mission in Syria, emphasizing the importance of their return after a Security Council resolution on 16 August 2012 which has stipulated the end of the observers' mission and leave Syria starting from August 20 (Al-Shaikh, 2012). Russia has suggested an initiative to hold an International Conference on Syria under the sponsorships of the United Nations and stressed the need to involve influential regional actors including Iran along with Qatar and Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq and Turkey, in addition to the Islamic cooperation organization and the European Union. While Washington has refused categorically the involvement of Tehran in this meeting, where Moscow's proposed Conference differs substantially from the conferences of Syria's friends, which has been boycotted by Russia and refused to participate in them for being limited to find various pretexts to overthrow the regime and not to implement Annan's plan (Al-Shaikh, 2012).

Coordination with international and regional forces supporting the Syrian regime

Russian diplomacy has tackled the Syrian crisis through coordination with international and regional powers supporting the Syrian regime, notably China, Iran, India, Brazil, Venezuela and South Africa, and to have unified positions towards the Syrian crisis. The Chinese-Russian position agreeing on using veto power four times successively in the Security Council against any resolution condemning Syria has been an attempt to reflect the political coordination between the two countries on the international scene, to show the ability to resist pressure of US and West, and to change the unclear image of Russian policy after the collapse Soviet Union (Abdulhay, 2014).

The Chinese-Russian coordination has justified their position based on several principles formed the core of their consensus including:

1. The need to adopt a peaceful political settlement of the conflicts of strategic areas, and confirm the constancy of this principle in the network of interactions and international relations.
2. Not to exceed the mandate conferred by the Security Council has happened in relation to the Libyan issue.
3. Not to explain the concepts of freedom, democracy and human rights selectively and use them as a political pawn to carry out other purposes and objectives (Al-Mulhim, 2014).

On the other hand, the Iranian-Russian political coordination since the beginning of the crisis and throughout its political and military developments has been distinctive. During a press conference collecting Russian Foreign Minister, Sergey Lavrov, and Iranian counterpart Mohamed Javad Zarif, in Moscow on 17 August 2015, the Parties renewed the constancy of their countries position on the need to a political solution to the crisis in Syria. Lavrov has explained that talks between the two sides focused on intensifying efforts and cooperation to resolve the crisis, saying: "the solution to the crisis in Syria would only be peacefully, diplomatically and politically, and can be

reached only in the framework of talks among all Syrian parties without foreign interference” (Sana News Agency, 17 August 2015).

Military means

Russia did not conceal its military support to the Syrian regime, whether direct or indirect and provided the regime with weapons and adhere to the agreements signed between them till the Alliance to fight terrorism. Moscow has taken a set of military measures to strengthen their position and political movements according to the developments in the crisis. The most critical Russian military means in dealing with the Syrian crisis can be explained as follows:

The use of indirect military force

Russia has provided military support for the Syrian regime since the beginning of the crisis in March 2011, in addition to continuing the work of Russian military experts in most sectors of the Syrian army, and arrange for a long term presence in the Russian naval base (Tartous). The Russian Navy has conducted military maneuvers in front of Syrian beaches in the Mediterranean which lasted from 19 to 29 March 2013. They have been characterized as the largest maneuvers conducted by the Russian Navy since the collapse of the Soviet Union. More than 20 warships and three submarines of the Russian armies located at the Black Sea and Baltic Sea have participated in the maneuvers. These maneuvers have implied clear messages to the West concerning not to think of any military intervention in Syria (Ahmed, 2014).

The Russian President, Putin, has promised to continue military support to Damascus. During his participation in a Security Summit in Tajikistan, Putin has urged other States to join Russia in sending military-technical assistance to the Syrian Government, and warned that "the numbers of refugees to Europe will grow without military support for the Government in Syria."; saying: "the situation in Syria would be worse than Libya if Russia did not support its leadership"; adding: "we will continue to provide the necessary military assistance, and urge other States to join us." Stressing that Moscow has sent military equipment to Syria to help the Government to fight the Islamic State (ISIS) organization. Putin has said: "we support the legitimate Government of Syria in the face of the terrorist attack” (BBC Arabic, 15 September).

The use of direct military force

In a procedure considered to be the first for the Russian military intervention in the Middle East since the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Kremlin announced that Russian Federation Council agreed to grant the President, Vladimir Putin, the authority to deploy military forces in Syria, in response to a request from President Assad for military help from Moscow. The Kremlin Chief of staff, Sergei Ivanov, said that the Russian Federation Council unanimously agreed to give President Putin the authority to deploy military forces in Syria and that the use of military force is related to use air power and not ground troops. He added: "the military target of this process is to provide air support to the Syrian armed forces in their battle against terrorism.", and

confirmed "Russian air strikes will be carried out under international law as the Syrian President formally asked Moscow for military assistance in the absence of a UN resolution (Al-Jazeera.net, September 30, 2015).

Hours after the Russian Federal Council approved the request of President Putin to grant him the authority to deploy the Russian troop abroad, Russian warplanes began on 30 September 2015, targeting military sites of ISIS in Syria. The Russian Defense Ministry declared that the Russian warplanes carried out about 20 raids on Eight targets belong to ISIS organization in Syria. Defense Ministry spokesman, Igor Kalashnikov, stated that "airstrikes resulted in damaging stores for weapons, ammunition and military vehicles belonging to ISIS, as well as focal points in the mountainous area and annihilated them." He noted: "all attacks are carried out after an aerial reconnaissance mission and verify information received by Russian Aviation from the Syrian General staff". He added: "the raids have not been implemented on civilian infrastructure facilities and surrounding areas". On November 7, Russian warships have participated for the first time in the fight against terrorism. Hence, four ships carrying the missiles have fired 26 winged missiles from the Caspian basin to 11 targets in Syria. The Russian intervention in the military operation has occurred only after Syria has asked for it, and has contributed to many military confrontations in Aleppo and others (Russia today, 30 September 2015).

The Russian direct military intervention in the Syrian crisis has had an active role in outweighing the regime's forces and recapturing much of the territory and cities which were under Syrian opposition control. Russia has had an active role in influencing the talks between the regime and the opposition and concessions made by the latter.

CONCLUSION

The Syrian crisis is considered an important issue whereby Russia is seeking to strengthen its influence in the region. It seems that the overall vision adopted by the Western countries becomes convincing that the Syrian crisis cannot be resolved without Russia, which has justified its support for the regime in the face of opposition forces by defending its vital interests in the region. Accordingly, Moscow insisted not to talk about the future of Assad only after fighting ISIS organization and other terrorist organizations, so as to keep the Syrian State institutions.

Russia's taking an active role in the Middle East is not new, in particular, Russia maintains strong historical relationships with a large number of States in the region, and then Putin has changed the passive neutrality policy on regional issues into initiatives policy.

During those transitions, Russia has taken into account the avoidance of a clash with the United States. Putin has declared his country's keenness to employ a new policy based on equality between all parties and common interests.

It can be said that the Syrian crisis reveals the extent of the changes and developments experienced in the international system, where the failure of American foreign policy in dealing with the crisis, which created the instability situation along with increasing activity of terrorist and extremist groups whose threats are no longer limited to Syria and neighboring countries but extend to American interests and security; as well as being a key factor exploited by Russia to manifest its strength and ability to influence the international decision by rejecting a lot sanctions imposed on the Syrian regime and to support it in many situations till currently. The current study found several conclusions including:

1. The Syrian crisis has created a situation of unprecedented regional and international attention and competition since the end of the cold war. It has resulted in the emergence of two camps; the first one consisted of the Syrian opposition with its political and military branches. This camp is regionally supported by Turkey and the Arab Gulf States and internationally by the West including Us and EU. On the other hand, the second camp includes the Syrian regime locally and regionally-backed by both Iran and Hezbollah party in Lebanon, and internationally by both Russia and China.

2. The Syrian crisis becomes one of the most important factors revealing international system-level changes. In the light of regional and international developments, it can be said that there is data confirming the emergence of a new international system features, or at least a new map of international alliances and balances in the Middle East and the rise of new powers, including Russia and China, engaged in leading the international system and hegemony would not return to the United States like before but it will remain the most influential and effective force at the international and regional levels.

3. The involvement of the regional force in the Syrian crisis has made it threatening regional security. The proliferation of armed groups with their various intellectual and ideological associations has led to the accelerated pace of regional consequence. Their brutal practices have contributed to converting the peaceful revolution demanding freedom and democracy into the issue of combating terrorism and the regional security becomes threatened not only by the proliferation of these groups, but also by fighting them, not to mention sectarian conflict which became evident in the regional Arabic interactions and revealing Arab political and security system to regional and international powers.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on research questions and objectives, the study suggested a number of suggestions as follows:

The States of the region must resolve the crisis in Syria away from the Western foreign interventions headed by Russia, which is seeking to serve its interests.

Russia has to reconsider its position toward Assad's regime because it is illegitimate and does not represent the Syrian people.

The opposition must find a way to persuade Russia to stop supporting the regime through reassuring their interests in Syria and then the possibility of toppling the regime.

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