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FACULDADE DE LETRAS

Kremlin-Assad Relations:

History and Propaganda 1970-2016

João Lyle Martins Luce

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Dedicado à aldeia de Mesquitela

Dedicated to the village of Mesquitela

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Preamble

I would like to thank my parents for the constant support that they have given me, without them nothing would be possible. I also want to thank Professor Doctor Teresa Nunes for helping and advising me during these years as her student that I enjoyed tremendously and for which I am incredibly grateful. I would also like to finally thank my colleagues for their friendship and for their recommendations that were of substantial assistance in my work.

The Syrian War is a highly concerning factor for national security in the XXIst Century. The dangers that originate from the war such as terrorism, arms proliferation, and population displacement represent grave regional and international threats. Moreover, in a globalized society that is saturated with outlets for instant communication, propaganda has never had a more fertile ground to grow in. This convergence of highly volatile political and social destabilization are concerns that must be addressed to guarantee national security. Western foreign interests are constantly challenged by a variety of actors, and Russia is an especially urgent case. It is symptomatic of a larger issue that, for instance, since 2013 the President of the United States has lost his position in *Forbes* magazine's rankings of most powerful person on earth to President Vladimir Putin of Russia. As American and European strategy is continuously and increasingly put to the test by other rising powers, it is imperative to recognize the mechanisms through which countries such as Russia and Syria project their image and influence public opinion on the events and conflicts that are occurring throughout the world. What follows is an historical analysis of the propaganda that is present in Russian-Syrian relationship.

Abstract

The relationship between Russia and Syria is a strategic partnership with the purpose of strengthening the Russian sphere of influence and power projection in the Near East, an area of vital Russian geopolitical interest. For Syria it is a relationship that furnishes military, economic and diplomatic support from a powerful ally. This analysis seeks to shed light on how history has shaped the relationship between Russia and Syria and how propaganda has been utilized as an apparatus in service of these two actors especially between the years of the Syrian Assad administration from 1970 and 2016.

Keywords: Propaganda, Russia, Syria, War, Hafez al-Assad, Bashar al-Assad, Vladmir Putin

A relação entre a Rússia e a Síria é uma parceria estratégica com o fim de fortalecer a esfera de influência Rússia e a sua projecção de poder no Médio Oriente, uma área de interesse geo-estratégico vital para a Rússia. Relativamente à Síria, esta relação fornece-lhe apoio militar, económico, e diplomático de um poder de ordem superior. Esta análise procura compreender a amizade histórica entre a Rússia e a Síria e como a propaganda tem sido utilizada como um aparelho em serviço destes dois actores, especialmente durante anos da administração Assad na Síria entre 1970 e 2016.

Palavras-chave: Propaganda, Rússia, Síria, Guerra, Hafez al-Assad, Vladmir Putin, Bashar al-Assad

Introduction

Propaganda is the art of the anti-science. Where science is concerned with rational methodologies that advance the understanding of the world through reason and multifaceted discourse, propaganda serves to accomplish the opposite: it seeks to manipulate a debate or thought process and promote a predetermined conclusion at the expense of alternative options. While propaganda can be deployed with scientific support, it is ultimately unscientific in its spirit, which is focused on the predetermination of ideas. It is an inextricable part of human communication by the nature of mankind, which is instinctively driven by self-preservation and self-interest not just of the individual, but of the group as well. How to identify the discrete forms which propaganda takes is a significant question in its field of study, as different environments, purposes, and varying degrees of aggressiveness make a clear definition elusive and generates a broadness of scope that plagues the categorization of identifying markers. In 1627 the Catholic Church under Pope Urban VIII established the *Congregatio de Propaganda fide* in Rome to spread the message of the Church in the New World and counteract the growing influence of the Protestants.[1] This minted propaganda's definition as the organized spread of ideas. However it was not only until World War I that the word would become infamous, despite its technical practice by many countries and governments before the war.[2]

Political scientists and sociologists such as Harold Lasswell and Jacques Ellul have commented on propaganda, devising theoretical structures that categorize and facilitate its identification. Propaganda is a form of communication that can be created and received in both conscious and unconscious ways. Lasswell enumerated several

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1   Bernays, *Propaganda.* p. 48
2   *Idem,* p. 11

ways propaganda may take shape, using as examples, the Anti-Cigarette League, civic associations, amateurs, state organs, and corporations.[3]

Jacques Ellul's analysis rests on several theoretical structures based on dichotomous gradients that align the purposes and origins of propaganda on several axis. The two axis in respect to the goals of propaganda are the Political-Sociological and Agitation-Integration camps. The political and sociological duality is concerned with the targets of propaganda: political propaganda is aimed at influencing popular opinion on civic organizations, while sociological propaganda is focused on ties at a societal level. The difference can be exemplified in two posters, one advocates the election of a political party, while another warns about the dangers of recreational drug use. Agitation-Integration is the degree to which propaganda can pull people apart or push them together. Agitation is embodied in calls like the Soviet Union's for resistance against "Zionism and imperialism", and integration could be seen during Portugal's Estado Novo period in the insistence that Portugal was a multi-racial pluri-continental unitary state.

The Vertical-Horizontal and Rational-Irrational gradients are respectively related to the production of propaganda and to what degree reason or emotion are targeted by the propagandist. Vertical propaganda is generated through hierarchical processes, like ministries such as the Committee on Public Information, the Soviet Union's Department of Agitation and Propaganda, or modern day PR firms. Horizontal propaganda is generated in a decentralized manner, the most current and relevant example would be politically active forums on the internet.

The Rational-Irrational characteristic leans in two directions: rational propaganda can be as simple as an advertisement that lists the superior specifications of a car relative to the competition, but the emotional side convinces the buyer through

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3   Lasswell, *The Theory of Political Propaganda.* p. 629

seductive appeals such as "this is the car a real man would drive."[4]

Propaganda constructs narratives by using cultural networks of information. A person's capability of understanding common symbols is defined by E.D. Hirsch as "cultural literacy." Hirsch believes that the background information held in the minds of a population binds them and is an essential part of communication. A population that has a common history, culture, and language will understand subtle queues and references that are evoked in the transmission of ideas. Lasswell writes that it is these significant symbols that are managed by the propagandist to influence collective attitudes.[5] [6] Propaganda in short is the power to convince. The line where propaganda ends and coercive force begins, especially where states are concerned, is a subject approached in Joseph Nye's conception of Soft Power and Hard Power. Soft power is a country's ability to generate sympathy and the internalizing of political ideals and policy in foreign nations.[7] Hard power relates to the use of aggressive policies such as espionage and use of military force.

The state actors of the XXIst Century rely on propaganda to support their foreign policy goals. In an era of high connectivity provided by technology, the perceptions (or the presentations) of events and the opinions of the public are highly susceptible to the influences of propagandists. Owing to the waves of unrest resulting from the Arab Spring, the West, Russia, Syria, and others are currently locked in a volatile confrontation over the future of the Syrian people. The messages these entities emit are crafted to influence opinion and support favorable outcomes for implemented policies. The relationship between Syria and Russia is a critical aspect for Russian foreign policy, both in terms of soft power propaganda and hard power politics. President of Russia

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4   Ellul, *Propaganda: The Formation of Men's Attitudes.* pp. 62-84
5   Hirsch, *Cultural Literacy* p. 2
6   Lasswell, p. 627
7   van Herpen, Marcel H. *Putin's Propaganda Machine: Soft Power and Russian Foreign Policy.* Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2016. p. 21

Vladmir Putin spoke of soft power in *Moscovskie Novosti*: "Soft power [is] a complex of instruments and methods to achieve foreign policy objectives without the use of weapons […] The distinction must be made clearly between where there is freedom of expression and normal political activity and where illegal instruments of "soft power" are used... the activity of "pseudo-NGOs" [and] other structures which, with outside support, have the aim to destabilize the situations in this or that country is unacceptable."[8]

In essence, Russia has combined both soft power and hard power in a revitalized propaganda machine inspired by the former Soviet system, which is used to defend the Kremlin's line and its actions. Damascus has also used mass media to promote its message throughout the world which among other efforts includes the drive to project a positive image of President Assad. How these two actors have developed their influence throughout history is fundamental for the analysis of the War in Syria. The West has suffered directly because of its own intervention in this conflict, and it is from this concern that it is necessary to comprehend what has happened in Syria, what is the Russian-Syrian perspective, how both actors promote said perspective, and what can be done to guarantee peace and stability in Syria and beyond.

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8   *Idem*, p. 27

Background

Russian-Syrian relations are predominantly defined by a strategic alignment of interests in geopolitical issues throughout regional and global fronts. Russia's relationship with Syria is the longest-lasting and strongest bond forged outside the Warsaw Pact during the Cold War and outside the Eurasian Economic Union of the modern day. While at times facing diverging pursuits and imbalances within the relationship, the Moscow-Damascus friendship has proven resilient and beneficial to both parties. This relationship is the product of the specific political environments unique to each nation, and in order to properly contextualize the positions that these nations and their governments take in the world it is necessary to understand how they came to be formed. In Bashar al-Assad's words: "If you do not understand the culture and the politics you don't understand the decision we make as a leader."[9]

Russia

Russia is a complex, massive country with over a thousand years of history and a great variety of peoples living within its borders. Russia's identity is tempered with profound influences originating from Byzantine, Viking, and Mongol interactions with the peoples of Eastern Europe, which have led to debates on the extent of its European identity, both inside of Russia and outside. Russia's territory is mostly Asiatic, but these areas are sparsely populated relative to the lands west of the Urals, the traditional boundary between Asia and Europe. When taking in account its historical bonds and cultural inheritance it can be concluded that Russia is the sum of its contacts with Asia

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9   Rose, Charlie. "Interview with Bashar al-Assad", 2006. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JqQa-QSMMjs>

and Europe, and is not easily represented by a single continental interpretation. It is composed of many peoples but majority Slavic as a result of the expansionist colonial policies of the Tsars and slavicizing influence of the Orthodox Church. Like any nation, Russia has its own idiosyncrasies and a past that make it unique and must be observed in context to reveal, even if partially, the thought process and concerns of the Russian people and especially its government.

The cultural ancestor to the eastern Slavic nations was the Kievan Rus, a union of loosely-affiliated Slavic tribes that lived in the paths of the trade routes connecting the Byzantine and Viking civilizations in an area that encompassed modern day Ukraine.[10] The proof that these foreign ties were valued and cultivated is evident in the marriage pacts such as Iaroslav (988-1054) with Ingigerde, and how among the descendants of the Byzantine Emperor Monomakh was Vladimir II the Grand Prince of the Kievan Rus. Saints Cyril and Methodius created the Galgolithic and Cyrillic alphabets in the 9th Century to translate church works into Slavic languages.

The adoption of Christianity by Prince Vladimir the Great (960-1015) tied the future of a large part of Eastern Europe with the Orthodox Church. Byzantine-Rus relations were also influenced by a strategic necessity to confront the Cumans in the east which threatened both the Kievan Rus and the Byzantine Empire.[11] There is a legend surrounding a crown called the cap of Monomakh which is said to have been given to Prince Vladimir by the Byzantine Emperor Constantine. This legendary gesture was the origin for the concept of Moscow as the "Third Rome", destined to become the center of a religious and influential empire.[12] The effect of Byzantine religious-political structures on modern Russia is noticeable. The modern day Russian Orthodox Church

10 Milhazes, José. *Rússia e Europa: uma parte do todo.* Lisboa: Fundação Francisco Manuel dos Santos, 2016. p.15
11 *Idem,* pp. 16-17
12 *Idem,* p. 18

operates with the Russian state with a similar respect as the Byzantine Church operated with the Emperor in a concept called *symphonia*; though the Russian application in reality it is asymmetrical in its balance of power between church and state.[13]

In the XIIIth Century the Russian principalities would suffer a devastating shock at the hands of the Mongol invaders which left vast swaths of territory under the rule of an authoritarian foreign power. Pope Innocent IV convened the Council of Lyon with the purpose of understanding how to halt the advance of the Mongol horde. The decision was made to ask for Daniil of Galicia's support in a front against Mongol aggression, but Daniil saw the necessity of maintaining peace and avoiding the wrath of Genghis Khan. Daniil became a tributary of the Mongol empire but in return he spared his people from war and gained greater autonomy relative to the Mongol vassals subjugated by force. Alexander Nevski, another Grand Prince, is a contested figure that decided cooperation with the Mongols was preferable to war.

Threatened from west and east by Scandinavians, Catholics and Mongols, Nevski's responses to the complex threats emanating from every direction against him have been debated furiously for centuries. In José Milhazes' analysis *Rússia e Europa* there are identified three major approaches to how Nevski is treated by historians: the first, and most traditional, is that Nevski is a saint that saved Russia from the Catholics, the Mongols, and Lithuania. Lev Gumilov's view sees Nevski as the architect of the alliance with the Mongol Horde, compounded by his friendship with Batye Khan. Valentin Ianin describes Nevski as a pragmatic despot, whose accomplishments are exaggerated for historical posterity.[14]

Through the lessons these events have taught, one can comprehend that Russians have been affected by a history of invasion and occupation from hostile foreign powers

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13 van Herpen, p. 166
14 Milhazes, pp. 19-21

surrounding, using Halford Mackinder's geopolitical terminology, the Heartland.[15] These challenges required a response of calculating alliances and strong political decision-making processes. Herein lies the genesis of despotic power in Rus, thus consequently the autocratic basis for Imperial Russia and beyond. The effects of the Mongol occupation are just as contentious. Boris Rybavok blames Mongols for throwing the development of Rus back several centuries. It is estimated by historians such as Boris Sponar that the Mongols exterminated nearly one third of the population of Rus.

Nevertheless, the political readjustment caused by the Mongols is for instance seen by the celebrated historian Karamzin as the cause of ascension of the Principality of Muscovy. The Mongol's held onto their conquered territories in Russia until Dimitri Danskoi revolted against the his suzerains and defeated their forces in the Battle of Kulikovo, in 1380.[16]

In 1453 Constantinople fell to the Turks. In 1472, Ivan III (1440-1505) the Grand Prince of Muscovy married the niece of the last Byzantine Emperor. Soon the Grand Princes began using the title *Tsar* and Autocrat and adopted the bicephalous (double-headed) eagle of Byzantium as a symbol of personal power.[17] Ivan III was faced with foes in several hostile fronts: despite the Western Catholic Europeans considering Ivan III a potential friend, Ivan found that securing access to the Baltic Sea (therefore securing access to Europe) through war against Poland-Lithuania was of far more strategic importance.

Ivan also developed ties with the Khan of Crimea, Mengli Heray I (1445-1515) whose assistance was necessary to defeat the Mongol Golden Horde in the east. Under Ivan's rule, Russian interests in the Baltic and Black sea become a central theme from Russian strategy. These two seas define the relations between Russia and its western

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15 van Herpen, p. 191
16 Milhazes, p. 23
17 *Idem,* p. 24

neighbors: Russia realized it must have access to both bodies of water to guarantee trade route income, safety, and open lines of communication with the outside world.[18]

In 1612, the Romanov dynasty rose to power and continued the process of Russian acquisition of territories to access the Black and Baltic seas. Tsar Peter the Great (1672-1725), the first Emperor of Russia, focused on Ottoman and Scandinavian foes which had become powerful in their own right, dominating and blockading the Black and Baltic seas, both of essential Russian interest.[19] Russia won the Northern War against the Swedes and Peter founded the city of Saint Petersburg, whose name is indicative of a Germanophilic current in Russian society: Peter specifically chose the German word *sankt* over the Russian *svyatoy,* and utilized the suffix *burg* for his namesake city.[20]

Russia's captivation with Europe during the Enlightenment era had Tsars such as Peter I and Catherine II inviting foreign specialists from the West to advise on the development of the Russian state and society. Russian nobility spoke foreign languages such as French while Russian itself became a vulgar tongue, this was common throughout Europe as French was the *lingua franca* used in international diplomacy.. The adoption of Western customs was however a superficial act. While Catherine II preoccupied herself with corresponding with illuminated figures such as Diderot and Voltaire, the Empress utilized philosophy to justify her own absolutist form of rule. Montesquieu's works were for instance was used to legitimize harsh leadership that stemmed from the oppressive nature of the Russian environment: cold and merciless.

This became more obvious after the Peasant's War (1773-1775), where Catherine II became openly hostile and persecuted Enlightenment thinkers.[21] Among Catherine's

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18 *Idem,* pp. 25
19 *Idem,* p. 31
20 van Herpen, p. 182
21 Milhazes, pp. 32-33

accomplishments is the conquest of Crimea and the subsequent treaties of Kuçuk Kaynarca in 1774 and Jassy in 1792 in which the Ottoman empire recognized Russian dominion on the coasts of the Northern Black Sea.

In the early XIXth Century Russia was invaded by Napoleonic France, and the French suffered an historic defeat culminating in the Russian Tsar, Alexander I, marching triumphantly in the streets of Paris. This placed Russia in a powerful position to dominate the European mainland in the post-Napoleonic period, a state of affairs that strategists in Great Britain would find unacceptable and worked to suppress, in Asia, Europe, and in the Americas, where Russia had colonies. This fear of the bear led popular opinion of Russia throughout Europe to reach a familiar low later in the XIXth Century. Astholphe-Louis-Leonor, Marquis of Custine, wrote a highly critical book titled "Russia in 1839", in which he declared that Russia "is a barbarian country whose own population collaborates with its own oppression."[22]

The Marquis further went on to say "Social life in this country is a permanent conspiracy against the truth. Anyone who is not duped is regarded there as a traitor... to refute a lie, to contradict a political claim... is an attack on the security of the state."[23] In this century a debate develops between those who identified Russia's future with the West, the Occidentalists, and those who believed Russia had its own character and destiny, the Slavophiles. Among the Slavophiles were such authors as Mikhail Katkov,[24] Ivan Aksakov,[25] Nikolai Danilevsky,[26] Fiodor Dostoievsky;[27] those who believed in the ultimate truth of the Orthodox faith and Europe as a "spiritual Egypt" for Russians,

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22 *Idem,* p. 34
23 van Herpen, p.3
24 Mikhail Katkov (1818-1887), nationalist journalist, graduate of Moscow University. Editor of the *Moscow News*.
25 Ivan Aksakov (1823-1886) author, journalist, and soldier, veteran of the Crimean War.
26 Nikolay Danilevsky (1822-1185) religious conservative writer, historian and naturalist, an opponent of Darwinism. Graduate of the University of St. Petersburg
27 Fiodor Dostoievsky (1821-1881) graduate of the University of St. Petersburg, wrote on a great variety of topics ranging from psychology to Christianity.

evoking the sense of a past long gone and disconnected by time from Russia. In the Occidentalist camp there can be found thinkers such as Piotr Chaadaev,[28] Alexander Herzen,[29] Georgi Plekhanov,[30] and Vladimir Lenin.[31] Despite the intensity of the debates, Marlene Laruelle found that "defining Russia as belonging to a 'civilisation' [was] always made in relation to Europe as the yardstick, never to Asia."[32]

The Russo-Japanese war and later the First World War delivered critical blows to the Tsar. The wars and domestic upheavals in the Empire resulted in the Tsar's slide into political irrelevance and then bloody extinction in the Bolshevik coup d'etat. The First World War turned from an imperialist war to a civil war, and out of the ashes of this conflict the communist revolutionary model would come to dominate Eastern Europe and threaten the world. In this transformation, Russia metamorphosed from a "copier to a model"[33] and began a series of not only military but ideological expansions throughout the world using propaganda, international conferences, and foreign parties.

During this time a group of political thinkers developed in the ranks of the political prisoners in the USSR and the more fortunate emigré community that escaped the Soviets. These were the Eurasianists. Among these were Lev Gumilev,[34] Nikolai Trubetskoy,[35] and Piotr Savitsky.[36] Ultimately, the purpose of the Eurasian movement was to promote a Federal Eurasian state, with borders not unlike the USSR's. This

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28 Piotr Chaadaev (1794-1856), veteran of the Napoleonic wars, writer and outspoken critic of the Tsar and what he considered the poor condition of Russian social, philosophical, cultural, and economic development.
29 Alexander Herzen (1812-1870) socialist agrarian writer, graduate of the University of Moscow.
30 Georgi Plekhanov (1856-1918), Marxist philosopher, opponent of Tsar Nicholas II's empire and also of Lenin's Bolshevik government.
31 Milhazes, p. 35-37
32 Laruelle, Marlene. "Russia as an anti-liberal European Civilization." Ed. Pål Kolstø and Helge Blakkisrud. *The New Russian Imperialism*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016. 275-97. Web. 28 Jun. 2017. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.3366/j.ctt1bh2kk5.17> p. 278
33 Milhazes, p. 39
34 Lev Gumilev (1912-1992) Russian writer and historian, son of two famous poets Nikolai Gumilev and Anna Akhmatova, developed theory of *passionarost*, or "passionarity" that seeks to encapsulate the impulse that drives people to achieve great feats. Many of his ideas were a result of Gumilev's time in the Gulag prison system.
35 Nikolai Trubetskoy (1890-1938), Russian linguist and historian, graduate of Moscow University.
36 Piotr Savitsky (1895-1968) Eurasianist author and proponent of the idea of Russia as the "Third Continent" and center of the Old World; an entity that is neither European nor Asian.

school of thought would have great influence in the post-Soviet period.[37] The Russian Republic, later the Soviet Union, aimed a campaign of propaganda against the West for almost a century. Immediately following the victory of the Bolsheviks in the Civil War, an unsuccessful war was fought against a freshly independent Poland in a communist attempt to dominate Eastern Europe and recover the lost territories that guaranteed Russia access to the Baltic and the Black seas.

Stalin's Great Purge (1936-1938) wiped out political opponents, and in Ukraine millions of peasants and farmers died of famine. The intelligentsia, among other classes, were ideologically and systematically filtered and placed the Gulag labor camp system or simply executed after a mock trial. This effort was directed to filter the ranks of the communist party so that only Stalinist loyalists remain. Even then, men who were in Stalin's grace would often soon find themselves in the Gulags and their person wiped from official records and images. The Red Army that came to replace "bloody" Nicholas II was simply a different kind of authoritarian dictatorship. During these harrowing events the West did not interfere and even profited from the USSR, hoping that the Soviet Union would someday collapse under its own weight.[38]

This enabling paved the way for the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact and the invasion of Poland by National Socialist Germany and the USSR. The hesitations demonstrated by the Allied powers in the lead-up to the pact left an opportunity open for cooperation between both authoritarian states that held deep suspicion for the Western capitalist nations. Both powers worked in tandem to split Eastern Europe into spheres of influence as they geared up for their inevitable ideological showdown. The Soviet Union lost over 20 million people in World War II, the highest number of casualties of any country involved in the war, closely followed by China.

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37 Milhazes, p. 40
38 Pozner, Vladmir *et al.* "The West vs. Russia." Debate. Munk Debates.
    <http://www.munkdebates.com/debates/the-west-vs-russia>

In post-war Europe, the Soviet Union enjoyed a superiority of conventional weapons vis-à-vis NATO, which forced the American military strategy, led by Eisenhower, to focus on the development of a nuclear arsenal to counter-balance the USSR's conventional numeric advantage. Today the situation is just the opposite: NATO holds the conventional advantage, while Russian nuclear weapons stockpiles are greater than the West's.[39] The Cold War's potential to spiral out of control was checked by the Mutually Assured Destruction doctrine which forced superpowers to constrain themselves to subterfuge, proxy wars, and propaganda to push the narratives against each other and prepare the minds of enemies and allies alike for the eventuality that a Third World War could break out.

This was achieved by the Soviet Union through the financing of communist parties worldwide, supporting the Council for Peace and Cooperation, and encouraging demonstrations against NATO actions, all with the purpose of confounding Western policies and advancing Soviet interests. World War III fortunately did not happen. The USSR and the Cold War did not come to an end through force of arms, or sanctions, or isolation. The system that Communism promulgated was simply flawed in its principles and could not function, so it collapsed. The war in Afghanistan coupled with the fall of oil prices in the 1980s contributed to the pressure put on the Soviet system.[40]

The 1990s were watershed years for Russia. Economic turmoil, attempted coups, and a reduction of territory back to XVIIth Century borders damaged the Russian psyche profoundly. Despite inheriting Soviet embassies and the USSR's seat in the United Nations Security Council, Russian standing in the world was crippled. Among many internal issues that still hurt Russians today are widespread corruption, criminality,

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39 Clapper, *et al*. *2015 U.S. Intelligence Community Worldwide Threat Assessment.* Warsaw: Progressive Management Publications/Amazon Fulfillment, 2015. p. 65
40 Milhazes, p. 51

alcoholism, drug abuse, and an HIV epidemic.[41] This period saw the enrichment of a small oligarchy and the wealth disparity grew.[42] The cut-backs affected private life and the military which was painfully felt in tragedies such as the *Kursk* submarine disaster in 2000. Marcel van Herpen separates this period into two stages: the robber-baron stage and the meta robber-baron stage.

The initial stage under Yeltsin saw parts of the Russian economy become privatized into a small group of individuals, the latter stage was characterized by a re-nationalization of those entities into the hands of President Putin and the *siloviki*, the ex-KGB and ex-military men who have surrounded the Russian President and profited tremendously off their partnership. The principle difference between the behavior of the barons lies in the extended use of the judiciary in the Putin era. The state organs are used to repress individuals that threaten the profit President Putin's group stands to make: legal threats, criminal investigations, "tax-measures", imprisonment, blackmail, and even death threats and assassinations are used as tools to keep the elite on top. The monopolization of Russia's resources through companies like Gazprom and Rosneft under the *siloviki* is a great benefit for the objectives of Putin's policy, where these organizations are used as tools of pressure in Ukraine or influence in countries such as Germany.[43]

Under Putin's watch Russia has re-engaged its propaganda, espionage, and military machine to levels not seen since the Soviet Union.[44] Putin's success is not artificial, according to the Levada Center, Putin's approval ratings have been consistently around 80%. In fact they were boosted thanks to the Crimea annexation, along with unilateral military actions in Chechnya, South Ossetia, Georgia.[45] Along with

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41 van Herpen, p. 134
42 Milhazes, p. 53
43 van Herpen, pp. 220-221
44 *Idem,* p. 268
45 Levada Center. "Ratings" <http://www.levada.ru/en/ratings/>

aggressive foreign policy maneuvers, President Putin's tenure encompassed the early 2000s commodities boom and high oil prices which contributed greatly to Russian growth and the positive image Russian people hold of their President. There is an undeniably new found purpose in Russia under Putin who has gained his support from the economic situation seen early in the President's tenure and his administration's hard power politics.[46] In 2000, Russia abandoned its nuclear "No first strike" policy in favor of a "escalate to deescalate" policy where Moscow will threaten or if necessary launch a nuclear strike in order to force outcomes in Russia's favor.[47]

Russia is the sum of two different worlds: the Asian and European world. Democratism and Communism emanated from Europe, while authoritarian collectivist multiculturalism was the primary influence from Asia. The confluence of these philosophies and practices resulted in the modern Russian system of government that the former deputy Prime Minister Vladislav Surkov[48] calls "sovereign democracy." A democracy run by an authoritarian system.

46 Clapper, *et al*, p. 117
47 *Idem,* p. 65
48 Vladislav Surkov (b. 1964) First Deputy Chief of the Russian Presidential Administration (1999-2011) and Deputy Prime Minister (2011-2013). Surkov is a close adviser to President Putin on geopolitical and propaganda affairs.

Syria

The region modern Syria occupies has been inhabited by humanity for thousands of years. It is home to one of the most ancient continuously inhabited cities in the world: Damascus. The origins of this country have deep roots far back into time to the Assyrians, Egyptians, Hittites, Phoenicians, Greeks, and Romans. Islamic Syria's history begins with the *Rashidun* Caliphate's conquest in the VIIIth Century of what was called the *Bilad al-Sham* that demarcated an area encompassing modern-day Lebanon, Israel, and Syria.[49] Islam has been fraught with tribalism since its inception, the Syrian poet Adonis commented that there is an "absence of plurality" in Arab thinking.

This is to the point where a clan once allied to the prophet Mohammed's, the Ansar, was pushed from exercising power after the prophet's death by Mohammed's tribe, the Quraysh.[50] Tribal and factional power struggles have defined so-called Islam, a religion in which the realm of politics is subordinate to God's word as revealed to Mohammed. The *Bilad al-Sham* gained great importance with the advent of the Ummayad dynasty that had its capital in Damascus. With the fall of the Ummayads, Damascus and the territories around contemporary Syria lost their political strength and for the next centuries became part of a contested frontier zone between powers such as the Fatimids, Ayyubids, Ilkhanate Mongols, Mameluks, and the Ottomans. This shifting nature of power in the region has contributed to a great diversity of peoples in Syria.

The Ottoman empire's administrative reforms in the XIXth Century revised borders and regional nomenclature several times, for instance under Selim III whose reforms can be seen in the 1803 *Cedid Atlas*, the first of its kind developed and published in the Islamic world. The *Cedid Atlas* was based on European cartographic

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49 Karsh, *The Soviet Union and Syria* p. 109
50 Adonis, *Violência e Islão* p. 26

works so in effect names were transliterated thus classifying many regions in the Near Orient with terms originating from European conceptions. In the *Cedid Atlas* the modern-day borders of Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, and Syria are almost completely included into the region of Palestine. The borders of the constituent parts of *eyalet* regions, called *sanjaks*, and semi-autonomous regions such as the *mutasariflik* of Jerusalem had a formal delineation while definitions of regions such as Palestine were more fluid. After the Ottoman reforms of the mid XIXth Century *vilayets* slowly began to replace the former *eyalets*. The *vilayets* of the XIXth Century that surrounded Jerusalem were Beirut to its north, Damascus, Haleb (Aleppo), and Zor to the east.[51] These divisions were specifically chosen in hopes of defusing tensions with neighboring states and European powers.[52]

The modern state of Syria originates from the collapse of the Ottoman empire in the wake of World War I and the subsequent partition of the former Ottoman administrative spaces by France and Great Britain in the 1920s. The borders were delineated with no concern for the former Ottoman regions. That being said, the old Ottoman elites would still be found working in the bureaucratic systems of many future Arab States.[53] Despite the European interventions in the Middle East, local leaders still had hopes for a free Syria. In the First All Syrian Congress, 2 of July 1919 the borders of Syria were designated to include modern-day Lebanon, Jordan, and Israel; a 'Greater Syria'.[54]

The European powers however divided the Ottoman empire into spheres of influence through treaties such as the Sykes-Picot agreement (1916) made in conjunction with the Russian Empire. Such agreements reneged on previous wartime

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51 Tamari, Salim. "Shifting Ottoman Conceptions of Palestine: Part 2" *Jerusalem Quarterly.* Issue No. 48. (2011). p. 6
52 *Idem,* p. 8-9
53 Quataert, *O Império Otomano* p. 227
54 Karsh, pp. 26, 109

deals such as the territorial re-arrangements promised by Sir Henry McMahon to Hussein bin Ali, the Sharif of Mecca. Sykes-Picot was outed in the Soviet Union's *Pravda* newspaper which regaled in revealing the backroom deals made between the Allied "imperialist bourgeoisie" powers in World War I. The treaties of Sevres (1920), and Lausanne (1923) established the borders for Post-Ottoman Levant: the former was drafted then rejected before the end of the Turkish War of Independence, and the latter becoming the final treaty accepted by the Turks who, having fought the war with the support of Bolshevik Russia against the Greeks and the Allies, founded their Republic.

As a consequence France took control of the Syrian territories which came under its rule in the League of Nations Mandates. As a former territory of the Ottoman Empire, Syria was marked as a class A mandate. B and C mandates were dedicated to former German colonies. During World War II Vichy France maintained *de jure* control over Syria, however the end of the war and the admittance of Syria into the United Nations ended the mandate and marked the start of the modern Syrian Arab Republic.

Bashar al-Assad has commented that the "history of Syria is history of coup d'etat."[55] The Syrian Army has been at the center of these political convulsions. After a failed invasion of Palestine with Arab allies to halt the establishment of Israel, Syria entered an era rattled by a series of army coups. A brief union with Nasser's Egypt under the United Arab Republic ended with Syrian army officers unilaterally declaring independence from the UAR in 1961. In 1963 the Ba'ath party took control of Syria. The Ba'ath Arab Socialist Party[56] is a pan-Arabic political party that was in George Kerevan's words, "based on classless racial unity, hence the strong anti-Marxism, and on national socialism in the scientific sense of the word, such as nationalised industry and an autarkic economy serving the needs of the nation. Hence, the antipathy towards

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55 Rose, Charlie. "Interview with Bashar al-Assad", 2006. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JqQa-QSMMjs>
56 *Ba'ath* means renaissance, revival.

Western capitalism."

The Ba'ath party was founded in the 1940s by Michael Aflaq,[57] and Salah al-Din Bitar.[58] During World War II Ba'ath party members were involved in protests against the French government in Syria, in support of the Iraqi rebellion that requested the assistance of Nazi Germany in throwing off the British yoke. The reorientation of the Ba'ath towards the Soviet Union in the post-War era was, according to Kerevan, a decision that was guided by self-interest as "Both in Syria and Iraq, economic and military necessity required an alliance with the Soviet Union, eroding the old anti-communism. The attractions of power resulted in personal corruption."[59]

The Ba'ath party's organization was structured in regional branches and operational cells, inherited from its times as an underground party. In 1966 the Syrian Ba'ath regional branch suffered an internal coup and its leadership was replaced by its left-wing faction under Salah Jadid.[60] The left-wing Ba'ath leadership broke ties with the Iraqi Ba'ath branch and pursued an even closer relationship with the Soviet Union until Hafez al-Assad, promoting an anti-Soviet position, rose to power in 1970.[61] Under President Assad, Syria became governed by an Alawi minority that was deeply resented by the Sunni majority that represented 60% of the country.[62] The Ba'ath party became dominated by Alawi military officers.[63] Assad's rule in Syria was marked by the October

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57 Michael Aflaq (1910-1989), a Greek Orthodox anti-colonialist Christian, philosopher, and author. A student at the Sorbonne. Advocate of Pan-Arabic socialism, co-founder of the Ba'athist party. The conflict between Nasserite and Ba'ath ideologies led to Aflaq's exile and the Marxist 1966 coup in Syria which split the Ba'ath party in Iraqi and Syrian branches. The Assad government condemned Aflaq to death *in absentia* in 1971 for his public criticism of the Syrian Ba'ath party. Aflaq died in Iraq, powerless, but still shown a modicum of respect as a founder of the Ba'athist movement.

58 Salah al-Din Bitar (1912-1980), a Sunni, studied at the Sorbonne in Paris along with Aflaq. Bitar was Prime-Minister of Syria in March-November 1963, May-October 1964, and January-February 1966. He fled Syria after Jadid's left-wing 1966 coup. A critic of the Assad regime, Bitar was assassinated in 1980. The identity of the assassin is unknown.

59 Kerevan, George. "Ruling party learned from Nazis". *The Scotsman*, <http://www.scotsman.com/news/world/ruling-party-learned-from-nazis-1-601588>

60 Salah Jadid (1926-1993), strong man of the left-wing Ba'athist faction from 1966 to his ouster by Assad in 1970.

61 Karsh, pp. 3-4

62 CIA, Director of Global Issues, *"Syria: Scenarios for Change"* pp. 1, 13

63 *Idem*, p. 12

War, the Lebanese Civil War, the Iran-Iraq war, the Syrian Sunni uprising in the 70s and 80s, and the Gulf War. President Hafez al-Assad was also allegedly involved in assassinations and has been accused of being a "state-sponsor of terrorism".[64]

President Assad chose several individuals as potential heirs throughout his time. Bassel Assad had become heir apparent until his accidental death in 1994 leaving his younger brother Bashar Assad as the only viable candidate to continue his father's vision. Hafez Assad died in 2000 and Bashar Assad was elected president of Syria. Assad's administration has been controversial, such as its suspected involvement in the assassination of the former Prime Minister of Lebanon Rafic Hariri,[65] an allegation that President Assad categorically denied.

Yevgeny Primakov, former Russian Foreign Minister, is skeptical of Assad's involvement, writing: "First it strikes me that Syrian *politicians* cannot have been the ones behind the assassinations; they must have realized that the inevitable outpouring of anti-Syrian feeling in Lebanon would compel the international community to step up its demands for Syria to comply with Security council resolution 1559 […] Hariri had enough political enemies within Lebanon would would have like to get rid of him."[66]

Since the spread of the Arab Spring protests in 2011, Bashar Assad has been embroiled in a bitter war that with many international actors intervening in their own interest. President Assad's government has been shielded from rebel forces by its intelligence apparatus, clan alliances, militia forces like the *Shabiha,* the Syrian Army, Hezbollah, Russia, and Iran. [67]

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64 Shlaim, *The Iron Wall* p. 553
65   Rafic Hariri (1944-2005), Prime Minister of Lebanon from 1992-1998 and 2000-2004. His tenure focused on the rebuilding of post-Civil War Lebanon, however Hariri was accused of corruption as his wealth grew tremendously during the course of his administration. In addition Hariri supported Syrian interests within Lebanon. He was allegedly assassinated by Hezbollah (who accused the Mossad of the assassination) in an explosive blast in 2005. Hariri's murder sparked protests and eventually led to a withdrawal of Syrian forces from Lebanon.
66 Primakov, *Russia and the Arabs* p. 207
67 Napoleoni, pp. 99-100

Soviet Era

Soviet, Russian, and Syrian projections of their relations onto the world's consciousness have been reliant on propaganda. Soviet Communist propaganda was so successful the Bolsheviks even found respect among enemies. Joseph Goebbels admitted in 1933 that "we National Socialists have learned much from the Russian Bolsheviks"[68] Since its inception the Soviet Union freely used aggressive communications to skew conversations in its favor. The Central Committee of the Communist Party had an Agitation and Propaganda Department (Russian: *otdel agitatsii i propagandy*) working tirelessly to spread the message of Communism and damage the reputation of its enemies.

Disinformation was created by the KGB, first appearing in 1963, which was a process that involved the falsification of documents and pictures.[69] The efforts pursued by the Soviet Union in damaging and influencing the so-called imperialist western powers were labeled *aktivnyye meropriyatiya*, "active measures." These were black propaganda operations pursued by the KGB's First Directorate. Black propaganda, antonymous to white propaganda, masquerades as propaganda made by a certain group while it is in reality published by an opposing hostile faction. Gray propaganda, in contrast to both white and black, is entirely anonymous. Yuri Bezmenov, a propagandist, KGB agent, and Soviet defector stated that maybe 15% of the Russian intelligence funds would be spent on espionage. The rest of the funding would be spent on the active measures. Bezmenov defined active measures as the process aimed at "[changing] the perception of reality, of every American, to such an extent, despite the abundance of information, that no one is able to come to conclusions in the interests of defending

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68   van Herpen, p. 3
69   van Herpen, p. 2

themselves, their families, their communities, and their country. It's a great brainwashing process."[70]

Active measures functioned in a period of 20 years, as it was the amount of time necessary for a generation to grow and absorb the propaganda. This process was organized into different stages: first it involved a demoralization, then a destabilization, which then in theory would bring a victim country to crisis. The moral weakening of a nation would prepare it for the advent of socialism. The tools at the disposal of the Soviets were many. Among the Soviet Union's lifetime a number of media organizations served Communist interests, such as the official newspaper of the Communist Party, the *Pravda*, the Telegraph Agency of the Soviet Union (*TASS*), *RIA Novosti, Radio Moscow, Izvestia*, the *New Times*, and *Krasnaya Zvezda*; all of which were limited by Article 58 of the Soviet Criminal Code that forbid counter-revolutionary propagandist activities in any sphere of Soviet society, which was in essence censorship of the press.[71]

Information agencies like *Novosti* were 70% staffed by agents of the KGB, according to Bezmenov.[72] The Soviet Union spread its hard-line left-wing Communist ideology through these mouthpieces. The fall of the USSR did not result in the extinction of these media organizations. Quite the opposite: what has happened during the Putin-Medvedev years is a revival and modernization of the former Soviet propaganda machine. The federal Russian government oversees media through *Roskomnadzor*, the regulatory body of communication which imposes fines and shuts down media enterprises that run afoul of Russian law.

In regards to Syria, the most popular channels of communication used by Damascus are the Syrian Arab News Agency (SANA), controlled by the Ministry of

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70 Griffin, G. Edward, "Soviet Subversion of the Free-World Press", Interview. 1984.
    <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y3qkf3bajd4>
71 *Idem* p. 42
72 Griffin, G. Edward "Soviet Subversion of the Free-World Press" Interview. 1984.

Information, and the official newspaper of the Syrian Ba'ath Party, *Al-Ba'ath*. Hafez al-Assad, much like his son Bashar al-Assad and Russian President Vladimir Putin, was open to interviews in the Western media and used informal channels such as Radio Monte Carlo's Damascus correspondent Louis Farres and *Time* magazine to maintain contact with the West.[73]

In the current era, the Internet has been a powerful tool at the disposal of both Russia and Syria, who have their respective government channels on web sites such as YouTube broadcasting the tune of their governments. How these media outlets have voiced themselves and their respective government's line regarding Moscow's relationship with Damascus is an inquiry that can reveal a great deal on the thought process and desires of these two actors in the Middle East. The attitudes that these states adopt are deeply embedded in a cultural inheritance and an historic output that not only drive the actions of Russians and Syrians, they are also retrieved in an *ad hoc* fashion by propaganda mechanisms to construct narratives that attempt to manage public opinion in favorable directions.

The Portuguese prime-minister Dr. Antonio Salazar stated in 1949 that "Soviet Communism promotes nationalism in Asia and internationalism in Europe."[74] The USSR's ideological inconsistency stems from the fact that Marxist-Leninist thought is insufficient to function practically in international politics. The USSR followed geopolitical principles when pursuing its objectives despite geopolitics being a taboo school of thought in the Soviet Union. Geopolitics are anathema to Marxism-Leninism, as Marxism seeks to create a socialist revolution in the entire world. Marxism believed that class warfare between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie would bring about a global socialist society and that the establishment of Communism was a scientifically

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73 Karsh, p. 64
74 Salazar, Antonio de Oliveira "O Meu Depoimento", *Notas e Discursos Politicos (1943-1950)*. p. 355

verified inevitability.[75] [76] Geopolitics in Mackinder's definition maintains a geographically-based vision for political control and delineates zones of influence in the world: it does not fulfill the preconditions for an international Marxist revolution.

In addition and most critically, *geopolitik* was an academic school of thought encouraged and practiced by the mortal enemy of the Soviet Union, Nazi Germany. In recent years however Mackinder's Heartland theory has been a source of inspiration in Russia especially to the Eurasian school of thought as exemplified by political thinkers such as Alexander Dugin, a Eurasianist author who holds influence in the Kremlin.[77] Alexander Dugin's geopolitical theory is lifted directly from Mackinder but defines Russia as a tellurocratic (land-ruled) central "world-island" destined for domination, and the Atlantic Anglo-Saxon-led West as the thalassocratic (sea-ruled) "civilization of the sea" surrounding the "world-island", both which are in direct and perpetual conflict.[78]

In Efraim Karsh's analysis the Soviet strategy towards Syria in the 1970s to the 1980s differed from the Western approach in that it adopted a structural and regional perspective rather than a purely circumstantial and global approach.[79] Despite a brief period of retreat in the 1990s, the strength of the Russian Federation's foreign policy would gain momentum and reach a new height under President Vladimir Putin. How are Syria and Russia relevant to each others geopolitical interests? Syria initially was on the periphery of Soviet focus, and on the occasion of its accession to the United Arab Republic, it briefly ceased to exist. In the immediate post-war Middle East, the USSR was primarily interested in developing relations with Turkey, Afghanistan, and Iran.[80]

The formation of the UK and US-led Baghdad Pact in the mid-1950s and Syria's

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75 van Herpen, p. 190
76 Karsh, p. 1
77 van Herpen, pp. 190-192
78 Dugin, *Last War of the World-Island*, pp. 6-7
79 Karsh, p. 2
80 *Ibidem*

opposition to its implementation convinced the leadership of the Politburo to court Syrian support. The Soviet Union's interests and objectives in the Middle East have been consistent with contemporary Russia's: to prevent interventions from foreign powers, to preserve governments friendly to the USSR, and to establish an outlet for naval activities for greater influence over the straights of Bosphorus and the Dardanelles with the purpose of ultimately blocking Western war ships from engaging in activities in the Eastern Mediterranean. In 1955 the Soviet Union announced "aid in any form" to protect Syrian independence that was endangered by the Turkish-Iraqi threat and the retaliatory Israeli raids on Arab countries. This led to the first Soviet-Syrian arms deal in the autumn of 1955.

Within two years Syria had purchased £100 million worth of Soviet weapons. In 1957, the Soviet Union sent a naval unit to Syria in response to heightened pressure from the Turkish military. This was an action that had no precedent.[81] In 1957 a technical agreement worth $579 million was signed between the Soviets and Syrians. Syria's left-wing Ba'ath faction took power in 1966 rendering Syria almost completely dependent on Soviet assistance. During this time the Syrian Communist party, while still suppressed, was allowed to operate. Its leader, Khaled Bakhdash returned from exile. The *Sawt al-Arab*, the official communist newspaper of the time, was permitted to be published and Samih 'Atiyya, a communist, was appointed Minister of Communications by Salah Jadid.[82]

In 1967 the Six-Day War resulted in Israel occupying the Sinai peninsula and the Golan Heights, damaging the standing of the left-wing Ba'ath in Syria. In addition, the increased influence from the USSR was not welcomed by some in Syria, such as the Minister of Defense Hafez al-Assad who was a conservative and outspoken critic of the

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81 *Idem* p. 3
82 *Idem* p. 4

Soviet Union. In an interview given to the Daily Telegraph President Assad claimed that the Soviet Style communist type regime reduced Syria from the granary of the Middle East to an impoverished country and served to isolate it from its Arab neighbors. The Soviet Union's *Krasnaya Zvezda* warned that "the internal reaction [in Syria] joined hands with imperialist circles, striving to interrupt the process of socialist transformation."[83]

While the Soviet Union would rather abandon the Syrian Communist Party to maintain its standing with the current government, the USSR and its media still showed direct support for the SCP. The USSR permitted the publishing of Bakdash's works in the Soviet Union. In 1978 the *New Times* cited Bakdash on his belief of the importance of supporting the Progressive National Front, the only political body the Syrian communists could participate. The Syrian Communist Party was alarmed at Assad's positions and warned that the "failure to settle the crisis in accordance with [...] the framework of the anti-imperialist progressive policy which Syria adopted on the 23rd of February 1966 [... might] harm the existing relations between Syria and the USSR and other friendly socialist bloc nations."[84]

These concerns turned out to be unwarranted as Assad's tenure would see the strengthening of Soviet-Syrian relations stemming from a necessity to confront the Israeli-American threat. In 1971 Assad made his first official visit the USSR, bringing with him the Deputy Prime Minister, Foreign Minister, and the Minister for Petroleum, Power, and Mineral Resources among leaders of the Syrian Ba'ath party.[85] July 1972 two arms deals with the Soviets worth $700 million in total would be concluded under

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83 *Idem* p. 5
84 *Ibidem*
85 Ramet, *Soviet-Syrian Relationship* p. 88

supervision of the Syrian defense minister Mustafa Tlas.[86] [87] In the same year the Soviets would expand the port in Latakia where Syria had permitted usage of the port for Soviet vessels.[88]

The political climate in Syria was not homogeneous in the 1970s. Support for the West was known, for instance the Minister of Economy Muhammad Imadi[89] was Western-educated and friendly to the United States while still maintaining familiar Syrian positions on foreign policy objectives such as the Golan.[90] The Soviet political objective in the Middle East at this time was to maintain the integrity of its allies, Egypt and Syria, and keep the United States from achieving any progress on monopolizing the diplomatic solutions to the Israeli-Arab issue. Unlike Syria, the Soviet Union recognized Israel's right to exist.

The lead up to the October War of 1973 would show that the Soviet Union would have to engage in a balancing act to avoid the conflict at first, then later show meaningful support to Syria and Egypt in the war. Since President Nasser's death the Soviet Union's relationship with Egypt was endangered. President Anwar Sadat removed Ali Sabri, one of the staunchest supporters of the USSR, from the echelons of Egyptian leadership. In July 1972 15,000 Soviet military personnel were expelled from Egypt.[91] Sadat wished to respond to the Soviet Union's reluctance to support Egypt's fight to recover the Sinai peninsula from Israel. It is interesting to note that the USSR pressured Egypt more than it pressured Syria to avoid the October War. This was for several reasons: Assad was reliant on Egyptian support for the war against Israel.

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86 Moustafa Tlas (1932-2017), a Sunni Syrian Minister of Defense from 1972 to 2004. Tlas graduated from the Homs Military Academy where he met future President Hafez al-Assad. Tlas supported Assad in the 1970 coup against Jadid.
87 Karsh, pp. 8-9
88 Ramet, p. 94
89 Muhammad Imadi (b. 1930), technocrat, former Minister of Economy from 1972-1980. Imadi never joined the Ba'ath party.
90 *Idem* pp. 150-151
91 Karsh, p. 10

The Egyptian-Syrian relationship was not in the same critical state as Syrian-Israeli relations, which meant that Soviet policy had to target Egypt to avoid antagonizing Syria which was a precarious and sensitive position. Pedro Ramet quotes Secretary of State Henry Kissinger's memoirs: "No Arab leader whom I met immediately after the war gave credence to the charges of Soviet-Arab collusion. Sadat, Algerian President Boumedienne, Syrian President Assad, whatever their differences, agreed that Moscow had been grudging in its support for the Arab cause, slow in its delivery of arms, and eager to press for a ceasefire from the first day of war. Indeed, in his autobiography Sadat insisted that while the Soviets were ignorant of his precise plans, Moscow had sought to impede any possible Egyptian move by slowing down military deliveries and working against him in Syria."[92]

Egypt had become increasingly hostile to Soviet overtures, leading Soviet leadership to conclude that Syria would soon become the main Soviet partner in Middle Eastern diplomacy.[93] However, any attempt at detente between superpowers was highly criticized by Syria. Responding to the June 1973 Summit between American and Soviet diplomats, the Syrian *Al-Ba'th* voiced Assad's disapproval of the breakdown of talks to reach an agreement stating that the "Soviet-American accord comes at the expense of all weak and vanquished peoples."[94] The October War would see the Soviet Union provide the most material support to any Third World nation to date: 4,360 tons of supplies were airlifted while 38,210 tons were shipped out by sea. Israel's sinking of a merchant vessel elicited a strongly-worded response from *TASS*: "The USSR cannot regard indifferently the criminal actions of the Israeli military, as a result of which there are victims also among Soviet citizens."

However, it is clear that the Soviet mission was to merely feign participation in

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92 Ramet, p. 97
93 Karsh pp. 9-10
94 Karsh, p. 11

the peace discussion in hopes that the USSR's position in the Middle East would not be compromised. Soviet support for Syria was tantamount to a token force of advisers, supplies, and a vocal approval of Syria's "legitimate [...] right to use all effective means for liberation of its occupied lands."[95] The USSR's major objective consisted of reconvening the Geneva Conference to readdress the Israeli-Arab conflict.

The process through which the disengagements for the October War had been reached exposed the American advantage over the USSR as a diplomatic intermediary.[96] This was clear by Assad's openness to the USA following the October War with Nixon's visit to Syria in June 1974 and the restoration of Syrian-Israeli diplomatic channels that had been cut-off following the 1967 Six-Day War. This visit ended on a promise of $100 million dollars in aid from the United States. In March 1974, Assad eased restrictions on foreign investment.[97]

This easing of relations with the United States would be short-lived as Assad became more frustrated with the American focus on a separate Egyptian-Israeli agreement. In September 1974 Assad adopted the Soviet position on the necessity of reconvening the Geneva conference. Lev Talkunov, chief editor of *Izvestiya*, praised the Soviet-Syrian collaboration as a model for other countries and criticized the Egyptian approach.[98] In general, the Soviet media had several approaches to their line on Middle Eastern relations: *Pravda* pursued moderate political solutions in the Middle East advocating cooperation with the United States, while *Izvestiya* and *Kranaya Zvezda* inflated the risk of threat from the "zionist-imperialist" alliance of Israel and the United States. *Sovetskaia Rossiia* used interviews with Arab politicians as vehicles for a hardline view.[99]

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95 *Idem* p. 17
96 *Idem* p. 18
97 *Idem* p. 19
98 *Idem* p. 20
99 Ramet, pp. 161, 194

However Soviet propaganda and pressure was not enough to halt Egypt's slide out of the Soviet sphere. In August 1975 a three year Egyptian-Israeli disengagement agreement is reached. In March 1976, Egypt ended the 1971 Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation with the USSR.[100] Sadat's visit in 1977 is in Karsh's view the turning point of the Soviet-Syrian relationship.

The balance of power in the Soviet-Syrian relationship was turned in Assad's favor with the official termination of Soviet influence in Egypt. From then on, the Soviet Union would find itself in a delicate balance of supporting its bellicose ally President Hafez al-Assad, and his uncompromising brinkmanship in such quandaries as the Lebanese Civil War. Syria had been involved in Lebanon since 1976. Syria's position originates from the old *Rashidun* period claims on Lebanon and the 'Greater Syria' proposed by the First All-Syrian Congress in 1919.

Syria's concern over Lebanon stemmed over the possible break-up of the multi-ethnic and multi-religious state. The Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) began growing in influence in Lebanon after its ejection from Jordan. By the mid-1970s 400,000 Palestinians lived in Lebanon, erecting a mini-state that was at odds with the local Lebanese. These tensions threatened to tear the country apart and dissolve it into ethnic borders.[101] Had this been the result, Syria's advocacy of a single-state solution in Palestine would have been severely hampered by the Lebanese example. The Syrian Foreign Minister Abd Al Khalim Khaddam declared "Either Lebanon remains united or it will be returned to Syria."[102]

In essence the Syrian objective in Lebanon was to act as a diplomatic mediator between the Islamic leftists and the Christian right and maintain a relative stability in Lebanon to avoid an Israeli intervention. While in January 1976 Assad intervened in

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100Karsh, p. 23
101 Ramet, p. 109
102 Karsh, p. 27

favor of the leftist Islamic faction, by March 1976 Assad ordered the Sa'iqa and PLA military units to halt the threat from the Islamic side that had seen increased successes. In June 1976 Syria officially invaded Lebanon with its Third Armored Division. Moscow followed the developments and voiced support for its Syrian ally, labeling the war as an "imperialist-zionist" plot.[103] This was a destabilizing event for Soviet interests as they witnessed in shock as one of their clients was pitted against another despite Soviet pressures on Assad to not intervene.[104]

Israel in the meantime was not interested in preventing Syrian action against Christian militias provided the Syrians would recognize boundaries of military operations.[105] The Soviet media claimed the intervention was made at the official request of Lebanese authorities, and that Syria was primarily moved by a "national duty towards a sister nation" and "compassions for the victims of bloodshed between Arab brothers". *TASS* relayed the opinions of Soviet-Syrian leaders declaring that "two sides expressed deep concern over the continuing crisis in Lebanon which is the result of plotting by the forces of imperialism and zionism."[106]

As the war turned into a quagmire, Soviet opinion began to shift as the USSR could not continue balance its strategy of presenting itself as a defender of Arab interests while maintaining its strategic alliance with Syria. *TASS* claimed that reconciliation between Syrians and PLO would only be possible after Syria pulled all of its forces out of Lebanon. In June the USSR rejected a Syrian request for material aid. *Krasnaya Zvezda* reported on its concern over the "danger of foreign intervention in Lebanon." Meanwhile papers such as the *Pravda* and *Izvestia* echoed the hopes of the Soviet leadership that the Soviet-Syrian relationship would continue to grow.[107]

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103 *Idem* pp. 28-29
104 Ramet, pp. 109-110
105 Karsh, p. 30
106 Karsh pp. 32-33
107 Ramet p. 111

Nonetheless by August 1976 media outlets such as *Pravda* and *Radio Moscow* admitted respectively that "the decision [to invade] proved to be harmful to the Palestinian movement" and that Lebanese patriots and Palestinians were under double encirclement from Israelis and Syrians.[108]

Relations between the Soviets and Syrians became so tense that the Soviet Afro-Asian Solidarity Committee praised the PLO and accused Syria of undermining Arab struggle against zionism and imperialism.[109] After the October Riyadh mini-summit and Assad's order of a general cease-fire during its discussions, the Soviet Union halted overt criticism of Syrian forces, even admitting to their presence as a peace-keeping force. Arms shipments were allowed into Syria in 1977 after President Assad threatened to shut off Soviet access to the Tartus port.[110]

Assad was also frustrated with the Carter administration that, while being the first administration to recognize the need for a Palestinian homeland, still unequivocally supported defense of Israeli interests. Regarding the foreign policy of the United States of America, Syrian media commented that "the difference between the policies of the US Democratic and Republican parties is that the former has no clear feature or specific identity, while both search for a solution at the expense of Arab rights and territories."[111] The Soviet media was also critical American ventures and commentary emanating from its media regarding the Middle East and accused the Washington Post and Christian Science Monitor of "[trying] too hard to misrepresent the real essence of Soviet-Syrian relations."[112]

Meanwhile, Egypt's concern over superpower interference and a lack of progress in the peace negotiations led Sadat in 1977 to visit Jerusalem and speak directly to the

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108 Karsh p. 34
109 *Idem,* p. 38
110 *Idem,* p. 39
111 *Idem*, p. 42
112 *Idem,* p. 43

Knesset. This resulted in profound change in Soviet-Syrian relations as Syria's vulnerability and isolation forced it closer to the USSR, strengthening the Soviet position. This set the stage for the signing of the Soviet-Syrian Treat of Friendship and Cooperation. Before the October War in 1973 Syria was too peripheral to warrant such treaties, and after the war the USSR did not want to estrange Syria or damage relations by urgently pursing the issue.

After Anwar Sadat's 1977 pivot and Syria's isolation from its Arab neighbors, the position of Syria regarding the treaty substantially changed.[113] In its pursuit of achieving closer relations with the USSR and securing the Friendship Treaty, Syria supported various Soviet engagements such as its invasion of Afghanistan in 1979. In the UN Syria abstained from the vote to condemn the Soviet Union, and Syria even called criticism of the invasion an "uproar fabricated by world imperialism." Syria was also not present at the Islamic Conference Organization (ICO) Islamabad conference that was summoned in the wake of the invasion. When the conference released a statement calling for the removal of Soviet forces from Afghanistan, Syria and the USSR responded with a message that was none other than an impressive distraction denouncing "the continuing campaign of the imperialist forces, headed by the United States, which are exhibiting false concern for Islam, while at the same time supporting the seizure by Israel of Islamic temples in Jerusalem."[114]

The Soviet-Syrian Treaty was signed shortly after. In the preamble the Treaty declared that the Soviet Union and Syria were "filled with determination to administer a firm rebuff to the policy of aggression pursued by imperialism and its accomplices, to continue the struggle against colonialism, neocolonialism and racism in all their forms and manifestations, including Zionism, and to stand for national independence and

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113 *Idem,* p. 51
114 *Idem,* p. *52*

social progress."[115] The *TASS* claimed in the month of the Treaty's signing October of 1980 that "This is a treaty in the name of peace, not in the name of war."[116] Syria would have rather secured a firm defensive arrangement.

In 1981 to 1982 the situation in Lebanon deteriorated after Israel annexed the Golan and ordered its troops to cross the Lebanese border. This came at an opportune moment for the USSR as it used Israeli aggression to distract world opinion on the imposition of martial law in Poland and the recent invasion of Afghanistan.[117] In March 1982 the *TASS* accused US defense secretary Caspar Weinburger of "practically [giving the] green light" to Israeli intervention. *Izvestiya* held more alarm in its message, declaring that Israel was preparing to "unleash bloody terror on Palestinians [and] about to crush Lebanon with its mailed fist."[118]

The termination of the Lebanese civil war rested on the results of American pressure and the degree to which Israel felt satisfied in the achievement of its objectives, in Karsh's words: "There was little the Soviets could do to save their allies from defeat but put pressure on the United States to restrain Israel."[119] The war had a debilitating effect on Soviet aspirations. In short, the PLO, which was part of the left-wing Muslim coalition, felt betrayed by Moscow's balancing act in respect to Syria, which was itself quite pleased at Moscow's behavior. Syria had encouraged insurrections within the PLO (such as one led by Abu Musa) against Arafat and his al-Fath faction within the PLO.[120]

Abu Salef, the second in command of al-Fath, reportedly told the Soviets: "What have you given us? We do not want you to tell us to reach an understanding with the Syrians. You have lost many of your positions in the Arab world because you did not

115 Ramet, p. 263
116 Karsh, p. 55
117 *Idem,* p. 63
118 *Idem,* p. 65
119 *Idem,* p. 70
120 *Idem*, p. 77

understand the conspiracy."[121] Syria's operational goals in face of Israeli military superiority were to simply frustrate Israeli efforts. Among Syrian successes was the evacuation of PLO forces from Tripoli and the American retreat after the embassy and Marine HQ bombings. Assad allowed pro-Syrian militias to operate from Syria controlled Lebanese territory against enemy targets.[122] Despite the complicated political waters the USSR had to navigate, its media outlets continued to reiterate Soviet support for the Arab cause, *Radio Moscow* stated in May 1983 that the "Soviet Union will continue to support the struggle of the Syrian, Lebanese, Palestinian, and other Arab peoples against the aggressive schemes of the USA and Israel."[123]

The Lebanese civil war also carried negative consequences for President Assad. Syria found itself increasingly isolated from the Arab world due to its occupation of Lebanon, as evidenced through the disapproval voiced by Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, and the PLO, which had been ejected from Lebanon as a result of the war. Sunni protests erupted within Syria voicing strong disapproval regarding the Alawite Syrian-Christian alliance that fought the left-wing Muslim forces. Even with these challenges in consideration, the Soviet-Syrian relationship was relatively undeterred by the setbacks and diplomatic conflicts. The Friendship Treaty would be tested again over the years, but the bonds would gradually grow between Soviets and Syrians throughout the 1980s.[124]

In 1986 the CIA's Director of Global Issues (DGI) released a memorandum that summarized the Syrian situation and presented a number of scenarios that could result in the fall of President Assad. The DGI's memorandum briefly analyzed the Soviet position in 1986: "The continuation of Alawi dominance would be most beneficial to

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121 Ramet, p. 113
122 Karsh p. 76
123 Karsh, p. 78
124 Ramet, p. 115

Soviet interests. […] If Sunnis gained power, Moscow's position would be weaker because of Sunni resentment of Soviet support for the Alawis."[125] This is precisely why President Assad was so eager to crush the Muslim Brotherhood rebellion in the late 70's to the early 80's, and of course why American policy was so eager to see President Hafez al-Assad and his successor taken down from power.[126] According to the CIA, Syrian troops killed thousands of Sunnis in the city of Hamah in 1982.[127]

The *New Times* reflected on the Soviet-Syrian relationship on the third anniversary of the Friendship Treaty: "It is not easy, however, to undermine the Soviet-Syrian cooperation […] Year after year the Soviet-Syrian Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation serves as the basis for rebuffing the aggressive policy pursued by the imperialists and Zionists."[128] The steadfastness of the relationship would be tested in the Iran-Iraq War, where the Soviet Union and Syria would support opposing sides. Syria had earned the enmity of the Iraqi Ba'ath since the ideological split in 1966. Despite supporting Iran against the Soviet-supplied Iraqis, Syria was valued by the USSR as a channel for communicating with the Iranians, who had rebuffed Soviet overtures towards friendship and wished to topple Saddam Hussein, a prospect unacceptable to the Soviet Union that steadily grew more supportive of Saddam throughout the war.

While the relationship was troubled over the conflict, the war by no means damaged the connection between Moscow and Damascus.[129] Aid from the Soviet Union flowed into Syria, and Syrians gave the USSR preferential treatment: in March 1983 Syria gave the USSR a £120 million contract to a power station outside Damascus despite the contract having already been awarded to the Swedish ASEA. Assad also replaced Boeing airplanes in Syria's national airline with TU-154s. In April 1987 further

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125 CIA, p. 3
126 *Idem*, p. 2
127 *Idem,* p. 13
128 Karsh, p. 80
129 *Ibidem*

economic and military agreements between the USSR and Syria were made including developing Syrian phosphate and oil industries, construction of the Tishim dam, rescheduling of Syrian debt worth $15 Billion, developing cotton industries, mechanization, irrigation, railways, ports, and the arrival of the first deliveries of the MiG-29.

On the 22nd of July 1987, the first Syrian cosmonaut flew to space on the Soyuz TM-3.[130] The CIA's 1986 DGI memorandum stated: "The Soviet Union and its East European allies provide virtually all of Syria's arms, and the Soviets deliver more weapons to Syria than to any other Third World client. In spite of his dependence on Soviet military aid, Assad has remained wary of excessive Soviet influence, and, in the view of Western observers, has demonstrated his independence by taking actions contrary to Soviet wishes such as the invasion of Lebanon in 1976."[131]

What major lines of logic and consistency can be found in the Soviet period of Moscow-Damascus relations? The Soviets were at times limited by political situations unfavorable to decisive, brazen action. Syria and especially Assad's personal nature were difficult to handle in face of the USSR's desire to avoid escalating tensions. Brezhnev and Chernenko were models for Gorbachev's foreign policy which exercised caution and restraint. Soviet policies that encouraged Assad's brinkmanship were the exception and not the rule.[132]

In fact, Yevgeny Primakov points out that both superpowers "expended great efforts to bring stability to the Middle East" and were not willing "to allow a situation to develop in which they might get drawn into a direct military conflict with each other."[133] In general Syrians were provided with enough help to enact effective policy and the

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130 *Idem*, pp. 81, 91-92
131 CIA, p. 8
132 Karsh, p. 85
133 Primakov, p. 163

Soviets in return gained bases, a market for arms exports, a Mediterranean port, and diplomatic support in the United Nations. Soviet interests were global while Syria's were regional, and the flexibility of interests allowed for at times a great divergence in objectives. This was tolerated in accordance to the fluctuations in international affairs. The post-war system constrained great power maneuverability and tilted influence in the favor of smaller states. Syria embodied this being the only consistent ally for Moscow in the region and the linchpin that spited US monopolization of the Israeli-Arab peace process.[134] [135]

Assad regularly accused Israel of being a power with "aspirations beyond Palestinian territory. [...] Israel aspires to the establishment of a state from the Nile to the Euphrates."[136] This echoes the intentions of a Zionist foreign policy article entitled "A Strategy for Israel in the 1980s" that is now called the Yinon plan, after its author Oded Yinon. It was written in 1982 for the journal *Kivinum,* advocating the incitement of ethnic and religious identities and the replacement of neighbor governments such as Syria with principalities favorable to Israeli interests. In Yinon's words: "The dissolution of Syria and Iraq later on into ethnically or religiously unique areas such as in Lebanon, is Israel's primary target on the Eastern front in the long run, while the dissolution of the military power of those states serves as the primary short term target. Syria will fall apart, in accordance with its ethnic and religious structure, into several states [...] so that there will be a Shi'ite Alawi state along its coast, a Sunni state in the Aleppo area, another Sunni state in Damascus hostile to its northern neighbor, and the Druzes who will set up a state, maybe even in our Golan, and certainly in the Hauran and in northern Jordan. This state of affairs will be the guarantee for peace and security in the area in

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134 Ramet, p. 254
135 Karsh p. 96
136 Prager, Karster; Stacks, John F.; Fischer, Dean. "Syria's Stubborn Survivor.*"* Interview. *TIME Magazine*, April 3, 1989. p. 36

the long run, and that aim is already within our reach today."[137] Avi Shlaim described

Syria's position in the Middle East by the end of the Cold War: "Syria was the standard

bearer of Arab nationalism. After the defection of Egypt, the PLO, and Jordan,

Damascus became the last redoubt of Arab resistance, holding out for complete Israeli

withdrawal from the Golan Heights."[138]

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137 Yinon, Oded, and Israel Shahak. *The Zionist plan for the Middle East*. Belmont, MA: Association of
     Arab-American U Graduates, 1982. Web. 30 July, 2017. p. 22
138 Shlaim, p. 553

Post-Soviet Era

The early decade of the 1990s was a period of instability for Russian and Syrian relations. The collapse of the Soviet Union led to a retreat on several fronts, giving leeway on American influence in the Middle East. Gorbachev and Assad's support for the Gulf War was highly indicative of acquiescence before the domination of American interests. Assad was particularly criticized domestically for siding against Iraq in the Gulf War.[139] [140] During the Yeltsin years, the Chechen rebellion and NATO expansion would bring public opinion to an historic low and deliver harsh criticism upon President Yeltsin and Foreign Minister Andrei Kozyrev.[141]

It was not until later in the Yeltsin years that the Russian Federation would achieve a cohesive policy under the scholarly arabist Yevgeny Primakov, who was appointed Foreign Minister by Yeltsin in 1996. Primakov's foreign policy doctrine called for a strong state to handle outside challenges, and in fact Putin's popularity partially stemmed from Primakov's influences in the foreign policies decisions taken by the Russian Federation. In short the policies since 1996 were to extend Russian influence into post-Soviet states and neighboring countries, establish alliances, and avoid US influence from growing in areas of Russian interest.

Yevgeny Primakov criticized his predecessor Kozyrev, affirming that integration with Western liberal democracy left Russia in a humiliating position. This is repeated in the works of Russian writers such as Dugin, who for instance denounced the so-called

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139 Nizameddin, "Squaring the Middle East Triangle in Lebanon: Russia and the Iran-Syria-Hezbollah Nexus", p. 476

140 Moseley, Ray. "Syria's Support of U.S. During Gulf War Paying Dividends". *Chicago Tribune*. <http://articles.chicagotribune.com/1991-03-12/news/9101220963_1_syria-president-hafez-assad-peacekeeping-force>

141 Andrei Kozyrev (b.1951) graduated in 1974 with a PhD in History from the prestigious Moscow State Institute of International Relations, which is funded by the Russian Foreign Ministry. Russian Foreign Minister from 1990 to 1996. Currently lives in the United States.

"Koyrev Doctrine [which] held that unipolarity was an accomplished fact."[142] Primakov presented three fundamental ideas on what the ideal post-Cold War era Russian policy should be: First, that Russia could not be thought of as a European power but instead had to be envisioned as a Euroasiatic one. Second, Primakov advocated the formation of a multi-polar world and the end of western ocidentalism.

Third and last, Primakov specified that Russian policy should focus on the old Russian satellite states where 25 million Russian speakers resided.[143] Yeltsin initiated a process that Putin would follow. Igor Ivanov[144] replaced Primakov in 1998. Ivanov also voiced heavy criticisms of NATO and American foreign policy. In 2004, Ivanov was replaced by the current Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov.[145] [146]

The relations between the West and Russia during the Putin years have been slowly disintegrating, while Russia is very far from innocent, blame does not solely rest on the shoulders of the Russians. Western leaders broke promises made with Russia, especially in respect to the expansion of NATO in the 1990s.[147] Professor Stephen F. Cohen claimed that the Ukraine crisis happened because the Russian elite believed NATO was on its way to Kiev.[148] To be clear, Russia has violated the Budapest Memorandum that exchanged nuclear weapons for the territorial integrity of several post-Soviet states. Russia invaded the borders of a sovereign country and annexed territory that legitimately belonged to Ukraine ever since the Kuruschev years when the

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142 Dugin, p. 80
143 Milhazes p. 54
144 Igor Ivanov (b. 1945) graduated from the Moscow State Linguistic University in 1969. Russian Foreign Minister from 1998 to 2004. An opponent of American policies in Yugoslavia and Iraq. Currently president of the Russian International Affairs Council (RIAC) and the single member of the expert council in the Gorchakov Foundation (GF). See: van Herpen, p. 39-40
145 Sergei Lavrov (b. 1950), a graduate of the Moscow State Institute of International Relations. Current Russian Foreign Minister, former Russian ambassador to the United Nations. Member in the Board of Trustees of the RIAC (along with Primakov and Ivanov) and also a member the GF. *Ibidem*
146 Nizameddin, p. 477-478
147 Milhazes, p. 51
148 Cohen, Stephen F. *et al. "The West vs. Russia."* Debate. Munk Debates.
<http://www.munkdebates.com/debates/the-west-vs-russia>

Supreme Soviet accepted the proposal to reorganize Crimea under the Ukrainian SSR.[149]

It is not only a question of language or nationality, but a question of fulfilling promises and respecting international agreements.

In the meantime, in support of its ally, Syria voted against the denouncement of Russia's annexation in the UN General Assembly. Despite the controversy and the intensity of the debate, Russia's past must be reflected upon to understand their leader's positions: the Mongol empire, Napoleon, Hitler, the collapse of the USSR, all these experiences have left Russian strategists haunted by a prospective encirclement of Russian borders. An ostensibly anti-Russian alliance expanding into post-Soviet states and areas formerly under the Russian sphere can only be received with hostility. The Iraq-Afghanistan invasions, the expansion of the EU, the color revolutions in Georgia, Ukraine, Moldova, and the Syrian situation after the Arab Spring all led to a powerful sense of discomfort in the Kremlin circle.[150] It certainly did not help when American leaders such as Senator John McCain taunted on Twitter in 2011: "Dear Vlad, The #ArabSpring is coming to a neighborhood near you."[151]

It is irresponsible thinking to express, especially considering how Muammar Qaddafi was sodomized with a knife by American-backed rebels after his capture as a result of the Arab Spring.[152] No matter what someone may think of Col. Qaddafi, the lack of a trial and his summary execution were not indicators of a positive development for human rights in Libya. Putting aside Senator McCain' dangerous ramblings, what are the sober American intentions for the future of Russia or Syria? What is currently occurring in the Middle East is the American clean-up of old Cold War pawns: Qaddafi,

149 Milhazes, p. 54
150 *Idem*, p. 58
151 McCain, Twitter. Twitter, December 5, 2011. Web. July 25, 2017.
 <https://twitter.com/senjohnmccain/status/143689929975799809>
152 Hersh, Seymour M. "Military to Military: Seymour M. Hersh on US intelligence sharing in the Syrian war." *London Review of Books* Vol. 38. No. 1 (2016): 11-14. *London Review of Books*. 7 Jan. 2016. Web. 17 June 2017. <https://www.lrb.co.uk/v38/n01/seymour-m-hersh/military-to-military>

Mubarak, Saddam, and Assad among others. Revolutions are approved and supported by Western powers. These are geopolitical moves that are planned with respect to the American Long War strategy.

In 2008 the RAND Corporation released a book detailing an analysis of the Long War and the multitude of ways America could manage it. In its introduction, the RAND authors wrote "The long war has been described by some as an epic struggle against adversaries bent on forming a unified Islamic world to supplant Western dominance, while others characterize it more narrowly as an extension of the war on terror."[153] The American focus lies on three threats identified by RAND: *jihadists*, religious-national organizations like Hezbollah, and political pan-Arab parties such as the Ba'ath.[154]

Therein lies the cause of the modern conflict between the West and the Russian-Syrian alliance: Assad's administration in Syria is Ba'ath dominated and has open relations with groups such as Hezbollah. The Syrian government's initial failure to contain the rebellion has led its territory to become swamped by a chaotic tide of Salafist militias including the Islamic State. Matthew G. Olden, Director of the USA's National Counterterrorism Center estimated in 2014 that there were nearly 15,000 foreign fighters in Syria, 2,000 of which came from the West.[155]

US President Barack Obama's policy in Syria was to support all opponents of Assad no matter the moral cost, even against the warnings of the Head of the Defense Intelligence Agency Lt. Gen. Micheal Flynn. America had to take a leadership position in guaranteeing at least a negotiated stale-mate where a part of the deal would involve President Assad stepping down from power. Gen. Flynn cautioned that mercenaries and

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153 Pernin *et al, Unfolding the future of the Long War: motivations, prospects, and implications for the U.S. Army.* RAND. p. xiii
154 *Idem*, pp. xiv-xv
155 Clapper *et al*, p. 101

militias supported by the United States were proponents of fundamentalist Islam. This did not matter to President Obama, who even took a blind eye to Turkish President Erdogan's own funding of rebel groups associated with al-Qaeda.[156] After President Donald Trump's upset victory in the 2016 US Presidential election, Lt. Gen. Flynn would become embroiled in a media controversy that forced his resignation as President Trump's National Security Adviser based on allegations of improper contact and illegal financial dealings with the Russians. The results of America's short-sighted and insistent support of factions in the Middle East during the Obama administration are encapsulated in Democratic pollster John Anzalone's words: "We spent $500 million training Syrian rebels and got nothing."[157]

Since the late 1990's Russia has developed a powerful propaganda machine along with a restoration of the Soviet espionage system in an attempt to attack Western aspirations. Among many governmental reforms there have also been developments in allocating unprecedented budgets for propaganda, modernizing media, hiring lobbyists in the West, developing relationships with western politicians, funding western political parties, and utilizing the openness of Western media to spread a pro-Kremlin message.[158]

Under Yeltsin, the KGB was split into several organizations: the Foreign Intelligence Service (SVR), the Internal Counterintelligence Service (FSB), the Border Guard Service (FSR), the Federal Protective Service (FSO), and the FAPSI. Putin's administration would reform these branches in 2003, placing the FSR and the FAPSI under the management of the FSB, slowly increasing its power. The SVR and its military counterpart, the GRU, operate in foreign intelligence gathering working on tasks such as industrial espionage, filtration of collected information, and infiltration of

156 Hersh, "Military to Military" <https://www.lrb.co.uk/v38/n01/seymour-m-hersh/military-to-military>
157 Wikileaks, "RE: Remarks on ISIS" <https://wikileaks.org/podesta-emails/emailid/905>
158 van Herpen, p. 3

foreign governments and international organizations.[159]

Broadening definition of treason, in 2012 the Duma amended articles 275 and 276 of the criminal code, a move proposed by the FSB that echoed Article 58 of the Soviet criminal code.[160] Non-governmental organizations were banned under a tax law. Foreigners were impeded from funding parties and media organizations while the Kremlin enjoys the same privileges in Western countries.[161]

Under Putin, the Russian intelligence apparatus has been revived with vigor. Oleg Gardievsky, a former KGB agent, warned of the Russian intelligence's mindset: "They're spying on all western countries like mad. It's just in their psychology and their tradition."[162] The situation regarding Russian espionage has grown to worrisome levels, for instance, the Russian embassy in Vienna employs double the number of diplomats employed by the US embassy and four times that as the French. Hans-Georg Maasen, director of the BfV illustrates the severity of the situation with an historical example: one third of Russian diplomats stationed in Berlin in the Cold War were Russian spies.[163] Between 1960 and 1986 France expelled 83 KGB and GRU officers.[164]

The Russian government uses every tool at its disposal to spread its message. Television, newspapers, radio, internet, even the Orthodox church is considered as a valuable asset, as it is staffed with former KGB spies such as Patriarch Kirill whose former KGB codename was "Mikhailov".[165] This was the same patriarch who visited Ukraine several times to insist upon the spiritual, cultural union between Ukrainians and the Russians who at the time were threatening Ukraine with economic and military pressure.[166]

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159 *Idem*, pp. 114-115
160 *Idem*, pp. 40-42
161 *Idem,* p. 70
162 *Idem,* p. 120
163 *Idem,* p. 123
164 *Idem,* p. 121
165 *Idem,* pp. 129-131
166 *Idem,* p. 173

Russian strategists believe that the XXIst Century will witness hybrid wars where control and production of propaganda is essential. Marcel van Herpen quotes Stefan Halper on the Chinese perspective of this conflict: "The Chinese public information chief, Li Chang-Chun, explained his government's view […] 'Communications capacity determines influence, whichever nations communications capacity is the strongest, is that nation whose culture and core values spread far and wide... with the most power to influence the world.'"[167]

Among the Kremlin's most powerful tools is the international multilingual TV Network Russia Today (RT). The Federal government of Russia allocates vast sums of money into RT's production: in 2005 it's budget was $23 million, by 2011 it surpassed $380 million with over 2,000 employees. RT holds a special record as well: it was the first news media account to get one billion views on Youtube.[168] It has been controversially received, at one point RT broadcast a Syrian War documentary that according to UK Ofcom was biased. RT presented the massacre as doing of "the rebels" and not the government forces. The idea remained unchallenged during the duration of the documentary.[169] RT UK showed a Jewish man allegedly "Fleeing Kyiv" to escape anti-Semitism, but in actuality it was a man escaping Simferopol in Crimea after the Russian annexation.[170] RT also hosts interviews with Syrian President Bashar al-Assad who explains, in soft-spoken English, his point-of-view directly to the general public.

The Syrian government itself operates an official Youtube channel, PresidencySy, which hosts interviews explaining the Syrian war through the eyes of the administration, focusing primarily on the international interference and the "terrorist" elements involved in the war of which Syria has been a victim, and downplaying the

167 *Idem,* p. 6
168 *Idem,* p. 71
169 *Idem,* p. 279
170 *Idem,* p. 3

violence in which the Syrian Arab Army and forces allied to it have participated. Videos on the channel include a video-op of President Assad visiting and speaking to shopkeepers and average people on the street, accompanied with uplifting music.[171] In 2012, the Minister of Information Adnan Mahmoud accused foreign powers of lying and propagandizing their view of Syria: "We know that 80% of the satellite channels dedicate 30 minutes of their news hour to Syria today. And a recent study shows that 90% of satellite coverage on Syria has nothing to do with the actual situation in the country. It's all lies and fabrications. This again proves that there is a real information war waged against Syria, with real facts being substituted with fabrications. These lies are the only way for them to achieve their objectives in their war against Syria."[172]

A critical event occurred in 2013 that put Syria and the US on the edge of direct conflict: the gas attack that struck the Ghouta suburb in Damascus. The Obama administration immediately accused Assad of being the perpetrator but shied away just as Western military forces were ready to attack Assad. Regarding the tragedy, Seymour Hersh wrote an article "The Red Line and the Rat Line" detailing why, according to Hersh's sources, President Obama pivoted so suddenly on following up to his 'red-line': "Obama's change of mind had its origins at Porton Down, the defence laboratory in Wiltshire. British intelligence had obtained a sample of the sarin used in the 21 August attack and analysis demonstrated that the gas used didn't match the batches known to exist in the Syrian army's chemical weapons arsenal."

The source from where the sample originated, according to Hersh, was from a "trustworthy" Russian. Hersh and his anonymous sources assert that a US-backed logistical support network, a "rat line", was created from Libya through Turkey and into

171 PresidencySy, "Made in Syria." Youtube. Youtube, June 8, 2017. Web. July 26, 2017.
   <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bjo1rJSeF8w>
172 "Foreign powers waging media war on Syria - Information Minister." *RT International*. N.p., 6 June
   2012. Web. 19 July 2017. <https://www.rt.com/news/syrian-media-information-war-115/>

Syria in an attempt to provide weapons to anti-Syrian government forces. The control of this line was cut off from Turkey in the aftermath of the attack on the US Consulate in Benghazi. Soon after reports emerged that Turkey began unilaterally supporting groups such as al-Nusra and even supplying chemical weapons material.

In May 2013 members of the Islamist Al-Nusra Front were arrested in Turkey for allegedly procuring a purchase of equipment and chemicals that were involved in the production of sarin. The Turkish ambassador to Russia denied the claims and stated they were merely carrying "anti-freeze." Hersh claims Turkey supplied the chemical weapons for the Ghouta gas attack out of desperation to involve the United States in a war against Syria so that President Erdogan could create a Turkish-oriented satellite state in Syria. In Hersh's words: "Our senior military officers have been told by the DIA and other intelligence assets that the sarin was supplied through Turkey – that it could only have gotten there with Turkish support. The Turks also provided the training in producing the sarin and handling it.'"[173]

The Syrian Arab News Agency denied all "terrorist" claims that the government participated in the attacks, accusing opposition of perpetrating the assault with weapons looted from Syrian Army bases, while spokespeople from the rebel forces reflected the charge, accusing President Assad. The Russian intervention in 2015 was the first major Russian foreign military venture beyond its immediate borders since the fall of the USSR, done at the request of the Syrian government to combat the Islamic State among other coalitions.

The fog of war obscures the conflict in Syria and discussion surrounding it. So far the relationship the Israelis, the Turks, the Qatari, and the Saudis have with opposition forces is subject to much speculation, but overall the news is grim. The

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173 Hersh, Seymour M. "The Red Line and the Rat Line" *London Review of Books* Vol. 36 No. 8 (2014): pp. 21-24. *London Review of Books*. 17 Apr. 2014. Web. 17 June 2017.
    <https://www.lrb.co.uk/v36/n08/seymour-m-hersh/the-red-line-and-the-rat-line>

Clinton Emails revealed a strong collusion between the Gulf States, as former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and failed Presidential candidate commented: "[...] we need to use our diplomatic and more traditional intelligence assets to bring pressure on the governments of Qatar and Saudi Arabia, which are providing clandestine financial and logistic support to ISIL and other radical Sunni groups in the region."[174] Ribal al-Assad, cousin of President Bashar Assad, wrote in the *India International Centre Quarterly*: "[the] key players in the region are not only anti-democratic, they are also hoping to benefit from an increase in sectarian divisions and extremism."

Ribal Assad asserts that the pressure originates in Saudi Arabia and Qatar, who fear that a democratic wave in the Middle East will cause the collapse of their absolute Islamic monarchies. The Gulf States use propaganda as a means to achieve their goals: WISAL and SAFA TV stations broadcast Islamist ideology calling for the mincing of minorities to feed dogs. The Grand Mufti of Saudi Arabia called on Muslims to destroy churches throughout the Middle East.[175] The Gulf State's desire is to dominate the Muslim world and beyond. To their detriment, there is competition from Iran which supports militias like Hezbollah and states such as Assad's.[176] Assad is the target for a Sunni strategy that includes plans to extend oil pipelines through Syria, Turkey, and into Europe.

Russia could suffer an economic blow with the success of this plan, as it would severely damage Gazprom and Rosneft's bottom line.[177] The insistence by foreign powers such as the Saudis and the United States that the Assad administration has to go is not is not a new phenomenon. The CIA stated in 1986: "we judge that US interests in Syria probably would be best served by a Sunni regime as it might well include relative

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174 Wikileaks, "RE: Here's what I mentioned" <https://wikileaks.org/podesta-emails/emailid/55380>
175 Assad, "Syria and the Arab Spring", *India International Centre Quarterly,* p. 86
176 Clapper *et al*, pp. 8, 17
177 Kennedy Jr., Robert F. "Syria: Another Pipeline War". Ecowatch. p. 4 Web.
   <http://www.ecowatch.com/syria-another-pipeline-war-1882180532.html>

moderates interested in securing Western aid and investment. Such a regime probably would be less inclined to escalate tensions with Israel."[178]

It is clear that President Putin is intent on frustrating the United States on every major front in reach. Russia will be hard-pressed to consider the United States as anything but a rival. President George Bush, the man who looked President Putin in the eyes and saw a trustworthy man, said in 2014: "Vladimir's a person who in many ways views the U.S. as an enemy [...] And although he wouldn't say that, I felt that he viewed the world as either the U.S. benefits and Russia loses or vice-versa. I tried of course to dispel him of that notion." Russia aims to increase its influence and global standing by achieving its vision of a multipolar world. President Putin very openly asserted "A unipolar world is not only unacceptable, but impossible."[179]

Syria's behavior ultimately will be conditioned by how it perceives outside attitude towards it. As Hafez al-Assad once explained his position in the Cold War: "By saying we are non-aligned we are not equating the two superpowers [...] Syria befriends those who befriend it and is hostile to those who are hostile to it."[180] This brings to mind John Herz's astute observation, as quoted by the vice President for Studies of Carnegie Endowment George Perkovich, regarding the paradoxical predicament in national security where the "structural notion in which the self-help attempt of states to look after their security needs tend, regardless of intention, to lead to rising insecurity for others as each interprets its own measure as defensive and measures of others as potentially threatening."[181]

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178 CIA, p. 4
179 Milhazes, pp. 58-59
180 Karsh, p. 48
181 Clapper *et al*, p. 59

Conclusions

Russia should be addressed with deep skepticism as long as its government follows authoritarian models of governance and is staffed with politically compromised individuals. Since the end of World War II the Soviets and later Russia have been focused on destabilizing the Atlantic alliance and damaging relations between European nations that, when properly banded together, could act as a collective counter-weight to Russian pressure. Threats, shows of force, illegal actions, and violations of basic rights such as free speech and assembly perpetrated by Russia should be responded with decisiveness that indicates strong disapproval of actions made by the state without antagonizing and needlessly hurting the people of Russia. This can be achieved with policies that have been put through the test such as sanctions at the individual level, expulsions of foul actors, a consistent case-by-case countering of propaganda, and most importantly addressing the core issues in international relations in an honest and direct manner through ordinary government channels and domestic media. The West must behave in such a way that does not feed credibility into accusations of Western "double talk" or play into the hands of Russian propagandists.

Regarding the Syrian War, its conclusion will be complicated by several entities that have grown in influence throughout the war and the international interests involved in the conflict. The partition of Syria is a goal of many foreign actors and it will be extremely unlikely that Assad will allow any humiliating capitulations in post-war Syria, especially with Russian and Iranian support. Among the greatest concerns are the Kurds who have fought a tremendous campaign and expect to have at the very least greater autonomy or even independence which will be at odds with the wishes of other countries with meaningful populations of Kurds such as Syria, Iraq, Iran, and Turkey.

Above all, to secure peace in the region, it is imperative that Iran and the Gulf States begin a process of deescalating support for the promulgation of *jihad* and Islamism in all of its forms.

That being said, this war does not exist in a regional vacuum, and it is necessary for the West to look at itself to find answers about what can be done to prevent more chaos. Israel, America's closest ally in the region, has relied on aggressive maneuvering and shows of force as primary tools in assuring its survival in a hostile climate. These actions inflame world opinion against Israel and the United States, to the great detriment of their national security. Many times Israel has run contrary to the ways a country is expected to act. Israel must cease expansionist policies, end unilateral military actions, and suspend its nuclear weapons capability[182] to achieve, or at least come closer to, a deal with the Arabs on recognizing Israel's right to exist. Existence ideally should not be guaranteed only by force but through mutual recognition.

The United States must adopt positions that strengthen its soft power capability rather than destroy it. Actions taken in the XXth and especially the early XXIst centuries legitimize warfare as a means of achieving foreign policy goals and set the tone for the behavior of nations throughout the world. This has been a disaster for US interests and the credibility of the United States as a force for good. Western medias have failed as journalistic entities and have become essentially propaganda machines. The United States as the most powerful military and economic force in the world should be capitalizing on its position rather than abusing it for short term gain. To give way to peace and prosperity, truth should become the top priority and not blind self-interest.

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182 *Idem*, p. 68

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