

[War and Conflicts of Gray Areas] Analytical Study of the Syrian Crisis

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Abstract

The Fifth generation of wars is among the most dangerous types of war, as it uses all means to force the other party to imply its will through process of internal destruction, whether through military and non-military methods represented in employing multiple methods and new tactics in line with technological, information, economic, cultural and social development.

One of the most important characteristics of this generation of wars is that it is characterized by the spread of gray areas, which occur through interactions on different levels; inter-state, intra-State and among different states in a way that enhances hybrid warfare tactics, combining the use of conventional armed forces and irregular forces.

Syria is a live example of such gray areas where it has an important geopolitical status in the global political map. It gains its increasing importance from the diversity of ethnic and religious identities and the complexity of the socio-political structure, which has made it an appropriate arena for the interaction of many conflicting regional and international interests that was reflected on its political situation.

-: Research problem:-

The multiplicity of interests in Syria was the reason behind the ongoing crisis, the various international and regional parties and their intervention has an impact and continues to have a significant impact on the course of the crisis in Syria.

-: Research purpose:-

The research aims at identifying the concept and causes of the emerging gray areas by determining to what extent the involvement of international parties influence the formation of events in Syria. Also, it tries to map the strategic interests of the major countries in Syria.

-: Research Questions:-

The research seeks to answer a major question; To what extent did the gray wars affect the course of the Syrian crisis? What are the repercussions of the gray wars on the Syrian crisis?

From which several sub-questions arise, the most important of which are:

1. What are gray wars?
2. What is the most important interest that can benefit the conflicting parties on Syria?
3. What are the most important challenges facing the Syrian regime to solve the Syrian crisis?

-: Research methodology:-

In order to analyze the main research problem and answer the sub-questions diversified scientific research methods are adopted. The first approach is the historical approach, it starts by recording the facts and events in order to study, interpret and analyze the historical events in a way that helps to understand the present in the light of the past and thus predict the trends of the near future. Also the case study approach will be adopted to provide an in-depth study to the Syrian case between the intervention of the international parties in the crisis and the extent of solving or complicating the crisis inside Syria in order to reach a deeper understanding so as to reach generalizations.

-: Search plan:-

In order to answer the research questions, the researcher clarifies and explains the concept of gray wars as a new term being deliberated and how it is reflected in the Syrian crisis. Then the researcher exposes the historical background for the reasons of the crisis in order to identify the circumstances of the events and their repercussions. In addition to highlighting the main positions and visions of the major powers and their impact on the development of the situation in Syria, and then the researcher presented the most important findings and recommendations reached.

-: The First Pillar: The Syrian crisis:

Before addressing the reasons for the outbreak of the Syrian revolution as an example of modern wars in the gray areas, one must first address and identify the concept of gray areas.

First: the concept of modern warfare in the gray areas:

Modern warfare is a term used to describe war in the post-Cold War era. Since the end of this war - despite the arms race - the force used in international relations has taken a new dimension

in influencing states to control their internal and international choices, and defining the alternatives to the interests of the major powers. Plus, globalization resulted in intellectual and cultural invasion through various means of communication that led to weakening the sovereignty of States on its territory and their ability to face external interference through soft power. In the case of a weak state, if a state objected or tried to contain such external influences, the citizens would reject such attempt and consider it as a limitation or as a new kind of soft military intervention. The concept of conflicts in the gray areas has emerged as a new phenomenon that will continue in the international system as influential countries seek to create a conflict of so-called gray areas.

Conflicts and gray wars are not traditional official wars; they are wars involving unconventional acts through the use of various tools, including media and cyber-attacks, which enable non-state actors to compete

Increasingly with states¹. Electronic attacks can also cause political unrest The use of counterfeit news stories and rumors to influence the thoughts and behavior of the target population alongside the economic echelons, vandalism and sponsoring proxy combatants, as well as some deliberately designed armed acts to keep violence below the threshold of Military conflict, but the hallmark of this kind of war is ambiguity about ultimate goals.²

There are many conflicts and wars in the world, including "ISIS" in Iraq and Syria or "Pokuhram" in Nigeria, some analysts believe that the parties involved in the conflict or gray wars seek to modify some of the existing aspects in the international environment, whether regional or otherwise, However, gray-area approaches aim to achieve these gains without escalating into actual war, thus evading legal responsibility and minimizing the military, economic and political consequences that this escalation might cause.³

For example, it may be difficult to modify the language of international treaties, but treaty modifications and multilingualism can permit multiple interpretations, providing a simple hidden mechanism to change the impact of treaties.⁴

The United States of America is a pioneer in the gray areas. After the events of September 11, there have been successive developments witnessed by the world at different levels, which have left their various repercussions on the countries of the world. The United States has developed its legal interpretations in order to exploit the legal gaps and ambiguity within the framework of international law. In 2001-2002, the United States argued that the Geneva Conventions, including Article 3, were not entirely applicable to "Taliban" and "Al-Qaeda" detainees,

¹Mary Kaldor, *In Defense of New Wars*, stability: International Journal of Security and Development, 2013;2(1):Art. 4 DOI [10.5334/sta.4](https://doi.org/10.5334/sta.4)

²ERIC OLSON , America's Not Ready for Today's Gray Wars, DECEMBER 10, 2015, available, <https://www.defenseone.com/ideas/2015/12/americas-not-ready-todays-gray-wars/124381/>

³Hal Brands , Paradoxes of the Gray zone, foreign Research institute , February 2016 ,available, <https://www.fpri.org/article/2016/02/paradoxes-gray-zone/>

⁴Rosa Brooks ,Rule of law in the Gray Zone ,July 2018 ,available <https://mwi.usma.edu/rule-law-gray-zone>

considering that there is no legal objection to the degrading treatment of detainees, although the United States is one of the signatory parties to the United Nations Convention against Torture.⁵

The United States strikes against terrorism could also be considered among the gray zones. In accordance with the US National Security Act 2002, it insists on adopting the concept of pre-emptive strikes –by which the United States can preempt dangers and act alone if necessary to abort such dangers before they are implemented,⁶ under the banner of self-defense, making such strikes an illegal use of force in violation of the UN Charter, which explicitly states not to interfere in the internal affairs of states, but since the United States refused to recognize formally the identification of the legal basis for certain strikes and proof that all American targets were fighters and not civilians, it is difficult to prove the involvement of the United States

Unequivocally.

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One of the examples of gray areas is Russia's intervention in Ukraine in 2014. Its army, known as the "Green Army", was because the Russian soldiers were dressed in green, this allowed the Kremlin to distance itself from official intervention and thus retaliation.⁸ Another example is provided by Iran's use of sabotage and proxy warfare in an attempt to destabilize opponents and transform the balance of power in the region is also a form of gray-area proliferation.

The concept is also reflected in Lebanon which is considered a grey area resulted from the concurrent conflict among Israel, Iran, Saudi Arabia and their allies. After it was considered one of the democracies that are trying to get rid of the failed state scenario, in addition to the destruction of the lives and property.

Yemen is another example of the gray conflicts, as it suffers from the worst humanitarian conditions, both in the spread of diseases and epidemics and lack of food in addition to the ongoing war, after the end of the revolution by the National Conference in 2013 was on the path of proposing a successful model, yet the impact of external elements on the situation makes it a gray zone until the actors reach consensus to resolve their internal conflicts.⁹

Furthermore, Syria is one of the clearest examples of gray areas. The emerging crisis refers to the management and planning of external elements that have not yet reached an agreement on how to impose their influence and control over the region.

⁵Ibid

⁶Elsayed Amin Shalaby, Theory of International Relations (Cairo: World of Books, 2008) p

⁷Ibdi Rosa Brooks ,Rule of law in the Gray Zone,

⁸Mark pomerleau ,Why DoD Leaders are increasingly worried about the" gray zone", available <https://www.c4isrnet.com/it-networks/2018/02/05/why-dod-leaders-are-increasingly-worried-about-the-gray-zone/>

⁹Hal Brands , Paradoxes of the Gray zone, foreign Research institute , February 2016

Second: The Development of Syrian crisis

The Syrian crisis is part of a wider wave of protests in the so-called Arab Spring 2011. The crisis began with discontent with the Assad government, which escalated into conflict after the Syrian regime suppressed the protestors and mortified the detainees and opposition.

1. Developments of the Syrian crisis

The Syrian demonstrations were launched on March 15, 2011, demanding freedom, dignity, equality, social justice, participation in the political decision, ending corruption among other demands. The demonstrations spread in different Syrian cities. The regime initially tried to contain the situation and manage the internal crisis by making political concessions such as; the legal rights to end the emergency law, dissolve the previous government, form a new government, and call for national dialogue and revising Article 8 of the constitution on the Baath Party's leadership of the state.¹⁰ Such concessions led the demonstrators to raise the ceiling of their demands, but the oppressive

security apparatus undermined the credibility of the declared governmental procedures, and exposed its violations that resulted in the injury and death of many which increased the demands of toppling down Assad's regime.¹¹

Despite the severity of security in suppressing the revolution, the demonstrators insisted on their demands, which made the ruling regime resort to:

- Recognize that there is a need to reform the deteriorating situation in various economic, political and social fields.
- A constitutional change, by issuing a new electoral and parties law.

¹⁰Abdul-IlahBalgiz, *Revolutions and Experiences of Change Unfinished*, presented by Mohammed Habib Taher (Beirut: Knowledge Forum, 2012) pp. 140-141.

¹¹Mona Matar, *The Syrian uprising from A to Z* (Beirut: Dar Al Arabiya Science, 2012), pp. 29,30.

- In addition to holding new elections in 2012 to elect a new People's Assembly. But the Syrian people saw these measures as inadequate and unrealistic, because the regime had lost credibility, so the masses continued insisting on their demands.

Second: The causes of the Syrian crisis

There are a number of reasons that led to the outbreak of demonstrations, which have been exploited by those who have interests in the realization of slogans raised by years such as the Greater Middle East and creative chaos, including:

1. Nature of the ruling regime:

The continuation of the one-party system and its dominance over all the aspects of life – by the affirmation of Article 8 of the Constitution, led to the absence of political life in its real sense. Public opinion, freedom of speech and participation were absent on the different levels, lacking accountability and power domination. The political life was deducted to Assad's political party and family. This allowed the entry of a number of beneficiaries and opportunists to hold different position in the party achieving their own ambitions and serving illegal purposes.¹²

2. Corruption:

Corruption in the Syrian society has spread in all forms; favoritism, bribery and nepotism were features of Syrian society. The absence of creativity, personal competence and experience has led to low income and deteriorating living standards.¹³

3. Economic situation:

Although Syria is rich in various natural resources, it contains fertile plains, abundant water and natural diversity between mountains, valleys, and human capital, yet its economy is classified as a developing country, ranking 80 out of the 131 countries included in the 2008 report,¹⁴ with wide social gaps between a large class suffering from extreme poverty and a small rich class. As stated in the second national report on poverty and equitable distribution that there is an increase the proportion of poor people in 2010,¹⁵ about 7 million people of the total population have fallen below the poverty line, prompting protests demanding equality and social justice.

4. External intervention:

¹²The Syrian Revolution and the Future of Political Reform: Regional and International Implications, Arab Democratic Center, 20 August 2014, entry date 4/5/2018 available at <https://democraticac.de/?p=2702>

¹³Khaled Ahmed Moussa, The Syrian Crisis and its Impact on the Situation of Palestinian Refugees, Unpublished PhD Thesis, Faculty of Commerce, Suez Canal University, Ismailia, 2017, p. 89.

¹⁴Samir Saffan et al., The Syrian Revolution Backgrounds Syria Studies (The Arab Center for Research and Studies), p. 122

¹⁵The Syrian Revolution and the Future of Political Reform: Regional and International Implications, Arab Democratic Center, 20 August 2014, entry date 4/5/2018 available at <https://democraticac.de/?p=2702>

The global changes that occurred on the international arena by the conclusion of the Cold war, which were accompanied by the collapse of the Soviet Union and the dominance of the United States of America and its implications on the structure of the world order, led to changes in the power relations map and international forces that lasted four decades, led to imbalance of regional powers in favor of regional ones. On the Arab forces account, along with the lack of strategic maneuvering margin for small and medium-sized entities,¹⁶ this helped to encourage the US-Israeli alliance to resolve outstanding issues since the Cold War, but the various interests of the major powers resulted in increasing the influences of these powers on the region to ensure expanding their commercial, strategic and security interests.

5 - Neutralizing the middle class and removing it from the political arena:

Since the era of "Hafez al-Assad" in 1970, the regime has marginalized the intellectual and cultural forces capable of carrying out a political activities, calling for change or mobilizing and energize the societal capabilities, this was done by linking them to the various security apparatuses and forcing such intellectuals and innovators to submit to such control. Politics was exclusive to the president in person, his family and followers, which led to the intellectuals of the middle class to play a major role in planning and implementing the protest movement in Syria.¹⁷

6 - Social networks and space media:

Social media played a prominent role in the protest movements witnessed by the Arab countries in general. Social networks played an important role in the Syrian uprising, mobilizing the opposition through social platforms such as Facebook, Twitter and others. The civil disobedience has turned into demonstrations and the government was unable to control it.¹⁸

The support provided by the Obama administration to e-activists as the crisis continued, the Syrian government's efforts were held, and they stated that they were receiving US assistance from outside Syria in the form of training in computer encryption and security use of mobile phones through non-profit organizations funded by the federal government.¹⁹

The media played an important role in launching the Arab revolutions in general, including the Syrian revolution, the televised image changed the most influential evidence in the public opinion and the composition of its trends and influence on its positions, which contributed to

¹⁶Jassim Mohamed Taha, The Impact of Arab Spring Revolutions on the Future of Regional Strategic Balance in the Middle East, Master Thesis, Institute of Arab Research and Studies, Cairo, 2013, p.72

¹⁷Ibtisam Mohammed Al Ameri, The Regional Dimension in the Syrian Crisis, Journal of International Politics, p. , 22/5/2018, available at <https://www.iasj.net/iasj?func=article&ald=108378>

¹⁸Khaled Ahmed Mousa, The Syrian Crisis and its Impact on the Palestinian Refugee Situation, PhD Thesis, op. Cit., P. 92

¹⁹Jay Newton-small, Awar on two front, Time, 25 Jun 2012, p, 48.

escalating and inflaming events in Syria and thus influence the feelings of citizens and their departure to demonstrate.²⁰

The second pillar: The influential Actors stances in the Syrian crisis

First: International organizations and the Syrian crisis:

The United Nations, along with the League of Arab States, played a key role in the Syrian crisis

1- League of Arab States and Syria:

In response to the ongoing Syrian crisis and the emergence of demonstrations demanding freedom, dignity and justice, some Arab countries reacted and drafted a project in the name of the Arab League, in which the Syrian regime demanded the cessation of violence, releasing political prisoners, opening a dialogue with the opposition and allowing observers and the international media to enter the country.²¹ However, with the failure of the Syrian regime to implement the project, the measures that should be taken against Assad's regime were discussed. These measures ranged from suspension of Syria's membership in the League of Arab States to the imposition of diplomatic and economic sanctions.²² Eventually, the Arab League suspended Syria's membership at an extraordinary meeting 12 November 2011 as a result to the death of almost 3,500 people in the period from March to November 2011 as per the estimation of the United Nations.²³

With the crisis escalation, the Arab League launched a new initiative in December 2011. The Syrian government did not accept the Arab League protocol known as the "Peace Plan" because it violated Syrian sovereignty – as argued by the Syrian side- eventually Syria had to agree on the protocol after pressure from regional and Western countries. After signing the protocol the Arab observers were allowed to enter Syria on 19 December 2011, the Arab League sent an observers delegation led by "Mohamed Mustafa Albabbi" to ascertain the commitment of Syria to implement the peace plan, spread observers in a number of cities and villages. The delegation's concluding report assumed responsibility of all the parties which led some countries such as Saudi Arabia to withdraw their representatives from the Arab Observer Mission, and then followed by the GCC countries withdrew their representatives as well, thus announcing the failure of the Arab League's initiative.

The United Nations Project in Cooperation with the League of Arab States:

²⁰AzmiBishara, Syria, Dar Al Alam Towards Freedom, (Beirut: Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies) 2013, p.439

²¹Syrian acceptance of Arab League ceasefire plan met with skepticism, "Guardian, 2" November 2011.

²²The results of the meeting of the Council of the League of Arab States on the developments of the situation in Syria, official website of the League of Arab States, 22/1/2012 Date accessed 17/10/2017 Available at <http://www.lasportal.org/wps/portal>

²³Arab League votes to suspend Syria over Crackdown," The New York Times, 27" November 2011.

The Arab League headed to the United Nations after the failure of its project and they agreed on a joint project between the Arab League on the one hand and the United Nations. "Kofi Annan" Former Secretary-General of the United Nations was appointed an envoy to Syria to implement this resolution. The draft resolution contains several points, including the withdrawal of armed manifestations from cities and villages, the release of political prisoners in addition to allowing peaceful demonstration and cessation of violence. An international observers' committee was sent to ensure implementing the resolution.

2 - The stance of the United Nations on the Syrian crisis:

The United Nations has made a great deal of efforts to resolve the Syrian crisis through a series of decisions, most notably the decision of 3 August 2011, in which the Security Council approved a statement of condemnation of the violence practiced by the Syrian government. Also it called on the Syrian parties in Syria to immediately stop the violence and urged all parties to exercise maximum degrees restraint and refrain from reprisals, including attacks on state institutions.²⁴

Furthermore, resolution No. 2042 of April 2012 entails the Syrian authorities to guarantee the security and freedom of movement of observers. The Syrian government also demands that it abide by its promises to withdraw its troops from the cities according to the plan of "Kofi Annan" the international and Arab special envoy to Syria.

The UN Security Council unanimously adopted resolution 2254 in 2015, which supports a plan to end the war in Syria, without giving any resolution on the fate of President Bashar al-Assad, which has long formed the biggest node between the Russian and American positions on resolving the crisis. The ceasefire also called for a meeting between the Damascus government and the Syrian opposition for negotiations leading to a transitional government and elections under the auspices of the United Nations.

In December 2016, the UN General Assembly established an independent international mechanism to assist in the investigation and prosecution of those responsible for the most serious crimes committed in Syria since the beginning of the crisis, in accordance with international law.²⁵

In an emergency session of the Security Council in April 2018, the latest developments were discussed in Syria after the "United States - France - Britain" announced the implementation of air strikes on sites in Syria, where Syria put forward a draft resolution that was not adopted in the Council for not obtaining the quorum.²⁶

The alleged violations of human rights committed by the Syrian government have led to the attention of international organizations. However, the international policies related to the crisis

²⁴UN Security Council issues statement condemning violence in Syria, SNN.com, 3 August 2011.

²⁵Security Council Resolution on Syria: Details and Implementation Mechanism, Sky News, December 2015, 6/10/2018, available at <https://www.skynewsarabia.com/middle-east/800431-%D9%>

²⁶Rejection of Russian draft resolution on Syria at UN Security Council and Graetz stresses the need to abide by the UN Charter, United Nations official website, available at <https://news.un.org/ar/story/2018/04/1006201>

in Syria have lagged behind humanitarian concerns. The international community hesitated to take swift action, which led to the development and aggravation of the crisis.²⁷

It is clear through the voting pattern of the countries that are active in the Syrian crisis that many preliminary understandings were agreed upon yet the United Nations did not submit to them. Consequently, the United Nations was unable to stop or mitigate the war. It's worth noting that the inability of the United Nations didn't occur due to the non-involvement of the international community but due to the over involvement of the major powers. This is quite evident from the observation of veto practice inside the UN. Russia has used its veto power 13 times to block any international project imposing sanctions on the Syrian regime or any attempt to apply Chapter VII of the UN Charter or refer the Syrian file to the International Court. China has used the veto 4 times for the same reason. While the United States used its veto twice to stop a Russian resolution denouncing the US attacks on Syria²⁸.

Second: The stance of the major on the Syrian crisis:

The Syrian crisis, which has been going on since 2011, has been linked to the Arab Spring, but it has quickly become a point of contention between many regional regimes, also it is associated with a higher level of involvement from the superpowers, namely Russia and China on the one hand and the United States and its allies on the other. Achieving the strategic gains that have become more important in the Arab region during the revolutions and creative chaos that is spreading among the Arab countries, hence the extent of attraction and conflict of interests among the international power and the stances of the United States, the Russian Federation and the People of China galvanize the problem.

First - United States of America:

The American position toward the Syrian crisis was hesitant and ambiguous and it is not a static position. Before the Syrian crisis broke out, the American administration was reviewing its policy towards the Syrian administration. After the American administration considered Syria as a supporter of terrorism as it threatened Israeli interests by supporting Hamas, they argued that the regime should change.²⁹ This situation changed after Democrats won a majority of seats in the US Congress in 2008. They confirmed that Republican policies towards Syria failed to achieve American interests Thus, US President Barack Obama began a new phase in US-Syrian relations, where the US ambassador returned to Syria despite the conviction of America that Syria is a state supporter of terrorism.³⁰

²⁷ David W. Leach, *The Fall of Al-Asaad Kingdom*, Publishing Company for Distribution and Publishing, pp. 339-340.

²⁸ Salwa Farrag, *The Nature of Formal and Informal Sino-Russian Political Networks: The Case of Syria*, *International Affairs and Global Strategy*, Vol.45, 2016.

²⁹ Ali Hussein Bakir, *Al Bayan Magazine*, Count 312 June 2013

³⁰ David W. Leach, *op. Cit.*, Pp. 243, 244.

The Syrian crisis poses new challenges to American policy, to represent the determinants of American policy towards the following issue, first and foremost:

1 - Absence of control over Syrian chemical weapons:

Since the outbreak of the Syrian crisis, Washington has announced that any attempt by Syrian President Bashar al-Assad to use chemical weapons would expose him to a US military strike. That is, chemical weapons represent a red line that should not be approached. Therefore, the use of chemical weapons in Al Ghouta area in August 2013 exceeded this red line Which resulted in the deaths of nearly 140 civilian casualties, and although "according to the American vision", it is not the first time the use of chemical weapons in Syria, as it was used 11 times before, the use of weapons on a large scale put the credibility of the US president and his country highly questionable.³¹ Which led to the US administration announcement that it is considering launching a limited strike against Syria? To avoid further chemical attacks Obama sought a congressional authorization before launching such military strike.³²

2. Protection of Israel's security:

One of the most important pillars of the American strategy in the Middle East is to maintain Israel's security and ensure its superiority over the Arab countries.³³ Therefore, usually the American policy seek to preserve Israel's interests in preventing the existence biological and chemical weapons in the hands of extremist elements with Hezbollah or Iran, according to what is promoted, President Bashar al-Assad used chemical weapons in the region of Al-Ghouta in August 2013, The Russian initiative to demise the Syrian Chemical weapons came supported the same cause and was approved by the United States and supported by Israel as well.

Israel considered that the agreement is a strategic gain in its favor by eliminating the deterrent capabilities of the old Syria, ie, chemical weapons, and ensuring that they do not fall into the hands of armed organizations that can be used in the future in confronting Israel. Hence, Israel would enjoy superiority in traditional and non-conventional weapons.

So the United States reacted to the Syrian crisis as an enemy of its strategic ally Israel, but other US interests prompted the United States to maintain open channels with Damascus permanently.³⁴

- Limiting Syrian Expansion:

³¹ Mahmoud Hamdy Abu Al-Qasim, US-Russian Consensus on Syrian Chemical Demilitarization, Has the Potential of Military Action Down? (Al-Ahram Strategic No. 226, October 2013), pp. 113,114.

³² Presidential study group , Security Reform and Peace : The Three Pillars of U.S.Strategy in the Middle East , Washington ,D.C. report of the Presidential study group ,by the institute for near east policy 2005 ,p,82 .

³³ BasmaOthmani, American-Russian Security Competition in the Mediterranean Region, Master Thesis, Faculty of Law and Political Science, Department of Political Science, Al-Arabi Bin Muhaidi University, Umm Al-Buqai, 2015,2016, pp. 60,61.

³⁴ AzmiBishara, Syria The Path to Freedom Towards Freedom (Beirut: Arab Center for Research and Political Studies), 2013, p. 461

The Russian military presence in the Mediterranean basin, the expansion and consolidation of its influence that began with the Syrian crisis by installing the naval base in Tartous and the installation of the airbase at Humaimim in Lattakia, made the United States assert its presence in the growing Russian influence in Syria by carrying out a missile attack by two destroyers Of the US Navy in the Eastern Mediterranean In April 2017, the Syrian military airfield of the Syrian-backed Syrian regime targeted the Syrian regime for a chemical attack on "Khan Sheikhan", followed by another attack against targets related to the storage and use of chemical weapons.³⁵

3. Maintaining energy security:



Figure (1) illustrates the route of the Nabucco pipeline, which aimed at liberating Europe from Russian domination

Source: Directorate of Strategic Studies, Oil and Natural Gas Pipelines in West Asia and North Africa (Tables and Maps), Advisory Center for Studies and Documentation, 2016 available at <http://www.dirasat.net/uploads/research/2717729.pdf>

Natural gas plays a major role in the formulation of US policy towards the Middle East, where the discovery and the production of energy resources in the eastern Mediterranean, with the desire for economic hegemony, to secure its maritime corridors and to secure oil and gas supplies to Europe, this drove the attention of the American administration to the Middle East in general and the eastern Mediterranean and the "Syrian crisis," in particular, given the following;

³⁵Noha Baker, The United States Strategy in the Eastern Mediterranean (International Policy, No. 213 July 2018) p.104

A) The overthrow of the "Nabucco" project which would have prevented Moscow from passing the Russian gas to Europe through the Mediterranean Sea and excluding the project of transporting Qatari gas to Europe that pass through Syria and Turkey. In return to supporting the Syrian regime, Russia would passing a gas pipeline – named Al Islami gas- through Iran, Iraq and Syria to Europe.



Figure (2) illustrates the route of the Qatar-Syria pipeline, which is adopted by the United States Source <http://www.dirasat.net/uploads/research/2717729.pdf>

B) Gas discoveries in Syria's territorial waters, which are expected to make Syria one of the world's largest producers of oil and gas.

That is why Washington supported the Syrian rift from the start to get rid of the regime in Syria and to find a government loyal to them, thus control Syria's gas and oil.

EVOLUTION OF THE UNITED STATES STANCE ON THE SYRIAN CRISIS:

There was gradual change in the United States policies towards the Syrian crisis that went through several phases:

- **The first phase:** the US position on the condemnations of the violence of the regime and its call to meet the demands of the protesters and abide by the reform plans.
- **The second phase:** the imposition of sanctions and the calls to topple down the regime, as the United States imposed a series of sanctions on the Syrian regime and urged President Bashar al-Assad to stop the violence.³⁶
- **The third phase:** Diplomatic pressure, characterized by the escalation of the diplomatic tone against the regime and openness to the Syrian opposition³⁷ through the support of the Syrian opposition formation of the Syrian National Council, as

Third: Russia's stance on the Syrian crisis:

"Obama" in 2013 that the United States continues to provide support and assistance to the Syrian opposition forces.³⁸

- **The fourth phase:** Military intervention, in April 2017, the Syrian military airfield of the Syrian regime was targeted

Since the beginning of the crisis, Russia has taken its strategic decision to defend Assad's regime, considering it a strategic ally in the region against the United States. The most important determinants of Russian policy towards the Syrian issue are as follows:

1. Restoring its influence in the international community:

Russia's foreign policy should be nationalized and Russia must regain its lost status since the collapse of the Soviet Union. The increasing American influence in the Middle East region, which Russia regards as a geographical region bordering its southern border and affecting its national security and economy, is a catalyst for foreign policy. Russia has gained more influence as a global power vis-à-vis the United States, so Russian policy has moved from regional

³⁶BasmaOthmani, op. Cit., P. 60.

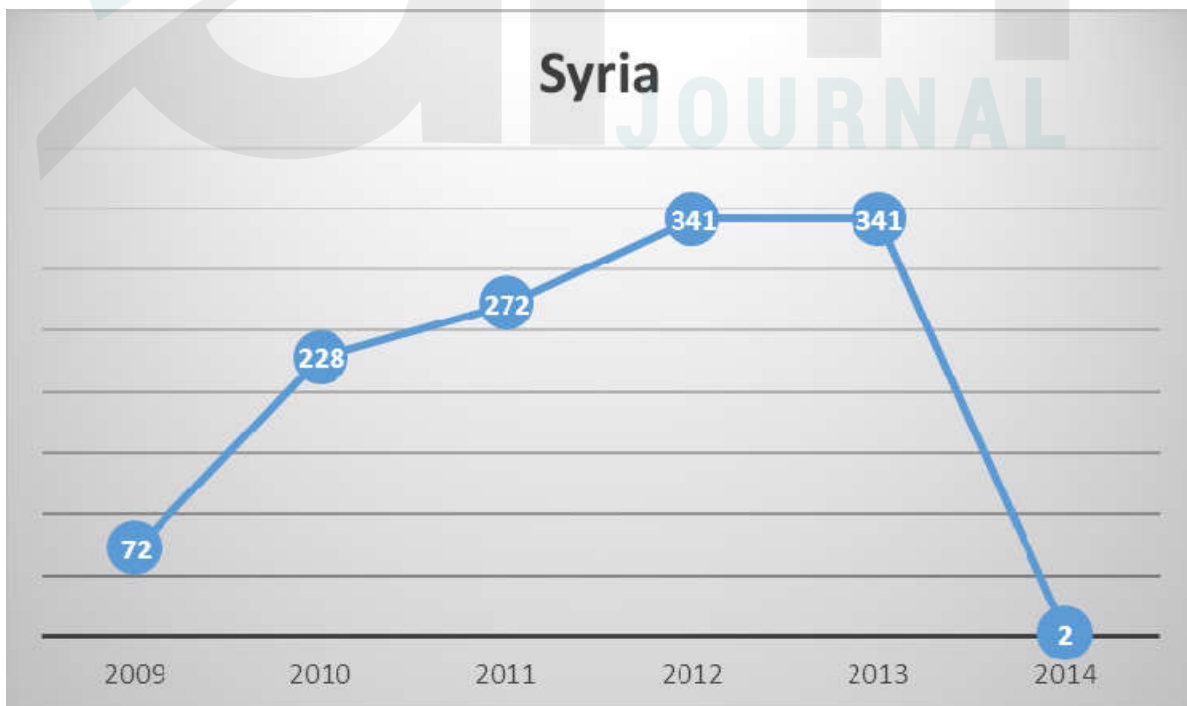
³⁷Mona MatarThe Syrian uprising from A to Z, op. Cit., Pp. 169, 170.

³⁸BasmaOthmani, op. Cit., P. 60.

engagement to balance US ambitions. Hence, its policies are consistent with its ambitions in the age of globalization.³⁹

2. Security and economic interests:

The Russian naval doctrine gives great strategic importance to the Mediterranean region to strengthen its role and to compete with the American influence in the region and the Syrian naval base "Tartous" is the only base of Russia⁴⁰ on the shores of the Mediterranean Sea and is there pursuant to an old agreement between the two countries dating back to 1971, Syria is one of the important countries as a market for Russian weapons. Figure 3 illustrates the increase in Russia's military exports to Syria from 2009 to 2013. In this context, it is clear Moscow's economic activities are one of the tools of the Russian administration to achieve beyond the financial gain Russia provides economic presence and influence of a regional.



³⁹ Ahmed KhalafallahKhalafullah Ali, Russian Foreign Policy and its Impact on Arab Issues: A Case Study of the Syrian Crisis (unpublished Master Thesis, Faculty of Commerce Suez Canal University, Ismailia, 2015, p.26

⁴⁰David W. Leach, op. Cit., P. 182

Figure (3) illustrates Russia's military exports to Syria. Source: author based on data retrieved from <http://armstrade.sipri.org/armstrade/page/values.php>

3 – Controlling gas transport lines:

Russia's economy faces major challenges by low oil prices, as well as US sanctions, which are pushing for control of gas pipelines to Europe and the elimination of any Western American attempt to circumvent Russia and provide new sources of European gas. Russia aims at controlling the pipelines, the sewage facilities and the ports thus benefit from Russia's position as a turning point for the region's oil and gas to Europe. In doing so, Russia will not only expand its hegemony in the eastern Mediterranean but will also tighten its grip on The European gas program, thus the latter's influence on Russia, as more than 75% of the natural gas produced by the state-controlled Russian company "Bromgas" is sold to the European Union, so Russia's position supports the Syrian regime.

Evolution of the Russian position:

The Russian position passed through several stages:

First phase: Since the beginning of the crisis, Russia has offered friendly advice to the Syrian regime, represented in the involvement of the opposition so that no reprisals occur. Moscow did not associate its friendly advice with pressure, yet it continued to send weapons to Syria.

Second phase: As violence escalates and the insurgency gradually degenerates into conflict and the possibility of Western or Arab intervention aimed at replacing Assad's regime with a pro-Western government, Russia used its veto in the Security Council to block Western efforts to overthrow President Bashar al-Assad and thus impede any scheme by Western countries.

Third phase: Russia intervened militarily to prevent ISIS progress which contributed to the intervention in Aleppo to restore its order in January 2016 in favor of the Assad regime, to support such victory Moscow sent military experts and Russian Special Forces in ground operations. A clear change in the course of the battle, where the Syrian opposition was forced to activate the course of diplomacy, including the negotiations of Istana.

Russian foreign policy is motivated by the principle of establishing a "multipolar system." This position supports the Russian-Syrian relations. Syria is a strategic ally of Russia, which has joint security and military agreements and has military bases in it. In the framework of the international poles, especially with Russia's desire to restore the system of multilateralism and then develop its position on the crisis, where support for the system militarily and security, also to impede any decision that can be taken in the Security Council to engage in military operations almost immediately, and then directly under the pretext of fighting terrorism.

Russia is working to create a strategic role on the international map, especially in the Middle East, which is of great strategic importance in global influence. It also seeks to ensure its share of energy extraction and protection by a permanent military presence.

Fourth: China's Stance on the Syrian crisis:

The Chinese position towards Syria is mainly based on ideological grounds, in addition to political and economic considerations.

Ideological Considerations:

The Confucian doctrine, which is a major anchor in Chinese political thought, urges the rule of dealing with soft power rather than solidity in China's foreign policy. China's foreign policy is also based on the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence adopted by the Communist Party of China The People's Republic of China in 1949. Therefore, China's position on the Syrian crisis is stable and objective, by emphasizing the need to respect the desire of the Syrian people and non-interference in the internal affairs of Syria. This was demonstrated by the use of veto power by China, Several times in the Security Council to prevent the division of Syria and military aggression on them.

China crowned its position by appointing a special envoy for the Syrian crisis. On March 29, 2016, China appointed its first special envoy to the Syrian crisis, a diplomat who served as a former ambassador to Iran. The appointment came in a bid for Beijing to play a more active role in the Middle East.⁴¹

⁴¹Chinese position on the Syrian crisis over the past years "A balanced and welcome attitude", 21 August 2017, 24 October 2018, available at: www.china.org.cn/txt/2017-08/21/content_41444135.htm

Political and economic considerations:

China considers the Middle East in general and Syria in particular an area of economic, strategic and security importance. The history of Sino-Syrian relations dates back hundreds of years. Syria formed the trade route linking China to the Arab countries known as the Silk Road. In 2002, China's efforts to increase economic activity in the world After Bashar Al-Assad launched in the same year a strategy to turn Syria into a gas transport base and a free trade zone between the East and West, China saw in Assad's strategy a project to whitewash the Silk Road, the most important in creating a new economic development zone in western China. Also it would link between Asia and the Pacific eastward to the Arab region. The Syrian crisis is the most important link in the context of the transformation process pursued by Russia and its ally China in the international system in order to move towards a multi-polar system.

Conclusion and recommendations

- The end of the Cold War is not the beginning of achieving peace. There is still a nuclear deterrent between the great powers. This has helped in the emergence of gray areas characterized by multiple forms of wars. Including political, economic, military, social and cultural wars. Cyber warfare is one of the most dangerous wars, where the Internet has been an effective means of spreading false information and black propaganda that have a great impact on fueling the people and facilitating the external intervention of the forces of society to achieve their goals without involvement in direct intervention cost of depletion material, human or even International discontent.
- The competition for influence and energy sources in the eastern Mediterranean area is one of the forms of gray wars in the Arab region. This competition directly affects the Syrian crisis, which has turned from an internal crisis into a regional-international one.
- To carry out its interests and objectives, the United States had to rely on private entities to carry out a proxy war, such as ISIS, which has no legal status, an army of thousands of religious militants from around the world who have been trained to carry out a religious war against Shiites.

Thus, the Russian adherence to the Assad regime to obtain gas and use it as a tool to pass its political interests, furthermore, Russia and China have been able to impose themselves as influential powers which support the argument of the decline of the American domination.

Therefore, the Syrian crisis is a war between the old and the new powers on land other than their land and its tools are people, government and militias, which are supplied and financed by these powers. The situation is expected to continue in Syria until these actors reach a settlement.

Recommendations

To address the most important challenges of the gray area of hybrid wars, with its diversified tools ranging from electronic attacks, proxy wars and fighting in the name of identity policy, the policy decision maker shall consider:

First: Surpassing the security solutions in the fight against extremism.

Second: Understanding the strategies and tools of gray wars in order to develop the appropriate tools to face them which require reducing ambiguity through the dissemination of correct information.

Third: Governments must clarify the nature and objectives of the forces involved in war to reveal the truth of their actions and illegitimacy.

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